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INDEPENDENCY AND ITS ECLIPSE

INDEPENDENCE is a relative term, expressive either of a blessing or a curse. To be disenthralled from the traditions of men ranks among the chief privileges of the children of God ; but the false freedom, so much in vogue to-day, of thinking and acting irrespective of His revealed will and word deserves only censure. There are few sadder spectacles than that of liberty degenerated to licence, a fair start spoiled by subsequent fooling. With what keen grief Paul beheld it in the Galatian churches ! "Ye were running well ; who hindered you that ye should not listen to the truth ?" John Owen observes of his own day : "There are more fallen than standing churches in the world." In our century that statement has assuredly acquired enhanced emphasis. How lamentable that modern Congregationalism should so signally point its moral !

Whatever may have been its defects, the old Independency, whose dirge the writer would fain croon, was no plaything of every gust of opinion. Indeed, if it erred we fancy that it was on the score of rigidity. Its faults were akin to its virtues, or, as the French say, it had "the defects of its qualities". Its aspect towards its neighbours was, if anything, too stiff and unyielding. Well, there are worse characteristics than staunch convictions. Invertebrate religion, the bauble of the present day, cannot be styled a thing of beauty. To call curvature of the spine graceful would be idiotic. As John Trapp remarks : "We must not make either censure's lash or charity's robe too long." Whether mistakenly or not, the Independent of earlier days, now so well nigh defunct, was fully persuaded that a banner had been given him to display ; and he displayed it with stalwart resolution. In molluscous days like ours, that firm backbone of his merits a meed of praise from honest hearts.

I. PROMISE

The elder Independency whereof we speak belonged specifically to the Calvinistic household of faith. We are glad that the late Principal of Mansfield, Dr. Andrew Fairbairn, frankly admitted that in an article on this topic which he contributed to a former edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

They dissented from their Presbyterian brethren on points of church government, but not in their doctrinal platform. The *Savoy Confession* of 1658 demonstrates that. The mysticism of Peter Sterry and the Arminianism of *John Goodwin* were anomalies in their midst.

The sect had been cradled in the rough nursery of persecution and its stamina tested from the outset. The attempt to set up "gathered churches" outside the national institution attracted prelatial and parliamentary notice towards the close of Elizabeth's reign, and seemed to drive the Anglican hierarchy almost to frenzy. Archbishop Whitgift adopted drastic measures for the suppression of these conventicles. Many earnest souls, taken in the act of worshipping God apart from state regulation after the dictate of their own consciences, suffered close imprisonment; and their leaders, Penry, Barrow and Greenwood, notwithstanding a spirited defence, were tyrannically hanged at Tyburn. But "persecution recruits for the enemy". Fresh adherents, including some university graduates like Henry Ainsworth and John Robinson, joined the despised band of separatists, who, upon James's betrayal of his Puritan monitors, and the failure of the hopes centred in the Hampton Court Conference, sought an asylum in Holland, and formed the nucleus of the emigrants in the *Mayflower*. Robinson, himself a strong Calvinist, wrote an elaborate defence of the decrees of the Synod of Dort. A group of Baptists gave him trouble; but the bulk of his people believed, as he did, in the inclusion of believers' children in the covenant of grace, and in their title to its seal. His *Essays*, a designation borrowed from Montaigne and Bacon, exhibit a thoughtful and sober, though not a sparkling, mind.

The despotism of Laud, and his craze for Popish puppetry, forced an increasing number of fervent Puritans into exile; but meanwhile by far the most serious and God-fearing generation this country has known was growing up, and omens of the pending conflict between religious depth and shallowness were multiplying. "In the first half of the seventeenth century," says Lowell, "the centre of interest lay rather in the other world than in this." The Solemn League and Covenant sounded forth the watchword of "Christ's Headship" in face of the counter-theory of episcopal supremacy and the "right divine of kings to govern wrong"; and the meeting of the Long Parliament rung the knell of prescription, whether in church or state.

The Independents were still a tiny minority; but upon the inclusion of the five "dissentient brethren" in the pale of the Westminster Assembly they had a *pignon sur rue*, a settled place in the community. We cannot pursue the tale of their rising fortunes, linked in no small measure with those of Cromwell's Ironsides, nor descant on the interlacing strands of religion and politics during the Commonwealth era. Fanatical elements rose to the surface, as was inevitable when the bases of society had been shaken. Yet during those memorable years the Gospel was preached throughout this realm to an extent scarcely equalled before or since, both under the aegis of government, and by voluntary societies. The severest of censors, Richard Baxter himself, in the preface to his *Reformed Pastor*, testifies (in 1656) that "the world hath not a more able, faithful, godly ministry than Britain at this day". That record was borne, be it noted, to the church of the "Triers", Presbyterian in the main, but including not a few Independents of standing and some conforming Episcopalians.

We are inclined to deem these Independency's best days. Of the personal piety and spiritual-mindedness of such ministers of the word as Jeremiah Burroughs, Joseph Caryl, Thos. Goodwin and Thos. Brookes in this country, or of men like Cotton, Eliot, Hooker, Shepard and the Mathers in New England, there can be no question; nor can Owen's influence for good in Oxford and Dublin be contested by evangelical assessors. Erratic spirits doubtless there were; but the Savoy Confession represented 120 Independent congregations, and its preface bears witness that "a gracious God hath kept us in the unity of faith until now", and that "though our churches have been like ships launched singly and sailing apart in the ocean of these tumultuating times, yet, upon the search now made, all of them are found to have steered their course by the same chart, and to have been bound for one and the same port". These worthies cherished no blind antipathy to creeds, but only to their imposition on demurrers; and their own declaration of faith exhibits the main Calvinistic positions of the Westminster Confession. In view of later aberrations it is well to lay stress on these particulars.

After the Restoration, the Independents bore their share in the oppression inflicted on all conscientious Nonconformists. The mass of the ejected of 1662 were Presbyterians; but everywhere Dissenters from the State Church were harassed by

iniquitous legal restrictions and heavy fines, or consigned, like Bunyan, to jail. This ordeal sifted their membership; but while the chaff was scattered, much genuine wheat bore the brunt of the storm. If the gold was severely probed in the process, it abode the test of the crucible; for the Divine Metallurgist watches over His furnace-fires by night and by day.

An English historian has characterized toleration as the equilibrium of neutralized forces. That remark does not cover the whole truth; but it suggests the obstacles in the way of the establishment of the principle whilst contending passions run high. Too often, in sooth, it has been the offspring of pure indifference. The Independents and Baptists were among its first assertors, because they were most grievously assailed by intolerance; but even they hesitated to advocate unlimited licence of opinion. They would have drawn the line, as Milton did, at Romanism, partly as idolatrous, partly as a perpetual menace to freedom; and many present-day sects, which trade on the Christian name for their own sinister ends, would have been, like blatant infidelity, beyond their pale of sufferance. The queer ideal of every man doing what seemed right in his own eyes was no ideal of theirs. It was as a legitimate birth of the Reformation that they pleaded for liberty of worship.

II. FRUITION

But the removal of outward disabilities, in conjunction with the spread of latitudinarian notions, occasioned a new danger to all parties alike. "All the churches shall know," says the Risen Lord, "that I am He Who searcheth the reins." Apart from a few outbreaks of mob-violence, the eighteenth century brought times of comparative ease and tranquillity, but also days of testing. Deism assumed the status of a propaganda and Arianism met its advances half-way. Meanwhile a generation of professors grew up "whose hearts turned back unto Egypt". Offended by the rugged inelegance of Puritanism, they were bent on making coalitions with worldly-mindedness. The philosophy of "common sense" grew to be their fetish and came almost to control their creed. The goddess Culture was most sedulously worshipped in the politer circles of Presbyterianism; and we know how smugly in the north Blair and Robertson donned her vestments and offered incense at her shrine. In England the infection of Arianism soon sapped the life-blood of meeting-house

after meeting-house, once crowded with devout worshippers. No farther back than the reign of Anne Presbyterians had formed a large majority of the "Dissenting interest"; sixty years later they had dwindled to little more than a twentieth of the whole, and the portraits of Baxter and Matthew Henry were hanging in Unitarian vestries, four-fifths of whose older places of worship were built by and for Trinitarians,¹ and stand to this day memorials of that mournful blight. "I knew the time," wrote a correspondent of Doddridge, "when I had no doubt but that my heart would be warmed at Dissenting services; now I hear prayers and sermons which I neither relish nor understand. Evangelical truth and duty are quite old-fashioned. From many pulpits one's ears are so dunned with the 'eternal law of reason' that it is enough to put one out of conceit with the chief excellency of our nature, because it is so abused." The Gospel of the grace of God was fast being replaced by a mongrel moral and rational philosophy which brought decay and ruin in its train.

It is singular that Congregationalism, which in recent days has shown so little capacity to withstand heretical inroads, should have offered the stoutest resistance to their assaults at this juncture. "Baxter," says S. T. Coleridge, "would have utterly disbelieved a prophet who had foretold that the orthodoxy of the Nonconformists would have been retained and preserved by the Independent congregations in England, after most of the Presbyterian had lapsed into Arianism or Socinianism." Dr. Halley, to be sure, has observed with his usual judicial fairness that a number of the champions of heterodoxy issued from Independent Academies.² That cannot be denied. The Daventry college, in particular, after Doddridge's health failed, fell into the snare; but the novelizers did not carry the rank and file with them, and, as a rule, found it advisable to quit their congregations, if they would not be quitted by them. Lay influence, moreover, stood firm; and a body called the "King's Head Society", composed of prominent church-members, arose, to take cognizance of aspirants to the ministry and devise their own measures for stemming the current of error. When Arianism first reared its head, Thomas Bradbury, a London Congregational pastor, had led the opposition to it, and followed Waterland's example at St. Paul's by preaching sixty-one sermons on the

¹ Bogue and Bennet: *Hist. of Dissenters*, IV, 329. Waddington: *Congregational Hist.*, IV, 312.

² *Lancashire Puritanism*, c. xix.

deity of Christ, still extant in his *Mystery of Godliness*. Watts's foolish attempt to heal the breach by his pre-existent scheme fell quite flat, and drew forth Bradbury's pungent remonstrance. But Watts himself disclaimed Arianism, and held the essentials of the Gospel fast; and whatever may have been Doddridge's complaisance of temper and aversion from controversy, the modern assertion that he capitulated to the foe is certainly a slander, propagated by interested parties. We need only peruse his elaborate confession of faith before the church at Northampton, or listen to the evangelical ring resonant in his hymns, or mark the welcome he gave to Whitfield, or consider the general tenor of his *Rise and Progress* or *Life of Gardiner*, to be satisfied of that. He was no stalwart; but neither was he a seducer in disguise.

It was to the scattered Independent congregations that dissatisfied Churchmen or Presbyterians who felt no attraction to Methodism mostly turned for refuge from the Arian inundation. Self-erected barriers stood in the way of communion with Particular Baptists, many of whom were enamoured of hyper-Calvinism; but we know how John Newton thought for a time of identifying himself with the Independent body to which his mother had belonged. Some of the writer's own ancestors, Presbyterian by upbringing, like many other Scots on removal southwards, found a home in the same quarter. There were instances in which, to escape asphyxiation in a Socinianized atmosphere, Presbyterian congregations merged themselves in a conservative Independency. On the other hand, Dr. Langford, the Abdiel of the London presbytery of the day, accepted the pastorate of the Weigh House Chapel, and filled it till his death.

We doubt not that Calvinistic church-covenants and trust-deeds helped to preserve a sound tradition in many instances; but what chiefly kept the enemy at bay was a godly membership, Bible-fed and not unversed in the *Shorter Catechism*. Owen's works were still widely studied by the stricter Dissenters, and intelligent minds could give a reason for the hope that was in them. Constancy is ever the reward of vigilance. These elder generations had a jealousy for the truth since, alas! lost; they took heed *how they heard*.

There were defections among them likewise, especially in the north of England; but the leal-hearted did not permit judgment to go by default. John Scott founded the Heckmond-wike Academy on purpose to counteract Priestley's mischievous

influence in Lancashire. In that gentleman's first charge his gifts of dispersion had fairly emptied the meeting-house over which he presided; and this *contretemps* convinced him that Independents were "bigots", enslaved by tradition; so he turned to the more pliable Presbyterians of the day, though he admits that they were pining "under decline", and that many congregations had already become extinct. His candid portraiture of these "Rational Dissenters" is worth citing. "With the generality," he remarks, "there is no regular appointment of officers. There are societies in which the ministers are expressly forbidden to visit their hearers, except by invitation. In short, a minister begins to be considered as a person paid by his hearers for haranguing them once a week; and the people attend as they would attend lectures. It becomes his whole study to surprise them every time that he exhibits, till at last he is a mere stage-player." He adds: "those called Independents retain all the zeal of the old Puritans; and though several of their societies are become more free, they receive daily recruits from the Methodists".¹ In Doddridge's own church at Northampton an intrigue set on foot with the connivance of his successor to introduce an Arian type of doctrine was defeated by the prompt action of the diaconate. Priestley owns that the fraudulent parties kept their sentiments as much as possible out of sight. In brief, heresy, at least in the hands of sleek dissemblers, lives by secrecy. She weaves her spells in silence till her prey is secured. Her strategy is that of Sinon and his wooden horse, capturing Troy by means of ruse. Smugglers usually deem it advisable to land their goods in the dark; and tricksters find it expedient to subvert Christian doctrine under the mantle of Christian institutions.

These details are so thoroughly up-to-date that they deserve notice! And they furnish evidence that the best safeguard of sound doctrine consists in a living membership, consciously invested with the trusteeship of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. If eighteenth century Congregationalism resisted decomposition, it was because the salt retained its savour. And so it came to pass that when Socinianism fell into bad odour through its intrigues with Tom Paine and the French Jacobins, orthodox Nonconformity escaped the baleful stigma, even when Burke was playing the role of alarmist.

¹ Quoted in Waddington, *Congregational Hist.*, III, 574 sq.

The modifications undergone by Congregationalism in New England, owing to its interaction with the township and the adoption of the "half-way covenant", lie beyond our scope. Here the figure of Jonathan Edwards towers above his contemporaries, like that of Bishop Butler in Great Britain. Both were reasoners of comprehensive grasp who made intellect a handmaid to faith; but Edwards' addiction to metaphysics bred a fashion of philosophizing in religion which grew in weaker hands into a mania. The habit of excavating the foundations of faith in order to readjust their setting tends to damage the solidity of the superstructure. We should judge that Timothy Dwight's reasoned confutation, when Principal at Yale, of the shallow, but arrogant, scepticism he found regnant there, was the most valuable achievement to be met with in this direction.¹ Dr. Edward Williams, Payne and perhaps Wardlaw, may be placed in the same category; but their evangelical belief was of much greater significance than their *penchant* for philosophical disquisition, indulged sometimes to excess.

The note of conversion was clearly sounded by all whom we have named, and many of the Independent pastors of that day were withal keen evangelists, who had themselves, like Joseph Hart for example, been singularly transformed by the grace of God. The lifelong labours of these men were steady and unwavering rather than of any public prominence; but they did their share in fertilizing tracts of soil which else would have lain barren and waste. Better work was then done unobtrusively and "unto the Lord" than in later days with much greater parade and flourish of trumpets. It was their sterling qualities and fidelity to the Gospel that drew men like David Bogue and the Haldanes into coalition with Calvinistic Independency.

With the dawn of the nineteenth century momentous changes were impending, into which we cannot enter in detail. The petty social ostracisms hitherto inflicted on Dissent were becoming an intolerable anachronism; for Nonconformity, as a whole, was now spreading rapidly. Even a judge so little sanguine as John Foster wrote in 1814; "The number of hearers is increasing prodigiously every year." During that generation Independency, still predominantly orthodox and evangelical, lengthened her cords and strengthened her stakes in England

¹ Orthodox Independency recovered ground in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, and bore a good confession in the States. The names of Lyman Beecher, Edward Payson and George Cheever, among others, deserve honourable mention.

and Wales remarkably. The typical ministries of Joseph Fletcher, Thomas Roby and Raffles, John Campbell, Robert McAll, James and Benjamin Parsons, Winter Hamilton, Angell James and William Jay, were veritable proclamations of Christ and Him crucified. At the period to which we refer the denomination presented a homogeneous aspect, with no visible leaning to Socinian views. One or two of the more intellectual aspirants to the pastoral office faltered in the immaturity of youth between the historical faith of the church and rationalistic tendencies.¹ It was so with Hall and Foster for a season, and Binney and McAll passed through a like experience. But Evangelicalism triumphed over negation in all these instances. Young McAll, in fact, after his establishment in the faith, championed orthodoxy so ably in the Edinburgh University debating clubs, when he was a medical student, that Dr. Thomas Brown dubbed him the "Christian advocate"; a title which might well have been conferred a generation later on another dialectical Independent and notable contributor to the *Edinburgh Review*, Henry Rogers. Nor can anyone read the touching narrative of McAll's deathbed testimony (he died at forty-five) without a thrill of blended sadness and gladness. All those we have named lived and died in faith, in the quality not of speculators but believers. And missionaries like Robert Morrison, John Williams, Moffat and his wife, and young David Livingstone, were of the same calibre.

The Scottish element in these representative names reminds us of the fact that Independency has always been an exotic north of the Tweed. The Glassite movement gave birth in Scotland to a bastard form of the sect, frigidly finical and exclusive; and the wholesomer teaching of the Haldanes and their early coadjutors, widely ramified through open-air preaching, suffered a permanent check by their secession to the Baptists. Moreover, at the time spoken of, the reign of moderatism was coming to an end, and Presbyterian orthodoxy, under men of light and leading, was acquiring a new lease of life and vigour, first in Scotland and then in the south also. John Knox was Caledonia's divinely ordained lawgiver and moulder.

That the heart of Independency still beat sound to New Testament doctrine may be inferred from the unanimous adoption of an evangelical and moderately Calvinistic Declaration

¹ The niceties of modern scholarship were no doubt deficient in most of the college tuition then available. Dr. Pye Smith, however, and Ebenezer Henderson could hold their own in such matters.

of Faith by the Congregational Union a century ago on its inception, as what was "commonly believed among them". This Declaration affirms the inspiration and supreme authority of the Scriptures; their Trinitarian convictions; the doctrine of the fall and that "all mankind are born in sin", with "a fatal inclination to moral evil, utterly incurable by human means"; the selection of the Jews as a chosen people; the virgin birth of Christ, who was both Son of man and Son of God, the full revealer of the Divine mind. "By His obedience to the Law and His suffering unto death He meritoriously obtained eternal redemption for us, having thereby vindicated Divine justice, magnified the Law and brought in everlasting righteousness." After reference to His resurrection and mediation and the work of the Spirit, and to justification by faith in Christ as the Lord our Righteousness, there follows the statement that Congregational Churches believe that "all who will be saved were the objects of God's eternal and electing love, and were given by an act of sovereignty to the Son of God", and that this "in no way interferes with the system of means, nor with the grounds of human responsibility"; also that the Scriptures teach the final perseverance of all true believers. Enough has been quoted to prove their steadfastness in the faith at the era when Dr. Redford of Worcester drafted this document "for general information".¹

In Binney's address at the re-opening of the Weigh House Chapel a year later, similar adherence to the truth finds expression. "We are reminded to-day," he says, "of the melancholy end of many kindred societies whose rise was contemporary with our own. Error gradually crept in; spirituality decayed; a secular spirit was first tolerated, then caressed, till at last the dark wing of the angel of death cast its gloomy shadow over many a place where our fathers worshipped. But I hold that the death and burial of anti-evangelical churches is not an evil, but a good. A minister becomes a denier of fundamental doctrines; he is consequently discountenanced and proscribed; one by one his attendants retire, till the sanctuary, become a sepulchre, is converted to some secular use, while the imperishable principles of our faith spring up under the cultivation of other labourers." What Binney would have said of the propaganda of Popery without protest by Dr. Orchard from his own pulpit it is hard to

¹ The trust-deed of Spring Hill College (now Mansfield) provided that every member of its committee should certify his evangelical belief in writing, and that of Airedale College (now Bradford) that none should be its officers or students save holders of the doctrines of the Shorter Catechism and Westminster Assembly. We wonder what has happened to these stipulations.

conceive ! The author of *Micah the Priest-maker* would surely have evinced tokens of disgust, rivalling those of Jenny Geddes !

Some of our readers will note with interest that, though long accustomed to hymn-books, strong objection was still felt by many English Congregationalists to the introduction of instrumental music, as a step tending in the direction of ritualistic flummery. That there was also a disrelish for speculative theology as late as the middle of the nineteenth century is evident from the language employed from the chair of the Congregational Union. The chairman of 1850, Dr. John Morison, in the course of his address, said : " There must be no trimming to the spirit of these speculative times, no sympathy with a relaxed theology, no tampering with a modified rationalism, no Pelagian or Arminian importations into our pulpits, but a staunch adherence to those evangelical verities which have made us what we are. . . . Should we ever be tempted to quit our high doctrinal standing, it will be mainly as the result of an enfeebled godliness. If our churches lose that, they will soon forgo their attachment to truths which must ever painfully remind them from whence they have fallen."¹

Some discordant notes, however, had already sounded, and they found fresh vent ere long in the utterances of Baldwin Brown and Lynch. Yet they met with staunch resistance. The revealed mind of God still ranked as paramount over the thoughts of men, and the divine aspect of truth remained ascendant over the human. Moral effeminacy had not yet drugged the mind of the religious public, nor had it learnt to decry systematic theology, or replace it by " diet too thin to keep the soul alive ". That danger lay ahead. Dr. Halley could still declare in 1855 : " I do not believe that a single evangelical truth has been renounced by the accredited preachers of the denomination. Some have removed to another gospel ; but in so doing they have removed from our sanctuaries." He adds very significantly : " men lost faith in the last century before they elected pastors who introduced doctrines directly opposed to their fathers' belief. The spirit of the world, which gendereth to bondage, had come over them. If we have not power, by our preaching and prayers, to overthrow the tables of the money-changers and cast out the unclean spirit, *our work is done*. God raise up others to do it !"

The first open clashes between the old and the new Congregationalism occurred in connection with the *Rivulet* controversy,

¹ *Christian Witness*, VII, 268.

and the deposition of Dr. S. Davidson on the ground of neology from his professorship in the Lancashire College. Reproduction of German rationalism and the "moral influence" theory of the atonement were his offences, and they were then counted unpardonable. The best minds still clave to the best side. The names of Dr. Robert Vaughan, and his gifted son, so early removed, Dr. Liefchild, Dr. Lindsay Alexander, John Kennedy, Enoch Mellor, and others, might be adduced in support of this affirmation. As late as 1863 we hear Samuel Martin in his presidential address declare: "With those who deny the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, reject the witness of miracles, and trample underfoot the blood of the Son of God, we have no common ground"; and, a year later, Dr. Allon repudiates what we should term modernism with equal decision. "The insidious heresy," he says, "that resolves the death of the cross into simple self-sacrifice and the atonement into mere moral influence finds little favour amongst us. The healthy instinct which tells us that righteousness must have precedence even of love resents the maudlin theology that finds its ultimate root in mere benevolence. Our churches hold the conception of Christ's death as expiatory, having a legal aspect Godwards as well as a moral aspect manwards."¹

III. ECLIPSE

Full loth are we to turn the page; for studies in degeneration are little to our taste. Nor is it needful to explore the recesses of the morass in which historical Independency has been engulfed.² The broad fact cannot be gainsaid that Congregationalism has parted company with its antecedents, and become a medley of nondescript components, most of them trainbearers in the retinue of unbelief. It may plume itself on its creedlessness, and the open house it offers to all comers; but we are forcibly reminded of the "house to let" in the Gospels, swept and garnished, yet ominously vacant. Talmage's remark contains no small measure of truth: "a church without a creed is a church without a conscience". Besides, negations diligently promulgated constitute a very articulate creed, all disclaimers notwithstanding; and that Congregational colleges and pulpits circulate that sort of counterfeit coin to-day with singular assiduity, who can dispute? Their ruling tendency is to sift every distinctive

¹ Waddington, *Congregational Hist.*, V, 366, 428.

² We use general terms. There may be single churches, *rarae nantes in gurgite vasto*, relics of Lady Huntingdon's Connexion, for example, which form exceptions.

peculiarity out of Christianity, to place confidence in man rather than in God, and to claim the right to believe as they list. Of course, a church must be at cross-purposes with divine truth when it has thus gutted its Bible. So we cannot wonder at the presence of close approximations to Socinianism, or at efforts to transform chaff into meal by inculcating ethics as a substitute for the evangel of divine renovation.

What, we may ask, has Congregationalism achieved by spurning the counsel of its seniors? Has it won the world's countenance and esteem? We doubt it; but if so, it has been dearly purchased. Vanity Fair's guerdons are never bestowed gratis; a *quid pro quo* is always exacted. Part of the price paid consists in the substitution of a sham battle with the world for a real one. For modernism masks its impotence to wage the holy war to which Christianity is sworn under the fanfaronade of a pretentious dress-parade. It is manifest that Independency no longer wields the sword of the Spirit as it did aforetime. Once it was a pioneer in evangelism; but it bears that character no longer. We have no wish to pass censorious judgments on a body whose memories we have been cordially scanning; but the contrast between past and present is too patent to be blinked. Many Congregational ministers to-day dislike the very name *evangelical*, unless they can impose on it a meaning of their own. To them it represents what their German masters call an *überwundener Standpunkt*. And free and easy practice keeps pace with free and easy doctrine. Depletion of spiritual life may be gauged alike by discarded prayer-meetings and approved theatricals and "fancy fairs". Another evidence of spiritual destitution appears in the slender share which Congregationalism nowadays takes in Gospel work or in interdenominational missionary enterprise. Our Baptist brethren have been preserved from similar atrophy largely through the influence of men like C. H. Spurgeon, himself (by the way) a nursling of an Independent manse where Puritan folios were read and treasured.

Is it too late to ask votaries of culture and modernity, weary of being the flotsam and jetsom of current thought, secretly sick of spurious satisfactions and collapsible speculations, to consider what they have gained by a religion "sicklified o'er with a pale haze of doubt", a religion without assurance of the past or hold on the future? God knoweth! *Facilis descensus Averno est; sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras, hoc opus, hic labor est!* Shall *Ichabod* be finally written here or *Jehovah Shammah*?

Protests have been tendered now and then against that curious "waxiness to persuasion" which has made current Congregationalism such a Proteus. This "religion of the open mind" and nothing else, like Saul among the prophets, seems ready, with some of its devotees, to strip itself to the skin, and then wait hopefully for a crop of feathers to sprout from within, or a suit of clothes to drop from without, on its chilly destitution. But we observe that, as recently as 1873, Dr. Eustace Conder could plead the cause of systematic theology before the Union; and, whatever demurs we may make to Dr. Dale's want of apprehension on some points or Dr. Parker's eccentricities on others, both of them were men of convictions, not personified notes of interrogation. Parker's book, *None like it*, in fact, upholds the authority of the Bible, and he goes to the root of the matter when he writes: "the moment inspiration begins, the very apparatus of criticism must be changed". Others, like Forsyth and Jowett, have bowed the knee to the critical Baal, yet clung to an objective atonement, a Gospel whose terms did not confute its title. And we still have with us, in Dr. Campbell Morgan, a distinguished preacher, who, whatever may be his distaste for Calvinism, has always preached the word without discount, and never ceased to proclaim salvation through the blood of the Lamb. But Forsyth had to make the sorrowful confession: "the Gospel is fighting for its life in our churches". And that was tantamount to saying that the churches in question were ceasing to be churches of Christ at all, that their very *raison d'être* was disappearing; that, in short, they were dwindling to mere clubs for "social service" or mutual religious improvement.

The same remark applies to modernism in all the churches. What Prof. Machen denominates "two mutually exclusive religions" are striving for the mastery. *The Gospel* can no more co-exist with such a housemate than the worship of Jehovah with that of the golden calf, or the cuckoo long nest with the genuine fledglings. One must oust the other. "Truth and falsehood", as Bacon observes, "may cleave, but not incorporate." And their artificial amalgamation entails sooner or later a *cleavage* in the opposite sense of that Janus-faced word. A consummation devoutly to be wished by all genuine truth-lovers! Light and darkness, life and death, the Church and the world, God hath parted asunder: let not man join them together!

EDMUND K. SIMPSON.

Ipswich.