

doctrine of the gradual development of Christianity. The Romanists had stopped short at the council of Trent, when the decrees of a general council were canonized by the sanction of an infallible Pope. In like manner, almost every Protestant church has acted as if religion ceased to be progressive at the precise moment of time when their own articles of belief were drawn up, after much dispute and difference of opinion.

But the precepts inculcated by Pastor Robinson were delivered to a body of men whose form of ecclesiastical polity was very peculiar; who held that each congregation, each separate society of fellow-worshippers, constituted within themselves a perfect and independent church, whose duty it was to compose for itself and modify at pleasure its rules of scriptural interpretation. In conformity with these ideas, the common law of New England had ruled, that the majority of the pew-holders in each church should retain their property in a meeting-house, and any endowment belonging to it, whatever new opinions they might, in the course of time, choose to adopt. In other words, if, in the lapse of ages, they should deviate from the original standard of faith, they should not suffer the usual penalties of dissent, by being dispossessed of the edifice in which they were accustomed to worship, or of any endowments given or bequeathed for a school-house or the support of a pastor, but should continue to hold them; the minority who still held fast to the original tenets of the sect, having to seek a new place of worship, but being allowed to dispose of their pews, as of every other freehold, if purchasers could be found.

Every year in some parts of New England, where the population is on the increase, the manner in which some one of these new congregations starts into existence may be seen. A few individuals, twenty perhaps, are in the habit of meeting together on the Sabbath in a private dwelling, or in the school-house already built for the children of all denominations in the new village. One of the number offers a prayer, another reads a chapter in the Bible, another a printed sermon, and perhaps a fourth offers remarks, by way of exhortation, to his neighbors. As the population increases, they begin to think of forming them-