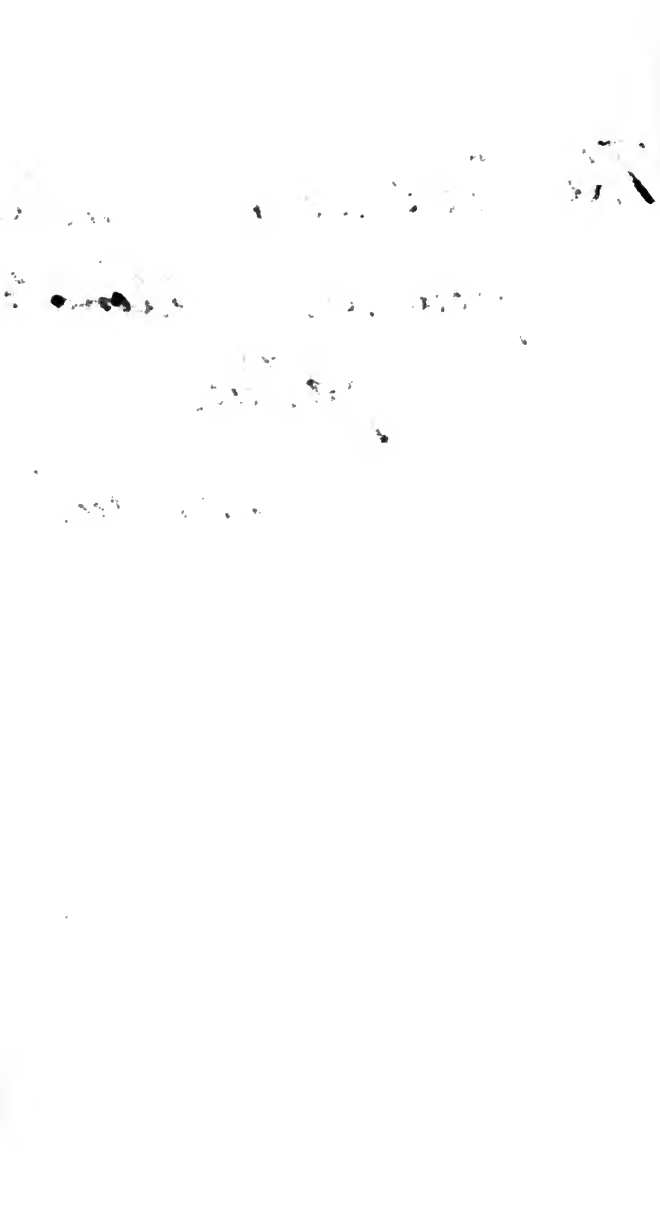


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Letters to Presbyterians



The Rev. & Mr. Buckinidge
from his affectionate
father,

The Author

LETTERS



TO

PRESBYTERIANS,

ON THE

Present Crisis in the Presbyterian Church

IN THE

UNITED STATES.

BY SAMUEL MILLER, D. D.

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LETTERS TO PRESBYTERIANS.

8c.

LETTER I.

Introductory Remarks—Early Rupture in the Presbyterian Church.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

IN every community, whether ecclesiastical or civil, there are seasons of special excitement, and of deep interest, which cannot fail of engaging the attention of all who seek its welfare. In such seasons it is of the utmost importance that every member of the body be calm and impartial; and that every thing consistent with fidelity to truth and order, be done to avert the influence of prejudice and passion, and to promote the reign of brotherly love. Such a season, if I mistake not, now exists in that part of the religious community with which it is our privilege to be connected. Under this impression I venture to address you on a few topics which appear to me peculiarly important in the present state of our country and church. In doing this, I claim no right to assume the office of censor, or even on this occasion, of an instructor among you. But as your friend and brother; as one born and bred within the bosom of our beloved Church; and who has been permitted, however unworthily, to occupy a place in her ministry for more than forty years;—you will not wonder that I feel

the deepest solicitude for her prosperity; and that I hope to be forgiven for pouring out the fulness of a heart which, unless it deceives me, desires nothing more unfeignedly than to see her walking in peace, and built up in truth, love, and holiness, unto salvation. Permit me then to say, as one of old said, after listening to much discussion of a very diversified character, in a circle which he regarded as his superiors—"I also will show mine opinion."

Never, since I became capable of using a pen, have I taken one in hand with a deeper, and more awful sense of responsibility than at present. While I write, it is my fervent prayer that I may not be permitted to give, in any case, a wrong touch to the ark of God. And it is my earnest desire that every reader, in entering on the perusal of what may be written, may devoutly lift up his heart to Him who has the residue of the Spirit, that it may make on no mind any other than a hallowed and useful impression.

I hardly need say that, in contemplating the present state of our church, there are some considerations which impress my own mind far more deeply than they can be expected to impress the minds of those who are much younger than myself; and who have not been placed in similar circumstances. My birth and early life were cast by Providence in a family, and in the midst of a population, which were deeply agitated by an old controversy, and eventual rupture, in the Presbyterian Church:—a rupture which, for seventeen years, divided and kept asunder a large body of ministers and churches, who ought to have felt that they were one; and which, for a much longer time, operated as a worm at the root of

their Christian affection. A brief sketch of the rise, progress and consummation of that deplorable rupture, may not be wholly useless, especially to the younger part of those whom I address. It is always useful to "remember the days of old, and to consider the years of former generations." At any rate, if the sketch which I propose to give, should answer no other purpose, it will serve to show why I shrink, with a kind of instinctive horror, from every thing adapted to produce strife and division in our beloved Church. I have heard so much under my paternal roof, and among the associates of my youth, of the mischiefs and miseries of the old schism, that I feel willing to sacrifice every thing but truth and duty, for the sake of avoiding a repetition of those melancholy scenes.

The first ministers and members of the Presbyterian Church, in this country, were chiefly from *Scotland* and the north of *Ireland*. They were generally driven from their native shores by persecution, and sought in America that liberty to worship God according to the dictates of conscience which they had been denied at home. They settled principally in *Pennsylvania*, *West Jersey*, *Delaware* and *Maryland*, because in those colonies alone were they permitted to enjoy the exercise of their religious rights and privileges. The Puritan settlers of *New England* do not appear to have been very favourable to the introduction of the Presbyterian form of government and discipline into the midst of their Congregational churches. The Episcopalians in *Virginia* and *New York*, were still more indisposed to extend to persecuted Presbyterians the rites of Christian hospitality. But in *Pennsylvania*, *West Jersey* and *Delaware*, the

predominant influence was that of the *Quakers*, who opened their arms freely to all denominations to settle among them; and in *Maryland* the adherents to the Romish Church, who were the first settlers, from a principle of policy, so far deviated from their wonted habit, as to adopt the same indulgent system. These circumstances may be considered as the main reason why the first Presbyterian Churches organized in any of the American colonies, now forming the United States, were almost all found in the colonies before mentioned.

The pious founders of these churches were warmly attached to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and to the Presbyterian form of ecclesiastical government. To these they had been accustomed from their youth, and deemed them important to the edification of the body of Christ. On these principles they associated; and to sustain this scriptural system, they virtually pledged themselves to one another and to the church of God. They began to form congregations on this plan toward the close of the seventeenth century; and in the year 1704, they seem to have constituted the first judicatory, under the name of the "Presbytery of Philadelphia."

Very soon after these primary organizations, some who had been bred Congregationalists in *South Britain*, or in *New-England*, acceded to the new body, and consented to bear the name and act under the order and discipline of Presbyterians. At this early period, the venerable men who founded the Presbyterian Church, though strongly attached, as before stated, to a particular system of faith and order, which it was well understood they wished faithfully to maintain;—had not formally and publicly adopted any

particular Confession of Faith, or ecclesiastical constitution. They acted under a plan rather understood than officially ratified; but which, in the beginning, they seem to have carried into execution with much fraternal harmony. In a few years, however, a degree of discord began to appear. Those who had been bred Presbyterians were desirous of carrying into effect the system to which they had been accustomed in all its extent and strictness; while those who had been educated in Congregational principles and habits, though willing to bear the names of Presbyterians, yet wished for many abatements and modifications of Presbyterianism, and were found frequently encroaching on the order of that form of ecclesiastical government. It is due to candour to say, that the Congregational part of the ministers, and those who sided with them, appear to have been more ardent in their piety than the strict Presbyterians. At any rate, it is undoubtedly a fact, that they urged in the judicatories of the Church, with peculiar zeal, their wishes that great care should be exercised respecting the personal piety of candidates for the holy ministry; and that a close examination on experimental religion should always make a part of trials for license and ordination. The strict Presbyterians, on the one hand, were zealous for the *Westminster* Confession of Faith, Catechisms, Directory, Presbyterian order, and Academical learning, in the preachers of the Gospel; while they appear to have disliked the close examination contended for in regard to personal piety; or, at least, to have disapproved the *method* in which the examinations were conducted, as being different from any thing to which they had been accustomed in their native country. On the

other hand, the brethren congregationally inclined, provided they were satisfied on the score of personal piety, did not set so high a value on human learning, or require so much of it as indispensable in candidates for the holy ministry, as their opponents contended for; but were too ready to make indulgent exceptions, and to give dispensations as to this point, and even in violation of rules to which they had virtually assented. And, in some instances, they proceeded, with indecent haste, and in defiance of order, to license and ordain candidates whose want of suitable qualifications gave great offence to the more regular part of their brethren.

In 1716, the number of ministers had increased so far, chiefly by emigrations from *Europe*, that they distributed themselves into four Presbyteries, bearing the names of *Philadelphia*, *New-Castle*, *Snow-Hill*, and *Long Island*, and erected a Synod under the name of the "Synod of *Philadelphia*." About this time, or a little before, a considerable number of ministers, who had been educated Congregationalists, entered our Church, more particularly several in *East Jersey*, and on *Long Island*. This, in a little while, gave rise to strife and difficulty. Discrepant views and feelings began, to a greater extent than before, to appear. The great importance and even indispensable necessity of having some known and publicly acknowledged standards of faith and order became manifest. For although all professed to believe in the *Bible*, yet they found that good men interpreted the Bible very differently. It became evident, therefore, by painful experience, that some explicit test, some explanatory statement, by the application of which they might ascertain in what manner candi-

dates for license and ordination *understood the Bible*, was indispensable. The attainment of this object was the result of several years discussion and conflict. The Congregational part of the ministers, generally, opposed with warmth the adoption of a Confession of Faith, both from the pulpit and the press. The venerable President, *Dickinson*, of *Elizabeth Town*, took the lead in this opposition, and was an able writer on the subject. The measure, however, was ultimately carried. In 1729, the Synod passed what was called the "Adopting Act." This act consisted of a public authoritative adoption of the *Westminster* Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as the Confession of Faith of the Church; and made it necessary that, not only every candidate, but also every actual minister in the Church, should be obliged, by subscription or otherwise, in the presence of the Presbytery, to acknowledge these formularies respectively, as the confession of their faith. This act, though, as before observed, it did not pass without much opposition, appears to have been adopted by a large majority; and was, at length, peaceably acquiesced in by all.

In 1734, an overture was brought into Synod, concerning the trials of candidates for the ministry; directing that "all candidates for the ministry be examined diligently as to their experience of a work of sanctifying grace on their hearts; and that none be admitted who are not, in a judgment of charity, serious Christians." This overture was adopted unanimously; and thus the Congregational party were gratified in one of their favourite and very laudable objects. In 1738, the Synod, finding that, in some of the Presbyteries, in which the brethren who were inclined to Congregational laxness formed a majority,

there was a disposition to license almost any young man who offered himself, however great a novice he might be, and however defective in literary acquirements, provided he appeared pious, thought it their duty to pass an act, directing that "young men be first examined respecting their literature, by a commission of Synod, and obtain a testimony of their approbation, before they can be taken on trial by any Presbytery." This act, however, though regularly adopted by the Synod, was not duly regarded by all the Presbyteries; and especially in one signal instance, adapted by its circumstances to create general attention and deep interest, was openly set at defiance and disobeyed, by those ministers who had distinguished themselves by opposing strict Presbyterian order. Every thing of this kind served, of course, to exasperate feelings previously excited, and to lay a train of combustible materials, ready to be kindled into a flame, whenever an occasion occurred. The ministers and their respective adherents were now arranged into two parties. The friends of Presbyterian order, a learned ministry, and strict adherence to the Confession of Faith, were styled *Old-side-men*, or *Old-lights*: while the others were denominated *New-side-men*, or *New-lights*. These parties, in the progress of collision, became more excited and ardent. Prejudices were indulged. Misrepresentations took place. And they at length reached a stage of mutual suspicion and animosity which almost, and in many cases, absolutely, precluded all intercourse as Christian brethren.

While things were in this unhappy state, Mr. *Whitefield*, in 1739, paid his second visit to *America*. The extensive and glorious revival of religion which took

place under his ministry, and that of his clerical advocates and adherents, is well known. The cordial and active friends of this revival generally coincided with that portion of the Presbyterian Church which was most friendly to ardent piety, and least zealous for Presbyterian order, Confessions of Faith and literary qualifications in the ministry. While the strict Presbyterian party, perceiving some really censurable irregularities among some of the active friends and promoters of the revival, were too ready to pronounce the whole a delusion. This brought on the crisis. Animosities, which had long been burning in secret, now burst into a flame. *Old-side-men*, under the influence of prejudice, regarded their opponents as a body of extravagant and ignorant enthusiasts: while the *New-side*, under an equally strong prejudice, regarded *Old-side-men* as a set of pharisaical formalists. Undue warmth of feeling and speech, and improper inferences were admitted on both sides. One act of violence led to another, until, at length, in the year 1741, the highest judicatory of the church was rent asunder; and the Synod of *New York*, composed of *New-side-men*, was set up in a sort of opposition to that of *Philadelphia*. In this controversy, some excellent and judicious ministers, believing both sides to be in the wrong, could not fully agree with either. These took no part in the controversy, as such; were sometimes claimed by both parties; and formed that connexion as to Presbytery and Synod; which was most convenient, on account of their local circumstances. And even some of those who were ranked by themselves, as well as by others, with one or the other of the parties respectively, disapproved of much that they saw in both. This will

not appear strange to those who are acquainted with the human heart, or who have witnessed analogous scenes in later times.

In this controversy there were, undoubtedly, faults on both sides. This, indeed, not only moderate men, as was just stated, saw at the time, but even some of the most excited and fervent actors of each party in the humiliating scene, were candid enough, after union was restored, to acknowledge, and on account of it severely to censure themselves. The *Old-side* were wrong in opposing the revival of religion under the ministry of *Whitefield* and his friends; and in contending, as they did at first, against examinations on vital piety:—while the *New-side* were as plainly wrong in frequently violating that ecclesiastical order which they had stipulated to observe; in undervaluing literary qualifications for the holy ministry; and in giving countenance, for a time, to some real extravagancies and disorders which attended the revival of religion. That the *New-side* men were sensible of having carried to an extreme their comparative disregard of literary qualifications, and of mature theological study, was made evident by their strenuous and successful efforts, a few years after they became organized as a party, to retrace their steps, and to establish the college of *New Jersey*.

These errors were afterwards seen and lamented. Both parties gradually cooled. Both became sensible that they had acted rashly and uncharitably. Both felt the inconvenience, as well as the sin of division. Congregations had been rent in pieces. Two houses of worship, and two ministers were established in places where there was not adequate support for one. The members of one Synod were excluded

from the pulpits of the other; and this was the case even when individuals cordially respected each other, and were desirous of a fraternal interchange of ministerial services. Still, although both parties soon became heartily sick of the division, the Synods remained divided for seventeen years. The first overture towards a union appears to have been made by the Synod of *New York*, in the year 1749. But nine years were spent in negotiation. At length mutual concessions were made; the articles of union in detail were agreed upon; and the Synods were happily united, under the title of "the Synod of *New York* and *Philadelphia*," in the year 1758.

Although this breach was healed eleven years before my birth, yet, in my youth, I heard so much of its melancholy scenes, and witnessed so many of its mournful effects, that I hardly need say, my recollections of it are deeply painful, and that I consider it as one of the most solemnly admonitory portions of the history of our Church. From a venerated parent, who acted his part with other ministers in the distressing struggle; and from a number of his clerical friends, with whom I had, in early life, a sort of filial acquaintance, I learned so much of the miseries and mischiefs of the whole scene; of the wounds which were inflicted on private feeling; above all, of the deeper wounds inflicted on the cause of religion; and of the deplorable degree in which the hands of ministers, and the interests of many churches, were weakened by strife and schism;—that you cannot wonder that all the associations in my mind with that history are peculiarly painful; and that it is impossible for me to witness ecclesiastical animosity and alienation, and to hear suggestions of another

rupture in our beloved Church, without much more intense anguish of spirit than seems to be endured by many younger men who make or hear the suggestion. I shall not attempt to institute a comparison between the sources of the spirit of the old animosities which I have described, and some which we have witnessed in our own day. This will be left to the mind of each reader for himself. Suffice it to say, that if we refuse to profit by the experience of our fathers, we may be said to spurn some of the choicest lessons which the word and the providence of God furnish for our instruction.

In contemplating, then, the present state of the Presbyterian Church, in comparison with its former conflicts and trials, the following questions very naturally present themselves to the considerate mind. Do the *great mass* of the ministers and members of our Church differ *more* among themselves at this hour, than did those who directed her affairs ninety years ago, at the date of the unhappy rupture which has been described? Did not the good men, on both sides, who acted in that schism, and produced it, deeply lament, afterwards, what had occurred, and severely reflect on themselves for the spirit and conduct in which they had indulged? Did not the same men, after seventeen years, actually come together again, with mutual concessions, and with many lamentations over their animosities and rupture? Is there the least reason to believe that the members of either party really entertained essentially different opinions on any important points when they effected a union in 1758, from those which they entertained at the date of their schism in 1741? In other words, was there any more propriety, on principle, in their

being united in 1758, than there was in their remaining united in 1741? Is there not reason to believe that the strife and division which so long agitated the Church, resulted, not merely in much trouble to pious individuals and churches, but in the dishonour of religion before the world; in hardening and driving farther from the kingdom of God, many a serious inquirer; and in the final destruction of hundreds of precious souls, alienated and confirmed in impiety by the controversies of Christians? Would it be wise, then, at the present day, to promote a second rupture, only to reap from it similar fruits; nay, fruits of, perhaps, still more morbid malignity; and, after a few years of embittered strife, to come together again, as our fathers did, with mutual regrets and humiliation, for having ever separated, and without one important object having been gained by the separation?

While I offer these queries for solemn consideration, you will do me great injustice, if you suppose me to entertain the opinion, that those who are not agreed upon the fundamental principles of evangelical truth and order, ought, nevertheless, to be united in church communion. "How can any walk together except they be agreed?" Though the Church is one; and though all who are united to the Head are "one body in Christ, and every one members one of another;"—yet there can be no valuable communion of saints without communion in the essentials of Christian truth. Of course, where differences among professing Christians relate to fundamentals, they cannot "walk together." To attempt it would be solemn mockery. The great question is, at what point of difference ought they to separate? That

some differences in the mode of explaining truth, must be tolerated, and even expected, among those who bear the same denomination and commune at the same sacramental table, is too manifest to require proof. If this were not the case, no ten men in the Christian world could unite in the same ecclesiastical body. Or rather, as no two men on earth perfectly agree in all their habits of thinking on all subjects, and even on all theological subjects, it is plain, if no diversity of sentiment be admissible, that there must be as many different ecclesiastical communions as there are men.

Some differences of opinion, then, among those in the same communion must necessarily be allowed. How far they may be safely indulged, is the great question. In solving this question, there are, doubtless, extremes on each side which ought carefully to be avoided. The true course, if we can find it, is between these extremes. If there be individual ministers and members in the Presbyterian Church, who depart so widely from its professed faith and order, that they ought never to have entered it; and even having entered it, cannot, consistently with good faith, remain in it for a single day—which I neither affirm nor deny—but of which some assuredly entertain the painful apprehension—I certainly plead for no latitude which would either justify their original reception, or encourage their continuance in our body. But admitting that there are such ministers in our communion—which I pretend not to decide—that their number is considerable, I have never seen reason to believe; and that a very large majority—nay nineteen-twentieths of the whole number of our ministers, are sufficiently near to the scriptures and to

each other, in respect to all the essentials of truth, to be comfortably united in Christian fellowship and co-operation, I cannot allow myself to doubt. Surely, if this be the case, for such brethren to "part asunder," and form separate denominations, would be unnecessarily, nay criminally, to "rend the body of Christ." What would, probably, be the character and the consequences of such a rupture? If a single definite line between existing parties could be drawn, and a separation amicably effected, perhaps we might say, the sooner it is done the better. A quiet separation would certainly be better than a mere nominal union with protracted strife. But such a single definite line could not be drawn, or if it could, would not suffice. Our body would be sundered into at least four or five parts. *Synods* would be divided into several parts. *Presbyteries* would be rent in pieces. *Congregations* would be found, in a multitude of cases, to be made up of members of different sentiments, and, of course, be severed into two or three sections, neither of which would be able to sustain the regular ministrations of the Gospel. Controversies also without end respecting church property, would probably be engendered; unhallowed passions would be excited; friends would be separated; families be painfully divided; the Saviour "would be crucified afresh, and put to an open shame" among his professed disciples; and Zion would lie bleeding and dishonoured in the sight of an unbelieving world:—and all this for what? Only to remain apart for a little while; to make work for bitter repentance; to patch up an ignoble peace, to come together again as before, without removing a single real evil, or attaining a single real advantage; and after having driven off hundreds,

it may be thousands of souls into hardened impiety and perdition. For, that two or more such bodies as could be formed out of the mass of the Presbyterian Church at the present day; out of such men as were *unanimous* in adopting such a "Narrative of the State of Religion," and such a "Pastoral Letter," as were sent forth by the last General Assembly—could long consent to remain separate, in this day of noble catholic enterprise, is altogether incredible.

My voice then, is NOT FOR DIVISION, but FOR PEACE AND CONTINUED UNION. It is for softening asperities; for reconciling differences; for "putting away all bitterness, and wrath, and evil speaking;" for following with ceaseless diligence, "those things which make for peace;"—in a word, for labouring to turn away our own minds, and the minds of others from all non-essential points of difference, and striving with one accord to promote a spirit of brotherly love, and of hearty co-operation in the great practical work of converting the world to the knowledge and love of the Saviour. Let us take this course; let us put away our philosophical refinements and subtleties; let us come back to that mode of preaching which accords with the plainness and simplicity of the scriptural model; let us lay aside speculation, and endeavour to be absorbed ourselves, and to engage others, in the grand enterprise of spreading the knowledge of that "Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Let us do this, and all will be well. Our beloved Church will soon be more united than ever; and will, by the blessing of God, be prepared to go forward with greatly augmented degrees of harmony, zeal and love, in the great work of the conversion of the world.

But in order to our pursuing this course with comfort, and especially with any hope of success, a few corrections of our present procedure will be indispensably necessary. If we pertinaciously refuse to admit corrections as to the points contemplated, we shall undoubtedly be broken in pieces. These points it will be my endeavour to exhibit in the following papers, without reserve, and in a spirit of cordial conciliation. I have no wish to denounce or criminate. My aim, as I stated, is peace:—and as nothing but truth can, ultimately, promote genuine peace—my desire is to “speak the truth in love.” I write under the impression that my race is almost run; that I can have no real interest but in the harmony, purity, and edification of the Church; and that what I write, as well as the spirit with which it is read, will soon pass in review before that tribunal where every disguise will be stripped off, and “all things will appear naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

Princeton, January 1st, 1833.

LETTER II.

Voluntary Associations.

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS,

IT is in vain to hope for solid peace in our beloved Church, as long as views so discordant, and feelings so excited in regard to the relative claims of Ecclesiastical Boards, and Voluntary Associations, as have recently prevailed, continue to prevail, and to be warmly urged. In reference to this subject there appear to me to be faults on both sides; faults which, if carried to the extreme, and pressed with the zeal, which we have often witnessed, must keep the Church in constant commotion, and ultimately rend her in pieces.

I have spoken of extremes of partisans on both sides in this controversy. My meaning shall be stated with all plainness and candour. I have reason, then, to believe, that there are many ministers and members of the Presbyterian Church, who are conscientiously of the opinion that the Church, as such, that is, by her appropriate judicatories, cannot conduct the missionary enterprise, or the education of youth for the gospel ministry, with any advantage; that she ought not to attempt it; that every thing of this kind can be more easily and far better done, by Voluntary Associations. And, accordingly, it is their earnest desire, if I understand their wishes and aims, to combine the whole evangelical influence, throughout the United States, especially the undivided strength of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches, in national institutions, for conducting the

missionary and education causes, independently of all ecclesiastical judicatories. And, for the attainment of this object, they are desirous, unless I am deceived, of taking every thing of this kind out of the hands of the General Assembly; or, at least, of so amalgamating the Boards of "Missions," and of "Education," under the care of the Assembly, with their corresponding Voluntary Associations, as to divest the former of all ecclesiastical character, and make them, if not tributary to the latter, at any rate so connected with them, as to implicate their movements very essentially, with the will of national and irresponsible institutions. And hence those who adopt these views are sometimes too ready to stigmatize all such plans and measures as have for their object the establishment, or the invigoration of Ecclesiastical Boards, as "high-church" plans, and those who favour them as "high-church men;" who are rather sticklers for a party, than liberal and magnanimous friends of the Redeemer's kingdom.

I am far from charging the brethren who entertain these opinions and wishes with having sinister aims, or with pursuing their object by unhallowed means. On the contrary, I consider them as truly pious men, who verily believe that their views and plans are most in accordance with the cause of God, and best adapted to expedite the conversion of the world. I allow them, in short, the same candour and honesty of purpose that I claim for myself. Yet I can by no means concur with them in opinion. They go to an extreme from which both judgment and conscience compel me to draw back.

On the other hand, there are some warm friends of Ecclesiastical Boards, who appear to me to go to

the opposite, and an equally injurious extreme. They believe, if I understand them, that all Voluntary Associations, from the circumstance of their not being responsible to any ecclesiastical authority, are dangerous, and ought to be discouraged. They suppose that all measures for sending the Gospel to the destitute, or training candidates for the holy ministry, ought to be conducted by the Church alone, in her appropriate capacity, in conformity with her laws, and on a plan subject to her control. It is not only the business of the Church, in their opinion, to take the lead in all these measures; but they go further and maintain, that measures of this kind which are not subjected to her authoritative direction, are so liable to become irregular, and even lawless, that they are quite as likely to issue in evil as in good; and, therefore, that no member of the Church of Christ can wisely or safely aid such associations either by his money, or his influence. Some of the most enlightened and pious ministers and members of our Church, it is well known, entertain these opinions, and take a corresponding ground, especially in relation to the "Home Missionary Society," and the "American Education Society." They foresee many dangers as likely to arise from the growing influence of these institutions; and, of course, consider every degree of patronage extended to them, as so much thrown into the scale of real, though not intended, hostility to the Church.

With those who cherish these feelings, it is as impossible for me to concur as with those who go to the other extreme. Their zeal for the truth, and for the purity of the Church; and their vigilance in warning and guarding against even possible dangers are

certainly commendable. But that they carry their apprehensions and jealousies altogether too far;—much farther than either justice, or sound policy warrants, I cannot help feeling persuaded. And hence, from the course which they think it their duty to take in relation to this matter, I am constrained entirely to dissent. It is true, I have no doubt, as before stated, that there are individuals in the Presbyterian Church; and individuals of no small worth and influence, who do really entertain the opinions, and aim at the object, which their brethren impute to them. They do wish either to put down Ecclesiastical Boards, as such, or to subject them to some system of controlling connexion with their favourite Voluntary Associations. And they do honestly believe that in striving to accomplish this object, they are most effectually promoting the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. Yet the number of these mistaken partisans, is not, in my opinion, so great as many imagine; and if it were, the true way to counteract them, is by no means, that of denouncing, and endeavouring to depress Voluntary Associations, as such; but by employing all lawful means to infuse new life and activity into Ecclesiastical Boards; and by making it manifest, while we support with zeal our own denomination, that we regard with a benevolent eye every institution which honestly raises the banner of Christ, and appears in any wise adapted to extend his reign.

The view which I take of the whole subject is this. Every church, that is, every separate denomination of Christians, as such, owes it to her Master in heaven, and to herself, to propagate, by all fair and lawful means, and as extensively as possible, that

system of truth and order which she believes is found in the Holy Scriptures. This is, undoubtedly, one of the grand purposes for which the Church was instituted; that is, to maintain and extend the true religion. And if she really believes her doctrine, worship and discipline to be agreeable to the will of Christ,—which she of course *does* believe, if she be sincere in her profession,—she is plainly *bound* to bear testimony in their favour; to defend them against all opposers; and to extend the knowledge of them by all the means in her power. In fact, every church that would be faithful to the great purpose for which she was founded, ought to consider herself in her ecclesiastical capacity—as a MISSIONARY AND EDUCATION SOCIETY, whose *main business* it is to maintain in perfect purity, and to spread abroad to every creature, all the known doctrines and institutions of Jesus Christ; and to take measures for raising up well qualified and faithful men for performing this work. These things, as is perfectly manifest from Scripture, are not only the appropriate duty of the Church; but they constitute her PRINCIPAL DUTY. She ought not, indeed, to be bigotedly or blindly attached to those peculiarities which form her distinctive testimony as a Church. She ought not to indulge an offensive, proselyting spirit; far less ought she, with fierce and fiery zeal, or by any sinister, or unfair means whatever, to attempt to enlarge her borders. But still it is her duty, by all honest, honourable, and Christian means, to endeavour to propagate “the truth as it is in Jesus,” among all whom she can reach. And I will add, that Church which contributes largely of the pecuniary means which God has given her, towards the propagation of the Gospel,

and yet gives the application of these means entirely out of her own hands, to an irresponsible body or bodies of men, who may or may not employ them for the support of genuine evangelical truth and order;—may be pious, zealous and active;—but surely cannot be considered as faithful in sustaining her own confession and testimony as a body of “witnesses” for Christ. I am aware that some call this “sectarianism,” and “high-church” doctrine. But those who thus stigmatize it, show that they understand neither the authorized meaning of terms, nor the nature of Christian duty. Such persons would, undoubtedly, if they had lived in the first century, have brought the same charge against the Saviour himself, and his inspired apostles. For they constantly enjoined it on the churches to which they wrote, to “hold fast the form of sound words which they had received;” to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,” against “all gainsayers;” and to “keep the ordinances as they had been delivered unto them.”

It is beautiful, indeed, and truly edifying, in this day of multiplied sects and parties, to see the disciples of Christ acknowledging the substantial unity of the visible Church; to see them taking by the hand Christians of different evangelical denominations, as brethren in Christ; communing with them, and joyfully co-operating with them in plans and efforts for extending the Redeemer’s kingdom. All this may be done without the sacrifice of a single truth or duty; nay to the great advancement of Christian edification. But when those who profess to consider themselves as “witnesses for God,” in the midst of a dark and unbelieving world, are willing to merge their testi-

mony in that of the general undistinguishing mass of nominal Christianity;—to give up every point which discriminates between a pure and a corrupt profession; to break down every fence which excludes error; and to pronounce all steady, consistent endeavours to maintain the genuine faith and order of the Gospel, “sectarian bigotry,” or “high-church intolerance;”—they may greatly applaud themselves as patterns of expanded charity; but they rather deserve the title of *latitudinarians*; and so far as their influence extends, are preparing the way for that false liberality which really confounds truth and error, and generally terminates in the extreme of laxity and indifference.

So far, then, from seeing any solid objection to Ecclesiastical Boards, for spreading the Gospel, and for educating young men for the sacred ministry; I think I see very obvious and powerful reasons why every denomination of Christians, as such, should have in constant and vigorous operation a missionary system, for publishing and extending the Gospel, according to their views of scriptural purity; sending forth itinerant preachers; disseminating books adapted to inculcate what they deem sound principles; planting churches of their own order; and thus, while they are ready and liberal in contributing to the cause of Christ in general,—bending their first and principal efforts towards the propagation of that pure system which Christ has committed to his Church to be maintained against all adversaries, and to be extended as widely as possible. This is what all denominations around us are professing to do, and we commend them for it. And when the teachers and rulers of any church neglect to do this with con-

stancy and zeal, they are unfaithful to the body of which they are the appointed guardians; unfaithful to the Master who has called them to their office; and unfaithful to the great purpose which the visible Church was founded to accomplish. I repeat it—as I read and understand the Bible, I am constrained with unwavering confidence, to pronounce, that however numerous, powerful and active other missionary associations around her may be, every Church—unless she would forget her PRIMARY DUTY, ought to consider herself as constituted by Christ a great MISSIONARY AND EDUCATION SOCIETY, for the express purpose, as far as means are possessed, of evangelizing the world; and, as one essential instrumentality for accomplishing this object, to raise up an able and faithful ministry. This object she is, no doubt, bound to pursue with unwearied zeal, *until the Church shall fill the world.*

But, on the other hand, I am quite as well persuaded that Voluntary Associations, for benevolent and pious objects, and among the rest, for spreading the Gospel, have been eminently useful; may still be eminently useful; and ought by no means to be denounced or opposed. They may do much, in their appropriate sphere, which cannot, perhaps, be accomplished by any other means. They may enlist as zealous and active coadjutors, many whom, possibly, no ecclesiastical body could attract or engage. They may gain access to persons and places which no ecclesiastical board could so well, or even at all, reach. Their movements, precisely because they are irresponsible and unshackled, may be eminently characterized by extent, popularity and vigour. And they may even benefit ecclesiastical bodies, by “provoking

them" to warmer zeal and more extended effort. I have, therefore, cordially rejoiced in the existence, for example, of such a body as the "American Home Missionary Society." I was a hearty friend to its institution; became, as soon as practicable, one of its life-members; have contributed to its treasury since; and mean to do so, if Providence permit, again. I have, therefore, been glad to witness its prosperity; and cannot for a single moment doubt, that it has been eminently useful. Such has ever been, and is now, my estimate of this important Society. My first and warmest affection, I acknowledge, is given to the General Assembly's "Board of Missions," as the organ for strengthening and extending that Church which I verily believe to be the purest and most apostolical on earth. To that Church I consider my *special* and *peculiar* devotion as due. Just as I suppose that every father of a family owes his first attention and solicitude to his own household, to which he is, of course, bound by peculiar ties. He who has solemnly joined himself by formal vows to a particular Christian denomination, because he professed to think it nearer the scriptural model than any other; and yet feels himself under no special obligation to consult the welfare and advancement of that denomination; must labour under some grievous intellectual or moral obliquity. To call a man "bigoted," a "sectarian," or a "high-churchman," because he decisively *prefers* to all others the Church to which he has solemnly pledged his membership and his affection; and to insist that he is *equally* bound to *approve*, and *equally* bound to *sustain*, all other denominations; — is as perfect an affront to common sense, as it is to every sober ecclesiastical principle. No man ought

to be willing to bear the distinctive name of any particular branch of the Church of Christ, without being resolved, while he extends his patronage and his prayers far beyond it, to make *that branch* the object of his first ecclesiastical care.

But, notwithstanding my warm adherence to this doctrine, it by no means closes my heart against the "American Home Missionary Society." Much as I love the Assembly's "Board of Missions," it does not by any means appear to me to supersede the value, and even the necessity of the great national institution just named. There is ample *room* for both. There is abundant *need* of both. I consider the Home Missionary Society as holding a most important place in the great operations of the present day, for the conversion of the world. It is, therefore, my earnest wish, not only that it may live, but that it may grow and prosper; that it may "lengthen its cords, and strengthen its stakes," and become more and more a blessing to our land. I would say, indeed, to all *Presbyterians*—"First, take care of the 'Board of Missions' of your own Church. See that *that* board is well supported, ably conducted, and every thing done consistent with the spirit of the Gospel, to promote its vigorous operation in its appropriate sphere. This, your relation to the Presbyterian Church; your virtual if not formal vows and engagements; and your Christian honour all demand of you. If you do not deliberately prefer the Presbyterian Church to all others, why did you solemnly connect yourselves with it? And if you *do* so prefer it, how can you reconcile it with fidelity to your engagements—nay, with the obligations of common honesty, to turn your backs upon those boards upon which the extension

and prosperity of the Church may be said, under God, to depend; and to give the main strength of your aid and counsel to bodies out of her pale? Christians ought not only to do as they would be done by, but they ought also to act, in all cases, upon principles which they would be willing should be made the principles of universal action. Suppose, then, *all* Presbyterians should neglect all the boards and institutions of their own Church, and give their exclusive patronage to other bodies; would not the Presbyterian Church soon languish and die? Can you as Presbyterians, then, be considered as acting a consistent or commendable part, if you abandon the appropriate institutions of your own Church, and prefer those which, though devoted to the general interests of religion, have not in view the enlargement of that portion of Christ's family which you profess to believe is purer, more scriptural, and better adapted to promote the real prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom than any other?"

But my exhortation would not end here. I would go on to say—"Having taken due care of your own Board of Missions, give efficient aid, as far as possible, to the Home Missionary Society. It is engaged in the same great and general cause with the Board of your own Church. Therefore, as far as your circumstances will allow, contribute to them *both*; pray for *both*; and endeavour to promote the strength and usefulness of *both*. It is the duty of every Christian, while he feels specially charged with the interests of that portion of the visible church with which he has joined himself, and specially bound to sustain and promote them;—to pray, and give, and labour for the prosperity of the whole body of Christ. This is the

spirit of the Gospel; and the more perfectly this spirit is cherished, and carried into practice, the more individual edification, and the general enlargement of the Church will be secured."

Some, indeed, have felt apprehensive that voluntary associations may become animated by such a spirit of inordinate ambition; may so encroach, and grasp, and invade, as finally either to break down ecclesiastical boards, or so to interfere with their movements, as greatly to embarrass and enfeeble them. Of such attempts, and of such a result, it is believed there is much less danger *now*, than there was several years ago. The friends of ecclesiastical order and peace, in our church, even many of those who are most warmly attached to voluntary associations, are beginning to see that *forced* amalgamations, or forced connexions of any kind, are worse than useless. They are beginning to see that a greater number of minds will be likely to be enlisted and accommodated by having *more than one board* devoted to a given branch of Christian effort. They are beginning to perceive that a much greater amount of good will probably be done by the separate action of rival bodies, than by the agency of one alone. And they are gradually receiving the impression that voluntary associations can scarcely take a course more adapted to weaken and discredit their own power, than to interfere, directly or indirectly, with the interests or arrangements of particular churches. Certain it is, that if voluntary associations were bent on their own ruin, they could not more speedily accomplish it than by taking this course. It is my belief, then, that, in the present state of the public mind, any serious apprehensions of danger from the en-

croachments of such associations may be safely dismissed.

But even supposing the danger to organized churches, from the ambitious interference of voluntary associations, to be ever so real and formidable, what is the best method of meeting that danger? Is it totally to decry such associations; to declare war against them; and to endeavour to turn away from them all public support and patronage? Would not this be attempting to put down an agency, which, though susceptible of perversion and abuse, is yet eminently powerful and capable, when wisely directed, of producing benefits to the Church and the world, of incalculable value? Would not this also be taking a course peculiarly adapted to exasperate party feeling; to divide the Church; and by protracted strife, to diminish the strength and the usefulness of both parties in the dispute? Such is my view of the subject. If, therefore, my apprehensions of the designs and the influence of voluntary associations were much more unfavourable than they have ever been, I should think it better, by far, to obviate the danger by treating them with respect and kindness, and by entering into a generous Christian competition with them in the career of usefulness, rather than, by hostility, by denunciation, by exciting party prejudices and passions, which, even if they should be effectual in putting down the object opposed, cannot fail to fill the church with conflicts altogether uncongenial with the hallowed work of extending the Redeemer's kingdom.

When, therefore, I contemplate the state of feeling in the Presbyterian Church in regard to the "Board of Missions," and the "Home Missionary Society,"

I cannot help rejoicing that they both exist, and hoping that they may both long continue to flourish. Some in our communion prefer *one* of those institutions, and some *the other*. On which side the majority lies, I shall not undertake to decide. Suffice it to say, that there is a large amount of piety, wealth, and public spirit, on each side. Many who are able to contribute largely to the cause of missions, will not give to the Home Missionary Society, because its constitution and responsibility are *not* ecclesiastical. While, perhaps, quite as large a number, ardently zealous for extending the Redeemer's kingdom, will not give to the General Assembly's Board, because its constitution and responsibility *are* ecclesiastical. I do indeed marvel, not that Presbyterians should be found who are unwilling to give to other boards than their own, but that *their own* should be precisely those which they are not willing to patronize. It is only, however, with facts, that I have at present to do. The question is not, then, at present, which of these classes is right, or which is most worthy of encouragement:—but the question is, seeing they *exist*, and are *likely to exist*, how their diversity of views may be disposed of in the best spirit, and with the best results? Is it not plainly desirable that both parties should be gratified? That each should have a treasury into which its contributions may be profitably cast? Is it not evident that, in this way, more harmony and Christian feeling will be likely to be secured; a larger amount of funds collected; more missionaries employed; and a far greater sum of good accomplished, than by either board if it existed alone?

Can there be a single friend of either Board so

narrow minded, so swayed by party feelings or so exclusively devoted by party schemes, as to be capable of saying—"Let *our* board flourish or *none*. Let the contributions of those who are not willing to give to *our* body, be withheld altogether from the cause of Missions?" I cannot admit the degrading supposition. If there *be* any who are willing to utter language, or even to cherish a feeling of this kind, they will do well to examine anew whether they are actuated by the spirit of Christ. Rather may we not hope that the great mass of the most zealous friends of each Board, respectively, will be ready to say—"Let the cause of missions prosper, and be extended, by whomsoever carried on. Let those who will not give to *us*, pour their liberal contributions into some other treasury?" Such, I trust, is the spontaneous decision of thousands who deserve to be called warm partisans in this controversy. And I am equally confident that the number is by no means small of those who, disregarding party feelings, and intent on promoting, as far as possible, what ought to be the great object of every Christian, are ready to contribute to *both* boards, and to do all in their power to promote the efficiency of *both*. Let this spirit prevail, and the missionary cause will cease to be a bone of contention among us. Let this spirit prevail, and the friends of each party may adopt with confidence the reply of Him who "spake as never man spake," who when one of his disciples said, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us," answered and said unto him, "Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us."

Other remarks on this important subject, will be reserved for a future letter. In the mean time let our prayers ascend that the God of love and of peace may be with us!

Princeton, Jan. 18th, 1833.

LETTER III.

Voluntary Associations, and Ecclesiastical Boards.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

LET me request your attention to some further remarks on the subject which stands at the head of this letter.

There are several considerations which demand our special notice in reference to the Assembly's "Board of Missions," which, it is probable, have been sometimes overlooked or forgotten in the estimates which have been formed of its position and proceedings.

The *first* consideration referred to is, that the Presbyterian Church in the United States has been *for a long time* engaged in the missionary department of evangelical labour. It is now nearly *seventy years*, since our branch of the American Church began, in her ecclesiastical capacity, and by means of her supreme judicatory, to take systematic measures for sending the Gospel to the destitute regions of our extended country. This was done by the old Synod of *New York and Philadelphia*, in a few years after its formation, in 1758. Not long after the establishment of our national independence, in 1783, the General Assembly, upon its present plan, was organized as our highest ecclesiastical judicatory. At the very first meeting of that body, in the year 1789, particular attention was directed to the missionary cause. A system of effort was formed; and an injunction issued to all the Presbyteries to raise adequate funds

for carrying it into execution with zeal and vigour. In pursuance of this plan much was effected in the following ten or eleven years. In the year 1801, the General Assembly, regarding this whole subject as one of primary importance, appointed agents to solicit *permanent funds* for sustaining the missionary enterprise under its direction. This appointment was crowned with success. Very considerable funds were obtained; and the Assembly gave *a solemn pledge to the churches*, not only in soliciting these contributions, but after they were obtained, *that the principal sum would be kept forever sacredly unbroken, and the interest applied, under the direction of the General Assembly, to the great object of sending the Gospel to the frontier and other destitute settlements.* It is by the annual avails of this fund, added to current contributions, that the Board of Missions has been enabled to carry on its pious enterprise from that time to the present.

It is plain, then, that the Board of Missions of the General Assembly, is *not a mere upstart body*; that the system which it is pursuing was begun by the highest judicatory of our Church, more than half a century before the Home Missionary Society had an existence; that more than thirty years ago, the business of conducting missions under its direction was committed to a standing Committee or Board of Missions; and that hundreds of Churches have been formed by its instrumentality. And although it be true that, for many years, our supreme judicatory did not conduct its missionary business with the zeal and vigour which were desirable and which the nature of the service ought to have inspired; yet a great amount of good was done by her efforts, and

many parts of the wilderness made to "rejoice and blossom as the rose." Can it be thought surprising that, with all these circumstances in view, a majority of the Presbyterian Church should feel unwilling to give up that missionary system in which, as a Church, she has been so long engaged; or, at least, to do what would have amounted to merging it in a new body, which had no immediate ecclesiastical connexion or responsibility? But this is not all. The General Assembly could not possibly consent to such measure without a *breach of faith* not to be for a moment thought of. The solicited contributions from the churches under her care, more than thirty years ago, were made, as before stated, under the solemn stipulation that she would preserve untouched the principal, and annually expend the interest forever in sustaining missions. Is it wonderful, then, that, holding funds obtained under so sacred a pledge, she should feel unwilling to accede to any proposal which would amount, either formally or virtually, to her giving the disposal of these funds in any measure out of her own hands; or subjecting them, in whole or in part, to the vote of another body? The writer of these pages acknowledges that when the proposal was first made several years ago, to adopt a plan which would have amalgamated the Assembly's Board of Missions with the Home Missionary Society, so strong was his desire for accommodation and peace, that he looked upon the plan with a favourable eye, and felt disposed to vote for its acceptance. He is now, however, persuaded that his then favourable impressions were erroneous; that to have adopted the proposed amalgamation would have been *in every view unwise*; but that, above all, it would have amounted to the abandon-

ment into other hands of *a sacred trust*, which was assumed in the most solemn manner, and which now, after more than thirty years, when most of the donors who contributed on the faith of the pledge then given are beyond the possibility of being consulted, can never be cancelled. The General Assembly, as I apprehend, can never cease, *without a breach of faith*, to carry on missionary operations with those funds; and cannot, without a manifest violation of her engagement, transfer the annual expenditure of their avails to other hands than her own, however pious and faithful those hands may be.

Seeing, then, that the General Assembly is *compelled*, by her own solemn engagement to the Church, made many years since, perpetually to carry on domestic missions, in her ecclesiastical capacity; is it desirable that she should perform this duty in a feeble and languid manner; that she should expend in this work nothing more than the interest of her old funds, derived chiefly from *deceased* members, without calling upon her *present* members for either effort or sacrifice in this most blessed service? This will hardly be admitted. If it be proper for her to act at all in this business, it is surely proper for her to act with zeal and efficiency, as a body feeling her obligations, and in good earnest desirous of discharging them. Instead, therefore, of imputing blame to the Board of Missions, that, when a few years ago, the Home Missionary Society was founded, it roused from a state of comparative inefficiency, and began a system of operations more spirited and extensive; it is rather worthy of censure for its former languor, and of high commendation for its subsequent increase in zeal and diligence. And if it were "provoked to good

works," as well as to "love," by a generous Christian rivalry with a sister institution, I know not that there is any thing, in such competition, inconsistent either with the spirit of the Gospel, or the edification of Christian intercourse. Sure I am, there will not be one dollar less contributed to the Home Missionary Society, on account of the renovated zeal of the Board of Missions, and her efforts to rouse a missionary spirit in the community, and to draw larger contributions than ever before to her treasury. On the contrary, while large sums are placed at the disposal of that Board, which would never, but for her existence and efforts, have been given to any Missionary Board; we have abundant reason to believe that a zeal has been diffused through the country which would not otherwise have been excited; that an emulation of the most active and fruitful character has been awakened; that many thousands of dollars have flowed into the treasury of the Home Missionary Society, which would never otherwise have reached it; and thus a much larger amount of funds collected; many more missionaries employed; and a far greater aggregate of good accomplished, than we have reason to suppose could possibly have been attained by any one of the boards, if it had existed alone. He who does not see that the Assembly's Board of Missions has been probably stimulated, to do more than double what it would otherwise have done, in consequence of the existence and efforts of the Home Missionary Society; and on the other hand, that the Home Missionary Society has been excited and enabled to do far more than it could have accomplished, if the Assembly's Board had not been revived, must be blind indeed!

If there be any friends, then, of the Assembly's Board of Missions, on the one hand, who feel disposed to wish that the Home Missionary Society had never come into existence, or, having existed, might now be disbanded; or if there be any of the patrons of the Home Missionary Society, who indulge a similar wish concerning the Assembly's Board; I would say, they know not what they desire. Their views are, in my opinion, erroneous. They partake, I fear, more of the spirit of partisans, than of enlightened and devoted labourers, for the spread of the gospel. If such persons could penetrate, for a moment, through the mists of prejudice, they would see that they had been governed by feeling, rather than by Christian principle; and would be ready to say—"Let both prosper! Let both be sustained! There is an appropriate field for both; and the work of the Lord in our land cannot be so well accomplished as by the separate, yet concurring, labours of both in their respective spheres."

If my earnest wishes, then, could be carried into effect, we should hear no more of collision between the Board of Missions and the Home Missionary Society. They would be considered as sister institutions; entirely separate; sustained by the voluntary contributions of those who preferred each respectively; neither forcing itself on the patronage or countenance of any one; each inoffensively occupying its own appropriate field; each carefully avoiding all interference with the other; and each making it the object of supreme desire, not to outshine or overcome the other; but to accomplish the greatest amount of effort toward the conversion of the world. Let this be done. Let the conductors and agents of each

Board, wherever they go, be careful to ascertain, in the most quiet and inoffensive manner possible, who those ministers and congregations are who are disposed to look with a more favourable eye on their rivals, and respectfully pass them by; applying for aid only to those who are known to be favourable to themselves. Let each Board, in all its proceedings, carefully abstain from all *complaints* against the other; never hinting at any *comparisons* between their own plans, missionaries, or movements, and those of the other; and never even alluding to each other, in public or private, unless it be to express love and benediction. Let one thing more be done:—let not only the Boards themselves, but all the *friends and advocates* of each, in every part of the Presbyterian Church, with one consent, resolve to adopt a course of perfect conciliation, and inoffensiveness, and to guard against every thing adapted to excite jealousy, or to give pain on either side. Let all this be sincerely and faithfully done, and the two Boards may proceed to the most vigorous discharge of their respective duties without interference, and without controversy. Let this plan of procedure be conscientiously acted upon on all sides, and the precious cause of missions, which is by far the most important cause now agitated among men, may be pursued with all the zeal and diligence corresponding with its unspeakable interest, and yet with movements of such a character as shall not produce a single jar in the Presbyterian Church. Why cannot this be done? It is, undoubtedly, for the comfort of both sides to take this course. Nor can either side, I am persuaded, take a different course, without impairing, in a corresponding degree, its own *strength* and *eventual success* with the religious public.

But there is one department of the Voluntary Association system, to which it is my desire to direct particular and most serious attention. I refer to that which respects the *selecting* and *training* of the sons of the Church for the *holy Ministry*. It is well known that, in some parts of our Church, strong feelings have been excited, and painful conflicts generated, by the question, whether the "American Education Society," or the "General Assembly's Board of Education" should be patronized by Presbyterian Churches and ministers? In reference to this question, whatever suspicion of the contrary may be excited by the subsequent remarks, I am conscious of possessing a spirit of entire kindness and impartiality. I sincerely rejoice that there is such a body in existence, and in successful operation, as the American Education Society. It is surely one of the noblest forms of Christian benevolence, to provide for taking by the hand pious and ingenuous youth, of all evangelical denominations; furnishing the means of aiding them in their poverty; and sustaining, guiding and stimulating them in every stage of their preparation for the sacred office. Every well wisher to the moral and intellectual culture, as well as to the Christian character of his country, ought to be thankful for the existence of such a body; to pray for its prosperity; and, as far as he can possibly afford, to help it on by his contributions. It is plain that the plans and efforts adopted by each particular Christian denomination, as such, to select and train its own candidates for the holy ministry, cannot supersede the necessity for such a general society, stretching over the whole country, and intended to receive the contributions, and to aid pious and promising youth of any and every de-

nomination, and especially those who, on account of their ecclesiastical connexion, may not be admissible to the aid of any of the other existing denominational societies. There are many wealthy individuals who have so little attachment to any particular Christian sect, that they are very indifferent how the donations which they devote to the education cause are applied, provided pious and promising youth of any denomination are really aided by their means. There are many Churches, too, whose views of doctrinal truth, and ecclesiastical order, are such that they feel cordially willing that the American Education Society, though neither attached nor pledged to any particular denomination, should have the task of sustaining, and, to a certain extent, guiding, all their candidates for the sacred office. And to all these may be added a large body of professing Christians, some of them in the Presbyterian Church; and as many, or more, out of it, who deliberately prefer what they call the "liberal" and "anti-sectarian" character of the American Education Society, to that of any Board confined to a particular denomination. To suit so important a portion of the religious public, it is plain that some such institution is desirable, and indeed indispensable. Were it not in existence, and conducted with that wisdom and efficiency which have so remarkably characterized its general management, who does not see that the education cause would never have reached that wonderful extent and vigour which, by the divine blessing, have been imparted to it within the last five years? I scruple not to say, that the society in question has been, and is likely in a still higher degree, to be a rich blessing to our country. I, therefore, contemplated its rise and progress with

great pleasure. I took an early opportunity of making myself a life-member, by *subscription*, after previously becoming entitled to that privilege by *election*. Charged, too, with the duties of a member of one of the "Examining Committees" of the Society, I have cheerfully served it in this capacity for a number of years. And were it in my power, I would urge every friend of religion, and of his country, in the United States, who could do it, consistently with his other obligations, to become its liberal and constant patron.

But high as the foregoing statements will show my estimate to be of the importance of the American Education Society, and cordial as my friendship is to all its interests; I can by no means persuade myself that the Presbyterian Church in the United States ought to be so far satisfied with it as to *desire no other* for selecting and training her youthful candidates for the ministry. That institution is an invaluable one, and has a very important part to act at the present day, in preparing living teachers for the conversion of the world. But can it be for a moment imagined that an extended denomination of Christians ought to be content to have this society, which, as I said, is neither attached nor pledged to any particular Christian Church, entrusted with the management of all her sons intended for the holy office? As well might the father of a family, under the plea of great liberality, yield the entire education of his children, while he was yet living, and able to take care of them, into the hands of strangers, to choose their preceptors; to prescribe their objects and course of study; and to mark out for them their path in life. It is true, strangers might be in many cases as en-

lightened, wise and faithful as the parent himself; nay they might, in some cases, be far more capable than he of making a wise choice of teachers and studies for his children; yet in ordinary cases, what wise and conscientious parent would be willing to give this all-important task out of his own hands? If he have the spirit of a good citizen, and above all, of a sincere Christian, he will be willing to help forward all judicious plans for promoting general education—will take pleasure in planning and aiding, to the extent of his power, to bring the means of knowledge within the reach of the poor and destitute. But, having done this, he will feel himself bound by all the ties of natural affection, to take the training of his own children under his peculiar and immediate care. He will think it his duty to see that every part of their education be adapted to bear in a favourable manner on the sphere and pursuit in life in which he expects them to act; assured that, how much soever others may excel him in respect to skill in teaching; none can take so deep and tender an interest as himself in all that bears on their success in life, and their real happiness.

Upon this principle, I profess to be not only a sincere, but a warm friend to those noble confederacies of different denominations, in the great work of doing good, which are at once the ornament and the glory of the present age. It is perfectly proper, and immensely important, that all denominations of Christians should unite in sending the *Bible* through the world. It is no less proper and desirable that all professing Christians who substantially agree in the leading principles of evangelical truth should combine in sending religious *Tracts* to every portion of

the human family. In like manner, different parts of the professing body of Christ may, with great advantage, unite in the prosecution of *missionary* labour. But can the church, that is, the assembled rulers of a particular denomination, with propriety delegate to individuals, or to bodies out of her communion, the delicate and all important task of selecting, counseling and training her youthful candidates for the ministry? Can she safely commit to a body not within her bosom, and not responsible to her authority, that most vital and solemn of all trusts, the trust of preparing for her service those who are to be her leaders and rulers in spiritual things? Who are to "feed her with knowledge and with understanding;" to preside over all the interests of doctrine and discipline within her pale; and to become her counsellors and guides in conducting her faithful testimony in favour of that purity of gospel truth, worship and order which the Church was instituted to maintain? It were just as rational, in my view, and just as safe to maintain, that each Presbytery might commit to some voluntary association in her neighbourhood the task of examining and licensing her candidates for the ministry:—just as wise in the General Assembly of our Church to refer the most delicate and difficult judicial questions which might come before her to a body of wise and pious *arbitrators*, many of them not in her communion, and a majority, perhaps, having no attachment to her constitution. True, in many cases, such a body of arbitrators might decide as wisely as the Assembly itself, and, perhaps, in some cases, might possibly come to a result even more dispassionate and impartial than that judicatory would be likely to reach. But that is not the question.

Would such a course, on principle, be either wise or safe? We need not wait for an answer. Every one sees that it would be an infatuated course, altogether erroneous in principle; and inevitably leading in the end to mischiefs of the most destructive kind.

These things being so, let none say, that the "Board of Education" of the General Assembly is a "party" concern; or that it is adapted to subserve "old school" views. It is not possible, I will venture to say, for human impartiality to construct a system more entirely free from all just exposure to such a charge. The supervision of the candidates sustained by the Board, and all the influence connected with that supervision, are not engrossed by any one central body. To every Presbytery is yielded the power of directing the studies of its own candidates. Can any thing be desired more free from party narrowness than this? And to crown all, every auxiliary to the Board, whether Presbytery or Synod, agreeing to pass all its moneys through the hands of the Board, "shall be entitled to claim aid for *all* the youth regularly received under its care, however much the *appropriations* necessary for their support may exceed the *contributions* of said auxiliary." Can any thing be more liberal than this?

Such, then, is the basis of that general pacification in the Presbyterian Church for which I plead. Only let the great mass of our ministers and church members cordially adopt the principles which have been sketched, and act upon them, and the work is done. Peace and harmony may be restored to our agitated, bleeding Zion. But just so far as these principles are rejected and departed from, hard feelings, discord and alienation, will be the unavoidable conse-

quence. Let the doctrine be prevalent that Ecclesiastical Boards and Voluntary Associations *cannot* maintain separate action at the same time in peace; that they *must* either be united, or one or the other put down; or the churches kept in constant agitation;—let this doctrine be maintained, and to precisely the same extent will the most unhappy consequences be realized. In this case, the churches *will* have no peace; and the great work of doing good will be conducted on both sides, in the manner ascribed to the old ecclesiastic, of whom it was said, that “he served God as if the devil were in him.” If we do not get along with entire harmony and comfort, it will be our own fault. It will arise from the want of “moral ability,” not of “natural.” If Voluntary Associations keep their proper place, without recrimination, and without encroachment; and if Ecclesiastical Boards confine themselves to *their* appropriate sphere, without any offensive claim or interference, what is to prevent all parties living together in peace? In short, all serious difficulty will vanish, if those bodies will faithfully and constantly speak to each other, and act towards each other in that spirit of mutual kindness which marked the amicable negotiation between the patriarch *Abraham* and his nephew, *Lot*. “And *Abraham* said unto *Lot*, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me:—if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.” Our respected brethren of the Dutch Church have long had a Domestic Missionary Society, sustained

by the funds, and designed to promote the enlargement of their own particular denomination; but I have never heard of any collision between this body and the Home Missionary Society. They operate in the same parts of the country without difficulty; nay, so far as I know, with entire harmony; very many of the members of the Dutch Church, with a liberality which does them honour, contributing constantly to both. In like manner, the same Church, if I mistake not, has, for a number of years, sustained by and for their own body, an Education Board. But no strife between that Board and the American Education Society has ever come to my knowledge. Several other examples of a similar kind are known to exist in our country. Why cannot the Assembly's Board of Missions, and the Home Missionary Society, "go and do likewise?" Why cannot all our Ecclesiastical Boards and Voluntary Associations live together in the same Christian concord?

Princeton, Jan. 25th, 1833.

LETTER IV.

Voluntary Associations, and Ecclesiastical Boards.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

THE foregoing discussion of the subject of Voluntary Associations is intended to apply, more particularly, to the existing division of opinion in our Church, in regard to that subject. And accordingly, in all that has been said, there was a constant eye to that application of the general inquiry. It is my wish, however, in the present letter, to examine the general subject a little more at large; to state the arguments of those who contend, that Voluntary Associations are *alone* adapted to carry on the great works of benevolence at the present day; and to answer the objections which these partisans are wont to urge against the practicability of accomplishing much good by means of Ecclesiastical Bodies.

The remarks in the preceding letter will show that I am no enemy to Voluntary Associations. On the contrary, I repeat, my deep conviction is, that they occupy a most important place in the religious movements of the present age. It is only with those who assert that, in the great work of Christian effort for the conversion of the world, Voluntary Associations *only* can be expected to furnish efficient and valuable instrumentality, that I have any contest. With these I can by no means concur. Scripture, reason and experience are all, I am confident, against them. And however ardent the piety, and active the

zeal of those who entertain this opinion, I have no doubt they will be found in the end, though they cannot now be persuaded to believe it, so far as they act upon the principle in question, to be opposing the best interest of Zion.

And, in the outset, allow me explicitly to put you on your guard against one assertion, often made, and extensively taken for granted, as generally applicable. It is, that those who are friendly to the agency of Ecclesiastical Bodies in the great work of Christian benevolence, are universally, and of course, the enemies of Voluntary Associations, in any form, and for any purpose. This is a most unjust assertion. I have not only declared, repeatedly, and with the utmost sincerity, in the preceding letter, that the charge does not apply to myself; but I also know, assuredly, that it does not apply to multitudes of ministers, and others in our church. There are, indeed, some—I have no doubt a small number—of pious, excellent men belonging to our body, who have been so deeply impressed by some of the movements of at least one Voluntary Association in our country, as hastily to conclude that all such associations are dangerous, and can never be permanently useful. This impression, I repeat, is very limited in its extent. It belongs not to the great body of the Presbyterian Church; and it is a calumny to represent it as the prevailing doctrine of Presbyterians, or even of *old school* Presbyterians. As long as associations of this kind keep their proper place, and avoid all interference with Ecclesiastical Bodies, as such, I can venture to say, that nineteen-twentieths, at least, even of those who are styled “old school” men in our church, will wish them well, and take pleasure in helping them forward

in their "labours of love." And if all offensive measures on their part be laid aside, the remaining twentieth part will soon be ready to accede to the same spirit of cordial conciliation.

Allow me also to settle, before we proceed further, what is meant when we speak of *the Church*, as such, and as distinguished from Voluntary Associations, engaging in benevolent labours for the conversion of the world. It would seem, at first view, impossible for any thinking mind to mistake the meaning of this language; yet, as some have professed to be at a loss to understand it, a few words of explanation may not be useless. It is well known that the word *church* has various significations in Scripture, as well as in popular speech. It sometimes means the invisible church, which includes all the *real followers* of Christ, whether still in conflict on earth, or glorified in heaven. At other times it is intended to express the whole body of those who *profess* the true religion throughout the world, and of all denominations. In a very precious sense, that great multitude may be said to be *one church*, however divided into parties and denominations, and however reluctant some of the denominations of which it is composed, may be to acknowledge one another as members of the body of Christ. But, still further, the word church, in common parlance is, perhaps, more frequently employed to designate a particular section or denomination of this general body. Such as, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, &c. Now when we speak of an ecclesiastical organization for spreading the Gospel, or for accomplishing any benevolent object, in other words, when we represent the Church, *as such*, as acting in a matter

of this kind, we mean a particular organized body, or denomination of the great Christian family. When we say, for example, that the Presbyterian Church in the United States, has publicly adopted a certain Form of Government, and a certain Confession of Faith, and has pursued a certain system of measures for promoting revivals of religion, and for the edification of her members; every intelligent hearer knows what is meant. It is the Church who is described in these cases, as acting by her representatives, and in her regular judicatories. In precisely the same sense is the term used when it is said, that the Presbyterian, or any other church, as such, is engaged, or proposes to engage, in a plan for conducting domestic or foreign missions, or for the education of her candidates for the holy ministry. We mean to say, that the Church, in her distinct and denominational capacity, does these things; and the language is equally proper, whether she herself immediately executes as well as forms the plan; or whether she chooses a committee or board, the members of which belong to her own communion, to carry into execution her wishes. Not only so; but if any one Presbytery or Synod belonging to our Church, should, as such, commence a system of missionary operations; or if twenty or thirty Presbyteries, connected with different Synods, should agree to unite, in their organized capacity, for carrying on such a system; it would be, properly speaking, an ecclesiastical organization; although it could not, with propriety, be said to be an act of *the* Presbyterian Church at large. When, therefore, we speak of Ecclesiastical Boards, we mean boards for executive action constituted by Ecclesiastical Bodies; subject to ecclesiastical authority; con-

ducted on ecclesiastical principles; and amenable to ecclesiastical tribunals. If the Church were all one in name and spirit, as it was in the days of the Apostles, we should never hear of sectarian names, in speaking of what the Church is doing. Even then, however, the Church in *Asia*, the Church in *Greece*, or the Church in *Rome*, might without impropriety, have been represented as engaging in plans of Christian benevolence; and, in that case, "the Church," as such might have been considered as acting. In like manner, if all the judicatories of the Presbyterian Church in the State of *New York* were to undertake a great missionary enterprise, every one sees that it would be an undertaking of the Church, that is of a section of the Church, availing itself of the ties which bind its several parts together, to secure unity and energy of action.

These principles may appear to some too obvious to require so much elucidation. Yet as they have been so frequently and so entirely misapprehended, it was thought best to state them explicitly at the threshold of the ensuing discussion.

The great question, then, is, are Voluntary Associations *alone* suitable for carrying on the plans of Christian benevolence, at the present day; or may Ecclesiastical Boards properly, and with great advantage, co-operate in this interesting work? The former doctrine I am constrained to reject. The latter, I cannot doubt, is sound and Scriptural.

The friends of the doctrine, that Voluntary Associations *alone* are adapted, in the present state of the world, to the active and energetic pursuit of the great work of doing good, are in the habit of adducing in support of their doctrine the following ar-

guments. I shall endeavour with all fairness to state, and briefly to examine each of these arguments, so far as they have come to my knowledge; and, having done this, to present some of the principal considerations which led me to embrace the opposite opinion.

1. The first argument commonly urged by the exclusive friends of Voluntary Associations, in behalf of their doctrine, is drawn from the *alleged fact, that almost all the good which has been done, especially in modern times, has been accomplished, not by the Church in her organized capacity, but by Voluntary Associations.* Now the assertion here made, if I mistake not, is *false in fact*; and would deserve to be set aside as a *non sequitur*, even if it were true.

It is *false in fact.* That is, the alleged fact which it assumes, cannot be admitted. The instances are numerous of much good being done by Ecclesiastical Bodies, long before Voluntary Associations became either frequent or efficient. Has the General Assembly of the Church of *Scotland* done nothing for enlightening and evangelizing the destitute parts of their own country and other countries? Let the history of that church tell. Have the highest judicatories of the Presbyterian Church in the *United States* done nothing toward sending the Gospel and planting churches among the frontier settlements? The old Synod began this hallowed work, as we have seen, near seventy years, ago when no Voluntary Associations for this purpose were known on this side of the Atlantic, and when most of the religious denominations around her were fast asleep in reference to their duty in this matter. The General Assembly, as before stated, in the very first year of its formation,

upwards of forty-three years since, commenced a system of missionary operations, which it has been every year pursuing; and though not always with desirable zeal or success, yet with a perseverance which has led to the planting of hundreds of churches in the new settlements of the United States. Again, the Church of the *United Brethren*, usually called *Moravians*, has been greatly distinguished for more than a hundred years, for its zeal and energy in conducting Christian missions. Perhaps it may be said, that the Missionary operations of no people were ever so *strictly ecclesiastical as theirs*; and that no body of people, of the same numerical strength, ever laboured so systematically, or so successfully in the work of evangelizing the heathen. It is further evident that several of the missionary bodies which the advocates of the doctrine in question confidently number with Voluntary Associations, such as the "Church Missionary Society," and the "Baptist Missionary Society," of *Great Britain*, are really, in their spirit and essential character, Ecclesiastical Bodies; being each made up of the members of one denomination; having no connexion, unless it be to beg pecuniary aid, with any other sects; and being governed in the whole management of their missions by strictly ecclesiastical principles. The same may be said of the "Wesleyan," and some other missionary societies. They are not ecclesiastical bodies in the technical sense of that phrase; but they are so in all the exclusiveness of their intercourse, and in all the denominational rigour of the principles on which they are conducted. Many other notorious examples, in opposition to the alleged fact before us, might be produced were there time or necessity for it. The truth is, the whole as-

sumption is derived from a narrow and indistinct view of ecclesiastical history. It has nothing like the foundation in fact which is confidently asserted.

But even if the assumption before us were really warranted by fact, it would be entitled to much less weight in the argument than is commonly ascribed to it. Because the Church of God has been asleep for ages in regard to the great work of evangelizing the world; because Ecclesiastical Bodies have done comparatively little in this work, until within forty years, what legitimate inference can be drawn from the acknowledged fact, but that the whole nominally Christian family was in a state of criminal torpor with respect to its duty? Voluntary Associations have been long known. Several centuries ago, they were in existence, and in very vigorous and affluent existence: but what have they done until within thirty or forty years, for efficiently carrying the Gospel to a benighted world? Quite as legitimately, therefore, might an argument be brought against Voluntary Associations, because *they* have done so little for the conversion of the world until within a very recent period. No man, I say again, rejoices more cordially than I do in the good that is doing by Voluntary Associations, or more sincerely wishes that it may be augmented and blessed; but no one, I think, can doubt, that the comparative magnitude of the good which they do, appears greater, from the greater novelty and bustle, and consequent prominence, of these Associations, when compared with Ecclesiastical Bodies; which appear to be doing less, because they are older; have been longer familiar to the public view; and are proceeding with more silent steps.

2. Another argument which has been urged in

favour of the almost exclusive enterprise and usefulness of Voluntary Associations, is, "*that they are made up of 'Volunteers,' and 'officered by men of select and devoted character;' and of course, will be more likely to work with zeal and energy than the members of Ecclesiastical Bodies.*" This is most extraordinary reasoning. Is not the Christian Church in all Protestant denominations, made up exclusively of "Volunteers;" and is it not "officered" by men in the highest degree "select and devoted?" At least if it be not so, the fault is not either in the Head or in the Scriptural constitution of the Church; but in the want of wisdom or fidelity in its administration. Is not such a character indispensably required by the authority of its Master, and by every essential principle of its organization? Surely, if voluntary devotion, and ardent disinterested zeal are not to be found in the Church, it is not easy to conceive where associations out of her pale should find them. If men who appear wakeful, forward and active in Voluntary Associations, are drones and slumberers in the Church, can charity herself avoid the conclusion that something besides deep-seated Christian principle; something occasional and temporary; something connected with carnal motives and objects is, at least in part, the stimulus by which they are actuated?

3. It is further alleged, that "*Voluntary Associations, by bringing Christians of different denominations to unite and act together, have a tendency to promote liberal and Catholic feelings; whereas the natural operation of Ecclesiastical Bodies is to beget a narrow, sectarian spirit.*"

If this argument proves any thing, it will prove too much. It will show that all the fences which divide

different denominations ought at once to be broken down; that it is criminal in any Church to "contend for the faith once delivered to the saints;" and, of course, that all distinctive testimony, on the part of any portion of the Christian family, in favour of that truth and order which are revealed in Scripture, is uncommanded and wrong. Can this consequence be admitted? What, then, becomes of all those injunctions in the word of God, which represent professing Christians as "witnesses for God" in the midst of a deluded and unbelieving world, and which bind them to maintain faithfully and in their purity all such doctrines, as well as all such religious worship and ordinances as God has revealed in his word? Suppose, for argument's sake, that Presbyterians are really persuaded that the "system of doctrine," and form of government and discipline held forth in their ecclesiastical formularies, is taught in Scripture, and ought to be maintained and propagated. Is it criminal in them to admit this conviction, and act accordingly? Is it rebellion against Christ to endeavour to lift up a standard against error, and to preserve pure and entire the faith and order of the Gospel? If it be, then all the partition walls which distinguish the different portions of the great family nominally called Christians, ought at once to be taken away, and all discriminating testimony against heresy, and in favour of sound doctrine to be abandoned. This will not be pretended by any man who lays claim to the character of an evangelical Christian. But if Churches, as such, ought to *maintain the truth*, is it wrong for them to maintain it *in sending the Gospel* to those who have it not?

But you will, perhaps, ask, are the members of ortho-

dox Churches bound, then, to withhold all co-operation and aid from those plans and measures for spreading the Gospel, which embrace some with whom they cannot in all things perfectly agree? By no means. After maintaining *their own testimony*, that is their own Church, with fidelity and zeal, they are not only at liberty, but bound to help forward all those plans which appear adapted on the whole to extend the Redeemer's kingdom. They are under obligations first to be faithful to all their duties in reference to that Church which they believe to be nearest to the scriptural model; and then to aid in promoting every other institution, the general tendency of which is to promote the temporal and eternal welfare of mankind. While they do the latter, however, according to their ability, they ought not to leave the former undone. But the argument which I am opposing seems to be founded on the principle, that the *latter* only is duty, and that all regard to the *former* is *narrow-minded* and *sectarian*. Is this the principle intended to be avowed? If so, let us understand it. The fact is, however, the strictest fidelity to the distinguishing truths and institutions of the Gospel is not only consistent with the most enlarged charity for all evangelical denominations; but all history attests, that those who have been most faithful to their conscientious convictions, as adherents to their chosen denomination, have been at the same time, most ready to aid every good enterprise out of their own pale. Show me a Presbyterian who habitually manifests the largest share of public spirit and zeal in sustaining the benevolent enterprises of his own particular denomination; and I will show you one to whom every benevolent and pious enterprise, out of that de-

nomination, has been encouraged to look for countenance and patronage.

4. It has, further, been contended in favour of committing the benevolent enterprises of the day to Voluntary Associations alone, rather than to Ecclesiastical Bodies, "*that the former tends to promote freedom; the latter despotism: that when this important work is committed to Ecclesiastical Boards, it is adapted to build up a strong system of ecclesiastical government; whereas, if it be carried on by men who are wholly free from the trammels of Church rules and Church authority, it is attended with no such danger.*"

Many of those who urge this argument tell us that they admire Presbyterian Church government; that the system of connexion and supervision by Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly, has their entire approbation; and that as long as these bodies perform their *proper work*, in deciding appeals, settling differences, and promoting intercourse, fellowship, and harmonious action among all the churches within the sphere of their jurisdiction, the whole plan is adapted to do great good, and has their best wishes. But that when the great Missionary and Education causes, and other benevolent executive enterprises are undertaken by the Church, as such, it has a tendency to secularize and corrupt her; to create a thirst for power; and to issue in dangerous encroachments on Christian liberty. In one word, if I understand the spirit of the argument, it is this; that as long as ecclesiastical judicatories are confined to the work of government and discipline, there is no fear of them; but that when they undertake to intrude into the province of *doing good*, they become dangerous! That while they "take order" respecting references, appeals,

complaints, schismatic contentions, and the adjustment of all cases of order and discipline, our religious rights are safe; but that when they venture to cherish feelings of compassion for the destitute and the perishing, and undertake to send them the Gospel, and thus to extend the Redeemer's kingdom; and when they attempt to form and execute plans for selecting and preparing the sons of the Church for her sacred ministry, there is danger of ecclesiastical encroachment and domination!

The very statement of this argument, I should suppose, is sufficient to refute it. Indeed, if the direct converse of the allegation on which the argument rests were made, it would, evidently, wear an aspect more like the truth. Ecclesiastical Bodies, constantly employed in acts of government and discipline only; exercising judicial authority; deciding appeals; adjusting differences; and presiding over all investitures with office, and all official decisions;—Ecclesiastical Bodies, I say, constantly engaged in the discharge of such functions, and such only, *might* be imagined, by a suspicious mind, to be in danger of having a love of power, and a spirit of encroachment and domination cherished by these habitual employments. But the moment such bodies began to engage in enterprises of direct and unmingled benevolence; the moment they commenced the work of planning, preaching, and praying for the poor heathen, and others destitute of Gospel ordinances, and of rousing themselves and others to this labour of love;—one would imagine that a spirit of ambition and dominion would be one of the last that would be apt to arise as the fruit of such employments. If there be any thing adapted to soften the heart, and

to cause it to overflow with sentiments of Christian benevolence and charity, it is being engaged, in good earnest, in imparting the knowledge of the love of God in Christ to perishing men.

If, indeed, Ecclesiastical Bodies were to claim, and attempt to exercise, the power of *prohibiting all others, excepting themselves*, from engaging in this work of faith, and labour of love,—there might be room for jealousy, and even alarm, on the score of ecclesiastical domination. But has such an attempt, or claim, ever been made? Has any church in our land, or in any other Protestant land, ever dreamed of crushing, or even forbidding any plan for spreading the Gospel, or promoting the moral benefit of mankind, out of her own pale? Some excellent men have, indeed, formed and published the opinion, that no enlightened friend of the Redeemer's kingdom, ought to be willing to *encourage and help forward* any Missionary association which was not responsible, for the doctrines and worship which it sent forth, and for the character of its missionaries, to some Ecclesiastical Body. This is not my opinion. But I see nothing, even in this doctrine, to furnish ground for the imputation which I am now opposing. These good men think, and think justly, that every Church of Christ is bound, as such, to be a constant witness in favour of pure Gospel truth and order; and to maintain a constant agency in spreading them abroad. When they go one step further, and maintain that none of the members of this Church ought to feel at liberty, as individuals, to patronize any religious scheme, which has not some ecclesiastical responsibility, they draw an inference which I cannot, indeed, adopt; but which appears to me by no means liable to the

charge of ecclesiastical domination. If I, injudiciously, but conscientiously, decline having any thing to do with a popular undertaking, I may make a very unwise use of my own power, but I surely cannot be said to encroach on the rights of others.

5. A further plea in behalf of Voluntary Associations *alone* being employed in the great work of Christian benevolence, is, *that they can engage in new enterprises with MORE PROMPTNESS, than Ecclesiastical Bodies, which must necessarily wait until a majority of the Church can be enlisted in the measure, or prevailed upon to move.* To this plea I answer, that *expedition* is not the only, or even the chief good quality in religious movements. It is of more importance to move wisely and with energy, than in haste. Many advantages may sometimes be gained by waiting a short time, and taking the whole Church along. But there is no need of thus waiting in any case. A single Presbytery or Synod, on becoming convinced that a certain course is proper, may enter upon it at once, without waiting for the concurrence of the whole denomination with which it is connected. Nay, this may be, in some cases, the very best method of commencing ecclesiastical enterprises. Besides, it seems to be perpetually forgotten, that the question is, not whether those non-ecclesiastical bodies who feel ready to move with promptness in any good enterprise, should be allowed with all freedom to go forward; but whether they *alone* shall enjoy this privilege, and the Church, as such, however desirous of going forward, be compelled to stand still, and to fold her hands in inactivity? Let Voluntary Associations enjoy the advantage of all the *energy* and *expedition* with which they can pursue their objects. And even

if the Ecclesiastical Boards in their neighbourhood *do not* enjoy these advantages, in the same degree, (which, however, is not necessarily the case,) perhaps their deliberation—their waiting a little for one another, may not be without some countervailing benefits.

6. It has been further urged, with great confidence, “that Voluntary Associations alone ought to engage in benevolent enterprises for evangelizing the world, because, *when they are undertaken by Ecclesiastical Bodies, they too often give rise to controversy and strife*:—whereas, if conducted by Voluntary Societies, who are of one mind, and no others will, of course, unite in the scheme, there will always be harmony of action.” This argument, if admitted to be valid, would prove that Ecclesiastical Bodies ought never to undertake *any thing*; for I know of no subject on which they can be called to deliberate on which diversity of opinion may not arise. Controversies often arise in such bodies, and sometimes of a very animated character, in regard to questions of government and discipline. Shall we therefore infer, that such questions ought never to be discussed? There was “much disputing” in the Synod of Jerusalem, in the apostolic age, when the question respecting Jewish observance was under deliberation:—still, as the Holy Ghost decided, that was very proper business for the Synod to undertake and decide. There is, manifestly, *no more need* of strife in pursuing enterprises of Christian benevolence, than in settling cases of appeal and complaint from contending parties, or any other department of mere discipline. If, in Ecclesiastical Bodies, there be warm and obstinate partisans, who are *not willing* that the bodies in question should do their appropriate work, and who *make difficulty* and

trouble whenever it is undertaken; it is, surely, with a very ill grace that such partisans assign as a reason why such work should never be undertaken, that it always occasions controversy! The whole difficulty arises, not from the nature or bearing of the duty to be performed, but from the heat and acerbity of party feeling.

7. I shall notice only one argument more which I have heard adduced in favour of Voluntary Associations, as *exclusively* proper to be employed in enterprises of Christian benevolence. It is, that *such associations can more easily than Ecclesiastical Bodies, enlist the co-operation of pious public spirited LAYMEN*, who have too long been in the habit of surrendering almost entirely to clergymen the affairs of the church, and all prominent agency in "ecclesiastical matters." This plea, like all the rest, has more of speciousness than solidity. Is there any pious laymen of whose zeal and services the Church, in her organized capacity, may not, at any time, avail herself? If such persons cannot *all* be introduced into her judicatories as *elders*, or into her service as *deacons*, they can be all habitually employed by those judicatories, as members of standing committees, or permanent boards, for doing the Church's work. How many pious devoted laymen in the Presbyterian Church are, at this hour, in their capacity as church-members, promoting in a very important degree, the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom! And how many more *might* be thus useful, if they had but a heart for it! The truth is, wherever there are laymen in the bosom of any church who unite knowledge, good sense, piety and zeal, the Church, whatever may be the form of her government—and certainly *with at*

least as much advantage under the Presbyterian form as any other, may employ every one of them in the great work of doing good, to the extent of their power, in full consistency with her ecclesiastical organization. There may, indeed, be a moral torpor in the Church, which may cause her to fail of putting in requisition all the services of such members. But this delinquency is not peculiar to the Church. It may exist, and has existed in every kind and form of society, and even, very strikingly, in Voluntary Associations. The history of some old Voluntary Associations in *Europe*, as well as in this country, affords in support of this remark, ample proof and illustration.

In reference, however, to the agency of LAYMEN in ecclesiastical matters, I feel constrained, in candour and fidelity, to make one or two general remarks, before taking leave of the subject; remarks which, however they may thwart the feelings of some of my readers, I cannot conscientiously forbear to state, "without conferring with flesh and blood." My deliberate opinion then, is, that while pious laymen have a large and most important sphere of duty in the Church of God; and while within that sphere, they may render incalculable services in promoting the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom; yet that this agency ought ever to be regulated by the essential principles of scriptural *order*; and that when they venture beyond the limits of that order, and encroach upon the appropriate functions of ecclesiastical office, their agency becomes a source of mischief, and not of benefit. I believe this principle has sometimes been forgotten; but never without injury to the cause of religion. If the ministry and the el-

dership in the Church be ordinances of divine appointment, they, surely, ought not to be trampled under feet or nullified by the lay members of the sacred family. It is in the Church as in the State. Every citizen, as such, can and ought to do much for promoting the public welfare; but when he interferes with the constitutional functionaries of the State, and either individually, or by a combination of individuals like himself, resists or usurps the power of those functionaries, he becomes an unwholesome member of the republic. Let none say this is a suggestion flowing from party feeling. It embraces a principle which applies equally to *all parties*. And allow me to say, that whatever party may contravene this principle, will find in the end, that its course is as contrary to sound policy, as it is to gospel order. That party which gains strength by a departure from scriptural regularity, will find, when it is too late, that its strength is neither healthful nor lasting.

It appears, then, that all the arguments which have been urged in favour of committing the great enterprises of Christian benevolence, at the present day, *exclusively* to Voluntary Associations, are founded either in misapprehension or sophistry; either in an entire mistake of the real question in controversy; or in an illegitimate mixture with the question of matters which have no proper connexion with it. How hard is it, when party feeling is strongly excited, for either side to contemplate the points in dispute with a truly candid spirit, or to do justice to the positions of the other! The truth is, that if the Church were connected with the State, and could not move but with the concurrence of the State, and with all those incumbrances and entanglements which such a con-

nexion seldom fails to bring with it, several of the arguments above stated would be unanswerable. But where the Church, as in our happy country, is cursed with no such corrupting and embarrassing alliance, these arguments are not only without force, but they have no legitimate application whatever. Here the members of the Church are, in all the extent of the expression, "VOLUNTEERS;" and, in our communion, either the whole body, or any subordinate judicatory, can move, whenever it pleases, with all the ardour and celerity that Christian zeal, and Christian love can dictate.

The opinion then, which after much careful attention to the subject, and much painful observation on the course of events, I have been constrained to adopt, differs essentially, as has been seen in the preceding letter, from those of the ultra men on both sides. I hold, not that Voluntary Associations ought not to exist as good-doing bodies; but that they ought not to be allowed to exclude every Ecclesiastical Body from this work. Not that they should be shut out from their full share of the enterprises of Christian benevolence; but that they ought not to insist on *monopolizing the whole*. Not that they should be interdicted from the most free and zealous services to the Redeemer's kingdom that they can possibly render; but that they ought not to be permitted to interfere with the rights or the duties of those Ecclesiastical Bodies to which some of their members may respectively belong. Not, in a word, that they should be themselves destroyed or injured; but that they should not be permitted to destroy or injure *others*.

There are some further remarks which I wish to have an opportunity of offering on this subject: but

they must be made the subject of one or more letters. After which, the way will be prepared to proceed to some other important subjects. In the meanwhile, may the God of all grace send down upon our beloved Church, that love of truth and of peace which we so much need!

Princeton, February 6, 1833.

LETTER V.

Voluntary Associations, and Ecclesiastical Boards

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

Having endeavoured in the preceding letter to show that the arguments usually urged in favour of *confining* the enterprises of Christian benevolence to Voluntary Associations are essentially unsound; I propose in the present letter to proceed one step further, and to show *that it is plainly the duty of the Church, in her ecclesiastical capacity, to undertake and conduct such enterprises; nay, that when she neglects to do so, she is guilty of great injustice to herself, and of direct disobedience to her divine Head and Lord.*

That it is the duty of the Church, in her appropriate capacity, to be much occupied in works of Christian benevolence, and in particular, to engage in the work of evangelizing the world, and of selecting and training up the best agents she can find for that purpose, may be clearly demonstrated, as it appears to me, by the following considerations.

1. It is the COMMANDED AND APPROPRIATE WORK OF THE CHURCH to maintain in its purity; to press on the hearts and consciences of men for their sanctification; and to propagate as far as she has power, the religion of Jesus Christ. For this she was constituted to be a depository of truth, a witness for God, and a blessing to the world. Others *may* exert themselves, and *ought* to exert themselves, for evangelizing the nations; but she *must* do it, or disobey her Master

in heaven. Assemblages of individuals, either not belonging to the Church in any of its departments, or belonging to different departments of it, *may* take measures for sending the Gospel to those who have it not; and the Church may not discountenance or oppose their proceedings; but ought rather to rejoice that by any means Christ is preached. But whatever *others* may do, or leave undone, *she is bound* in her ecclesiastical capacity, to let the Gospel sound out in its purity and power, from all her borders. To neglect this, is to neglect one of the great purposes for which the Church was founded in this world of error and of sin. What are all her government and discipline and ordinances worth, if not employed in bearing testimony against Satan's kingdom and in building up and extending the kingdom of the Redeemer?

To say, then, that the Church in her ecclesiastical capacity, is bound to maintain the ordinances of religion within her bosom, and to sustain discipline in its purity in all her borders; but that she ought to leave to Voluntary Societies the work of evangelizing the world—is, in other words, saying, that she ought to resign into other hands, as not her appropriate work, one of the most undoubted and important of all the trusts which her Almighty Head has committed to her and commanded her to discharge!

2. It may be urged, as an important argument in favour of our ecclesiastical judicatories, as such, being engaged in the great work of spreading the Gospel, THAT THE ORGANIZATION OF THOSE JUDICATORIES AFFORDS A CHARACTERISTIC AND PECULIAR FACILITY FOR PURSUING THIS OBJECT. In Congregational churches, there seems to be no possible method of

combining their strength for the pursuit of any common object, but by resorting to Voluntary Associations. No wonder, then, that those who prefer this form of church government, and especially those who have no other form within their reach, should contend zealously for such associations, as alone adapted to the work of combined and active benevolence. And to this source, perhaps, in part, we may trace the zeal of some brethren on this subject. But, surely, in the Presbyterian Church the different portions of the whole body are bound together, and brought together, at stated periods, by an organization at once the most complete, energetic and convenient that can well be conceived. Our *Presbyteries*, convening a number of times every year; our *Synods*, coming together at least annually, and embracing a larger number of ministers and delegates; and our *General Assembly*, binding the whole body in authority and counsel, and meeting every year not only for advice, but also for final adjudication in all questions of faith and order;—all furnish the best facilities that can be imagined for the united and vigorous co-operation of the whole Church in any great object. Ought not such a facility to be faithfully improved? When we have the machinery already for accomplishing work of the most important kind, ought it to be unemployed?

3. When Ecclesiastical Bodies are busily and earnestly engaged in endeavouring to send the glorious gospel “to every creature,” THEY ARE EMPLOYED IN THAT SPECIES OF WORK WHICH, OF ALL OTHERS, IS PERHAPS THE BEST ADAPTED TO PROMOTE THEIR OWN SPIRITUAL BENEFIT. When judicatories of the Church are occupied, as they are often called in the sove-

reign providence of God to be, in trying offenders; in examining testimony; in deciding appeals and complaints; and in adjusting painful differences; it cannot be said, indeed, to be a useless occupation; for, however irksome, it is indispensable, and often eminently useful, as one of the means of grace. Still the immediate bearing of such work on the spiritual benefit of those who perform it, is not always obvious; and it sometimes proves a severe trial to their faith and patience. But when either the whole Church, of any particular denomination, acting by her representatives, or any subordinate judicatory belonging to the whole body, addresses herself to the hallowed work of sending the Gospel to those who are "perishing for lack of vision;" when she calls into fervent exercise that "charity which seeketh not her own," and labours for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the welfare of immortal souls; when she pities those who are suffering a spiritual famine, and expends her resources in sending them the bread and the waters of life; she is, undoubtedly, employed in that way which is best adapted to promote her own spiritual benefit; to draw down upon herself the blessing of her divine Head; and to call into exercise all those graces in which the true glory of a Church consists. If I were consulted by a Church struggling with poverty, labouring under the most deplorable moral torpor, and torn with divisions, and asked what she had best do to increase her strength, to rouse her energies, and to bind her contending parties together in holy love; among other things, I would say to her, "Begin without delay to plan, and labour, and pray, and contribute for sending the Gospel abroad to your fellow men. Endeavour to engage every heart and

every hand, from the hoary head to lisping infancy, in this noble work. Make the experiment; and if you do it from proper motives, and in good earnest; amidst your poverty, you will be enriched; amidst your feebleness, you will be strengthened; amidst your divisions, you will be united; amidst your coldness and languor, you will be roused to feeling, and vital warmth, and affection, and vigour, and sacred enterprise in the service of your Master. In short, the more it is in your hearts to feel and pray and labour for the everlasting welfare of others, the more you will draw down the blessing of God on yourselves, the more you will promote your own growth in those things in which the essence of religion consists. Those who water others, shall be watered themselves. 'It is more blessed to give than to receive;' since the act of giving with a proper spirit, imparts a double benefit. While it is the performance of a duty, and the conferring of a benefit on others, it includes at the same time in its very nature, the reception of a blessing ourselves."

The same counsel, if consulted, would I give to every judicatory of the Presbyterian Church. I would say to every such judicatory, "Neglect not the various cases of ecclesiastical 'process,' which may occur in the faithful exercise of discipline. Imagine not, because this part of your work is always painful, and sometimes agitating, that therefore, it is not one of the most important means of grace, or that it ought to be avoided. Although, like the trial of offenders, and the execution of justice, in civil society, it as an unwelcome task, and often deeply distressing; still it is indispensable to the order, purity and happiness of the social system. But

while you are careful not to undervalue or shun the work of government and discipline, ever remember that this work is to be pursued as a *means*, not as an end. Be not content to come together from time to time *merely* or even *chiefly*, to adjust forms, to balance testimony, and to measure the extent and the duration of ecclesiastical penalties. This is necessary work; but they are not your friends who would *confine* you to such work. See that it be all made subservient at every step, to the great object of all Christian effort, which is to edify and extend the Redeemer's kingdom. Let the great work of *doing good* be your chosen employment. Never come together without having your meeting marked by some plan and effort for sending the knowledge of the 'great salvation,' to the benighted and the perishing. This will warm your hearts. This will purify and elevate your affections. This will bind you together as one body in love. This will, more than almost any other work in which you can engage, draw down the spirit and the consolations of Christ into the midst of your assemblies, and cause you to retire from them as from a feast of Christian feeling. Can you consent, then, to resign to other hands a species of work so peculiarly adapted to make you doubly blessed? Can you consent to consider as unfit for Ecclesiastical Judicatories that hallowed employment which is of all others the most appropriate and precious; which pre-eminently belongs to them; and to which every other ought to be regarded as tributary? To yield to such counsels appears to me the greatest of all infatuation. Let as many bodies as possible, by whatever name they may be called, engage with zeal in the blessed work of evangelizing the world, 'no man

forbidding them;’ nay, by whomsoever the real Gospel is sent to a world ‘lying in wickedness,’ let every one ‘bid them God speed;’ but of all bodies in the world let not Ecclesiastical Judicatories neglect or omit that work which is their primary duty; the most delightful of all employments; and that which is most adapted to build them up in holiness and love.”

In perfect harmony with the foregoing counsels, I cannot forbear to quote the following paragraphs, by a learned and eloquent Presbyterian divine of Europe, found in a discourse recently delivered on a public occasion, and bearing marks throughout, of much judgment, and of ardent piety.

“The first concern of the Church, no doubt, is the edification of its own members. But a concern for others is not only a duty required of the Church, but the faithful discharge of it ministers to its own edification. It is placed in the world *as a missionary establishment*, required to look narrowly into the purity and advancement of its own members, but at the same time to consider the world as its charge, and to labour for its evangelization. This missionary spirit was a distinguishing feature of the primitive churches. They received a command to ‘go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,’ which they understood literally, and obeyed vigorously. In their assemblies for worship, the conversion of the world was a prominent feature in their prayers, and their sincerity was evinced by wise and vigorous measures for carrying the object of their supplications into effect. As long as the missionary spirit lasted in the Church, the Christian spirit was cherished by it. Those who ‘watered others,’ were ‘themselves watered.’ While there

was zeal and exertion for extending the Gospel abroad, there was peace and purity at home. Not merely did this result from the blessing of God; but it is easy to show how the zealous labour of the Church for the extending the truth, is, more than any thing beside, conducive to its own edification. Hereby all its energies are engaged. There is no time to spare for dissensions and trifles. There is, indeed, no taste for them; for all are so absorbed in one great object, that with one heart, and one hand, they strive together for its attainment. If there is one cause more than another, to which we would trace the decay of religion in the Church, it is that the missionary spirit became cold, and missionary labour feeble. And when at length, this pulse ceased to beat, the body became one mass of corruption. The living spirit of the Church seemed to depart, when its missionary zeal expired; and thenceforward it became the subject of error and dissent, and every evil work.

“ In our own times, when religion seems to be reviving, it is easy to trace along with it the revival of the missionary spirit, and to see their close connexion and mutual dependence. The late revival of religion in these countries commenced with missionary labour. Just as the young convert when he has learned the truth himself, burns with zeal to declare it to others; so the Church, as soon as the spirit of religion revives in it, looks out to others, and offers its missionary services to them. The state of missionary labour in these times is, indeed, very peculiar. It is the offering of Voluntary Associations, rather than of the Christian Churches. This fact merely proves that the Church had fallen far from a due

sense of its duty in this matter; that it ceased to be in a capacity to discharge it; and that its lack of service required to be otherwise supplied. One blessed effect of these societies, however, will be, that besides doing much positive good to the world, they will bring back the church to a due sense and faithful discharge of its duty. This has in part appeared already, and we have seen only the beginning.”*

4. The duty and importance of Ecclesiastical Judicatories, as such, engaging with zeal in the missionary enterprise, is manifest *from the security which their agency affords that “the faith once delivered to the saints,” will be maintained and transmitted in some degree of purity.*

When voluntary, and of course, irresponsible associations, engage in the great work of evangelizing the world, having no other bond of union than the common sentiments, and the warm feelings which originally prompted them to associate, there is no security that they will continue either to receive or to propagate the pure Gospel. Such bodies may commence their operations with as much attachment to truth, and as sincere a disposition to maintain and extend it, as any Ecclesiastical Body in the world; but having no confession of faith, no acknowledged standards, in conformity with which they pledge themselves to conduct their ministrations; and as all sorts of religionists may become members of such bodies who choose to do so; what is to prevent them

* “The Foundation, Character, and Security of the Christian Church,” a sermon preached before the General Synod of Ulster, Ireland, at Monaghan, 26th June, 1832. .By the Rev. James Morgan, of Belfast.

from gradually and even speedily degenerating into associations, who agree in nothing but in a warm desire to send out missionaries; who *may* be prompted to do this, in the strange and wayward course of human affairs by motives far from being worthy of commendation; and who, of course, *may* exert an influence deeply hostile to the spread of true religion? It is true, Ecclesiastical Bodies may also swerve from their original character, and *have* swerved in the same way. Still it cannot be denied that there are sources of security in the case of the latter, which do not exist, in the same degree, with respect to the former; and consequently, that the existence of Ecclesiastical Boards at the same time, and in the same country with Voluntary Associations; ought to be desired by every friend of evangelical truth, as one of the best means within our reach of maintaining the Gospel in its purity and power.

To illustrate my meaning. The American Home Missionary Society, which has now been in existence a little more than six years, and which is formed by the adherents of four or five different religious denominations, is now, perhaps, and has been during the short period of its history, as orthodox as any Voluntary Association in the land. A degree of attachment to the fundamental principles of Gospel truth, and of fervent zeal for spreading it as widely as possible, truly commendable, has, doubtless, been manifested in their proceedings. No departure from the spirit of their original association, so far as I know, has been charged against them. Yet we all know that they have no public standards to which they engage to be conformed. They have no confession of faith; no ecclesiastical responsibility. They *may*

deviate greatly and grievously, from the purity of the Gospel; and if this should ever occur, there will be no other power than the vague and ever varying power of public sentiment to call them to account, or to arrest their wayward career. A majority of the members of that body, now so truly worthy of our good wishes and prayers *may*, in less than ten years, become so thoroughly Arminian, or even Pelagian, as to be an offence to all the enlightened friends of Zion, and really a curse instead of a blessing. What is there to prevent such a deviation? What to check it? Nothing but the sentiments and feelings, for the time being, of the scattered members, who may assemble once a year, and choose an Executive Committee, who may gradually become partisans of error, and even of essential error; and at length send forth none but missionaries of destructive heresy. I have no apprehension, indeed, that such *will* be the result. My hope is that the Society will long continue, as she has heretofore done, to employ pious and faithful men, in whose ministry the friends of Zion will have reason to rejoice. But one of the very best securities, under God, that this will be the case, is found in my opinion, in the existence and influence of Ecclesiastical Boards, engaged in the same benevolent works, who, if they degenerate from the truth at all, will be apt to degenerate more slowly than Voluntary Associations, from the circumstance of their being guided and restrained by public formularies. The reflex influence of these, on surrounding Voluntary Associations, in holding up the banner of truth, and in constantly sounding the voice of warning against error, can scarcely fail of being both potent and salutary.

Upon the principle, then, of sincere friendship to the Home Missionary Society, and to all the Evangelical Voluntary Associations in the land, I am a warm advocate for the continued existence and efficiency of Ecclesiastical Boards. Let them be sustained with increasing vigour. They will not only do great good by their direct agency in extending the Redeemer's kingdom; but they will exert a benign influence on other bodies, not ecclesiastical, by stimulating their zeal; by holding up to their view standards of truth—by warning them against error; by contributing to purify and regulate public sentiment; and thus to put as far off as possible that prevailing corruption into which every thing committed to human management, even with the best guards that can be employed, is so prone to degenerate. I have no hesitation in saying, that every vigorous and faithfully maintained Ecclesiastical Board in the United States, furnishes a powerful guarantee, for which every friend of religion ought to be thankful, that our Voluntary Associations, will be longer pure, more wisely and prudently active, and of course, more extensively useful, than they would be likely to be if those Boards should be now abolished.

The foregoing considerations, my Christian brethren, satisfy me that, on the one hand, those who denounce Voluntary Associations, and wish to put them down, as ineligible and dangerous means of promoting the great cause of religion; and those, on the other, who would throw the *whole* work of doing good *exclusively* into their hands—are both wrong;—unhappily wrong;—mischievously wrong. I say this with sincere respect for those brethren who think otherwise; but with a confidence which is every day

becoming stronger. For my part, I dare not oppose Voluntary Associations, as such. They *may*, indeed, be perverted. They *may* be employed, by designing men, as instruments of sinister purpose. But so may the best things. The abuse of a thing, we all know, is no valid argument against its legitimate use. When Voluntary Associations assume improper ground, or resort to improper means, let them be rebuked, and the Christian public warned against the danger. But in this day of abounding Voluntary Associations, for almost every purpose of knowledge or of benevolent action, I cannot doubt that they may be safely and efficiently employed in the great work of promoting religion. In fighting against them, therefore, I should be afraid of being "found fighting against God."

But on the other hand, I dare not *oppose*, or even *neglect* to promote the formation of Ecclesiastical Boards for the same great purpose. If the Church, in her appropriate character, is not employed in the great work of extending the Redeemer's kingdom, she neglects, as has been said, a primary and essential design of her institution. If her judicatories, every time they come together, do not make the spread of the glorious Gospel, one main object of their counsels, prayers and efforts, they neglect one of the most powerful means of warming, elevating and enriching their own souls, and of drawing down the most precious blessings on the body, which they represent. Nay, if the Church supinely allows herself to fail of lifting the standard of missionary zeal and enterprise,—there is absolutely less security than there would be, if she did her duty in this respect—that the Voluntary Associations around her will continue faith-

ful to the principles with which they set out, and thus prove a permanent blessing to the world.

It was from the combined force of all the foregoing considerations that I was induced, more than a year ago, to express an opinion favourable to the formation of the "Western Foreign Missionary Society;" a society formed within the bounds of the Synod of *Pittsburgh*, under the auspices of that body; having as its formal patrons, all the Presbyteries composing that Synod, together with some Presbyteries belonging to other Synods. In taking this course, I was not influenced by the smallest diminution of confidence in the "American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions." On the contrary, I am persuaded that there is no association on earth the whole affairs of which are conducted with more wisdom, piety, diligence, and fidelity, than those of that Board; and none more worthy of the entire confidence of the Christian community. But when it was represented that there was a missionary spirit rising within the bounds of the Synod of Pittsburgh; that a number of the leading ministers and elders of that body were animated with a strong desire to engage in this hallowed enterprise; that they were entirely satisfied that the great majority of the churches within their bounds could not be made to feel so strongly, to pray so fervently, or to give so liberally to any other Board, as to one within their own bounds, of their own religious denomination, and conducted by individuals of their own acquaintance;—when these facts were alleged and believed to be true—I for one, could not find in my heart to discourage the undertaking. I became convinced that by their going forward, a much larger amount of missionary

interest and zeal would be called into exercise than by attempting to rally all their churches round the American Board. I was satisfied, too, that if this plan were prosecuted, the American Board herself would not find less friendship, or less patronage, even in the western country, than she now does, but probably much more. Of course I could not doubt, that, on the whole, more missionary work would be done, and a greater amount of moral good effected by engaging in the proposed enterprise, than if the whole field were left open to the American Board, without a competitor, and under every possible advantage.

It is possible that these views may not be realized. But it was under their influence that the plan was enterprised, and as long as they were sincerely adopted by the brethren in that region, and by others whom they consulted, could they conscientiously have acted otherwise? Would it have been wise; would it have been a dictate of the most expanded Christian charity, to say to hundreds of their pious church members—"Your preference for a board of your own must not be indulged. If you are not ready to pour all your contributions into the treasury of the American Board, we do not wish you to contribute at all to the foreign missionary cause?" I need not wait for an answer. I am sure there is not a single member of the American Board itself so narrow and exclusive in his zeal, as to be willing to speak thus. They would, as individuals, and as a body, with one voice condemn such a reply. I can speak for one. My attachment to that Board, as one of its members, was never stronger than it is at the present moment; and my determination, by all the means in my power, to promote its interests, is every

day becoming more deeply fixed and unwavering. Yet if more missionary zeal can be roused, more money collected, and more missionaries engaged to go to the heathen, by forming a Presbyterian Board, and opening a new treasury—I am ready to say, let it be done.

The probability is, that the “Western Foreign Missionary Society” will not be placed under the direction of the General Assembly, or attempt any resort to that body for patronage. It would be unwise and unhappy to introduce into the highest judicatory of the church, another subject of party jealousy, and party contention. Such portions of the Church that feel friendly to its existence, and willing to make efforts for its support, will of course, yield it their patronage, without impeaching the motives of those who may choose to act otherwise; and without the least unfriendly feeling toward other institutions.

It may not be improper, however, to take a passing notice of one suggestion which has been publicly made. It is this; that if the General Assembly of our Church should institute or patronise a Presbyterian Board for foreign missions it would VIOLATE A TREATY with the American Board. This is an entire mistake. No such treaty exists, or was ever made. The General Assembly was one of the three ecclesiastical bodies which *consented* to the dissolution of the old “United Foreign Missionary Society,” and to the transfer of all its stations, property and debts (which debts were just about covered by the property transferred with them) to the American Board. This consent was accompanied by a recommendation of the Board to the friendship and patronage of our

churches. A year or two after this transfer was effected, a proposal was privately made by some friends of the American Board, that the General Assembly should pass a solemn act, binding itself, or at least, resolving, not to undertake any separate foreign missionary enterprise. This proposal, however, was firmly resisted, and no such stipulation or resolution was ever adopted. At the last General Assembly, when a report was brought in from a joint Committee of the Assembly and the American Board, which recommended that the former should not separately engage in the work of Foreign Missions, the Assembly declined expressing any opinion, or giving any pledge on the subject, and again recommended the American Board "to the affection and patronage of our churches." The truth is, the General Assembly has never, directly or indirectly stipulated with the American Board not to undertake any separate missionary enterprise, nor made any engagement which can be considered as susceptible of this construction. Just as reasonably might it be alleged that the Reformed Dutch Church, or the Associate Reformed Church (the *two* other Ecclesiastical Bodies which gave their consent to the transfer above stated) were barred by "treaty" not to engage in the missionary cause in their ecclesiastical capacity.

On the whole my firm hope is, that the American Board, with the wisdom and disinterestedness of an elder sister, will look upon the infant Western Society with an eye of indulgent affection, and treat her with sisterly kindness; imparting to her the lights of her longer experience, and be ever ready to afford her countenance and encouragement. This will be

as much her policy as her duty. On the other hand, my confident expectation is, that the Western Society will ever regard the American Board with veneration and love; will carefully avoid every thing like jealousy, or even rivalry; will honour her wisdom and fidelity; will endeavour to profit by her noble example; and not only with affectionate cordiality, yield to her the undisturbed patronage of every church which may prefer her agency, but also encourage her to glean even in her own most appropriated harvest fields. It will be a blessing, instead of a burden, to the churches of the west, as well as of the east, to sustain with firmness the Western Society, and at the same time to give more than ever to the American Board. If this should not be found to be the result, I shall be, in common with many others, equally disappointed and grieved.

Thus it appears, my Christian brethren, that, from whatever point of view we contemplate this whole subject, we are led to the same results. We are taught that *Judah* not only *ought* not, but *need* not vex *Ephraim*, nor *Ephraim*, *Judah*. That Ecclesiastical Boards ought not to cherish a hostile feeling against Voluntary Associations, as long as they move in their proper sphere, without attempting to interfere with denominational bodies or interests; but are rather bound to regard them as invaluable helpers in the great work of doing good. And that, on the other hand, Voluntary Associations, when they cherish a desire either to depress Ecclesiastical Boards, or to bind them to their own machinery, take a view of the subject, and pursue a policy, as narrow and unwise as it is mischievous. *An entire separation, and a friendly, generous competition, form the true po-*

licity of both. If they cultivate the proper spirit, and pursue the proper course, they will be greatly quickened and aided by the operations of each other; and a much greater amount of good will be accomplished by the harmonious agency of both, than could possibly be done by either, standing alone, and occupying the whole field.

Princeton, February, 1833.

LETTER VI.

Adherence to our Doctrinal Standards.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

I NEED not say to any attentive observer of passing scenes, that the subject of faithful adherence to our doctrinal standards is another point, which stands essentially connected with the peace of the Presbyterian Church. On this subject, therefore, it is of the utmost importance that there be a concurrence of sentiment, in favour of some rational and scriptural principles. On the one hand, if such absolute uniformity in the mode of explaining every minute detail of truth, be contended for, with the rigour which some appear to consider as necessary; if men are to be criminated, and subjected to discipline for not expounding every doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, in the same precise manner with every other subscriber who has gone before him;—the Church must inevitably be kept in a state of constant mutual crimination and conflict. Quietness and peace will be out of the question. On the other hand, if all sorts of unscriptural opinion, except the extreme of heresy, should be freely countenanced by any of our judicatories; if that refusal to censure any form of doctrinal error, short of palpable Unitarianism, which would seem to be the plan of some brethren, should be adopted as the prevalent policy, it will be impossible much longer to keep the Church together. Or rather, it will not, much longer, be *worth* keeping together. For it will cease to be what the Church

was constituted and intended to be, from the beginning, a "WITNESS FOR GOD," in the midst of a corrupt and ungodly world;—a witness for the truth as well as the order of his family. If we cannot adopt some course between these ruinous extremes, and with a spirit of mutual affection and accommodation, walk in it, there is an end of our long cherished union. We must be torn in sunder and scattered to the winds.

On this deeply interesting, this vital subject, allow me, then, to offer a few fraternal remarks. If I do not entirely mistake, they are conceived, and will be expressed, in that spirit of conciliation and Christian love, which it is my wish to cherish, and to recommend to all whom I address.

It is well known, that when ministers are ordained in the Presbyterian Church; or when those who are already ordained are received into our body, from other denominations, they are called upon to give their formal and solemn assent, among others, to the following questions.

1. "Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?"

2. "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?"

Here, it will be observed, the BIBLE is declared to be THE ONLY INFALLIBLE RULE OF FAITH, and the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church is recognised as only a summary or compendious view of the manner in which the members of that Church agree in interpreting the Scriptures. In this sense *only* are we in the habit of calling our "Confession of

Faith," and "Form of Government," our "*ecclesiastical standards.*" Not ultimate standards of faith and practice; but standards or tests, for ascertaining the manner in which we, as a Church, PROFESS TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE. If there be any individuals, then, in our body, capable of saying or thinking that the Confession of Faith "is the Presbyterian's Bible," let them seriously pause, and ask, whether they have ever seen and read *this formula?* and if they have, whether the charge of deliberate slander does not justly lie at their door?

But the great practical question which I wish now particularly to discuss, is, how is this public subscription, or assent to the Confession of Faith, to be understood? Is it to be considered as precluding all variety of opinion whatever, as to the mode of explaining any of the doctrines of the Confession? Is it the design of this subscription to secure such entire and perfect uniformity in the manner of construing every minute article, as to censure and exclude every possible diversity of exposition on any point? To *expect* such perfect uniformity among two thousand ministers of the Gospel, is a chimera. It never was or can be realized. And to attempt to *enforce* such a principle, would be worse than useless. It is well known that the divines of the *Westminster* Assembly, who framed and adopted the Confession of Faith which we receive, had minor differences among themselves. Some of them were *Supra-lapsarions*; others *Sub-lapsarions*; and a third class had their peculiar views respecting *reprobation*, and also respecting the place which the *active* as well as the *passive* obedience of Christ holds in the Gospel system. Still they were all substantial and sincere *Cal-*

vinists, and framed the Confession in such a manner as that those who differed in respect to these minor shades of opinion, might all honestly adopt it. It is notorious, too, that the Calvinistic members of the Synod of *Dort* differed among themselves in regard to some minor points, particularly with regard to the *extent of the atonement*; but they were *unanimous* in that thorough condemnation of *Arminianism* which their canons contain. It is also equally well known, that a similar diversity of views in relation to the modes of propounding and explaining some doctrines, existed in the old Synod of *Philadelphia*, at the date of the "Adopting Act," in 1729. Still, as in the case of the *Westminster* Assembly, and the Synod of *Dort*, they were all substantial, sincere *Calvinists*; and, therefore, unanimously, and with good faith, subscribed the Creed which had been framed by their fathers in *Europe*, more than seventy years before.

But if some degree of diversity in the modes of representing Gospel truth, must be expected and tolerated in a large ecclesiastical connexion, the question arises, *how far* can this diversity be allowed with safety to proceed? This is, undoubtedly, a question of great delicacy, and of very difficult solution;—but not more difficult than many other practical questions relating to morals and religion. We all grant that even real Christians, though sincere, are imperfect. But if it were asked, what *degree* of moral imperfection may be considered as consistent with Christian character? I presume every thinking man would find himself embarrassed by the attempt to draw a precise line; but would feel quite sure, at the same time, that there are certain *forms* and *de-*

grees of moral delinquency which must inevitably exclude him in whom they are found from the ranks of professing Christians. So, in regard to the form of subscription to the Confession of Faith, it is believed that few fair and candid minds can be at a loss to decide how it ought to be interpreted.

If the question, what is the meaning of the words, "the system of doctrines taught in the Holy Scriptures," as they occur in the formula which makes a part of the ordination service, were submitted to any intelligent and impartial jury in the country; to twelve men of plain common sense, who had never heard of the subterfuges and refinements of modern subscribers to creeds,—I cannot doubt that they would be unanimous in their verdict without quitting their seats. They would naturally decide thus: "Since the primary object of subscribing an ecclesiastical creed is to express agreement in doctrinal belief; since the manifest design of the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church is to maintain what is commonly called the *Calvinistic system*, in opposition to the Socinian, the Arian, the Pelagian, and the Arminian systems; since almost every point which distinguishes these several forms of error are specifically exposed, disproved and rejected, under one or another of its several articles; and since this has, notoriously, been the universal understanding, ever since that Confession was formed, we judge that no man who is not a *sincere Calvinist*, that is, who does not *ex animo* receive all the distinguishing articles of the Calvinistic system, can honestly subscribe it. We do not suppose, indeed, that among those who subscribe that formulary, it is necessary, in order to a candid subscription, that there should be entire

agreement as to 'every jot and tittle' in the mode of explaining every doctrine which the Confession contains; but we cannot resist the conclusion, as fair and honourable men, that unless a candidate for admission does really believe in the doctrine of the Trinity; the incarnation and true Deity of Jesus Christ; the personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit; the fall and entire native depravity of man in virtue of a connexion with Adam, the progenitor of our race; the vicarious atoning sacrifice of the Redeemer; justification solely on account of the righteousness of Christ, set to our account, and made ours by faith; sovereign and unconditional personal election to eternal life; regeneration and sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit; the eternal punishment of the impenitently wicked, &c. &c.; unless he sincerely believes all these and the essentially allied doctrines which have ever been considered as the distinguishing features of the Calvinistic system, and believes them in substance, as they are laid down in the Confession, our verdict is, that he cannot honestly subscribe it. We suppose, indeed, that among many hundred sincere and candid Calvinists on earth, there will ever be found some diversity in their manner both of explaining and defending these doctrines, while they all truly and steadfastly hold them: but as long as none of them embrace any of the errors to which reference has just been made, and which it was the special design of the Confession to exclude, we judge that they may all adopt it without any breach of good faith."

Such, I do believe, would be the verdict of any candid impartial jury, who had any tolerable acquaintance with the facts in the case, and whose minds

were entirely unsophisticated by party polemics on this subject. And such, I am equally persuaded, is the conclusion to which Christian fairness and honour ought to conduct *us*. There is a manifest difference between the *essential nature* of a Christian doctrine, and the different modes of representing and expounding it, which have been resorted to by divines, on the whole equally sound and pious. To depart from the former, is to abandon the doctrine; but with respect to the latter, some variety of views must be expected and allowed. To illustrate my meaning, the doctrine of the vicarious atoning sacrifice of Christ is regarded, by all who are entitled to the Christian name, as a fundamental doctrine of the Gospel. The essential nature of this doctrine I suppose to consist in the fact, that the Redeemer laid down his life as a covenanted substitute and surety for sinners. In other words, that, "though he knew no sin, he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Those who adhere to this leading idea, and consider the sacrifice of Christ as *strictly vicarious*, must be considered as adhering to all that is *radical* and *indispensable* in the doctrine, whether they explain it on what has been called the *Gethsemane* theory, the *infinite value* scheme, or the plan of *universal applicability*. As long as any one holds the true scriptural *nature* of the atonement, he may be allowed some latitude in his mode of explaining its extent, without being considered, in reference to this article, as recreant from the standard which he has subscribed. And so of other leading doctrines.

While, therefore, some diversity in the explanations adopted of an extended series of doctrines, must

be expected among the teachers in every church, and has been ever found to exist; there cannot, it appears to me, be a plainer dictate of common sense, and common honesty, than that a *Pelagian*, a *Semi-pelagian*, or *Arminian*, to say nothing of more radical errorists, cannot possibly, with a good conscience, subscribe the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church. That this Confession was originally drawn up by men decisively and warmly opposed to these errors, is universally known. Nay, to erect a barrier against the encroachments of those errors, which were then coming into *England*, "like a flood," was, notoriously, one main object in the construction of this formula. Again, the private writings of those who first formed and adopted it, all speak the same language, and establish, beyond a doubt, the *quo animo* of its original authors. Further, it is equally well known, to all who are acquainted with the history of those times, that our own Church, in this country, when by her "adopting act," in 1729, she received this Confession of Faith, as her ecclesiastical "form of sound words," had a main reference to Semi-Pelagian or Arminian errors, as those to which she was most exposed, and against which it behooved her to be especially on her guard. Further still; who is ignorant that, from that day to this, the Presbyterian Church has been universally regarded, and by multitudes stigmatized, as a Calvinistic body; that on this ground, she has uniformly stood aloof from all ecclesiastical communion with confessedly Arminian bodies, of various denominations, and has borne testimony against what she considered as their sericus errors; and that she has, more than once, in her highest judicatories, condemned the writings and

the preaching of such of her own ministers as were found propagating those errors. And, to crown all, the whole history of the *Cumberland Presbyterians*, in the west, bears witness, that our venerable Fathers, thirty years ago, when there was no special jealousy or prejudice excited in reference to this subject, thought the adoption of Arminian opinions altogether inconsistent with an honourable subscription to our Confession, and considered it as their duty to cast out of the Church a large body of otherwise respectable ministers and members, who, though they decisively preferred, and still retain Presbyterian order, yet could not subscribe a Calvinistic Confession.

Shall we, then, be told, at this time of day, after all that has been written, and decided, and done in reference to this very subject, that an Arminian, or one who, if not entirely of that creed, adopts its leading and most exceptionable principles, can yet, with entire candour, subscribe to our Confession? Just as rationally and honestly might it be contended that a zealous *Remonstrant*, in 1618, might have conscientiously subscribed to the "Canons" of the Synod of *Dort*; or an *Arian* to the Creed adopted by the *Nicene Council*. The truth is, however the question, as to the admissibility of minor differences in the mode of explaining Gospel truth, may be decided; no position in morals can be plainer, than that the advocate of those principles which the Confession in *language* directly proscribes; which it was expressly and specially *intended* to exclude; and which the actual administration of the Church under it, is known to have again and again *condemned* and excluded, cannot possibly, with a good conscience, subscribe to its articles. Such a subscription is a so-

LEMN PERJURY. If there be such a thing as "lying to the Holy Ghost," here it is. It is destroying the very intention of a creed; the object of which, as all allow, is to ascertain and secure concurrence in faith. If the system of doctrine taught in the Confession be wrong, let it by all means be changed. But as long as we *profess* to hold certain doctrines, let us *really* and *honestly* hold them. I would unspeakably rather discard the Confession altogether, than adopt a principle which would render its use a solemn mockery. The moment this lax mode of interpreting subscription to creeds becomes general, or even frequent, we may bid farewell to their power or usefulness. They can no longer be regarded as either a bond of union, or as a fence against the inroads of error. With whatever potency or value they may have been once invested, they will soon degenerate into mere unmeaning forms.

That this view of the subject is neither novel nor extravagant, will be apparent to those who weigh the following sentiments, deliberately published, many years since, by the late Dr. *Witherspoon*, who was never charged with either levity in forming his opinions, or with violence in maintaining them.

"I cannot forbear warning you against a piece of dishonesty which may possibly be found united to gravity and decency in other respects. I mean a minister's subscribing to articles of doctrine which he does not believe. This is so direct a violation of sincerity, that it is astonishing to think how men can set their minds at ease in the prospect, or keep them in peace after the deliberate commission of it. The very excuses and evasions that are offered in defence of it, are a disgrace to reason, as well as a

scandal to religion. What success can be expected from that man's ministry, who begins it with an act of such complicated guilt? How can he take upon him to reprove others for sin, or to train them up in virtue and true goodness, while he himself is chargeable with direct, premeditated, and perpetual perjury? I know nothing so nearly resembling it as those cases in trade, in which men make false entries, and at once screen and aggravate their fraud, by swearing, or causing others to swear, contrary to truth. This is justly reputed scandalous, even in the world; and yet I know no circumstance in which they differ that does not tend to show it to be less criminal than the other.—I have particularly chosen to introduce the subject upon this occasion, that I may attack it, not as an error, but as a *fraud*; not as a mistake in judgment, but an instance of gross dishonesty and insincerity of heart. I must beg every minister, but especially those young persons who have an eye to the sacred office, to remember that God will not be mocked, though the world may be deceived. In his sight, no gravity of deportment, no pretence to freedom of inquiry, (a thing excellent in itself,) no regular exercise of the right of private judgment, will warrant or excuse such a *lie* for gain, as solemnly to subscribe what they do not believe.”*

It obviously affords no relief from this heavy charge to allege, as some have done, that they subscribed the Confession of Faith with a *mental reservation*, implying that they received it *only so far as they considered it as agreeing with the Scriptures*. This, I acknowledge, appears to me a subterfuge which offers

* Witherspoon's Works, Vol. I. p. 313—314.

as direct an insult to common sense as it does to common honesty. Upon this principle it is plain that *any man* might, without scruple, subscribe *any Confession of Faith whatever*. For, surely a Socinian might, without the least hesitation, declare that he believed a rigidly Calvinistic Confession, so far as he considered it as coinciding with the Bible; or as to those points, (and there are surely some such,) in regard to which it agreed with the word of God. Besides, of what value is a subscription to any creed which is made upon this principle? The only object of subscribing a creed, is to ascertain whether the subscriber believes a certain set of doctrines; or in other words, whether he believes them to be taught in the Bible. But is it not evident that he who subscribes with the mental reservation before us, entirely defeats this object; evades the only design of the whole transaction; and palms a base deception upon the body before which he stands; a deception the more criminal, and the more mischievous, because practised as a solemn religious act, and in the name of the heart-searching God! It would be unspeakably better, in my opinion, to abandon at once all church creeds, than to continue their use, upon a principle so utterly subversive of all fairness and sincerity. And it requires no gift of prophecy to foresee, that any church or judicatory that acts upon such a principle, is sowing the seeds of ruinous discord and corruption, and must expect the curse of a God of truth.

It has been sometimes, indeed, alleged, as a source of relief from this view of the subject, that those who are agreed in the *great facts* involved in Christian truth may safely subscribe the same creed, although

they may differ very widely in their *philosophical solution* of those facts. For example, it is supposed by some, that those who agree in what are called *Calvinistic facts*, may conscientiously subscribe our Confession of Faith, though all their philosophical explanations of those facts be thoroughly *Pelagian* or *Arminian*. Now, it is not denied that the *facts* of the Christian revelation *may*, to a certain extent, be separated from the *philosophy* of those facts. It is not denied that the *former* may, in many cases, be honestly held fast, while a considerable range of speculation is indulged with regard to the *latter*. But what is denied is, that this principle can be admitted in the case before us, beyond very restricted limits. As applied, by many modern errorists, to cover a disingenuous subscription to articles of belief, it is a subterfuge in the highest degree uncandid and dangerous; and if employed as some theologians appear willing to employ it, can scarcely fail of opening the door to all the evils of perfect latitudinarianism.

Suppose one of the alleged *Calvinistic facts* in question to be, that man is a depraved being? It is true *Calvinists* maintain this fact. But so do *Arminians*, so do *Pelagians*. But *how* is it held by each? The slightest intelligent survey will satisfy any impartial judge that the general fact *may* be admitted, and is admitted by thousands, upon principles, and in a form entirely subversive of the Gospel plan of salvation. Again; suppose the fact in question to be, that all the sincere disciples of Christ are renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost? Here again, all classes of professing Christians agree in words. When many *Arminians*, however, accede to this fact, they mean only that the Holy Spirit operates upon all alike,

where the Gospel comes, just as the atmosphere presses equally upon all who are immersed in it; and that the reason why one is savingly impressed and not another, is, that the former cherishes the impression, which the latter does not. They “make *themselves* to differ.” When the Pelagian admits this fact, it is upon principles still further removed from scriptural truth. And when the Socinian acknowledges the fact, it is often meant by him to import nothing more than that the Holy Spirit, that is a Divine influence, has revealed in the Scriptures the way of salvation. I ask, is the *nominal fact* sufficient here? May not, nay, *is not*, a mode of explaining it adopted, which completely nullifies it, as a ground of Christian hope? Or rather, which makes it an ENTIRELY DIFFERENT SORT OF FACT from that which the Bible exhibits? Further; suppose the fact under discussion to be, that men are saved through the atonement of Christ. Almost all denominations of Christians will readily concur in this statement, as announcing a great fact. But is this enough for him who would “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints?” Some mean no more by the statement just made than that Christ by his instructions has revealed to men a future life, and by his sufferings and death intended to benefit them in the way of example. A second class understand the nominal fact in question to mean that Christ by his obedience, sufferings and death has procured a mitigation of the demands of the law; so that the believer can now purchase eternal blessedness by his own imperfect obedience; whereas, anterior to the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God, a perfect obedience only could avail to this end. According to these, Christ died,

not to satisfy the demands of law and justice—not to pay the debt of his people, and thus set them free from condemnation; but simply to lower the terms of acceptance, and to bring the required payment within the reach even of sinful creatures. But a third class interpret the fact of which we speak in a totally different manner. *They* suppose that the sacrifice of Christ was truly and properly vicarious; that the Father “laid on him the iniquities of us all;”—that he “bare our sins in his own body on the tree;”—and that he delivers his people from the curse of the law by “being made a curse for them.” I ask again, is the alleged *fact* the same in the systems of all these people? Let the humble believer, who can find no rest for his soul but in the all-perfect and all-sufficient righteousness of his Divine Surety, answer the question. The truth is, what is called the *fact* in question, is, in each of these cases, an entirely *different fact* in the estimation of the different classes enumerated. Each erroneous theory perverts the fact as found in the Bible, and transforms it into a fact of totally different aspect and bearing. Let me entreat the friends of Bible truth, then, to beware of those who talk of *Calvinistic facts* explained by *Pelagian*, or *Semi-pelagian philosophy*. It is an utter and ruinous delusion. The *Pelagian philosophy* never fails to transform all the facts which it perverts and tortures, into *Pelagian facts*, with this dangerous circumstance attending them, that they are really Pelagian under a deceptive name and false colours. Let Pelagian philosophy prevail in the Church for a few years, and he is an infatuated man who flatters himself that Pelagian doctrines will not soon be the reigning creed.

These remarks, my Christian brethren, are freely

made, not for the purpose of wounding feelings, or fomenting strife; but with a sincere desire to prevent both, by preventing what must inevitably lead to both. Allowing men to subscribe to a confession which they obviously do not believe; and to declare that they "approve" of a form of ecclesiastical government and discipline which they do not love, and have no disposition to support, may have the appearance of great "liberality," and may seem to promise a most enviable harmony among brethren of different opinions. But the appearance is delusive. The hope is a miserable dream. It requires no spirit of prophecy to foresee, that whenever our ecclesiastical judicatories begin deliberately to admit of subscription to our public standards on any such principles, they are paving the way for troubles and dangers of the most ruinous kind. They will soon discover, either that they have introduced an enemy into the camp, who will create all the confusion of *Babel*, and eventually tear them in pieces; or, that they have, unwarily, brought upon themselves, that indifference to truth, and that moral torpor and death, into which the Protestant Churches of *France* and *Geneva*, from this very cause, and in this very way, gradually sunk down, and which was, for many years, the basis of all their tranquillity. There is peace among the dead; but it is the peace of darkness, of rottenness and of desolation. From such a peace, may God of his infinite mercy preserve us.

Princeton, February, 1833.

LETTER VII.

Adherence to our Doctrinal Standards.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

It may be asked, and probably will be asked by some, what application the subjects discussed in the preceding letter, can have to the present state of the Presbyterian Church? I answer, MUCH in a variety of ways. There are, undoubtedly, circumstances, either real or supposed, in the situation of the Church, adapted to excite deep solicitude in the minds of those who take an interest in her welfare; and especially in the minds of those who believe that her true interest essentially depends on her faithful adherence to those EVANGELICAL PRINCIPLES, which our fathers laboured hard to defend and establish; which their sons have gone through many a conflict to maintain; and which the great mass of our most experienced, wise, and pious ministers and members do still consider as lying at the foundation of our real prosperity as a Church of Christ. You will, no doubt, anticipate me when I say, that the circumstance to which I allude is, the painful apprehension entertained by many, that, in some of our Presbyteries, there is not that entire adherence to our doctrinal standards which the purity of the Church demands. To what extent there is real ground for this fear, I pretend not to decide. I would fain hope, as expressed in my first letter, that nineteen-twentieths of our ministry and eldership

are not liable, in any considerable degree, to the charge in question. I know, however, that the apprehension above referred to, exists in some minds; and that in some cases, it is so deeply fixed, as materially to interfere with that cordiality of feeling, and that harmony of Christian intercourse, which are so desirable among the members of the body of Christ, and which it is the unfeigned object of these letters to promote. Many of those whom I address, will be better judges both of the reality and extent of the evil in question, than, in my situation, I can possibly be. Permit me, then, Christian brethren, to pour out the fulness of my heart on this important subject, with fraternal freedom. I shall "bring no railing accusation" against any one. I shall hold up no brother to the public gaze as a heretic. Nothing is further from my wish, than to hurl the charge of heterodoxy, or to indulge the suspicion of it in my bosom. Rather would I cherish myself and inculcate upon all whom I address, the exercise of that Christian charity which "hopeth all things," and "thinketh no evil." Still, even charity herself has eyes, and ears, and intellect, and cannot be regardless of the truth. If the evil in question exists, is it the part of wisdom to close our eyes against it? Will it not "eat as doth a canker," and be likely, at last, to produce a fatal mischief? If it produce uneasiness now, will it not be likely, if left uncorrected, to produce discord, hostility, and rupture in the end? Allow me, then, to express my feelings on the subject with all the sincerity and frankness of one who loves *harmony* and *quietness* MUCH, but *truth* MORE; and who remembers that the inspired oracle represents that "wisdom which cometh down from above, as *first* PURE, *then* PEACEA-

BLE;”—nay who is persuaded that all that peace which rests upon indifference to the truth, or on friendship to error, must be as transient as it is false.

Let none say, that uniformity of doctrinal belief, among the ministers and members of a particular church, is by no means so important as many imagine; and that to indulge uneasiness, or to give trouble respecting it, is rather a mark of prejudice and bigotry than of sound wisdom. This, I know, is the language of some. But is it the language of God's word? Has it been the language of the most faithful and eminently useful of the servants of Christ in any age? What is to be done by those who verily believe that Christians are bound, agreeably to the inspired injunction, to “hold fast the form of sound words which they have received,” and to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints?” What shall be done by those who believe that one principal end for which the Church was instituted by her Divine Head, was that she might preserve in their purity, and transmit uncorrupted to future ages, the true faith and order of Christ's house? What shall we say to those humble, conscientious Christians who think they read, in every page of ecclesiastical history, that in all cases without exception, when the Church has faithfully adhered to those doctrines of the Bible, and of the Reformation, which are taught in our Confession of Faith, she has been blessed and prospered; and that, just in proportion as she has departed from these doctrines, she has declined both in spirituality and peace? It is not enough to tell such persons that they are weakly prejudiced, or that they are “high church” bigots. This is, surely, not the way either

to satisfy a conscientious scruple, or to promote Christian love among brethren. The stubborn facts, after all, remain; that is by the *truth* alone, borne home to the heart by the Spirit's power, that any of the children of men are truly sanctified;—and that it is only so far as the disciples of Christ “walk by the same rule,” and “speak the same thing,” that they can be blessed with a harmony and love which are worth possessing.

The impression which has undeniably been made on the minds of some excellent ministers of the Presbyterian Church, that there are brethren in our connexion, who have departed from some of the important doctrines of our Confession; and that there are others, who, though not chargeable themselves with this departure, in all its extent, are yet over-indulgent to it in their co-presbyters;—the impression, I say, thus made, is either founded in truth, or it is false. If it be entirely false; if there be no real ground for the suspicion; why suffer it to be indulged for a moment? Why not remove it effectually, and at once, as might easily be done by a few candid and explicit statements? Surely to make such statements, is not too great a condescension, when the edification of brethren, and the peace of the Church, are involved. But if the impression referred to be just; if the suspicion of doctrines seriously erroneous having crept into the Church, be founded in fact, can those who lament, and complain of the fact, be blamed? Ought they, as “watchmen on the walls of Zion,” to hold their peace when their Master's truth is invaded? And is it possible to hope for a sound and safe peace until the evil is, in some way, corrected; until the

impression of which we speak is legitimately removed?

On such a subject, however, general remarks and suggestions will be of little value, unless followed by some distinct specifications. I will, therefore, frankly give a specimen of the doctrines to which I allude. That teaching doctrines such as I am about to mention, has been often and formally imputed to ministers of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, no one who has been conversant with the religious journals of our country can fail to know. With what truth these imputations may, in some instances, have been made, I will not, at present, undertake to decide; and, therefore, I do not venture to connect the specified opinions with any particular names. But I will venture to say, that if any of these doctrines are held and taught by *any* of the ministers connected with the Presbyterian Church, it is deeply to be deplored, and affords a painful augury of the purity and peace of the Church in time to come.

The doctrines referred to are such as these—That we have no more to do with the first sin of *Adam*, than with that of any other parent;—that he was not constituted the covenant head of his posterity, but was merely their natural progenitor;—that there is no such thing as *original sin*; that infants come into the world as perfectly free from corruption of nature as *Adam* was when he was created;—that to speak of innate corrupt inclinations and propensities, is an absurdity;—that by human depravity is meant nothing more than the universal fact, that all the posterity of *Adam*, though born entirely free from moral defilement, will always begin to sin when they begin to exercise moral agency;—that the doctrine of im-

puted sin, or imputed righteousness, is nonsense;—that the human will determines itself;—that the impenitent sinner is, by nature, in full possession of all the powers necessary to a full compliance with all the commands of God;—that he is in possession of plenary ability to repent and believe, without the aid of the Holy Spirit;—that if he laboured under *any kind of inability*, natural or moral, which he could not remove himself, he would be fully excusable for not complying with God's will;—that man is active in his own regeneration; in other words, that his regeneration is his own act;—that it is impossible for God, by a direct influence on the mind, to control its perceptions and practical choices, without destroying its moral agency;—that, consequently, Omnipotence cannot exert such an influence on men as shall make it certain that they will choose and act in a particular manner, without making them mere machines;—that we have no evidence that God *could* have prevented the existence of sin, or that he could now prevent any that exists, without interfering with the moral agency of man;—that he would, no doubt, be glad to do it, but is not *able*;—that he elected men to eternal life, on a foresight of what their character would be;—and that his sovereignty is confined to the revelation of truth, and the exhibition of it to the mind.

Now, let any man take these doctrinal propositions, and compare them with the spirit and language of our Confession of Faith; and if he can lay his hand on his heart, and say, with an honest conscience, that they agree with that formulary, and that the same individual can sincerely assent to both, he will furnish, it appears to me, one of the most signal

examples of either perverted intellect, or moral obliquity, that can easily be found. If I really adopted the foregoing doctrines, I should certainly consider myself as guilty of the grossest *perjury* in subscribing the Confession of Faith. If *Pelagian* and *Semi-Pelagian* sentiments existed in the *fifth century*, here they are, in all their unquestionable and revolting features. More particularly, in regard to the denial of *original sin* and the assertion of the doctrine of *human ability*, *Pelagius* and his followers never, certainly, went further than some of the advocates of the doctrines above recited. To attempt to persuade us to the contrary, is to suppose that the record of the published language and opinions of those ancient heretics is lost or forgotten. And to assert that these opinions are reconcilable with the Calvinistic system, is to offer a poor compliment to the memory of the most acute, learned, and pious divines, that ever adorned the Church of God, from the days of *Augustine* to those of the venerable band of Puritans, who, after bearing a noble testimony against surrounding errors on the other side of the *Atlantic*, bore the lamp of truth, and planted the standard of Christ in this western hemisphere. Were *they* entirely mistaken in all their able and heroic testimony against Pelagian and Arminian errors? Did *they* spend their breath, and give up all that was dear to them in this world, in vainly contending against a mere imaginary discrepancy? My Christian friends, if we are prepared to admit this, we are indeed the degenerate offspring of a noble race of men. Let us no longer claim them as our sires. Let us withdraw the memorials of their exalted virtues, piety and services, which we have so often thought ourselves honoured

in erecting. Let us no more repeat that almost hal-
lowed aspiration—*Sit anima mea cum Puritanis!*

That the distressing apprehensions of error just expressed are not confined to “old school” Presbyterians, is well known to those who have attended to the popular publications of the day. One of the most acute, profound, and cautious theologians of *New England*, the venerable Professor of Christian Theology at *Andover*, in speaking of the precise opinions above recited, and others of allied character, represents himself and his friends as filled with anxious fears respecting the nature and tendency of these opinions; and considers their advocates as “making an attack on several important articles of the orthodox faith; and as employing language on the subject of moral agency, free will, depravity, divine influence, &c., which is so like the language of Arminians and Pelagians, that it would require some labour to discover the difference.”* And one of the most enlightened and respectable divines of *Connecticut*, in terms of still more unqualified reprobation, denounces the same opinions, as Arminian in their character; directly adapted—whatever may be the intention of their advocates, to make all who believe them Arminians; and tending to undermine, at once, the purity and peace of the Church.†

But the question, whether the doctrinal opinions alluded to are reconcileable with the received Confession and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church, is of small importance compared with another—Are they reconcileable with the Scriptures? What is

* Dr. Wood's Letters to Dr. Taylor, p. 93.

† *Letters, &c.* by an EDWARDEAN.

their bearing, on that great system of "grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ?" And here the unavoidable answer appears to me to be of the most painful kind. I am aware, indeed, that the respected brethren who are said to be the advocates of these opinions, are said also to believe and insist that they consider them as peculiarly benign in their aspect and influence. They assure us that these doctrines afford great advantages over all others, in addressing both saints and sinners; in making men feel their deep responsibility, and in moving them to immediate and vigorous effort in the great work of salvation; that they are the most efficient promoters of revivals, and eminently adapted to build up the Church of God. I have no doubt they believe all this. And those who, with me, deplore the reception of these opinions by any, might believe it too, if the opinions themselves had now, for the first time, been known in the Christian Church. But they are old opinions. There is scarcely any thing new about them, even in their dress. An ample experiment has been made of their effects in different ages, and in various parts of the world; and these effects have always been deplorable, especially in reference to the spiritual interests of the Church. The very same plea was made in behalf of the same doctrines, by their original advocates in the fifth century, and has been urged by their followers ever since. Yet nothing is more plain than that all the principles of evangelical truth, and all the lessons of Christian experience must be reversed before such a plea can be admitted. In fact, the whole tendency of the system of doctrines just detailed, is to exalt the creature, and depress the Creator; to give us less humbling ideas

of the moral disease under which we labour, and a diminished sense of obligation to the grace of Christ, and to the power of the Holy Spirit;—to make the impenitent believe that conversion is a small and easy thing, and that they can accomplish it in their own strength, whenever they please. If men come into the world as free from all moral taint as *Adam* was in his state of primitive rectitude, and yet never fail to commence a course of sin the moment their moral agency begins, is not the doctrine of depravity, on this plan, encumbered with new difficulties, and placed on a footing far more perplexing and objectionable than the old system of orthodoxy ever placed it? If there be no such thing as *innate* depravity, what is the real source of the sinful series of actions which never fails to commence with the commencement of moral agency? Is God the source of it? There is nothing, it seems, in man, by nature, to which it can be traced. Besides, if this be so, in what can regeneration consist? If there be no native tendency or disposition of the soul to be corrected, what does the Holy Spirit do to or for a man when he regenerates him? Does he only break the force of a few successive sinful *acts*, without any agency on the heart which will render it less liable, or less disposed to sin in future? Further; if God cannot control the volitions of men without destroying their moral agency, then all certainty that his purposes will be accomplished, his predictions fulfilled, and the perseverance of his people in holiness secured, is, at one stroke, subverted. If God wills to save man, and yet cannot save him, unless man wills to help him, though at the same time, man, (according to this system) can will to be saved inde-

pendently of any agency or will of God to that end; what security is there that *any* will be saved? If man be active in his own regeneration; in other words, if the agency by which he is "brought out of darkness into the marvellous light" of the Gospel, is his own, in what rational or scriptural sense can he be said to be "born of the Spirit;" to be "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God?" If the wills of men are always governed by a "self-determining power," how can all glorying be taken away from the creature, and ascribed to almighty, sovereign, self-moving grace? Is it indeed so? then I see not—notwithstanding all the solemn, and I doubt not, sincere protestations of the abettors of these doctrines to the contrary, I see not how we can avoid the conclusion, that the character of God is dishonoured; that his counsels are degraded to a chaos of impotent wishes, and abortive endeavours; that his promises are the fallible and uncertain declarations of circumscribed power, and endless doubt; that it is impossible to guard the best hopes of the Christian from the constant liability to be blasted, unless by reducing him to a mere machine; that the whole plan of salvation is nothing better than a system of probabilities and peradventures, in which nothing can be made certain but at the expense of destroying the moral agency of the creature; and that it is nearly, if not quite, as likely to land the believer in the abyss of the damned, as in the paradise of God!

I know that these consequences are neither recognised nor admitted by the respected brethren who entertain the opinions under consideration. On the contrary, they think they see consequences flowing

from them of the most favourable and inviting character. Nay; I believe they have been led, in some instances, to embrace and to preach these doctrines, by a sincere wish to avoid certain evils which they saw, or thought they saw, to arise from the exhibition of what they called the "Old Orthodoxy." They have heard, perhaps, some who professed to be advocates of "Calvinism," represent some of the features of that system, and especially the subject of human *inability*, in a manner rather adapted to diminish a sense of responsibility, and lull to sleep, than rouse and alarm the impenitent sinner. They have thence hastily concluded, that the fault was in the system itself, and not in the preacher. And in their ardent zeal to do good, instead of *only rectifying the mode of presenting truth*, which was all that needed rectification, they have been allured into the opposite error, by an honest desire to make a strong and salutary impression. This, I have no doubt, is a real statement of facts; and that we have, of course, to thank the occasional mistakes of "old school" preaching, for some of the most serious departures of "new school" champions, from the simplicity of Bible truth. This, however, while it *accounts* for the fact before us, by no means *justifies* it. Some of the worst heresies that ever infected the Church have arisen from a similar source.

As to the alleged peculiar tendency of these doctrines, to make men feel their responsibility, and to promote revivals of religion, it is, I am constrained to believe, altogether delusive. The preaching of these opinions may promote, as I am persuaded it has promoted, revivals of a spurious kind, in which temporary excitement—strong animal feeling—and

vows and resolutions made on the spur of the moment, and in human strength, were the sum and substance of what was accomplished by them. Or they may exceedingly rouse the public mind, by being connected with novel devices and movements. Thus, it is well known, that strongly marked and extensive religious excitements have often occurred, both in former and latter times, under the ministration of those who denied every fundamental doctrine of the Gospel. But surely no one ever considered this as any evidence that the sentiments on which the whole rested, were either sound in their character, or salutary in their influence. I defy the most diligent student of ecclesiastical history, to produce a single instance in which the interests of vital piety, and of genuine revivals of religion, have not utterly perished in Pelagian hands.

O how different, my Christian friends, is this scheme of doctrine, from that humbling, yet elevating, and glorious plan of salvation, which shines so clearly in the Bible, and which appears to me to be so exactly and happily copied into our Confession of Faith! A system which represents man as universally fallen, depraved and guilty, in virtue of his covenant connexion with “the first *Adam*;”—which exhibits him as an active, sentient, moral being, endowed with all the faculties which constitute a free, responsible moral agent; yet destitute of all holy dispositions, “dead in trespasses and sins,” that is insensible to the glory of God, and to all holy taste and enjoyment;—which describes him as wholly unable to recover himself from this state of moral pollution and alienation, yet entirely to blame for this inability; to blame, nay wholly inexcusable, for every moment

of its continuance; the inability being altogether moral, and consequently, rather aggravating than excusing the spirit and conduct of the sinner;—a system which, while it represents man as in these deplorable circumstances, holds forth to him a dispensation of rich and wonderful mercy, through “the second ADAM, the Lord from heaven;”—which proclaims to a guilty world, a divine, almighty, all-sufficient Saviour, who as the covenant Head and Representative of his chosen, laid down his life as an atoning sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God;—a sacrifice abundantly sufficient for the whole world, but according to the gracious purpose and sovereign wisdom of God, made efficacious only to those who believe;—which on the ground of this all-sufficient sacrifice, sincerely makes an offer of the Saviour, with all his benefits, to every one who hears the Gospel; and that, not on the ground that those who make the offer thus general, do not know who are chosen, and who are not; but because the provision made by the sacrifice of the Redeemer is abundantly adequate, and in its nature, perfectly adapted to the case of all;—a plan which represents the pardon and acceptance of the sinner as founded solely on the perfect satisfaction and righteousness of the Redeemer, received by faith, and imputed to the believer; and his regeneration and progressive holiness, as produced entirely by the power of the Holy Spirit, on whose gracious power the Christian is entirely dependent, for the commencement and continuance of every holy exercise. In short, a system, which represents the moral ruin and impotence of man by nature as entire; which maintains from the beginning to the end, his perfect dependence, and

at the same time his perfect freedom and responsibility; and which also, from the beginning to the end, holds forth the Saviour, his love, his atoning blood, his justifying righteousness, his life-giving spirit, as the only hope of the sinner—as the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the first and last of the whole plan. This, as I read the Bible, is the great evangelical system. And as *David* said concerning the sword of *Goliath*, so say I of this system—“There is none like it,—give it me.” This is “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.” It may, no doubt, be preached unfaithfully, or unskilfully, as it has often been by its professed friends; but, when proclaimed in its genuine character, it is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” Some, I know have said, that to exhibit the Gospel thus is to give it a “discouraging” aspect. But I know of no “discouragement” with which it is chargeable, except it be, that it discourages in the sinner *all hope of being his own saviour*. And this, I acknowledge, is, to me, one of its strongest recommendations. It humbles the sinner. It exalts the Saviour. It warms, consoles, and edifies the believer. This is that “sword of the Spirit,” which, accompanied with the mighty power of Him who gave it, is destined to accomplish the conquest of the world.

I do not forget that some of the respected and beloved brethren who are regarded as the advocates of the doctrines alluded to, tell us continually, that *they* believe substantially as *we* believe; that the difference between them and us is chiefly, if not entirely, a difference of *words*. And is it possible, if this be the case, that they will allow so much anxiety and noise to be created by a mere *verbal dispute*? Is it

possible that they are so intent on a set of *terms*, as to grieve multitudes of the pious, and run the risk of breaking the peace of the Church, for the sake of maintaining a mere phraseology? Surely they cannot so lightly esteem the harmony and edification of the body of Christ! But whatever may be the understanding and the intention of the leading preachers of the doctrines referred to, the question is, how are they understood by *others*? What impression, when preached as they are, will they be likely, and are they found in fact, to make? Nothing can be more certain than that the *language* of some of these doctrinal statements is palpably Pelagian, and some others of them Semi-Pelagian; and even if those who, after all they have heard of the uneasiness of their brethren, still insist upon employing this language, do not themselves embrace the errors with which it was once connected; there is the utmost danger that others, not so discerning or so pious, will be led astray by the language in question, and really embrace, in all their extent, the errors which it was originally employed to express. I am persuaded that ecclesiastical history furnishes no example of such theological language being obstinately and extensively used, without being found in fact connected with Arminian and Pelagian opinions, or at least ultimately leading to their adoption.

Besides, all experience admonishes us to be upon our guard against those who, in publishing erroneous opinions, insist upon it that they differ from the old orthodox creed "only in *words*." This plan has been often pursued, until the language became familiar, and the opinions which it naturally expressed, current;—and then the real existence of something

more than a verbal difference was disclosed in all its extent and inveteracy. Such was the course adopted by *Arius*, in the fourth century. He and his followers strenuously maintained that they differed in no material respect—nay in terms only—from the orthodox Church. But how entirely was their language changed when they had gained a little more power and influence! The same plea precisely was adopted by *Pelagius*, and his leading adherents in the fifth century, and also by *Cassian*, and other advocates of the Semi-Pelagian cause, about the same time. When *Arminius* arose toward the close of the sixteenth century, he veiled his opinions by the very same plea, and by this means succeeded, for a number of years, in eluding ecclesiastical discipline. Such also was the allegation of *Cameron* and *Amyraut*, of *France*, in the seventeenth century, when they commenced that corrupting process in the doctrine of the French churches, which at length issued in their deplorable degeneracy from the truth, and, indeed, in their final ruin. And, to mention but one example more:—All the world knows that a similar plea was confidently urged by our *Unitarian* neighbours of *Massachusetts*, when more than twenty years ago, they were charged, by some faithful watchmen on the walls of *Zion*, with holding Arian and Socinian opinions. They denied and resented the charge; denounced those who brought it as malignant slanderers; and warmly contended that they differed from the mass of the *Massachusetts* clergy chiefly in “words.” If my memory does not deceive me, only one man in the whole commonwealth was candid enough, when the charge was first published, to acknowledge its truth. But we all know how the affair issued. The worst

predictions of the advocates of truth were seen realized; and proof of the most unequivocal kind produced, that while the truth of the charge was loudly and indignantly denied, it had a deep-seated and growing foundation in fact. Shall these instructions of experience be lost upon us? Shall examples so numerous and decisive be contemplated in vain?

I am very far from imputing to the respected brethren, to whose alleged opinions I now refer, the insidious aim to conceal and deceive, which appeared but too plainly in the long line of errorists to which I have referred. On the contrary, I am bound to take for granted, and do really believe, that the greater part of them have completely succeeded in persuading themselves that the doctrines specified are truly, for substance, those which are found in our public formularies. Yet it is impossible for me to doubt that these brethren are labouring under an entire mistake; that they are really, without being aware of it, teaching dangerous errors; and like men of excellent intentions who have gone before them, are laying a foundation for still more serious departures from the purity of Gospel truth. I am not unacquainted with the ingenious and plausible efforts of distinguished brethren, who advocate these speculations, to reconcile them with the simple truths of the Gospel; and to show that they do not differ from the doctrines taught on the same subjects by President *Edwards*, by *Witherspoon*, and by other venerated fathers whose praise is in all the churches. But the more I read of such efforts, the more I am amazed and dissatisfied. By a similar process I could prove that President *Edwards* and *John Taylor*, of *Norwich*, did not materially differ! Either lan-

guage has lost its meaning, or these brethren differ essentially from the excellent men whose authority they plead. I can confidently say, that I have heard preachers of my own denomination, with my own ears, deliver sentiments, and have seen in print, tenets which others, of the same class, publicly avowed, which constrained me, and not me only, but some of the wisest and most *moderate* ministers in the Presbyterian Church, to say "that we had rather, much rather, sit habitually under the ministry of a pious Methodist brother, with all his avowed Arminianism, than under that of the Presbyterian brethren alluded to." My deliberate judgment is in favour of this decision. I verily think that the former would approach much nearer to the spirit of the Bible than the latter; and be, in every respect a more sober, safe, and edifying guide to us and our children.

Our Church, as such, professes to be a CALVINISTIC CHURCH. This name and this character she has long borne. She is descended from a Church which, for a series of generations, deserves to be called one of the noblest witnesses for "the truth as it is in Jesus" that ever adorned the annals of reformed Christendom. And ever since her organization in this country, the daughter has acknowledged and gloried in the faith of her transatlantic mother. She has been distinguished as Calvinistic; reproached as Calvinistic; and, as Calvinistic, has suffered, on some occasions, every thing short of martyrdom from an ungodly world, and from professing Christians, who misunderstood and maligned her tenets. Under this "flag" she has bravely and successfully fought. Shall she now "change her colours?" Or shall she retain them ostensibly, only to dishonour and betray them?

Every principle of fidelity to the God of her fathers, and of regard to Christian truth, and Christian honour, ought to forbid this. If her public "Standards" have not been hitherto correct, let them be openly and frankly altered. But as long as she professes to maintain them, let them be maintained in sincerity and good faith. Let not her Confession of Faith speak one language and her pulpits another. Let the world be honestly informed what, as a Church, she really holds. I venture to predict, that, whenever we abandon our doctrinal testimony, God will abandon us. No instance, I repeat, can be produced, in all the records of ecclesiastical history, in which a Church, once firm and zealous in maintaining the Calvinistic system, gradually relaxed from her testimony, and deviated into Pelagian or Arminian errors, without, in a great measure, losing her spirituality, and manifesting that her strength had departed from her. It is true, the influence of Arminian doctrine has not always been such in churches *originally founded and nurtured in its belief*. But never, as I believe, has the adoption of this system succeeded to the light and the influence of a more scriptural faith, without being marked, very distinctly and mournfully, as a *descent*, rather than a *rise* in the scale of Christian prosperity. This was exemplified in *England*, in the early part of the seventeenth century. Precisely in proportion as Arminianism gained ground in the established church, in the time, and under the influence of *Laud*, spirituality declined, and remained in a deplorable state for more than a hundred years. And the return to spirituality, at a later period, in that church, was notoriously attended with a corresponding return to Calvinistic opinions. The

same general principle is strikingly illustrated, and mournfully confirmed by the history of the French Protestant Churches in the same century. Just in proportion as they relaxed from the original doctrines of the Reformation, and extensively embraced opinions nearly allied to the Semi-Pelagian system, they declined in harmony and piety, and manifested that their glory was departed. The same fact notoriously appeared in the churches of *Massachusetts* and *Connecticut*, when, more than a century ago, a number of their ministers manifested a tendency toward the adoption of Arminian opinions. Who does not know, that, in almost every such case, coldness, formality, and spiritual barrenness were, constantly, the ultimate result? To speak of an Arminian, at that time, and in that country, was to speak of one opposed to close and faithful preaching, and to all fervent zeal for the conversion of souls. It may be imagined by some to be a sufficient answer to this position, that the very reverse is now alleged to be the fact; that those who are charged with Arminian tendencies in doctrine, are among the most fervent preachers in the country. But we have not yet seen the end. Let us wait a few years, and see what the result will be. It is yet to be decided whether they will sink down into the coldness and death-like formality of the *Whitbyan* school, as a great majority of Arminians, in every age, have done; or take the position of the *Cumberland* Presbyterians, with their unscriptural creed, and their fanatical, revolting irregularities. Either result, I am sure is *now* regarded by those worthy brethren to whose opinions I allude, as equally unwelcome and improbable.

It will be seen, from the foregoing representation, that my opinion decisively is, that unless there can

be some fraternal understanding and co-operation, in both sides, in adhering to our Doctrinal Standards, our beloved Church must long continue to be a stranger to peace. It is, indeed, very important that the brethren of what is called the "Old-school" should not be, as to this matter, captious, or over rigorous in their demands; that they should not be perpetually and vexatiously occupied in the work of "heresy hunting;" that they should not indulge the disposition to make a brother "an offender for a word." But it is evident that this will not be enough. If the brethren of the "New-school" *will* persist in the public, habitual use of a theological language, which impartial judges consider as Pelagian in its obvious import;—if they *will* pay no regard to the distressing apprehensions of multitudes of their brethren, who are grieved in regard to this subject;—if they *will* venture, notwithstanding all the irritability of the public mind in relation to the matter, to license and ordain men who give too much reason to fear that they do not, *ex animo*, receive the doctrines and order of our Church; and if, whenever a question arises, in our higher judicatories, respecting doctrinal soundness, they *will* always sustain and acquit lax theology, to whatever extreme it may go; I say, if they *will* pursue this course, it requires no spirit of prophecy to foresee, that growing alienation, strife, and eventual rupture must be the consequence. It is, indeed, an easy thing for a minister accused of heresy, and affording too much evidence of the fact, by ingenious refinements, and plausible protestations, to render it difficult, if not impossible for a judicatory to convict him: and it is easy for such of his brethren as resolve to screen him from censure, so to varnish over his

opinions, as to hide, for the present, most of their deformity. But is this the policy of Christian fidelity and candour? Will such a course be likely to issue favourably *to either party?* I trow not. It will be to no purpose that we call ourselves the Presbyterian Church in the United States, if we cannot be really united in cordial attachment to the faith as well as the order publicly adopted by that body. To retain our name, while we desert our standards, will not long be possible; and would be neither honest nor useful, even if it were possible.

My further remarks on the importance of adhering to our Doctrinal Standards, will be despatched in one or more letter.

Princeton, Feb. 1833.

LETTER VIII.

Adherence to our Doctrinal Standards.

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS,

BEFORE I take leave of the subject of adherence to our Doctrinal Standards, allow me to advert to one or two points, closely connected with the general subject, in relation to which I cannot resist the impression that sentiments and practices of more than doubtful character have been repeatedly indulged in several of our judicatories. No one, I trust, will suspect me of a disposition so far to travel out of my province as to arraign and censure Ecclesiastical Bodies with which I have nothing immediately to do. Far from it. My only object is to remark on some *principles*, which, however they are assumed, and acted upon, cannot fail, in my opinion, to lead to mischief.

The first of the points to which I refer is one which appears to me to have a very portentous bearing on the doctrinal purity and peace of our Church. I mean the disposition which has been avowed and acted upon, of forming new Presbyteries upon the plan of what has been called "elective affinity;"—or, in other words, where there is a large Presbytery, comprising brethren who differ very materially in their doctrinal belief, and who find it difficult to act with harmony together, on account of that difference, of forming the members who constitute one of the parties into a new Presbytery, by themselves, thus enabling them to indulge their doctrinal peculiari-

ties, and to pursue their favourite policy without control. In the remarks which I have to offer on this subject, I beg to be considered as having no special reference to the act of the last General Assembly, by which a certain Presbytery seems to have been confessedly divided upon this very principle. If I had been a member of that Assembly, I am inclined to think I should have given my vote for the division which was made; not, however, by any means on the principle which was avowed by many of the advocates of the measure; but on an entirely different ground, hereafter to be stated. My sole object is, without any reference to particular cases, to offer some general remarks by which I hope you will be satisfied, that the whole scheme of forming new Presbyteries on the principle of "elective affinity," involves an essential departure from the spirit of our constitution; and, if freely pursued, must very speedily issue in a painful and fatal division of the Presbyterian Church.

The theory of our ecclesiastical constitution, as every one who reflects on the subject, will immediately perceive, is, that the Presbyterian Church, though composed of many parts, is ONE BODY. It supposes a number of individual churches and judicatories all embracing the same faith; walking by the same rules; and agreeing to be governed by the same principles of truth and order; thus forming one harmonious community, in which every part is presumed to agree with every other part, and one law, spirit, and counsel to pervade the whole. "Things equal to one and the same thing are equal to one another." Of course, if every minister, and elder, and deacon, of the Presbyterian Church, on becom-

ing such, subscribe a certain formulary, the whole body is to be considered as according with that formulary, which each individual part has formally adopted; and, consequently, every part as in harmony with every other part. In this sense, the Presbyterian Church, in a manner somewhat peculiar to herself, is ONE: not merely composed of a number of religious bodies, or worshipping assemblies, bearing the same *name*, and a *general resemblance* to each other; but every member and judicatory being integral parts of the same compact and organized body, and each part exercising its appropriate and definite share of government, over itself and over the whole.

This is the theory. Now it is evident that if there be not real harmony, real unity of spirit among all these several parts, the principle on which the body is constituted, is precisely to the extent to which this want of harmony exists, really abandoned. If even a single subordinate part, or judicatory does not believe, and refuses to act, in accordance with the rest, it is plain that the beauty, the purity, and even the safety of the whole, may be invaded by that one. And if a few more parts become erratic and impure, their influence may soon become, not merely unhappy, but fatal. This principle is not so applicable to various other denominations. If a single Independent or Congregational Church, or even a single Congregational Association, should depart from the general faith or order which it has been wont to receive, it would, of course, be regretted by the wise and the good. But as that church, or that association is an independent and insulated body; has only an *advisory* power, and can take no part in *governing* the rest of

her sisters; the mischief of her aberration might by no means be widely extended; at any rate, the mischief attendant upon it might not be *necessarily* great.

But suppose the case to be, as it actually is, and must be, when a similar occurrence takes place in the Presbyterian Church. Suppose a Presbytery to be set off on the principle of "elective affinity;" that is, on the principle, that the members who compose it, were not able to agree with their brethren in doctrinal sentiments; suppose that they differed so widely in this respect, not only from their brethren, but also from some very material articles in the Confession of Faith, as to be no longer able to act together with comfort and peace; and suppose that they wished for a separate organization that they might be free to indulge their doctrinal peculiarities in licensing and ordaining candidates, &c., without restraint or conflict. This may appear, to superficial thinkers, a very reasonable demand, and a very feasible expedient for terminating the evils of ecclesiastical controversy. But let us, for a moment, pursue this expedient to its natural results. Suppose this newly organized Presbytery to follow out the principles of its solicitude, and eventually granted organization, into a regular system of corresponding acts. Suppose it immediately to go to work, and to be a kind of *mint*, for manufacturing and sending forth among the churches an abundance of coin bearing the same stamp with itself. Suppose, further, that the principle recently contended for be also adopted and acted upon, viz. that whenever either a licentiate or an ordained minister comes from any Presbytery with regular testimonials, declaring him to be in good standing with that body, he must, *of course*, be received by

any and every other Presbytery to which he may present himself, without a word of examination or inquiry; suppose these things, and is it not manifest, that it would be in the power of a single Presbytery of this character, in a few years, to ruin the Presbyterian Church? Let such a Presbytery be regarded by the public generally, as the centre and patron of lax theology. Let it be understood that its members, though not all, or perhaps *any* of them, Pelagians themselves, will not hesitate a moment to license or ordain a Pelagian! Let every individual in the land who dislikes the rigid plan of subscription to the Confession of Faith, and who wishes for the privilege of declaring his solemn assent to a system of doctrines without believing them—flock to that Presbytery for license and ordination. Let a score of candidates from that mint be emitted into the Church every year, and by certificates be distributed about among the more orthodox Presbyteries, as inclination or policy might dictate; and let the doctrine be adopted that no Presbytery must hesitate about receiving such candidates as come with “clean papers,” whatever degree of painful suspicion respecting their soundness in the faith may be entertained:—let this course be pursued, and it is plain that no long time would be requisite to inoculate the whole Church with the views of this single Presbytery, and that all faithful adherence to our public formularies would be at an end. I do not say, for I do not believe, that there is a single Presbytery in our Church which is *now* capable of acting in this manner. But a supposition has been made for the purpose of showing the natural tendency, and indeed the unavoidable operation, of the general principle of set-

ting off new Presbyteries on the ground of incompatibility of doctrinal belief. And if I do not deceive myself, it is clearly and directly adapted to destroy the purity of the whole body.

There is an incompatibility, indeed, which I can readily recognise as a valid reason for dividing a Presbytery, and erecting a new one with a part of its members. I mean such an *incompatibility of temper*; such an *alienation of feeling* among the members as renders it difficult, if not impossible for them to transact the business of the Church with mutual confidence and affection. For this reason, that is on account of an evident incompatibility of feeling which rendered it wholly impossible for the members to act together with edification—as well as on the account of the extraordinary and unwieldy size of the Presbytery which was divided by the last General Assembly, I think I should have concurred in the general measure of division, if it had been my lot to give a vote on that occasion. There was evidently a *state of feeling* in the body, which, as it respected *some* of the members, at least, had no immediate connexion with doctrinal discrepance. To divide them into two distinct bodies for the purpose of affording relief from this unhappy state of feeling—was in my apprehension no way inconsistent with correct and safe principle; and really seemed to be the only mode of affording the necessary relief. But to divide, and to erect new Presbyteries on the ground of the existence of such DOCTRINAL DIVERSITY as that brethren cannot live and act together;—is, in my opinion, high treason against the first principles of Presbyterianism;—it is to poison the very fountains of our ecclesiastical purity; and, for the sake of avoiding a little present

inconvenience, to lay a train for an explosion which must, at no great distance of time, rend the Church in pieces. I contemplate the subject, my Christian brethren, I repeat, not at all with feelings excited by the case which occupied so much of the time and attention of the last Assembly. Of these I have none; having before intimated, that, if I had been a member of the body, I should probably have yielded my assent to the general measure which was adopted. But upon the most impartial and dispassionate view that I am able to take of the essential characteristic of a Presbyterian Church, as made up of many members, all subject to the same rules, and bound together in truth, love and authority by one common Head;—the idea of *expressly providing for the encouragement and perpetuation of diversity of faith in her bosom*, is deliberately to conspire against her unity, and to take counsel for introducing into her very system a principle of disease and self-destruction.

The only other point to which I shall refer as existing in our Church, and as threatening her peace, is nearly the converse of that which was last mentioned, and relates to the licensing of candidates for the ministry. I knew, not long since, a young man, who, after being, for a number of months, on trial for license, before a certain Old-school Presbytery, rather more than usually respectable for size, talents, learning and piety, was deliberately refused license, on account of alleged immaturity in theological knowledge, and unsoundness in the faith. He immediately applied to another Presbytery, of the New-school, more than a hundred miles off, by whom he was promptly licensed, notwithstanding the refusal of the sister judicatory, and with a distinct knowledge of

that refusal. Here you will observe, was a departure from the doctrine contended for in the other case. *There* it was maintained, that a minister licensed and ordained by one Presbytery, and coming to another, with "clean papers," as a minister in good and regular standing, must necessarily be received, as *rectus in ecclesia*, upon the principle that the acts of one Presbytery must be respected and sustained by all co-ordinate judicatories. But *here* it was quite as strenuously maintained, that the judgment and act of a sister Presbytery might properly be disregarded. In other words, it seems to be the doctrine of some, at least, of our respected brethren of the New-school, that where the act of a sister Presbytery makes *in their favour*, it is to be sustained; but that where it makes *against them*, it is to be set at naught. It is easy to see that these two doctrines, though diametrically opposite in principle, yet harmonize most perfectly in one respect. So far as they are acted upon, they both alike facilitate the multiplication of candidates of a particular stamp, to an indefinite extent; and would enable, as was before observed, a single Presbytery, if she should be so disposed, to deluge the Church with unsound ministers, without her sister Presbyteries being able to interpose any adequate remedy. While the former would feel herself at liberty to act at her pleasure; the latter would be, if I may so express it, bound hand and foot; compelled to receive all who came to them with regular testimonials; and utterly unable to defend either themselves or the rest of the Church from the encroachments of error. Is this right? Is it not subversive of every sound principle of ecclesiastical government? Is it not adapted to destroy mutual confidence among

judicatories, who ought to feel not only that they bear the same name, but that they are in truth, "one body in Christ, and every one members one of another?"

But the question naturally arises, what is the proper remedy in cases such as those of which we have been speaking? Suppose an ordained minister in good standing in his own Presbytery, to be called within the bounds of another, or to wish for any reason, to connect himself with that other. And suppose that, while he presents the most ample testimonials of regular official character from the Presbytery from which he comes, a majority of the members of that which he proposes to join, believe him to be materially unsound in the faith. What is to be done? Has the latter Presbytery no alternative? Must we consider her as *compelled* to receive the candidate for admission without inquiry? If so, then, as before suggested, a single Presbytery might poison, and eventually destroy the whole Church. She might soon create a majority of her own way of thinking in every Presbytery within her reach. It cannot be that this is the true theory of Presbyterian church government. By no means. It is evident that the Presbytery to which the candidate applies *may*, if she see her way clear, receive him at once, on the faith of his testimonials, and, as soon as he becomes a member of her body, proceed to arraign and try him, as she may any other of her members, on the charge of heresy. But suppose the Presbytery to which the applicant comes to, foresee, that if she receives him at once to membership, he may, either by artfully tampering with other members, render process very difficult; or, by adding one more vote to a previously

large minority, obstruct it altogether; would she be doing justice to the cause of truth to receive him at once, and thus run the risk of strengthening the interests of error within her own bosom, and possibly of giving it a predominant influence? If she distinctly foresaw such a result as likely to ensue, she would be not only justifiable, but bound in duty, to decline admitting such an applicant among the number of her members. However painful such an alternative might be, it would undoubtedly comport with the strictest rules of ecclesiastical order. Everybody, ecclesiastical as well as civil, must be considered as having a right to judge of the qualifications of its own members. It ought, indeed, to exercise this right with great wisdom and prudence; and always exercise it on its own responsibility;—but exercise it, it *ought* and *must*, or there is an end of all liberty. This right is inherent in our Presbyteries. When a candidate for admission stands before them, and his testimonials are produced and read, a vote is taken whether to receive him or not. If they have a right in this vote to say *yes*, they, surely, have quite as good a right to say *no*. In other words, the right of voting on the question at all, necessarily implies the right of voting either in the affirmative or negative, as they see cause. If they think proper to say *no*;—in other words to reject him, any one of several courses may be taken. The rejected applicant may simply withdraw his application, and take no further step in the business: *or*, the Presbytery which rejected him may represent the case to that from which he came, and by which he was recommended, and may request process to be commenced against him: *or*, the rejected candidate may complain of his

non-reception to the Synod, and that body may take such order in the case as the rules and edification of the Church may appear to require. Two of these courses may appear, at first view, circuitous; but when we consider the value of harmony in an extended community, and the importance, if we would attain it, of adhering to the rules agreed upon by that community, we cannot for a moment doubt, that the most regular course of proceeding is always the best, and generally the most easy and expeditious.

While on the subject of the respect due from one ecclesiastical judicatory to another; and the necessity of their concurrence in maintaining our ecclesiastical standards, if they would promote either the peace or the purity of the Church; there is a matter of so much delicacy that I scarcely know how to speak of it, and at the same time of such vital importance, that I dare not wholly refrain from speaking. I refer to some circumstances which have attended the intercourse between our Church and the Congregational Churches in *New England*. That intercourse began with the commencement of my ministerial life. I have always been a warm friend to it; and should be grieved at the occurrence of any thing adapted either to interrupt it, or render it less comfortable. If no such intercourse were already constituted, it ought forthwith to be begun. Those who come so near together as the great body of the ministers of *New England* and those of the Presbyterian Church, ought undoubtedly to know and love one another, and to co-operate in the great work of enlightening and converting the world. But while the intercourse in question is delightful to every pious heart, and has been made, I doubt not,

mutually useful to the contracting parties, and conducive to the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom; both its comfort and usefulness cannot fail of being painfully interrupted, unless care be taken to guard against some of those sources of misunderstanding, which, however small they may appear in the beginning, will assuredly work wider and deeper mischief as they advance.

The articles of intercourse between the Associations of *New England*, and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, are to be considered as a solemn ecclesiastical compact, evidently intended to promote harmony, co-operation, and mutual strength. They secure the friendly reception of the ministers and licentiates of each party by the other; and they furnish a virtual, if not a formal pledge, that the peace, purity, and edification of each other, will be respected by both. Now the spirit of these principles seems to require that each party should abstain from such acts as manifestly militate with the object of the compact; and, of course, that candidates for the ministry which are known to have been rejected by one party, should not be received by the other, and immediately sent back to the party which had rejected them, and there claim reception under the broad shield of this compact. Yet cases of this kind have occurred with a frequency, and painfulness, which cannot fail of being regarded with apprehension by the friends of the Presbyterian Church.

About thirty years ago, a young man presented himself to the Presbytery of *New York*, of which I was then a member, to be taken on trial for license to preach the Gospel. In the preliminary examination as to his experimental acquaintance with reli-

gion, he by no means gave satisfaction. The Presbytery, however, determined to pursue his trials a little further, and for the purpose of obtaining more light, gave him several subjects on which to produce written compositions. When these were exhibited, it became so perfectly apparent to the Presbytery that he was destitute of every proper qualification for the sacred office; that they, *unanimously*, resolved to proceed no further in his trials, and advised him to turn his attention to some secular employment. He appeared to acquiesce in their decision; but in a few weeks went to *Massachusetts*; applied to one of the Associations in that State; was promptly licensed; and immediately returned to the bosom of the Presbyterian Church; and presented himself as a regular licentiate from *New England*, to the Presbytery in the immediate vicinity of that by which he was rejected. That Presbytery felt itself bound, in courtesy (although the compact between the General Assembly, and the General Association of *Massachusetts*, now existing, had not then been formed,) to receive him as a licentiate in good standing. He was received; was finally with much reluctance ordained; occupied several stations in the church, though none for any length of time; and proved as long as he lived a trouble to the judicatories with which he was connected, and a distress to all intelligent and conscientious Christians, for his gross ignorance, and lamentable departure from the correctness of Christian example.

Nor does this case stand alone. Several times, since the date of that to which I have referred, candidates for ordination in our Church, who refused to adopt our Confession of Faith, and of course, were

rejected by the respective Presbyteries to which they applied, have gone forthwith to *New England*, and there, with a distinct knowledge of their rejection in the Presbyterian Church, have been immediately ordained, and returned to its bosom, clothed with the ministerial character, and candidates for settlement in Presbyterian Churches. Now, though it cannot be said that any formal engagement was violated by these proceedings; although the Associations which acted in these cases had a perfect right, on the principles of their government, to decide and act as they did; although I am entirely satisfied that they meant to do nothing unfair or unfriendly; and although it is not known that any extensive mischief in fact resulted from more than one of the cases in question:—yet it is perfectly plain, that if similar proceedings should become frequent, heart burning and impaired cordiality must be the consequence. Indeed, if such acts were to become very frequent, not to say habitual; if our beloved and respected brethren of the *New England* Associations were to allow themselves to license and ordain without reserve, rejected fugitives from our Presbyteries—they might essentially weaken our hands; nay, they might absolutely destroy the discipline of the Presbyterian Church, and render the articles of agreement in question, a curse instead of a blessing.

It ought to be known that this is not a new difficulty. It is not a matter of complaint to which the recent jealousies of conflicting theologians have, for the first time, given rise. More than seventy years ago, the same evil was felt and remonstrated against. The following extract from the proceedings of the Synod of *New York* and *Philadelphia*, then the high-

est judicatory of our Church, at its sessions in 1764, will at once explain and confirm my statement.

“Though the Synod entertains a high regard for the Associated Churches of New England; yet we cannot but judge, that students who go to them, or to any other than our own Presbyteries, to obtain license, in order to return and officiate among us, act very irregularly, and are not to be approved, or employed by our Presbyteries, as hereby we are deprived of the right of trying and approving the qualifications of our own candidates. Yet if any cases shall happen wherein such a conduct may in some circumstances be thought necessary for the greater good of any congregation, it shall be laid before the Presbytery to which the congregation belongs, and be approved of by them.”—Here, it will be perceived, the conduct censured was applying to Eastern Associations, in the *first instance*, to be licensed, “in order to return and officiate” in the Presbyterian Church. How much louder would have been the complaint against those Associations, if they had licensed and ordained candidates which had been *rejected* by our Presbyteries,—knowing them to have been rejected, with the distinct and avowed purpose of preparing them to come back and settle, or at least to preach, in Presbyterian Churches!

It is for the purpose of averting evil, and of guarding against every feeling which may threaten mischief, that I make these remarks. It is because I wish the connexion which exists to be perpetual, and, at once, more pleasant and more beneficial on both sides, that I speak thus of the dangers to which it is exposed. If there ever has been an instance in which *we* have failed to pay due respect to the decisions of

any of the Associations with which we have a conventional intercourse, it is unknown to me; and if such a thing were to occur, I think I should be the first to condemn it, and to make a motion for acknowledging and repairing our fault.

It was in connexion with uneasiness arising from an event of the kind referred to, that the proposal was made, and carried into effect, several years ago, that the delegates from the several Associations to our General Assembly, and from us to them, should no longer have a *vote* in the decisions of those bodies respectively. The proposal came from *us*, and was prompted by the following considerations.

1. The system of mutual voting by these delegates, appeared, on serious consideration, so far as our Church was concerned, *unconstitutional*. The form of Government under which the General Assembly acts, makes provision for that body maintaining a *correspondence* with sister churches at home and abroad; but not for receiving their members into *authoritative* co-operation with us. It declares very explicitly, in what manner the General Assembly shall be constituted by the ministers and ruling Elders from the several Presbyteries; but opens no door for admitting to a complete membership and vote any other description of persons. It was deemed, therefore, that our fathers, in forming this agreement, had gone beyond their constitutional warrant, and that we were, of course, bound to retrace our steps.

2. Some years after our brethren of the *New England* Associations had established a conventional intercourse with the General Assembly, the Associate Reformed, the Dutch Reformed, and the German Reformed Churches, made overtures for establishing

a similar intercourse;—in framing the articles of which, although those bodies are all strictly Presbyterian, yet, such was their adherence to constitutional principles, that the privilege of voting on the part of the delegates reciprocally sent by each party, was expressly precluded. Accordingly, for some years, at the meetings of our General Assembly, the singular spectacle was witnessed of all the delegates from the Congregational Churches voting on every question; while those from the Presbyterian Churches in correspondence with us were never permitted to vote. This had so strange an appearance, that the friends of impartiality and good neighbourhood thought it of importance that all the delegates from the corresponding Churches should be placed on an equal footing. And as our Presbyterian correspondents would not consent either to *give* or *take* the voting power, it was deemed most judicious to abolish it in regard to all.

3. In 1821, when our Form of Government was revised, it was judged best to take away even *from our own corresponding members*, the right of voting. As the constitution of the Church had stood before, when a member of one of our Presbyteries happened to be present at the session of another Presbytery, he was, commonly of course, invited to sit as a corresponding member; and when he did so, was allowed not only to speak, but also to vote, as if he had been a stated and plenary member of the Presbytery in which he held this temporary seat. On the revision of our Form of Government, in the year just mentioned, it was judged best, for weighty reasons, to declare, that such corresponding members should, thereafter, be allowed to sit and deliberate, but *not*

to vote. In these circumstances it was surely not equal to continue to the delegates of corresponding sister Churches, a privilege which we had deliberately thought proper to withdraw from the corresponding members of our own denomination.

4. Finally, the General Assembly was deliberately brought to the conclusion that the voting system of the delegates from the Congregational Churches ought to be abolished, because this power, as enjoyed in *their* bodies and *ours*, was by no means of equal potency. On the one hand, it is well known that our General Assembly is a judicial body; that its decisions are *authoritative*, and bind the Churches which are represented by its members. On the other hand, it is equally well known, that the General Association of the Congregational Churches have no judicial authority; that they are only *advisory* bodies; and, of course, that a vote given in them binds no one, not even those, strictly speaking, who concur in it. Here, then, is an immense difference in the potency of votes. In our General Assembly, if there should happen to be nearly a tie, a single delegate or two from an Association, if they enjoyed the privilege of voting, might absolutely turn the scale, and give law to the Church on a most important point; or might be instrumental in deciding an interesting case of discipline in a manner contrary to the wishes of a real majority of the Church. While in the Association, supposing one of our delegates to enjoy the privilege of voting, the utmost that his vote *could* avail, would be to carry a question in favour of giving *advice*. It could, in no case whatever, carry with it an authoritative power. To many warm friends

of the intercourse system, this difference appeared too serious to be disregarded. The truth is, that on more than one occasion, while the system of delegate voting continued, the General Assembly has been so nearly divided, that, if the votes from the Association did not decide the vote of the Assembly, they came very near it, and might have done so in reality. Can it surprise any one that such a fact should be regarded with some apprehension? It must be acknowledged, indeed, that our *New England* brethren have never discovered the least disposition to take the advantage of such a power on any occasion; but we might easily conceive of a state of things in which the enjoyment of it would be by no means unattended with hazard.

My reasons for mentioning this subject, in the present connexion, are chiefly two.

1. Because I am sensible that painful feelings have been excited in the minds of some by the abolition of the system of delegate voting. These feelings, I am confident, could never have been indulged, if the whole subject, in all its bearings, had been well understood.

2. Because I am more and more convinced that if the intercourse in question is to be maintained with comfort, and to edification, it will be of great importance that the rules and feelings of each party be, in all cases in which it is practicable, affectionately respected. Those families which the providence of God has placed in the immediate vicinity of each other, and whose circumstances give rise to much intercourse, must habitually consult the feelings and interests of one another, if they desire to dwell together in peace. Long, very long may the correspond-

ence between our *New England* brethren and ourselves continue! And, henceforth, may there be no other strife between us than who shall love one another, and our common Master with the most fervent affection, and who shall do most for the conversion of the world to the knowledge and likeness of that Master!

And, by the way, while speaking of our *New England* brethren, it gives me unfeigned pleasure to *know*, that a large portion of the most enlightened, venerable and pious of the clergy in that part of the United States, lament and deprecate, as much as any individual in our Church can do, the disposition which has been manifested by some to propagate the *Pelagianizing* sentiments alluded to in a former letter. It will, indeed, be deeply to be deplored, if, while these excellent men are frowning upon this pestiferous system, within their own bosom, and regarding its patrons as dangerous corruptors of truth; it should find countenance in any of the judicatories of the Presbyterian Church! Nothing more, I am persuaded, is necessary, under God, to save us from this calamity, than a fraternal understanding and cooperation among that large majority of the "New-school" ranks in our body, who are known to reprobate the philosophical deceits in question. If *they* will faithfully unite in setting their faces against these erroneous opinions, and withholding their licensing and ordaining suffrages from all who avow them, they may become happily instrumental in harmonizing the Church, as well as promoting its purity. It is in *their* power, humanly speaking, to do more for the peace and edification of our beloved department of Zion, than in that of any other equal number of in-

dividuals in our communion. If, however, these respected brethren of the "New-school," who are the real friends of substantial orthodoxy, should indulge their party feelings to the uttermost, and feel more desirous to oppose and thwart those whom they call the "ultra orthodox," than to resist the encroachments of heresy, and the acts and inroads of real disorders; the prospect is indeed gloomy; the issue must be disastrous.

And now, my Christian brethren, in regard to adherence to the Doctrinal Standards of our Church, on which I have so long detained you, I have done. I have spoken my mind with the freedom of one who is conscious of an honest desire for peace, but who prefers *truth* even to *peace*. I have not intentionally magnified a single evil, or inconsiderately sounded a single note of alarm. If I have in the least degree overstated facts, no one will more cordially rejoice than myself, to find the overstatement proved. And now, at the close, I ask—WHAT WILL YOU DO? The question is not, whether, in opposing erroneous opinions, you will patronise a system of "ultra" rigour, of inquisitorial strictness. This I have never approved, and have no wish to see applied. But the question is, whether you will honestly and with good faith maintain the system of doctrine which every minister and elder of the Presbyterian Church has solemnly engaged to sustain? Again I ask—WHAT WILL YOU DO? Will you keep up the "land marks" which your fathers with so much labour, and with so many prayers and tears erected, and bequeathed to you; or will you abandon them? Will you adhere, as faithful witnesses, to that testimony in favour of truth, which, in the old world and in the new, God

has so signally blessed to the glory of his Church; or will you suffer it to be trampled under your feet? Will you call a convention of the whole Church, and attempt to *alter* your Confession of Faith, and to make its articles either so unmeaning, or so general, that persons of every grade of opinion, short of Unitarianism, may honestly subscribe it? An alteration has been publicly proposed, and is, perhaps, wished for by some. Make the attempt; and, instead of really mending this venerable and precious monument of orthodoxy, you will leave it a disfigured and mutilated carcase, less satisfactory *to any party* than it is at the present moment. Or, while it stands in your book, as an evidence of what the Presbyterian Church once was, and still ought to be—will you suffer one article of it after another to be *nullified*, in fact, by reckless subscription, until its whole dignity and authority shall perish together? In other words, will you suffer men of coarse and ductile consciences, with the philosophy and the language of Pelagianism on their lips, to be guilty of the solemn, dishonest mockery of subscribing your Calvinistic Creed, and entering your judicatories? If this be admitted, you will soon fill our beloved Church (with anguish of spirit I write it) not merely with the elements of fearful repulsion and explosion; but, what is unspeakably more to be dreaded,—with the seeds of spiritual desolation and death, with which the ears of every Christian who hears, shall tingle! Or finally, will you faithfully maintain that Creed in its true spirit and meaning, and let those who cannot honestly subscribe it, seek a connexion with some other portion of the great Christian family? These questions must

soon be decided. The crisis is approaching. God grant that you may decide them in such a manner as most effectually to promote his glory, and the purity and edification of our beloved Zion.

Princeton, February, 1833.

LETTER IX.

Revivals of Religion.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

WHEN the real Christian reads or hears of a revival of religion, a chord is touched which vibrates with pleasure to his heart. In no event is a friend of Christ more ready, instinctively, to rejoice, than when he is informed that the Holy Spirit is poured out in large measures, reviving the graces of the people of God; causing multitudes anxiously to inquire what they must do to be saved; and many to rejoice in "a good hope through grace." Long may the Presbyterian Church be favoured with genuine revivals of religion, of greater and greater power, in all her borders; and long may she be blessed with ministers and members who love them; who pray for them without ceasing; and who habitually and faithfully use those means for promoting them, which the Scriptures warrant, and which the great Head of the Church is wont to own and bless!

This subject appears to me, at the present time, to assume an aspect more than usually interesting, and to indicate a most momentous connexion with the future. The frequency, the power, and the precious results of revivals, in almost every part of the American churches, within a few years past, cannot but fill the hearts of intelligent Christians with joy, while they furnish a most animating presage of the rapid manner in which the conversion of the world may be

expected to proceed, when “the set time to favour Zion shall come;” and a no less gratifying pledge of the ease with which the Head of the Church can solve that problem so perplexing to human wisdom—How the number of candidates for the ministry may be so rapidly multiplied, as in any good measure to meet the urgent and increasing demand for spiritual labourers, both in the domestic and foreign field? Let such revivals as we have been permitted to see, but with augmented power and extent, visit the churches year after year, and fill all lands, and the work will be done. The knowledge and glory of the Lord, without the interposition of what we call miracle, will soon fill the earth; and on every side candidates for carrying the Gospel from the rising to the setting sun, will be raised up, saying, with humble readiness to spend and be spent for Christ—“Here are we, send us.” I cannot help recording my conviction that these revivals are the hope of the Church and of the world. In other words, the millennium is at a far greater distance than the most pious and enlightened interpreters of prophecy have supposed; or else the conversion of the heathen, and of all that are afar off, must proceed in a much more rapid manner than it has hitherto done. I am disposed to adopt the latter alternative; and, of course, to believe that the Church is warranted in looking and praying for revivals of religion far more extensive, more powerful, and more glorious, than the present generation, or indeed any other, has ever witnessed.

This being my impression, I cannot doubt that it is the duty of all professing Christians, at the present day, to expect great things; to ask for great things; and to employ with increasing diligence all the means

which the Spirit of God has warranted, and has promised to follow with his blessing, for the attainment of great things in the way of REVIVALS. They are solemnly bound, in that spirit of hallowed enterprise, which becomes a new exigency, and new dawns in human affairs, to endeavour, by augmented parental care and diligence; by increasing pastoral fidelity; by the more edifying example, and unwearied activity of private Christians in their appropriate sphere; by prayer more humble, importunate, and persevering than heretofore; and by redoubled efforts to sustain and extend all those associations which have for their object the reformation and conversion of the world;—they are bound, I say, by all these means to endeavour to hasten the arrival of that period when “nations shall be born in a day,” and when multitudes shall flock to the ark of safety “as a cloud, and as doves to their windows,” and when “converts to righteousness shall be numerous as the drops of the morning dew.” In my opinion every professing Christian ought to consider the degree in which he longs, and prays, and exerts himself for the revival of religion, and for the extension of the Redeemer’s kingdom, as affording one of the most undoubted and unerring tests of his piety. Show me a professor of religion who manifests but little zeal for these great interests, and I will show you one who has great reason to “stand in doubt” of himself, and to examine, with new solicitude, whether he has ever taken his stand “on the Lord’s side.”

Assuming, then, the unspeakable importance of this great subject, and the obligation resting upon all Christians, not only to desire revivals, but also to be actively engaged in promoting them;—I beg leave to

offer some general remarks on a few points relating to the subject; and it is my wish to do it with all that caution and reverence which becomes every one in taking a step on consecrated ground.

I. And my first remark is, that it is of the utmost importance THAT WE BE UPON OUR GUARD AGAINST SPURIOUS REVIVALS.

If I were called upon to say what I mean by a genuine revival of religion, as distinguished from a spurious one, I should draw the line of distinction by saying, that *a genuine revival* is one which is produced by the exhibition of GOSPEL TRUTH, faithfully presented to the mind, and applied by the power of the Holy Spirit. And that all high religious excitement or commotion produced by other means than the impression of truth, is the essence of *fanaticism*. It is a spurious work, adapted to bring genuine revivals into disrepute, and to send a blast instead of a blessing on the Church of God; and, of course, the more extended and powerful, the more to be deplored.

It is no uncommon or difficult thing to work upon the animal feelings of assembled multitudes, by mere terror, by sympathy, by vehement addresses, by fine music, by a great variety of means in which Gospel truth is not presented, and has no influence. Those who are aware what a "fearfully and wonderfully made" piece of machinery human nature is, and especially how susceptible of strong and diversified impression are the nerves and sympathies of that nature, will not wonder, though they may not be able fully to explain, why such powerful effects flow from a little adroit management. Who does not know that the far-famed fanatical Unitarians, who call themselves

“Chrystians,” have their “revivals” of a strongly marked character, their “anxious seats,” and all the most imposing and exciting means that have ever been adopted for making a popular impression. Nay, one of the most active and artful leaders of that sect, boasted that he had drawn at least fifty persons to anxious seats, merely by the influence of his own *singing*, which was, indeed, remarkably touching and powerful. It is surely unnecessary to remark, that such revivals are a disgrace to the name;—that they are the fruit of animal excitement merely; and that every enlightened friend of the Redeemer’s kingdom, must mourn over their character and tendency.

It is not mere *excitement* then, in which the animal feelings of many are roused and agitated, and in which the mere principles of *nature* are addressed, and called into powerful action, that constitutes a genuine revival of religion. For, as there can be no real piety in any individual heart, without the reception and love of the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel; so we must estimate the real character of every religious excitement which claims to be a revival, by the degree in which pure Gospel truth is presented, embraced, and obeyed. However widespread and powerful the excitement may be, it ought ever to be brought to this obvious, fair, and decisive test:—Is it produced by a blessing on the *truth* plainly and faithfully presented? Is it throughout regulated by the truth? And do its professed subjects manifest a general and cordial love of Gospel truth? Are their views of the character of God, of his holy law, of sin, of the ground of acceptance, and of Christian hope,—I do not say perfectly—but in the main, accordant with the Bible views of those great subjects?

If so, we may hail the work with joy, and bid God-speed to those who are instrumental in commencing and giving it direction. If the subjects of it, in "giving a reason" of their anxiety, or of "the hope that is in them," appear to be moved by scriptural views of truth, addressed to the conscience and the heart;—if in giving an account of their distress or their peace, they manifest that their views of themselves, of the Saviour, and of Christian confidence towards God, are in substance, those which the Scriptures authorize; and if they evidently bring forth the fruits of holy living,—we *must* denominate such a revival a work of God,—thank him for it, and rejoice in it as a rich blessing. But if by some strong excitement, addressed to the animal feelings, we could so work upon the nervous system of hundreds, or even thousands in a great assembly, as to constrain them to weep, to cry out with terror, to fall prostrate, and to fill the house with sobbing and groans;—if this were all, we must pronounce it a *spurious work*, the product of fanaticism and not of the Holy Spirit.

I am persuaded, my Christian brethren, that this is a point of more practical importance than is commonly imagined. To say that spurious revivals are of no use to the Church of God, is to express but a small part of the truth. They are a DREADFUL CURSE to any church. They exert a most pestiferous influence. They deceive and destroy the souls of men. They harden the worldly and the infidel in tenfold obduracy. They leave a country over which they have passed arid and desolate, like that over which a raging fire has swept, and laid it all a gloomy waste. I have more than once witnessed strong and extensive religious excitements, evidently produced

by powerful appeals to animal feeling and sympathy, without suitable exhibitions of Gospel truth. The effects were, indeed, plausible, and adapted to make a deep popular impression. They *did* make such an impression; and were trumpeted far and wide as “glorious revivals of religion.” But, in a few months, the real character of these excitements was painfully disclosed. In a great majority of cases the impressions made, “like the morning cloud and the early dew,” soon entirely passed away; while the small minority who held out long enough to make a public profession of religion, and some who, in the fervour of their first exercises, offered themselves as candidates for the holy ministry—soon made it too evident, by their unhappy mixture of levity, ignorance, censoriousness, and claims of high attainment, that they needed a new conversion before they could be fitted to adorn or to edify the Church.

I once knew a minister who took unwearied, and I doubt not, honest pains, to produce a revival of religion in the church under his pastoral care. After employing abundant means, and those of the most exciting and alarming kind, he succeeded in collecting together, at the close of a solemn evening service, in which a powerful impression seemed to have been made, a large number of the professedly “anxious” and “inquiring” in his session room. There he met and addressed them—and there, without saying one word to them of their guilt and misery by nature, of Christ, of the Gospel plan of acceptance with God, of the nature of evangelical faith and repentance, or of the work of the Holy Spirit as the author of all spiritual life, he spoke to them about “resolving to be for God;”—asked them if they

could not "make up their minds decisively to submit to God;"—and assured them that to "determine in their own minds to engage in the service of God," was regeneration—was to become a Christian. With almost one consent they took the seats assigned to the "hoping," and came out of the room called, and supposing themselves to be, "converted persons." Most of them were forthwith hurried into the Church; but in the estimation of intelligent Christians few of them appeared to know what they were doing, or turned out to be solid, established Christians. Of such a revival, I should say, with confidence, it has nothing to do with the religion of the Gospel.

I repeat it then, experience proves that spurious revivals *have been* mistaken for genuine, and may be mistaken for them again; and that we ought never to recognise as genuine any revival which is not produced by the instrumentality of truth, which is not regulated by the truth, and which does not bring forth the fruits of truth. All else is fanatical excitement. Like a fever in the human body, it cannot fail of leaving the system relaxed and debilitated, when it declines. Like counterfeit money, it excites deep doubt and distrust wherever it comes, and ultimately interferes with the circulation of genuine coin. "Beloved," says an inspired Apostle, "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

II. Allow me further to suggest, the great importance of GUARDING AGAINST ALL THOSE DISORDERS AND UNWARRANTED MEASURES WHICH ARE ADAPTED TO ARREST OR TO MAR GENUINE REVIVALS.

I have sometimes heard inconsiderate querists ask, whether it is possible that a work which is really of God, should be arrested in its progress, or marred in its character, by the weakness of man? This question may be answered in the affirmative or negative, according to our understanding of its meaning. Let me answer it by asking another. If an individual were deeply anxious respecting his eternal interests;—and if, in the midst of his anxiety, a large estate were unexpectedly left to him, which, from its extent and situation, was adapted to engross his whole attention;—or, if he were suddenly engaged in all the violence of party politics, or some other angry and absorbing contest, might we not naturally expect, would not all experience teach us to fear—that the new and engrossing subject would soon expel all his former anxiety? Even so, the history of the Church has evinced, that even when a genuine and undoubted work of the Holy Spirit has commenced its progress, in the most promising manner, if gross disorders are admitted; if angry contentions arise; or if any thing occur powerfully to distract or divide the public mind; the Holy Spirit is wont to depart, and the minds of men to be turned away from the most important concerns, to those subordinate objects which are thus urged on their attention. In these circumstances, where the sanctifying Spirit has taken up his abode in any heart, He will not be totally and finally expelled; but by thousands who had been brought by his strivings to deep conviction, to promising seriousness, and to apparently sincere resolutions, his influences have been quenched, and his presence grieved away from a people who once appeared “not far from the kingdom of God.” Well

meaning, sanguine Christians, may fondly hope, that if the Spirit of God be really present, there is nothing to fear. But his own word, as well as the history of his dealings with the Church, plainly shows that he is a Spirit of *order* and *of love*; and that whenever there is a striking departure from either, there he will not remain; but will leave such a people to greater hardness, apathy, and unbelief, than ever.

Let any one who really desires to know the truth on this subject, look into the Apostolical Epistles, especially into the fourteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, and he will there see that, even under the ministrations of inspired men, gross disorders creeping into a church were found quite sufficient to mar the work of the Holy Spirit, and to impede the progress of the truth. Let him look into the fourth part of the venerable President *Edwards'* "Thoughts concerning the Revival of Religion," which appeared in our country more than ninety years ago, and he will perceive that that eminently wise and holy man saw and lamented disorders amidst the glorious revivals which then blessed the Church, and had no doubt of the deplorable mischiefs produced by them. Let him read the accounts of the disorders introduced into *New England* by *Davenport* and his associates, during the great revivals under the ministry of *Whitefield* and his excellent coadjutors, many years since; and if he have a particle of sincere love for the kingdom of Christ, he will mourn over the evils which those disorders occasioned, grieving the hearts of God's people, tearing the churches in pieces, and causing the Holy Spirit to depart, and give them up to strife, and finally to coldness, stupidity, and desolation. Let

him notice with care the extravagancies and disorders which have attended revivals of religion within the last thirty years in different parts of the United States; revivals which were in their commencement highly promising; but which soon became marred, disgraced, and terminated, by various forms of fanatical irregularity, which disgusted intelligent and sober minded Christians, and hardened the enemies of vital religion in deeper hostility. I say, let any one who sincerely desires to know the truth on this subject, ponder well this recorded experience of the Church of God, and then say, whether it is not both reasonable and important to lift, in relation to it, the voice of warning.

If any desire to know what the particular disorders are, to which allusion is intended in these references;—I answer, the very same disorders which the venerable President *Edwards*, and other eminently wise and pious ministers of the Gospel, lamented and opposed nearly a century ago, and which wrought such complicated and wide spread mischiefs then, and many years afterwards. Such as the excessive multiplication of public meetings, so as to leave little or no time for the duties of the family and the closet:—continuing the exercises of such meetings to an unseasonably late hour, thereby deranging the order of families, and exhausting both the bodies and the minds of the people: indulging in bodily agitation, groans and outcries in public assemblies: unauthorized and unqualified persons thrusting themselves forward to perform the work of public instruction: a number of persons speaking and praying at the same time: females speaking, and leading in prayer in promiscuous assemblies:—publicly praying for particu-

lar individuals by name, as graceless, or opposers of religion: giving vent to the language of harsh censure, and of uncharitable denunciation, as enemies of God, against all who oppose these irregularities: urging the public confession of secret sins, as indispensable to the attainment of a blessing: all these, and many other contrivances of a like kind, the object of which was to produce *strong excitement*, have been tried a hundred times, in various countries and ages;—have been uniformly found to work ill in the end;—and have been unanimously condemned by judicious Christians as unscriptural and mischievous. They disgust intelligent, reflecting people. They drive many from the house of God, and, perhaps harden them in hopeless infidelity. And they confirm the prejudices of many against revivals altogether. And yet there are those who believe those very means adapted to do good, and who are disposed to try them again! The truth is, there are good people who imagine that unless high popular excitement and agitation be produced, nothing desirable is done. They are ready, therefore, to adopt any new and bold measure which promises to produce the effect. Their delight is in *public excitement*; in producing effects on large masses of people analogous to the influence of *strong drink* on the animal body: not remembering that, as in the case of strong drink, such excitement is unnatural; that it is unfriendly to the calm, intelligent and humble exercise of Christian grace; that it cannot long continue; and that it will never fail to be followed by morbid depression, and debility in the end.

But besides these manifest disorders, which have so often drawn a cloud over revivals of religion, and

against which judicious Christians, it may be hoped, will be ever on their guard; there are other “measures,” to which the title of “new” has been given, of which I beg permission to say a word under this head. The principal of these are,—at the end of a warm and pungent discourse—calling upon all who are more or less impressed by it, and who have formed the resolution to attend to the subject of religion, to rise from their seats, and declare their purpose before the public assembly;—or, requesting all who are willing to be prayed for, to rise and come forward to a particular part of the church, and kneel together for that purpose;—or, inviting all who are anxious about their everlasting welfare, to separate themselves publicly from the rest of the congregation, and to occupy certain seats, called “anxious seats,” and vacated for the purpose of being thus filled. In short, this machinery for working on the popular feeling may be, and has been endlessly diversified. Sometimes those who have “obtained a hope” have been requested to rise in every part of the house, and signify it. At other times, those who have not yet begun to cherish a hope of their good estate, but who resolve that they *will* attend to this great subject, are urged, on the spot, to signify this resolution in the same way. And sometimes those whose stubborn wills are not yet inclined to bow, and who feel no particular disposition to comply with the Gospel call, have been requested to make even this publicly known, by either rising in their seats, or leaving the house.

The great argument urged in favour of this whole system of “new measures” is, that, as the impatient are naturally prone to stifle convictions, and to

tamper with the spirit of procrastination, it is desirable they should be prevailed upon, as soon as possible, to take some visible step which shall "commit them" on this great subject. This, however, in my opinion, instead of being an argument in its favour, is precisely the most powerful objection to the whole system. There is no doubt that every impenitent sinner to whom the Gospel comes, ought to be called to *immediate* repentance; and that *all delay* in embracing the Gospel is as unreasonable as it is criminal. But of all the subjects that can come before the human mind, surely religion is that in which every step ought to be taken without rashness, with distinct knowledge, with due consideration, "counting the cost," and with sacred care not to mistake a transient emotion for a deep impression; or a momentary paroxysm of alarm, or of animal sympathy, for a fixed, practical purpose of the heart. If we call upon those who are "anxious" about their eternal interest, to take certain *seats*, or to stand up before the public assembly, as a testimony of their anxiety;—is it wise in them publicly to take such a station, before they know whether their feelings will last an hour, or pass away with the first night's sleep? Or, if we should call upon those who have "obtained a hope" in Christ, to make it known to a large assembly, by some prescribed signal; would it be right in those into whose minds this hope, whether genuine or spurious, has beamed only a few hours or minutes before the call was made, to stand forth in this high and responsible character, before there was the least opportunity to put their hope to a scriptural test? Of all methods yet devised, this appears to me most directly adapted to fill the Church with rash, ignorant,

superficial, hypocritical professors, instead of solid, intelligent, truly spiritual and devoted Christians.

Nor is even this, bad as it is, the worst. I feel constrained to add, that when this highly exciting system of calling to "anxious seats,"—calling out into the aisles to be "prayed for," &c., is connected, as, to my certain knowledge, it often has been, with erroneous doctrines;—for example, with the declaration, that nothing is *easier* than conversion;—that the power of the Holy Spirit is not necessary to enable impenitent sinners to repent and believe;—that if they only resolve to be for God—resolve to be Christians—*that* itself is regeneration—the work is already done:—I say, where the system of "anxious seats," &c., is connected with such doctrinal statements as these, it appears to me adapted to destroy souls by wholesale! I will not say that *such* revivals are never connected with sound conversions; but I will be bold to repeat, that the religion which they are *fitted to cherish*, is altogether a different one from that of the Gospel. It is, I sincerely believe, a system of soul-destroying deception!

Those of you, my Christian brethren, who have seen a highly instructive and interesting volume on the subject of "REVIVALS," by the Rev. Dr. *Sprague*, of *Albany*,—a volume which I would earnestly recommend to the careful perusal of every Presbyterian in the United States, have no doubt been impressed, not only by the just and luminous views given of the subject before us, by that excellent writer himself; but also by the remarkable unanimity of opinion on the same subject, expressed in the Appendix to his work, by a long list of eminent ministers, of six different Christian denominations—most of them dis-

tinguished for their great wisdom and piety, as well as their ample experience in revivals. From the communications of three of the venerable men—whose competency in every respect to give testimony on the subject before us, will be questioned by none who know them—I beg leave to make a few short extracts.

The following is the testimony of the Rev. President *Humphrey*, of Amherst College, whose character as a tried friend of revivals is well known. “If you ask me, what means and measures have been most eminently blessed, in the revivals which have fallen under my own personal observation, in College and elsewhere,—I answer, substantially the same as were ‘mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds’ in the apostolic age;—the same as were employed by *Edwards*, and *Bellamy*, and *Brainerd*, almost a century ago. Meetings for personal conversation, commonly called, “*inquiry meetings*” have been held weekly, or oftener, with great spiritual advantage, in all the revivals which have fallen under my notice. The duty of prayer, both secret and social, has been earnestly and daily urged upon Christians; but *late* meetings have generally been discouraged, as interfering with the religious order of families, and tending in a short time, to exhaust the physical and mental energies of God’s people, as well as to mingle “strange fire” with that which is kindled from the skies. When met for social prayer, neither ministers nor laymen have indulged themselves in loud and boisterous vociferations, in audible groans, or in smiting the hands together in token of their sincerity and earnestness. They have observed, that the most noisy waters are seldom deepest; and have laid more

stress upon "fervency of spirit," than upon strength of lungs, or muscular contortions. With us it has never been customary, either in our larger or smaller religious circles, to pray for sinners who may happen to be present, by name, or to indulge in equivalent personalities. The general tendency of such a practice, it is thought, would be detrimental to the cause of piety, however different the effect might be in solitary instances. Females have kept silence in all our meetings, except such as were composed exclusively of their own sex. Calling anxious sinners into the aisles, to be addressed and prayed for, has not been practised within the circle of my observation; nor have they been requested, before the great congregation, to come forward from any part of the house, and occupy seats vacated for that purpose;—and wherever such measures have been adopted, within my knowledge, I believe the cause of revivals has lost more than it has gained by them. It is unsafe to argue from the present effect of any new system, that it is better than the old. It may accomplish more in a week, but not so much in a year. It may bring a greater number of persons into the *visible* kingdom of Christ, but not so many into his *spiritual* kingdom. For myself, every new revival of religion which I am permitted to witness, serves to confirm me in the opinion, that it is safest to walk in the "old paths," and to employ those means and measures which long experience has sanctioned, and in the use of which the churches in this part of the land, have been so greatly enlarged and edified."

The Rev. President *Lord*, of *Dartmouth College*—in reference to the same subject, has the following weighty remarks. "In regard to these revivals of re-

ligion, I think it important to remark, that, in every instance, they seemed the product of the Spirit's influence silently affecting different minds with the same truths, and multiplying the trophies of divine mercy. They were an effect, and not a cause of divine interposition; and except as occasionally blemished through human weakness and sinfulness, bore the characteristics of the wisdom that is from above. We have known here nothing except by report, of the 'new measures' for building up the kingdom of Christ. We have no machinery for making converts; and we could allow none to be introduced. We should be afraid to make or suffer an impression upon the young men under our care, many of whom will be ministers of Jesus Christ—that the Gospel can be helped, or the work of the Holy Spirit facilitated by human devices. And I think we shall hold, on this subject, to our general principles, too long settled by the experience of ages, and confirmed by the blessing of God, attending the application of them, to be now thrown away in the ardour of questionable excitements, or for the love of innovation, or even to escape the imputation of being the enemies of revivals. When shall the ministers and churches of the Redeemer know effectually their proneness to mar the beautiful simplicity of the Gospel, to add something of their own inventions to its sufficient ordinances; to lead instead of following the divine Providence, and to mistake their own dreaming for a heavenly impulse; to inflame the sacrifice with unhallowed fire, and to arrogate that power, and that glory which belong to God only? I cannot tell you how much I sometimes fear, when I look abroad upon our country, that Christianity will degenerate

in our keeping. Yet let us hold to the old foundations. There are many yet to maintain the right; and the recovering spirit, we are assured, will accomplish the purposes of divine mercy, will correct and convert the world."

President *Griffin*, of Williams College, than whom few living ministers have had more experience in revivals, employs, on the same subject, the following language—"Much has been done of late, to lead awakened sinners to *commit themselves*, in order to get them over that indecision, and fear of man which have kept them back, and to render it impossible for them to return with consistency. For this purpose they are called upon to request public prayers by rising; to come out into the aisles, in token of their determination to be for God; to take particular seats, called in bad English, 'anxious seats;' to come forward and kneel in order to be prayed for; and in very many instances, to promise to give themselves to religion at once. For much the same purpose converts are called upon to take particular seats, and thus virtually to make a profession in a day, and are hurried into the church in a few weeks. These measures, while they are intended to 'commit' the actors, are meant also to awaken the attention of others, and to serve as means of general impression. I would not make a man an offender for a word; but when these measures are reduced to a system, and constantly repeated;—when, instead of the former dignity of a Christian assembly, it is daily thrown into a rambling state by these well meant manœuvres;—it becomes a solemn question, whether they do not give a disproportionate action to imagination and passion, and lead to a reliance on other means than truth and

prayer, and on other power than that of God. I have seen enough to convince me that sinners are very apt to place a self-righteous dependence on this sort of commitment. 'I have taken one step, and now I hope God will do something for me'—is language which I have heard more than once. Against any *promises*, express or implied, I utterly protest. If they are promises to do any thing short of real submission, they will bring up a feeling that more the sinner is not bound to do. If they are promises to submit, they are made in the sinner's own strength, and are presumptuous. The will, which forms resolutions, and utters promises, cannot control the heart. Sinners are bound to love God at once; but they are not bound to promise beforehand to do it, and rely on their own will to change their heart. This is self-dependence. They are bound to go forth to their work at once; but they are not bound to go alone. It is their privilege, and their duty to cast themselves instantly on the Holy Ghost, and not to take a single step in their own strength. In these extorted promises there is another evil,—the substitution of human authority for the divine. It is right for Christians to urge upon sinners the obligation of immediate submission, and they cannot enforce this too much by the authority of God; but to stand over them and say,—'Come, now promise; promise this moment; *do* promise; you *must* promise; promise, and I will pray for you—if you dont, I wont'—is overpowering them with human authority, and putting it in the room of the divine."

The experience and wisdom of the Rev. Mr. *Nettleton* in revivals of religion, for more than twenty years past, are well known throughout the United

States. His testimony against the "new measures" of which I am now speaking is strong and decisive. He informed me, with his own lips, within a few weeks, that a short time before he commenced his career as an Evangelist, *these very "measures,"* (calling upon people in the public assemblies, to proclaim the state of their minds by standing up, going to certain seats—or kneeling in the aisles to be prayed for) had been extensively employed, by the Rev. *James Davis*, a Congregational minister in the eastern part of *Connecticut*, where he (Mr. N.) was subsequently called to labour; that the ultimate fruit of them every where, was fanaticism and disorder; that, in more than one place, the spirit which they generated presented such insurmountable obstacles to all rational and sober ministrations, that he was obliged to take leave and go elsewhere; and that in every period of his ministry since, he has found similar "measures" invariably productive of the same distressing effects. His judgment, therefore, long since formed; tested by much experience both in the Presbyterian Church, and in *New England*; and rendered more and more decisive by every day's additional observation, is, that the whole array of the "measures" in question, is opposed to the meekness and humility of the Gospel; that it tends to nourish a spirit of ostentation, fanaticism and censoriousness; and that, although it may appear to be productive of a greater number of conversions in the beginning, a less obtrusive system may be expected to produce more genuine and more abundant fruit in the end.

Let it not be said, that calling out inquirers to "anxious seats" is the only effectual method of ascertaining who are under serious impressions, and who

are not. Is it not quite as effectual, and much less exceptionable, to give a public invitation to all who are in any degree seriously impressed, or anxious to remain after the congregation is dismissed; or to meet their pastor the next evening, in some convenient apartment, for the purpose of disclosing their feelings, and of being made the subjects of instruction and prayer? Nay, why is not the latter method very much preferable, in every respect, to the former? It affords quite as good an opportunity to ascertain numbers, and to distinguish persons and cases. It furnishes a far better opportunity to give distinct and appropriate instruction to particular individuals. It prevents the mischief of dragging into public view, and even into the highest degree of publicity, those whose exercises are immature, and perhaps transient. And it avoids the danger which to many, and especially to young people, may be very formidable; I mean the danger of being inflated by becoming objects of public attention, and by being forthwith addressed and announced, as is too often the case, as undoubted "converts." Surely the incipient exercises of the awakened and convinced ought to be characterized by much calm self-examination, and much serious, retired, closet work. If there be any whose impressions are so slight and transient, that they cannot be safely permitted to wait until the next evening, it will hardly be maintained that such persons are prepared to "commit themselves," by publicly taking an anxious seat. And if there be any whose vanity would dispose them to *prefer* pressing forward to such a seat in the presence of a great assembly, to meeting their pastor, and a few friends, in a similar state of mind with themselves, in a more

private manner, the Church, I apprehend, can promise herself little comfort from the multiplication of such members.

After all, what is the *ultimate effect* of this system of "new measures," as it is commonly called? Does it continue, like all the ordinances of God's own appointment, to impress and to edify, from year to year, without abatement or weariness? Not at all. In those places in which the practice of calling out the serious, the anxious, and the hoping to the aisles, or to particular seats, as habit or caprice may dictate, has been most extensively and longest in use, all experience testifies, that when the novelty of the expedient has worn off, its exciting character is at an end; and that it soon becomes as powerless and inefficient as any other old story. This is notoriously the case in many parts of the western country; and it will soon be found to be the case in those eastern portions of the Church in which similar practices are now in high vogue. The truth is, things of this kind cannot long be tolerated among enlightened, sober-minded Christians. Solid food nourishes the body, and leaves it invigorated and comfortable. But stimulating potations excite to morbid action only, and that for a time; and then leave the system depressed and wretched.

But I must postpone to one more letter some further remarks on the subject of revivals.

Princeton, March, 1833.

LETTER X.

Revivals of Religion.

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS,

THE subject of revivals of religion is so unspeakably interesting and important, and at the same time, so extensive, that I am persuaded you will not wonder at my making it the subject of another letter. There are several other topics on which I feel desirous of making a few observations.

III. A third remark which I would most respectfully offer, is, that, if we desire to promote genuine and salutary revivals of religion, WE MUST NOT UNDERVALUE THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE, NOR MAKE TOO COMMON AND CHEAP THOSE WHICH MAY BE CALLED EXTRAORDINARY.

When the ancient people of God, in their passage through the wilderness, began to loathe the plain but excellent *manna* which was provided for them day by day, and to call for some extraordinary supply; we find that, on their request being granted, surfeiting and mischief were the consequence. So it is with respect to Zion's more spiritual provision. When new schemes for making a popular impression begin to occupy the public mind, a love of excitement and of agitation seems to take possession of the people. They begin to suppose that when these are absent, nothing valuable is accomplished. The ordinary exercises of the Sabbath, the weekly lecture, the prayer meeting, and the sacramental table, are esteemed

“light food.” Something stirring; something new; something adapted to produce powerful excitement, analogous to that of *strong drink*, must be present, or all seems to them vapid and uninteresting. When a spirit of this kind becomes prevalent among a people, it augurs most unhappily for their spiritual interest. The object of these remarks is, not to intimate that extraordinary means of grace ought not sometimes to be employed; but that they ought not *so* to be employed and regarded as to place the ordinary means which God has appointed “in the back ground,” and to make the popular impression that where these alone are employed, little good is to be expected.

To exemplify my meaning: I am a warm friend to “Protracted meetings.” They were evidently employed, on special occasions, under the Old Testament economy; but they were not made cheap by too frequent recurrence. They were considered and treated as *special* services. In the days of our blessed Lord’s personal ministry, we know that He kept the people hanging on his lips for three whole days in succession, and, during the greater part of this time, large numbers of them evidently remained on the ground *fasting*. In the Church of *Scotland*, protracted meetings, on sacramental occasions, were almost universal, it is believed, for more than a hundred years, and, on many occasions, with richly excellent results. It was on such an occasion that a single sermon, by the celebrated Mr. *John Livingston*, was blessed to the hopeful conversion of five hundred souls. And such protracted meetings, have, beyond all doubt, been made signally instrumental in many parts of our own country, especially within a few years past, to the commencement or the continuance

of the most precious revivals of religion. Against protracted meetings, therefore, as such, thus warranted and fortified, it is probable no sincere and intelligent friend of vital piety will venture to speak. But are not such meetings extremely *liable* to abuse? Nay, is there not reason to believe that they *have been* abused, and thus made a hindrance, instead of a help, to the cause of pure and undefiled religion? And they may be said to be *abused*, when professing Christians begin to place their chief *dependence* upon them; when they look forward to them with eagerness, as the hope of the Church; when they are made, as it were, to come in place of an humble tender reliance on the Holy Spirit, and broken hearted, importunate, persevering prayer for the prosperity of Zion; when they even seem, as they have sometimes been, to be regarded as a kind of machinery which may serve as a substitute for personal religion, and persevering devotion; and, finally, they are greatly abused when they are resorted to so frequently by the same people, as to convert them into *stated* means of grace, and thus to make the Sabbath, and its ordinary privileges lightly esteemed in comparison with them. This is a sore evil; yet it has happened; and there is great danger that it will happen again. But if my views of the nature of the economy of grace, as well as distinct information respecting the effects in particular cases, do not deceive me, such an abuse never can happen without mischief; without such frowns and desertion by the great Head of the Church, as will leave a people chargeable with it, in a greater or less degree, to the coldness, the stupidity, and the desolation of those who are given up to "eat the fruit of their own way," and to be "filled with their own devices."

The truth is, men have been prone, in all ages, to lay more stress on their own inventions, than on the simple ordinances of Christ. They have honestly, but vainly, thought that the appointments of the Head of the Church were not sufficient; or, at any rate, that they might be added to, not only without sin, but with advantage. Every new device for winning the attention, and exciting the mind, they have been ready to adopt; and imagined that in doing so, they "did God service." This was, no doubt, the origin of a large number of those human inventions in the worship of God which deform the Romish Church. They began early. They were a long time in reaching that corrupt and revolting maturity which they now exhibit. Good men, in their pious zeal to impress the multitude, and to bring souls into the Church, invented device after device for addressing the senses, and working on the feelings of men; until the piety of their inventors, and the force of habit, consecrated these devices in public estimation, as institutions of Christ, and gave them a permanent place in the apparatus of the Church; until one after another they built up that mass of superstition which forms the dire machinery by which the "man of sin," dazzles and deceives the simple. It is, moreover, one of those notorious facts, in the history of human inventions in the worship of God, as humiliating as it is striking, that after a while, more stress is commonly laid upon those inventions than on the ordinances of Christ. Uncommanded festival and fast days in the Romish Church are commonly observed with far more strictness than the Lord's day. And many, if appearances are not deceptive, are beginning to feel as if no good can be hoped for without pro-

tracted meetings, and that they are of far more importance than the privileges of the holy Sabbath.

I would say, then, employ protracted meetings. They are fully warranted, by the example, as well as the spirit of the word of God. But do not make *idols* of them. Do not imagine that they have an inherent efficacy, independently of the Spirit of God, to produce a revival of religion. Resort to them but seldom; not as *stated*, but as *extraordinary* means. Prepare for them with much humble, importunate prayer. Remember that, like all other means, they will only be useful as far as they are attended upon with a believing reference and application to the Spirit of all grace. And be careful not to view or use them in any way which will tend to depreciate in your esteem the ordinary means of grace. Whatever or whoever does this, is a great evil, and will inevitably be followed by the frowns of Zion's King.

IV. It is of great importance in revivals to GUARD AGAINST A SUDDEN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHURCH OF THOSE WHO ARE HOPEFULLY MADE THE SUBJECTS OF CONVERTING GRACE.

Until recently, the practice here opposed had few or no advocates among intelligent, sober minded Christians. If it be of any importance, either to themselves or the Church, that those who are introduced to her communion be sincere and enlightened believers, then it is, undoubtedly, desirable that, after cherishing the hope that they have become such, they should have some little time to try and know themselves, and to become known to the Church. Especially is this caution highly important in seasons of powerful awakening and revival; when many are wrought upon by sympathy, who are strangers

even to deep conviction, much more to a genuine conversion;—when many appear serious and promising for a while, but soon draw back, and relapse into deeper carelessness than before. Surely it would be unhappy, in every respect, if such persons were encouraged in their first paroxysms of feeling to enrol themselves publicly as professors of religion! Scarcely any thing could be more directly adapted to fill them with delusive hopes, and prevent their genuine conversion. The truth is, the system which I have known to be pursued by some warm hearted and well meaning ministers; a system of high animal excitement throughout, unaccompanied with much instruction, and followed up with admission to the communion of the Church, within a few days, and sometimes within a few hours, after the commencement of serious feelings; is undoubtedly a system adapted to deceive and destroy immortal souls; to fill the Church with ignorant, noisy hypocrites; and, in the end, to destroy, at once, its purity and its peace.

As to the examples found in Scripture, which are supposed to justify the *immediate* admission of hopeful converts to sealing ordinances—such as the prompt baptizing of the Ethiopian eunuch, by *Philip*, and the reception of three thousand on the day of Pentecost, they are manifestly nothing to the purpose. The cases, when examined, will be found to have been peculiar, and not to have admitted of delay;—not to say, that the peculiar state of the Church at that time totally alters the aspect of such facts. Besides, no one doubts that cases may be supposed, and sometimes actually arise, in which immediate reception would be wise and perfectly safe; but the

question is, what course is best *as a general rule*? What course is adapted to fill the Church with intelligent, solid, and truly sanctified members? Is it possible to hesitate respecting the proper answer?

I have been struck, and very much gratified with the remarkable unanimity of opinion on this subject, on the part of the distinguished ministers whose communications appear in the Appendix to Dr. *Sprague's* excellent "Lectures on Revivals," before mentioned. The Rev. Dr. *Hawes*, of *Hartford*, in reference to this subject, speaks thus:—"It is a great error to admit converts to the Church before time has been allowed to try the sincerity of their hope. This is an error into which I was betrayed during the first revival among my people, and it has cost me bitter repentance. And yet none were admitted to the Church under *two months after they had indulged a hope*. It is of great importance that young converts, immediately after conversion, should be collected into a class by themselves, and brought under the direct and frequent instruction of the pastor.—*And if they are continued from four to six months in a course of judicious instruction, and then admitted to the Church*, there is very little danger that they will afterwards fall away, or that they will not continue to shine as lights in the world till the end of life."

The Rev. Dr. *Griffin*, in speaking on the same subject, expresses himself thus:—"The means employed in these revivals have been but two—the clear presentation of divine truth, and prayer—nothing to work upon the passions, but sober solemn truth, presented, as far as possible, in its most interesting attitudes, and closely applied to the conscience. We have been anxiously studious to guard against delu-

sive hopes, and to expose the windings of a deceitful heart, forbearing all encouragement except what the converts themselves could derive from Christ and the promises, knowing that any reliance on *our opinion* was drawing comfort from *us* and not from the *Saviour*. We have not accustomed them to the bold and unqualified language, that such a one *is* converted; but have used a dialect calculated to keep alive a sense of the danger of deception. For a similar reason, *we have kept them back from a profession about three months.*”

The ministry of few Pastors in any Church has been more honoured by a succession of powerful revivals, than that of Dr. *M'Dowell*, of *Elizabethtown*. In the light of his ample experience on this subject, he speaks of it in the Appendix to Dr. *Sprague's* work, before mentioned, in the following terms: “We have carefully guarded against a speedy admission to the privileges of the Church. Seldom in times of revival have we admitted persons to the communion in less than *six months after they became serious.*”

Closely allied with the too sudden introduction of hopeful converts to the communion of the Church is another mistake, as I am constrained to regard it. I mean calling upon such young converts, even before they have been recognised as professors of religion, to lead in public prayer, and even, in some cases, to instruct the anxious and inquiring, and to solve the perplexities of distressed and doubting souls. There are many things which the youngest converts may do, as the proper fruit and evidence of conversion; and it is desirable, from the earliest period of their spiritual life, to give them some appropriate employment in the new relation into which

they are brought, consistent with the retiring humility which becomes them. But to set "babes in Christ" to leading in public prayer, is, in most cases, to engage them in a service for the performance of which to edification, their spiritual knowledge and experience are very seldom adequate; and, what is no less worthy of regard, when young converts find themselves called upon to come forward in this public manner, there is danger of their being puffed up, and thus receiving precisely that kind of impression which is most apt to be injurious to the young and inexperienced. I have repeatedly known young persons who, after having undergone what had the appearance of a very decisive conversion, were almost immediately called upon to pray in public; who acknowledged, afterwards, that their being thus publicly noticed filled them with spiritual pride; and who subsequently became apostates of the most deplorable and humiliating character. O how much better to have waited awhile, to see what would be the issue of their exercises, and thus to have avoided a train of circumstances which rendered their apostasy more signal, and more injurious to the cause of Christ! Let me say again, then, that encouraging young converts to speak and pray in public, in a few days or hours after their hopeful passage from death to life—is most seriously to endanger the edification of those who hear them; but it is quite as likely, nay more likely, to injure the converts themselves. And allow me to say, that this is especially the case *in times of excitement and revival*. Then, if ever, wisdom, prudence, and the best experience, are indispensably demanded. Then rashness, and misguided, though well-meant zeal, may do more harm in a

single day, than years of laborious diligence can repair.

V. Further; the real friends of revivals of religion ought to be upon their guard against the confident allegation, THAT THE PREACHING OF CERTAIN NEW OPINIONS IS ALONE FAVOURABLE TO REVIVALS; AND THAT THOSE WHO ADHERE TO THE SYSTEM OF OLD ORTHODOXY CANNOT HOPE TO BE, IN THIS RESPECT, EXTENSIVELY IF AT ALL USEFUL.

This allegation has been often and confidently made; yes, and in the face of multiplied and incontrovertible facts, plainly establishing the contrary, has been so often repeated, that many are weak enough, or ignorant enough, to believe it. So that, with not a few, it has come to be a received opinion, that where new opinions are not preached, no revivals are to be expected. But surely, none who have any tolerable acquaintance with the history of revivals, can be imposed upon by a deception so palpable and disingenuous. The preaching of *Whitefield* was as free from any tincture of the new opinions, as that of the most rigorous old Calvinists among us; and yet all the world knows that the revivals with which his ministry was crowned were more extensive and powerful than have attended the ministry of any other man since his time. The same remark may be made concerning the ministry of the *Tennents*, President *Davies*, Dr. *Finley*, and a number of other men of similar spirit and usefulness. That they were guiltless of either holding or preaching those new, or rather revived theological speculations, which many extol, and seem to consider so peculiarly potent in their influence, all know who have read their printed discourses:—yet how few of those who make the ar-

rogant claim, which I am now opposing, have been favoured with equal ministerial success! Nor was this fact, so conclusive against the claim before us, by any means confined to former times. Many individuals, among the living and the dead, within the last thirty years, might easily be mentioned, who preach the same doctrine with *Whitefield*, *Tennent* and *Davies*, and have been favoured with a success strikingly similar to theirs. Nay, my impression is, that nothing would be easier than to demonstrate, that, in every part of our country, up to the present hour, the more nearly the style of preaching has been conformed to the general spirit of *Whitefield*, *Tennent*, *Edwards*, *Davies*, and *Bellamy*, the more deep, sound, scriptural and consistent, as well as numerous, have been the revivals which have followed its dispensation. Within the last four or five years it has been estimated that at least *twelve hundred congregations* within the bounds of the Presbyterian Church have been graciously visited with revivals of religion:—and of this number it is susceptible of proof, that not only a decided, but a very large majority have occurred under the ministry of men who rejected the new opinions. The testimonies to this amount in every part of the Presbyterian Church, north, south, east and west, are so indubitable and abundant, that no one, it appears to me, who is not either wonderfully ignorant of facts, or strangely blinded by prejudice, can resist the inevitable inference.

It is not denied, indeed, that some advocates of Old-school orthodoxy, appear to have very little scriptural life and zeal, and very few seals to their ministry. And is not this the case, also, notoriously, with some individuals who are fierce advocates for New-

school opinions and measures? What, then, does a fact of this kind prove? It *may* give reason to fear, that a man, though *reputed* orthodox, is really leaning upon the crutches of antinomian delusion; or, though truly orthodox, is a stranger to true piety:—or, that, though truly pious, he is lacking in some of those qualities which seem necessary to prepare men for usefulness. I could name New-school men whose ministry is as strikingly without good fruit as that of the veriest drone that ever discredited the Old-school ranks; yet I never heard the most zealous advocates for Old-school principles allege this fact, taken alone, as proof of the unsoundness of their creed.

VI. Finally; I would put the real friends of revivals on their guard, AGAINST THE ARROGANT CLAIMS OF SOME TO PECULIAR, NAY, TO ALMOST EXCLUSIVE SKILL AND POWER IN THIS GREAT CONCERN.

It is well known to attentive observers of passing scenes, that claims of this kind are by no means unfrequent. We have heard of both ministers and laymen who applied to one another, with peculiar complacency and emphasis, the title of "*revival-men.*" They openly claimed to possess some special skill in the art of producing and conducting revivals. They were announced to the churches in this high and imposing character; and held themselves up to public view as persons to be invited from place to place for the professed purpose of introducing religious excitements. Nay, these men have been known to enter congregations without the request or even consent of the pastor; to commence and pursue a system of measures for the accomplishment of their objects, without consulting him; to proceed altogether independently of him,—not even asking him to make a

prayer; in short, to reject entirely the co-operation of all excepting a chosen few; refusing to suffer ministers venerable for age as well as piety, who were present, to take any part with them, for the avowed reason, that they were not "revival-men" or not "up to the times."

And what, in many cases, has been the character of these self-styled "*revival-men?*" Were they generally conspicuous for their modesty, their meekness, their humility, their gravity and peculiar spirituality? Did they appear to be deeply acquainted with human nature, and deeply skilled in genuine Christian experience? By no means. It may at least be asserted that this was far from being *always* the case; but that, in very many instances, rashness, presumption, pride and censoriousness, often intermixed with a heartless levity, were their most prominent characteristics. They appeared, on too many occasions, like men vain of some artful machinery, in the use of which they supposed themselves to be peculiarly expert, to which they looked, and on which they depended for success, far more than on the spirit of a sovereign God. Nay, we have sometimes seen in the front ranks of these "revival" preachers, young men scarcely of age; of very small knowledge, and still less experience, denouncing and condemning, as if sure that "they were the men, and wisdom would die with them;" treating with contempt aged and eminently devoted ministers; ministers who had themselves been brought into the kingdom of Christ in powerful revivals, and had enjoyed for many years more than usual experience in those displays of heavenly grace;—treating such men as these with contempt—as though they knew nothing of the matter,

compared with their own deep insight and pre-eminent skill! The truth is, when the thorough-going and highly rectified spirit of which I speak has taken full possession of any individual, young or old, there is no calculating on the lengths to which it may carry him; or the wonderful degree in which it may blind him to the claims of Christian decorum, and even sometimes, alas! it would seem, to those of Christian candour and integrity!

It is granted, indeed, that there *are* men peculiarly adapted to promote revivals of religion. Some ministers, unquestionably, preach the Gospel with more spiritual skill, clearness, force, and pungency than others. There is in all their sermons, and in all their prayers, more instruction, more point, and more feeling and solemnity, than in those of most of their brethren. They have a deeper insight into the human heart; know better the avenues which lead to it; and are better versed in the varieties of Christian experience than is common even among pious men. They pray much for the blessing of God on their labours; and their whole conversation and example out of the pulpit, are eminently adapted to make an impression in favour of religion on all whom they approach. These I call TRUE REVIVAL-MEN. If there be men in the world peculiarly adapted to promote genuine revivals of religion, these are the individuals. This, however, is only saying, that men who most resemble the Apostle *Paul*, or rather *Paul's* Master, are most likely to be instrumental in promoting real religion. But they would be the last men in the world to call themselves by way of eminence, "revival-men," or to favour such a claim being made for them by others. Nothing would be more abhorrent from their minds

than the thought of attaching that power to their machinery, which every page of the Bible, and all the experience of the Church, ascribe to the sovereign agency of Him who has declared, "Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord."

A "revival man" I do know, whose ministry has probably been connected with more numerous and powerful revivals of religion than that of any other man now living:—whose power in such displays of divine glory seems to consist, not in noise, in bustling trickery, or in any kind of artful management; but entirely in simple, pungent exhibitions of Gospel truth; in representing to men their true condition as lost sinners; in holding up Christ as an Almighty and willing Saviour; and in constantly referring every thing to the power and grace of a sovereign God:—who, instead of loving to be called a "revival man," shrinks from such an appellation with instinctive aversion:—who, instead of thrusting himself into a congregation, uncalled, for the purpose of making a revival, has ever laboured to avoid every thing which might, by possibility, wear such an aspect, or which might lead others to claim for him a revival-making power:—who has always been observed, whenever he entered a congregation, whether in a state of excitement or not, to do honour to the pastor, placing *him* forward on all occasions, and while he made unceasing efforts to promote the spiritual welfare of the flock, *hiding himself*, as it were, behind its appropriate shepherd:—whose retiring modesty and humility have ever been as remarkable as his pious zeal:—and whose success is a standing refutation of those who contend that revivals can never be expected to occur excepting under the mi-

nistry of those who preach the *new opinions*, and resort to the *new measures*. May this venerated and beloved brother be long continued an ornament and a blessing to the American Church! Though he is not connected with my own particular denomination, I can as cordially rejoice in his labours and success as if he were, and pray that his spirit may fill the land!

But in reference to this momentous subject, my respected friends, I must now draw to a close. If we wish our beloved Church really to prosper, let us never cease to long and pray for revivals of religion. No degree of outward prosperity can compensate for the want of these precious tokens of the divine presence. Let no degree of abuse or disorder with which they have been attended, prejudice you against revivals themselves. Desire them, and pray for them with unwearied importunity. But if we desire to be favoured with revivals in their genuine power, we must never cease to honour the Holy Spirit of God, and importunately to solicit his life-giving influence: and if we would not grieve away the Holy Spirit, when obtained, we must lay aside all human inventions in cherishing his work;—every thing tending to nourish pride and self-confidence;—all carnal machinery; all parade, all ostentation, every thing, in short, adapted to kindle mere animal excitement, and to bring animal feeling into collision with spiritual exercises, or to give it the predominance over them. Let no persuasion, no plausible example prevail on you to countenance these unscriptural “measures.” They may promise much for a time; but they have never failed ultimately to corrupt and depress the cause of genuine piety.

It is deeply to be regretted that even this hallowed

subject has not escaped the perversion of party violence. Attempts have been made to persuade the religious public that a large portion of our Church is unfriendly to revivals of religion. I must cherish the hope that this representation has been rather the result of prejudice than of disingenuousness. I know not of a single Synod, or even Presbytery in our whole body in which revivals of religion are not constantly and fervently prayed for, and really desired, and would not be cordially welcomed. I know, indeed, a few individual ministers and churches, in the minds of whom the disorders which have really occurred, or been reported to them as occurring, in religious excitements, have created a prejudice against the whole subject; just as, seventy or eighty years ago, in the time of Mr. *Davenport*, and his followers, the same unhappy cause produced a similar effect on the minds of many truly pious and worthy men throughout *New England*. But let us hope that the prejudice even in such minds will be but temporary. An expression of sentiment on this subject is coming in from the aged, the pious, the wise, and the experienced, in every part of our land, most happily and remarkably concurring; and affording a pledge of united hearts and united prayers in behalf of a GENERAL REVIVAL, which will do more, I trust, to bind together the affections of American Christians, than all the theories and theoretical persuasives that can be urged by human eloquence. When the Spirit of pure, scriptural revival shall be "poured out from on high," in its genuine manifestations, and in large measures on our American churches—ensoriousness will die. Party violence will cease. The metaphysical refinements and subtleties of a delusive the-

ology will be no more heard. The Gospel preached, will be taken from the Bible, and not from the rakings of exploded heresies. And the hearts of Christians, instead of "doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof come envy, railings, evil surmisings, and corrupt disputings,"—"will be knit together in love," and united in counsel and effort for the conversion of the world. MAY SUCH A REVIVAL speedily bless all our churches, and pervade Christendom!

Princeton, March, 1833.

LETTER XI.

Adherence to Presbyterian Order.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

I AM aware that when adherence to Presbyterian Order is urged, it is considered by many as a plea in favour of a cold and chilling formality, at the expense of the more spiritual interests of the Church. On this account, there is not only a prejudice against exhortation on this subject, but a prejudice against the thing itself, as one which, in proportion to the extent to which it is regarded, is much more likely to hinder than to promote the reign of genuine piety. That this *is* a prejudice, and not a wise judgment, the experience of forty years, as well as the judgment of all ages, has fully convinced me. And it is the design of this letter most respectfully to impart a few thoughts on this subject, which, if they fail to convince those who have hitherto adopted different opinions, will, at least, serve to explain why he who now addresses you, in common with many of his brethren, attaches no small importance to the principles which he would humbly recommend.

It is well known, that the fundamental principles of Presbyterian Church government are *three*:—the *parity of ministers*;—the government of individual churches *by a bench of Elders*, instead of the whole body of the communicants;—and the union of a number of single churches *under representative bodies of review and control*. In the *first* of these principles we

agree with our Congregational brethren. In the *second* and *third* we differ from them. And I am one of the many ministers of our body who do sincerely believe that a faithful adherence, both to the spirit and the letter of our form of government, in reference to both these points, is more nearly connected with our union, our peace, our purity, and our best interests as a Church, than is commonly imagined. I do not, however, of course, expect this opinion to go for any thing, except so far as it may be sustained by solid reasons.

Having, in a separate volume, published nearly two years ago, treated at large of the office of the *Ruling Elder*, as founded in Apostolic usage, and as essential to the intelligence, tranquil and orderly government of the Church, I shall not dwell particularly on that subject at present; but shall confine myself chiefly to the importance of adhering to that system of rules and regulations, which, as a body, we have adopted, and under which we have solemnly stipulated to God and to one another that we will walk together.

I need not say to those who are in the habit of making the Bible their guide, that *order* is one of the first laws of Christ's kingdom. "Let all things be done decently and in order," is his inspired command. Where no order is, there is confusion and every evil work. As there can be neither peace nor comfort in a particular Church where the members do not adhere to rule, and sacredly consult the feelings and edification of each other; so there can be no unity or true Christian communion among churches, which, while they profess to be one, do not "speak the same thing;" will not "walk by the same rule;"—and insist on consulting their private convenience or incli-

nation alone. The mischiefs of such a course I cannot attempt to enumerate. It interferes with harmony and edification to a degree of which no one can estimate the extent, or see the end. The members of a Church session, or of a Presbytery, when, in a particular case, they confessedly go counter to the published rules of the Presbyterian Church, may imagine that very little if any evil can possibly result from the course adopted. But, the truth is, they form a part of a great body which is one; all the several branches or members of which are to be considered as under the same regulating principles. Whenever, therefore, they allow themselves to be guilty of any disorderly proceeding, they commence a derangement of the machinery, which, for aught they can tell, may extend a disturbing impulse to the remotest members of the body with which they are connected. It may be compared to the operation of a single *falsehood* uttered in an orderly and tranquil neighbourhood. It is not, perhaps, intended, and it may not seem possible, that it should do much harm. But it has gone forth. The mischiefs which it has generated may spread like a cancer. It may lead to a hundred falsehoods, and a hundred quarrels. "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" The peace of many families may be destroyed by it. A happy Church may be torn in pieces by it. Nay, it may create evils of which a whole generation may not witness the entire removal.

But perhaps it will be said, that a machinery so constructed, and so liable to be deranged by disorder in a single part or branch, had better be laid aside. That it were wiser to adopt the simple Congregational plan, as it exists in *Massachusetts*, in which

each particular church is independent of every other church; and in which there is no delegated body representing all the churches; empowered to review the proceedings of the whole; to receive appeals from the aggrieved; and to bind all together as one church. This plan allows each church to take its own course in every thing, without yielding to any other body the power to inspect or re-judge its proceedings. I am persuaded that whoever examines this plan, with an impartial mind, will find it liable to radical objections. It is contrary to Apostolical example; for in *Acts xv.* we find an account of the Synod of *Jerusalem*, in which questions were *authoritatively decided* for the *whole Christian body*; and from which "*decrees*" were *sent down to all the churches to be sacredly observed*. It is contrary to the practice of the Church in the ages immediately after the Apostles; for we find, repeatedly, in the records of those ages, examples of judgments passed, and decrees published at Synodical meetings, which were intended to bind all the churches within a particular kingdom or district. It is in the highest degree unfriendly both to the unity and purity of the Church: and it would not be difficult to show, that, where this Independent system prevails, some of the most important means of promoting the harmony, co-operation and health of the churches are essentially wanting; and that for some of the worst evils to which an assemblage of neighbouring churches of the same denomination are exposed, there is neither prevention nor cure.

But I may not be an impartial judge. I will, therefore, request your attention to some remarks of a writer, who may, perhaps, be more unprejudiced; who speaks in the pages of the *New Haven Spectator*,

a journal which has not always appeared over partial to the Presbyterian form of Church government. The writer in question, himself a Congregationalist, and referring particularly to the Congregationalism of *Massachusetts*, speaks thus—

“When an individual church, in any town or parish, possesses the power of Christian discipline, even to the exclusion of offenders, and possesses the same power to discipline its Pastor, as any other member; the government is denominated *strictly Congregational*. And be the church ever so few in number, or even so much at variance among themselves, there is no remedy, except it come from themselves. They may contend for years, two against two, or three against three, without a prospect of peace. Being plunged deep in difficulty, the parties sometimes consent to a mutual counsel. A venerable council is convened, consisting (in many cases) of more and wiser men than the whole church that called them, and they come from out of the reach of every bias or prejudice. They are considered, by all parties, as men of talents, and of enlarged views; men of integrity and ardent piety. They hear and labour night and day with many tears and prayers. They make out a result, which is communicated with much solemn advice and exhortation. But, unfortunately for both, and all parties, this venerable council, the best situated and qualified of all men to hear and judge and decide, is totally void of *power*. The result goes to the church, and there it is rejected. The council retire with grief and mortification, leaving the church in a worse predicament than they found them. Now they are ripe for an *ex parte* council; and when and how will the troubles end? Nothing can safely be decided.

“ If, instead of multiplying councils, evidently selected for party purposes, the churches would *unite*, and covenant together to become *one body*, of *many members*, instead of *many bodies of few members*; the work of discipline would be easy, correct, and efficacious; and this was exactly the form of all the apostolical churches. The church of *Jerusalem* consisted of one body and many members. It consisted of five thousand men; how many women and children we know not. But they were all one body, under the pastoral care of many elders. Such were all the apostolical churches. They were one united body, under the care of a suitable number of elders, called *the Presbytery*. The church in every city or district was a completely organized *Consociation*. This venerable body of Elders, together with delegates from all the churches, has always possessed the right of self-government;—for this is the legitimate body of Christ, consisting of *all the saints, with the bishops and deacons*. To them, in the Apostolic age, were the difficult cases referred, by the minor churches, for a final decision. They were *the Church*, in the highest sense of the word.

“ Let us consider some of the benefits of this union of churches. The benefits are realized chiefly by the brethren of the churches, rather than by their pastors and elders. It brings the brethren out of obscurity. It brings them forward one after another, to attend to the most important and interesting discussions, both of a doctrinal and practical nature. It brings the churches to deliberate, by their delegates, and co-operate with their pastors, and give their votes on the most important questions. Delegates of

the churches, when they return from meetings of the consociation, realize that they have been attending a most excellent and profitable school; and with pleasure communicate to their brethren what they have learned in the consociation; so that information circulates through the whole body of churches.

“ We notice another benefit of this *union*; and that is, that *vacant churches* derive great advantages from their connexion with the consociation. Being destitute of ministers and spiritual guides of their own, they have a claim on any or all the ministers in the connexion, for that aid, direction and fatherly care, by which they are kept from going astray, and are enabled to obtain faithful ministers of the Gospel. It is no small privilege to have the aid and assistance of those ministers who are in the closest bonds of union and fellowship. The vacancy of churches, is, in a great measure, filled by the union of pastors and churches in the vicinity. The pastors, by this union, become like pastors of the apostolical churches: *fellow labourers, workers together, fellow helpers and fellow servants* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“ But there are still greater benefits resulting from the consociation of the churches. *It is a great check to the progress of prevailing errors and heresies.* If the consociation is, as it most certainly ought to be, a standing council for the examination and ordination of ministers within their own limits; there will be but little danger of the introduction of heretics into the sacred office. Instances are very rare, if any have occurred, in which heretics of any name have gained an establishment in the midst of an harmonious consociation. But where no bond of union

exists in the churches, there is a struggle between the advocates for the various systems of religion. Unitarians and Universalists claim the congregational principle, and introduce their disciples almost imperceptibly into our vacant congregations.

“What is the form of church government in *Massachusetts*? It is extinct. There is not a shadow of union of one church with another. Instead of union and co-operation, we stand aloof, and cultivate jealousies and party feelings against each other. Being rarely called together to act in concert, as sister churches, we make but very little acquaintance with Christians beyond the narrow limits of our own parishes. This shameful ignorance of our brethren in Christ, and even of the officers and leading members of his church, ‘ought not so to be.’ We ought to be intimately acquainted with our brethren, even at a distance. But how can this acquaintance exist, so long as we utterly refuse to associate, or to cultivate any bonds of Christian union whatsoever? It cannot take place. We must remain strangers and aliens for want of some bond of union.

“There is, in fact, but one alternative. The churches in this state (*Massachusetts*) *must unite*—must organize themselves in union with their pastors for mutual acquaintance, improvement, good fellowship and discipline; or they must go to ruin. It is as absurd and unscriptural for independent churches to set up for independence of the united body of the Church, as for individual towns to set up for the independence of the state or nation. Order, harmony and peace cannot be preserved and promoted, without a more extensive union, than that of a few individuals, or individual bodies. From a careful review

of the Scriptures on this subject, we have found, that churches established by the Apostles, were composed of a large number of ministers, with their individual churches. These, in cordial union, fellowship, and co-operation, composed what we call a *consociation*. And from the days of the Apostles to this day, the orthodox churches have been nearly on the same ground. Their ecclesiastical judicatories have been of the nature, and have had the effects of a consociation of the churches.”*

These remarks are pointed and excellent. And, I may add, that every word which the author has written in favour of what he calls the “consociation of churches,” applies with equal force in support of the Presbyterian form of church government. The plan of consociation as it exists in *Connecticut*, which the writer, no doubt, had in his eye, is neither less nor more than Presbyterianism as far as it goes. And, indeed, the writer frankly acknowledges that, in the Apostolic age, that united body of churches and pastors, not only for giving *advice*, but for the exercise of ecclesiastical *authority* over all the churches represented, and for the restoration of which he pleads, was called a “Presbytery.” The advantages of this system in *Connecticut* have been equally indubitable and signal. And had the churches in that State, a “General Consociation,” to which appeals might be brought from the county or district consociations, they would have a form of government, in the opinion of Dr. *Dwight*, greatly improved, and still better adapted than at present to maintain general order and purity. Had *Massachusetts*, more than a

* *Christian Spectator*, Vol. III. p. 460—463.

century ago, united with *Connecticut* in the adoption of the consociational system, there is every reason to believe that she would have been, at this hour, as free from the Unitarian heresy as her next door and happier sister.

The truth is, the indispensable need of some such system, for binding the churches together in one harmonious and co-operating body, as Presbyterianism furnishes, is daily disclosed by the *expedients* to which our respected Congregational brethren are compelled to resort; for which their original system makes no provision; and which, though sometimes successful, are still oftener found totally inadequate to the purposes for which they are intended. For all these exigencies, the Presbyterian form of government, in its essential structure, makes appropriate and ample provision. For terminating all controversies between churches and their pastors; between different parties in the same church; and between different neighbouring churches, it furnishes the most prompt and regular means. It cannot prevent the existence of offences; but it provides the most expeditious and effectual methods of removing them. It cannot reverse the laws of depraved human nature; but it offers the best means of restraining the disobedient, and reconciling the alienated, that human infirmity admits. It has not power to banish selfishness, violence and schism from the church; but it furnishes ties for binding together individual churches and pastors, and for facilitating their ecclesiastical union and co-operation, more easily, happily, and completely than any other system which Christendom presents. If the machinery of this system were complicated; if there were a single unnecessary wheel, there would be some ground for

objection. But the truth is, it is not more efficient than simple. There is no part for show or mystery; nothing but what is at once adapted and necessary to attain the object—HARMONIOUS, ACTIVE UNION.

Now the question is—seeing we are blessed with such a system of Church government; a system more admirably adapted than any other to promote the harmony, purity, and extension of the Church; a system pre-eminently suited to secure Christian liberty with Christian order; a system which some of the most learned, wise, and pious divines that ever adorned the *New England* churches, have cordially approved, and expressed an earnest desire to have introduced among themselves;—I say, *having* such a system happily established among us, shall we trifle with its essential principles? Shall we refuse to avail ourselves of the advantages which it places within our reach? Shall we trample it under feet as a thing of naught? This were indeed infatuation. What would be thought of a functionary of the civil government, who should allow himself to violate one article after another of the public constitution, which he had solemnly engaged to support, and which could only be really useful so long as it was kept entire? Would it be considered as consistent with either political or moral fidelity? I presume not. As little can we justify either the wisdom or the integrity of him who, entrusted with office in the Presbyterian Church, proves faithless to the articles of her constitution. He may imagine, every time he departs from the spirit of that constitution, that the infraction is of small importance, and that the evil arising from it will be more than counterbalanced by a greater good; but the form of government may be compared to a

compact building. However firm it may be while it remains entire, yet if one stone after another be displaced, or taken away, the whole edifice will be seriously weakened, and if the practice be continued, must soon be levelled to the dust.

Some ecclesiastical evils, like some bodily diseases, have a tendency to cure themselves. While others, like diseases of a different sort, tend not only to the continuance, but also to the extension and perpetuation of the mischief which they generate. Of this latter class are many of the departures from Presbyterian order. They affect others, as well as ourselves. They give rise to trouble, and perhaps to extended, intricate, and incurable trouble afterwards. They disturb, and it may be poison, streams which ought to flow equably and pure to every part of the body. And their effect often is to introduce members or measures into the Church, whose influence is permanently and increasingly mischievous.

When any man solemnly unites himself to a particular ecclesiastical body, and especially when he offers himself to her as a candidate for the office of one of her teachers and rulers, he is bound in honour,—anterior to all formal engagements to that amount—he is bound in honour to observe her rules, to consult her peace, and to make her interest his own. The idea of any man coming into such a community, with a mind hostile to its declared principles and interests, as such, is so abhorrent from every ingenuous feeling, that we cannot suppose any man of common integrity, capable of deliberately taking such a step. What would a society of worldly men of honour, who had associated for the avowed purpose of maintaining and carrying into effect a certain set of moral or poli-

tical principles, think of a man who should offer himself as a candidate for membership in their body, when he was a secret enemy of the principles in question, and wished to become one of their number with the deliberate purpose of opposing the object for which they united, and secretly assailing the essential principles of their plan? No one can doubt, that he would be both despised and abhorred, and that he would richly deserve his fate. But if such would be the estimate of worldly men, how much more unfavourable must be the judgment of those who are governed by Christian principle, and who remember that, in the affairs of the Church, if in any thing, "whatsoever we do, we are to do heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men."

The various ways in which Presbyterian order may be, and has been invaded, are too numerous to admit of minute specification within the limits which I have assigned to these letters. But there are a few, which as they are more frequent in their occurrence, so they are more injurious in their influence, than most others; and, therefore, may deserve, on both these accounts, special notice.

I. The first irregularity that I shall specify, is the introduction of men into office in the Church, without the qualifications which our form of government requires; or without due regard to the subscription and engagements prescribed in our public formularies. *Church Sessions* have consented to invest with the Eldership, persons who were notoriously unfriendly to the doctrine and order of the Presbyterian Church; and have either omitted to demand from them the prescribed adoption of the Confession of Faith, &c., or have allowed them to adopt these

standards with an avowed laxity of construction, or an evident mental reservation, altogether inconsistent with Christian probity. *Presbyteries*, in defiance of the rules adopted for regulating such cases, have sent forth, as licentiates to the churches, young men so deficient in literature, so unfurnished with theological knowledge, such novices as to every practical qualification; and of such doubtful soundness in the faith;—as to defeat the purpose of every regulation in reference to this important concern. Nor have instances been wanting in which *Presbyteries*, after licensing young men thus unqualified for the sacred office, have proceeded to ordain them, without any suitable or legitimate inducement, and in spite of every law and remonstrance to the contrary. The mischiefs arising from this disorderly procedure are numberless, and of an extent not easily measured. If the licentiates and ministers thus irregularly sent out, could, in all cases, be confined to the *Presbytery* which sent them forth, the mischief might be less than it is often found to be. But a licentiate or minister in the *Presbyterian Church*, belongs, of course, to the whole body, and expects to be received every where, as in good standing. Whenever, therefore, the licensing or ordaining power is exercised contrary to the spirit of the rules formed for its regulation, and admits into the class of public instructors, or pastors, an unqualified person, no one can estimate either the amount or the duration of the injury inflicted on the Church. Whatever of evil, ignorance, indiscretion, fanaticism, and headlong violence, when exhibited by a teacher of religion, are capable of producing, may be produced by a single instance of irregular license or ordination, or may last as long as

the life of the individual thus improperly introduced, and, indeed, long after he has gone to his account. As long as Presbyteries expect their licentiates and members to be received as in good standing by all the judicatories of our Church, to whom they present their testimonials, they surely owe it to common honesty to proceed, in licensing and ordaining them, in strict conformity to those rules by which all have engaged to be governed. Where men are licensed or ordained in opposition to these rules, who can complain of sister judicatories for refusing to recognise them?

Instances of this kind, of the most distressing character, are by no means wanting. A signal example of licensing, and subsequently ordaining a candidate, in violation of the rules solemnly adopted, was hinted at in my first letter, as having taken place more than ninety years ago; and as among the events which contributed to rend asunder the Presbyterian Church. The mischief which followed that irregularity was, probably, a hundred fold more than a counterbalance to all the good which the candidate was instrumental in effecting through the whole course of his ministry. But the complicated evil arising from this kind of departure from Presbyterial order, was still more painfully exemplified in the Western country, particularly within the bounds of the Synod of *Kentucky*, about thirty years ago. One of the Presbyteries composing that Synod, during a remarkable revival of religion, being requested to license a number of young men, who, though entirely destitute of any suitable education, and partaking largely of the fanatical excitement around them, appeared to be pious;—thought proper to comply

with their request; hoping that, although not regularly qualified, they might still be useful. Candidate after candidate of this character was accordingly licensed. After giving them license, finding that they were acceptable as preachers to large bodies of people, as fanatical as themselves, the Presbytery went a step further and ordained them. A number of these young men, declined adopting the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the usual form; declaring that they were ready to adopt it, "only so far as they considered it as agreeing with the word of God." They were, however, freely licensed and ordained, notwithstanding. All this was felt and acknowledged at the time to be contrary to rule; but it was hoped, on the old corrupt principle, that "the end might sanctify the means." But, as might have been expected, trouble of the most serious kind, soon began to disclose itself. Those who had been introduced in an irregular manner, encouraged irregularity in others. Disorders multiplied. Errors of the most serious kind were preached. And ministers of this unhappy character were in a fair way to become a majority; when the decisive course of the Synod of *Kentucky*, followed up by the enlightened and strong measures of the General Assembly, arrested the progress of the evil, by cutting off from the Presbyterian Church, the greater part of those who had been thus irregularly introduced. The result manifested that the worst fears of the friends of truth and order, were but too well founded. With very few exceptions, they all turned out grossly heterodox and disorderly; and could not have failed, if they had remained in our Church, to corrupt, as well as to disturb and disgrace it. A majority of these

excluded men, formed the body since known by the name of the "Cumberland Presbyterians;" now consisting of a number of Presbyteries, professing to adopt the Presbyterian form of government, but avowedly embracing Arminian sentiments in theology. Another, but smaller portion, formed a new body, denominated "Chrystians," and sometimes "New Lights," or "Stoneites," (from the name of their principal leader,) and became a kind of enthusiastic, noisy Socinians. While the remainder, under the same lawless impulse, took a third course, and fell into all the fanatical absurdities of "Shakerism." Such have been the consequences of departing honestly, and with good intention, from Presbyterial order! All the churches in that region were agitated, and some of them torn in pieces by their operation; judicatories were, year after year, occupied and perplexed in endeavouring to repair the injury done by one false course of procedure; and monuments of the most disastrous character remain, for our instruction and warning, to the present day.

The truth is, as all the churches in the United States, under the care of the General Assembly, have solemnly adopted a written Constitution; have pledged themselves to one another, and to the public, to walk together according to a certain system of rules; they are bound to adhere to those rules in "every jot and tittle;" recollecting, that they act, in each case, not for themselves alone, but for the whole body; and that each act may, for aught they can tell, be brought, by reference, appeal or complaint, before a higher judicatory, who must judge of it by the same rules which were prescribed for the lower judicatory, and which ought to have governed it.

It will, perhaps, be asked—can no case arise in which a Presbytery may be justifiable in dispensing with some portion of those literary attainments, in candidates for license and ordination, which our rules on that subject demand? To this question, I would respectfully offer an opinion, that there ought never to be such dispensation but in cases truly extraordinary; where a candidate, though he have not gone through a regular course of academical training, is, nevertheless, so distinguished for fervent piety, good sense, prudence, and aptness to teach all that he does know, that all who know him are ready to acknowledge, that he may be useful as a religious teacher. For, in my judgment, no subordinate judicatory ought to feel itself at liberty, in any case, and especially in the delicate and important work of admitting the teachers and rulers of the Church to their respective functions, to depart from strict rule, unless when the case is so strongly marked, and so unquestionable in its aspect, that if the whole Church was assembled by its representatives, in the highest judicatory, there is every reason to believe, it would approve of the proposed measure.

I shall finish what I have to say on Presbyterianial order, in another letter.

Princeton, March, 1833.

LETTER XII.

Adherence to Presbyterian Order.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

I PROCEED, in this letter, to take notice of some other departures from the order of our ecclesiastical constitution, to which temptations may arise, and which have been found highly injurious in their influence.

II. In this list of irregularities, that which has been commonly styled LAY PREACHING, deserves a conspicuous place. This is an evil of which, in many parts of our country, there is no danger. The state of public sentiment, and all the habits of the people are such, that, instead of any disposition unlawfully to intrude on official functions, there is rather a blameable backwardness among laymen who profess religion, even to lead in prayer in social meetings. In such places, there is certainly, at present, very little need of caution on the subject before us. But there are many other places, in various parts of our land, in which a tendency of a different character exists, and in which it were well for the cause of Christ, and for the edification of his people, if correct principles and practice in reference to this subject were prevalent. And what renders the subject peculiarly interesting, is, that difficulty in relation to it is most apt to arise in extensive and powerful revivals of religion. In a season when many, heretofore careless, are awakened to a sense of the importance of eternal

things; and when the minds of Christians are excited and warmed to an unusual degree, nothing is more natural than that some not accustomed or authorized to speak in public, should feel impelled to give vent to their feelings in religious assemblies. Individuals among the recently converted, being brought, as it were, into a new world, can scarcely refrain from pouring out the fulness of their hearts, with the hope of doing good to some around them. And even some of longer standing and more experience in religion, in the wonder, joy, and gratitude occasioned by seeing so many triumphs of the grace of God,—feel constrained not only to take the lead in prayer, but also to undertake the office of instruction and exhortation. In most of the great revivals of religion that I have ever seen or heard of, more or less of this irregularity appeared. In the celebrated and truly glorious revivals which occurred, and which prevailed so extensively in this country, under the ministry of *Whitefield*, *Edwards*, the *Tennents*, and other distinguished ministers of Christ, from sixty to ninety years ago, irregularities as to this point were frequently complained of, and evidently, in some cases, injured the cause of religion. They are mentioned with pointed disapprobation and regret by the venerable President *Edwards*, in his “Thoughts” on the revival of religion which existed in his day in *New England*. Indeed I suppose they seldom fail in some degree to arise whenever a large number of persons, in the same neighbourhood, are awakened to a knowledge and love of the truth. I suppose, too, that when these irregularities do arise, the season of their exhibition very seldom closes, without leaving all intelligent and judicious Christians perfectly convinced

that they are mischievous and to be deplored. But in this, as well as in other important cases, those lessons which are learned, and it may be most impressively learned, by one generation, are generally forgotten before another arises. It seems to be necessary, then, for the churches, every few years, to learn by woful experience, the mischiefs of *lay-preaching*, and *lay-exhorting*, and to be delivered from them only after witnessing for themselves their unhappy effects. I have known this evil to arise again and again, in different parts of the United States; but have no recollection of its ever having been put down until after running a certain course, and satisfying all enlightened, solid Christians, of its evil nature, by its painful consequences.

I am perfectly aware, that without referring them to the light of *experience*, it is impossible to convince many good people of the real evil of this thing. They are ready to ask—shall a man, whose eyes have been opened to see the importance of the great salvation, and whose “heart burns within him” with love and compassion for perishing sinners;—shall he be debarred from bearing an honest testimony on this subject? I answer, let such an one by holy *example*; by fervent, importunate *prayer*; and by seasonable, wise, persevering *conversation*, with every individual, and in every social circle, where he has an opportunity;—let him by all these means, and by the distribution of pious books, &c., endeavour to impress the minds of all around him with the knowledge and importance of eternal things. Let him be ever ready, also, to promote the cause of Christ by religious visits; by assisting his pastor in catechetical instruction, Sunday Schools, Bible classes, and attention to the sick and

dying;—in short, by every pious effort which falls within the department of *private instruction*. All this may be done without invading any official function, and may be so conducted as to occupy the best talents, and all the leisure time of the most spiritual and diligent Christian, who is not devoted to the work of the ministry. But let him not invade the function of the *authorized public teacher*. When every man serves God with diligence in that sphere in which an all-wise Providence has placed him, he will, undoubtedly, be more likely to serve Him acceptably and profitably, than he can hope to do by going out of that sphere, however honest his intentions, or unceasing his efforts. God is a God of *order*; and no one ever yet pleased him, or advanced his kingdom, by invading the prescribed order of his house.

The mischiefs of lay-preaching are radical and numberless. If none but the wise, the well-instructed, and the truly pious ever engaged in this work, the evils attending it would be much less;—but every one who has had an opportunity of observing, knows, that it is most apt to be usurped by the vain, the arrogant, the enthusiastic, and the superficial. Where lay-preaching is much practised, I will venture to say, that, for one old, experienced, truly enlightened, and prudent Christian who engages in it, there may be produced ten mere novices, scarcely fledged sciolists, who have not for twelve months, perhaps not for six, cherished the hope that they are Christians, and who are scarcely able to state and defend the most simple and elementary truths with any degree of distinctness. These are the men most apt to imagine that they are qualified to be public instructors, and most ready to obtrude themselves into the duties of the office. The

humble, the modest, the well-informed, who know how solemn is the task of guiding immortal souls, and how important it is that "the word of truth be rightly divided," and the deeply pious, are ready to shrink from the work, as too arduous and solemn to be undertaken by them: while those who know little of themselves, less of the truth, and least of all of the various conflicts and trials of the serious inquirer, are often found willing, without hesitation, to present themselves before public assemblies as Christian teachers. Often—very often, have I known this experiment made; but never have I known it to terminate otherwise than disastrously. Its invariable tendency is to draw down the displeasure of the King of Zion for an infringement of the law of his house; to degrade the Christian ministry, as an ordinance of God; to introduce incalculable disorder and confusion into the Church; to make crude, erroneous, superficial views of divine truth popular; to introduce a fondness for noise and fanaticism, rather than solid instruction; to repel persons of education and judgment from the house of God; and thus to bring religion into contempt with thousands who might otherwise have been willing to place themselves respectfully within the sphere of its influence.

It has been supposed by some, that *students of Theology*, although not yet licensed, may be allowed, without impropriety or danger, to exhort, and even preach in public at pleasure, provided they do not intrude on the regular services of the pulpit. It may, perhaps, be granted, that such candidates for the ministry may be safely permitted to conduct prayer meetings, and occasionally to make short practical addresses to the small circles which usually attend

such meetings. A privilege of this kind may be regarded as a part, and an interesting part of their professional training. But it is a bad precedent, even for theological students, to take a text, and do every thing that would be formally, as well as virtually, considered as *preaching*, if it were to take place in the pulpit. Surely candidates for the sacred office ought to be the last men in the world to pursue a course adapted to degrade that office! Surely those who are preparing to be the Church's *guides* and *rulers*, ought not to give such an unfavourable presage of their character, as to be found, in the course of their preparation, trampling upon her order!

The truth is, every Presbyterian, whatever place he may occupy, who violates the constitutional rules of the Church, knows not what degree of mischief he is preparing for the cause of Christ. A single bad example may work incalculable evil. Our distinctive system, as a denomination, is one which professes to unite genuine spirituality with strict order:—the spirit of true scriptural revivals, with that adherence to ecclesiastical rule, which guards against the prostration of any of the great laws of Christ's house. Both parts of this system are essential to our glory as a Church. On the one hand, if we depart from our spirituality, that is, from a faithful adherence to the practical, experimental religion of the Bible, our order will be but a frigid, heartless machinery. The vital spirit will be gone. Our forms will not be worth preserving. But, on the other hand, if we depart from our distinctive order, all experience demonstrates that our spirituality will not long survive. We may remain nominal Presbyterians; but we shall really be disorderly fanatics. The enlight-

ened and faithful friend of our Zion will carefully *hold fast both*; remembering that no degree of spirituality, no degree of warm hearted zeal for revivals, will atone for a departure from either pure Gospel truth, or genuine Gospel order. Again, then, I say, "what God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

III. Another deviation from Presbyterianial order I mention at once with diffidence and distress. With *diffidence*, because I am not *certain* of its having occurred in all the extent reported: with *distress*, because if it ever have occurred in any Presbytery within our bounds, it appears to me to indicate a more alarming disaffection to our public standards than almost any other fact which has come to my knowledge. Is it a fact, then, in one or more Presbyteries, instead of calling upon candidates for License and Ordination to subscribe the Confession of Faith of our Church—an entirely different Confession has been prepared and presented to these candidates; a Confession much shorter—consisting, indeed of only eight or ten very brief articles; and formed upon the avowed principle of meeting and relieving the scruples of those who could not conscientiously subscribe the larger Confession received in our churches? I ask, is it a fact that such a Confession has been adopted by any Presbytery in our connexion, and made a substitute for the proper one; and that upon the acknowledged principle, that the *proper* one could not, and would not be subscribed? If I am not misinformed, something like this has actually been done; and by brethren, too, whose undoubted piety precludes the suspicion of that reckless tampering with conscience and with truth which might be supposed to have

occurred in some other hands. On such a subject it is difficult to speak with candour without the use of terms which the character of respected brethren might seem to render undesirable. But if ever there was an act, not merely of departure from order, but of high treason against the Presbyterian Church, which every consideration of fidelity and honour ought to have forbidden, this, undoubtedly, is one. An act to be accounted for, as I suppose, only on the supposition that it was passed hastily, and of course without that due deliberation, which, had it been calmly exercised, must have led, I should think, to a different result.

But whatever might have been the inducements to such a procedure, or the circumstances attending it, it cannot be regarded in any other light than as a vital offence against ecclesiastical order; as a complicated violation of the fundamental law of the Presbyterian Church; and a violation adapted really to subvert the whole system of our church government. Can Presbyteries which admit men to office on such terms as these, expect other Presbyteries to receive them to the usual standing, without difficulty or examination; nay, without calling upon them to adopt a Confession which they have never yet adopted? What would be thought of that magistrate who should so far violate the trust reposed in him by the constitution of his country, as to dispense with oaths enjoined by law; to disregard all the legal qualifications prescribed for those whom he introduced into office; and to sanction by his conduct an entire negligence of those laws which he had solemnly sworn to obey? Surely the severest imputations against both his moral and official fidelity would not be thought

unmerited. What opinion would be formed of a township, or county, in a great state, which, in the administration of its affairs, should entirely disregard the statutes which were equally intended for every part of the state, and instead of them, adopt a system of regulation of its own contrivance, a system directly opposed to the enactment of the legislature, and which could never be sanctioned on an appeal to the highest judicial authority? Could such a course fail of being condemned by every enlightened and patriotic citizen? And can it deserve a smaller degree of reprobation, in a body of Christian ministers, to pursue a similar course with the laws and interests of the Church of Christ; to change, by their private agreement, the terms of admission on which the whole body had agreed to act; to admit persons to the office of teaching and ruling in the body over which they presided, who, by the very terms of their introduction, declared that they were not the friends of the body, that is, not the friends of its essential constitution and rules;—in a word, to pursue a course directly adapted to undermine the foundation of the Church's purity and peace; to change her fundamental principles; gradually to take away all the landmarks which our fathers had so carefully set up; and, while the public standards are really abandoned, to deceive us with the empty name of Presbyterianism?

I have not the remotest idea of charging the brethren who may have consented to this measure, with a distinct apprehension of its real character, or with a disposition covertly and insidiously to invite these consequences. No such views, I am persuaded, occurred to their minds; and probably no members

of the Presbyterian Church would be more ready to abhor such principles and consequences, had they been distinctly contemplated. Still measures may not be the less injurious because they were inadvertently adopted. Many a potion has proved fatally poisonous, which was administered with the most benevolent intentions. But surely no sincere and intelligent Presbyterian can wish for accessions to the *numbers* of our church upon principles so directly adapted to impair her strength, to destroy her peace, and to degrade her character!

It will be gratifying to me to find that the alleged irregularity against which I have been arguing, has never occurred. Unless I utterly deceive myself, no disposition to credit or circulate idle rumours, or to magnify real faults, in reference to this subject, has a place in my bosom. Much rather would I say and do every thing consistent with truth, to remove prejudices; to allay party excitement; and to unite in affection and confidence those who have hitherto been discordant. But I dare not, in discussing the general subject before me, omit to notice an alleged departure from Presbyterian order, which, if it ever had any foundation in fact, is certainly one of the most radical and threatening irregularities which I have heard of as charged on conscientious and pious men.

IV. I shall, at present, take notice of only one more departure from our ecclesiastical order, which has already given much uneasiness, and which if persisted in, cannot fail of giving much more, and perhaps of a still more serious character. I refer to the practice of introducing "Committee-men," under the

name, and with the powers, of ruling elders, into the higher judicatories of the Church.

It was my lot to be a member of the General Assembly, in 1801, by which the system of rules out of which this practice has grown, was formed, and proposed to our brethren of *New England*. I can, therefore, speak with some degree of confidence concerning the history and meaning of that system. It was intended to obviate a difficulty which had arisen in organizing churches in what were called the "new settlements." These churches were, in many cases, made up of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, who, without some specific arrangement, might, and often did, find it difficult to form together a united and comfortable body. To meet this exigency, the following article was adopted. "If any Congregation consist partly of those who hold the Congregational form of discipline, and partly of those who hold the Presbyterian form, we recommend to both parties that this be no objection to their uniting in one church, and settling a minister; and that in this case the church choose a standing committee from the communicants of said church whose business it shall be to call to account every member of the church who shall conduct himself inconsistently with the laws of Christianity, and to give judgment on such conduct. And if the person condemned by their judgment be a Presbyterian, he shall have liberty to appeal to the Presbytery: if a Congregationalist, he shall have liberty to appeal to the body of the male communicants of the church. In the former case the determination of the Presbytery shall be final, unless the church consent to a further appeal to the Synod, or to the General Assembly; and in the latter case,

if the party condemned shall wish for a trial by a mutual council, the cause shall be referred to such council. And provided the said standing committee of any church shall depute one of themselves to attend the Presbytery, he may have the same right to sit and act in the Presbytery, as a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church.”

This is the rule, which has been variously interpreted, and on which a practice has been founded, which many consider as hostile to our general system, and dangerous to the purity and peace of our Church. I mean the practice of sending these “committee-men,” with commissions in the usual form, as ruling elders, to the General Assembly. In considering this subject, the following remarks appear to me to be obvious.

1. In the first place, this conciliatory expedient was manifestly, from its whole spirit and scope, intended to be a *temporary arrangement*, to meet an immature and unsettled state of things; and by no means to be adopted as a permanent ecclesiastical system. It was designed and adapted for “new settlements,” and inchoate churches; and became inapplicable when the denominational character of a religious community had become fixed. In all cases therefore, in which a church has settled down regularly on the Congregational plan, and there is no longer that diversity and conflict of opinion which the rule contemplates, every principle of just interpretation forbids such a church to avail itself of the privilege here offered. The privilege belongs exclusively to a church made up partly of Presbyterians, and partly of Congregationalists, who cannot agree to unite on any other than this accommodating plan. It is manifest

then, that when a church really and entirely Congregational in its government and discipline, avails itself of this plan to send a "committee-man," even to the Presbytery, it makes a use of the plan of accommodation altogether unjustifiable, and one which, however honestly intended, ought never to be allowed. It is perverting a mutual privilege from its original design, and making it serve a purpose which its spirit altogether forbids.

2. My *second* remark is, that the power of "committee-men," such as the rule contemplates, to sit and act in judicatory in place of ruling elders, obviously *extends no farther than the PRESBYTERY*. The rule says expressly that they shall be allowed to sit in the Presbytery; but says not a word of any other or higher judicatory. Now, as it is drawn up with remarkable caution and explicitness, we may reasonably suppose that no other judicatory than the Presbytery was intended to be recognised. I will not undertake to assert that, at the time of its formation this was distinctly understood and expressed; for of this my recollection is not clear; but it is plain that the letter of the rule, its general spirit, and a variety of important considerations bearing on our form of government, constrains us to believe that such was the original design of those who formed and adopted the plan. That these "committee-men," representing particular churches, should have seats in Presbytery, for the purpose of watching over their own interests, all will allow to be reasonable and important. But that they should be sent to the highest judicatories, to assist in judicial decisions for the whole Church, will hardly be regarded by any as either safe or reasonable.

3. A *third* remark worthy of regard in reference to this matter is, that, if “the committee-men” in question were permitted to sit and vote in the higher judicatories of the Church, and especially in the General Assembly, the practice would have a most *UNEQUAL OPERATION*, and could scarcely fail of giving rise to painful apprehension, if not to actual danger. According to the constitution of our Church, all the ministers and ruling elders who are regularly connected with our judicatories, are required, previously to their admission to office, solemnly to adopt the Confession of Faith of our Church, as “containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures;” and also to declare that they “approve of the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in these United States.” Now, when these solemn declarations are required of all those who strictly belong to our own body;—when not one Presbyterian minister or elder is permitted to occupy a place in any of our judicatories, without bringing himself under the obligations which result from the formal assent which has been stated; is it reasonable, is it equitable, to give the very same privilege and power, on easier terms, to brethren who are not, properly speaking, members of our body at all; who have never subscribed our public standards; nay more, who practically tell us, by the very principles on which they present themselves as candidates for seats in our judicatories, that they *do not approve* our Form of Government, and *cannot assent* to our Confession of Faith? Is it reasonable in itself; can it be justified on any principle, that we should admit those brethren to seats in our highest judicatory, there to give authoritative votes; votes which perhaps, may turn the

scale in modifying the laws, and controlling the affairs of that Church, to the constitution of which they have such insuperable repugnance, that they are constrained in conscience to stand aloof from it; and never, in fact, attempt to approach it, but for the purpose of taking a part in its government? I ask again, is this reasonable or proper? Ought it to be desired by those brethren, or granted to them if desired? I cannot help believing that every intelligent and impartial judge will feel ready to give to these questions a prompt and decisive negative.

4. An objection still stronger may be brought against the practice which has sometimes been adopted, of commissioning these "committee-men" under the title of "ruling elders," and formally announcing them, in writing to the General Assembly, *as such*. It will be observed that the language of the rule is, that when committee-men, in the circumstances supposed, shall present themselves to a Presbytery, they "shall have the *same right* to sit and act, in the Presbytery, as a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church." Every part of this system of rules requires that, when they appear in Presbytery, they should be known in their real character; not under an assumed guise or name. No part of the regulation in question, either in its letter or spirit, will justify this. It is a flagrant deception. In addition to all the serious objections which have been already stated, this is liable to the charge of palpably violating good faith, and concealing the truth for the sake of carrying a point. How conscientious, honourable men, could persuade themselves that this was a justifiable course, I presume not to decide. Were I a "committee-man," I would no more present such a

commission at the table of the General Assembly, than I would forge a deed, or counterfeit a bank-note. Whenever they appear in judicatories, they ought to be announced in their true character—simply as “committee-men,” that the whole case may be at once understood and appreciated.

Concerning the gross impropriety of commissioning as a delegate to the General Assembly, and expressly announcing, in his commission, as a “ruling elder,” a brother who is not even a “committee man,”—which has, I believe, occurred; it is presumed no one can hesitate for a moment to give it up to the most severe and unqualified reprobation. All these things are the more exceptionable, and deserve the heavier censure, because they pervert, and tend to render odious a plan founded in Christian charity, and intended to promote Christian harmony. He who can palpably violate, while he seems to be obeying, the provisions of such a plan, may be compared to the man who, in secular warfare, should violate a “flag of truce.”

I must be allowed again to declare, that in making these statements, and in expressing this censure, I am very far from imputing to any Presbytery or brother, with whom any irregularity of the kind specified may have occurred, that charge of moral obliquity which might seem to be implied. By no means. I know too well the occasional inadvertence, or temporary excitement, to which good men are often liable, especially in conducting affairs which have become implicated with party feelings. Still, while the men are acquitted from all intentional offence, it is impossible to justify their measures. The tendency

of these measures to generate mischief, has not been overrated, I am persuaded, in the smallest degree.

There is such a thing, however, as being sticklers for the *letter* of Presbyterian order, while the *spirit* of it is disregarded. I have known persons whose attachment to our form of church government, was, to say the least, very questionable, who contended for its technical niceties and zealously urged its minutest rules, when they could be employed to embarrass and defeat an adversary, or delay the course of discipline; while the broad and noble principles of the system appeared to be willingly overlooked, and even recklessly trampled upon. Often, very often has the disposition imputed by our Lord to the Pharisees of old,—to “strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel,” been strikingly exemplified, by some, who cannot too highly applaud the Presbyterian system, when they can employ its provisions to carry a point of unjust policy; or too unceremoniously depreciate its best principles, when their operation appeared unfriendly to party plans. Nothing is more adapted to render the system odious, than this perversion of its laws. No system, I will venture to say, in the world, is so well adapted to promote the peace, purity, and edification of the Church, as this, when applied in the true spirit of Gospel candour and charity: and none more capable of being made an instrument of vexatious entanglement and delay, and of giving an unrighteous cause a temporary triumph, when an ingenious and reckless “troubler of Israel” undertakes to expound and apply it. Carry this form of government into execution fairly, impartially, and firmly, and it will commend itself to the judgment of every enlightened Christian. Its happy results will be

order, justice and peace. But trample on its great and essential principles, and stickle only for its petty, restraining by-laws, and the result may be vexation and strife without end.

But I will not dwell longer on the details of this subject. Every part of the received order of the Church is important to those who have agreed to act together as one body. We may say this of every Christian denomination. The truth is, however, there is no form of ecclesiastical government in which departures from prescribed order are more mischievous in their bearing and consequences, than the Presbyterian. All her judicatories, from the lowest to the highest, are supposed in theory, and ought in fact, to be made up of men who have all subscribed the same public standards, and who are all attached to the same system of doctrine and order. They are all supposed, of course, to speak the same language, and to be governed by the same discipline. Now, as was remarked in a former letter, "things equal to one and the same thing are of course, equal to one another." Consequently, all the several parts of this extended body must be considered as agreeing with each other, or its essential principle is abandoned. Upon this principle it is, as stated in a preceding letter, that, when any difficulty arises, or when an appeal is taken from the decision of a lower judicatory, a higher one, comprehending a larger portion of the whole body, reviews the decision of the lower, and either confirms or reverses it. But if the lower judicatory should disregard the rules which have been adopted for the regulation of the whole body; in other words, if it should prescribe for itself a different set of rules from those laid down in our

public formularies, how could it expect to appear with advantage before the higher court, in which these formularies were regarded as containing the law of the Church? In fact, when any of our judicatories venture to proceed, in any case, in opposition to the prescribed order of the Presbyterian Church, they violate their covenant engagements; they weaken the hands of their brethren with whom they have agreed to walk; and they may be preparing an amount of trouble for themselves and others, of which no one can calculate the amount, or see the termination.

Princeton, April, 1833.

LETTER XIII.

Selecting and Licensing Candidates.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

EVERY new exigency in the Church demands new efforts; and every new effort gives rise to new dangers. When we commence the prosecution of any important enterprise, especially if the character of that enterprise partake in any considerable degree of *novelty*, it is apt so to fill our minds, as too much to exclude from our view other objects, and to prevent our seeing the various perils which attend our course. The tendency of human nature is ever to extremes. And it is only when we see evils which we had not anticipated beginning to arise, that we are constrained to pause, and doubt whether we have been altogether judicious in our proceedings.

A number of years ago, some of the most intelligent and zealous friends of our Church began to be alarmed at the scantiness of our supply of *Gospel labourers*, compared with the extent of the demand, both for the domestic and foreign field. The harvest was seen to be great, and rapidly extending; while "the labourers were few," and by no means increasing in a corresponding ratio. It was distinctly foreseen, that, without some extraordinary efforts, a deplorable scarcity of living teachers must be the consequence; and that the progress, and even unimpaired continuance of Gospel ordinances must be seriously endangered. In these circumstances, the General

Assembly commenced a system of measures intended to meet this pressing exigency. It called upon the Presbyteries to select and educate pious young men for the work of the ministry; entreated them to raise funds for this purpose; and made it their duty to report to the Assembly from year to year, what they had done in this important concern. And this object has been steadily pursued by the Assembly, with various degrees of zeal and success, from that time to the present; until the enterprise has reached an extent and prosperity truly interesting. Even yet, indeed, it continues to be a problem of painfully difficult solution, where we are to find ministers to meet the hourly increasing calls for evangelical labour from every part of our own country, and the heathen world. We are so far, as yet, from having any prospect of an over supply, that if our candidates for the ministry were multiplied five, or even tenfold beyond the present state of annual increase, we should not have more than the exigencies of our Church, and of the missionary service most urgently demand.

Even in these circumstances, however, we may be by far *too much in haste* to make ministers. And it is to this point, my Christian brethren, that I now earnestly desire to direct your serious attention. There is, undoubtedly, prevalent a great mistake in relation to this matter. It seems to be the opinion of many that almost *any* young man who appears to be *pious*, will do for a minister, whatever may be the character of his mind. Now, it is true, we urgently need many more ministers than we possess, or have any prospect of gaining, to go forth and feed the destitute and perishing millions in every part of our re-

volted world. But we still more urgently need ministers of an elevated and scriptural character. There is a great want of Gospel labourers; but there is a still greater want of *well qualified* labourers, in whom piety, wisdom, prudence, zeal and learning are conspicuously united. *One* SUCH MAN will really be likely to do more good—far more good—than *fifty* unqualified men, or men not furnished in some measure, by nature, by grace, and by study, as public teachers and guides ought to be furnished. Of course, if we could add ten thousand men to the list of our ministers; yet if four-fifths of them were men of small and dubious piety; or if they were ignorant, weak, rash, imprudent men, however pious;—would the Church be really benefited by such an addition? No, truly: the obtaining them, would rather be the infliction of a curse than the bestowment of a blessing. In the days of *Paul* the scarcity of ministers, and the urgent demand for them, were far more pressing than in our day, yet, even then, the inspired apostle was very particular in prescribing qualifications, without which he decided that no one ought to be admitted to the sacred office.

But if there was danger, even in that age of persecution and trial, that men without suitable qualifications would offer themselves as candidates for the holy ministry, how much greater is the same danger *now*, when religion is to a great extent popular; when the ministry is regarded as a highly respectable office; and when the temptation is really strong to an enlightened and ingenuous youth, to escape from the various forms of secular and servile employment, and engage in one at once so elevated, so useful, and so truly honoured by the best part of society! Yet this

danger has never appeared to me to be adequately appreciated by those,—or at least by *some* of those who are engaged in the arduous and responsible task of selecting and training candidates for the service of the Church.

It is well known that (so soul-destroying are the fascinations of wealth and luxury,) comparatively few of the children of the affluent and honourable in society are pious; and that fewer still of this class are disposed to seek the self-denying and laborious office of the ministry. A large portion of those who are willing to engage as labourers, for life, in the Lord's harvest, are in humble circumstances, and need the parental aid of the Church to sustain them in their course of preparation; and, of course, are so situated as to be peculiarly exposed to the temptation of seeking the ministry from motives of a mixed character, partaking in some degree of secular ambition. There was a time, indeed, when the Presbyterian Church in the United States had little to tempt any aspiring youth to seek a place among her pastors. But it surely cannot be denied that *now* there is much in our body which is well adapted to excite the ambition of one who is presented with an offer of being raised from a servile or mechanical employment to a place in our ministry. This circumstance, indeed, ought by no means to prevent the offer from being made, on all proper occasions; but it certainly ought to render those who make it exceedingly cautious and vigilant that they present it to none but such as they have good reason to believe will be likely really to adorn the office to which they are invited.

We know that, even in the established churches of *Europe*, where both the circumstances and the habits

of the people render family distinction both prominent and important—many of the most distinguished prelates, and other clergymen of the highest reputation, have been of very humble origin; and this was so far from discrediting them with the wise and good, that the circumstance was rather considered as an honourable distinction, evincing, on their part, a force of character, and a degree of diligence and enterprise, worthy of the highest estimation. The same has occurred in our own Church, both in former and later times. It is delightful to the Christian's heart to recollect how many bright ornaments of the sacred office in our communion were taken from the humbler walks of life, and aided by the bounty of their friends, or of the Church, in pursuing their studies. It was a happy day for the Church, and for themselves, when they were drawn from obscurity, and put into that course of training which issued so well both for their comfort and usefulness.

At the present time, when the number of candidates taken up by Education Societies is every day becoming larger; and when the inconsiderate partiality of some sanguine pastors leads them to fasten with eagerness on almost every young man within their charges who becomes serious, as a candidate for the holy ministry;—the importance of wise and faithful discrimination in selecting, was never more manifest. In these circumstances, he who does not wish the Church to misapply her bounty, and to assume a burden, rather than gain a blessing, will be conscientiously careful to recommend no candidate either to an Education Society, or to private patronage, who does not really promise to be an ornament and a blessing in the house of God. In particular, I

feel constrained to urge the most serious regard to the following considerations:—

1. That none be recommended, or even countenanced, in going forward to prepare for the sacred office, who does not give decisive evidence of **SINCERE AND HUMBLE PIETY**. I do not merely mean that he should give that amount of evidence of what we are wont to call “hopeful piety,” which we require of *all* who are admitted to the communion of the visible Church. My meaning goes much beyond this. The piety of a candidate for the ministry ought to be deep, unquestionable, and strongly marked. We expect ministers of the Gospel to be not only pious, but *eminently pious*:—to *go before* their people in this as well as every other department of Christian character. Every unconverted minister will probably prove a curse rather than a blessing to the Church. Every minister of feeble, wavering, and dubious piety, even though learned and eloquent, will be likely to be of little use, and to have little comfort in his work. And when large numbers of unsanctified men are introduced into the sacred office in any church, her true glory will have departed. Doctrinal error will soon insidiously creep in. The benefit even of the portion of truth which they preach, will in most cases be counteracted by pride, ambition, unsanctified speculation, heresy, or unsavoury deportment; and the best interests of the “commonwealth of Israel” will perish in their hands. Whatever else, then, is overlooked, or slightly regarded, in selecting and training candidates for the sacred office, personal piety—piety deep, undoubted, and exemplary—is the first, most important, and most radical of all qualifications. If there be any serious doubt, as to this

point, no young man, however otherwise promising, ought ever to be encouraged, for one moment, in seeking the sacred office. Especially ought nothing of this kind to be whispered to him until the reality of his conversion has borne the test of a number of months. I have now in my recollection cases in which a contrary policy was pursued, and in which the results were painful and melancholy in a high degree. But,

2. After the best endeavours to ascertain the reality of this first and greatest qualification, no consideration should induce any one to be satisfied with mere piety, however decisive and fervent. The possession of GOOD NATURAL TALENTS should also be deemed equally indispensable. The truth is, a man of a weak, childish mind, though he were as pious as *Gabriel*, can never make a respectable or truly useful minister, and ought never to be invested with the sacred office at all. With respect to a large portion of the duties pertaining to that office, he is utterly unqualified to perform them; and he will be in constant danger of rendering both himself and his office contemptible. Here again my recollection, for the last thirty years, furnishes me with no inconsiderable list of cases truly instructive and admonitory in their character. Cases in which, at the instance of partial friends, who seemed to think that apparent piety was the *only* thing to be regarded,—large expenditures were incurred in training up young men for the sacred desk, who, after reaching it, gave but too much evidence that, if they had been pious, exemplary *mechanics*, or *merchants*, they would have served the cause of Christ far more effectually than as public teachers; and who have continued, for many years,

through entire incompetence, to be a hindrance rather than helpers of the great cause which they appeared really to love. It might seem almost an insult to common sense to say a word by way of enforcing this point, did we not frequently see enlightened individuals, and public bodies, acting as if they still doubted of its truth!

3. PRUDENCE is another quality which ought ever to be deemed indispensable in those who are selected and encouraged to go forward as candidates for the holy ministry. A youth may possess unfeigned piety, and talents far above mediocrity, and yet be so strikingly deficient in dignity, in common sense, in regard to the decencies and proprieties of life, in one word, in practical wisdom, as to be totally unfit for the work of the ministry. It is not enough, therefore, in bringing forward candidates for the holy office, in such a day as this, to ascertain that they give satisfactory evidence of genuine piety, and vigorous talents. If they be characteristically rash, imprudent, censorious, strikingly vain, or ridiculously eccentric, my judgment would be decisive against encouraging them to think of the Gospel ministry. I should consider a manifest, striking defect in these particulars, as a barrier in the way quite as insurmountable as the want of piety:—and, if I mistake not, the New Testament will fully bear me out in this decision.

4. It is manifest that none ought to be selected and trained by the Church, unless they appear to be SINCERE FRIENDS TO HER DOCTRINE AND ORDER. I am aware that young men recently brought into the visible church, and seeking an education with a view to the Gospel ministry, cannot be supposed to have stu-

died either systematic theology, or church government; and therefore, I would never call upon them, previously to engaging in professional study, to subscribe a creed, or to give any pledge of future conformity to our public formularies. These subjects it will be their duty afterwards impartially to examine. Of course, to call upon them to commit themselves prior to an examination would be preposterous in itself, and might be a snare to conscience.

When they shall have honestly and impartially examined, if they cannot agree with our ecclesiastical standards, I should be the last to criminate or reproach them. The moment they have thus decided, let them quietly and honourably withdraw. But it sometimes happens that a young man, who has been selected as a candidate for the ministry, even before he begins his academical course, and frequently at the outset of his theological studies, is heard to ridicule the doctrines of our Confession of Faith, and to speak with disrespect, if not with contempt, of our Form of Government. Such young men, surely, ought never to be taken up as candidates for the ministry by any of our Presbyteries; and especially ought never to be sustained by funds derived from the Presbyterian Church. It cannot be said of *them* that they have not yet made up their minds on these subjects; for, unless they are rash and presumptuous to a most criminal degree, they *have* made them up, or they surely could not denounce and ridicule the doctrines and order of that church which is daily sustaining them, and among whose teachers and rulers they are preparing to take their station! No one abhors more than I do an inquisitorial interference with the rights of private judgment in ingenuous

youth. It is only when any publicly proclaim themselves as recreant from the faith and order of the mother who is nurturing them for her own service, that I would take them at their word, and allow them to find other patrons. It argues, indeed, great coarseness and torpor of the moral sense in such youth, when they are willing to stand in this relation to a Church to which they are not cordial friends; but it argues no less infatuation in the Church herself to expend her means in the support of enemies, not even in disguise. When she consents to do this, she is unfaithful to her trust, and is, no doubt, sowing the seeds of internal mischief of the most distressing and dangerous character.

If these things be so, who does not see that, in the present age of *educational* enterprise for the Church; when hundreds of youth are training for the sacred work, and hundreds more are eagerly sought and prayed for, to carry on the Lord's harvest; when Presbyteries and Committees, in every part of our ecclesiastical bounds, are busy in the work of selecting and bringing forward young men to "bear the vessels of the Lord;"—who does not see that the considerations of which I have been speaking—always highly important, are *now* invested with a double importance, nay, with a tenfold greater interest than ever before in our day? Unless we examine with caution, and select with sacred care; unless we take counsel of our fears, as well as of our sanguine hopes; unless we learn the unwelcome art of repressing the forward, and rejecting the unworthy—as well as the more pleasing task of encouraging the modest and timid; we shall, in the midst of all our honest zeal for the cause of Christ, be in danger of filling the

Church with drones and pests, with clerical ignorance, imbecility, heresy and carnal ambition, while we fondly dream that we are preparing faithful labourers for her service.

Be not in haste, then, my Christian brethren, when precious revivals of religion have hopefully brought a number of amiable young men into the Redeemer's kingdom;—be not in haste to hold up to the mass of them without distinction, the offer and the prospect of being ministers. Wait patiently. Discriminate carefully. Remember that the object in view is not to gratify personal feelings, or to soothe parental partialities; but to search out, and bring forward for the service of the Church, not the *greatest possible number*, but the most *select and excellent choice* of the sanctified youth of each flock.

But momentous as is the task of *selecting* candidates for the holy ministry, no less momentous is the trust of ORDERING THEIR PREPARATORY STUDIES, and presiding over their whole professional training. And in reference to the latter point as well as the former, the present state of our Church appears to me to call for the most profound and solemn consideration.

It cannot be disguised, and ought to be known to all who wish well to the Presbyterian Church, that only a very small part of our candidates for the ministry can be prevailed upon to go through a regular or adequate course of study preparatory to the sacred office. This is an evil of deep and painful import. In spite of every remonstrance that has been urged against it, both by judicatories and individuals, it does not appear in the least degree to diminish. And if it should go on to prevail, it is not possible to mea-

sure the mischief which will be likely to arise from it to the Church of God.

When Theological Seminaries were erected at great expense, for the benefit of those who wished to pursue a course of study for the holy ministry, it was taken for granted that they would generally and eagerly avail themselves of the advantages thus afforded; and that the Church would soon be furnished with a generation of ministers who should manifest the superior training under which they had been placed. It is deeply to be lamented that this expectation has not been more happily realized. But so it is:—and unless public sentiment, the most potent of all earthly rulers—should be made, by the divine blessing, to effect the conquest of an evil which has set at defiance every other influence, we must sit down, for aught I can see, under the humiliating impression that the Church has provided these facilities, so far as respects a majority of her sons, in a great measure in vain.

The reasons of this unhappy fact among our candidates, are various. Some plead for such an abridgment of their studies as they know to be injurious, on account of the want of *pecuniary support* for a more extended course. In other words, they think it right to enter on the duties of the sacred office, but half qualified for their discharge, because the providence of God has interposed an obstacle in their way, which a little patience and perseverance, or a little humility in accepting aid, would enable them to surmount. And thus, instead of struggling with some real difficulties, perhaps for a couple of years longer, they make the ignoble choice of saddling themselves on the Church as incompetent drivellers through

their whole lives! Others plead as an apology for shortening their course of study, *the urgent call for ministers*;—the wants of the heathen world; the great scarcity of gospel labourers in the domestic field;—and the perishing necessities of unevangelized millions; not recollecting, as before suggested, that, even in the days of the Apostle *Paul*, when the scarcity of ministers, on the one hand, and the darkness and misery of the world, on the other, were far greater than at present, the sending forth of “novices” as ministers was solemnly interdicted;—and forgetting, too, that the usefulness of the Gospel labourers, in every department of service, depends much more on their *character* than on their *numbers*. A third class are hurried on prematurely to the pulpit by the *importunity of relatives and friends*, who cannot be made to see the importance of more protracted study; and who feel a sort of childish ambition to see their youthful friends engaging as early in their public work as some others of whom they have read. And not only have youthful candidates, in all the fond inexperience of their juvenile feelings, yielded to this silly importunity; but venerable ministers have not been ashamed to countenance it, and to prevail on Presbyteries to become parties in the infatuation. Others again, when they had but little more than half completed their proper course of study, have been prevailed upon by Missionary Associations, immediately to break off, and repair, with all the meagerness of their furniture, to the domestic or foreign field of labour;—forgetting that every day’s deduction from the amount of regular and adequate study, will probably lead to a corresponding deduction from the amount of their usefulness even among the heathen,

as long as they live; and that if missionary boards, by fixing their attention too exclusively on a single point, really injure the cause which they desire to serve, this is no reason why youthful candidates for the sacred office, who ought to calculate, in the fear of God, not for the present moment only, but for life, should become willing partners in the injury. And, finally, some allow an indiscreet *matrimonial engagement* to embarrass their whole course; to interpose an obstacle of the most intractable kind in the way of continued study; and even to make an assumption of the pastoral office, before their studies are half finished, almost indispensable.

From one or another of these causes, our candidates for the ministry, in all our Theological Seminaries, as well as those engaged in more private study, are daily breaking off their studies in the midst, before they have become well versed in any department of those studies, and before they have so much as entered on some important departments. The consequence is, that they go forth mere sciolists in Biblical and Theological knowledge; in a great measure unprepared to defend any one article of faith or order against the attacks of a subtle adversary; destitute of those resources which will enable them, from year to year, to "feed the people with knowledge and with understanding;" altogether unqualified to be the guides and counsellors of the Church in cases of delicacy, and seasons of trial; wholly unprepared to be a powerful auxiliary to the cause of religion through the medium of the press: prone to be "carried about with every wind of doctrine," and liable to become the dupes of every plausible projector of novel opinions, and schemes for doing good, that may obtrude

himself on a community. What must the consequence be to the Church, when a considerable portion of those who are to be her teachers and guides, go forth to their work thus unqualified? Is it possible that they should be "workmen that need not be ashamed," prepared "rightly to divide the word of truth?" Can we imagine that such "babes" in Christ, and in scriptural knowledge, however warm their hearts, will be able to "go in and out" before a Christian people with wisdom, dignity and usefulness; to explain the doctrines of grace; to defend them against ingenious adversaries; to meet the learned caviller; to counsel anxious inquirers, in all the variety and mazes of their difficulties; and to administer safe and seasonable consolation to the perplexed and doubting Christian? We might as well expect "to gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles." No, it cannot be. And if the evil of which I speak continues to prevail, our ministry, instead of rising in intellectual and moral power with the state of society, and the demands of the age, will more and more depreciate, to the deplorable detriment of Christ's kingdom, and to the mortification of those who desire to see the Church adorned with able, faithful, and well furnished pastors.

I am well aware that insisting on this point, will be regarded by some as an effort of "old school" prejudice and formality; and that, while learning in a *few* will be admitted to be important, the plan of conducting the *great mass* of our candidates for the ministry to the pulpit by a very summary course, is supposed by many to be expedient, and indeed required, in the present state of the Church and the world. I answer, however urgent may be the demand for mi-

nisters, it is infatuation to take this method of meeting it. It were just as rational, when a direful pestilence was raging, to send out among the people, under the name and guise of physicians, large bodies of rash and ignorant young men, who would be likely to kill ten times as many as they cured.

Do you ask me, my Christian friends, what remedy can be applied to this evil? I answer, there seems to be no hope from the ordinary application of ecclesiastical authority. The highest judicatory of our Church has remonstrated and recommended in vain. The wisdom and firmness of a few Presbyteries will avail nothing, while others stand ready to license and ordain those whom their neighbours would refuse. The wisest and best men in our Church have entreated and mourned; but still the evil has continued to prevail. PUBLIC SENTIMENT, in relation to this matter, must be reformed, or the case is hopeless. The Churches can apply the most effectual remedy, by frowning on such a course, and refusing to countenance those who thus set at defiance all Scripture and all experience. It is as much the *interest* as it is the *duty* of every Church to do this. Were the Churches faithfully to act thus, we should not so often witness the melancholy spectacle of young men who were highly acceptable and popular when they first settled in a pastoral charge, and who continued so for a few weeks, declining in acceptance almost immediately; and before they had well passed what may be called the "honey-moon" of the pastoral marriage, sinking in public estimation, and, after a speedy dismissal, hanging in the market, like tainted meat, without attraction, and without an offer. If the Churches did but understand their true interest in

this thing, they would as carefully guard against the choice of novices and sciolists to be their teachers, as they would avoid young men suspected of unsound opinions. For, truly, if a young man has passed through only a hurried and superficial course of study, what security can any Church have that he will not completely "run out," as to resources and acceptance, in less than six months; or become, immediately, a mere puppet, to be moved by some neighbour, of more art and less honesty than himself? One thing is certain, that a man who has himself learned but little can teach but little; and that one of the most deplorable sources of disappointment in a stated ministry, is the mis-direction and inadequacy of preparatory study.

The time prescribed for a "full course," in most of our Theological Seminaries, is three years. This period is not, indeed, long enough, especially where the candidate is quite youthful, say below twenty-one years of age. But it is probably quite as long as the present generation can be prevailed upon to sanction. But, among the many things, in relation to this matter, to be regretted, one is, that even of those who *profess* to continue their studies regularly through this period, by unwisely soliciting and *obtaining license* at the end of the *second year*, their third and last year is in a great measure destroyed as a season of regular study. This step is taken sometimes to gratify the impatience of friends, who are often over-anxious to see and hear in the pulpit those candidates in whom they take a peculiar interest:—and sometimes it is resorted to as a means of ekeing out a scanty support. In either case, the effect seldom fails to be unhappy. If an individual, in these circum-

stances, be tolerably acceptable as a preacher, he will be so much solicited to preach, and the interruptions thence arising will be so numerous, as to render all regular application to study thereafter next to impossible. I have scarcely ever known an instance of a candidate who was licensed to preach at the beginning of the third year of his course, who did not find, whatever might have been his hopes and promises beforehand, that the death warrant of the studies of that year was irrevocably sealed.

In a word, it may be laid down as a fixed principle of ecclesiastical duty and policy, that the moment we give up our ancient practice of regular and thorough training for the sacred office;—the moment we adopt the habit of introducing to our pulpits, and clothing with the sacred office, unqualified, superficial, empty men,—however fervent; it will be a miserable omen of our future prospects as a Church. The inconsiderate and the narrow minded may rejoice at such a prospect, as if it were a return to the simplicity of primitive times; but the truly enlightened and wise will mourn over it, as a departure from the principles of common sense, and practical wisdom, which all Scripture and all experience concur in pronouncing injurious, and inevitably fatal, in the end, to the best interest of Zion. It is well known that our Methodist and Baptist brethren were for a considerable time, to a great extent regardless of human learning, if not unfriendly to it, in their candidates for the holy ministry. But it is equally well known that both these denominations of Christians have felt the importance, for a number of years past, of directing increased attention to this subject; and of providing colleges and Theological Seminaries for their regular training.

And it will also be remembered, as already hinted more than once, in the course of these letters—that the “new-side” brethren, in the old dispute which long ago agitated and divided our Church, when calm reflection succeeded to the strong impulse of passion under which they had acted,—became sensible that they had not paid due regard to preparatory study for the ministry; that they had hastily licensed and ordained men, who were not qualified for the sacred office; and were at great pains and expense for establishing a wiser and better plan. Indeed it may safely be asserted that no denomination or party, ever allowed themselves to license, or to send forth invested with the office of teaching and ruling in the Church, raw, half-trained, ignorant, and self-sufficient men, however zealous they might be, without eventual mortification and disappointment; without ultimately finding that they had done more harm than good to the cause of Christ, and had degraded themselves in the eyes of all enlightened observers.

Nothing is further from my view, my Christian brethren, than to plead for raising up as Gospel ministers a set of learned, heartless drones, who will study more to shine as scholars than to “win souls to Jesus Christ.” The men whom I wish and pray may be trained for the service of the Church, are men of devoted and fervent piety; enlightened and warm friends to revivals of religion; men qualified and disposed to take an active part in forwarding all the laudable Christian institutions of the day; and, at the same time, so well instructed and solidly judicious; so intimately acquainted with the Bible, with the system of grace, with the history of the Church, and with the human heart, as to be prepared at once

with enlightened discrimination and zeal, to promote all that is good, and to discern and resist every thing of a contrary tendency, whether it appear in the form of an "angel of light" or of darkness. Such is the character of the ministry indispensably, I may say, *peculiarly* needed at the present day, by every church which wishes to take a large and active part in the conversion of the world. And I fully believe that the day has come when no other ministry than such as I have described, will command the respect of the wise and the good, or really promote the interests of "pure and undefiled religion." It is not denied that men of very small knowledge, and of quite as little prudence,—provided they be truly pious, ardent in their temperament, and impressive in their elocution, may excite, and perhaps greatly excite, popular assemblies, for a short time; may even become instrumental in producing considerable awakenings; and be, for a few weeks or months, borne on the shoulders of the populace. But will this last for a single year? Can it be imagined that such persons are qualified to be stated pastors? Can they be expected to instruct, to unite, and to build up the people, as well as to rouse and collect them? Is it possible that they should bring forth, from Sabbath to Sabbath, what is necessary to meet the necessities of the various classes of their hearers; to convince the gainsayers, to enlighten the anxious and the doubting, wisely and seasonably to give each one his portion, and to feed and edify the people of God? None but those who shut their eyes against all reason and all experience, can expect such a result. Ecclesiastical partisans may fondly imagine that they are promoting the Redeemer's kingdom by rapidly multi-

plying ministers *almost at any rate*. But it is just as certain that, if they act upon this principle, they are making work for bitter repentance, as it is that the relation between cause and effect is indissoluble.

The community stands in no need of any addition to the numbers of ignorant, superficial, incompetent ministers of the Gospel. They are multiplied quite fast enough by other denominations. Our system, in its essential structure, calls for a ministry in whom fervent piety, and ample intellectual, literary and theological furniture are united. But, besides the character of our system, the period in which we live demands such a ministry, more imperatively than any preceding period. The state of society calls more loudly every day, for mature scholars, able divines, and powerful writers. Such men have it in their power to do far more good than any others. And when our ecclesiastical judicatories, or our individual churches forget or disregard this fact, they are undoubtedly trifling with the best interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. The following summary, then, of the suggestions contained in this letter, I could wish to see inscribed on the walls of every Theological Seminary and of every church;—on every place of meeting of all our ecclesiastical judicatories;—and on the heart of every professing Presbyterian.

1. Do not imagine that every pious young man is called to be a minister. Many to whom God has given his grace, can serve him better out of the ministry than in it.

2. Let those only among our converted youth be prompted and encouraged to seek the holy ministry, who, in addition to undoubted piety, have good ta-

lents, prudence, and those physical capabilities which qualify them in some good degree to be public instructors.

3. Let no young man be, on any account, taken up by any Presbytery, or Education Society, in connexion with the Presbyterian Church, who has *made up*, and *publicly expresses* an opinion hostile to our public formularies.

4. Let every candidate for the ministry, to whom it is practicable, be persuaded to go through a complete course of academical and collegial study, preparatory to the study of theology. Upon the character of this literary and scientific foundation, more of the solidity and success of his after course depends, than he can now possibly conceive. He who slights this part of his course cheats himself, and cheats the Church of God.

5. Let no youth who has devoted himself to the ministry, diminish aught from a full and regular course of three years' theological study. Let the infatuated habit of lopping off a portion, and sometimes a large portion of this time, be frowned upon, prohibited, and as far as possible, banished from the Church.

6. Let there be one combined and determined resolution, on the part of all our judicatories, and all our members, to put down the system of premature licensures and ordinations. They are working so much harm to the Church that they ought no longer to be sustained. If young men cannot be prevailed upon in this matter by considerations addressed to their understandings and their hearts, let the judicatories of the Church save them from their own infatuation by authority; and if this cannot be exercised,

let the individual churches manifest to such young men *their* disapprobation, by withholding their countenance, and resolving that they will not have "babes to teach and rule over them."

Princeton, April, 1833.

LETTER XIV.

Religious Education of the Children of the Church.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

THE topics on which I have taken the liberty to address you, in the preceding letters, are such as appear to me essential to involve the peace and even the continued union of our Church. On these I have enlarged more, perhaps, than to some appeared necessary. My only apology is, that my intense solicitude for your welfare, and my estimate of the importance of the several topics, insensibly led me on to an extent of discussion not originally intended.

There are several other subjects, not precisely of the same class, yet scarcely less important, and even vital in their character, on which it is my wish to make a few remarks, before I bring to a close this "labour of love." One of the most interesting of these subjects is that which relates to FIDELITY IN THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF YOUR CHILDREN. Among all the duties incumbent on the professed followers of Christ, I scarcely know of any one more neglected than this; and none, the neglect of which tends more directly and vitally to injure both the neglected individuals, and the church to which they belong. It is too plain to be made the subject of argument that if the Church, as such, is bound to maintain in their purity the truth and order of the Gospel; if she is bound to defend the genuine doctrines and discipline of the house of God against all gainsayers, and to transmit them uncorrupted to posterity;—she is, of course,

bound carefully to impart a knowledge of these things to her children, that they may transmit them to theirs, and so on to the latest generation. "These things," said Jehovah of old, to his covenant people, "These things which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." We, as Presbyterians, profess to believe that the system of doctrine exhibited in our Confession of Faith is the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and that the form of government and discipline set forth in our ecclesiastical constitution, is that which the Bible warrants. Now, if we really believe this; and if one grand purpose for which the Church was instituted is that she may preserve and transmit pure and entire all such religious truth, worship and ordinances as Christ hath revealed in his word, ought she not, conscientiously, to train up all the children and young people within her bosom, not only in general in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord," but also in the knowledge of those peculiar views of truth and order which she regards as scriptural and important? When we neglect this, we not only sin against the best interest of our children, but we pursue a course which is adapted to weaken and eventually to scatter and destroy the Church herself; or, at any rate, to take away all her intelligence, zeal and strength as a witness for Christ. Children are the hope of the Church as well as of the state. Of course, if they are not prepared to come in, and take the places of their parents, when they cease from their labours, by whom shall we expect the purity and activity of the body of Christ to be sustained!

It is deeply to be regretted that this negligence has so far obtained in many of the churches of our denomination in the United States. In this day of Christian zeal and effort, when the spirit of God is poured out in such copious measures upon young as well as old, and when the motives to fidelity in instructing our children and youth are becoming every day more obvious and powerful; it would seem as if in many of our churches, the faithful training of young people in the knowledge of scriptural doctrine, were more and more declining. The excellent compends of Gospel doctrine, sanctioned and carefully taught by our fathers, are in a great measure neglected, as there is reason to fear, by many pastors and church sessions. The general principles of religion only, which are common to all Protestant denominations, are imparted to our youth, and that in a superficial manner, and the whole system of instruction so conducted as to leave them destitute of any distinguishing views of doctrine or order; and to train them up in that ignorance of discriminating gospel truth, which will prepare them to be "carried about by every wind of doctrine," or perhaps, in the end, to be drawn away from all the fundamental principles of our holy religion, and allured, it may be, into open infidelity.

I am aware that many serious people profess to be of the opinion, that it is improper to preoccupy the minds of children with any particular mode of religious belief. They allege that they ought to be taught to believe in the Christian religion: to read the Bible;—and to reverence those general doctrines of the Gospel in which all Christians agree; but that instilling into their minds the peculiarities of any one denomination, is adapted to fill them with prejudices,

and to interfere with that impartial examination of the relative claims of all denominations, which it will be incumbent upon them to make when they reach mature age, and begin to take their stand in the Church of God. However specious this plea may appear in the view of some, it will by no means stand the test either of common sense or of scriptural examination. Will any contend that it is improper to pre-occupy the minds of our children with *any kind of truth*? Is it improper to instil into their minds, with the earliest dawn of reason, and anterior to all experience, that fire will burn them; that if they fall into deep water, they will be drowned; that lying is infamous; and that if they commit theft or murder, they will be punished? Would it not be highly desirable that the deepest impression of these truths and of a hundred others which we cannot enumerate, should be made upon their minds as early as possible? Could any wise parent desire that his child should be kept in ignorance of these things, under the notion that he did not wish him to be filled with *prejudices*—until he acquired the knowledge of them by painful and perilous experience? Surely not. Would he not rather say, that the more completely he could fill his youthful mind with the knowledge of errors and dangers, and with a desire to avoid them, the better? Precisely so is it with regard to all moral and religious errors. If our children were always inclined, by nature, to embrace and obey the truth, our constant efforts to explain and recommend it, would be less important. But the fact is *just the reverse*. Their invariable tendency, left to themselves, is to error rather than truth. Common sense, then, tells us that the more completely we can put them on their

guard against every species of mistake and danger, and the more entirely we can fill their minds with truth, that is, with just apprehensions of the God who made them, of their own character, and of the way of duty and happiness, the more we shall be likely to promote their safety and enjoyment. If this were in all cases successfully done, how many false steps; how many aching hearts; how many disgraceful falls, on the part of children and youth, might be prevented? Accordingly the Scriptures, with peculiar solemnity and force, enjoin upon us this duty. The inspired command is, "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Surely even prejudices in favour of truth and righteousness will be so far from *injuring* our children, that if we can instil them into their minds beforehand, and thus forestal the allurements of error, we shall confer upon them a rich and lasting *benefit*. Nay, to omit this, is as cruel as it is unwise.

Not only are *parents*, then, bound, as far as possible, to guard their children against error, and to fill their minds with what they deem just sentiments, on all important subjects, and especially on subjects of the most vital importance, as early as they are capable of receiving them;—but the *Church* also, as such, is bound to see that this momentous trust is faithfully discharged, by her appropriate officers,—by instructing and stimulating parents to perform their duty; by diligently conducting *Bible-classes*; by causing the *Catechisms* of the Church to be carefully committed to memory, and statedly recited by all the children under her supervision; by making the *Sabbath-school* instruction as rich and faithful as possible; and, in

short, by the diligent use of all suitable means, to train up children and youth in an enlightened attachment to those principles of doctrine and order which the Church, their moral mother, believes to be taught and enjoined in the word of God. It is really distressing to observe in how many of our churches this great duty is almost entirely neglected. The noble *Catechisms*, drawn up, I had almost said, by the collected wisdom and piety of the seventeenth century; which our fathers publicly adopted, and placed among our Formularies, as manuals for the instruction of youth, have in a great measure passed out of view in hundreds of congregations nominally Presbyterian. Indeed the false liberality of the present day has taken so strong a hold of many serious minds, in our communion, that they turn away, with fixed purpose, from those doctrinal manuals which the Church has sanctioned, as contracted and obsolete; and think it right, upon principle, to put nothing into the hands of their children but those general and superficial compends which are equally adapted to all denominations, and which, of course, will inculcate none of the peculiarities of their own. The consequence is, that these children grow up without any intelligent acquaintance with the distinguishing tenets of the Church of their fathers, and of course without any motive or disposition to adhere to them. Hence, when they come to adult years, they are just as apt to go off to other societies, and sometimes to those of the most corrupt character, as to remain Presbyterians. If we wish our children to become Pelagians, Universalists, or Socinians, we cannot take a course more directly adapted to attain the object, than to adopt the plan just mentioned; to instruct

them in some general principles only of our common Christianity, leaving them under all the disadvantages of inexperience, and all the ardour of youthful appetite and passion; to spell out the distinguishing system of doctrine and order with which they ought to connect themselves. In this situation, they will not only be *liable* to go astray, but the *probability* is that they will make a wrong choice, perhaps a fatally wrong one. If we could unfold the history of many Presbyterian families, we should, no doubt, find the entire abandonment of the second generation to moral and religious error, and their deplorable shipwreck of the advantages transmitted to them by their parents, manifestly attributable to the want of enlightened fidelity on the part of those parents, in regard to religious instruction. If intelligent Christians will not laboriously endeavour to pre-occupy the minds of their children with discriminating truth, it will be found that, long before they arrive at the age in which they are capable of making an enlightened inquiry, and an impartial choice of a religious system for themselves, they will be apt to have imbibed prejudices, and to have formed connexions from which, you might just as well hope to bend the mature oak of the forest, as to think of turning them. The idea of leaving our children to choose their religion when they come to mature age, is of all delusions one of the most unreasonable and fatal. Every child of apostate *Adam*, I repeat, is *by nature a heretic*, and if left to himself, will probably take some heretical course; and long before the age of intelligent inquiry arrives, may be irrecoverably sold, by his depraved propensities, to fatal error.

I would say, then, to every Presbyterian parent—

“If you desire your children to be happy, here and hereafter, or the Church to which you belong to prosper, faithfully train them up, from their mother’s lap, in that system of Gospel truth and order which you verily believe to be taught in the word of God. But be not contented with mere doctrinal instruction. Take unwearied pains to instil into their minds the sentiments of practical piety. Pray with them, and for them, and teach them to pray! Not only warn, but restrain them from plunging into those unhallowed amusements which the children of this world love, but which are deeply hostile to all real religion. Be not afraid of the charge of ‘sectarianism.’ If by ‘sectarianism’ be meant a strict adherence to Scriptural Christianity, I hope you will not shrink from the charge, but rather glory in being yourselves, and in training up your children to be such ‘sectarians’ as the apostles and primitive Christians were.” And to every Presbyterian pastor and elder I would say—“As ever you wish the Church committed to your charge to grow in solid enlightened piety, and to be built up under your watchful labours, bestow unwearied attention on the children of the Church. If you consider yourselves as witnesses for Christ, leave no effort unapplied to train up all the youth committed to your care to be equally intelligent and faithful witnesses. For this purpose bring them all as early and as thoroughly as possible under the inspection and instruction of the Church. Put the BIBLE into their hands, and teach them to study and revere it as the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Put into their hands also those *Catechisms*, and other digested summaries of Bible truth, which the Church has sanctioned as ma-

nuals of elementary Christian knowledge, that their memories may be stored with gospel doctrine in such a plain and simple form as will be likely never to be forgotten. Endeavour to make them familiar with some of the soundest and best treatises on doctrinal and practical religion, with which such men as *Flavel*, *Baxter*, *Boston*, *Doddridge*, *Edwards* and *Bellamy* have favoured the Church. Let the instructions of the *Sabbath-school*, too, be so conducted under your parental eye, as to minister to the same end. Never allow that institution, so transcendently important to the rising generation, to pass from your control into irresponsible and capricious hands. But ever keep it under the eye and the guidance of the pastor and Church session, and see that all its instructions be sound and edifying. In short, let your aim be to train up the children committed to your care, not as *bigots*, but as *enlightened Presbyterians*. Teach them to exercise the most cordial charity toward all of every name who bear the image of Christ; but peculiarly to venerate and love the Church in which they were born and baptized, and whose interest they are bound assiduously to promote. There is no part of your official duty to the Church of God more important, or more likely to produce a rich reward of the most precious fruit, than that which is here recommended. Other denominations around us are taking unwearied pains to produce an enlightened attachment on the part of their children to the religious connexions of their parents; and if *we* neglect to imitate their example, while *they* are built up, *we* shall be 'scattered and peeled,' and our beloved children become the prey of every vain delusion."

But there is one source of danger, my Christian

friends, to the children of some of you, concerning which I feel constrained to put you on your guard with more than common solemnity. I refer to that whole system of artful, proselyting allurements which is presented by the adherents to the CHURCH OF ROME, and which, in many parts of your bounds, must be considered as a source of real and formidable danger to inexperienced youth. Many good Presbyterians imagine that all alarm on this score, is in a great measure groundless, if not ridiculous. They suppose that the Popish controversy, however important in former times, or in other countries, has ceased to be worthy of particular attention on the part of American Christians. They believe that the system of superstition and of spiritual tyranny built up by the Church of Rome is so manifestly unscriptural, so unreasonable, so essentially subversive of all the rights of conscience, and of private judgment, and so utterly at war with all the interests of good morals, that no Protestant youth of the least intelligence can be in danger of becoming a convert to such a system. But the truth is, that although the real character of the system is just as unscriptural, unreasonable, tyrannical and pestiferous as has been mentioned;—it has attractions to which the young, the inexperienced, and the dissolute are peculiarly apt to fall a prey. It may be said, without impropriety, that the religion of the papacy is the religion of *human nature*. As Mr. *Toplady*, a pious clergyman of the Church of *England*, was accustomed to say, that “every man is born an *Arminian*;” so it has also been said with equal truth, that “every man is born a *Papist*.” That is, every man is born with such principles and tendencies as, left to themselves, will naturally con-

duct him to the substance of this system, as the foundation of his hope, and the guide of his life. Nothing is more certain than that the humbling, holy, self-denying plan of salvation by Christ as laid down in the Gospel, is, of all others the most distasteful to the natural feelings of the human heart. Pride, which was "the condemnation and snare of the devil," is equally "the condemnation and snare" of man. Guilty and polluted as sinful man is, he has an innate propensity to trust in himself, or in something done, or intended to be done, by himself, to avert the displeasure, and merit the favour of heaven. The hope of being in some way, his own saviour, is the last which the rebel abandons. He is willing to undergo the heaviest drudgery of rites and ceremonies; to submit to the severest penances; to make long journeys; to pay large sums of money; in short, to lacerate his body, and tax his purse, as far as he can bear, for a season, if by these he can enjoy the prospect of gaining the heavenly paradise. Any, or all these, he is willing to give for such a hope; but his *heart* he cannot, will not give.

Now to relieve this impenitent unyielding mind,—which is the mind of all men by nature—the system of *Romanism* comes in with the most plausible and fascinating allurements. It meets him with a system of most ingenious expedients for removing every difficulty, and satisfying every doubt, without the sacrifice of a single lust. It persuades him that if he be in regular communion with the Church of *Rome*, he is, of course, in real covenant and communion with Christ:—that there is no need of any radical change of heart, provided he will submit to the dictation and the discipline of the constituted authorities of that

church:—that by the sacrament of baptism a priest can regenerate him, and that no other change than that which baptism includes, need be sought or expected:—that by this baptism, when regularly administered, all his sins are taken away and he reconciled to God:—that by a regular attendance on the sacrament of *penance*, all his sins, committed from time to time, after baptism, may be certainly forgiven:—and that by a regular confession and absolution during life, and the reception of *extreme unction*, when he comes to die, he may be assured of everlasting happiness:—or that, at the worst, he will only be detained some time in *purgatory*;—which however, will be made very short and light, if he bequeath a handsome sum of money to the church, or if his surviving friends shall pay liberally for the prayers that may be said, and the masses performed for the rest of his soul. In short, according to this delusive system, a man might live and die without any real holiness, either of heart or of life, and yet, in spite of all that the Scriptures have so solemnly pronounced to the contrary, may be certain of seeing the Lord in peace. He need not trouble himself to read the Scriptures. The *church* reads, judges, and engages for him. The church has a stock of *merit* to dispose of, which, upon being properly *paid for*, she can set down to his account, and make available to his acceptance. So that, however multiplied and enormous his sins, and however obstinately and impenitently persisted in, to the last hour of his life;—still if he reverently submit to all the rites of the church, he is certain of salvation.—All this, provided he be *sincere* in his penances; and we all know what *Papal sincerity* means. If any should be at a loss on that point, let them read the

account which the learned and venerable Dr. *Mosheim* gives of the Jesuit doctrine of *philosophical sin* in his history of the seventeenth century. In support of these statements, testimony of the most unequivocal kind might be produced. I am aware, indeed, that several of them have been either denied, or ingeniously varnished over by artful apologists for these unhallowed claims:—but I am very sure that when the whole system, taken together, is compared with its most authentic vouchers, my representation will be completely borne out in every particular. At any rate, it is certain that the system has been and is so represented by a multitude of its actual ecclesiastical administrators, and so understood by the great mass of its devoted adherents.

Now, I ask, is it any wonder that multitudes, and especially of the young, the sanguine, and the inexperienced, are captivated with this system, and fly to it as a refuge from every doubt and fear? Is it any wonder that such a plausible and insinuating form of religion, adapted to conciliate the strongest propensities of our nature, and, at the same time, embodied in a gaudy, dazzling ritual—should be found to attract and beguile those who have not been faithfully put on their guard against its delusions? In truth, it would rather be wonderful if it were not so. And those parents who are not aware of the danger to which youth are peculiarly exposed, when brought in contact with this flattering, delusive plan of acceptance with God, are but poorly qualified to be their counsellors and guides in spiritual things.

These remarks, my Christian brethren, are something more than mere theory. It is well known to intelligent observers of passing scenes, that our Ro-

man Catholic neighbours, knowing where their strength lies, and deeply acquainted with human nature, are labouring, with unwearied diligence, *to obtain the education of as large a portion of our youth, as possible.* They multiply seminaries beyond the wants of their own population. They take the utmost pains to furnish them with popular, attractive teachers; to puff them liberally in newspaper advertisements; and to invite all denominations of Christians to come in and partake of their advantages. They promise to do more for their pupils, and upon far cheaper terms, than any of their neighbours. And they deceive the simple by the most solemn assurances, that no attempt to interfere with the religious opinions of their pupils will in any case be allowed. On the faith of such offers and assurances, Protestants, in large numbers, have been induced to send their children to these Popish institutions; and to subscribe, in some cases largely, toward their support, under the impression that they were thereby promoting a plan by no means sectarian, but perfectly liberal and benevolent in its whole design. It is against this deception that I wish to put Presbyterians on their guard. It may be safely asserted that pledges of total non-interference with the religious principles and connexions of children committed for education to the care of Papists, however absolute and solemn, are seldom, nay, strictly speaking, almost never redeemed. Of the truth of this assertion, it has fallen to my lot not only to *hear*, but to *know*, of the most flagrant and distressing examples. Indeed it is due to candour, and to the veracity of those who make such pledges, to say, that it is almost impossible they should be really and faithfully redeemed. The spirit of the

Papacy is a spirit of *proselytism* to the very core. The whole tendency of its rites is to dazzle and allure. It cannot be expected, or even requested, of the conductors of such seminaries as I have alluded to, that they should hide from the eyes of their pupils the rites and ceremonies of their own worship. Yet it is almost impossible that those rites should be even *witnessed* by youthful minds, from day to day, for a considerable time together, without mischief. The instructors, indeed, may so far keep their promise, as never to say a word to their pupils, which if heard, even by their parents themselves, would be construed into a direct violation of their engagement. But they can, systematically, pursue a course of treatment peculiarly affectionate and attractive toward those whom they wish to win. They can flatter, cajole, and ensnare them in ten thousand nameless and covert ways. They can manage so as to present some of their most peculiar rites and practices under very alluring aspects. They can contrive to give hints and inuendoes, and to make impressions in favour of what they wish to recommend, not only without words, but, perhaps, more powerfully without than with them. Of these unceasing artifices, pious, simple-hearted Protestants are not sufficiently aware; but Jesuits, and those who have imbibed Jesuitical maxims and principles, which, without injustice, may be said essentially to belong to the general system of Romanism,—understand them perfectly.

It is perfect infatuation, then, for Protestants, in any case, to expose their children to such a snare. For, on the one hand, I know of no Popish seminary in the United States which affords any advantage not to be obtained in an equal degree in Protestant insti-

tutions; and, on the other, I have seen, in so many instances, the most irreparable mischief done to the religious character of youth by committing their literary training to the hands of Roman Catholics, that I would lift up my voice, if it were possible, in every part of the United States, and warn all Protestants, and especially all Presbyterians, if they have the least regard to the everlasting well-being of their children, not to expose their tender years, and their forming minds, to an influence so likely to be followed by fatal injury. It is, no doubt, the duty of Christian parents to place their children in situations as favourable as possible to the development and culture of their intellectual powers. But they are still more solemnly bound to provide for the faithful and sound culture of their moral and religious principles, and to guard them with the utmost vigilance against those dazzling deceptions which cannot fail of putting the soul to hazard. If ever there was an instance of false and ruinous "liberality," it is that which will not believe the dangers of Popish instruction; which pronounces all opposition to it, and warning against it, "bigotry" and "persecution;" and which is ready to subject youth to the most formidable snare, rather than forego the tinsel advantages, which might be quite as well attained from other sources, without any countervailing peril. If you wish your children to be allured into the belief of "another Gospel" from that on which you profess to rest your own hopes; if you wish them to be betrayed into an abandonment of the right of private judgment, and a submission to the most degrading spiritual tyranny that ever held in chains the consciences of men, then send them for their education to Popish Seminaries.

Let none imagine that the system of Popery is either less corrupt, or less dangerous than it once was. Hear, on this subject, the opinion of the eloquent, pious, and learned *Robert Hall*, late of *Great Britain*, whose faithful warning is couched in the following strong language—"Popery still is, what it always was, a detestable system of impiety, cruelty, and imposture, fabricated by the father of lies. It combines the 'form of godliness' with a total 'denial of its power.' A heap of unmeaning ceremonies, adapted to fascinate the imagination, and engage the senses;—implicit faith in human authority, combined with an utter neglect of divine teaching;—ignorance the most profound, joined to dogmatism the most presumptuous;—a vigilant exclusion of Biblical knowledge, together with a total extinction of free inquiry;—present the spectacle of a religion lying in state, surrounded with the silent pomp of death. The very absurdities of such a religion render it less unacceptable to men whose decided hostility to truth inclines them to view with complacency whatever obscures its beauty, or impedes its operation. Of all the corruptions of Christianity which have prevailed to any considerable extent, Popery presents the most numerous points of contrast to the simple doctrines of the Gospel; and just in proportion as it gains ground, the religion of Christ must decline." Surely not at once to warn and to arm our children against this fascinating delusion, is the height of parental unfaithfulness and cruelty!

But it is not enough, my Christian brethren, that you forbear, upon principle, to commit the education of your children to Romish instructors. In the pre-

sent posture of the influence and efforts of that denomination of professing Christians, it is incumbent upon all who would be exemplary guardians of the best interests of their children, to make themselves acquainted with the Popish controversy; to be aware of the arts and plausible arguments by which the adherents of "the man of sin" are wont to "deceive the hearts of the simple;" and to arm themselves, not as theological polemics, but as enlightened, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, with those moral weapons, by which the adherents of the Papacy are refuted, and the "simplicity that is in Christ" established. Every age brings with it its peculiar dangers, and, of course, its peculiar duties. Among those which belong to the present period of the American Churches, we may confidently reckon such a degree of attention to the claims and corruptions of the Church of *Rome*, as will enable faithful witnesses of the truth to bear an enlightened testimony against them, and to guard the children of the Church against that "instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge."

It is not, however, against the superstitions and the corrupt allurements of the Papacy alone, that we ought to be diligent in arming and guarding our children. They are like lambs in the midst of wolves. On every side enemies and corrupters of the truth, and, of course, enemies and corrupters of souls, abound. They are in jeopardy every hour; but have neither the knowledge nor the experience to meet it with safety to their best interests. They ought, therefore, to be sent to *no institutions*, the conductors of which differ essentially from us in their views of Gospel truth, and will be likely to draw them away from the religion of their fathers. He is an infatu-

ated man who commits his children to such hands. "Parents must lay up for their children," in a moral and religious, as well as a temporal sense, or they will, probably, be undone. With respect to those parents who have no concern about their own religious interests, we cannot wonder that *they* have no anxiety in regard to those of their children. As little can we be surprised that those who consider the prosperity of the Church as a matter of small moment, should be reluctant to make any sacrifice of convenience or inclination for the sake of preparing their children to be sound and useful members of that hallowed body. But that professing Christians, who claim to love Christ, to love his Church, and to feel in any measure as they ought for the everlasting welfare of their children;—should permit themselves in providing for the education of those children, deliberately to prefer the *ornamental* to the *useful*, part of their training; and to select seminaries and teachers upon the avowed principle of making their moral and religious subordinate to their literary culture—is indeed humiliating! Never shall I forget the lamentation of one whom I must consider as a pious parent, who mourned over the deplorable consequences of such a course—and said, in all the bitterness of self-proach—"Alas! my unhappy mistake! I have been supremely intent on the literary improvement and fashionable accomplishments of my son; when I ought to have regarded, first of all his moral and religious principles. I was ambitious of having him *great*, when my highest desire ought to have been that he should be *good*. Upon this unchristian plan I acted; and now, I fear, he is ruined for both worlds!"

Princeton, April, 1833.

LETTER XV.

Doing good as a Church.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

USEFUL activity is the medicine of life. It is adapted to benefit the agent himself as much as the objects of his benevolent attention. No idle man can be either healthful, happy, or morally prosperous. To be stagnant is to be miserable, as well as useless. This is a law of our being, as invariable as it is unavoidable. And the same principle which applies so universally and essentially to our intellectual and physical structure, is no less applicable to our spiritual life. A torpid, inactive Christian, cannot be a prosperous one. The disciple of Christ cannot, if he would, "live to himself," without injuring his own soul. He *must* go out of himself, if he would attain moral health and comfort. He *must* take a deep interest in his Master's kingdom, and desire and seek to promote it;—he *must* love his fellow men, pray for them, labour to promote their holiness and happiness, in a word, be daily employed in doing good. This is necessary, not merely for the benefit of society, but for the spiritual health of the individual himself. It is not more certain that daily work nerves the arms, and invigorates the health of the labourer, and thus increases his personal enjoyment; than it is that habitual benevolent activity directly and essentially ministers to the Christian's own growth in grace:—or rather, to speak more properly, growth

in grace itself essentially *consists* in cultivating the spirit and habits which characterize the benevolent, prayerful, diligent, good-doing Christian. Wherein consists the health of the body, but in the lively, unobstructed, harmonious *action* of all the corporeal organs? So far as this is interrupted, disease must be the consequence. In like manner, wherein consists the real health of the soul, but in spiritual sensibility, and in the *daily exercise* of all appropriate and commanded graces, toward our Father in heaven, toward the Saviour and his kingdom, and toward all our fellow creatures?

You have, no doubt, anticipated me in applying these remarks to the Church of God—the body of professing Christians. What is true of individuals, is true of communities. A torpid, prayerless, inactive Church, however large, wealthy or splendid, cannot be a prosperous Church. Nay, however rich, extended, and outwardly flourishing it may be, if the spirit of ACTIVE GOOD-DOING be extinct in it, it is a DEAD CHURCH, and cannot fail of speedily becoming a mass of spiritual putrefaction. But, on the other hand, that Church which, in her collective capacity, is constantly employed in planning and labouring for the promotion of the great interests of knowledge, virtue, evangelical holiness, and salvation, is taking the most direct method to secure her own enjoyment, growth, and prosperity.

We have had occasion, more than once, in the preceding letters, to advert to the thought, that the great design of infinite wisdom in the institution of the Church, was that she might be every where instrumental in promoting the reign of truth and holiness among men. It was, no doubt, intended that she

should constantly seek the spiritual improvement and welfare of her own members; but also that she should labour to communicate the blessings of salvation to every part of the human family within her reach, with all the zeal and efficiency of *united effort*. The history of the Churches organized by the apostles affords unquestionable evidence that *they* so understood the design of their Master. From them the word of the Lord “sounded out” through all parts of the civilized world. Nor did this noble, disinterested missionary spirit cease to operate until they had become secularized and corrupted by a very different spirit. Accordingly, our venerable fathers of the Presbyterian Church, in the introduction to our Form of Government, justly remark, that “truth is in order to goodness, and the great touch-stone of truth is its tendency to promote holiness.” In conformity with this principle, they were no sooner organized than they began to direct their earnest attention to the great work of sending the Gospel to the destitute and the perishing. And in all ages, both in the old world and in the new, the Church of God has invariably flourished, in regard to her best interests, just in proportion to the degree in which she has devoted herself to the hallowed work of active Christian benevolence.

If this be so, then every Church ought to consider it as equally her duty and her interest, not merely to support, within her own bosom, all the divinely instituted ordinances of religion;—not merely to watch with fidelity over the purity and edification of her own immediate members;—but also to be indefatigably active in extending as widely as possible *to others* the true religion, with all its blessed concomitants

and benefits. She ought to regard it at once as a primary duty, and precious privilege, to be constantly employed in spreading the glorious Gospel from the rising to the setting sun. In a word, it ought to be the unceasing care of every Church of Christ, whatever denomination she may bear, or under whatever form she may be organized, not only to have light, and purity, and order, ever shining in her own dwellings; but also to "hold forth the word of life" for the benefit of "those who are without," and to send it forth far and wide to every creature within her reach. So manifest and so important is this duty, that if there were but one worshipping Christian congregation now on earth, that congregation ought to consider itself as solemnly bound to do all in its power for evangelizing the world; and ought to give itself no rest as long as any thing which it could possibly do towards the accomplishment of this object, remained undone. Before this position can be so much as questioned, we must renounce the spirit of the New Testament, and trample on the authority of our Master in heaven.

There are, at present, connected with the Presbyterian Church in the United States, nearly *two thousand preachers of the Gospel*; about *two thousand five hundred congregations*; and more than *two hundred thousand communicants*. In stating these numbers I do not mean to speak with scrupulous accuracy, but to make a representation sufficiently near the truth to serve my purpose. Now, suppose all the officers and judicatories, as well as the private members of this whole body to be engaged with unwearied diligence in the great work of Christian benevolence. Suppose our two thousand preachers *all* to possess,

in a good degree, the spirit of their Master, who "went about doing good." Suppose them to be employed, "in season and out of season," in proclaiming "the unsearchable riches of Christ" with wisdom, with affection, and with power. Suppose them in public and in private, in the pulpit, in the lecture-room, and "from house to house," to be indefatigable in calling men to repentance, and in publishing the glad tidings of mercy and love through a Redeemer. Suppose them to be all intent on promoting the intellectual and moral benefit of every class entrusted to their pastoral care, from lisping infancy to hoary age, and to be incessantly contriving, praying and labouring for their welfare. Suppose them habitually to meet their flocks with hearts not only full of love to the souls immediately committed to their charge; but also overflowing with benevolent regard to perishing millions in every part of the globe, and burning with desire for the conversion of the world. And suppose them, in the exercise of this great animating principle, to be, not only the sincere, but the zealous, active, and unwearied friends of all those benevolent enterprises of the day which have for their object to promote knowledge, purity, and order throughout society, and to gospelize the whole human race. Suppose this to be the case; and what an amount of good might not be accomplished, every year, by two thousand warm-hearted, active, unwearied labourers in the field of Christian benevolence, thus unceasingly occupied in scattering temporal and spiritual blessings around them!

If this were the character of our *pastors*, we might expect our *Church Sessions*, and the mass of the *Churches* over which they preside, to bear, in a good

degree, a corresponding stamp. The spirit of the several shepherds, if properly exhibited, could scarcely fail to pervade the flocks committed to their inspection. When the *eldership* assembled in their respective parochial judicatories, from week to week, to consult respecting the edification of the respective Churches committed to their care, such questions as the following would constantly arise, and would be discussed with solemnity and with prayer:—"What can be done to promote the reign of pure and undefiled religion in the midst of us? What to secure the best interests of our children and youth? What to render our Sabbath-Schools, and Bible classes, and Catechetical instruction more useful and extensive? What to promote the cause of temperance? What to extend among young and old, genuine evangelical knowledge and piety? What to rouse among the people a spirit of active Christian benevolence? What for contributing our proportion, and, if possible, more than our proportion, of means, toward the conversion of the world?"—Animated with this spirit, and intent on such objects, every Presbyterian Church in the United States, would be an organized society for spreading the Gospel; for sending the word of life, and the herald of salvation to the destitute and the perishing:—and every one who united himself with such a Church would feel that he was becoming "a member for life" of a body perpetually consecrated, in its very nature, to the great work of "doing good" to mankind.

Again, when ministers and elders filled with the spirit which I have described, came to meet in *Presbytery*, two or three times a year,—what a delightful spectacle might they not be expected to exhibit!

Here, as in their own parishes, they would, of course, come together to take counsel and labour for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. This body, however, being more numerous than the Church session; and the members being drawn from different districts of the Church, might be expected to bring with them a larger amount of the hallowed spirit in question, and to have their zeal kindled into a brighter flame by the influence of a more extended Christian communion. In this judicatory, the representatives of fifteen or twenty churches might be expected to make it their main object in coming together to "lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes" of Zion; to hold up each other's hands, and to encourage each other's hearts in forming and executing plans for the spread of the Gospel; in a word, by preaching, praying and conferring together, to gain a deeper impression of the value of the Gospel; a more heart-felt sense of their obligation to send it far and wide; and a new unction of love and zeal to animate them in their hallowed work. Such meetings, instead of being a burthen to the congregations in which they were held, would be anticipated with deep interest; would be enjoyed as seasons of peculiar and refreshing Christian fellowship; and might be expected to be the means of conferring rich blessings on many individuals, both saints and sinners, whenever they occurred.

Of the same character, but marked with still more enlarged views, and more deep feeling, might we expect the meeting of every *Synod* to prove. In this judicatory, from three to six or eight Presbyteries, united in one body, and comprising the ministers and elders representing, perhaps, from eighty to a hun-

dred churches, assemble, annually, to review the proceedings of Presbyteries and to take order for promoting the peace, the purity, and the edification of their portion of the "body of Christ." Now suppose in this larger judicatory, the same spirit of GOOD-DOING to reign which we have imagined to govern in the minds of the individual pastors and the single churches. Suppose, after despatching with fidelity and wisdom all the cases of discipline and ecclesiastical order which came before them; or rather in the midst of what might be called the ordinary and routine business, their counsels and prayers were directed to increased efforts for promoting the revival of practical religion; to the excitement of new zeal for improving Christian education; to the supply of destitute settlements with Gospel ordinances; and to the adoption of all practicable means for sending the "light of life" to those who are "perishing for lack of vision." Over such counsels and labours of a venerable Synod, there would be "joy in heaven;" and we might anticipate great joy as likely to flow from them throughout the habitations of Zion on earth.

To complete the system of counsel and co-operation, the *General Assembly* convenes every year, to look over the whole Church, from *New Hampshire* to *Florida*, and from the *Atlantic* to *Missouri*;—to issue all appeals and references which may be brought from inferior judicatories; and to recommend and endeavour to carry into execution all measures for promoting real religion, both among our own churches and throughout the world. This body it is known, constitutes the bond of union, peace, correspondence, and mutual confidence between all the ministers and churches of our denomination in the

United States; and is expressly charged by our ecclesiastical constitution with the solemn and responsible duty of maintaining truth, order, harmony, and discipline in all our congregations; of corresponding with foreign Churches; of suppressing schismatical contention, and every species of irregularity; and of promoting charity, truth, and active holiness through all the churches under its care.

Only conceive, my Christian brethren, of the benign and precious influence which this great annual Assembly might be expected to exert, if all the ministers and elders composing it, were to come together, from every part of the Church, with a double portion of the spirit which I have imagined to reign in the subordinate judicatories. Suppose its members to convene from year to year, with hearts filled with brotherly love; with enlightened zeal for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, and ready to forego every consideration, except those of Scriptural truth and order, for the sake of DOING GOOD. Conceive of such a body, representing every portion of our Church in the United States; animated with one heart and one soul; all "seeing eye to eye" in regard to the essential principles of Gospel truth; all honestly desirous of maintaining and carrying into effect that system of Bible truth and order which they have solemnly subscribed and engaged to support. Conceive of an Assembly of such a character:—where all minor differences were swallowed up in a supreme desire to extend the Redeemer's reign and glory; where party feelings gave way to Christian love; where no banner was raised but that of Christ; and where the only contest should be, who should love the Redeemer most, and who should serve him

with the warmest zeal. Conceive, in a word, of an Assembly made up of the wisest heads and the warmest hearts in the whole Presbyterian Church; who had come together, not to contend for victory; not to carry points of sectional or party interests; but to get good and do good; to enlighten, purify, and revive the Church of God; to promote every moral and spiritual interest which promises to benefit the community; and to devise the most effectual measures for sending the glorious Gospel far and wide to all who are sitting in moral darkness!

Such is the picture of the Presbyterian Church, which I have sometimes imagined to myself, and which I have often prayed that we might see realized. What a glorious spectacle would such a Church be! How happy in itself! How honourable to the cause of religion! What a blessing to our land, and to the world! And is it too much to hope that we may one day see it realized? The same grace which, eighteen centuries ago, raised up men "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost;" which animated and sent forth bands of noble-minded Christian labourers and heroes to bear the word of life to a dark and dying world, and which crowned their ministrations with success;—the same grace is still treasured up in Him whose "throne is forever and ever," and may be manifested in us amidst all our weakness and unworthiness. The same Almighty King of Zion, by whose consoling and sanctifying Spirit it was that the churches, even in the days of bitter persecution, "had rest, and were edified;" and "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost were multiplied,"—still lives, and can cause his ministers to be equally faithful, and

his word to be clothed with equal power in our day. Under whatever cloud the glory of our Zion may be in a degree obscured, for the present, He can cause her to shine forth with more beauty than ever, "through his own comeliness put upon her."

Do you ask, my Christian friends, how this happy attainment may, under the divine blessing, be reached? Do you inquire, by what means we may hope to be most effectually delivered from our discord and strife, and blessed with that spiritual peace and strength which form the true glory of a church? I answer, let us adopt the policy of some sagacious worldly counsellors, who tell us, that the most direct way to remove a morbid action in the animal body, is to excite a different and salutary action in its neighbourhood:—that the best method of putting out one fire, which is raging and likely to triumph, is to kindle a counter fire. Upon the same principle, if we desire most speedily and most effectually to extinguish the fire of party spirit, and to arrest the progress of erroneous opinions; let us try to kindle the fire of Christian benevolence, and to rouse in all our congregations and judicatories, from the lowest to the highest, that fervent desire for the spread of the Gospel, and the salvation of a perishing world, which ought to reign in every heart, and in every Church which bears the name of Christ. Let such a hallowed flame be kindled: and it is not more certain that oil, cast on an agitated body of water, will calm its troubled surface, than it is that an ardent zeal for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom,—for promoting the temporal and eternal happiness of mankind,—is better adapted than any thing else to calm angry passions; to terminate strife; to turn away the minds

of men from the conflicts of selfishness and ambition; and to bind them together in the bonds of fraternal affection. Only let this blessed spirit spring up, and exert a governing influence in all our ecclesiastical assemblies;—and their meetings will of course, be peaceful and harmonious; their deliberations will be marked with gravity, with dignity, with mutual respect, and with genuine Christian benevolence. And when their business is brought to a close, the members will separate, not, as has too often happened, with disgust, alienation and weariness; but with warmer affection than they came together; will return to their respective charges with increased attachment to their Master and his work; and will look forward to another meeting as to a delightful feast of Christian fellowship.

Here, then, my Christian brethren, is the grand, and, as I think, under God, the *only* effectual remedy for all our ecclesiastical difficulties. The prescription of the immortal *Howard* for shaking off trouble, was conveyed in the following strong and pointed language;—“Set about DOING GOOD: put on your hat, and go and visit the sick and the poor in your neighbourhood; inquire into their wants and minister to them; seek out the desolate and the oppressed, and tell them of the consolations of religion. I have often tried this method, he adds, and have always found it the best medicine for a heavy heart.” So shall we, as a Church, find the spirit of ACTIVE GOOD DOING,—if we honestly and in good earnest apply it,—the best cure for all our trials and conflicts. And, in order to the attainment of this blessing, as the whole cannot be greater and better than its parts, it will be our wisdom to begin, systematically, with the individual

ministers, elders and churches which compose our aggregate body.

From this good hour, then, let every minister in the Presbyterian Church feel himself just as distinctly and solemnly called upon to engage, with his whole heart, in the various benevolent enterprises of the day, as he is to preach the Gospel, and administer the sacraments of the Christian Church. Let him, accordingly, take the earliest opportunity of forming within the congregation committed to his charge, an auxiliary *Bible* association; a society for aiding in *Foreign Missions*, and another for aiding in *Domestic Missions*; a *Tract Society*; a *Temperance Society*; and an *Education Society*; in short, let him form as far as possible, *all* the members of his church, young and old, male and female, and as many of his stated hearers as may be willing to join them,—into bodies more or less organized, for aiding in the great work of promoting the extension of truth and happiness among men, and bringing the whole world to the knowledge of the glorious Gospel. Let even the *little children* of his congregation have a place assigned them in these hallowed ranks for doing good. There is no danger that, by pursuing this course, he will impoverish his people. However few and poor they may be, it will rather enrich them in *pocket* as well as in *soul*. He will, undoubtedly, strengthen, enlarge, and build them up in it. Those who are engaged in saving and giving for the cause of Christ, will of course be economical and industrious, and will generally be found more thrifty and prosperous than those who live without this sacred impulse. The blessing of the Lord will infallibly descend upon such a church. “There is that scattereth and yet increaseth;

and there is that withholdeth, but it tendeth to poverty." No children and young people will be so likely to be all that their parents could desire, as those who are trained up under such a purifying and elevating influence.

But to form and preside over these benevolent associations in his own church, ought not to be regarded as the whole of the Pastor's duty. Let him be a member of each himself. Let him be present, if possible, at all their meetings; and endeavour to impart to all of them, at each meeting, a new and more powerful impulse. Let him, whenever he meets the *Elders* of his church, either individually, or in their official capacity, make it his study to engage them cordially and zealously in the same enterprise. Let him in his preaching, in his prayers, and in all his public and private intercourse with his people, study to recommend a growing attention to these benevolent objects, as, at once, the duty and the privilege of all Christians. In short, let him habitually regard the nurturing, strengthening and extending these associations, as among the primary objects of his ministry; as not only adapted to aid in the great work of converting the world to Christ; but also as one of the richest means of grace that can be employed for promoting the spiritual benefit of the people themselves who are zealously employed in this glorious cause. The truth is, a faithful pastor cannot possibly engage his people in any work better adapted to draw down blessings on themselves and their children; better adapted to enlighten, to sanctify, to enlarge, to enrich, and to strengthen themselves, as a Church, than to engage them with their whole heart in the benevo-

lent enterprise of bringing their fellow men to the knowledge and love of the Saviour.

A *Presbytery* composed of ministers and elders who have drunk largely of this spirit, will, of course, come together, from time to time for the great purpose of DOING GOOD. Accordingly, let this body, whenever it convenes, while it attends with fidelity to all the details of review, and of government and discipline which demand attention, consider these details as subservient to the grand purpose of ecclesiastical union, doing good to the souls of men; and spreading the knowledge and reign of the glorious Gospel. Let the members, at every meeting, make it a primary object, to encourage each other's hearts, and strengthen each other's hands in all the appropriate labours of Christian benevolence. Let them inquire with fraternal fidelity and affection of each other, what is the state of religion in their respective charges; how far the benevolent enterprises of the day are countenanced and sustained in the several congregations; and what further can be done to extend the reign of Christian zeal and effort in all the Churches under their care? Let every meeting of the *Presbytery* be the signal of a little *jubilee* in the town or village where it is held. Let meetings in all cases in which it is practicable, be marked by such seasons of prayer and mutual conference among the members of the body, and such a judicious, pre-concerted series of public services, as shall make it an object of earnest desire among the pious members of the several Churches, to be favoured with these meetings as often as possible.

Let every *Synod* bear the same character and take the same course; only remembering that its larger

size, and more interesting character, will ever afford an opportunity of rendering its meetings more deeply impressive, and more extensively useful. Let every member come to this annual convention of teachers and rulers in the house of God, with an humble desire and fervent prayer that he may be enabled to *get* as much good himself, and to *do* as much good to the Redeemer's kingdom as may be possible while he and his brethren continue together. Conducted in this manner, every Synodical meeting will be instrumental in giving new ardour to Christian zeal, and a new impulse to Christian activity.

When all the subordinate judicatories shall be animated with this spirit, and shall convene with these views, we may expect to see the *General Assembly* crowning the whole with a corresponding character. Let the ministers and elders deputed from the respective Presbyteries all come to our ecclesiastical metropolis, as so many single streams all pouring into one mighty reservoir of Christian benevolence; as so many fires kindled from the altar of God, and preparing to unite in one sacred flame to enlighten a dark world. Let them come, not to represent parties—not to contend for victory—but fraught with the spirit of *DOING GOOD*; with hearts overflowing with desire for the spread of the Gospel, and resolving, as God shall enable them, by mutual counsel and prayer, to impart new life and vigour to all the departments of evangelical enterprise within our bounds. Let this be unceasingly done. Let no part of the routine business annually devolving on this court of ultimate appeal, be neglected or slighted: but let the subserviency of all to the great work of promoting human piety and happiness, and evangelizing the world be

the grand, the favourite object with every member. Let the opening sermon be a powerful plea for united and affectionate co-operation in extending the Redeemer's kingdom. Let every prayer that passes the Moderator's lips, at the commencement and close of every session, and every speech that may be offered on whatever subject, breathe the same consecrated spirit. In a word, let every vote that passes, every report that is offered, and every act of correspondence with other churches, whether at home or abroad, disclose the hearts of men supremely intent on exciting one another, and all with whom they have any intercourse, to the highest efforts for promoting the salvation of immortal souls. Let every successive General Assembly manifest this spirit, and leave behind it, when it dissolves, a series of acts which display the reign of unfeigned Christian benevolence; and more will be done to gladden the hearts of the pious than my feeble pen can portray. The month of May will be considered by the friends of Zion as the most blessed month in the year. *Philadelphia* will have great reason to rejoice. Surrounding denominations will be constrained at once to respect, to love, and to imitate us. And an annual impulse will be given to the progress of religion, which will be felt, not only through the United States, but throughout the world.

Let none imagine that, if this course were pursued, our minds would be too much turned away from doctrinal correctness; and that all zeal for maintaining "the faith and order once delivered to the saints," would be likely to languish and die. My impression is directly the reverse. If such a spirit were to be fully roused and universally to reign in our churches,

it would do more to rectify every species of aberration than any other that we could cultivate. Only let fervent zeal for the glory of God, and the welfare of mankind;—in other words, the deep and active spirit of DOING GOOD, reign in our beloved Church; and we shall, undoubtedly, witness the following effects:

1. There will be, immediately, much less heresy in the Church to be put down, or to be disputed about. For, as the prevalence of truth never fails to generate a spirit of active obedience; so the spirit of active Christian obedience, the genuine spirit of DOING GOOD, has a direct tendency to promote the love of truth, and of course, to exclude error. Fairly rouse a missionary spirit in the Church, and we shall hear little of erroneous doctrine. Not because of any deficiency of zeal for the truth, but because the spirit of holy love will have “cast out” the demon of heresy.

2. Under the reign of the spirit supposed, when heresy *does* occur, it will be put down more quietly and with more ease. The members of our higher judicatories will consider each case of alleged error more coolly and impartially, and dispose of it with more of a spirit of mutual confidence and affection than at present; and consequently, with less controversy and less delay.

3. The delicate and important cases of discipline, which come before our Synods, and especially the General Assembly, from year to year, and which have too often divided and agitated those bodies, will be decided with more of a fraternal spirit; will excite less heat and debate; will, of course, consume much less of the precious time of the judicatories;

and consequently, leave more time for plans and works of Christian benevolence. The hearts of the members will be so intent on the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, that they will have no disposition to attend to other objects, except on the most obvious call of truth and duty.

4. Our higher judicatories will assemble with a better spirit; under a higher sense of responsibility; and all their business will be conducted with more solemnity, more affection, more prayer, more gravity, more expedition, more comfort, and more to edification. The younger members will conduct themselves with more modesty, and treat the elder with more filial respect and reverence. The fathers will be neither overbearing nor dogmatical; the sons will avoid that flippancy and insolence which is apt to mark the conduct of those youth who despise their superiors, and think of victory only.

5. The BLESSING OF GOD will rest upon our judicatories, and upon the whole of our beloved Zion. The Spirit will be poured out, and religion revived in all our borders. In fact, the fervent, active spirit of doing good to mankind by bringing them to the knowledge and love of the Saviour, is *itself* a revival of religion, and cannot be cultivated without an increase of the spiritual prosperity of those who cherish it.

6. If our judicatories be seen faithfully and steadily pursuing the course which has been described, prejudices against Presbyterianism will die. When the people see that we are intent on doing them good, they will receive us. Our very enemies will be at peace with us; and we shall no longer have insidious

enemies in our own bosom, tearing in pieces the mother on whose substance they live.

If we wish this great plan of doing good to be completely successful, it is indispensable that it bear two characteristics. It must be *systematic*; and it must be *consecrated by much fervent prayer*.

It must be *systematic*. That is, every pastor must endeavour to establish among his people the habit of doing good UPON A PLAN. That which is left to the occasional impulses of waxing and waning zeal, cannot go steadily and strongly forward. The professing Christian who has no *system* in regard to his *secret devotions*, will soon find his closet testifying against him. In like manner, where there is no system in doing good, the cause cannot steadily prosper. Let every pastor, then, endeavour to introduce among the people of his charge such *plans* of effort and of contribution for promoting the Redeemer's kingdom, as will distinctly present to every member of his Church, and to every attendant on his ministry, a *stated opportunity and call* to do something for the great cause. If every communicant of the Presbyterian Church could be prevailed upon to give *twenty-five cents* per month, or even half that sum, into the Lord's treasury, it would suffice for all the great objects of general Christian benevolence, which the Church is now endeavouring to bear forward. All but the veriest paupers could do this with perfect ease; and very many could, with entire convenience, give much more. The only difficulty which attends the subject at present, is that of regularly *collecting* these contributions. But if *pastors* were animated with the zeal and diligence in doing good which ought to govern them:—if the *elders* and *deacons* in

every church could be prevailed upon to enter into the true spirit of their respective offices, and daily to move about among the people as ministers of good; if every active and discreet private member had *something given him to do* in his appropriate sphere, toward helping forward this cause; and if every contributor could be prevailed upon to lay by what he felt willing to consecrate to his Saviour, at the end of every month, or year, as might be most convenient, and cheerfully to carry it to the collector, instead of waiting to be called upon, and even repeatedly *dunned*, for a reluctant offering;—if even the little children of each parish could be habituated from their mother's lap, to contribute to the Redeemer's treasury, from week to week, a portion of those pence which they commonly spend to their own injury:—suppose a *system* of this kind established in each congregation, and far more would be done for the cause of Christ; and what was done, would be done with more ease, with more cheerfulness, at less expense of agencies, and with more spiritual profit to each contributor. O when will professing Christians really feel that it is “more blessed to give than to receive;” and that to be *permitted* to pray and labour and give for extending the kingdom of Him to whom we are indebted for all we enjoy and hope for, is as rich a *privilege*, as it is a solemn *duty*? Yet all this might, I firmly believe, be in a considerable degree attained, if the ministers of the Gospel were entirely faithful at once in their *instructions* and their *example*. That it will be happily realized before very long, no Christian can doubt. Surely the sooner we come to it, the better for ourselves, and the better for that cause which we profess to love.

The *second* characteristic which must mark our system of doing good, if we would succeed, is that it be *consecrated by much fervent prayer*. Nothing is more offensive to God than plans, even of doing good, undertaken in a spirit of pride and self-confidence, and prosecuted with carnal ambition and boasting. Show me an enterprise thus undertaken and thus pursued, and I will show you one which will speedily come to naught. The King of Zion "will not give his glory to another." We must "walk humbly with God" even in labouring for him. The more profound then, our sense of our utter unworthiness to be employed as fellow-workers in Christ's kingdom; the deeper our impression of our utter inability, with any amount of men or funds, to accomplish any important good, by our own wisdom or strength; and the more humble and importunate our continual supplication for the Divine guidance and blessing in all our labours, the more reason we have to hope that those labours will be crowned with success, and that our own souls, in pursuing them, will be refreshed and edified.

It is plain from the foregoing representations, that no individual can be so well qualified to be a *doer of good*, as he who is DEEPLY PIOUS; as he in whom the love of God and of man is, habitually, the RULING PASSION. There may be a zeal which is fervent, and even fiery, but altogether false; a zeal characterized by heat without light; by feverish paroxysms, the product of external stimulants, rather than of an internal, gracious principle; and prompting to spasmodic, ill-directed, and sometimes even extravagant and over-acted efforts, under the name of Christian benevolence. Such is the zeal which has been fre-

quently exhibited by men claiming the character of peculiar devotedness to Christ; and full of censoriousness against those who cannot consent to accompany them in all their headlong excesses. I need not say, that this is not the zeal for doing good which can either adorn an individual, or prove a blessing to the Church. That good-doing spirit which may be expected to last long, to operate well, and to bring forth with constancy an abundance of rich fruit, must flow from sincere and ardent piety; must be regulated by the word of God; and must be in a great measure free from the narrowness, and especially from the bitterness of sectarian bigotry. The good-doing spirit cannot really prosper in any church, unless real religion prosper. Yet no more direct method can be adopted, as was before said, to make real religion prosper, than to commence, in good earnest, a course of active benevolence. Here "action and reaction are equal and (not contrary, but) coincident."

Let us all, then, my Christian brethren, with one consent, henceforth address ourselves to this great work of **DOING GOOD**;—the appropriate work—and I will venture to say—the **BEST** work of the Church of God. To this let us daily give our thoughts, our hearts, our prayers, and our best efforts. Let this be our great distinction as Presbyterians—that we belong to a Church peculiarly and pre-eminently devoted to doing good. Let others set their hearts on ecclesiastical splendour, and be mainly intent on multiplying numbers. Let those who choose, spend their time in abusing all other churches besides their own, and in sounding the praises of their own sect. Be it our sacred care to be ever found "speaking the

truth in love;" pleading the cause of human happiness; and labouring to extend the reign of righteousness and peace. Be ever found steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, and verily your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

Princeton, April, 1833.

LETTER XVI.

Sectarianism.—Conclusion.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

IT is now time that I draw to a close with this series of letters. Topics of discussion, indeed, and those of a deeply interesting character, are by no means wanting to furnish matter for its continuance. But I fear that I have already trespassed unduly on the patience of my readers. One subject, however, yet remains, on which I cannot forbear to make a few remarks, before taking my leave. It is that which stands at the head of this letter.

There is, perhaps, no term in popular use more frequently misunderstood and perverted than the term *sectarian*. It is commonly used as a term of reproach; and yet it is often applied to a character and to measures highly commendable. In all such cases it is, of course, most unjustly applied. If any one manifest that he decisively prefers the doctrine and order of the Church with which he is connected to those of any other denomination:—if he write a book to show the scriptural warrant of that doctrine and order, though he speak with ever so much kindness of other portions of the great Christian family;—or, if he habitually discover, in any way, a strong attachment to the Church of which he is a member, and be willing to labour and make sacrifices for its benefit;—he is immediately stigmatized by many as a *sectarian*. If a body of professing Christians of any particular denomination, form a society, or lay a

plan, for strengthening and extending that denomination;—or if an ecclesiastical judicatory be found taking measures for promoting the prosperity and enlargement of the churches committed to their care;—though all this be done with perfect inoffensiveness toward their neighbours, their conduct is immediately, by multitudes, branded with the same revolting name. In short, in the estimation of many, to be warmly attached to the ecclesiastical body with which we have chosen to be connected, and to feel ourselves peculiarly bound to labour for its interest, justly exposes us to the charge of being “sectarians” and “high-churchmen.” But can this be an enlightened or equitable estimate? Did not Christ and his Apostles manifest the strongest attachment to the truth, and an equally strong repugnance to error? Did they not utter some of the most solemn exhortations to search after truth; to hold it fast; and even to “contend earnestly” for it against all opposers? Did they not enjoin upon Christians to “observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded them;” and to “keep all the ordinances as they were delivered unto them?” Was this *sectarianism*? Were they “high-churchmen” in the offensive sense intended? Jesus Christ had a most unfavourable opinion of the Pharisees and Sadducees in the days of his personal ministry; warned the people against their corruptions, as equally criminal and mischievous; and evidently laid the greatest stress on what he proclaimed as the way of life. Was he a *sectarian*? If not, why apply this term to those who are actuated by the same spirit, and walk in the same steps?

In countries where there is an *established religion*, those bodies which separate from the establishment,

and form distinct religious parties or denominations, are called *sects*, and those who belong to them, *sectaries*. But in countries where there is no established religion, there can be no sectaries or dissenters, in the technical sense of those words. All denominations are equally sects, that is, separate divisions or departments in the great family of nominal Christians. In such countries, for example in our own, when we speak of the Presbyterian sect, the Episcopal sect, the Methodist sect, the Baptist sect,—we simply mean,—without the smallest disrespect—to designate the different bodies of professing Christians known by these names respectively. It is, indeed, at once a misfortune and a sin, that the Church of Christ, which ought to be one in name and in profession, as well as in fact, should be divided into so many different denominations. But so it is. Now each of these divisions is a *sect*, or *section*, of the general visible Church. And yet the individuals who adhere to these several bodies, provided their adherence be characterized by mildness, candour, and inoffensiveness, are not wont, on that account, to be regarded with less respect, or to be loaded with opprobrious names. Their opinions may be erroneous, but as long as they adhere to them with sincerity, and without bitterness or rancour, they deserve no hard names. They belong to a certain sect of the visible Church. They prefer and peculiarly love that sect. They feel bound to use all fair and Christian means to promote its enlargement and prosperity. And all this, because they believe it to be that cause which is warranted by the Holy Scriptures. Is this conduct wrong? As long as they entertain this opinion, would they be innocent if they did *not* act thus?

A man, then, may be a member, and a very devoted, zealous member of a sect, and yet not deserve to be stigmatized as a *sectarian*.

To be a *sectarian* is something very different. It is to be *inordinately, unworthily, and offensively* devoted to a sect. Those who deserve this appellation are habitually governed by party zeal; and that zeal is at once narrow and excessive. They can see little or no good out of their own denomination, and little or no evil within it. They are so blindly prejudiced in favour of their own Church, and so blindly prejudiced against every other, that they can take no pleasure in the prosperity of any but their own. Hence the praises of their own they are constantly sounding; the advantage of their own they are exclusively seeking; and as to the edification of any other, they not only seldom think about it, or pray for it; but when it occurs, it really seems to give them pain, as an event adapted to demonstrate that there may be something good out of their own pale. In short, the *sectarian* is one who is shut up in his views and affections within his own little community, and seldom or never looks, with an enlarged mind, and a benevolent heart, beyond this narrow circle. When he is invited to unite in any benevolent enterprise, the first question which he asks, is—not, whether it will be likely to promote the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom; but what will be its probable bearing on his own sect? Not, whether the salvation of souls will be secured; but whether his own idol will be exalted? He feels much more concern that some little peculiarity of his own church should be extended and honoured, than that thousands of immortal be-

ings should be made partakers of salvation under some other name.

I am deliberately of opinion that of real sectarianism, thus defined, there is less—much less in the Presbyterian Church than in any other body of professing Christians in the United States. If I were to make any exception to this remark, it would be in respect to our Congregational brethren of New England, most of whom, so far as I know, stand on the same ground as ourselves with regard to the point in question. Comprehending them with ourselves, then, I would again deliberately repeat, that, of *real sectarianism*, there is much less in the Presbyterian Church, than in any other body of professing Christians in the United States—perhaps I might add, in the world. The great Searcher of hearts is my witness that I say this, not for the purpose of emblazoning and flattering my own denomination (for I have had occasion enough in these letters to find fault with it); but because it is not possible, in my opinion, adequately to elucidate my subject without these statements. The truth is, we have hardly enough of the *esprit du corps* to prompt us to take the trouble of defending ourselves when attacked by other denominations. And this, not because we have a less clear conviction than others of the truth of our system; but because OUR SYSTEM ITSELF IS MORE PACIFIC AND LESS EXCLUSIVE than any other which holds to the importance of truth. For *one* instance in which a Presbyterian or Congregational minister says a word in the pulpit to recommend the peculiarities of his own Church, or to the disparagement of other denominations, I will venture to produce *fifty* examples of this conduct in the churches around us. We can

scarcely enter a Baptist Church, without hearing the doctrine and practice of pedobaptism denounced and ridiculed; and very often, to my certain knowledge, offensive insinuations uttered, that the advocates of infant baptism are not sincere; that they know better; but have not the honesty to follow the dictates of conscience. In like manner, when a Presbyterian ventures into a Protestant Episcopal place of worship, he may sometimes, indeed, hear nothing offensive; but much more generally he will find himself revolted by claims of being the only true Church; by the most extravagant praises of their Liturgy and prescribed forms; and by intimations that all who are out of the Episcopal pale are to be regarded as not Churches of Christ at all, and as "out of the covenanted way of salvation." And how often, among our Methodist brethren, do their pulpits ring with invective or sneer against other denominations, and especially against what they deem the hydra of *calvinism*! How often do they openly speak as if theirs were the only denomination which has any scriptural life and power! In fact, the frequency of such occurrences is a matter so notorious, that those of other churches who put themselves in the way of being assailed by the several sects which have been mentioned, expect, pretty much, as a matter of course, to have their feelings more or less invaded by sectarian claims, or hostile insinuations. Now, how seldom—how very seldom, is any thing of this kind heard from a Presbyterian pulpit! Our ministers, in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand, utter nothing, either in prayer or preaching, but what any evangelical, pious Christian man, of any denomination might hear without the smallest offence. Nay, to say the truth, I can-

not recollect to have witnessed or heard of, in the course of my whole life, a single instance of a contrary character, excepting where our ministers were called upon to speak in the *defence* of their ministry and creed against *violent attacks*. And very often, to my certain knowledge, such attacks have been passed over in perfect silence, either because it was supposed that they were too feeble to merit notice; or because it was feared that a proper notice of them might interrupt the peace of society, or at any rate, wound some individual feeling.

This striking *anti-sectarian* character of our beloved Church, is, I may say without impropriety, sublimely exemplified by the unanimity and zeal with which our ministers and members unite in sustaining the great national benevolent institutions which are among the most signal glories of the day in which we live. Let any one look at the records of the American Bible Society; of the American Tract Society; and of the American Sunday School Union; to say nothing of other noble associations less unlimited in their nature and bearing;—let any one, I say, look at the records of these great national institutions, which have been the means of such incalculable good to our country and the world;—and then say whether eight, if not nine-tenths of all their support have not been derived from Presbyterians and Congregationalists. A few, indeed, of our Baptist, Episcopal and Methodist brethren are found among their patrons; but so few in proportion to their respective numbers, that we may pronounce with confidence, that if we and our Congregational brethren should all withdraw, the institutions in question would inevitably sink.

This ought to be known and understood. We are

almost the only denominations in the United States, whose views of Christian doctrine, of the holy ministry, and of the Church of God are such as present no obstacle to our uniting in Christian enterprise with any and every other denomination who hold fast the essentials of true religion. Hence, I suppose bigotry itself will not deny, that all the great national institutions to which reference has already been had, are of Congregational or Presbyterian origin; were first brought into being by their charitable desire to unite with all others in doing good; and have ever since been sustained with the same laudable spirit. Some denominations, as to the mass of them, stood aloof from the beginning, and refused to take any part in these liberal enterprises. Others professed, in the outset, to come in, and be one with their brethren; but have since withdrawn, and have set up separate Sunday School Unions, separate Tract Societies, and even separate Bible Societies for themselves; thus practically declaring, that even in the circulation of the "Bible without note or comment," they could not unite with other denominations! The different classes of Presbyterians, together with our Congregational brethren, are, so far as I can now recollect, the only Christian denomination in our country who have promptly, unanimously, and perseveringly, without the least semblance of sectarian backwardness or bigotry, united in sustaining and bearing forward these precious monuments of Christian catholicism and benevolence. And yet, strange to tell! these very denominations have been more than any others, loaded with reproach as *sectarians*; and, most strange of all! few, it is believed, have been more forward in repeating and circulating this charge than some of the

members of precisely those sects, who have been themselves most narrowly exclusive in their policy and conduct, and, of course, most justly liable to the very imputations which they so injuriously cast on us! It has been hard, indeed, to hear it trumpeted abroad, with the most clamorous zeal, that Presbyterians are governed by systematic sectarianism; that they are ambitious, high-church bigots; and this trumpeted by none more loudly or confidently than by those to whom we might with propriety say, in the language of Him who "spake as never man spake"—"Why beholdest thou the *mote* that is in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the *beam* that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull the mote out of thine eye, and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?"

But, my Christian brethren, let none of these things move you! I have spoken of this as a fact strange to be told! But I recall the expression. It is not strange. It ought not to surprise or perplex any one. It is precisely what has happened in all ages. The most devoted, zealous and truly charitable and disinterested of all the followers of Christ; in a word, those who have most nearly resembled the Saviour himself, have been, in every period of the Christian Church, most bitterly reviled as ambitious, plotters of mischief, and enemies of mankind! So the Master himself was slandered. So the primitive Christians were perpetually followed with calumny. And so have those been ever treated, who were most distinguished for their expanded charity, and their distinguished devotedness to the best interests of the human race! There *are* religious denominations in our land whose narrow sectarianism is conspicuous

and revolting in no small degree; who are perpetually denouncing and "unchurching" all other denominations; or, if not doing this, at least taking measures to build up walls between themselves and other Churches, as high and as strong as those of *Babylon*;—and yet *their* sectarianism seems never to be thought of. The charge is seldom or never laid at their door. It would seem that *they* are considered as having a prescriptive right to indulge in this spirit, and to manifest it in its most repulsive forms, without notice. But if a Presbyterian happens to say a word in favour of what he believes to be the truth and order prescribed by Christ in his Church;—even if it be in the strictest *self-defence*—he must expect to hear himself denounced, without ceremony, as a narrow "sectarian," and his conduct ascribed to ambitious and sinister motives.

But, I say again, my Christian friends—let none of these things move you. The same thing has happened to the best Christians and the best Churches that the world ever saw. None are so apt to imagine the existence of bigotry in their neighbours, as the fiercest bigots. None so ready to suspect others of a proselyting and encroaching spirit as those who are most entirely under the government of this spirit themselves. The truth is, as you can scarcely ever persuade the selfish and fraudulent man that all men are not actuated by the same principle with himself; so in religion, the most narrow-minded and exclusive *propagandists* are ever found to be most clamorous, and most obstinate in charging a similar spirit on the most devoted and disinterested labourers for the benefit of mankind. Be not surprised, then, that infidels and hostile sectarians have united in charg-

ing Presbyterians with aiming at a religious establishment. Most of those who make the charge, cannot but know that it is false. Our history and our public formularies contain testimony on this subject, which demonstrates that every such charge is a calumny. But no matter for that. It answers the purpose of some scoffers, and of some professing Christians, to repeat the charge, and to ring upon it all the changes which ingenuity and sectarian motive can suggest. Heed it not. Go straight forward in that humble, benevolent, Catholic and devoted course which your professed principles require; and commit your cause to Him who judgeth righteously.

Imagine not, however, that in order to avoid the charge of "sectarianism," it will be necessary, or even desirable that you should give up the peculiarities of your own Church. It were just as reasonable to tell the head of a family, that in order to establish a character for general benevolence, he must abandon all special care of his own household, and spend his whole time in taking care of the families of others. This would be as contrary to Scripture as to natural affection. Equally false and absurd would it be to tell any man that, in order to exemplify the character of a Bible Christian, he must relinquish that peculiar system of doctrine and order which he believes to be laid down in Scripture, and contend for nothing but that in which all classes of Christians agree. Would this be acting the part of a faithful *witness* for Christ? Would this be "holding fast the form of sound words once delivered to the saints?" Would this be "observing all things whatsoever Christ has commanded," and "keeping the ordinances as they were delivered unto us?" Sup-

pose all professing Christians to take this course, and what would, long since, have become of the peculiar and most precious truth and order of the Gospel? It can never, surely, be an act of fidelity to our Master in heaven to abandon what he has commanded us to hold fast; or to allow complaisance to those around us to interfere with that testimony which is incumbent upon us as disciples of Christ. If you believe the doctrines and government of the Presbyterian Church to be agreeable to the word of God, it is undoubtedly your duty to maintain them in their purity, and to extend their influence as far as possible. Be not afraid, then, of adhering to the peculiarities of your own denomination, with meekness, but at the same time with unwavering fidelity and zeal. Every principle of truth, honour and consistency demand it of you. If you prefer the Presbyterian Church to every other, because you think it most scriptural, ought you not to be willing to avow and manifest that preference? Those who would stigmatize this course as "sectarian," would have loaded with the same unjust reproach the blessed Saviour and his inspired Apostles.

But, while I say this, let me entreat you conscientiously to avoid the spirit of "sectarianism," properly so called. Hold fast your own opinions, and maintain with affectionate fidelity the institutions of your own particular department of the great Christian family; but let not your affections be *confined* to that department. Ever cherish a spirit of candour, forbearance, and brotherly love toward all who bear the image of Christ, by whatever name they may be called. Never forbid any to "cast out devils," nor regret to hear that they have in fact cast them out,

“because they follow not with us.” Rather rejoice that good is done, by whomsoever effected; and that religion flourishes within the bosom of whatever Church it may be. This was the spirit of the Apostle *Paul* “Some preach Christ,” said he, “of good will, and some of envy and strife. What then? Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.” It is not your duty to think equally well of all denominations:—but it *is* your duty to think as favourably of all, as the word of God will allow you; to love all; to pray for the spiritual prosperity of all; and to rejoice when you see evidence that God is present by the power of his Spirit and his Word in any. It is not your duty to believe that other Churches, which differ materially from yours, are as near the scriptural standard as yourselves:—but it *is* your duty to acknowledge and honour piety in them wherever it appears; and to love sincere and ornamental religion in one of another denomination more than cold, heartless formality under the Presbyterian name. Leave to others the habit of continually sounding the praises of their own Church, and depreciating the character of other churches. Your time, and all your best energies ought to be employed, not in fighting with your fellow Christians, but in opposing the great adversary of God and man, and in doing good to the souls of men. Abhor and avoid a *proselyting* spirit. I might mention adherents to certain sects who, whenever they hear of an unusual religious attention in any place, immediately commission their emissaries to go in among the serious inquirers,—not to instruct them in the way of salvation,—but to perplex and ensnare them with the peculiarities of their own body. This is one of the most unworthy

and revolting arts of sectarianism, and ought to be cordially despised. Let nothing of this kind be laid to the charge of Presbyterians. Be ever ready to unite in affectionate intercourse, and in doing good with any and all denominations who appear to have the Spirit of Christ, however they may differ in circumstances from your own. In a word, let it be seen that the Presbyterian Church is the most liberal Church in the land; that it has fewer points of repulsion than any other; that its whole spirit and structure admit of more free intercourse with sister Churches than any other; that it is much more intent on being a truly pure, spiritual, and actively benevolent Church, than on a great enlargement of its *size*, or great increase of outward *splendour*;—in fine, that it is much more anxious to see the world converted to the holiness and happiness with which Christ came to bless mankind, than to see the peculiarities of its own body obtaining universal dominion.

Manifest this spirit; pursue this course;—and it will infallibly “turn to you for a testimony.” It will, beyond all doubt, recommend you to the wise and the good. You may not in this way, grow so rapidly as some other denominations; but your growth will be more fair, honest, and healthful than upon any other plan. The friends of social and ecclesiastical purity will rise up and call you blessed. I am aware that, by pursuing this course you may sometimes give a temporary advantage to the insidious votaries of sectarian zeal. For there is no doubt that some of the most bigoted devotees to ecclesiastical sect, with the language of the most exemplary catholicism on their lips, have been found meanly availing themselves of invited intercourse with other denominations, to in-

crease, by indirect methods, the numbers and consequence of their own. Be on your guard against such base arts; but rather resolve, in all cases, to suffer wrong than to do wrong. It is in spiritual as in temporal things, that what is gained by sinister methods, is seldom enjoyed either permanently or with comfort.

I have sometimes heard it suggested, that as several other large and important churches have withdrawn from the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, and the American Tract Society, and have established corresponding societies within their own denominations exclusively;—it might be expedient for the Presbyterian Church, in a sort of self-defence, to do the same thing; and to set up a Presbyterian Bible Society; a Presbyterian Sunday School Union; and a Presbyterian Tract Society. Suggestions of this kind, from whomsoever they may come, ought, in my view, to be decisively repelled, as altogether unwise, and as highly mischievous in their tendency. If Presbyterians and Congregationalists were to abandon those national institutions, they would undoubtedly fall. And instead of being permitted to fall, they ought rather to be borne forward with increasing patronage, and extended with daily growing zeal. What though they do not immediately minister to the growth of the Presbyterian Church, as such? They minister to that cause which, I trust, is dear to the heart of every pious Presbyterian;—the cause of Christ, and of human happiness. That ought to be quite enough to command for them our faithful support, and our fervent prayers.

Nor ought our patronage of those great national institutions to induce any forgetfulness of the pecu-

liarities of our own Church. Presbyterians universally, I hope, consider it as their duty to lend their hearty and persevering support to the American Bible Society, by means of which the holy Scriptures, "without note or comment," are circulated far and wide. Yet this circumstance does not prevent their taking care that those views of Gospel truth and order which they believe are taught in the Bible, should be faithfully imparted by pastoral labour, and other means, to themselves and their children. They take up the precious volume if they are faithful, where the Bible Society leaves it, and cause it to be explained and applied, agreeably to what they consider as its genuine import, to all within their own pale. Now, if you pursue the very same course concerning the Sunday School Union, and the American Tract Society, you will, in my opinion, act wisely. Patronise those institutions with more and more efficiency, every year. They are not, indeed, directly, and far less exclusively, ministering to the extension of Presbyterianism. But they are doing what is far better. They are labouring with zeal, and with a benefit which no man can now calculate, to promote the great cause of knowledge, virtue and religion in every denomination, and in every part of our land. When we help them by our funds, by our prayers, and by our adoption, as far as we deem expedient of their plans and publications; we are helping forward that great cause. Is this a small matter? Is this an object from which any Christian hand should be withheld? What though the publication of those Societies, respectively, do not teach us and our children *every thing that we ought to learn?* They teach much that is precious; much by which we may all essen-

tially profit; and by which millions out of our own pale are every day profiting. Of course when we contribute to their circulation, we confer an inestimable blessing on our beloved country, and enlarge the boundaries of Christ's kingdom. When we wish the children in our Sabbath-schools, and the rising generation in all our churches, to be instructed in those things which relate to our own peculiar views of doctrine and order as Presbyterians, it would be surely very unreasonable to expect the Sunday School Union, and the Tract Society to do this for us. Their design forbids this. Our own denominational interests forbid it. Each particular Ecclesiastical Body can do this work best for itself. If we have Catechisms, or other appropriate manuals of Christian instruction, let us *superadd* them to the excellent works which the national institutions provide. Those institutions cannot possibly do more than furnish the means of that *general* instruction in Gospel truth, in which all evangelical denominations agree. Having done this, is it a hardship for each Church to take up the matter where these general manuals leave it, and to *add* that careful instruction in any thing and every thing which it may be desirable for all our children and church members to know as Presbyterians? In this way every Church may be perfectly catholic, and yet perfectly faithful to its own Formularies. In this way, sectarianism properly so called, may be completely avoided, and yet every Christian denomination do full justice to its own distinguishing peculiarities. If Presbyterians, as a body, had all the zeal, and all the attachment to their own denomination which generally characterize our Methodist brethren, without a particle of that spirit of exclusive bigotry

which too many of that body manifest; together with a love to the image of Christ wherever it appeared, and a readiness to unite in doing good with all who bear that image, which I rejoice to say many Presbyterians cherish—we should have that *beau ideal* of Christian catholicism, which I should be glad to recognise in every member of our beloved Church.

And now, my Christian brethren, I must bring to a close a series of letters, in which I sometimes fear I have put your patience to a severe trial. For the kind treatment which they have received, even from those to whom they were not acceptable, I feel deeply grateful. My first prayer is, that what I have written may be in some degree useful, by promoting that cause of truth and love which, unless I am deceived, is dear to my heart;—my next, that it may be received with that fraternal spirit, from which it has certainly flowed.

I am one of those, my Christian brethren, who not only wish to be known as a decided Presbyterian; but who are also firmly persuaded, that the edification, and even the continued existence under any respectable form, of the Presbyterian Church, absolutely depend, under God, on a faithful adherence to our public formularies; and that this adherence cannot be attained, but in some such way, and on some such ground as I have attempted to delineate in these letters. If we cannot cordially meet on this ground, I, for one, have no hope of our continued union. It will be to little purpose that we patch up from year to year, a series of compromising decisions, for the purpose of quieting each difficulty as it arises. Unless we can unanimously resolve to ADHERE TO OUR PUBLISHED PRINCIPLES;—TO ABIDE BY THE ECCLESIAS-

TICAL CONSTITUTION which every minister and elder in our body, if regularly in office, has solemnly promised before God and man, faithfully to maintain;—we may be nominally one; we may quarrel on together for a little while longer; but we cannot long walk together. Discord, strife, and at no great distance of time, a total rupture must be the consequence.

If there be any within our bosom who are reckless of these consequences, I must be allowed to say, “O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly be not thou united!” They may be *called* Presbyterians; but they are not worthy of the name. And if the melancholy consequences of which I have spoken should ensue, they will have an awful amount of guilt lying at their door. The guilt of still further rending the body of Christ; of destroying much individual Christian peace; and, probably, in the end, of plunging thousands of immortal souls into remediless ruin, will cleave to their skirts. If this direful catastrophe should come, may I be so happy as to stand among those who can “take God to witness that they are clean from the blood of all men!” May I be found among those who shall be “weeping between the porch and the altar, and saying—spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach; save them, and lift them up forever!”

But it is not yet too late to avert this evil; nor can I yet despair of ultimate safety and peace. To effect this, all that is necessary is, that we unanimously resolve to be genuine, consistent, honest Presbyterians. No retractions; no new system of measures; no humiliating concessions, on either side, are demanded. If we simply determine, as one man, to bear true

faith and allegiance to the Church, whose constitution we have solemnly subscribed, tranquillity and harmony will, with the blessing of God, follow of course. We may love as many good objects as we please, and labour as much to do good as we please, *out of our own pale*, provided we be faithful to our obligations *within that pale*. To so reasonable a demand, can any brother find it in his heart to refuse assent? I trust not. O, if we could see such a spirit once more pervading our beloved Zion, how honourable would it be to religion! how comfortable to ourselves! how useful to our troubled world! what a happy pledge of the approach of that period when the name of Christ shall be one, and his praise one, from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same!

Christian Brethren, farewell! Grace, mercy, and peace, be multiplied to you from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the eternal Spirit! Amen!

So prays your affectionate brother and fellow-servant in Christ,

SAMUEL MILLER.

Princeton, May, 1833.







