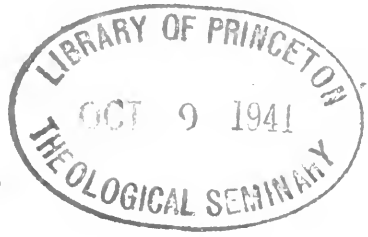


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REPLY

TO

DR. MILLER'S LETTER

TO

A GENTLEMAN OF BALTIMORE,

IN REFERENCE TO THE CASE OF

THE REV. MR. DUNCAN.

BY JOHN M. DUNCAN,

Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Tammany street, Baltimore

Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal:
but as for them their way is not equal.—EZEK. xxxiii. 17.

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Chas W. Ballott

REPLY, &c.

“A gentleman of Baltimore,” whose name does not appear, feeling, no doubt, a very deep interest in their general subjects, has supposed himself warranted to solicit from Dr. Miller’s pen, some notice of my “Remarks on the Rise, Use, and Unlawfulness of Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the church of God.” The “uncommonly clear and powerful review,” which “the venerable editor of the Christian Advocate” had furnished, it was understood, had not been generally read by those, who felt some regard, both for the parties concerned, and the subject under discussion. There seemed, therefore, to be a necessity that Dr. M. should again appear as the defendant of the creed-cause. His correspondent had suggested the alternative of addressing him privately, or answering his communication through the medium of the press: and Dr. M. preferring the latter course, has issued a long letter, ostensibly designed to elucidate my ecclesiastical circumstances, and to counteract the effects of my heretical aberrations. This correspondence has devolved upon me the unwelcome task of preparing the following sheets for the press.

I am discarded, however, by the letter-writer, as “a controvertist by no means to his taste.” And had he consulted his own inclinations, or addressed his correspondent *privately*, instead of canvassing my writings with so much freedom, and criticising them with so much tartness, I might have been spared the troublesome, and almost unnecessary, work which he has now obtruded upon my feelings and my leisure. Dr. M. could not have supposed, that my cause had been so entirely crushed, and the citadel of refuge for a vanquished foe had been so nearly demolished, that nothing more was wanted save the finishing stroke of desolation from his generous hand. I conclude then, that in rejecting the respondent as a champion not at all worthy of his superior tactics, he has fancied the *public mind* to be his antagonist: and, as I do by no means covet the high honour he refuses, I augur that there is some hope that the present controversy will soon be stripped of all offensive personalities.—So be it. But the letter before me must be taken as it is; and the worthy professor may, in any future publication, discuss the subject in the form which he may consider best suited to general edification.

In arranging the present remarks, they shall be thrown into sections, according as the nature of the subjects may admit, or as their importance may require. My intention is to take up the most important particulars which the letter has suggested, and on which its author reposes with most confidence and complacency. Some observations, however, on

the character of the “Remarks,” with which the Doctor has prefaced his more serious discussions, must first be noticed: and to these I shall devote the first division of my reply.

SECTION I.

Dr. M. has been pleased to say, that the “conclusive reason,” why he has “forborne to make any answer” to my book, “is that it really *requires* no answer.”—“He, (Mr. D.) is so far from having invalidated, or even weakened, any of the arguments in favour of creeds, urged in my Introductory Lecture, that he has hardly so much as touched them. I have conversed repeatedly with some of the most acute and enlightened men in our country, and solicited their candid judgment as to the real force of Mr. D’s book. And they have ALL, with a single exception, united strongly in the opinion, that he has written nothing which impairs, in the least degree, the strength of my reasoning; nothing which possesses such a degree, even of plausibility, as to demand a reply. Why then should I write again, when all my original positions remain, not only unshaken, but really unassailed.” These are good, round, assertions: almost enough to make any man lay down his pen in despair. But then there is one “most acute and enlightened” man, who does not think so meanly of the “Remarks:” and a suspicion darts across my brain, that the remainder might have been the advocates of the creed-system. I

make no doubt, however, that they expressed their honest opinions, and I regret that they have been brought across my path, as a passing remark may unintentionally wound a friend, whose feelings my heart would hold sacred. It seems, moreover, that Dr. M. has after all thought it necessary to "write again;" and to urge once more the very points so strongly pressed in his "Introductory Lecture;" and that too on the apparently unobtrusive solicitation of a "gentleman of Baltimore."

It may be necessary here to state, that the "Remarks" were pledged to do nothing more, than fairly and respectfully to controvert *the principles* of Dr. M's "Lecture." He was not followed step by step in the arrangement he thought proper to make. I chose to shape the subject for myself, according to my best apprehensions; and to take up the principles of the "Lecture," merely as they might be fairly introduced in the order of discussion. This course put the reader to the trouble of analysing my "Remarks," in order to range them along with Dr. M's arguments. If he did not please to do this, but to leave it as undeserving of his effort, which Dr. M. appears to have done in his reply, then I had conducted him, as far as personal ability and my time allowed, through the whole of the subject, as I apprehended it. Perhaps this was an ill-judged course. But then it seems, that throughout the greater part no presbyterian antagonist could be found; that almost all the propositions advanced were sound, and the facts stated indisputable; and

that it was useless to labour through so many pages in proof of things which no one denied. Yet, Dr. M. has thought proper to reply; the synod has thought proper to refuse forbearance; and the book is reviled as most heretical, and of most injurious tendency. There is a veil over these representations, which I shall not attempt to penetrate;—a mist, which time may disperse.

In sustaining the assertions already quoted, Dr. M. says—“Mr. D. is also fighting *without an adversary* in all that he has said, at so much length, and with so much laboured rhetoric, respecting the character of many of the christian clergy, within the first three or four hundred years after Christ.” Afterwards, when he would throw, what he apparently supposes to have been, my argument from the brief review that was taken of the history of the primitive church, into an “abridged syllogism,” he states it thus:—“Many of the clergy began, very early, to manifest an overbearing and grasping spirit; *therefore*, it is unlawful for the church, at present, to take any measures to prevent her ministers from falling into the same evil courses, and, for this purpose, to ascertain their soundness in the faith, and guard the purity of their principles.”—I feel as if it would be doing Dr. M. a most serious injustice, to believe that he saw nothing more in the deductions, made from the historical extracts in question. But he has said so, and I may not dispute his word. However, he may be assured that there was a vast deal more implied, than he appears to have disco-

vered, of which the following observations may, perhaps, convince him.

The fifth argument of the “Introductory: Lecture” in favour of creeds, was expressed in the following proposition:—“The experience of *all ages* has found them indispensably necessary.” If this proposition be true, it verily required some hardihood of adventure to undertake what, in the “Letter,” has been denominated a “confessional battle.” The doctrine of the “Remarks” is, that the proposition is not true, and the argument was designed to make it appear untrue. The reader will please to notice the following particulars:

1. Dr. M. in illustrating his proposition, had begun with the apostolic age, and discovered, if I understood him, an *ecclesiastical creed* in use among the apostles. By an ecclesiastical creed, let it be remembered, is to be understood “an accredited, permanent, public document”—“a summary of christian doctrine”—“a formulary,” other than the scriptures—“a test” of orthodoxy. Now the apostles had no such thing, and I undertook to show that they had not. The scriptures have not stated the fact, that any such document was used by them; and history affords not the slightest proof that they left any such instrument behind them, for the use of the churches after they were gone. There has existed in the church a small schedule, which has been denominated the apostles’ creed; and about this there has been considerable discussion. Some have supposed that the apostles did actually pen it;

that they held a solemn convocation in order to draw it up; and that each apostle inserted his particular article. Others have combated this as a mere figment,—stating, that it was near four hundred years after Christ before it was ever heard of; that neither Luke in his history of the apostolical transactions, *nor any ecclesiastical author before the fifth century*, has made any mention of any assembly convened for such a purpose by the apostles; that none of the early councils made any mention of such a document, nor referred to it as their standard, or basis, or test; that “there could not have been a stronger or more convincing proof brought against heretics, than to have referred to such a creed;” and that, “if the apostles had made *a creed*, it would have been every where the same throughout all churches, and in all ages; all christians would have learnt it by heart; all churches would have repeated it after the very same manner; in fine, all authors would have expressed it in the same terms”—the contrary of all which is evident. If this detail is true, what becomes of Dr. M’s general proposition, and particularly his first specification under it?—Or will he say, that his position has been neither assailed nor shaken?

2. Dr. M. in carrying on his illustration, had said, that in the second and third centuries, not only were these creeds “*more formally drawn out*,” but they were “more minute, and more extensive, than those of earlier date.” This too was explicitly denied in the “Remarks,” and historical

proof was advanced to show that it was not correct. In those early ages, or previous to the council of Nice, no such formulary is to be found: but after this council, creeds abounded so much, that Socrates speaks of their "confused multitude," and Hilary tells us, that they "did nothing but make creeds"—that they made them arbitrarily, and explained them as arbitrarily. During the period anterior to this famous assembly, there was no *one particular form* made use of. Du Pin, says—"In the second and third ages of the church we find as many creeds as authors; and the same author sets down the creed in a different manner in several places of his works; which plainly shows, that there was not any creed that was reputed to be the apostles', *nor even any regulated and established form of faith.*" St. Justin, and St. Irenæus observe, that in those days, they had the faith "deeply imprinted on their minds." Jerome says, that it "was not written on paper, or with ink, but was engraved on the fleshly tables of the heart."—Moreover, some of the examples of early creeds, to which the "Lecture" had referred, were quoted, that they might speak for themselves, and demonstrate to every candid mind, that there was not then even the form of an established creed. And did not all this *touch* the proposition, which was controverted? Or was nothing more done by the respondent, than to play the part of an humble and undesired amanuensis, to record over again the degeneracy of those unhappy times, and to infer that we should do nothing now to prevent a

like “wide spreading degeneracy?” Is there no difference between the assertions, that “the friends of orthodoxy had been in the habit of framing *creeds* from the earliest ages,” and that the friends of orthodoxy never framed such an instrument until *the fourth century*? And is there no importance in the historical testimony, which established the latter assertion, when the former had been made?

3. The doctrine of the “Remarks,” most distinctly and most carefully stated, was, that creeds are *authoritative* instruments, imposed upon the human conscience, by being erected into terms of communion in spiritual ordinances. The historical proof adduced, was intended to establish this doctrine; by manifesting that until ecclesiastical power was acquired by ambitious ecclesiastics, there were no such formularies in the church: but that when synods and councils were introduced in the second century, they hastened to the supreme control over divine ordinances; and that in the fourth century, for the first time, they drew out and established such a test. Synods and councils are the framers and defenders of these instruments now: so that human creeds are still the creatures of ecclesiastical power. Moreover, the historical proof was adduced to show, that, at first, the churches were all independent of each other, and therefore were not in circumstances at all favourable to the system of making or imposing creeds; and that if churches were independent of each other *now*, as they were then, they would not feel these creeds to be “indispensably necessary”

now, more than they did then. Did not these facts, with the instantaneous conclusions which were deduced, “in the least impair the strength of Dr. M’s reasoning.”—He appears to me, not only to be sporting with my feelings, but to be trifling with his own reputation.

4. The habit of appealing to these early ages, as Dr. M. had done, was objected to in the “Remarks” as unbecoming in christian divines, and as altogether irrelevant to an argument like the present. This same objection Dr. M. had made, under corresponding circumstances, and when sustaining the presbyterian cause, against his prelatical adversaries. He seemed then to think, that the degenerate character of those ages, gave great force to his objections. Indeed, so important was that circumstance, in his estimation, that he would not consent to go beyond the *second* century, which was quite anterior to the period of introducing creeds; and he condescended to go, even that far, merely as an act of grace, thinking that when he had the Bible in his hand, nothing more was wanted. The “Remarks” followed the very same track; because that the “Lecture,” in sustaining its argument, had committed the same sin, for which he had censured episcopals. And is there nothing unseemly in referring to a degenerate age for proof and testimony, in favour of any of the ecclesiastical institutions in our own day, when we have the Bible in our hands?—Or is it no argument against creeds that they were the offspring of a degenerate age? And would it not

follow, that instead of being "indispensably necessary" to make instruments by which to sustain their ill-gotten power, the ecclesiastics of that age ought rather to have retraced their steps, and surrendered their usurped sovereignty? Or having such an example before us, ought we not to profit by their mistake, and freely part with that which we are not entitled to hold?

Again: The fourth argument advanced, in favour of creeds, in the "Introductory Lecture," was, that "they are friendly to the study of christian doctrine, and of course to the prevalence of christian knowledge." This position too was controverted in the "Remarks," and very opposite ground was taken. Creeds were considered as unfriendly to the acquisition of christian knowledge, because they take divine truth out of its biblical connexions; throw it into scholastic forms; substitute abstract propositions, as disputable as they are philosophical, for plain practical law; and interfere with the varied operations of different minds, by forcing a unity of sentiment at the expense of free inquiry. This view of creeds, which every man may see exemplified in the controversies of the present day, was traced up to the same degenerate ages, when scholastic theology, as correlative with ecclesiastical power, was introduced as another active cause, creating the *indispensable necessity* for these instruments. Thus history, instead of passing any eulogy upon their power to extend spiritual erudition, proclaims them from the first to have

been mere tests of philosophy, and therefore the ministers of strife and controversy. Such they have always been, and such they are now. This train of argument it was thought proper to undertake; and if it can conclusively be made out, every candid reader must feel, that the position it assails is fairly “demolished.” I did the best I could at the time, and shall not here resume the subject,—Dr. M. having in this case, as in almost every other, unceremoniously passed by every thing that was said.

It may be proper here to state—as, after having read the “Letter,” it seems difficult to say what amount of explanation is not necessary—that I do not indiscriminately condemn all who lived in the early ages, to which this argument refers. Augustine, Gregory Nazianzen, Irenæus, Jerome, and others, entered their serious protest against the sectarian measures of their own day. And no doubt there were many, belonging to the class of private christians,—men of good common sense, and sound moral judgment,—who expressed their noiseless and ineffectual testimony against the inroads of ecclesiastical power. Such men there are in every society, both political and religious. Their voice is seldom heard in the ferments of a popular policy; or when the public mind has sunk into indolence and sluggishness, subdued and paralysed by the success of a *party*. Such individuals, however, are generally found, though they may be unfrequently called out, to be the redeeming corps of a declining community; and happy is it for that community, when

they have moral courage enough to meet their moral responsibilities. *Calvin* has happily expressed this condition of human society, in reference to ages preceding him, in the following language:—"Let us now return to human laws. If they tend to introduce any scruple into our minds, as though the observance of them were essentially necessary, we assert, that they are unreasonable impositions on the conscience. For our consciences have to do, not with men, but with God alone. And this is the meaning of the well-known distinction, maintained in the schools, between a human tribunal and the court of conscience. When the whole world was enveloped in the thickest shades of ignorance, *this little spark of light still remained unextinguished*, so that they acknowledged the conscience of man to be superior to all human judgments. It is true that what they confessed in one word, they afterwards overturned in fact; yet it was the will of God, that even at that time there should remain some testimony in favour of christian liberty, to rescue the conscience from the tyranny of men." The misfortune, however, is, that such men too often retire from public view, and, doubting their competency to hold in check a growing evil, leave it to cure itself.

In making up the historical testimony, intended to support the doctrine of the "Remarks," I took the liberty of summoning Dr. M. himself as a witness; and quoted several extracts from letters, published by him, a few years ago, on the points in-

volved in the episcopal controversy. The language of some of these extracts has been thought, by many, to be inconsistent with the phraseology of the "Lecture;" and to show, that Dr. M. inferring from the degeneracy of the early ages that their testimony was worth nothing, and rejecting *all human testimony*, in or dermore fully to sustain his inference, had retreated, not to his *creed*, but to the BIBLE ALONE. I thought so too. Dr. M. however, is very much surprised that any inconsistency should for a moment be supposed to exist. It is never very pleasant to foil an opponent by his own weapons; and it might be rude now to press the controversy in that form, especially as he has unequivocally declared his present opinions, and seems to mourn that it is impracticable for our Bible societies to send the confession of faith along with the Bible. I beg leave, however, to offer some reasons, why it is supposed that the extracts in question are somewhat contradictory.

1. In the "Letters" he speaks of the Bible *alone*—of the word of God as being the *sole standard*—of *the traditions and inventions of men*, as not to be *followed*—of our having but *one master*, even Christ—of our obligation to call *no man, or body of men*, masters, on earth, &c. i. e. I supposed him to be maintaining, in all its integrity, this argument against the episcopalians,—that it was death to any cause which could not be sustained by the Bible *alone*. To quote some new extracts:—Thus he smiles at a prelatial concession:—"In other words,

they confess, that the scriptures, taken *absolutely alone*, will not bear them out in their claims. But they suppose, and insist, that the *facts* which are mentioned in the sacred history, *taken in connexion* with the writings of the *early fathers*, decidedly support this claim. That is, the New Testament, in its own divine simplicity, is insufficient for their purpose; but *explained*, and *aided*, by the writings of fallible men, it declares positively in their favour. Is it so?—What is this but saying, that *the Bible is not a rule either perfect, or sufficient for the church?* What is this but embracing a *principle which makes human testimony co-ordinate with that of God*; and which must involve us in all the mazes and uncertainty of tradition.”* Thus also he quotes the declaration of the celebrated *Chillingworth* with great commendation:—“I, for my part, after a long, and, as I verily hope and believe, impartial search of the true way to eternal happiness, do profess plainly, that I cannot find any rest for the sole of my feet, but upon *this rock only*, viz. the *Scriptures*. I see plainly, and with my own eyes, councils against councils; some fathers against other fathers; the same fathers against themselves; a consent of fathers of one age against the consent of fathers of another age; and the church of one age against the church of another age.”—“But it is needless,” continues Dr. M. “to multiply reasonings, or authorities on this subject. The *sufficiency and infallibility of the scriptures ALONE*, as a

* Letters, vol. 1. p. 119—20.

rule of faith and practice, was assumed as the grand principle of the reformation from popery, and is acknowledged to be the foundation of the protestant cause.”* Now Dr. M. does not speak in this plain manner in his “Lecture.” He does not come out unequivocally, and say that the Bible is the **ONLY** rule—the **SOLE** standard. On the contrary, he speaks of the Bible as the only **INFALLIBLE** rule; and then employs all his argument to show that this only infallible rule is not *sufficient*, but that we must have a creed to *explain and aid* the Bible;—a *co-ordinate* instrument. He even goes so far as to speak of the grand principle of the reformation from popery, the acknowledged foundation of the protestant cause, being *properly understood*; as if there was any difficulty in understanding it, saving that it is not very easy to perceive how authoritative creeds can be introduced into protestant churches, consistently with its evident import; and as if it had not been framed, purposely to shut out the decisions of synods and councils.

To lay two sentences alongside of each other, and to show that Dr. M’s attempt to *explain* does not relieve him:—In the “Letters concerning the order and constitution of the christian ministry,” he says: “As the christian ministry is an office deriving its existence and its authority *solely* from Jesus Christ, the King and Head of his church, it is obvious that his word is the *only* rule by which *any* claims to this office can properly be *tried*, and the duties and

powers of those who bear it, ascertained.”* In his letter to “a gentleman of Baltimore,” he says:—“I say, how is she (the church) to ascertain that this is the character of her *candidates for the holy ministry*, when, according to the brother whom I am constrained to oppose, she is forbidden to employ *any other test* than that which the most corrupt and unqualified will bear, (the Bible) just as well as the most excellent; and which is, *of course in reference to the point to be decided*, NO TEST AT ALL.”† Ah! *pudet, pudet!*

2. When Dr. M. was conducting his argument with episcopalians, he found it necessary to object to *human* testimony, in which the strength of their reasoning lies, as beneath the grave and solemn subject on which he wrote. But as human testimony has so much to do with all the sectarian varieties that exist in the church, he steps forward, like a candid man, and discards the whole, as an unhal- lowed intrusion upon sacred things, and appears to view the sanctuary as God’s own tabernacle. He could not sustain his cause on any other principle; because his antagonist would not suffer him to de- cry human testimony, and then to introduce just as much of it as suited himself. Now let us suppose some episcopalian really convinced by the Doctor’s argument, and conscientiously brought over to the presbyterian cause. The convert had, or had not, been previously an officiating minister. He how- ever wishes to be so employed in the new associa-

*Vol. 1, p. 25.

† Page 24.

tion which he has been induced to join. Dr. M. hands to him the confession of faith, and coolly asks—“Do you sincerely receive and adopt the confession of faith of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the holy scriptures?”—“The confession of faith of this church! Pray Sir, is this the Bible?”—“This confession, my friend,” replies Dr. M. “is a *summary* of the Bible; it contains whatever is important in the Bible, arranges religious doctrine much better, and is a more effectual *test* of orthodoxy. It is well calculated to extend ‘the prevalence of christian knowledge;’ it is a tribute to truth and candour, which we owe to other churches and to the world; and it is ‘a depository, a guardian, and a witness of the truth;’ all of which is lost, if we take the Bible *alone*; so that if you reject this, or hesitate to receive and adopt it, you will necessarily become a latitudinarian and a heretic; for these have been the most zealous opposers of such ‘excellent standards.’”—“Ah, but Dr. M. did you not tell me, that ‘as the christian ministry is an office deriving its existence and its authority *solely* from Jesus Christ, the King and Head of his church, it is *obvious* that his word is the *only* rule by which any claims to this office can properly be tried? And when I objected to you, that your liberality, in sustaining such a proposition, seemed to me to involve you in a collision with this confession of faith, did you not tell me that we had but ‘one master, even Christ,’ whose word was our *sole* standard; and wind up your

reply, by awakening all my fears, when you said—
 ‘Happy will it be for us, if we can appeal to the
 great searcher of hearts, that we have not followed
 the *traditions and inventions of men*, but the
sure word of prophecy, which is given us to be a
 light to our feet, and a lamp to our path, to guide
 us in the way of peace?’ Is not my human testi-
 mony as good as your human testimony?”

Dr. M. must finish the dialogue, as I am unable
 to sustain the consistency for him. The case sup-
 posed may indeed be altogether the product of a
 delirious imagination; for episcopalians think as
 much of, and differ as much about, their ecclesiasti-
 cal formularies, as presbyterians do. But in the
 judgment of charity the case has been supposed; as
 presbyterians do not always reason illogically, and
 episcopalians are not always proof against a good
 argument. Moreover, thus much I thought proper
 to say, by way of explanation. Dr. M. may not,
 perhaps, be inconsistent with himself, and the
 reader may see, that the Bible ALONE, and the
 Bible with a CREED, mean the same thing. But I
 thought, when the “Remarks” were penned, that
 these were very different things, and I think so
now.

SECTION II.

In continuing his objections, Dr. M. says—“A
 still more remarkable charge to which Mr. D’s
 book is liable, is, that while he maintains, with so
 much zeal and vehemence, the utter unlawfulness

of all creeds and confessions, he distinctly allows the indispensable necessity of having a confession of faith, and confesses that he has, and employs one himself."—I beg leave, very respectfully, to say, that the *charge* is most remarkable; so much so, that it is far from being *correct*. One of the necessary qualities of a good controvertist is, that he should carefully endeavour to understand his opponent; and most scrupulously avoid misrepresenting words, or phrases, or sentences, which it would require some ingenuity to misunderstand.—I did not condemn *all* creeds, taking the term *creed* in its literal sense; but I did condemn all creeds, taking the term *creed* in its ecclesiastical sense, i. e. as expressing a rule of faith and manners, composed, authorised, and *enforced* by a voluntary association. I did not confess that I employed a creed, in the ecclesiastical sense of that term; but did confess that I had one, in the literal sense of the term; and admitted that every man must have one, as far as he has investigated, to his own satisfaction, any set of subjects which may be proposed to his belief. It is difficult to perceive how my meaning could have been mistaken, or not to be grieved by the use of such unfair artifice in argument.—I must explain myself again.

Faith is one of the great distinguishing attributes of the christian: and faith, Dr. M. himself would define to be, reliance upon *the testimony of God*. God has revealed certain truths in the Bible, which he calls upon men to *believe*, and which they are

explicitly required personally to examine and apprehend, in order that they may believe them. Every man who has obeyed the divine commandment, and received as true the things revealed, has formed a *creed*;—in other words, he *believes* what the Holy Spirit has revealed. Without this *he cannot be a christian*, but plunges, as an obstinate rebel, into everlasting perdition. The sentence is—“He that believeth not shall be damned:”—“He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” To save men from this awful issue, and to bring home to their hearts the truths, which are addressed, in the scriptures, with so much plainness and point to the human mind, the comforter is sent:—“He shall reprove the *world* of *sin*, because they *believe not* on me.” Most indubitably then, every real christian has a *creed*—or certain things which he believes. In making this declaration, may it be considered, in any sense, as conceding the point in controversy? Do I thereby allow, that men may form voluntary associations, and frame articles of belief for one another? Or that, our fathers, being good, wise, and holy men, far more so than any of their children, had a right to form a *test* of orthodoxy, comprising certain abstract propositions, which in their apprehensions were certainly true? No, verily. Did not our fathers examine for themselves, and form a *creed* for themselves? And may we not, with equal freedom, and equal confidence, do the same thing, each for himself? If the fathers had

possessed the talents of as many archangels, would their superiority over our little capacities, entitle them to usurp the prerogative of the Lord Jesus, and tell us what we must believe, on pain of forfeiting gospel privileges?

Further, I have supposed, that as the word of God is intended for the human family, and as they may all have the Holy Spirit as their common teacher, there will be found a certain coincidence of sentiment, at least in regard of the first principles of christianity. This coincidence I ventured to represent as something like a *social creed*: that is, that the Bible being so plain a book, as Dr. M. himself will admit, there are certain truths which men will embrace in common, from the very nature of the case. Truths which no *test* of orthodoxy can make more plain; truths which may be brought into dispute by the manner in which such tests may express them; and truths which the different sects may and do fully embrace, notwithstanding their tests may be exceedingly varied. Some of these truths, I undertook to state, and Dr. M. has, as he supposes, caught me tripping. But nevertheless, in the primitive church, as Irenæus reports, christians throughout the world believed these things, as though they had inhabited a single house, while they had no permanent, accredited, document, in the shape of an ecclesiastical creed.

One sentence occurring in the "Remarks," on this subject, has struck Dr. M. as peculiarly unfortunate for my argument. It is as follows: "Here-

ticks were censured and avoided by common consent, under the operation of that inherent power, which religious society has, like all other societies, to regulate itself according to its own constituent principles." This sentence, it seems, needs some explanation. When I wrote it, my impressions were of this kind: that when certain elemental truths should be necessarily adopted by any community, or by society at large, any man, who would undertake to question them, would be condemned by every tongue; and thus hereticks would be kept out by the force of enlightened *public opinion*. So it was in the primitive church. So it *should* be now, without the help of an ecclesiastical creed: and so it *is*, in certain things, independently of all these arbitrary rules. Public opinion is always to be respected and consulted, and that too just in proportion as it is enlightened. It will eventually overturn every thing which opposes it, and establish its own enlarged and liberal principles. I supposed then, that in the case specified, the integrity of these elementary truths would have been sufficiently protected, without the interference of ecclesiastical power; and that ecclesiastical power could only give importance to the opponents of such truths, by making a *fuss* about them, or by undertaking *formally* to chastise them. "It was not *necessary*," says Dupin, "to assemble councils in order to own the truth and condemn error."

Again, my impressions were, that this coincidence of sentiment, would *naturally* extend itself,

by the habitual intercourse to which it would lead. Union is not only the basis of communion, but communion promotes union. There is no more common result from the operations of society than this very one. Separate men into ecclesiastical or political communities, and they acquire a sectarian likeness. They will have common sentiments, common language, and common habits. Indeed, one of the great evils flowing from our voluntary associations, is, that they divide men into small classes on unnatural principles; and so prevent that spiritual unity which might exist, by narrowing the intercourse which christians ought to have with each other. The practical virtues of believers, in the exercise of which they might exert a reciprocal influence of the most happy character, have not their full play; but are often metamorphosed into those offensive qualities which party contests require. If then society was left to feel the full force of whatever virtues its members might have, instead of being diverted to secure or sustain some sectarian objects, not only might any heretical influence be speedily repressed, but social virtue would be increased. In other words, if men would cease to interfere with one another, quit their "doubtful disputations," and honestly seek to promote each other's spiritual welfare, we should have more unity than all the synods and councils on earth ever have produced, or ever can produce.

Once more. It was my impression, that even when a high excitement occurs, the more mildness

that is displayed, the sooner that excitement will subside; the different combatants will the more speedily rise, or be reduced, to their own level; and that it is an extreme case, when mere *power* must be introduced, and all arguments be answered by *force*. In religious matters, no disputant is at liberty to suppose such an extreme case; because church government is a mere matter of *moral* influence, to be sustained by mere *moral* means, and leaves all beyond to the arbitration of the Lord Jesus. The union between church and state has begotten different ideas, and mere *power* has been solicited to settle a *moral* question. Ecclesiastical creeds belong to this progeny; and, as might have been supposed, controversy has been prolonged, not settled. So, after the council of Nice, it was long before the orthodox could settle what the *creed* ought to be, and Arianism has not been banished yet. Hence also the contests between Calvinists and Arminians have been perpetuated to the present time, and we are invited to sustain all the prejudices of ages past: ages which were thrown into commotion, by combining religious and political principles together in one common mass. Such is the effect of *power*, when it is summoned to decide a moral question. At last it will be found, in pursuing such a course, that the civil arm cannot sustain an ecclesiastical domination. The world has at length discovered the mistake; politicians, who have any insight into the principles of their science, feel the difficulty; and while the nations of the earth are marching through the great

revolution, we Americans have some antedated documents to "nail to the cross." Our ecclesiastical rulers, however, do not yet understand, that religious society can regulate itself, under the blessing of the Head of the church; but they must be continually coveting a supremacy, which undertakes to correct the errors of others, while they never look at their own. A few years ago, there were two great political parties in these United States. What if they had written out their respective political creeds; and, forming assemblies to give importance to their sentiments, had regularly trained up their children in the faith, which the wisdom of their fathers had prescribed! Would they not have perpetuated their strife? Changing terms, such has been the value of the different creeds of different ecclesiastical parties. And, as in the one case, society has regulated itself, so would it have done in the other.

Dr. M. has made it necessary for me to offer some other explanations, in consequence of the following assertion:—"Spectres of monstrous form are constantly flitting before his (Mr. D's) eyes; and though most other people see them to be spectres only, *he* cannot be persuaded to believe that they have not a real existence. On such a feverish judgment, I have little hope of making an impression; but to *you*, (a gentleman of Baltimore,) my dear sir, allow me to appeal, and to ask, whether the doctrine of creeds, as held by me, has been fairly represented in Mr. D's pages."

Passing by the character of these assertions, or rather of the language in which they are expressed, I have to say, that if I have misrepresented Dr. M. in any thing, I am very sorry for it. It was done very unintentionally. But it must be recollected, that we had both taken up a subject of general interest to society; and that all the reasonings must be conducted in a manner to meet its actual connexions with society. At least such were my convictions; and I made use of Dr. M's "Lecture," not for the sake of systematically answering its statements, but to meet its general principles, so far as he had, according to my apprehensions, brought forward the subject in that form; and in defence of views, charged against me, which I could not deny. His own definition of a *creed*, was given in his own words; and the following observations were appended.—"This definition, perhaps, states the subject in *its mildest and least offensive terms*. But whether it will convey a full and entire view of a creed or confession of faith to the minds of his readers, is very questionable; or rather it is absolutely certain it will not, and cannot. The second part of it does, indeed, *partially* express the matter of oppression, against which we protest; and it does this in the least objectionable form: but it does not declare the 'sore evil' *in broad terms and in plain language*." This was surely affording a fair cover for Dr. M's peculiarities in defining the matter in controversy. And I cannot imagine why he should complain of any unfair representation. It is true,

that some of his expressions, which were thought a little uncourteous and dogmatical, were quoted in proof of a much harsher doctrine, than his definition expressed. But how could that be avoided? If Dr. M's phraseology was inconsistent with his mild, and comparatively inoffensive definition, that was no fault of mine. But when a man comes up to me with burning words like these,—“subscribing a church creed is not a mere formality; but a VERY SOLEMN TRANSACTION, WHICH MEANS MUCH, AND INFERS THE MOST SERIOUS OBLIGATIONS. For myself, I know of no transaction in which insincerity is more justly chargeable with the *dreadful sin of lying to the Holy Ghost than in this,*”—it is surely enough to make one look about, and ascertain where he is standing. Annanias and Sapphira start up before the view, in forms frightful as angels of darkness, with their hideous aspects and clanking chains. Perjured minister—broken ordination vows—and such like phrases, follow with every breeze; and as heaven or hell, souls redeemed or souls lost by ministerial influence, form alternatives of no small consideration, one almost feels as if “the feet of the young men were at the door.” I entreat Dr. M. to illustrate his subject in a different manner, if he wishes my nerves to lie still under his milder views of creeds, or of the obligation which they imply.

But to the subject itself. How far do my opponents intend to carry the obligation of their creeds? I cannot understand them. Do they design, that a

creed, which a man subscribes, should be obligatory on his conscience? The reader knows, that an honest man's creed ought to lie very close to his conscience. But I have heard some say, that the creed of the presbyterian church is not obligatory on the conscience of those who subscribe it. Can this be? Others have said nothing about that delicate matter. And others again have talked about a minister's *leaving* the church, where he has been, and still is, successful in his labours, and going elsewhere to seek for people who might agree with him; as if there were no moral considerations to be weighed—nothing but the ecclesiastical forms of a voluntary association to be consulted; and as if a minister had no preliminaries to such a step, to settle, between his conscience and his Master. But suppose an individual, thus circumstanced, should depart to meet a more congenial settlement; would he escape censure? His opponents would, perhaps, rejoice to witness the removal. But would they forget his defection the sooner, or condemn him the less? Perchance ecclesiastical rules might be forgotten; and the nature of a *moral compact*, formed between sanctified hearts, on the pledge of a common hope, or between a father and his spiritual children, by ties which they mutually understand to be eternal, might be then called up into warm discussion. And rather let me meet the censure of an ecclesiastical body, than the glance of a redeemed spirit, whose confidence in my moral integrity has

been disappointed, or who has detected me, at the altars of God, destitute of a “natural affection.”

I do not understand my brethren, nor Dr. M. speaking in their name. If the creed of the presbyterian church is a mere summary of scriptural doctrine, not obligatory on the conscience, why not say so in words which are perfectly intelligible? If it be not obligatory on the conscience, why have they treated me as they have done, because I threw it off from my conscience?—If it be obligatory on the conscience, why do they talk of a mere *summary*, and tell us that the only question in dispute, is about the practical *usefulness* of such an instrument? Why do they make it a term of communion, when in “the Holiest of all” they confer with a devoted youth, about his entering into “the holy ministry?” Why do they trace out any scruples, which a tender conscience may feel on the subject,—and that after they have clearly ascertained that no heterodoxy exists, even upon their own principles—into a necessary opposition to some things which the word of God has indisputably established, and into an obligation, resting on such an individual, to break up all his social relations—to go into the wide world, and seek companions wherever he may find them?

The “Remarks” were explicitly directed against creeds, as asserting *authority*—as *tests*, whereby men’s claims to evangelical privileges are to be determined—as *rules*, by which faith and practice are to be tried. That this is the use to which they are

put, every ecclesiastical movement of church courts most abundantly demonstrates. Dr. M. calls them *tests*, and ardently pleads for them, in that form; and so far as he adopts this view, the "Remarks" were directly opposed to his principles. The ground occupied, was precisely that which he took in his controversy with episcopalians, when he said— "But although my opponents discover so much reluctance to be *judged by the law and the testimony*, I hope, my brethren, we shall never so far forget our character as christians and protestants, as to suffer our faith or practice to be tried by ANY OTHER TEST." That is, my whole argument was employed against the almost universal practice of using *other tests*, than the law and the testimony. Did I then misrepresent Dr. M's doctrine of creeds? Or when he calls them by another name, and speaks of them as summaries of the leading doctrines of the gospel, does he, even in his "Letter," disclaim the use of them as tests? And if not, why am I thus accused, as though I were beating the air?

Dr. M. moreover says, that "after the most ample explanation and assurance has been given to the contrary," I still insist on representing his doctrine of creeds, "as placing them above the Bible." Now I do most certainly know, that my brethren will unequivocally declare, that they do not make their creeds equal to the word of God. I have charged them with no criminal intentions; but do believe them to be perfectly honest in the declaration; and in the "Remarks" I had gone so far as

to say, “we know full well, that no protestant will dare to represent them (creeds) as paramount” to the scriptures. Who doubts this? So Calvin says, that “the schools acknowledged the conscience of man to be superior to all human judgments:” but then he adds, “what they confessed in one word, they afterwards overturned in fact.” In like manner these brethren act. After they announce their opinions concerning the unrivalled excellence of the holy scriptures, they turn round and make their creed the rule of admission into ministerial privileges. After they have declared the *sufficiency* of the Bible, they, in almost the same breath, assert that with the Bible *alone* the church cannot live. After they have ascertained that men have common principles with them,—something very far beyond a laconic declaration of their general belief in the Bible—they immediately refuse communion with them, unless they consent to receive their creed. Now, if the church cannot live simply with her Bible, but may flourish with her creed—if the Bible affords no effectual guard against the inroads of heresy, while a creed does—if the privileges of the ministry are to be determined, not by the Bible, but by a creed,—then is not the one *practically* put into the place of the other? Is not one *practically* better than the other, insomuch as it does what the other cannot do? In short, is it not the supposed practical *usefulness* of creeds, which has obtained for them all the laboured eulogy they have received?—I can assure Dr. M. that there are

more than frightful spectres flitting before a man, when a church court undertakes to censure, to condemn, and to eject him, because he has declared that his conscience is not amenable to their authority. And while facts are so glaring, it is in vain to say, that these ecclesiastical tests are of secondary importance: or, that in being rules of ecclesiastical proceedings, when men's doctrines and morality are to be tried, they yet are not rules of faith and practice: or still farther, that, when both doctrines and morality remain unsuspected in making the Bible a test, they still are sufficient to utter a judicial sentence,—they are not practically made *paramount* to the word of God.

SECTION III.

Dr. M's *third* charge against the "Remarks" is, that the "principal conclusions are not only as perfectly illogical as they can possibly be, but, so far as they go, *they prove by far too much*" for myself. Under such circumstances, any writer would be truly unfortunate; and ought to feel himself really foiled by his adversary, if the charge can be substantiated. How does Dr. M. establish his assertion?

In my argument, he supposes me to reason,—I must state the doctrine of the "Remarks" as I intended it, because Dr. M. most certainly uses words to suit himself,—that if the Bible be the *only* rule of faith and practice, then it clearly follows,

that when the church forms an *authoritative* creed or confession, and presents it to a candidate for the ministry for adoption, she commits sin; for she attempts to add something to God's own *rule*. His remark on this argument is, that it would equally prove all **PREACHING** to be sinful, and every **COMMENTARY** on the Bible to be a monument of rebellion against God; in short, "that every attempt, on the part of ministers or others, in whatever form, *to illustrate, explain, and apply* the truths of scripture, is a presumptuous interference with the authority of God over the conscience!"—These are very serious "conclusions;" and well may Dr. M. ask his correspondent, whether we are prepared for them?

For one, I am ready to say, that I am very far from being prepared for them; and Dr. M. very fairly intimates that he knows I would shrink from them. My idea, however, is, that these conclusions do not follow from the doctrine of the "Remarks;" and I suppose, that in making them out in the "Letter," the writer has felt his ingenuity fairly taxed. He has anticipated objections, and thus put his reader in the possession of principles, which refute his charge in the most demonstrable form; and that too, when they are in his own hands. I must, however, discuss these principles, briefly, for myself.

1. Is an ecclesiastical creed, a mere *explanatory* document? Does not every christian know the difference between the *creed* of any denomination,

and the sayings of any of its ministers or commentators? If a creed be a mere matter of explanation, then it has been conceded, that a church court may make an *annual* creed, if it pleases, and on its own responsibilities; provided that, when made, it is not imposed upon others, or used as a term of communion in religious ordinances. But is this the fact? What hosts of ministers have passed away to their last account, since the Westminster Assembly met! How commentators have been multiplied—falling or rising according as public opinion may have sanctioned or condemned them! But their creed—it would well nigh break all the presbyterian churches to pieces, to part with it! Surely then Dr. M. will not tell me, that all these different matters are one and the same thing; because he knows better.—What an immense difference between the occasional declaration, or passing sentence, of a minister of the gospel, and a permanent, accredited document! The one is not remembered from Sabbath to Sabbath, though its savoury impression may remain through eternity;—the very fact that it is *nuncupative*, leaves to the divine spirit, who searches all these deep spiritual things, to employ the moral essence of a truth, which has been encompassed by human infirmities, while the mistakes of words and phrases are entirely forgotten. The other is a manual, designed for common use, perpetuating its abstract propositions, and clustering around it the best affections and the strongest feelings of human beings. Often have I

heard a tale of personal experience, traced up to a sermon, whose words were all forgotten, or to an ordinance, made more spiritual by an “expressive silence.” But with ten-fold frequency have I heard angry and protracted debates about the strong and forbidding phrases of a catechism or confession of faith. And is there no difference? Or will Dr. M. tell me that, in condemning a sectarian institution of bad tendency, my reasoning equally rejects a moral one, under the immediate care of the Spirit of God? Will he tell me that an abstruse compend, exhibiting philosophical speculations far beyond the reach of ordinary mortals, is equal to that providential superintendence which scatters a multitude of mercies over all God’s works,—makes his sun to shine upon the evil and upon the good, and sends his rain upon the just and the unjust? Can an ecclesiastical creed be compared with the ministerial institution for one moment, either in respect of its good, or of its bad qualities? The mistakes of the apostles themselves are long since forgotten, and their sermons exist no more, but in the hearts of beings passed either to heaven or to hell, or in the records of the Judge of all the earth. You might almost as well re-inter the body of Moses, and wrest it from an angel’s grasp, or confound us with a piece of the Redeemer’s cross—a nail that pierced his blessed feet—as to give us an abstract of an apostle’s sermon. Their *summaries*, framed under the direction of the Holy Spirit, during the hour they spoke, have all been forgotten; but their

inspired epistles gather fresh laurels in this lately discovered land, and are now borne on angelic wing to earth's remotest bound, and darkest corner.—And is there no difference? Are ministerial sermons and permanent documents correlative matters? No, verily, no.

The great objection against ecclesiastical creeds, was, that they formed *authoritative rules*, and are practically used in that way. If, knowing that a civil constitution has made the legislative and executive powers distinct branches of government, I should argue that the executive officers had no right to make laws; would it thereby be inferred, that professional counsel, which society recognises and the law allows, is equally inadmissible, or that treaties on law would be rebellion against the legislative power? Certainly not. But if a class of civilians, should so far contravene the principles of the constitution, as to resolve themselves into a coordinate branch of legislators, then the supposed inference could not only not be evaded, but it ought most freely to be admitted. In like manner, if ministers, stepping from their pulpits, where they might have poured in full stream their most generous feelings around the altar of the church's service, should enter a church court, and undertake to exercise legislative power, after God has given us his Bible as the only *rule*, then Dr. M's inference would fairly be applied. In truth, this is the very thing against which we inveigh. Ministers, erecting themselves into "courts of Review and Con-

trou,” as Dr. M. himself says, do use a power, which the Bible, as the great constitution of the church, has not entrusted to them. Nay more, as this power has very frequently been usurped before the canon of scripture was closed, and as inspired men foresaw that it would be usurped afterwards, express provision has been made against it in the scriptures themselves.—This being the doctrine of the “Remarks,” Dr. M’s reasoning is wholly inconclusive.

In relation to “commentaries on the Bible,” his argument is, if possible, still more defective. They may not be altogether harmless, and the church, upon the whole, might do as well, if not better, without than with them. For the most part they manifest very little intellectual independence, and are the depositories of the dogmas and notions of the day in which they were written. But still, no man is obliged to own or read them; no church court will try heresy or immorality by their interpretations; there is no difficulty in exchanging them, and no censure implied in rejecting them. But what of ecclesiastical creeds? Are they thus lightly esteemed? Do christians consider them as mere commentaries? Would Dr. M. listen for a moment to any overture, which would propose so to treat them?—Let men write as many creeds as they please, and publish them as often as they please. But let it be done on their own responsibility, and let ministers and christians read them or not, at their own option. On these terms our controversy

would soon be over.—Dr. M's third charge therefore is wholly unfounded.

2. I reply to this charge, by saying that preaching is a *divine ordinance*; and if Dr. M. can say as much for ecclesiastical creeds, I yield the dispute. And certainly he has been often enough called upon to do it. But how can the doctrine, that the Bible is the only *rule* of faith and practice, lead to the destruction of the ministerial office, when this only rule creates that office? In sustaining the one, I am executing the other. So that the fair conclusion is directly the reverse of that drawn by Dr. M. This charge has been often made before, and it was distinctly taken up in the "Remarks;" where the ministry was represented, not merely as a divine ordinance, but as a favourite institution, which Jehovah proffered to take under his own habitual inspection. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, *that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.*" That is, God would consecrate ministers as his own immediate agents: he would supply them with every needful grace; and give them an "increase" in the end. The living teacher, thus qualified, goes forth under those same provisions of mercy, which guaranty the moral consequences of the Bible itself; and the special charge given to him, in order that he may obtain the increase, is not to aspire after dominion. "Whosoever will be great among you," said the Master to his disciples, "let him be your *minister*; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your *servant.*" How then

Does the position, that the Bible is the only *rule* of faith and practice, lead to the abolition of the ministerial office, when those, who are inducted into it, are prohibited from making any other rule? The scriptures themselves, which we may not suspect of any inconsistency, have put the two things together. They declare their own perfection and consistency, and then create the office, under the limitation which such a view of their character supposes. So that Dr. M's criticism would reach a little higher than he wishes—his argument proves too much.

But suppose some inconsistency did exist. Is it an uncommon thing that one general principle should limit another, or that an exception should be admitted under a general rule? Must we laugh at every intermediate rest between two extremes? Are circumstances unworthy of being considered, when a lawgiver would enact laws? Or would Dr. M. from the fact that the ministerial institution has been created, infer that it must have a legislative character? Does not his own confession declare the Bible to be the only *rule* of faith and manners, and will he infer from that the destruction of the ministerial office? Or how will he escape the same conclusion from his own definition, that the Bible is the only *infallible* rule? Will not a fallible rule be as inconsistent with an infallible one, as any secondary agency may be with an *only rule*? In short—even if his reasoning were logical, would I be irreverent in saying along with Moses,—“Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spi-

rit upon them:" or in supposing, that finding a necessity, from the nature of the case, to form a secondary institution, he has carried this delicate matter of legislation as far as it ought to be carried? I do not see the justness of Dr. M's observations on this subject, in any view that can be taken of them.

Dr. M. after having admitted that preaching is called for by a divine ordinance, immediately asks—“And have we not an equally clear and unquestionable divine warrant for taking effectual care, that those who are candidates for the important offices of teachers, guides and rulers in the church; who are to dispense ‘the word of life,’ and to separate between the precious and the vile; do really understand and embrace the ‘truth as it is in Jesus,’ that they will not teach for doctrines the commandments of men; and for this purpose to receive their assent, in some form or another, to all the leading doctrines of the Bible?” The reader may see the reasoning more at length by consulting the “Letter” itself.

Does Dr. M. mean to say that we have a *divine warrant* for dividing the church into *voluntary associations*, and to authorize each party to frame its own rules or laws, by which to judge of the pretensions of a candidate for the ministry? If he does not, then the divine warrant he pleads does not cover the subject on which he writes: and of course his argument fails to accomplish his object. The remark will be found frequently in the course of these observations,—and there is a glaring necessity for its repetition—that Dr. M's reasonings rest up-

on the assumption, that we have a right to construct the church in the form of voluntary associations.— But this is not granted; on the contrary, it is most explicitly denied. Establish this, and the favourite conclusions, on which the “Letter” insists, may follow; but without it they cannot be sustained, because the premises are incorrect.

Dr. M. has not given one single train of reasoning, which his readers could feel to be scriptural. That his views are political, or meet the state of religious society, certain things being granted, is abundantly evident. If this be all that is necessary on a subject of such high, and commanding moral importance, I might pause; because I need no instruction in order to see the whole argument. But if scriptural law is to decide the controversy, and moral principles are preferable to sectarian provisions, then I cannot consent, for an instant, to his doctrine. Let him change his course, and take this ground; for if his principles be, by one tenth part, as important as they are represented to be, it is impossible that the scriptures should have left them unnoticed: nay impossible that they should not have fully disclosed the whole system. If this cannot be done, that simple circumstance shakes the system to its centre. And if Dr. M. should ever resume his pen in this controversy, I hope he will take up the subject in this form, and demonstrate his positions, as though he was benevolently reasoning for the good of human beings, who, though

they cannot yield to his creed, will bow to scriptural authority with the utmost cheerfulness.

When Dr. M. makes use of such scriptural phrases as these—"truth as it is in Jesus"—"sound in the faith"—"teach for doctrines the commandments of men," he must remember, that though they may be uttered in dulcet tones to a pious ear, yet among sectarians, all parties may use them with equal freedom, and with equal impropriety. They refer to the most desirable objects; but the question is how may all these things be determined, particularly under an evangelical law, which is defined as a "perfect law of liberty?" For example, I think, and I believe most correctly too, that the creed system inculcates "for doctrines the commandments of men:"—if a number of individuals combine together, call themselves a church court, and put me down, it does not follow that *I* am fairly condemned, as "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." And yet this is the precise import of a creed. If I am as correct as they are, and more so, as I take myself to be, how is the scriptural object secured?—In like manner, soundness in the faith, means, among sectarians, correspondence with their creed. But then it is abundantly evident, that parties, which are thus contending, may be equally "received by God;" nor only so, but if theoretic opinions were not so strongly insisted upon, and the fruits of righteousness, by which, the Redeemer says, his people are to be known, were more considered, there would be a corresponding judgment on the part of men.

For certain it is, that the different sects admit each other to be christians, and each other's ministers to be servants of Christ, while their respective creeds form impassible barriers to their mutual fellowship. Define the scriptural objects clearly, and then let it be answered, whether they may not be acquired without these voluntary associations, and sectarian formularies? This subject I will refer to a distinct section.

SECTION IV.

Dr. M. has ascribed to creeds certain "important ends," which, he says, cannot possibly be obtained without them. In illustration of this position, he asks, "how the church can take effectual measures to exclude Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, Swedenborgians, Universalists, Arians and Socinians from her ministry, without the use of creeds and confessions in some form?" "Here," he declares, speaking of my "Remarks," "here his doctrine labours most deeply and fatally. Until he shall relieve it from this difficulty, he will have accomplished nothing. It is a mill-stone about the neck of his cause, which, unless detached, must sink it irrecoverably."— Though I am very far from supposing this to be the most important part of the controversy, yet, as Dr. M. is pleased so to represent it, and as it is one of the most common topics of argument on his side of the question, it would be a serious omission not to give it a distinct consideration, in a reply to his "Let-

ter." This is undertaken, not without a hope of successfully parrying the blow, which he imagines to be fatal to my cause; and with some degree of confidence, that the argument will not "miss the point," which is so omnipotently destructive.

To present the subject in its full force to the reader, I must refer to a case, on which Dr. M. himself dwells with considerable fondness;—the case of Arius before the council of Nice. "We can scarcely conceive," says Dr. M. "of a more striking exemplification of the real importance of this point, than that which is furnished by the proceedings of the council of Nice, in the fourth century, in relation to the heresy of Arius." In reference to this, he asks, "what would Mr. D. have done, with his doctrine, had he been a member of the council of Nice?—Had he been there, he would, no doubt, have done—JUST NOTHING." This seems to bring the matter close home, and affords to the author of the Letter a fine opportunity of awakening all the suspicions of the community against his opponent, an opportunity which he does not fail to improve with his utmost skill, by throwing out a variety of hints, which are either unintelligible or unkind.

When asked, what course I would have pursued, had I been a member of the council of Nice, I confess there is considerable difficulty in framing an answer. You might almost as well "draw a diameter through the periphery of the divine plan, and ask me how God should make a world out of the other half. I answer, I do not know." The human mind, it is

presumed, always derives its own peculiarity of character from the combination of circumstances under which it is developed. How my mind might have been affected in that age, when a synodical test of orthodoxy was for the first time formed, and when the church deserted her Master's providence, to shelter herself under the patronage of an earthly prince, I cannot tell. What would Dr. M. with his doctrine,—unfavourable, it is supposed, to an union between the church and the state,—have done, when Constantine appeared to settle religious disputes by the potency of the civil arm? Just nothing? Or would he have persevered in making the creed, and then humbly craved the royal signature?

Some men always go with the majority. The sword is often a powerful argument, and I can assert nothing for my own courage, further than as it has been tried. I might then have been on the side of the council, and perhaps have approved of Arius' being sent into exile without a tear. But if this question is to form a sort of test for my doctrine, as held in the present age, where men may think for themselves; and under a government, which though "rich in woods, and groves, and coppices," yet "refuses to spare a single faggot for an *auto de fe*," then, I reply, that I must be an opponent of the measures of that unwise and slavish assembly. And, though Dr. M. with all his unfriendly hints, and the synod of Philadelphia, with all their exuberant zeal, cannot fasten down upon me the charge of Arianism, yet, in all probability, I should have been

banished with the heretic into Illyricum. I judge this latter consequence must have followed, from the inseparable connexion which my opponents suppose to exist between Arianism and the denial of the authority, or usefulness, of human creeds; from the conduct of the synod, which tried every practicable expedient to banish me from the heritage the Lord had given me; and from the many invitations I had received to leave the communion of presbyterians:—*The whole world*, says Dr. M. is before you.

My doctrine would have compelled me to have protested against the authority of the council, as a mere human contrivance; and as having no divine warrant, nor justifiable plea, to take cognizance in the case. I should have objected to the interference of the temporal prince in spiritual matters, as the great Head of the church had never committed them to his political management, nor in any sense consecrated him as an evangelical officer. I should have urged the utter incompetency of the imperial mandate to restore peace to the church; or indeed, to do any thing else but spoil the beauty of the whole evangelical association, and defeat “the important ends” for which the church has been instituted. I should have inveighed against the artifice of making an authoritative creed, inasmuch as, if a man cannot be condemned by the scriptures, he is not to be condemned at all. A judicial sentence must rest on *testimony*, clear and unequivocal—“Against an Elder,” saith the word of God, “receive not an accusation, but at the mouth of two or three witnesses.”

And finally, taking advantage of subsequent history, the knowledge of which the question supposes me to have possessed, I should have, with prophetic voice, forewarned the council, that they were giving form and size to a controversy, which should last until the Millennium should come round. Would I have been wrong in any of these views?

To illustrate my meaning a little farther, I will ask the privilege of relating an interesting story, whose circumstances are connected with the history of the council of Nice. The reader may find it in Cave's life of Athanasius, or in Milner's church history. "The bishops, before they formally met in the solemn council, spent some days in preliminary discourses and disputations; wherein they were attacked by certain philosophers; men versed in subtilities, and the arts of reasoning, whom either curiosity had drawn thither, or, as some suspect, Arius had brought along with him to plead his cause, and to retard and entangle the proceedings of the synod. One of which, priding himself in the neatness and elegance of his discourses, reflected with scorn upon the fathers of the council. A piece of insolence so intolerable, that an ancient confessor, then in the company, a man plain, and unskilled in the tricks and methods of disputing, not being able to bear it, offered himself to undertake him. For which he was laughed at by some; while others, more modest and serious, feared what would be the success of his entering the lists with so able and famed a disputant. The good man, however, went on with his resolu-

tion, and bluntly accosted his adversary in this manner. ‘In the name of Jesus Christ, philosopher, give ear. There is one God, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, who created all these things by the power of his word, and ratifies them by the sanctity of his Holy Spirit. This word, which we call the Son of God, pitying the apostacy and brutish state of mankind, condescended to be born of a woman, to dwell amongst men, and to die for them; who shall come again, to sit as judge upon whatever we do in this life. These things we plainly believe. Strive not, therefore, to no purpose, to endeavour the confutation of what we entertain by faith, or to find out *how these things may, or may not be*; but answer me if thou dost believe?’ The philosopher, astonished and thunder-struck with the zeal and plainness of the old man’s discourse, answered that he did believe, and thanking that conqueror that overcame him, yielded up himself to his sentiments and opinions, persuading his companions to do the like; solemnly affirming, that it was by an unspeakable power, and not without immediate direction from heaven, that he was brought over to be a christian.”

Could I whisper into Dr. M’s ear, I would say—
 “My brother, such are the consequences to which my doctrine leads. A doctrine, for which you venture to consider me as *delirious*, and on whose account your presbyteries and synods have treated me as an alien from the commonwealth of Israel. A doctrine, which rather covets the conversion of

sinner, than harshly casts out christians from the communion of saints. A doctrine, which solicits divine power as its aid, rather than the subtleties of scholastic theology, or the ingenious schemes of ecclesiastical rulers." O, that our old men and ministers, were like this ancient confessor, and that they would go forth with the Bible in their hands, praying that their preaching might be **THE WISDOM OF GOD, AND THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION!**

Shortly after, and in that very council, where this old man spoke with such divine eloquence, a *creed* was made. What did it effect? Was Arius converted, convinced, or silenced? Very far from it. Contentions abounded, angry debates were protracted, and Arius was banished. A little while after Arius was recalled, and *subscribed the creed*, remaining still unchanged in his heretical sentiments; so that this "important end," of excluding Arius from the ministry, was not secured even by a **CREED**.

Nor did many years roll by, until a bishop of Rome was guilty of an equally disgraceful manœuvre. Pope Liberius, "about the middle of the fourth century, when the Arian controversy was at its height, intimidated by the power of the reigning emperor Constantius, whom he knew to be a zealous disciple of Arius, declared publicly in favour of that party, and *excommunicated Athanasius*, whom all the orthodox regarded as the patron and defender of the catholic cause. This sentence he soon after revoked, and after revoking it, his legates, at the council of Arles, overawed by the em-

peror, concurred with the rest in signing the condemnation of Athanasius, yielding, as they expressed it, *to the troublesome times*. Afterwards, indeed, Liberius was so far a confessor in the cause of orthodoxy, that he underwent a long and severe banishment, rather than lend his aid and countenance to the measures, which the emperor pursued for *establishing Arianism throughout the empire*. But however firm and undaunted the pope appeared for a time, he had not the magnanimity to persevere, but was at length, in order to recover his freedom, his country, and his bishoprick, induced to *retract his retraction*, to sign a second time the condemnation of Athanasius, and *to embrace the Arian symbol* (creed) of Sirmium. Not satisfied with this, he even wrote to the Arian bishops of the east, excusing his former defence of Athanasius; imputing it to an excessive regard for the sentiments of his predecessor Julius; and declaring, that now, since it had pleased God to *open his eyes*, and show him how justly the heretic Athanasius had been condemned, he separated himself from his communion, and *cordially* joined their holinesses, (so he styled the Arian bishops) in supporting *the true faith*. Before he returned from exile, meeting with the emperor, who was by this time turned *semiarian*, the pliant pontiff, impatient to be again in possession of his see, was induced to *change anew, and subscribe the semiarian confession*.”—Will Dr. M. who has so earnestly asked me what I would have done, with my doctrine, as a member of the

council of Nice, look at the contrast, and candidly answer to himself, who “missed the point”—the ancient confessor or the creed-makers?

Dr. M. must now listen to a question from me, which was asked in the “Remarks,” and which he has not deigned to answer. Admitting that he may, by his creed, exclude Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, Swedenborgians, Universalists, Arians and Socinians from the ministry, by what authority does he extend its operation, and exclude from the ministry, in his voluntary association, men who are contaminated by none of these heresies? Men against whom he has not a word to say, but that they oppose the exercise of human authority in the church, and are scrupulous to preserve the rights of the human conscience, and the supremacy of the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church? Will he permit me respectfully to return his own words to him:—“Why this almost entire silence concerning a part of the argument, which, first of all, and above all, demanded his whole strength? Not, I am persuaded, because he had not discernment enough to see the full front and force of the difficulty; but because he had nothing to say. Here his doctrine labours most deeply and fatally. Until he shall relieve it from this difficulty, he will have accomplished nothing. It is a millstone about the neck of his cause, which, unless detached, must sink it irrecoverably.” I make not this quotation in the spirit of retaliation. But Dr. M’s words very clearly express my opinion in relation to the subject to which they are

applied; and in using them, I hoped to escape the charge of “dogmatizing with peculiar positiveness.” The case is drawn out at length in the “Remarks,”* and not one explanatory observation is made to meet it. It is now returned with deeper feeling than ever, as one which rises with ten-fold importance over that of the heresiarch, condemned by the council of Nice.

Still, however, the question remains unanswered, it may be said.—I must then turn to show, in a more systematical and formal manner, how this “important end” of securing the purity of the church is to be obtained, without imposing a human creed as a test of orthodoxy. An attempt to do this, will lead to a variety of observations; some of which may, perhaps, incur full as much censure as the doctrine they are designed to defend. I ask for them a candid consideration, from all those who propose the question under examination, in a manner sincere and frank.

1. One of the best methods of ascertaining how a difficulty is to be removed, is to trace it to its origin. If the circumstances which gave rise to it can be discovered and corrected, the remedy is at once provided. This was a principal object in the first part of the “Remarks,” which Dr. M. has laboured to discard as a piece of declamatory writing, or inconsequential reasoning. But, with all due deference to his higher pretensions, it is a much better mode of discussing so interesting a subject,

than dwelling with great pertinacity upon minor details; which must necessarily be entirely altered, by abandoning the false principles from which they proceed.

The present difficulty, the existence of which is considered to be so very important an argument in favour of the creed cause, and so destructive to the Bible cause, may be traced to a double source. The *first* is, the establishment of *ecclesiastical power*; contests for which have been the true secret of our sectarian divisions. All Dr. M's reasonings are founded upon the assumption, that christians have a right to transform the church into a *voluntary association*. This assumption rejected, the difficulty, which is supposed to be so mighty, dwindles into utter insignificance. A majority of the cases of discipline, which have occurred in the church, have originated here. The synod of Philadelphia, for example, never pretended to justify their high-handed measures by the scriptures; nor on the broad principle, that the Lord Jesus Christ, being King and Head of the church, had commanded them to do what they did do. Neither does Dr. M. in his letter, pretend to set up such a defence for them. Had they gone no farther than the scriptures warranted them to go, their reasonings would have been of a very different character, and their decisions would have been reversed. Let the church be constructed on her own principles; let the law which Christ has given her take its own proper place, and exert its own

proper influence; let room be afforded for the due display of the christian's personal graces,—love, humility, gentleness, *forbearance*, &c.—and there will be very little controversy. The conclusion will follow, that there can be no need for multiplying facilities, by which members of the church shall be ejected from her communion. If Dr. M. then inquires, how heretics are to be kept out, I reply, abandon those ecclesiastical schemes, which divide the church into voluntary associations, and introduce continual contests about the power of the keys. Let christians learn to seek a “godly simplicity,” rather than that outward show of sectarian superiority, which brings in the kingdom of God “with observation.” Let both ministers and people interest themselves about the spread of “pure and undefiled religion,” rather than indulge themselves in pride and complacency, while they tell of “seventeen or eighteen hundred congregations belonging to *our body*.” But if, instead of this, they will still sustain their voluntary associations, then I admit, as was done in the “Remarks,” that, “the priesthood being changed, there is made of *necessity* a change also of the law.” The difficulty thus changes proprietors; and Dr. M. is left to do with it what he pleases; and that too in connexion with the fearful responsibility that belongs to an instructor of the rising ministry.

If the christian community in Baltimore should be of the Methodist persuasion;—if the community in Philadelphia should be of the *true* Presbyterian

order;—if the community in New York, should be endowed with high prelatival privileges; and a christian, agreeing with either, or with none, of them in their peculiarities, should visit any of these cities, in what relation does he stand to the members of any of these sects? Is he a brother, or is he not? If he is a brother, may they undertake to cast him off as an alien? May they refuse him a seat at the table of their master? Or may he decline to obey his Lord's commandment, do this in remembrance of me? Extend these questions as far as they may be carried; i. e. as far as Jehovah awards evangelical privileges to his own people, and what would become of these voluntary associations? The ecclesiastical idol would totter on his base, and Dagon like, perish before the ark of the Lord. But is this extended communion admitted? Are there no sects in the church in open and unblushing collision with its spiritual principle? How long is it since this subject has been fairly exhibited to the christian public in America? Who did not, but the other day, apprehend the most fearful consequences from its introduction? But as it has proceeded in its march, has not controversy subsided? As it goes still farther on, will it not continue to hush angry contests? And is it delirious to expect, that even the heretical speculations, which Dr. M. so frequently calls up like "spirits from the vasty deep," may presently be merged and forgotten, and each combatant learn the lessons of pure christianity?—If men would but quit their

strife, errors would be comparatively few; the Lord God would reign in the midst of them, and his professing people would have common feelings, and wear a common image. "For where envying and strife are, there are confusion and every evil work."

A *second* source to which this difficulty may be traced is *scholastic theology*. This too was very distinctly exhibited in the "Remarks," which yet in Dr. M's judgment, left all his original positions unshaken and unassailed. This system, or rather the jarring systems, which fall under the general designation of theology, convert religion into a human science; or make philosophy and metaphysics *the test of orthodoxy*. Did not Origen thus perplex the church in his day, and leave his philosophic mantle a pernicious legacy behind him? Did not Arianism start up here, and is she not the mere child of subtle speculation? Do not christians of different denominations in the present day agree more fully than they appear to do? Are not the principal subjects of their controversy the mere bequests of their fathers, and are not the people resigning them to their ministers; perhaps, after a little, to resign their ministers along with them?

Dr. M. sometimes refers to classes of men in different parts of our country, who "reject every thing like confessions, and boast that they take the BIBLE, simply, as their rule." He inquires after the orthodoxy of these individuals; and remarks—"Ah! it is death to his (Mr. D's) cause to take a

look into this part of the ecclesiastical statistics of our country!" These churches must be left to defend themselves. I have had no opportunity of knowing them. But let the fact be admitted, and still Dr. M's conclusion, in the humble opinion of the respondent, is a complete *non sequitur*. He himself designates them by controversial names, and in doing it, would go through the whole range of heretics. It seems then that they have all the accredited creeds of the different parties in their heads, instead of a sketch or summary on paper. The example goes a little farther than Dr. M. intended it should, and serves to reveal the pitch of refinement to which his system can be carried. And is not the presbyterian church on the high road to like preferment? The people in the first place can do without the book altogether; and then the ministers, if we may believe the report of a sermon lately addressed to the students at Princeton, are greatly troubling the church, to which they belong, by their difference in sentiment; so that the confession of faith in the presbyterian church is not in fact the creed of the members of that church. And in truth, if all the written creeds in the world were committed to the flames, there is scholastic theology enough to yield immortality to their different items. Dr. M's example then proves entirely too much for him, and only serves to show how perfect the system has become.

If then the question is again pressed, how shall we exclude heresies and their advocates from the

church, I reply,—Let christians quit their scholastic strife, and seek after nothing but biblical theology. Let young men, while in training for the ministry, be turned to the study of the BIBLE, and taught to learn for themselves what Jehovah has said. Systems of theology will always produce heretics; for they are always creating matters of “doubtful disputation,” and ranging parties in hostile array. Few men examine every thing which belongs to any given system; and many men declare a vast deal more than they know. A principle is taken for granted, and then its legitimate consequence is boldly defended; whereas, both should be discarded, if the first were candidly and fairly considered. Let young men be taught to investigate for themselves; to turn their attention to the scripture page, and declare no more than what they learn from prayerful and diligent inquiry. When this is done, the “millstone,” which we are endeavouring to detach, shall roll to the bottom of the floods; and Dr. M. and myself, with our Bibles in our hands, shall rise to the paradise of God, to differ no more for ever. There we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known; and charity, the greatest of all christian graces, now so loosely seated on our hearts, will adorn us with her mantle, while eternity shall last.

The foregoing remarks do not evade the point, but they state the real difficulty:—a difficulty, which a lover of the Bible may rather desire to see removed, than expect that it will be done in his day.

I am not so feverish as Dr. M. is inclined to represent me. My physician, I fear, does not understand my disease; at least, the patient has no confidence in the prescription. I see “the full front and force” of his objection; and the CONCLUSION to the “Remarks” derived all its peculiarity from the distinct perception of all the embarrassing circumstances in which the church has been involved. It was therefore that I wished not to be cut off, or *forced* to withdraw, from brethren, with whom the providence of God had associated me, both in joy and sorrow. A revolution, like that which has been so briefly described, is not to be accomplished in an hour. A generation may pass away before any very deep impression may be made. Perhaps Dr. M’s prophecy may prove but too true, and something like another babylonish captivity—a season of awful darkness, which may break many hearts,—be necessary to bury in deep oblivion the fearful mistakes of ecclesiastical combatants. My forebodings are often as gloomy as Dr. M’s prospects are bright. The Lord reigns, and Zion is his dwelling place.

2. How did the primitive church exclude heretics? Before the council of Nice there was no such permanent document as we call a creed or confession of faith;—what was done without it? Irenæus says, “as the sun is one and the same throughout the whole world, so the preaching of the truth shines every where, and enlightens all men who are willing to come to the knowledge of the truth.” The

who were “trained up in the faith, *had it so deeply imprinted on their mind,*” as Justin and St. Irenæus observe, “that they were always ready to give an account thereof, and as often as they should be required to do it, *without making use of any one particular form;* and from thence proceeds the difference of the creeds that are set down by the fathers.” St. Jerome says, “that the faith of the creed, which is an apostolical tradition, *was not written on paper, or with ink, but was engraved on the fleshly tables of the heart.*” Dupin affirms, that “every bishop instructed his own people in the faith of the church, and refuted errors by the authority of scripture and tradition.” And further he asserts, “the errors of those heretics created horror in all christians; they looked upon the authors of them, and those who maintained them, as people excommunicated and separated from the church, without their being expressly condemned in synods.” Such was the manner in which the early christians acted. Why should we not act in the same way? It might be as effectual a plan in our day as it was in theirs; and a coincidence in sentiment, as well as a harmony of feeling, might be as general now, as Irenæus declares it to have been then. Dr. M. has asked—how? He is answered by a simple detail of historical facts;—of facts which should have remained with all their prominence and interest to the present hour, had the church adhered to her divine constitution, instead of yielding to that wretched ambi-

tion, which changed her whole face, and gave her a new form; and had she preserved the simplicity of her faith, instead of conniving at those philosophical speculations, which corrupted her doctrines.

Perhaps it may be objected, that the primitive church became very much degenerated. This fact the letter under consideration declares will not be disputed. But what then? Was it for want of a "form of sound words?" What a pity, that some such test had not defended the altars of the sanctuary, when Origen drew nigh to philosophize over the mysteries of redeeming love! What a pity, that some such impassable barrier had not arrested Arius, as he approached the throne to pluck the crown from Immanuel's brow! The objection is a mere figment. The love of power, and an unhallowed zeal in doctrinal disputation, corrupted the church then, as they have often done since, and as they are doing at this present hour, to the shame of those who are so engaged. Creeds were brought in as an ecclesiastical *recipe*, and with the professed design of restoring peace; and they have aggravated the evil they sought to cure, as they should have done at an earlier period, had they been sooner introduced.

In the scriptures, there are some fundamental principles of christianity very distinctly stated, and which must immediately strike every candid mind. The man, who is willing to come to the knowledge of the truth, cannot mistake them. About these, even now, christians agree; which is one of the best

proofs that could be offered in favour of the simplicity of those principles. Is there no security for the peace and prosperity of the church, in this happy consideration? Was it not in this very thing that the primitive church might have gloried so much? Would not an apostle have descended cheerfully to this level, and have said—"If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; and as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the whole Israel of God?" And might not we, with like liberality of feeling, follow the same course, and so attain the "important end," so greatly to be desired? Such things, however, do not satisfy us, and every step we go beyond them involves us in controversy:—controversy which is always embittered by becoming identified with a *party*. And until we revert to this ground, which has been so long abandoned, we can never attain the important end that is sought for, either with, or without, a *creed*.

I beg that I may be understood. No intention is felt to circumscribe christian inquiry. The minister, with his Bible before him, may lay out all his mind and heart, in analysis, in exposition, in argument, in exhortation. But let him do it under a sense of personal responsibility, and as detached from every sectarian corps. Let him conscientiously feed the church with the bread of life, dividing to each saint his portion in due season; and, as a scribe, well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, bring out of his treasury things new

and old. Let him speak wisdom among the perfect, as well as frame lessons suited to babes. But let him not do this with wisdom of words, nor with the zeal of a partizan. The people in like manner must be thrown upon their responsibilities, and urged diligently to inquire after wisdom and truth, whose price is above rubies. They must be exhorted to practise, rather than to quarrel about what they know; and to love one another, rather than to glory over each other on account of their sectarian privileges. In all this there is not one atom of heresy. There is nothing but a little, plain, practical christianity. Nor can a better method be devised to keep out heresy. A common interest will thus be created; common feelings will be cherished; angry passions will be extinguished; party intrigues will be abhorred; knowledge will be increased; and thus religious society, like all other kinds of society, will, under the divine blessing, whatever Dr. M. may think of the assertion, fix its own social principles, "by an inherent power to regulate itself." To that happy result is every thing now tending, while the great practical movements of christians are in direct collision with all sectarian theories. The love of truth in the heart, combined with social virtues in the life, will become a principle of reform, as omnipotent and resistless as the blessing of Jehovah can make it: while, on the other hand, if we "bite and devour one another," we shall as certainly be "consumed one of another."

Adhering to fundamental principles, without

which christianity cannot at all exist, and in regard of which, unanimity of sentiment does even now prevail far beyond the lines of our sectarian divisions, the primitive church did live and flourish. Nor did she ever lose her spiritual image, until her sons began to philosophize about her doctrines, and to intrigue for dominion. Then a necessity for CREEDS was felt or supposed, and the attempt was made “to hatch a counterfeit life with the crafty and artificial heat of jurisdiction.” What followed, all the world may know:—agreeably to an ancient observation, “religion brought forth wealth, and the daughter devoured her mother;” or according to ecclesiastical traditions, when Constantine’s liberality was extended and accepted, a voice was heard from heaven, crying aloud, “this day is poison poured into the church.” Let us then revert to her original ground, and the important object under consideration will be secured; as the experiment, difficult at first, and having many apparent contrarieties to adjust, will in the end demonstrate.

3. The question, how heresies are to be precluded, will be fairly met by throwing ourselves under the protection of God’s word and Spirit. Dr. M. judging from the extract, which he has given in his letter, from the Savoy confession, and the warm recommendation with which it is pressed upon *my* notice, would appear to think that these are rather equivocal guardians of the church and her ordinances. Indeed, his whole reasoning is founded upon their supposed insufficiency. On this point he has

certainly a very awkward argument to maintain. Sometimes indeed he does venture to break away from its trammels, and then he tells us,—“In the mean time, the BIBLE ALONE is sufficient, I have no doubt, and has actually been found sufficient, in many thousands of cases, when accompanied by that Spirit who inspired it, to make men ‘wise unto salvation.’” That is, if I understand him, now, while christians are circulating the Bible “without note or comment,” the nations, from pole to pole, who shall thus be evangelized, shall find the Bible *alone* sufficient, when sanctified by the Holy Spirit. It is true he contemplates the introduction of creeds afterwards, together with voluntary associations, and all their glorious appendages. What? Are no heresies introduced in the mean time? How are they kept out? By the Bible alone, accompanied by that Spirit who inspired it? Will Dr. M. say all this, and then laugh at my absurdity for supposing that we christians, who have every spiritual privilege, might do the same thing? The converted heathen, in all the simplicity of their first love, may present an exhibition of the primitive church; but we must strive and contend. The concession yields the whole principle; and God forbid that his prospect of recovering it, when this “mean time” shall have passed away, should ever be realized.

Can we conceive of any better guardians than the Bible and the Spirit? “To the law, and to the testimony,” say the scriptures themselves.—“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is pro-

fitable *for doctrine, for reproof, for correction,* for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”—“Not by might, nor by power, *but by my spirit,* saith the Lord of Hosts.” The Spirit “*will reprove the world* of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” The Spirit of truth “will guide you into ALL TRUTH.” Now what more can the church want? Where is the christian’s faith? Is God no more unto Jerusalem “a wall of fire round about?” Will he be no more “the glory in the midst of her?” Shall his people call upon the Egyptians for help? Shall the ministry, like Uzzah, put forth their hand to the ark of the Lord? Does Dr. M. inquire who is to defend the church from her enemies, as though it had not long ago been revealed, that “the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence?” Is there any “restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few?” Why all this diffidence about results, which the providence of God stands pledged to secure; or these fears about the church, which he has “purchased with his own blood?” I may not coincide with the advocates of creeds in their practical unbelief, nor share in councils which question the divine faithfulness.

But it is to be apprehended, that Dr. M’s question does not propose the real difficulty. To refrain

from fellowship with men who deny the Lord that bought them, is not the object for which human creeds, as they are now employed, make provision; and to accomplish which the word and Spirit are represented as so insufficient. There is a much more serious difficulty pressing upon our sectarian ingenuity, which creeds are called in to remove; and that is,—how may living christians be excluded from our communion? Or, how may presbyteries and synods avoid extending FORBEARANCE to those who do not exactly agree with them in sentiment? It is no matter of wonder that human legislation should be resorted to, in order to invent an expedient to meet such a case; for the Bible is altogether insufficient, to teach us how we may safely contend with one another; or issue mutual sentences of excommunication. The scriptures call for forbearance, and all its kindred virtues, and forbid “doubtful disputations,” with all their kindred evils. Such passages as Dr. M. quotes with so much ease,—separating between the “precious and the vile,”—are altogether aside of the subject. The separation is between those who are not *vile*, but who are the Lord’s people, having “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” Or, to say the very least, the whole church is thrown into dissention and confusion; the most fearful animosities are cherished; and controversies, under false sanctions, are handed down from father to son as a spiritual legacy of the most costly value; in order that heresies and heretics may be excluded from

the church. Is this not plucking up the wheat with the tares, and undertaking to do what the Master has commanded us all to leave to his own arbitrement at the judgment day?

To repeat here a question, which was earnestly pressed in the "Remarks;"—if these ecclesiastical creeds are so very necessary, that the church cannot possibly do without them, why did not the Master furnish us with them? "It seems to us to be a very strange problem, that such instruments should be so indispensable, and that yet neither the Lord Jesus, nor any of his apostles, should ever have given them to us." It cannot be replied, that the occasion, or a difference in human sentiments, on which the whole argument rests, was not afforded: for never was there an age, when the controverted points were of more vital importance, than when the apostles themselves lived and preached. Yet, no annual synods were called, neither were any human creeds erected into tests of orthodoxy. Nor can it be replied, that they were unapprised of the difficulties of the coming times, or that they carelessly supposed that their epistles would settle all controversies, and for ever. For they foretold the endless heresies, which should creep in after their decease, and have described, not only Antichrist—huge, unsightly, and deformed,—but they have spoken of many antichrists "already in the world." Yet no human creed was formed, which in our day is represented as a sovereign remedy. And why not? To me it would seem, that it was because they had

no right to make one, or that they knew that it would be good for nothing when it was made. I may be mistaken. Then why did not the Lord Jesus, or some of the apostles, give us a CREED, seeing the church must perish without it?

The argument, involved in the observations immediately preceding, if it be not too positive to say so, I consider unanswerable, at least by Dr. M.—*He* cannot throw it back upon me, as being inconsiderable, or undeserving of attention. For, in his Letters on the episcopal controversy, he makes a very confident use of it himself; as, I doubt not, many advocates of creeds have done before and since those letters were ushered into the world. He had occasion to refer to “public prayer,” and observes in a note;—“By the way, it is not a little remarkable that the apostle should content himself with giving Timothy only *general directions* with respect to public prayer, and even these only with regard to *some* of the objects of petition. Where were the *liturgies* of those times? Had forms of prayer been *so indispensably necessary*, or, at least, *so pre-eminently important*, as our episcopal brethren tell us they *are, and always have been*, why did not Paul, or some other of the apostles, furnish the churches with liturgies *written by themselves, and under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost? How shall we account for it*, that instead of sending Timothy a form, he only laid down for him a few general words of direction? But this is not the only instance in which the apostles appear

to have been of a different mind from some modern churchmen.”* For example, CREEDS.—But I will not press too hard. I leave this argument to his calm and serious reflection. The “important end,” under consideration, is to be obtained by a due and faithful use of God’s word and spirit. Such is the divine arrangement, which no system of human policy can amend or improve.

4. There are certain things which men cannot escape if they would. They may often meliorate what they cannot cure; and they will only aggravate an evil by attempting to prevent, what the present condition of society places above their reach. Can you hinder a man from *thinking*? “I will not say,” said lord Thurlow, “that your majesty is ungrateful, but I *think* so.”—In religion, above all other things, the heart belongs unto the Lord, as a matter subject to his own inspection. Can you conjure away from me the images of eternity, or extinguish in my soul the idea of God? If a man’s impressions on topics of such high concern are false, can you alter them by the gibbet or the sword?—When religious sects possess the royal ear, and are supported by the royal decree, multitudes may change their *visible* professions, or suffer their consciences to become seared, from calculations of a secular character. But in a free land, where the civil arm would be paralysed by an effort to establish mental slavery, different consequences must follow. Why then undertake to control thought, or to in-

* Vol. 2. p. 88—9.

roduce a system of legislation, founded upon the absurd assumption that men must think alike? Or when divine providence is, with mysterious purpose, diffusing the varieties of human character over the world, and thus making men mutual aids, why should we separate and class them according to some arbitrary rule of a fancied similarity?

In the parable of the tares of the field, to which I before alluded, this subject is most beautifully illustrated. Human talent is not competent to the task of distinguishing accurately, between the different degrees of religious impressions, which men may receive. "In the multitude of counsellors, there is safety," says Solomon: and yet, even under these favourable circumstances, such an experiment has uniformly and completely failed. Synods and councils, with all their supposed wisdom, have never produced unanimity of sentiment in the church: though they have often ejected from all spiritual communion under their jurisdiction, those who loved the Lord Jesus; and have called upon the arena of their unhallowed conflicts, hostile synods to oppose their unrighteous measures. The wheat and the tares, it seems, must still grow together, by a moral necessity, which men have not sagacity, nor power enough, to remove. "Offences *must needs* come." Wo, indeed, unto the man by whom they come; but still they *must* come. Such is the situation of human things, and the fact should teach ecclesiastical politicians to make large allowances for the infirmities of human nature; to

mingle their censures with something of “the milk of human kindness;” to substitute charity for invective; to be gentle and forbearing, considering themselves lest they also be tempted; and to do a thousand other things, which would betoken the high origin of their ministerial commission.

To be plain. There is a vast deal too much legislation in the church. There would be more harmony and more purity, if there were fewer courts and fewer laws. There are many things in the world, which never thrive so well as when they are let alone. And religion, comparatively speaking, is one of those things. That is, it is not the result of an enlarged, and continually enlarging code of laws: but it is of the operation of God upon the heart; and never bursts forth with greater fulness or beauty upon the world, than when it is tenderly cherished in private. You might as well expect to make or test a philosopher by a set of by-laws in an academy, as to make or test a christian by synodical decrees.—By such a course, politicians have ruined human society; until a reaction has occurred, heaping revolution upon revolution. And by the same course, theologians have reached the appalling maxim—Ignorance is the mother of devotion. It is, and it must necessarily be, the result, that mankind shall be injured by interfering with freedom of thought. The human mind can never be what it ought to be, without liberty. Its perceptions are never so accurate; its views are never so enlarged; its decisions are never so prompt; its reasonings are never so

ingenuous; its approaches to God are never so close; as when, free and untrammelled, it learns from the prospects of the life to come, the duties of the life that now is. Virtue and liberty go hand in hand: at least men begin to think so, and every day accumulates testimony that it is so. Give us religious liberty then, and what becomes of heresy. If on the one hand, "liberty produces virtue, order and stability;" and on the other, "slavery is accompanied by vice, weakness, and misery," as Sidney would tell us, and as might easily be demonstrated by an induction of facts, as it has been by Sidney, why all these apprehensions—these fearful prognostics of the disastrous consequences of religious liberty?

I should be very much disinclined to suspect Dr. M. of an attempt to drive me into this wretched extreme. But then such is the nature of his question, and of all the reasonings by which it is illustrated: such is his argument in relation to the ministerial office, which has already been shown; and such is the character of his prophetic impulses, when he argues that the "no-creed system," as he would call it, rushes headlong into the wildest independency. All this, no doubt, he fully believes. But as I mean to act according to my own creed, I refuse to move one step, without my own consent. Men *may* use their "liberty for a cloak of maliciousness," and often have done it: but that they *must* necessarily do it, or that such is the unavoidable consequence of moral freedom, is another proposition altogether; which it would require more than the erudition of

a Salmasius, or the effrontery of a Filmer, to establish. Many such prophecies were tumultuously uttered by the enemies of the American revolution, in their hurried zeal; but time and facts have proved them hasty and untrue.

“Ariosto tells a pretty story of a fairy, who, by one mysterious law of her nature, was condemned to appear, at certain seasons, in the form of a foul and poisonous snake. Those who injured her during the period of her disguise, were forever excluded from participation in the blessings which she bestowed. But to those, who, in spite of her loathsome aspect, pitied and protected her, she afterwards revealed herself in the celestial and beautiful form which was natural to her, accompanied their steps, granted all their wishes, filled their houses with wealth, made them happy in love, and victorious in war. Such a spirit is liberty. At times she takes the form of a hateful reptile. She grovels, she hisses, she stings. But wo to those who, in disgust, shall venture to crush her! And happy are they, who, having dared to receive her in her degraded and frightful shape, shall at length be rewarded by her in the time of her beauty and her glory!

“There is only one cure for the evils which newly acquired freedom produces—and that cure is *freedom*. When a prisoner first leaves his cell, he cannot bear the light of day:—he is unable to discriminate colours, or recognize faces. But the remedy is, not to remand him into his dungeon, but to accustom him to the rays of the sun. The blaze of

truth and liberty may at first dazzle and bewilder nations, which have become half blind in the house of bondage. But let them gaze on, and they shall soon be able to bear it. In a few years men learn to reason. The extreme violence of opinions subsides. Hostile theories correct each other. The scattered elements of truth cease to conflict, and begin to coalesce. And at length a system of justice and order is educed out of the chaos." Or, as was stated in the "Remarks,"—"in society individuals will approximate to, or recede from each other, in their modes of thinking and habits of action; an assimilation may occur, by an inherent or an accidental power in society to regulate itself, and thus some social principles will be adopted by common consent."

It may be urged in reply, that our fathers have long since tried the experiment of these liberal principles, and found them wanting. Ah, me! What absurdity have not our fathers demonstrated to be just and rational? They have demonstrated that the nations ought to be governed by hereditary kings. They have demonstrated that the church should be regulated by diocesan bishops; or, rising according to a duly graduated scale, that at last the pope, as universal bishop, is entitled to universal obeisance. They have demonstrated that church and state should be identified together, under a common constitution. But what has their posterity said to these several demonstrations? On all these subjects Dr. M. would reject their testimony with unmingled indignation, and shelter himself under the reformation

motto—the Bible is the religion of protestants. Is it then only in making creeds that any reliance is to be placed on their judgment? Or have we not *altered*, revised, amended, enlarged, rejected, the creeds they made? Has their wisdom dwindled away into insignificance in every thing else, and may we safely take the Bible in one thing and not in another?

Dr. M. however, very confidently urges the experience of others, who have lived before us, as affording a very decisive argument. The following *remarkable* declaration, he quotes from the preface to the Savoy confession, and facetiously enough presses it upon my serious and frequent perusal.—“Hitherto there have been no associations of our churches, no meetings of our ministers, to promote the common interest. Our churches are like so many ships launched singly, and sailing apart and alone in the vast ocean, in these tumultuous times, exposed to every wind of doctrine; under no other conduct than the word and spirit; and our particular elders, and principal brethren, without associations among ourselves, or so much as holding out a common light to others, whereby they may know where we are.” After reading this passage, according to the wishes of my adviser, I can see nothing *remarkable* in it, but what is truly objectionable. There is nothing very remarkable in attempting to correct supposed evils by false remedies. There is nothing very remarkable in the circumstance, that men should imagine that church courts are highly useful, and ecclesiastical power very desirable. All such things

are common, wherever the creed cause has prevailed, and might very easily creep in among classes of "Independents," who might soon learn to reason like their neighbours, and fancy a *necessity* to exist to copy their example. The sons of Samuel governed Israel in a mischievous and immoral manner, and the people inferred from this evil, that they must have a KING:—"Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be *like* all the nations." Change terms, and the argument is as good in one case as in the other. So also in the second century, the primitive church would have *councils*; because, as Dr. Mosheim intimates, their *great utility* was soon perceived. And yet, what evils have not councils produced in the church, from that day to this? But that which I do consider as remarkable in this extract is, that christian ministers should speak in such a disrespectful manner of God's word and spirit: and lament so mournfully that they had no better pilots to direct them to the haven of peace; that they found no refuge from the storm in the protection of the King of kings; that they so bitterly wailed their fate, as though their brethren neither saw, nor cared for, their distress; and above all, that Dr. M. should laud them so highly, and prematurely triumph in the demonstration, that a creed, being able to effect what the word and spirit of God could not do, is above all praise.

Dr. M. is fully aware that quotations may be made on both sides; and that sometimes, the best answer that can be given to the opinion of one fa-

ther, is to lay alongside of it the opinion of another father. I would avail myself of the privilege, and offer, very respectfully, the following extract to the serious consideration of my worthy opponent. I do not apprehend that he is not aware of its existence, or that he has not read it “again and again:” but it serves me at the present juncture, and may meet the eye of some reader, who never saw it before. It is from the pen of *Hilary*, bishop of Poitiers, in Aquitania, who flourished in the fourth century, and is as follows:—“It is a thing equally deplorable and dangerous, that there are as many creeds as there are opinions among men; as many doctrines as inclinations; and as many sources of blasphemy as there are faults among us; BECAUSE WE MAKE CREEDS ARBITRARILY, AND EXPLAIN THEM AS ARBITRARILY. And as there is but one faith, so there is but one only God, one Lord, and one baptism. We renounce this one faith, when we make so many different creeds; and that diversity is the reason why we have no true faith among us. WE CANNOT BE IGNORANT, THAT SINCE THE COUNCIL OF NICE, WE HAVE DONE NOTHING BUT MAKE CREEDS. And while we fight against *words*, litigate about new questions, dispute about *equivocal terms*, complain of authors, that every one may make his own party triumph; while we cannot agree, while we anathematize one another, there is hardly one that adheres to Jesus Christ. What change was there not in the creed last year! The first council ordained a silence upon the *homoou-*

sion; the second established it, and would have us speak; the third excuses the fathers of the council, and pretends they took the word *ousia* simply; the fourth condemns them, instead of excusing them. With respect to the likeness of the Son of God to the Father, which is the faith of our deplorable times, they dispute whether he is like in whole, or in part. *These are rare folks to unravel the secrets of heaven. Nevertheless it is for these creeds, about invisible mysteries, that we calumniate one another, and for our belief in God.* We make creeds every year; nay every moon we repent of what we have done, we defend those that repent, we anathematize those that we defended. So we condemn either the doctrine of others in ourselves, or our own in that of others; and, reciprocally tearing one another to pieces, we have been the cause of each other's ruin."—The reader will find this extract partially quoted in "Gibbon's Decline and Fall," &c. and given entire, as here copied out, in "Locke's new method of a common place book." If he please, he may compare it with the preface to the *Savoy* confession, and observe how much men, who cannot be directed by the word and spirit of God, gain by making CREEDS.

I cannot, however, part with this extract without a remark or two.

1. It proves that the account given of *the rise* of creeds, in the "Remarks," and which traced them to the council of *Nice*, is perfectly correct.

2. It shows that creeds from the first have been the mere instruments of division; and that they did not produce, in those days, either the harmony or purity, which, from Dr. M's view of the council of Nice, the reader might be inclined to imagine they did.—“For these creeds,” says Hilary, “*we calumniate one another.*”—“Reciprocally tearing one another to pieces, we have been the cause of each other's ruin.”—Such was the *utility* of creeds then.

3. Dr. M. discovers in the “Remarks” some phrases, which have a terribly heretical squint: such as,—“the council of Nice was riven by a dispute ABOUT WORDS:”—then “speculation was arrayed against speculation.” But are not the declarations true? Hilary, living in that day, vouches for their truth:—for he says—“we fight against WORDS”—we “dispute about EQUIVOCAL TERMS”—one council required “silence upon the *homoousion*,” and another would call for deliberate declarations;—one would take “the word *ousia* simply,” and another would not;—they were “rare folks to unravel the mysteries of heaven.”

4. Hilary was not an Arian, but was a zealous champion for orthodoxy: though by the rules of ratiocination, now-a-days adopted, he might justly be considered as such. And so may a thousand others: Dr. Watts, for example, to a charge against whose orthodoxy on the subject of the Trinity, many in the presbyterian church are exceedingly sensitive,—who says, “No bishop, or presbyter,

no synod or council, no church nor assembly of men, since the days of inspiration, hath power derived to them from God, to make creeds or articles of faith for us, and impose them upon our understandings. We must all act according to the best of our own light, and the judgment of our own consciences, using the best advantages which providence hath given us, with honest and impartial diligence to inquire and search out the truth: *for every one of us must give an account of himself to God.* To believe as the *church, or the court believes*, is but a sorry and a dangerous faith: this principle would make more *heathens* than *christians*, and more *papists* than *protestants*; and perhaps lead more souls to *hell* than to *heaven*; for our Saviour himself has plainly told us, that if the *blind* will be *led by the blind, they must both fall into the ditch.*"

This section is long. It has necessarily been so. Dr. M. hinges the whole controversy upon its subject, and esteeming his propositions demonstrable, he argues nothing less than destruction to my cause. I was anxious to "detach the millstone," that he hangs on my neck, and escape free and untrammelled to the land of liberty, on whose verdure every christian may love to look, and on whose fruit every minister of the gospel should delight to regale. Though there be abundant room still to enlarge, yet, fearing that further illustration might be tedious to my reader, I leave the whole subject to his judgment, perfectly willing that he, or Dr. M. or any other "neighbour," may search

out this cause, which is indisputably right in my own eyes.

SECTION V.

The "Remarks," it seems, have in no form disclosed how the church can "be a depository of truth," or "bear testimony, from age to age, in favour of the truth," without adopting and publishing ecclesiastical creeds:—which is another "important end" of these instruments, that had been distinctly noticed and strongly urged in the "Lecture." How far this charge may be sustained, I will not stop to inquire: but turn immediately to its subject.

Is it not strange that God should have constructed his church in such a manner, that she cannot be a depository of truth, or bear testimony to truth, unless men should mend her form, and unite a human contrivance with her sacred institutions? Is not an assertion like this, a presumptuous reflection upon divine wisdom? Might it not, with equal propriety, be said, that the church can have no visible fellowship with her glorious head, without forms of prayer? If an ecclesiastical creed was so indispensably necessary, where has the Redeemer referred to its important consequences, or where has he prescribed the rules, according to which it is to be found? The subject of communicating truth, has not been overlooked in the scriptures. The Master himself is the true and faithful witness, who came to bear testimony on earth, as having the truth

committed to him; the law and the prophets are represented as giving witness to him; the ministry of reconciliation are described as his witnesses; the Holy Ghost, first as the Spirit of prophecy, and now in all his official operations, is styled a witness for the truth; mention is made in general terms of Christ's "two witnesses" who shall be slain; and the church is the light of the world—a city set upon a hill that *cannot be hid*. So varied are the scriptural representations on the subject of exhibiting truth, transmitting it from age to age, and carrying it to all the nations of the earth, that Jehovah seems to have left no means unemployed, which are consistent with man's infirmities, or with his free-agency. And yet not one word is uttered about ecclesiastical creeds. How then Dr. M. can undertake to say, that the church cannot "fulfil one great purpose," or "faithfully discharge one great duty, for which she was instituted," unless she writes out these authoritative acts and testimonies, I cannot see. If these things were so inestimably precious, the Master would have told us about them in some part of the sacred volume; would have calculated the happy consequences which should have resulted on the one hand, from their adoption, and the evil consequences, on the other, which must necessarily be produced by neglecting them; and above all, he would have designated the church courts, from whose legislative wisdom they should proceed. Nothing of all this has he done; and the fact that

he has not, is most decisive evidence, that Dr. M. rests his argument upon a mere assumption.

Further, it is evident that the scriptures have constructed the church's testimony on very different principles. Her influence is to be purely moral, and must derive its efficiency from the divine blessing. All human agents are secondary. God sustains the operation of his scheme of redeeming love by the power of his Spirit. To mould human hearts anew, is not a task for human hands. The Ethiopian might first change his skin, or the leopard his spots. The Lord Jesus has sent forth his Spirit, to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; which are the great moral subjects belonging to the gospel. What higher, what better, what more effectual testimony to truth can be desired? In the apostolic age, both Jews and Gentiles received the gospel as thus attested, and that too under circumstances far more forbidding and difficult than ours can be.

The subordinate agents are presented to us, as operating under laws equally simple. Ministers are required to search the scriptures diligently, honestly, and prayerfully, and to go forth with a "Thus saith the Lord." Christians, in every situation, must have the truth deposited in their hearts, out of which are the issues of life. Their walk and conversation must be their testimony, by being a visible and consistent exhibition of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," which are the moral qualities of the personal characters of Christ's

servants;—and says Paul, “he that, in these things, serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and *approved of men.*” They must let their “light so shine before men,” that men may see their *good works*, and glorify their Father which is in heaven: or as Peter expresses it,—“Having your conversation honest among the gentiles; that whereas they speak against you as evil doers, *they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.*” Will Dr. M. say, that this is not bearing testimony to truth, and that before the world too? Can any one say, that thus divine truth cannot be handed down from age to age? Or can it be denied, that, even now, with all our voluntary associations, this is a better and more effectual testimony, than all the ecclesiastical creeds in the world? Can ministers ever be more useful, than when, in their pulpits, or “from house to house,” they preach the simple things of the gospel, in the name of their Master? Do not christians accomplish every thing by their frank conversation and consistent example? Are not worldlings thus induced to commend and imitate them, and are not the minds of the rising generation, thus formed and cultivated? Do not professors, and that too just in proportion as they make a noise about their creeds, injure their master’s cause more deeply by their unholy tempers, and unworthy lives, than by any thing else they may do? And have not the contentions about the different creeds, entailed more practical

injury to the cause of truth, than can be compensated by any of their supposable advantages?

It seems necessary to observe, step by step, that the doctrine of "voluntary associations" has changed the whole face of the church; and that it is only in relation to this unhappy state of things, that any of the "important ends," referred to in the "Lecture" or "Letter," are at all to be presumed. This doctrine being admitted, the question immediately arises, how shall these voluntary associations exert their ecclesiastical influence? In other words, it may instantly be asked, how now shall the kingdom of God come with "*observation*"—with external pomp and parade? But deny this doctrine,—let the church resume her simple form, and lay off the gorgeous apparel of a *civil* jurisprudence; let evangelical law have the force which Jesus ascribed to it, when he said, "the kingdom of God is within you;" and a moral influence is immediately formed, by which every believer becomes, in his own place, a glorious witness for the truth. This moral influence, employed and seconded by the Holy Spirit, is the very way by which the church can, and by which *alone* she can, fulfil *every* great purpose, and faithfully discharge *every* great duty, for which she was instituted. And by this means she does these things now, and not by her ecclesiastical creeds. Passing by these arbitrary lines, which voluntary associations have drawn, her members now meet together on common christian ground; and under auspices so purely moral, the Bible and the living

teacher, the great witnesses for truth, are carrying the gospel from city to city, and from nation to nation.

But the church is a social body, and her social testimony is the object of inquiry. The preceding observations may be considered as in this respect deficient, and amounting to nothing in the present controversy. Though I should feel such a criticism to be trifling, yet the general principle may be applied most distinctly to the social movements of the church. Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, severely censured them, because they acted on sectarian, rather than on moral, principles. One said—"I am of Paul," and thus *he* bore his testimony to truth. Another said—"I am of Apollos," and thus *he* bore his testimony to truth. Another said—"I am of Cephas," and thus *he* bore his testimony to truth. Another, far purer than all the rest, said—"I am of Christ," and thus he bore his testimony to truth. Now did any of them bear testimony to truth, by their party distinctions? Or can we suppose, that the whole together, made the church the *depository*, or the *guardian*, or the *witness* of truth? Alas, no. Paul tells us that there was no spirituality about such proceedings,—and yet truth is spiritual. He tells us, that they were carnal,—and yet truth is not carnal. He tells us, that they were babes,—and yet, directed by the truth, they might have been full grown men; those perfect ones, among whom he might have spoken wisdom. I know it may be said, the cases are not parallel; for

such a reply is very common. But why are they not parallel? The Corinthians had some different ideas or forms, or ceremonies, when they maintained such different pretensions. There was some reason why they thus preferred different ministers. They could say as much in their own defence, as modern sects can say in their defence. They lived in a very remote age; we cannot enter into their feelings, nor fully define their difference; and besides, we have an apostolical sentence against them. *Now* the different sects are continually moving in the whirlwind of their own passions; their prejudices are in full force; and their party distinctions are kept in full view. And here is all the difference. As little testimony to truth is afforded now, as then. For how can presbyterianism, episcopacy, and independency be all true? How can calvinism, arminianism, hopkinsianism, &c. be all true? Or how can their ecclesiastical creeds, embracing their respective peculiarities, be all a testimony to truth?

Again. The Corinthians behaved in a scandalous manner, in regard of the exercise of their spiritual gifts. When they came together, every one had a psalm, had a doctrine, had a tongue, had a revelation, had an interpretation. And what sort of moral impression would this confusion have made upon a bystander? Should not an unbeliever, or one unlearned, have said that they were mad? But if they had exercised their spiritual gifts in a decorous and consistent manner, then an unbeliever should have been convinced of all, should have been judged of all; thus

the secrets of his heart would have been made manifest, and so falling down, he would have worshipped God, and reported that God was among them of a truth. Such is the moral influence which the church exerts, when she acts consistently with the principles of her own institution. Thus, in her public assemblies, she bears testimony, effectual testimony, to the truth as it is in Jesus; and the world feels the force of what she says: while, with this ecclesiastical influence, exerted by voluntary associations as such, and in defence of their own peculiarities, the world has been continually at war. I do not say, that the world is not corrupted, or that her sons are ready to receive religious truth; but I do say, that these sectarian divisions have afforded to unbelievers a most powerful argument against religious truth, while these contending parties bear their lordly and contradictory testimonies in her favour.

The public and accredited ordinances of the church—what is the principle of their operation? What is the value of the sacramental supper, if its moral references be not understood, or if a spiritual influence be not realized? Of what other use is baptism, than as it is an external symbol of a moral benefit? What rational calculations can a preacher form, when he does not feel himself to be a moral agent, under the superintending care of the Holy Spirit? Or why have we public assemblies at all, convened for any public celebrations, if it be not to throw spiritual things into a visible form, and exhibit a moral spectacle, which may charm the eyes and convince

the understandings of those who see? Why that profession? Why those touching appeals? Whence, the savoury impressions that are left? Is not the church in all this a depository of truth? In all this does she bear no testimony to truth? Is the practical demonstration, that God is in the midst of his own sanctuary, to pass for nothing?

In addition, it may be asked, how did the primitive church fulfil the great purposes of her institution? Neither in the apostolical age, nor until three centuries had rolled past, had she any such document, as that which, in this controversy, is denominated an ecclesiastical creed. This is a demonstrable fact, according to all the evidence which I have seen. Was the primitive church not a *depository* of truth? Did she bear no *testimony* to truth? Was not truth transmitted from age to age? How did *she* discharge her important duties? How did it happen that she preserved the same faith, as though she inhabited a single house, and had but one heart and one soul? How did it happen, that, “with all perfect harmony,” she proclaimed, taught, and handed down the faith, as though she had but one mouth? How did it happen, that her ministers could compare the preaching of the truth to the sun, shining one and the same throughout the whole world? How did it happen, that “the basis of her communion was laid so broad, in the vital doctrines of the gospel, that all who ‘held the head,’ in whatever spot of the globe, might join, as they had opportunity, in the reciprocation of christian kindness, and the en-

joyment of christian privileges?" Such is not the condition of the church now, with all her creeds. She bears no such harmonious testimony to the truth. An "unbeliever," or "one unlearned," might suppose that the different denominations worship different gods. These facts are surely sufficient to expose the fallacy of Dr. M's reasonings on this subject; and to show, that ecclesiastical creeds, instead of making the church a depository of truth, make her the depository of sectarian dogmas; or, that, instead of elevating her as a witness for truth, they divide her members into so many parties, holding testimonies against each other.

The same argument applies with equal force to another "important end," which Dr. M. supposes to be obtained by ecclesiastical creeds; i. e. that they are so many tributes to truth and candour, which the different churches owe to one another. This seemingly valuable purpose, on which Dr. M. descants in his "Lecture," with very great confidence, amounts, as I understand it, to this:—when one party says, I am of Paul,—another, I am of Cephas,—another, I am of Apollos,—and another, I am of Christ, truth and candour require each party to explain to the others, what its peculiarities are. All this may do very well, if there was not a previous question to be decided;—is it spiritual, or is it carnal, is it wise, or is it childish, to divide the church into parties, or voluntary associations?—If this be not right, then there is no use in talking about a tribute to truth and candour, resting on

the presumption that it is right.—I believe this is logical.

There is however a second question, which follows on the *admission* of the antiscriptural premises, just stated:—are these creeds *really* a tribute to truth and candour? Do the different churches really adhere to their respective creeds? Have they settled among themselves what their creeds mean? As far as I am acquainted with the various denominations, I know not one whose members are not differing with each other about the articles of their creed? How many matters, contained in the Westminster confession of faith, are not subjects of controversy among presbyterians? Are the “thirty-nine articles” calvinistic or arminian? And so on.—When I look back, over the history of *subscription* to church articles, I do not find any difference. The members of the council of Nice were not satisfied with their own creed. The members of the Westminster assembly would not subscribe their creed. Bishop Burnet says,—“The requiring subscription to the thirty-nine articles, is a great imposition: I believe them all myself; but as those, about original sin and predestination, might be expressed more unexceptionably, so I think it is a better way, to let such matters continue to be still the standard of doctrine, with some few corrections, and to censure those who teach any contrary tenets, than to oblige all, that serve in the church, to subscribe them: the greater part subscribe *without ever examining them*: and others do it because they *must*

do it, though they can hardly satisfy their consciences about some things in them.” Lord Chatham said, in the face of the bishops of his day—“We have calvinistical articles, an arminian clergy, and a popish liturgy.” Now if these things be so, how can these ecclesiastical creeds be, in any sense, tributes to truth and candour? Cannot every reader see, that there is a palpable sophism in Dr. M’s argument?

I here close my observations upon the “important ends,” which Dr. M. has ascribed to ecclesiastical creeds. The whole argument, if I mistake not, may be found in the “Remarks,” arranged under some of the different articles of discussion there considered. It was intentional on my part, that Dr. M’s arrangement was not followed. Having formed my own opinions, without reading any of the controversial pieces, which have been written on the general subject, excepting Dunlop’s work and Dr. M’s “Lecture,” I penned my own reasons and arguments for the doctrine, of whose truth I am every day more and more convinced. And if Dr. M. had left the whole controversy with “the sober and thinking part of the community,” who, he supposes, neither need nor wish “a continuance of the discussion,” I should have left it there too. But as he was not willing to leave the subject, as far as it had been argued, with the good sense of the community, which he so confidently bespeaks in his own favour, the respondent feels no reluctance to plead the cause at the bar of the public mind. There

it must finally be settled. No church court, in a free land, is, or can be, competent to decide the question in controversy. And society, at present, is in a situation so peculiar, that, it appears to me, Dr. M. is prophesying "smooth things" at a venture.—I shall wait in patience, and, I trust, with good humour, for the verdict of the public mind, whatever it may be.

SECTION VI.

Dr. M. has thought proper to appear as the advocate of the synod of Philadelphia; and to justify their late proceedings, without any modification or reserve. He seems, from motives of delicacy, to have felt considerable hesitation about undertaking the task. But as a prominent controversialist, in relation to the general subjects involved in those proceedings, he has done right not to be too fastidious, and in waving considerations of that kind. His correspondent had transmitted correct information, when he reported, that the conduct of the synod was esteemed by many as high-handed and tyrannical. "The fundamental principles of church government," by which such judicial acts are to be sustained, really need eclaireissement; and certainly, no one, it is to be presumed, could be a more competent expounder of ecclesiastical law than the professor of church government! Falling so precisely within his official range, and requiring, in this free land, as luminous demonstration as the creed

system itself, Dr. M. is not at all to be censured as stepping out of his sphere. Moreover, when the abstract case was carried up to the assembly by the presbytery of Baltimore, every member of the assembly fully understood to what it referred. All parties knew that it grew out of the publication of my "Remarks," which were written in reply to the *principles* of Dr. M's "Lecture." When a committee was appointed to devise a remedy which might cover the case, Dr. Miller was made chairman of that committee; and thus my opponent became my judge. I then, for my own part, consider it to be quite consistent that Dr. M. should become the champion, and advocate his own measures.

In undertaking to discuss this unpleasant subject, it may not be amiss to detail the circumstances of the case.—Mr. McLean and myself formerly belonged to a presbytery, which was in connexion with the Associate Reformed Church; and which, after the union between the General Synod of that church and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, chose to retain its own distinct organization, under the name of the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia. This presbytery, in a short time, "judging the interest of the churches under their care, no longer to require their continuation as a presbytery"—"unanimously agreed to suspend their functions as a presbytery, from and after the 9th day of April, 1825;" and "granted testimonials to their members, licentiates and candidates, to become

connected with such presbyteries belonging to the General Assembly as they might desire." These testimonials were unhesitatingly given to us by our brethren, though they were fully apprized of our sentiments on the subject of creeds.

Our certificate was presented to the presbytery of Baltimore, to which our application was made at our own choice. An opposition was quickly, and somewhat unexpectedly, started; and our credentials were not sufficient for the purposes for which they had been given. In a body, where *formalities* pass for so much, it appeared strange to see one court, sitting in judgment upon the official proceedings of another court, which had been entirely its *equal*. An overt-act, it may indeed be said, had been committed in the mean time, by the publication of the "Remarks." But then the substantial form of any crime, which that act implied, had, according to the representations which have often been made, existed long before the second presbytery of Philadelphia had been dissolved; and that too within the knowledge of both courts, and of the whole ecclesiastical association to which they belonged. The assembly, however, has decided since, that the presbytery had the privilege to decline receiving us;—and that decision who may dispute?

The plan on which the presbytery of Baltimore, immediately began to deliberate, was to refer the application to the General Assembly for advice

This we readily foresaw would involve the church courts in controversy, as facts have since evinced. And as we could easily forbear with our brethren, if they could forbear with us, we shrunk from any agency in so unhappy a transaction; and preferred to stand alone, the charge of our Master's providence, rather than to become in any measure accessory to it. Consequently we deliberately and earnestly protested against the adoption, of what we supposed to be so injurious a course. Finding this in vain, we then desired our certificate to be returned to us; and addressed to the brethren the following note, in the hope thereby to stay any further proceedings.

*“To the Moderator and other brethren of the
Presbytery of Baltimore.*

The subscribers, unwilling to involve themselves in any judicial litigations, and the courts of God's house in any embittered discussions, respectfully request that their certificate may be returned to them.—They cannot consent to refer the case to the General Assembly: they cannot consent that their names should be held up any longer before the public, as applicants for admission into the presbytery; nor can they consent to be received, even with their certificate, but on the most unequivocal terms. Should the Presbytery resolve on any other course, or refuse to return them their certificate, the subscribers do hereby distinctly declare;

that they do not hold themselves in any form amenable to the authority of presbytery.

JOHN M. DUNCAN,
C. G. McLEAN.

May 11th, 1825.

The certificate was returned. The proceedings of the presbytery, however, did not terminate. With, or without, our consent, the subject they would, and did, carry up to the General Assembly, in the form of an abstract question; and thus those embittered discussions were ensured, which we thought it desirable to avoid. In the mean time, by withdrawing our certificate from the presbytery, and refusing to be a party to any litigation before other church courts, we considered ourselves to have withdrawn from our ecclesiastical connexion, as *peaceably* as we could, and in the most *formal* manner the nature of the case would admit. The application never was renewed; it was never transferred to any other presbytery; neither we, nor our people, made any reference, nor protest, nor appeal in any form, by which the connexion could be sustained.

The Assembly, taking up the overture thus made to them, referred it to a committee, of which, as has already been observed, Dr. Miller was made *chairman*. This committee reported sundry resolutions, which are minute enough in their provisions to show, that the whole circumstances in which the reference originated, had been fully can-

vassed. They were evidently designed to make way for the interference of the Synod, on the presumption that the presbytery was "incompetent to conduct process in an impartial and efficient manner." Under cover of these resolutions, judging from one of the papers laid on the table of the Synod, subsequent transactions were commenced, and carried to an issue, suited to another age and another country; and as unbefitting the ministry of reconciliation, as they are inconsistent with biblical law.

When the Synod met, we appeared, not as members, but as individuals; who, supposing themselves to have been injuriously treated, had previously withdrawn from the ecclesiastical connexion, and were yet willing to enter into any conference with their brethren about any plan of a re-union, which would protect their consciences. A committee was appointed to confer with us, who treated us like brethren; and on our interview with whom, we never can reflect but with the most unfeigned pleasure. For myself I speak—I did most distinctly inform the committee that I did not consider myself as a member of the Synod; I did as explicitly make a like declaration on the floor of the Synod itself, and that too before any committee was appointed. Some of the members expressed the same views, while others dissented; and though the question was agitated, whether we were, or were not, members of the court, it was never synodically determined; but by a mere gratuitous assumption on

the part of the majority, the proceedings were zealously and unrelentingly conducted to their close, as though we had belonged to a *presbytery*, and were thus entitled to the privileges, and amenable to the authority, of the Synod.

The committee reported a resolution, which according to the reasoning in the preamble, was based upon views which they thus expressed. "Your committee—are entirely of opinion that *forbearance* will be the duty of Synod in their case." The arguments, for and against, were directed to this point. And Dr. M. who, it is to be presumed, understands the whole matter, says,— "the Synod passed a vote, which most *unequivocally expressed*, as the opinion of a large majority, that he (Mr. D.) could not regularly retain his connexion with the Synod, in consistency with the opinions he had avowed." When then the "report" was rejected, or not adopted, the Synod refused to *forbear* with us and our opinions. Forbearance being denied to us, what could we do? We wished no further conference with the Synod, as our opinions could not be surrendered, and we saw no other alternative. For myself I again speak—I once more informed the Synod that I did not consider myself as a member of the Synod—that I came there for the purpose of brotherly conference—and that being so injuriously treated, I should again withdraw.

There had been another resolution proposed, which in all probability would have been called up

next, and which, no doubt, will be thought by many, a fine ecclesiastical measure, mingling a great deal of gentleness with a great deal of dignity. It is as follows:—"Now then, that this Synod may perform its constitutional duty, and may know whether the said Rev. John M. Duncan, and Rev. Charles G. McLean ought to be attached to any of the presbyteries under the care of this Synod;—*Resolved*, that each of them be asked, by the Moderator, if he still adheres to the *profession of faith*, which he made at the time of answering the 'formula of questions for ministers at their ordination,' which were proposed to him by the presbytery which ordained him; and if he is now willing to be attached to *any one of the presbyteries* under the care of the General Assembly, as a minister of the gospel, subject to the established constitution of the presbyterian church in the United States of America?"

To this resolution I should not have made a single allusion, had it not been printed. But as it is before the public, I shall make a passing remark or two.—I am not sure, for my own part, that I fully understand it. What does the "profession of faith," of which it speaks, mean? Was it intended to ask us whether we had altered our views on the great doctrines of the gospel? Our orthodoxy was not questioned by the Synod, so far as we know. The committee said in their report, that they felt themselves warranted to state, that we entertained no opinions materially different from those exhibited

in the "standards." With this interpretation, the resolution was altogether irrelevant to the matter in hand. The subject which the Synod had before them, merely covered our ideas of the illegality of any ecclesiastical control over human consciences: and of course it had nothing to do with the general "profession of faith," made at the time of ordination.

Was the resolution intended to obtain a promise of unequivocal subjection to the constitution of the presbyterian church? This we had declared we could not give them, by every step we had taken, and by our interview with the committee. *Forbearance* might have been asked, should have been cheerfully extended, and was actually proffered. That is, we should have peacefully suffered the brethren to have carried out their rules, on their own responsibility to the Master; and should have acquiesced in their measures, as far as we conscientiously could have done it. Might the synod then abruptly turn round, and ask the entire surrender of our principles to the arbitrary laws of a sect?

But the question further demanded, whether we were "willing to be attached to *anyone* of the presbyteries under the care of the General Assembly?" What does this mean? Was it their design to separate us by way of neutralizing our heresy? We heard some such proposition out of doors. And were the members of the synod proprietors of the soil, and could they send its tenants where they pleased, without consulting their own inclinations and feelings? This

would not only have required the surrender of our opinions, but it would have made our condition worse than it originally was. For, after the dissolution of the second presbytery of Philadelphia, we might have applied to any presbytery we pleased. Our application to the presbytery of Baltimore was a mere matter of our own choice, which we were under no obligation to have made; and which that presbytery had no right to use, as throwing us under their power. Some calculations of the kind here supposed, I should also infer from Dr. M's reasonings; for he intimates that a majority would speedily have been formed in our favour, had we been attached to the presbytery of Baltimore. Our opponents are adroit politicians. We had never counted *votes*, nor arranged any plans on such a principle. We should simply have availed ourselves of the privilege of respectful *argument*, when cases might make it necessary:—well understanding that no man benefits his own cause by going too far ahead of the community, with which his official relations may be established. And should a *majority* really have been secured? Then the synod, by adopting such a resolution, would have undertaken to control the religious impressions of this community; and like the Superior of an order of Jesuits, might have commanded their members to go or come, at their pleasure. And are these the principles of legislation in the nineteenth century?

Perhaps the question was merely intended to inquire whether in any thing we had *changed our*

opinions?—Ask men whether they have changed their opinions, since they were boys? Or whether, after having spent a dozen or more years, in the active employments of professional life, they had learned any thing new to them, or had corrected the erroneous impressions of their youth? And that too, when the evidence of such a change was in printed documents; when every man who knew them was a prompt and competent witness of the fact. I am forcibly reminded of a question, put to an intelligent young man, by one of these classical assemblies, when preparing to ordain him over one of their most important congregations—“Pray, sir, who made you?”

After all, it is not of much importance, what the question really does mean, as the synod did not act upon it. Though still it appears as evidence, that other proceedings were contemplated; that the synod had not finished with our case; and that we withdrew, perhaps, too hastily. When forbearance, however, was denied, all conference was at an end, and nothing but the exercise of *authority* remained, which we never attended on their meeting to recognize. The resolution, under consideration, or some such like measure,—an equal sophism in judicial law—was necessary. There was no other intermediate step between forbearance and a formal trial. Forbearance they denied, and a formal trial they were not competent to conduct. The trial of a minister, by their own constitutional principles, must commence in the presbytery to which he belongs,

and the synod had no “general” jurisdiction, being only a court of review; and could take no order in such a case, unless in conformity with *the word of God* and the established rules. Nor could the General Assembly empower them to erect themselves into an original court; for they could legally give no “advice,” nor “instruction,” in any case submitted to them, but “in conformity with the *constitution* of the church.” They did not *formally* cast us out; for we saved them that trouble. But they did take our case into their *judicial consideration*,—terms by which their own book describes the last effort of removing an offence. There was as much said as could have been said; and, morally speaking, as much done as could have been done, had they conducted a formal trial.

The circumstance of the synod’s not *formally* excluding us, seems to have a very important bearing on the whole transaction. I have seen several fine speculations in print on this subject, brought forward with great complacency in defence of the synod. And some equally fine argument has been urged against us; because, that when we withdrew from our ecclesiastical connexions, by requiring the restoration of our certificate from the presbytery of Baltimore, it was not *formally* done. And yet, in such a case, MERCY, which is so closely allied to *forbearance*, and which ought always to temper juridical proceedings, not only in the state, but more especially in the church, would award the *privilege* to an accused party. I pretend not to say that we

were *formally* ejected; for the whole proceeding was the most *informal* thing I ever saw; and could not have been admitted at all, had we not supposed it to be founded on a moral confidence, which ought always to exist among the ministers of a prince, whose "kingdom is not of this world." As to the ejection, we had felt the *thing*, and did not think proper to wait for the *word*. So far then, the act, as Dr. M. says, was *our own*, and it was "promptly followed up," as Dr. M. further observes, by acts purely synodical.

I was, for my own part, perfectly willing to have preserved christian silence on all these proceedings; and to have left those concerned in them to the judgment of God, of society, and of their own consciences. But for some reason, Dr. M. has felt it incumbent on him to defend them; and it devolves, therefore, on me, to meet what he has said. This I shall do, so far as I feel it to be necessary, and leave the rest to make any impression, which it may be capable of producing.

I must again observe, that the whole of Dr. M's argument rests upon a mere assumption. He takes it for granted, that the church has a right to resolve herself into a *voluntary association*; adopt a suitable constitution; and judge of the various circumstances of her members, by laws of her own enacting. Now this is the very point in dispute. Hence, while on one side a plea is set up for the simple dominion of moral law, which the Master has given; on the other much ingenious and plausible argument

is used, merely to sustain the consistency of ecclesiastical law, or of the sectarian manuals of different parties. Dr. M. has very skilfully selected his position, as a controvertist, on a sectarian summit, and takes a commanding view from thence of the whole ecclesiastical field. Lest I may be supposed to do him an injustice, let the reader review his argument for himself; and then say, whether he has found one scriptural principle of the Master's kingdom, or one single line of biblical law, brought forward in his defence of the synod. And yet one scriptural statute, fairly and candidly applied, would have been worth more than the whole argument, which he has so carefully elaborated. Why then has he not done this? Why did he not carry us over the scripture page, and show us "line upon line, and precept upon precept," in favour of a measure, which he tells us was founded upon the "fundamental principles of church government?" Are not these fundamental principles laid down in the Bible? Can they not be easily educed,—are they not always at hand? Particularly when it is considered, that so large a portion of the New Testament was written to meet the circumstances of times greatly agitated;—times when heretical sentiments, and heretical teachers, so much abounded—is there not one line, which even the professor of church government could bring forward to settle this dispute? And that too, when the synod, transcending their ordinary modes of procedure, and undertaking a more "general" superintendence, were expressly

required, by their own constitution, to act "in conformity with the word of God?" Is it not strange?

Of what amount is it that the General Assembly had adopted certain resolutions? Can the General Assembly make laws to regulate God's house?—Were not these resolutions reported by Dr. M. himself? And did he collect them from the sacred page, or was he simply meeting a question of ecclesiastical politics? Or could the General Assembly empower the synod, in conducting a more than usually enlarged administration, to go aside of the constitutional law, which required them to act "in conformity with the word of God?" And yet, neither Dr. M. nor the synod, had one single word to bring forward from the scriptures. And why all this shyness, or unwillingness to give us their Master's commandment? Why so hasty and uniform a retreat into old established habits, or sectarian principles, which the church has outgrown? I take it to be a very plain fact, that if they could plead scriptural law, they would do it; and that the very circumstance of their not so doing, after having been so frequently called upon to do it, is full proof that it is not in their power. And then the embarrassing question starts up, and with no diffident air,—how can they declare their creed to be a *summary of scriptural doctrines*, when they considered it to require measures which cannot be sustained by scriptural testimony? Immediately follows the more embarrassing challenge—"To the law, and to

the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, *it is because there is no light in them.*"

It is true that Dr. M. does sometimes bring forward scriptural phrases, in application to some part of his argument; such as—"bear witness to the truth"—"contend earnestly for the faith"—when error "comes in like a flood," the church must "lift up a standard against it," by "holding forth the word of life"—"sound in the faith"—"truth as it is in Jesus"—"teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"—"if any man bring any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed." But it is manifest that they have no application, by which the synod can be relieved; neither would he himself so use them. Now, under such circumstances, why does Dr. M. so tartly reproach me, as he does in the following language:—"Neither is it a sufficient answer to say, that the cases are not parallel in another respect:—that in preaching and expounding holy scripture, we do not, either really or virtually, set up another rule of faith; but that we only explain and apply the divine rule itself: whereas, in forming a confession of faith, and in asking a candidate for the ministry to adopt it, we are not only proposing a new rule of faith, but even setting it above the scriptures. Mr. D. after the most ample explanation and assurance has been given to the contrary, still insists on representing my doctrine of creeds in this light; as placing them above the Bible; as giving them authority to bind the conscience independently of the Bi-

ble; nay, as imposing on men an obligation to believe that which the Bible never taught." Now, most surely, I am willing to believe the assurances of my brethren. They are "incapable, I am persuaded, of designedly misrepresenting any thing." But then, when I look back to the synod, or read over Dr. M's defence of their proceedings, what shall I do with the facts? If, by the Bible, they could not refuse forbearance to their brethren, and yet, according to their standards they could, which, I ask, is the authoritative book? Which has the pre-eminence? Are not the decisions of councils elevated above the decisions of the word of God? The last is my controversial weapon—can Dr. M. turn its edge against me?

Thus say the scriptures:—"Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness; with *long suffering, forbearing one another in love*; endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."—"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, *forbearing one another.*" "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, *patient*, (forbearing) in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves."—"Him that is weak in the faith *receive ye*, but *not to doubtful disputations.*"—"Who art thou that *judgest* another man's servant?"—"Let us not therefore *judge* one another any more; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling

block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way." "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."—"He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment."—But where should I stop? There is nothing more highly commended, more urgently pressed, or more frequently presented in the scriptures, which is the book of LOVE, than the social virtues, which should adorn every christian man. How then came the synod to refuse *forbearance* to their brethren? Have they any decision of the Assembly to defend them?—Then is not that decision put *above* the word of God? Is there any law of their sect requiring such a measure? Then is not their law framed *independent* of the word of God? Does their creed call upon them to believe such things to be right? Then does not their creed impose upon them that which is not in the word of God?—What defence can possibly be set up for the synod on scriptural principles? Did they not *judge*, if not *formally*, yet morally and really—did they not judge their brethren, though the scriptures had peremptorily forbidden them so to do; and though the apostle, with an indignant frown, had asked—"who art thou that judgest another man's servant?"

There is no escaping from the preceding observations, by accusing me of a forced interpretation, in applying the texts to the case in hand. They are used in the scriptures in direct reference to certain

controversies, existing at the time they were written; and they were professedly designed to reconcile alienated brethren, and to correct the irregularities of their ecclesiastical intercourse. The Jews and the gentiles, in the apostolic age, seemed to be in perpetual collision; and their contentions involved, both points of evangelical doctrine and principles of external church polity. They too had a high regard for established habits and ancient traditions. Their prejudices were strong, their passions quick, and their jealousies easily roused. Their fathers were wise, good, and holy men, and their hereditary privileges were inestimably precious. The dividing lines between episcopalians and presbyterians, between the acknowledgment and the rejection of ecclesiastical creeds, are not more broad and plain, than were the distinctions in those days. Human nature is pretty much the same in all ages, and must be controlled or regulated by the same moral principles. In fact, if there were no differences, where would be the necessity or room for *forbearance*, or any of the social virtues of that class? So that my scriptural quotations were fully as applicable to the synod, as to any other dominant party which ever has existed, and render any attempt to defend them, purely chimerical. And such voluntary associations cannot afford stronger evidence of officious interference with spiritual things, than when their sectarian laws are at variance with the social virtues of christian character.

Neither may it be said, that such texts do not apply to social bodies, but to the private intercourse of christians. The scriptures make no such distinction. Social bodies are as strictly required to be virtuous, as individuals are. The Pharisees do not appear one whit better, when, as rulers, they cast out of the synagogue, the man “who had received his sight” than they should have done, had they in their private characters spoken evil of him, or, meeting him “by the way,” had crossed to the other side to avoid exchanging looks or words. The one sin is perhaps a little more “splendid” than the other. Its turpitude may not be so quickly seen, and its evil consequences may be more extensive, and not so easily remedied. But there is no other difference. That social bodies have their peculiarities I readily admit; and so every individual has his peculiarities, both in character and circumstances; but then they must not be opposed to social virtues; and particularly to that class of social virtues, whose very existence is created by those peculiarities.—The synod, then, had their Master’s commandment to forbear, and why did they not do it?

Such proceedings would have been condemned in the early ages of christianity, degenerate as they are represented to have been; and that, too, after ecclesiastical creeds had been introduced.—“I most sincerely wish,” says Calvin, “that every person would observe the method recommended by Augustine, in his third book against Maximinus. For with a view to silence the contentions of that here-

He respecting the decrees of councils, he says,—
 ‘I ought not to object to you the council of Nice,
 nor ought you to object to me the council of Arimi-
 num, to preclude each other’s judgment by a pre-
 vious decision; I am not bound by the authority of
 the latter, nor you by that of the former. Let cause
 contend with cause, and argument with argument,
 on the ground of scriptural authorities, which exclu-
 sively belong to neither party, but are common to
 both.’”

Such proceedings are equally inconsistent with
 the principles of the Reformation. Protestants did
 not merely say that the Bible is the *only* rule, but
 their argument spread itself out over all the circum-
 stances which made the term *ONLY*, necessary. They
 reasoned against all other rules, and would submit
 neither to the civil arm, nor to ecclesiastical coun-
 cils, as pretending to, or really exercising, *autho-
 rity* over human consciences. Indeed, it was im-
 possible that they should reason on one side, without
 taking up the other. And yet, at this late hour, the
 synod founded their proceedings upon resolutions
 adopted by the General Assembly, and never pre-
 tended to advance any scriptural authority for what
 they did. In truth, the subject of forbearance, is
 merely the old subject of *toleration* over again,
 which, it might be supposed, had been sufficiently
 argued in the church, to be understood in the pre-
 sent day. It admits of, and it calls for, precisely
 the same train of argument.

Much, very much, do I admire the following remarks, made by Augustine, and which are not unappropriate to the present discussion.—“We were of opinion, that other methods were to be made choice of; and that to recover you from your errors, we ought not to persecute you with injuries and invectives, or any ill treatment; but endeavour to procure your attention, by soft words and exhortations, which would show the tenderness we have for you, according to that passage of holy writ,—‘The servant of the Lord ought not to love strife and quarrels; but to be gentle, affable, and patient towards all mankind, and to reprove with modesty those who differ from him in opinion.’—Let them only treat you with rigour, who know not how difficult it is to find out the truth, and avoid error. Let those treat you with rigour, who are ignorant how rare and painful a work it is calmly to dissipate the carnal phantoms, that disturb even a pious mind. Let those treat you with rigour, who are ignorant of the extreme difficulty that there is to purify the eye of the inward man, to render him capable of seeing the truth, which is the sun, or light of the soul. Let those treat you with rigour, who have never felt the sighs and groans that a soul must have before it can obtain any knowledge of the divine Being. To conclude, let those treat you with rigour, who never have been seduced into errors, near akin to those you have been engaged in. I pass over in silence that pure wisdom, which but a few spiritual men attain to in this life; so that

though they know but in part, because they are men; yet, nevertheless, they know what they do know with certainty: for, in the catholic church, it is not penetration of mind, nor profound knowledge, but simplicity of faith, which puts men in a state of safety.”

So much then for the conduct of the synod, in denying forbearance to us. After we had withdrawn and declined any farther conference with them, they proceeded to other acts, at least equally reprehensible. By what right could they dissolve the connexion between us and our congregations? How can a synod, the offspring of political plans formed in the second century, and not recognized in the scriptures, break up social relations, formed in the Providence of God, and on which his blessing had long rested? How could the synod perform acts, which, if justifiable at all, must have constitutionally been done by the presbytery, as an *original* court; and when their official relation to the church was that of a court of review? How could they proceed to such lengths, when they were explicitly told, that one congregation had never been formally united to them? When they were explicitly told that the other congregations, had *formally* declared their willingness to retain their pastor, after he had frankly told them that he was connected with no denomination whatever? Did not our people know what were the opinions of their ministers? Did they ever call upon the presbytery of Baltimore, or any other presbytery,

or upon the synod itself, to interfere for their relief? Has not their deportment since sufficiently evinced, that the resolutions of the synod were officious and uncalled for? And did not the synod thereby leave, what they had no right to touch, in a happy train for more vigorous dispute, and open the door, as far as they could, for the entrance of another power—exciting appeals to the civil arm?—Verily if synods or presbyteries may thus interfere to distract congregations, which have neither asked their counsel nor sought their aid, it is high time that the fundamental principles of such church government should be fully known, deliberately canvassed, and for ever abandoned; for they are utterly inconsistent with scriptural law, and destructive of christian liberty; and they leave not to the freeman of the Lord one foot of ecclesiastical ground on which to stand, unless what these lords over God's heritage may graciously allow to him.—Did the synod of Jerusalem, as it has been confidently enough called, do deeds like these, even when special messengers went and related to them the circumstances of the church at Antioch.

Dr. M. however, goes clear through with his defence of the synod, and justifies even these far stretched acts of power. His argument, as usual, is constructed on the assumption that the church is a voluntary association. And notwithstanding the congregation never did declare their approbation of the union, he infers from the fact, that because the session sent an elder to the Second Presbytery of

Philadelphia, and because that presbytery sent that particular elder to the assembly, therefore the congregation did voluntarily place themselves under the discipline of the Presbyterian church. Indeed! Was this doing the thing *formally*; or formally enough to justify the synod in such high handed measures? We withdrew far more formally, when our note, which was read in the synod, was addressed to the presbytery of Baltimore. Want of *formality* is every thing, it seems, in one case, and it is nothing in the other. What we had done was not *formally* done, and therefore the synod would not recognize the act. One congregation had done nothing formally, and yet they would recognize them; the other congregations had acted formally, but still they were not safe. This defence which Dr. M. has set up will not answer. It ought to be put on moral grounds simply, or on the principle of ecclesiastical formalities simply; and yet in neither case can it be substantiated. And the looseness, ecclesiastically speaking, in which these things were found, providentially gave to the synod an opportunity to leave our congregational relations undisturbed, until the people themselves had applied for their protection. Had they retired in this peaceful manner, they would have been guilty of no inconsistency with their own constitutional laws, and might have prevented many unpleasant consequences that have followed.

I feel tired of this argument, which is so much connected with personal circumstances. But Dr.

M. in his statement, having said some other things, from being misinformed, or from reasoning rather too rapidly, I am obliged to pursue it a little farther. "The brethren," (Mr. McL. and myself) he says, "had shown themselves *indefatigable* in the propagation of their hostile sentiments." I do not know on what authority this assertion has been made; but I do know that it is not correct. Mr. McL. had delivered a discourse at the opening of a session of the second presbytery of Philadelphia, which was, by special appointment, addressed to his brethren in the ministry. In like manner, by special appointment, I had delivered a discourse at Princeton, intended for the consideration of the ministry. And may not ministers be *preached to*? Is there any presumption in a brother's venturing earnestly to exhort them to study their Bibles, or carefully to guard them against the influence of human authority? Or having done it, with a spirit frank and generous, shall they raise a clamour, enlist their church courts, proceed to cast us out of the church, and then complain that we have grievously troubled their Israel?—My discourse, in consequence of being defamed by common report, was sent to the press, that the public might know where to find me. Mr. McL. was arraigned before his presbytery, and they refused to censure him. There the matter should have ended. But Dr. M. wrote and published a long lecture, running the whole range of the subject of creeds, as far as the argument afforded by voluntary associations was

concerned; Dr. Green followed with a long and harsh review;—must I be silent, and suffer myself thus to be brought before the public as heretical and wicked? The *book* appeared in reply. Dr. G. undertook to answer in a second review, more offensive than the first; church courts began to play their part, and our ecclesiastical relations were violently assailed; the public newspapers were employed, and our names were published from village to village, and from state to state, as men condemned and rejected by a very conscientious and generous synod. Any of these occurrences afforded us an opportunity again to write and publish: but we have borne it all in silence. Is this being *indefatigable* in the propagation of our hostile sentiments?

We have never carried the controversy to our own pulpits, nor to other pulpits. We have not gone from house to house, seeking proselytes. Young men, under our care, have been left to the enjoyment of their own sentiments; and we have done nothing with them, but to endeavour to lead them into the habit of analyzing the scriptures for themselves. Is this being *indefatigable*?—Or if we had done all that is ascribed to us, if we had created opportunities of exhibiting our sentiments, could any man wonder? Have we not been *preached at* from pulpit after pulpit,—our sentiments misrepresented, and our motives traduced? Has there not been every species of effort tried, which ingenuity could invent, or civil law sanction, in order to

overthrow and crush us? Have we not been simply defending ourselves against our indefatigable opponents?

Dr. M. further says, that in our conference with the committee, we “claimed a right freely to express our opinions on *all occasions*, on which we should think it our *duty* so to do, and to *act accordingly*.” And what is there strange in all this? What else could honest men do? Must they surrender their opinions, or not do their duty?—We have freely allowed others to have consciences, and never made the denial of creeds a term of communion with us. But it is because we demand for ourselves the rights of conscience, that all these unmanly assaults, and ungenerous proceedings, have been commenced and carried on.

Dr. M. reasons out our claim to its conclusion, and tells the church, that “every time a candidate was to be licensed or ordained by the presbytery, with which we should have been connected, a confessional battle” would be fought. I do not know for which party Dr. M. intends this augurial declaration. If he designed to foretell *our* course, we are happy in the consciousness of possessing feelings considerably elevated above such manœuvres.

We stipulated with the committee in the first place for the *freedom of the press*. This was done, because we supposed that the whole subject ought to be kept out of church courts, and that it would be brought to a speedier, and a safer, issue through the press: and because that others had written, and

would perhaps again write, on the other side of the subject. We candidly informed the committee, that at that time we had no intention of writing any thing farther, as we knew of nothing that demanded a reply from us. But I must frankly say, that I very frequently thought, that after the decision of the synod should be known, Dr. M. would follow it up as he has done; and I had no idea of committing the censorship of the press to the synod of Philadelphia, or of covenanting away my right to answer.

As to the presbytery of Baltimore, we promised to leave them as much, or as little, of the confession of faith as they pleased, and to act with them as far as we conscientiously could. The following cases were stated as illustrations of our views:—1. If a young man applied for licensure or ordination, who could receive the confession of faith without a scruple, we would not interfere; but we would take no part in that licensure or ordination, unless liberty was granted to us to make it understood, that we had nothing to do with his receiving that instrument. If this privilege was refused, we would then leave the presbytery to conduct the ceremony in their own way, and on their own responsibility,—as they can do now. 2. If a young man applied for licensure or ordination, who could not take the confession on his conscience, then we would ask for the same forbearance to him that was extended to ourselves. If this had been denied, we would affectionately and respectfully plead his cause; and in case of a failure, we would leave the pres-

bytery to answer to their Master for the consequences. At the same time, should the individual so aggrieved carry his cause to the synod, or the assembly, we would consider ourselves as at full liberty to have pleaded his cause there.—A confessional battle, under such circumstances, should then have been waged by the *presbytery* in withholding forbearance.

Such a course requires some honourable feelings, and some sympathies with the difficulties of human society, which we were supposed not to possess: and yet for which we were willing to give our brethren full credit. But as a member of the second presbytery of Philadelphia, I had, (Mr. McL. was not present) advocated the cause of a young man on such principles: and had undertaken to defend my own, when, though moderator, I could not conscientiously ask him to receive or adopt the confession of faith. “Happy,” say the scriptures, “is he that condemneth not himself in the thing that he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” The presbytery consented almost unanimously, after having examined the candidate as much as they thought proper. No trouble was created by it, as Dr. M. says, but what our opponents have created by refusing to sustain his licensure; or to ordain him, when a congregation, flourishing under his care, and tenderly loving his ministrations, called for his services. And if, when Paul says, “judge not a brother,—for God has received

him," he means, that a blessing from Jehovah, poured out on a man's ministerial labours, should protect him from church censure, his busy and zealous opposers had better let him alone; and Dr. M. might have spared him the pain of the unkind allusions he has made. Success in such a case is worse than defeat.

A very few months after, we joined with the same presbytery in the ordination of another young man, who had none of these scruples, it being understood that we, for ourselves, did not, in any shape, impose the confession upon his conscience. Though, by the way, it is not a little remarkable, that, in the region of country where it took place, and where there are several congregations under the care of the General Assembly, after inquiry was made, there was not a single copy of the Confession of Faith to be obtained. There was of course, some argument, growing out of this latter circumstance, but there was no interruption to the harmony and good feeling of the presbytery.

Such a course, Dr. M. contemplates, should have ultimately made the presbytery of Baltimore anti-confessional, and "converted it into a machine for multiplying its own advocates, to an indefinite extent, and sending them all over the church." I cannot disguise my feelings, when our opponents themselves thus bear a tribute of respect to the potency of our principles, and to the accuracy of our judgment. This statement, which Dr. M. makes, demonstrates that society only asks for an opportu-

nity to throw off these ecclesiastical shackles, and she will do it. I believe he is right, and my heart exults in the prospect, whenever it is not too timid to realize its approach. And does Dr. M. suppose that our being detached from the synod will prevent that result? No verily; such measures, however defended, only aggravate the evil; present it in more visible form; and give to men such thoughts as they never had before. If we have not obtained a single friend to go with us to the whole length of our opinions, as he intimates, there are many, as his correspondent informs him, who unequivocally condemn the measures of the synod, and whose voice may be heard, when silence can no longer be endured.—“The present paroxysm of feeling and of clamour,” by which Dr. M. so handsomely describes the religious sympathies of the community in which he dwells, may not “pass away” as soon as he expects. But if it does, then it will only be to burst forth, with greater power, at a later, but more auspicious period, when this cause, for which we plead, will unveil all its beauty, and extend its influence from pole to pole, and from the rivers to the ends of the earth. It is Immanuel’s dominion over the human mind, to be sustained by the light of his word and spirit, for which we plead; and which angels in heaven will league with the redeemed on earth to carry, like a horn of divine munificence, to pour out its spiritual bounties on all the nations of the world.

CONCLUSION.

In concluding these observations, there is one other view of the general subject, which, as Dr. M. observes, certainly deserves very "grave consideration." "You give me to understand," says Dr. M. to his correspondent, "that, although you are yourself friendly to creeds and confessions *under certain limits*; that yet you have been constrained to doubt whether any creed, intended to be subscribed by all candidates for office in a church, ought ever to contain any other articles than those which are *strictly fundamental*."

In venturing briefly to remark upon this view of the subject, I must say, at the outset, that I consider ecclesiastical creeds to be injurious in every form. If they are reduced in size, they may be, proportionally, less hurtful: or perhaps they may be equally oppressive. There are some small, as well as some large, creeds in the church; and the one seems to serve the purpose of ecclesiastical dominion, or of governing a *voluntary association*, as well as the other. And besides, the different points of theological controversy may be expressed within a very narrow compass, and the church be kept in turmoil and distraction to the end of time, unless her great Head prevent. The early creeds, at the council of Nice and afterwards, were small. But the contentions, to which they gave interest and form, have lasted until the present hour. And

the fact must ever be the same, until the church becomes, what her Master intended she should be,—a purely moral association; distinguished by principles, which I have never shown any disposition to surrender, and which Dr. M. happily describes as being “absolutely essential to christian character;” and devoted to sustain a conflict with sin in the world, by weapons that are not “carnal,” but spiritual or moral. Such is my candid opinion; and for myself, I must protest against an ecclesiastical creed, of any mould or size, being pressed upon my conscience, or the conscience of any other man, who may scruple the propriety of such a measure. And this I say, not from any desire to avoid giving “a reason for the hope that is in me,” for that has been frequently and fully done; and those, with whom I have heretofore been associated, have as much *personal knowledge* on that subject, as they have either right or necessity to demand.

At the same time others may think differently. They may conceive ecclesiastical creeds to be both *necessary* and *useful*: and they may plead *conscience* with as much earnestness and candour as I can do. The feelings and habits of society ought to be respectfully treated, and patiently borne with. On this principle was based my conference with the committee, appointed by the synod; and on this same principle should I continually feel myself called upon to act with my fellow men. If then the present illustrations shall be found to coincide

with the suggestion which Dr. M's correspondent has made, these previous explanations may protect them from being misunderstood.

I have been grossly misinformed, if there are not many, in the presbyterian church, who think their excellent standards to be very much too large. They seem to think that the writers in the present controversy are all astray; and that a middle course ought to be taken. Why then do *they* not propose, and advocate, such a reform? It certainly rests with them to remonstrate against an evil which they see, and to provide a remedy which they think should be effectual. The fact, however, that such ideas are cherished, if it be a fact, deserves very serious consideration; as it presents an opportunity of affording very extensive, if not entire, relief; and may call forth a good deal more biblical investigation than is common.

Dr. M. does not, however, favourably receive such an overture. His opinion is, that an ecclesiastical creed, "not only lawfully *may*, but always *ought*, to contain a number of articles besides those which are fundamental." Of this opinion he offers various illustrations; and the cases which he specifies, are not without their force, though they are far from being insuperable. Differences of opinion, it must be conceded, have always existed; and they always must exist, while men have different talents, and are placed in different circumstances. But can human creeds obliterate these differences? Or do they not rather perpetuate them, and, by creating

parties, extend the collision? In the present condition of the church, while divided into voluntary associations, and zealously contending for sectarian articles, is there any likelihood that a reconciliation will very speedily take place? Is there any probability of such a happy issue, on any other principle than this,—that, divested of the prejudices of a party, men should be constrained to study the Bible for themselves? To my mind this seems to be the only feasible plan, in consistency with human free-agency. It might be slow in its operations, but it would be certain and effectual: and would save society from those dreadful judgments, which, reasoning from the history of past ages, may ere long overtake her; and which will devolve upon generations yet to come the duty of remodelling our social institutions on simple and better principles. The proposition, made by “a gentleman of Baltimore,” *might* prove to be, if adopted, the beginning of better days, and the harbinger of an entire redemption from the control of sectarian law. Each successive generation would learn to find truth somewhere else than in theological subtleties, or external forms. That which is substantial in morals would every day appear more important and desirable; an extended intercourse, with a more candid exchange of sentiments, would occur; and the direct consequence would be, a much greater degree of assimilation than now exists even in the same denominations. Such is the effect of chris-

tian *love*, which the scriptures themselves warrant us most distinctly to state.

The first case which Dr. M. adduces, in order to exemplify his meaning, is the following:—"The presbyterian church, and most other denominations, who have a regular system of government, believe that the christian ministry is a divine ordinance.—Yet there are very pious, excellent men, who have adopted the sentiments of some high-toned Independents, who verily think that every "gifted brother," whether ordained or not, has as good a right to preach as any man; and, if invited by the church to do it, to administer the sacrament."—The question between these differing opinions, Dr. M. says, is not *fundamental*, and that no "sober-minded presbyterian" would consider it so. Now, if it were not that our ecclesiastical creeds interfered to prescribe certain sectarian notions, there might be some opportunity afforded to argue this question, and very much to the moral advantage of religious society.

If our creeds were not in the way, I should say, that a "gifted brother," whose services the people needed and solicited, ought to preach, and that *this* is the "divine ordinance." Perhaps, after throwing their minds, untrammelled by sectarian restrictions, upon the scripture page, this matter might be conceded.—What! And may every man then preach, without any reference to a *ministerial* distinction? I did not say so. There may be extravagances on all sides. If none but men of clas-

sical education, according to our sectarian ideas, may go into the pulpit, how might we suppose a man, occupying moral grounds, to reason under circumstances like these? I do desire the office of a bishop—my “bowels yearn” over multitudes perishing around me—I am confident that I understand the gospel, and that I can tell my fellow men what they should do to be saved—I ventured lately, under the pressure of circumstances, and after much earnest prayer, to address them—my fellow sinners tell me their eyes have been opened, and that they wish to hear more—by a divine blessing many have become “hopefully pious”—no regularly ordained minister is on the spot—the streams from theological seminaries are like drops to the ocean—now what shall I do? Apply for ordination to a presbytery? I have no theological learning, and I shall be refused. Must I leave these poor sinners and their little ones to perish, when I can tell them what they ought to do?—I can readily conceive that sectarian law may become relaxed under such a moral urgency; for there are some such cases, which scarcely any sectarian can stand. He has resolved to preach, and a blessing comes down upon his labours. Christ’s ministers may not have ordained him, but the Master himself has done it. Is there any wonder, that human beings, who so often reason wrong, should, out of an occurrence of this kind, inconsiderately manufacture a *general law*? And if our creeds did not prevent us from reasoning in a compassionate and feeling

manner about the moral necessities of our race, might not this whole difficulty be easily removed?

Besides. Is not the presbyterian church itself, often compelled to employ a "gifted brother," to meet certain conditions of human society, where a learned brother is not to be obtained? Do not presbyterians see, that divine providence very often makes a minister, and one most gloriously successful too, who never had the advantage of a theological education? And would it not very much contribute to the enlargement of the presbyterian church, and to the salvation of the souls of men, if a multitude of these "gifted brethren" would arise in the midst of our numerous *vacancies*, and direct men on the road to heaven? But the presbyterian standards call for classical qualifications; and without men, who have been drinking at the fountain of science, their vacancies must be vacancies still. This case, by which Dr. M. would exemplify his meaning, grows out of the moral condition of society; and if there was no other reason why our sectarian regulations should be abolished, the existence of such cases is a sufficient one.— In the very form in which Dr. M. states his own example, it is only a lesser evil controlling a greater one; and one too, which, if, in such cases, it be an evil, seems to be protected from censure by the happy consequences which have followed. When our fixed creeds shall have lost their commanding influence, this interesting subject may display its own importance to the eyes and consciences of pro-

lessing christians; and the extravagances on all sides may be very easily corrected.

A second example is stated in the "Letter."— "The question between presbyterians and prelatists is generally acknowledged not to be fundamental. — Still is it not plain, that a body of ministers, entirely differing among themselves as to this point; though they might love, and commune with each other, as christians, could not possibly act harmoniously together in the important rite of ordination; whatever they might do in other religious concerns?" Perhaps there has no severer, and yet less profitable, controversy existed in the church, than that to which Dr. M. here alludes; and it appears to be no nearer an amicable settlement now, than it was centuries ago. I am not an episcopalian. I am a *presbyterian*; notwithstanding Dr. M. thinks it a "burlesque upon every principle of ecclesiastical nomenclature," to call myself such; and though I am no advocate for synods or councils, or presbyterian "courts of review." Yet I do not think that this controversy is worth half as much as has been made of it: but that, when the pretensions of the two parties are fairly sifted, they are not very far apart. They are arguing, in a great measure, a mere question of ecclesiastical politics; such as "voluntary associations" are continually agitating with each other;—a mere matter of form, which may admit, or exclude, the moral operation of the gospel on either side. What is the real difference between hearing a *bishop* preach, and hearing a *presbyter*

preach, provided they alike preach the gospel? Can either the one or the other make any thing more of it than simply this—hearing the gospel? Does not divine providence equally bless their ministrations, in so far as they act consistently with the gospel?—Or what is the real difference between a bishop's diocese, and a presbyterial district—a state convention, and a particular synod—the general convention, and the general assembly? Are not the ecclesiastical *principles* very nearly the same, and do not the results perfectly correspond with each other?

Now is it an improbable result, that if both parties should lay aside their sectarian prejudices, so far that they might respectively examine the scriptures for themselves, instead of quoting the fathers; or if they should seek to construct the church on a moral basis, rather than to become the advocates of ecclesiastical power,—is it an improbable result that they might coalesce? Would not a host of ceremonies be thereby swept away, and the forms of social communion speedily grow more simple and natural? Has not Dr. M. himself informed us, “that all *presbyterians*, without exception, a great majority of the best *prelatists* themselves, and all moderate, sober-minded *protestants*, of every country, acknowledge that this point of controversy is one which does *by no means* affect christian character or hope,”—or that it is not *fundamental*? After such a concession, mutually, and generally made, where is the difficulty? Is it not, rather to their

common reproach, than any thing else, that this coalition has not long since been effected? Did not Archbishop Usher again and again propose a scheme of the “episcopal and presbyterian church government conjoined?” Nay, if I mistake not—I cannot now make my reference,—did he not permit presbyters, of a presbyterian sect, to unite with him in the ordination of a presbyter?—Once more, I ask, where is the difficulty? Is there any thing to prevent, save the indefensible doctrine of *voluntary associations*, or the dominion of ecclesiastical creeds, which have transmitted to us some of the worst, and left out some of the best, ideas and practices of ages past? Do not the scriptures evidently contemplate such simplicity and harmony, when they simply require that elders should be ordained in every city? And are there not moral feelings enough in every community speedily to accomplish the whole, if an opportunity was offered? But while the ministers make these things, which are not fundamental, as important as if they were fundamental, and so positively assert them in their ecclesiastical creeds, or demand them by their ecclesiastical laws, how can a reconciliation be effected? How can peace be established where strife is, or where angry feelings are restrained only by a mere lack of opportunity to express them?

Dr. M. gives a third example.—“No man in his senses will consider the question, which divides the Pedobaptists and Antipedobaptists, as a fundamental one.”—I approach this subject with a very dif-

ferent set of feelings from those elicited by either of the other cases. There is no form of controversy in the church, which I so deeply regret. It makes its appeal to the finest affections, and not unfrequently invades the tenderest joys, of the parental heart. But might it not be argued mildly and respectfully? Might not the Antipedobaptist consent, that his brother should peacefully enjoy a privilege he so highly prizes, and leave him to hold what he has taken as a scriptural pledge from Him, who is "the resurrection and the life," that the little "lamb," which has been taken from his bosom, the great Shepherd has mercifully folded in his own? Is it right to disturb the exercises of faith, so calmly reposing on the Redeemer's faithfulness? And on the other hand, might not the Pedobaptist consent that his brother should forego what he feels not to be a privilege, and which he thinks his Lord has not commanded? Is there any requisition that the individual, whose child is not baptized, should be "cut off from among his people?" And after all, is this not one of those very subjects, in which a similarity of sentiment might eventually be brought about? When christians mortify their controversial tempers, and submit their minds to the simple influence of the scriptures, light often breaks in unexpectedly: the Spirit teaches an honest and prayerful inquirer whatever his soul earnestly desires to know, and which is necessary to the discharge of his own duties. He who is the covenant God, not only of the righteous, but of their seed also, has some tender

lessons to teach a believing parent even on this subject; and a difference, which cannot be reconciled by that species of argument, which has been used, might perhaps be readily healed by that affectionate intercourse which divine ordinances are designed to cultivate.—The reader will remember, that my doctrine requires me to make large calculations on the influence of God's word and spirit.

Dr. M. presses this apparent difficulty with considerable ardour. I will state a parallel case, and apply his own argument to it. In the apostolic church, there was considerable difficulty concerning the lawfulness of eating certain "meats." Paul argues on the subject frequently in his epistles, and states the question uniformly as involving nothing *fundamental*. "Meat," says he, "commendeth us not to God: for neither if we eat, are we the better; neither if we eat not, are we the worse." Yet there was much, and very hurtful, controversy about this point. Ministers disagreed as well as private christians: apostles themselves, seem sometimes on opposite sides: and the whole interests of the Jewish and the gentile churches, as being introduced into a common heritage, were jeopardied by their contentions. Now to apply Dr. M's argument:—"What would be the situation of a church equally divided, or nearly so, on this point: ministers as well as private christians continually differing among themselves; members of each party conscientiously persuaded that the others were wrong; each laying great stress on the point of difference, as one con-

cerning which there could be no compromise, or accommodation; all claiming, and endeavouring to exercise the right, not only to *reason*, but to *act*, according to their respective convictions; and every one zealously endeavouring to make proselytes to his principles and practice? Which would such a church most resemble—the builders of *Babel*, when their speech was confounded; or a holy and united family, “walking together in the fear of the Lord, and in the consolation of the Holy Ghost, and edifying one another in love?”

This statement most accurately and minutely describes the condition of the apostolic church in relation to “meats.” Dr. M. reasons right, when he foretells the consequences of such proceedings. Now for the conclusion:—They certainly ought to have separated, as they could not be “comfortable in the same ecclesiastical communion:” they should have erected different voluntary associations, and framed creeds, in which they might have asserted their own particular belief on this subject, which was not fundamental: one should have taken Paul for its head; and another should have taken Peter for its head, every where spreading abroad, how rudely Paul had treated Peter, in reproving him for his dissimulation. Most assuredly this is the legitimate conclusion from Dr. M’s premises. But is it scriptural? Did Paul urge such a course? Or, when it was likely to be adopted, did he not exert all his influence to crush this rising schism? Did he not forbid their doubtful disputations? Did he not solemnly warn them

not to “judge one another?” Did he not affectionately exhort them to cherish that “love which worketh no ill to his neighbour;” and which is the “fulfilling of the law;” and to seek “to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus,” that they might, “*with one mind and one mouth, glorify God?*” Did he not command them—“Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God?” Did the apostles at Jerusalem decide that it was better for these disputants, more conducive to peace, and more likely to fulfil the great purposes for which the church was instituted, that they should be separated? And down even as late as the days of Justin Martyr, did he not feel himself warranted to say, concerning Jewish converts that adhered to Mosaical rites, “that if they did this only through their weakness and imbecility, and did not persuade other christians to the observance of the same Judaical customs, that *he would receive them into church fellowship and communion?*” And would not like reciprocal love and forbearance, produce like happy results, and make the maintenance of the unity of the church equally practicable? Why not? Human beings are the same now that they ever have been: or if they are not, the advantage should certainly be found with us, seeing we have every privilege which our fathers had, and, in addition, the benefit of their experience to guard us against their mistakes.

I see not then, why an ecclesiastical creed, if such a thing there must be, should not be redu-

ced, so as to embrace merely *fundamental* matters, or those items which are "absolutely essential to christian character." Real christianity will always sustain itself. If men will only obey her dictates, whether they be in the ministry or not, nothing need be apprehended for the result. But when ecclesiastical influence is the prize to be won, then any evil may follow, and all the ecclesiastical creeds which may be made, cannot prevent the evil. But if a course thus lenient, and evidently called for by the circumstances of the church, some, at least, of the advocates of creeds themselves being judges, cannot be admitted, then they who may, but will not, afford relief, must take the consequences. There is another tribunal before which we must all appear, and where the law of God itself, unfettered by our arbitrary explanations, will form the rule of judgment. Not to act according to the word of God now, surely argues want of preparation for the arbitrement of the last day.—Reader, beware. Pause and reflect. Ecclesiastical policy is not redeeming love. Ecclesiastical creeds are not the rules of the Master's procedure. The Bible is his—sectarian formularies are our own. Lo! He cometh quickly, and His reward is with him, to give every man according as his work shall be. I pray you, "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not again entangled with the yoke of bondage." "Hold fast what thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

THE END.



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