

THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW,

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ARTICLE I.

AGNOSTICISM.¹

When Auguste Comte propounded his philosophical system to the world, he gave that system the name of Positivism. The scientific method which he in common with the body of physical inquirers pursued, and which he commended as the only method that is fruitful of valuable or satisfactory results, he styled the Positive, and the thinkers who, under his guidance, adopted and advocated that method to the exclusion of every other, he denominated Positivists. These descriptive terms were willingly accepted by the bulk of his followers; even by such of them as John Stuart Mill, and perhaps *M. Littré*, distinguished pupils who considerably modified and extended the views of the acknowledged master of the school. From this it was a very natural step to apply the convenient term "Positivists" to *all* who, in addition to the familiarity they betray with Comte's nomenclature, agree with Comte in his essential principles; nor has the fashion of doing so wholly gone out even now that so

¹This paper takes its starting-point from the article on Positivism in the work entitled "Modern Philosophy, from Descartes to Schopenhauer and Hartmann. By Francis Bowen, A. M., Alford Professor of Natural Religion and Moral Philosophy in Harvard College. Second Edition. New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Company, 1878."

Let us examine *its* temple. Let us force an entrance into its penetralia, for we cannot say its most holy place. What shall we say of the deity hidden behind the foul curtain? hidden there though his flamens deny that he is there! Let us drag forth to the light, the blind, idiotic, howling god whom his own servants despise. IT, the author of this magnificent cosmos! IT, the father of our spirits!

Yet between these two we must choose. There is no other alternative: we must take the Lord our God, or Chance.

L. G. BARBOUR.

ARTICLE VII.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1881.

This Assembly, it is surmised, has left an extremely pleasant impression upon the minds of its members. The little "Mountain City" of Staunton, Va., as its inhabitants love to call it, is at all times a pleasant place to visit. Situated in the middle of the "Great Valley," midway between the Blue Ridge and North Mountain, it presents the tourist, in its bold and rounded hills, endless undulating surface, and distant but majestic mountain-ramparts, a landscape to whose perfect beauty nothing is lacking, except the contrast of the level azure of a Swiss lake. As though to greet the great convocation with a cheerful welcome, the country clothed itself in all the glory of summer verdure, combining the greenness of the North of England with the brilliancy of an Italian sky. Nor were the good people behind their country, in the hospitable reception extended to the visitors. The doors of the beautiful homes of all denominations were thrown open without distinction. All that a cordial, but unpretending, hospitality could do, was combined with mountain air, and propitious weather, to make the season of the Assembly's sittings enjoyable.

A representation absolutely full would have given one hundred

and forty-eight commissioners. Of these there were present on the first day one hundred and sixteen; and during the whole sessions, one hundred and thirty. Precisely at 11 a. m. of May 19th, the Moderator, Dr. Thos. A. Hoyt, of Nashville, ascended the pulpit. A great audience filled the spacious and commanding church. The text of the opening sermon was Gal. i. 6 and 7, and its subject was the duty of preaching only that system of truth known as the "doctrines of grace," as the only one revealed in the gospel. This glorious system was unfolded, in constant contrast (as the text suggested) with the other schemes of religion erroneously deduced from the gospel. The "doctrines of grace" exhibit their supreme excellence in these four respects:

I. In that they alone do full honor to the Holy Scriptures, asserting their full inspiration in consistency with the personality of their writers; and thus claiming for them supreme and absolute authority; while admitting the beautiful adaptation of their humanity to the human soul. The "doctrines of grace" also recognise the distinction between natural and revealed religion, and between the general contents of Scripture, all of which are authoritative, and the special truths of redemption; while they alone recognise all the declarations of the word, and successfully combine them into a compact and logical system.

II. The "doctrines of grace" cohere fully with the revelation God has made of his own essence and personality. They convert the mystery of his Trinity in Unity from an abstraction into a glorious practical truth, by connecting man's redemption essentially with the several persons and their relations and functions. And while all lower theories of redemption must needs mutilate God in some of his perfections in order to permit man's escape from his doom, the gospel plan not only permits, but requires, the highest exercise of all the attributes which make up God's infinite essence.

III. The "doctrines of grace" portray our fallen nature in colors exactly conformable to human history, and the convictions of man's guilty conscience. And they propose to deal with the fallen soul in the way most conducive to its true sanctification and salvation, by enforcing the holy law, in all its extent, as the

rule of the Christian's living; while they quicken into action the noblest motives of love and gratitude, by bestowing an unbought justification.

Thus, IV. These doctrines embody the only salvation suited to man's wants, and worthy of God's perfections. It is a salvation righteous, holy, honorable to God, which yet bestows on sinners an assured, ineffable, rational, and everlasting blessedness. Hence the high and holy duty, enforced as much from the tremendous necessities of lost souls as from the rights of Jehovah, to know no other gospel than this, and to preach it always and everywhere.

The preacher, evidently furnished with the advantages of a thorough preparation, and untrammelled by notes, delivered this great body of vital truth in language elevated, classic, and perspicuous, supporting his words by an utterance and action of graceful dignity. As he expanded side after side of the glories of the true gospel, the hearer's soul was raised higher and higher towards the level of the angelic anthem: "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace, good-will to men!" Our Redeemer-God was brought near in his full-orbed glory; his severer attributes harmonised, but undimmed, by his benevolence and mercy. Man fallen was placed in the dust and ashes of humility. Man redeemed was lifted to a hope and bliss as honorable to God, the giver, as precious to the receiver. "Mercy and truth met together: righteousness and peace kissed each other."

The new Assembly then proceeded to organise itself by the unanimous election of Dr. Robt. P. Faris, of St. Louis, Mo., as Moderator, an honor well earned, and skilfully and worthily borne, and of the Rev. Geo. A. Trenholm, of South Carolina, as Temporary Clerk.

The body quickly gave an earnest of its purpose of work, by resolving to proceed at once, in the afternoon, to hear the reports of the Executive Committees. These exhibited advancement, except in that work of fundamental importance, Home Missions. It is safe to take the money given by the churches to these evangelical agencies as an index of the interest and prayer expended on them. Instead of the \$10,000 which the previous

Assembly found to be the least measure of the urgent wants of the Home Missions' work, and which it asked the churches to bestow, the Committee receive for this cause \$18,526. If the contribution to the kindred work of the Evangelists' fund, \$10,958, to the Invalid fund, \$10,248, and the sum of about \$4,000 supposed to be spent in Home Mission work by Presbyteries not in connexion, be added, we get, as the aggregate devoted in our Church to home work and charities . . . \$43,732

The gifts to Foreign Missions were	59,215
An encouraging increase of \$11,000.	
The gifts to the Publication Committee	8,009
The gifts to candidates for the ministry	10,335
The gifts to the Colored Institute	2,000
And those to colored evangelists	597

Thus the total of these contributions was \$123,888

This is less than an average of one dollar from each of our reported communicants.

For some years past, the General Assembly of the Northern Presbyterian Church, which also meets by precedent on the third Thursday of May, has sent to ours a simple greeting in the form of a telegram. To this our Assembly has usually responded in the same terms. On the second day of the recent sessions, Dr. Adger, the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Correspondence, proposed that our Assembly should take the initiative, by sending, without delay, the usual message. This, to his surprise, evoked one of the most animated debates of the session. No opposition seemed to be made to the intercourse itself, while kept within the bounds of a simple recognition and expression of good wishes. But it was argued that the injuries and detractions put upon Southern Presbyterians by that Assembly, and never yet withdrawn or repaired, made it improper for us to take the initiative in such messages. Our Commissioners to the Baltimore Conference in 1874, sustained by our Assemblies, had declared that the withdrawal of false accusations was an absolute prerequisite to the resumption of any fraternal relations. But the action proposed to-day was a departure from that righteous and

self-respecting resolution. Moreover, it would be misunderstood as indicating a purpose in us, of which it is presumed no Southern Presbyterian could for a moment dream, to retreat from that position, and to approach a dishonorable and deceitful reunion made at the expense of truth and our own good name. It was urged that the separate independence of the Southern Church was a great boon, mercifully bestowed on her by God at an opportune time; when that laxity of discipline and doctrine now so prevalent, began to invade the Presbyterian Church of the North and of Scotland. This independence, then, is not to be regarded as an expression of our pique or revenge; but as a holy trust, in a solemn and unexpected way bestowed on us by the divine Head of the Church, as a necessary bulwark for his vital truth among us. Its jealous maintenance by us, therefore, is not to be treated as a prompting of ill-temper; for this is an odious and slanderous travesty of the facts. The line of action hitherto pursued by our Church is, rather, the simple performance of a solemn duty to God and his Church and truth. And the slightest tendency towards the betrayal of this independence is to be deprecated.

It was replied by the other side: That our Assemblies had never, on account of the unatoned injuries of the other Church refused all official intercourse with it; but from the first had responded to such civilities as might pass between us and any other denomination; that the ground taken in 1870, when an exchange of delegates was asked, was, that this especial mark of community of church-order and affection could never be extended, until false accusations against us were withdrawn; that the only question here raised, whether our Assembly shall send the first telegram, instead of answering theirs, is really a very trivial one, having no significance except that which would be given it by a refusal under existing circumstances; that our Church's separate independence was indeed a priceless trust bestowed on her at an opportune time (as the protestants have well said); and that we and they are altogether at one in not tolerating the slightest thought of its surrender. Our Church stands now where she has always stood; we take no step forwards, and none backwards.

The latter views prevailed, and the Assembly authorised the Committee on Foreign Correspondence to send the usual formal greeting to the Northern Assembly sitting in Buffalo, N. Y., only thirteen dissenting. In due time, the usual response came from the other body; and so the matter ended. But Dr. Mullally, of Lexington Presbytery, and a few others, entered their protest, stating in substance the above arguments; to which the Assembly replied with the views advanced by the majority.

The transaction for which this Assembly will probably be most remembered, was the final disposition made of the two counter-reports on "Retrenchment and Reform" in the Assembly's Committees. On the third day, these were taken up; and the Rev. A. C. Hopkins from Winchester Presbytery, chairman of the Committee, was heard on this and a subsequent day, at great length, in defence of the majority report. The Rev. S. T. Martin, the author of the minority report, also spoke in defence of his suggestions in an excellent spirit, and with great ingenuity and force. That he had prejudiced the success of the few practical amendments in our methods, which he really urged, by taking too wide a range of discussion, and by asserting other doctrines and changes which the great body of the Church dread as revolutionary—this had now become obvious to the amiable speaker, as it had all along been obvious to his friends. He now attempted to parry this adverse effect, by pleading: That when called by the Assembly to lay his whole mind before the churches for their discussion, he had but acted conscientiously, in speaking out the whole system of thought on our church-work, which honestly commended itself to his judgment. But now, when he was come to proposing amendments in that work for the Church's adoption, he should limit himself to those few changes which were generally obvious and confessedly feasible. And he claimed that members ought now to weigh each of these proposals on its own merits, and unprejudiced by other unpopular speculations (as others might deem them) in which he might be nearly singular. This claim, evidently, was no more than just. But it was equally evident, that members were unable to rise to the dispassionate level of this equity; and that the hearing of Mr. Martin

was prejudiced by the previous opposition to his more extreme views, even when he urged his most reasonable proposals.

These, he now limited to two: 1. As to aiding education for the ministry, he proposed that an Assembly's Committee of Education should be continued, but that it should perform its brief duties without a paid secretary. These duties should be only to receive remittances from the stronger presbyteries and distribute them among the candidates of the poorer and weaker. As for the rest, the selection of candidates suitable to be aided, and the raising of money to aid them, should be left, where the Constitution places it, with each presbytery. But the Assembly should advise presbyteries which have, for the time, no candidates, and those which have wealth, to contribute to the weak presbyteries, through the Assembly's Committee.

2. As to the work of Evangelism and Home Missions: that there shall be, as now, a Committee and Secretary of Home Missions. But each presbytery shall collect its own funds, and manage its own Evangelistic and Home Missions' work. The Assembly, however, shall enjoin all the older and stronger presbyteries to send to the Central Committee a given *quota* of all their collections for this work (say one-tenth, or one-fifth), that this agency may have abundant means to aid and push the work of church-extension and missions in the weaker and the missionary presbyteries.

The chairman, Mr. Hopkins, on the contrary, moved the Assembly to resolve, that the present system was substantially perfect, and needed no modification, except in slight details of exact responsibility. After long debate, resumed for several days, the Assembly finally voted under the previous question against all amendments by a great majority—only eight adhering to Mr. Martin.

The current discussion on this matter has been made so familiar to Presbyterians through their newspapers, that it will not be again detailed here. Another great question was unavoidably mingled in this discussion, by the Report of Dr. Girardeau's Committee on the Diaconate, also made, by order of a previous Assembly, on the morning of this third day. The whole contents

of that thorough Report will not be stated here; the readers of the REVIEW have already seen the substance of it in the articles of Dr. Girardeau, in our January and April numbers. Of course, all in the Assembly were ready to admit that the deacon is a scriptural officer; that every fully organised congregation should have deacons; that his office is distinguished from the presbyter's by its functions, which are, not spiritual teaching and rule, but collection and distribution of the church's oblation. But the positions of Dr. G.'s Committee excited the opposition of many, on these following points (which are the points especially involved in the discussion on "Retrenchment and Reform"): The Committee held that, in the fully organised Church, the distinct separation between presbyterial and diaconal functions was obligatory and proper, not indeed for the true being, but for the best being, health, and ulterior safety of the Church. Many others held, that presbyters are also *ex officio* deacons, and may always assume, in addition to their proper teaching and ruling functions, diaconal functions, if convenience and policy seem to dictate it. But especially, the Committee held that diaconal functions extend beyond the concerns of a single congregation, when many congregations are acting concurrently in matters of oblation and distribution; even as the local presbyter assumes rule over the Church at large, when he sits in a superior court. But the opponents of the Committee held that the functions of the diaconate can never extend beyond the local concerns of a particular congregation. Hence it follows, that when many congregations, or the whole Church, engage jointly in oblation and distribution, not a deacon, but a minister, shall perform this general diaconal work. Of course, the doctrine of the Committee contains the corollary, that these treasuryships and distributions also should be, like the congregational, in diaconal hands, where the Church is fully and correctly organised. Then, qualifications and functions will be properly connected. Presbyters, supposed to be qualified and called of God to spiritual functions, will not be diverted and perverted from their proper duties to financial affairs—for which they are notoriously often disqualified. Financial affairs will be put into the hands of men not called of God

to the higher and heterogeneous work of preaching or ruling, but specially selected for their experience in handling money. This is the point of connexion between Dr. Girardeau's Report and the views of the minority on Reform; for one of the strong points of the latter had been, that the treasuryships of the Assembly's Committees ought to be committed to deacons.

The Assembly, moved by pressure of business and an evident distaste for the discussion, resolved formally to postpone the consideration of the Diaconate to next year; but none the less, the argument on these points was unavoidably mingled with that on Mr. Martin's resolutions. Dr. Girardeau, finding his positions assailed by high authority, with the most technical weapons of logic, deemed it necessary to defend them technically, as well as popularly and scripturally, in his Report. He did both with eminent success. But as his written argument will be given to the Church, and as we now only attempt a brief review of the Assembly's own debates, we shall not follow Drs. Lefevre and Girardeau in their formal printed arguments. The opponents of the Report placed much stress on the fact that the apostles continued to perform diaconal functions, (as Paul, Rom. xv. 25, 26,) after the appointment of deacons in Acts vi. A venerable member amused the house by saying, that Judas, an Apostle, was treasurer of the apostolic family by the Saviour's own appointment, and denominating him "St. Judas," he asked why he was not as well entitled at that time to the prænomen as St. Matthew? If we ascribe to this citation of Judas's treasurership the value to which alone it was entitled, that of a pleasant jest, then its sufficient repartee would be in saying, that this jumbling of spiritual and diaconal functions turned out wretchedly; as the money was stolen, and the officer disgraced. So that the example weighs on Dr. Girardeau's side. But if the instance be advanced as a serious argument from precedent, then the answer will be, that Judas, when treasurer of the Saviour's family, *was not an apostle*, but only an apostle-elect. He was only in training for that high office.

In arguing from the example of Paul, that the minister's office includes the right to diaconal functions in the settled state of the

Church, it was strangely forgotten that the apostles were purely extraordinary officers of the Church; they could not have any successors. The very reason for the temporary existence of such extraordinary offices was, that the frame of the new dispensation might be by them instituted when as yet it was not. From this simple fact follow two consequences. One is, that these founding officers must, initially, exercise all the organic functions of all necessary church officers. The other is, that when they had once established the full organism, no other officers could regularly claim to do the same from their example. Thus, in order that there might be a regular order of priests in the Church under the dispensation of Sinai, Moses, the great Prophet, must for the nonce exercise the priest's office in consecrating Aaron and his sons. But after Aaron and his sons were consecrated, Moses never presumed to sacrifice again. Nor did David. And when King Saul dared to imitate the argument of our brethren, by engrossing the inferior office of priest, he was cursed of God for the intrusion. I. Sam. xiii. 8-14.

Again, when it is argued that the presbyterial office is still inclusive of the diaconal, there is a strange oblivion of the third chapter of I. Tim. There, the Apostle is, plainly, ordering the frame of the Church for post-apostolic times. He provides for equipping the Church with two distinct orders of officers, elders and deacons. As the qualifications are distinct, so the functions. There is no more evidence here, that in a fully developed Church an elder may usurp diaconal functions because he has been made an elder, than that a deacon may usurp presbyterial functions because he has been made a deacon. The result of a scriptural view is then: that in a forming state of the given church, the officers who are properly commissioned to initiate the organisation, must for the time combine in themselves their own and the lower functions. But *the very object of their instituting the lower organs is*, that in due time the functions may be separated, and the anomalous mingling may cease; that the church may have its orderly and safe ulterior growth. Thus, an evangelist, preaching the gospel *in partibus infidelium*, must, at first, exercise the function of examining and admitting adult converts as full members

in the visible Church. Strictly, *this is a sessional*, not a *ministerial* function. But there cannot be a session until after there is a membership; so that the evangelist is obliged to do it. But now, does it follow that every pastor, who has a session, may properly usurp this sessional function? By no means. There is not an intelligent session in the land which would tolerate such systematic intrusions.

In the next place, that Christ and the Apostles designed diaconal officers not only for the local, but the combined functions of oblation and distribution of larger parts of the Church—this follows naturally from the truths conceded to us. The Apostles did institute the diaconal office. They did assign especially to them the official management of oblation and distribution. They did assign to the presbyters the distinct functions of spiritual teaching and rule. They did command the churches to exercise the “grace of giving” statedly. And it is admitted that whenever a given congregation, as a body, exercised this grace, the receiving and distribution went naturally into the deacons’ official hands. But now, both Scripture and Providence call the many congregations to joint exercises of this grace of giving. Why does it not follow, that the receiving and distribution should still fall into diaconal hands, representative of the joint congregations? How does the circumstance that many congregations, instead of one, are now exercising this grace, make it right to break across the distinction of offices, which was so proper in the single congregation, and to jumble functions which were there so properly separated?

But this is not a human inference. • The New Testament unquestionably gives instances of general deacons, other than the twelve, who managed this duty of oblation and distribution, not for one church, but for many. A member did, indeed, attempt during this debate to argue from II. Corinthians, viii. 18–23, that a preacher of the word was intrusted with the diaconal function as soon as the oblation was a general one of many churches; but his argument was a mere begging of the question. He *assumed* that this “brother . . . chosen of the churches to travel with” Paul and Titus, “with this grace,” was a preacher. This was

the very point he should have *proved*. But no man can prove it. On the contrary, it is obvious that this "brother" was a general deacon. Not a single trait or title of evangelistic or preaching office is given him by Paul. He is "chosen of the churches" for the express purpose of "travelling with *this grace*;" that is to say, to collect and disburse the general oblations. He is not a presbyter, but (v. 23) a "messenger" of the churches (a commissioner, ἀπόστολος.) The use of this title catches our brethren in the jaws of this sharp dilemma: either they must hold with us that ἀπόστολος is here used of these general deacons in the lower and modified sense of financial commissioners of the churches; or else they must open wide the door to the prelatial argument, *by admitting many Apostles* (in the full sense) besides and after the Twelve. The Twelve are always "Apostles of Christ"; these general deacons are "apostles (commissioners) of the churches." We have another example in Epaphroditus, Philippians ii. 25, and iv. 18, unquestionably a deacon of that church, and called their "apostle" and λειτουργός to Paul's necessities. We also have probable cases in the Romans Andronicus and Junia (or Junius), Romans xvi. 7. Thus, the fact that this alms-receiver-general for the churches enjoyed "a praise throughout all the churches," instead of proving that he must have been a noted preacher, only shows how much better the primitive churches understood and honored the general deacon than the Christians of our day do.

The formal remission of the discussion of Dr. Girardeau's Report to a future Assembly, produced one result, which it would be discourteous to charge as premeditated. His powerful voice was silenced in this debate, inasmuch as he was not a regular member of the Assembly. Hence but little of the truth was heard on his side, which, if advanced with clearness, would have given a very different aspect to the debate.

It would be exceedingly erroneous to suppose that the vote of almost the whole Assembly against a minority of eight, is an index and measure of the unanimity of our Church in the position that our methods of committee action need and admit no amendment. Many side influences concurred particularly against

Mr. Martin and his propositions at this time. The discussion of desirable betterments is by no means ended, as time will show. This was made perfectly obvious to the observer, by such facts as these: that a part of Mr. Martin's principles were and are openly advocated by many men of the widest experience and influence; that after the vote, very many who voted with the majority were heard to admit that *there is room for amendments*, and that they should and must be introduced, in due time, and each upon its own merits.

Dr. Adger, for instance, announced himself, not as a revolutionist, but as one who desired to *conserve* and *improve*. He disclaimed all sympathy with the cry for *retrenchment*—he wanted more liberal expenditures. Our Church can give and ought to give every year one million of dollars. His position was equally removed from that of the rash innovator and from the arrogant and fulsome assumption that all our present methods are too near perfection to be amended. Against adopting that egotistical position, there rises in protest these great, solemn, and sad facts: that by present methods we only succeed in drawing from all our churches \$123,000 for all the Lord's work (outside of pastoral and church support), which is less than one dollar for each member; and that our present agencies yearly afflict our hearts with the complaint that half our congregations neglect all coöperation! Is this so satisfactory? Is this to remain our best attainment? And whereas all criticism has been deprecated, as tending to destroy confidence and utterly cripple existing agencies, it turns out that this year of sharp criticism has shown a considerable, though still an inadequate progress! No; free discussion is the healthy atmosphere of a free Church. The surest way to arrest effort and paralyse confidence is to choke down the honest questionings of Presbyterians by a species of bureaucratic dictation, and to leave an angry mistrust brooding in silence. But our churches cannot be so dealt with; they will think and speak independently.

Power conferred on our agencies is not a subject of dread. Power is efficiency. Power is life. Power is work. But the thing always to be watched is combination, or centralisation of

power. Our present methods, notwithstanding all the safeguards of our former wisdom, suggest grounds of caution in these three particulars: *First*, That they transfer so much of the Church's home-work (education, home missions, &c.) to the Assembly. It is the Assembly's agencies which must do everything. True, they are, by their rules, all required to act in concert with the presbyteries; yet they are the Assembly's agencies; to the Assembly they are responsible; from it they derive their existence; to the extension of its prerogatives they instinctively lend all their practical weight. Hence, the Assembly has rolled over upon it too many of the functions which the Constitution assigns to Presbyteries. There is too much blood in the head, and not enough in the members. Financial and executive work, which should be left to its proper local agencies, when thus drawn into the Assembly, disqualifies this supreme court for its higher and more spiritual duties of conserving the doctrinal and moral purity and spiritual life of the Church. So preoccupied is the Assembly with these engrossments of executive detail, that it has no time nor taste for other questions touching the very life of the souls of its people. But if our system hinders the efficiency of the Assembly, it likewise damages all self-development in our lower courts. The work of the Presbyteries being assumed by the Assembly, those bodies will not and cannot be expected to take its responsibility on them. Why need the Presbytery bestir itself to raise funds for its candidates or its own Domestic Missions, when there is a great central Committee of the Assembly anxious to do all that for the Presbyteries which coöperate, and ready to its power and almost beyond its power to meet every call properly made upon it?

But *secondly*, the fellow-feeling natural to these executive agencies, as children of a common mother, results in a combination of influence for each other and to resist criticism. It is not meant to charge the conscious formation of any corrupt "ring-power." The honorable disclaimers of secretaries and committee-men are fully allowed, when they declare that they have made no overt compact to defend each other. Doubtless this is perfectly true; but the tendency to combination is uncalculated and

unconscious ; and therefore the more a subject of solicitude. It is not the fault of the men—they are good men and true, honorable and incapable of calculated usurpations ; it is the fault of the system. Yes, you have an established system of central agencies, all which have a common life, and when you touch one of them, all of them feel and resent it. What is there in the nature of the case to make it certain that your education work, for example, is arranged in the best possible way ? And yet if it is proposed to make any changes therein, your Secretary of Foreign Missions and every other Secretary will be found quick to come forward in defence of the established system.

But *thirdly*, while power is good, and while our *powers* might be acknowledged to be all right in themselves considered, surely it cannot be maintained that it is well to concentrate so many of them in one corner of the Church. Last year at Charleston a strong effort was made to separate two of them ; but to every observant eye, there was a rallying of the forces which effectually prevented it. Now, do you imagine that the Church is satisfied or going to be satisfied about this ? Let this Assembly vote that *all shall remain as it is*, and will that prevent the Church from repeating, in due time, her dissatisfaction with this concentration of so much power in so few hands or in one corner of our territory ?

The history of the discussion against “Boards” in the old Assembly (at Rochester, in 1860, and previously,) might be instructive to us now. All of us admit that the old Board system was vicious ; even unconstitutional. Yet all amendment was resisted, when urged by Dr. Thornwell and others, by just such arguments as we hear to-day, against admitting even the smaller modifications prompted by the lights of experience. Dr. Thornwell was voted down, as we shall be to-day, by a very large majority. But only a few years elapsed, when lo ! the Northern Church adopted his very principles. The old Boards of one hundred members were swept away and Executive Committees of fifteen put into their places, but wearing still the name of *Boards*. The vanquished became the victors. It may be so, to some extent again. For our present methods still retain some of the evils which Dr.

Thornwell then objected against the old ones: too much tendency to centralisation; the atrophy, through disuse, of those smaller limbs of the spiritual body, the lower courts; and the transfer of diaconal functions out of diaconal hands. Dr. Adger then advocated the two measures moved by Mr. Martin.

The Rev. Mr. Quarles, of Missouri, in a long and able speech, also urged, in addition, these points: That it seems almost farcical to send a presbytery's home missions money to Baltimore, in order to send it back, at that Presbytery's demand, to pay its home-missionary; and to expend the Church's money in providing for this useless migration of money checks, and in paying treasurers to do such business as this. But unless the presbytery's will, which the rules of the Home Missions' Committee seem so fully to recognise, is to be resisted, such seems to be the useless nature of our proceeding, on our present plan. Nehemiah, when he would arouse the householders in his defenceless town of Jerusalem to contribute to the building of a common wall, combined general patriotism with personal affections, by calling each man "to build over against his own dwelling." The Assembly should imitate his wisdom. The way to do this is to leave local enterprises more to local agencies and affections. Christians will give more to help *this known destitute church*, in their own Presbytery, than they will give for that vague impersonal thing, "the general destitution," a thousand miles off. Hence, it was claimed that Presbyteries acting for themselves have usually acted with more vigor, and raised more money, than those connected with the Assembly's Committee; while they have been prompt to contribute a certain portion to that committee for its frontier work.

The advocates of the majority were frequent in characterising Mr. Martin's motions as visionary, as grounded in mere theory, and as unsupported by experience; while they claimed that theirs were sustained by the experience of seventeen years' success. This boast laid them open to a pungent rejoinder, from the damaging effect of which they seem to have been spared mainly by the forbearance of their respondents. It might have been answered: that the desire for these betterments was in the fullest sense practical and experimental, being grounded, namely, in

very melancholy and pointed experiences. For instance: under the present boasted system, contributions to education had fallen from fourteen or fifteen thousand dollars, gathered under another system, and that, in the days of the Church's poverty, to nine or ten thousand now. Last year, the Assembly solemnly told the churches that Home Missions *must have* not less than \$40,000 this year, or most critical losses would result. The excellent Secretary afflicted us by telling us that the churches only gave him \$18,000 for Home Missions. But these same churches have given \$59,250 for Foreign Missions. It is impossible to ascribe to our people an ignorance of the plain truth, so eloquently put by Dr. Hoge, in his Home Missions' address: "That this cause cannot be second to any other, because the home work is the very *fulcrum* of the levers by which all our other agencies seek to work for the world's salvation." Hence, their failure to respond, their seeming depreciation of the home work under the foreign in the ratio of 18 to 59, must be ascribed to the defects of our present method. And especially did the history of the Publication Committee give us a most awakening experience. For there we saw an important and costly interest committed precisely to our present boasted methods, and utterly wrecked. An eminent divine was called to usurp the diaconal functions of an accountant and distributor, for which events proved him wholly unfitted, while he sunk into abeyance those preaching duties for which he was so richly fitted, called, and ordained. The result was the total insolvency of an agency which should have been profitable and prosperous, an insolvency which was only prevented from becoming flagrant by renewed and onerous special contributions exacted from the churches. And the most significant part of this experience is in the fact that, while our present methods, claimed to be too near perfection for criticism, were maturing for us this astounding calamity, the voice of faithful warning, uttered for instance by the excellent elder, Mr. Kennedy, of Clarksville, was rebuked by precisely the arguments appealed to by the majority of to-day! "Oh! fault-findings were mischievous. They repressed contributions. They hampered meritorious officers. They impaired confidence. They

should be rebuked by the actual censure of the Assembly." One would think that such an experience, so recent, should have inculcated more modesty in the majority.

There are a few more instructive thoughts bearing upon our present modes of aiding candidates for the ministry, which were not uttered in the Assembly. The education-collection is, confessedly, the unpopular collection with the churches. This every pastor experiences; and the scantiness of the returns attests it. But, on the other hand, we find that there is no object of philanthropy, for which it is so easy to elicit liberal aid, as to educate *a given and known deserving youth* for usefulness to his generation. The two facts, when coupled together, show that we have not yet gotten hold of the wisest method. Our present method makes it hard to do what, supposing our candidates to be really meritorious, the generous Christian heart of our men of wealth would make exceedingly easy. The money which, in all proper individual instances, comes easiest, we now make to come hardest. The mistake is obvious. Instead of presenting to the Christian heart the known concrete case of the highly deserving young brother, we present that impersonal and suspected abstraction, the unknown body of "indigent candidates." In fine, the aid rendered should, in each case, be grounded, not on the candidate's indigence, but *on his merit*. It should be given him as the well-earned reward of diligence, self-improvement, and self-devotion. It would then stimulate and ennoble the beneficiary, instead of galling him.

We venture to predict that the Church will finally concur in these conclusions, as to the various subjects agitated:

1. That unpaid Committees without paid Secretaries can never maintain in their vigor our various agencies for the world's conversion. There will be too strong an application of the old maxim: "What is everybody's business will be nobody's business." Such an attempt would be too wide a departure from that ordering of human nature and Providence, which fits the energetic few to lead, and the many to follow.

2. To direct and energise one of these works, as executive

head of its committee, is a work neither prelatie in its claims, nor derogatory to the ordination-vows of a preacher of the word. But the mere diaconal functions attending these agencies should be transferred, as fast as practicable, to the more suitable hands of deacons and *deaconesses*; the latter furnishing the Church the most quick, intelligent, and economical service, probably, in this direction. Thus the Secretaries will be released from pursuits heterogeneous from their calling, to devote their energies to their proper evangelistic tasks in organising the spread of the gospel by tongue and pen and press.

3. Some of these works, as that of Foreign Missions, will always be mainly under the control of the Assembly, by its Committees. But those home enterprises, in which the Presbyteries can act directly, should be remitted to them. This will economise expense, prevent undue centralisation, and leave the hands of the secretaries, who will still be needed, free to do work more useful to the Church than the engrossment of functions belonging to the Presbyteries.

4. An economy which would prove "penny wise and pound foolish" would be the poorest economy. Yet, it is a sacred duty of the Assembly to see that working-expenses are reduced to the lowest safe *ratio*; because the money handled is sacred, in most cases the gift of poverty and self-denial, to God; and every dollar, needlessly diverted to the mere expenses of administration, is so much taken from the salvation of perishing souls.

The Assembly of 1881 was happy in having but one judicial case before it. This was the appeal of Mr. Turner, of the Central church in Atlanta, against the Synod of Georgia. He had been cited by his Session to answer to charges of fraud and untruthfulness in the prosecution of his secular business. The testimony adduced did not substantiate these charges. But the Session deemed that there was such proof of heedlessness as justified a serious admonition. In this admonition Mr. Turner acquiesced. A few days after, he asked his dismissal to join the Methodist communion. The Session refused this, on the ground that he was not "in good standing," inasmuch as ad-

monition leaves the admonished member somehow in a species of probation with the Session as to his standing, to be continued virtually at the Session's option; and that even a member in good standing cannot demand dismissal to another communion as a right, but must ask it of the option and courtesy of the Session. These were the points raised by the appeal. In both, the Assembly properly decided against the lower courts. It held that a mere admonition is a species of Church censure which completes and exhausts itself when administered, if received with docility. To hold the contrary, virtually raises it to a higher grade of censure, that of indefinite suspension, at the option of the Session. But this is a distinct, and a graver censure. To construe an admonition thus would punish the culprit twice under the same indictment, and the second time without trial. As to the second point, the Assembly decided, with those of 1839 and 1851, that no member of the Presbyterian Church can claim, as of right, a "letter of dismissal" to another communion; but a member who is "in good standing," is always entitled to a "certificate of good standing," whenever he asks it. If he is found to have used it to institute membership in another denomination, then his name is simply to be removed from our rolls. And this is not an act of resentment or censure; but simply the logical sequel, with us, of his own exercise of inalienable private judgment, in electing another church-connexion.

The interests of Columbia Seminary filled a large place in the attention, and a larger in the heart, of the Assembly. The important points in the Directors' Report were:

1. The request that the immediate government of the Seminary be remanded to the Synods of South Carolina, the Assembly retaining its right of review over its proceedings, and a *veto* over the election of professors and teachers. This was unanimously conceded.

2. The Directors propose to reopen the Seminary in the autumn, with at least three professors. They brought the gratifying news, that a large part of the endangered or suspended investments have been regained, that thirty thousand dollars have

been actually paid in for new investments, besides numerous subscriptions still outstanding; so that the institution will have the use of a cash endowment of \$ from this date; which, besides the Perkins foundation, will liberally support three other professors. The Assembly, of course, cordially encouraged the Board to go forward, and reopen the institution at once.

3. The Directors, in conjunction with the Presbyterian church in Columbia, now vacant, have formed and do now submit to the Assembly the purpose of recalling Dr. B. M. Palmer from the First church in New Orleans, to the professorship of Practical Divinity in the Seminary, and the pastorate of his old charge. The Board regards these as essential parts of their own plan. Everything, in the first place, cries aloud for the immediate reopening of the Seminary, chiefly the great and growing destitution of ministers in the South and West especially; but also the progressive loss of influence for the Seminary as long as it remains closed; the dispersion of the students of divinity of those sections, and their resort to institutions without the bounds of our Church; the evident use made of this season of suspension to undermine the independence of our beloved Church. It is, therefore, vital that the Seminary be restored to activity.

But, in the second place, the same considerations demand that it be restored to a vigorous activity. A feeble existence would prove wholly inadequate to gain the vital ends in view. Hence it is for the highest interests of the Church, that her best men and best talents be devoted to rehabilitating this school of pastors. But from this point of view, every eye and every hand points naturally to Dr. Palmer, the former professor, the ex-pastor of the Columbia church, as the one man who is able to give the necessary impulse to the Seminary. He has labored long and hard in the most onerous pastoral positions; his experience is ripe; his age has reached that stage when his bodily vigor, adequate to many more years of efficiency in the more quiet, academic walks, may be expected to flag under the enormous strains of a metropolitan charge such as his. This consideration goes far to counterpoise our sense of his great importance to New Or-

leans and the Southwest, and our sympathy with the grief of a bereaved charge there.

These views, eloquently advanced by the representatives of the Seminary, Drs. Girardeau and Mack, proved so influential, that the Assembly approved the action of the Board in electing Dr. Palmer, by a large majority; the dissentients being the immediate representatives of the city and Synods which would lose him. But while the Assembly cordially sanctioned Dr. Palmer's return to the Seminary, should his own sense of duty lead him thither, its courtesy towards his church and immediate associates in the Southwest prevented it from applying any urgency to his mind.

Two other topics claimed the attention of the Assembly, in connexion with theological education, which were despatched during the later sessions of the Assembly. One was the report brought to that body by the representatives of Columbia Seminary, touching the resort of many of the candidates to seminaries without our bounds. Drs. Girardeau and Mack stated that, when compelled to close the Seminary for a time, they had urgently exhorted their pupils to resort to Union Seminary in Virginia, as their natural and proper place, and as offering them the most efficient instruction, until their own school was reopened. Six had done so, but fifteen had resorted to Princeton Seminary. Indeed, adding those in other Northern and Scotch institutions, we find this anomalous state of affairs: that about one-third of all our candidates in their theological course received, last winter, their tuition from institutions of the denominations which have chosen to take the positions of accusers of our Church and opposers of its cherished principles!

It appeared also, that in every case, so far as known, inducements had been held out to these candidates, in the form of money-assistance, to leave their own institutions. A very specious explanation was given, indeed, of this measure. It was said that several of the scholarships in Princeton Seminary had been endowed, in more prosperous times, by Southern donors, and that it seemed magnanimous for the North, rich and powerful, to offer the incomes of these foundations to the children of the South, in

their poverty. This offer was coupled with no condition whatever, nor requirement of adhesion to the Northern Church.

Of the latter fact there can be no doubt; the managers of this measure are too adroit to commit so useless a blunder. They understand too well the force of Solomon's maxim, that "a gift blindeth the eyes of the wise." They appreciate the silent, steady, but potent influence of association, on mind and character; and expect that the young, ill-informed, as the young men and women of the South already are, of the historical facts, the rights, the injuries, and the true position of Southern Christians, will surely absorb all the contempt for those principles they desire, during a three years' immersion in a sea of unfair and erroneous literature, preaching, and conversation. It is a safe calculation that, if we are stupid enough to allow the enemies of our Church to train its leaders, we must be soon undermined and destroyed. Some who have acted in this matter may warmly disclaim such views; and their disclaimer may be candid. We are far from surmising that there are no men, in the Church of our assailants and conquerors, really generous and magnanimous towards us. But various shades of motive may mingle. A professor naturally desires the *eclat* of numbers. Princeton naturally desires to retrieve her prime position in her own Church, now eclipsed by her New School rival, Union Seminary in New York; and as Princeton's commanding numbers were largely recruited, in the days of the Alexanders, from the South, she desires to gain the land now, by drawing students from the same fields. But that Northern Presbyterians do approve and practise these seductions of our candidates from the more insidious motives, we should be silly indeed to doubt, in the face of such proofs as these: that we find officers of our own Church, disaffected to us, furnished in advance with these bids for our candidates, and authorised to buy, in the open market, any corner; that we hear Northern ministers openly profess the purpose, and boast that five years of such success as the last will seal the overthrow of the Southern Church; that those who are laboring to reinstate Columbia Seminary have actually met opposition to their pious and holy enterprise, inspired from this source, and by the undoubted motive of under-

mining our Church through the final destruction of this institution. The insolence of this latter tactic, especially, inspires in every right mind nothing but indignation; and we profess none of that unchristian hypocrisy, which pretends to make a virtue of suppressing its honest, manly expression.

Now it might appear at the first view that there is a remedy for this counterplotting, which is of the easiest possible application. This would be, to advertise all our candidates, that they have no earthly occasion to go abroad in order to receive any such assistance as they ought to desire in paying for a theological course. Their own institutions are abundantly able to give this assistance to all comers. No young man who deserves to be helped has ever found it necessary to leave a Southern Seminary for lack of suitable pecuniary assistance. The Boards and Faculties stand pledged that none such shall ever go away from this cause. If, then, money is the inducement, the Church might say to all its candidates who need this species of help: "Here is the money ready for you at home. There is no occasion to go abroad for it."

Why does not this suffice? For two reasons: Our Church wisely places a limit upon the amount of aid given to each one; because, regarding the candidate's exercise of personal energy, independence, and self-help, as essential *criteria* of fitness for the ministry, she ordains that her candidates shall be *assisted* and *encouraged*, but not *bodily carried*. Her own officers, professors, and directors are bound to obey this excellent rule. But these bidders for our candidates from without disregard it, and offer larger pecuniary inducements. Thus the double injury and insult is wrought of breaking down a rule which our Church has wisely established, and of interfering between her and her own children. The other reason is suggested by the whisper, that the student who goes abroad also gains a much easier time: he reads easier text-books; less research is exacted of him; slighter examinations await him; looser scholastic and ecclesiastical restraints are held over him. Thus, after a course of light and superficial study, he can return to his mother-church (unless a fatter salary and more distinguished position invite him to desert

her wholly) and still pass for a learned theologian, in virtue of that peculiarly Southern tendency to esteem "*omne ignotum pro mirifico*." Now, we avow that, to our mind, the latter inducement appears more degrading and mischievous than the former. Thorough study, diligent labor in the theological course, righteous responsibilities—these mean, simply, more efficiency in the pastoral work and in saving souls. The man who has a desire to evade these in order to secure an easier life with more superficial results, proves by that desire, that *he is not fit to preach Christ's gospel*. The man who really desires to glorify him, desires to glorify him much; and he will never pause to barter away a portion of his Saviour's honor for this ignoble self-indulgence.

It was, therefore, with a timely wisdom, that the Assembly took action on this matter. It did not advocate the narrow spirit which, pronouncing our own culture in every case, all-sufficient for ourselves, refuses the aid of the learning of other peoples and countries altogether. But it declared that, as to those who may properly go abroad to complete their culture, the suitable time is, after they have grounded themselves in the principles and scholarship of their own land. The Assembly therefore urgently requested the presbyteries not to allow any candidates to go abroad into the schools of other denominations until they have completed the course offered them in their own seminaries.

A most important modification in our theological education was also proposed in a strong memorial from Bethel Presbytery, S. C. This proposed, in substance, that, while the present *curriculum* of preparation should be retained and even extended for such students as desire and have time for it, an English course of theology, exposition, and history, shall be taught for others, without requiring either Latin, Greek, or Hebrew. This, of course, contemplated the licensing and ordaining of ministers upon this English course. The main plea urged was from the extent of the harvest and fewness of reapers. The comparatively slow growth and small numbers of the Presbyterian body were ascribed to the difficulties our system imposes on the multiplication of ministers; while the rapid growth of the Immersionists, Metho-

dists, and others, was accounted for by the facility with which pious and efficient men can rise to the ministry in those communions. It was urged also, that such an English course, added to piety, zeal, and good sense, would suffice to give us thoroughly respectable and efficient pastors. There was even a virtual attack upon the more learned training; where it was charged that it led the students rather around about than into the Bible, which should be the pastor's great text-book, and that our classical candidates, while well posted in the languages, were often found by their presbyteries more ignorant of their English Bibles than intelligent laymen.

The Committee on Seminaries, to whom this overture was sent, could not but find that it proposed a virtual change in the Constitution. It therefore recommended the Assembly to answer: that the object of Bethel Presbytery could only be gained by moving the presbyteries, in the orderly way, to change the constitutional rules for trying candidates for licensure and ordination. The friends of the overture, in order to evade this fatal objection, then moved the Assembly in due form, to send down the proposition to the presbyteries for their vote. This the Assembly, after debate, declined to do by a vote of 55 to 37.

To the aspiration for a more rapid way to multiply ministers, no pious heart can fail to respond: it is but the echo of our Saviour's words: "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest." But to multiply them by encouraging those who feel the call to content themselves with an inefficient and shallow preparation, is another thing. In making a comparison between the growth of our Church, and of those who permit an uneducated ministry, large allowances must be made for the instability of a very large part of the accessions counted, and even of the congregations organised; the heterogeneous nature of those large communion rolls; and the mixture and incorrectness of the doctrinal views held. If these deductions were made, it would not appear so plain, that the solid growth of these denominations is so much more rapid than of our own. Again, the change proposed would place us substantially in the attitude, as to a learned ministry, held by the Cumberland Presbyterians. It is, then, the plainest dictate

of practical wisdom, that we shall ask ourselves whether we should gain by exchanging our present condition for theirs. Again, the standard of devotion set up by Christ for every Christian, and especially every minister, is that he shall not only purpose to serve his Lord, but serve him *his best*. Hence, the preliminary question for every man called of God must be whether the classical and biblical training prescribed in our Constitution is really promotive of a minister's *best* efficiency. If it is, the same devotion which prompts him to preach at all must prompt him to desire this furniture for preaching better; and if it is attainable, must prompt him to acquire it. But the position taken by our Church is, that to every man called of God to preach, *it shall be attainable*. She will help all who are worthy of help. Nor has her pledge to do so been yet dishonored. Here, then, is the ideal which we would present, in place of the one so graphically painted in the Bethel overture: That aspirations of good men to preach should be as frequent and as readily multiplied among us as among Immersionists or Methodists: but that the teeming crowd of aspirants should be led, not to a rash and ill-furnished entrance on their public work, but to this best preparation; while the unstinted sympathy and help of their brethren should make their entrance into a learned ministry just as practicable for every one of them, as the entrance into an unlearned ministry is to the Immersionist—that is, supposing in all the aspirants a true zeal and devotion. And without these, their aspirations would prove deceptive, under every system.

The contrast between the candidate pretending classical training, but ignorant of his Bible, and the plain man of God, mighty in his English Scriptures, contains an illusion. How comes that classical scholar to leave the Seminary ignorant of his Bible? Is a knowledge of the languages of inspiration, in its nature, obstructive of Bible knowledge? Surely not! Then the imperfect result must be due to the fact, that this classical man has indolently neglected his better opportunities to know his Bible. Now, will the offering of another man worse opportunities ensure him against indolence? Suppose the student of this two years' English course infected with a similar negligence to that detected

in the classical student? Where will the former's line of acquirement be? When his indolence shall have sunk him relatively as far below his lower standard, will not his acquirements be contemptible? In a word, the expectation claimed is founded on a tacit assumption that, while many candidates pursuing the learned course, are unfaithful to their better opportunities, and so exhibit inferior results, all the candidates pursuing the lower course will be models of exemplary fidelity and industry. Does the Church see any guarantee of such superior spiritual principles in these men, in the fact that they have deliberately elected a less perfect way of serving Christ in the pulpit? We confess we do not.

A similar illusion harbors in the argument so often drawn from the primitive preachers ordained by the Apostles. These, it is said, were but plain, sensible, business men, soundly converted, taught of the Holy Ghost, and set apart to preach without other qualifications than these, with Christian experience and "aptness to teach." They were required to study no foreign language, no *curriculum* of science. We grant it. Let us represent to ourselves such a good plain man, in Ephesus, ordained during Timothy's days there; probably, like Alexander, a mere coppersmith. But this plain good man had as his vernacular the Greek language, one of the languages of inspiration. He was, by his own experience, practically conversant with that whole set of events, of miracles, of religious ideas and institutions, pagan and Jewish, which are perpetually involved in the explication and illustration of gospel truths in the Scriptures. Here, with his long experience of divine grace in his own heart, his reputation for devout piety and integrity, and his forcible gift of utterance, was his sufficient furniture for the pastoral office.

But now, let us remember that to us of this nineteenth century that Greek language is a dead, a learned language. All those facts and ideas which constituted that man's practical, popular intelligence, are to us now *archæology*! They are the science of antiquity. How much study of the classics and history will it require to place a sprightly American youth simply on a level, in these respects, with that plain Ephesian? We may find an answer by asking, were that Ephesian raised from the dead among us

to-day, only furnished with his Greek language and ideas, how much study would he have to undergo to become equal to this American youth in his mastery of the English language and our contemporary knowledge? Does the most thorough Seminary course put its graduate on a level with that good Ephesian brass-smith, in his Greek and his Asiatic archæology? We wish it did. We devoutly wish we could reach that level.

But does the apostolic example, in ordaining a plain Greek artisan, permit us to fall below it?

One of the most responsible tasks of the Assembly was to receive and digest the remarks of the Presbyteries upon the Revised Directory for Worship. It was found that sixty-six Presbyteries had complied with the last Assembly's order to examine and amend it. A few had expressed their wish that the work should be dropped, and their preference for the old Directory. Evidence appeared, that some of the sixty-six judged the same, but examined and amended the Revision only out of courtesy to the Assembly. All the reports of Presbyteries having been referred to the Revising Committee, that body, with commendable diligence, immediately digested them, and made the following Report:

The Committee appointed to revise the Directory of Worship hope that they are able now to present the Revision in a much improved form. Their effort last year was, of course, only *tentative*. They were well aware that all they could produce of themselves must only serve as a basis on which it must be for the Presbyteries to build—a skeleton into which they must breathe life, and which they must cover with flesh and clothe with beauty. A number of the Presbyteries have devoted themselves with zeal and ability to this business; and the work under their skilful manipulations will be found, the Committee trust, much more acceptable to the Church.

The changes made at the suggestion of the Presbyteries are numerous. The chief ones are an alteration in the order of the last four chapters, and the omission of all forms, except the one prepared for a funeral occasion where no minister is present. All forms having been omitted, your Committee do not think it necessary to retain the Note about Forms, which many Presbyteries desired to have inserted in the body of the Directory. As the Committee has left out the forms, it has left out the note.

We have to report that a copy of the Revision, as it now stands, is

ready for the Assembly to dispose of as it may judge best. The Committee very respectfully suggests that if this body can afford the time necessary, and consider it advisable, the Revision in its present form be now read aloud, that the Assembly may judge of the improvement. But if, on the other hand, this be not the pleasure of the body, your Committee would then suggest, that the Revision be recommitted to be printed, and one copy sent to every Minister, one to every Session, and two copies to every Clerk of Presbytery; and that the Presbyteries be directed to take up the work again for a fresh examination, and report the results to the next Assembly.

(Signed)

JOHN B. ADGER, Chairman.
 B. M. PALMER,
 THOS. E. PECK,
 J. A. LEFEVRE,
 G. D. ARMSTRONG,
 W. W. HENRY.

The Assembly gave the Revision this direction.

Committee of Foreign Correspondence reported :

1. An overture from Holston Presbytery asking that appointments to the General Presbyterian Council be distributed more equally through the Church, at least one to each Synod; and that Synods make the nominations.

The Committee recommended the Assembly to answer that it had no power to regulate the action of the Assembly of 1883 which has to make these appointments; but might express the opinion that they should be distributed so as to represent our Church; and that Synods might be invited to nominate.

2. A request from the Council aforesaid for a small standing committee, with which Clerks of the Council could correspond. The Assembly appointed its two clerks.

3. An overture from Synod of Texas, asking the Assembly to appoint a committee to confer with a similar committee of the Northern Assembly so that the two Churches might avoid conflicts in their labors in Texas.

The Committee recommended, that the Assembly express its earnest desire that brethren of the Northern and Southern churches in Texas should endeavor to avoid such conflicts, and cultivate peace; but refer all such questions back to our Presbyteries in Texas, to whom they properly belong; at the same

time recommending the Synod of Texas, in a way merely advisory, to seek to promote the ends of charity and edification.

4. The Committee nominated for principal delegate to the General Synod of the Reformed Church the Rev. Miles Saunders, and for alternate delegate the Rev. John A. Scott.

5. A telegram being committed to this Committee from the Young Men's Christian Association of the United States and British Provinces conveying Christian greeting to the Assembly and referring it to Eph. i. 3, the Committee reported an answer conveying to the Association the Assembly's Christian salutations and referring the Association to Eph. i. 4 and 5. Objection was made to the answer, as likely to prove offensive, and it was recommitted. Subsequently the Committee reported, that on further reflection, it had grave doubts whether the Assembly ought to exchange formal salutations with any other than *ecclesiastical* bodies; but that as in this particular case, the matter had gone so far, it recommended that the Assembly should reply by "commending the Young Men's Association to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Upon the subject let us remark: 1. That the doubts of the Committee appear to us to have a good foundation. If we are to go outside of ecclesiastical bodies with this exchange of salutations, where is it to stop?

2. It seems to us that if an answer were to be given to the greetings of the Association, none could have been more *apropos* than what the Committee prepared at first. The objection to it was, that a Calvinistic passage of Scripture could not be quoted to a body in which there might be some Arminians without offence. To this the answer is pertinent: (1) That the Association is not a body of Methodists; (2) That Methodists receive that passage of Scripture as not contradicting any doctrine held by them, having their own way of expounding it, and that in fact, for the Assembly to signify by its action that a Methodist body could not tolerate two verses of one of Paul's epistles, was to be indeed offensive to those Christian brethren; (3) That if the Committee of Correspondence had gone about to hunt up that passage, the objections made might have applied; but that, as

the young men had quoted only the first verse of the passage, stopping short where there was no period, there could be fairly found no ground of complaint for our merely completing the quotation, and returning them the remainder of the passage with our salutations.

We must add, however, that this whole business of shooting off passages of Scripture at one another is not to our taste.

Our readers know that certain Deliverances of the Louisville and Charleston Assemblies, respecting cases *in thesi*, led to some discussion in the Synod of South Carolina, out of which grew an overture to the Assembly. This asked the supreme court, substantially, to declare that propositions drawn "by good and necessary consequence" from the constitutional law of the Church by our supreme court, have the binding force of law until constitutionally repealed. On this overture, the Committee on Bills and Overtures made a report on Friday night. On Saturday morning the Rev. Dr. Palmer offered the following paper in place of that acted upon by the Assembly the previous night, regarding the overture from the Synod of South Carolina. It was fully discussed by Rev. Drs. Lefevre, Mullally, Hoyt, Pratt, Molloy, Armstrong, Davies, and Shanks, and was adopted by an almost unanimous vote. The paper reads as follows, viz. :

"To the overture from the Synod of South Carolina the Assembly returns answer that all just and necessary consequences from the law of the Church are part of the same in the logical sense of being implicitly contained therein. The authority of this law is, however, twofold. It binds all those who profess to live under it as a covenant by which they are united in one communion, so that there is no escape from its control, except by renouncing its jurisdiction; and it binds because it has been accepted as a true expression of what is revealed in the Holy Scriptures as infallible truth.

"The consequences deduced from it cannot, therefore, be equal in authority with the law itself, unless they be necessarily contained within it, as shown by their agreement also with the Divine Word."

This debate showed that harmony of opinion has not yet been reached on this vexed question. The paper finally adopted is a compromise, and is still ambiguous. It says, consequences de-

duced from the Constitution must be shown to be necessarily contained in it, by their also agreeing with the Divine Word. But the question whether the deductions so agree is itself a question of construction. The difficulty reappears. Its obstinate reappearance, after the almost unanimous compromise, indicates that a church government at once free and Presbyterian (as opposed to the mere advisory action of congregational associations) cannot be excogitated, without admitting the principle claimed by the South Carolina Synod. Let us, however, glance at the debate. The side opposed to the overture cannot be better set forth than in the remarks of Dr. Lefevre.

Dr. Lefevre, in several short speeches, fully admitted that a just inference from given propositions was truly involved in the propositions themselves, but denied that logical inferences from the laws of the Church, as contained in our standards, were themselves laws and binding on the ecclesiastical conscience with the authority of the standards themselves. He affirmed that it is the doctrine of our Confession and of all Protestant Churches that nothing can be made *law* in the Church but the Scriptures themselves, and immediate consequences justly derived from them. He contended that our standards were indeed a system of propositions justly derived from Scripture and adequate for their purpose—that is, to be a bond of ecclesiastical union—and therefore binding the consciences of all those who have covenanted together on this basis, so that their only escape from the obligation is by withdrawal from our communion. But he contended that the standards were, by universal concession, not pure and complete truth, like Holy Scripture, but necessarily somewhat deficient and disproportionate, and therefore unfitted to serve, in turn, as satisfactory premises for new conclusions having the authority of *law*. These new conclusions not only might be, but in many cases would be, more deficient and disproportionate and far less conformable to Scripture than the propositions from which they were drawn. The full and strict authority of the law must stop with the law itself, or we shall have an endless concatenation of logical inferences, at each successive step

farther and farther removed from Scripture, until at last we are as far from the Bible as Rome herself.

In this there is unquestionable force. This right of construing a constitutional covenant *may be abused*; it may be so exercised as to infringe the spiritual liberty of members. But the compromise admits, even Dr. Lefevre admits, that the power to construe is unavoidable, to some extent. Where, then, is the remedy? Where the ultimate protection for the member's rights and freedom? In his privilege of seceding whenever he feels himself vitally aggrieved, seceding without molestation or persecution. This is the principle, too much neglected in the discussion. The principles of our Constitution are: that we acknowledge our Synods and Assemblies, like all others, to be uninspired and fallible; that each man's entrance into our particular branch of the Church-catholic is his free act, and that he has an inalienable right to go out of ours into some other branch, at the dictate of his own conscience; for we never held that our branch is the only valid one; that when a member exercises this right of secession, we have no right to restrain him by any civil pain or penalty whatsoever, nor to revenge his departure by any excommunication from the Church-catholic, nor by any denunciation even. Hence, if a church, in the exercise of its unavoidable power to enact and interpret its own constitutional compact, should "err in making the terms of communion too narrow; yet, even in this case, they would not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own."

That the safeguard of the member's liberty is *here*, and not in the denial of a right of construction to the supreme court, appears very simply from this fact. All admit that the express propositions of our Constitution have the binding force of law on us, while we remain Presbyterians. But it is just as possible for a fallible church court to err in enacting a proposition, as in stating an obvious corollary. This is indisputable. Suppose the former error committed, where is the shield of the member's liberty? Ultimately, only in his right of unmolested secession.

But that the supreme court *must possess* a power of construc-

tion of the articles of the constitutional compact, whether liable to abuse or not, may be made exceedingly clear. The only alternative is Congregationalism. The Constitution itself gives this power: "to *decide* questions of doctrine and order regularly brought before it." The strictest opponents of the validity of "*in thesi* declarations" admit it; for they concede that when the Assembly sits judicially and interprets an article of the Constitution *in hypothesis*, its decision is law. But surely, the Assembly's passing into its judicial functions has no influence to make its logical inferences infallible. It may also err *in hypothesis*; yet, it is admitted its conclusions *in hypothesis* are law. This granted, the admission that the Assembly may err *in thesi* is not sufficient to prove that such conclusions cannot be law. Again, it is an admitted maxim, that "the meaning of an instrument is the instrument." Who shall deduce that meaning? each one for himself, or that court which the constitutional compact has set up as the common umpire? Again, that the Assembly must have some such power of construction appears thus: the propositions set down expressly in any constitution, however detailed, must be limited in number. But the concrete cases of human action to be judged thereby are almost infinite in number, and endlessly diversified in their particular conditions. Hence there must be a process of construction, to be performed by some court, in order to show whether these varied cases come under the principle of the law. Again, in point of fact, our Constitution, in the fullest details of the larger Catechism, fails to mention many actions which no church court in Christendom would now hesitate about disciplining. Under the Sixth Command, it does not prohibit duelling nor obstructing the passage of a railroad car. (The Westminster Assembly had never dreamed there would be railroads.) Under the Eighth, it does not mention forging bank checks, nor trafficking in "futures" in a stock or cotton exchange, under the head of "wasteful gaming." Yet rumor says, that in one of our church courts, a member was censured for buying "cotton futures." But our Book does mention "usury" as against the Eighth Commandment; and every church court allows its members to take usury up to *six per cent.*! Now, it

may be replied, that in all these cases it is perfectly clear to every mind the actions named are or are not breaches of the principles of the commands. This is true. Yet *they are not expressed* in our Constitution; whence it is clear that some constructive process of logic is employed to bring them under it. It is a constructive process which is obvious and conclusive; and therefore it gives a valid law. Just so. But every court, exercising its power of construction, will hold that its process is equally logical. So that we come again to the inexorable issues: that this right of construction *must be conceded* to the supreme court, and yet that *it may be abused*. Well, what does this mean? Simply, that no institution, not even our Presbyterianism, can become a perfect machine in human hands; but that this Presbyterianism, liable to possible perversion, is better than Congregationalism; and that, if the "worst comes to the worst," the scriptural safeguard for our spiritual liberty is to be found, not in the corrupting license of Congregationalism, but in the individual right of withdrawal.

The Assembly signalled its close by creating a new Synod, that of Florida. Let us hope that this measure will give all of that impulse to the cause of Christ in the "flowery land" which its advocates hope from it.

At 2½ o'clock p. m. Saturday, the sessions were finally closed, and the members began to disperse to their homes. The next Assembly meets in Atlanta, Ga.

R. L. DABNEY.