

THE
BIBLICAL REPERTORY.

OCTOBER, 1834.

No. IV.

J. A. Alexander
ART. I.—*Guerike's Manual of Church History.**

THE rapidity with which this work was sold, is a sufficient proof that it was wanted. The German press teems, it is true, with valuable books in this department, nor are there wanting in that language convenient manuals for the use of students. But research is continually adding to the stock of knowledge; and the favourable change, which has occurred of late years, in the religious views of many, has created a necessity for a compendious work, which should not only furnish the results of recent investigation, but present them in a form consistent with evangelical belief. This task Professor Guerike has undertaken in the work to which we now invite the attention of our readers. He is *Professor Extraordinarius* of theology in the University of Halle, and is well known as a strenuous adherent to the creed of Luther, but at the same time as an humble and devoted Christian. Some of our readers may perhaps recollect him, as the author of a life of Francke, which was reviewed in a former volume of this work,† and from which the late lamented Rezeau Brown

* *Handbuch der Allgemeinen kirchengeschichte.* Von H. E. Ferd. Guerike, a. o. Professor der Theologie zu Halle. Halle, 1833. 2 vols. 8vo. pp. 1120.

† See Bib. Rep. for July 1830.

Charles Seadore

ART. VI.—*The Act and Testimony.*

THE history of this document we understand to be as follows. The proceedings of the last General Assembly of our church being, in many cases, much disapproved of, by a large minority of that body, a meeting was called in Philadelphia, to which all those ministers and elders were invited, who sympathized with this minority in their opinions and feelings. Among other acts of this meeting, a committee was appointed to draft a public declaration to the churches of the views and wishes of those then present. The result of this appointment was the publication of a paper entitled an *Act and Testimony*. It is impossible for any man to read this document, without being deeply impressed with respect for its authors. It is pervaded by a tone of solemn earnestness, which carries to every heart the conviction of their sincerity, and of their sense of the importance, as well as the truth, of the sentiments which they advance. The fear of God, reverence for his truth, and love for his church seem clearly to have presided over the composition of this important document. In addition to these intrinsic claims to the respect of those to whom it is addressed, the fact that it has received the sanction of so large a number of the best ministers of our church, demands for it the most serious consideration. It is therefore natural that those, who feel the truth and weight of a great portion of the statements of this document, and yet withhold from it their signatures, should feel desirous of letting their brethren know the grounds on which they act. We believe that most of the sentiments of this *Act and Testimony* meet a ready and hearty response from the great majority both of our ministers and elders; and yet we presume it will not be signed by any thing like a moiety of either. Why is this? Is it because they fear to assume the responsibility of such an act? This is very easily said, but we believe that the number of those who are nervous enough to be influenced by such a consideration, is very small. There is often much more courage in not acting, than in acting; and still more frequently in moderation than in violence. It is generally easy and safe in cases of controversy, to take sides decidedly, and through good and evil, with one part or the other. If you are sure of decided opponents, you are equally certain of warm friends. The unfortunate individuals who belong to neither side, are cared for by neither, and blamed, if not abused, by both. Though there may be imbecility, indecision, and timidity, which prevent a man's knowing what to think, or saying

what he knows; there may also be firmness in standing alone, or in that unenviable position where neither sympathy nor probation is to be expected. It is humbling to think of good men as being so deficient in the fear of God, and so sensitive to the opinions of their fellow men, that they withhold their probation of the avowal of truth, from the base fear of man; we are therefore slow to attribute such a motive, or to believe in its extensive influence. There must be some other and better reason why such a document as the *Act and Testimony* has not received, and is not likely to receive the sanction of more than a small minority of our churches. We pretend not, of course, to know the reasons which have influenced the conduct of so many different individuals, but we know that the following considerations have had a decisive weight on the minds of many, and presume that these and similar views have influenced the course of others.

In the first place, this document has been perverted from its true and legitimate purpose, as a *Testimony*, into an invidious *Test Act*. This evil has resulted from two sources, partly from the form and nature of the *Act* itself, in some of its essential features; and partly from the use that has been made of it in some of our leading religious journals. It would seem to be a very obvious principle, that any individual member of a body has a right to address his fellow members on subjects affecting their common interests. If he thinks that errors and disorders are gaining ground among them, it is more than a right, it is a duty for him to say so, provided he has any hope of making his voice effectually heard. If such be the case with an individual, it is equally obvious that he may induce as many as he can to join him in his warnings and counsels, that they may come with the weight due to numbers acting in concert. Had the meeting in Philadelphia therefore been contented to send forth their solemn *Testimony* against error and disorder, and their earnest exhortation to increased fidelity to God and his truth, we are sure none could reasonably object. Their declaration would have been received with all the respect due to its intrinsic excellence, and to the source whence it proceeded. But when it is proposed to "number the people;" to request and urge the signing of this *Testimony* as a test of orthodoxy, then its whole nature and design is at once altered. What was the exercise of an undoubted right, becomes an unauthorised assumption. What was before highly useful, or at least harmless, becomes fraught with injustice, discord, and division. What right have I to publish a declaration on truth and order to the churches, and call upon every one to sign it on pain of being denounced as a heretic or revolutionist?

Surely, many sound and good men may well take exception at some of my modes of expression, or demur at some of my recommendations, without forfeiting all claims to confidence. It may be said that no one is required to sign this Act and Testimony against his own will; and that there is no denunciation of those who decline. It ought, however, to be considered, that this is a necessary result of the call, on the part of the meeting, and in the body of the act itself,* for a general signing of this document, like a new League and Covenant, that it should act as a test. Such in fact, no doubt, was its design. The authors of this feature of the plan at least designed to make it the means of ascertaining the number and strength of those who thought with them, and of uniting them in a body capable of acting with concert. If such is the very nature and purport of the act, it necessarily follows, that refusing to submit to the test or to join the league, must be regarded as an act of hostility. The very design of the effort is to make neutrality impossible. And this design unfortunately it but too well attains. In a recent number of the Presbyterian the editor says, "We verily believe that every orthodox minister and elder, who refuses his signature under existing circumstances, will throw his weight into the opposite scale, and strengthen the hopes, and confirm the confidence of those who aim to revolutionize the church."† We are not surprised at such language; it is the natural result, as just stated, of the measure. Now, we say, no man, and no set of men, have the right thus to necessitate others of their own body to adopt *their* statements and recommendations, or be considered as the abettors of errorists and anarchists. Here is one of the most serious evils of the whole plan. It makes one a heretic, or an abettor of heresy, not for error in doctrine, not for unfaithfulness in discipline, but because he may be unable to adopt an extended document as expressing his own opinions on a multitude of facts, doctrines, and practical counsels. This is an assumption which ought not to be allowed. It is an act of gross injustice to multitudes of our soundest and best men; it is the most effectual means of splitting the church into mere fragments, and of alienating from each other men, who agree in doctrine, in views of order and discipline, and who differ in nothing, perhaps, but in opinion as to the wisdom of introducing this new League and Covenant. We confess we are more disheartened

* "We recommend that all ministers, elders, church sessions, Presbyteries and Synods, who approve of this Act and Testimony, give their public adherence thereto in such manner as they shall prefer, and communicate their names, and when a church court, a copy of their adhering act."

† Presbyterian for Aug. 21, 1834.

by the effects which this untoward step is likely to produce, than by any thing which has occurred for a long time in our church. If it is doubtful, as the friends of the *Act and Testimony* suppose, whether a majority of our ministers are faithful to our acknowledged standards, what proportion are likely to adhere to this extra-constitutional confession? Had the ingenuity of man been taxed for a plan to divide and weaken the friends of truth and order in our church, we question whether a happier or more effectual expedient could have been devised. Our first leading objection, then, to this document is, that it is not what it professes to be, a *Testimony*, but a *Test*. Had it been signed only by the chairman and secretary of the meeting by which it was issued, or by the individual members, its whole nature would have been different. As it is, it is a *Test*, and must operate unfairly and injuriously, subjecting some to unjust suspicions, and dividing those who, on every principle of duty, ought to be most intimately united.

But leaving this objection out of view, and admitting that it was right to adopt this extra-constitutional method of ascertaining and rallying the friends of truth, we think there are specific objections against this document, which show that it is unfit to answer this purpose. We have already said, and said sincerely, that it is impossible to read this *Testimony* without being deeply impressed by the seriousness of its tone, the weight and truth of the great part of its sentiments, and the decided ability and skill with which it is drawn up. It evinces in every line the hand of a man accustomed to legal precision and accuracy of phrase. Yet it was necessarily prepared in a hurry, probably at a single sitting, and read at a general meeting, in which the careful weighing of every clause was out of the question. Considering these circumstances, instead of being surprised that there are instances of unguarded statement, or unwise recommendations, our wonder is, that the blemishes of both classes are not tenfold more numerous. But is it not obvious that a document that was to be put forth, not only as a *Testimony*, but a *Test*, which the friends of truth were to be required to sign, or forfeit their character as such, and which was designed to rally as large a number as possible of those who were of the same heart and mind, should be most carefully and solemnly considered, and every thing avoided which might cause the well affected to hesitate or refuse? Were we ever so much in favour of such a measure, we are free to confess, that there are statements in this *Act and Testimony*, in which we could not concur, and recommendations of which we highly disapprove. Of course, however anxious we might be to join in this enterprise,

we should still be obliged to submit to have our names cast out as evil.

It is not our purpose to go over this document, and criticise its various parts. We shall merely refer to a few of the passages, which we think must be stumbling blocks in the way of all but the most determined.

The very first paragraph is sufficiently startling. It stands thus: "BRETHREN IN THE LORD:—In the solemn crisis to which our church has arrived, we are constrained to appeal to you in relation to the alarming errors which have hitherto been connived at, and now at length have been countenanced and sustained by the acts of the supreme judicatory of our church." The first question suggested by this paragraph is, whether in fact such a crisis has arrived in our church, as to justify such avowedly revolutionary measures, as the present document recommends? If such is the state of the church, desperate remedies may be justified, if in themselves wise and well directed. This point, however, we must at present waive. The statement to which we would now call the attention of our readers, and at which we should hesitate long, and sign at last, if sign we must, with a slow and shaking hand, is the declaration, that the highest judicatory of our church has at length countenanced and sustained alarming errors. These errors, of course, are those specified in the document itself. Is it then true, that the highest judicatory of our church has "countenanced and sustained" the doctrine, that we have no more to do with the sin of Adam than with the sins of any other parent—that there is no such thing as original sin—that man's regeneration is his own act—that Christ's sufferings are not truly and properly vicarious? How serious the responsibility of announcing to the world that such is the case! How clear and decisive should be the evidence of the fact, before the annunciation was made and ratified by the signatures of such a number of our best men. Surely something more than mere inference from acts of doubtful import, should be here required. We do not pretend to be privy to the grounds on which this serious charge is made; but we are sure that no conscientious man would set his name to it, without having evidence to produce the painful conviction that such was the fact. Such evidence ought to have been detailed. We do not know, and we suppose the churches generally do not know, what this evidence is. How then can they sign this document? How can they be expected to take the responsibility of one of the most serious annunciations ever made to the churches? We do not believe it to be true. We have not the least idea, that one tenth of the ministers of the Presbyterian

church would deliberately countenance and sustain the errors specified above. And if not done deliberately and of set purpose, it should not be announced as having been done at all. We may put upon acts an interpretation very different from what they were intended to bear, and thus be led to assert as fact what is very far from the truth.

We see that some, in adopting the *Act and Testimony*, apparently impressed with the solemnity of the step they were about to take in sanctioning this introductory paragraph, refer in justification of the charge which it involves, to the rejecting of a series of resolutions, calling upon the Assembly to denounce these and various other errors. But is the inference a necessary, or even a fair one, from declining to consider these resolutions, which required the Assembly to condemn certain errors, whether "held in or out of the Presbyterian church," to the sanctioning of these errors themselves? During the sessions of the last General Assembly in Scotland, a motion was made and rejected, relative to the devising of some measures for securing the better observance of the Sabbath. Must we infer from this rejection, that the body in question countenanced Sabbath-breaking?* A few years ago, when petitions were circulated in reference to Sunday mails, many, especially after the failure of the first attempt, refused to sign them. Are such persons to be regarded as in favour of the desecration of the Lord's day? The mere rejection, or rather refusal to entertain, the resolutions referred to, cannot of itself, therefore, afford evidence of the disposition of the Assembly to countenance these errors. We do not know the history of the case, but there may have been something in the circumstances under which they were introduced, to account for their being set aside. We have heard, indeed, the warmest friends and advocates of the *Act and Testimony* regret exceedingly the manner in which they were brought forward. As far as our informant, a leading member of the minority in the last Assembly, knew, it was without consultation, to any extent, either as to their form or mode of being presented. Yet, what more difficult and delicate task, than the framing of doctrinal propositions, to be affirmed or denied by the supreme judicatory of a church? If these resolutions were hastily prepared, carelessly arranged, or loosely expressed, this alone would be reason sufficient to account for the Assembly's passing them over. As they have been published in the religious papers, the churches may judge on this point. For ourselves, we are not surprised at their

* The rejection arose, we believe, from the wish to await the issue of the Parliamentary proceedings on the subject.

rejection. Instead of wondering that a majority of the Assembly did not vote for them, we wonder that any considerable number of voices was raised in their favour, so various are the errors they embrace, and so different in degree; some of them serious heresies, and others opinions (at least as we understand the resolutions) which were held and tolerated in the Synod of Dort, and in our own church from its very first organization. Is it to be expected that, at this time of the day, the Assembly would solemnly condemn all who do not hold the doctrine of a limited atonement? We do not believe that the penman of the *Act and Testimony* himself, whatever his private opinion on the doctrine may be, would vote for these resolutions. And it is too notorious that many of his most active and zealous cooperators deny this, and still more important points, to allow for a moment the supposition that they could intelligently have given such a vote. Surely then, the rejection of propositions, for which at no period of the history of the church, perhaps, a tenth of its ministers could have voted, is no adequate proof that the Assembly "countenanced the alarming errors" contained in this *Act and Testimony*. We are not now attempting to decide whether the Assembly did or did not countenance these errors, but we say, the evidence on which we could be induced to subscribe the solemn declaration that they did, must be very clear; and that no such evidence is exhibited to those who are called upon to join in the accusation. As before said, we do not believe that the errors quoted above from this document, or any others which it specifies, (unless it be that on the doctrine of imputation) are held or approved by one tenth of the ministers of the Presbyterian church. And we consider it a very serious affair to have the corruption of such a body of Christians asserted and proclaimed through both hemispheres.

As a proof of disregard of discipline, the *Testimony* refers to the treatment, by the Assembly, of a memorial sent up from several presbyteries, sessions and individual members. It may be supposed that the manner in which this paper was disposed of, furnishes evidence that the Assembly countenanced the errors abovementioned. This memorial, however, is not sufficiently known to make this the ground of a general signature of the *Act and Testimony*. We are very far from feeling called upon to justify all acts of the Assembly, or to apologize for them. Our feelings always, and our judgment generally, were with the minority in that body. There were things in the doings of the Assembly, which we disapprove of as much as any of the signers of this document. The manner in which this memorial was treated, is one of the acts which we think

much to be regretted. But the single point now is, whether this treatment furnishes evidence sufficient to authorize the authentication of the charge contained in the first paragraph of the Act and Testimony. Let any one look over this memorial, and ask, whether it was reasonable to expect the Assembly, in the present state of the church, to meet its demands. It is a long document, which concludes by requesting,

1. "That the plan of union between Presbyterians and Congregationalists in the new settlements" be wholly abrogated, &c.

2. That presbyteries be restrained from ordaining, licensing, or dismissing men, not to labour in their own bounds, but in the bounds of other presbyteries.

3. That the Assembly resume the sole direction of Missionary operations within the bounds of the Presbyterian church, to the exclusion of non-ecclesiastical associations.

4. That the Assembly bear solemn testimony against the many errors preached and published in the church.

5. That various points of order and discipline should be decided; as, 1. Whether one presbytery must admit a member coming from any other with clean papers. 2. Whether a judicatory may not examine and express an opinion of a book, without first commencing process against its author, when a member of their own body. 3. Whether in adopting the Confession of Faith as a system, the candidate "is at liberty to reject as many particular propositions as he pleases," &c.

6. That the Assembly disannul the act of the Assembly of 1832, dividing the Presbytery of Philadelphia, and disavow the principle that presbyteries may be founded on "the principles of elective affinity."*

Here is matter enough to occupy a deliberative assembly for months. That all these points should be taken up, and properly considered, was therefore not to be expected. And as many of these requests are in direct opposition to measures carried with the full concurrence and approbation of the prominent signers of the Act and Testimony, who now request the Assembly to undo, what they themselves have done—it was as little to be expected, that, if considered, they could be granted. Though we think that the number and weight of the signatures to this memorial were such, that the Assembly ought to have paid more attention to their plea, and granted many of their requests, we are far from being convinced that it was a desire to countenance or sustain the errors specified in the Act and Testimony, which

* For the sake of brevity we have not quoted these demands at length, but contented ourselves with giving the substance of each.

led to the course pursued. It is a very prevalent, and in itself a reasonable feeling, that church-courts should not legislate *in thesi*, or pronounce on doctrines in the abstract; that it is best to wait until the points come up for decision in the usual course of judicial proceedings. This feeling is so strong, in some of the soundest and best men in our church, as of itself to induce them to vote against many of the demands made in this memorial. It is not, however, possible to know the motives which influenced different individuals in taking the course which the Assembly pursued with this document. It is sufficient, that this course does not afford proof of the charge brought in the first paragraph of the *Act and Testimony*: and this point we think as clear as it can well be made. Were there no other reason, therefore, for not signing this document, the character of that paragraph we think sufficient.

There is another ground of serious objection to be found in the fifth of its eight recommendations to the churches. The signers say, "We would propose, that we consider the presbyterian existence and acts of any presbytery or synod formed upon the principles of elective affinity, as unconstitutional, and all ministers and churches voluntarily included in such bodies as having virtually departed from the standards of our church." This, it is to be observed, is not an expression of the opinion, that the existence and acts of such bodies are unconstitutional, but a recommendation that they be so considered, and of consequence, so treated. This is the only interpretation which we are able to put upon this passage. If this be its meaning, it must be seen at once, that it is a very serious step. For the members of any community, civil or ecclesiastical, to meet together, and recommend to their fellow members, to consider and treat the acts of the constituted authorities as unconstitutional and void, is an extreme proceeding, to be justified only by a necessity which authorizes the resolution of the society into its original elements. It is a deliberate renunciation of an authority which every member of the community has bound himself to respect. It is therefore the violation of a promise of obedience which can only be excused by proving that it is an extreme case, to which the promise was never intended to apply, and is not in its nature applicable. In civil governments this procedure is inceptive rebellion; in ecclesiastical governments it is the first step in schism. To take this step, is either a virtue, or a crime, according to the presence or absence of a justifying cause. That it must, however, be a very serious cause which will justify the disregard of obligations voluntarily assumed, and promises deliberately given, will of course be

admitted. That it is not competent for any individual, within the limits of the extreme cases just supposed, to judge for himself of the unconstitutionality or the constitutionality of the acts of the constituted authorities of the community to which he belongs, is too obvious to need remark. Every one sees that there would be an end of all government, if every member of a community were allowed to recognize or disregard a law at option; or by a simple assumption of its unconstitutionality to escape from the obligation to obedience. We cannot but regard, therefore, the recommendation of this document, that churches and ministers consider certain acts of the Assembly unconstitutional, as a recommendation to them to renounce their allegiance to the church, and to disregard their promises of obedience. Whether this recommendation be justifiable or not, depends of course on the exigency of the case. Those who do not think the act complained of, sufficiently heinous and destructive to dissolve the bonds of their allegiance, cannot sign this Act and Testimony; while those who regard it as a case of life or death, may feel at liberty to give the advice in question.

Though we are of the number of those who disapprove the plan of constituting presbyteries on the principle complained of, and think that it was, at least, never contemplated by the constitution, yet we are unable to discover so much evil in the measure as to justify the dissolution of the church, or the disregarding of the obligation we are all under to obedience. The plan recommended in this document necessitates a schism of the church, and perhaps was designed so to do. The Assembly have passed an act which these signers refuse to recognise. Either the Assembly must retract, or the signers must secede. One or the other of these results must take place, unless we are to have the confusion of two churches, with two sets of ministers and members, not recognizing each others acts or ecclesiastical standing, all included in the same body. How can such a state of things exist? The Assembly's second Presbytery of Philadelphia we will suppose, ordains a man to the ministry. As their constitutional existence is denied, the validity of this ordination, as a Presbyterial act, must also be denied. This leads to a denial of the candidate's ministerial acts, at least ecclesiastically considered. He is to those, who adopt this recommendation, a layman, and can do nothing which a layman may not perform. Will they recognise his baptisms? his introduction and dismissal of church members? This evil may be bearable, while there are but two or three individuals in this situation; but it must increase every month or year, until the whole church is a chaos. Such seems the necessary result

of acting on the plan recommended, unless schism be at once resorted to. This result, indeed, seems to have been distinctly in view when the act was prepared. The signers say, "If the majority of our church are against us, they will, we suppose, in the end, either see the infatuation of their course, and retrace their steps, or they will, at last, attempt to cut us off." That is to say, 'we have assumed such a position that things cannot remain as they are; the Assembly must either retrace their steps, or the church be divided.' Division, then, is the end to which this enterprise leads, and at which, we doubt not it aims,* and division for what? As far as this document is concerned, it is division which is to result from not recognising the existence and acts of certain presbyteries and synods. This is the only effective provision in the whole act. All its other recommendations may be adopted, and no division occur; but if this be acted upon, division is inevitable. Is the church then prepared to divide, because one portion thinks that A. B. C. may lawfully be united into a presbytery, on the ground that they wish to be so united; and the other that A. B. C. and D. may be thus united, because they live within the same geographical lines? The motive for the wish, in the former case, does not affect the principle. It may be a corrupt motive, or a good one. Some individuals in Philadelphia wished to be set apart into a presbytery, it was said, because they differed from the standards to which the majority of their presbytery adhered. Other individuals in Cincinnati wished to be set apart in like manner, it was said, because they adhered to the standards, while the majority of their brethren were unsound. Admit both these suppositions to be correct, and both requests to have been granted, and we have two elective affinity presbyteries, the one formed from a desire to evade the operation of the constitution, and the other to give it its full force. We think the principle is a bad one; but it is clear that it may operate one way as well as the other, and that it is not to be viewed as a device designed to form a secure retreat for heresy. The fact is, that the members of our presbyteries are so much intermixed, especially in our cities, where not only ministers, but even churches frequently change their location, that the necessity of definite geographical limits has never been strenuously insisted upon. As the geographical is the obvious, and, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the most convenient principle of division, and the one which the constitution directs

* Since writing the above we see that this intention is denied, in the Presbyterian. We have heard other signers of the *Act and Testimony*, however, very distinctly avow their desire to effect a division of the church.

to be followed, it is clear that it ought to be adhered to. But can any one prevail upon himself to say, that the church must be split to pieces, because, in a single case, another principle has been adopted? The fact is, that this matter is, comparatively speaking, altogether insignificant; and it never would have attracted the least attention, were it not for the supposed motive which led to the adoption of the elective affinity principle. Had a Synod constituted twelve ministers, resident in one city, all of them equally distinguished for soundness of doctrine and purity of life, six into one presbytery, and six into another, simply because it had been so requested, would the whole church be agitated, when it was ascertained that the members of the one body were not separated geographically from those of the other? This, no one can believe. It is not therefore the simple principle in question, however generally admitted to be incorrect, that is the cause of this deep and extended feeling. If this be true, it ought not to be thrust forward as a test principle. The church ought not to be called upon to deny the constitutional existence of bodies constituted on this plan, and by this denial, render schism unavoidable. Brethren agreed in doctrine and views of order and discipline, united in heart and effort, ought not to be thrust asunder, because, on such a point as this, they cannot agree.

We can hardly persuade ourselves that reflecting men can consider this matter viewed as an abstract constitutional point, of sufficient importance to justify schism. Yet this is really the issue made and presented in the *Act and Testimony*. Refusal to retract on this point was the great offence of the last Assembly. As soon as this refusal was known, preparation was made for issuing this manifesto. We do not doubt, as already said, that the real ground of offence, the true cause of the present excitement, is not this insignificant question, but the impression as to the motive which governed the decision of the Assembly. Still this is the question as here presented. It is not pretended that the Assembly formally sanctioned the errors enumerated in this document. It countenanced and sustained them, by the erection of the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia, and by the refusal to consent to its dissolution. These are the acts, therefore, which are the grounds of complaint, and which the churches are called upon to disregard. The issue therefore is on a constitutional point of very minor importance.

Our second specific objection, then, to this *Act and Testimony* is, that it recommends a disregard of the regular authority of the church which we are bound to obey; and that the ground of this recommendation is, in our opinion, altogether insufficient. The consequence of adopting the proposed course, must be either

to divide the church on a constitutional question of little comparative moment, or to produce a state of the greatest confusion and difficulty. A third objection, and the only other of this kind we shall mention, is founded on the eighth and last recommendation, viz. "We do earnestly recommend, that on the second Thursday of May, 1835, a convention be held in the city of Pittsburg, to be composed of two delegates, a minister and ruling elder from each presbytery, or from the minority of any presbytery, who may concur in the sentiments of this act and testimony, to deliberate and consult on the present state of our church, and to adopt such measures as may be best suited to restore her prostrated standards." The objections to this recommendation are nearly the same urged against the one already considered. It is essentially a revolutionary proceeding. It is an appeal from the constitutional government, to the people in their primary bodies. When this is done, merely for the expression or formation of a public sentiment, which may exert its legitimate influence upon the regular authorities, there is no ground of complaint. Analogy is to be found to such a course in the public meetings and conventions under our civil government, which are perfectly consistent, both with the theory and regular action of our institutions. But the case before us is very different. A large meeting first declare certain acts unconstitutional and resolve not to submit to them. They invite others to join in this refusal and to send delegates to meet in general convention to adopt ulterior measures. They first take a step which brings them necessarily into collision with the government, and then call on all of like mind to unite with them. The analogy is so complete between this case and that which recently convulsed our whole country, and threatened the existence of our political institutions, that none can fail to perceive it. There can, therefore, be no invidiousness in making the allusion. An act of the general government was pronounced, by the people of one of the States, to be unconstitutional and consequently void. They deliberately resolved to refuse to submit to it. Whether this was right or wrong, it was regarded by the country as creating a necessity for one of two things; either that the act should be repealed, or the union dissolved by secession or war. It was indeed, in itself, a conditional dissolution of the union. The condition was the repeal of the offensive act. If this was refused, the union was at an end. When under these circumstances, the State in question proposed to call a convention of all who agreed with her in opinion as to the grievance complained of, did not every one regard the proposal as a step in advance, as a measure designed and adapted to make the breach more certain and serious. Of this there can be no doubt. Public sen-

timent was overwhelmingly against the wisdom and lawfulness of the course of this aggrieved member of our union. The remedy, as extra-constitutional and revolutionary, was deemed disproportionate to the malady. Yet it was on all hands admitted that there might be evils, which, being intolerable, would justify this dissolution of political society, and the disruption of all existing bonds of political duty and allegiance. So in the case before us, if the evils complained of are such as justify the dissolution of the church, and the disregard of the solemn obligations by which we have bound ourselves together, then the case is made out. The propriety of the *Act and Testimony* is vindicated. The point now before us, however, is, the true nature of its recommendations. We say they are extra-constitutional and revolutionary, and should be opposed by all those who do not believe that the crisis demands the dissolution of the church. If such a crisis be made out, or assumed, then all the rest is a mere question of the ways and means.

We do not believe that any such crisis exists. That there has been much disorder of various kinds within our bounds, that there has been a good deal of erroneous doctrine preached and published, and that many judicatories have been criminally remiss in matters of discipline, we do not doubt. These are evils with regard to which the churches should be instructed and warned, and every constitutional means be employed for their correction. But what we maintain is, that there has been no such corruption of doctrine or remissness in discipline as to justify the division of the church, and consequently all measures having that design and tendency are wrong and ought to be avoided.

To exhibit fully the grounds of this opinion, would require us to review the origin and progress of the present difficulties, and consequently render it necessary for us to enter into historical details too extensive for our limits, and inconsistent with our present object. We must therefore be contented with the remark, that the burden of proof rests on those who assert that such a crisis does exist. This proof has not yet been exhibited. Until it is, we can only say, that we do not believe there is any call for the extreme measures proposed in the *Act and Testimony*.

We believe, indeed, that there are a number of men in our church, who hold doctrinal opinions, which ought to have precluded their admission, and who should now be visited by regular ecclesiastical process. But we believe this number to be comparatively small. We have never doubted that there was serious ground of apprehension for the purity of our church.

Considering the ease with which men are introduced into our communion, who, not being brought up among us, know nothing, and care nothing about Presbyterianism, it is very evident that we must have a constant accession of unsound, and even hostile men, if our judicatories are not faithful to their vows. We have often wondered, indeed, at the facility with which decided Congregationalists, so born and educated, become Presbyterians. We rejoice to see that there is a general Congregational Association formed in the State of New York. Those brethren who really prefer the Congregational system, may now indulge that preference, instead of being forced to submit to the painful necessity of joining a church, with whose distinctive organization they are unacquainted, or to which they are unfriendly. This is the main evil, which it requires nothing but honesty on the part of the presbyteries effectually to prevent. We are happy in knowing that at least one case has occurred, in which a presbytery, where there is not to our knowledge, a single adherent of the *old school*, has deliberately, and almost unanimously refused to ordain a candidate who held the popular errors on depravity and regeneration. There are not wanting other decisive and cheering intimations that the portentous union between the New Divinity and the New Measures, which threatened to desolate the church, has, at least for the present, done its worst. The latter, but scarcely the lesser, of this firm of evils is, to all appearance, dead. Its course doubtless will be marked by melancholy memorials for generations. But as the great mass of the wisdom and piety of the country (we are speaking of the north and east) were found decidedly arrayed against it, we trust the church will be spared such another visitation. And even as to the other member of the firm, we hope the shout of victory from its advocates was rather a mistake. If we may credit what we hear, the novelty being over, the wonder is on the decline. It is said, that out of the immediate sphere of the origin of the theory, its friends are very few and very far between.

But let it be supposed that in all this we are mistaken, that the corruption in doctrine, and remissness in discipline, are far more extensive than we imagine. Let it even be admitted, that the General Assembly, after having long connived at alarming errors, has at length countenanced and sustained them. Let every thing be admitted which we have endeavoured to disprove. Still, the case of the Act and Testimony is not made out. The necessity or propriety of schism does not appear. Is Christ divided? If the head be one, should the body so easily be separated? Is not the visible union of the people of God, as

the expression of their spiritual union to each other and the Lord Jesus, a solemn obligation? To what a lamentable condition would the church be reduced, if on every occasion of disappointment or excitement, or even of serious mistake, injustice, or error, her members were to separate into distinct communions! We are not about to advocate a spurious liberality, or defend a spirit of compromise with remissness or error. We merely wish to state, that the division of a church of Jesus Christ is a very serious thing, expressly forbidden in the word of God,* and only to be justified by the most obvious necessity.

What then constitutes a necessity for schism, and makes that crime a virtue? We venture to answer, that no man is at liberty to labour for a division of the church to which he belongs, unless he and others are called upon either to profess what they think erroneous, or to do what they think wrong. As the duty of preserving the unity of the church is obvious and admitted, the seceders must make out that they are free from this solemn obligation. But what can free them from the obligation of duty, but the interference of some stronger obligation? So long as the standards of any church remain unaltered, its members profess the same faith which they avowed when they joined it. I do not profess to hold or to teach what A. B. or C. may be known to believe, but I profess to believe the confession of faith of the church to which I belong. It matters not, therefore, so far as this point is concerned, how corrupt a portion, or even the majority, of the church may be, provided I am not called upon to profess their errors. Instead of my mere ecclesiastical connexion with them being a countenancing of their errors, it may give me the best opportunity of constantly testifying against them. Who have done so much to render conspicuous and odious the errors and unfaithfulness of the clergy at Geneva, as the orthodox and pious portion of their number? The individuals who previously seceded, left the body in quietness behind them, and lost in a great measure their ability both to promote the truth and to oppose error. As another illustration, let us refer to the church of Scotland. Every one knows the long controversy between the Orthodox and the Moderate parties in that body. Had Dr. Witherspoon, and the faithful men who acted with him, listed the standard of division, what would have been the present state of that church? In all probability it would be little better than that of Geneva. All the resources of the body, all its institutions, its corporate existence and privileges, would have been basely (shall we say?) delivered up to the enemy as a contribution to his means of

* 1 Cor. i. 10.

promoting and perpetuating error. By the faithful adherence of these men to their posts, after one defeat had followed another in rapid and long succession, the church has been saved. The pious and orthodox portion have gained the ascendancy, and are now shaking off the trammels of patronage and other antiquated corruptions, and wielding the whole of her resources for the advancement of the truth. Blessings will rest for ever on the memory of Witherspoon, because he was not a preacher of secession. If others in that land of our ecclesiastical fathers had been equally wise; if the numerous body of evangelical men split up into the sects of Burghers, Anti-Burghers, &c. were now united with their former brethren, what an army would they form! Would any one be so infatuated as to urge the pious and devoted members of the Protestant church in France to secede from their brethren, and give up their institutions at Strasburg and Montauban, to be perpetual nurseries of error? Or would any one counsel the orthodox Germans to forsake their stations on the plain, where they can meet their enemies on equal terms, and go down into the deep and narrow valley of dissent?

What has become of the Morristown Presbytery? What has become of the True Reformed Dutch Church, which not only seceded from their highly respectable and orthodox brethren, but had well nigh excommunicated them? How completely has the wave of oblivion blotted them out! They have disappeared from the visible ranks, at least, of the hosts of the church. Are they doing more good, or preventing more evil now, than in their former connexion? We think their example should serve at once as a warning to any who are disposed to secede from among us, and as a rebuke to those who appear anxious to precipitate a similar crisis in our church.

We cannot see, then, how any thing is to be gained, for the cause of truth, by secession; but we see how much will be lost. We shall gain no advantage in opposing error; but only lose our facilities for promoting truth. Instead of manifesting fidelity to the cause of the Redeemer, we shall deliver up the post committed to our keeping. Until, therefore, the standards of the church are altered, or its members are in some way called upon to profess error, or to do wrong, their motto should be, "STAND FAST; HAVING ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD."

We have now performed a painful, though, as we think, an imperative duty. We have come out openly against brethren in whose doctrinal views we coincide, whose persons we love, whose character and motives we respect, with whom we have ever been associated, and fondly hope ever to continue united. The grounds on which we have felt constrained to bear this testimony, may be very briefly stated.

As we have already said, it is at all times the privilege, and often the duty, of the members of a community, to spread their views on important practical subjects before their fellow members. How constantly is this done in political matters. If such be the privilege of every individual, it is especially incumbent on those who are connected with the periodical press. The very end and object of that press is the diffusion of practical knowledge, and the discussion of important points of truth and duty. We confess, however, that we have had other motives for the course which has been taken. We, in common with that large class of our brethren who do not belong to the number against whom the Testimony is directed, and yet have not joined in the act, have felt annoyed by the urgency which has been used to obtain signatures, and the serious censure lavished on those who refuse their names. It was necessary, as a matter of self vindication, that the grounds of this refusal should be publicly stated. It should be known, that it was not fear for the consequences of the act, nor insensibility to the evils complained of, but disapprobation of the nature and tendency of the measure. It is with a sincere desire to cooperate in the prevention of the evils, which we think must ensue from the prosecution of the course proposed, that we have lifted up our voice against it. Let the facts and reasons here presented pass for what they are worth. Let brethren give them a candid consideration. Let them ask themselves, if when, as they suppose, error and disorder are coming in like a flood, they should turn their backs on the enemy, and leave a weakened and discouraged remnant to continue the battle. What if they are defeated, not once or twice, but many times? Constancy and truth always ultimately prevail. Let us only be careful that it is for truth we struggle, and that our weapons are not carnal, but spiritual; and there is no ground for apprehension. In every church there are fluctuations. Sometimes truth and piety predominate, at others, error and irreligion. When darkest, it is nearest light. In a church like ours, we think, there is no excuse for abandoning the regular constitutional methods of proceeding. Every man can free himself from responsibility for the errors of his brethren, if he cannot have them corrected. He has all the means that others have to secure predominance for his own views, and if they are correct, he may confidently hope for their success. Let but the friends of truth be humble, prayerful, faithful and active; let them adhere to each other and to the church, and then, whether in the majority or minority for the time being, they will be most effectually serving their Master and his cause.