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Smyth, Thomas.

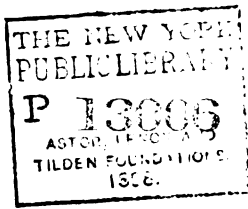
The true origin and source of  
the Mecklenburg and National  
Declaration of Independence.

1847.



IGA Smyth. True origin...

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THE

TRUE ORIGIN AND SOURCE.

OF THE

MECKLENBURG AND NATIONAL

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

[EXTRACTED FROM THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW, BY REQUEST.]

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BY REV. THOMAS SMYTH, D. D.

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## TO THE READER.

With the Introductory Remarks, the following argument was substantially delivered by the Author to his Congregation on Sabbath morning, July 4th, 1847, and was, by many of them, requested for publication. As however, it was written for the Review, it was given to it, and appears in a separate form by permission of the Editors. The Author would only further state, that he was encouraged to present the argument to the public by the favor with which a partial presentation of it was received by the Literary Club of Charleston, to whom he had submitted it.

# THE TRUE ORIGIN AND SOURCE

## OF THE

### MECKLENBURG AND NATIONAL

### DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

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Among other remarkable coincidences which occur during this year, one is that our national political year began on Sunday, the fourth of March, and another is that the anniversary of our National Declaration of Independence also occurs on Sabbath.

“The year begins with Friday and ends with Friday.—The fourth of July comes on Sunday. For the first time in the ‘recollection of the oldest inhabitant,’ there will be no full moon this year in the month of February. Our national political year begins on Sunday, the fourth of March.—There will be no eclipse visible in the year—January will have two full moons, and March a like number.”

God has thus given this recurrence of the great American Jubilee to the commemoration and improvement of the pulpit, and made it the duty of his ministers to diverge from their usual routine of subjects, and to choose one consonant to the occasion.

This I shall do. I will, therefore endeavor to found some profitable and encouraging remarks upon that very declaration of independence, which, after various amendments and full discussion, was adopted and signed on this memorable day.

“This,” says the Edinburgh Review, in a passage which should be remembered, (1) “is that famous *Declaration of*

(1) For Oct. 1837, p. 88, Am. ed.

*Independence*, by which the freemen of the New World approved themselves worthy of their ancestors in the Old,—who had spoken, and written, and fought, and perished for conscience and freedom's sake,—but whose descendants in the Old had not always borne their high lineage in mind. We verily think that this 'Declaration' is the most important event in the history of mankind, whether its consequences be regarded on one side of the Atlantic or on the other; and if tyrants are sometimes said to feel uneasy on the thirtieth of January, how much more fitted to inspire alarm are the recollections associated with the fourth of July, in which nothing like remorse can mingle on the people's part, and no consolation is afforded to their oppressors by the tendency of cruelty and injustice to mar the work they stain!"

This declaration, however,—marvellous as have been its consequences,—was not a cause but an effect—not the source from which the fountain was supplied, but itself the fountain whose secret springs had long been accumulating under ground, and finding their way to one common centre. The drops of feeling and the streams of opinion, having converged to a centre, burst forth in this full, clear, and perennial fountain, whose living waters still continue to fertilize the earth.

Many people imagine that the Declaration of Independence forms the date of our liberty. In our opinion, to use the words of another, that Declaration was only the falling of the fruit when it had become (perhaps a little prematurely) ripe. No new light burst upon the people upon the occasion. The separation from Great Britain involved no change in the political theories they had entertained. It was placed upon clear and definite grounds. The general and vague idea of liberty, that dazzling image with the face of a goddess and the heart of a prostitute, entered not into the question. The colonists had enjoyed the substance from the day they put their feet upon American ground. And it was not the desire to change, but the desire to keep and secure, which produced their Independence. They made little or no change in their domestic affairs, after that object was gained. One of the States at least retains the same form of government, which she had when she was a

Province. To talk of the influence of the ambition of a few leaders, seems absurd, when they could do nothing the moment they ceased to appeal to principles, the soundness of which the community acknowledged. The people, that is, the great mass of responsible members of the State, had inherited, they did not acquire, the extraordinary jealousy of their rights, which is apparent through the century and a half of their preceding history; and when they complained, they could put their finger on the spot that was hurt. They asked a remedy. It was refused. They adopted the only alternative which was left. They declared themselves independent.

No one man, therefore, can claim the glory of having originated the Declaration of Independence. It was the embodiment of the growing sentiment and feeling of the American people, and reflects its lustre upon THEM rather than upon its immediate author. "Believe me," said Mr. Jefferson, writing to a friend in 1775 after the battle of Lexington and Bunker Hill,—“there is not in the English Empire a man who more cordially loves a union with Great Britain than I do; but, by the God that made me, I will cease to exist before I yield to a connexion on such terms as the British Parliament propose, and in this, I think I speak the sentiments of America. We want neither inducement nor power to declare and assert a separation. *It is will alone that is wanting*, and that is growing apace under the fostering hand of our king.” There is not, therefore, as Mr. Pickering observes, an idea in the Declaration of Independence, but what had been hackneyed in Congress for two years before. The substance of it is contained in the declaration of rights and the violation of those rights in the journals of Congress in 1774. Indeed, the essence of it is contained in a pamphlet, voted and printed by the town of Boston before the first Congress met. (2).

It is altogether a mistake, therefore, to attribute the Declaration of Independence, in its spirit, sentiment, or power, to the magic of Mr. Jefferson's pen. (3.) “Mr. Jefferson, says the N. A. Review,” had no literary pretensions whatever. “He wrote through life very little. The little he

(2) Pickering's Review, 2d ed., p. 131, 132, in N. A. Rev., 1826, p. 387.

wrote consisted mostly of private letters, which never went out to the people: in his few published writings, there is no extraordinary force or charm of style. As mere literary productions, they would have attracted no attention; they produced effect not as writings, but as *acts*. Who ever thought of attributing the effect of the Declaration to the merit of the style? Who that could enter into the spirit of the paper, would dwell with any interest on the language? It was a simple record of the great *Act*, by which thirteen Colonies shook off the British yoke, and sprang into being as independent States. It was only as an *Act* that it drew attention. The total absence of all pretension to literary merit, was the only literary merit which it could possibly possess, and this it has. The case is substantially the same with all the rest of Mr. Jefferson's writings. There was no magic in his pen. The witchcraft by which he acquired influence lay, like that of the *Maréchale d'Ancre*, in his *mental superiority*. The source of his power, was the energy with which he represented in his feelings and opinions and acts, the *Spirit of the Age*." (4).

The triumph of the American Declaration of Independence, was owing not to any one man, but to that combination of men fitted for the great enterprise, whom God—for the ends He had in view,—had raised up and endowed with great abilities for the work. It was not by might, nor

(3) In his *Memoirs*, see *wks.*, vol. 1, p. 10, he himself adduces, as instructions sent up to Congress from Virginia, a portion of the very wording of this paper, that was in May, 1776.

(4) *Do.*, 1834, p. 243, when it is added, "It is a common mistake to suppose, that extraordinary skill in some particular accomplishment, which depends in a great degree on study or accidental personal qualifications, such as writing, public speaking, or even the technical art of war, will carry with it a great power over the minds of other men. This may sometimes appear to be the case, because skill of this kind is often combined with the moral energy of character which constitutes real greatness. But even in this case, the talent is the mere instrument of the mighty mind, which can work just as well with the talents of others as its own. It was the same thing to Moses, whether he spoke himself or employed his brother Aaron for a mouth-piece. These talents are in the nature of beautiful arts: we admire their possessors as artists; as men, we can only yield our homage to the superior mind: and the only test of general superiority is the mental energy, which renders the language, writings and conduct of its possessor, a bolder, firmer, truer expression, than any other to be met with, of the opinions and feelings that prevail at the time in the community. In the *talents*, by which individuals are

by power, nor by wisdom, but by God's overruling providence the conquest was achieved. "It was," again to quote the language of the *Edinburgh Review*, "the peculiar felicity of the Americans, and of the great cause of civil liberty, of which they were the champions, that among their leaders were to be found both men of the most ardent spirit, and men of the most approved discretion; whilst all were alike firm of purpose, and alike determined to let no differences, nor any personal feelings whatever, keep them apart in the pursuit of their common object. It would be difficult to point out any serious error committed in the whole of their difficult course; and it would certainly be impossible to find instances of the unreflecting violence, and the sudden changes, either among the people or their chiefs, which, in other cases, have brought such discredit upon the popular cause, and removed its triumph to so great a distance."

That the origination of the sentiments contained in the Declaration of Independence, is not to be attributed to Jefferson, is further proved from the evident similarity between it and the Declaration of Independence made at Mecklenburg, in North Carolina, May 19th, 1775, and in the Second Mecklenburg Declaration, made on May 20th, 1775. (5) Of these most interesting documents, a full account will be found in this volume.

"The little village of Charlotte," says Mr. Foote, "the seat of justice for Mecklenburg county, North Carolina, was the theatre of one of the most memorable events in the political annals of the United States. Situated in the fertile champaign, between the Yadkin and Catawba rivers, far above tide-water, some two or three hundred miles from the ocean, and in advance of the mountains that run almost parallel to the Atlantic coast, on the route of that emigration which, before the revolution, passed on southwardly, from Pennsylvania, through Virginia, to the unoccupied region east of the Mountains, on what is now the upper stage route from Georgia, through South Carolina and

commonly supposed to acquire and extend their influence, he was almost wholly deficient: he had no military taste or skill; he never spoke in public, and had no particular power in writing."

(5) See Foote's *Hist. of N. C.*, p. 37, 38; and see also Jones's *Defence of North Carolina*.



North Carolina, to meet the railroad at Raleigh,—it was, and is, the centre of an enterprising population. It received its name from Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg, whose native province also gave name to the county, the House of Hanover having been invited to the throne of England.

The traveler, in passing through this fertile, retired, and populous country, would now see nothing calculated to suggest the fact that he was on the ground of the boldest Declaration ever made in America; and that all around him were localities rich in associations of valor and suffering in the cause of National Independence, the sober recital of which borders on romance. Every thing looks peaceful, secluded, and prosperous, as though the track of hostile armies had never defaced the soil. Were he told, this is the spot where lovers of personal and national liberty will come, in pilgrimage or imagination, to ponder events of the deepest interest to all mankind, he must feel, in the beauty and fertility of the surrounding region, that here was a chosen habitation for good men to live, and act, and leave to their posterity the inestimable privileges of political and religious freedom, with abundance of all that may be desired to make life one continued thanksgiving.

There was no printing press in the upper country of Carolina, and many a weary mile must be traversed to find one. Newspapers were few, and, no regular post traversing the country, were seldom seen. The people, anxious for news, were accustomed to assemble to hear printed handbills from abroad, or written ones drawn up by persons appointed for the purpose, particularly the Rev. Thos. Reese, of Mecklenburg, North Carolina, whose bones lie in the grave-yard of the Stone Church, South Carolina. There had been frequent assemblies in Charlotte, to hear the news and join in the discussion of the exciting subjects of the day; and finally, to give more efficiency to their discussions, it was agreed upon, generally, that Thomas Polk, Colonel of the Militia, long a surveyor in the province, frequently a member of the Colonial Assembly, well known and well acquainted in the surrounding counties, a man of great excellence and merited popularity, should be empowered to call a convention of the representatives of the people, when-

ever it should appear advisable. It was also agreed that these representatives should be chosen from the Militia districts, by the people themselves: and when assembled for council and debate, their decisions should be binding on the inhabitants of Mecklenburg."

Alluding to the deep feeling of discontent produced in the public mind by the arbitrary attempt of Governor Martin to prevent the assembling of a Provisional Congress for the Province of North Carolina, at Newbern, the author remarks:

"In this state of the public mind, Col. Polk issued his notice for the Committee men to assemble in Charlotte, on the 19th May, 1775. On the appointed day, between twenty and thirty representatives of the people met in the Court House, in the centre of the town at the crossing of the great streets, and surrounded by an immense concourse, few of whom could enter the house, proceeded to organize for business, by choosing Abraham Alexander, a former member of the Legislature, a magistrate, and ruling elder in the Sugar Creek Congregation, in whose bounds they were assembled, as their Chairman; and John McKnitt Alexander, and Dr. Ephraim Brevard, men of business habits and great popularity, their clerks. Papers were read before the convention and the people; the handbill, brought by express, containing the news of the battle of Lexington, Massachusetts, on that day one month, the 19th of April, came to hand that day, and was read to the assembly. The Rev. Hezekiah James Balch, pastor of Poplar Tent, Dr. Ephraim Brevard, and William Kennon, Esq., addressed the Convention and the people at large. Under the excitement produced by the wanton bloodshed at Lexington, and the addresses of these gentlemen, the assembly cried out, as with one voice, 'Let us be independent! Let us declare our independence, and defend it with our lives and fortunes!' The speakers said, his Majesty's proclamation had declared them out of the protection of the British Crown, and they ought, therefore, to declare themselves out of his protection, and independent of all his control."

A committee, consisting of Dr. Ephraim Brevard, Mr. Kennon, and Rev. Mr. Balch, were appointed to prepare resolutions suitable to the occasion. Some drawn up by

Dr. Brevard, and read to his friends at a political meeting in Queen's Museum some days before, were read to the Convention, and then committed to these gentlemen for revision.

The excitement continued to increase through the night and the succeeding morning. At noon, May 20th, the Convention re-assembled with an undiminished concourse of citizens, amongst whom might be seen many wives and mothers, anxiously awaiting the event. The resolutions previously drawn up by Dr. Brevard, and now amended by the Committee, together with the by-laws and regulations, were taken up; John McKnitt Alexander read the by-laws, and Dr. Brevard the resolutions. All was stillness. The Chairman of the Convention put the question:—‘Are you all agreed?’ The response was a universal ‘ay.’

After the business of the Convention was all arranged, it was moved and seconded that the proceedings should be read at the Court House door in hearing of the multitude. Proclamation was made, and from the Court House steps Colonel Thomas Polk read, to a listening and approving auditory, the following resolution, viz :

#### THE MECKLENBURGH DECLARATION.

“*Resolved*, That whosoever directly or indirectly abetted, or in any way, form, or manner, countenanced the unchartered and dangerous invasion of our rights, as claimed by Great Britain, is an enemy to this country, to America, and to the inherent and unalienable rights of man.

*Resolved 2d.* That we, the citizens of Mecklenburg county, do hereby dissolve the political bonds which have connected us with the mother country, and hereby absolve ourselves from all allegiance to the British crown, and abjure all political connection, contract, or association with that nation, who have wantonly trampled on our rights and liberties, and inhumanly shed the blood of American patriots at Lexington.

*Resolved 3d.* That we do hereby declare ourselves a free and independent people; are, and of right ought to be, a sovereign and self-governing association, under the control of no power, other than that of our God, and the General

Government of the Congress;—to the maintainance of which independence, we solemnly pledge to each other our mutual coöperation, our lives, our fortunes, and our most sacred honor.

*Resolved 4th.* That as we acknowledge the existence and control of no law, nor legal office, civil or military, within this country; we do hereby ordain and adopt, as a rule of life, all, each, and every of our former laws; wherein, nevertheless, the crown of Great Britain never can be considered as holding rights, privileges, immunities, or authority therein.

*Resolved 5th.* That it is further decreed that all, each, and every military officer in this county, is hereby retained in his former command and authority, he acting conformably to these regulations. And that every member present of this delegation, shall henceforth be a civil officer, viz: a Justice of the Peace, in the character of a committee man, to issue process, hear and determine all matters of controversy, according to said adopted laws; and to preserve peace, union and harmony in said county; and to use every exertion to spread the love of country and fire of freedom throughout America, until a general organized government be established in this province."

A voice from the crowd called out for 'three cheers,' and the whole company shouted three times, and threw their hats in the air. The resolutions were read again and again during the day to different companies desirous of retaining in their memories sentiments so congenial to their feelings. There are still living some whose parents were in that assembly, and heard and read the resolutions; and from whose lips they heard the circumstances and sentiments of this remarkable declaration."

THE SECOND MECKLENBURG DECLARATION.

"The Convention had frequent meetings, and on the 30th of May, 1775, issued the following paper, viz:

'CHARLOTTE, MECKLENBURG COUNTY, {  
May 30th, 1775. }

"This day the committee of the county met and passed the following *Resolves*:—Whereas, by an address presented to his Majesty by both houses of parliament, in February last, the American Colonies are declared to be in a state of actual rebellion, we conceive that all laws and

commissions confirmed by, or derived from the authority of the king or parliament, are annulled and vacated, and the former civil constitution of these Colonies for the present wholly suspended. To provide, in some degree, for the exigencies of this county, in the present alarming period, we deem it necessary and proper to pass the following resolves, viz:

‘1st. That all commissions, civil and military, heretofore granted by the crown, to be exercised in these colonies, are null and void, and the constitution of each particular colony wholly suspended.

‘2d. That the Provincial Congress of each province, under the direction of the great Continental Congress, is invested with all legislative and executive powers, within their respective provinces, and that no other legislative power does, or can exist, at this time, in any of these colonies.

‘3d. As all former laws are now suspended in this province, and the Congress have not provided others, we judge it necessary for the better preservation of good order, to form certain rules and regulations for the internal government of this county, until laws shall be provided for us by the Congress.

‘4th. That the inhabitants of this county do meet on a certain day appointed by this committee, and having formed themselves into nine companies, viz: eight in the county, and one in the town of Charlotte, do choose a Colonel and other military officers, who shall hold and exercise their several powers by virtue of this choice, and independent of the crown of Great Britain and the former constitution of this province.’”

*[Then follow eleven articles for the preservation of the peace, and the choice of officers to perform the duties of a regular government.]*

“16th. That whatever person shall hereafter receive a commission from the crown, or attempt to exercise any such commission heretofore received, shall be deemed an enemy to his country; and upon information to the captain of the company in which he resides, the company shall cause him to be apprehended, and upon proof of the fact, committed to safe custody, till the next sitting of the committee, who shall deal with him as prudence shall direct.”

The first great impulse having been given to the spirit of independence by these remarkable declarations, it was not

long before their happy influences began to manifest themselves in other and better forms. On the 4th of April, 1776, the Provincial Congress of North Carolina met at Halifax. On the 8th, a committee was appointed "to take into consideration the usurpations and violence committed by the king and parliament of Great Britain;" and on the 12th, four days afterwards, the committee submitted an able report, concluding with the following resolutions:

"*Resolved*, That the delegates from this colony, in Continental Congress, be empowered to concur with the delegates of the other colonies in *declaring independence*, and in forming foreign alliances; reserving to this colony the sole and exclusive right of forming a constitution and laws for this colony, and of appointing delegates from time to time (under the direction of a general representation thereof,) to meet delegates of the other colonies for such purposes as shall be hereafter pointed out."

This resolution was, on the same day it was proposed, unanimously adopted; and **IS THE FIRST PUBLIC DECLARATION FOR INDEPENDENCE BY THE CONSTITUTED AUTHORITIES OF A STATE.** It was presented to the Continental Congress, May 27th, 1776, nearly six weeks before the National Declaration.

Now, the similarity between some parts of this Mecklenburg Declaration, of which the late John Adams says, that "the genuine sense of America, at that moment, was never so well expressed, (6),—and of the celebrated Declaration of Independence, is very striking, and has given rise to the opinion that the Declaration of Independence, framed by Mr. Jefferson **FIFTEEN MONTHS AFTER IT**, was framed in the knowledge of this model, although in a letter to Mr. Adams, Mr. Jefferson positively denies even the authenticity of the paper. (7).

The authenticity of the Mecklenburg Declaration, is, however, placed beyond doubt, (8) while the similarity between it and the present Declaration, in their general spirit and in some of their most remarkable expressions, is equally incontrovertible.

(6) See Jones' Def., p. 297. (7) See *ibid.*, p. 2-4.

(8) See Foote's History of N. C., ch. i. and ch. xv.; and in this work also will be found instructions prepared by Dr. Brevard, the author of the Declaration, for those who composed the Mecklenburg Convention, which are perfectly consonant in spirit with the Declaration itself. See ch. iii., p. 68, &c.

How, then, is this similarity to be accounted for?

It may be accounted for in one of two ways: either by the supposition, that notwithstanding his positive disclaimer, Mr. Jefferson HAD BOTH SEEN AND USED THIS PAPER, —or that both papers may be traced up to a common source. To this latter conclusion, we are led by feelings of charity towards the character of Mr. Jefferson, to whom, notwithstanding all his enmity to Christian truth, injustice should not be done.

The sentiments and expressions, common to both Declarations, are traceable to a source, with which it can be shewn that both parties *were* familiar, and from which, therefore, without collusion, both parties might have derived the sentiments and language common to both papers.

THERE IS SUCH A SOURCE. And that it was known and familiar to the respective authors of these two declarations, is happily beyond doubt. Charity, therefore, will rejoice in being able to give to the respective authors of these two declarations, all the honor to which they are unquestionably entitled, while truth and justice require that the ultimate honor due to the noble sentiments contained in both, should be given to whom it will be found owing. It has, indeed, been said that the sentiments in question had become general and were the common property of the nation. Now, to some extent, this was doubtless the case; (9) but that they had become common and familiar, is not in evidence before us, and may, or may not, be true. But, be this as it may, it will be our object to point out a source

(9) In the Charleston Mercury, for July 4th, 1847, speaking of South Carolina, it is said: "But while others halted and hesitated, it was the proud destiny of South Carolina to set the first glorious example of open resistance. She was then, as ever, in the van of freedom's battle, and nine years before Boston immortalized herself by destroying the tea, her citizens, acting under orders, seized the King's Fort, captured the odious Stamps, put them on board one of his ships in the harbor of Charleston, and expelled them forever from the country. She nullified the act, and it was repealed. She was again shoulder to shoulder with Massachusetts in 1775, when that Colony resisted the Tea Act, and was, in fact, the first to declare her independence. On the 10th February, 1776, Christopher Gadsden, in her General Assembly, raised the first voice heard in its favor in this country, and on the 26th March following, the same Assembly adopted the first Constitution ever made in America, establishing a government, and vesting it with all the powers incident thereto. The Preamble is an eloquent and virtual Declaration of Independence, referring to nearly the same causes of complaint, reciting the same wrongs, and proclaiming the same reasons, as are set forth in the General Declaration of the Colonies, with a striking similarity of tone and language."

from which these sentiments, and the language in which they are here conveyed, and the general form, style, and manner of these declarations, respectively, may have been derived; and if it shall appear that WE ARE INDEBTED IN SOME GOOD MEASURE FOR THE SPIRIT, METHOD, AND LANGUAGE OF THESE CELEBRATED DOCUMENTS, TO A RELIGIOUS, AND STILL MORE, TO A PRESBYTERIAN ORIGIN, the fact will, we trust, confirm our attachment to a system of doctrine and of polity, of which, even its opponents testify that it has ever been found on the side of liberty and freedom, both civil and religious, and ever ready to "contend, even unto blood," for the defence of truth and freedom.

The source, then, to which we would trace the spirit, sentiments, order of arrangement, and to some extent, the very language of these celebrated declarations, is no other than the solemn leagues, bands and covenants, entered into by our forefathers, at the period of the reformation, and especially those adopted by our Presbyterian forefathers, in Scotland and in Ireland. That there is in these National Covenants a similarity—in thought, in word, in style, and in arrangement—to the Mecklenburg and National Declarations of Independence, will be the first position we shall attempt to establish; and that the knowledge of these documents, and consequently, of their spirit, manner and arrangement, was possessed by both Mr. Jefferson and Dr. Brevard, the authors of these declarations, respectively, will be the second point which we shall endeavor to sustain.

First, then, we will endeavor to shew that the Confessions, Covenants, and Bands, adopted by our Presbyterian forefathers in Scotland and in Ireland—in style, in order, in spirit, in general sentiment, and in some of the most remarkable expressions,—are strikingly similar to these two Political Declarations of Independence.

The documents are similar in their *object*, which was TO SECURE UNION, by a public testimony to common truths; by a common exposure to the danger to which such testimony made its subscribers inevitably liable; by the necessity of common prudence, watchfulness and devotion; and by the strength derived from such a combination and such entire consecration to the cause at stake.

The documents are similar in the *order* pursued in their arrangement. In both the religious and the political documents, there is first a general introduction,—then an enu-



meration of grievances, against which protest is made,—then a declaration of independence and resistance,—and, finally, a vow of mutual devotion, fidelity and determination.

These documents are similar also in their respective *titles*. The first Scottish paper, “subscrit” in 1580, 1581, and 1590, is called a “A General Confession,” or “General Band for maintainance of the trew religion and the king’s person and estate.” (10). The second paper issued by the Scottish Church, in 1588, 1590, is denominated “A General Band of Maintainance of the trew and Christian Religion,” and which was also subscribed by all classes. (11). The third paper adopted by this church, in the year 1638, and subscribed by the nobles, barons, &c. in that year, and generally in 1639, is entitled “The General Confession of Faith, together with a Resolution and Promise,” &c. (12).

Now, these titles are only *modernized*, to use Mr. Jefferson’s own phrase, (13) in the title given to the political papers in question, both of which are termed “Declarations,” that is “Confessions;” and both of which embody a “mutual pledge,” which is, in other words, a “band.”

Again, the analogy between the religious and the political declarations, is seen in the adaptation of both for being engrossed upon parchment, in order to have the names of parties—willing to commit themselves to the hazard of all consequences—subscribed upon it, which was, in both cases, accordingly done.

The *circumstances* in which both were drawn up and subscribed, were also very analogous. In both cases, the grievances endured were manifold;—in both, the power to which the parties were opposed was terrible; in both, the chances of defeat were great,—and in both, the danger incurred was most imminent.

There is a further similarity between the religious and political documents,—inexplicable on any other supposition, than that of precedent,—we mean a similarity in the language employed in both documents. This will appear from the following tabular view:

(10) See in Dunlop’s Collection of Confessions of Faith, vol. 1, p. 103, &c.

(11) Ibid., p. 108.

(12) This is what is known as “The National Covenant.”

(13) See quoted below.

THE RELIGIOUS DECLARATIONS.

— general Fund.

— we believe with our hearts, confess with our mouths, subscribe with our hands, and constantly affirm before God, and the whole world.

*Third Scottish Decl. and First Scottish Decl.*

We resist and refuse the usurped authority of that Roman Antichrist, all his vvarny, laws, &c., against our Christian liberty, and the consciences of men. See Do.

— and viewing the imminent danger threatened to the said religion, as well by foreign preparations for prosecuting of that damnable conspiracy against Christ and his evangel.

[Here follows a long list of grievances and usurpations.] See Do.

And swearing by the great name of the Lord our God, that we shall defend the same under danger both of body and soul.

We protest and promise solemnly with our hearts under the same oath, hand, write and pain, that we shall defend with our gear, bodies and lives, &c.

— *First Declaration.*

Faithfully and upon our truths and honours, bind and oblige us to others, &c. to expose and hazard our lives, lands and goods, in defence of the said true religion, &c. and generally to assist and defend every one of us one another, as we shall answer to God upon our honours, and to the world upon our truths and honours, &c. — *Second Declaration.*

And swearing by the great name of the Lord our God and (as above) . . . . We protest and promise with our hearts, that we shall defend with our goods, bodies and lives, the liberties of our country against all enemies, &c. — *Third Declaration and the National Covenant.*

THE MECKLENBURG DECLARATION.

— dissolve the political bands which have connected us with the mother country, and hereby absolve ourselves from all allegiance, and from all political connection.

— unchartered and dangerous invasion of our rights.

— the inherent and inalienable rights of men.

— trampled on our rights and liberties, and inhumanly shed the blood of American patriots at Lexington.

THE NATIONAL DECLARATION.

— dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another.

— we utterly dissolve all political connexion, reject and renounce all allegiance.

— a decent respect to the opinions of the world require that they should declare, &c.

— let facts be submitted to a candid world.

— a history of unremitting injuries.

— a long train of abuses and usurpations.

— inherent and unalienable rights.

— [See the omitted paragraph on the Slave Trade, and the catalogue of usurpations and injuries.]

We do hereby declare ourselves to be a free and independent people, etc. and of right ought to be, a sovereign and self-governing association.

[Compare also Resolution 34 with the preamble of the National Declaration.]

We solemnly pledge to each other our mutual cooperation, our lives, our fortunes, and our most sacred honour.

We assert, these Colonies to be free and independent States, and do all things which independent States may or right do.

— it is their right, it is their duty to throw off such government.

Appealing to the supreme Judge for the rectitude of our intentions, with a firm reliance on the protection of Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour.

N. B. — This analogy might be enlarged, and especially between the 21 and 34.

The analogy between these celebrated documents, will be further manifested by their *spirit*. This is in all the same bold, conscientious, and, therefore, fearless spirit ;—a spirit confident of the truth of the positions it assumes, of the rectitude of its principles, of the equity of its demands, and of the assured certainty of ultimate triumph.

In both cases, the same tyranny had been exercised, and the same despotism endured. In both, there was the same enlightened view of rights and duties, of truth and privilege. In both, there was the same determination to endure no further tyranny, to assert their rights, to resist all oppressive acts, and to contend earnestly, even unto blood, for their civil and religious liberties.

We have thus given an outline of some prominent characteristics, in which the the Religious Declarations of our Presbyterian forefathers, exhibit a similarity to the two celebrated American Political Declarations ; a similarity, not to be accounted for by any accidental causes. It can only be explained, therefore, by the supposition that the authors of the latter declarations were acquainted with the former, and being fired by their spirit, and captivated with their style, order and method, with the force and beauty of their thoughts, the grandeur and sublimity of their sentiments, the deep and powerful impression they were *adapted* to produce, and *had actually* and indelibly made, and by the transcendently noble results to which they had given birth, had made them the models of their compositions and the fountains from which they drew their inspiration.

Is this supposition credible, considering that both of these political declarations are of American authorship, and that one, at least, is the production of a man bitterly opposed to every thing of a religious character ? To this we might reply, that from the public and *national* character of these religious declarations, there is nothing improbable in the supposition that they were some or all of them known to these gentlemen, inasmuch as they are still found in the established confessions of several branches of the Presbyterian church in this country. Charity also favors the supposition, since it opens up a way of explaining the perfect identity in many remarkable words and ideas between the Mecklenburg and the National Declarations, without involving the character of Mr. Jefferson, in the charge of perfidious dishonesty, which his denial of any knowledge of

the Mecklenburg Declaration and his attempt to prove that it is spurious, (14) would otherwise render inevitable.

But, we can go beyond mere conjecture, and offer proof to shew that such acquaintance, on the part of Dr. Brevard and of Mr. Jefferson, with these religious declarations, was perfect.

As it regards Dr. Ephraim Brevard, the author of the Mecklenburg Declaration, we have full and interesting information in the volume of Mr. Foote. (15.) Dr. Brevard was one of seven sons of a widow, who were all in the rebel army, and was taken prisoner at the surrender of Charleston, in May 1780. He has left behind him a paper of instructions for the delegates of Mecklenburg county, fired with the noblest spirit of the revolution, which he has here embodied in a most condensed form, and expressed forcibly. Of him, Mr. Foote says, "he thought clearly—felt deeply—wrote well—resisted bravely—and died a martyr to that liberty none loved better and few understood so well." This eulogium is merited by the Mecklenburg Declaration, which he drew up and submitted to the meeting, by which it was adopted with a universal "aye," and which led in April 4th, 1776, to the promulgation by the Provincial Congress of North Carolina of the first public Declaration of Independence by the constituted authorities of a State. (16). "Whence, then, came those principles of civil and religious liberty, which struck so deep in the soil of Carolina, and led to the outpouring of the first blood shed in the revolution on the Almac—and to the first Declaration of Independence by a county and by a State? (17). Suffice it to say, the inhabitants of Mecklenburgh county, were Presbyterian emigrants from the North of Ireland. (18). Trained in religious things by the strict doctrines of the Reformation, their settlements were made in congregations, and their places of worship so arranged as to accommodate all the families. Their descendants now assemble where their fathers worshiped before the Revolution. Their forms and creed were the forms and creed of their ancestors, who were eminently a religious people; and their Confession of Faith has descended as a legacy from the emigrants, to go down to the latest posterity."

(14) See his letter to John Quincy Adams, in Jones's *Defence of the Revolutionary History of N. Carolina*, Introd.

(15) Ch. i. and ch. iii.

(16) Foote, p. 43.

(17) Do., ch. i. and ii.

(18) See do., p. 187 and 201.

"But, the question arises with increased force, who were these people, and whence did they come? In what school of politics and religion had they been disciplined? At what fountains had they been drinking such inspirations, that here in the wilderness, common people, in their thoughts of freedom and equality, far outstripped the most ardent leaders in the Continental Congress? Whence came these men, that spoke out their thoughts, and thought as they spoke; and both thought and spoke unextinguishable principles of freedom of conscience and civil liberty? That they were poor and obscure but adds to their interest, when it is known that their deeds in the Revolution were equal to their principles. Many a "life" was given in Mecklenburg, in consequence of that declaration, and much of "fortune" was sacrificed; but their "honor" came out safe, even their great enemy Tarleton being witness. They did not get their ideas of liberty and law from Vattel, or Puffendorf, or the tomes of English law. From what book, then, did they get their knowledge, their principles of life? Ahead of their own State in their political notions, as a body, they never wavered through the whole Revolutionary struggle; and their descendants possess now just what these people asserted then, both in religion and politics, in conscience and in the state."

"In less than one quarter of a century after the first permanent settlement was formed in Mecklenburg, men talked of defending their rights, not against the Indians, but the officers of the crown; and took those measures that eventuated in the CONVENTION of May 20th, 1775, to deliberate on the crisis of their affairs. Of the persons chosen to meet in that assembly, one was a Presbyterian minister, Hezekiah James Balch, of Poplar Tent; seven were known to be elders of the church—Abraham Alexander, of Sugar Creek, John McKnitt Alexander and Hezekiah Alexander, of Hopewell, David Reese, of Poplar Tent, Adam Alexander and Robert Queary, of Rocky River, (now in the bounds of Philadelphia), and Robert Irwin of Steel Creek; two others were elders, but in the deficiency of church records, their names, not known with certainty, but the report of tradition is, without variation, that *nine* of the members were elders, and the other two are supposed to have been Ephraim Brevard and John Phiifer. *Thus, ten out of the*

*twenty-seven, were office bearers in the church; and all were connected with the congregations of the Presbyteries in Mecklenburg.*

These Presbyterian settlers in Mecklenburg had been instructed by the Rev. Mr. Craighead, from Ireland, (19) and who settled there in 1766, "the solitary minister between the Yadkin and Catawba."

In this retired country, he found full and undisturbed exercise for that ardent love of personal liberty and freedom of opinion, which had rendered him obnoxious in Pennsylvania, and was in some measure restrained in Virginia. He was ahead of his ministerial brethren in Pennsylvania, in his views of civil government and religious liberty, and became particularly offensive to the Governor for a pamphlet of a political nature, the authorship of which was attributed to him. This pamphlet attracted so much attention, that in 1743, Thomas Cookson, one of his Majesty's justices, for the county of Lancaster, in the name of the Governor, laid it before the Synod of Philadelphia. The Synod disavowed both the pamphlet and Mr. Craighead; and agreed with the Justice, that it was calculated to foment disloyal and rebellious practices, and disseminate principles of disaffection."

"In Carolina, he found a people remote from the seat of authority, among whom the intolerant laws were a dead letter, so far divided from other congregations, even of his own faith, that there could be no collision with him, on account of faith or practice; so united in their general principles of religion and church government, that he was the teacher of the whole population, and here his spirit rested. Here he passed his days; here he poured forth his principles of religious and civil government, undisturbed by the jealousy of the government, too distant to be aware of his doings or too careless to be interested in the poor and distant emigrants on the Catawba."

"Mr. Craighead had the privilege of forming the principles, both civil and religious, in no measured degree, of a race of men that feared God, and feared not labor and hardship, or the face of man; a race that sought for freedom and property in the wilderness, and having found them re-

(19) Foote, p. 183.

joiced—a race capable of great excellence, mental and physical, whose minds could conceive the glorious idea of Independence, and whose Convention announced it to the world, in May, 1775, and whose hands sustained it in the trying scenes of the Revolution.”

When, therefore, we have proved that Dr. Brevard was a Presbyterian of Scotch-Irish descent, a graduate of Princeton, (a Presbyterian college,) and a ruling elder in the church, we have proved that he was *ex-officio* familiar with those standards in which these national religious covenants are embodied, and that nothing, therefore, could be more natural, than that being imbued with their spirit and versed in their style and order of arrangement, he should have drawn from them the models of his own covenant and declaration.

And, now, as it regards Mr. Jefferson, though it might seem impossible to connect him with these religious documents, yet, strange to say, he has himself in his own Memoir preserved the facts, which afford the strongest confirmation of our position. In the first place, he tells us that from the age of nine, his “teacher was Mr. Douglas, a clergyman from Scotland, and that on the death of his father, he went to the Rev. Mr. Maury.” “It was,” he adds, “my great good fortune, and what probably fixed the destinies of my life, that Dr. William Small, of Scotland, was then (that is when he was at College,) Professor of Mathematics, &c. \* \* \* He, most happily for me, became soon attached to me, and made me his daily companion, when not engaged in the school. \* \* \* With him, (Governor Fanquier,) and at his table, Dr. Small and Mr. Wythe, and myself formed a private quarree, and to the political conversations on these occasions I owed instruction.” (20.)

It is thus apparent that the attention of Mr. Jefferson would be early drawn, *by those necessarily familiar with them*, to the National Covenants, as models of that free, independent and daring spirit, which the condition of this country then demanded. And that such was the case, would appear from these further facts, also stated by himself: “The next event which excited our sympathies for Massachusetts, was the Boston port bill, by which that port was

(20) See Memoirs in wks., vol. 1, p. 2.

to be shut up on the 1st of June, 1774. This arrived while we were in session, in the spring of that year. The lead in the House, on these subjects, being no longer left to the old members, Mr. Henry, R. H. Lee, F. L. Lee, three or four other members, whom I do not recollect, and myself, agreeing that we must boldly take an unequivocal stand in the line with Massachusetts, determined to meet and consult on the proper measures, in the council chamber, *for the benefit of the library in that room.* We were under conviction of the necessity of arousing our people from the lethargy into which they had fallen, as to passing events; and thought that the appointment of a day of general fasting and prayer, would be most likely to call up and alarm their attention. No example of such a solemnity had existed since the days of our distress in the war of '55, since which a new generation had grown up. *With the help, therefore, of Rushworth, whom we rummaged over for the revolutionary precedents and forms of the Puritans of that day, preserved by him, we cooked up a resolution, somewhat modernizing their phrases,* for appointing the first day of June, on which the port bill was to commence, for a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, to implore Heaven to avert from us the evils of civil war, to inspire us with firmness in support of our rights, and to turn the hearts of the king and parliament to moderation and justice. To give greater emphasis to our proposition, we agreed to wait the next *morning on Mr. Nicholas, whose grave and religious character was more in unison with the tone of our resolution,* and to solicit him to move it. We accordingly went to him in the morning. He moved it the same day; the 1st of June was proposed; and it passed without opposition. The Governor dissolved us, as usual. We retired to the Apollo, as before, agreed to an association, and instructed the Committee of the other Colonies, to appoint deputies to meet in Congress at such place, *annually,* as should be convenient, to direct, from time to time, the measures required by the general interest: and we declared that an attack on any one colony, should be considered as an attack on the whole. This was in May. We further recommended to the several counties, to elect deputies to meet at Williamsburg, the 1st of August ensuing, to consider the state of the colony, and particularly to appoint delegates to



a general Congress, should that measure be acceded to by the committees of correspondence generally. It was acceded to; Philadelphia was appointed for the place, and the 5th of September for the time of meeting. We returned home, and in our several counties invited the clergy to meet assemblies of the people on the 1st of June, to perform the ceremonies of the day, and to address to them discourses suited to the occasion. The people met generally, with anxiety and alarm in their countenances, and the *effect of that day through the whole Colony was like a shock of electricity, arousing every man, and placing him erect and solidly on his centre.* They chose, universally, delegates for the Convention. Being elected one for my own county, I prepared a draught of instructions to be given to the delegates whom we should send to the Congress, which I meant to propose at our meeting. In this I took the ground that, from the beginning, I had thought the only *one orthodox* or tenable, which was, that the relation between Great Britain and these Colonies was exactly the same as that of *England and Scotland*, after the accession of James and until the union."

From this paragraph, it is evident 1, that from educational feelings, Mr. Jefferson was led to estimate as very great and very essential, the influence of religion in calling up and alarming the slumbering patriotism and devotion of the people; 2, that from previous knowledge he was at once led to look for models in the covenants and declarations of the Puritans, and especially the Scotch Reformers, which he terms very emphatically "revolutionary precedents and forms." 3. That to give his plans greater effect, he committed them to the advocacy of one whose "grave and religious character" was known; 4, that he invited the clergy (as they were wont to do in those olden times of reformation,) "to meet assemblies of the people, and address to them discourses suited to the occasion;" 5thly, that he records the effect of this combination of religious forms, language and influences to have been, "that the effect of the day was like a shock of electricity, arousing every man, and placing him solidly on his centre, and 6thly, that "the only ground he considered orthodox or tenable" "from the beginning was" "that the relation between Great Britain and these Colonies was exactly the same as that of England

and Scotland, after the accession of James and until the union," that is *the very period* when the National Declarations in question were produced and acted upon.

It appears to us, therefore, a most reasonable and charitable conclusion, that both the Mecklenburg and the Jefferson Declarations are traceable for their manner, spirit, design, order, and language, to the Declarations of the Reformers; and that it is to them, and not Mr. Jefferson, (21) we are indebted for whatever "like an electric shock aroused the country" to revolutionary effort. It may be a confirmation of this theory to remark, that it has suggested itself to other minds.

In the author's work on "Ecclesiastical Republicanism," he has said: "Let any man, we again say, attentively compare the solemn leagues and covenants, by which the continental and Scottish reformers, and the puritans and non-conformists at a later period, pledged themselves to one another by their lives, property, and sacred honor, and bound themselves to spend and be spent in the cause of civil and religious freedom, with our declaration of independence, and he will, we think, allow, that in the former, we have the plan, the spirit, and the prototype of the latter."

The Rev. John McLeod, in a recent discourse on Protestantism, (22) says: "And we have ourselves heard another distinguished civilian (Hon. Gulian C. Verplanck) of our own State, in a public address, trace the origin of the Declaration of American Independence to the National Covenant of Scotland. Nor was it a mere flight of fancy. The Scottish reformers from popery had drunk deep at the fountains of protestantism, as they had been opened on the continent of Europe, and especially in republican Geneva; or, rather, they had drunk, along with the continental reformers, at the same open fountain of God's word. They succeeded the reformers of the Continent in the movement against antichrist, and had all the advantage of their lights.

(21) And yet this is the substance of the famous inscription prepared by Jefferson for himself.

Here lies buried

THOMAS JEFFERSON,

Author of the Declaration of Independence,

Of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom,

And Father of the University of Virginia.

(22) N. York, 1843, p. 21, 22.

Their covenants were bonds of union among themselves, and public declarations of the grounds of their opposition to the anti-christian system, in all its parts. And they were distinguished, *first*, as connecting civil and religious liberty together in the definitions which they made—and, *secondly*, in combining all classes of the community in the effort to secure them. As first formed, and afterwards renewed at various crises of their history, the National Covenant of Scotland was a declaration of the independence of the Church of Christ, as a distinct community from the State; and of both church and state from all foreign control. It was subscribed by the mass of the people, as well as the privileged orders. And as ultimately embodied with additions, in the solemn league and covenant, it became the constitution of the British empire. Under it, the Presbyterians of Scotland and the North of Ireland, the Puritans of England, of whom the majority were Presbyterians, and all other protestants who chose to receive it, united together in the strife for liberty, which had already commenced.”

Thanks be to God for that blessed word and that holy faith, which, in proportion as they are pure and undefiled, foster the spirit of freedom, nourish and sustain liberty, civil and religious, and nerve the heart to fight valiantly and dare every thing in defence of “inherent and inalienable rights.”

How forcibly also are we taught that righteousness exalteth a nation, and that godliness has the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come, and that he is the best patriot who is most deeply imbued with the spirit of the Bible.

How forcibly also are we taught by these facts, that infidelity is as powerless to effect great good as it is powerful to do great harm; and that even infidels are obliged to use the sword of the Spirit when they would accomplish noble and self-denying achievements.

How are we led to value the spirit and principles of the Reformers, from which, as from the two breasts of freedom, the sincere milk of civil and religious freedom have so freely flowed.

We are also taught that religious freedom must, in the nature of the case, and has, in fact, always preceded civil freedom. And to prove that this connection between civil

liberty and pure Christianity, is not incidental, we may refer to the history of Europe. The dawn of religious light at the Reformation was equally the dawn of political enlargement. In proportion as the reformation in religion advanced in any nation, so did that nation partake of the blessings of civil liberty. Spain felt the rise and quick suppression of the reformed opinions, and she continues passively to wear the chains of despotism. In Switzerland the doctrines of a pure religion flourished, and its cantons formed an asylum for the persecuted. Holland cherished the spread of Protestantism, and was repaid in political freedom. France, displays the alteration of change; now struggling for the reformed faith and enjoying the rights of freedom, and again submitting to the corruptions of faith and the usurpation of tyranny. In Britain the blessings of pure Christianity and of civil rights have prospered together. The foundations of British freedom were securely fixed in the great Christian principles of the revolution, and it has been through the careless observance of these that the goodly fabric has risen in strength and in beauty; and what is American freedom but the everflowing stream of this fountain.

Finally, how noble is the testimony here given to the genius and character of Presbyterianism. Even were it as true, as it is untrue, that it has "written no poem" and achieved no literary triumph, **IT HAS DONE MORE. IT HAS PROVED ITSELF TO BE THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH AMID ERROR AND DEFECTION. IT HAS FOUNDED EMPIRES IN THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM AND LIBERTY, AND HAS GIVEN BIRTH TO DECLARATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS WHICH ARE THE WONDER OF THE PRESENT, AND WILL BE THE ADMIRATION OF EVERY FUTURE AGE.**

