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**NON
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REMARKS 238.17
ON THE

Rise, Use, and Unlawfulness

OF

CREEDS

AND

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH,

IN THE

CHURCH OF GOD.

IN TWO PARTS.

BY JOHN M^r DUNCAN,

Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Tammany Street, Baltimore.

And yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. 1 Cor. 12, 31.
He the only Heretic, who counts all Heretics but himself.—Milton.
Historic fact is not Divine institution.—Miller.
Let us not lay aside *charity* to maintain *faith*.—Ganganelli.

Baltimore:

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1825.

DISTRICT OF MARYLAND, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on this twenty-sixth day of March, in the forty-ninth year of the Independence of the United States of America, Joseph Cushing and Joseph Jewett, of the said District, have deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors in the words following, to wit:

“Remarks on the rise, use, and unlawfulness of Creeds and Confessions of Faith, in the Church of God; in two parts, by John M. Duncan, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Tammany Street, Baltimore. And yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. 1 Cor. 12, 31. He the only Heretic, who counts all Heretics but himself.—Milton. Historic fact is not Divine institution.—Miller. Let us not lay aside *charity* to maintain *faith*.—Ganganelli.”

In conformity to an act of the Congress of the United States, entitled “An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;” and also to the act, entitled, “An act supplementary to the act, entitled ‘An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned,’ and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints.”

PHILIP MOORE,

Clerk of the District of Maryland.



Gift
Tappan Presb. Ass.
1-8-1932

DEDICATION.

THE Author most respectfully and affectionately inscribes this little volume to Students of Theology, and to young Ministers of the Gospel in America. The varied interests of the Church of God are presently to be committed to their hands, and great confidence will be placed in their integrity. The country which gave them birth, and which has guaranteed to them the liberty of the most free and enlarged inquiry, occupies a moral position on a most commanding eminence. They may be the means of great good, or the instruments of great mischief—for their opportunities are splendid and numerous; and the present moment demands much vigour of thought, acuteness of observation, importunity in prayer, biblical simplicity, patience and perseverance in effort. Let them be careful that they do not fall below their own level, and disappoint the expectations of all who love the prosperity of the American Churches, and who long to see the gospel diffusing its blessings throughout **THE WORLD.**

2-1-32 AWB

This offering is not made to them without deep solicitude, and an anxious prayer, that the Father of every good and perfect gift, would most abundantly qualify them to sustain the high, but delightful responsibilities, which they are so soon to assume. Their fathers are going to their rest: all the world is in commotion; or, if not roused, is waiting in awful suspense for what TO-MORROW may bring forth. The human mind is in search of something which it has not yet learned to define:—IT IS THE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. And to whom shall mankind look, if the ministers of THE SON OF GOD have no message to deliver, nor any evangelical scheme to substantiate, by DIVINE AUTHORITY?

GET WISDOM; GET UNDERSTANDING.
LET NO MAN DESPISE THY YOUTH.

INTRODUCTION.

THE public have already been informed, that during the last year I was called upon to deliver a Discourse before the Directors and Students of the Theological Seminary, at Princeton. It was necessary that the discourse should be appropriate to the occasion; and, as it is believed, addressed particularly to the Students. Such an occasion is always a solemn one, and its exercises may be followed by the most interesting and important consequences. Paul never spake in more awful tones than in the last charge which he delivered to the Elders of Ephesus; "Take heed, therefore," said he, "unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Nor does he ever appear more deeply affected, than when he forewarns those very Elders of the unhappy occurrences which would shortly take place among themselves. "For I know this," he adds, "that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock; also of your own selves shall men arise, speak-

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ing perverse things, to draw away disciples after them: Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one of you, night and day, with tears." That man is thrown into similar circumstances with this magnanimous Apostle, who is called to address the rising ministry of his own age, on the nature and importance of those relations which they sustain to the church of God. Such is the situation of every Director of the Seminary, who appears to deliver the semi annual sermon at Princeton. Of all audiences that can ever be summoned to listen to his instructions, he has before him then, one of the most peculiar and interesting; and he should feel as though, for the time being, he was constituted their **OVERSEER** by the Holy Ghost. He who can trifle with, or lightly esteem, such responsibilities, or who can bring in any unhallowed motive to preside over their discharge, had better take care how he consents to assume them. They are high, holy, and eventful.

I believe that I did, in some good measure, understand and feel both the value and the delicacy of the exercises which the appointment prescribed; and did honestly endeavour to fulfil the duty to the best of my ability, and to express a proper and tender concern for those young men, whom, for the *first*, and perhaps for the *last*, time, I was addressing in the name of our common Master, and on behalf of a redeemed church and a dying world. It appears, however, that the discourse then delivered, had some of-

fensive peculiarities about it; peculiarities which have procured for it the censure of some aged ministers, who have risen in their might, and with very strong feeling, to counteract its baneful influence. And if heretical it was, they had done right to express their disapprobation of its anti-scriptural principles in a firm, decisive, and dignified manner; but if its doctrines were all true, consistent with the word of God, and appropriate to the circumstances under which it was delivered, it becomes them to have a very good reason to render, for attempting to wound the feelings of an unoffending brother, who had courage enough conscientiously to do, what he thought, his duty.

Perhaps it may be both necessary and proper to explain the motives and views which animated the bosom of the Preacher; as men very often appear excessively fond of sifting each other's motives, and unwilling to concede that there is any thing right, where it may be suspected that there is any thing wrong. If so, no disposition is cherished to withhold them from public inspection. They were all carefully and conscientiously formed; and created deeper anxiety in no bosom than in that which produced, and is not now ashamed to avow, them. They are the following:

1. I believed what was said to be **TRUTH**; that every proposition advanced was abundantly visible in the passage of scripture which had been chosen; and that each particular illustration, under each particular proposition, was just, re-

spectful, affectionate, and easily understood.— The contrary may have been insinuated; but it has not been proved.

2. I believed what was said to be truth *appropriate to the occasion*. The circumstances of the ministerial office were, in a fair and honourable manner, disclosed to those who were very soon to be inducted into that office. Creeds and Confessions of Faith, even supposing them to be what they are so confidently represented to be, yet as they are now used, have a desolating effect upon a young mind, from which it can be redeemed only by the simple study of the scriptures; and church courts, even admitting their divine warrant, yet by their abuse of power, are bold and domineering enough to frighten and discourage any youthful spirit that seeks the spiritual weal of mankind. It was therefore thought proper to proclaim on this subject “a plea for ministerial liberty.” The ideas, which the Presbyterian Church now cherishes concerning the Westminster Confession of Faith, are very different from those which were admitted, when that book was composed, even by its authors; and an intention to resist the encroachments of human authority, constituting its own laws a test of ministerial character, rather than the word of God, is not disowned.

3. I thought that, holding the opinions on the present state of religious society which the discourse unfolds, an obligation was thereby created to declare them to those who were most deeply interested in them, that they might judge for

themselves; and that, instead of blindly pursuing a course which they had not deliberately investigated, they might carefully examine, and most profoundly feel, what was passing every day before their eyes. It was moreover supposed, that this declaration must be made on the very spot where I had been placed by the Providence of God, and in the midst of those who were *Fathers and Brethren*. Would not strangers have thought any interference with them, on similar principles, officious and imprudent; and very politely have bid me attend to the concerns of the religious *family* to which I belonged? The idea, that a man, who has something to tell, which he apprehends to be scriptural truth, and which he fears his associates do not like to hear, must cut himself loose from his social relations, belongs to the dark ages, when civil power reigned over the human conscience; or when an inquisitor's sentence would quickly and effectually determine the fate of an independent ecclesiastic. Ministers of the Gospel must not talk so in these days: ecclesiastical philology has been greatly changed; and we must now talk to one another like *freemen of the Lord*.

Such were the views sustained throughout the Discourse; and that without the smallest intention of hurting any man's feelings, or challenging any other Director of the board, or any Professor of the institution, to controversy. Not one of the principles discussed has been denied, not even by those who felt themselves called upon to enter the *lists* with its author; but in-

ferences of a most serious character have been drawn, which must be admitted, or the principles themselves must be controverted, or these good brethren have not reasoned fairly. The deduction of the inferences is a work of their own; and under such auspices the following remarks are committed to the press; yet the public must not be surprised to find that those very inferences are conceded and justified. All this was fully apprehended. Religious prejudice is no novelty in our world: and that it is both forcible and unfeeling, is a characteristic of its operations, which every man may learn from the tears and blood that have so freely flowed in ages past. All the excitement which has been produced, only proves the truth of what had been said concerning the sensitiveness of the religious mind, on the subject of Creeds and Confessions:—it is so excessive, that even the abuse of them must not be publicly condemned; nor the distinguishing principle of Protestantism, that the Bible is the *only* rule of faith and practice, be fairly argued out. It was well known that both ministers and their people are exceedingly tenacious of their own ecclesiastical forms; that in every age, since their introduction, their advocates have reasoned most zealously in their defence; and that even now, as well as then, a *divine warrant*, which, if it can be proved, closes the controversy at once and for ever, is pleaded in their favour. These facts made it somewhat hazardous to deliver the discourse at all, but yet could not alter the nature of the solemn duty

which the occasion enjoined. My conscience would not accept them as an apology, and I could not decline obeying a call which was felt to be imperious. Yet, after all, the Discourse was framed in a manner so respectful to the feelings of those, who, it was supposed, were inimical to its views, that when it is subjected even to harsh and fiery criticism, its reviewers are obliged to retreat into *intentions and designs*, in order to find matter of censure. "No man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him."

Shortly after the Discourse was delivered, and at the opening of the subsequent session, Dr. Miller addressed an introductory lecture to the Students of the Theological Seminary, selecting for its subject, "The utility and importance of Creeds and Confessions." He did not allude to the Discourse, with which the preceding session had been closed: But the connexion between the two productions has been perceived by every reader; and at the same time it has been explicitly declared by our common reviewer, who has passed on the Professor a very handsome compliment for not being transfixed by either horn of an "apparent dilemma," and who confidently challenges an "*attempt*" to answer the lecture. Dr. Miller will not be surprised, nor offended therefore, if I consider HIM as having thrown me on my own defence; and as having made it *necessary* for me again to appear before the public, to plead in favour of opinions, which the whole circumstances of the case have iden-

tified with my ministerial character. In the following remarks, his name will very frequently appear, and quotations from his writings will be very freely transcribed. If any sentence in those remarks can be justly censured, as either rudely assailing his feelings, or abandoning the subject for the sake of any personal advantage, it shall be most cheerfully retracted. Nothing of the kind is intended; neither is any further controversy sought or desired. I write for *truth*, not for *victory*; and to demonstrate to the public, that some good reasons exist for my scruples on the subject of Creeds and Confessions. No man, who has a good cause to manage, has any need to grow vulgar, and descend to personalities; or if he does, he is a feeble advocate, and his cause would succeed much better without him. At the same time, it would be carrying the rules of politeness too far, to require a writer to enfeeble his argument, or not to give it all the force which the circumstances of his subject demanded. On these terms, the principles of Dr. M's. lecture shall be fairly controverted in the following pages; for I verily believe that he is erroneous, and very erroneous too, in what he has advanced, and that the sentence of heresy is not due to those to whom he awards it.

Some time after Dr. Miller's lecture had been given to the public, a review of both it and the Discourse appeared in "The Christian Advocate." This piece of rude criticism, it is understood, is from the pen of Dr. Green, who perhaps thought that the young heretic was escap-

ing too easily from public reprobation, or that his "strange discourse" was passing too quickly into oblivion. Of this production I scarcely know what to say. It would be far more unpleasant to me, than offensive to him, to state its general character: and it must be left with the reader, to condemn or approve, as he may think proper. Had it been a young man, proud of his portly mien and his sinewy arm, who had taken up the gauntlet, and treated me with such lordly disdain, I might have, perhaps, — at least exhorted him to keep a stricter watch over his own heart, lest in old age a bad temper should be his besetting sin. But, alas! it is an OLD MAN, whose declining years no young man is permitted to distract. I cannot strike my father—my heart would fail me. It is an OLD MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, a character and personage whom all the world should hold in high veneration; and whom all the church should desire to see "such an one as Paul the aged." My hands are tied, and I can only say, that young ministers of the gospel calculate to receive very different treatment from those who have gone before them in the arduous work to which they are called: they hope ever to find such individuals to be "helpers of their joy."

There is one circumstance, however, which the feelings of the public will not suffer me to leave unexplained; though I did suppose, at first, that I had been long enough engaged in their service to shield me from an aspersion so

foul. Be my *opinions* what they may, I had hoped that my *integrity* was not to be impeached. It is surprising that Dr. G. should have alluded to the subject at all; because he knows, that there are in his own denomination, and in every other denomination; and that there are in the Board of Directors of the Seminary at Princeton, ministers and laymen, who espouse very different sentiments. In differing from one another, do none of them differ from the Confession of Faith, which they have alike subscribed? If Dr. G. intended that these brethren should feel the pungency of his remark, he should have told all the truth, and let the whole Christian Church know how far subscription to Creeds and Confessions is desolating our moral feelings; that, if her sons have any magnanimity left, they might rise in their majesty, and put these polluting things out of God's holy sanctuary.

He has thought proper to give the public the following information:—"Mr. D. did this too," "that is, violently impugn all Standards of Faith, we speak of what we witnessed—*within four or five hours after he had himself*, in the most solemn manner, subscribed a formula, by which he pledged himself faithfully to endeavour to carry into effect all the articles and provisions of the plan of that Seminary; one article of which declares, that the Institution is intended to sustain, in their integrity, the Standards of the Presbyterian Church." And in a *note*, after copying out the formula, which the Directors

subscribe, he remarks,—“This was the formula which Mr. D. first read, deliberately and audibly, in the presence of the Board, and then subscribed his name to a copy of it, in a book kept for the purpose.”

Now all this is, what some writers would call, a *false fact*: For this formula I had subscribed about *twelve months before*, instead of “four or five hours;” and that in the city of Philadelphia, and not at Princeton; and on a loose piece of paper, and not “in a book kept for the purpose.” Dr. G. will certainly not tell the Presbyterian Church, that the Directors of the Theological Seminary are all *sworn in every time they meet*; nor can he justify himself, considering the high ground he has taken, in making the assertion he has, with such circumstantial phrase. The affair, as it occurred at Princeton, is as follows. The *book* was handed to me for my signature. I stated that I had a year before subscribed a formula, preparatory to occupying a seat at the board. To this it was replied, that my subscription had been given on a loose piece of paper, which might be *lost*; and that it was desirable to preserve the names of the Directors together. With these explanations, I transcribed my name, never suspecting that I was involved in the repetition of an oath. Had such an idea been suggested, the loose paper must have served for my time of service. For I do think it to be a deep disgrace to the Church, that her ministers must be so continually harrassed with *tests* and *oaths*, as though they had forfeited every claim

to the character of *honest men*; and could not be trusted in ecclesiastical matters, which are yet so deeply interesting to themselves, without continually *swearing* to be faithful. Such views of the ministerial character, carried out into practice, will destroy all ministerial influence. A minister's ordination to office, includes his *oath*, and the whole Church should be satisfied with it. Their yea should be yea; and their nay should be nay.

But still, "four or five hours," or twelve months, may not materially affect the morality of the transaction. A difference might indeed exist, if a man was ever permitted to alter his opinions, when he is convinced that they are wrong; and if twelve months would not be too short a period for such a change, which might probably take place even "within four or five hours." This, however, is not consistent with the confessional system. According to its dictates, a man is not at liberty to throw his doctrinal views into any new form: he must preserve them inviolable until his latest hour, and then transmit them unimpaired to his children. Or, if he should be so eccentric as to acquire different ideas, as he advances in life, and extends his researches after truth, then he must leave *the Church*, which possesses every association of his youth, and whose interests have been entwined with every fibre of his heart.—Thus, the difficulty is only removed one step farther, and there it must be met in all its ugliness.

What then must the Directors of this institution promise to do? Dr. G. it is presumed, has placed their duties in the clearest light; for he has shown considerable anxiety to prove his charge, and to make it speak audibly. According to his quotations, their official aim must be—
 “To form men for the Gospel ministry, who shall truly believe and cordially love, and therefore endeavour to propagate and defend, in its genuineness, and simplicity, and fulness, *that system of religious belief and practice* which is set forth in the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, and Plan of Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church; and thus to perpetuate and extend the influence of true evangelical piety and gospel order.” How far all this might be affected in a single discourse, it is not easy to see. The decision of that question must depend upon the character of the discourse itself. In relation to that one which has fallen under his censure, it is abundantly evident that the very front of its offending is, that it has honourably and honestly maintained, that *the Bible is the only rule of faith and practice*, a proposition which the Confession of Faith has again and again asserted; and it therefore states an *essential principle* of that system of religious belief and practice, which the Directors are bound to preserve in its integrity. Does Dr. G. question this proposition? If he does, then let him disburthen himself of the charge he deals out to others. Does he not question it? Then why so severely condemn others?

Does the Confession contradict itself? Then abandon it; for if the Directors are sworn to reconcile contraries, the matter of their oath is unlawful, because it is impracticable. Most assuredly, if the Confession of Faith itself declares, that God is the only Lord of conscience, and the Bible the only rule of faith and practice, it occupies as high ground, as the Discourse which has provoked so much ire. The truth is, the Confession of Faith never was intended to express what some of the brethren wish to make out; they have added something of their own to it in their rules of order, and the two things do not, and never will, harmonize; one or the other must be given up. For the advocates of Creeds and Confessions, after admitting that the Bible is the *only* rule of faith and practice, have the trouble of proving that there is another rule of faith and practice; and so little do they like the trouble, that they will not express a proposition on the subject in plain language. It is true, they call a human Creed a *test of orthodoxy*, without which no Church ever lived in peace for half a century: but is this test of orthodoxy a rule of faith and practice? They make a distinction also between an infallible, and a fallible rule; but who wants a fallible, when an infallible, rule is to be obtained? So that the whole of this argument has yet to be made plain: let the brethren make themselves clearly understood.

To sustain the charge of the Reviewer, perhaps some great and distinguishing doctrine of

the gospel must have been denied in the discourse, which has so much displeased him. Let him speak for himself: "We feel no reluctance," he says, "but a real pleasure, in stating that, so far as we understand him, Mr. D. appears to *hold fast the essential doctrines of the gospel*. Of these doctrines, his subject did not lead him to treat directly; but, from what he says incidentally, we think we can gather, that he is not only entirely free from any leaning to the Socinian or Unitarian heresy,* but that he fully believes in the native depravity of man, the necessity of regeneration by the spirit of grace, justification solely by the righteousness of Christ, evangelical repentance for sin, the essential importance of obedience to all the commands of God, the progressive sanctification of believers, a judgment to come, and a future state of endless rewards and punishments. Nor only so, but he seems to be a warm advocate for great ministerial fidelity, simplicity, zeal, charity, holy and exemplary living, and an unreserved devotion to the glory of God, and the winning of souls to Jesus Christ. Now this is much as it should be." And what more does the good man require,

*What need is there for such a remark as this? It serves to reveal the character of the reports which had been in circulation, and to show how very sinfully Christian ministers can speak of one another, without ever inquiring into facts. Perhaps the Reviewer might have felt some misgiving on this subject. I have certainly to thank him for assuring the public that I am not a SOCINIAN. The brethren had better omit associating the denial of Creeds and Confessions with this heresy; it is an unmanly attempt to throw public odium over upon those who do not deserve it, and can only demonstrate that they are in want of proof to substantiate their unbrotherly charges.

that he should insinuate a want of *integrity*, and charge me with unfaithful dealing with the plan of the Seminary? Did the Students hear any thing contrary to the "system of religious belief and practice," which had been drawn out in the Confession of Faith, as explanatory of scriptural doctrines? And if not, was the subscription invalidated?

But the Reviewer has declared explicitly the matter of offence. In continuance of what has been already quoted, he says; "It really looks as if Mr. D. had been intended for better things, than to be a panick-struck declaimer against all the formulas of faith in protestant Christendom, and a visionary expectant of the speedy occurrence of such a new and improved state of the world, as to render all old things—not excepting Christianity itself, as it has hitherto existed—as much matters out of date, as the Jewish dispensation was, after the coming of Christ, and the preaching of his Apostles. Here is the rock, on which Mr. D. has unhappily run foul; and we heartily wish he may get off, without eventually making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience."

So then it seems that a man may "hold fast the essential doctrines of the gospel;" but if he should venture to say any thing disrespectful of *human Creeds*, he is in danger of losing his soul for ever, and deserves the severest animadversions which an old minister of the gospel can write. It is too common an idea. There are many besides Dr. G. who cherish this idolatrous

reverence for "human inventions."—The question still is, has "the system of religious faith and practice, set forth in the Confession of Faith," been invaded? The charge, be it remembered, is the violation of a particular *oath*. When the Assembly adopted their book of discipline, did they take such high ground as this? Hear what they say in their prefatory chapter:—"They are unanimously of opinion, that God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrine and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship: *therefore, they consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable.*" And again they declare—"That all church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or, in the way of representation, by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; *that is to say, that the holy scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws, to bind the conscience, in virtue of their own authority, &c.*"* Dr. G. and some others, who have been very liberal in their censure, must have forgotten what the system of religious belief and practice, proposed to the Directors of the Theological Seminary, really is. Apprehending, from the exquisite tenderness which is cherished for Creeds and Confessions, and which I have had abundant opportu-

*p. p. 376—8.

nity of knowing, that some such charge might be brought against me as a Director of the Seminary, I had consulted the Confession of Faith before the discourse was prepared; and had deliberately formed the opinion, that there was nothing in it which the Confession itself did not distinctly assert. Often, and very often, have warm advocates of "our excellent standards" argued against propositions, which those very standards themselves most explicitly declare. And no wonder, for many ardent friends of the Westminster Confession of Faith seldom or ever read it.—But still farther. Suppose the whole doctrine of subscription to our own church Creed had been assaulted, would *the system of belief and practice*, therein contained, have been thereby invaded and set aside? Then the Westminster Assembly itself, which made this book that Presbyterians so highly eulogise, must fall under the reviewer's lash; for that Assembly did declare, that to require subscription simply to the answers to the questions in the shorter catechism, was an UNWARRANTABLE IMPOSITION—as shall be shown in its proper place, in the course of the following remarks.

Once more: Dr. G. says, "Mr. D. is a visionary expectant of the *speedy* occurrence of such a new and improved state of the world, as to render all old things as much matters out of date, as the Jewish dispensation was, &c." That a change, and a very great change too, is coming, Dr. G. himself believes; and so does every christian who has read his Bible. God forbid that

we should be disappointed; for, really, ecclesiastical matters are, at present, most terribly distracted. As to the *speedy* occurrence of such a change, it happens that I believe directly the reverse of that which the Reviewer charges upon me as a serious crime; neither have I made any such visionary calculations, derived from a hasty glance at the vast scene, which a troubled world and a distracted church spread out to the view of every sanctified philanthropist. But suppose this had been done. Have I thereby offended against my subscribed formula, as a Director of the Theological Seminary? That prescribes no doctrinal decision on the question, whether the Millennium shall burst forth within the next twenty years, or shall be deferred for two centuries. And if, in relation to this subject, I have been unfortunate enough to say, that Sectarianism is now falling like the worn out economy of Moses, is it not a fact? May not every man see it? Have not christian denominations felt it to their very centres? Does not Dr. G. himself exult in it, when he says, "*it is pleasant to observe, that whatever sectarian feelings may exist at home, the missionaries, when they meet in heathen lands, lay them all aside; and live, and love, and co-operate as brethren?*" In this way, it may be the walls of division between christian sects will at last be so far prostrated, that while each may retain its peculiar forms and usages, *all may cherish a spirit of christian feeling and fellowship.*" I agree with Dr. G. and have expressed similar ideas in my own language, which he has

thought proper to criticise with all the asperity he could employ. So then, at last, we are both heretics together.—What a strange creature is *man!*

I hope that I have fairly disabused myself of the unjust and cruel insinuation of a want of *integrity*, as to the matter of subscription. If it has not been done to the satisfaction of the reader, I shall never return to it again, and shall hear of its renewal with composed silence. My feelings, on such a subject, are housed under the protection of a good conscience, and my heart is safe. Deeply regretting that any necessity existed to notice the review at all, and particularly that such a long explanation had become requisite, I now part from its author, hoping that it may be our happy lot to meet on that holy mount, where nothing shall hurt or destroy; in that home of the redeemed, where there is fulness of joy, and where there are pleasures forevermore. There the sectarian shall be found a spiritualised man; human inventions shall be forgotten, as the unsanctified elements of earthly strife; and God shall be ALL AND IN ALL.

The following remarks, on the Rise, Use and Unlawfulness of Creeds and Confessions of Faith are now given to the public, because it is conceived that the Lecture and the Review have furnished a very unfair view of the utility and importance of these ecclesiastical rules; and because these two publications, as has already been stated, have, in the minds of their readers, identified the con-

troversy on this subject with my ministerial character. I do not deny the views which are ascribed to me: That is to say, I am an undisguised advocate of the following truths:—That God *alone* is Lord of conscience, and that his Bible is the *only* rule of faith and practice: Or, if the reader pleases, that church courts and human Creeds or Confessions, are not entitled, in any shape whatever, to control the human conscience. If these things be true, and if contrary principles of ecclesiastical policy are in operation in the church, the subject is worth an elaborate discussion. And if my discourse has particularly associated me with that subject in the public mind, I dare not decline to state my reasons for the opinions which have been advanced. Yet most cheerfully would the important cause be yielded into other hands, if any other advocate, to whom the church might be more willing to listen, would take it up. Under these feelings, and with these views, I write.

Though the early ages of the Christian Church are briefly reviewed in the *first part* of these remarks, and the testimony of such historians as were within my reach is freely quoted, yet I attach very little importance to any argument that may be derived from that source:—For, admitting that human Creeds were then in favour and fashion, the fact would only prove these instruments of human authority to be lawful, *by human authority*. And can any given number of human witnesses, however learned

and holy they may be, and however frequently and unanimously they may declare their testimony, prove that one human being has a right to control the conscience of another human being? If our political ideas and institutions were subjected to such a process of reasoning, it would certainly follow that we have no right to be *an independent nation*; and that these United States were traitorous indeed, when they refused to live any longer in colonial servitude; for political despotism and hereditary rulers have long enslaved the human mind. We Americans say, that all men *of right* ought to be free, and that the people are the fountain of political power. If some sagacious statesman should rise to prove these principles unsound and dangerous, because they were not recognized in ancient times, when Nebuchadnezzar kindled his "burning fiery furnace," or when Tarquin despised the approbation of public assemblies, and trampled on the decisions of the Senate, who would listen to him? We have a political charter of our own, which we chose to frame for ourselves, and which other nations have been copying out in blood. The argument is equally futile in ecclesiastical matters; and if carried out, would prove that the Pope is of right our sovereign lord, both in church and state. The Scriptures alone are of any avail here; and if they have declared that God is the only Lord of conscience, and have forbidden any man, or any set of men, to usurp his prerogative, then the united testimony of all ages in sustaining con-

trary principles, would only demonstrate the lamentable corruption of all ages. The argument must be taken fairly and freely from the Bible itself; and the authority of human Creeds must be established by *divine right*. Controversialists on ecclesiastical order most strenuously insist on this; and they do as they ought to do. Let them change terms, and give the argument they so loudly call for.

Then it may be asked, why has any appeal been made to ecclesiastical historians at all in these pages? I reply—because that reference had been made to the early ages of the church, by those who have undertaken to defend Creeds and Confessions; because that reference cannot be sustained; and because the argument, in its present condition, seems to require it: though still such materials of reasoning cannot settle the question on either side. The Bible is the charter of our spiritual freedom: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” On the argument, therefore, that is to be derived from the Scriptures alone, must this cause finally rest; and in this view, every prayerful and attentive reader of God’s word, is fully competent to decide for himself, though he had never read another page of ecclesiastical history, nor ever heard of the opinions of either the Apostolical or later Fathers.

It may be necessary for me here to state, that I am not courting controversy with any man, who may think it incumbent on him to reply. The

duties of a pastoral charge are arduous enough, and are attended by exhausting anxieties enough, to occupy the heart, and fill up the time, of a minister of the gospel. Perhaps this production may be permitted to sink into an early grave. Be it so. Then some louder voice may hereafter rouse the public mind from its lethargy, and more successfully proclaim to mankind what are their religious rights. Perhaps a rejoinder may very quickly appear. If so, whoever may undertake it, I ask him, for his own sake, as well as for the sake of religious truth, to show himself an honorable opponent; and to write on a christian subject, as though he knew it ought to be handled in a christian spirit. Let him be "valiant for the truth upon the earth;" but let him discuss the *subject*, not the *man*. Be the present writer what he may, or however his offended brethren may be pleased to estimate what he has written, the subject itself is of the most dignified and exalted kind. It involves the growth of immortal spirits; the habits of christian living; all that generous and benevolent effort which the churches are making for the regeneration of the world; the glory of God, and the present and everlasting interests of all mankind.

The day is at hand, when all this shall be seen, and most distinctly seen too, whatever obloquy they may now incur, who have hazarded almost every thing that is dear to them in a contest with public opinion. A happier hour is coming, when ministers and their people shall look at things **AS THEY ARE**; and when they shall

most intensely labour to make them **WHAT THEY OUGHT TO BE.** A more joyful day is nigh, when the lightnings of the skies, shining from the east even unto the west, shall light the steps of the Son of Man; when, the Spirit descending like rain upon the mown grass, or as showers that water the earth, the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; when Jehovah shall solve all doubts, as he did by the dew on Gideon's fleece,—afford a refreshing shadow, as he did by Jonah's gourd—and satisfy the hungry, as he did when the widow's barrel of meal did not waste, and her cruse of oil did not fail, or when thousands feasted on the barley-loaves; and when all nations shall take up their song and sing—"God is in his holy temple—Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

REMARKS

ON

CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS.

PART I.

SECTION I.

It is a very unhappy circumstance, that the corruptions of Society can be traced back to so early a period in the history of man. Antiquity often arrays vice in the lovely attire of virtue, and not unfrequently consecrates error as an inheritance too invaluable to be dispensed with. How often do men sustain a favourite scheme by the example of past ages, and argue out the orthodoxy of their own particular views, by appealing to the opinions of their fathers. What religious denomination does not boast of its lineage, and "minister questions" by telling of "endless genealogies?" What disputant now appears on the theological arena, who is not flushed with victory, in proportion as he is able to enlist great names in his favour? In what controversy does not that scale preponderate,

into which you may throw the opinions and sayings of such men as Newton, Calvin, Luther, Melancthon? And why is it so? Is that which is *old*, necessarily *right*? Has the world undergone no changes in modern times? Have the circumstances of society been in nothing modified? Is the intellect of man too much degenerated in the present day, to permit him to think, judge, decide, and act for himself?

We have no intention to satirize the memory of those who have gone before us, to meet the Judge of all the earth. He who does not reverence his fathers, and love their very shades, is out-stripped by barbarous Scythians in one of the most amiable qualities of the human heart. He is too parricidious, to estimate those exquisitely tender descriptions of divine love, which the scriptures afford, when they would liken it to the parental storge. But, at the same time, by no principle of social honour, is any man bound to bury his own individuality of existence under the exactions of their arbitrary rule; nor to paralyze the powers of his own mind, and to extinguish the affections of his own heart, by cherishing an awful and desolating feeling of their federal responsibility. In doing so, he would mock the wisdom of the most High, quench those intellectual fires, which illumine and cheer his own soul, and sport with the fearful realities of that dreadful day, when every one must give account of *himself* to God.

Selfish as man is generally represented to be, yet so common is his dereliction to the best in-

terests of his own spirit,—a dereliction, which it would be the very affectation of filial feeling to justify, by a regard for his father's honour—that we cannot but rejoice in those revolutions, which sometimes are permitted to occur by an overruling Providence. They serve to break that stillness of death which settles on the human heart, and to afford to whole generations another start for “glory, honour, and immortality.” Society, it is true, experiences a tremendous shock, and the most calamitous consequences are endured, ere such changes have accomplished their grand design. But to leave human things alone, and suffer them to run heedlessly on to irremediable ruin, would be more tremendous still. What a tale of terrible things would the spirit of judgment have written out, to appal the universe, if no Redeemer had appeared, to quench the livid flames that sin had kindled around the tree of life! And what sad and gloomy prognostics, would now fill our thoughts by day, and give frightful forms to our dreams by night, when we contemplate the awful desolation of morals which overspreads so large a portion of earth, and converts human genius into so fearful an engine of satanic policy, if we did not know that Jehovah had promised the millennial extension of the gospel of peace! There would be no relief but in a dire insensibility, from which every noble spirit would most quickly break away, to breathe out its aspirations for heaven's rich and all-sufficient mercy.

It is really matter of deep regret, that subjects, of known and universal concern, should be systematically lifted above the reach of common minds. That those very things, which every man should endeavour distinctly and fully to apprehend for himself,—and particularly, when the means by which he may make them fairly his own, are really provided, and freely proffered,—must yet be encumbered by perplexing arrangements, which his fathers have thought proper to transmit. It is a deplorable state of intellectual existence—an inanity which all ought most earnestly to deprecate for themselves and their children. Religion is just such a subject; and, of that class of subjects, the most inestimable. In relation to it, the Scriptural injunction is, *let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*. No man may neglect a pearl of such great price. His soul is at stake: his decisions are for eternity; the operations of his mind, the affections of his heart, the habits of his life, after all the eulogy he may receive, and all the censure he may incur, on earth, are all reserved for divine inspection, at a divine tribunal. The righteousness of those who have gone before him cannot save him; their iniquities cannot condemn him; and, that “the fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children’s teeth are set on edge,” cannot excuse him. He must answer for himself, and *for himself alone*.—Then surely not to think, not to feel, not to act, as *personally* accountable, is a spiritual delirium, which makes him the object of the profoundest

pity; or a spiritual aberration, for which theologians shall in vain attempt to apologize.— Tamely to surrender his personal independence; voluntarily to take refuge in the opinions of his fathers; or to permit others to impose on him such terms of communion in spiritual things; and offer him oral or written tradition, in room of the word of God, which melts and transforms the human heart;—who would not call forth all his strength, and expend all his charity, in a determined effort to disenthral society from such an ill-fated system of mental and spiritual mismanagement?

These reflections do not proceed from a sickly fancy, insulated by its own feverish impulses from the actual circumstances of real life; ranging among dark forms of human sorrow, which have no existence; or dwelling upon fantastic visions which itself rapidly creates. The attributes of social life, whether religious or political, are not always the most delightful subjects a moral writer is called to canvass. We apprehend, we have been partially describing the situation in which Creeds and Confessions place the members of the church. Else, why should the denial of the *authority* of those ecclesiastical instruments, be considered as almost infallible proof of gross and soul-destroying heterodoxy? Why should an argument, made up of a detailed report of the opinions and practices of the fathers, be thought so conclusive? Why should an honest and conscientious effort, to give truth a scrip-

tural, rather than a scholastic, form, excite so many suspicions against him who makes it, and create so many heart-burnings in christian assemblies?

Suffer us to declare what we have been made to *feel* on this subject. Our own experience, to go no further than the Discourse delivered at Princeton, is our voucher. We feel, that we cannot disown the supreme authority of our fathers, and determine to think for ourselves, without provoking the displeasure of professing christians. We feel, that we cannot furnish illustrations of evangelical truth, framed according to our own best conceptions; and modified to meet the peculiarities of the day in which we live, as far as we apprehend those peculiarities; without incurring the heaviest censure, under a gratuitous assumption that we are not "walking in the footsteps of the flock." We feel, that we cannot whisper a doubt as to the theological views of divines of "the olden time," or review the crude notions of our youth by the severer thought of maturer years, without finding our change to be our reproach, in the estimation of thousands whose good opinion we value. We feel, that to abandon that mode of scriptural exposition, which makes every text to utter some Calvinistic or Arminian dogma; and to exchange it for that which brings up every conscience to the bar of divine revelation, to answer for *itself*; or which pours the full radiance of the Bible over the individual and social habits of men; is to subject ourselves to be reviled for a breach of

ordination vows. *These things we have been made to feel:* and we cannot reject the testimony of our senses. The doctrines of our forefathers have been constituted, in practical life, the rules of our faith. We must have their ideas, their terms, their intellectual associations; every thing must be consecrated by antiquity, or we are not orthodox. Once more we ask, who would not labour to redeem society from such mental servitude? Who can suppose that he has too much to sacrifice, to bring men back to God, and to induce them to think for themselves, as if they had a mind and conscience of their own?

We propose a question, if it will not startle the reader as daring and presumptuous:—Are we not, or may we not become, as good judges of the Scriptures, as any of the fathers? For example; when it is declared, that “God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but might have everlasting life;” can we not understand this gracious overture, as well as any apostolical father? And after all that men, both ancient and modern, may say about it, must we not be personally taught its meaning by the Holy Ghost dwelling in us? Let us go a step farther, and ask another question:—As to the application of scriptural principles to present circumstances, do we not understand them *better* than our fathers? They did not live in our day: they knew nothing of the peculiarities of our age: they could not foresee the

operations of the public mind, under the full development of political liberty, the large advances of science, the changes in language, or that enthusiastic spirit which now animates the Bible cause. We award to them, as we ought, closer and more accurate views of the circumstances of their own age; for we know comparatively little about them: but, as we value our responsibility, we must judge for ourselves in this age, which God has committed to our thought and management. Then why must we be compelled to speak as they spoke, to write as they wrote, or to sing as they sung? If they thought it necessary to write Creeds, does it follow that we must write them too? If they thought they had a right to frame a Creed for themselves, does it follow that we have *not* a right to make a Creed for ourselves? If they were good and holy men, does it follow that we may not be good and holy men too? Yet we cannot move a single step in this argument, without being reminded of the superior excellencies of our fathers, and hearing whole generations reviled by a charge of their dwarfish stature and diminutive powers. Has their authority foreclosed all discussion? Have their Synodical decrees irrevocably predestinated whatever may come to pass in these days, and sealed up all our ecclesiastical operations under an unchanging fate? We beg leave to examine this matter for ourselves; and ask our brethren to suffer us to discuss it in a candid, manly and christian manner. Our petition does not transcend the rights which are secured to us by

the word of God, and the republican institutions of our own happy land.

We do not think, as has already been observed, that the testimony of the early fathers is worth half the credit, that is so gratuitously conferred upon it; to whichever side of the present controversy it may be favourable. Of the value of Creeds, and of the authority by which they are imposed, we are fully as competent to judge as they were. They were men like ourselves; and sinful men, and very sinful men too, as well as those of the present day, who must now breathe by their good will. We moreover do not think, that the early ages of christianity afford any evidence in favour of Creeds, as they are at present forced upon our attention; but that their evidence is entirely against the popular opinion on this subject.— These assertions we think we shall make good, in the course of these remarks. It may be necessary however, first to put our readers fully in possession of our ideas of a *Creed or Confession of Faith*; or precisely to point out, what that thing is with which we are so much offended, as to be willing to meet the grievous censure we have incurred. This shall form the subject of our next section.

SECTION 2.

“By a **CREED**, or **CONFESSION OF FAITH**, I mean,” says Dr. Miller,* “an exhibition, in human language, of those great doctrines which are believed by the framers of it to be taught in the Holy Scriptures; and which are drawn out in regular order, for the purpose of ascertaining how far those who wish to unite in church fellowship are really agreed in the fundamental principles of Christianity.” This definition, perhaps, states the subject in its mildest and least offensive terms. But whether it will convey a full and entire view of a *Creed or Confession of Faith* to the minds of his readers, is very questionable; or rather, it is absolutely certain it will not, and cannot. The second part of it does, indeed, partially express the matter of oppression against which we protest; and it does this in the least objectionable form: but it does not declare the “sore evil” in broad terms, and in plain language. We are anxious to give an undisguised view of this matter, that we may not be censured for false delicacy, and unmanly scruples. The whole subject must be met full in the face, and the objection we make, fairly and honourably refuted, or we refuse to be satisfied. It was not the mere existence of Creeds, nor was it the fact that they were pro-

* Introductory Lecture, Page 8.

claimed by particular denominations of christians, that first excited our alarm: but it was the actual oppression of church *authority* in demanding a *subscription* to these sectarian articles, and that not in relation to ourselves either, that opened our eyes upon the "unwarrantable imposition," of which we now complain.

A *Creed*, doubtless, every man must have, who has any desire to know truth, or who has in any measure made truth his study. A *Creed*, to some extent or other, every minister of the gospel must have, who intends to fulfil his official duties with integrity; and every sermon he preaches, as far as it goes, is his *Creed*. And in society, individuals will approximate to, or recede from each other, in their modes of thinking and habits of action; an assimilation may occur, by an inherent or an accidental power in society to regulate itself, and thus some social principles will be adopted by common consent, or something like a *social Creed* will be tacitly formed. For the law of the human mind, while it possesses any moral consistency, is to cherish and evolve its own honest impressions. "I believed," said the Psalmist, "therefore have I spoken:" and, Paul, personating his brethren, while he vouches for himself, adopts the same rule; "we also believe, and therefore speak." No honest man ever acted in any other way; and one of the most necessary qualifications of a faithful minister, is, that he should believe in his own heart, what he declares unto others.

Whoever doubted this? Nay, more; a man may publish to the world what he believes to be true, and it shall be considered as his *Creed*: or the General Assembly may declare every year, and that in the most mathematical order, the various moral doctrines its members may conceive to be true, and these shall form their *Creed*. Still all this does not touch the objection we are making to Creeds and Confessions of Faith. Are Calvin's institutes, Witsius' economy, or Dwight's Theology, our *Creed*? Do we make a belief in any one of them, a term of communion in religious ordinances? There are a multitude of such Creeds in the world; and "of making many books there is no end." But does the present controversy embrace these, or have we taken up our pen unceremoniously to condemn them? The Westminster Confession of Faith itself,—is our hostility against Creeds and Confessions directed against it, *as a book*? Not at all. It may be, for any thing we know about it in the present subject, the best book that ever was written; and the best *Creed* too. But if it was an hundred fold more excellent than it is, our argument would be still unaffected, still unanswered. Manifestly then, there is a necessity that we should distinctly declare what it is to which we object; and that our brethren should meet us on the very ground we occupy: or this whole process of reasoning will degenerate into wretched and undignified vituperation, as though we had some petty jealousies to indulge, or some equivocal plans of per-

sonal aggrandizement to promote. And we claim it as our right, to be treated as honorable men, who prize integrity and a good conscience as highly as our brethren can do. Nothing else could ever induce us to embark in this painful, and, it may be, thankless, enterprize.

By a Creed or Confession of Faith, we understand, not only an exhibition of supposed scriptural doctrine; but that exhibition, when it is made, *imposed upon the human conscience as a term of communion in the ordinances of God's house*. A denomination, or a *voluntary association*, is formed, having the ministry and the whole variety of Gospel ordinances, which is called THE CHURCH; into which no man can enter without subscribing its *Creed* or *Confession*. We do not say that this Creed is imposed by *civil authority*; that, very happily for us who live in this free country, is not practicable. But, if the Creed be imposed as a term of communion in spiritual things, the principle is precisely the same, whether it be done by a civil or an ecclesiastical court. Other men have made a Creed or Confession for us, which we must receive; and whether they be politicians or theologians, who have undertaken to legislate for our consciences, is quite immaterial. The thing is done, and we must submit. *Authority* is exercised, and to this exercise of authority we do most seriously and resolutely object; asserting that the Master never invested those, who use it, with such a dangerous prerogative. He never gave them a right to say, upon what prin-

ciples his church should be formed; but taking that matter into his own hand, he has decided for us all, and commanded us to be of "one mind," and to "love one another." If any imagine that they are duly authorized to take this stand in the management of religious things, it becomes them to show their *scriptural commission*; and to prove that they have a divine right to make a Creed or Confession, to which others must bow.—We have now explicitly stated our difficulty. Some men undertake to make a summary of scriptural doctrines for other men; and bringing that summary into the Church of God, as substantially a rule of faith and morals, they exclude from spiritual privileges those who will not receive and adopt it. Where is their *divine warrant*? Let this question be fairly and unequivocally answered.

We do not know how far the foregoing statement may be considered as fair; for we have heard some of our brethren assert that we lay entirely too much stress upon this view of the subject; and that Creeds and Confessions are not considered *as obligatory on the conscience*. There is in fact every variety of opinion about the matter; and the public mind, by the natural course of events, is exceedingly unsettled on the questions, what a Creed is, and what it is not?—We feel it therefore to be our duty to make good what we have said. Dr. Miller will certainly agree with us, in our exposition of the matter of fact; for after supposing a voluntary association to have been formed, he states the following

case, in which an individual applies for admission:—"I demand admittance into your body, though I can neither believe the doctrines which you profess to embrace; nor consent to be governed by the rules which you have agreed to adopt.—What answer would they be apt to give him? They would certainly reply—your demand is very unreasonable. Our union is a voluntary one, for our mutual spiritual benefit. We have not solicited you to join us; and you cannot possibly have a right to *force* yourself into our body. The whole world is before you. Go where you please. *We cannot agree to receive you*, unless you are willing to walk with us upon our own principles. Such an answer would undoubtedly be deemed a proper one by *every reasonable person*. Suppose, however, this applicant were still to urge his demand; to claim admission as a *right*; and, upon being finally refused, to complain, that the society had 'persecuted' and 'injured' him? *Would any one think him possessed of common sense?* Nay, would not the society in question, if they could be compelled to receive such an applicant, instead of being oppressors of others, cease to be free themselves?*" Now all this may be justified by the brethren, who think we have very little to which to object. But in this case, are not the rules of order, and the scriptural doctrines, as they are said to be, made *obligatory upon the conscience?* The voluntary association formed, we are told, is only "a body

*Lecture n. 45—6.

of professing christians," exercising their "natural right thus to associate;" extracting "their own Creed from the scriptures," and agreeing to act "upon the principles by which others may afterwards be *admitted* into their number." But suppose that this applicant should happen to be a living, growing, humble CHRISTIAN;—and the supposition is by no means an improbable one:—Would Dr. M. or any other christian minister, deny such an one admission to spiritual privileges, according to the terms in which he has described the case, we have quoted from his pages? Most certainly. Into such an association no man can enter, who will not consent to walk with its members on their own principles; or, in other words, who will not consent to receive and adopt their Creed. The whole *world* is before HIM. Then is their Creed made an *authoritative* rule of faith and manners in the house of God; and the doctrines and commandments of men are invested with power to control the human conscience, of which God alone is the Lord.

That we have rightly defined a Creed or Confession, in representing it to be an authoritative rule, imposed upon the human conscience merely under human sanctions, is further evident, from the manner in which it is used, when a young man is to be licensed to preach the gospel, or to be ordained to the ministry. The following questions are asked him. "Do you believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, the only infallible

*Mason's Plea p. p. 6. 7.

rule of faith and manners?" The scriptures then are not the *only rule*; but the only *infallible* rule. Another rule there is that is not infallible. And this mode of phraseology is employed, to make the way clear for the introduction of that second rule; which accordingly is brought forward in full form in the next question: "Do you sincerely receive, and adopt the Confession of Faith of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the holy scriptures?" The Confession of the church, is therefore a *rule*, sustained by the authority of the church, the *sincere* reception of, and unequivocal submission to, which, is a necessary preliminary to induction into the ministerial office. It is intended to add solemnity to the ceremony of ordination; to awaken the attention of the candidate to a most conscientious review of the nature and importance of his official engagements; and, like a well secured contract, to guaranty to the church the fidelity of her ministers.—It is surely a mere evasion to say, that an ecclesiastical Creed is not an authoritative rule of faith and manners, binding upon the conscience.

But there is another official oath, more refined and explicit, which is administered to the Professors of the Theological Seminary, which demonstrates that we have not mistaken the use to which Creeds are applied. The third section of the third article of the plan of the Theological Seminary, is as follows: "Every person elected to a professorship, in this Seminary, shall, on being inaugurated, solemnly subscribe

the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, and Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church, agreeably to the following formula, viz. "In the presence of God and the Directors of this Seminary, I do solemnly, and *ex animo* adopt, receive, and subscribe the Confession of Faith, and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, as the Confession of my Faith; or, as a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief which is contained in holy Scripture, and therein revealed by God to man for his salvation; and I do solemnly, *ex animo*, profess to receive the Form of Government of said Church, as agreeable to the inspired oracles. And I do solemnly promise and engage, not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate any thing which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any thing taught in the said Confession of Faith or Catechisms; nor to oppose any of the fundamental principles of Presbyterian Church Government, while I shall continue a Professor in this Seminary." We do not remember to have seen any thing so revolting as this, since we read Neal's history of the Puritans;—those glorious men, who refused to have their consciences trammelled in this manner. We confess, that under such circumstances we can see but little use for the Bible, and cannot avoid remarking, that if the scriptures should disclose any thing to the Professor's mind, during his laborious researches, which should contravene any thing contained in our sectarian formulary,

he has thus subscribed, either he must not declare it, or he is necessarily absolved from his oath by a higher power, and thus the whole transaction, so awfully solemn, becomes nugatory. Surely in this case a *Creed* is a most fearful instrument; exercising authority enough to make any man tremble, and rendering it a most dangerous employment to study the Bible for himself.

Let us state a case, which will bring the subject home to every man's bosom; and to decide accurately and promptly on which, will require no philosophic subtlety. We shall not colour it too highly, nor substitute the visions of life for its realities. Our subject seeks no advantage from the use of hyperbole. A young man of acknowledged talents and unfeigned piety, covets employment in the ministry, after having endured all those anxieties which that subject, as a matter of consultation between his own soul and the great head of the church, creates. His early history forms a train of providential circumstances of the most happy character; and every facility had been afforded to qualify him for the work. His believing parents had lent him to the Lord. He lived nigh to the sanctuary, and, like Samuel, as he grew up, he was employed in its service according as opportunities occurred, or his own strength admitted. He cannot be charged with "habitual indiscretion," nor censured on account of "a defect in sobriety of mind." His gifts, as far as he has

been permitted to exercise them, have procured for him the esteem and confidence of all who know him; and effects have followed, which look very much like the master's blessing shed down upon his efforts, and now audibly bespeaking him for himself. His lot has been cast among *us*: we knew him from his infancy; his education was conducted under our eye; and he has become most affectionately attached to our old men, and our young men. His fathers were labourers in the same vineyard before him, and when they went to their rest, they left Elijah's mantle to their young Elisha: and now a call from the church demands his active services.

Such is the case. What church court would hesitate to license or ordain him? He is a faithful man;—he is “able to teach others also.” In ordaining him, the Presbytery would not contravene the scriptural statute, to “lay hands suddenly on no man.” The way to proceed is perfectly clear, for every thing has been obtained which the scriptures call for. But a difficulty exists. He imagines that our Creed or Confession, is a mere piece of human legislation, and he cannot consent to subscribe to it as obligatory on his conscience. He acknowledges as Lord of his conscience, none but Jehovah. Other ministers of the gospel, he views as his brethren whom he can dearly love, but refuses to know them as the directors of his faith. He judges of the peculiarities of his own social position, and labours according to his ability, to produce *there* the greatest amount of spiritual effect: but

he shrinks from a proposition, which constitutes his brethren at a distance, or his fathers, who have long since gone to the dead, and around whose sepulchres he has often walked, his spirit saddened by the multitude of his own melancholy recollections, the overseers of his thoughts and duties. He thinks he must see the word of life with his own eyes, hear it with his own ears, handle it with his own hands, and taste it with his own lips. He knows he might keep all this a secret with himself, never whispering to his Presbytery that his mind has been given up to an orbit so eccentric. But he is too ingenuous. He detests vows curtailed by mental reservation, and hidden from unsuspecting presbyters, but seen by the heart searching God. With a guileless heart and an open brow, he frankly confesses the whole, and respectfully, but firmly, claims his **RIGHT**: a *right*, which exists independently of the *will* of the church court at whose bar he stands; and the evidence of whose existence must be sought for in his own spiritual character and ministerial qualifications.

Now what shall be done with this young Apollos, who so dearly loves the scriptures, and who is so jealous of their honour? Shall he be licensed and ordained? If he may, then all is granted for which we contend. If he may not, then the very difficulty exists of which we complain; i. e. a Creed is an *authoritative rule*, prescribing *law* in God's house: or, in other words, our Confession of Faith is a *human Bible*, containing doctrines and precepts, which it enjoins

upon the ministry of reconciliation to preach to sinners for their salvation.

It grieves us to say, that such a youth would be rejected by our church courts; for he will not agree to walk with them on their own principles. It will not at all lessen the difficulty, that he may connect himself with any other religious denomination; for that is violently to rupture all the associations of his life, and to insult all the fine feelings of his heart. And besides, all these denominations are but voluntary associations, constructed on the same principle; and he may range through them all, until he meets the *Racovian Catechism* itself, or some of its shreds, manufactured into a Standard of Faith.

In such a case, what has a church judicatory done? It may be replied, "We have refused to receive an uncomfortable inmate into our voluntary association, even as a head of a family would turn an unpleasant guest out of doors." But the question is, even admitting the simile, who is the Head of the family in the present case? Is it the Presbytery, who has been making these laws of its own accord, or is it the Father of mercies? And can it be made appear that our heavenly Father has turned off the youth of whom we have been speaking, as an irreclaimable prodigal?—Suffer us to declare our judgment. The Presbytery have turned a living christian, an amiable, consecrated, young servant of the Lord Jesus, out of THE VISIBLE CHURCH OF GOD; they have desecrated a temple of the Holy Ghost, where a purified spirit ministers under

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his heavenly impulses, have refused him a right and a privilege to which he is equally entitled with themselves. The cup of ecclesiastical life, which sparkled in his hands, they have cruelly dashed from his lips. They have denied him the crumbs that fall from his father's table, and have sent him out into the wide world, that waste, howling, wilderness, without a christian companion, and as much alone as Elijah among the idolaters of Israel. He must go and seek that sympathy among strangers, which is denied to him among his brethren; or, wail his fate, like David, when the sparrows nestled over the altars of God, whence he was driven by those of his own house. And where is their WARRANT? Let them show us the sign manual of the King of saints. We refuse to justify such proceedings on any other ground.—We charge none of our brethren with any *intention* to do these things: for we believe them to be conscientious men. But such, in our view, is the consequence of the Creed-making system, and therefore do we object to it.

We are not alone in entering our protest against this ecclesiastical oppression. The Westminster Assembly itself,—that venerated body, which our brethren are so fond of eulogizing, as forming a most beautiful and brilliant constellation in their ecclesiastical hemisphere, clustering on their horizon, and gilding it with the loveliness of the morning, and which had nevertheless its own faults and weaknesses;—the

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Westminster Assembly itself, never pressed their own Confession of Faith into this extreme of legislative control. We are told, that—"Notwithstanding the zeal expressed against toleration, the Confession of Faith it drew up was not made the legal standard of orthodoxy. It was not subscribed by any member of that Assembly, except by the prolocutor, assessors, and clerks. *Nor till forty years after was a subscription or assent to it required of any layman or minister, as a term of christian communion.* And Mr. Nye, a member of that Assembly, informs us, when the Scots Commissioners proposed, that the answers in the shorter catechism should be *subscribed by all the members*, the motion was *rejected*; after a considerable number had shown it was *an unwarrantable imposition.*"* Our brethren have been too quick in uttering their severe criticisms. They themselves have been making a use of their own Confession of Faith, which its framers never designed; and have been pressing it upon the consciences of christians in the present day, to an extent, which those very divines, assembled by right of *civil authority*, condemned as unwarrantable. Nay, more:—in our retrograde movements to the reign of spiritual tyranny, we are required to subscribe, not merely the shorter catechism, but *the whole book*;—a dose of legislative poison, which even the Scots Commissioners themselves, in those days, could not swallow. If we pronounce this matter of subscription, as it is

* Neal's History of Pur. vol. 3, p. 387. Note.

received in the present day, to be an unwarrantable imposition, we have violated, we know not what solemn oath; we have broken, we know not what social compact. We must be very heavily censured for awful criminality; must meet suspicions of the most uprotherly and palsyng kind; must be traduced as affected, and maddened by the action and re-action of some unholy alliance; and must be ranked among the worst troublers of the church. If we mistake not; if our principle of intellectual living has not been paralyzed amid the visions of a vitiated fancy; and if, in our bosoms, conscience has not succumbed to some unhallowed motive we cannot detect; then is there something in this subject of divine authority, or of human authority sinfully transformed into the divine prerogative, that will one day convulse the whole christian world. And if the subject is now about to summon christian ministers, in the character of plaintiff and defendant, again to argue out their religious ceremonies, on *jure divino* principles, we beseech them to remember that the Judge of all the earth is a looker on; and that these things, which are now done upon God's Holy Mount, shall presently be told in the eternal world. O what an anxious hour shall that be, when the signs of the times;—tokens in the heavens above, and tokens in the earth beneath—tokens more fearful than the “blackness, and darkness, and sound of a trumpet, and voice of words,” which shook Mount Sinai to her base, and

made Moses so "exceedingly fear and quake"—more portentous than those bloody, fiery symbols, which overhung the ill-fated Metropolis of Judea, the murderess of our Lord;—what an hour shall that be, when the signs of the times shall announce, that the end of the world is at hand! "My soul trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments," O Lord! "Who would not fear thee, O, King of nations?"

The following quotation fully agrees with the judgment of the Westminster Assembly, and expresses our ideas with great point and force. It is from "a Treatise on Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes," written by the great Milton, that true son of human liberty; who, had he lived in our day, and in our country, might have found ample scope for all the powers of his mighty genius, in the cause which was so dear to his heart: "Seeing, therefore, that no Man, no Synod, no Session of men, though called the Church, can judge definitively the sense of scripture to another man's Conscience, which is well known to be a general maxim of the Protestant religion; it follows plainly, that he who holds in religion that belief, or those opinions which to his Conscience and utmost understanding appear with most evidence or probability in the Scripture, though to others he seem erroneous, can no more be justly censured for a heretic than his censurers; who do but the same thing themselves, while they censure him for so doing. For ask them; or any Protestant, which hath most authority, the Church or Scripture? They

will answer, doubtless, that the Scripture: and what hath most authority; that no doubt but they will confess is to be followed. He then, who to his best apprehension follows the Scripture, though against any point of doctrine by the whole church received, is not the heretic; but he who follows the Church, against his Conscience and persuasion grounded on the Scripture. To make this yet more undeniable, I shall only borrow a plain simily; the same which our own writers, when they would demonstrate plainest, that we rightly prefer the Scripture before the Church, use frequently against the Papist in this manner. As the Samaritans believed Christ, first for the woman's word, but next and much rather for his own, so we the Scripture: first, on the Church's word, but afterwards and much more for its own, as the word of God; yea, the Church itself we believe then for the Scripture. The inference of itself follows: if by the Protestant doctrine, we believe Scripture, not for the Church's saying, but for its own as the word of God, then ought we to believe what in our conscience we apprehend the Scripture to say, though the visible Church, with all her Doctors gainsay: and being taught to believe them only for the Scripture, they who so do are not heretics, but the best Protestants: and by their opinions, whatever they be, can hurt no Protestant, whose rule is not to receive them but from the Scripture; which to interpret convincingly to his own conscience, none is able but himself, guided by the Holy Spirit; and not so guid-

ed, none than he to himself can be a worse deceiver. To Protestants therefore, whose common rule and touchstone is the Scripture, nothing can with more conscience, more equity, nothing more Protestantly can be permitted, than a free and lawful debate at all times, by writing, by conference, or disputation of what opinion soever, disputable by Scripture: concluding, that no man in religion is properly a heretic at this day, but he who maintains traditions or opinions, not probable by Scripture, who, for aught I know, is the Papist only; he the only heretic, who counts all Heretics but himself."

We presume we are now fully understood, as to the unlawful use which is made of Creeds in the house of God. They are mere human instruments employed as authoritative rules. And though in some respects they are practically abandoned, as we shall hereafter evince, yet, as far as our church courts have power to sustain them, they are enforced as rules binding on the conscience. And we say, that Jehovah, the only Lord of conscience, has delegated no such power to man. Let men make as many Creeds as they please; let them publish them as often as they please; let them combine together and make them as minute and philosophical as they please; but let them not impose their Creeds, when they are thus made, upon the consciences of others, and erect them into ecclesiastical ordinances, as though they were enacted by divine authority. Let them not make them terms of communion between Christ and his redeem-

ed; or turn out of the visible church, as unworthy of spiritual fellowship, those who have other and better evidences of their christian character, than submission to the commandments of men. The Master himself never acted thus. He did not demand the belief of men to the simple declaration of his divine mission; but the Spirit of God attested his words as true. He appealed to his works as a demonstration suited to the capacities of his hearers, and as leaving them without excuse. Every opponent is struck dumb by the self-evident argument he advanced, or confounded by the miracles he performed. The Apostles did not shut up the avenues of inquiry, nor condemn the noble Bereans for examining the scriptures, to ascertain whether what they had preached was true or not. And if in our day men were not called to subscribe a Creed made ready to their hands; if they were not reduced to the cruel and unrighteous alternative of receiving what our church courts may be pleased to call gospel, or of being shut out from religious ordinances; if every man was required, as the nature of the case requires him, to preach what he has learned for himself from the Bible, and what he can demonstrate to be there by trains of reasoning, such as men adopt on every other popular subject; and if the people were made to feel the imperious necessity of searching the scriptures for themselves, and that with many prayers and tears, a very important change would soon take place. Ministers would betake themselves to the Bible

instead of systems of theology; the Lord of hosts would be to them "for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, and for a spirit of judgment," when they sit as ministerial judges in Mount Zion's heavenly seats; and the sabbath would become their spiritual jubilee, when they should be heard to pray and preach, as though an unction had come down upon them from heaven: while the people would read more, think more, pray more, and grow more than they do. They would alike feel the full stress of personal responsibility; their "faith would not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God;" and the opinions of the fathers would not be so popular a substitute for their own personal efforts. A Creed they would all have; a better Creed than they have now; a Creed which each one would form under the teaching of the Holy Ghost; a Creed which—we believe, and therefore speak—would shut out the multitude of errors our brethren seem to apprehend, and produce union and harmony, in a measure which never has existed since ecclesiastical councils first took the faith of mankind into their own hands. But a Creed, imposed by human authority, calling for an impracticable uniformity, in words and ideas, transmitting its influence from age to age, and cutting down the conceptions of men to its own requisitions, whatever changes may occur in the world, we cannot away with. Here is where we have our unwilling contest with our brethren, and where we intend to meet

them with all the firmness, affection, and zeal we possess. "Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way."

SECTION 3.

MANY christians, who have had neither leisure nor opportunity to examine the subject for themselves; imagine, that the primitive church was an ecclesiastical body, regulated by Presbyteries, Synods, Assemblies, Conferences, Conventions, or Associations, like those we have now. Such an impression is the natural consequence of long established usage; and in the present case, it has become deep and fixed, from the circumstance, that these institutions have been represented as established by *divine right*. Of course it is quite natural to look for an annual convocation of delegates, convened from all parts, to take cognizance of the whole, and duly authorized to settle questions of doctrine, and determine cases of discipline. They will be very much surprised to be told that this was not the fact. That in those early times, the churches, though Presbyterian, were yet *independent*; and that they were not joined together by any such confederacy, as we have been in the habit of supposing so essential to the peace and prosperity of religion. A great part of the second century had

elapsed before these associations were formed; and during that period, the churches were connected together by no "other bonds than those of CHARITY." The custom of holding Councils commenced in Greece, where "nothing was more common than this confederacy of independent states," as a mere political expedient; and, after all that has been said in favour of Councils, they were a mere imitation of the political institutions of that country. This is historical fact, if the ecclesiastical historians we have consulted speak truth.

It is our province, after making such assertions, to present our proof. Our first appeal shall be to the pages of the learned Dr. Mosheim, whose volumes are, with great confidence, put into the hands of the rising ministry, and whose fidelity as a historian will not be disputed.

In his introduction, when detailing the subjects of which he conceived himself called upon to treat, he remarks;—"In that part of the sacred history which relates to the doctrines of christianity, it is necessary, above all things, to inquire particularly into the degree of authority that has been attributed to the sacred writings, in all the different periods of the church, and also into the manner in which the divine doctrines they contain, have been explained and illustrated. For the true state of religion in every age can only be learned from the point of view in which these celestial oracles were considered, and from the manner in which they were expounded to the people. *As long as they were the only rule of*

Faith, religion preserved its native purity; and in proportion as their decisions were either neglected or postponed to the inventions of men, it degenerated from its primitive and divine simplicity.”* This is very plain language, and deserves the attention of those who inquire how the church could possibly survive the renunciation of human Creeds? As the inventions of men, the historian declares it to have been a uniform fact, that the church did better without, than with, them; and that they became the very means of corrupting the faith of the church.

In giving his view concerning the doctrine of the christian church during the first century; after having stated that the Bible was the rule of faith and practice; and declared the solicitude of the Apostles and their disciples to put that book into the hands of all christians; Dr. Mosheim goes on to inform us of the method of teaching religion during that period:—“The method of teaching the sacred doctrines of religion, was, at this time, most simple, far removed from all the subtile rules of philosophy, and *all the precepts of human art*. This appears abundantly, not only in the writings of the Apostles, *but also in all those of the second century*, which have survived the ruins of time. *Neither did the Apostles, or their disciples, ever think of collecting into a regular system the principal doctrines of the christian religion, or of demonstrating them in a scientific and geometrical order.* The

* Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, page 5.

beautiful and candid simplicity of these early ages rendered such philosophical niceties unnecessary; and the great study of those who embraced the gospel, was rather to express *its divine influence* in their dispositions and actions, than to examine its doctrines with an excessive curiosity, or to explain them by the *rules of human wisdom*.

“There is indeed extant, a brief summary of the principal doctrines of Christianity in that *form*, which bears the name of the *Apostles’ Creed*, and which, from the fourth century downwards, was almost generally considered as a production of the Apostles. All, however, who have the least knowledge of antiquity, look upon this opinion as *entirely false and destitute of all foundation*. There is much more reason and judgment in the opinion of those, who think that this Creed was not all composed at once, but from small beginnings was imperceptibly augmented, in proportion to the growth of heresy, and according to the exigencies and circumstances of the church, from whence it was designed to banish the errors that daily arose.”*

We have nothing told us, in the foregoing extract, of these authoritative rules of faith and manners, which are now imposed upon the human conscience. On the contrary, their very existence is plainly denied, and the Bible itself is declared to be the standard of the churches. There is not even a regular detail of the doctrines of christianity, as forming a happy instrument.

* Vol. I. p. 113—14.

of spiritual instruction, attempted. The Christians of these early ages, adopted a very different method of imparting to their offspring a religious education: "They took all possible care to accustom their children to the study of the scriptures, and to instruct them in the doctrines of their holy religion; and schools were every where erected for this purpose, even from the very commencement of the Christian church."* And even the Apostles' Creed itself, as to its origin, is declared to be equivocal: and not one sentence is uttered about any sanction it received from any such measure of ecclesiastical authority, as is now exercised.

Further, and in relation to the first century, this historian informs us, that—"The churches, in those early times, were *entirely independent*; none of them subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but each one governed by its own rulers and its own laws. For, though the churches founded by the Apostles, had this particular deference shewn them, that they were consulted in difficult and doubtful cases; yet they had no juridical authority, no sort of supremacy over the others, *nor the least right to enact laws for them*. Nothing, on the contrary, is more evident, than the perfect equality that reigned among the primitive churches; nor does there even appear, in this first century, the smallest trace of that association of provincial churches, from which *Councils* and *Metropolitans* derive their origin. It was

* lb. p. 115.

only in the second century that the custom of holding Councils commenced in Greece, from whence it soon spread through the other provinces."† This doctrine of human authority controlling religious matters, had not been formed at so early a period; when, as Jerome expresses it, "the blood of Christ was yet warm in the breasts of Christians, and the faith and spirit of religion were brisk and vigorous." It is an exotic in the church, which may be nourished and forced by unnatural heat: but it is not one of Calvary's plants, germinating under the dews of the Spirit of inspiration, and blossoming by Apostolic culture:—its fruit is yielded under heresy's deadly night-shade.

Following our historian down to the second century, he gives us the following statement—
 "During a great part of this century, the Christian churches were *independent* on each other; nor were they joined together by association, confederacy, or any other bonds, but those of *charity*. Each Christian assembly was a little state, governed by its own laws, which were either enacted, or, at least, approved by the Society. But, in process of time, all the Christian churches of a province were formed into one large ecclesiastical body, which, like confederate states, assembled at certain times, in order to deliberate about the common interests of the whole. This institution had its origin among the Greeks, with whom nothing was more common than this confederacy of independent states,

†Ib. p. 106.

and the regular assemblies which met, in consequence thereof, at fixed times, and were composed of the deputies of each respective state. But these ecclesiastical associations were not long confined to the Greeks; their great utility* was no sooner perceived, than they became universal, and were formed in all places where the gospel had been planted. To these assemblies, in which the deputies or commissioners of several churches consulted together, the name of *Synods* was appropriated by the Greeks, and that of *Councils*, by the Latins; and the laws that were enacted, in these general meetings, were called: *canons*, i. e. *rules*.

"These *Councils*, of which we find not the smallest trace before the middle of this century, *changed the whole face of the church, and gave it a new form; for by them the ancient privileges of the people were considerably diminished, and the power and authority of the bishops greatly augmented.* The humility, indeed, and prudence of these pious prelates prevented their *assuming all at once the power* with which they were *afterwards* invested. At their first appearance in these general Councils, they acknowledged that they were no more than the *delegates* of their respective churches, and that they acted in the name, and by the appointment, of *the people*. But they soon changed this humble tone, imperceptibly extended the limits of their authority, turned their influence into *dominion*, and their Councils into *laws*; and

* *Quere.*

openly asserted, at length, that CHRIST *had empowered them to prescribe to his people authoritative rules of faith and manners.* Another effect of these Councils was, the gradual abolition of that perfect equality, which reigned among all bishops in the primitive times. For the order and decency of these assemblies required, that some one of the provincial bishops met in Council, should be invested with a superior degree of power and authority; and hence the rights of Metropolitans derive their origin. In the mean time, the bounds of the church were enlarged, the custom of holding Councils was followed wherever the sound of the gospel had reached; and the universal church had now the appearance of one vast republic, formed by a combination of a great number of little states. This occasioned the creation of a new order of ecclesiastics, who were appointed, in different parts of the world, as heads of the church, and whose office it was to preserve the consistence and union of that immense body, whose members were so widely dispersed throughout the nations. Such was the nature and office of the *Patriarchs*, among whom, at length, ambition, being arrived at its most insolent period, formed a new dignity, investing *the bishop of Rome*, and his successors, with the title and authority of PRINCE OF THE PATRIARCHS.”†

Here then we have the rise of ecclesiastical power, constructing its claims upon the ruined privileges of individual conscience, and absorb-

† *Ib.* p. 174—6.

ing the inalienable rights of man; its gradual advances, its accelerated growth, while Christians became sluggish, and Bishops grew ambitious; and the awful extreme of despotic sway to which it hastened, even in those first ages of Christianity, to which appeals are so often made with the most ungenerous confidence. Here we have that retrograde movement in spiritual things, which degraded the Church from the dignified simplicity of being under law to Christ, dressed her off in the meretricious attire of human institutions, and exchanged the glorious principles of the new covenant, for the forbidding peculiarities of a human compact. Here we have, in an altered form of government, the unity of the Church expounded as a political principle, instead of that pure, spiritual, ethereal subsistence, denominated "the unity of the Spirit." Here we have the origin of those authoritative rules of faith and manners, which have so completely taken the place of the Bible, that unless they are received, spiritual privileges are forfeited. And surely there has been nothing like a *divine warrant* exhibited and proved; nor any thing more than a mere transcript of historical facts, proving how quickly, and how entirely, religious society may be corrupted. It is utterly in vain to tell us of any Creed or Confession, introduced by any Apostolical Father or Fathers, as a bond of union in the Church, when the Church was united by no other bonds than those of *charity*; or of an authoritative rule of faith and manners, when

the Church had not yet conceived the idea of ecclesiastical power. "Letters of Communion," it would seem, were freely exchanged; but that idea, which transformed Ministers of the Gospel, who ought to have been among the most kind and compassionate of mortals, into Lords over God's heritage, was never formed, until that ecclesiastical measure, which created Synods and Councils, *had changed the whole face of the church, and given it a new form.* It is utterly in vain to tell us, that this new policy, while marked by a great deal of clerical modesty, was just as bad as when the bishops became bold adventurers, uttered their pretensions in the loudest tones, and brought Christendom to their feet. And surely it is worse than vain, to attempt to convince us that the glorious simplicity of the christian church was preserved, when church courts came out with their full grown prerogative, of majestic mien, and royal air, declaring that they were empowered to enact rules for the human conscience.

It is manifest that this historical portrait, which Dr. Mosheim has drawn, represents more than the deteriorated condition of the church during the second century. We must therefore follow him down through the third and fourth centuries, and observe the gigantic strides of this ecclesiastical power, which mismanaged circumstances had created. In the third century, he informs us:—"The face of things began to change in the christian church. The ancient method of ecclesiastical government, seemed, in gene-

ral, still to subsist, while, at the same time, by imperceptible steps, it varied from the primitive rule, and degenerated towards the form of a *religious monarchy*. For the bishops aspired to higher degrees of power and authority than they had formerly possessed; and not only *violated the rights of the people*, but also made gradual encroachments upon the privileges of the *Presbyters*. And that they might cover these *usurpations* with an air of justice, and an appearance of reason, they published *new doctrines* concerning the nature of the church, and of the episcopal dignity. which, however, were, in general, so obscure, that they themselves seem to have understood them as little as those to whom they were delivered. One of the principal authors of this change, in the government of the church, was CYPRIAN, who pleaded for the power of the bishops with more zeal and vehemence than had ever been hitherto employed in that cause, though not with an unshaken constancy and perseverance; for, in difficult and perilous times, necessity sometimes obliged him to yield, and to submit several things to the *judgment and authority of the Church*.*

Again,—“The bishops assumed, in many places, a *princely authority*, particularly those who had the greatest number of churches under their inspection, and who presided over the most opulent assemblies. They appropriated to their evangelical function the splendid ensigns of *temporal majesty*. A throne, surrounded with

* *Ib.* p. 256—9.

ministers, exalted above his equals the servant of the meek and humble JESUS; and sumptuous garments dazzled the eyes and the minds of the multitude, into an ignorant veneration for their *arrogated authority*. The example of the Bishops was ambitiously imitated by the *Presbyters*, who, neglecting the sacred duties of their station, abandoned themselves to the indolence and delicacy of an effeminate and luxurious life. The *Deacons*, beholding the Presbyters deserting thus their functions, *boldly usurped* their rights and privileges; and the effects of a *corrupt ambition* were spread through every rank of the sacred order.”*

So much for the third century. In the fourth appeared CONSTANTINE the GREAT, who, having been converted to Christianity in consequence of seeing a *miraculous Cross* in the air, spread universal joy among Christians by becoming the PATRON of the Church. But Constantine, who was very far from leading a religious life, instead of breaking up this dominion over the human conscience, confirmed and extended it;—appropriating to himself the pre-eminence. “Though he permitted the church to remain a body politic, distinct from that of the state, as it had formerly been, yet he assumed to himself the supreme power over this sacred body, and the right of modelling and governing it in such a manner, as should be most conducive to the public good. This right he enjoyed without any opposition,

*Ib. p. p. 259—60.

as none of the bishops presumed to call his authority in question." The people chose their bishops; the bishops governed their districts; the provincial councils governed their provinces, and Constantine, at the head of *oecumenical* or *general* councils, governed the whole.

The first of these general councils, which owed their existence and authority, not to the commandments of the Lord Jesus given in the Bible, but, to the political schemes of this eulogized emperor, assembled at Nice, in Bithynia, in the year 325, and was composed of 318 bishops. In this assembly, the disputes between Alexander and Arius on the subject of the Trinity, among other matters, on which it was thought proper that the council should legislate for the peace of the church, were to be adjusted by the exercise of *absolute power*. Our historian says, that "after many *keen debates, and violent efforts of the two parties*, the doctrine of Arius was condemned; CHRIST declared *consubstantial*, or of the same essence, with the Father; the vanquished presbyter *banished* among the Illyrians; and his followers *compelled to give their assent to the Creed or Confession of Faith, which was composed by this council.*"* Reader, behold the origin of Creeds and Confessions of Faith; or of authoritative rules of faith and manners in the church of God; for which so earnest a plea is now advanced, as though they had been sanctioned by the master himself, and

*Ib. p. 402—3

had been framed by the light of pentecostal fires:

It is surely to be supposed that the church now, under the happy auspices of a fixed Creed, and the mild reign of a Christian emperor, enjoyed universal peace, and that her members lived together in great union and harmony. For this, we are told, is the peculiar value of a Creed. But the fact was directly the reverse. For though, out of 318 bishops, Arius was supported only by twenty-two; and but two of these persisted in refusing to subscribe the Creed, the controversy was far from being settled. "The commotions it excited, remained yet in the minds of many, and the spirit of dissension and controversy triumphed both over the decrees of the council, and the authority of the emperor. For those, who, in the main, were far from being attached to the party of Arius, found many things reprehensible both in the decrees of the council, and in *the forms of expression* which it employed, to explain the controverted points; while the Arians, on the other hand, left no means untried to heal their wound, and to recover their place and their credit in the church. And their efforts were crowned with the desired success."* In the year 330, Arius was recalled; the laws enacted against him were repealed; and he was, by the emperor's permission, to be admitted into the church, on condition of his declaring his adherence to the orthodox Creed. Dr. Milner says, that the

*Ib. p. 406.

emperor "sent for him therefore to the palace, and asked him plainly, whether he agreed to the Nicene decrees. The heresiarch, without hesitation, subscribed: the Emperor ordered him to swear; he assented to this also."* So that this artful chief, whom the orthodox could not detect by simply using the scriptures, was able to foil them at last by subscribing their own Creed: and it moreover appears, that "though victorious in argument in the face of the whole world, with the Council of Nice, and an orthodox emperor on their side, they yet were persecuted and oppressed, and their enemies prevailed at court."

Nor is this all. When one council had formed a *Creed*, other councils thought they had an equal right to frame Creeds too: and a number of Creeds are presented to us by ecclesiastical historians, in a very short period after the Nicene decrees were so gloriously ushered into the world. Socrates, after writing their history, undertakes to give a recapitulation: "Now having at length run over *the confuse multitude of Creeds and Forms of Faith*, let us once again briefly repeat the number of them. After the Creed that was laid down by the Nicene council, the bishops framed two others at Antioch, when they assembled to the dedication of the church. The third was made in France of the bishops which were with Narcissus, and exhibited unto the Emperor Constantine. The fourth was sent by Eudoxius unto the bishops throughout Italy. Three

*Milner's Ecc. His. vol. 2—p. 82.

were published in writing at Sirmium, whereof one being gloriously entitled with the names of consuls, was read at Ariminum. The eighth was set forth at Seleucia, and procured to be read by the complices of Acarius. The ninth was given abroad, with additions at Constantinople; there was thereunto annexed, that thenceforth there should be no mention made of the substance or subsistency of God. Whereunto Ulphilas, bishop of the Goths, then first of all subscribed: for unto that time he embraced the faith established by the Council of Nice, and was an earnest follower of Theophilus' steps, bishop of the Goths, who had been at the Nicene Council, and subscribed unto the Creed. But of these things thus much.*

It must be very evident, that the whole circumstance of deciding controversy by authoritative rules of human invention, sustained by ecclesiastical councils, was a novelty even in that age; and that this boasted measure of ministerial skill, produced as little effect in quieting disturbances, and promoting unity, then, as it does now. Subscription to Creeds was as equivocal a transaction in those, as it is in these, days, and as it must ever be, while such a system is pursued, or while theology is converted into a human science, instead of being unequivocally illustrated as proceeding from divine authority. The Nicene Creed has long since lost all its control; and other Creeds, which are in existence now, and which have derived all their importance

*Ecc. His. Lib. 2. ch. 32.

from an excitement produced in ages past, must soon loose their control too; if indeed their sun has not long since set, and another day has not already dawned upon the Christian world. We have been passing through one of those periodical revolutions which are incidental to our earthly condition; and it must soon be demonstrated to all, who do not hang behind the changes of their own age, that the disturbances, which the Westminster Assembly was convened to allay, formed but wretched indexes of the present times; that those men, however great and good, were utterly disqualified to legislate for the more, or less, fortunate circumstances of this day; and that the spiritual institutions of America must not be regulated by religious precedents derived from England, Ireland, or Scotland. We must take up, in its most liberal import, the reformation motto, *the Bible, the Bible is the religion of Protestants*. And how great the blessing, that the *Bible* is the charter of human liberty! Was it a mere political arrangement on which we were obliged to rely, hope on this delightful subject might prove a mere illusion; all human complaints would be hushed into sepulchral silence; and the immortal spirit of man must remain in everlasting "chains of darkness." But if Jehovah grants this boon, and his own gospel freely proclaims it, then shall the angels of his presence shout, and the stars of the morning sing—glory to God, and freedom to men. Surely they are to be both pitied and blamed, who would

not suffer the Bible to exert its own unlimited sway over human minds.

SECTION 4.

WE intend in this section to give the testimony of some other writers on the subjects we have in hand. That is to say, on the origin and use of ecclesiastical councils, and on the importance which is to be attached to their decisions. We hope thereby to make it appear, that there is no just reason, why we should go so far back in the history of religious corruptions, to satisfy ourselves upon a question, which, with the Bible in our hands, we are fully qualified to determine for ourselves; and which, at all events, the fathers had no right to determine for us.

Dr. Du-Pin, in his history of the three first centuries, on the article of the Councils held during that period, remarks;—"Councils are assemblies composed of Bishops and Priests, which are held to deliberate upon ecclesiastical affairs, *to make decisions about the true faith, to regulate the policy and manners of Christians, or punish the blame-worthy.*"—This is defining their powers with as liberal constructions as we could have asked, in defence of the position we have taken. Their business was to make *rules of faith and manners* for the christian world; which we say no church court, in that age, nor in any

other age since, has been empowered to make. With all due allowance for the historian's sectarian connexions, we quote his historical declaration as a true assertion of the ecclesiastical prerogative, with which these bodies thought themselves invested.

He proceeds: "The original of those assemblies is as ancient as the church of the three first centuries. The Apostles gave a pattern of them in the council at Jerusalem, to deliberate whether the ceremonies of the law were to be observed. That usage was afterwards followed in the church, when any differences arose, or when it was necessary to make any regulations."—In tracing back these councils to the first three centuries for their origin, this historian agrees in his testimony with Mosheim. In referring to the council at Jerusalem as the pattern to which they were conformed, we beg leave to say, that we have the scriptural document in our own hands, and chuse to judge for ourselves;—the council at Jerusalem never exercised such control over the human conscience, as we shall show in its own place. But if he intends to say that there were other councils, before the moral desolations of the second century were spread out to view, he is not only contradicted by Mosheim, but he is inconsistent with himself, as will be evident from his own words, before we have finished with our quotation.

"Those assemblies," he continues, "were more rare in the three first centuries, and not so famous as in the following ages; as well be-

cause the persecutions of the pagan emperors hindered the bishops from assembling freely and publicly, as because *the traditions of the Apostles being yet new*, it was not *necessary* to assemble councils in order to own the truth, and condemn error. 'Tis for this reason, we don't read in any authors of credit, that councils were held to condemn most of the first heretics whom I have been speaking of. The errors of those heretics created horror in all christians; they looked upon the authors of them, and those who maintained them, as people excommunicated and separated from the church, without their being expressly condemned in synods. In fine, *every bishop instructed his own people in the faith of the church, and refuted errors by the authority of scripture, and tradition.*" If there had been any thing like these authoritative rules, these superadded tests of orthodoxy, surely this author must have noticed them. They would have answered his purpose full as well as, if not better than, the traditions of the Apostles to which he refers. The fact is, that there were no such Creeds in existence; and yet there was as much need for them then, as there has been since, or can be now. Their bishops had no opportunity to assemble and make them, even if they had thought of them. They had enough to do in contending for the common faith, which they could all learn from the scriptures; and fearful persecution formed the test of their sincerity: so much so, that Tertullian remarked, that the blood of the martyrs was the seed which pro-

duced an abundant harvest of new christians. And there was no very great difficulty in detecting and excluding heretics: these were censured and avoided by common consent, under the operation of that inherent power, which religious society has, like all other societies, to regulate itself according to its own constituent principles. Every bishop could then instruct his own people according to his own ability, and take the scriptures for his guide, unfettered by the decrees of councils, or the laboured systems of philosophic divines.

Our historian goes farther: "The first councils mentioned in ecclesiastical history, were those that were held towards the end of the second century, upon occasion of the dispute among the churches about Easter. The church of Rome, according to its ancient usage, never celebrated that day but upon a *Sunday*, the day of our Saviour's resurrection, and waited till the first Sunday after the fourteenth day of the moon of March. On the contrary, the churches of Asia and some others celebrated it, as the Jews did, on the fourteenth day of the moon of March, whatever day of the week it fell upon. When St. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, came to Rome, under the pontificate of Anicetus, they conferred together upon that difference, and not being able to persuade one another to quit their custom, they parted good friends, reckoning that so small a difference ought not to break the peace of the churches. But under the pontificate of pope Victor that dispute grew warm; for that

pope having wrote to the bishops of Asia, to conform themselves to the usage of the church of Rome. Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, assembled the bishops of Asia, and wrote a letter to Pope Victor, wherein he strenuously maintained the usage of his church, and the other churches of the east. Victor likewise assembled a council at Rome, *wherein it was resolved to separate from communion, Polycrates, and the other bishops of Asia, that would not follow the usage of the church of Rome, in the celebration of Easter.* Victor sent them the synodical letter of that council, *by which he declared them excommunicated.* There was also a council held at Palestine, in which presided Theophilus, bishop of Cesarea, and Narcissus, bishop of Jerusalem. The bishops of Pontus, over which presided Palmas, wrote likewise a synodical letter upon the same subject; and St. Irenæus directed a letter to Victor in the name of the churches of France, wherein he remonstrates, that although in those churches they celebrated Easter on Sunday, as at Rome, yet he could not approve his *excommunicating whole churches* for keeping up a custom which they had received from their ancestors: and acquainted him, that it was not only about Easter, but likewise about *fasts*, and several other practices that the churches differed in their customs. 'Tis probable that Victor yielded to the reasons of St. Irenæus; for, although the Asiatics did not quit their usage, yet we do not find that the peace

was broke betwixt them and the bishops of Rome.”

We have then once more traced back these ecclesiastical councils to the second century, and have found their origin there. Their business again appears to be, to exercise authority over human consciences, which was never delegated to them; and to excommunicate from spiritual privileges those who would not submit to their *canons*. Though still, there is no evidence of their attempting at so early a period to form a *Creed*, or a general system of the doctrines of the gospel, and thus fully to take into their hands the entire conscience of the christian church. That was an ecclesiastical measure too presumptuous for the first councils to have conceived. It would have been hazardous for them to have attempted so much, when what they did attempt, was so manfully resisted. Had they stretched their prerogative so far, there would have been a protest so vigorous and universal, that, we were going to say,—and would say, did not the history of the church since the reformation forbid us,—we should never have heard of an authoritative rule of faith and manners, of human invention, in the church of God.

We have not given any unfair turn to this historian's testimony, when we have recorded it as most decisively in our favour. For he had a fine opportunity of proclaiming the existence of these *Creeeds*, if he could have found them, when closing his account of the lives and actions of the *Apostles*. And he does then most distinctly allude

to the subject, and has said all he could say consistently with truth. His words are as follows: "But, it may be said, had not the Apostles, before they separated, drawn up a *short formula-ry of the principal points they were to teach*? Is not that the same which we call the Apostles' Creed? It is certain that comes from the Apostles, *as to the substance of it*, and that it contains the principal points of the doctrine the Apostles taught uniformly to all the Churches, which preserved them. Rufinus, and some antients have also said, that the Apostles made a Creed before they separated; but it is not certain that it was exactly in the same words, for the ancient churches had several Creeds, differing as to some expressions, though uniform in doctrine.

"There is no question to be made, but that the Apostles regulated the discipline of the churches they founded; but it does not appear, that they made *any other regulations in writing*, but that of the council of Jerusalem; for the canons called the *Apostolical Canons* were not made by the Apostles; but are rather a collection of Antient Canons made by the Bishops during the three first centuries of the church, and therefore called *Apostolical Canons*, or *Canons of the Fathers*. The Constitutions which bear the name of the Apostles, are a work *made up long after them*. "It is thus evidently impossible to trace back these human rules to the Apostles. They never sought a lordship over God's heritage, nor permitted christian so-

cieties to be called after their names. They never interposed their authority to crush the personal responsibility of their hearers, or to stamp their own image upon them. They never curbed human spirits, occupied by processes of thought which it is the glory of intelligent beings to pursue, by their own laws; nor sought to lash into a childish uniformity, those varieties of human intellect and christian graces, which are the ornament of our world. They left believers as they found them, **THE FREEMEN OF THE LORD**; and Creeds, the offspring of human genius wildly speculating about things divine, came in long after they had gone to their rest; the paragon of that love of pre-eminence, which John so severely rebuked in the person of Diotrephes. Our historian has no contrary fact to give us, even when he would make the *historical record* of what he had learned by painful and laborious research; and *the several Creeds of the ancient churches*, to which he alludes, have as little to do with the present controversy, as the Apostles' Creed;—which shall be shown hereafter.

We are now about to invite the attention of our readers to quotations from the pages of another writer, whose various reading in ecclesiastical history will be as little disputed, as his interest in the present controversy. We allude to Dr. Miller; who, we think, has been too incautious in his introductory lecture on the utility of Creeds and Confessions; and to the vo-

lumes which he published in the Episcopal controversy, a few years since. We think that in the letters which he then published, he fully agrees with us in the principles on which we are arguing. There are two volumes, and, though not so marked, we shall, for the sake of brevity, distinguish them in our references as first and second. He there says,

“We are accustomed to look back to the first ages of the church with a veneration nearly bordering on superstition. *It answered the purposes of Popery*, to refer all their corruptions to primitive times, and to represent those times as exhibiting the models of all excellence. But every representation of this kind must be received with distrust. The Christian church, during the apostolic age, and for a half a century afterwards, did indeed present a venerable aspect. Persecuted by the world on every side, she was favoured in an uncommon measure with the presence and Spirit of her Divine Head, and exhibited a degree of *simplicity and purity, which has, perhaps, never since been equalled*. But before the close of the *second century*, the scene began to change; and before the commencement of the *fourth*, a deplorable corruption of doctrine, discipline, and morals, had crept into the church, and disfigured the body of Christ. Hegesippus, an ecclesiastical historian, declares that the *virgin purity* of the church was confined to *the days of the Apostles*.”* Now with all this we agree; and are in fact objecting

* Vol. 1—p. p. 290—1.

to that very veneration with which these first ages of the church are treated, when a reference is made to them on our present subject. For, as Dr. M. remarks in another part of the same volume—"Even supposing you had found such declarations in *some* or *all* of the early Fathers; what then? *Historic fact is not divine institution.*"*

Again, when remarking on the shorter epistles of Ignatius, Dr. M. says—"It is equally evident, that the *Presbyters* and *Presbytery*, so frequently mentioned in the foregoing extracts, together with the *Deacons*, refer to officers which, in the days of Ignatius belonged, like the bishop, to *each particular church*. Most of the epistles of this Father, are directed to *particular churches*; and in every case, we find *each church furnished with a Bishop, a Presbytery and Deacons*.—In short, to every altar, or communion table, there was one *Presbytery*, as well as one *Bishop*."† We understand this as asserting what we have already expressed, that in those early ages, the churches, though *Presbyterian*, were *independent*. We are aware that the genuineness of these epistles of Ignatius have been called in question, and that Dr. M. states that fact. But his whole argument in favour of *Parochial* and against *Diocesan Episcopacy*, proceeds upon the principle, which those epistles, according to the extract, declare. *Diocesan Episcopacy* may have its peculiarities;

* p. 164. † Ib. 146—7.

but still it has its assimilation to our **Presbytery**, in that an ecclesiastical power is formed in both cases, whose province extends beyond the bounds of a particular church; and an entrance is thus made upon that system of synods and councils, which "changed the whole face of the church and gave it a new form."

We now offer another extract, on the subject of *synods and councils*, which we consider as one of the greatest fountains of ecclesiastical corruption that ever have been unsealed, if we are permitted to form our judgment from the details of ecclesiastical history.—"That the Synods and Councils which early began to be convened, were, in fact, thus employed by the ambitious clergy, to extend and confirm their power, might be proved *by witnesses almost numberless*. The testimony of one shall suffice. It is that of the great and good bishop, *Gregory Nazianzen*, who lived in the fourth century, and who, on being summoned by the emperor to the general council of *Constantinople*, which met in 381, addressed a letter to *Procopius*, to excuse himself from attending. In this letter he declares, 'that he was desirous of avoiding *all synods*, because *he had never seen a good effect, or happy conclusion of any one of them*; that they rather increased than lessened the evils they were designed to prevent; and that the *love of contention, and the lust of power*, were there manifested in instances innumerable.' And, afterwards, speaking of that very council, this pious Father remarks:—'These

conveyers of the Holy Ghost, these preachers of peace to all men, grew bitterly outrageous and clamorous against one another, in the midst of the church, mutually accusing each other, leaping about as if they had been mad, under the furious impulse of a lust of power and dominion, as if they would have rent the whole world in pieces.' He afterwards adds, "this was not the effect of piety, but of a *contention for thrones*."* Such were the framers of Creeds and Confessions in the early ages of the churches; and such were the circumstances, from which these instruments of oppression, started forth in living and stately form:—Dr. M. himself being judge.

But we have another class of quotations to make, from the pen of Dr. M. which, while they express generally what has been offered, assert something more, and meet the views we are advocating more fully. They are the following:—
 "I shall not now stay to ascertain what degree of respect is due to the writings of the Fathers in general. It is my *duty*, however, to state, that we do not refer to them, *in any wise, as a rule either of faith or practice*. We acknowledge the scriptures *alone* to be such a rule. By this rule, the Fathers themselves are to be tried; and, of course, they cannot be considered, properly speaking, *as the Christian's authority for any thing*. It is agreed, on all hands, that they are not infallible guides: and it is perfectly well

* *Ib.* 328—9.

known to all who are acquainted with their writings, that many of them are inconsistent both with themselves, and with one another. We protest, therefore, utterly against any appeal to them on this subject. *Though they, or an angel from heaven*, should bring us any doctrine, as essential to the order and well-being of the church, which is not to be found in the Word of God, we are bound by the command of our Master, to reject them.”*

“In examining the writings of the Fathers, I shall admit only the testimony of those, who wrote within the FIRST TWO CENTURIES. Immediately after this period, so many corruptions began to creep into the church; so many of the most respectable christian writers are known to have been heterodox in their opinions; so much evidence appears, that even before the commencement of the third century, the Papacy began to exhibit its pretensions; and such multiplied proofs of wide-spreading degeneracy crowd into view, that the testimony of every subsequent writer is to be received with suspicion.”†

Again—“When we have proved that the Apostolic church existed without diocesan bishops, we have done enough. No matter how soon after the death of the Apostles, and the close of the sacred canon, such an order of ministers was introduced. Whether the introduction of this order were effected in four years, or four centuries after that period, it equally rests on *human authority alone*, and is to be treated as a mere

* *Ib.* p. p. 124—5.

† *Ib.* p. 126.

contrivance and *commandment of men*. *We cannot too often repeat, nor too diligently keep in view, that the authority of Christ can be claimed for nothing which is not found, in some form, in his own word.*"*

Again—"But although I am not conscious of departing either from the letter or the spirit of that *Confession of Faith* which I have solemnly subscribed; and although I am confident that my Presbyterianism is substantially the same with that of Calvin and Knox; yet let us remember that we are to *call no man, or body of men, Master on earth. One is our Master, even Christ. HIS WORD is the sole standard by which, as Christians, or as Churches, we must stand or fall. Happy will it be for us, if we can appeal to the great Searcher of hearts, that we have not followed the traditions and inventions of men, but the sure word of prophecy, which is given to us to be a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path, to guide us in the way of peace.*"†

Once more—"Suffer me, my brethren, again to remind you of the principle on which we proceed, in this part of our inquiry. If it could be demonstrated from the writings of the *Fathers*, that, in one hundred, or even in fifty years, after the death of the last apostle, the system of *Diocesan Episcopacy* had been generally adopted in the church, it would be nothing to the purpose. As long as no traces of this fact could be found in *the Bible*, but much of a directly opposite nature, we should stand on a secure and immoveable foun-

* *Ib.* p. 286.

† *Vol.* 2, p. p. 72 3.

dation. To all reasonings, then, derived from the *Fathers*, I answer with the venerable *Augustine*, who, when pressed with the authority of *Cyprian*, replied, 'His writings I hold not to be canonical, but examine them by the canonical writings: And in them, what agreeth with the authority of divine scripture, I accept, with his praise; what agreeth not, I reject with his leave.' **

Now with these sentiments of Dr. M. we do most heartily coincide. Our doctrine, let it be remembered, has been, and still is, that the Bible is the *only* rule of faith and practice; the "*sole standard*, by which, as christians, or as churches, we must stand or fall;" and that, in relation to the authority of ecclesiastical officers and church courts, we are to "call no man, nor any body of men, master on earth." We are not contending for any thing more than this: and the argument, when used by us against Creeds and Confessions, as authoritative rules of faith and manners, is surely as good and conclusive, as when Dr. M. uses it against Episcopalians, when he would maintain the scriptural view of *ministerial parity*. Are we not pleading for ministerial parity? Now, why does Dr. M. in his introductory lecture, say,—"that the great Protestant maxim, that THE BIBLE is the ONLY infallible rule of faith and manners, is a precious, all important truth, and cannot be too often repeated, if it be *properly understood*?" We do not comprehend him. We really thought

* *Ib.* p. 149.

that we understood it; that we understood it as Dr. M. appears to understand it, in the extracts we have made; and as we think every man must understand it, who has any acquaintance with the English language. But it would appear from his *parenthetical proviso*, that there is some obscurity about this protestant maxim, and that it requires some ecclesiastical logician to explain its terms. Can it mean after all, that there is *another* rule of faith and manners? Does Dr. M. imagine that this favorite maxim admits that there may be another rule? Then must we quarrel with the maxim itself; for we do mean to say, in the most unequivocal form, and in the best manner in which human language can express the idea, that there is no other rule of faith and practice; that no man, nor any body of men, nay, nor *an angel from heaven*, has any right to prescribe another; and that if any of them should dare to do it, we are bound, by the imperious and irrevocable commands of our Master, to reject whatever they may bring to us. They preach *another gospel*.

Nor is there the least necessity to be at all fastidious about declaring this reformation principle in the broadest terms. Our presbyterian standards assert it in the most liberal language, and that frequently too. In the shorter catechism it is said; "the word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is *the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him*," In the larger Catechism it is said, "the Holy Scriptures of the

Old and New Testaments are the word of God, *the only rule of faith and obedience.*" In the Confession of Faith it is said—"the *whole* counsel of God, concerning all things *necessary* for his own glory, man's salvation, *faith and life*, is *either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing is to be added, at any time, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.*" Should the difficulty of understanding the scriptures be objected, then the confession of faith again speaks:—"All things in scripture, are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; *yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may obtain unto a sufficient understanding of them.*" And all this is asserted by that very Assembly, who made the book, and who solemnly declared that, to demand subscription to the answers to the questions in the shorter Catechism, is an *unwarrantable imposition*. Dr. Miller will certainly not disown his own frequent declarations, nor dispute the positive decisions of his own Confession of Faith.

We further agree with Dr. M. when he asserts, that the fathers cannot be considered as the christian's authority *for any thing*; that when we have proved our point from the Apostolical church, we have done enough. But then we must ask, why does he, in his introductory lec-

ture, refer to the fathers as authority on the subject now under consideration? And not only so, but why is he so latitudinarian as to transgress his own rule, and lead us through the *third and fourth* centuries, those periods which he has himself represented, as crowded with such "multiplied proofs of wide spreading degeneracy," that the testimony of their writers must be received with suspicion? Or how does he refer to *Cyprian's* writings, after having told us that *Augustine* would not receive them as *canonical*, but resisting such an interference with his conscience, made his direct appeal to the divine scripture? Surely, if the testimony of the fathers, though harmoniously uniting to assert the episcopal dignity, and lordly pretensions of those who made rules for the human conscience, fails to prove *their authority*; by parity of reasoning, that same testimony, though thus harmonious and universal, must fail to prove *the authority of those rules* which they made. "No matter how soon" these human Creeds were introduced "after the death of the Apostles, and the close of the sacred canon;" no matter "whether the introduction" of these instruments "were effected in four years, or four centuries after that period, they equally rest on *human* authority alone, and are to be treated as a mere contrivance, and *commandment of men*. The authority of Christ can be claimed for nothing, which is not found, in some form, in his word." We can thus freely exchange terms with Dr. M. And no marvel: for when we write against authoritative Creeds,

and he writes against the assumed authority of Bishops or Presbyters, we are in fact writing on the very same subject; advocating the very same principles; pleading for the very same rights; and aiming at the very same object. It is impossible for him to deny our conclusions, without denying his own; or to sustain the exercise of an assumed power, without sustaining the legality of the power itself. And if our doctrine will affect all denominations, so must his; for they are demonstrated by the same trains of reasoning. Dr. M's letters, to which we refer, are as prejudicial to the cause of Presbyterianism, in its present form, as they are to diocesan Episcopacy: and we are surely very much obliged to him for the varied and valuable testimonies, with which his letters abound, on the subject we have undertaken to discuss.—The liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, may be invaded in a variety of ways; but when it is gone, it matters not who the proud assailant is, under whose prowess it has fallen; the effect is the same.

It is very true that Dr. M. seems to think, that human Creeds have a *divine warrant*; and in his lecture he adduces some scripture texts, which appear to him to look that way. But if he has misapplied his texts, as we think we can show he has, and which we shall undertake to do, when we shall have reached the *second part* of our remarks, the argument by which he would sustain the doctrine of his lecture, is overthrown. Had he inserted in that lecture, the extracts we have made from his letters, or similar

paragraphs, suited in their phraseology to its subject, we apprehend that production would have left a very different impression on the minds of his readers, than it has left. He must then have changed the whole course of his discussion. Occupying more commanding ground, he would have appeared with the Bible in his hand, and, demonstrating his positions by *scriptural argument*, he would have brought the conscience of his reader, directly under the irrevocable decisions of divine authority. No opponent could then have withstood him; and we should have bowed with as much cheerfulness as any, and devoted ourselves, unhesitatingly and quickly, to repair any injury, it might be supposed, we had inflicted. This he has not done. And again we must insist, that these formularies of human invention shall be defended by argument, drawn from the scripture page; or we be permitted to claim, and rejoice in, our christian liberty, which we may not, cannot, dare not, will not, surrender. And "happy will it be for us, if we can appeal to the great searcher of hearts, that we have not followed the traditions and inventions of men, but the sure word of prophecy, which is given us to be a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path, to guide us in the way of peace."

We forbear to press our remarks on these extracts any farther, though there is abundant room; and now proceed to consider the early Creeds to which reference is made; which we shall make the subject of our next section.

SECTION 5.

Dr. Miller asserts, in his introductory lecture, that—"In the *second* century, in the writings of Irenaeus; and in the *third*, in the writings of *Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Gregory Thaumaturgus, and Lucian* the martyr, we find a number of Creeds and Confessions, more formally drawn out, more minute, and more extensive, than those of earlier date." Now all this may be true; we have no disposition to dispute the fact, nor does our cause at all require the denial of it. Dr. M. will remember his own principle of argument in the episcopal controversy, that no form of authoritative dominion, introduced into the church after the death of the apostles, though that should have occurred within fifty years, is any thing to the purpose, as long as no traces of that thing could be found in the *Bible*. He will moreover remember the reply of *Augustine*, when the writings of *Cyprian*, and perhaps the *Creed* referred to by Dr. M. as contained in his writings, were pressed upon his conscience; how quickly that father started back from the approach of human authority, and sheltered his spiritual convictions under the protection of the scriptures.

We have no doubt but that there was a great multitude of Creeds in those days. Human talents were as various then as they are now: and when every man is permitted to apprehend

truth for himself, and express his apprehensions according to his ability, a variety in thoughts and phrases will necessarily take place. Every man when he enters the church must have a *Creed*—for the characteristic of a christian is, that he is a *believer*. Let us look at it. “Without faith it is impossible to please; for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Again, “if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema, maranatha.” And once more—“whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor the world to come.” Now here are articles of a *Creed*: and the man who does not possess them, cannot belong to the church of God. Not one of the apostles would have baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, the individual who did not believe in what is represented here, as to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But is this a *Creed* imposed upon the human conscience by human authority? Or will any reasoner on our present subject suggest such a case, as fully replying to all our argument?

But let us frame a ministerial *Creed*:—“If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” If under a declaration like this, a man who denied our Lord Jesus Christ, should be excluded from ministerial privileges, will this be called the operation of a human *Creed*, and the exercise of ecclesiastical authority, resulting from sectarian

combination? Assertion and argument, conducted in this manner, must grow out of misapprehension, and lead to no satisfactory issue. The cases are evidently predicated upon divine legislation, as clear as words can make them; and human authority can neither confirm nor repeal the law which is applied to them:—no church court can either enact or amend these things; but the human conscience receives them as coming immediately and directly from God himself.

And there must not only have been Creeds, but living and visible *Confessions* too; for again the divine law saith—“If thou shalt *confess with thy mouth* the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”—“Whosoever shall *confess* that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God”—“Whosoever therefore shall *confess* me before men, him will I confess also before my Father, which is in heaven.” Now here is confession—a *Confession of Faith*; and a Confession of Faith too, which is a term of communion in spiritual things. But then the reader clearly perceives, that it owes none of its obligation on the human conscience to *human authority*. The Master himself has established the law, and no man may object to it, without incurring the most awful penalties. We make no objection to a divine Creed, or to a divine Confession; but we do object to a human Creed, and to a human Confession.

We then, let us repeat, never have denied that there were a multitude of such Creeds and Con-

fessions in primitive times, and that there must be in all subsequent times, and in all states of society, wherever christians are to be found. But then it may be objected, that all this is our interpretation, and that our own admitted Creeds, are after all but a fully formed sample of the very thing, which we professedly reject. Indeed?—Most certainly we have offered no interpretation of the divine law; we have simply recited the law itself, and, without a single comment, as to its individual meaning, have left it to speak for itself; and every man to pronounce for himself what his own eyes see, his own ears hear, his own hands handle, his own lips taste. And in what has been thus adduced, we contend, consisted the simplicity of the primitive church, which was afterwards so grievously corrupted by the ambition of bishops, and the intrigues of ecclesiastical courts.

But after all, is not this adventuring a great deal, jeoparding the purity of the church, and most incautiously sacrificing her peace? We do not think so. For, we believe, that thus the primitive church did actually live in purity and peace; and that her purity was never corrupted, nor her peace destroyed, until the idea of ecclesiastical power had maddened and degraded her sons and daughters; and led them to substitute human for divine law. We believe, that the whole world is, at this present moment, aiming at a return to the principles and habits of original simplicity, in political, as well as in ecclesiasti-

cal, matters; and that all the political and ecclesiastical powers on earth, cannot prevent the changes which have commenced their reforming and revolutionising process. We believe, that there is a scriptural point where divine truth concentrates all her rays, in one powerful, burning, focus, and where no man can resist her authority and be guiltless:—so much so, that not even the Gentiles, according to Paul's reasonings in his epistle to the Romans, who had not the formal privileges of the Jews, can escape divine judgments for not obeying truth, or for holding it in unrighteousness.

On this latter idea we think it necessary to enlarge. The elemental principles of divine truth do not constitute such a difficult, obscure, mysterious, matter, as they are often represented to do; and on which presumptions have been founded so many of our synodical documents, as if a poor sinner could not understand what God has said to him in his Bible, unless a number of learned ecclesiastical logicians, convened too by special order of *civil rulers* in many cases, should interpret his law. The fact is, that divine truth never appears with so much plainness and simplicity as it does in God's works, and in God's word. One of the finest illustrations of moral principle which men can find, and which the Redeemer himself could find, is derived from the structure of God's works, or from the course of his providential transactions. And when we wish to have a clear moral idea, which no man can dispute, we are never so happy as when we

obtain it directly from the scriptures, and can sustain it by comparing the scripture with itself. This every man knows, who has separated himself, like Gregory Nazianzen, from sectarian regulations, and addressed himself, with all the ardour of an accountable being, to the study of the *Bible*, for his own spiritual and intellectual advantage.

The whole arrangement of human things, under the superintendance of the great and good Governor of the world, appears to have been made purposely coincident with evangelical law: or evangelical law has been purposely made to correspond with that arrangement. And if this be so, then the Bible must address itself with the clearest evidence to the human mind; and those who reject its testimony, which they are commanded to believe, must do it for some other reason than its obscurity. And accordingly the Master himself says—"THIS is the condemnation, *that light is come into the world*, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." And his Apostle, when giving a description of the moral character of the Gentile mind, says, "The Gentiles, which have not law, do *by nature* the things contained in the law;—which show the work of the law *written in their hearts*, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts (disputations or reasonings) the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." Now if this view be true, then must there be such a correspondence between the present state of the human mind, and

the revelation which God has given by Jesus Christ—both with regard to its character and amount,—that the Bible must necessarily recommend itself to mankind; and it contains in itself, in the most visible form, those principles which men may see at a glance, in which they may immediately agree, and on which they may worship God with the most perfect harmony. It is not difficult then to perceive how the spiritual unity of the church may be inviolably preserved, and extended with the most lovely uniformity down through all ages, under the simple administration of the Bible. And of course it cannot be difficult to perceive how the primitive church could live in peace and love, without the aid of rules of faith and practice, derived from the authoritative decisions of synods and councils. This was in fact the beautiful simplicity of the early ages of christianity, of which historians speak in strains of such exalted eulogy; and which was afterwards corrupted by the encroachments of ecclesiastical power, and the presumptuous pretehsions of ecclesiastical canons. So that it is altogether a mistaken view of the subject, when it is supposed, that discord and strife must necessarily ensue, if the church would betake herself to the Bible as her *only* rule. The fact is directly the reverse. The early history of the church demonstrates the fact to be the reverse; for never was there an age, when the unity of the church was dearer to the hearts of living christians, or when louder lamentations were uttered over the breach of that unity.

We are not alone in giving this testimony concerning the character of scriptural revelation. Irenæus, after having given an account of the FAITH received from the Apostles and their disciples, says,—“This faith, the church, as I said before, has received, and though dispersed over the whole world, assiduously preserves, as if she inhabited a single house; and believes in these things, as having but one heart and one soul; and with perfect harmony proclaims, teaches, hands down, these things, as though she had but one mouth. For though there are various and dissimilar languages in the world, *yet the power of the faith* transmitted, is one and the same. Neither the churches in *Germany*, nor in *Iberia*, (Spain) nor among the *Celtæ*, (in *France*) nor in the East, nor in *Egypt*, nor in *Lybia*, nor in the middle regions of the world, (Jerusalem and the adjacent districts) believe or teach any other doctrines. *But as the sun is one and the same throughout the whole world; so the preaching of the truth shines every where, and enlightens all men who are willing to come to the knowledge of truth.* Nor will the most powerful in speech among the governors of the churches, say any thing more than these; (*for no one can be above his master;*) nor the most feeble any thing less. *For as there is but one faith*, he who is able to speak much, cannot enlarge; nor he who can say little, diminish it.”*

Dr. Miller in his letters on Unitarianism, makes the following remarks:—“If the Bible

*Mason's Plea, p. p. 41—2.

contains a revelation from God to *the mass of mankind*, and is expressly intended to teach them the way of duty and happiness, we must suppose it *adapted to the purpose for which it was given*; that is, we must suppose it to be a *plain book*, suited to the common people, as well as to the learned and wise. The gospel was originally *preached to the poor*; and is fitted no less to nourish *babes in Christ*, than to support and invigorate *strong men*. The Bible, it is true, has depths which are beyond the ken of angels; and portions of its contents by no means unfrequently occur, which require much various knowledge to enable any one to peruse them with intelligence and satisfaction. While there is more than enough in the scriptures, as there is in the great AUTHOR of them, to fill the most enlarged intellect, and to give scope and exercise to the most profound erudition; yet, it is equally certain, that the *great body* of those truths which relate to *our common salvation*, which hold forth to us *redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace*, and which enforce the various duties of the christian life, are *plain, and level to the most common capacity, disposed humbly to receive them*. They are, indeed, so *plain*, that we are assured, *he who runs may read them; and even the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein*. Such is the representation every where given on this subject, in the sacred volume itself. Nothing more is necessary, as we are assured, to enable a sim-

ple, unlettered man to read the word of God with *intelligence and profit*, than *common sense*, accompanied with *an humble and teachable disposition*.*

Now if such views of the Bible be correct, as we verily believe they are, and as we shall have an opportunity of showing more, at large hereafter, then it might be a task not unworthy of some presbyterian *field-marshal*, to show what is the value of such a book as the volume which contains the Standards of the presbyterian churches. And, again, if such views of the Bible be correct, we may not be surprised to find that the early ages of christianity could do without authoritative rules of faith and manners, framed and enforced by some lordly prelate, or ecclesiastical council; and that the church in all ages would "gain a loss" by their adoption. Here again, we have presented before us the very thing for which we are pleading:—the **s**upreme, single, and sufficient authority of **T**HE **B**IBLE. We ask no more.

But we must now turn to look at the *facts*, which characterised the primitive church, in order that we may ascertain the worth of these early Creeds, which have been pressed upon our attention. And the *first* fact, which we have to state is, that there was a great deal of uniformity in sentiment and feeling during that period of the church;—a peculiar circumstance, which never has occurred since these human Creeds were introduced, and where *mind was in action on*

* p. p. 225—7.

religious subjects. The uniformity of ignorance and superstition, no man who loves his God, himself, or the human race, would make a single effort to accomplish, or utter a single word to praise.

The *second* fact is, that synods and councils, whose province it is to form these authoritative rules, did not appear in the christian church until the middle of the second century; were a pure *human contrivance*, when they did appear; and did nothing but mischief, by interfering with the immensely important, and the greatly chequered, interests of christendom, which they were not qualified to manage. That ethereal spirit, which pervades the whole region of morals, the Holy Ghost alone can direct; and they who do not bow to his control, as mere secondary agents, whatever eclat they may acquire in hazardous enterprise and doubtful strife, can do nothing but stain the escutcheon of Israel's glory, and betray the cause they have been commissioned to defend.

The *third* fact is, that "every church," as Sir Peter King expresses it, was, "at liberty to express the fundamental articles of the christian faith in that way and manner, which she saw fit *pro re nata*, or as occasion offered. Or as another writer, we think bishop King, has it:—"This Creed was handed down from Father to Son, as a brief summary of the necessary scripture truths, not *in ipsissimis verbis*, or in the same set words, but only the sense or substance thereof, which is evident, from that *we never*

find the Creed twice repeated, in the same words, no, not by one and the same Father." Now even admitting that these were authoritative rules, which the very statement given of them proves they were not, their framers must have been very untutored in the science of ecclesiastical legislation; for surely they ought to have been careful to express the Creed, if there was an authoritative one, in uniform language; seeing there is nothing about which theologians differ, more than they do about words. The council of Nice was riven by such a dispute.

The *fourth* fact is, that in the early ages, bishops or presbyters appear to have been modest-men. When synods and councils were formed, they handled ecclesiastical matters with a great deal of diffidence: and, on their first appearance in these meetings, declared "that they were no more than the delegates of their respective churches, and that they acted in the name, and by the appointment of the people." They had not yet ventured to proclaim a lordship over the human conscience. The present incumbents were not prepared for that glorious distinction.

The *fifth* fact is, that the approach to dominion was *very gradual* and *imperceptible*; and that synods and councils proceeded onward, after having once commenced, until they "changed the whole face of the church; gave it a new form; and at length openly asserted, that Christ had empowered them to prescribe to his people *authoritative rules of faith and manners.*"

We presume we have now furnished facts enough to prove, that these early Creeds were very far from being those ecclesiastical instruments, with which we are concerned in these remarks: That if that age could do without such instruments, we can do without them too; confusion and disaster, doctrinal carelessness and heretical wanderings, are not the consequences of living and acting, preaching and praying, under the dominion of the Bible, when sectarian Creeds and Confessions are heaved, like the idols of those who had departed from the only living and true God, "to the moles and the bats." And that the origin of these aspiring and despotic ordinances, must be referred to the council of Nice, assembled by the order of a civil ruler, whose character was as equivocal as the wisdom of his ecclesiastical vassals.

But perhaps the reader would wish to see some of these early Creeds, as they are considered to form the connecting link between the council of Nice and the apostolic age. We shall furnish him with two of them, that he may judge for himself. The first of them is from the pen of *Irenaeus*, to whom Dr. Miller refers in his lecture, and is as follows:—"The church, although scattered over the whole world, even to the extremities of the earth, *has received from the apostles and their disciples*, the FAITH, viz. on one GOD the FATHER, Almighty, that made the heaven and the earth, and the seas, and all things therein—and on one CHRIST JESUS, the son of God, who became incarnate for our salva-

tion—and on the HOLY SPIRIT, who, by the prophets, preached the dispensations, and the advents, and the generation from a virgin, and the suffering, and the resurrection from the dead, and the assumption, in flesh, into heaven, of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ; and his coming again from the heavens in the glory of the Father, to sum up all things, and raise all flesh of all mankind; that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God; and Saviour, and King, according to the good pleasure of his Father, who is invisible, every knee may bow, of beings in heaven, in earth, and under the earth; and every tongue may confess to him; and that he may exercise righteous judgment upon all; may send spiritual wickednesses, and transgressing and apostate angels, and ungodly, and unjust, and lawless, and blasphemous men, into eternal fire. But on the righteous and holy—on those who have kept his commandments, and continued in his love, whether from the beginning, or after repentance, may, with the gift of life, bestow incorruption, and put them in possession of eternal glory.”*

Now the intelligent reader may very readily suppose, that all this could have been written by one of the early fathers, without any intention, on his part, of declaring any thing more than those essential principles of the gospel, which, like the sun, “shine every where, and enlighten all men who are willing to come to the knowledge of truth,” which accordingly he expresses

*Mason's Plea, p. p. 39, 40.

in his further remarks on the faith, *received from the apostles and their disciples*. Irenæus declares the articles of belief which belonged to the FAITH, that the church, *dispersed throughout the world*, had professed, and that without any of those ecclesiastical combinations, which we would imagine to be indispensable to such an uniformity. And when Dr. Mason, from whose pages we have made the extract, and who had been referring to the "*early Creeds*," or as they were called, *symbols of faith*, undertakes to speak of the character of this Creed, he remarks;—"It is clear that this venerable father did not mean to give the very words of any formula of faith; but to state, substantially, those high and leading truths in which all the churches of Christ over the whole world harmonized; and which formed the doctrinal bond of their union." So we think. And so we imagine, the reader too must think. For in those days Creeds were not expressed, not even by the very same Father, in the same words. This Creed then, from the writings of Irenæus, was not an authoritative rule in the house of God. And if it was, and could be transferred to our day, it would effect a wonderful change in our orthodox, or heterodox, age.

The second example of an early Creed, which we shall furnish, is from the closet of *Gregory Thaumaturgus*, as quoted by Dr. Miller, in his letters on Unitarianism, from Cave's Lives of the Fathers, and to which Dr. Mosheim refers, as "a brief summary of the Christian religion." It is as follows:—"There is one God, the Father

of the living word, of the subsisting wisdom and power, and of him who is his eternal image; the perfect begetter of him that is perfect, the Father of the only begotten Son. There is one Lord, the Only, of the Only, God of God, the character and image of the Godhead; the powerful Word, the comprehensive Wisdom, by which all things were made, and the power that gave being to the whole creation: the true Son of the true Father, the Invisible of the Invisible, the Incorruptible of the Incorruptible, the Immortal of the Immortal, and the Eternal of Him that is eternal. There is one Holy Ghost, having its subsistence of God, which appeared through the Son to mankind, the perfect Image of the perfect Son; the life-giving Life; the holy Fountain; the Sanctity, and the Author of sanctification; by whom God the Father is made manifest; who is over all, and in all; and GOD THE SON, who is through all. A PERFECT TRINITY, which neither in glory, eternity, or wisdom, is divided or separated from itself.”*

This document, Dr. M. has been pleased to term, *The celebrated Confession of Faith of Gregory Thaumaturgus*, who flourished about A. D. 235. Its celebrity may be great, and may continue to be great, for any thing that we know, for really we do not understand it. It is something very different from what Irenæus has written, and looks very much like those unintelligible matters which were introduced, for the conside-

* Let. on Un. p. p. 144—5.

ration of spiritually minded men, about the time that the Council of Nice pronounced its revered decisions. But the circumstance, which entitles this *Confession of Faith* to such *notoriety*, deserves to be made known. We shall take our account of the whole matter, from Dr. Cave's biographic sketch of the good bishop in the article referred to. It seems that Gregory was called to fulfil the duties of a particular position, which like some similar things in our own day, were difficult and troublesome. Heresies had spread themselves over the countries, where the scene of his episcopal labours had been laid out. He himself was "altogether unexercised in theological studies, and the mysteries of religion." Now this was evidently a serious situation, in which to be placed:—called to the discharge of episcopal functions which he was not prepared to meet. Our Creeds would not suffer this; and most assuredly the Bible does not sanction it. What was the relief? Dr. Cave informs us, after having stated the difficulty, that the following relief was afforded:—"For remedy whereof, he is said to have immediate assistance from heaven. For while one night he was deeply considering of these things, and discussing matters of faith in his own mind, he had a vision, wherein two august and venerable persons, (whom he understood to be St. John the Evangelist, and the Blessed Virgin) appeared in the chamber where he was, and discoursed before him concerning those points of faith, which he had been before debating with

himself. After whose departure, he immediately penned that canon and rule of faith which they had declared, and which he ever after made the standard of his doctrine, and bequeathed as an inestimable legacy and *depositum* to his successors."

Now, whether the foregoing story, which Dr. Cave gravely relates, be true or untrue, the relation of such circumstances concerning this good father's Creed, makes it a very suspicious article; and renders it about as unfavourable a specimen of these early Creeds, as Dr. M. could have selected. It is true, it introduces the apostle John and the virgin Mary, in their heavenly habiliments, as august and venerable witnesses in favour of Creeds and Confessions of Faith: but still it makes them so, only by permitting them to frame their own Creed for us: and, as we do not lie within their jurisdiction, we must object to the whole testimony. Our Presbyterian standards assert, that nothing is to be added to the scriptures, "at any time, or on any pretext, whether by *new revelations of the Spirit*, or traditions of men; and such an instrument no Protestant conscience can possibly receive. The Westminster Confession of Faith itself, could not be sustained by such testimony, to the satisfaction of any intelligent Presbyterian. We are too well apprised of the effect of such things in ages past; the world and the church have grown too old to be convinced by such arguments; and our own good sense would reject as altogether unworthy of our confidence, any ec-

clesiastical arrangements that may be traced to so equivocal an origin.—Dr. M. will excuse these remarks on a subject, which can produce no difference of sentiment between us. He was pleased to refer to this document; the name of *Gregory Thaumaturgus* is very sonorous; and the whole sentence referring to the early fathers, sweeping before it all our convictions and conclusions, has a very imposing aspect.

Such then were these early Creeds. And certainly we cannot be considered as at all interfering with any man's liberty to write a book, if he pleases to do so. This was the civil and religious right of the ancients, as it is now of the moderns; and is entrusted to human beings, under an obligation which is common to all their privileges, and that is not to abuse them. "As good almost kill a man, as kill a good book: who kills a man, kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life blood of a master spirit; embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." Many such theological and literary efforts are made now a days, which we shall not undertake to denounce; neither do we choose to trouble ourselves about their influence. If men will write what they ought not to write, and read what they ought not to read, and believe what they ought not to believe; if they do not feel it to be a matter of the utmost importance to their present and ever-

lasting destiny, to bring their minds under the influence of TRUTH *which they understand*, we cannot gratuitously offer to do for them what they ought to do for themselves, but will not. If men will not do what they ought, they must suffer. We have no idea of becoming ecclesiastical *Reviewers*, to save others the trouble of thinking for their own good. That is a kind of religious *pauperism*, which is inconsistent with the genius of christianity, and the spiritual prosperity of professing believers: and is an attempt to engraft religious institutions of our own upon those which God himself has created, and in which, he made man a dependant upon external influences, as far as his own wisdom determined to be right. Every thing which makes MAN less than what he ought to be, is certainly suspicious in its character, and deleterious in its results. God himself has carried this delicate subject of legislation as far as it can be safely carried; and every step, which is taken to reduce the personal independence of men below the level on which he has placed it, must necessarily do very great mischief.

Many such Creeds; or many pieces of such Creeds, are published every day in our own country; but none of their authors imagine that they are empowered to make laws for the human conscience, or to erect their speculations into terms of christian communion. And it was so with these early Creeds. The good bishops, whose names have been introduced into this controversy, were not framing sectarian rules, by which God's re-

deemed children should be deprived of "the children's bread." They were not sketching out "voluntary associations," and giving schismatic, arbitrary, political forms to different sections of the church; or, with conscious power, forcing upon men their own frigid, heartless, formularies. The power to make laws must be constituted, before the laws can be made; and we must look for these authoritative rules of faith and manners, when the time came round, and the men appeared, who claimed the authority by which they could be enacted. "Before there were," says Jerome, "*by the instigation of the devil, parties in religion; and it was said among different people, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, the churches were governed by the joint counsel of the Presbyters. But afterwards, when every one accounted those whom he baptized as belonging to himself, and not to Christ, it was decreed throughout the whole world, that one, chosen from among the Presbyters, should be put over the rest, and that the whole care of the church should be committed to him, and the seeds of schisms taken away.*"* It follows then most conclusively, from what we have culled out of the history of the early ages of the church, that there were no such instruments as our Creeds and Confessions; and that, as we have already stated, the council of Nice framed the first formulary of this kind. Ecclesiastical history then is not against us, but for us;

*Mason's Plea, p. 79.

and if there be any value in such kind of testimony in relation to a Bible question, then that testimony is all in favour of the doctrine advocated in these pages.

SECTION 6.

There is another class of historical facts, belonging to the early ages of christianity, which our subject requires us to state, and to which we now invite the reader's attention. It was not the want of an authoritative Creed, which opened the door for *heretics* to enter; neither have such Creeds ever kept heresy out of the church. In defiance of the Nicene Creed, Arians would be Arians still; and with that very Creed in his hand, Arius himself, unconvinced, unchanged, and in every thing, it would seem, too subtle for the orthodox, having regained his privileges, carried on his own intrigues. It is altogether a mistake to suppose, that these ecclesiastical documents, are unsuspected, and untreacherous guardians of the truth. They never protected truth, nor promoted unity; they never gave health to the church's soul, nor grace and beauty to the church's form; they never hushed contention, nor reconciled conflicting opinions, since they were first introduced. They do none

of these things now; but, as of old, they do at this day tarnish the beauty, distract the peace, and cripple the efforts, of the church of God. They did then, and they do now, set brothers at variance, and teach them to divide their inheritance on unfair principles, and in the midst of strife and discord. And these things they will always do, while they are permitted to regulate ecclesiastical matters, and divide the church into voluntary associations.

Philosophical, or *scholastic* theology, as it is called, furnishes a very large proportion of those materials, from which the ecclesiastical historian must make up his details. The reader, who has turned his attention to this subject, and examined the early records of ministerial enterprise, must have discovered how soon theologians were decoyed from the simplicity of religious truth, and the evenness of religious manners, and were led astray into devious paths by philosophy, as their *ignis fatuus*. He has been perusing the confused and forbidding annals of heresy. He has been holding communion with men whose speculations corrupted the doctrines, and whose ambition stabbed the peace, of the church. And if he has applied the information he has acquired, amid the most painful emotions, to this subject under discussion, he will readily pardon the scruples we have expressed. Such a course of inquiry has put him in possession of a great variety of facts, which, when compared with the present state of theological science, must have conducted him into a train of observa-

tions, similar to those we are now making. We cannot conceive how he should escape the impression, which we suppose such studies must necessarily make. If any one of our readers is surprised by this intelligence, he is bound to postpone at least his censure, until he has for himself investigated that branch of ecclesiastical history to which we refer.

During the *first* century, Dr. Mosheim informs us, that "the method of teaching the sacred doctrines of religion, was most *simple*, far removed from all the subtile rules of philosophy, and all the precepts of human art:"—That "all who professed firmly to believe that Jesus was the only Redeemer of the world, and who, in consequence of this profession, promised to live in a manner conformable to the purity of his holy religion, were immediately received among the disciples of CHRIST. This was all the preparation for *baptism* then required; and a more accurate instruction in the doctrines of christianity was to be administered to them, after their receiving that sacrament."—"The christians took all possible care to accustom their children to the study of the scriptures, and to instruct them in the doctrines of their holy religion; and schools were every where erected for this purpose, even from the very commencement of the christian church."*

In his account of the *second* century, our historian remarks,—“The christian system, as it

*Vol. 1, p.p. 113—116.

was hitherto taught, preserved its native and beautiful simplicity, and was comprehended in a small number of articles. The public teachers inculcated no other doctrines, than those that are contained in, what is commonly called, the *Apostles' Creed*; and, in the method of illustrating them, all vain subtilties, all mysterious researches, every thing that was beyond the reach of common capacities, were carefully avoided. This will by no means appear surprising to those who consider, that, at this time, there was not the least controversy about those capital doctrines of christianity, which were afterwards so keenly debated in the church; and who reflect, that the bishops of these primitive times were, for the most part, plain and illiterate men, remarkable rather for their piety and zeal, than for their learning and eloquence.

“This venerable simplicity was not, indeed, of a long duration; its beauty was gradually effaced by the laborious efforts of human learning, and the dark subtilties of imaginary science. Acute researches were employed upon several religious subjects, concerning which ingenious decisions were pronounced; and, what was worst of all, several tenets of a chimerical philosophy were imprudently incorporated into the christian system. This disadvantageous change, this unhappy alteration of the primitive simplicity of the christian religion, was chiefly owing to two reasons; the one drawn from pride, and the other from a sort of necessity. The former was the eagerness of certain learned men to bring about

a union between the doctrines of christianity, and the opinions of the philosophers; for they thought it a very fine accomplishment, to be able to express the precepts of CHRIST in the language of *philosophers, civilians and rabbins*. The other reason that contributed to alter the simplicity of the christian religion, was, the necessity of having recourse to logical definitions and nice distinctions, in order to confound the sophistical arguments which the infidel and the heretic employed, the one to overturn the christian system, and the other to corrupt it.”*

In the *third* century appeared ORIGEN, who, according to our historian, was the most eminent man of his day, “whether we consider the extent of his fame, or the multiplicity of his labours;— a *presbyter* and *catechist* of *Alexandria*, a man of vast and uncommon abilities, and the greatest luminary of the christian world that this age exhibited to view. Had the justness of his judgment been equal to the immensity of his genius, the fervor of his piety, his indefatigable patience, his extensive erudition, and his other eminent and superior talents, all encomiums must have fallen short of his merit. Yet such as he was, his virtues and his labours deserve the admiration of all ages; and his name will be transmitted with honour through the annals of time, as long as learning and genius shall be esteemed among men.”†

After such a high wrought eulogium on the character of *Origen*, from the pen of Dr. *Mosheim*,

*p. p. 180—1.

† Ib. p. 268.

it perhaps becomes us to speak with the most profound reverence of this great man. But our cause is too important to be exchanged for a compliment to human talent. The Apostle Paul, who was a much greater man, would accept of no such idolatrous homage. Refusing to be dazzled by the splendour of such a panegyrick, we feel almost disposed to say what Dr. Miller almost says in his lecture—"it had been good for the church if he had never been born." But let the historian himself, who has written so fine an epitaph on the tomb of this departed genius, pass his own sentence upon the object of his admiration. Thus he writes:

"The principal doctrines of christianity were now explained to the people in their native purity and simplicity, without any mixture of abstract reasonings or subtile inventions; nor were the feeble minds of the multitude loaded with a great variety of precepts. But the christian doctors, who had applied themselves to the study of letters and philosophy, soon abandoned the frequented paths, and struck out into the devious wilds of fancy. The Egyptians distinguished themselves in *this new method of explaining the truth*. They looked upon it as a noble and a glorious task to *bring the doctrines of celestial wisdom into a certain subjection to the precepts of their philosophy*, and to make deep and profound researches into the *intimate and hidden nature* of those truths, which the divine Saviour had delivered to his disciples. **ORIGEN WAS AT THE HEAD OF THIS SPECULATIVE TRIBE.**

This great man, enchanted by the charms of the platonic philosophy, *set it up as the test of all religion*; and imagined that the reasons of each doctrine were to be found in that favourite philosophy, and their nature and extent to be determined by it. It must be confessed, that he handled this matter with modesty and caution; but he still gave an example to his disciples, the abuse of which could not fail to be pernicious, and under the authority of which they would naturally indulge themselves without restraint in every wanton fancy. And so, indeed, the case was: for the disciples of Origen, breaking forth from the limits fixed by their master, interpreted, in the most licentious manner, the divine truths of religion according to the tenor of the platonic philosophy. From these teachers, the philosophical, or *scholastic* theology, as it is called, derives its origin; and proceeding hence, passed through various forms and modifications, according to the genius, turn, and erudition, of those who embraced it.”*

Afterwards, when the church was passing through the changes and conflicts of the fourth century, the same historian tells us, that “among all the religious controversies that divided the church, the most celebrated, both for their importance and their duration, were those relating to Origen and his doctrine.”† Indeed, while he “was held, by the most part of christians, in the highest veneration, and his name was so

* *Ib.* p. p. 265—6.

† p. 378.

sacred as to give weight to the cause in which it appeared, the Arians, who were sagacious in searching for succours on all sides to maintain their sect, affirmed that he adopted their opinions." Such then was the value of this great man, and his theological abilities; and such the course he run as a philosophic moralist, in an attempt to curb the truth divine by human laws. His scholastic modes of reasoning; his labour to introduce a system of theology which would correspond with his principles of philosophy; the varied efforts which his zealous disciples made to extend the influence of his doctrines; and the deep interest which was taken in his speculations; gave that form to religious truth, and that turn to the religious mind, which to this hour sanctions, and creates, the necessity for human Creeds, and occasions the diversity of doctrine and feeling which still exists. This comparing the Bible with philosophy instead of with itself, called for another *test* of christian character than the Bible; a *test*, which would mould and fashion religion into a philosophical form; and a *test*, which would try the philosophy, not the christianity, of professing believers. Origen "set up the platonic philosophy as the *test* of all religion;" and this is the true explanation of a *test* of ORTHODOXY. Let our sectarian christians pause and reflect, whether it is their duty, or worth their while, to endeavour to make plain and humble christians, PHILOSOPHERS.

A similar combination of circumstances oc-

curred, or rather a combination of circumstances, in which, by the magic power of Origen's genius, the spirit of philosophising transmigrated into other religious systems, when Arianism appeared in living, but subtle form. And this gave birth to our ecclesiastical Creeds. For the famous council of Nice was convened, under the auspices of a civil ruler, who was more crafty than religious, to quell the controversy which had arisen between two speculating theologians, who divided and distracted the whole church with matters which were "too high" for them. The case is as follows:—Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, "leading a quiet and peaceable life, brought the church into an unity, and on a certain time, in presence of the priests which were under him, and the rest of the clergy, he entreateth somewhat more curiously of the Holy Trinity, and the unity to be in the Trinity. Arius then being one of the priests placed in order under him, a man very skilful in the subtleties of sophistical logic, suspecting the bishop to have brought into the church the erroneous doctrine of Sabellius the *Africk*, and being kindled with the desire of contention, set himself opposite against the opinion of Sabellius the *Africk*, and, as it seemed, directly against the allegations of the bishop.—When he had, with his strange kind of doctrine, concluded and laid down this position, he provoked many to reason hereof, so that of a small sparkle a great fire was kindled."* Here was speculation

* Soc. Ec. His. Lib. 1 ch. 3.

arrayed against speculation; the simplicity of scriptural instructions was exchanged for abstract reasonings and subtile inventions; great and learned men were arguing about things that neither of them understood; and the whole church was involved in grievous and unprofitable controversy.

Constantine the emperor, according to Eusebius, is grievously afflicted, "as much as if he himself had fallen into some great calamity," when "a report was brought to him of a great faction which was growing up in the church." He accordingly "bethought himself how he might prevent it," and "straight he chooses one of those religious men which he had about him, who had been a faithful and zealous confessor of the truth in the times of persecution: him he sends to draw the *Alexandrians* to peace and concord, and by him sends letters written to that effect to the authors of the sedition." It is further stated, that "this faithful messenger, did not only deliver his letters, but also dealt very earnestly with them in the emperor's behalf, that he might effect his desire. And though he was a very godly man, yet his letters nor his endeavours could not bring matters to any good success, in regard that this faction grew stronger, and had overspread all the eastern provinces. And thus through the malice of the devil, who envieth the happiness of the church, discord and dissention continued."

This good emperor was very much troubled by his unsuccessful efforts. "Whereupon he

levied, as it were, an army of God's servants, and called a general council, and writ letters to the bishops, to summon them to repair to this convention or spiritual parliament. Neither did he only give command for the assembling of a general council, but sought to further it by his imperial authority, permitting some to take up his horses in his name for the performance of this journey, and provided for their convenient travel by wagons and other means."*—What a good emperor! We wish he had been better.

It seems however that after all the pains which the emperor took, he failed in his purpose. And we should mourn over the awful degeneracy of that state of society, in which the human conscience can become the vassal of civil power. Neither could the synod, with all its mighty apparatus and imposing grandeur, control the error they sought to cure. The heterodox became more inflexible, because the orthodox had become more arrogant; and spiritual governors must not *tantalize* immortal spirits, for they are of high birth and glorious destiny. And no wonder that the council should be frustrated in their designs. For synods have not, nor can they ever acquire, the authority which they pretend and desire to wield, when men *think for themselves*, which all men ought to do, if they wish to be companions for the seraphic intelligences of glory. Synods cannot blend disjointed thoughts, as if they were tying up a ruptured artery; nor heal division, as if they were winding

* Eusebius' life of Constantine.

a bandage round a broken limb. The eye must see when there is light, and the ear hear when there is sound; and the mind that is stupified, the principle of intellect that does not "overleap a wall," which a human architect has built, is like the eye obscured by an unnatural film, or the ear deafened amid dissolving elements.— Mind is gone when men may restrain it; or there is a last effort in reserve, like Samson's expenditure of recovered strength in the Philistine temple—but it is amid the flames of Tophet.

When error is once introduced; when reverence for the authority of the scriptures has declined; and when christian men have learned to employ bitterness, sarcasm, ridicule, and ingenuity, as their controversial weapons, who can foretell the issue? Excitement has arranged hostile parties; the unity of the church is broken; her beauty, so lovely in the eyes of tender christians, is blighted; and the most vindictive feelings crowd all spiritual graces out of the human bosom. Such was the case, when Alexander, on the one side, and Arius, on the other, took the field, and forced the whole christian church into interminable altercations. To restore harmony, and induce both bishops and their people to think alike on the subjects that divided them, the œcumenical council, assembled at Nice, thought of framing an *authoritative rule of faith*, ycleped a CREED. They supposed, that having civil power to back their decisions, every thing would be accomplished, and that they could *compel* the Arians to believe

their Creed. All nature frowns at the cruelty of persecution; and who ever imagined that persecution could drive the human mind from its range of thought, when holding communion with its great Creator? The Creed did not unite the contending parties: they still manœuvred and disputed; stratagem was employed against stratagem; and reviling was returned for reviling. And who is so uninstructed on the subject of moral unity, especially after such streams of blood have flowed, and men have concentrated all their powers, to produce it, as not to know, that **LOVE, LOVE,** is the celestial band which makes spiritual intelligences harmonize; commissions angels to mingle among earthly scenes; and forms the essence of Deity—proclaimed in the grace of the gospel, expended in the sorrows of Immanuel, and hourly dispensed to man as a pensioner on “the fulness of Godhead?” O, what a puny thing is a human Creed!

It is a correlative fact, of great importance, that, in this present age, the church is recognizing her spiritual *unity*, and that her members are cherishing *love* to one another. Christians are discovering their common similitude; and the associations which they are now forming, and which so often bring them together to mingle heart with heart in the **GREAT CAUSE**, are of the most fascinating kind. They are throwing off “the painted earth-made vizors, which conceal the human face divine,” and their extended communion charms every eye by its enchanting love-

liness. The result of it *must* necessarily be to put down all these authoritative rules. The result of it *has* been to bring them into disrepute, and enfeeble their control. The longer they exist, and the more efficiently they act, the more visible will that result become. Like a mountain of polar ice, loosened from its northern fixture, and hastening to dissolve under milder suns, these ecclesiastical exotics will droop and wither, and die, where charity kindles her burning coals. It is the province of love to unite men together, and heal the divisions which separate them;—it is that moral bond of union which God himself has created, and by which he intends to bind together all things in his spiritual kingdom. At last we shall see the members of Christ's body "*fully* joined together, and compacted by that which *every joint* supplieth, according to *the effectual working* in the measure of every part." Unity indeed will be produced; not that unity which sectarians so clumsily define, and which their unceasing contentions have made so entirely chimerical; but the unity of the spirit, "which is to be kept in the bond of peace." Such a *sect* we do most heartily wish to see formed. Not a sect which covets the honour of giving birth to generations of controversial heroes, and promises a crown of immortality to the victorious polemic, who has been striving with his brethren. But a sect, "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, *Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fully framed to*

gether, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

We humbly conceive that we have now traced these human Creeds and Confessions of Faith to their true origin. They are wholly destitute of a *divine warrant*. They are the offspring of ecclesiastical power, created by human ambition, and sustained by *civil law*; they sprang from scholastic theology, introducing subjects of contention among christians, and courting decisions from human authority. They are the institutions of a degraded state of religious society, and the representatives of deteriorated moral principles, argument, and feeling. When the church made them, she "left her first love;" she forsook "the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Such is the biography of these expiring rituals, down from the unmanly contests of the council of Nice, through all the variegated scenes of the reformation, the perilous distractions of Puritanic times, and the unsatisfied scruples of many dissenting parties, to this age of great, general, universal, needful, prophesied changes. They are like the synods—members in fact of the same troublesome family—of which the great and good Gregory Nazianzen declared, "that he had never seen a good effect, or happy conclusion, of any one of them;" but that they "rather increased than lessened the evils they were designed to prevent."

In concluding this *first* part of our remarks, we think it worth while to observe, how far the

principle of this error, which we are criticising as so indefensible in its character, and injurious in its tendency, always has belonged to "*a declining state of religious society.*" Different ages of the world have possessed different degrees of divine revelation. Of course, then, their circumstances were very different. But however different, this *principle* of error possesses versatility enough to accommodate itself to them all.—What is *Idolatry*? Had its devotees no knowledge of God, that they should build altars for all the host of heaven, and worship stocks and stones? Was the revelation, which Jehovah made of himself on earth, hidden from them by an arbitrary decree? Had he no witnesses speaking to them in his name, in his works, in his providential administration, in their own bosoms? The promise given to Adam—the covenant made with Noah—the sacrificial rite—the opportunity of deprecatory prayer—were they ignorant of these things, which belong to God's dispensation of grace? Or did they not lose their moral privileges in consequence of perverting the simplicity of divine worship by *inventions of their own*? Were they not given over to a reprobate mind, because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge; because their foolish heart was darkened by their own vain imaginations; and because, that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image *made like to corruptible man*? Were not doctrines—the offspring of human wisdom,

and rites—the creatures of human power, the legalized substitutes for the commandments of God?—These two things cannot exist together. God must be the supreme Governor among men. Man, as an accountable agent, cannot serve *two* masters. One must be loved, and the other must be hated; and just according as man himself may choose, will the decision be made. Such was the operation of this principle of moral existence, in the Gentile world. They did not choose to glorify God as *God*, but yielded themselves up to the despotic sway of a tyrant brother, and truth was at last secreted from the public eye; as the Bible was in after ages, when men must needs try the experiment again, and attempt to wave the banner of the cross over the unholy combination. The coming of Messiah and the period of his incarnation, were matters of divine purpose and heavenly prediction, not entirely obliterated from the minds of Gentile moralists. But systems of philosophy, and rules of ethicks, very different from the revelation which God had given, kept these things out of sight, and proclaimed them too mysterious for the vulgar gaze. Eastern Magians came with their gifts to the babe of Bethlehem;—but what more do we know about them? The oracles of the Cumæan Sibyl, announced the coronation of a universal king; but then these oracles were deposited in a stone chest in the temple of Jupiter, and were guarded from public inspection by civil law.—Such is the danger of permitting human authority to play with the

human conscience. Such is the result of suffering man, under any pretensions not sustained by a divine commission, to control the moral responsibilities of his brother.

What was the history of the Jews? Did they not pursue a similar course, and take the most unwarrantable liberties with the divine prerogative? Did not the Redeemer explicitly charge them with the crime of making void the law by their *traditions*? Were they not broken up into sects and parties, each contending most zealously for its own peculiar tenets? Were they not divided on the very question, to the discussion of which these remarks are devoted—whether the written law *alone* was of *divine authority*? Did they not differ in their interpretation of the law, and sanction by statutes of their own, a variety of moral maxims, on which the Redeemer animadverted with the most unsparing severity? Had they not destroyed the simplicity of the scriptures, defaced the beauty of their own *ceremonial* ordinances, dressed off the person of the long promised Messiah in political livery, and converted the prophecies into so many military mottoes, by their own unsanctified speculations? And did they not, while engaged in these demoralizing proceedings, celebrate the praises of Moses in the loftiest strains, and pronounce the highest eulogies upon the writings of the prophets? O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the Master would have gathered thy children together; but their consciences were seared by the splendid, but deceiving, processes of human law.

What was that "career of shame," to use the language of a modern writer, which the primitive church "ran with wild incontinence through the night of the dark ages?" Ah! the memorials of her aberration are yet before our eyes, awaiting his approach, who is coming to set up his kingdom with its appropriate glories, and who will reign in human hearts without a rival? Did not a most gorgeous ritual, sustained by great ecclesiastical oppression and financial resource, supersede the authority, and occupy the place, of the Bible? Had not Luther and Calvin, and that whole host of evangelical heroes, to contend with the arrogance of councils, and plead the cause of truth against the encroachments of ecclesiastical power? These were the champions of human freedom. They sighed after the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and counted not their lives dear, that they might inscribe upon the portal of every christian temple, and write on the fleshly tablet of every human heart,—*The Bible is the only rule of faith and practice.* They had to contend against that very *power*, of whose rise we have been writing, and which set up human laws in the house of God; and their names shall live in blest remembrance, while the records of God's mercies shall be read with delight, by the redeemed on earth.

And for what did the Puritans suffer? Why fled they to the American wilderness, to seek a home among unsanctified savages? Were they

too unsocial, too fastidious, or too heretical, to live in a better clime? Or did they seek to escape from an ecclesiastical tyranny striving to establish a cruel, unrelenting, and degrading lordship over their conscience? How could they submit, or how could any man who has any respect for himself submit, to such statutes as the following which their sovereign's crown was pledged to support:

1. That no preacher, under a bishop or dean, shall make a set discourse, or fall into any common place of divinity in his sermons, *not comprehended in the 39 articles.*

2. That no parson, vicar, curate, or lecturer, shall preach any sermon hereafter, on Sundays or holydays *in the afternoon, but expound the Catechism, Creed, or ten commandments; and that those be most encouraged who catechise children only.**

Paul would not have submitted to such things for an hour. And neither could these magnanimous men, to whom we Americans owe our lofty ideas of the equal rights of men. Nor is it long since these things were done. A few years only have rolled by, since they landed on these shores, where liberty has now spread her mantle over a large and flourishing and noble nation: and the apostolic tones of Robinson's address, as he bid these spirited sons of truth an affectionate farewell, still rest upon our ears, and thrill along our nerves. He said:

* Neal's His. Pur. vol. 2. p. 153.

BRETHREN,

We are now quickly to part from one another; and whether I may ever live to see your faces on earth any more, the God of heaven only knows; but whether the Lord has appointed that or no, I charge you before God and his blessed angels, that you follow me no farther than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. X

If God reveal any thing to you, by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry; for I am verily persuaded, the Lord has more truth, yet to break forth out of his holy word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the reformed churches, who are come to a period in religion, and will go at present no farther than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of his will our God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it; and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. (

This is a misery much to be lamented; for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God; but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they first received. I beseech you remember, it is an article of your church covenant, that you be *ready to receive*

whatever truth shall be made known to you from the written word of God. Remember that, and every other article of your sacred covenant. But I must herewithal exhort you to take heed what you receive as truth; examine it, consider it, and compare it with other scriptures of truth, before you receive it; for it is not possible the christian world should come so lately out of such thick antichristian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.*

And if in the present day, we should have reverted to such an unhappy state; if there is any thing to be found among us like that which such men would reprove; if our summaries or Creeds have in any measure become substitutes for the Bible, or have forbidden any investigation beyond their own sectarian limits; if truth is rather learned from them, than from the scriptures, by any classes of professing christians; if they have given shape to our thoughts, or moulded our religious ideas and phrases into their own peculiar forms; if they have become the tests of christian character, and have authoritatively fixed the terms of christian communion; if they avail to keep a christian from baptism and the Lord's supper, and close the doors of the sanctuary against a man who has the scriptural qualifications of a minister of Christ; if they have instructed us to make the law of Christ a rule of ecclesiastical procedure under the form of "our own principles;" and transferred

* Neal's Hist. Pur. vol. 2, p. p. 146—7.

the church to rest on the basis of our voluntary purposes, instead of Christ the only foundation; then verily is there room for the most earnest entreaty and the boldest remonstrance. The Mediatorial prerogative of the Lord Jesus has been most sinfully invaded; and there is not a believer in Christendom, in the ministry or out of it, who is not entitled, in the place which the providence of God has called him to occupy, to record his unhesitating and determined dissent.

We now close this *first* part of our Remarks, under the full impression, formed in the most conscientious manner, that the history of the early ages of christianity affords no proof in favour of these authoritative rules called Creeds or Confessions; but that all the testimony which is to be derived from that source, is directly against them. And we honestly think we have demonstrated all this by the quotations which we have made, and which we might have multiplied and varied without much difficulty. Independently of that testimony, however, we believe that every christian who has the Bible in his hands, and who is in the habit of reading it, as it ought to be read, has all the materials which are necessary to make up a satisfactory and correct judgment on the matter of discussion. The church of God wants nothing more than his own divine institutions; and with these she may grow and flourish, until the enlarged purposes of divine grace concerning her, are all accomplished, and the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

This we hope most clearly to show in the *second* part of our Remarks. May the Lord Jehovah bless and prosper every man who seeks to know and do HIS WILL; and multiply the number of those who shall fully comprehend, and fairly appreciate, this principle of intellectual glory, and spiritual living.

PART II.

SECTION I.

THAT God has given law to all mankind, is an unquestionable fact;—"sin is not imputed where there is no law." That all mankind are bound to obey God's law, is equally self-evident:—"the soul that sinneth, it shall die." And that God is pleased with human virtues, possessed and cherished in obedience to his law, is abundantly plain;—"hath the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" This institution creates the turning point of human destiny, and forms the most important of all important things, with which mankind can be concerned. Who then can be, or ought to be, displeased, because the *divine law* is most urgently pressed upon the human conscience? Who then would, or ought to, regard any plea which may be advanced against its *exclusive* authority? Who then would break one of its least commandments, and teach men so, running the risk of being pronounced by the Master, "the least in the kingdom of heaven?" It is a matter of the most serious moment to every human being, that, as the rule

of his conscience, it should preserve its own awful supremacy; and that nothing else should at any time occupy its place, or set aside its claims. The Son of God, who came down from heaven to magnify it and make it honourable, will accept the love of no man who will not keep its statutes and ordinances to do them.

This law makes its appeal directly to CONSCIENCE, or that moral faculty with which every man is endowed, and which qualifies him to judge on moral subjects. Conscience is God's witness in a man's own bosom, bearing testimony to *himself*. He carries it with him wherever he goes, and it sits in judgment on every thing he thinks, says, and does: so that he is evidently susceptible of moral impressions to a much greater extent, than can possibly be known by any but God and his own soul. And if the authority of God cannot control him, and lead him to the faithful discharge of all his moral duties, nothing else can. All agencies are necessarily less powerful than that which is divine; and where this is successfully resisted, or when the conscience has been seared by habits of rebellion, in vain does man interpose his puny arm.

This faculty, like every other power which man possesses, is susceptible of great cultivation. Not more certainly will the human body grow up to its own proper size by the use of healthful nutriment, or the human mind expand and enlarge by its own exercises in the pursuit of various knowledge, than conscience will become vigorous, refined, and tender, by being brought

under the immediate superintendence of the Holy Ghost, and the wholesome discipline of truth. Men differ more in nothing than in the amount of conscience they display; or in the application they make of moral principles to the transactions of life: and among professing christians, that difference will always be in proportion to the degree of *scriptural* light they have, or to the use they make of that light. There are many things which some christians do, which other christians cannot consent to do; and yet they all plead *conscience*. If then, under analogous circumstances, men are very cautious what they eat or drink, lest they should injure their bodies; or are anxious to acquire the best means of intellectual improvement; why should they not be as careful, as circumspect, as solicitous, as diligent, that this moral power should be matured by some corresponding process? And if the study of the Bible is the great mean which God has provided, why should they not most patiently employ it, that they may accomplish so desirable an end? Do they not eat the *best* food they can obtain? Do they not seek the *best* instructors to guide them in academic pursuits? Why not then take the *best* of all books; that which is most happily adapted to make them proficient in religious science, and study it as though their most earnest desire was, to "have a good conscience?" And should not ministers of the gospel, whose province it is, as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, to commend themselves to every

man's conscience in the sight of God, urge them by all that is lovely, and by all that is terrible, to search the scriptures? Is it not their business, does not their greatness in the kingdom of heaven consist in their doing and teaching God's commandments?

Manifestly it must be a most presumptuous, and consequently a most injurious, thing, to interfere between God and a man's conscience: either to take away the light by which God would illumine the human mind, or to introduce any rival influence, by which the mind may be distracted. It is surely one of the most perilous experiments an unwary moralist ever tried: nor can he offer one good reason why he should do so. Can he manage conscience better than its maker? Can he mend the moral constitution which Jehovah has set up, or place the church under better regulations, than those which He has given who redeemed her by his blood? "Who hath instructed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor, hath taught him?" Why then these human rules to regulate what God has already regulated, or to shut the mouth of prayer and praise which God hath opened? Whence this human authority that is so extensively exercised in the house of God, that circumscribes his own divine institutions, and binds heavy burdens, grievous to be borne, upon the free-born sons and daughters of Zion? Is it from heaven, or of men? If it be from heaven, say so distinctly and audibly? Is it of men, then where is your authority? If you cannot

produce the most unequivocal warrant, then you have interfered between God and the human conscience, and by your own social laws have degraded both yourselves and your brethren. You are but repeating the experiment which Jewish Rabbies, and ambitious Prelates, have tried before you, whose sad catastrophe we have already related. If there is a warrant, let us see it, and we withdraw our protest against these ecclesiastical proceedings.

Such a plea, however, has been advanced. Speaking of the heresies of the Apostolic age, and referring to provisions which were then made for the safety of the *churches*, Dr. Miller says—"An inspired Apostle directed them not to be contented with a general profession of belief in the religion of Christ, on the part of those who came to them as christian teachers; but to *examine* and *try* them, and to ascertain whether their teaching were agreeable to the "form of sound words" which they had been taught by him: and he adds, with awful solemnity—"If any man bring any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be ACCURSED." Here was, in effect, an instance, and that by Divine warrant, of employing a CREED AS A TEST OF ORTHODOXY: that is, men making a general profession of Christianity, are expressly directed by an inspired Apostle, to be BROUGHT TO THE TEST, IN WHAT SENSE THEY UNDERSTOOD THAT GOSPEL, of which, in general terms, they declared their re-

ception; and how they explained its leading doctrines.”*

Now the question is, what was this Creed—a human or a divine formulary? According as this question shall be answered, will Dr. M’s whole argument stand or fall. If it was not a Creed imposed by human authority, it has nothing to do with our subject. We never objected to divine prescriptions. When God commands, we feel ourselves solemnly bound to obey; and it is at our peril if we do not obey. And as Paul appears to have been so much alarmed lest ANOTHER GOSPEL should be introduced into the churches, we are very much inclined to believe that it was a divine Creed, or the truth which he had declared to them on divine authority. A *human Creed*, framed by man’s wisdom, sustained by man’s reasonings, and enforced by man’s authority, is the very thing, as we apprehend the matter, of which he was afraid: and that is the very thing of which we are afraid too, and against which, like him, we have lifted up our hands.

But suppose it was a human Creed, imposed by the authority of these churches, whom Paul addressed; which we must suppose, in order that the argument may have any bearing upon the subject in hand. Then Dr. M. considers it as “an instance, *in effect*, and that by Divine warrant, of employing a (human) Creed as a test of orthodoxy.” We believe we interpret him fairly, though the phraseology is very timid

* Lecture p. p. 25—6.

and cautious. Now then, we ask, what Creeds are here warranted by divine authority? The Creeds which *those churches* made? Then where are they? As an inspired Apostle has sanctioned them, we should rejoice to see them, for we must receive them as inspired:—though a sight of them would, we confess, change all our views on the liberal arrangements of the divine government, and on the correspondence between human powers and human responsibilities.—Or does this Creed of the apostolic age, cover all later Creeds framed by synods and councils in after ages? Then we have two or three consequences to look at. And the first is—That if authority be exercised in making rules by a divine warrant, then obedience must follow by the same warrant. Has any divine promise been given, by which the human conscience may be assured that all these rules, which ecclesiastical assemblies may make, are necessarily right? Then here is the old exploded idea of *infallibility*. If that will not answer, then, if these rules should happen to be wrong, yet as we must obey lawful authority, we have a divine warrant to live in *error*. It will not avail to reply, that this authority may be unlawfully exercised, and that we must judge for ourselves according to the Scriptures; for that would be merely a warrant to synods to make bad rules; or, in other words, to make rules which no one is bound to obey, which is no warrant at all. And as it is admitted on all hands, that

councils may err and do err, and err in their Creeds too, it follows that they have not a divine warrant to make rules for the human conscience.—We know indeed that there is authority to be exercised, and a corresponding obedience to be rendered, among men: but let it be remembered, that in both cases it must be IN THE LORD.

A second consequence at which we have to look, is, that when synods and councils in ages past, framed Creeds, their creeds must have been all alike obligatory on the human conscience; and the science of morals, as it passed down through the various modifications of different ages, thus presents to our view the most uncouth specimen of confusion we ever saw.

And a third consequence is,—which is perhaps the best of the three,—that as we have synods and councils continually meeting, and as errors are very abundant in our age, these assemblies are bound to make a new Creed *now*; which we confess we should be glad to see them undertake; but only because we think it would put an end to them altogether. So various are the ideas of different denominations about the different articles of their own religious Creeds, that they never can unite, no, not even among themselves, until they abandon these *instruments of union*.

Dr. M. appears to us to think that the great value of a Creed is, that it is a *test of orthodoxy*. And what, pray, is orthodoxy? Is it defined in the Bible? If it is, then what other *test* do we want? We apprehend, however, that our breth-

men are a little troubled on this point; for they continually connect *unbelief in the doctrines*, with the rejection of the Confession of Faith. Their favourite maxim is, that "men are seldom found opposed to Creeds, until Creeds have become opposed to them."* If this be so, or if men are not likely to discover the doctrines of their Creed from the Bible, and by their own reading of its pages too, it is one of the most powerful arguments against their Creed which can possibly be conceived. The Bible is not a collection of riddles: it is a book which every man may peruse—the way-faring man, though a fool, need not err therein. If then their doctrines are so plainly written in the scriptures, that "he who runs may read," why all this alarm? For when the Creed, as an authoritative human rule, is gone, the doctrines remain still in the scriptures, exposed to every man's eyes; and no fear may be indulged, that under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, all these doctrines will not make a full impression of their own image upon the human spirit. If Calvinism, which we understand to be what is called orthodoxy, be truth, we have no doubt the Spirit will establish it by his own influences to the belief of every man, as far as that man may know what good use to make of it: and if it be not truth, the sooner the Creed which contains it is abandoned, the better.

But suppose a *test*, over and above the written word of God, be necessary, and so necessary that

* Lecture p. 32.

discord and confusion must follow as a matter of course without it; and that the Bible *alone* would fail in communicating its spiritual benefits to mankind; then why have we not such a *test given* to us, by him whose kingdom is joy and peace in the Holy Ghost? Why are we left to these unsatisfactory and inconclusive reasonings on the subject of our *divine warrant* to frame such a test? It seems to us to be a very strange problem, that such an instrument should be so indispensable, and yet that neither the Lord Jesus, nor any of his Apostles, should ever have given it to us. They have furnished us with a Bible, a church, a ministry, the ordinances; but this thing that we call a Creed, they never did give us; and yet the church cannot live without it. It is passing strange! Our brethren certainly must be in the wrong, for the master is most certainly in the right.—“Let God be true.”

But after all, the value of this test is to *try* and *examine* “christian teachers.” And why not try and examine *christian people*? Truth is just as important to the people as it is to their teachers; their souls are just as precious; and the Bible is equally binding upon them. We apprehend, that Dr. M. himself would shrink from this extended application of his own principles. But cannot we *try* and *examine* these christian teachers, without one of our authoritative Creeds? Or when one of our Creeds is framed, are not these teachers still *tried* and *examined*? Will our brethren receive any man merely upon his general approbation of the

Westminster Confession of Faith? Or do they suppose that our argument requires us to receive a man merely upon the general profession of his approbation of the Bible—whether he be Jew or Gentile? If then these teachers must be tried and examined after all, and the Creed does not serve the purpose of a *test*, why defend it on the ground that it is valuable as a *test*? This matter, however, we forbear to press.

Dr. Miller has quoted two scripture texts, which, he *appears* to assert, amount to a direct warrant for the employment of a *Creed*, i. e. an authoritative rule of faith and manners, as a test of orthodoxy. These we now proceed to examine. If he has fairly interpreted them, if they do propose a human formulary, over and above the word of God, then we must admit there is a flaw in our reasonings somewhere. We will receive any Creed, for which a divine warrant can be brought; and we hope our brethren will be as willing to reject all Creeds, for which no divine warrant can be produced. The first of these texts is taken from Paul's second epistle to Timothy,* and is as follows:—"Hold fast the *form of sound words*, which thou hast HEARD of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." Now if this refers to a Creed which Paul had framed, and bound down upon the conscience of Timothy, by his mere ministerial superiority, without a divine warrant; and if he thereby affords us an example which we are at liberty to imitate; then, in the first place, let it

* Ch. i. v. 13.

be remembered, that it was an unwritten, or as Dr. M. would term it, a *nuncupative* Creed; and was therefore not intended to be transmitted from generation to generation, unless we revive the old doctrine of tradition, which was exploded by the reformation. And, in the second place, let be remembered, that if it did not flow from the mere authority of Paul as a man, but was an *inspired* communication which that Apostle made to Timothy, as an official witness for Christ, declaring what were the elements of the new dispensation, it is altogether foreign to our subject; or else, it is a solemn admonition to this young minister of the gospel, to take heed to himself not to depart from the truth as it had been given to him *in its own divine connexions*; nor to receive it in the form in which the sectarians of that age were pleased to insist upon it.

There are many passages in the writings of this venerable apostle, which are quite as explicit, as that to which Dr. M. refers, and which must all be interpreted on the same principle. In addressing the Romans, he says,* "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin; but ye have obeyed from the heart that *form of doctrine* which was delivered you." Here are *doctrines*, as well as *words*, shaped, perhaps, into a Creed. But the question recurs, was this Creed a mere *human* instrument? If so, Creeds must have been very numerous in those days; and it is very strange that our brethren have not a single one to give us. In addressing the Corinthians, he says:

* Chap. 6. v. 17. Chap. 11. v. 23 29.

“For I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you:” *i. e.* what he had now written unto them in this epistle, they had HEARD from him before: but when he did utter it they had *heard* it from an *authorised* messenger, speaking to them in the name of the Son of God, and with the awful sanctions of *divine authority*. And again, alluding to what he had done, when he made them acquainted with the doctrine of the divine ordinance of the Lord’s supper, he says: “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you.”* “For I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you.”† And when writing to the Thessalonians, he employs similar language:—“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by WORD or our EPISTLE.”‡—It must be very evident, that all such phrases, which are frequent with this apostle, and which are synonymous with that to which Dr. M. has referred, do not at all allude to any ecclesiastical documents, shaped like our Creeds, but to the testimony of God, which he authoritatively delivered as a heavenly messenger, declaring what he had received from the Lord. His word and his epistles, he himself, places on the same level.

This apostle appears to be exceedingly careful to inform the churches, that he came to them as an ambassador for Christ, and delivered his doctrines on divine authority. Listen to him:

* Chap. 11. v. 2. † v. 23. ‡ 2 Thess. 2. 15.

“Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father. I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me, is not after man.” “For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” “And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, *declaring unto you the testimony of God.* My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but *in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*” The reader surely cannot suppose, that this apostle was an abetter of human Creeds, pressed upon the human conscience. Did he not wish to make religion a *divine* matter? Does he not expressly assert, that he did?

Dr. Macknight, who was sufficiently orthodox, we presume, to be quoted on a text like the present, remarks in a note on the place—“This is an insinuation that the false teachers had proudly and impiously introduced into their discourses, a variety of high sounding, mysterious words and phrases of their own invention, on pretence that they expressed the christian doctrines better, than those used by the Apostles. This bad practice Timothy was to resist, by adhering closely to the words and phrases in which the Apostle had taught him the doctrines of the gospel, and which he terms *wholesome words*, because being *dictated by the*

Spirit,* they are more fit for expressing the doctrines of Christ, than any words of human invention.—The teachers in modern times, who, in explaining the articles of the christian faith, use phrases different from the scripture phraseology, would do well to attend to this Apostolical injunction.”—Dr. Macknight was a great admirer of the constitutional principles of the church of Scotland, and yet he found in this text no hint, delivered under Apostolical foresight, in favour of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

It deserves to be particularly remembered, that at the period to which the Apostle refers, when Timothy *heard* a form of sound words from him, and when the churches received the traditions he had left with them, the New Testament scriptures themselves, much less human Creeds based upon them, were not written. The Apostles did not, for a considerable time after their Master's ascension, commit to *writing* what he taught them. As we shall have occasion to remark in a subsequent section, they were not, and could not be, prepared for so exalted an effort. Yet their unwritten communications were of divine authority; and the churches, by such references, are explicitly required to consider what they had *heard*, as of divine origin. Paul, when he reminds Timothy of the form of sound words he had heard from him, alludes to nothing he had done in his own name, or by

* 1 Cor. 2. 13.

virtue of his own authority; but to *the manner in which divine truth was at first promulged*.— We hope we have satisfied the reader, that this text, which Dr. M. has quoted, was not *in effect* a divine warrant for a human Creed.

The *second* text which Dr. M. quotes is in these words;—"If any man bring any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be ACCURSED." The reader will please to notice that this second text is not a conclusion from the first; though it would make no very particular difference in our argument, if it was. The first is from an epistle to *Timothy*, and the second from an epistle to the *Galatians*. This remark may be unnecessary; but we are not sure that it is. Let all things stand fair.

An Apostolic *curse* is a serious thing: and is to be neither carelessly, nor angrily, denounced against human beings. It is no light matter to be cast out of the church, and delivered over to Satan, as despisers of the Son of God, or as corrupters of his gospel. Any, who may thus indulge themselves in anathematizing their brethren, because they do not agree with them in their ideas, should seek to make "assurance doubly sure," as to their divine right to do so. Even when hard pressed in argument, they must be very cautious how they take refuge here; for it is the last resort of God's best authorized messengers, and may mean something more than an oratorical fling, or a sanctimonious threat. Let them examine their Master's instructions, given in the parable of the tares, and ascertain

how far they are required to leave such things to better informed, and less prejudiced, judges. Perchance, in their hasty zeal, they may commit a blunder, and pluck up the wheat, while they are seeking for the tares—not being wise enough to know the difference in all cases. We hope the day for such ecclesiastical pomp has gone by, and that we are learning some modesty from the mistakes of ages past. And we really think we love the pure gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as our brethren, though they should take the Confession of the Faith, and we receive *nothing* but the Bible.

But what application has this text, which Dr. M. has quoted, to the subject in hand? Is it an ascertained matter, that if we deny the authority of human Creeds, we bring into the church *another gospel*? Is it a decided point, that, if our Confession of Faith should be severely censured on account of the form in which it presents divine truth, he who does it, proclaims *another gospel*? Are the orthodox party so perfectly sure that they alone have the truth, and so perfectly sure that all others are wrong, that they may venture to utter this fearful anathema against all but themselves? This is taking high ground in our controversial world, and a man has need to look well where he is standing, when he takes it. The charge of preaching *another gospel*, or even an insinuation that looks like it, must be supported by strong, numerous, and substantial vouchers. It must not be quickly, nor dogmatically, made. It must not be taken up

on vague report; on interested representations; on superficial reasonings; on uninformed conjecture; nor on angry suspicions. It is a charge of high treason, which must be proved, and doubly proved; and by which a man loses his life—his all. And hard must be the heart, degraded the mind, and “a world of iniquity” the tongue, that can harshly make it. If we should *feel* a charge like this, and feel it in all the *bitterness of our soul*, no man can be surprised.—But after all, our simple crime is, that we are pleading for the authority of our Master’s law against that which his servants have set up, pretending to his authority while they do it, which authority they cannot show us. If to maintain that the Bible is the only rule of faith and practice, be to introduce *another gospel* into the church, then evidently the gospel is a human contrivance.

But, again we ask, what application has the text to the matter in hand? Was the apostle writing on the subject of human Creeds? If he was, then has he most decidedly condemned them, and forbidden the churches to receive them. Did he cast a prophetic glance forward to these times, and argue the whole subject against us, charging us with bringing in another gospel, when we maintain that God alone is Lord of conscience? O, that the reader would but turn to the epistle, and listen to his eloquent defence of the *liberty* of the redeemed! Efforts were made to enslave them, and he stands forth their champion, covering them with the shield of inspiration. Others were bringing in statutes

and ordinances, enforcing them by *human authority*, and so setting up another gospel: he rises in the midst of the Galatian churches, and sounds an alarm;—"I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me, is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ: stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Surely the apostle does not afford, in this epistle, even the shadow of a divine warrant for human inventions. He most resolutely met every attempt to impose them upon the christian conscience, and speaks of the LIBERTY, to which christians are entitled, in the most enchanting terms. If then these authoritative rules are mere human inventions, let our brethren judge who are in danger of bringing in ANOTHER GOSPEL, in the sense in which Paul uses that phrase—THEY OR WE?

It is worth while to remark, that after all the rules which men may make, christians still will differ in their opinions. They did so in Paul's day: they did so in the ages that immediately succeeded his day; they do so now; they do so in our own denomination, and that too with our received Creed in their hands. The thing is natural and unavoidable, and the highest effort of human power cannot make it otherwise, or alter the laws of the human mind. But there are things in which they all agree; elemental

principles, which not one of them will dispute; and in which they can hold fellowship together. Will they not all admit that the Bible is the word of God? Will they not agree that the Bible is a perfect rule of faith and practice? Then why, O why, will they have another rule, and contend with each other about the terms in which it shall be expressed? Why do they not live in harmony and love? Surely they ought to treat one another with the greatest tenderness and forbearance; and never rend the unity of their spiritual fellowship by unholy strife. So Dr. Miller himself would affectionately exhort them, and we would join with him:—
 “Let it be apparent to all, that you cherish no dispositions, advance no claims, employ no language, which can reasonably disturb the harmony of your intercourse with other christians. Let it be seen that you know how to esteem those who differ from you, as well as to contend for the truth; and to cover with the mantle of charity, that which you cannot approve. There is a charm in this conduct, which even infidelity itself cannot resist. It will do more than a thousand carnal weapons to *put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*, and to “extort a trembling homage from those who *know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”*

“Providence has cast our lot in those *latter days*, which are pre-eminently characterised in Scripture as *perilous times*. Trials are coming on the church, which, were not her King in the

*Letters, vol. 1. p. 352—3.

midst of her, would appal the stoutest heart. Is this a time for the followers of Christ to be divided? Is this a time for them to *fall out by the way*, and to *bite and devour one another*? Alas! no. Under these circumstances, how solemn is the call to union and love! In this situation, how obvious is the duty of all who believe the gospel, to unite in exhibiting our common christianity to mankind in her meekest, loveliest, and most attractive form! How honourable might not such an example be to religion! How ornamental to the church! How comfortable to ourselves! How useful to our troubled world!"

"Remember, that the period is hastening on, when all the real followers of Christ shall meet in a more harmonious and a more happy world. Oceans now roll between them; mountains and deserts keep them asunder; and differences of opinion and denomination, *often more inhospitable than the most dreary desert*, place at a distance from each other, those for whom Christ died. But in that blessed and holy Society which you are speedily to join, in that glorified *multitude which no man can number, gathered out of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues*, these differences will be for ever unknown. There perfect holiness and perfect love shall reign undisturbed and eternal. Let this happy prospect fill you with the *tenderest love to all who bear the image of Christ*; let it comfort you amidst the contentions and divisions of the present imperfect state; and let it excite

you daily to cherish those dispositions which will form the best preparation for that kingdom, where all christians shall *appear* to each other, what they are in fact, *one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*"*

Now, if things be in such a condition, "what temptation is there to cultivate a spirit of bigotry or contention? Why can we not quietly and meekly enjoy our privileges together?"† Why should Creeds and Confessions of Faith keep us apart, and divide us off into so many voluntary associations? Why should we actually *fall out by the way*, and mutually refuse fellowship, because we cannot persuade one another to walk, each on the other's *own* principles? There must be something wrong; and the very fountain of the whole error is, the unlawful exercise of human authority in the church of God. As he warrants it not, he smiles not upon it. In wanting his sanction, it wants his blessing. In being a carnal instrument, it makes carnal professors. And in creating subjects of "doubtful disputation," it instructs christians how to "bite and devour one another," and teaches them to imagine that union is neither a duty nor an advantage.—"Every tree is known by its fruits." Theologians need not flatter themselves that they shall ever "gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles;" and they are wasting their time, their talents, and their feelings, in seeking after such unnatural things.

* Miller's Letters, p. p. 353—5.

† Ibid. p. 354.

SECTION 2.

Having in the preceding section, as we believe, fairly set aside the plea which has been advanced in favour of Creeds and Confessions—that they are enforced by a divine warrant, we now proceed to state and illustrate some general principles, hoping to show that the Scriptures are most explicit in their condemnation of all such ecclesiastical instruments. If we can do this, we shall then have accomplished as much as can be required of us, in order to justify the views we have expressed. The reader's attention is particularly requested to this part of our discussion, as we think it will develop the operations of a heavenly agency, designed to subdue and sanctify his own spirit, and calculated to induce him to seek after a better reason for his own Creed or Confession, than men are often disposed to give—"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain." Among the rising dead shall he himself appear, to answer for himself before the Judge of all the earth; and "though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job," were by his side, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness."

1. *The Bible is the word of the living God, and all that it says is necessarily obligatory on the human conscience, for that reason.*

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God." Therein holy men of God have spoken unto us, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. This is the peculiar excellence of the scriptures.

They alone can claim this high and distinguished honour. All the various systems of morals, which have been pressed upon the attention of men, have aspired after this distinction, and many of them, as well as human Creeds and Confessions, have endeavoured to persuade men that they were from heaven: but the Bible alone has succeeded in substantiating so serious a claim. It is a message from Jehovah, proposing a relief for the misfortunes of mankind.—And we, who live under the present dispensation, possess it in all its fulness; for God formerly spake unto our fathers by the Prophets; but he hath in these last days spoken unto us by his SON. So then every minister of the gospel goes forth with a *Thus saith the Lord*, to gain the ear, convince the understanding, win the heart, and awe the conscience, of his fellow man.—“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

If there be such a book in the world, one coming directly from God himself, and if that book makes the present and the everlasting interests of mankind its particular subject, surely it must be the best of all books. No man can commit a greater piece of folly than to neglect or reject it. It ought to rouse a universe to thought and effort, and make all creation listen to what Jehovah is pleased to say. Devils should tremble, as they do, if it reveals no hope for them, but confirms the judicial sentence under which they writhe and blaspheme; an-

gels should pry, and inquire and watch, as they do, that they may learn what further mysterious purposes their great Creator may please to disclose; and man, to whom the book is sent, and for whose good it is written, acting as under influences which might exhaust the very essence of his being, is solemnly bound, by every rational, philosophical, literary, and moral consideration, to become its diligent, attentive, humble, and believing reader. Who would imagine, that a human being could be found who had not read and believed the Bible? And if any man should be so unhappy as to be unable to procure a Bible, who would not suppose, that the whole race to which he belongs would be in commotion until this poor, unfortunate, immortal had read the word of God? Oh, surely the great anxiety of every man's soul, and the great effort of every man's life, ought to be to understand, and to become familiar with, this good, this delightful, this heavenly book. And if any one should be so happily disposed, as to become its servant, and the servant of his fellow men, and God should be pleased to give him his Holy Spirit, that he might have an additional heavenly influence to carry him through his benevolent enterprise; if any one should feel a deep concern for the spiritual interests of his fellow men, would he not carry this book with him wherever he went, and preach its glorious doctrines to every one he met? If its principles are all correct, and its doctrines all true, as they necessarily must be, because they come from God; if it

never can deceive a human being, which it certainly cannot do, because God cannot lie, would he not make it "the man of his counsel?" If he is in the pulpit; if he is by the couch of affliction, or the pillow of death; if he is in a church court, endeavouring to scan, or seeking to promote, the interests, not of one human being merely, but of unnumbered thousands, and that not only in his own age, but for many ages to come, should not the Bible be his companion and instructor? Surely he can need no substitute, and must be too much engrossed by heavenly statutes, and too full of heavenly impulses, to inquire for any thing else! He has already the best book that can be written. If he acts consistently with it, he is always right; if he departs from it, he is always wrong. What our fathers thought, or what "our excellent standards" may say, constitutes not the subject of his solicitude: his business is to hear what God the Lord has to say, and to tell what he knows, and no more.

Jesus himself, while upon earth, uniformly represented the truth as coming directly from God, and manifested a great deal of anxiety that his hearers should receive it under that view. "I came down from heaven, *not to do mine own will*, but the will of him that sent me."—"My doctrine is *not mine*, but *his that sent me*. If any man will do his will, he shall *know* of the doctrine, whether it be of *God*, or whether I speak of myself."—For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave

me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." The principle we are discussing, was then sufficiently important to be impressed by him frequently on the human conscience;—he ever gave his audience to understand, that when they heard truth from an authorized agent, *God himself* was addressing them.—His name is The Word of God.

The Apostles did the same thing. They were God's messengers; they were Christ's servants: and this was their glory. How cautiously they exercised authority! How quickly they shrunk from every thing that even looked like a lordship over one another, or over God's heritage! How careful not to offend one of Christ's little ones! How they paused and entreated, ere they ventured to anathematize a human being, or to fling him out of the pale of the visible church, to share the wrath denounced against the world that lieth in wickedness! Their great concern was, that *Christ* should be preached; and if that were done, even though it was out of envy and strife, yet they rejoiced that Christ was preached. They would glory in their very infirmities, that the *power of Christ* might rest upon them. They asked no favour from civil courts; they coveted not human applause; "troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, cast down, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," they went forth as the consecrated agents of him, who has all power given into his hands. and told his message to the world.

Their doctrines bore no human names; it was not Paul's gospel; it was not Peter's gospel; it was the gospel of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which they preached. And if any of the churches judged differently, and attempted to append human names to the doctrines they believed, they instantly reprov'd their presumption.

And this is precisely what the church is required to do now. She is not at liberty, under the form of a voluntary association, to enforce *her own principles*. She must promulge the commands of her Lord, and that in his own name; and she steps entirely out of her place when any pretension is made to original authority. All her ministers are called upon to preach the gospel of God, and to persuade men out of the scriptures. But they trifle with all that is solemn in ministerial responsibility, and delightful in ministerial privilege, when they conduct their administration by rules of human invention.

In fact, the whole value of ministers of the gospel consists in this; that God has sent them to proclaim his own word, and administer to men his truth, under the direction of his own spirit. A moral revolution must be accomplished in this world, like a political revolution. All things cannot be done *at once*. God has *human beings* to deal with, and their infirmities, as well as their advantage, must be consulted. Men may make better ministers of the gospel than angels; human languages are very various and dissimilar; and Jehovah's Bible cannot be found written

in all languages by an instantaneous effort, unless he should do it himself, as when he wrote the law on tables of stone on Mount Sinai, or as when he said, Let there be light, and there was light. And if the Bible was written in every language,—we are a poor unhappy race—all men cannot *read*; multitudes are ignorant; many cannot see the light of the sun; and little children live upon parental smiles. Or if we could all read, still the sympathies of social life are indispensable to human comfort;—“it is not good for man to be alone.” How kind and considerate was our heavenly Father in erecting the ministerial institution! Oh, most surely, he never intended that this ordinance of mercy should be a desolating curse! He never intended to give power to his apostles of mercy to injure and degrade those whom he sent them to bless! He never commissioned them to be lords over human consciences, and to bring in their own laws, framed according to their own literary or philosophic notions, to regulate his church.—No, no. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that *the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*” “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; *but God gave the increase.* So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.”—Nay, brethren in the ministry, ye must not assume authority in the house of God. The Master never gave it to you. He

said to his disciples,—“whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” The scribes and the pharisees corrupted the Jewish church by their struggle for *dominion*; and the bishops of the early ages of the christian church, broke up her unity, destroyed her peace, and changed her institutions and her law, by their lust of *power*. We must not imitate their example.—Be not ye called **RABBI**.

This principle we are considering, is of the utmost importance in this discussion. For, in stating it, we are describing that aggressive influence by which God himself affects men. The Bible is not “a dead letter;” but it is spirit and life. Independently of all power which men may employ under the direction of ecclesiastical courts, it wields a mighty influence over the human mind. It engrafts upon the human spirit its own image, and furnishes to society the very elements of its moral existence. The different sects contend with each other about their Creeds, or the various doctrines to which their Creeds have given distorted forms; but they all appeal to the Bible. The Bible is in fact an instrument of *divine* operation, by which Jehovah intends to govern men. It is the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. It is that heavenly formulary, in which he has sketched out, in the manner he thought

best, a system of morals, for the regulation of mankind. He who *believes* on the authority of the Bible, has acquired a faith which does not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. And he who *preaches* on the authority of the Bible, does not preach "with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The Bible then, instead of being incapable to preserve peace and prevent strife, is the very best thing which can be employed for that purpose; and is as superior to a human Creed, as divine wisdom is superior to human wisdom, or as divine power is superior to human power.

Consistently with the foregoing remarks, it has been promised that all Zion's children shall be *taught of God*; that the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, shall teach us all things; that if any man lack wisdom, he may ask of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him; and that the "anointing" which is provided for us, and which we receive from heaven, is sufficient to make us understand the truth. Nay, our very bodies are declared to be the temples of the Holy Ghost, where he carries on his own divine operations; and where as an advocate, he ministers to our most intense devotion. He opens our understandings to understand the scriptures; he reveals Christ *in us*; he quickens us into spiritual discernment, and strengthens us with might in the inner man; he purifies his own temples, so that Christ may

dwell in our hearts by faith; he superintends all the moral impulses, all the intellectual combinations, and all the animal excitements of our nature, which circumstances may create; he watches over our forming characters, that being rooted and grounded in love, we may be able to *comprehend*, with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, *that we may be filled with all the fulness of God.* And what more can men want than an inspired volume and a divine teacher? What human infirmity has Jehovah left unconsidered, when he made such provisions? Against what difficulty has he omitted to guard? What enemy to human peace may riot and devour uncontrolled? "O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it," saith the Lord. Come, ye ministers of Christ, accept the challenge, and reason with your master. Tell him of the insufficiency of his Bible, and of your happier legislation in forming a *Creed!* Make it appear in his presence that there is a necessity for other tests of christian character, than the one he has furnished. Tell him that it is impossible for the church to get along in peace and love, unless the form in which he revealed truth be altered, and a concise summary of moral doctrines be framed, as a companion for the Bible. Take your stand on the threshold of his holy temple, and proclaim aloud, that men

who will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, to Christ and his Apostles, will be persuaded by your Creed; and that unless this demand is gratified, the church must crumble to pieces.— The whole angelic host would frown at such presumption.

The experience of individual christians must necessarily confirm the view we have taken of the influence and value of the Bible. Never did any man acquire truth under such happy circumstances, as when he was assured that he derived his convictions from a divine agent. Men are capable of very high excitement, both from good and bad causes; and it is a very easy thing for sectarians in religion to produce a great commotion; but assuredly, he who receives a truth which he knows has resulted from communion between God and his own soul, is differently affected than those have been, who have neither sought nor felt such things. We are fully aware that there has been much superstition in the world; and that there is a great deal of it among Protestants. But such a concession does not touch the question; for after all the cases of a superstitious character, which might be stated, we know, that the direct influence of the Bible upon the human heart, remains still a substantial part of evangelical truth. Let us follow a minister of the gospel to the death-bed of a human being. It is an awful thing to die. The prospect of eternity is most appalling to a poor sinner. Earth has faded from his view; wealth has lost its charm, and philosophy is

dumb. The livid flames of Tophet fasten on the unprotected conscience—philosophic speculation is overreached—human deeds are indifferent specimens of moral principle—the talents of a Voltaire grow fiend-like. There is nothing to revive the dying, nothing to awake hope and create assurance, but *the word of God*. A scripture text has a charm, a power, a renovating influence, which would even equip a thief on the cross for an entrance into glory. And as to a christian—a promise which he knew came from God; which he felt to be sealed on his heart by the Holy Ghost; which he recognized in its own divine simplicity; and to which he bowed, because of its own divine power—this dissipates all his darkness, removes all his doubts, refutes all his objections, and, amid songs of praise and shouts of triumph, he is away to glory. A *divine* assurance is every thing to a dying saint. And why should it not be every thing to a *living saint*? This is, as we believe, the course which christian ministers pursue:—they take their Bible to the death-bed of a dying sinner, and leave their Creeds and controversies behind them, as too unholy for such a hallowed spot, and too perplexing for such a troubled conscience.—“Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.”

In further illustration of our principle, we would ask, what effect is the church to have upon the world? There is a very large portion of the

world yet to be enlightened:—will christian men predicate their christian efforts upon their sectarian Creeds? Are they not now circulating the Bible without note or comment, merely because they think the Bible carries divine power along with it, and that our notes and comments are very wide of the simplicity of the gospel? And as to wordlings, which are nearer home, are they not perpetually objecting to our Creeds? We may talk of the necessity of human Creeds as much as we please; we may make what summaries of scriptural doctrines we please; but if the world will not receive them at our hand, what then? We may argue, but they can argue too; for evidently our Creed is of *our own making*. We may threaten, but they will resist; for evidently they have as much right to divine munificence as we have. We may pass our sentence, but the instrument wants the master's seal, who is not going to invalidate his own institutions to enforce our statutes: and any stubborn effort on our part, will only convert the church into an engine of moral desolation. "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." Disorder and confusion in the church, are always unfavorable to moral impressions on the minds of unbelievers. They question, from such a circumstance, the reality of religion altogether, and depart to encourage one another in their infidel speculations. But when truth is proclaimed according to its own simplicity, and divine ordinances are administered according to their "due order," why then,

says Paul to the Corinthians,—“if there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.”

But perhaps our allusion to men of the world may bring us under suspicion. We have been told that we have the popular side of this question with that class of human beings, and a manifest effort has been made to identify our opinions with the most forbidding heresies. And what then? Are such individuals wrong all over? Have they no truth, no conscience, no moral perceptions? Are all their reasonings sophistry? Are all their conclusions erroneous? Do not the scriptures speak of the Gentiles as having the law written on their hearts, and doing by *nature* the things contained in the law? When the young man came to Jesus, though afterwards he went away very sorrowful, not liking the commandment he had received, were there no estimable qualities, no fine attributes of moral character, about him, which induced the master himself to love him? There are many happy views of a divine truth, acquired and illustrated by human minds, which perhaps have not been transformed by the regenerating process of divine grace;—shall we cast them off as unworthy of our concern, as if no good thing could come out of Nazareth? This argument has not been analysed, sifted, and fairly formed by those who use it. And if it had been, it must

be remembered, that human inventions are never introduced into the church, until the simplicity of divine truth has been corrupted; and that there have been Arian as well as Calvinistic Creeds. In fact, there has been all manner of bad Creeds in the church: so that the argument works both ways.

But if it be so, that the value of any particular Creed is admitted only by the religious denomination which declares it; and if the world will not receive that Creed, but will receive the Bible, then what will the church reply?—Let the reader study this queer problem. It is worth his special attention. We ask him, what has God established the church on earth for? Is it not for the conversion of the world? Are not christians the light of the world? Has not God set Jerusalem upon a hill, elevated beyond the possibility of being hidden? If then the world will not receive our Creed, but will receive the Bible, which shall the church abandon—her synodical instrument, or the conversion of the world? We leave the reader to take his choice.

Again. What objection can the world make to our Creeds? It must be, we presume, founded either upon principle, or upon the apprehension of some restraint. If it be on *principle*, then of course the church must yield, for she may not trample down principle. If it be on the apprehension of some *restraint*; then that restraint must be on the just liberty, or the licentiousness, of the human mind. If it be a restraint upon *just liberty*, then the matter is again

resolved into a question of *principle*. If it be a restraint upon *licentiousness*, then the amount is, that a Confession of Faith, framed by human wisdom, and managed by human skill, is a more powerful instrument of moral operation, than the Bible; and, of course, is the best book of the two. We leave the reader again to take his choice.

After all, are theologians really astonished, that the world itself, ignorant and unholy as that world may be, should prefer the Bible to their Creed? Can they be offended that truth should be so much better told in the Scriptures than in any volume they have written, that even a worldling can see it? And do they not perceive that this may after all be the true reason, and that they deserve no censure, but great praise, for the ground they have taken? Truth is *truth*, wherever it may be found, and by whomsoever it may be told. The illiterate fishermen of Galilee, might tell it better than Jewish priests; and however simple they were, truth in their hands might become a most powerful mean of reformation. But when you are searching after the *rule* of truth,—that which must suit all minds and all ages,—you ask after something, which, it is a pure impossibility that uninspired men should ever give you. Hence our Creeds have been perpetually changing; have been of different forms and sizes, among different denominations; and have never exactly suited any one. Every man will and must have his own Creed, and all the world cannot deny his right,

not prevent his exercising it. But the Bible has never been enlarged by any one except its great author: and when human laws, and those who made them, have passed away, and are known no more, it still remains the monument of divine wisdom and divine power. And now, when it is so freely distributed, and men are every where sitting down to read it, there is still that mighty influence overpowering all resistance:—it would seem as if the Spirit of the Lord had again gone down to the valley of dead and dry bones,—for lo, there is a noise, and a shaking, and the bones are coming together, bone to its bone.

We feel anxious that this principle should be distinctly apprehended. That *the Bible is the word of God*, is a proposition which none of our brethren will controvert, we know; but at the same time, it is one which no man can admit, without conceding to us the whole subject of controversy. All opposition withers under its influence; or if any thing remains to impede our course, there must be some deficiency in apprehending this simple truth. No living man can want any better testimony on moral subjects, nor any better arranged system of religious truth, than THE WORD OF GOD. Its statements are like mathematical axioms: they are in the moral world, what facts are in the natural world; and as well may you attempt, by a fine and ingenious effort of philosophy, to alter the arrangement of those orbs that stud the firmament, or modify the nature of these dying crea-

tures on earth, whose generations descend so rapidly to the tomb, as to mend by your theology the spiritual analogies of God's evangelical world. Now let us be charged with heresy as we may, our great principle, on which we rest all that we have to say, is, that the gospel is *the wisdom of God, and the power of God* unto salvation, to every one that believeth. And as the salvation of our own souls, and the maintenance of a good conscience, depend upon adhering to it, we cannot, and will not, give it up;—no, not in the smallest item.

Perhaps, however, we may still be thought to be entirely too zealous, as none will deny our principle. Be it so; we wish controversy did not exist on the subject, and that the great Head of the church were permitted, by his servants, to govern his own church by his own law. But we have distinctly defined the matter against which all our opposition is directed, and which, it is in vain to say, has no existence. That thing, concerning which Dr. M. remarks,—
 “That subscribing a church Creed is not a mere formality; but a **VERY SOLEMN TRANSACTION, WHICH MEANS MUCH, AND INFERS THE MOST SERIOUS OBLIGATIONS.** It is certainly a transaction which ought to be entered upon with much deep deliberation and humble prayer; and in which, if a man be found to be serious in **ANY THING,** he is bound to be honest to his God, honest to himself, and honest to the church which he joins. For myself, I know of no transaction, in which insincerity is more justly

chargeable with the dreadful sin of LYING TO THE HOLY GHOST, than in this."* Is there here no interference with Jehovah's government, as being the only Lord of conscience, or with the word of God, as being the only rule to his church? Is there here no snare to a man's soul, nor any danger of his taking that to be the law of his conscience, by the breach of which he *lies to the Holy Ghost*? Moreover, we know how readily men convert religion into showy form and pompous ceremony, attempting to add solemnity to divine worship by institutions of their own; how rapidly human rites, when once introduced into the church, ascended to a lordship over the christian conscience; and with what bitterness of spirit, and asperity of manner, different sects have contended for their own particular ordinances. We know how much more importance is attached to the fact of belonging to a particular denomination, than to the church of God; and how really our sectarian connexions regulate our mutual attentions. And we well remember, when our own reverence for our Presbyterian standards, induced us to take the shorter Catechism into the pulpit, as our text book, instead of the word of God. Knowing all this, and after having been beguiled into an act so presumptuous, is it any matter of wonder that we should have lost our respect for all these ecclesiastical instruments? Or is it surprising, if, feeling ourselves called, we should betray zeal enough, "to throw down the

* Miller's Lecture, p. 69.

altar of Baal, cut away the grove that is by it, and build an altar unto the Lord, upon the top of the rock, in *the ordered place*?" And what if we be but few in number, like "Gideon's three hundred men approaching the host of Midian?" what if our opposition be feeble, and our weapons as disproportioned to our enterprise, as Gideon's trumpet, and pitcher, and lamp?—if we have *truth*, then truth must overcome; for it is the cause which the great Mediator has undertaken to manage. And if we have not truth, we wish not to prosper in our error. On these terms, we suspend the whole matter, which we have been summoned so early to defend; not at all wishing to contend with our brethren, but seeking the good of Jerusalem.

SECTION 3.

Our second principle is—*That the Bible being the word of God, it must necessarily be precisely suited to human beings as sinful and fallen; and therefore it embraces in its provisions all that is peculiar, either in their character or condition.*

The whole Bible is full of the finest descriptions of human life; and these are drawn with the most considerate hands, and the most delicate pencil. The scriptures are every where the language of mercy to poor, perishing, sinners, who cry for help, and whom fallen spirits

revile, while holy angels may weep in silence. God alone can help, and every alleluia that a redeemed world can utter, is due to him. Let him define our sin; let him declare our desert; let him propose a remedy:—all the universe beside is incompetent—we want no angelic commentator—we want no human guardianship—we want no sectarian affectation—we want God's own word to come home to our minds, our hearts, our consciences, our business—and we ask our parents, our friends, our ministers, to give us the *word of God*. Surely this is reasonable.

And what is this *Bible* for which we plead so ardently? It is not merely a high-wrought eulogy upon the character of Jehovah; but it is his condescension to men upon earth. It is not a stern display of abstract righteousness; but it is the mingling together of justice and peace, of mercy and truth. It is not the impracticable requisition of absolute purity, made with an unpitying eye and an oppressive hand; but it is the proclamation of "the righteousness of faith," that glorious principle, of which angels and the redeemed shall talk together throughout eternity. It is not the statute of an indescribable sovereignty, which no prayer can relax, and which no tears can soften; but it is the opening of the prison doors; it is a universal call, it is an indiscriminate overture;—whosoever will, may come; and whosoever cometh shall in no wise be cast out; and all its agents act upon its own liberal commission—"The spirit and the bride say, come.

And let him that heareth, say, come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." None of our Calvinistic brethren, as they may be pleased to denominate themselves, will halt at the foregoing statement. If they do, let them pause and reflect, whether, under the guise of Calvinism, they have not sunk into a system of the most haughty, joyless, and chilling fatalism?

Again, the Bible is intended to be a system of *practical morals*. It reveals not doctrines for the sake of doctrine, but as they may serve to fulfil practical purposes: or, it never was designed to establish theory independent of practice. God did not send his only begotten son into our world, merely to display the brightness of his glory; he veiled all that glory, that men might look at it; and sent his son "in the likeness of sinful flesh," that men, whose moral perceptions were very low by reason of "the weakness of the flesh," might have an "express image of his person," which they could adore with a degree of intelligence, consistent with their infirmities. The Holy Spirit has not come down merely to astonish by his own mysterious movements; his official work is to build up a temple on earth for the habitation of God:—a spiritual house, resting on Jesus as a living stone, and into which he inserts, as living stones, all whom he sanctifies. The gospel, even when angels have tuned their harps to its lofty strains, is not simply glory to God in the highest; but it is peace on earth, and good will towards men. The

whole is a scheme of redemption for sinners; who, suffering under the curse of a broken law, are incapable of relieving themselves; and who, in whatever circumstances they may be found, are accountable to him who made them, and must stand or fall on the principle of their own responsibility. The best way to promote the good of man, consistently with his circumstances as a fallen, helpless being, is the great object, which the Bible desires to accomplish. Not only is truth to be declared; but it must be so declared, that miserable man may understand, and make a speedy, instantaneous, death-bed, and profitable use of it. Not only must Christ die to exhibit God's aversion to sin; but he suffers for the personal benefit of the sinner;—he died that *we* might live; he died the just for the unjust, that he might bring *us* to God; his whole work was characterised by its reference to LAW, under which *we* are placed; and was finished, that he might bring in the righteousness of faith, to be *unto all and upon all them that believe*.—O, surely the Bible was suited to us poor sinners; is entirely proportioned to our *capacities*, whose advantage it proposes to secure; and the best men which the church can produce, are unable to frame any thing like it. Men?—There are a thousand combinations which they do not understand; a thousand spiritual delicacies belonging to our personal communion with Jehovah, which they cannot appreciate; and a thousand occurrences, which must be reserved for the disclosures of the last day.

Again. The simplicity of the Bible, or its happy adaptation to the circumstances of mankind, is one of the most striking proofs of its divine original. That the blind should receive their sight and the lame walk, that the lepers should be cleansed and the deaf hear, and that the dead should be raised up, form an irresistible demonstration in favour of any thing they can be brought to prove; but when the Redeemer stated all these things in testimony of his own pretensions, he did not think the train of evidence complete, and added—*the poor have the gospel preached to them.* The heavenly visions which he had seen with his Father, and the particulars of which he came down from heaven to reveal on earth, are made plain and distinct to *the human mind*;—level to the comprehension, not only of the divine, the philosopher, and the scholar, but of the **POOR.** They are like Habakkuk's message, made plain upon tables, so that he who runs may read. It is this very thing which reveals the author of the Bible with peculiar glory: for infinite wisdom is ever displayed by the perfect adaptation of means to an end. Instead then of needing any of those perplexing summaries, which different religious denominations have given us, as the product of their own wisdom, the Bible, by its own plainness, evinces its own perfection, and recommends itself to the most uninformed, as a sure guide to everlasting life. If in it "there are depths where an elephant might swim," there are in it also, "shoals where a lamb may wade." If it ad-

ministers strong meat to those who are of full age, it serves the babe with milk. If it prescribes perfection to its reader, it begins by communicating first principles; and he who has learned rightly to divide it, has learned how to give to *each* his portion of meat in due season.

And what, we ask, would become of the mass of mankind; what of the majority of professing christians; what of our children, whose very praise in the presence of the Redeemer may be, that from childhood they knew the holy scriptures which are capable to make *even them wise unto salvation*, if the Bible was not thus modified to meet the imbecility of human powers? How can society be governed by it as the law of Jehovah, if it be not minutely applicable to the circumstances of society? How can any man become adequate to judge of the varieties of his own earthly condition, if it be above his comprehension? Or how shall he cheerfully sustain his own responsibilities, if what Paul has said, be not true;—"all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for *doctrine*, for *reproof*, for *correction*, for *instruction in righteousness*, that the man of God may be *perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*?" Or what can christians expect to accomplish by sending the Bible without note or comment to all the nations of the earth?—It is manifest that the scriptures must be plain to the human mind, or they can be of no use to the *poor*; and the mass of mankind could have no divine book which they can profitably read. It must be a volume

suiting to the illiterate and the busy, the bond and the free; fitted to the tottering old man, bowed down with years, who has no time to waste on our speculations, and to the young child that cannot comprehend them. It must be a book which the mother can explain to her little ones, and from which the father can read to them, under the sanctions of divine authority, a morning and evening lesson. Say it is otherwise, and then the fact, that to the poor the gospel is preached, is no longer a proof of the divine authenticity of the scriptures, seeing they cannot be put to that use as a system of moral truths. To them its page is unintelligible; its very doctrines mysterious; its propositions unformed; its promises irrelevant; and, by a reference to a human Creed, imposed upon them as the meaning of the scriptures, *their faith must stand in the wisdom of man.*

Once more. It would appear, that the great pre-requisite to a profitable reading and a correct understanding of the Bible, is to possess a *teachable disposition*; a moral quality, for which, in scripture story, we know that wise men and philosophers have never been much famed. "Verily I say unto you," declared the Redeemer, "except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Paul also, adapting his instructions to such a disposition, addressed himself in like manner to the Corinthians:—"My speech, and my preaching, was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spi-

rit and of power." The Master and his disciples, it would seem, met with the same difficulty in their preaching; took the same view of human responsibilities; and alike sought to relieve the embarrassments in which the human mind had been involved by its own conceited ideas of itself. The one tells us of divine things "hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes;" and the other, that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble," were called. In fact it would seem as if the great Head of the church was at a loss to find any moral materials among these classes of mankind, who are so uniformly discarded; and forsaking them, as having become foolish by their own trains of reasoning, he retired to the humbler walks of human life, where he might select men of better intellectual character. The one had been "spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit, *after the tradition of men:*" they had reached their pinnacle, and they wished for no change; or, if they could have imagined such a thing, that "a stone cut out of the mountain without hands" might become "a great mountain and fill the whole earth," and have yielded to necessity, they might only, chameleon like, have changed their colour, and then we should still have had human, philosophical, systems instead of the Bible. The other came forth from obscurity itself; knowing little, and less known; they had no pretensions of their own, and no systems to make; they therefore "waited patiently for the Lord," and, under the

direction of the Holy Spirit, who can commit no mistakes, they said what they had to say, and wrote what they had to write. The history of mankind may perhaps afford many analogous cases.

This view of our subject, is not only true in relation to the original constitution of the New Testament ministry, but also in regard of the whole extended platform of the christian church. Preachers and their hearers must alike be humble, teachable, men. The pride of learning, the pride of intellect, the pride of acute, philosophical, reasoning, may make the mind of a lay-man as impervious to a moral argument, as that of the most learned bishop in the whole church. Who ever saw an humble christian, with a teachable disposition, studying his Bible, and praying over it, that did not derive from it every thing that was necessary to spiritual living, in the circumstances in which God placed him? And who ever saw a professor, neglecting his Bible, and glorying in his literary attainments, or conducting a theological argument upon philosophical, rather than upon scriptural principles, who did not perplex both himself and others? These things are so common, that it must be useless to enlarge upon them; every one must know how that man necessarily grows, who conscientiously and prayerfully studies the *subject-matter* of the Bible for himself, and suffers no man to interrupt communion between God and his own soul.

It is worthy of remark, in confirmation of

what has already been said, that the Bible was not given all at once; but was penned at different periods; and was accommodated to society, as progressing from infancy to manhood. "God, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets;" but he "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son." During the dispensation under which the patriarchs lived, promises, prophecies, precepts, institutions, were liberally afforded; yet they appear to have been a good deal detached from each other; or they were gathered together by the slow and feeble process of human thought, elicited by limited opportunities, and guided by insufficient tradition. Thus Melchizedeck was priest of the Most High God; while Abraham, called from the land of his fathers, was constituted, under a beautiful covenant relation, the father of the faithful. The circumstance of their meeting after "the slaughter of the kings," which has since formed so important a paragraph in scripture history, was not an occurrence transpiring under any ecclesiastical relations, so far as we know, but was—shall we say it—purely accidental, or—it may be better, providential. It was one of those events, whose importance is not suspected at the time they take place, and which Divine Providence consecrates as most efficient agents to accomplish his own purposes;—the whole story had well nigh been forgotten altogether. And Paul, when he is reasoning on the subject, views the priesthood

of Melchizedeck as entirely detached from that of Aaron; as constructed on very different principles; as holding its own individual relations to the coming of Messiah; and as uniting at last with the Aaronic order in the person of Christ,— a parallel, kindred institution, conveying a truth, which the ceremonial law did not express in the same way.

Afterwards, when Moses came as a special apostle, his whole law was an assemblage of types, suited to the moral apprehensions of the times; was fitted to supply the wants of the church, during the period of her non-age; and was accompanied by a legislative policy, which adapted its statutes to the political relations, the geographical position, the historical facts, the insulated privileges, and the limited morality, of the Jewish nation. Many of the laws of Moses cannot else be explained; nor can their moral consistency be otherwise seen. Accordingly, when the church had arrived at full age, she needed something more than the instructions, which the tutor of her infantile years could give her. The Mosaic law was therefore abrogated, and the son of God appeared, “the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.”

The great teacher himself, when he came in the flesh to fulfil his own high obligations, was very considerate of the infirmities of his disciples, and hesitated to tell them many things which he had to communicate, because they were “not able to bear them.” And when he

transmitted official power to them, he required them to make the then present situation of human things, a matter of their special consideration. He commands them to begin the discharge of their official duties at Jerusalem: an injunction, which cannot fail to remind the reader of the peculiarity of the times, the relation of the Jews to the administration of evangelical ordinances, and the unfortunate alienation of the Gentiles from the commonwealth of Israel. The apostles scrupulously obeyed their Master's order. They went forth preaching the gospel every where; they assembled and organized churches; they ordained elders in every city, and waited patiently the result of the evangelical experiment. They did not convene in ecclesiastical council, to frame the New Testament for the regulation of the church. Their capacity to do this would have unveiled a larger combination of spiritual gifts, than their subsequent history exhibited; and would have distinguished them by powers of thought, and a range of political observation, altogether disproportioned to their conduct in relation to the Gentiles, and to the discussions in which they engaged in Jerusalem. In a convention of such singular construction, it seems to us that human agency would have been entirely lost in a supernatural interference; these men would have possessed the foresight of omniscience, and their glance would have been that of omnipresence; the whole New Testament would have been the production of prophecy; and we should have lost one of the finest ex-

amples, which have occurred in the history of God's moral government, to show that God makes no waste of means, but that he operates by the instrumentality of human nature, acting on its own principles. The apostles never thought of making a "form of sound words," like one of our Creeds. When they recorded, or discussed the doctrines of the gospel in writing, they appeared singly; and every line of the New Testament rests its claim to our attention, not upon the authority of an ecclesiastical council, but upon the direct inspiration of God.

The fact, as it is a matter of scripture history, is as follows. By the preaching of the apostles, and their unwearied efforts in itinerating, to erect church associations, truth was brought into collision with the various habits of society. It met with men in opposite conditions of life; it was subjected to severe investigation, by men of various modes of thinking; and its messengers were incessantly catechised by individuals of very different classes of mind, propounding questions, according to the vigour or feebleness of their own conceptions. Inquiries, in great variety, are started in every section of the church. Then one part of the New Testament was written by one apostle, to afford, under the superintendence of the Holy Ghost, an inspired answer to the moral problems which grew up in the sphere in which he moved; and another part is written by another apostle, to meet the difficulties originating in the circle of his labours. The *application* of truth to society suggested the inquiries,

and has given to scriptural exhortation its multiform appearance. Thus have been put into our hands, as the subject matter of new inspired records, the facts, principles, doctrines, promises, and prophecies, belonging to the measure of revelation, which the new dispensation affords.— Truth is exhibited as it is seen to bear on the actual operations of the human mind; or as it is illustrated in its palpable connexion with the circumstances of men as they are. The apostles were not system makers: but as the gospel was to be preached to the *poor*, they became writers for the *poor*; adopted the most familiar illustrations; and associated *doctrine* with *fact*, as the best, most popular, and most effectual mode of instruction.

We have no intention of denying that there are trains of close, doctrinal, reasonings in the scriptures. Facts are too plain and luminous to admit such an idea. The epistles of Paul are in some instances exceedingly dense; so much so, that even Peter tells us, that there are “some things in his epistles hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” But that forms no reason why we should involve the whole matter of religion in more perplexed argument, and make simple things more difficult than they are. Paul was called to fulfil a particular purpose, and to engage in services, from which the others seem to have been exempted. His province appears to have been,

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to settle the great controversies of his age, when the church was passing from under the long established peculiarities of one dispensation, to sustain the responsibilities of another, which had not yet been fully developed. And we really think that the principles of moral obligation, and ecclesiastical order, have been sufficiently canvassed by him, if we could only prevail upon ourselves to be satisfied with what he has done. But if we gather confidence from his example, and forget that he was an inspired man, for whose gifts our literature can invent no parallel, we may strike out into discussions, that will make us as troublesome as ever ORIGEN was, and give to the next age, abundant difficulty, to ascertain what we believe in this age.—Moreover, it is to be remembered that all the arguments of this beloved apostle, were the result of the application of truth to society; which result, so far as the spirit of truth, when closing the canon of scripture, is pleased to declare it, must be the same in all ages; and that, of course, he has by his writings, decided the subjects on which he wrote once for all. Can any man, however acute he may be, offer an argument against the righteousness of faith, as the great principle of God's government in the world, which he has not answered? Can any man feel himself perplexed, by an appeal from a Jew on the subject of external church order, after understanding his explanations? There were some doctrinal points on which Jehovah thought proper to reason with the world, and

he called Paul to do it. He has done it under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and let every man listen to what he has to say. Yet after all, when due consideration is given to the nature of the work, in which this Apostle was engaged, the reader never examined a writer who hastened more rapidly to his practical conclusions, or who interrupted his argument more frequently by digressions, which exhorted to practical holiness. Paul, the best gifted man for such a purpose that ever lived, never prepared an abstruse manual like our shorter catechism. He has gone to his rest without bequeathing to the church the troublesome legacy of a human Creed, or such a piece of distracting legislation as a Confession, which we, by a complete misnomer, call a summary of the doctrines of the Scriptures. We heartily wish, that wise divines, who lived after him, had imitated his example.

Now, if we have fairly represented the scriptures,—and we certainly did intend to give a faithful representation of them—if they really form a plain and simple revelation of truth from God himself, what other book or books can we want for the direction of the human conscience? How can any theologian tell us, that if we have nothing else than the Bible to regulate us, then anarchy and confusion, discord and strife, must necessarily follow? What room is there for contest, where every thing is plain and perspicuous? If “nothing more is necessary, to enable a simple, unlettered man, to read the word of God, with intelligence and profit, than common

sense, accompanied with an humble and teachable disposition," how is it, that with a law of such sensible excellence, the church cannot pass up through this wilderness in harmony and love; but must present to every beholder a "miserable Babel," instead of that beautiful city, which God hath so magnificently adorned? Can the thing be a *fact*? And when the advocates of Creeds declare that such consequences must follow, and urge them upon us with such impassioned language and minute detail, can they possibly be right? Let the reader review again the premises, and ask himself seriously whether such a conclusion does logically follow?—For our own part, we have often been not a little startled by the remarks which we have heard upon this subject, and have been very much surprised that ministers of the gospel should suffer themselves to speak so "untenderly about the Bible:"—for if their Creed will create harmony, and the Bible produce discord, then is not' their Creed the best book of the two?

Perhaps all this may only provoke a smile, and we shall be asked what is the *fact as it exists*? Do not men now disagree about the meaning of scripture, and are they not now divided into religious sects, each having its own view of Bible doctrines? We admit the fact. But what then? Is this dismemberment of Christ's body, the natural result of being governed by the Bible simply; or is it the *sin* of those who are engaged in it, and which the scriptures denominate *schism*? If it be the natural result, then it cannot be *sin*.

if it be sin, then it cannot be *the natural result*—and if it be the natural result, and not sin, then division, contest, strife, wrath, cannot be sin.—But besides, under what administration has this fact occurred? Under the simple Bible, sustaining its authority by reaching the human conscience in demonstration of the Spirit, and with power; or under Creeds and Confessions, impressed and enforced by human authority? Did not the primitive church, simply with her Bible, live in harmony, and maintain the unity of the church with a zeal, and to an extent, of which we cannot boast? And now, when the different churches are beginning to lay aside their mutual hostilities, is it not because our Creeds and Confessions are losing their influence, and christians are reverting to their *Bible*? What then can our brethren mean, by ascribing anarchy and confusion to a state of things in which no Creeds of human construction should exist, but where the Bible would have an entire sway? Their Creeds produce the confusion and strife which perplex the church, and form the true reason of this variety of doctrine which is proclaimed.—Most surely, if the Bible be a *plain* book, men may understand it; and if it be a difficult book to comprehend, we should be led to doubt the ability of our wise divines, and our learned assemblies, to make it any better, from the simple fact, that they have produced nothing but confusion and strife, by their authoritative decisions.

But still further;—if Jehovah indited the Bible, and intended it for such beings as we are, it is

to be presumed that he made it *just what it ought to be*; that he presented it in its most appropriate *form*; and that no man, nor any set of men, can frame one which shall be *better adapted* to the infirmities of human nature. Surely, no man will undertake to dispute this: or, if any one could be found thoughtless enough to do it, surely the church would not receive him, when thus trampling under foot an elemental principle of morals, as orthodox. If such ideas are in practical force, while theoretically denied, we beg leave to enter our most unreserved protest, and to inform our readers, that we think them quite as heretical as the denial of the inspiration of the scriptures. Most certainly, he who knows the secret thoughts of human hearts, who sees the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, needs no counsellor, from among the sons of men, to assist him in constructing an evangelical law. The whole gospel is his own divine contrivance, something too sublime to fall within the range of human thought; too perfect and consistent, to be criticised by human wisdom; and too circumstantial not to be applied to every human occurrence.

If then we are right in saying, that God has in the Bible given us moral truth in the best form it could wear, considering the character of the beings for whom it has been prepared,—and who can say we are not right?—then, under what principle have synods and councils undertaken to alter that *form*? For *our Creeds and*

Confessions of faith do take the truth which God has revealed out of its scriptural connexions; and they do modify it according to the conceptions of the men who make them, or the prejudices and feelings of the age which creates and enforces them. And why do they this? It certainly becomes them to give the best of all reasons for so eccentric an adventure. Can they make truth more tangible? Have they the promise of the spirit to superintend their deliberations, when they undertake to revise and correct God's institutions? Have they any divine promise to guaranty a good result? Or do they suppose, that they have a sufficient warrant to take such a step, from the fact that they have a *sectarian* object to accomplish, or that the interest of a *voluntary association* may require it? Then they must remember, that they have the very same argument to meet in application to these voluntary associations; and to justify themselves for so dividing the church of the living God, and altering her external form. And we really do not wonder that these two things are put together; for as Paul argues with the Hebrews — "The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."

But perhaps it may be denied, that our Creeds do alter the form in which truth is brought to bear upon the conscience. We must then make our assertion good. Are not our Creeds professed *summaries*? And what is a summary? Is it the same thing with that which it abridges, or is it a different thing? If the original and

the abstract be drawn out by different hands, will they present the same intellectual image? Is this summary needed? Did the master give us one, or empower us to make one, because his Bible was a deficient instrument of operation upon the human spirit? Every man at a glance may perceive that he has not framed the scriptures upon the same principle on which our theological systems are constructed. The Bible is not a collection of abstract propositions, systematised into regular order, nor is it a schedule of difficult, metaphysical subjects, arranged under general titles, such as, the attributes of God; the divine decrees; the perseverance of the saints, &c. On the contrary, it is a transcript of social transactions; it is an exhibition of human life; it is that species of composition which, all the world knows, is most interesting to the mass of mankind. It is true, some lofty speculators, some profound thinkers, who are capable to reason both matter and spirit out of God's creation, might prefer a volume of mental abstractions; but then the reader must remember, that the Bible was written for the poor; that it was intended to throw a beam of the life that shall never end upon the infant mind; to cheer the humble, the lowly, and the contrite spirit; and, while the dews of its blessing are falling upon the dying old man, to stretch the bow of the covenant of grace across the firmament of truth, that his closing eyes may be opened upon the cloudless light of an eternal day. Had such an epitome or compend of moral

truths, as our Creed profess to be, been the best form of revelation by which the human mind could be spiritually enlightened, doubtless God himself would have adopted that form: for he declares, he has done for man, all that he could do for him; and, indeed, he has too much pity and compassion for this fallen child of his love, to leave any thing undone which could have been done. If he had intended to write a book for a race of philosophers, instead of rejecting such for being wise in their own conceits; and if philosophers really know how to make systems, or are themselves best instructed in that way, doubtless he would have given them his revelation in a more logical form. Most certainly, however, he has not done it; and the inference fairly is, that our systems are constructed on false views of human nature, or that our Creeds are not at all fitted for man in his present state. There is a better way of teaching mankind the science of morals: for Jehovah himself, who needs not that any should tell him what is in man, has adopted another way. Surely we may safely follow where God leads, and to imitate his example, never can jeopard the prosperity or peace of his church.

The practical result of our Creeds confirms our argument. Can children understand the abstract propositions contained in the shorter catechism? Have not scientific men long since learned that every thing must be simplified, and

if possible illustrated by *example*, in order to interest, impress, and benefit the infantile mind? Are they not descending from their own lofty eminence, and, taking these little immortals by the hand, leading them up step by step? And shall we leave their moral nature uncultivated, or fatigue their tender spirits by the incessant repetition of things which they do not understand? Are our grown up christians better treated by this system of perplexed legislation? Do not these Creeds *drag* away the christian mind from scriptural exposition to dwell upon polemic propositions? Do they not make it necessary for us to contend with those whom we ought to love; and even to divide families as if the husband and the wife, the parent and the child, worshipped different Gods? Do they not present truth in philosophical forms, about which men are every where at liberty to reason according to their own apprehensions? Do they not teach men to feel comparatively *irresponsible* about religious things, because they consider themselves to be reasoning with man about his *notions*, and not with God against his *institutions*? Let the reader judge for himself, whether we do not recite facts:—As Calvinists we almost intuitively shrink away from being thought Arminians; and as Arminians we are equally frightened by a charge of Calvinism. The past age has made a controversy between these two sets of opinions exceedingly popular, and our Creeds have served to perpetuate the strife! He is thought to be a clergyman of secondary con-

sideration, and to possess talents of a very inferior order, who cannot perspicuously arrange, and skilfully discuss, the *five points*:—while, on the other hand, Whitby and the Lime street lectures have obtained immortal honour. Neither party seems to know that if they would cease to contend, and declare what they are honestly convinced is in the Bible, they would blend in most perfect harmony, as soon as long established habits, running throughout society, could admit so happy a revolution. But they have formed their opinions; they have chosen their theological system; they have entered into their ecclesiastical connexions; and of all things that are inimical to harmony, these voluntary associations are the worst—because by them *all society* is thrown into commotion. It is really admirable to hear how controversialists, belonging to different voluntary associations, will treat a scripture text which they have abstracted from its own relations, and how clearly they will demonstrate it to utter their own opinions. Who does not feel some concern, when he hears a minister of the gospel endeavouring to establish a doctrine, which, every one knows, is employed to evolve a sectarian, rather than a scriptural principle? And who, that has even thought dispassionately upon the subject, would not prefer to have the Bible explained to him *as other things are explained*, than hear the most eloquent discussion on a sectarian tenet? Surely the study of the scriptures; and an effort to make men feel truth as spoken by divine wis-

dom, and enforced by divine authority, would entirely change the complexion of such ministrations; and impel the human mind into trains of thinking, and habits of application much more spiritual and edifying. We say again, let the reader judge for himself; the whole subject is presented to him in real life; it is pressed out to its very extreme; and he may even hear, as an argument in favour of theological strife, that division is necessary to unity.—A lovely paradox! An unexpected, but happy union of contraries! Its framers are fairly entitled to all the credit of its ingenuity. We dare not envy them their happy talent at invention.

Now, most assuredly, if these things be so, and we believe we have been detailing facts, then the practical result has demonstrated, that human Creeds have not only changed the form in which God presented his own truth to the human mind, but that they have given to it the *worst* form, seeing such consequences are produced; that the whole scheme of making men think precisely alike on all subjects, or on any given set of subjects, is perfectly utopian; and that in “the confuse multitude of Creeds” which clerical ingenuity has produced, our learned theologians have been cutting another “spear of Achilles” from mount Pelion, or heaping Ossa upon Pelion in rebellion against the authority of the Head of the church—for by their Creeds they have divided his spiritual empire. We have reached bold conclusions, we know: but be it remembered, we charge none with criminal

intentions; our brethren we believe to be *conscientious*, and we hope they will show themselves *honourable*, men.—We are discussing our *subject* in the best manner we know how, or think ourselves capable of executing.

Our general idea in this argument, has been most happily expressed in the following extract; which we copy from Erskine's "remarks on the internal evidence for the truth of revealed religion;" a work which we much esteem, and which has been highly recommended by several of our Presbyterian brethren, whose signatures we are very happy to recognise as the pass port of such sentiments to the public mind. The writer is sitting on the skirts of civil magistracy, and yet hesitates not to declare what he thinks, on a subject, which is all-important even to the political existence of the country in which he lives. Mr. Erskine says:

"Most people in this country, and probably even the majority of the population in Europe, think that they understand christianity; and yet a very small proportion of them have read the Bible with that degree of ordinary attention, which they bestow upon the common concerns of life. Their ideas on this subject, are derived almost entirely from Creeds and catechisms, and church articles, or human compositions of some kind. The evil consequences arising from this, are most greivous. To convince ourselves that they are indeed so, to a high degree, we have only to compare the two methods.

“—In the Bible, the christian doctrines are always stated in this connexion: They stand as indications of the character of God, and as the exciting motives of a corresponding character in man. Forming thus the connecting link, between the character of the Creator and the Creature, they possess a majesty which it is impossible to despise, and exhibit a form of consistency and truth, which it is difficult to disbelieve. *Such is christianity in the Bible; but in Creeds and church articles, it is far otherwise.* These tests or summaries, originated from the introduction of doctrinal errors and metaphysical speculations into religion; and in consequence of this, they are not so much intended to be the repositories of truth, as barriers against the encroachment of erroneous opinions. The doctrines contained in them therefore are not stated with any reference to their great object in the Bible,—the regeneration of the human heart, by the knowledge of the divine character. They appear as detached propositions, indicating no moral cause, and pointing to no moral effect. They do not look to God, on the one hand, as their source; nor to man, on the other, as the object of their moral urgency. They appear like links severed from the chain to which they belonged; and thus, they lose all that evidence which arises from their consistency, and all that dignity which is connected with their high design.”

*p. 76. 81.

These are fine paragraphs. They are written by a close and independent thinker, and deserve most serious consideration. It is true, he closes the last of them by remarking,—“I do not talk of the propriety or impropriety of having church articles, but of the evils which spring from receiving impressions of religion, exclusively or chiefly from this source.” But certainly the candid reader may see, that there are few men who could have said more, if as much, against formularies of human contrivance, in so few words. For if they make christianity a different thing from what it is in the Bible, then how can they be barriers against the inroad of errors? Are they not themselves, the framers of the most grievous errors, by “*changing the glory of the incorruptible God,*” and modifying the form of human responsibility? If their doctrines have no reference to the great object of the Bible,—the regeneration of the human heart by the knowledge of the divine character; if they have so completely usurped the place of the Bible, that the majority of the population in Europe, are deriving their religious ideas from them, without giving the Bible even a decent reading; and if, in their original purpose and their present character, they are altogether disproportioned to the scheme of grace, and in their tendency have so dreadfully poisoned the fountain of spiritual living,—have frozen in the human bosom the love of God as the moral animation of the immortal spirit—what can be more improper?—Such is the effect of

taking divine truth out of its *scriptural connexions*, and presenting it in forms to suit the theological notions and religious prejudices of any particular age, or of any particular class of mankind. These instruments of human legislation, burst asunder the heavenly ties, which bind men together, and convert society into a huge, unsightly, and unformed mass, like Nebuchadnezzar's image, whose iron, and clay, and brass, and silver, and gold, shall be broken to pieces, and become like the chaff of the summer threshing floors.

SECTION 4.

Our third general principle is—*That the Scriptures have expressed their most pointed disapprobation with all human institutions, that interfere with the supreme authority of God over the human conscience, and have most explicitly warned us against submitting to them.*

At the very time the Messiah made his appearance, as has already been remarked, the Jews were canvassing the question whether *the written law alone* was of divine authority. The Pharisees, who formed the most popular sect of the day, attached a very great deal of value to the traditions which had been handed down from their fathers. As was quite natural, the scriptures were understood to declare things suited

to their traditionary notions; and a rule of interpretation was adopted, which transplanted the truth from out of its scriptural connexions, and completely perverted the public mind. They made void the law by their traditions; their perceptions became too obtuse to apprehend moral principle; they grew exceeding fond of frivolous ceremonies; and thus they directed and confirmed the prejudices of their age. In this dreadful course of moral deterioration, the rulers of the Jews took the lead in their own nation, as the philosophers did among the heathen. They had men among them entirely too wise to live in this world under the government of God; they could manage matters much better than he had done; and they could correct his mistakes, and supply his deficiencies.—“Art thou a Master of Israel, and knowest not these things?”

The Pharisees, as is generally the case under such circumstances, had misinterpreted the scriptures. They gave the most degrading representations of the character of Messiah, and stamped the ugly symbol of their own authority on false moral maxims. They had sunk into the greatest stupidity on spiritual subjects, and were utterly incapable of profiting by, or even at all estimating, the signs of their own times. The effort which the Redeemer made was designed to bring them back to the scriptures which they had forsaken; and to teach them to understand divine things as they had been revealed, by comparing spiritual things with spiritual. It was a mighty experiment to revive the moral judgment of a

nation, which had become so reprobate; one too difficult to be accomplished by human hands, and whose success must await the passing away of a whole generation; and one, which, while we are at liberty to reason on second causes, brought him to the cross, and the whole nation to destruction. Popular prejudices are always hard to be eradicated, and an obliquity of moral view is never easily corrected, either in an individual or a community. He had, therefore, to sustain many a fearful onset, and meekly to endure the most virulent abuse. "Many of them said, he hath a devil and is mad; why hear ye him?" And even when his words and his works demonstrated a divine presence with him, they affected a great deal of regard for the divine glory, and yet condemned and crucified him.—Hear them; "give God the praise, we know that this man is a sinner." A plain, unsophisticated mind, could reason,—“Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began, was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.” This, one would think, is a plain, common-sense, argument, from whose force the most wily sophist could not escape. The reader, however, knows the result. The Pharisees had *power* in their hands, and they took a very short way of removing the difficulty

in which they were so unexpectedly involved; their minds were seared; their theological pride was picqued; their influence was in danger; and with an air of great magisterial authority, they answered the man who had so mildly expostulated with them—"Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out."—They were wise divines, and puissant rulers.

Moreover, they exercised their power as ecclesiastical officers, with a great deal of barbarous arrogance. We shall take the account of their official deportment from the lips of Jesus himself. "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, the scribes and the pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say and do not. For they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men; they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi."* What a description of dignitaries! However, we must often take society as it is, and make the best of it. Accordingly the master calls his disciples to the exercise and display of all their passive virtues under those

* Mat. 23. 1—7.

unfavorable circumstances which he had described; but at the same time warns them against defiling their conscience, or sacrificing their moral integrity. We said it was *barbarous* arrogance with which these official men made such pretensions; and the Redeemer himself condemns it as a *heathenish* custom;—"Ye know," says he, "that the princes of the gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great, exercise authority upon them."* Alas! human beings have been, in every age, and in every quarter, of this unhappy world, sighing after liberty. And yet they have been greatly enslaved. When will the time come for the emancipation of the human mind? Politically and religiously, a great and thorough revolution is needed, and it will come in its time. What a pity that the princes of the earth cannot be induced to change their policy! Even admitting their plea, that the world is not prepared for such a change, why do they not show their wisdom in yielding to it as far as it has gone, and ripening it for its further progress? It belongs not to rulers to crush public opinion, but by an even and liberal administration to enlighten and direct it; for the dissemination of knowledge, whether religious or political, is always a blessing to the community which enjoys it.

Such were the social principles which the Redeemer undertook to criticise and correct, when he came a messenger from God to the sons of men. He endeavoured to bring back

*Mat. 20, 25.

the human mind under the dominion of divine authority, as not merely the safest, but as the only, principle, by which the human *conscience* is to be controlled. And ere he went to his throne, to send down his Spirit as the official seal of a ministerial commission he had imparted to his disciples, he solemnly charged them to carry on the work he had begun; to erect all their New Testament associations in that simple form; and on no account whatever to introduce any institution into his church, which would destroy the liberty of his people, or bring them into subjection to human masters. Thus, immediately after having stated the presumption and aberrations of the Jewish rulers, to which we have referred, he says unto them—"but be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your master, even Christ; *and all ye are brethren*. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you, shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself, shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself, shall be exalted."* Who can discern any thing here like a spiritual aristocracy; or trace any thing of that superiority in ministerial character, which, under a variety of form, has created so much controversy in the religious world? What show is there of fatiguing ceremony, of lordly dominion, or of perplexed rule? Is there aught else

* Mat. 23, 8—12.

than love, and harmony, and equality? Have not all these disciples, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all?" Is not every manner of ecclesiastical supremacy among christian brethren positively forbidden? Surely then, at this tribunal, our Creeds must fall; for they are evidently the statutes of men, combining together to wield an ecclesiastical sceptre. However good the intentions of christians in framing them might have been, or whatever good result they might have conscientiously believed them capable to produce, the whole political importance of these instruments consists in their *authority*; and their practical tendency has been to bring the church under the dominion of men. Once they grew up into the papal tyranny; afterwards they made a LAUD an overmatch for a royal despot; and what they would do now, were they consistent with the spirit of the age, or had not the Puritans, amid tears and blood, introduced the idea of human liberty for the consideration of mankind, it is impossible to say. The event of this present controversy may reveal what their strength is, and satisfy the most sceptical, whether they are *authoritative* rules of faith and manners in the house of God, or not. For, be it remembered, that it is against such pretensions, that the argument in these pages, maintaining that God is the *only* Lord of conscience, and that his Bible is the *only* rule of faith and practice, is directed.

The change of dispensation, which occurred in consequence of the personal advent of Messiah, would necessarily occasion a very high and general excitement. To revolutionise society, which certainly the Redeemer not only intended to do, but which by his gospel was actually done, is never a trifling matter; and happy is the age, which, when it must be done, can realize it without bloodshed. The question about the authority of the ceremonial law, was every where argued, and created "no small dissension and disputation." The Jew was very tenacious of his old customs; and, however repulsive they were to Gentile converts, he would unrelentingly demand their conformity. Every reader of the scriptures knows what a large space this controversy occupied in the early history of the christian church. And if ever holy men were embarrassed by a general question of ecclesiastical order, which the spirit of the times would not suffer them to settle, the apostles were thus unhappily situated. At length the matter was brought up to Jerusalem to undergo a formal discussion. The church at Jerusalem was the oldest, and therefore, it was to be supposed, the best informed, of the christian churches: the question was particularly a Jewish one; the Jews in the various provinces would naturally respect the opinions of their brethren in the metropolis; several of the apostles were there: in short, all circumstances combined to suggest a reference to that particular church, and at that particular time. The manner

in which ecclesiastical things are managed now, is sufficient to awake our curiosity to know how such matters were treated in those days; or to lead us to observe what kind of ecclesiastical politicians Peter, Paul, and James were, when they wished to heal the divisions of religious society.

When "the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter," and the whole subject was proposed for discussion, there was "much disputing." And no wonder. They had a difficult subject to handle; a subject which interested every body; a subject on which the public mind had not been enlightened, though every one had something to say about it, and some would be very moderate, and others very intolerant. We know how often society has been divided, and convulsed, by such a state of things, and how often hasty legislation has done more harm than good. Full liberty was granted to the variety of speakers to declare their sentiments, and expend all their zeal. When they had done, Peter rises and reminds the assembly of some things which had occurred under his ministry, and about which he had been specially instructed by a heavenly vision; and from what he had seen, when the Holy Ghost descended upon the Gentiles, he infers that God who knows all hearts, and is therefore a better judge of the moral character of human beings than men can be, had, by communicating the blessings of the gospel to them, borne witness in their favour, without enjoining the ceremonial

law upon them. The next step, therefore, was, that the Jewish church had no right whatever to impose a yoke upon the Gentile church, by enforcing the ceremonial law. After he had finished, the whole multitude listened patiently to Barnabas and Paul, who rose to declare what God had done among the Gentiles by their ministry, in order that they might judge from providential intimations what opinion they should express. Facts were not slight things even when apostles had to reason, and God's providential decisions were not to be lightly esteemed. James takes up the subject in this form; and laying the facts, which had been detailed, along side of a scripture prophecy which was brought to his recollection, he reached a conclusion to which they all eventually agreed. This conclusion they thus express:—"It seemed good to the Holy Ghost,"—*i. e.* judging from scripture prophecy, and providential facts—and "to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these *necessary* things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well."^{*}

We have already stated our views of this assembly at Jerusalem, which is generally considered as a fine sample of a synod composed of delegates from various parts of the church, if not a full warrant for a general council conven-

^{*} Acts 15.

ed to take in charge the whole interests of the church. Possibly all this may be so; but certainly the context does not afford the proof that it is so: and the maintenance of evangelical truth, requires no overstrained interpretation of scripture, nor any far fetched illustration. It is the only thing of the kind on the New Testament page; and it does not appear to be any legislative provision, affecting the constitutional principles of the church, as a social body. A reference to the church at Jerusalem, providentially favoured by the presence of some of the apostles, is no sample of later synods. But be that as it may, it gives us an opportunity of making the following remarks in connexion with our present subject:—for which reason we referred to it.

1. In this assembly, great care was taken not to enforce upon the human conscience, religious rites for which there was no *divine warrant*. The ceremonial law had been ordained by God: but had he ever required Gentiles to obey it? And if he had revealed no decision of that kind, the apostles would not suffer it to be done by human authority. They searched the page of prophecy, to know what had been declared beforehand, on a subject on which the prophets had dwelt with such holy rapture; they carefully observed what had been the course of the Spirit in the administration of the gospel after the ascension of the Saviour; and perhaps they then “desired to see one of the days of the Son of Man,” that they might hear an answer from his own lips. They could find nothing to sustain Judaic

prejudices, and they would not undertake to be lords over God's heritage.

2. They seemed to be afraid of *burdening* the human conscience with a multitude of ceremonies. There were some things which they considered *necessary*; some elemental principles which were to be surrendered on no plea whatever: but they could not proceed to make every little thing a term of communion, and essential to church membership. They had all felt some difficulty about the ceremonial law; and never arrived at the conclusion of its present nugatory character without those painful anxieties, which they best understand who have to change their early prepossessions; and to endure the censure of those who have not seen the necessity for such a change. But now they speak very distinctly;—"A yoke," they said, "which neither we, nor our fathers, were able to bear." The simplicity of the christian dispensation, the liberality of its principles, the extent of its charitable operations, its more enlarged provisions of individual liberty and social privilege, form its great peculiarities, which the apostles seemed so anxious to protect and preserve. When ecclesiastical courts have made religious rites oppressive by their number, or embarrassing by their narrow prescriptions, they have inflicted a serious injury upon the church; and this heir arrived at full age must revert back to her juvenile tutelage.

3. This assembly did not proceed to extremes in any acts of discipline which they passed. The whole question is not answered, but society

is left in a very great measure, under the direction of Jehovah, to regulate itself. The ceremonial law is not repealed; the Judaic teacher is not thrown under ecclesiastical censure; the Jew is not prevented from practising circumcision; nor is the Gentile either required, or forbidden, on the subject which had been referred, to gratify his own feelings. They passed no *authoritative* decision.

4. Difference of opinion is not recognised as a warrant for sectarian divisions. The matter before this supposed church court, was manifestly of considerable importance; and we know, from the history of the times, with what a jealous eye every movement in relation to it was watched. Yet the apostles seem to have cherished no idea of separating the Gentile from the Jewish christian, for the sake of peace; nor to have made any provision for such ecclesiastical strife and ruin. They seem to have supposed, that even with so wide a difference they ought to commune cheerfully together in New Testament ordinances; to forbear with one another to a great extent; and anxiously to endeavour to be of "one mind."

Such were some of the characteristics of this early council, if council it may at all be called. And if this course had not been pursued, no living man can tell the amount of injury the church might have sustained. For it is abundantly evident, that at that time, the church was not prepared to abrogate the ceremonial institutions. The apostles could allow no compromise

with idolatry, nor would they suffer any religious rite in an idolatrous connexion; though still they were very tender towards gentile feeling, and very delicate towards gentile infirmities. The one thing was plain and clear, and their decisions were unhesitating and firm; the other involved many difficulties, and was to be argued on very different principles. The one they could manage; the other they were obliged to leave to the providence of God; and, though receiving more light every day, they were yet compelled to wait, until their master took the whole incumbrance out of the way by the destruction of Jerusalem, and the calamitous dispersion of the Jewish nation. But had they adopted a different policy, and separated the Jewish from the gentile christian; had they erected different religious establishments;—of one of which the Jews could say, this is *our church*, and no man shall enter here, who will not agree to walk with us, on *our own principles*—and of the other of which the gentiles could say, this is *our church*, and no man shall enter here who will not agree to walk with us on *our own principles*; what confusion would have been introduced! The Jewish church would then have made Peter *their* pope, and the gentile church would have made Paul *their* pope. How completely they would have nullified their own commission to preach the gospel to every creature!” And how fully would they have denounced the peculiar doctrine of the new dispensation they were sent out to proclaim, that “the righteousness of God, by faith of Jesus Christ, is

unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference!" These things, which we can do so easily, and justify so positively, they did not do. They never suffered either Jew or Gentile to set up a sectarian standard, and form a voluntary association for himself and those that agreed with him. They never permitted a human Creed or summary to be drawn out, either with few or with many articles, the one admitting, and the other excluding, the obligation of the ceremonial law. All their deliberations in Jerusalem are evidently predicated upon the unity of the church. They sanctioned no reciprocal excommunications; but viewing the differences of opinions and habits which existed, and which it is not easily seen how, considering human infirmities, they should not have existed, with a mild eye, they made them matters of forbearance, and endeavoured to maintain "the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

In their individual characters, the apostles acted on the very same principles. After Paul had left Jerusalem, and while he held the decrees of the apostles and elders in his hand, he met with Timothy, and desiring to have him as a ministerial companion, he "took and circumcised him, because of the Jews." This fact clearly reveals the nature of those deliberations which had been carried on at Jerusalem, and the bearing which their sentence was designed to have upon the practice of the churches. It clearly proves, that the apostles and elders had not made an authoritative decision upon the subject which had

been referred to them; for circumcision was not among those *necessary things* which the apostolic decrees had specified; so that, in going beyond their limits, it is manifest, either that they were not intended to operate as a positive rule, or that Paul did not feel himself under an obligation to comply with them. Circumcision was, in fact, the very thing which they refused to enjoin;—"we gave," said they, "no such commandment:" yet Paul did circumcise Timothy, and that for a reason simply prudential and local. On another occasion, when certain individuals, actuated by invidious motives, sought to spy out the liberty which he allowed and enjoyed, and were making an effort to *force* the Mosaic law upon his conscience, he would not submit, no not for an hour. And though he had taken Titus, who was a Greek, up to Jerusalem, yet none there would *compel* Titus to be circumcised. There was evidently a good deal of discussion about it, but still it was not done. Had it been a mere matter of indifference, or a mere question of prudence, the apostle would have yielded, as he had done when he chose Timothy to accompany him. But there were some, who, not contented to have their own opinions undisturbed, would *authoritatively* bind them down upon others, and make them the term of ministerial, and christian, communion. There was no divine command to circumcise the Gentiles; that rite could be pressed upon them only by *human authority*, and this was the contest. Paul would not stand by, timid and unfaith-

ful, while christian *liberty* was assaulted, and an attempt was made to bring the children of God under the dominion of *man*. The great master of assemblies would not suffer his church, no, not under the administration of the apostles themselves, to trifle with the consciences of her members, and Paul stood forth to maintain their rights. Such was the deportment of this apostle, who, though he had made himself servant unto all, yet most explicitly asserts, that he is free from all; and who, while he styles the christian "the Lord's freeman," exhorts him not to be the servant of men.

When Peter went to Antioch, he at first did eat with the Gentiles; but afterwards he separated himself from them, when certain Jews came down from James. Paul says, he was *afraid*. Those of the circumcision had awed him into their measures; and instead of maintaining his integrity, he dissembled, and led others, by his influence and example, to act in the same manner. In this, his brother apostle says, he was to be "blamed;" and he therefore severely reprov'd him. "When I saw," says he, "that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all,—If thou, being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why *compellest* thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" Here again, Paul stands forth the champion of christian liberty. He would not suffer even an apostle to usurp a control over the human conscience, nor applaud him for submitting to others

through *fear*: but considers him as walking neither *uprightly*, nor *according to the truth of the gospel*. He had abandoned the high ground, on which, as a minister of Christ, he ought to have stood, and through "the fear of man," which "bringeth a snare," he had fallen into sin. Thus he not only incurred a very severe rebuke, but became an example, to all who should come after him, of the wretched consequences of submitting divine things to human control.—We may not then allow any man, nor any set of men, to carry out similar pretensions.

Some incidents which occurred during the ministry of the Redeemer on earth, afford a similar illustration of our subject, to which we must advert before we close this section. On one occasion, "he went through the cornfields on the sabbath day, and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn." This conduct greatly offended the Pharisees, who were very scrupulous religionists, and supposed that no one could be as righteous as they. They therefore said unto him in their holy zeal—"Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?" Now, unquestionably, the sabbath is a divine institution; and the Pharisees were perfectly right to keep it a holy day. Many men, however, "have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge," which happened to be the fact in the present case. For they had not adopted the *scriptural* view of the sabbath; but it was their *traditionary* and *sectarian* notion,

which they expressed;—an idea which they had acquired from a *summary* of moral duties which they had made for themselves, or which their fathers had made for them; and which they adopted as a spiritual rule in place of the scriptures. Had they studied the Old Testament, as much as they did their traditions, they would not have fallen into the mistake they so hastily committed.—“Have ye never read,” said Jesus, “what David did, when he had need and was an hungered; he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God, in the days of Abiathar the high priest; and did eat the shew bread, which is *not lawful* to eat but for the priests; and gave also to them which were with him?” And what conclusion does this divine expositor of his own law, draw from the fact? A very important one, which ministers of the gospel ought never to forget:—“the sabbath was made *for man*, and not man for the sabbath.” And what ought we to infer from the whole? We think the following things most clearly result:

1. That, as the Pharisees were severely rebuked for condemning the disciples on their own sectarian principles, man is not to be judged, nor his conscience to be controlled, by those views of divine truth, or of divine institutions, which are sanctioned simply by human authority and sectarian provisions. Now this is the very form in which our Creeds and Confessions of Faith are presented as most fairly defensible;—i. e. as *summaries of the doctrines of the scriptures*, made by human hands in building up a distinct denomi-

nation or sect. The Pharisees wished to make *their own* law a rule for Christ's disciples, and he would not suffer it, but *referred directly to the scriptures* as their rule.

2. That God never designed to make even his own institutions oppressive to man; nor did he intend that in their operations they should deprive him of his comforts. How much less then would he allow ecclesiastical rulers to meet together, and erect institutions, and frame laws which would distract and distress the human spirit.

3. That christians who are living according to the scriptures, though they may not approve of some of the current maxims of the day, shall be protected by him, however much they may be condemned by men in power: and that he views any course of legislation, which may shut out any who are so living from divine ordinances, as anti-scriptural and tyrannical.

4. That in any age, the scriptures are a better subject of reference in relation to christian principle and christian duties, than any formularies which men may adopt; that the popularity of a human Creed is not an unequivocal proof of its excellence, not though it may have been approved by many different ages; that they who are walking in the light of the Bible, are on surer ground; than those who are zealously maintaining their own sectarian distinctions; and that the Master, when he comes to judge the character and conduct of men, throws aside all human Creeds, and takes the Bible.—**THE BIBLE IS**

HEAVEN'S TEST OF ORTHODOXY FOR THE SONS OF MEN.

On another occasion, it happened that while "Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, why eateth your master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Here was another incorrect view of moral principle, in its application to the affairs of human life; classing men under sectarian names, and substantiating social regulations by human authority. The Pharisees, in stating their scruples, are once more referred to the scriptures, and are made to blush for the wretched leanness of their own summary of moral duties. Moreover, it is rendered evident, that men, who have immortal souls, are not to be treated with so much *sang-froid* and inhumanity, as though under the operations of the gospel there was no hope for them; that we are not at liberty—and certainly we ought to have no disposition—to insert in our systems, any clause of cold, unfeeling, and harsh reprobation; and that we may not withdraw the benefits of the gospel from those who cannot accede to all our views, which we may be pleased to call scriptural, but which they cannot see to be in.

the scriptures. We may not wrap ourselves in our sectarian mantle, and, like the priest and Levite, pass by on the other side, leaving a poor fellow man to be mangled by fiends or torn by devils, because he does not agree with some of our metaphysical ideas, about some religious truths. We must be the agents of *mercy*; and **MERCY** is a lovely attribute of a moral agent. Man, fallen, unhappy man, is the object of her profound concern; wherever he lives, whatever he suffers, however uninformed, she loves and seeks to bless him. She ranges from north to south, and from east to west; she encourages the missionary amid all his toils; and gathers up every little pittance, which we cold-hearted christians contribute, weeping that she has been able to procure so little;—God designs that the sons of truth shall cover *the whole earth* with deeds of mercy. This walking on “our own principles;” this shutting out from our brotherly intercourse and spiritual fellowship the saints of the Most High God, is not one of mercy’s plans: it is an unhallowed system which can be defended only by the bloody weapons of sectarian pride.—How humbled and mortified must these Pharisees have felt; who thought they were so holy, knew so much, and could so easily thrust a poor, humble, *saved*, sinner out of the synagogue; when Jesus bid them to go and study the scriptures, and to try to find out the meaning of this plain sentence,—*I will have mercy and not sacrifice.*

We think we have now proved our position, that the scriptures have expressed much displeasure with every attempt to bring the human conscience under the tyranny of human rulers. What then if the form be a little changed? What if we be called Presbyterians, or Episcopalians, or Methodists, &c. instead of Pharisees, Sadducees, or Essenes? What if we call our sectarian code a *Creed*, instead of the ceremonial law? What if we substitute the term *orthodoxy* for *circumcision*? Where, after all, is the real difference, when we still control the human conscience; give visible form to the divine ordinances; and call men up to worship in *our church*? If we possess the power to create terms of communion in religious things, and can "cast out" of the church those who do not chuse to submit to our assumed authority, we cannot see the difference:—the two things appear to us to be one and the same. And if we are right, as we most conscientiously believe we are, then are human Creeds as frequently, as solemnly, and as peremptorily, forbidden in the scriptures, as ever the idols of the nations were reprobated, or "the traditions of the elders" condemned. Let the reader look out for himself; we are uttering simply what *we believe we have proved*;—presently the Lord Jesus shall come to judge the world in righteousness and truth.—Happy shall it be for the church, when Ministers shall learn to argue like men, and not like theologians; like christians, and not like churchmen; or when, instead of retreating into the decisions of synods for

authority, and into Creeds and Catechisms for spiritual instruction, they shall betake themselves to the word of God, and plead for the influences of his Holy Spirit.

SECTION 5.

Our fourth general principle is,—*That the Scriptures never do recognise the church as a voluntary association; but do uniformly represent it as a community separated from the world, and under law to Christ.*

Israel of old was God's peculiar people, whom he had chosen for himself. They stood in a particular relation to him; had special advantages conferred upon them; and were peremptorily commanded to serve no other God. In the statutes which they had received, they were positively forbidden to assume any lordship over one another; and were required to live together as *brethren*, who had been associated under a common law; not by a mere voluntary arrangement of their own, nor yet as the consequence of natural relations, but by a very singular and gracious constitution which Jehovah was pleased to grant unto them. Hear the *law*;—"If thy brother, that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant.—Over your brethren, the children of Israel, ye shall not rule

over one another with rigour." Hear the *reasons* of the law;—"For they are *my servants*, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bond-men." This was fine national law: and if the nations of the world were all under it, how very different would be their situation! The earth should yield her increase, and God, even our own God, would bless us. We look for that day, however vain our expectations may be supposed to be: that day, when the spear shall become a pruning hook; when the sword shall be beaten into a ploughshare; when official robes shall all be "for beauty and glory;" and when peace and love, like the dews of heaven, or like "rain upon the mown grass," shall descend upon all the earth.

But what has this to do with our subject?—Much, very much. For Paul applies this very fact, so characteristic of the happy condition of GOD'S PEOPLE, to our condition under the new economy, when he is arguing on the subject of *christian liberty* with the Galatians. He extracts a beautiful allegory from the history of Abraham's family; and represents the christian church as a society composed of *the people of God*: of free born sons and daughters whom no man has a right to enslave by statutes and ordinances. "This Agar," he says, "is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above, is *free*, which is the mother of us all.—So then, brethren, *we are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free.*

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.* What can be the meaning of all this, if it be not, that God's people are a *free people*? And in what can their freedom consist, if it be not in an exemption from human laws; particularly when it is considered, that the apostle is arguing upon the repeal even of *divine* laws, suited to *infant society*? We all understand what the meaning of a young man's arriving at legal age is; how he himself feels; and how all society feels towards him: and the apostle is deriving his simile from those established habits of human law which every man fully comprehends;—those established habits which grow out of such simple and self-evident principles, that every age must have them, while the common sense of mankind knows any difference to exist between men and children. Israel, as God's people, were then under *law to himself*; and their ecclesiastical condition declares—that liberty of conscience, or freedom from human law as controlling the conscience, is an elemental principle of that ecclesiastical constitution which has brought us into relation with God: or in other words, that the very meaning of our being under law to God, is that we are not under law to man. If this be not so, then there is no application of the apostle's figure to the subject he was discussing; and the harmony of principle between.

*Gal. chap. 4, 5.

the two dispensations, which he asserts does exist, is completely broken up.

Now then we say, that the Jewish constitution was not the law of a *voluntary association*. We do not mean in this to say, that the Jews, acting according to the spirit of their national institutions, were not God's *willing servants*; but simply use the phrase in the sense, in which we understand it, in relation to our present subject. God did not leave them to make laws for themselves or for one another, but gave them his own law. Their **CHIEF ADVANTAGE** was, "that unto them were committed **THE ORACLES OF GOD.**" He did not allow them to usurp any dominion over one another; but commanded them to live together as *brethren*, and to remember that they were all his servants. The introduction of **monarchical power**, made a **gross** breach among them; and they surrendered their liberties by disowning Jehovah as their sovereign.—"They have not rejected thee," said God to Samuel; "but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them." And Samuel went and told them what kind of a ruler their fellow man would make; that he would deprive them of many of their rights; diminish their privileges; rob them of their liberties; and despoil them of their goods. But they refused to listen, and a king they *would* have. They wanted to change the fine constitution which

God had given them; and they *would* alter their national compact into some other form; for which, perhaps, a *voluntary association* is not a bad name. And thus a mighty power was organised amidst God's own free people, which took away Jewish liberty; not unlike that which afterwards grew up in the christian church, when Constantine was called to grace the chair of state in God's house; and an ecclesiastical council was made his spiritual cabinet, to frame a human Creed as the rule of his ghostly dominion. That very power which still exists, wherever men exercise the fearful prerogative of making rules of faith and manners for God's people; which, whether they think them of paramount or equal authority with the Bible, or not—and we know full well, that no protestant will dare to represent them as *paramount*—are yet made the great and distinguishing tests of christian character. This mighty power, erected in Judea, accomplished there, what it will accomplish any where, and what it has accomplished in the christian church;—it either degrades and crushes the spirit of man, or it ends in division.

Under the New Testament, the Holy Spirit never adverts to this principle of human liberty, but with an intention to increase its force, and seat it more firmly in the human breast. Hear the apostles speak of the church, and of their own relations to her members:—“We are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry; God's building:—Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-

citizens with the saints, and of *the household of God*: and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone: in whom all the building, *fitly framed together*, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.—Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves; and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost has made you bishops, to feed *the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood*.—And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, *for the edifying of the body of Christ*.” Can any man perceive here any thing like our voluntary associations, or a number of ecclesiastical bodies, totally distinct from one another, and regulated by human laws? The apostles knew of no such institutions, as sanctioned by divine authority. They always represent the church, as having within herself the principle of her own existence and prosperity, by virtue of her union with Christ her head; and as wholly independent of the regulations of men. They indeed admit of local divisions; and speak of the church of Corinth, the church of Jerusalem, the church of Rome, the churches of Galatia; but they never describe them as voluntary associations. They are all the church of God, and are all bound together as one great whole, pervaded by one spirit, and fed by the same bread.

Attempts were made to form voluntary associations, but the apostles always frowned upon

them, and severely rebuked all who were engaged in them. Thus in Corinth, professing Christians were very zealous in promoting division. One said—I am of Paul; another—I am of Apollos; a third—I am of Cephas; and a fourth, more towering than all the rest—I am of Christ. Just as we say now a days; I am a Lutheran,—I am an Arminian,—I am a Presbyterian,—or, I am an Episcopalian. Paul would not accept the honours his party wished to confer upon him; and forbids them all to seek for any human patrons, however exalted their official stations might be. He asks them with a great deal of significance, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you, or were ye baptised in the name of Paul? Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth *any thing*, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth, and he that watereth, are one: *and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.*” Nor is this all: for Paul could discern none of that superior zeal for purity of doctrine, and godliness of living, growing out of these sectarian divisions, about which we hear so much. On the contrary, he expressly tells the Corinthians, that these things manifested a great deal of childishness and carnality; and that thus the spread of the gospel was interrupted, and the influence of

the truth, hindered. "And I, Brethren," he informs them, "could not speak unto you *as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ*. I have fed you with milk, and not with strong meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it; neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?"—If Paul had lived in our day, would he not have been reprobated as a grievous heretic; and invited to leave our voluntary associations, as being a very unworthy member? For surely, he would level all our proud distinctions, with a determined spirit, and an impartial hand.

The particular form, in which human authority would be most likely to present her lofty pretensions in the days of the apostles, and from which an opportunity might be derived to usurp a dominion over conscience, would, of course, be afforded by the controversy of the age. Ambition, lust of fame, and love of power, are often found to be the distinguishing attributes of a controversial spirit. In that period of the church, we must look for those men who love to have the pre-eminence, among the zealots in favor of the ceremonial law: and it is in the opposition which the apostles made to them, that we must look for their ideas on spiritual liberty. And with this remark to guide us, we should consider Paul's epistle to the Galatians, a most satisfactory and conclusive argument against

human Creeds: because he is there contending against the approach of human authority, in the form in which it must necessarily be made in that age. Luther seems to have thought, that he could select no better scriptural position, where he might defend the liberty of the human conscience on better terms. To this, however, we have already had occasion to refer, in a previous part of these remarks. And as the inspired author of that epistle, had to contend with the same difficulty under a variety of circumstances, we shall extract the further quotations we think proper to make from other epistles addressed by him to other churches.

He thus exhorts the Colossians. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith; as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." This is the great object which christians ought always to keep in view. We should continually endeavor to live near to Christ; daily to grow up into his image; habitually to obey his commandments; and confidently to rest our hopes upon him as the only Saviour, and as an all-sufficient Saviour. But we shall not accomplish this moral enterprise, without meeting many difficulties; efforts will be made to corrupt our integrity, and to divert our faith from its great object. The apostle therefore proceeds to put the Colossians on their guard:—"Beware lest any man spoil you through *philosophy* and vain deceit, *after the tradition of men*, after the rudiments of

the world, and not after Christ: for *in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are complete in him*, which is the head of all principality and power." Now the meaning of this is very plain; and as the church afterwards forgot this exhortation, she became a melancholy example of its truth. Christians are in danger of being spoiled by philosophy; of which the history of scholastic theology, both in the days of Origen, and at the present hour, furnishes ample proof. They may be led away from Christ the head, by human traditions; or the maxims and ordinances of men, handed down from generation to generation: a wretched combination, to which, every christian knows, must be traced the causes of the reformation. The apostle's injunction must pass down through all ages. It is as important for us, to beware lest any man should spoil us through philosophy and human traditions, as it was for the Colossians. And the reason of the injunction is equally valuable to us, that in Christ as our single, glorious, head, we have all that we need. Our profession does not require the help of human traditions; for in Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily; we do not want other institutions, superadded by human authority, to preserve order, harmony, and peace in the church; for we are complete in him, without any of them. Or, in other words, the church with her Bible and ordinances in their own divine arrangement, is sufficiently provided for by her Master, without human Creeds, or summaries of

moral duties, framed for her direction by human wisdom. The church, in her own spiritual unity, is in a better state, than under any voluntary associations which can be formed on any principle whatever.

He is still more particular in his address to this church; and continuing his exhortation, forbids her members to suffer any man to "judge them in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day—or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days." He charges them to "let no man beguile them of their reward in a *voluntary* humility, and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshy mind; and not holding the Head, from which *all the body*, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and *knit together*, *increaseth with the increase of God.*" And on these legislative provisions he earnestly reasons with them: endeavouring to demonstrate to them the absolute folly of submitting to human institutions. "Wherefore," says he, "if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to *ordinances, after the doctrines and commandments of men.*" Manifestly there was nothing of which this magnanimous apostle was so much afraid, as the introduction of human institutions into the church; or the interference of human authority, in attempting to give law to the consciences of Christ's professing people. It would not avail to satisfy him, that

christians, whose spiritual welfare he sought so ardently to protect, should reply,—in submitting to these ordinances and doctrines, we do not esteem them as paramount to, or equal with, the scriptures; for we cannot imagine that they would venture to defend them in his presence as *tests of orthodoxy*. He instantly replies,—“Touch not, taste not, handle not:”—there must be no compromise here: if ye are dead with Christ, ye must have “the power of his resurrection” resting upon you.

We have one more quotation, which we think proper to transcribe. It is from the epistle to the Ephesians. The apostle is speaking of the design of divine institutions, and of the great things which they were made sufficient to effect. He tells us that they were intended to *perfect* the saints, to fulfil the work of the ministry, and to edify the body of Christ; thus embracing all the objects of practical godliness, and every thing that belongs to communion in the sanctuary; and consequently providing for all those things, around which Creeds and Confessions professedly throw all their influence. Sectarian divisions are not admitted, nor any deficiency in their arrangement supposed. But on the contrary, these institutions are considered fully adequate to carry the church through the whole of her militant career, and bring her with fulness of joy into her Master’s presence at last:—“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a *perfect*

man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be *no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men* and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ; from whom, *the whole body, fully joined together, and compacted* by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in every part, maketh increase of the body, to the edifying of itself in love." Now here are unity, harmony, reciprocal love, prosperity, and perfection itself, ascribed to the simple operation of divine institutions. And what more can we want? Surely the advocates of Creeds can show nothing like it, in the whole history of their voluntary associations.

Thus the apostles left the church when they went to glory. So the church continued for some time, if Irenæus records truth in summing up her doctrines, as they were uniformly believed, and which she "assiduously preserved as if she inhabited a single house." And so in fact, she continued, if Jerome speaks truth, until "by the instigation of the devil, *parties in religion*" arose; "and it was said among different people, *I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas*; and until "every one accounted those whom he baptised as *belonging to himself, and not to Christ.*" So then these voluntary associations, like Creeds and Confessions, synods and councils, are all to be traced to the same source.

Destitute of a divine warrant, they are the offspring of human ambition, and merely keep alive the contest for *thrones*.

We must then be permitted to deny, that any body of christians has any right to separate from other christians; and, walking upon their own principles, to administer Christ's ordinances upon terms which shall exclude Christ's people from the benefits of his sanctuary. We speak not of a *civil right*. Political rulers have nothing to do in Christ's sanctuary, except as poor, unworthy, perishing sinners, like all the rest of their race, to plead for pardon and life as the free gifts of his own undeserved mercy. We do not dispute with our brethren about such things, nor arraign them at such a tribunal. The transactions of the council of Nice, ought to have frightened the whole christian world, from that day to this, away from every appeal of this kind. We congratulate ourselves that civil power has nothing to do with our present controversy, but to let it alone; and that we live in a country, where our rulers have had good sense and magnanimity enough, to see and abandon the mistakes of *our fathers* on this subject. The moral question, about which we differ, must be tried at the bar of God's word, and we must receive our sentence thence. And in this view we must be understood, when we deny these *secession* principles:—we ask for the seal of the King of saints; and when this is obtained, we have nothing more to say. Will the brethren

be good enough to produce it, that this controversy may be closed for ever?

We are very much surprised, when scripture precepts, like the following, are introduced to condemn our opinions:—"Be ye perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." We know it is a very easy thing to quote scripture, and that it is very often done with great thoughtlessness and inaccuracy; but this is too glaring. Did the apostle mean, when he thus commanded the Corinthians, that those who were of Paul, should go and form a voluntary association by themselves; and that those who were of Apollos, should go and form a voluntary association by themselves; and that those who were of Cephas, should go and form a voluntary association by themselves; and that those who were of Christ, should go and form a voluntary association by themselves? Why surely every man, who reads the words in their own connexion, must see, that this is a pure burlesque on all scriptural investigation. So far from this being the fact, the apostle exhorted them to be of one mind by quitting their divisions: his words are—"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that *there be no divisions among you*; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment;" moreover our brethren will not say, that a command to separate from the unholy, means that we should separate from the holy? They will not say that a command to

reject unbelievers, means that we should reject believers? Yet, by our voluntary associations, are not christians shut out from Christ's ordinances; and christian ministers denied their seats in Christ's heavenly places? Are not those, who are giving every evidence by which their christian character can be substantiated, refused the privileges which Christ purchased for them by the shedding of his blood? And do not christians themselves, decline receiving the ordinances of grace, at the hands of ministers whom the Master has owned, and blessed, and honoured, in his holy providence. O, our brethren must not talk about the excellence and blessedness of their voluntary associations. They are no blessing; they are a curse, to the church of God.

It is true, our sects are beginning to relax the reins of despotic government, and are growing more liberal in their ideas and plans. The state is fatigued by her connexion with the church, and politicians have long since seen the folly of such a union. Our voluntary associations themselves, are tired of their strife and their separation; and the spirit of unity is guiding her car of triumph over all their divisions. But then all this is a practical fact, proving our doctrine; and an abandonment, as far as it goes, of the very principle which they advocate;—a subject which deserves to be considered by itself, and which we shall take up in our next section.

SECTION 6.

Before we close our discussion upon the subject of human legislation in the church of God,—a matter of religious argument, which is every day growing more important and interesting; there is one other view which we wish to offer to the serious consideration of the reader, and which, we think, we can establish to his entire satisfaction. It is this:—*That these Creeds and Confessions of Faith, are every day growing into disuse, and falling by their own weight; society being both unwilling and unable to bear the heavy burden any longer.* In other words, they are practically abandoned by the very sects which have adopted and proclaimed them; and no man can tell the real Creed of our voluntary associations, by their public standards. The particular form in which they are now sustained, is as a matter of ecclesiastical order, or as a *rule* by which mere *authority* may be measured.

We do not know, how far this proposition may be conceded; and therefore feel under some responsibility to make it good. Some, perhaps, may grow very angry at the suggestion, and attempt to argue it down; and we are contented they should do so, if it be not true. But the fact is certainly apparent to every man, who has calmly and candidly reviewed the present state of religious society. Besides, many have explicitly declared it; some telling it as a

matter of grievous complaint, as though those who had done what the proposition asserts they have done, had well nigh been guilty of "lying to the Holy Ghost;" and others, as a mere matter of argument, who yet would not accede to the doctrine of these pages. In the mouth of two or three witnesses, shall every word be established:" and they are good and substantial witnesses, whose testimony no one will dispute, whom we shall summon to testify to what we have said.

Dr. Miller, in his introductory lecture to his pupils, makes the following statement:—"These formularies,—if they be really an epitome of the word of God—and surely we think them so—*every minister is bound to circulate with unwearied assiduity among the people of his charge.* This is so far, *in general*, from being faithfully done, that I seriously doubt whether there be a protestant church in christendom, in which there is *so striking a defect as to the discharge of this duty*, especially in some parts of the country, as in the Presbyterian church." After a warm eulogium upon the more faithful conduct of our Episcopal, Methodist, and Baptist brethren, which, he says, "bespeaks men *sincere in their belief*, and earnest in the dissemination of what they deem correct principles,"—and of course he exonerates them from any charge of "lying to the Holy Ghost," leaving that awful sin at the door of less faithful Presbyterians,—the Doctor proceeds;—"Why is it that so many ministers of the Presbyterian church, with a Con-

session of Faith, and Catechism, which I verily believe, and which the most of them readily acknowledge, are by far the best that were ever framed by uninspired wisdom; and with a form of government and discipline, more consentaneous with apostolical practice, than that of any other church on earth, are yet *so negligent, not to say so indifferent, as to the circulation of these formularies?* They, perhaps, *do not take the trouble even to inquire whether there be a copy of the volume that contains them, in every family, or even in every neighbourhood, of their respective charges.* How are we to account for *the peculiar frequency* of this negligence in the ministry of our church? It would be far from being true,* I trust, to say, that our clergy are more unfaithful in the general discharge of their duties, than those of any other communion. May we not rather ascribe the fact in question to another fact, from which *it might be expected naturally to arise?* The fact to which I allude, is, that in the Presbyterian church, at the present day, and in this country—whatever may have been the case in former times—*there is less of sectarian feeling; less of what is called the esprit du corps, than in any other ecclesiastical body among us.*†

There appears to be in this, a biting sarcasm for

* And yet it must be true, according to the general argument of the Lecture, which connects heresy, and the worst of heresies too, with the abandonment of Creeds and Confessions, and that in a manner so plain, that he must be very dull, who cannot understand it.

† p. p 77. 79.

some one: but we do not exactly know to whom it properly belongs—whether to our Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, or Baptist brethren. Perhaps the Professor wished to praise all, or to censure all, or to please all. We do not know how to take it. We believe, however, there is a kind of rule in polite circles, to consider any equivocal article of this kind as a *compliment*. We shall adopt the rule in the present case with cheerfulness—for every man loves to see his own party ahead; and when works of charity, or a labour of love, are the matter in question, it is perhaps hard to disown the feeling;—though certainly we do wish that all other religious sects may not only do as much as Presbyterians are doing; but may very far surpass them in any thing they have yet done, in order that men may be brought to feel all that is genial and refreshing in the sympathies of their nature;—particularly, when those sympathies are sanctified by the grace of the gospel. But Dr. M. has very happily explained, *by the natural connexion between cause and effect*, the very thing he seemed to feel as a most serious and unaccountable difficulty: and he is, if we understand our own doctrine, offering to the public the very same views, for which we have been censured, and even ridiculed. Let us state it in our own language. Living facts, which every man may see, have demonstrated, that Creeds and Confessions are losing their influence over the christian mind: that our voluntary association has *outgrown* her own “standards;” and that our ministers, catch-

ing the spirit of the age in which they live, or yielding to its force, have practically abandoned an ecclesiastical measure, which,—“whatever may have been the case in former times,”—is now utterly impracticable. The Presbyterian clergy are generalising their feelings and their plans; they are exercising great forbearance towards those who misrepresent them; and they are loath to enter into strife with any. A happy change! A glorious sign of the times! We wish it may be all true: and soon, far more true than it is; so true, that they may cease to contend with one another.—May the spirit of the Lord carry on this glorious work, until “the Lord shall be king over all the earth!” Until that day, when “there shall be one Lord, and his name one!” And this shall be the result. The cause of LOVE,—blessed be the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,—is too far ahead to be arrested. Our Bible societies must be crushed; our missionaries must be called in from their labours; and all those, whose spirits are burning with evangelical enterprise, must be driven far away, like the Puritans of old, to live as pensioners upon pagan hospitality, before it can be done. And at this, we know, there are many zealous advocates of Creeds and Confessions, who would quickly frown.

In another part of his lecture, Dr. M. makes the following most painful and overwhelming remarks;—“It is truly humiliating and distressing to know, that in some churches it has gradually become customary, to consider articles

of faith as merely *articles of peace*; in other words, as articles, which, he who subscribes, is not considered as professing to *believe*: but merely as engaging *not to oppose*—at least in any public or offensive manner. Whether we bring this principle to the test of reason, of scripture, of the original design of Creeds, or of the ordinary import of language among honourable men;—it seems equally liable to the severest reprobation, as disreputable and criminal in a very high degree. Nor does it appear to me to be any alleviation, either of the disgrace or the sin, that many of the governors of the churches referred to, as well as those who subscribe, publicly avow their adoption of this principle; admit the correctness of it; keep each other in countenance; and thus escape, as they imagine, the charge of hypocrisy. What would be thought of a similar principle, if generally adopted and avowed, with respect to the administration of oaths in civil courts? Suppose both jurors and witnesses, feeling it a grievance to be bound by their oaths to speak the truth, were to agree among themselves, and openly to give out, that they did not mean, when they swore, to take on themselves any such obligation: that they did not so understand the import of their oaths, and did not intend to recognise any such meaning? And suppose the judges were freely to admit them to their oaths with a similar understanding? Would a witness or a juror, in such a case, be exempt from the charge of PERJURY, or the judge from the guilt of SUBORNATION OF PER-

JURY? I presume not, in the estimation of any sober minded man. If it were otherwise, then bad men, who form a majority of every community, might, by combining, violate all the principles of virtue and order, not only with impunity, but also without sin.*

The foregoing—we write it with deep and mournful feeling—is one of the most awful paragraphs we remember ever to have read, since books were first put into our hands. For if we should admit it to be true, what then? If jurors and witnesses, and judges, in civil courts, were to act thus, what would the consequence be? Must not revolution and ruin follow? Would not God be avenged on such a nation as this?—And what but similar results can occur in the church, if found in similar circumstances? But are not these honourable men? Are they not useful men? And shall we approach them with such a charge? Is any man bound to keep an oath, the subject matter of which oath, is not lawful? And if ministers of the gospel are thus embarrassed by Creeds, has not the church magnanimity enough to part with ecclesiastical instruments, whose character is betrayed to be so bad, by their own practical operation? Heaven's bride should be dressed in robes, white as the driven snow. Her ministers should possess all that is lovely, excellent, and elegant, in the christian profession, like those who can say,

*p. p 69, 70.

"I will greatly rejoice in Jehovah;
 My soul shall exult in my God.
 For he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation;
 He hath covered me with the mantle of righteousness:
 As the bridegroom decketh himself with a priestly crown;
 And as the bride adorneth herself with her costly jewels."*

But leaving this harsh opinion of the conduct of men, who evidently feel themselves most grievously oppressed by these human rules, and whose consciences are vexed by such arbitrary law, does not the fact confirm our proposition? If Creeds are become *articles of peace*,—which, by the way, is an amusing use of terms,—instead of *articles of faith*, are they not practically abandoned? For while they do not possess a sort of ubiquity, whereby they can be tests of orthodoxy, where they are not visible; neither are bonds of union, nor guardians of truth, where they are not to be found; they cannot be considered as a rule of faith, where they have been converted into mere articles of peace. And are these ministers, about whom such things, when said in relation to their sectarian standards, are true, declining into heresy, abandoning the word of God, and sinking into sloth, as to "the general discharge of their duties"? Then why declare these human institutions to be in force when they are not? Or, why condemn us for translating facts into words, or uttering with our lips, what men are demonstrating by their lives?—"Therefore, thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thy-

* Is. 61. 10. Lowth.

self; for thou that judgest *doest* the same things."

Another witness on this subject is the Christian Spectator; a popular miscellany, whose writers, it is presumed, must understand something about it. In the pages of that work, it is, in some measure, professedly discussed, as circumstances have forced it upon the public attention. A writer in the christian disciple had asserted, that, "the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, are the *public standards of faith* in the Presbyterian and Scotch churches in this country; that the Saybrook Platform is the professed standard of the Calvinism of Connecticut, &c." With this assertion, the Reviewer, in the Spectator, is very much offended; and, among other remarks, makes the following:—"It is true, that these formularies are regarded by Calvinists in this country, as containing a doctrinal system, which, whatever imperfections and errors may belong to it, is in its general features in accordance with the scriptures. But we ask for the *proof* that there is any such *public profession* of the Creed contained in these formularies; any such recognition of them *as standards of faith* by Calvinistic ministers and churches as the Reviewer asserts; any which shows that the ministers and churches actually adopt, as their *faith*, every article of these formularies in its precise form and statement. *We say that such is not the fact, and that it is notorious that it is not the fact.* There is no subscription to these formularies by Calvinistic ministers or churches, no such use made

of them, *no such recognition of their authority in matters of faith, in any form whatever*, as will warrant the representation of the Reviewer. Decisive to the contrary are the freedom of religious opinions among Calvinists, in regard to several points treated of in these formularies”*

Again.—“To talk then of Creeds *publicly professed*, and of *public standards of faith*, as if there were any such thing existing, in the manner and form in which the Reviewer would have it understood, is a mere trick at imposition. It is representing the religious faith of the great portion of this community, as so absolutely tied to Creeds and formularies of human formation, that they cannot, with good conscience, fail of believing every doctrinal iota they contain; *a representation which every sciolist in the ecclesiastical history of this country knows to be false*. It is in the present instance asserting a uniformity of faith among the Calvinists of this country, which does not exist, and which they, who assert it, know and abundantly *confess* does not exist.”†

These remarks from the christian Spectator, embrace the whole subject of subscription to Creeds; and very materially modify the view, which is taken by some, of the principle of *contracts* in the church. The value of this whole process, adopted to secure the purity of the church, is brought down exceedingly low: and the charge of perjury is as honourably, as it is indignantly, thrown off from the ministerial conscience.

* Vol. 6. No. 7. 360—74. † p. p. 372—3.

There ought to be no such contracts in the house of God. When God sends his ministers to preach, and calls upon the people to hear, *his own law* prescribes their reciprocal duties. All those sectarian notions, which require a minister to preach *according* to a human Creed, or which forbid him, as in former times, to "fall into any common place of divinity in his sermons, *not comprehended in the 39 articles*," are passing, under general reprobation, into a much to be wished for forgetfulness. Men are every where beginning to imagine, that, however profoundly, or ingeniously, or scripturally, their fathers might have thought, they yet have a right to think for themselves, as well as their fathers had to think for themselves: and whether it be vanity and self-conceit, or not, they imagine they can think just as well as their fathers, for all the purposes which can require the application of their powers of thought to the circumstances of life. And why should they not imagine so? Or why should any principle of contracts obtain in the church, by which they should be prevented from thinking for themselves? Is it an ascertained matter that they must think wrong? Or is it supposed, that, surrounded by temptations of every variety of hue, they will become unfaithful, and prove that they are not honourable, christian, men? Then what will human Creeds do for them? Will they convert Arians; transform Arminians into Calvinists; or compel the Universalist to believe in the doctrine of "particular redemption"?—Be these things as they may, such is the course

the religious mind is taking in this free community, and this liberal age: and the effort to arrest it, will be as impotent as that which touches the motto of Bible societies—*the Bible, without note or comment.*

But, leaving these extracts to speak for themselves, we must now inquire after some facts, which every man may know, and on which every man is fully competent to judge. Would our brethren, or do they, make the Westminster Confession of Faith, as it has been received by their own denomination, a term of communion for *private christians*? We know they will *recommend* it as a very good book: but that is not the question. Will they require them to *believe* it, or even to *read* it, before they can be admitted to christian fellowship in religious ordinances? We know they will not;—whether from want of power, or want of disposition, it, perhaps, does not become us to say: but one thing is certain, the attempt would break the Presbyterian churches to pieces. Dr. M. himself, whose lecture has proclaimed some very harsh things on the subject of subscription, in a letter published since his lecture was given to the world, says—“It is time enough, in my opinion, when persons make inquiries with a view to join a particular denomination, or put themselves in the way of being taught its peculiarities, to meet them—if candidates for private membership, with those views of doctrine and order;—or if aspirants to the ministry, with those ‘Creeds and Confessions’—the reception of which appears

to me indispensable to the attainment of ecclesiastical concord and edification." Surely in consistency with this opinion, private christians are not to be perplexed with the church Creed: the minister, it is presumed, must be the Creed of his people. So then, either christians are not the *church*, or Dr. M. himself has abandoned our Creed as a *church formulary*?

For whom, then, are Creeds designed? For ministers and elders? And may the people be left with their Bibles as sufficient instructors, and permitted to think for themselves, without endangering the purity, the peace, or the harmony of the church? Are church officers the only men who cannot read straight lines in the Bible? Are they alone unfit to be trusted, notwithstanding that their responsibilities to their master are so heavy? Or when any of them rebel against such an implied censure upon their integrity, shall all the rest rise up in their might, to destroy their influence, and reprobate their scruples, as heresy? Shall the ministry of reconciliation employ themselves in forging chains for each other's perpetual slavery; or become the unadvised enemies of their own liberty? Do they estimate freedom of thought as a secondary, or dangerous, privilege; or can they succumb to any aristocratic combinations among themselves? Have they forgotten their master's law, as to their mutual relations—ALL YE ARE BRETHREN, or his "new commandment," given specially to them,—that they—LOVE ONE ANOTHER?

But even taking this view of the subject, as

stating the proper place which Creeds and Confessions should occupy in the church; have they produced unanimity of sentiment, and harmony of feeling, among the ministers in the Presbyterian church? Do our ministers all think alike, and carry out the same doctrinal system without alienation or discord? Take for an example, the doctrine of the *atonement*:—do they all think that the atonement of the Lord Jesus is definite and limited? Do they all think that it is indefinite and unlimited? Or is there any subject, in the whole range of theological principles, on which ministers in our own denomination differ more frequently, and more unexpectedly? Are our standards indecisive? Do they take neither side, or do they take both sides? Or do not the clergy treat the Creed of the Presbyterian church, on this subject, precisely as the clergy of the fourth century treated the Creed of the council of Nice;—*i. e.* they find things in it reprehensible *in the forms of expression*? Have our church courts followed out a course of faithful discipline, and excluded from ministerial fellowship, those who have wandered from the ideas and phraseology of their own standards? Will the highest ecclesiastical tribunal we have, undertake to arraign those who are heretical upon this all important point, on whichsoever party the charge of heresy may be fairly fastened? If not,—and the impracticability of such a measure is well known—then are our standards, so far as this matter is concerned, practically abandoned; and on that subject, they

form a piece of gratuitous, lifeless legislation, which the whole church has not power to carry out into execution.

Let us go a step farther, and see if the official acts of our Presbyteries, do not continually involve us in the same palpable inconsistency? If a young man applies for licensure or ordination, who should, in the course of examination, disclose his belief in the unlimited atonement of Christ, or question some favourite doctrines which our Creed has decided,—will our Presbyteries, or do they, refuse to license or ordain him? Suppose, in order to have a fair example, that he should directly except to this proposition, in the third chapter of the Confession of Faith:—“The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice;” and tell the Presbytery in so many words, that he does not believe it;—and surely the case is not very improbable, among a set of beings who have *hearts*, and who may be animated by a love, kindred to that which brought the son of God to die for sinners;—will any of our Presbyteries, or do they, refuse to license or ordain him? Do they even feel themselves competent to enjoin silence on the point in question; or can they conceive, that, destroying a man’s personal re-

sponsibility, they have any right to forbid a minister of Christ to be silent on any subject of divine revelation? Surely if these things exist, even by the consent of church courts, then there is a failure to carry out our standards, and that on the part of their executive officers. They are, as far as such cases can prove them so, practically abandoned. Our statement is not hypothetical merely; the thing does really and truly exist. Dr. M. himself, in his introductory lecture, would allow forbearance "in some minor details," and justify a presbytery, provided the points excepted "were of little or no importance, and interfered with no article of faith." But in a *Creed*, what is not an article of faith?* Or will Dr. M. after having in such awful terms abjured them in that form, consent that the articles of our *Creed* should be articles of *peace*? And in the cases specified,—which do exist within the bounds of the Presbyterian church,—is there an interference with articles of faith, or is the exception made to articles of minor detail? Whichsoever it may be, so far as the case extends, there is an abandonment of the ecclesiastical charter.

We must go one step further, in order to observe the full range of this official dereliction. By reference to the Assembly's digest,† we find this question;—whether a man, who had married his deceased wife's half brother's daughter, should, with his wife, be admitted to church privileges? Had he married his own half-brother's

* p. p. 71, 72.

† p. 103.

daughter, it is presumed the parties must have been excluded:—in the case referred to, they were admitted. Another question of the same kind, was presented two years after:—whether a man, who had married his deceased wife's sister's daughter, might, with his wife, be admitted to church privileges? If he had married his own sister's daughter, it is presumed the parties would have been excluded. But in the case referred to, it was finally decided, that, provided it was consistent with the existing laws of the state, and the *peace* of the church, where it had occurred, the parties might be admitted. In the year 1804, when a similar case was brought up to the Assembly, they say:—“As great diversity of opinion seems to exist on such questions in different parts of the church, *so that no absolute rule can be enjoined with regard to them, that shall be universally binding*, and consistent with the peace of the church; and as the cases in question are *esteemed to be doubtful*, the Assembly is constrained to leave it to the discretion of the inferior judicatories, *to act according to their own best lights, and the circumstances in which they find themselves placed.*”* Now in the Confession of Faith, which the Presbyterian church is bound to maintain *in its integrity*, there is an absolute rule laid down in the following words:—“The man may not marry any of his wife's kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own; nor the woman of her husband's kindred nearer in blood than of her own.”† Here then is an

* p. 106.

†Ch. 24. Sec. 4.

abandonment of our public standards under another form, positive and frequent, and that by the highest judicatory of the church. The whole matter is declared to be *doubtful*, and it is referred to inferior judicatories, who are left to regulate their decisions *according to circumstances*.

We know very well that the subjects referred to in the Digest, may be considered by many as of comparatively little importance; for it is not an uncommon thing so to estimate a question of social morals, particularly when it is brought alongside of a form of faith. Be it so; but that does not alter the principle of our argument. One alteration may lead to another, and ten thousand amendments may be justified by the same train of reasoning. If truth, if doctrine, if statute, may be modified to meet *circumstances*, then why may not our Creed suffer an entire repeal, should circumstances require it? And this is precisely the thing which we are discussing, as belonging to the changes of the day in which we live. In fact, this loose provision for matters of minor detail, is *itself* an abandonment of the Creed principle as it has been maintained, and as it ought to be maintained, if espoused at all. As it ought to be—because, if there is a necessity for a Creed at all, it must be like all other things: i. e. the more perfect it is made, the *better* it must be, and every thing that is taken from it, is only making it worse than it really was. As it has been—for the assembly, in reply to some matter of reference embracing this subject, address the applicants in the following man-

ner:—"If you *modify any part* of our standards, to suit these men, you are *bound by the precedent*, to modify another part for another set of men, if they should make objections." And again—"Whilst we thus exhort you to receive none, upon *any modification* of our standards, we recommend to you a conciliatory, mild, and forbearing conduct to those who are out of our communion."* But now there are matters of *small moment* to be yielded; things may be compromised for the *peace* of the church;—in short, those doctrines, which have hitherto been considered as *vital*, are undergoing a very severe discussion, and have created an endless variety of opinions in the very denomination to which we belong: and the evil, if an evil it is, runs, not only through our private intercourse, but through our official and judicial transactions; while the whole church is incapable to arrest it.

We beg to be considered as not condemning these things, but as merely stating facts. The thing must be so; there is no help for it: our Creeds do not suit the spirit of the age; their terms are growing obsolete; their idiom is offensive; and men are insisting, that if religion be preached to them at all, it must be in such a manner that they can understand and feel it. "This age requireth religious truth to be justified, like other truths, by showing its benefits to the mind itself, and to society at large. It is in vain now to quote the opinions of saints or re-

* Dig. p. 141—2.

formers, or councils, or assemblies, in support of any truth." Those aberrations from sectarian standards, to which we have referred, are the natural and necessary consequences of the state of the times in which we live; and instead of becoming fewer every day, they must be multiplied every day; sweeping before them every impediment, either political or ecclesiastical, which opposes the progress of the human mind. In other words, our Creeds and Confessions are altogether disproportioned to the objects of ecclesiastical enterprise, in which christians in this age are engaging by common consent.—Such is *our* CREED upon this subject, which we leave to the reader to receive or reject, as he pleases:—the only way in which any one man ought to present *his* Creed to any other man.

Every man naturally thinks his own Creed worth defending, when brought into collision with the opinions of others. And as we have been censured for our supposed ideas on this subject, we feel ourselves called upon to express our views.—The gospel was unquestionably intended for all mankind: for to the first pair, ere they had received "a man from the Lord," was it given, when God revealed it as the characteristic fact of his institutions on earth,—“The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent.” The scriptures uniformly afford this representation of the gospel, and proffer no doctrine whatever to our acceptance, which is inconsistent with that representation. It is the genius and the glory of christianity, that it

is a system of grace without being a system of fatalism; that it is an exalted view of the divine character, and a perfect exposition of moral principle, most happily suited to man in his lapsed state; and that it flows from the same fountain of goodness, which dispenses its favours upon our race, from pole to pole;—from him who “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” That it has not been preached to all men, in actual fact, is a matter of human guilt—or, if of divine severity, it is in condemnation of human sin. But still, this great object is continually kept in view, and the agents of divine mercy are continually approaching towards it. The gospel was preached to Abraham, when he was informed, that *in him, and in his seed, all the families of the earth* should be blessed. The apostles were commanded to preach the gospel to every creature: they “received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations;” and their commission has been transmitted to every age;—at this very hour, it enjoins its arduous, but delightful, duties upon us, and demands its own magnificent achievements at our hands.

This moral enterprise must not only be undertaken; but it shall certainly be accomplished, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. We have promise upon promise, and prophecy after prophecy, whence to gather encouragement and assurance. All christendom has taken up the subject; and it has kindled in every heart the

holiest enthusiasm. Old and young, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, are all talking about it; and from every temple prayers ascend, that God would hasten human things in rapid movement towards the glorious reality. And may we not speak in harmonious strains, while others are shouting the praises of a redeeming gospel, as she takes the wings of the morning, and with speed seeks to bless man wheresoever he may be found? Is all that we hear a mere siren song, alluring sectarian zealots from their integrity?—If in declaring what we feel, we have been thought visionary; if in casting our mite into the treasury of the Lord, or in cheerfully giving what we had to expend, in order that the full tide of spiritual life may sooner make the solitary place to be glad, and the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose, we have been thought “transported by the visions of a heated fancy;” we can do nothing else than quietly submit to a reproach, which is altogether undeserved; or, when an opportunity offers, give an explanation of our views.

We have not attempted to systematise the prophetic writings, nor to run into any wild conjecture with some prophetic symbol, to apologize for our extravagance; but have simply endeavoured to avoid the reproach, which the master himself cast upon the Pharisees and Sadducees, because they were ignorant of “the signs of the times.” How soon the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, we pretend not to know; but must re-

joyce that the work has commenced, and is now going on. When South America shall be entirely rid of her oppressors, and political liberty shall have established her individual character; when Spain shall be regenerated, and the anniversary of Riego's disgrace shall have become the anniversary of his country's freedom: when Ethiopia shall have stretched out her hands to God, and the deserts of Africa shall be fertilized by the dews of heaven; when the *sainte alliance* shall be broken up, and its political Creed shall no more fetter the human mind; when the wandering Jew shall be brought home, and the last lingering Turk shall kiss our Immanuel's sceptre; when the aborigines of this land shall have become happy and prosperous, under the full flow of that sympathy, which, while it would bless them, would throw a halo of glory around these United States; when the human mind shall be fully awaked from its torpor, and become mighty enough to achieve those revolutions, which shall prepare the nations of the earth to go up to the mountain of the Lord's house, when it shall be established upon the top of the mountains;—we have never dared to calculate. That it should come to pass in a day, in a year, in a century, would require a voice like God's, and messengers of grace and truth, rapid as the lightnings of the skies. But surely, human things are not disjointed; one age is not disconnected from another age; and great events may be the results of very remote causes. If the American can trace his present independence

to the efforts of Puritans, who little thought they were destined to people a new world, and to spread the empire of liberty from the eastern to the western wave; and if, in investigating the exciting causes which agitated their bosoms, and emboldened their spirits, he may find them concentrated in the plans of that mighty intellect that once illumed Geneva; surely we may dwell with the holiest rapture upon the ultimate results of Bible and missionary societies; or some more perfect institution, which may one day be formed, when sectarian prejudices shall have passed away, and left the christian bosom free for the workings of divine love;—when the church herself, as such, shall be Jehovah's Bible and missionary society. If facts are not false, and our senses have not acquired the art of playing the sophist with our consciences, it cannot be extravagance to say, that the causes of a universal revolution have been introduced, and are hourly gathering strength; nor can there be any presumption in the public exhortation, that summons the "co-workers with God" to their post, that mankind may be blessed.

Those benevolent institutions are, in fact, the reason why sectarian Creeds have been so far, and why they must be still farther, abandoned. Can any one denomination effect, what, even in the incipient state of this moral revolution, must *now* be done? Let christians speak for themselves. Union is strength, and this is their motto. Can our Creeds enlighten the nations, or dare we carry them to the heathen, as exposi-

tions of truth, and rules of practice? Has not all christendom agreed, that the Bible shall be given without note or comment? And has not their effort been characterised by a reverting influence, to break up their own party distinctions? Was it to be supposed, that the whole world was to be converted without human Creeds: and that it would never enter the heads of those who were engaged in such plans, that the Bible was enough for them too? Could any one imagine, that, when christians would consult together; and discover that they did not disagree as much as they had thought, they would not throw down the partition walls which divided their fellowship, and separated them from each other? And now, when so much has been done, and so much is doing: when the watchmen are beginning to see eye to eye, and are bespeaking the affections of the public by the exchange of good offices, do any expect to stem the current, and prevent its farther progress? They appear too late. Christians have found out something else to do, than to contend with one another. They have entered into league with the Lord of Hosts; they are striving to set up the banner of the cross in every land; and every breeze is wafting their praises to heaven, that they have been preserved to see what they have seen, and to hear what they have heard. Hushed then be every tumult! Let christians cease to strive! Nor let any thing disturb the melody of that song, which angels, and missionaries, and Bibles, are singing, on every shore, in every clime, and to every

ear,—“Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will towards men.”—Come, let our response be, “Now abideth faith, hope, charity; but the greatest of these is CHARITY:” and let there be one universal chorus, harping Jerusalem’s hymn, in loveliest strains—

“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, *and* prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sake, I will now say, Peace *be* within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good.”

CONCLUSION.

PERHAPS it may be urged, that Creeds and Confessions are now in force; and considering this fact, it may be asked what is to be done? That the church is involved in a serious difficulty by the existence of these formularies, and by their long established control over the public mind, cannot be denied, even by those who argue that they are sinful. But the previous question as to their scriptural legality must first be settled. If it be demonstrated that they are illegal, then our brethren have as much concern with the existing difficulty, as we can have; and they cannot be permitted to retire from their own responsibilities. Whatever may be done, or whatever may not be done, is a circumstance which cannot alter the scriptural character of the subject, of which we have been writing. It by no means follows, that because a combination has been formed by human authority, it is therefore right, and must be sustained; or, that the supposed impracticability of escaping from its dominion, should preclude all discussion of its morality. If it does, then sin has found an apology; the corruptions of the human heart,

which it is so hard to eradicate, are perfectly excusable; and every aggressive influence, which the gospel exerts, is injudicious and reprehensible. If it does, then all the political despotism, with which the world is burdened, is to be defended and endured, no matter how deeply it degrades immortal spirits.

We do not wish, however, to be considered as taken by surprise, even when this troublesome question is stated. And if our voice may at all be heard in reply, we would venture to make a few remarks.—Violent revolutions in society, every considerate man will deprecate: and when they come, he will take good care that he does not share the *guilt* of producing them. He may indeed inveigh against the irreligious habits of society; for every minister of the gospel must declare the word of the Lord, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. His ministerial efforts may rouse the wrath of those to whom he addresses his message; a whole community may be thrown into fearful commotion; and he himself may be dragged forth by a ruthless band to the martyr's stake. But in this he has done nothing to deserve censure; he has done nothing but his duty. Thus his master went to the cross, condemned as a malefactor, and yet the Son of God—"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." The guilt of such transactions rests elsewhere than upon his courageous spirit. Under these views, we have not cherished the smallest wish, rashly to break in upon

the established habits of society; nor even contemplated such a course, in the present state of things as discreet or wise, whoever might be disposed to adopt it. Society is not easily to be managed, and its legislators must not be rude, uninformed, or passionate men; particularly in this age and country, where all classes aspire to think for themselves. The Redeemer taught us a profound principle of social government, and that in relation to a similar state of things too, when he commanded his disciples to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." The legislative policy of Moses also, who had to control a people of harsh character, and of inveterate habit, deserves very serious consideration from men who seek to be politicians either in church or state. We beg leave to refer the circumstances of that age, country, and people, to the careful and leisurely reflection of all who take any interest in our present subject.

Again we would remark, that the ministry of reconciliation must not enter into a judicial contest with the human powers of thought; nor, either in pensive or boisterous strains, call upon church courts to inflict, what they term "salutary discipline," on those who do not agree with them in every thing. Peradventure they might find this the most injudicious step they can take: and in doing it, might act over the part, which the comedian played before Charles V. in personating Leo X. when perceiving a fire blazing on the hearth, (a designed symbol of the reformation) he was very much agitated, and in

his hurry to extinguish it, mistook a bottle of oil for a bottle of water. Excommunication and secession are old foes to the unity of the church, which have become feeble and decrepid; and it is ardently to be desired, that their dying gasp may exude no pestilential breath to inflame the church into any unhallowed excitement. The ecclesiastical courts cannot shut us out of the church of God, if we be found obeying our Master's commandments. They can indeed forbid us to associate with them in their presbyteries, their synods, and their assemblies; and refuse to have any fellowship with us in the social movements, which are directed by their ecclesiastical authorities. And they may do so, if they please; for we cannot say we believe what we do not believe; nor undertake to say, that we do not believe what we do believe. They have uttered some very plain hints on the subject; but let them remember, that if we are christian ministers or christian men, they must give in their account at his tribunal, who has thought proper to give us simply his Bible as our rule. We certainly cannot feel indifferent about such an issue; but if it is accomplished, however much we may regret it, we are surely not to blame. We were placed in providential circumstances, which we could not control; and have most conscientiously declared what we believed to be truth. Had we denied the Lord that bought us, or habitually trampled his holy law under our feet, then indeed, their discipline might be found effectual:—what they would

bind on earth, the Master would bind in heaven; and what they would loose on earth, the Master would loose in heaven. But that they should proceed to such lengths, and root up a vine from Christ's vineyard,—that they should cast out of the church, men, whose simple crime is, that they have asserted that God is the *only* Lord of conscience, and his Bible the *only* rule of faith and practice, or that church courts are not entitled to be Lords over God's heritage, and to frame authoritative rules for his children; would be such a stretch of prerogative, such an assumption of power, and such an act of oppression, that it is impossible for them to justify it by any scriptural statute, or apostolic precedent. "Master," said John, "we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us; and we forbade him, *because he followeth not us*. But Jesus said, forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us, is on our part."

Neither may the brethren traduce us as disingenuous men, because we do not withdraw from their voluntary association. There is nothing disingenuous in such conduct. Was there any thing disingenuous on the part of Jesus, when he forbade his disciples to do the works of the Scribes and Pharisees, and yet did not require them to withdraw from having any communion with them in the services of the temple? On the part of Paul, when at one time he circum-

cised Timothy, and at another time refused to circumcise Titus; or when "he cried out in the council, men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee;—of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question?" Or on the part of Luther, when he did not immediately withdraw from the ecclesiastical association, against whose tyranny he had lifted up his manly voice? There is nothing disingenuous in such conduct. We cannot withdraw, if we would. If we are all living christians, we are members of Christ's body, and every one members one of another. "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." We cannot withdraw; we are bound to society by the common sympathies which bind other men to one another; God hath determined the bounds of our habitation as well as theirs; we are agitated by those feelings, which, from pole to pole, identify every human being as belonging to the common mass; and we can no more cease to be *men*, than we can cease to be *christians*. The brethren may think differently, and they must use their pleasure. We have nothing to retract, nor yield, under the exercise of arbitrary power; though we are fully prepared to renounce every thing, which we are fairly convinced is wrong.

We would further remark, that the ministry should permit the subject to be discussed. They must remember, that all men do not believe in the authority of human Creeds; and that many are not disposed to submit to them in that form.

Neither are such men, in their objections, actuated by a love of distinction, a lust for power, or a desire to occupy the seats of authority. Their principles, their reasonings, are all directly the reverse, and are couched in the most unequivocal terms. Love of truth, and a desire to do good, animate all their views; the wreath of sectarian glory they will cheerfully give to any, who are weak or ambitious enough to desire it; and they can never envy such candidates for popular favour an acquisition, whose memorials may constitute the proof of their guilt in the eternal world. And why should not the subject be discussed? Is it not important enough? Can truth suffer from investigation? Has the subject been canvassed before this generation? What if it has again and again been argued out in ages past? May not every generation, may not every individual, insist upon hearing the testimony *personally*? Is it, after all, such a *wicked* thing, that a poor humble sinner, should ask for the *right* by which human authority is exercised in the house of God? Every age should, uniformly, without an exception, have its documents to produce—for the issue is heaven or hell. And we must not be referred to books, which scarcely one man in a million has read, and which are very probably as indifferent and inconclusive as books which are written in the present day.

The subject is now out, mingling itself along with other topics of conversation, and occupying the attention of society;—it therefore must be discussed. If the public mind, after weighing

the matter of controversy, should determine in favour of Creeds and Confessions, they will then come into the church with new glory, and reign over human intellect with resistless power; if the determination should reverse the public decision, then it will be a vain effort for church courts to enforce them. Let the public mind be enlightened on the subject, and no difficulty can remain, either on the question of abandoning, or of establishing, these instruments of sectarian operation. When we speak of the public mind being enlightened on this subject, suffer us to guard against a peevish criticism, which may perhaps be incurred; for we do not admire the present method of reviewing opinions, by saying every severe thing that can be uttered against their authors.—We mean by the public mind being enlightened, that every man should be capable of passing an *intelligent* opinion on the subject, before he undertakes to speak decisively about it. And if, under such a process of intellectual examination, human Creeds must fall, they do not deserve a tear. If they cannot endure this ordeal, let them be suffered to meet their doom without a sigh. God can govern his own church much better than any ecclesiastical assemblies, who, distrustful of mere Bible legislation, would furnish us with decrees and rules of their own.

Once more we would remark, that ecclesiastical history, and, as it is called, Biblical literature, are not the primary studies of a young man, devoting himself to the ministry; nor yet of an

old man, already fully recognised as an officer in the church. Neither does systematic theology, according to its received sense, comprise all that remains. Perhaps this last branch of ministerial education, is the most popular form of study, by which young men are trained and disciplined for the pulpit; and, as every age has demonstrated, it is one of the most successful expedients, which could have been devised, to perpetuate sectarian strife. It was the happiness of the philosophic Origen, to acquire great reputation, in an attempt to make christianity a system of philosophy, rather than a system of morals, whose sum and substance is love. And any denomination of men, who may imitate his example,—which ecclesiastical history has held up as a beacon to warn all future generations—and adopt any human system of philosophy as a text book, rather than the scriptures, may acquire even superior reputation; but they will, at the same time, do proportionably greater mischief. If, on the other hand, students in theology should be directed to analyse *the subject-matter of the Bible for themselves*, and investigate truth in its *scriptural connexions*, instead of receiving it from the laboured systems of men, the whole course of a young man's studies would be entirely altered; and, by being thrown on his own resources, he would show what his mind and conscience are worth. His intellectual independence would elevate his personal character, and extend the sphere of his ministerial usefulness. Mind must always wither when it is en-

slaved. Men, when they become christians, are still *men*; and religion, like every other human concern, is sustained by them on the common principles of their nature. If then they are compelled to acquire their ideas on religious subjects from the books of others; or have, either from indolence or timidity, learned that this is the easiest and safest way to meet the popular notions of their sect, how can they feel themselves unshackled and free? Not to be free to *speak*, is not to be free to *think*; and not to be free to think, is the most debasing of all slavery. That young men then should be required to adopt systems, which others have framed for them, or be excluded from official stations in the church, is the most injurious of all rules; and that such a rule should be couched in mere terms of respect for the *fathers*, is the least magnanimous of all human ideas. Surely God never intended that fathers should be lords over the consciences of their children.

We have now closed our remarks on Creeds and Confessions of Faith. They were commenced, from a sincere desire to glorify God, and to promote the welfare of his church. If such high motives cannot be conceded to us, we shall still enjoy the calmness which springs from the consciousness of possessing them. We have not, in any thing, intentionally sought to wound the feelings, or injure the good name, of any of our brethren. The scriptures have called upon ministers and christians to act in a very different manner towards each other:—"Speak

not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law and judgeth the law; but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge." And how happy might the church be, if this rule was more generally fulfilled than it is. For, "the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

And now, may God, our Heavenly Father, bless them who have not blessed us! May it please him to lead those to chief seats in his church triumphant in glory, who seem disposed to shut us out from his church militant on earth! May he fill their hearts with gladness, and their mouths with praise, throughout their earthly pilgrimage; and endow them with all those moral capacities, which shall qualify them to serve him in the most exalted sphere! May they be found clothed with "the righteousness of the saints," "when the heaven" shall have "departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island" shall be "moved out of their places," and this song shall be sung throughout the whole kingdom of Immanuel,—
DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY.

THE END.