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To Wm. Toler, Esq.,

Dear Sir :

My desire to secure the impartial judgment of my fellow citizens upon the views expressed in this sermon, induces me at once to comply with your request, and give the sermon into your hands for publication.

Very Truly Yours,

WM. H. HORNBLLOWER. 38

Paterson, June 10th, 1861.

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**The Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church
on the state of the Country.**

Gratefully acknowledging the distinguished bounty of Almighty God toward this favored land, and also recognizing our obligations to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, this General Assembly adopt the following resolutions :

Resolved, That in view of the present agitated and unhappy condition of this country, the first day of July next be hereby set apart as a day of prayer throughout our bounds, and that on this day, ministers and people are called on humbly to confess and bewail our national sins, to offer our thanks to the Father of Lights for His abundant and undeserved goodness towards us as a nation, to seek His guidance and blessing upon our rulers and their counsels, as well as on the Congress of the United States about to assemble, and to implore Him, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest of the Christian profession, to turn away his anger from us, and speedily restore to us the blessings of an honorable peace.

Resolved, That this General Assembly, in the spirit of that Christian patriotism which the Scriptures enjoin, and which has always characterized this church, do hereby acknowledge and declare our obligations to promote and perpetuate, so far as in us lies, the integrity of these United States, and to strengthen, uphold and encourage the Federal Government in the exercise of all its functions under our noble Constitution, and to this Constitution, in all its provisions, requirements and principles, we profess our unabated loyalty. And to avoid all misconception, the Assembly declare that by the terms Federal Government, as here used, is not meant any particular administration, or the peculiar opinions of any particular party, but that central administration which, being at any time appointed and inaugurated according to the forms prescribed in the Constitution of the United States, is the visible representative of our national existence.



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**The duty of the General Assembly to all the Churches
under its care. A VINDICATION of the Minority
in opposition to the resolutions on the state
of the Country,
BY W. H. HORNBLLOWER.**

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things where-
with one may edify another.” *Romans 14: 19.*

The action of the recent General Assembly of our church on the state of the country, has been much commented upon.— Those who opposed the adoption of the resolutions that were passed by that body have been objects of some censure. To vindicate the opposition of that minority, not to apologize for it, is my present purpose.

Let me assert once for all, that that opposition proceeded from no disloyalty of sentiment, or lack of patriotism. No such charge was made on the floor of the Assembly, nor could be. The resolutions they opposed failed to express the full measure of their fidelity to the government and zeal in its service. They would have preferred, if any testimony was to be given, that it should have been uttered in clearer terms and stronger language, glowing with the enthusiasm that fired their own souls. The antecedents of the men themselves and the fervent declarations with which they accompanied their opposition evince a devotion of heart and life to the cause of the Union that could not be transcended and admits of no question. There were men in that minority who have been first and foremost in raising and sustaining the flag of our country. There were men in it from Border and Southern States who have spoken out against treason and rebellion at the risk of life itself. And the leader of that minority, the venerated professor of Princeton, has done

more by his pen to rebuke secession and arouse the North to the support of our government, than any other minister in our whole church. To accuse such men of lukewarmness in the service of their country were simply absurd. Their very opposition was incited by patriotic convictions no less than by a sense of duty to the church of God.

That opposition was based chiefly on three grounds.

I. The impropriety and incompetency of any action on that subject by *that* General Assembly.

II. The tendency of any such action to weaken the bonds of our Federal Union and cause personal injury to loyal men at the South.

III. The almost inevitable disruption of our church which must result from such action.

I. The impropriety and incompetency of any action on that subject by *that* General Assembly.

The circumstances, in which that General Assembly was placed, were very different from those of any other ecclesiastical body that had met in our country since the present war begun. Other religious conventions, representing only Northern States, have passed resolutions in concurrence with

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the prevailing sentiments around them.— This required no special amount of moral heroism; nor were they embarrassed by the conflict of opposing interests involving the peace and unity of Christ's house. Our General Assembly was in a very different position. It was to speak for a church co-extensive with the whole country, and embracing the two sections that are now arrayed against each other in actual hostilities. In the nature of the case it was impossible to take any action that would not endanger the church and damage the cause of the country either in one section or the other. In these difficult circumstances it was best, both for the church and the country, that the General Assembly should take no action at all.

There was no call for any action. The North did not need it. The South would not heed it. And no part of the church demanded it. It is not usual for the General Assembly to originate its own business.— It attends only to such matters as are brought before it in a regular way by overtures, memorials, petitions, complaints or appeals, or in the review of the proceedings of the Synods. But not a single Synod, nor a single Presbytery, nor a single Church Session, nor a single church member sought the advice of the General Assembly or asked it to bear any testimony in reference to the state of the country. There was no evidence before that body that the churches under its care desired any expression of its sentiments on this subject, and, therefore, there was no call for any such action.

It was impossible for that General Assembly to give a fair and equitable testimony upon this subject. The General Assembly is a representative body. It is so constructed that every part of the church shall be equally influential, and its acts are supposed to declare the opinions and bind the consciences of the whole church and every part of the church. But the last General Assembly, in the Providence of God, was not national, but local and sectional in its character. A large part of the church, and that the very part to be most affected by its action on this subject, was very slenderly represented. Five Synods and thirty-four Presbyteries in Southern States were wholly unrepresented. Ninety-two commission-

ers from slave States were absent, a number sufficient to have changed the complexion of the Assembly on this or any other subject. In their absence it was impossible to utter any testimony on a subject so differently affecting different geographical localities, that would certainly express the sentiments of the whole church.— Nor was it fair, without their consent, to take such action as could do us no good, and might embarrass them, impair their influence and imperil their welfare.

That General Assembly could prescribe no rule of duty equally binding on every part of the church. Our duty at the North to the Federal government is obvious and unquestionable. We are bound to proclaim our allegiance, proclaim it so loudly that every part of our country and every throne in Europe, yes, every nation on the earth may hear and understand it. We are bound to speak, to pray and to fight for our lawful rulers. No citizen here can be excused from every manifestation of loyalty and fidelity. But at the South the duty of the citizen is embarrassed by a complicated and extraordinary state of affairs. At the South there is a government *de facto*, that is not a government *de jure*. The Confederate government in the secession States is a usurping, but, nevertheless, an *actual* government. Its existence is a fact, and those who are under its power must submit to it whether they will or not. They proclaim their loyalty to the Federal government only at the sacrifice of life and property, and an actual loss to the Federal government itself of the aid they may offer it when their services become available. In such circumstances it is not their duty to throw away their lives, but it is most obviously their duty to remain quiet and inactive, till they can rise in their might and throw off the incubus that oppresses them. Especially may this course be allowed to ministers of the gospel, who are suffered to pursue their ministerial work, so long as they remain silent on political affairs.— The government of Cesar over the Jews was a government *de facto*, not *de jure*; it was moreover an oppressive, exacting and tyrannical government, and worse than all, it was a heathenish, and persecuting government. Yet our Lord acknowl-

edged the obligation of the Jews to pay tribute to Cesar. "Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's;" i e., says Dr. Alexander, who happily was removed from earth before these troubles begun, since "you are actually under Roman domination, yet allowed to serve God in the way of His appointment, and indeed protected in that service, you are bound to pay back what you receive." Render even unto the Usurper the things that are his. The ethical question, as to the obligation to obey an illegal but actual power, is intricate and difficult. For this very reason we should not enjoin upon those in this painful situation the same obligations we cheerfully assume for ourselves. Nor was it competent for our General Assembly, as the organ of the whole church, to make it the duty of every member of the church, whatever his circumstances, to declare his loyalty and allegiance to the Federal government. Suppose you had a son laboring as a missionary in Texas, and he should write to you for advice in this time of peril: "My dear father. You know I have labored here with success for ten or twenty years. I preach regularly to the whites and have some twelve or fifteen congregations of blacks, slaves, to which I minister in succession. Should I forsake this place, I leave this people without a minister to care for their souls, these poor sheep without a shepherd. Yet I can only remain by submitting to the powers that be, and observing the strictest silence upon all political questions. What is my duty?" Would you not immediately reply, "My son. So long as you are not required to take up arms against your lawful rulers, stand at your post, and excite no animosity by any declaration of your political sentiments God sent you there to preach the gospel, not to maintain the government.— Do the work to which your were ordained." If now you were a ruling elder and met that son in the General Assembly, would you insist that it is the duty of every Presbyterian minister to avow his loyalty and secure the integrity of these United States? Would you thus with your own hand shut the door to the return of your son to the missionary field, or send him back to be involved in greater difficulties, perhaps to die a shameful death? Yet this is the effect of the action of the General Assembly on every

Presbyterian missionary in seceding States!

The action of the Assembly was contrary to its own precedents and incongruous with its religious character. "Legislating upon political matters is no part of the functions of a court of Jesus Christ." Our Confession of Faith (chap. 31, Sect. 4) declares that "Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical, and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs, which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate." In accordance with the spirit of this law our church has ever maintained a studied reserve upon all matters not strictly religious and ecclesiastical. Especially has it put itself in an attitude of resistance to all popular excitements and secular agitations.— Even during the Revolutionary war its deliverances never undertook to decide whether allegiance was due to King George, or to the American Congress; but were religious exhortations to penitence and prayer and the careful performance of every christian duty. The General Assembly, as the highest court in our church, is the representative of the Lord Jesus Christ and His crown and sceptre, and cannot discuss matters merely secular and political without a condescension that involves a loss of religious dignity and majesty. It did seem to many of us that this high and venerable body should not be changed into a merely patriotic assemblage of citizens called together to give expression to an outburst of popular enthusiasm. In unfortunate contrast with our recent Assembly was the conduct of the Episcopal Convention of the diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania, sitting in the same city at the same time, from which all resolutions upon the state of the country were ruled out as irrelevant to the business on hand and inconsistent with the religious character of the convention. This occasioned no outcry, no public clamor. It commended itself to the good sense and correct taste of the people and was accepted with silent approbation.

II. The minority that opposed the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly did so because they believed that the

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tendency of any such action would be to weaken the bonds of our Federal Union and cause personal injury to loyal men at the South.

The bonds that hold nations together are not merely nor chiefly conventional. Race and language and religion are stronger ligatures in the body politic than any federal compacts or constitutional enactments. — Denominational ties are, perhaps, strongest of all. One church extending its ramifications through every part of an extended country like ours, confessing the same creed, observing the same forms of worship, uniting together in annual, semi-annual or quarterly assemblies, engaged in the support of the same benevolent institutions, exchanging freely its ministers from pulpit to pulpit, reading the same religious newspapers and periodicals, riveted together by five such Boards as our Boards of Foreign and Domestic Missions, Education, Publication and Church Extension, and all cemented by a General Assembly, that has equal power over every part, down to the church sessions and the humblest church member, and representing in itself the unity of the whole ; such a church is a bond of union in States, that no wise politician should despise or would willingly dispense with. The members of that church, assimilated in thought and feeling, and loving each other, will cling together and preserve to the last extremity every means of outward fellowship and communion, and will cherish political union for the sake of the facilities of christian intercourse and intimacy. The severance in twain of such a church must damage the political unity of States confederated as ours.

One after another the Protestant churches of this country have been divided by sectional and political questions, by Northern and Southern geographical lines. Nor can it be doubted that the ill feeling engendered by these ecclesiastical disruptions, has contributed to bring about the present political state of feeling between the North and South. Our church is the last Protestant denominational link that unites the North and the South. If that is severed, politicians may find it difficult to discover a substitute. No force can supply the place of affection in a free republican government. — And when a people are two nations in reli-

gion, it will be difficult to find the point of a national centralization. Armies and navies may form iron bands to hold the struggling parts together ; iron bands too strong for the beating and repellant hearts of the people to burst assunder : but armies and navies are symbols of compulsion and of subjugation, ugly and hideous features in a free republican government.

It was, therefore, a real patriotism, a patriotism enlightened by the furthest forecast and the broadest political view of the results, that animated the minority in our General Assembly in opposing the resolutions that were passed on the state of the country. They opposed them because they believed that they were likely to lead to the division of our church, and that the division of our church would be a national calamity.

If we overrate the power of our church to preserve the unity of our Government, yet there is a converse to the argument that is of political importance. Our church may not have power to cement the union of the States, but the disruption of our church may accelerate the disunion of the States. — When a people are in a panic of excitement a very little cause may effect a great amount of mischief. The people of the South are frantic. They are possessed of the Devil — secession. They are out of their right minds. And the least thing that can aggravate their distemper should be avoided. Any action of our church at such a time that may be construed into an expression of ill will against them, anything liable to misinterpretation, will be eagerly laid hold upon by their fevered minds and perverted into a new reason for revolt and separation. When a wedge is well in the log, a child's blow may drive it home and split the log; and now that the idea of secession is fixed in the minds of the Southern people, the action of our church, even if in itself insignificant, may have power enough to drive that idea of secession deep into their hearts and render their alienation from the North incurable.

These are not my own opinions alone. Politicians and statesmen and Union loving men, both North and South, have expressed the same views. They were uttered on the

floor of the Assembly as the deliberate judgment of men in the highest position in the government. And one member of the present Cabinet exerted himself as a ruling elder of our church to prevent any action by that body, deprecating it as injurious to the interests of both the church and the State.

But, aside from harm to the country at large, the action of the Assembly was likely to do private and personal injury to loyal men at the South. There is no doubt that there are many Union-loving, loyal men at the South, who are kept in a state of subjection and quiescence by the power of the usurping government and the fierce spirit of terrorism that has inflamed the populace. Many of those men are found in the old school Presbyterian church. It is a fact that old school men, especially old school ministers, in the South are looked upon with suspicion simply because it is conceded that old school Presbyterians, as a class, are favorable to the Federal Government. Any utterance of our General Assembly at such a time, by increasing the cause for suspicion, must render the position of every member, especially of every minister of our church, more hazardous.—The cry from the lips of a rabble mob, "Your church has bid you be loyal to the United States," will be a fearful tocsin in the ears of many an already suspected Unionist.

The Union men at the South are now at the mercy of the Disunionists. To require them to declare their sentiments and unfurl their flag, is to require them to die, to die a useless death, to throw away their lives for a mere abstraction. When we have marched our armies South and given the Union men there a chance for life, then we may put the sword in one hand and the flag of the Union in the other and bid them unfurl the flag and fight for it and conquer or die for it. But to bid them unfurl the flag of defiance while naked of all weapons to protect it or themselves, is unnatural, barbarous and monstrous. Yet this is what our General Assembly has required of all Southern Presbyterians. If I could have stood in that Assembly and shared with my Southern brethren what I asked them to encounter, I might have voted for those resolu-

tions. But while I myself was safe among a loyal people, with nothing to lose or gain but the loud plaudits of the populace. I would not and could not brandish a sword over their heads or slip a hempen cord around their necks. I must smother every sentiment of honor and justice and chivalry in my soul, before I could thrust others into such an unequal contest in which I bore no part and participated in no peril.

Especially was this action of the Assembly unjust towards the Southern Commissioners who were present in that body. It was well known that they were nearly all Union men. For their opinions some of them had already suffered insult and threats of violence in their own homes.—Could those men vote against such resolutions without violence to their feelings and conscience? And yet, if they voted for them, they must go back to the secession communities in which they live, to suffer new insults and doubtless to die an ignominious death! Was it right, was it kind, was it in the spirit of our Christian religion, was it *manly* to put them to such a test? I say it was shameful and detestable!

It is said, by way of apology, that they could be excused from voting. It would be painful for Union loving men to ask to be excused; and they might prefer certain death to the possible amputation of cowardice. And if excused, yet, at the South, where the doctrine of those resolutions is regarded as *treason*, the feeling against them for not having voted in the negative, would have been almost as strong as if they had voted in the affirmative. Besides, if all the Commissioners from disaffected States and communities, had been excused from voting, then the result of the vote would not have been an expression of the opinion of the whole church, but only of a part of it, that might better have been uttered in local Synods and Presbyteries, and the General Assembly would palm off upon the world a declaration of sectional sentiment as a testimony of the whole Presbyterian church; and as an act and testimony of the General Assembly, those men, whether they voted for it or not, must carry it back to the South, either to suffer for it and endure its penalties or to deny a

once their concurrence in that testimony and their adherence to this church.

And here permit me to add, that if the excitement at the North has rendered the discussion of these resolutions before the General Assembly the occasion of suspecting and censuring the most loyal and conscientious citizens, how could we expect the infuriated masses of the South to pass a dispassionate and unprejudiced judgment upon the part which Southern Commissioners might take in that Assembly.

III. The chief reason that influenced that minority in their vigorous opposition to these resolutions was one already anticipated: The almost inevitable disruption of our church which must result from such action.

Our Form of Government ordains, (ch. xii: sect iv.) that the General Assembly "shall constitute the bond of union, peace, correspondence and mutual confidence among *all* our churches." It is appointed to conserve the unity of the church, not of the State. Our church extends not only over the whole area of our own country, but interpenetrates the dominions of foreign powers. We have one Synod and three Presbyteries in India under the sceptre of Queen Victoria, two Presbyteries in Africa, one in China, all in connection with the General Assembly. And the General Assembly can only harmonize and control the churches by entire non-interference with political matters, sectional strifes and local disturbances.

Thus far our General Assembly has fulfilled its high and responsible mission.— Amidst all the tumults of political contests, whilst other churches have been dashed into fragments by local and secular questions, our General Assembly has proved "the bond of union, peace, correspondence and mutual confidence among *all* our churches," North and South, East and West.

The recent General Assembly was itself a sublime spectacle of a united church amidst the distractions of a divided country. Two hundred and sixty Commissioners assembled in such times as these in peaceful and loving concert was itself an imposing sight. And they were gathered from all parts of the country. So far as is known, every Presbytery in the Southern States ap-

pointed its Commissioners; and all Commissioners that could come, did so. Many causes prevented a fuller attendance. To some the customary lines of travel were closed. The imperious dictation of secession mobs and authorities prohibited others. The great expense of the journey and the poverty of the men were a hindrance to not a few.— Yet, so far as could be, every Presbytery was represented: The three seceded States of Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi sent delegates. The would-be secession States of Missouri, Tennessee and Virginia sent theirs. The doubtful States of Kentucky and Maryland sent theirs. And the little slave State of Delaware sent hers. Even fanatical South Carolina sent the book of her Synodical minutes to undergo the usual review, attesting still in her madness her attachment to our church and fellowship with us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. There was thus full proof in that Assembly that, however, the country was in danger of dismemberment, our church at least was still *one*. A fact no less hopeful to the country than gratifying to the church! In view of this fact, was it right, was it politic, was it in accordance with our duty to Christ, the Head of the church, to take any action that might cause alienation among our members and lead to the disruption of our church?

We are confidently assured by our rulers that this Government is to be maintained.— That the United States of America are to be one and undivided. That the Constitution, the laws and the geographical limits of our country are to remain unchanged. If this is so, or if we believe it is, is it wise to take any steps that shall divide our church?— Would it be pleasant to us, when the clouds of this present conflict are dispersed, to behold our country one and inseparable, and our beloved church broken into pieces, unnecessarily destroyed, and her efficiency and her prestige forever gone! If we are to be two nations, I can be reconciled to the idea that we are to be two churches. But if we are to remain one nation, why not continue to be one church? Why should we say, affirm or do anything, in these times of fever excitement, soon to pass away, that shall sunder the ties that bind us, alienate the hearts that love each other, and place geographical barriers between us that shall

render us forever twain. Why divorce in the mere heat of political contest, those whom God hath joined together. Yet to such a separation and divorce the action of our General Assembly tends. The churches of South Carolina cannot receive it. The churches of the secession States cannot acknowledge it. No minister in an excited community, pervaded with the mania of rebellion, can obey it. They must declare themselves free and independent of a church that has made loyalty to the Federal Government a part of its creed, or suffer extinction as churches and death as individuals.

This action in fact establishes a new term of communion that Christ has not instituted. Except a man adopt our views of the Federal Constitution and the doctrine of States rights, we shut him out from our fellowship. We cannot do this unless we are ready to affirm that no secessionist can be a Christian. But are we prepared to assert this? May not a man be misguided by false theories and sophistical arguments into acts of treason and rebellion, and yet be a good man? May not a man be justly adjudged to death by the law of the land and yet be a christian? John Brown deserved to be hung. Yet, which one of us is ready to say that John Brown did not act conscientiously, in the fear of God and in the love of man? Major Andrew was a spy and suffered justly a disgraceful death. Yet, what man of sensibility ever yet failed to shed a tear on that tragical page in the history of the American revolution. Dr. Palmer of Louisiana, who, within a year, received a call to a church in New York, Dr. Thornwell of South Carolina, and his copresbyter, Dr. Smyth, so well known and loved by this congregation, the gentle and spiritually minded Dabney of Virginia, and his associate, Major Hill, both theologian and soldier, all of them are in the eye of the law guilty of death. Misled by mere abstractions, the victims of a fatal fatuity of judgment, swept away from the truth by the velocity and force of current events and popular turbulence, they have been betrayed into the crime of preaching, advocating and abetting sedition and insurrection and treason and rebellion. But do we know that they have made shipwreck of

their faith in Christ. Is it for us to decide that they are not good men and do not sincerely preach and love the Lord Jesus? If not, then, we are not prepared to say that a man should be cut off from the communion of the church because he sincerely believes in the political heresy of the right of secession. Yet this is the legitimate effect of the resolutions passed by our last General Assembly.

Our only hope now is that the natural results of the adoption of these resolutions will be prevented by the noble opposition made by the minority in that Assembly, and the protest they have recorded upon its minutes, and thus our church be preserved, one and undivided.

Convictions of right and equity, a sense of propriety and dignity, the spirit of fairness and honorable dealing, an enlightened patriotism, the dictates of forbearance and fidelity to Christ, the King, all combined to justify and exalt the action of the minority in the last General Assembly.

Let me remind you of what I said to you from this pulpit the last Sabbath morning before I left home. I told you that it was right that the flag of our country waved above the tower of our church. That that flag had protected us in the worship of God, as our consciences dictated, without let or hindrance. That as christians as well as patriots, we should love that flag, and if need be, dye its red stripes with our own blood. But yet, that as christians, we should love the cross more dearly than the flag, the church than the constitution and Christ than our country. I remembered this exhortation I had given you, when acting as a Commissioner in the General Assembly, and resolved by the grace of God to act in the spirit of it; in defiance of all threats, in contempt of all intimidations, in spite of possible misinterpretations and animadversions, to be faithful to Christ and His crown and His church.

If any still judge me severely I have only to answer them in the language of the apostle Paul. "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ"—servants of Christ not of the State—"and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found

faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself, yet I am not hereby justified;" i. e. I am conscious of no wrong, yet I am not justified, for I may be guilty though unconscious of guilt; "but He that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall every man have praise of God." (1 Cor. 4:1-5.)

The introduction of this subject into our General Assembly has produced, among other evils, the apparent necessity of preaching this sermon, when I would rather have been beseeching you in the name of

Christ and by the tender mercies of God, to accept of everlasting life. All that I can now add is the exhortation of our text.

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things where-with one may edify another." The practical end of religion is love to one another.— Its present manifestations are mutual forbearance, endeavor to live together in harmony notwithstanding differences of views, opinions and principles—and a prayerful effort to make all things subserve our spiritual culture and sanctification.

"The fellowship of the saints is not to be broken for unessential matters; in other words, we have no right to make anything a term of communion which is not inconsistent with piety."

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