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A D D R E S S

ON THE

ACTS AND DELIVERANCES

OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

OLD SCHOOL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS,

ON THE STATE OF THE COUNTRY.

BY

REV. JOSEPH T. SMITH, D. D.

DELIVERED BY REQUEST, IN THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
BALTIMORE, ON THURSDAY EVENING, JUNE 21, 1866.

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A D D R E S S .

It is with great hesitation and reluctance I enter upon the duty here assigned me. My taste and temperament and habits and uniform course of conduct with reference to the questions before us, seemed to disqualify me, above all others, for such a service as this. Brethren and friends, however, to whose better judgment I have yielded my own, have thought that I might be able to remove some misapprehensions, relieve some minds of painful perplexities, and shed some light upon the path of duty, in which we all desire to walk; and with the hope, however faint, of accomplishing such a result as this, for the good of our Zion and the glory of our common Master, I dared not refuse the service.

It is a sad thing, my Brethren, that we are here at all on such an occasion as this. The storm of war, which has swept so wildly over us, is now past. The sword is sheathed, the confused noise of the warrior no longer heard, soldiers transformed into citizens, have everywhere returned to the pursuits of peaceful industry again, and the blessed Sun of Peace, breaking through the dun clouds which so long obscured it, again shines brightly upon us. During all these terrible years of passion and strife we watched and wept and prayed, O! how earnestly, for the Peace of Jerusalem. Prizing her above our chief joy, it was our heart's first desire that she might be preserved amidst the perils which threatened her. While all along the border, where the tempest broke in its utmost fury, churches were rent, pastors sundered from congregations, and congregations torn and scattered, God in his boundless mercy preserved us; and when the storm was overpast, our holy and our beautiful house still stood entire, and we, who had so long taken sweet counsel together, were still seen going up to the House of God in company, and sitting together around the table of our common

Lord. It was a beautiful spectacle; and as we rejoiced, we gave God all the glory. We felt as we looked upon it, that Christ's kingdom was indeed not of this world, that His people, whatever differences might obtain among them as citizens of an earthly kingdom, as citizens of the heavenly kingdom were all one—all one in Christ.

And now that all is over—that the questions which threatened us are by universal consent settled—it cannot be that Peace shall bring upon us all the calamities of War. This blessed dove, with the green olive branch in its mouth, which is hovering around the open window of our storm-tossed ark, our own hands cannot surely thrust it away;—not now, when so great a work awaits us,—when so many desolations are to be repaired—when the wounds left upon our own spirits are to be healed—when the cause of Christ in this great city demands our utmost care—when Prophetic events so long foretold and anticipated, are palpably moving on to their great accomplishment. I have no harsh word to speak, not one to awaken passion or inflame excitement; I would speak the truth, in love, calmly and soberly. Let me ask your prayers, my Brethren, that I may be suffered to give no wrong touch to the Ark of God, and that with hearts purified from all passion, and minds emptied of all prejudice, we may rejoice together in the fulfilment of the promise, “To the upright in heart, there arises Light out of Darkness.”

The Subject which now claims our attention is, what is the duty of those among us, who may disapprove of any, or all the Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of our Church, during these troublous years past. The single question upon which it is held the Assembly has erred, is that of the relation between Church and State,—the spiritual and the temporal powers,—existing as they do side by side, touching each other at so many points, traversing each other's territories in so many directions, and often so difficult to be discriminated.

The Assembly, it is charged, has over and over again left its appropriate sphere, intruded upon that of the State, and intermeddled with civil affairs, which, by the Word of God and the standards of the Church, it is forbidden to handle. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. “Synods and Councils,” says our Confession of Faith, “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.”—*Confession of Faith, chap. 31, sec. 4.*

Such is the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church, and it is one dear to us, for it is one peculiarly our own. It is the doctrine of our common Presbyterianism, and as a *Doctrine* no Assembly, or Synod, or Presbytery, or Minister, or Member of our Church, has ever called it in question. It belongs to no sect or segment of our communion, it is the common inheritance of us all. You would as soon expect to hear an American Presbyterian deny the Divinity of Christ, or His Atonement, as the Doctrine here set forth. I have never preached politics, and I never will. As a Minister I have never intermeddled with civil affairs, which belong to the Commonwealth, and I never will; and in this, my Brethren, I am sure, all are agreed with me.

And now the question recurs in what respects, and how far has the Assembly done violence to this doctrine. We begin with the Act of 1861, as first in order, familiar to you all as "the Spring Resolutions," which we quote in full:

"Gratefully acknowledging the distinguished bounty and care 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*, 1. 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 light for His abundant and undeserved goodness toward 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*, 2. That this General Assembly, in the spirit of that Christian patriotism which the sacred Scripture enjoins, and which has always characterized this Church, do hereby acknowledge and declare our obligation to affirm 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 Constitution; and to this Constitution in all its provisions, requirements and objects, we profess our unabated loyalty. And to avoid all misconceptions, the Assembly declare, that by the terms Federal Government, 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.”—*Minutes of the General Assembly, page 329.*

Against this action, the Commissioners from this Presbytery voted, and with fifty-six others protested. I will read from the protest and the answer of the Assembly, such extracts as will bring out clearly the points in controversy.

Protest of Dr. Hodge and others.

“We, the undersigned, respectfully protest against the action of the General Assembly, in adopting the minority report of the Committee on the State of the Country.

“We make this protest, not because we do not acknowledge loyalty to our country to be a moral and religious duty, according to the Word of God, which requires us to be subject to the powers that be; nor because we deny the right of the Assembly to enjoin that, and all other like duties, on the ministers and churches under its care; but because we deny the right of the General Assembly to decide the political question, to what government the allegiance of Presbyterians as citizens is due, and its right to make that decision a condition of membership in our Church.

“That the paper adopted by the Assembly does decide the political question just stated, is in our judgment undeniable. It asserts not only the loyalty of this body to the Constitution and the Union, but it promises in the name of all the churches and ministers whom it represents, to do all that in them lies to ‘strengthen, uphold, and encourage the Federal Government.’ It is, however, a notorious fact, that many of our ministers and members conscientiously believe that the allegiance of the citizens of this country is primarily due to the States to which they respectively belong; and, therefore, that when any State renounces its connection with the United States, and its allegiance to the Constitution, the citizens of that State are bound by the laws of God to continue loyal to their State, and obedient to its laws. The paper adopted by the Assembly virtually declares, on the other hand, that the allegiance of the citizen is due to the United States; anything in the Constitution, or ordinances, or laws of the several States to the contrary notwithstanding.

“It is not the loyalty of the members constituting this Assembly, nor of our churches and ministers in any one portion of our country that is thus asserted, but the loyalty of the whole Presbyterian Church, North and South, East and West.

“Allegiance to the Federal Government is recognized or declared to be the duty of all the churches and ministers represented in this body. In adopting this paper, therefore, the Assembly does decide the great political question which agitates and divides the country. The question is, whether the allegiance of our citizens is primarily to the State or to the Union. However clear our own convictions of the correctness of this decision may be, or however deeply we may be impressed with its importance, yet it is not a question which this Assembly has the right to decide.

“That the action of the Assembly in the premises does not only decide the political question referred to, but makes that decision a term of membership in our Church, is no less clear. It is not analogous to the recommendation of a religious or benevolent institution, which our members may regard or not at pleasure; but it puts into the mouths of all represented in this body, a declaration of loyalty and allegiance to the Union and to the Federal Government. But such a declaration, made by our members residing in what is called the seceding States is treasonable. Presbyterians under the jurisdiction of those States, cannot, therefore, make that declaration. They are consequently forced to choose between allegiance to their States and allegiance to the Church.

“The General Assembly in thus deciding a political question, and in making that decision practically a condition of membership in the Church, has, in our judgment, violated the Constitution of the Church, and usurped the prerogative of its Divine Master.

“We protest loudly against the action of the Assembly, because it is a departure from all its previous actions.

“The General Assembly has always acted on the principle that the Church has no right to make anything a condition of Christian or ministerial fellowship, which is not enjoined or required in the Scriptures and the standards of the Church.”—*Minutes of the General Assembly, pages 339 and 340.*

In the Assembly's answer to this protest, they say:

“The first and main ground of protest against the adoption of this resolution, is, that the General Assembly has no right to decide purely political questions; that the question whether the allegiance of American citizens is due primarily and eminently to the State, or to the Union, is purely political, of the gravest character, dependent upon constitutional theories and interpretations, respecting which, various opinions prevail in different sections of our country; that the action of the Assembly virtually determines this vexed question, decides to what

government the allegiance of Presbyterians, as citizens, is due, and makes that decision a term of communion.

“The protestants “deny the right of the General Assembly to decide to what government the allegiance of Presbyterians, as citizens, is due.” Strictly speaking, the Assembly has made no such decision. They have said nothing respecting the allegiance of the subjects of any foreign power, or that of the members of our mission Churches in India, China, or elsewhere, who may hold connection with our denomination. The action complained of relates solely to American Presbyterians, citizens of these United States.

“Even with regard to them, the Assembly has not determined, as between conflicting governments, to which our allegiance is due. We are the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Such is the distinctive name, ecclesiastical and legal, under which we have chosen to be known by our sister Churches and by the world. Our organization as a General Assembly was cotemporaneous with that of our Federal Government. In the seventy-four years of our existence, Presbyterians have known but one supreme government, one nationality, within our wide-spread territory. We know no other now. History tells of none. The Federal Government acknowledges none. No nation on earth recognizes the existence of two independent sovereignties within these United States. What Divine Providence may intend for us hereafter—what curse of rival and hostile sovereignties within this broad heritage of our fathers,—we presume not to determine. Do these protestants, who so anxiously avoid political entanglements, desire the General Assembly to anticipate the dread decision of impending battle, the action of our own government, the determination of foreign powers, and even the ultimate arbitration of Heaven? Would they have us recognize, as good Presbyterians, men whom our own Government, with the approval of Christendom, may soon execute as traitors? May not the highest Court of our Church, speaking as the interpreter of that holy law which says, ‘Ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake,’ Rom. xiii. 5, warn her communicants against ‘resisting the ordinance of God?’ Rom. xiii. 2. In the language of the learned Reviewer above cited, ‘Is disunion morally right? Does it not involve a breach of faith, and a violation of the oaths by which that faith was confirmed? We believe, under existing circumstances, that it does, and therefore it is as dreadful a blow to the Church as it is to the State. If a crime at all, it is one the heinousness of which can only be imperfectly estimated.’

“In the judgment of this Assembly, ‘this saying is true;’ and therefore the admission, on the part of the Assembly, that Presbyterians may take up arms against the Federal Government, or aid and comfort its enemies, and yet be guiltless, would exhibit that ‘practical recognition of the right of secession,’ which, says the Reviewer, would ‘destroy our national life’

“But we deny that this Deliverance of the Assembly establishes any new term of communion. The terms of Christian fellowship are laid down in the Word of God, and are embodied in our standards. It is competent to this Court to interpret and apply the doctrines of the Word; to warn men against prevailing sins; and to urge the performance of neglected duties. We regard the action, against which these protests are levelled, simply as a faithful declaration by the Assembly, of Christian duty towards those in authority over us; which adds nothing to the terms of communion already recognized. Surely the idea of the obligation of loyalty to our Federal Government is no new thing to Presbyterians.

“And this is a sufficient reply, also, to the second article of this protest. Having established no new term of membership, this Assembly is not liable to the charge of having departed from the old paths.” *Minutes of the General Assembly, pages 342 and 343.*

There was no question between the Assembly and the protestants as to the doctrine that the Church must not handle political affairs; the only question was one of fact or opinion as to whether the act in question was political. Both agreed upon the *Principle*, the difference was as to the application of the principle to a certain state of facts. There was no question either as to the judgment of the Assembly, whether right or wrong in itself, but simply and solely whether, as a Spiritual Court, it had a right to pronounce any judgment at all upon the subject. Let this be borne distinctly in mind.

The decisive question was here settled, and upon the Acts of subsequent years we need but glance. In 1862, (*Minutes, p. 624*) an elaborate paper was adopted recognizing the fact that the Federal Government was the “powers that be” which are ordained of God, that loyalty was due to it, that rebellion against it might be, perhaps was, sin, that it ought to crush force by force, and that the Church should uphold it. A paper adopted with less opposition, as the Southern Churches were unrepresented and its action respected only those in States connected with the Central Government.

In 1863 a paper was adopted refusing to display a flag upon the building in which the Assembly met, and reiterating substantially the Deliverances of previous Assemblies.

In 1864 an elaborate paper was adopted on the subject of Slavery, reviewing the action of the Church upon it, and citing its Deliverances through successive years from 1787 onward, (all condemning the system,) reaching this conclusion, "that in the judgment of the Assembly the time has at length come, in the providence of God, when it is His will that every vestige of human slavery among us should be effaced, and that every Christian man should address himself with industry and earnestness to his appropriate part in the performance of this great duty." This action is objected against, not only because slavery is a political institution, but became contradictory of previous testimonies of the Assembly. Two Deliverances bring out the precise position of our Church on this whole subject. That of 1818, drawn up by Dr. Baxter, of Virginia, supported by all the Southern members and adopted by the Assembly unanimously. A few extracts will bring out the main positions taken in this paper of 1818.

"The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, having taken into consideration the subject of slavery, think proper to make known their sentiments upon it to the Churches and people under their care.

"We consider the voluntary enslaving of one portion of the human race by another, as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature; as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ, which enjoin that 'all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' Slavery creates a paradox in the moral system; it exhibits rational, accountable, and immortal beings in such circumstances as scarcely to leave them the power of moral action. It exhibits them as dependent on the will of others, whether they shall receive religious instruction; whether they shall know and worship the true God; whether they shall enjoy the ordinances of the gospel; whether they shall perform the duties and cherish the endearments of husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbors and friends; whether they shall preserve their chastity and purity, or regard the dictates of justice and humanity. Such are some of the consequences of slavery—consequences not imaginary, but which connect themselves with its very

existence. The evils to which the slave is always exposed often take place in fact, and in their very worst degree and form; and where all of them do not take place, as we rejoice to say in many instances, through the influence of the principles of humanity and religion on the mind of masters, they do not—still the slave is deprived of his natural right, degraded as a human being, and exposed to the danger of passing into the hands of a master who may inflict upon him all the hardships and injuries which inhumanity and avarice may suggest.

“From this view of the consequences resulting from the practice into which Christian people have most inconsistently fallen, of enslaving a portion of their brethren of mankind—for ‘God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth’—it is manifestly the duty of all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day, when the inconsistency of slavery both with the dictates of humanity and religion, has been demonstrated, and is generally seen and acknowledged, to use their honest, earnest, and unwearied endeavors to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and if possible throughout the world.”—*Baird's Digest*, pp. 809-10.

The Paper of 1845, adopted by a large majority, was drawn up by Dr. Rice, of New York. Of this Assembly I was a member, and for this paper I voted. Its main features are these:

“The committee to whom were referred the memorials on the subject of slavery, beg leave to submit the following report:

“The memorialists may be divided into three classes, viz:

“1. Those which represent the system of slavery, as it exists in these United States, as a great evil, and pray this General Assembly to adopt measures for the amelioration of the condition of the slaves.

“2. Those which ask the Assembly to receive memorials on the subject of slavery, to allow a full discussion of it, and to enjoin upon the members of our Church, residing in States whose laws forbid the slaves being taught to read, to seek by all lawful means the repeal of those laws.

“3. Those which represent slavery as a moral evil, a heinous sin in the sight of God, calculated to bring upon the Church the curse of God, and calling for the exercise of discipline in the case of those who persist in maintaining or justifying the relation of master to slave.

“The question which is now unhappily agitating and dividing other branches of the Church, and which is pressed upon the attention of the Assembly by one of the three classes of memorialists just named, is, whether the holding of slaves is, under all circumstances, a heinous sin, calling for the discipline of the Church.

“The Church of Christ is a spiritual body, whose jurisdiction extends to the religious faith and moral conduct of her members. She cannot legislate, where Christ has not legislated, nor make terms of membership which he has not made. The question, therefore, which this Assembly is called to decide, is this: Do the Scriptures teach that the holding of slaves, without regard to circumstances; is a sin, the renunciation of which should be made a condition of membership in the Church of Christ?

“It is impossible to answer this question in the affirmative, without contradicting some of the plainest declarations of the Word of God. That slavery existed in the days of Christ and his Apostles is an admitted fact. That they did not denounce the relation itself as sinful, as inconsistent with Christianity; that slaveholders were admitted to membership in the Churches organized by the Apostles; that whilst they were required to treat their slaves with kindness, and as rational, accountable, immortal beings, and, if Christians, as brethren in the Lord, they were not commanded to emancipate them; that slaves were required to be ‘obedient to their masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, with singleness of heart as unto Christ,’ are facts which meet the eye of every reader of the New Testament. This Assembly cannot, therefore, denounce the holding of slaves as necessarily a heinous and scandalous sin, calculated to bring upon the Church the curse of God, without charging the Apostles of Christ with conniving at sin, introducing into the Church such sinners, and thus bringing upon them the curse of the Almighty.

“In so saying, however, the Assembly are not to be understood as denying that there is evil connected with slavery. Much less do they approve those defective and oppressive laws by which, in some of the States, it is regulated. Nor would they by any means countenance the traffic in slaves for the sake of gain; the separation of husbands and wives, parents and children, for the sake of ‘filthy lucre,’ or for the convenience of the master; or cruel treatment of slaves, in any respect. Every Christian and philanthropist certainly seek by all peaceable and lawful means, the repeal of unjust and oppressive laws, and the amendment of such as are defective, so as

to protect the slaves from cruel treatment by wicked men, and secure to them the right to receive religious instruction.

“Nor is the Assembly to be understood as countenancing the idea that masters may regard their servants as mere property, and not as human beings, rational, accountable, immortal. The Scriptures prescribe not only the duties of servants, but of masters also, warning the latter to discharge those duties, ‘knowing that their Master is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him.

“In view of the above stated principles and facts:

“*Resolved*, 1. That the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States was originally organized, and has since continued the bond of union in the Church, upon the conceded principle that the existence of domestic slavery, under the circumstances in which it is found in the Southern portion of the country, is no bar to Christian communion.

“2. That the petitions that ask the Assembly to make the holding of slaves in itself a matter of discipline, do virtually require this judicatory to dissolve itself, and abandon the organization, under which, by the Divine blessing, it has so long prospered. The tendency is evidently to separate the Northern from the Southern portion of the Church; a result which every good citizen must deplore, as tending to the dissolution of the Union of our beloved country, and which every enlightened Christian will oppose as bringing about a ruinous and unnecessary schism between brethren who maintain a common faith.”—*Baird's Digest*, p. 813.

In 1846 the General Assembly affirmed the agreement of all its Deliverances on the subject of Slavery in these words:

“Our Church has, from time to time, during a period of nearly sixty years, expressed its views on the subject of slavery. During all this period it has held and uttered substantially the same sentiments. Believing that this uniform testimony is true, and capable of vindication from the Word of God, the Assembly is at the same time clearly of the opinion that it has already deliberately and solemnly spoken on this subject with sufficient fulness and clearness. Therefore,

“*Resolved*, That in the judgment of this House, the action of the General Assembly of 1845 was not intended to deny or rescind the testimony uttered often by the General Assemblies previous to that date.”—*Baird's Digest*, p. 814.

The last Assembly affirmed that the actions of '64 and '65 are not contradictory of any previous actions.

The seeming contradiction vanishes when we remember that the Assembly held that the mere relation of master and slave was not sinful, and could not be made a bar to communion. This is the fact which the paper of 1845 affirms and draws out to its legitimate consequences. The papers of 1818 and 1864, on the other hand, affirm that the system of slavery, with all the laws, usages and abuses which had actually grown up within and around it was an evil. The one condemns the system as sinful, the other denies that every one implicated in the system is necessarily a sinner.

We come now to the action of 1865, which differs in one essential feature from all these. In all former Deliverances the Assembly simply exercised its office of instruction, and propounded its opinions or sentiments as a Religious Teacher. Here it exercises its power of Government.

“I. The right of every Presbytery to examine ministers asking admission into their body, as to their soundness in the faith, which has been long acknowledged and practiced by our Presbyteries, implies their right by parity of reasoning to examine them on all subjects which seriously affect the peace, purity, and unity of the Church.

“II. The exercise of this right becomes an imperative duty, in the present circumstances of our country, when, after the crushing by military force of an atrocious rebellion against the Government of the United States, for the perpetuation of slavery, many ministers who have aided and abetted this revolt, may seek admission into Presbyteries located in the loyal States. Therefore,

“III. It is hereby ordered that all our Presbyteries examine every minister applying for admission from any Presbytery or other ecclesiastical body in the Southern States, on the following points :

“1. Whether he has in any way, directly or indirectly, of his own free will and consent, or without external constraint, been concerned at any time in aiding or countenancing the rebellion and the war which has been waged against the United States; and if it be found by his own confession or from sufficient testimony, that he has been so concerned, that he be required to confess and forsake his sin in this regard before he shall be received.

“2. Whether he holds that the system of negro slavery in the South is a Divine institution, and that it is ‘the peculiar mission of the Southern Church to conserve the institution of slavery as there maintained,’ and if it be found that he holds either of these doctrines, that he be not received without renouncing and forsaking these errors.

“V. Church sessions are also ordered to examine all applicants for church membership by persons from the Southern States, or who have been living in the South since the rebellion, concerning their conduct and principles on the points above specified; and if it be found that of their own free will they have taken up arms against the United States, or that they hold slavery to be an ordinance of God—as above stated, such persons shall not be admitted to the communion of the Church till they give evidence of repentance for their sin and renounce their error.

“VI. The General Assembly gives counsel to the several church courts specified in these orders, that in discharging the duties enjoined therein, due regard be paid to the circumstances of the case and that justice be tempered with mercy. Especially is this counsel given to churches in the border States, where many impulsive and ardent young men, without due consideration, have been led away by their superiors, or seduced from their loyalty by their erroneous interpretation of the doctrine of State rights”—*Minutes*, 1865, p. 553.

The Assembly just adjourned does not properly come under our notice here, for confessedly, there was nothing political in its Acts and Deliverances, save as these contained incidental references to the Acts of preceding Assemblies. The “Declaration and Testimony” against which, and against the Presbytery of Louisville which adopted, and the individual ministers and elders who signed it, the judgment of the Assembly was pronounced, was a strictly ecclesiastical paper, and contained nothing political. The offence charged against those who adopted and signed it, was not political but ecclesiastical. They were condemned for what was declared to be an act of defiance and insubordination against the lawful authority of the highest court of the Church. It was not for the principles they avowed, for those principles were mainly true—nor for the dissent and disapproval they uttered against the Acts of the Assembly, for the Assembly explicitly recognized their right to dissent; nor for their refusal to carry out any supposed Orders of the Assembly, for this the Assembly did not require, but simply and solely because of their open defiance of the authority of a court to which their ordination vows and the laws of Christ’s house bound them to submit. I am not saying now that the process was properly conducted, for I do not think so, and voted against it, at every step, but simply that the whole matter was ecclesiastical, not political, and the errors, whatever they were, were altogether errors in the mode of conducting a process which it was confessedly competent to conduct. And I give it as my honest

opinion from constant and large intercourse with members of the Assembly, and especially of its leaders, and from careful observation of their spirit and purposes, that had it not been for the lavish distribution through the house of the Declaration and Testimony in printed form, which they regarded as an intended insult and defiance of their authority, and for the presence of some whom they considered as sent there in open contempt of them as a court of Christ's House, there would have been nothing done at the last Assembly to occasion disquiet to any—nothing but efforts to bind up what was broken. That is my honest and deliberate opinion, which you may take for what it is worth. I differed from the policy pursued, but I feel bound to say, that in my judgment, it sprang from a sincere desire to vindicate what was considered the lawful authority and dignity of the highest court of Christ's House.

It has been often repeated that the Commissioners from the Louisville Presbytery were expelled from the house without having a trial. The simple fact was that they were suspended from their privileges as members of the body until their case should be taken up, when, by express resolution, their right to a full hearing was recognized. And this suspension until their case was taken up was justified by those who advocated it, on the principle recognized in our book, that where persons are charged with grave offences, the court which takes cognizance of the case may suspend them from their privileges until it can be taken up.

It has been charged that the spirit of the Assembly was unkind, particularly towards our Southern brethren. An answer may be found in the following paper, offered by me and adopted almost unanimously:

“ *Whereas*, The churches in that portion of our country lately in rebellion, whose names appear upon our roll, have not been represented in this Assembly, and still remain in a state of separation from us; and whereas, the measures adopted by this Assembly, if not carried out by the lower courts in a spirit of great meekness and forbearance, may result in perpetuating and embittering divisions already existing, and extending them over portions of our Church now at peace. Therefore, be it

Resolved, That this Assembly greatly deplores the continued separation between ourselves and our Southern brethren, so long united with us in the bonds of Christian love and ecclesiastical fellowship, and expresses the earnest desire that the way may be soon

opened for a reunion on the basis of our common standards, and on terms consistent with truth and righteousness.

“Resolved, That the lower courts who may be called upon to execute the measures of this Assembly, be enjoined to proceed therein with great meekness and forbearance, and in a spirit of kindness and conciliation, to the end that strifes and dissensions be not multiplied and inflamed and extended still more widely, and that the discipline of Christ’s house may prove for edification and not for destruction.” *Proceedings,* 1866, p. 99.

It is a mistake that the last Assembly requires any oath of any kind from the members of our Churches. It is a mistake that it claims or holds Zion Church, in Charleston, S. C., as its property—or that any Assembly at any time went in a body to the rooms of any Loyal League and made political speeches, or rose to their feet and sang patriotic songs. These are little things, mentioned here only as specimens of misapprehensions extensively prevailing and encountered by us upon the streets.

And now from this long and tedious review we come back to the simple question before us.

The Assembly declares that the Federal Government is that ordinance of God which we are bound to reverence and obey; and that rebellion against it is a sin, to be visited upon those guilty of it as other sins. These two statements embrace in substance the whole. And now, without any question as to whether they are true or false in themselves, had the Church as such a right to declare and enforce them? If not, did it intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the Commonwealth in such a way and so far as to make it an Apostate Church?

In reply we remark: 1st. These Acts are in entire harmony with the the Acts and Deliverances of our Church from its very beginning in this country. And if Apostate now, and because of these, then has the Presbyterian Church in this land been always Apostate. In Baird’s Digest, under the Caption “Pastoral Letter on occasion of the old French War,” before the Assembly was organized, the Synod of New York says: “We look on ourselves bound, not only as members of the community, but by the duty of our office, as those who are entrusted with the declaration of God’s revealed will, to exhort all to implore God’s mercy for themselves, their children, country and nation, their and our rightful and gracious sovercign, King George the Second, his

royal family, all officers civil and military." The highest Church court distinctly recognizes the reigning King, "the powers that be," as "our rightful and gracious sovereign."—*Baird's Digest*, p. 820.

2. Again we find "A Pastoral Letter on the Repeal of the Stamp Act," in which, after speaking of the imposition of unusual taxes, the severe restrictions on trade, the almost total stagnation of business and the danger of being deprived of the blessing of English liberty, from all which they had been delivered by the clemency of the Government, we find these words, "You will not forget to honor your King and pay a due submission to his august Parliament. Let this fresh instance of royal clemency increase the ardor of your affection to the person, family and government of our rightful and gracious sovereign. We most earnestly recommend it to you to encourage and strengthen the hands of Government, to demonstrate on every proper occasion your undissembled love for your mother country and your attachment to her true interest, so inseparably connected with your own."—*Do.* p. 821.

Again, "on the Revolutionary War," after stating that in such a crisis as that of impending war, they felt bound as the highest tribunal of the Church, to speak to the congregations under their care, and after reviewing the causes which led to the war, they go on in these words: "First, In carrying on this important struggle let every opportunity be taken to express your attachment and respect to our sovereign, King George, and to the revolution principles by which his august family was seated on the British throne. Secondly, Be careful to maintain the union which at present subsists through all the colonies; nothing can be more manifest than that the success of every measure depends on its being inviolably preserved. In particular as the Continental Congress now sitting at Philadelphia consists of delegates chosen in the most free and unbiassed manner by the body of the people. let them not only be treated with respect and encouraged in their difficult service, but adhere firmly to their resolutions, and let it be seen that they are able to bring out the whole strength of this vast country to carry them into execution." *Do.* p. 823.

What more has any Assembly said?

See again "Address to the French Minister on the birth of the Dauphin," and "Address to Washington on his election to the Presidency," "Testimony against Persecution in Switzerland," "Petition to Congress on Sabbath Mail," and report presented by Dr. Plumer

and adopted in 1853, from which I quote the three concluding resolutions:

4. "*Resolved*, That this Assembly cordially approves of the provisions of a late treaty with the Oriental Republic of Uruguay, already cited, and trusts that the Government of the United States will, by treaty, secure the acknowledgment of the same inestimable rights by all other governments where it may be practicable.

5. "*Resolved*, That the people of the congregations in our connection be advised to unite with their fellow-citizens in urging upon the Government of the United States a careful and earnest attention to this matter.

6. "*Resolved*, That a duly attested copy of these resolutions be furnished to the President of the United States, to the President of the Senate, and to the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the next Congress for the consideration of each of these branches of the Government of our country."—*Digest*, p. 788.

And so we submit the Presbyterian Church from its very origin, especially during the Revolution, the only times parallel to our own, has acted on precisely the same principle as did the Assembly during our late civil convulsions.

II. All Evangelical Churches, both North and South, have taken precisely the same position and made substantially the same Deliverances as our own.

1. *The Congregationalists*.—The different Congregational bodies in the Eastern, Western and Middle States, as all know, with one consent took action, the same in substance, far stronger in language than our own.

2. *The Lutherans*.—The General Synod of the Lutheran Church, in 1862, after a preamble declaring that the rebellion was against the lawfully constituted Government, that that Government must be sustained as an ordinance of God; that they feel bound to express their convictions of truth and sustain the great interests of law and authority. *Resolved*:

1. "That it is the deliberate judgment of this Synod that the rebellion against the Constitutional Government of this land is most wicked in its inception, unjustifiable in its cause, inhuman in its prosecution, and destructive in its results to the highest interests of morality and religion.

2. "That in the suppression of this rebellion and in the maintenance of the Constitution and Union by the sword, we recognize an

unavoidable necessity and a sacred duty which the Government 'owes to the nation and to the world,' and call upon our people to pray for 'success to the army and navy, that our beloved land may speedily be delivered from treason and anarchy.' In 1864 the Synod reiterates and reaffirms its action."—*McPherson*, p. 478.

3. *The German Reformed*.—The German Reformed Synod of Pennsylvania in 1864, resolved "that this Convention deems it right and proper to give expression to the unfaltering devotion with which the German Reformed Church in the United States has hitherto sustained the cause of our common country, and we earnestly urge upon our clergy and laity to continue to labor and pray for the success of the Government in its efforts to suppress the existing rebellion, and to restore peace and union."—*Do.* p. 482.

The General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church adopted still stronger resolutions in 1863.

4. *The Baptists*.—At the General Convention of the Baptists in Brooklyn in 1861, it was resolved "that the doctrine of secession is foreign to our Constitution, revolutionary, suicidal, setting out in anarchy and finding its ultimate issue in despotism. 2. That the National Government deserves our loyal adhesion and unstinted support in its maintenance of the national unity and life."

The New York Baptist Convention of 1862 resolved that "as a religious body we deem it our duty to cherish and manifest the deepest sympathy for the preservation and perpetuity of a Government which protects us in the great walk of Christian civilization." Similar resolutions were adopted by the Baptist Conventions of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio.—*Do.* p. 474.

5. *Methodist Protestant*.—The Methodist Protestant Church at its General Convention in 1862 made a deliverance of a tenor precisely similar to those of the Baptists.—*Do.* p. 499.

6. *Methodist Episcopal*.—The Methodist Episcopal Church in its General Convention in 1864, Resolved, among other things,

2. "That it is the duty of the Government to prosecute the war with all its resources of men and money till this wicked rebellion shall be subdued, the integrity of the nation shall be secured and its legitimate authority shall be established, and that we pledge our hearty support and co-operation to secure this result."

5. "That we regard slavery as abhorrent to the principles of our holy religion, humanity and civilization, and that we are in favor of such measures as will 'prohibit slavery or involuntary servitude, except for

crime, throughout all the States and Territories of the country.'”
Do. p. 498.

7. *Protestant Episcopal*.—The Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Pennsylvania in 1864, Resolved.

“That we hereby declare our unfaltering allegiance to the Government of the United States, and that we pledge it our willing devotion and service,” and will pray that our now lacerated country may be so reunited, that “there shall be but one Union, one Government, one Flag, one Constitution.”

In the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, held in New York in 1862, the Committee to whom had been referred a number of papers on the state of the country, preface their Report, which was adopted as the action of the Church on the subject, with the remark, that in framing the resolutions, “They have designed to leave no room for honest doubt, or even for invidious misconstruction as to the hearty loyalty of this body to the Government of the United States.” And further, “There could have been no hesitation under any circumstances in expressing now and always our earnest and abiding loyalty and devotion to our country, its Constitution and its laws, and to all its duly constituted authorities.” Here follows a series of resolutions expressing their loyalty to the Government, their condemnation of the rebellion and hope for the speedy restoration of our beloved Union, while at the same time they avoided entering upon “any narrow questions, which peculiarly belong to the domain of secular politics.”

In the long letter of the Bishops to the Churches we find the following: “When St. Paul, in direct connection with the words just cited, exhorts us to ‘render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor,’ and *that* ‘not only for wrath, but for conscience sake,’ we have no hesitation in teaching that the claim to all these duties and manifestations of allegiance and loyalty from us and from all those States so recently united in rendering them, is rightfully in that Government, which is now by force of arms maintaining such claim. The refusal of such allegiance we hold to be a sin, and when it stands forth in armed rebellion, it is a great crime before the laws of God, as well as man. This, Brethren, your Bishops teach as official expositors of the Word of God. Less they believe they could not teach without unfaithfulness to the Scriptures.” *Do.* 483.

8. All branches of the Presbyterian Church: the United Presbyterian, the Cumberland Presbyterian, the New School Presbyterian, took precisely the same action, as a specimen of all, I read the Deliverance of

the Cumberland Presbyterian General Assembly of 1863, "*Whereas*, the Church is the light of the world, and cannot withhold her testimony upon great moral and religious questions; Resolved, that loyalty and obedience to the General Government, in the exercise of its legitimate authority, are the imperative Christian duties of every citizen, and that treason and rebellion are not mere political offences of one section against another, but heinous sins against God and his authority."—*Do. p. 473.*

We come now to the action of the Evangelical Churches in the Southern States, all of which assumed the same attitude towards the Government of the Confederate States and expressed towards it the same duties of submission, loyalty and devotion as an ordinance of God. And I need not say that the principles in question are the same no matter to what Government applied.

The Alabama Baptist State Convention in November 1860, before war had commenced, or a single State seceded, after declaring that "The Union had failed in important particulars to answer the end for which it was created," continued in these words, "While as yet no particular mode of relief is before us, we are constrained to declare that we hold ourselves subject to the call of proper authority in defence of the sovereignty and independence of the State of Alabama, and of her right, as a sovereignty, to withdraw from this Union. And in this declaration we heartily, deliberately, unanimously and solemnly unite."—*McPherson, p. 513.*

In the Georgia Baptist Convention of 1861: "Whereas the State Convention of Georgia, in the legitimate exercise of her sovereignty, has withdrawn from the confederacy known as the United States of America, and for the better maintenance of her rights, honor and independence, has united with other States in a new confederacy under the title of the Confederate States of America; and whereas, Abraham Lincoln is attempting by force of arms to subjugate these States, in violation of the fundamental principles of American liberty—therefore Resolved"—then follow resolutions to approve and support the Government of the Confederate States, urging the union of all the people of the South in defence of the common cause at whatever cost of treasure or of blood. *Do. p. 513.*

The Methodist, the Episcopal, and I believe every Church South, at once recognized the legitimacy of the Government of the Confederate States, and assumed towards it the same attitude of submission and loyalty which the Churches North had assumed towards the Government of the United States.

2. Some of the very first notes of war, as you are aware, issued from the pulpits of the Old School Presbyterian Church. Drs. Thornwell and Palmer were universally recognized as the leaders of the body and their voice upon all questions was most potential. On the 21st day of November, 1860, in Columbia, S. C., Dr. Thornwell, from the pulpit, discussed the theory of the Government, the relations between the States and the Federal Government, and advocated the political doctrine of States Rights. Dr. Palmer, from his pulpit, in New Orleans, took for his theme that it was the Providential trust of the South "to conserve and to perpetuate the institution of slavery as now existing," "with the right unchanged by man to go and root itself wherever Providence and nature may carry it;" and urges the fulfilment of this trust "in the face of the utmost possible peril."—"Should the madness of the hour appeal to the arbitration of the sword we will not shrink even from the baptism of fire." He then reviews the condition of political parties, and urges Secession as an immediate and imperative duty. I allude to these celebrated sermons because they were such potential agencies in precipitating the political catastrophe which followed. They were widely circulated as campaign documents, the religious papers of the South, almost without exception, echoed their call, and the several Presbyteries, one after one, stood prepared to renounce all allegiance to the United States and transfer it to the Confederate States.

On December 3d, 1860, months before the war commenced, the Synod of South Carolina declared: "The Synod has no hesitation, therefore, in expressing the belief that the people of South Carolina are now called upon to imitate their Revolutionary forefathers and stand up for their rights. We have an humble and abiding confidence that the God whose truth we represent, in this conflict will be with us, and exhorting our Churches and people to put their trust in God and go forward in the solemn path of duty which His providence opens before them, we, Ministers and Elders of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina Synod assembled, would give them our benediction, and the assurance that we shall fervently and unceasingly implore for them the care and protection of Almighty God."

In the preamble and resolutions adopted by the Presbytery of Charleston, in July, 1861, we find the following: "The relations of the State of South Carolina and ten other adjacent States, and of the people thereof, with the other States and people previously composing the United States of America, have been dissolved, and the former united in the separate and independent Government of the Confederate States of America." The United States Government is spoken of as one "foreign

and hostile to our own—"a political power which we, in common with our fellow-citizens of all classes and all Churches, have disowned and rejected;" calls the Confederate authorities "the rightful and legal authorities of the land;" declares that the people of the United States "have violated the Constitution under which we were originally confederated, and broken the covenant entered into by their fathers and ours;" and concludes: "We do most heartily, with the full approval of our consciences before our Lord God, unanimously approve the action of the States and people of the Confederate States of America."

The first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States met in December, 1861. It assumed in all its proceedings that the political bonds which had joined them to the United States were sundered, and that the Confederate States were an independent government. Their action throughout implicitly—their letter to all the Churches throughout the world explicitly—recognize the Confederate States as an actual and rightful government, thus deciding as a Church the political question then in dispute and unsettled between them and the United States, the decision of which had been committed by both parties to the final arbitrament of the sword. In the Narrative adopted by that Assembly they say, "In the first place, we notice the relation of our congregations to the great struggle in which we are engaged. All the Presbyterial Narratives without exception mention the fact, that their congregations have evinced the most cordial sympathy with the people of the Confederate States, in their efforts to maintain their cherished rights and institutions against the despotic power which is attempting to crush them. Deeply convinced that this struggle is not alone for civil rights and property and home, but also for religion, for the Church, for the Gospel, for existence itself, the Churches in our connection have freely contributed to its prosecution of their substance, their prayers, and above all, of their members and the beloved youth of their congregations. The Assembly desire to record with its solemn approval this fact of the unanimity of our people in supporting a contest to which Religion, as well as Patriotism, now summons the citizens of this country, and to implore for them the blessing of God in the course they are now pursuing."

It is a singular instance of the influence of times of great excitement in swerving men from the most cherished principles of their lives, and one which ought to teach us charity for each other, that our Southern brethren who had so long and loudly declared that slavery was a political question, with which the Church

might not intermeddle, should proclaim to the world, as they did in 1864, that "it is the peculiar mission of the Southern Church to conserve the institution of slavery." And we submit that our affirmation is made good—all Evangelical Churches in the country, both North and South, during the recent troubles, took precisely the same ground as our General Assembly.

III. All Protestant Churches throughout the world reject our American doctrine, as to the relation between the Church and the State. In the Church of England, the King, by virtue of his office, is Head of the Church. He prepared its prayer-book, ordained its rites and ceremonies, and by his own authority set up its whole frame-work. The Queen at this hour is the supreme head of the Church, the fountain of all Ecclesiastical power. Bishops sit in Parliament, and Parliament is the supreme arbiter in all questions of Ecclesiastical law.

In all Presbyterian Churches throughout the world, except our own, there is both theoretically and practically a most intimate union of the temporal and the spiritual power.

The Westminster Assembly, which composed our noble standards, was convened by order of Parliament, dissolved by it, and all their deliberations directed and controlled by it. The 23d chapter of the Westminster Confession, as prepared by them and held to this day as the doctrine of the Scotch and Irish Presbyterian Churches, declares: "The civil magistrate hath authority and it is his duty to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered and observed. For the better affecting whereof, he hath power to call Synods to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God." Think of the President of the United States deciding the questions which occupy our Church Courts, pronouncing upon what is orthodox in doctrine and immoral or blasphemous in practice, prescribing the duties of Ministers and Church Courts, settling and regulating all matters of worship and discipline, convoking, dissolving, presiding over our General Assemblies.

Yet all this—it is the doctrine of the Westminster Confession—"he hath authority, and it is his duty" to do, and all this the Queen of England does to this day in the established Church of Scotland, and all

this the Free Church confesses it is her right and her duty to do. And yet alongside of such a doctrine as this she holds fast to the Supreme Headship of Christ, and has made such glorious sacrifices and borne such glorious testimony to Christ's crown and covenant. Such is the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the mother of us all.

And now, the final conclusion from all this is:—If the acts of the Assembly during the last five years have been in harmony with the previous acts of our highest Church Courts from the beginning,—if they have been in harmony with those of all other Evangelical Churches North and South, if they have been in harmony, not only with the practice but with the doctrine of all Presbyterian and all Protestant Churches throughout the World except our own,—then its error, whatever it be, cannot be either fatal or fundamental—then the question as to the relation between Church and State cannot be an essential one; and error of doctrine or of practice on such a subject cannot make a Church apostate—then all the Doctrines of salvation, and all the Ordinances of the Church, its Ministry and its Sacraments, may be preserved entire, while it errs as to a question of only occasional importance and inferior concern. If the General Assembly has become apostate because of its actions in the premises, then is every Church on earth apostate, Christianity has vanished from the world, and the kingdom of God has disappeared from among men. I know how easy it is in excited states of mind to magnify “the jot and tittle” into the “weightier matters of the Law,” but the common sense of all men recognizes the distinction between essential and unessential in questions of Doctrine and Duty; and will not make the question before us “the Article of a standing or falling Church.”

And let me ask here, why, when all are in the same condemnation, should our Church alone be singled out, as the object of such fierce and persistent assault? And why, when the same guilt must rest upon the conscience of every member of every other Church in the land, should it drive us alone to division and schism?

The Truth corrupted is not fundamental. The Error imputed is not fatal. The whole question is one which rises into importance only in times of great political excitement, and leaves the doctrines of Redemption and the ordinances and institutions of the Church entirely unaffected, and error with reference to such a question never can justify Division. This is our first position.

The second is, that the General Assembly is not the Church, and its Acts and Deliverances alone cannot make the Church Apostate. Our Constitution and laws are found in the Bible and our written Standards. The Tribunals to interpret and administer them are a series of Courts, of which the General Assembly is the highest. It is a representative body of limited and carefully defined powers. It is the mere creature of the Presbyteries, subject to their control, liable to be modified or dissolved by them at any time. The Presbyteries are the fountain of all power in Presbyterianism. The Assembly is not a permanent body, but created from year to year, by the Presbyteries, and when its work is done, it is not adjourned but dissolved, and ceases to be, and another and altogether different body is again created by the Presbyteries. The Assembly can make no Article of Faith, ordain no Constitutional rule, which has the force of permanent and universal Law—that belongs to the Presbyteries alone. “Before any overtures or regulations, proposed by the Assembly to be established as constitutional rules, shall be obligatory on the Churches, it shall be necessary to transmit them to all the Presbyteries, and to receive the returns of at least a majority of them, in writing, approving thereof.”—*Form of Gov. chap. 12, sec. 6.*

The Assemblies sustain the same relation to the Church that the Congresses elected every two years do to the Government, and constitute, not the Government, but only so many different administrations of it, and are changed in one case by the people, and in the other by the Presbyteries at will. Their acts depend, from year to year, on casual majorities, and always concern, not the Doctrines, or Order, or Life of the Church in themselves, but only the application or adaptation of these to the emergent exigencies of times and circumstances.

The Assembly exercises two broadly distinguishable functions, those of Teaching and of Government. As a Teacher it interprets and declares the revealed will of God, and applies it to actual circumstances as they arise, just as a Pastor in his pulpit ministrations. It gives utterance to its interpretations and applications of the Word of God, but for these it claims no infallibility. Our Book expressly declares “that all Synods and Counsels may err, and have erred.” The Assembly has never laid claim to infallibility; always admitted its liability to err, and one declares and teaches what another rejects. Our Book expressly denies to the Assembly all power to bind the conscience or enforce its own Deliverances as the Word of

God. It expressly recognizes the right of private judgment, and every member of the Church not only may, but is bound to sit in judgment upon them, and decide for himself whether they be "according to the Word of God, aside from, or contrary to it." "All Synods or Councils since the Apostles' time, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred, therefore they are not to be made the Rules of Faith or Practice, but to be used as a help in both."—*Con. ch. 31, sec. 3.* "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines or commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word or beside it in matters of Faith and Worship; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also."—*Con. ch. 20, sec. 2.*

Every Assembly recognizes the absolute right of protest, dissent and open difference from its Acts and Deliverances, and if rash words have been sometimes spoken, and hasty actions sometimes taken, which seemed to infringe upon this right, no Assembly has ever deliberately called it in question, and none ever will. All the Acts of Assemblies preceding 1865 were in discharge of its office of Instruction. They simply declared, as Helpers of your Faith, what they believed to be the truth, and you are left free to receive or reject their testimony as it is according to the Word of God, aside from or contrary to it. How can such Instructions bind the Faith or wound the conscience?

No Presbyterian surely can regard any man, or any body of men, Synod, Council or Assembly, as infallible, or accept their utterances as Oracles. We recognize but one infallible Standard of Faith and practice—the Holy Scriptures. We know no infallible interpreters of these, but using all as "helps to our Faith and practice," every one for himself, in the exercise of his private judgment, and upon his own personal responsibility, receives or rejects. This is the glory of Protestantism. It is a fundamental principle of Presbyterianism, and we are amazed that any should doubt or hesitate with reference to it.

But the Assembly exercises also the power of Government. It is a court of last appeal, and its judicial decisions once pronounced are peremptory and final. The Assembly of 1865 exercised its power of Government when it required the lower courts—Sessions and Presbyteries and Synods—to examine all applicants for admission from the South into the bodies under their care, upon the subjects of loyalty and freedom, and to require repentance from all who had

offended in faith or in practice with reference to either. Their Deliverance here, though not a Law in the proper sense of that word, but only an Order, took the form of Law, as it prescribed something to be done, and as such, for our present purpose, we will regard it.

Let us look here at the Reason of this law—the conditions it implied and the end it was designed to reach, that we may see what it really was, for a high authority has told us, “He that knoweth not the reason of a law, knoweth not the law itself.” It had respect only to those who had been voluntary participants in the rebellion, and to them only when they made voluntary application for admission. It did not go out to seek them. It was enacted just when the war had closed, just when soldiers from both armies were returning to their homes, and in the Border States meeting in the same congregations. It was just after the assassination of President Lincoln, when the public mind was almost frenzied,—that time never to be forgotten of wild and terrible excitement. In the Border States, especially in portions of Kentucky and Missouri, where the tempest of passion was fiercest, many churches were threatened with scenes of violence and bloodshed, on the very floors of their sanctuaries, by reason of the presence of these returned soldiers. Members and officers of the churches from these localities appeared before the Assembly and its committee and plead that, for their own protection, they must have power over their membership to exclude those whose presence threatened to provoke violence, until passion should have time to subside. To meet this emergency, and under the impression of representations such as these, the Orders of 1865 were passed. In their very nature, as well as in the intention of the Assembly, they were temporary. They soon expired of their own limitation, having accomplished all they were intended to accomplish, and became, like multitudes of laws upon your statute books, a dead letter.

Such, beyond all question, the last Assembly regarded them. I stated without question or rebuke, openly on the floor of the Assembly, that the Presbytery of Baltimore had not enforced them—that I did not believe there was a single Session within its bounds which had done so. Some twenty others stated the same fact on behalf of their Presbyteries and Sessions, and no one was called to account. There was not a word said publicly or privately about enforcing them, which ever came to my ears. The Reason of the Law does not now apply to the Churches even of the border, and its reason ceasing, the law itself has passed away.

Not only by silent acquiescence, but by positive action the last

Assembly declared its judgment that the orders of 1865 were not now of force.

"It having come to the knowledge of this body that some of the ministers under our care, not able to subscribe to the recent Testimonies of the General Assembly on the subjects of Loyalty and Freedom, and that some who have not signed or formally approved the Declaration and Testimony, do, nevertheless, hesitate to comply with the requirements of the last Assembly, touching the reception of members from the South, known, or supposed to have been in sympathy with the rebellion; therefore,

Resolved, That while we would treat such ministers with kindness and forbearance, and would by no means interfere with the full and free discussion on their part of the Testimonies and requirements referred to, we deem it a solemn duty which we owe to them and to the Church, to guard them against giving countenance in any way to declarations and movements which are defiant of the Assembly's authority, and schismatical in their tendency and aim, and we do earnestly exhort them, in the name and for the sake of our common Lord and Master, to study and pursue the things which make for peace."—*Proceedings*, 1866, p. 103.

This resolution, for I know its history, was designed to declare two things: First, that lower courts who should fail to carry out the Orders of the Assembly of 1865, were not to be held to account for such failure. Second, that those who refused in a spirit of defiance to the Assembly's authority, and expressed that refusal in terms of defiance, should be held to account not for the refusal but for the defiance.

This is expressed still more plainly in another resolution:

"The dissatisfaction and discontent consequent upon the Deliverances of the Assembly of 1865 are abating with increased knowledge of the design and propriety of these decisions, and it is confidently believed that maturer reflection will produce a fuller acquiescence in the authority of the Church. It is alike the past and present purpose of our Church to preserve within its fold all who sincerely and earnestly love its order and doctrines, and to fan into life and energy every lingering spark of genuine attachment to our faith and order, which may exist in those portions of our country where the spirit and unrelenting power of the rebellion drove many true and loyal Presbyterians into a hostile attitude toward the Church and the Country. With this enlarged and Christian view it is appropriate to declare, that whilst the testimony and authority

of our Church are to be obeyed, the fullest Christian liberty of opinion is tolerated and protected, and no enforcement of the Deliverances of our Church is expected or demanded, except that which will debar from our communion and Church courts all those who refuse to submit to "the powers that be," and remain in wilful antagonism to the manifestations of God's providence and the authoritative decisions of our Church."—*Proceedings*, 1866, p. 107.

And still again: "While the last Assembly but fulfilled its duty in issuing these injunctions, (those of 1865,) *it left their application to the persons concerned entirely to the lower courts.*"—*Proceedings*, p. 100. This expressly recognizes every thing we have affirmed as to the Order of 1865.

But why, it is asked, was not the Act in question explicitly and formally repealed? For two sufficient reasons. First, because the majority would not consent to its repeal, in the face of what they considered a spirit of rebellion against its rightful authority in the case. And second, because many who would have consented held that as each Assembly is independent in an important sense of every other, one cannot repeal the Acts of another.

And now I affirm here, in presence of you all, in my own behalf and in behalf of every Pastor and every Session in this city, the Assembly has put no burden upon our conscience. It has bound no fetters upon our hands. We preach and we administer the laws of Christ's House just as we have always done. We exact no new terms of communion, we require nothing more than we have always required of those in our communion, or of those seeking admission into it. Extraordinary measures have passed away with the extraordinary times which called them forth, and like the soldier we leave the field and lay aside the harness for the peaceful walks in spiritual industry again.

As to the past at least our course is clear. There is nothing there to drive us from the Church of our fathers. What the future may have in store for us is known only to God. We are told that the spirit of Violence and Fanaticism has taken such thorough possession of those we once delighted to call our brethren in Christ, and of the Church we once so loved, that it can never be exorcised. I cannot discern the spirits, I cannot foresee the future, but I will wait at least till the evil come. We may be told that the New and the Old School Churches will unite in the North as they have already done in the

South, and a new flood of fanaticism will be let in upon us, I do not know what shall be on the morrow, but, meantime, I will stand in my lot and wait till the predicted evil comes. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and Prophets of Evil are not always inspired. It may be that Truth has somehow lost its old Omnipotence, and error has seized upon its power—but I do not believe it. And however Truth may be obscured and buried for the time in the dust of the arena where she struggles, she will rise again. "The immortal years of God are hers." And I will toil, and pray, and wait, and watch for her hour of triumph—for come it will, however long delayed. Great truths always make their way slowly and work themselves by almost imperceptible degrees into the life of the Church. It was through the lapse of ages and alternate victories and defeats often repeated, we have at last acquired the glorious trophies we possess to-night. It was reserved for the Presbyterians of this land to discover and propound to the Churches all over Christendom the true theory of the relations between Church and State. Not one of them all has yet attained to that theory, though they are slowly making their way towards it. And what if we do not always clearly discern and unflinchingly carry it out to all its practical conclusions, every fresh failure serves but for a new Warning and a new Incitement for the future, and so helps on the final triumph.

And now, since our consciences and our hands are left free, we are at liberty to look at the practical evils of separation.

1. The law of love is the fundamental law of Christ's house. Sins against Truth, as against every other Doctrine and every other Grace are but sins against the Statutes of the Kingdom; sins against Charity are sins against its very Constitution. Do violence to any other law of the House and you only rend away a pillar from its portico or a stone from its walls; do violence to the law of Love and you tear up its very foundation and make the whole building a ruin. "The greatest of these is Charity." "God is love, and he that loveth not, knoweth not God." "A new Commandment," said the great Founder and Legislator of the Kingdom, "I give unto you, that ye love one another." "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." "Love one to another," that I appoint as your badge and your rallying cry. That I give unto you with these bleeding hands, starred with my tears and striped with my blood, as your consecrated banner-flag, ever to

wave before your ranks and distinguish you amidst the gatherings of the Hosts. We may err as to our duty in what belongs to us as members of the Church and what as citizens of the State. We may not always discern the dim boundary line which separates the secular from the spiritual, and sometimes may transgress upon the one side or the other; and the error may be recovered and forgiven, and work no fatal injury to our souls. But if we have lost "love one to another," we have lost our badge, we have lost our banner, we have lost everything, and neither God or man can know us as Christ's Disciples. "A new Commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another. Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Strange, my brethren, when we speak so often of our zeal for Truth and tell so often of our sacrifice for Principle, we should speak so little of our zeal for Charity and tell so little of our sacrifice for Love. "Above all things put on Charity."

If it be indeed true that Christians of the North and Christians of the South "hate each other with such a cruel hatred" that they cannot dwell together—if it be indeed true that those who once loved and trusted each other, and went up to the House of God in company, can love and trust each other no longer, then is the glory departed. If passion and hatred be the only ground of separation, then indeed are we no longer Christ's disciples. And should these impel us still further to break the bonds of external unity and rend asunder the body of Christ, which is His Church, then are we guilty of the sin of Schism. It is no small sin to rend and separate what Christ has made one,—no small sin to make a fresh wound in that scarred body of His,—no small sin to introduce division and strife into the household of Faith, and plant the seeds of discord and contentions among those who are called to dwell together in love—to charm by fell incantations the serpent into the bowers of our only earthly Paradise. We pray God that the guilt of Schism may never rest upon your soul or upon mine.

2. Whither shall we go, if we go out self-exiled from the house of our Fathers? Where but Cain-like to wander as fugitives and vagabonds upon the face of the whole earth, houseless and homeless? We can find no Church North or South to shelter us, for the same leprous spot is upon all alike. Independency—A Presbyterian without Presbyterianism? The house is too small, and it rests upon a foundation of narrow and shifting sands. In a little time the

questions which now absorb us, and to our excited feelings loom up so largely as to fill the whole spiritual heavens, will be altogether forgotten or dwarfed and dwindled down to their true dimensions. When these political feelings, heated as they have become, in the fires of this fierce controversy, shall have cooled down—when new parties shall have arisen, and new issues been joined, confounding all the lines and landmarks of the present, and ranging us in new ranks, we will look back upon the passions of the hour as but the distorted visions of a distempered dream. No! the passions and excitements of the passing day, dignify and baptize them by whatever hallowed name of Truth or Principle we may, are not broad enough or firm enough to furnish a foundation on which a Church of God may rest. The world is covered all over with the wreck and ruin of such, built as they were upon the sands, “and daubed with untempered mortar”

3. The wounds inflicted by these last terrible years are not yet healed—shall we open them all afresh? Through our families and our congregations shall we plough fresh furrows of discord and division, before the marks of the old are effaced? Shall we present to the world the spectacle of strifes and debates in the house of God—the home of Love and the sanctuary of Peace? Shall we bring upon ourselves the shame of wrangling with each other in secular courts for the Temples of our God? Shall we lay up for ourselves a heritage of alienations and antipathies to spoil our future peace, and soil and sear our souls? Shall we transmit to our children a legacy of discords and divisions, and poison their opening minds with the deadly night-shade of our strifes? Shall we plant in this community the seeds of a hereditary hate, which shall spring up and ripen into their fearful harvest long after we are slumbering in our graves? Shall we embody and make perpetual the passions of the hour which have brought upon us such a terrible baptism of blood? Would we embalm and transmit them as Monuments and Memorials of these evil days? Would we vivify and leave them behind us to scatter among our children poisoned arrows and death? No, my Brethren; let us extinguish them in our own hearts. Let us destroy every monument and every memorial of them which we had thought to leave behind. Let us repair with united hands the desolation they have already wrought; and be careful that we do not transmit them as a legacy of strife and blood to our children and our children’s children. It is easy to plant the seeds of hereditary strife, for our children catch our spirit, inherit our passions, and prolong our con-

flicts. And here, upon the Border, with those passions which lately burned so fiercely, still smouldering, let us be careful that our breath fan them not into a fiercer flame. God is calling us—loudly calling us to ministries of love. Whose hands shall be busied in binding up these bleeding wounds if not ours? If the Church be not found at this hour engaged in the blessed work, by whom shall it be done?

As for me, I cannot leave the Church of my Fathers. As soon would I think of forsaking the mother who bore me, for a rash act or a hasty word. She received me into her sheltering arms in infancy; sprinkled the waters of baptism upon my brow; cherished my childhood; led my tottering steps to her sanctuaries, and surrounded me all my life long with her blessed ministries of Instruction and of Love. God is in the midst of her, for I have seen His glory and felt His presence, and as I trust, experienced His grace in her temples. The provisions of her house have been sweet to my taste, and under her shadow have I sat these many years with great delight. Kindred and friends, one after one, have I seen them ascend from her courts in the chariots of fire, to join the ransomed Church above, and their memories still hallow her sanctuaries. And with these memories of all she has been, and all she has done for me and those most dear to me, still fresh and warm in my heart, I cannot, no, I cannot forsake her now.

Times of trial and conflict may come. But such were no new thing in her history, baptised as she was in the blood of persecution and nurtured amidst the storms of revolution. She bears to-day the scars of many a conflict, but from each in turn she came forth victorious. The smell of many a furnace is upon her to-day, but the flames of each kindled upon her not to destroy, but only to purify and preserve. We glory in her past history. We bless God for all she has been permitted to do for His Truth and His Worship, and for the Salvation of men. And to-day she still stands amidst the tribes of Israel, her glorious banner streaming, as of old, in the front rank of the Sacramental Host. What though confusion may happen for the moment to a little portion of her ranks, the mighty host is still moving onward, for her God is with her—her Glory and her Defence. And never, perhaps, has He given such abundant tokens of His presence and His power in her sanctuaries as during the past year. Never, perhaps was His spirit more largely poured out or more

numerous converts gathered into her bosom. Ah, my Brethren, this is what we want,—to have our minds turned away from these ephemeral questions to the great things which pertain to the King. A revival of religion, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our Churches, and our own souls—how soon this would hush all these agitations and unite all our hearts in the Unity of the Spirit and the bonds of Peace.

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