

A REPLY

no. 4

TO A REVIEW

OF

THE ACT AND TESTIMONY.

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A REPLY TO A REVIEW.

It is to us a matter of extreme regret, that any circumstance should have occurred, to bring us into collision with a Journal which has been so long and favourably known for its general ability, and its particular discrimination and fearlessness, in the defence of Presbyterian doctrines and polity. A difference with friends is far more painful than open warfare with enemies, as domestic feuds are more exacerbating to the feelings, than public quarrels. But occasions may arise to mar the most fraternal and amicable relations, and a necessity may exist to contend even with the most valued friends. Paul and Peter were united in their general views, but their harmony was not uninterrupted; for, in an important instance, Paul, conceiving the conduct of Peter to be disingenuous and time serving, "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." We mean by this illustration no allusion to the spirit which dictated the strictures on the Act and Testimony, contained in the Biblical Repertory; we make no charge upon their author as designing to conciliate the favour of a majority, by a trimming policy, but concede to the article honesty of intention, although, as we believe, it contains mistaken views, which are calculated to produce disastrous results.

Three reasons have co-operated, in inducing us to review the article before us. The first is, that our views have been quoted by it, and our general course in the present crisis of the church, has been condemned. We are thus put on the defensive, and although we may be conscious of inferiority in strength and skill, our spirit is not disposed to submit, without an attempt to justify the course we have adopted. Again, the Biblical Repertory has been with us a special favourite,

and has, on more than one occasion, received from us unqualified commendation as a vehicle of those views of doctrine and church government, which we have embraced. That authority which we have thus commended, will now with painful force be employed against us, by those who have no affinity with orthodoxy, and who have been invariably hostile to the Repertory, as its advocate. Wounded, as we are likely to be, by an arrow feathered from our own wing, we must do what we can to blunt its point, or turn aside its aim. And once more, the claims of truth are, with us, paramount to all worldly friendships, and to all human authority, and our obligations to it lead us to withstand a friend as well as a foe, when in our opinion its interests are jeopardized. Such are our inducements to our present unwelcome task. If we fail in its execution, we trust the cause will not be prejudiced by the feebleness of its advocate.

It is but equitable to state, that the article in question is written with much christian temper, and betrays none of those objectionable asperities and personalities, which characterize almost every attempt hitherto made to invalidate the Act and Testimony. As an argument, the article is deserving of respectful consideration. So far from regarding the object of its attack through a jaundiced medium, which converts every feature into deformity, it recognizes and acknowledges something in it worthy of commendation. The following compliment is gratefully refreshing, after the heavy infliction of abuse, with which the document and its advocates have been visited, by its wrathful opponents.

"It is impossible," says the writer, "for any man to read this document, without being deeply impressed with respect for its authors. It is per-

vaded by a tone of solemn earnestness, which carries to every heart the conviction of their sincerity, and of their sense of the importance, as well as the truth, of the sentiments which they advance. The fear of God, reverence for his truth, and love for his church, seem clearly to have presided over the composition of this important document. In addition to these intrinsic claims to the respect of those to whom it is addressed, the fact that it has received the sanction of so large a number of the best ministers of our church, demands for it the most serious consideration."

And again—

"We have already said, and said sincerely, that it is impossible to read this Testimony, without being deeply impressed by the seriousness of its tone, and the weight and truth of the great part of its sentiments, and the decided ability and skill with which it is drawn up. It evinces in every line the hand of a man accustomed to legal precision, and accuracy of phrase."

This is flattering, and it is important, inasmuch as it admits, what has been so uncourteously denied, purity of intention, and seriousness of feeling in those who produced it. From personal observation, we can testify, that as far as external indications may be relied on, the feeling which originated this document, was kindled on the same altar, from which Luther lighted the torch of the Reformation. It was a feeling deep and hallowed, which was prepared not only to suffer shame and contempt for Christ, but the loss of all things, even of life itself. Aware of the temper of the times, which had adopted as its maxim, *that the toleration of error is to be preferred to the rupture of harmony*, those who embarked in this enterprise were persuaded that they should have to struggle against the current of popular opinion, and adventure their reputation to the hazard of shipwreck. But they were sustained by conscious rectitude, and consequences were committed to the disposal of God. We unfeignedly regret, that the author of the article before us, should believe that all this sincerity, love for the church, and reverence for God and his truth, should be associated in the production of a document of pernicious tendency.

Before we fully enter upon an examination of the argument of this paper, we wish to make one general remark in relation to the tendencies of the measure, which it condemns. A measure may have bad tendencies from intrinsic evil in its structure; or where it is not liable to this charge, its tendencies may be

bad, from external circumstances with which it comes in contact. Thus the system of idolatry is radically evil, and all its results are evil; but the Gospel of Christ is beneficent in its whole structure, and its native tendency is to promote peace on earth; yet from the depravity of men with which it comes in collision, its tendency is to create discord. This distinction leads us to conclude, that a measure is to be judged by its native, and not its accidental tendency. When Christ, referring to the accidental consequences of introducing his Gospel, affirmed, "I am come not to send peace on the earth but a sword," he gave no ground for the infidel charge, that the introduction of the Gospel was in itself an evil to be deplored. In view of this distinction, we deny that the Act and Testimony has any natively bad tendency; but if it arouses the angry passions of errorists, or if it finds the professed friends of truth indisposed, from whatever consideration, to assist its healthful operation, its result may be, to depress truth and embolden error. But this consequence will rest any where but with the instrument itself, which contains no just ground of offence. It has come into the world to promote purity, but if, through the supineness of those who should assist its operation, it is made to minister to the triumphs of error, it is easy to perceive where the responsibility and culpability will lie. The writer of the article under review, anticipating that this document will not receive the signatures of a moiety of ministers or elders in the Presbyterian Church, undertakes to defend the refusal of those who withhold their signatures. The fear of assuming responsibility, he thinks, will influence but very few, and he intimates that more courage is displayed in not acting than in acting, because "the unfortunate individuals who belong to neither side, are cared for by neither, and blamed, if not abused, by both." We humbly conceive that the inference, however true, as forming a general rule, can have no relation to the present question; for while we have no disposition to denounce all who withhold their concurrence, as errorists, we can admit no neutral party, in so simple a case of *pro* and *contra*. The paper must derive its efficiency from the force of its adherents, and to secure its aim, it solicits the adhesion of all who concur in its sentiments. Some *consent* and some *refuse*; these two classes constitute the parties, however discordant the motives which produce their respec-

tive determinations. We can conceive of no third party, except it may be those who have never heard of the paper, and therefore neither act for it, nor against it. Although there may be three parties in the church, *quoad hoc* there are but two, the friends and the opponents of the measure. And it is not at all probable that the new school men of our church, who are so deeply interested in the defeat of this measure, will ever *abuse* any who lend their aid for its overthrow. The new school men and the moderate men, however different the motives which influence them, agree in this, to refuse their signatures, and thus to render the measure an abortion, as far as their influence extends; and thus they constitute *one* party, antagonist to that which sustains the measure. In alluding to this concurrence, we mean nothing unjustly invidious; but view the subject in whatever light we can, we come to the same conclusion, that there are but two parties in this question,—those who urge a plan of active reform, and those who labour for its subversion. We readily concede that among the latter party, there may be those who wish reform, but doubt the propriety of the present expedient; to such we amicably propose the following queries, What are your objections to the present proposed measure? and, What substitute do you offer? With these queries we recur to the article in the Repertory, and discover that it responds to the first, but passes silently by the second. Acknowledging, as it does, the existence of error and irregularities in the church, it would defeat the plan for their extirpation proposed by men of sincere heart, acting under the influence of the fear of God and love for the church, and that too without the substitution of any measure more expedient and sufficient.

The friends of the Act and Testimony presume not to set forth their judgment and wisdom as infallible; counsel they solicit from every lover of truth; but after painful delay of any remedial measure, and a mournful certainty that the unhalloved leaven was extending its influence, they have suggested what they conceived to be the best and most practicable method of securing purity to the church, and their language still is,

—Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum.

If, in answer to this candid offer, *no action* is proposed as a substitute for *action*, it is but a mock-

ery of our hopes and griefs, and it will be indignantly refused.

The first objection which the Repertory urges against the document is, “that it has been perverted from its true and legitimate purpose as a testimony, into an invidious test act.”

Every word of this objection should be well considered. Whether it has any real force, an examination will determine. It is alleged that the document has been perverted from its true and legitimate purpose. Its legitimate purpose we conceive to be, the purpose which it was intended to answer by its original framers; and what was this? The document itself explains. It was to testify against abuses,—to act for their correction,—and to act in concert, by obtaining as many as possible, who, by giving in their adherence, would evince their readiness to embark in the enterprise. From this purpose, there has been no departure; it works precisely as had been anticipated, and according to its original design it will not only testify against error, but it will *test* the question, what is the number in the Presbyterian church favourable to prompt action for the reform of existing abuses. But on this point it may be necessary to take up some of the leading thoughts of the writer, and give them a more explicit consideration. The most alarming and invidious feature in this whole transaction in his view, is the “numbering the people,” the solicitation of signatures to the document; this he says is *unauthorized*, and impliedly *denunciatory*. How unauthorized? His reply shall be given in his own words:

“It would seem to be a very obvious principle, that any individual member of a body has a right to address his fellow members on subjects affecting their common interests. If he thinks that errors and disorders are gaining ground among them, it is more than a right, it is a duty for him to say so, provided he has any hope of making his voice effectually heard. If such be the case with an individual, it is equally obvious that he may induce as many as he can to join him in his warnings and counsels, that they may come with the weight due to numbers acting in concert. Had the meeting in Philadelphia, therefore, been contented to send forth their solemn Testimony against error and disorder, and their earnest exhortation to increased fidelity to God and his truth, we are sure none could reasonably object. Their declaration would have been received with all the respect due to its intrinsic excellence, and to the source whence it proceeded. But when it is proposed to ‘number the people;’

to request and urge the signing of this Testimony as a test of orthodoxy, then its whole nature and design is at once altered. What was the exercise of an undoubted right, becomes an unauthorized assumption."

Here we think is a very extraordinary inference from an admitted position. The transition from an acknowledged right to an unauthorized assumption, cannot easily be traced in the Act and Testimony, and will not certainly be very readily conceded. An individual, he admits, has a right to address others on important topics affecting the interests of the church, and where error exists, it is not only his right but his duty to sound the alarm; and not only so, but he has a right, under such circumstances, to solicit the concurrence of others with the view of securing efficacy to his warnings by concerted action; all this is admitted by the writer, as the quotation clearly shows, and, by the admission, his argument is prostrated. The framers of the Act and Testimony have done no more than this—they have addressed the church at an interesting juncture; they have warned it of prevalent error, and of approaching disaster, and "that they may come with the weight due to numbers acting in concert," they have invited the cooperation of their brethren. Signatures are solicited that the numbers may be ascertained, and that the weight of influence due to their warnings and recommendations, may be determined. The precise point at which this admitted and unquestionable right is transformed into an unauthorized assumption, we cannot perceive, except it may be, at the moment when these individuals assert their right under their own signatures. The sum of the argument appears to be this,—that which is a right when exercised by unknown persons, becomes an assumption when exercised by persons well known. As the writer intimates, if the framers of the document had signed it by their chairman and secretary, it might have been "useful, or at least harmless," but the moment they reject the proxy and give their own signatures, the document "becomes fraught with injustice, discord, and division." All this to us sounds surpassingly strange.

But again, it is objected, that the Act and Testimony by this process becomes a Test Act invidious and denunciatory. "What right," says the writer, "have I to publish a declaration on truth and order to the churches, and call upon

every one to sign it on pain of being denounced as a heretic or revolutionist?"

If the "declaration" spoken of should be in accordance with the word of God and the standards of the church, we would admit the right to publish it, although we might question the propriety of denouncing as heretics, those who should refuse their concurrence. But we ask, does the Act and Testimony deal out denunciations, and brand as heretics and revolutionists those who withhold their signatures? It is not pretended. That it silently rebukes such, is admitted, and that, in its searching influence, it will so far operate as a test, as to discover all who are prepared for a decided attempt to save the church from an inundation of error, is as freely admitted. If it becomes an invidious test act, because it determines the position of every man in the church, and impliedly censures those who come not up to its spirit, it stands in this respect on the same ground with all published religious creeds. They all contain particular statements, they all solicit adherents, they all impliedly condemn those who do not coincide in their views. Yes, the creed of the Presbyterian church, upon this principle, may be denounced as an invidious test act, an odious solemn league and covenant. The peculiar sensitiveness of the writer in regard to implied denunciations, might have suggested to him the respect due to the feelings of the advocates of this document, who are more than impliedly denounced in his article, as the promoters of schism. But we are content to bear opprobrium, contempt and denunciation, while sustained by conscious rectitude, and persuaded that we follow where duty points the way; and we are not disposed to be startled by any test act, which requires no more than a public acknowledgment of scriptural truth, and the adoption of scriptural means for resisting the encroachments of error. So far as the Act and Testimony will *try* the state of opinion in the church, we have no objection that it should be called a test act, although, from association, that appellation has become odious. But the test should be alarming only to errorists. That it may become offensive to others, arises from the anomalous fact, that there is a party in the church, which, professing orthodoxy, opposes orthodox measures, and while it denounces error, casts its protecting shield over errorists. That it should

place this party in a dilemma, is unjustly placed to its account, as a fault.

Again, it is objected that this document was "necessarily prepared in a hurry; probably at a single sitting; read at a general meeting; in which the careful weighing of every clause was out of the question."

This account of its origin is not strictly accurate. At the first meeting of the projectors of this measure, a committee was appointed to draft a paper which should comprehend the views that had been expressed; this committee, after the interval of several days, reported their draft to a second meeting, when its several parts were discussed; it was then recommitted to another committee, who reported it in an amended form, in which it was unanimously adopted. The insinuation, implied in the charge of its hasty construction, has therefore no weight. Yet it does not pretend to be perfect; and although it has thus far been signed without exceptions, still it does not preclude modifications which might improve its character without affecting its spirit or efficiency. The difficulty however does not consist in a little improper phraseology, or in a few injudicious clauses, as some would allege, but in the prominent feature which constitutes its excellence,—its urgent recommendation to prompt action. It requires no sacrifice, and it does but little good, to declaim against error; but to act against it by means entrusted by Christ to his Church for its purification, exposes to odium which few are prepared to encounter.

He further objects to the assertion contained in the first paragraph, "that the supreme judicatory of the Church had not only connived at, but countenanced and sustained alarming errors," as containing a charge, which must prevent the signatures of many. The charge he regards as very serious, and as unsustained by evidence. The only things, in his view, bearing the semblance of confirmative proof, were the rejection of the resolutions offered by Mr. Jennings, and the rejection of the memorial. The rejection of the resolutions against error, he thinks, implies no sanction of the errors enumerated, any more than the rejection of a motion for the better observance of the Sabbath by the late General Assembly of Scotland, or the refusal, after the first failure, to sign petitions to Congress for the stoppage of Sunday mails, would imply a sanction of the breach of the Sabbath. The examples are most unfortunate.

The General Assembly of Scotland had no authority to enact laws against the breach of the Sabbath, and the petitioners in our own country had no authority to stop the Sunday mails; if they had possessed the power to legislate, or had any sufficient ground for believing that their recommendation or advice would have induced an efficient legislation, and still refused to act, they might justly have been charged with countenancing the desecration of the Sabbath. But the position of our General Assembly was totally different; they were called upon to act in a case over which they had entire jurisdiction, and had authority to condemn the errors specified, and by refusing to exercise it, they gave them their countenance. They assumed precisely the same kind of responsibility as that assumed by Congress when they refused to legislate on the question of the Sunday mails. The refusal to exert a vested authority to check existing evils, constituted the criminality in each case. The legalized desecration of the Sabbath is attributable to Congress, the legalized diffusion of error in the church is attributable to the General Assembly, and that for the very reason, that, although they had the power, it was not employed to arrest the evils.

But again, he thinks these resolutions might have been rejected on account of the loose manner in which they were drafted. But we ask was this the ground of their rejection? If so, why were not modifications and amendments proposed? This would have been a course correct and orderly; but no such ground was ever hinted at by the majority; and it was very manifest to all present on the occasion, that the resolutions were rejected because they were proposed by a member of the minority, and because their adoption would have been a deviation from the *peace policy*, and would have given grievous offence to the partisans of the new school, who, according to this style of heresy, worshipped the God of their fathers. Neither is it a plausible supposition that these resolutions were rejected from the unwillingness of the Assembly to decide upon such points *in thesi*, because they had precedents in former Assemblies for such decisions, and they had the fact before them, that the Confession of Faith, from its very structure, had actually decided *in thesi* upon these very doctrines.

The rejection of the memorial, so far from committing the Assembly on doctrine, is accounted for by the article under review, on the ground of its

great length, and the variety of topics which it embraces. This statement is unfair, because contrary to fact; and it is fully answered by the contemptuous and sneering manner in which the memorial was received, by the violent invectives which it called forth, and by the resolutions which the Assembly finally adopted in relation to it. It was not its length that caused its rejection, but it was its proposal to search out errors in the church, which the Assembly had determined to shield. We speak advisedly; the proof of the assertion, to any intelligent visiter to the Assembly, was as conclusive as that which substantiates any historical fact.

But the paragraph in the Act and Testimony, which criminales the General Assembly, does not depend for its proof on these two facts; its truth is attested by a variety of circumstances which have transpired, particularly in the last few years, and which have tended to form the present crisis. Let it be recollected, that by the constitution of our church, "to the General Assembly belongs the power of deciding in all controversies respecting doctrine and discipline; of reprovng, warning or bearing testimony against error in doctrine, or immorality in practice, in any church, Presbytery, or Synod;" and then let it be asked, whether they have complied with this requisition, by the exercise of their vested power? We say, if they have not employed their authority and influence to preserve the church from error, they have countenanced and abetted its existence. A magistrate who refuses to interpose his authority for the suppression of a mob, is guilty of countenancing it, and is responsible for its excesses. On this subject let an appeal be made to facts.

It is a fact, that for several years, there has been a studious and determined effort by the General Assembly, to avoid the expression of an opinion on the subject of doctrinal errors existing in the church; and much more, to avoid the adoption of any mode of investigation, by which the extent to which these errors have spread, might be determined.

It is a fact, that the General Assembly have permitted men, whose dangerous and erroneous sentiments have been published to the world, not only to deliberate with them, but to preside over them, and to take offices of the highest im-

portance in the direction of their Theological Seminaries.*

It is a fact, that those who have shown an earnest zeal for the purity of the church, have been treated with the most marked discourtesy and insult, on the floor of the General Assembly.

It is a fact, that the measures of the General Assembly for some years past, have been highly gratifying to the feelings, and encouraging to the prospects, of the new school party.

It is a fact, that several of the Presbyteries, license and ordain students from New Haven, and from other seminaries, whose views are in conflict with the standards of our church, and candidates who have been rejected by other Presbyteries, on account of their doctrinal delinquencies; and yet the Assembly have adopted no effectual measure to arrest this evil.

It is a fact, that elective affinity Presbyteries, and an elective affinity Synod, have been erected, to shield new school men from the discipline of the church, and to afford them every facility, for propagating their errors in regions of country which have hitherto been under the influence of the orthodox.

It is a fact, that Presbyterian ministers have written books and pamphlets containing error, and that the Assembly have not directed their Presbyteries to institute any inquiry on the subject.

It is a fact, that the last General Assembly, by two particular acts, evinced their determination not to pronounce sentence upon error either *in thesi*, or as it related to particular individuals.

It is a fact, that the Confession of Faith is subscribed with many reservations—that Congregationalists glide into the Presbyterian Church without difficulty, and there is reason to believe, without having examined our standards, and with-

* We feel bound in this connection to state, that Mr. Barnes, whose name is so prominently associated with the controversies in our church, has been appointed a director of the Theological Seminary at Princeton—a member of the committee for examining the students in that institution; and that, at the very last meeting of the directors, he preached, by appointment, a sermon before the Professors and students, which was highly objectionable, as a philippic against the old school, and as inculcating upon the students the dangerous doctrine, that the science of religion was just as susceptible of improvement, as the science of Botany!

out being themselves examined by our Presbyteries; and yet we hear no warning voice from the Assembly.

It is a fact, that the Assembly have thrown open a wide door for the spread of error, by denying to Presbyteries the right of examination, and that they have cast a shield over errorists, by rebuking those who point out the dangerous tendencies of their publications.

It is a fact, that new school men find themselves much more at home in the General Assembly than do the strenuously orthodox.

It is a fact, that an exceedingly reduced tone of orthodoxy prevails in the church—that error is regarded with a more lenient eye than formerly—that the landmarks between truth and error are in a course of gradual removal—that the barriers of the church are crumbling—that the moderate spirit which is now popular, is the main hope of heresy;—and it is a fact, that this alarming state of things has been brought about by that course of compromising and peace policy so uniformly pursued by the General Assembly.

In view of these and similar facts, who will venture to say that the paragraph which is objected to, is not founded in literal truth? Who will venture to say, that the General Assembly has not in fact aided the progress of those errors, which it has refused to check in their career? It is as true of ecclesiastical bodies as of individuals, that a refusal to prevent sin in others when practicable, is tantamount to a participation of the sin.

The next ground of objection, is the recommendation that the presbyterial existence and acts of any Presbytery or Synod, formed on the principles of elective affinity, be regarded as unconstitutional, and the ministers and churches voluntarily included in such bodies as having virtually departed from the standards of our church. Adherence to this recommendation, the writer supposes, will necessarily produce a schism in the church, which seems like a spectre to start up in every paragraph of the article, to frighten the timid. The same result will, he imagines, flow from the proposed convention at Pittsburg. In one word, the great body of the argument is directed to prove that the whole paper is designedly of schismatic tendency. On this absorbing sub-

ject, we will endeavour to collect his reasoning, and examine its soundness.

1. He declares the above recommendations to be unlawful resistance and renunciation of an authority, which every member of the community has bound himself to respect. We answer, that no conscientious man has pledged a blind and unintelligent obedience; the pledge is given to the constitution, and to its faithful administration; and obedience may be righteously withheld where there is a manifest infringement of the spirit and letter of the instrument which constitutes the bond of union, and which is of permanent authority. Conscience binds to obedience to the constitution in its obvious sense, in its generally accepted sense, in its hitherto undisputed sense; and when it is made to appear that any agent created by that constitution, for worldly or carnal purposes, subverts its authority, and resists its healthful operation, conscience is still bound to an obedience, but it is obviously an obedience to the law, and not to the unfaithful agent of that law. In the present case, the violation of engagement is in the Assembly, which has set at nought the authority of the constitution, and not in those who adhere to it with unbroken faith. But it is demanded, has an individual a right to interpret the constitution in opposition to the supreme judicatory? We answer, every man living under that constitution, and every Presbytery and Synod, has a right to judge whether the temporary or delegated body which composes the Assembly, interprets the law according to its obvious import; and when it is made clear, that the supreme law has been infringed, it is their right and duty to resist. No one will dare to affirm that the constitution of our church ever contemplated the formation of Presbyteries on the elective principle; most will acknowledge that such Presbyteries cannot be formed without a manifest departure from the spirit and letter of that constitution. How then can the pledge of obedience which was made to that constitution, be transferred to any act which does it open violence? We are aware that this resistance may be stigmatised as incipient rebellion, but it may be more correctly denominated a sacred defence of our ecclesiastical charter. Were it certain that a majority of the church did deliberately approve those acts of the As-

sembly which are in such direct conflict with the constitution, the resistance, with much greater show of truth, might be called a renunciation of authority which we are bound to respect. Although, even in that case, unhesitating obedience may not be insisted on; since a majority may be in error—a church in the mass may be corrupt, and the difficult but sacred duty of the minority, may be to protest, resist and employ every practicable scheme to awaken consideration and effect reform. But the question of numbers is not yet settled; it is humbly hoped that the mass of the church will be found to be right, when attention is fully directed to the subject, and that the organ of the church, the General Assembly, having transcended its powers, will be rebuked for its corrupting policy.

It is the design of the Act and Testimony to excite the attention of the church to the subject, and to obtain from it an unbiassed and deliberate expression of opinion. At the present juncture, therefore, non-resistance and passive obedience would not only be a surrender of the constitution, and pave the way for future violations, but expose the whole church to the influence of usurped authority and peril her dearest interests.

2. But it is affirmed by this writer, that no circumstances have yet occurred to create a crisis that would justify this bold resistance, which he considers as identical with schism. We are of a different opinion. The errors enumerated in the Act and Testimony have been tolerated in the Presbyterian church, and every effort hitherto made to produce action in the General Assembly for their extirpation, has utterly failed; and this fact produces a crisis demanding some extraordinary remedy. In relation to this point the writer makes this candid admission,

“ We believe, indeed, that there are a number of men in our church, who hold doctrinal opinions, which ought to have precluded their admission, and who should now be visited by regular ecclesiastical process. But we believe this number to be comparatively small. We have never doubted that there was serious ground of apprehension for the purity of our church. Considering the ease with which men are introduced into our communion, who, not being brought up among us, know nothing, and care nothing about Presbyterianism, it is very evident that we must have a constant accession of unsound, and even hostile men, if our judicatories are not faithful to their
name !!

With this admission, we ask, shall these errors continue to spread their fatal poison or not? We have already seen that the policy of our supreme judicatory is to let them alone; but, as we conceive, a more enlightened and conscientious judgment points out the necessity of arresting them in their career. The church is always in a crisis when she is threatened with an inundation of error, and her appointed guardians fold their arms in indolent and uninterested inaction. We know it is said, the danger is magnified, the errors are not so diffused and active as has been apprehended; but, if this be true, it has never yet been demonstrated, and the facts we have stated show the difficulty of such a demonstration; still the case requires, that a prompt and rigid scrutiny should be instituted to settle the disputed point. The extreme reluctance of the Assembly to touch the matter, indicates an apprehension that the evil is widely spread, and cannot be healed without falling heavily upon a large portion of the church. If, in their judgment, but few would suffer by a strict prosecution of discipline, why should they keep the church embroiled from year to year, when peace could be restored at so small an expense? Why should they not listen to the loud and reiterated calls of many who have resolved, by the grace of God, to persevere in importunately pressing their suit, until an investigation is made? For our part, we have no doubt that many, very many, when weighed in the doctrinal balance of the sanctuary, will be found wanting, and we invite the trial.

The formation of elective Presbyteries may, in the view of the writer, be a comparatively harmless affair, and form an unsuitable ground of resistance; but, in our judgment, the infringement of the constitution, upon which their existence depends, as well as their natural operation, goes far to make up the crisis. Their tendency is to foster heresy, and to hasten the result which must flow from the division of a house against itself. They may justly be considered as the successful stratagem of heresy,—a master-stroke of policy to facilitate its efforts in encroaching upon the ground of the orthodox, and in counteracting their influence; and so long as they are permitted to mar the unity, and destroy the symmetry of the church, truth must be robbed of her shield, and the church be endangered in her safety. The reasoning of the writer on this point has greatly surprised us; he regards the principle as one not contemplated by the constitution, and yet virtually defends the Assembly in its application; he professes to dislike

it, and yet glosses the evils which it may be expected to produce.

3. The sum of the whole reasoning of the article is this: the Act and Testimony is of schismatic tendency, and there is nothing existing in the church to justify schism. Whoever may favour schism, we utterly disclaim the intention, and whatever individuals may have hastily said, we have reason to believe that the signers of the document aim at no such result. They have resolved to rally round the standards of the church, and to cling to them to the last extremity. Why should they voluntarily leave a church whose formularies they love and revere? And how can *they* be chargeable with schism who preserve these formularies inviolate? And even should they be cast out, by the excited wrath of those who have greater force in numbers, they will take these standards with them—they will still be the church, founded on the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ being chief corner stone.

The earnest dissuasives against schism directed to the orthodox, sound strangely when coming from the moderate party. "Why," says the writer, "turn your backs upon the enemy and leave a weak and discouraged remnant to continue the battle?" This discouraged remnant is the moderate party! the very party which have it in their power to prevent a separation, and the very party which will precipitate a separation should it take place! Why should not this party act with the brethren with whom they profess to agree in sentiment, and thus form an overwhelming majority against the troublers of our Zion? Why should they not in this way preserve the union and prevent the possibility of their being left to contend with errorists with their diminished forces, or, what is more likely to be the case, of their being identified, in case of a separation, with the errorists with whom they profess not to agree? This would be the true, the consistent course of procedure. Adopting the same hortatory strain employed by the writer to dissuade from schism, we might address the moderate party who are said to constitute the majority of the church, and say, Why leave our little band to contend for the truth alone and unaided? Why suffer us to be the scorn and derision of the heretical? Why suffer our plans of reform to be defeated? When you behold the sad havoc produced in New England by the insidious spread of Socinianism, through the supineness of the

friends of truth;—when you behold the seat of the glorious Reformation in Germany overspread with infidelity and rationalism, from the want of timely precaution and vigilance, why not unite with us in blasting the growth of heresy while yet in the bud, and cooperate with us in imitating the example of the Synod of Ulster, in excluding those corrupt members, who have disturbed our harmony, and who are daily increasing in numbers and power? In a word, why will you leave us "a weak (though not discouraged) remnant to continue the battle," when with your aid we might obtain a prompt and decisive victory?

But let the charge of schism be retorted, and what will be the defence? We do then assert that there is already a schism in the church. Some have departed from the faith—they have alike set at defiance Presbyterian order and doctrine—they have engrafted their dogmas on that system of truth which has ever been the glory of our church—they have formed themselves into a party with distinct and separate interests—they systematically assail those, whose only crime is resistance to their usurpation, and if this be not virtual schism we know not what is. And not only so, but this schism is countenanced and promoted by the General Assembly. That body have given system and visibility to the *imperium in imperio*; they have sanctioned Presbyteries on the elective principle, which supposes that the church is divided in sentiment; and following up the principle, they extend the schism throughout the whole church;—two antagonist denominations are thus found occupying the same ground, and with hypocrisy on one part, professing adherence to the same standards. This schismatic party have also their own Institutions for Missions and Education, which are irresponsible voluntary associations, whose interests they promote in opposition to the true Institutions of the Church; and to this procedure also the General Assembly has given its fullest countenance. The writer then has no reason to deprecate a prospective schism; he is called upon to deplore one already existing, and one which has been produced by the new school party, and sustained by the moderate party. If, as it is alleged, the majority of the church is sound, why should they not cut off the few unsound members who have fomented discord and schism? this, in our judgment, would be a more worthy proceeding and more demonstrative of true allegiance to the

Head of the Church, than all the attempts made to stigmatize the friends of truth as unprincipled schismatics.

The strain of the article under review may alarm the timid, may confirm many in their inaction, may be pleaded, and, in fact, is already pleaded, by the new school as an additional triumph; but these are small ends to accomplish, by a defeat of the only measure, which seems to promise the return of purity, peace and union to the church. For it must be remembered that no substitute is proposed for the measure which is so strongly assailed; the alternative is, the adoption of this, or the continuance of that policy which mitigates, protects and upholds the ruinous errors which have spread and which will continue to diffuse themselves until "the whole lump is leavened." Or in other words, error must be permitted to run its course, in the hope that it will exhaust itself; a reaction somehow mysteriously produced, may be expected,* the darkest hour precedes

* The writer of the article, in proof that there is a prospect of improvement in the state of the church, without the employment of any extraordinary means, of a remedial kind, says,

"We rejoice to see that there is a General Congregational Association formed in the State of New York. Those brethren who really prefer the Congregational system, may now indulge that preference, *instead of being forced to submit* to the painful necessity of joining a church, with whose distinctive organization they are unacquainted, or to which they are unfriendly. This is the main evil, which it requires nothing but honesty on the part of the presbyteries to prevent. We are happy in knowing that at least one case has occurred, in which a presbytery, where there is not to our knowledge, a single adherent of the *old school*, has deliberately, and nearly unanimously refused to ordain a candidate who held the popular errors on depravity and regeneration."

On this we remark, that if we have many in our church, as the writer intimates, who have been *forced to submit* to a *voluntary* subscription to doctrines which they do not believe, it is a sad proof of the corruption of our church.

the light,—but these are maxims in which we have no faith; *work*, is our maxim, and it is a Bible maxim, and then expect the blessing of God, to crown the work with success.

We have thus endeavoured to examine the force of every leading objection urged in this article against the Act and Testimony, and with a temper, of which we hope the writer will have no cause to complain; much more might have been urged in vindication of this admirable paper and its advocates, which a fear of unduly extending our remarks, has prevented; and now in conclusion we say, let the friends of reform assiduously agitate the question, until every minister and elder in the church shall be furnished with the information necessary to a proper understanding of its merits, and be prepared to give an enlightened suffrage; let them not be intimidated by any methods adopted to render them or their measures odious; let them not be discouraged even by repeated defeats; let them know that the cause which they have espoused, despised as it may be, is the cause of the Lord; let their motto be, **THE CONSTITUTION INVIOLOTE**, and with this inscribed on their banner, let them engage in this righteous warfare, and prosecute it *from year to year*, until the triumph of truth shall be complete.

As to the formation of Congregational Associations, that may be regarded as one of the promising fruits of the measures of the old school. Certain men begin to find, that as they are unable to bear the scrutiny which one day must come, a seasonable retirement from the church will most conduce to their comfort, as well as their good name. In relation to the rejection of a new school candidate, by a new school Presbytery, it should also have been told, that another Presbytery found no difficulty in ordaining that same individual, and that an act of the last Assembly may place him in the very Presbytery which rejected him. So much for the reform which is to be effected without means.