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ARTICLE I.

THE CHARACTER AND CONDITIONS OF LIBERTY.

Justice and equality the only stable foundation of all natural and moral rule, and of all rights under the government of God; and as such will be maintained and defended by God, who is the hearer and helper of the oppressed.

The Scriptures everywhere authorize us to plead with God, to whom reverence belongs, for His defence of a cause which is **RIGHT**, whether that cause be personal and private, or public and national. Whether we look to Abraham, or to Jacob, or to Job, or to Moses, or to Joshua, or to the Judges, or to the kings of Judah and Israel, or to Samuel and David, or to the prophets, or to the Maccabees during the lunar night which intervened between the setting and the rising again of the sun of inspiration, we hear one and the same appeal to God; the same humble acknowledgment of personal, national, and ancestral unrighteousness

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cipline heretics, from the *necessity* of such a right, and from the impossibility of any Assembly deciding for or against it; will utter nothing about "substance of doctrine," because all parties know our views about such a pretext; and therefore, founding no test themselves, they will allow none from the committee, but will gently demit the first article of their report, unless it be that the two committees, as would be infinitely better, see cause to withhold that part themselves.

Meanwhile the coalescing of Presbyterians may go on, perhaps, a great deal further. And without any new trammelling expedients or unlawful tests that must be inexorably maintained, there may be a great wholesome Presbyterian body at the South, not committed inviolably to any plans, or superinduced perpetual pledges of any sort, but partaking the old evangelical life, and submitting with no peculiarity of test to the old Presbyterian authority.



ARTICLE IV.

THE PROPOSED PLAN OF UNION BETWEEN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA AND THE UNITED SYNOD OF THE SOUTH.

In compliance with an overture from the Presbytery of East Hanover, the last General Assembly appointed a committee to confer with any similar committee of the United Synod, touching a formal union between these bodies. The two committees accordingly held a conference at Lynchburg, Va., in the month of July last; and agreed

upon a paper which, when adopted by the Assembly and the Synod, should consummate the proposed union. The report of this conference was immediately published, under the authority of the two committees, "to prevent public misapprehension," and for "the information of Presbyteries and Synods, upon which to ground any proceedings they may deem proper." It may be supposed, therefore, to be in the possession of all who shall honor this article with a perusal; thus obviating the necessity of its reproduction in our pages, which unfortunately our want of space would in any case forbid. In our criticism of this document, we shall be careful, however, to quote fully the passages to which we may have occasion to refer, that the reader may judge of the fairness and validity of the strictures ventured.

Before commencing this unwelcome task, two preliminary remarks must be indulged upon the history of this paper since the time of its adoption by the committees of conference, evincing a degree of unfairness on the part of its advocates of which we may justly complain. Immediately upon the publication of the report, an earnest request was preferred that no discussion of its contents should be admitted into the newspapers of the church; a prohibition which seemed to close the door against all who might desire a solution of their doubts respecting the principles of so important a paper. We construed this request, at the time, not as an attempt to forestall investigation, but simply to postpone it until the report should be brought, as required, before the General Assembly at its next meeting. The design of our brethren we judged to be simply an adjournment of the whole matter in its present inchoate state; with a view to carry the discussion over from the public press, where it could terminate in no tangible result, to the ecclesiastical court to which it properly belonged, and where it would end at once in a practical decision. We could see a manifest advantage in thus preserving the church from all agitation, until the moment when that agitation would

instantly be calmed by a vote which would reveal the mind of the whole church. It appeared therefore, to us, *pro tanto*, a pledge that the subject should sleep until it could be fully and fairly ventilated upon the Assembly's floor. What then was our surprise to learn that no efforts were spared to bring this report, not only unapproved by the Assembly, but not even as yet submitted to that body, before some of our largest and most influential synods?—thus committing no small portion of the church to its support six months antecedently to the assembling of the court which alone has jurisdiction over it. It seems to us that it would have been far more graceful to allow the Assembly's committee time to submit, according to its instructions, the report of its labors, and thus to take the sense of the collective church, rather than virtually to wrest the matter out of the Assembly's hand, and to make up the verdict of the church in detail. And what shall be said of the fairness of binding over to silence all dissentients, (which silence, by the way, has been quietly assumed as acquiescence in the proposed union,) while its advocates employ the interval in so shaping public opinion through the subordinate courts, that to the General Assembly itself is left only the poor office of registering the final decision? Connected with this should be noticed the extreme sensitiveness to even the gentlest criticism, manifested by some of the framers of this report. A few brief and courteous exceptions to the phraseology of that instrument have been received with an impatience falling just one degree below positive resentment—the last infirmity we should have attributed to leading statesmen in the church. This petulance towards old and tried confederates looks strange by the side of the new-born love glowing towards new-found allies, and somewhat abates our admiration so confidently challenged for the amiable conference at Lynchburg. We hope all this may not indicate a settled purpose to force this union by a predetermined method, whatever grief may be occasioned those by whom it is disapproved.

But this naturally introduces our second ground of complaint, the disposition to treat this as a local question upon which only certain portions of the church need be consulted. Since the United Synod happens to be distributed chiefly in Virginia, Tennessee, and North Mississippi, it is intimated that any expression of opinion from other quarters will be considered obtrusive and indelicate. If those who enjoy a daily intercourse with their New School brethren are satisfied of their orthodoxy, and earnestly desire a formal union, the hesitation of others, who do not possess equal facilities for knowing, must be ascribed to the remains of party zeal which has survived the interval of five and twenty years since the disruption in 1837. But this assumption, we may as well say frankly in the outset, will not be tolerated for a moment. The fusion of a body like the United Synod into our Assembly, will affect the complexion and fix the character of the entire church through generations to come. It is, therefore, preëminently a question of public policy; which they at least are not unfitted to determine, who happen to be free from the bias of local interests and friendships. Principles, too, may be involved in the manner by which the union is effected, in which, beyond dispute, all portions of the church have an equal interest. We are not disposed, therefore, to be ruled out of the court under the cry of non-intrusion; feeling that we owe a sacred duty to the church, and her blessed Head, to see the union accomplished by a right method, if it be accomplished at all.

We proceed now with our objections to the Basis of Union proposed by the committees at Lynchburg: the first of which is founded upon the following preamble of the report:

“The General Assembly and the United Synod of the Presbyterian Churches in the Confederate States of America, holding the same system of doctrines and church order, and believing that their union

will glorify God by promoting peace, removing the dishonor done to religion by former separations, and increasing their ability for the edification of the body of Christ, do agree to unite."

Now, what precisely is meant by the clause, "*removing the dishonor done to religion by former separations?*" The reference evidently is to the schism of 1837, for no other has any thing to do with the objects of this paper. Does the committee intend this as a constructive repudiation of what are known as the Reform Measures of 1837, and of the acts and testimonies of that day, which have been steadily affirmed by the Church to the present hour? Dr. Dabney, in his elaborate defence of the committee's report, disclaims this in the most express terms:

"It is objected that when we propose the Assembly shall say, the 'union will remove the dishonor done to religion by former separations,' we imply that the men and principles of 1837 were dishonorable to religion. The only things fairly implied are, that there were separations, that those separations did dishonor religion, (it does not say which was the guilty side in them,) and that the Assembly can, by re-union, aid in removing that dishonor. Does the editor of the *Southern Presbyterian* remember how prelatists mocked at Presbyterianism for its stormy strifes, and went about proselyting our weaker members, with the invitation into their "peaceful and harmonious" fold? Has he forgotten how the decent men of the world even were scandalized by the unseemly heats exhibited by some on both sides? Has he forgotten the mourning of the purest and best, the Baxters, the Alexanders, the Rices, on the old side itself, over the dishonor of religion? A right cause may be advocated in a wrong spirit; and he would be a bold man indeed, who would affirm that none of us have been guilty of that error. Therefore we should be willing to confess that part of the guilt as ours."

According to this, then, "the dishonor to religion" consisted not in the principles we then avowed, and which we may be supposed still to cherish, but in the acrimonious spirit with which the controversy was conducted. Even

with this important modification of the language of the report, it is a question whether the Assembly is authorized to pronounce thus judicially upon the motives and temper of men, many of whom have already gone to render their account to Him whose sole prerogative it is to search the heart. But unfortunately this is not what the clause affirms, which attributes the dishonor to the *separation itself*, and not to its *separable accidents*. The question is not what construction can be forced upon the words, but what will be their plain and obvious import to those who shall read the record as a matter of history, and who will not enjoy the benefit of the subtle commentary which will then have been long since buried in the files of the *Southern Presbyterian* office. We are constrained to say, that whatever may have been the secret meaning in the hearts of the committee, the language is a virtual abjuration of all the principles so earnestly contended for in 1837. Should the Assembly of 1864 be prepared for this, then we object to its being done covertly by an indirection. If we sinned against our New School brethren in the measures which led to that painful schism, let us have the magnanimity to confess it openly. Instead of an equivocal clause which throws the guilt upon both parties, and leaves each free under a species of mental reservation to take as much or as little as it may please, let us with Christian frankness implore pardon of God and forgiveness of our brethren, for an atrocious wrong which has been persisted in through a quarter of a century. But we do not believe that a single presbyter in the church recedes from the position taken in 1837. As for ourselves, so far from regarding that separation a dishonor to religion, we account it one of the most beneficent and glorious reforms which grace the annals of the church. It not only saved the Old School from rapid declension into error, but if there has been, as alleged, a gradual approximation of the New School to real orthodoxy, it is due under God to the faithful testimonies of that day

which aroused them in time to recoil from the frightful abyss into which they were about to plunge. We cannot, therefore, consent to the adoption of any language, the ambiguity of which will allow the possible inference that we ignore or repudiate principles and measures for which the church should still offer her thanksgivings unto God; much less the language of this preamble, which, in its obvious import, directly impeaches and disowns them.

We have lying before us, a copy of the *Christian Observer*, the representative of the United Synod, bearing date February 13, 1862, which may possibly show how this ambiguous clause will be interpreted by certain parties in the future. In an article under the well known signature of A. H. H. B., the writer thus graciously distinguishes between the Southern Assembly, and the Old Assembly from which it seceded, touching this very matter:

“But as our Southern Old School brethren have abandoned the Assembly, whose violent and unconstitutional acts in 1837 led to the division of the Church, North and South, they cannot be held responsible for those acts. As individuals our brethren may approve of the principles involved in those acts, still the cause of the division of the church was the endorsement by the Assembly of these principles; and until the Southern Old School Assembly declare their adhesion to these principles, we shall not be justified in regarding them as, in part, the *basis* on which they rest their church. It is true, Dr. Thornwell said, in the Augusta Assembly, ‘the Assembly of 1837 is to all intents this Assembly. We stand by its declarations.’ If this sentiment should be sanctioned by the Southern Old School Assembly, then we say emphatically, there can be no union between that body and the United Synod. * * * We wish Dr. Thornwell and his brethren distinctly to understand, that we have now as deep an abhorrence of this principle, involved in the act of 1837, as we had in 1839, when we separated from Southern brethren whom we loved, and with whom, under other circumstances, it would have been a privilege to have been united until death. We do not know of a single minister in connexion with the United Synod who has changed his views on

this subject. * * * We do not ask our Southern brethren to endorse our interpretation of these acts. Nor do we ask their Assembly *formally* to announce it as a fundamental principle in their church government, that no judicatory of the church can *for any cause*, by an act of legislation, constitutionally condemn or exclude from the church, ministers or private members, without a process of trial, such as is prescribed in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church. We did require of the Old Assembly in 1858, the declaration of this latter principle as indispensable to a union with them; and we did so because we regarded that Assembly as the successor of the Assembly of 1837, which, in our judgment, had most palpably trampled upon the great constitutional and moral right of a trial before condemnation. But as our Southern Old School brethren are confessedly seceders from their Assembly, they cannot be held responsible for the ex-scinding acts of 1837."

These remarkable sentences, which have at least the merit of being unambiguous, plainly show how the measures of 1837. are still regarded by our New School brethren. The writer declares, on behalf of the entire body to which he belongs, and the statement has been on record without contradiction, so far as we know, for two years, that no union could be formed with us if we were considered as endorsing these measures. In the overtures for union in 1858, their distinct repudiation was made an indispensable condition; and if the same demand is not made of us, it is because, by an amusing fiction, our ecclesiastical identity has been lost, and we are graciously discharged from all responsibility in the premises. Whatever individuals may think, so long as our Assembly shall abstain from formally re-affirming these obnoxious principles, it will enjoy an imputed innocence, by virtue of which the United Synod may unite with us without the sacrifice of dignity or principle. In this state of case our respected committee at Lychburg do what? Correct this error by re-affirming the reform measures of 1837? They were not desired to do that—no; but in the sixth line of the preamble of their report they

call upon the Assembly to repudiate and anathematize the separation, which was the fruit of these measures which are so bitterly reviled. It seems to us that our committee might have had the grace to refrain from aspersing our glorious past; and especially that with those published declarations from a representative man of the United Synod before their eyes, they would have abstained from placing upon the lips of the Assembly any constructive repudiation of principles still dear to the heart of the church. In vain does the committee protest, such was not our meaning. Their report goes upon the record, but not their commentary; and we begin to see the value of a test paper which requires explanation even in its preamble, and where explanations thicken upon us at every step of our advance. In vain Dr. Dabney exclaims, at Charlotte, as did Dr. Thornwell, at Augusta, "the Assembly of 1837 is to all intents this Assembly—we stand by its declarations." Dr. Boyd replies, You are only individuals; but your Assembly has formally denounced the schism of 1837 as a dishonor to religion, which is as strong a renunciation of that grand reform as I could myself desire. We sincerely hope, if this unfortunate report of the committee should be adopted by the Assembly, a protest may be so framed as to require that venerable body to define its relations to the acts of 1837 so seriously compromised in this ambiguous clause.

The cancelling of a single line will, however, remove this difficulty. But our next objection is interwoven with the whole texture of the report, in that it virtually impeaches the orthodoxy of our own church in the imputation of errors which she is required to disown. There are good reasons why the doctrinal soundness of the United Synod should be called in question, and why, perhaps, they should desire to purge themselves of these suspicions. It is notorious that doctrinal differences lay at the bottom of the separation in 1837. The Old School Assembly felt constrained to testify, in the most emphatic manner, against the

heresies of Barnes, Beman, Duffield, and others, which were rapidly infecting the church; and so imminent was the peril that, at one time, it was doubtful whether the orthodox or the heretical party would obtain the ascendancy. It is notorious, too, that the body now known as the United Synod voluntarily went out from us, and affiliated through twenty years with these errorists; separating at last from them, not upon doctrinal grounds, but upon a political question, and not until the fanatical fury of Northern radicals no longer permitted them a seat in their ecclesiastical councils. We are not unmindful of the defence set up on behalf of this procedure; that the southern wing of the New School were seduced by their sympathy for those whom they regarded as unjustly and unconstitutionally dealt with in what are known as the Excising Acts, and that they were never accused of participation in the heresies charged upon other portions of their body. We do not intend to discuss here the wisdom or equity of these same Excising Acts, since this is not at all necessary to the matter now in hand. Even admitting all that has been said and written against them, what are we to think of the doctrinal purity of men who, in their incomparable zeal for a mere constitutional safeguard or ecclesiastical right, are willing to see the truth of God turned into a lie, and the whole Gospel made of none effect through human traditions? Admitting the whole force of their defence, it is surely a strange insensibility to the preciousness of divine truth, which can induce them to sacrifice this rather than a principle, however important in itself considered, of their ecclesiastical constitution. They did prefer to homologate with men who subverted the atonement of Christ and the offices of the Holy Spirit, rather than with men the extent of whose crime, by their own showing, was simply the exercise of ecclesiastical tyranny. A conscience so exquisitely tender that it could not participate in the sin of the latter, ought to have shrunk from the guilt of the former. Had the zeal

of the United Synod been half as great for the gospel of the grace of God as for one single principle in church government, they would have withdrawn from both schools, Old and New; and would not now be required to explain the substantial difference between indifference to truth and the rejection of it. As it is, they must not complain of being judged of by the company they have kept.

It is moreover a suspicious fact, that the United Synod has never repudiated the partial and unsatisfactory subscription to the standards of the Church, which was one of the original grounds of offence against the New School party, with whom they have chosen to be identified. On the contrary, at their first meeting in 1858, they append to the declaration of their adherence to the Confession of Faith, a supplementary explanation which seems to us to recognise and to embody the fatal reservation of a subscription for "substance of doctrine." The reader may judge of the correctness of this inference by carefully weighing the import of their own language :

"In thus adopting the Confession of Faith as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, we adopt it in the sense in which we believe the Fathers of the American Church received it, to wit: not as requiring an agreement in sentiment with every opinion expressed in said Confession, but a belief in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and in the doctrines which distinguish the Calvinistic system from the Pelagian, Socinian, Arminian, and other systems of theology. This system we understand to include the following doctrines, viz: the trinity, the incarnation and supreme deity of Christ, the fall and original sin, atonement, justification by faith, personal election, effectual calling, perseverance of the saints, eternal happiness of the righteous, and eternal punishment of the wicked. Whilst various modes of stating and explaining these truths may be adopted, yet when they are received according to the usual way of interpreting language, and as they have been understood by the great body of the Presbyterian Church in this country, from the period of the adoption of the Westminster Confession in 1729, to the present day, the requi-

sitions of the Confession are complied with, and all such persons are to be regarded as having received as their doctrinal creed, this system of doctrines taught in the Holy Scriptures."

Observe, then, that we have not here a subscription to the Confession *simpliciter*, but a subscription with qualifying and restrictive clauses, couched in language far too indefinite to serve the purpose of a test. There is the same equivocation with the words "system of doctrine" which vitiated the subscription of New School men in 1837, and created such trouble in determining what was accepted and what was renounced. It is a subscription which does not bind to an agreement in all that the Confession contains, but only in certain fundamental doctrines, the reception of which is all that is meant by the phrase "system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." Then, apart from this restricted adoption, the Confession is not to be interpreted according to the literal and obvious import of its own terms, but according to a certain sense in which these parties believe it to be received by the body of the church; so that the appeal evermore lies from the Confession to this general sense of the church in whatever way it may be collected, instead of ascertaining the sense of the church by reference at once to its acknowledged symbols. Then, too, whilst the Confession is admitted as discriminating against Pelagians, Arminians, and Socinians, there is a studied silence in reference to the very forms of error prevalent in the New School body, except as these may be embraced in the very comprehensive clause, "and other systems of theology." Why, since the enunciation was commenced at all, in order to show in what sense the Confession was adopted, does the United Synod stop at the mention of these antiquated and well-defined heresies, and preserve an ominous silence in regard to Hopkinsians, Taylorites, &c., with whom they have been supposed more or less to sympathize? The specification of certain important doctrines

appears at first sight candid and fair; but unfortunately, writers of the class to which Dr. Beman belongs, profess to recognise these, for example, that of the atonement, as the doctrines both of the Confession and of the Bible, whilst by their interpretation we may truly complain, in the language of Mary, "they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." What we desire of these brethren is a plain, straightforward adoption of the Church standards, in their simple and obvious import, without equivocation or reservation of any sort. This is the way in which we have subscribed them, and which we require of all intrants into the sacred office. This will go further to remove our suspicions than the most elaborate attempts to fence round and to define their assent, or the best balanced basis of union which can be drawn up by joint committees of conference.

We do not mean by the foregoing remarks to affirm that the United Synod, as a body, is unsound in doctrine. Against one or two of their leading men, there is a written record to be disposed of, and of them we may have to speak in the sequel. But as our Virginia brethren have undertaken to vouch for the orthodoxy of the body, we are disposed to defer to their testimony, and to hope that what they believe in regard to them is true. But we have succeeded in showing the grounds upon which that orthodoxy has been at least suspected. Now the feature that offends us in the proposed plan of union, is that it places the Old School church upon identically the same footing of suspicion with the New School, and requires the same purgation of the one that it requires of the other. The framers of the report indignantly repel the suggestion of its being a compromise between the parties negotiating. But it is too patent upon the face of the paper, to be overlooked or denied. There is an antithesis pervading the entire document, a balancing of one view against another, which points to the two parties who are to adopt the instrument as plainly

as though it were written, this is for you, and that in turn is for you. Both drink alternately of the water of jealousy, and with their hands raised to heaven purge themselves of alternate errors. Both swear, indeed, in identical terms; but in each case, the oath with one is an absolute form, and with the other an absolute reality. Thus, in the section on imputation, the New Schoolman affirms Adam's posterity to be judicially condemned on account of his first sin, and means something by it, for he was supposed before to doubt or to deny it: the Old Schoolman affirms it too, and the world knows that he is called to do so only out of complaisance to his suspected brother, for whom the ordeal was really designed. Again, the New Schoolman declares this imputed guilt to be only obligation to punishment, and not the sinfulness of the act itself, and can scarcely keep his countenance in the solemn farce of disclaiming a dogma which no one ever dreamed of charging upon him; while his more serious neighbor feels the accusation of the test which requires him to deny that imputation involves a transfer of personal character. When, again, the New Side declares the sinner to have wholly lost all ability of will to choose spiritual good for its own sake, the Old Side responds yet so that the sinner be not stripped of his moral agency and accountableness; and thus the impartial test touches with the point of a needle the alleged weakness of both. Indeed, were it not for the solemnity of the subjects involved, one might smile at the ingenuity of the committee to find in every case the necessary makeweight that shall keep the balance even. Thus, when the suspected New Light has confessed the penal character of Christ's sufferings, affording a vicarious yet true satisfaction to the justice of God, where shall an offset be found, if that poor forlorn Gethsemane doctrine be not hunted out of its obscurity—"which," as Dr. Hodge testifies, "is not found in any confession of the Protestant churches, nor in the writings of any standard theologian, nor in the recognised authorities

of any church of which we have any knowledge." Accordingly this lost, stray theory, cast as a waif upon the theological world, without a patron or a friend, is trumped up simply that the General Assembly may be brought to the confessional in some form; and so she gravely testifies that the drops of Christ's blood were not weighed in the scales of a commercial transaction. Now, greatly as we may admire the generous compassion of our brethren of the committee for the shame which must attend the confessions of a suspected party, we doubt whether this sentiment would authorize the General Assembly in staining the reputation of a church hitherto immaculate in this respect, merely to afford them company in passing through the trial. Were it a question of mere sympathy, we would cheerfully consent to alleviate the humiliation of our New School brethren; but it is a question rather of simple justice to our own body, whether by voluntary impeachment we are to soil the garments of the Church, the bride, the Lamb's wife. We are free to say that we are prepared to spare them the humiliation of any confession, rather than compel a church to share it with them, whose glory it has ever been to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."

Our third objection to the proposed doctrinal basis, is more fundamental, and is drawn from the quasi-symbolic character it must necessarily assume. It is a declaration drawn up by two parties, in order to show their hearty agreement and to remove suspicions and offences. Now, what does the Confession of Faith itself propose to do? What is it but a scientific arrangement and statement of the truths which are supposed to be taught in the Holy Scriptures? It serves, therefore, as a bond of union between those who agree to receive it, and is the arbiter of all differences which may emerge amongst them. In like manner, this paper is a bond of union upon those points which it professes to cover. Nay, more; it becomes a

symbol in precisely the most objectionable and dangerous form—not simply as coördinate with the Confession, but as its authorized interpretation, so far, at least, as the two cover the same ground. In effect, the appeal will always be taken from the Confession to this instrument, as its acknowledged expounder. According to the oft-repeated maxim, “the *meaning* of the Bible is the Bible,” the same may be said of the Confession: and in every trial for heresy, the parties must come back to this “Doctrinal Basis” in order to ascertain what the church has decided to be the meaning of her own standards on the topics involved. The general sense of the Presbyterian Church, in accordance with which the United Synod has declared its adoption of these standards, is happily caught and imprisoned in this immortal document; and it comes forth, whenever invoked, to settle the law of the church, and the cases to which that law should be applied. We humbly submit whether the General Assembly is competent to pass upon any such proposition, except to send it down to the presbyteries to determine whether such an addition shall be made to our existing symbols.

Various attempts have been made to escape the force of this objection. For example, it has been suggested that this written declaration is simply a substitute for the customary examination of those who seek admission into any of our presbyteries. This view gains a measure of support from the clause in the report which says, “and it is agreed that no other condition shall be required of the members constituting said presbyteries, except the approval of this plan of union.” Dr. Waddel also writes, “While the rule which has been in existence for a long time in our presbyteries, of examining all who apply for admission as to their soundness of doctrine, is not exacted at all in this plan, at the same time it is required of every one who wishes to belong to this new united church, to signify his approval of this plan of union.” Unfortunately for this theory, the

examination is of both the parties, who mutually interrogate each other—the applicant who stands before the bar of the presbytery, after undergoing its inquisition, turns round upon his challengers to show their agreement with himself. Plainly this hypothesis must be dismissed as utterly untenable.

Dr. Dabney submits another and very different construction. It is a simple “declaration touching former grounds of debate,” and is put on the footing of the countless declarations emanating from the church ever since the days of Arius and the Nicene creed. He finds justifying precedents in the various declarations against error made, about the period of the schism in 1837, by different Synods and by the General Assembly itself. The fallacy of this position has, however, been ably exposed by the editor of the *Southern Presbyterian* in the following extracts, which we give as exhausting the matter :

“We propose now to point out at least two radical differences between all the cases referred to by Dr. D. and the one before us.

The first is, that in every one of those cases quoted, the statement adopted by the church was a testimony against error, intended to define the truth on the points where heresy was to be condemned, and drawn up with a special view to that object; while the statements of the committees are intended to manifest the agreement of parties supposed to have been disagreed as to doctrine, and to prepare a basis on which both can unite. This difference in purpose and intent, in the two cases, will, by well known laws of human nature, produce a marked difference in the result. When men, in the heat of a controversial war, testify against error, they are apt to use terms strong, unambiguous, precise, and sharp to the point. When opponents set to work to agree in a creed, they carefully avoid or modify all expressions which can call out their differences, and adopt vague generalities, or ambiguities, or inconsistent statements, which, by the rule before spoken of, can be interpreted both ways.

The second radical difference between the cases cited by Dr. D. and the one before us is, that while, as already stated, the former were of the nature of a testimony against error, and simply *declara-*

tive, the latter is of the nature of law, and is *legislative*. What is proposed is essentially a compact or treaty between two churches, by virtue of which they are to unite and become one. In the former, the church spoke as a *witness* for her Lord testifying to the truth which He delivered to her trust, and condemning contrary errors. In the latter, she exercises her power of *jurisdiction*, admitting others to her fellowship on their adopting certain doctrinal statements and complying with certain other terms. In this view, we hold the action proposed to be as unconstitutional as it is unwise and inexpedient. The General Assembly, we believe, has no power to admit to the membership of the church on such terms. * * * * *

* * * The difference is as wide as that between the mere *resolutions* of one of our legislatures, and its formal *acts* and *statutes*. The fact that in the report this statement is called a 'declaration' amounts to nothing. We must look at the real nature of the action proposed."

These distinctions need no amplification at our hands. They are clear in themselves, and are forcibly expressed. No function of the church is more distinctly recognised in Scripture than that of witness for the truth. She is anointed to this express end, that in her formal teachings and in the holiness of her behavior she may proclaim the truth of doctrinal and practical religion to an unbelieving world. She is often called, therefore, to testify against error; shaping her utterance to the thought of the age, tearing away the mask from all untruth, and touching, as with the spear of Ithuriel, the foul spirits who are pouring their seductive blasphemies into the ears of the unsuspecting. These testimonies are, however, by no means to be confounded with the standards which regulate her own faith, nor with the oracles from which her inspiration is drawn. They pass away with the occasions which drew them forth, or remain as historical monuments of the conflicts which she has been called to endure. But no one knows better than the drawer of this paper, that it was not conceived as a declaration against error. On the contrary, it is upon its face a declaration that no error exists, as between these two

parties, to testify against. How then can it be placed upon the footing of those grand deliverances of the past in which heresy and falsehood have been exposed to reprobation and scorn? It is simply a form of concord, in which two parties attempt to show that they are at one. Hence we find no where in the document, the sharpness and precision of testimony which defines the boundaries of error; but instead thereof, the smoothness of conciliation, which bevels off all uncomfortable corners and angles, until not a point is left upon which a controversy can be hung.

We are driven back, then, upon our original position, that this is a pronouncement of doctrine in which the parties profess to agree, binding as soon as it is adopted by them severally, which makes it a virtual symbol of their faith; and, as we have already shewn, from the very circumstances under which it was prepared, a symbol superseding practically the Confession itself, as determining what the parties agree that standard shall mean. Under this view, we object to its adoption by the Assembly, even though, as a paper, it were perfect of its kind. Though a searching criticism should fail to detect a single ambiguity, though it should afford no room for amendment in sentiment or in style, yet, as a symbol, we would reject it as superfluous, and as trenching upon the supremacy of the standards we have already covenanted to uphold. We are not of those who are opposed to creeds. On the contrary, we believe a creed, either long or short, written or unwritten, must exist as the bond of union in every religious body. But we are satisfied with the creed we already have—a creed drawn out over the whole circle of divine truth, closely articulated and held together by the strictest logic—a creed prepared by the wisest men the Church of God has ever known, and at a period peculiarly favorable to the accomplishment of such a task—a creed wrought in the forge of abundant prayer and deliberation through a succession of months and years—and above all, a creed which has with-

stood the storms of more than two centuries, and which is bound up in the most precious associations of the people of God. Such a creed is not to be lightly added to, or taken from, and, least of all, to be superseded by a rival, surreptitiously introduced and covertly palmed upon the church. If there are parties whom our existing Confession does not satisfy, let the proposition be openly made to modify and improve it, and the church will then, at least, know what she has taken in hand; but we trust the Assembly will watch with jealous care, lest this modest declaration of agreement should be found to usurp the functions which belong only to an acknowledged and authoritative symbol.

The foregoing objections are levelled against the proposed doctrinal basis, taken as a whole: we proceed now to a more articulate examination of its several parts, and draw attention,

1. To the section upon imputation, which reads as follows:

“Concerning the fall of man, and original sin, we faithfully hold with the confession of faith, that our first parents, by their first act of disobedience, “fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body; that they being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descended from them by ordinary generation; and that from this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.”

This imputation of the guilt of this sin of our first parents we hold in this sense, that thereby their posterity are judicially condemned by God on account of that sin; and so begin their existence in that corruption of nature, and subjection to wrath, into which our first parents fell by their first sin. And we mean that the guilt of their sin, which is imputed, is according to the constant usage of theology—“obligation to punishment,” and not the sinfulness of the act itself;

which latter cannot, by imputation, be the quality of any other than the personal agents."

If the last sentence in this extract is simply a caveat against the dogma that each individual of the human family personally committed the act of eating the forbidden fruit, and by an express exercise of his individual will, participated in the first sin, we have nothing to say except that a spear is hurled against a shadow. Undoubtedly, as individuals, we did not then exist: and it is a clear misconception, if not a wilful misrepresentation of the doctrine of our union with Adam, to suppose that we are transfused into him, having his personal consciousness, and individually doing his act. However useless therefore this disclaimer may be on the part of our new school brethren, we would pass it by as innocent. But when it is remembered that this language is placed upon the lips of the General Assembly, to be uttered by them as explaining the sense of our standards on this vital point, and to be cited hereafter as the authorized interpretation of the church, we cannot but inquire whether it exhausts the testimony of these standards, and gives us the whole doctrine of imputation as therein taught. Our complaint is, that the utterance is both defective and ambiguous. It is defective in that it does not bring out articulately the federal headship of Adam, which is the precise ground upon which this imputation is based. Indeed, if the reader will scan this section closely, there is not even a reference to this most important relation, except in the phrase "that thereby their posterity are judicially condemned by God on account of that sin;" which does certainly imply it, but from which it requires to be inferentially deduced. The committee does indeed quote from the Confession of Faith—but quotes from a passage in which the leading idea was to affirm the transmission of depravity by natural descent from Adam, as "the root of all mankind," rather than to state the formal ground upon which

that penalty is incurred. Other passages are passed over in silence, which distinctly affirm the federal and representative relation of Adam as being the principle which determines the imputation of his guilt to all his posterity. For example, in the seventh chapter of the Confession it is said; "the first covenant made with man was a covenant of works wherein life was promised to Adam, and *in him to all his posterity*, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." Again, the answer to the twenty-second question in the larger Catechism testifies, "the covenant being made with Adam as a *public person*, not for himself only, but for his posterity, all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, *sinned in him and fell with him in that first transgression.*" We do not, of course, intimate that this vital truth is even doubted by our respected committee, nor that it is denied by the members of the United Synod. But it does appear strange that, in a section explaining how the doctrine of imputation is received by the church, there should be no explicit statement of that legal relation which our standards recognise as "*cardo causæ*," the very principle which determines that there shall be any imputation; and that in a paper which is to operate as a test of orthodoxy, it should be recognised only by an implication from which it is drawn out by a remote inference.

There have been those who admit the inherent depravity of man, but deny the strict imputation of Adam's sin as the moral ground upon which it rests. Under the operation of the universal law by which like begets its like, this corrupt nature is transmitted as a natural consequence of the Fall. If Adam had begotten a son during the period of his innocence, that son would have been born holy; but as Eve did not conceive till after he fell, the race that issued from his loins was unholy, by the same law of propagation. In consequence of the corrupt nature, thus inherited, the sinner is justly condemned; and it is only *mediately*, through this inherent depravity, he has any thing to do with Adam's

sin. Here, then, is a sense in which the imputation of the first transgression is nominally conceded, while yet it is in fact exactly denied. The orthodox belief is precisely inverted: for while that considers imputation as prior to condemnation, and, of course, as prior to inherent corruption, this theory regards depravity of nature as the cause of condemnation, and thus remotely of imputation. To guard against the possibility of errors like these, the committee should not have left at the mercy of a mere inference that important relation to Adam as our covenant head, which underlies and supports this whole doctrine of imputation. But is the committee's language sufficient to detect and expose the speculations of the United Synod itself on this subject? We beg the reader to examine with care the following extract from the *Christian Observer*, of February 20, 1862:

“ We believe (1) that Adam was so the representative of his race, that his act would determine their character. If he had continued holy, they would have been holy. But as he sinned, they, as a consequence, became sinners. 2. We believe that in consequence of this representative relation of Adam, his posterity are treated as sinners, on account of his sin—that is, are liable to suffering and death on account of his act. We do not believe that God regards the posterity of Adam as *meriting* his wrath for the sin of their original progenitor—in other words, that the ‘*moral turpitude*’ of his act is transferred to them. But we do believe that, in as much as the evils brought upon the race are an expression of the Lawgiver's disapprobation of the sin of Adam, and were thus *designed* to show his regard for his law and his determination to uphold it, they may be termed *penal* evils, or what Dr. Thornwell would call the ‘*judicial result*’ of the sin of Adam. God does not inflict these evils upon succeeding generations as an arbitrary sovereign, or simply because Adam was the head of the race, irrespective of the claims of his violated law. It is as lawgiver, determined to give the highest possible expression of his abhorrence of the sin of Adam that he can give in this world, that the Almighty brings upon Adam's descendants suf-

ferings as the consequence of his transgression. Their sufferings, therefore, are the result of the first sin, are *penal, judicial* sufferings; whilst at the same time Adam alone, their representative, is the *criminal* individual."

Here then is a confession of faith for us! "Adam so the representative of his race that his act determines their character"—this is all the imputation in the case, just the mediate imputation of Placœus in the 17th century! Adam's posterity "treated as sinners on account of his sin," which, however, only means that "they are liable to suffering and death on account of that act!" But are these evils brought upon the race as calamities only? Oh no, says Dr. Boyd, they are "*penal, judicial* sufferings"—that is, "they may be termed penal," but only as "an expression of the Lawgiver's disapprobation of the sin of Adam, and designed to show his regard for his law and his determination to uphold it!" Does not the reader see that the whole is constructive and technical throughout? Adam is constructively a representative, since the result of his sin is that his posterity are sinners—and the "evils brought upon the race" are constructively penal, because they express the Lawgiver's abhorrence of the sin of Adam, for which reason, "as the consequence of his transgression," they fall upon his descendants. Not a word here of the covenant relation of Adam to his race as their federal head, and of their undergoing a full probation in him: but only an undescribed representation of some sort, and a constructive imputation, in consequence of which they suffer certain consequences that are only technically penal. Yet the writer of this ambiguous confession has accepted the doctrinal basis of the committee, and lends it his influence that it may be adopted by the body to which he belongs—and according to his own theory, he can swallow the committee's testimony of our being judicially condemned on account of the first sin without the slightest contortion of

face; for he has only to understand it in a Pickwickian sense—a *quasi* judicial condemnation, as being the result of that first sin, and inflicted by the Lawgiver to show his disapprobation of the same. Dr. Boyd has gone through the meshes of the committee's net in the language of another, without "ruffling a single feather."

Before dismissing this deliverance of the committee, we have a word to say about the ambiguity of the disclaimer; "and not the sinfulness of the act itself, which latter cannot by imputation be the quality of any other than the personal agents." As already stated, we have no objection to this as merely disavowing the notion of personal identity between Adam and his race. In our distinct and separate personality, his sin could no more be ours than ours could be his. But, then, what does the Catechism mean when it says that, "we sinned in him and fell with him in that first transgression?" The doctrine unquestionably is that, by the appointment of God, Adam's posterity were united to him, not only by the natural tie of physical descent, but also by a moral relation of covenant headship, in consequence of which he and they were constituted a legal unit. The race was put upon its trial in the person of its representative—in the eye of the law, Adam was the race—his obedience would have been theirs by a proprietary right in it, as truly as though it had been rendered in their individual persons—and this being recognized by imputation, they would have been entitled to eternal life as the reward of the covenant. It follows, *ex equali*, that his disobedience was theirs; which, being reckoned or imputed to them, put them equally with their representative under condemnation. The act of Adam, as a public person, must belong to all those for whom he was a surety. It is theirs as well as his; not theirs as personally committed by them, but upon the principle—*qui facit per alium, facit per se*; and their title to it is as perfect and indefeasible as that of Adam himself. Imputation is the formal recognition of this title,

the judicial decree, rendered in due process of law, by which the provisions of the covenant are carried out in successive generations. We do not care to enter into any discussion upon the generic unity of the human race, nor to quarrel with those who are indisposed to press beyond the appointment of God for a reason of this imputation. All that we contend for is the recognition of the truth, that we are "in Adam *virtually* as a natural root, and *representatively* as a covenant head;" and this union in him, mysterious and inexplicable as it may be, we are unwilling even by implication to disavow. By virtue of this union, we believe, with our standards, that we "sinned in Adam, and fell with him in that first transgression;" so that there is, on our part, a true and real, not a constructive and fictitious, responsibility, for the same. Dr. Boyd is unwilling to believe that "God regards the posterity of Adam as *meriting* his wrath for the sin of their original progenitor." We do not insist upon a term so equivocal as that of merit, which, if used by us, would be understood by him in a sense different from that intended. But a holy God treats Adam's posterity only as they deserve to be treated; they are now as much entitled to condemnation and wrath through the disobedience of their head, as they would have been entitled to life through his obedience. If any object, with Dr. Barnes, that the phrase, "sinning in Adam," is unintelligible, as confounding personal acts and personal consciousnesses, we commend them to the apostle's argument for the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedec over that of Aaron, by the fact that Levi paid tithes to him in the loins of Abraham; "and as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham; for he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedec met him." If Abraham's act, in paying the tenth of the spoils to Melchizedec, was the act of Levi, virtually present and acting in the loins of his father, we see no reason for scrupling to say that we sinned in Adam, as virtually and representa-

tively in him; and if the acknowledgement by Abraham, of the superior dignity of Melchizedec, was a profession of the same by Levi yet unborn, then we do not hesitate to say that the quality of sinfulness in Adam's transgression belongs in that same putative sense to his descendants.

We call attention,

2. To the portion of the same section which treats of the sinner's inability, in the following terms:

"We do also believe that because of this original corruption, men have 'wholly lost all ability of will' to choose spiritual good for its own sake, or to regenerate, convert or sanctify their own hearts. But we equally reject the error of those who assert that the sinner has no power of any kind for the performance of duty. This error strips the sinner of his moral agency and accountableness, and introduces the heresy of either Antinomianism or Fatalism. The true doctrine of the Scriptures, as stated in our confession, keeps continually in view the moral agency of man, the contingency of second causes, the use of means, the voluntariness of all the creature's sin, and his utter inexcusableness therein. It teaches that while the fall has darkened and impaired all the faculties of man's soul, and inclined his free will to evil only, it has not destroyed in him any capacity of understanding or conscience whereby the holy creature knows and serves God, and on which free agency and responsibility depend."

The feature of this paper, which makes it so fatal to the purity, and therefore to the peace, of the Church, is, that whilst it allows apparently the most innocent disclaimers on the part of our New School brethren, it does it in language so incautious as to open the door for the importation of the worst heresies that can afflict the Church of God. It thus requires a running commentary on the part of its framers, assuring us that they do not mean this, and they do not mean that, so as to render it utterly worthless as a touchstone of orthodoxy. For example, in the preceding extract, after a clear avowal of the sinner's inability to choose spiritual good, and that the Fall has inclined his free will to evil only, the committee turn round and upset

it all by the bold, unguarded denial, "that the sinner has no power of any kind for the performance of duty." Undoubtedly the two statements, in any proper sense, are contradictories. Why, then, is the latter introduced at all? Simply because the New School are afraid that a round assertion of the sinner's inability, will "strip him of his moral agency and accountableness, and introduce the heresy of either Antinomianism or Fatalism." Are we, then, to admit this implied impeachment of our standards, that without this important qualification they will take the sinner out of the moral government of God, and leave him an irresponsible agent, free from all accountability? Is not the allegation infinitely absurd, when, from beginning to end, the Confession holds every man so strictly to the law, that his only hope of escape from condemnation and wrath is through the sovereign grace of God? Is it not a wicked and wilful slander, when these very standards, besides other testimonies, expressly declare "the will of man to be endued with that natural liberty that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil?" Are we, for a moment, to allow that Antinomianism and Fatalism are any thing else but a rejection of Calvinism on the one side, as Arminianism is on the other? Is the Old School church to purge herself of the taint of these monstrous heresies, before the purists of the New School will consent to union with her? But offensive as the language of the report was under this view, we did not construe it as any thing more than an unguarded and conflicting utterance of the committee, until we read the elaborate defence of the paper from the same pen by which it was drafted. In that unfortunate polemic, which our brother will live to regret that it was ever written, Dr. Dabney justifies the "naughty words" on the ground that they were taken from a document written by the wise and good Dr. Baxter, and adopted by the Synod of Virginia in 1836. If so, it is only another illustration how unsafe are the doc-

trinal statements of the best men, which are drawn up for the purposes of concession and compromise. But this matter is not to be decided upon any other authority except that of our acknowledged standards. "We reject the error," says the report, "of those who assert that the sinner has no power of any kind for the performance of duty;" which implies, of course, says Dr. Dabney, that the sinner has some power of some kind to perform his duty. Let us, then, lay over against this unqualified and broad language the testimonies of our standards. Amongst others, take the following: "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." Confession, ch. 9. Again, the larger Catechism, question 25, on original sin: "Whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually." And in question 192: "Acknowledging that by nature we and all men are not only utterly unable and unwilling to know and to do the will of God, but prone to rebel against his word, * * * and wholly inclined to do the will of the flesh and of the devil; we pray that God would by His Spirit take away from ourselves and others all blindness, weakness, indisposedness, and perverseness of heart, and by His grace make us able and willing to know, do, and submit to His holy will," &c. We will not attempt to make the contrast more emphatic between these passages and the committee's report, by the use of italics, but quote them exactly as they are found in the book.

But it will be rejoined, these citations are nothing to the point, since they refer to the *moral* inability of the sinner, which the report distinctly affirms, and not to his *natural* inability, which the report as distinctly denies. Accord-

ingly, Dr. Dabney attempts at length to show that, whilst the committee rejected these terms as ambiguous and unhappy, the distinction which they express must be retained—that it is indispensable, in order to make out the responsibility of the sinner, and is implied in all the efforts of the preacher in dealing practically with the conscience. Alas! that our brother should thus “speak half in the speech of Ashdod!” Is not this the identical language in which the hereditary enemies of Calvinism have always endeavored to excite the prejudices of unthinking and uncritical men? and are not these the arguments by which the old theology of the church has ever been assailed? We venture to say that this painful embarrassment would not have been felt by our excellent brother in his theological chair at Prince Edward: but as a committee man at Lynchburg, he had a new and strange rôle to play, as the special advocate of New School opinions, and he works awkwardly in the harness. The transparent fallacy of his whole argument is exposed by a single interrogatory of the editor of the *Southern Presbyterian*, when he asks, “does not Dr. Dabney get confused between “powers” and “power?” *Acu rem tetigit*, the very core of the difficulty is reached. If a single iota served to separate the Arians and Orthodox of old, it is not strange that the letter *s* should settle this whole distinction between responsibility and ability, which seem so hard to harmonize. “Our Confession and Catechisms,” adds Mr. Porter, “while they attribute to man certain *powers* in the sense of faculties and endowments, those namely which constitute him a responsible being, deny, most categorically, the possession of any ‘*power*’ to perform his duty.” Undoubtedly, if the fall had obliterated all the faculties of the human soul, the sinner would be taken out of the category of a moral being; he would cease to be a man, and could, no more than any other brute, lie under the jurisdiction of the divine law. But what has this to do with the question, whether a fallen being, whose

original faculties are depraved by sin, has power to perform duties which can only be wrought when these faculties are sound and pure? This is the exact point under debate: it is the ability of the sinner to perform *moral acts*—and though he may possess the faculties which are essential to constitute him a reasonable and responsible being, if these are disabled by sin, then is he destitute of the very power which is required in the premises. The real difficulty lies in reconciling this responsibility with the want of *moral ability*; and the fact that the sinner continues to possess those natural faculties or “powers” which make him a man, does not afford even a proximate solution. How if the sinner be born destitute of those dispositions and habits which are necessary for duty,—can he be held responsible for his delinquency? Manifestly, if he had been originally created without this moral power, he could not be held answerable for the want of spiritual obedience: and the only solution of the difficulty is, that this inability is the penal visitation of God upon sin. Moral inability, which is all that is truly involved in the case, does not discharge the sinner from obligation, simply because it was not the original condition of man as he came from the hands of his Creator; it has been brought upon him by sin—and he is responsible for it precisely in the same way that he is responsible for the inherent corruption which produces it. We have lying before us an unpublished manuscript from the pen of the venerated Dr. Thornwell, from which we transcribe a passage as superseding all that we would say. It bears directly upon the topic now under discussion, and will be read with interest as an earnest of what is to be enjoyed when these lectures shall see the light.

“We must distinguish between inability as original, and inability as penal. Moral power is nothing more nor less than holy habitudes and disposition—it is the perception of the beauty, and the response of the heart to the excellence and glory of God—and the con-

sequent subjection of the will, to the law of holy love. Spiritual perception, spiritual delight, spiritual choice, these, and these alone, constitute ability to good. Now if we could conceive that God had made a creature destitute of these habits—if we could conceive that he came from the hands of the Creator in the same moral condition in which he is now born, it is impossible to vindicate the obligation of such a creature to holiness upon any principle of justice. It is idle to say that his inability is but the intensity of his sin, and the more helpless, the more wicked. His inability is the result of his constitution—it belongs to his very nature as a creature—and he is no more responsible for such defects than a lame man is for his hobbling gait, or a blind man for his incompetency to distinguish colors. He is what God made him; he answers to the idea of his being; and is no more blameworthy for the deformed condition of his soul, than a camel for the deformity of its back. The principle is intuitively evident that no creature can be required to transcend its powers. Ability conditions responsibility. An original inability, natural in the sense that it enters into the notion of the creature as such, completely obliterates all moral distinctions with reference to the acts embraced within its sphere. And if this had been what the advocates of natural ability meant, their position would have been impregnable. But this is not what they mean; they do not represent the natural as that which pertains to the idea and original state of the creature. In this sense, moral and natural ability are not distinguished as separate species; but the moral is the natural ability—the moral habits are the very things by which a moral creature possesses any ability to do good at all. They contend, on the other hand, that there may be the entire absence of all holy principles, of all spiritual discernment and love—and yet that the creature thus destitute of these may be possessed of power of another kind to do good, upon which his responsibility is conditioned. Upon their hypothesis, it is conceivable that a man may be originally corrupt as a creature, and yet under obligation to keep the perfect law of God. Their ability, when narrowly examined, turns out to be a mere play with the ambiguity of language, or the denial in one form of what they have affirmed in another. Sometimes it is represented as the mere possession of the faculties, and attributes of reason, intelligence and will, abstracted from any determinate states in relation to holi-

ness and sin. A being thus existing in *puris naturalibus* we have already seen to involve an absurdity—its very attitude of indeterminateness to good would be sin. It is precisely in the character of its determinations, and of them alone, that its good and evil consist. * * * * * These distinctions and evasions show conclusively that the natural ability which I make essential to responsibility, is a very different thing from that which many divines have invented as the condition on which man is responsible since the fall.

But there is another, a penal inability. It is that which man has superinduced by his own voluntary transgression. He was naturally able; that is, created with all the habitudes and dispositions which were involved in the loving choice of the good. Rectitude was infused into his nature; it entered into the idea of his being; he was fully competent for any exaction of the law. He chooses sin, and by that very act of choice impregnates his nature with contrary habits and dispositions. His moral agency continues unimpaired through all his subsequent existence; he becomes a slave to sin; but his impotence, hopeless and ruinous as it is, results from his own free choice. In the loss of habits, he loses all real power for good; he becomes competent for nothing but sin; but he is held responsible for the nature which God gave him—and the law which constitutes its eternal norm, according to the divine idea, and the spontaneous dictates of his own reason, can never cease to be the standard of his being and life. All his descendants were in him when he sinned and fell. His act was legally theirs; and that depravity, which he infused into his own nature, in the place of original righteousness, has become their inheritance. They stand therefore, from the first moment of their being, in the same relation to the law which he occupied at his fall. Their impotence is properly their own—how this can be, this is not the place to show. I am only showing that there is a marked distinction between the inability which begins with the nature of a being, and the inability which it brings upon itself by sin: that in the one case, responsibility is measured by the extent of the actual power possessed—in the other, by the extent of the power originally imparted," &c.

3. Our failing space warns us to take up the third section of the committee's report, on the atonement, as follows:

“Concerning the atonement of Jesus Christ, we hold that He, being very God and very man in one person, was our substitute under the law; that the guilt of men’s sins was imputed to him; that His sufferings were borne as the penalty of that guilt, and were a vicarious, yet true satisfaction therefor, to the justice of God; and that without this, God’s perfections would forbid the pardon of any sin. This atonement, we believe, though by temporary sufferings, was by reason of the infinite glory of Christ’s person, full and sufficient for the guilt of the whole world; and is to be freely and sincerely offered to every creature, inasmuch as it leaves no other obstacle to the pardon of all men under the Gospel, save the enmity and unbelief of those who voluntarily reject it. Wherefore, on the one hand, we reject the opinion of those who teach that the atonement was so limited and equal to the guilt of the elect only, that if God had designed to redeem more, Christ must have suffered more, or differently. And on the other hand, we hold that God the Father doth efficaciously apply this redemption, through Christ’s purchase, to all those to whom it was His eternal purpose to apply it, and to no others.”

Upon this fundamental doctrine of atonement, the utterance of the committee should have been the most full and explicit, instead of being the most exceptionable in their whole paper. The first question turns, of course, upon the *nature* of the atonement—what is it that makes the death of Christ a true satisfaction to the broken law? The uniform testimony of our standards is, that Christ, as the strict and proper substitute for his people under the law, rendered a perfect obedience to its precepts, and incurred the penalty denounced against the transgressor; which, by virtue of his federal relation to the elect, is reckoned to them as their righteousness, so that, when received by faith, they are not only discharged from condemnation, but are accepted in their persons before God. Thus the Confession, ch. 8, sec. 4—“This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake, which, that he might discharge, he *was made under the law and did perfectly fulfil it,*” &c. Again, in section 5; “The

Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which He, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, *hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father*; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance," &c. The Larger Catechism, Question 49, on the humiliation of Christ—"having also conflicted with the terrors of death and the powers of darkness, *felt and borne the weight of God's wrath*, He laid down His life an offering for sin," &c. Language like this it would seem impossible to mystify. For if Christ was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it, one would think he must come under and perfectly fulfil the two parts of law, the precept and penalty, the union of which constitutes the formal nature of law. If He fulfilled the precept by obeying it, He must equally have fulfilled the penalty by enduring it; and this is *the obedience unto death* of which the Scriptures speak. Yet our slippery opponents, who seem to think, with Talleyrand, language an invention to conceal thought, through a subtle interpretation contrive to evade the force of all this testimony. They admit, for example, that Christ was a substitute for the guilty, that His sufferings and death were vicariously endured, that they were penal inflictions, and rendered satisfaction to the injured law and insulted majesty of God. All this is well, if the words were employed in their usual signification; but when the key to the cipher is put into our hands, it turns out that they are all to be understood in a *quasi* sense. Thus, the sufferings of Christ were not inflicted as *the* penalty threatened to the transgressor, but what was *an equivalent in effect* for it; and they are termed penal, constructively, because the demands of the law or lawgiver are virtually answered by the death of Christ, and the end of the penalty subserved, to wit, the manifestation of God's holiness, and the maintenance of His authority. That the reader may not suspect us of drawing a caricature of their views, we present an extract from A. H. H. B., in the *Christian Observer* for March 13,

1862. And we quote thus frequently from this writer, because he is an acknowledged leader in the United Synod, because he has been endorsed by his own brethren in their election of him as a professor in their projected seminary, because he has written these sentences with special reference to a union between his body and our own, and because, with these utterances yet warm upon his lips, he has accepted the paper of the committees of conference upon which we are now commenting. Dr. Boyd says :

“But it may be asked, did Christ suffer the penalty of the law? We answer, yes, if it be meant to inquire whether the sufferings of Christ had the same effect and a like value in the moral government of God as the penalty of the law. But if it is intended by the question to inquire whether Christ suffered, in kind or degree, the *exact penalty* threatened to the sinner, or whether he endured the penalty of the law in such a sense as that God is bound by his *justice* to deliver from punishment all for whom he died, we answer, no.”

He then goes on to show that the Savior's sufferings were not eternal, and that he had no remorse of conscience, to all which we agree, and that these constitute the very essence of the penalty, which we as distinctly deny. Then he adds :

“The great practical question, with reference to this point, is not whether Christ suffered *the precise penalty* threatened to the sinner, but whether his sufferings were *penal* in their nature—that is, whether they were designed by the law-giver to uphold his government by being substituted in place of the punishment due to transgressors. They were not mere chastisements; they were not intended by God simply to be instructive or symbolical, and as an illustration of patience under suffering. But the great peculiarity of the Savior's agonies was that they were a *vicarious, expiatory* offering, designed to accomplish all the ends to be secured by the infliction of the penalty of the law upon transgressors. The demands of the law or lawgiver are *virtually* answered by the death of Christ, inasmuch as all the good ends of the law, which would have been

secured by the sinner's punishment, have been accomplished by Christ's obedience and death. His sufferings therefore were literally and truly *penal* in their nature."

Literally and truly penal, indeed! When it is openly declared that they were a substitution for the penalty, and of another kind from that inflicted upon the transgressor! Can the reader fail to penetrate the fraud, which is practised by all heresiarchs, of using even to profuseness the consecrated dialect of the Church, which, by a transposition of meaning, is made to convey the very errors it was intended to disown and denounce? What have we here beyond a merely technical penalty, and a constructive and fictitious imputation? The adroitness of the argument by which this view is supported, is worthy of the subtlety in which it was invented. Put in a compact form, it runs thus: the penalty against the sinner is death—Christ did not die eternally, therefore He did not undergo the precise penalty, but only an equivalent to it. The conclusion is vitiated, however, by the quiet assumption that eternity of suffering is of the *essence* of the penalty. If this should be disproved, the whole argument falls to the ground. Now, in the Scriptures, the phrase, the wrath of God, is used with almost technical precision for the judicial displeasure of God against sin expressed in the penalty of the law. "The wrath of God," says the apostle, "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." In like manner, the Catechism describes the sufferings of Christ in their relation to the law, as the "feeling and bearing the weight of God's wrath." This wrath, when it terminates upon such a being as man, issues in death; as terminating upon his body, in temporal death; as terminating upon his soul, in separating it from communion with God, which is spiritual death; and since the finite creature can never exhaust that wrath, in eternal banishment of soul and body in hell. But when this wrath terminates

upon such a being as the Lord Jesus, who is the God-man, it separates between the soul and body, and cuts him off from all communion with the Father in the hour when, as a sacrifice, he passes under his judicial displeasure,—but it does not banish him forever from the divine favor. By virtue of the hypostatic union, all the dignity and glory and resources of the divine nature were carried over to the work which was wrought in the human; and a person so mysteriously constituted, who shall say that he could not bear the wrath of God in all the fulness in which it was originally expressed in the penalty? We recoil, indeed, from the profaneness which undertakes to weigh in the scales of human judgment, or to measure in the scant proportions of human thought, the awful sufferings of our blessed Lord; and it is for this reason that we reject the presumptuous dogma of our opponents, that He did not bear *the* penalty of the law. God forbid that we should attempt to lift the veil from those transcendent sufferings which once caused the rocks to rend, and broke the slumbers even of the dead! It is enough for us to know that He “felt and bore the weight of God’s wrath,” that He did undergo the Father’s judicial displeasure, to satisfy us that He did endure the essence of the penalty originally denounced against the transgressor.

How, then, does the committee propose to protect the Church against these equivocations?—by testifying that “His (Christ’s) sufferings were borne as the penalty of that guilt, and were a vicarious, yet true, satisfaction therefor to the justice of God.” But as we have seen, these parties have no hesitation in affirming these sufferings to be vicarious; alas! too much so, since Christ was not only a substitute personally for his people, but his sufferings were also substituted in the place of the penalty. They have no hesitation in affirming them to be a satisfaction, and even a true satisfaction, to divine justice; for they “had the same effect and a like value in the moral government of

God, as the penalty of the law." How, then, shall they be tied up from all evasion? We answer, most certainly not by placing in their lips the very ambiguity they desire in the clause, "His sufferings were borne *as* the penalty." We have read and admired the dialectic skill of Dr. Dabney in his defence of this favorite little particle; but must say after all, if the New School men wish a formula precisely suited to their equivocations on this point, it is kindly furnished to their hands in this significantly ambiguous sentence.

The second great question upon the doctrine of atonement relates to its *intention* and *design*: for whom was it made? Here the issue between us and the New School is open and clear. They maintain that the atonement was designed, and of course did make a true satisfaction for the sins of all men. This is so distinctly avowed, that quotations from their writings are almost needless. But that the reader may have directly before his eyes, the position assumed by members of the United Synod, the body so soon to be incorporated with ourselves, we make a last extract from their representative writer, already so profusely cited. Dr. Boyd says:

"Among the ministers of the United Synod, there are few, if any, who do not believe that the sacrifice of the Saviour was *intended* by God as a means by which *every child of Adam might be saved*." Again; "We hold that in the covenant made between the Father and the Son, the Son covenants to lay down His life in behalf of the *whole* family of man; so that every obstacle to salvation, arising from the character and government of God, is actually removed, and was *intended* to be removed, that thus every one of Adam's race might be saved."

If any one will point out the difference between this and the view of Arminians, that Christ died, not actually to secure salvation to any, but to render salvation possible to all, we will do homage to his critical discernment. And

then we will propose another riddle for solution: How, upon his acknowledged principle that Christ is a substitute for men, and renders satisfaction to divine justice by vicarious, penal sufferings, if He lays down His life in behalf of the *whole* family of man, Dr. Boyd can be saved from drifting into open and confessed Universalism? The following dreadful alternative is his only refuge:

“Whilst we believe and teach that the atonement of Christ had a general reference to mankind at large, we at the same time hold that in the covenant between the Father and the Son, *special* reference was had to those who shall finally be saved. In other words, the Father covenants to give to the Son, ‘as a reward for the travail of His soul,’ a part of those for whom He dies; that this His death may not be vain as respects the actual salvation of souls.”

Our very flesh creeps as we transcribe these dreadful words, which do not fall short of positive blasphemy. Think of it, reader; Christ receiving as His reward a part only of the souls for whom He dies! the stupendous scheme of grace barely saved from disastrous failure! Christ’s death confessed to be inefficacious, and failing of its design with reference to a part of those for whom He died! and a just and holy God twice exacting the penalty, which, though satisfied by the surety, still takes vengeance upon the principal! Is this, or any thing like this, the doctrine of our standards? Is it not plainly denied, and the definiteness of the atonement affirmed, in all those passages which speak of Christ as “*purchasing reconciliation,*” and as “*certainly and effectually applying and communicating redemption to all those for whom he hath purchased it*”—and as “*fully discharging the debt,* by his obedience and death, of all those that are justified,” and “*making a proper and real and full satisfaction to His Father’s justice in their behalf?*” Is there no distinction here as to the parties whom the atonement was made? Did He lay down His life for the *whole* family of man, when redemption is declared to be

effectually applied to all those for whom it was purchased? If so, how are we to avoid the conclusion that the *whole* family of man will be saved? It was, therefore, with a feeling of sadness, like that one feels at the grave of the dead, that we first read the following challenge of Dr. Dabney; "he demands that we shall say that Christ was *only* the elect's substitute, and bore the guilt *only* of the elect's sins—show us the place where either the Bible or Confession says so." Is it not woven into the whole texture of both? Is it not taught in the whole doctrine of substitution, and of full satisfaction to divine justice by vicarious sufferings? "I lay down my life for the sheep," says the Bible: "neither are any other redeemed by Christ but the elect only," says the Confession of Faith.

We turn then to the committee's report to hear its voice upon this important point; and lo! there is no voice, but on the contrary, a most painful and ominous silence—a silence, too, which is unquestionably intentional; for was it not the committee's object to bring the two bodies together, and here is the very spot at which differences might emerge. But would that there had been only silence! The paper, not content with silence when it should have spoken, speaks at last when silence would have been wisdom: "and is to be freely and sincerely offered to every creature, inasmuch as it leaves *no other obstacle to the pardon of all men under the Gospel, save the enmity and unbelief of those who voluntarily reject it.*" Doubtless there is a construction of this broad and bold declaration upon which the committee can subscribe it *salva fide*, and which we have not the time here to explore; but taken in connexion with the entire silence upon the question whether the atonement be in its intention definite or indefinite, there can be no doubt of the interpretation that will be put upon it as favoring the general atonement theory. Last of all, we have the limitation placed, just where the New School have always placed it, in the decree of election restricting only the ap-

plication. Thus the order is completely reversed in which the purposes of God in reference to human salvation come to be considered: God looking upon the fallen sons of Adam; determining to provide and offer them a Saviour; then electing those to whom that salvation shall be effectually applied. We will not pause to discuss the correctness of this arrangement, but content ourselves with saying that it is not the order recognised in our standards. Thus the Confession, ch. 3, sec. 6, says: "As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ," &c. This redemption being among the means by which the purpose of election is carried out, the latter must be in logical order before the former. Putting these three things together, this section of the committee's report by its very form and structure carries the Assembly over, and, so far as this utterance of the General Assembly can do it, the whole church over to the assertion of an indefinite atonement. If it should be said, the Old School body has always tolerated a diversity of opinion upon the extent of the atonement, we answer, that is altogether a different affair from the Assembly affirming a general atonement, and construing it as the doctrine of the church, contrary, as we believe, both to the spirit and letter of our existing symbols.

We have now completed our review of this important document. Some minor points might well be considered, rather as matters of inquiry than of objection. For example, whether the union of two distinct bodies, coming together by treaty, will affect the historical succession of the Assembly, or jeopard its legal privileges and rights? Whether the Assembly has the constitutional power to pass finally upon the paper of the committee, without sending it down for ratification to the Presbyteries? And whether finally it be expedient to decide a question so materially

affecting the fortunes of the church, at a time when the public mind is too distracted to give it due attention, and when from the circumstances of the country no inconsiderable portion will be shut out from a representation on the floor of the Assembly? But the discussion of points like these we leave to others. We have confined our strictures to the doctrinal basis submitted in the report; and can truthfully declare that never did we undertake a task more reluctantly, and more entirely from a sense of duty to God and the church. It will be observed, too, that we have not assailed the orthodoxy of the report, nor of those by whom it has been framed. Its authors are men who stand high in the confidence and esteem of the whole church; and those of them whom it has been our privilege personally to know, enjoy no small measure of our love. But this very esteem, which they so deservedly enjoy, renders their paper only so much the more dangerous to a confiding church, predisposed to take much upon trust from parties whom she has delighted to honor. We do not impugn the doctrinal purity of any one of them, when we assert the ambiguities of the report to be such as to render it as mischievous a document as could engage the consideration of our highest court. We believe that, if adopted by the Assembly, it will become the nest of a thousand heresies to vex the repose of the church—the source of strifes and controversies which will outlast the generation which framed and accepts it, and leading to possible separations in the future as painful as those which are now attempted to be healed. Under this conviction we have been constrained to lift the voice of warning—“*equo ne credite, Teucri!*” If the United Synod is really at one with us upon the great doctrines of grace, we will go as far as any in overcoming technical difficulties, and will by God’s grace seek to bury all past feuds. And if they are with us in faith and order, let it be ascertained by a square and unreserved adoption of our acknowledged standards, in their obvious and literal im-

port. All these attempts, by conventions and conferences, to construct platforms of union, only prejudice and retard the movement. Let us have no more of this nibbling at the Confession of Faith, and of this paring down its statements to the very minimum of orthodoxy. Let us have no more declarations of adherence to these sacred instruments, with an appendix of reservations and explanations like a codicil annulling a will. A plain, straightforward, honest subscription to the Confession and other symbols, will place the parties on ground which both understand; and there will be union, when alone union can be found, *through the truth*. We pray God that our next Assembly may preëminently be guided by the wisdom which cometh from above, which is first *pure*, then *peaceable*.