

Richmond 14 Mar. 1821

My Dear Sir

With the views and feelings that I now have, I consider it to be my duty to write to you. For several years past, I have, as carefully as I could, watched the movements of certain men in our country, and marked their designs; and I am fully convinced that the church is in danger. I do not by this mean any particular society, but the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The enemy to be feared is Socinianism; the evil, its general prevalence. As, as Dr. Alexander, (to whom I communicated my views and apprehensions) expressed his coincidence of opinion; "I fear that our country is to become another Poland." As briefly as I can, I will state my reasons, and then suggest for your consideration, a plan in general outline, on which I ask your opinion. It is a subject on which the whole intelligence of the church must be brought to bear with all its power. Pray over it; meditate deeply on it; and let me know your views.

My fears respecting the prevalence of Socinianism arise from three sources—The present state of the whole southern and western country—The condition of the church—The genius, the success, and the design of Socinianism.

1. The present state of the country—The majority of the people are out of the church. They know scarcely anything of the grounds and reasons, or the doctrines of Christianity. Their children are not religiously educated. Their habits of living are free, and of every age are much prone to self-indulgence. They know, in general, that infidelity is odious; and they want a system, which will flatter the pride of their understandings, and yet shield them from this odium; which will indulge human depravity, and yet encourage a hope of future happiness. In all this, there is no exaggeration—it is just the ^{situation} ~~condition~~ of the people.

2. The condition of the Church—It is divided into different denominations, and there is considerable jealousy of one towards another. It is not well furnished with ministers; and of these, many are not at all prepared to give instruction. And even among the Presbyterians, whose clergy are best taught of any, there is little preparation to meet and encounter a well-disciplined & well-exercised Socinian. The ministers of that denomination are trained with an especial reference to the defence and propagation of their own peculiarities; and go forth armed at all points for the combat, while most of our clergy have paid little or no attention to the important studies (such for instance as Biblical Criticism in its various departments) which are brought into the controversy. And, owing to the fancied remoteness of the

enemy) our people have not been instructed particularly fearfully in the doctrines that are attacked by the Socinians. So that the people be open ^{to the enemy} ~~to~~ the whole country is no more prepared to resist an invasion of these ~~enemies~~ ^{boss} of the truth, than it would be to oppose a well disciplined army led by experienced generals, by the erection of a few Indian blockhouses.

3. The genius, the success, and the designs of Socinianism - As to its genius: It is bold, confident, and plausible. It pretends to great liberality. Makes a mighty outcry against mystery; and avows itself the advocate of a system perfectly intelligible. It favours indiscriminate communion. It flatters the pride of the understanding, and indulges the depravity of the heart. It throws off the odium of infidelity, and yet lays no restraint on the inclinations. It is in a word a system well adapted to the state & temper of the people. As to its success:- This is truly alarming. The Error has been, for years, creeping in the dark about Boston, but it has gotten strength, and now comes out most boldly. Cambridge University (the oldest & richest literary institution in ~~Europe~~ the United States) is completely under its control. Boston is well nigh Socinianized, and there are now nearly 70 ministers in Massachusetts, wholly corrupted. There is a Theological Seminary at Cambridge, for the express purpose of training up Socinian preachers. They already have thirty young men at it, and their funds are great. They have a splendid house in New York - They have made a lodgment in Philadelphia, in Baltimore, in Charleston, in Lexington. They are like to get Transylvania University into their hands; and the famous Dr. Cooper is now at Columbia. They have two magazines at Boston, and one at Baltimore. They have a Book & Tract Society in this last place, expressly for the purpose of distributing Unitarian works. They have efficient agents in members of Congress from the Eastward, who tempt the Southern men - They have Alumni of Cambridge College in all the States almost; and they to a man are zealous Socinians. Their success has already been great; and in fact they accomplish all their measures - As to their designs, I have no doubt but that they purpose and hope to possess the whole land. One object to which they are looking is the revolutionizing of Andover, and getting possession of that valuable school of the prophets; and they hope for success. Another favourite scheme is to get possession of the important seminaries to the south & the West; and for this purpose many schemes are laid, and much intriguing is carried on. Their Magazine & their Book & Tract Society at Baltimore have a reference to this great design. They wish to work on public opinion as speedily as possible. Another favourite object is to make lodgments in all the large towns. Soon they will have a chapel in Washington, Richmond, Petersburg, Raleigh &c. &c. And when these present objects shall be effected, then the difficulty will be over, and the country will soon be theirs.

4. Besides these distinct causes of apprehension there are others of a miscellaneous character, which I must submit to your consideration. There is, unhappily, much local feeling in different sections of the country. The agitation of the Missions question has greatly exacerbated it. The South & the North have been drawn up in battle array, and the conflict has been sore. Local feelings operate on Christians, as well as on the world. The Philadelphians think their city the London of America, and want to make it the centre of every thing undertaken. The same is the feeling of the New Yorkers. The same of the people of New England. We must go to them, and aid their plans, and receive their Magazines free. Now while the good men to the North are very good judges of what suits them, they know but little of what is adapted to the Southern people. Hence they send out tracts containing things, which go violently against Southern prejudices. Hence, not infrequently, there are articles in their Magazines, which, much to the surprise of the Editors (because they intended no such thing) create great offence. In fact; in our extensive and diversified country, it is impossible for any ^{one} set of men to know what is adapted to all parts. Thus it happens, that the orthodox are not all united; their force is not concentrated; they pull different ways; and often defeat their own purposes. In the mean time, the Socinians are united from Maine to Missouri. And they have sagacity enough to arrange their plans so as not to encounter local feelings; and they have zeal enough to make sacrifices of time, of money, and of labour, to promote their cause. They are all awake, while the orthodox are in profound repose. To illustrate this case, they erected an establishment in a state holding slavery. Baltimore was selected as the important place. A Magazine was issued there. In less than a month, it had largely more than a thousand subscribers. Many in Boston and Salem subscribe for it. The ablest men in Cambridge write for it. In fact, it is so supported to the north, that they are able to distribute it gratuitously to the south, and they do so. In like manner of the Tract Society. Thus they cooperate, and work free of local prejudices; while the orthodox take a very different course.

I now appeal to you, whether it is not time to take the alarm. Whether any power that we possess ought not to be put in requisition. It is in vain for us to look to the north. We cannot, in present circumstances, expect any material aid from thence. Under God, we must muster our own resources, and depend on our own strength. I want the United wisdom of the Christians to the South to be best to bear on the question, what shall we do? Hear my plan; and tell me what you think.

1. We want a Seminary to the South, in which a perfect Theological Education can be given to young men raised among ourselves. First however, the Seminary at Princeton must be put beyond all embarrassment. We will help to do that, and then they must aid us. A Southern, General Assembly's Seminary is what I propose. But in the mean time something must be done speedily.
2. Then, I propose that the preachers now in the ministry do their very best to prepare themselves for the Socinian controversy; and to instruct their people in those

doctrines, that the Socinians attack. But let them be very cautious how they speak of Socinians in harsh language, so as to raise the cry of persecution.

3. Let us do all that we can to promote the education of pious youth for the ministry.
4. In anticipation of what is to come I have made arrangements to make my magazine as effectual a defence as possible against this error. But its circulation is so limited that it can do but little good - would it not be well to encourage the people to subscribe for it, and endeavour to extend its influence? To suit the taste of the age, I have enlarged the department of Intelligence, without diminishing the other part, or increasing the price.
5. Is it not necessary to form an association for procuring or printing books and tracts especially suited to the present state of things, and distributing them as widely as possible? Let us learn from the enemy; and be prudent, united, active.

1881
Circular from J. H. Hill

I pray you take this subject under your most serious consideration - Consider it well, and pray over it - think of the interests that are at stake; and of all that the Lord our Saviour, that the Church, and the country, and precious souls demand of us, and let me hear from you as soon as possible.

I am Dear

With highest regard

Yrs in the gospel

J. H. Hill