



THE

17

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1854,

BY

REV. STUART ROBINSON,

REPRINTED FROM THE

SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW.

---



JOSEPH M. WILSON,  
SOUTH-WEST CORNER OF NINTH AND ARCH STREETS,  
PHILADELPHIA,  
1855.



## THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1854.

---

WE recur, at this late period, and after they have lost all their freshness and novelty, to the proceedings of the late General Assembly, with a view chiefly to discuss the true interpretation of the more significant of them. Some of them are of importance, because of their direct and palpable bearing upon great and vital interests of religion. Others, because they involve principles, far reaching in their consequences, and widely extending in their application to the great measures of the Church. Others, because of their significance, as indicating a movement of the mind of the Church, more clearly and strongly in a right direction as we think, than perhaps any other since 1837 and 1838.

And that they have been generally so regarded, is apparent from the strong tendency manifested among the more earnest supporters of certain measures,—mistaking and misinterpreting many acts of the last Assembly, by reason of their strong partiality for favourite schemes, to claim for them an endorsement which they did not receive; to fancy issues made before the Assembly which were not made, and adjudications of questions which were not mooted,—the final closing of controversies which were not opened, and battles won which were not fought.

Following the order of the Minutes, and aiming to select for remark, chiefly such topics as relate to questions of general and permanent importance, we notice first:

### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE NEW SYNODS OF BALTIMORE AND ALLEGHANY.

The erection of these two Synods, thereby reducing materially two of the largest Synods of the Church, is an event whose importance is by no means to be estimated by the local conveniences and advantage thereby secured to the parties

immediately concerned, great as these manifestly are. That the formation of the Synod of Baltimore, involved other results, viz.: a removal of one of the Boards from Philadelphia, was predicted on the floor of the house, and the anticipation of such a result may have been at the bottom of the otherwise unaccountable zeal of the opposition to the measure. And though any such purpose was earnestly disavowed by the immediate representatives of the new movement, as among the reasons which induced them to desire the new Synod, still the tendency of public opinion in the Church is manifestly toward such a change of the location of the Boards, and the measure in question may in some respects facilitate the project.

However this may be, these two acts of the Assembly, in the way of equalizing the Synodical arrangements of the Church, have an important bearing on another question. We mean as a preparatory step toward the solution of the difficulties now beginning to be felt from the inconvenient bulk of the General Assembly as at present constituted, and the consequent impossibilities of any adequate attention to the constantly increasing business, which the rapid growth of the Church is throwing upon that body. This fact, which formed the staple of the argument for judicial commissions in the discussion which arose near the close of the Sessions, suggested the proposition moved by Dr. Breckenridge, but for want of time not acted on,—and by the operation of a rule singularly unfortunate in some instances, (since it is often as important to know what did *not*, as what *did* pass,) excluded from the Minutes,—to send down to the Presbyteries an overture proposing a change from Presbyterial to Synodical representation in the General Assembly, with provision for a re-apportionment of representation every five or ten years. Some such change must inevitably soon take place; and it is well to have attention directed to the subject in time, before it shall, in connexion with some exciting controversy, be forced upon the Church, under circumstances unfavourable to a calm and well matured decision.

The proposition for a Synodical representation in the Assembly is by no means a novel one. As early as 1820, the scheme was suggested by a Synod in the west, and urged on the ground of the difficulty of reaching from the far west, the General Assembly, whose meetings at that period were fixed at Philadelphia. These reasons have now lost their force, but other more important and permanent reasons have

arisen, calling for a change. In addition to the reasons already suggested from the present unwieldy bulk of the Assembly, and the consequent delay in the transaction of business, and from the same cause this difficulty made more incapable of remedy by prolonging the time of the Sessions: the question of expense to the Church is not unworthy of consideration, especially at a time when great interests of the Church are hindered for want of funds. At an average expense for travel, &c., of fifty to sixty dollars, not a large estimate, all things considered, the Assembly, as now constituted, with some three hundred and twenty members, if full, costs the church, (or some one else,) annually, from fifteen to twenty thousand dollars. Now, when it is considered that half the number could transact the business in less time and far better, and probably represent the Church just as well, and that therefore one half of this sum is expended for that which is a hinderance to the work which the Assembly has to do, it may well be doubted whether the ends to be gained by a large representation from the Presbyteries are worth the outlay.

Independent of these considerations, is the additional fact, that the present scheme of representation is in its results very unequal and unjust. The Synod of Nashville, for instance, for 35 Ministers has 5 Ministers, and for 3100 Communicants, has 5 elders on the floor of the Assembly,—one Minister for a constituency of 7 Ministers, one Elder for a constituency of 600 Communicants. The Synod of S. Carolina, to represent 113 Ministers has 6 Ministers, and to represent 11,300 communicants has 6 Ruling Elders on the floor of the Assembly,—one Minister to a constituency of some 20, and one Elder to a constituency of some 2000. Thus, one Minister of the Synod of Nashville, has the ecclesiastical power of three Ministers of the Synod of South Carolina, and a Church member in the Synod of Nashville the power of three in the Synod of S. Carolina. But, if this inequality existed only in exceptional cases, the injustice of it might be extenuated, on the score of the necessity of exceptions in the working out of all general rules. In reference to this subject, however, the inequality referred to extends far beyond individual instances. An examination of the tabular views in the minutes will show, that arranging the 30 Synods in three classes according to their representation, as equal to, above or below, the average representation of the whole Church in

the General Assembly, (which is about one Minister to every 14 Ministers, and one Ruling Elder to every 1400 Communicants,) we shall have an equal number of Synods in each class, and a comparison of the average representation of the classes, will result in a like inequality. Thus, (throwing out in the reckoning, the Foreign Mission Synod of N. India, and the Foreign Missionary Presbyteries from the Synod of New York, as not coming under ordinary rule,) the ten Synods of Albany, New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Virginia, Pittsburg, Alleghany, Wheeling, and South Carolina, (all above the average, containing together 1,115 Ministers, and 131,821 members, over half the ministers, and not far from two-thirds of the members of the whole Church,) are entitled to 64 Ministers and 64 Elders, representatives on the floor of the Assembly; that is, an average of one representative for every 18 to 19 Ministers, and one Ruling Elder for about every 2000 Communicants. Passing by now, the nine Synods of the second class, whose representation is about the average of the whole Church, as above stated,—then the ten Synods of the third class,—namely, Buffalo, Iowa, Northern Indiana, Wisconsin, Nashville, Texas, California, Mississippi, Arkansas and Georgia, containing 408 Ministers and 28,000 Communicants, (little more than one-sixth of her Ministers and one-ninth of the members of the whole Church,) are entitled to 43 Ministers and 43 Ruling Elders, as representatives on the floor of the Assembly; that is, one Minister for a constituency of 9, and one Ruling Elder to a constituency of 700 members. Thus taking ten Synods as a class, in each case, the vote of one Minister in the third is equal to the vote of two Ministers in the first, and the vote of one church member in the third, equal to that of three in the first. It is obvious, that on the occurrence of any great question which might divide the vote of the Assembly, according to this classification, the decision of the Assembly might not be the true expression of the voice of the Church.

We regard every such change as tends to reduce the larger Synods to the average size, as an important preparatory step toward a Synodical representation and a consequent reduction of the number of the General Assembly, and an equalization of the representation therein. Such an arrangement, in the first place, better adapts the Synod to perform the important functions which it was designed to perform in our system; thereby increasing its influence and importance as a repre-

sentation of the Churches of a large district; and in the second place, will render it less difficult for the Synod to choose such a delegation, fewer in number, as may truly represent the Ministers and Churches of the larger district in the General Assembly. With the whole Church arranged into 30 Synods of from 75 to 100 Ministers, with a proportionate number of Churches,—a general Assembly composed of 2 or 3 Ministers, and as many Ruling Elders from each Synod,—and numbering, therefore, from 120 to 150 members, would more truly represent the whole Church, than the Assembly as at present constituted, and far more wisely and efficiently direct our ecclesiastical affairs. The provision for a re-portionment of representation every ten years, would be a sufficient remedy for any inequality that might gradually again grow up, and, at the same time, adapt the construction of the body to the expansion of the Church in this new country.

#### CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE GERMAN REFORMED CHURCH.

A resolution referred to the Committee on Correspondence with Foreign Bodies, and reported back to the Assembly by that Committee, proposed, that “in view of the peculiar position of the General Synod of the German Reformed Church toward the Theological Seminary at Mercersburg, whose Professors, we are pained to witness, have so notoriously become antagonistic to Protestantism, and lest a continuance of our correspondence may be understood as countenancing the fundamental errors which they are labouring to disseminate; and lest we be regarded as disapproving the course of those in that communion who have so nobly contended against them,—a respectable number of whom, we learn, have wholly withdrawn from her General Synod, on account of the alarming prevalence of those errors in that body; therefore, this General Assembly will suspend its correspondence with the General Synod of the German Reformed Church, and decline sending a delegate to that body.”

This resolution the Assembly declined acting upon, but at the same time declined appointing a delegate to the General Synod. Under all the circumstances, this was, doubtless, the most wise and prudent course. In the first place, because so formal a renunciation of correspondence with a sister Church ought not to be passed, under any circumstances,

without careful and mature consideration. In the second place, because, just at this present time, our peculiar relations to other bodies than the German Reformed Synod, are becoming such, as to demand a careful review and reconsideration of this whole matter of correspondence with Foreign Bodies. The discussions and the action of several of the New England Associations since the meeting of the General Assembly, all indicate plainly that the time has come for a distinct and clear understanding of what is involved in such a correspondence by delegates or otherwise, between ourselves and other ecclesiastical bodies.

The existing arrangement for an interchange of Delegates, had its foundation originally in the assumed agreement "in doctrines and forms of worship" between Presbyterians and Congregationalists. That such agreement did at the time substantially exist, we have no doubt. That the tendencies of New England Congregationalism have, of late years, been to widen the difference, by a constantly growing departure from her platform of faith, and by substituting for the practically Presbyterian government of the early Congregationalism, an irresponsible Independency, we have no less doubt. These facts, in connexion with the increasing disposition of the New England bodies to avail themselves of every opportunity to intermeddle with the internal affairs of our Church, as shown by the discussions and acts of these bodies during the past year, conspire to render it a matter of grave consideration to the General Assembly, whether the time has not come, if not for terminating an arrangement, the original reasons for which no longer exist, at least for coming to a very distinct understanding as to the grounds on which, and the conditions under which, it shall be continued. We regard the resolution proposing to suspend correspondence with the German Reformed Synod, as very opportunely calling the attention of the Church to the general subject; and we regard the action of the Assembly upon that resolution, as eminently wise, considering it as simply the expression of the sentiment, that the question is one demanding farther and more mature deliberation.

#### THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES.

The results of the action of the last Assembly, in filling the several vacant Professorships in Seminaries under the care of the Assembly, has no doubt been hailed with heartfelt

satisfaction by the Church generally. The final establishment of a third Seminary at Danville, and under prospects so flattering, we regard as an important event in our ecclesiastical history. Not only important, as evincing the remarkable zeal and liberality of the Presbyteries of Kentucky, and as the opening of another nursery for the training of the rising ministry—but still more important as expressing, in connexion with the founding of Alleghany Seminary, the settled purpose of the Church, to depend for the education of the ministry, not upon one great central Seminary, but upon sectional schools. We need not now enlarge upon the immense importance of such a policy,—the dangers that must inevitably attend upon the centralization of power in any one school—no matter how perfect and pure the men who are selected to wield it—the vast extent of territory and the varied population to which the ministers of our Church must adapt itself—and the large increase of the ministry, which the wants of our home and foreign field so loudly call for—all go to confirm the wisdom of providing numerous sectional schools of theology.

#### ACTION ON THE REPORT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

There was nothing, in itself considered, in the action of the Assembly on this subject, of marked importance—the resolutions of the Assembly being very general, and the discussion on them being rather a dispute as to what ground the Education Board intended to occupy, rather than the merits of the measures or doctrines of the Board. The discussions which have been had on the whole matter, have obviously arisen from the unusually general and indefinite terms, in which the propounders of the new doctrines and measures on the education question have chosen to express themselves. We have no desire to enter into the discussion of the question here, but confine ourselves simply to the point,—in how far the resolutions of the last Assembly justify the opinion of the Repertory, (Bib. Rep. July, p. 554,) that “all these resolutions sustain and endorse the course of the Board of Education.” In order to a correct judgment on this point, it will be proper to review, in few words, the history of this controversy, and set forth clearly, and exactly what has been the course of the Board in relation to the mooted question of secular education.

This question, so far as concerns the Board, had its origin

in the legislation of some New England States, and especially of New York in 1842 and 1843 and subsequently, excluding all religious teaching from the public schools. Owing to the general defection from the faith and the wide-spread latitudinarianism in New England, and the skilful use of his position to control the political demagogues by Bishop Hughes in New York—the cry of sectarianism was raised, and a system of legislation adopted on the subject of education, which, once their purpose to exclude the Bible from the schools was accomplished, the Romanists themselves were the first to pronounce “Atheistical and Godless.”

One of two courses was now left to the real friends of popular education. Either to arouse the people to resist these outrageous proceedings and restore the Bible, or to renounce the public schools altogether, leaving them to the infidels,—and establish schools under some other than State patronage for the children of those who held to religious culture as an essential part of education. Very unwisely, as we think, the latter course was resolved upon by those whose position, intellectual superiority and high claims on public confidence, would have provided a leadership for popular opinion, worthy the great occasion; and without doubt, as recent events clearly show, they would, with a little courageous resistance have utterly overthrown the infidel host. For, in the first place, the legislation referred to is so clearly a tyrannical interference of the State with the prerogatives of parents, that aside from any question of religion, the people could not fail to resist such an encroachment upon the liberties even of a minority, once pointed out to them. In the second place, the political power in those States was clearly in the hands of those who held to the Bible as a means of education, if only they had been made to understand the real question involved, and to understand one another. In the third place, after all the noise, neither New York, nor two or three of the New England States with New York, constituted the whole Union; nor did it follow that the victory of Infidelity, Romanism and indifferentism in New York, did by any means, render it useless for the friends of education to strive for their principles in other States.

Acting, however, on this view of the case, the proposition immediately began to be agitated in our church, to employ the church as foster-mother to the common schools, in place of the State. In 1844, a committee was raised which reported finally, through Dr. James W. Alexander, to the As-

sembly of 1846. In this report the prerogatives since claimed for the church, as a party to education, are no where set forth. But an eloquent and able plea is made simply in behalf of the thing to be gained, religious education. The Report throughout, with extreme modesty and diffidence, makes suggestions as to the duties of Presbyterian people in the case, and closes with the declaration, "It is too much to expect that such a revolution should be attempted at once, still less to expect that it should be made part of a uniform church scheme."

Had the new educational movement confined itself in the spirit of this report, to efforts for counteracting the growing tendencies of infidel and Popish legislation to destroy the public schools,—or even to making such provision as the emergency called for, to supply the lack of such schools as were no longer safe, or to call into action more fully the old spirit of Presbyterianism,—from the first and long before the modern theories of the prerogatives of the church as a party or *the* party to education, famous as the practical educator of the people; there had never been two parties in the Presbyterian Church on this subject. In an address before the Assembly of 1847, which seems to have furnished the groundwork of the subsequent course of the Board of Education, Dr. Hodge, after explicitly declaring that the exclusion of religion from the public schools "is an unauthorized encroachment on the religious rights of the people," instead of proposing a bold and manly resistance to the tyrannical legislation which is thus encroaching on the people's rights, in the very direct manner which the people have of reaching such tyrants,—at the polls,—he proposed on the contrary to renounce in effect, the public schools, so far as concerns the Presbyterian Church, and take the education of the people out of the hands of the State. The positions taken are:

1. That there "may be great doubt whether God ever intended to devolve upon the State the religious education of the young."

2. "That this duty rests upon the church—*the school is her peculiar and appropriate province.*"

3. "By a strange perversion, after long enlisting *the State as her agent*, she has come to think education the work of the State."

4. "It is a reproach to Protestants, that Romanists have been the first to discern this necessity," of declaring off from

the control of the State, and of asserting the right of the children to be taught religion.”—

5. “This we must do, *let the State take what course it may.* We should carry out the good old Presbyterian plan of having one or more schools in every Parish, a classical academy in every Presbytery, and a college in every Synod, *all under the control of the church.*” “*The teacher to be appointed, and the instruction directed, by the Session; and the Pastor having it as a part of his stated weekly duty to visit and examine the scholars and to participate in their instruction.*”

Here is, in brief, the foreshadowing of the course of the Board of Education. It involves, as will be seen, the practical withdrawal of Presbyterians from the public schools, the placing of schools, academies and colleges, universally under direct control of the church courts. And this change, on the ground that it is the special duty and prerogative of the church, to manage the education of children,—and a usurpation on the part of the State,—save as the *agent* of the church, so to do.

Now, the resolutions of the last General Assembly do not fully endorse this course of the Board of Education,—for the plain reason that the Assembly endorses the Christian training, especially by parents at home, teachers in institutions of learning, &c., in other words, the ancient views of the duty of the church, before the new theories of the Board have come into fashion,—and these resolutions express also, “*entire friendliness to all other educational efforts, not positively injurious,*”—and still farther, the resolutions declare that “the Assembly has never *denied the importance of State co-operation*, but, on the contrary, rejoices in the general enlightenment of the masses under the public school system, and hopes that all Presbyterians will continue as heretofore, to be known as true friends of general education,” &c. Any one who has kept pace with the discussion and reports of the Board, since 1847, will see that so far from “sustaining and endorsing” the foregoing declarations, the resolutions are directly in the face of many of the schemes of the Board hitherto, and in fact, of nearly every *distinctive* feature of the Board’s policy. The only portion of the Assembly’s action which really sustains and endorses the Board, is the very remarkable parenthesis in Resolution No. 7,—“That the General Assembly (*by affirming the church to be one of the parties in education, and by acting on that principle in accord-*

ance with the practice of all the Reformed Churches,) has never denied the importance of State co-operation," &c.

Touehing this remarkable parenthesis, we have to say:

1. It is peculiarly significant in its form, as a true representative of the course of the Board which it endorses, in too many of the cases in which the Board has presented their peculiar views for the Assembly's judgment. This is the standing complaint of those who differ from the Board, that these new doctrines of church prerogative are never brought fairly and squarely to the test of a vote on their own intrinsic merits, but evermore *hid thus away in a parenthesis*: The deceitful dose covered up in the coating of sweet syrup, with whose taste we have long been familiar. These very resolutions, Nos. 5, 6 and 7, are a fair sample of the method of the Board before the Assembly, three lines or less of the new doctrine in a parenthesis, preceded and followed by twenty-five lines of what, if it were consistent with the dignity of the occasion, and might not offend our Irish friends, we could find a term to characterize, but what we are content to denominate *compliment*, to all sorts of popular opinions and favourite educational measures.

2. The terms of the parenthesis itself, are sufficiently vague and indefinite, and may obviously be expanded or contracted in their meaning to sustain and endorse almost any variety and degree of church educational measures. Nor is it now, for the first time, a subject of complaint, that the discussion of these questions of church education in any, or in all our courts alike, has been chiefly, not so much the question, "is the Board of Education right?" as "what does the Board of Education mean?" It is manifestly from serious defect in some quarter, that after seven years of discussion on so practical a subject, the debate should still be on propositions so very vague as "*The church is a party to education,*"—" *The church has a right to educate?*" We are constrained, in spite of our reverence for the real dignity and high worth of the excellent advocates of these views, and our warm and heartfelt regard to them personally, to express the distaste we have felt toward their favourite modes of expressing their theories, in vague and, to us, unmeaning and almost "eant" phraseology. The real question, as presented in these measures, is simply "ought the Presbyterian people of this country to withdraw their aid and influence from the public schools, and is the church

bound in her *organized capacity* to provide a system of secular education for her people? Is it the prerogative of a church session, and their duty to be *ex officio* common school trustees? No one can deny that here is presented the real issue. That it is the duty of Presbyterian Ministers and Ruling Elders, as educated and patriotic Christian men, to use all their influence for the promotion of religious education in the schools, and of Presbyterian people to see that as far as lies in their power, their children are provided with such schools, was an obligation felt and acted upon long anterior to 1847, and felt and acted upon since 1847, fully as much by those who have opposed, as those who have favoured the distinctive plan and doctrines of the Board of Education. In giving utterance to these propositions, the Assembly no more endorses the Board of Education than when approving of honesty, integrity, sincerity, and zeal in God's service, the Assembly sustains and endorses the Board of Education. But when it comes to these vague generalities,—"the church is a party to education,"—"the church has a right to educate,"—"the church has, as her divine commission to teach," &c.,—propositions that not only any man of any party, may with equal propriety affirm, nay, which the same man may with perfect consistency, both *affirm* and *deny* at the same time,—we must demur to the plea, "the church is a party to education." So the church is a party to all financial and business contracts as between Christian men; for integrity violated by any of her members, she must enforce discipline. If it is a logical sequence from the first proposition that the church sessions are, therefore, bound as such, to establish separate schools and superintend them, it is equally a logical sequence from the second, that the church sessions shall constitute a tribunal for deciding on cases of contract and questions of business between man and man. Precisely as the church has, as one great end to promote honesty and integrity among men, and has a right to apply the rule of discipline to her members who violate, in this regard, the law of Christ's house, so in like manner it is one end of the church to promote knowledge and intelligence generally, and religious knowledge and intelligence particularly; and it is her right to apply discipline in case of parents who neglect their duty to their children in this regard, and violate the solemn vows imposed upon them at the baptism of their children. The church is a party to education just in so far as the declared creed and constitution of

the church makes her a party, and just in so far as the means for executing her work are pointed out in the book, and no farther. Here, as in so many other questions of late agitated in the church, the question is easily and best settled by going directly to the book. There the church is made a party *indirectly*, to the education of children, in the Ordinance of Baptism, requiring of parents then and there to teach their children. But let it be observed, the Book at the same time recognises the parents as the party, and the only party *directly*, to the education of their children. The error as we conceive of the politicians, who claim for the State the control of what children shall be taught as against the parents, and the error of those, who claim for the church a direct right to educate children irrespective of parents, are analogous, in both alike ignoring the complete and entire right of parents. God has given to the parents the direct control, and imposed on them the corresponding duty—the parent is the party to educate, and, in any real and literal sense, the only party. The state, for reasons of expediency, ought to provide means to enable the parent to discharge his duty to his children, not assume for the parent his duties, and say what the child shall or shall not learn. The church has no right, direct, over the children at all, but through the vow of the parents to educate them properly; and the only duty of the church is, in case the parent is unable to provide means, to administer to the parent's necessities in this regard, just as in any other particular, and on the same principle, as inability to provide for the temporal wants of the children. But as to the proposition, the church is a party, in the sense of affirming a corresponding duty of the church in *her organized capacity*, and of direct right to provide common school education, *under direct control of the officers of the church*, as such, we contend the Assembly has never endorsed, nor will be likely to endorse any such proposition nakedly made. We go farther, and maintain the Assembly has no right to endorse any such dogma. It is going beyond the book. Not only is no such prerogative claimed, and no corresponding obligation recognised in our standards, but the silence of the standards is of that sort in which "silence is greater than speech." The various officers of the church are fully provided for, ministers, elders, and deacons, but no such officer as the church school-master. The duties of the elders are clearly laid down, but among them, nothing of

their office as school trustees. The minister, among his various duties, as ruler, teacher, minister, ambassador, is nowhere declared to be *ex officio* a pedagogue. The deacons, whose functions also have been so utterly forgotten, are not trustees of a school corporation. The church sessions have no such duties imposed as regulating the school, appointing the teachers, &c. Nor among the duties of Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly, are specified any duties of the sort, which of late have given rise, in so many meetings of our church courts, to angry debates and waste of time about College trustees, to the exclusion of the peculiar business of a court of Jesus Christ.

And this again suggests the thought, that great evil practically results to the church from the assuming this new prerogative, and imposing on the church officers corresponding duties. The tendency of the church is ever to formalism—and it is obvious, that under this new view of official duties, the practical effect will soon be, that the people will select elders with a view to the character and representation of the school, rather than the purity and piety of the church. Those will be looked for—not best qualified as prayerful and godly men to rule and minister in the church—but those rather, who will be best qualified as school trustees. The professional man—lawyer or physician, often not being the most devout, but the best educated and therefore best qualified to discharge his duty of trustee in school, will be chosen to the eldership. The allusion in this remarkable parenthesis to the practice of the Reformed Churches as a precedent, is particularly unfortunate. Dr. Hodge in his Address in 1847, and many of the Essays on the subject from the Board, have shown *how* the Reformed Churches were connected with the public education of the country, through their connexion with the State. But it is the peculiar glory of the Presbyterian Church in this land, to bear her testimony against any such connexion between the church and the State, as in its very nature dangerous to the interests of religion. For this reason, precedents from the Reformed Churches of Europe, in any case relating to measures of church policy, are rather evidence against, than in favour of, any cause which they may be cited to support in the American church. It is obvious that from our peculiar circumstances, exposed at all times, through the influx both of ministers and people who have been educated under the church

and State system, to the infusion of the heresies that inhere in that system, we should be ever on the watch against, rather than in search after, their systems of action. One great cause of the confusion that ever prevails in our midst, and the too prevalent want of clear apprehension of the true working out of our system, we are disposed to attribute to the constant influx of prejudices and errors from New England Congregationalism, on the one hand, and the prejudices of church and stateism from across the water, on the other. It is on this very account that we press the importance of careful study of the principles of our constitution, rather than of precedents and usages, and the theory of "strict construction of our constitution, not only in reference to this question of the right of the church to educate, but of all measures proposed for the church's action. Here is the ground of our complaint against the "course of the Board of Education,"—that in a matter so important, in the claim to prerogatives so lofty, and duties so wide extending, the claim is urged in terms so vague and uncertain, and defended by arguments so indefinite in their point and application. Take the proposition in parenthesis. The General Assembly (by affirming that the church is a party to education," &c.) What are we to understand by "*the church?*" If we look to the reasonings of the Board, we find that the church in this connexion represents two very distinct ideas, according as the exigencies of the argument require—sometimes in the sense of the individual Christian people, who looking to their duties as parents, endow and patronise schools in which religion forms one of the subjects studied,—in other cases in a vague sense, the church, as denoting the same people, represented in some formal capacity, by a Presbytery or a Synod, acting for the time being, as an educational convention, passing resolutions for manufacturing a public opinion in favour of some educational enterprise to which the body has no direct official relation whatever. In either of these cases, of course, no one disputes the general proposition, which is in effect the simple truism—that Christian people ought to patronise Christian schools. But, in the distinctive proposition and measures of the Board, "the church" is always taken for the body of Christian people, *as represented in the courts of the church*, in their capacity as such. This is altogether a different affair. The same is true of the other term—"a party,"—which determines nothing, as we have shown already; if "a

party" in the sense of one who incidentally has an interest in, no one disputes; but if a party in the sense of having a controlling power and corresponding responsibility for children, then we utterly deny. *The parent, in the strict and proper sense, is the only party to education.* The State and the Church alike, are parties only incidentally; and any claim of either, except *under and through the parent, and for incidental ends*, is absolute tyranny, as much in one case as in the other.

So also of the third term "education"—a term notoriously vague and indefinite. In so far as education relates to the preparation for intelligent citizenship, the State has an interest incidental as a party,—in so far as education concerns holiness of heart and life, the church has incidentally an interest as a party in education. But to say that education as training in religion is an affair of State, or education as training to good citizenship is an affair of the church, is equally in the face of the rights of the parent, as against either church or State.

Nor is this objectionable vagueness confined to the use of terms in expressing the proposition. The arguments advanced in behalf of the new doctrine, are to us exceedingly unsatisfactory as specimens of logic, though always excellent in their spirit. Keeping in mind that the main point to be established, is simply whether the church, as such, and in her organized capacity, should set up a scheme of secular education, with sessions, *ex officio*, for school trustees; and Presbyteries, curators of the corresponding High schools; and Synods regents of the Colleges: look for instance at any of the formal papers on this subject, as specimens of argument on this proposition. We may select as a fair sample, the Report of 1852, which discusses "Who are the parties in education—the rights and responsibilities of each." The proposition, "the church is a party in education," is sustained by the following arguments:

1. The church is a party, "because the true objects and nature of education necessarily include religion."

2. "Because teaching is one of the functions of the church;" and here it is expressly said, "the question is how far the teaching of *other things* besides pure religion is embraced *within the scope of ecclesiastical authorities.*"

3. "Because her children are members of the church."

4. "Because the ordinance of Baptism justifies the church

in acting as a party in education and in establishing for her children religious institutions."

5. "Because the church *has a great interest in the work.*"

6. "Because she is able *effectually to superintend and promote the work.*"

7. "The history of the church proves it to be a lawful party in the training of the rising generation."

8. "The revelations of the eternal world will disclose that the church was a party to education."

Now, we submit, with all respect to the source from which the argument comes, whether this is the sort of reasoning whereon one of the most remarkable claims of prerogative,—one of the most immense responsibilities, and one of the most solemn obligations of duty with every officer and private member of the church,—should be allowed to rest? This sort of discourse, however appropriate to the platform in Exeter Hall, or in the Tabernacle, is not the sort of reasoning surely for a great church paper, to control and direct the responsible action of a high court of Jesus Christ. If any body of men in the world, from the high official responsibilities under which, and the important ends towards which, and the definite and restricted powers by which, they act, should have propositions clearly made and logically argued, it should be our General Assembly.

Nothing has impressed us more strongly, in reviewing the papers connected with this whole subject, than the evidence everywhere exhibited in the papers, that their authors, evidently men of great piety, learning, zeal and earnestness, had been driven by some excitement from without, into the positions which they take first, and then set about to find reasons to justify the positions. To this cause we are disposed to attribute many of the incidental views expressed in the papers—as "that the *parent is an agent for the church,—the State an agent for the church in education,*"—though freely admitting elsewhere that the parent is chiefly the party responsible. So, too, with the analogy from the duty of the church to provide for her poor, though the State also makes provision, individuals, as men and Christians, are bound to provide for the poor,—all in apparently utter forgetfulness of the fact, that in the very organization of the church, her ordinances and officers support the poor of the church. It is expressly provided. Has not the church deacons, for this very end? Yes; but has the church schoolmasters? If the

advocates of this new view will show that the book provides for the office of schoolmaster, as it does for that of Deacon, the analogy would be of force. So, also, the argument derived from the exigencies of missionaries among the heathen, which obviously, however it bear any resemblance to the case in question, has no relevancy, since it is arguing from an admitted case of exception to the general circumstances of the church. In this connexion we might refer, also, to some very extraordinary views of the right of the State as a party, in an article in the Repertory for July, 1854. Lest we be thought to misrepresent, we quote the case in question:

“All the arguments which go to prove the right of the State to provide for the education of the people, go to establish her right and duty of making that education religious. If the design of the State is the promotion of the public good, —if religious education is necessary for the attainment of that object,” &c.

“It may be objected to this argument, that *since the preaching of the Gospel is essential to the public good, the State is under obligation to secure the preaching of the Gospel to the people.* So IT WOULD, were *there not other agencies,*” &c. The point to which we refer here, more particularly, is the rights and responsibilities of the State in regard to religion, as measured simply by the *expediency* of interfering with it. The confusion of ideas here is so remarkably analogous to the indefiniteness of views in reference to the prerogatives of the church, of which we have complained above, that we think the two cases remarkably illustrate one another, and both alike, go to establish the very important consequences of confounding the limits and obscuring the marks that God has made clear, between the three Divine institutions, the church, the family, and the State. If the above argument be correct, then the only reason why Congress, or one of the States, shall not provide and send forth preachers to the wastes of our land, is because the thing can be better done by *other agencies.* But, in large portions of our country, it is *not* done by other agencies. What then? Either it is better not done at all, than that the State shall do it; if so, the argument falls to the ground, or, if the argument is good, the State of Pennsylvania, or Virginia, should be called on at once, to make the provision of the means of grace for their destitute fields. We think we can here discover traces of the influence

of the study of precedents of the Reformed churches, in giving to an American Presbyterian mind this strong bias toward large powers over the question of religion. The argument above quoted, is precisely the argument of European advocates of Church and State, wanting only one simple link, to wit: as it is the State's duty to provide a religion, so it is a plain duty to provide the *best* religion, and of course, to exclude from the State all religions that interfere with the chosen one. Add this clause, the logic of which is indisputable after the former argument, and we have precisely the reasoning of Vattel's famous chapter on religion.

#### REPORT AND RESOLUTIONS ON SYSTEMATIC BENEVOLENCE.

This action of the Assembly, we would cite as one of the instances, in which the act of Assembly is an indication of a movement of the mind of the church in a right direction. As yet, this Report of the Committee,—and especially the first and second Resolutions,—seems not to have excited the attention which either the subject intrinsically demands, or the bold statement of the truth, with its obvious consequences, would have led us to anticipate. A very remarkable paper, founded on this action of the Assembly, in form of an address to the churches under their care, from the Presbytery of Baltimore,—which, we learn, is to be distributed widely, through the benevolence of some gentlemen in that city,—gives evidence of an appreciation of the importance of this subject in that part of the church, and we hope will be the means of arousing attention to the views of the Assembly's Report. The distinctive peculiarity of these Resolutions, consists in their recalling the minds of Christian people to the fact, of late apparently forgotten, that our book makes all needful provision for the raising and disbursing funds for objects of beneficence, as a regular and ordinary duty of God's people. That it is not a measure, but a doctrine,—not simply resting upon the obligation to obey the exhortation of the General Assembly or the Board, but on the obligations to obey Christ's ordinance. Not one of the things which the Assembly recommends merely by resolution, but one of the matters of faith and practice over which the courts of the church have power in the administration of authority, and the right to call delinquents to account.

The Resolutions of the Assembly go to the bottom of the

subject. And the principles of the Resolutions, fully carried out, will, necessarily, bring about an entire change in the whole manner and spirit of the church operations. If the contribution to pious uses is one of the stated ordinances of worship, and to be attended to whenever the people assemble for the regular service, as much as the prayer, praise, and reading the Scripture and preaching,—(as is declared in the Directory for Worship,—chap. 4th, sec. 5th,) then plainly it is competent for the Presbytery to inquire into the faithfulness of the congregation in this, as in the observance of any other of the appointed ordinances of worship. And it is equally competent for the Synod and the Assembly, to call Presbyteries to account, and in short, to treat the neglect of this ordinance as a practical heresy. If the Presbytery see fit to receive the annual or monthly contribution, instead of the weekly contribution, that may all be well enough, (though of that there may be grave doubt,) still the power of the Presbytery over the subject is unimpaired.

It is obvious, therefore, that the necessity for extra machinery, agencies for the collection of funds, &c., in our church, has all grown out of a neglect of the first principles of our book; and that a return to the methods and plans of the book will do away with all such machinery. The funds will be provided, by the ordinary attendance upon the services of the house of God,—the Deacons, restored fully in the church, will be the Board of each congregation,—the stated returns to the Presbytery, will bring the funds into a common treasury, and through the Presbytery, pass into the central treasury for the support of the general operations of the church. Thus the sentiment of Dr. Rice, “the church is a missionary society,” will be fully realized as a great practical fact, not as heretofore, as a mere rhetorical figure. We think the times very propitious for the movement indicated in these Resolutions. Perhaps at no period since the division in 1837, could such a going back to the simple scheme of our book, have been successfully attempted. The leaven of voluntarism, through the long connexion of our church with that system,—a system made necessary only by the glaring deficiencies of independency, especially in a matter of any unity of action between their churches,—had worked too widely amongst us to allow the church to see clearly the old land-marks; and therefore, whilst adopting the scheme of church control in form, yet that was in connexion with many of the practical heresies of voluntarism. These errors have at length so effectually worked

themselves out, that the most earnest advocates of the measures in which they were implied are ready to give them up. The agency system, so necessary a part of the machinery of the voluntary societies, has developed its results so fully, that for some time past the wisest and most thoughtful of those who manage the affairs of the church have given it up, whilst those who continue the system, are obliged to use means for raising money which excite the fears and disgust of many among the most liberal of God's people. The expanded operations of the church require a more certain support than that arising from the constant operation of extra appliances; and the habit of dissociating the contribution from the worship of the Sabbath, while at first, producing larger immediate results, yet has left the piety of the church so untrained in this regard, that the difficulty of raising funds in the large amounts by subscription, is constantly increasing, while no corresponding enlargement of the field for contributions is taking place. After fifteen years of working under the present arrangements, one half of the churches are reported as doing absolutely nothing. We hail with pleasure this first movement, toward the recognition of these great works, as having a sure foundation in the piety of the church developing itself through the regularly appointed ordinances of the house of God. Having no space here, for the illustration of the Assembly's Resolutions, we refer our readers to the pamphlet of the Baltimore Presbytery above referred to. We look upon it as one of the auspicious signs of the times, that among our Pastors, full of the cares and duties of active Pastoral labour, there are those who can think so profoundly and discuss so clearly, the great principles that underlie the active life of the church.

#### CHURCH ERECTION.

It seems to have been on this question, and indirectly, that some discussion of the policy of the Boards of the Church took place in the Assembly. Of that part of the subject we shall have occasion to speak hereafter, and therefore, in this connexion, confine our remarks to the question of church erection alone. We have seldom had occasion to notice so remarkable an instance of the suffering of a cause at the hands of its special and immediate friends, as in this case. The object itself, is plainly one vital to the interests of the church, in such a country as ours,—so plainly such, that it

would seem hardly possible that it should not take strong hold of the sympathies of the church. From the peculiar nature of this cause,—fundamentally an appeal to the richer in behalf of the poorer classes, and at the same time an appeal which has nothing in the way of bodily suffering to press it upon the church, it is manifest that a first consideration with those who represent it, ought to be to keep it clear of all side issues, and all grounds of general controversy. A second consideration, obviously, should be to keep it in as close connexion as possible, with some other interest appealing still more strongly and immediately to the church at large. Unfortunately for this cause, its immediate friends and representatives in the last Assembly, and both before and since, seemed inclined to the reverse of both these considerations. Though urged by well-wishers to the cause on the floor of the Assembly, to confine themselves simply to the demand on the church for aid in the work, and avoid any responsibility for the manner in which the aid should be rendered, they thought proper to allow their measure to become entangled with the question of a new Board, or what some looked upon as a preparation for a new Board, and even to throw themselves, as partisans, into the arms of one side of this question. What if the Assembly constitute a new Board, and that too, in opposition alike to the principles of those who are in doubt as to the expediency of the system, and to the opinion of those who consider simply the present number of calls as many as the church will bear, and to the economical views of such as think the present machinery very expensive,—what then? The creation of a new Board does not, any more than the creation of a Committee, create the money,—the chief thing our practical church extensionists want! But it may create, nay, is very certain to create, many a bolt and bar, to exclude the agent of such a Board from many, if not most of the churches. The result of the action of the Assembly, as was foreseen, has been only to entangle and to embarrass with new difficulties the cause of the Board of Missions. Nothing has yet been done by the Board, nor is likely to be, beyond some earnest talk, and perhaps, exciting discussions. The Convention of the Northwest, have recently proposed a solution by the Cæsarean method. Seeing that the move in their behalf in the Assembly was a total failure—as ought to have been foreseen by their representatives—they now propose outright, a new *Board*

for this special purpose. The new Board may be obtained, but their great practical end will still be as far from its accomplishment as ever. Nothing can be plainer, than that the policy of the peculiar friends of church extension, is not to separate their cause from the Board of Missions, but, on the contrary, to connect it more completely and indissolubly with the Board of Missions, as part and parcel of the one great Missionary operation. The place of worship, so far as it is essential to the Missionary labour,—and that is as far as the purpose of these gentlemen goes,—is as legitimately and properly a charge upon the Missionary fund, as the Missionaries' travelling expenses. And money spent upon Missionary fields year after year, with no provision for a house of worship, is not commonly well spent. Far more wisely would it be applied to giving efficiency to a Minister's labours in some other field, whercin a small appropriation for a house of worship would be the decision, perhaps, of the question, whether a church shall there be permanently planted, and the results of previous years of labour be turned to account of the cause. That the funds for Missions would be allowed to fall short, if thus the claims of the two were inseparably blended, no one can believe who knows the feeling of our people in regard to this work.\*

#### BOARDS OF THE CHURCH.

In connexion with the matter of church extension, an incidental discussion arose, which, though in itself unimportant, and neither getting at the real merits of the question, nor leading to any practical results, has, since the Assembly, been made to occupy a conspicuous place in the proceedings. This instance, perhaps, as strongly as any other, is in illustration of the tendency already referred to, "to fancy issues made which were not, and battles won which were not fought." The paragraph in reference to this discussion, in the annual article on the General Assembly, in the Repertory for July '54, pp. 560, 561, is so remarkable in itself, has been so widely copied in the journals of the church, and brings into view so

\* It is a note-worthy fact, and one very encouraging to the Author of this article, denounced as revolutionary, to find that in the final working out of the matter in the Board to which this subject was referred, all the views here suggested, and also the views of the opponents of this action in the last Assembly fully sustained by the very able report of Dr. McElroy, in the Board itself. Is Dr. McElroy a filibuster?

completely the topics, of which we desire very briefly to speak,—that in order to more brevity, we take the liberty of using that paragraph as the foundation of what remains to be said, touching the Boards of the church,—our only remaining topic. Summing up the result of the discussion, the Repertory says, “The sense of the house was so strongly evinced in *favour of the Boards, and in opposition to merely speculative objections to their existence, that we presume the controversy will not be renewed.*” Now, there was no such “controversy” opened in the first instance, and no “objections to their existence,” either speculative or practical. It so happens that in this case, we have not to rely for proof of this fact, upon the mere *absence* of any such opinions in the reported debates,—but the two gentlemen who are named as the parties in opposition to the Board, have furnished positive proof in their own utter denials. Mr. Armstrong has since felt called upon to deny formally, in the Presbyterian, that he ever was opposed to the existence of the Boards. Mr. Robinson, at the close of this very discussion, complaining that he had been precluded by the previous question from repelling as misrepresentation, the charge that he was an enemy of the Boards,—asked leave to offer Resolutions, not for action, but record,—(and singularly enough the request failed, from the objection of the Secretary of the Board of Missions, whose misrepresentations they corrected,)—Resolutions which he had previously read, but not offered, and which he declared, set forth fully all his “heresies” on this subject. These Resolutions, so far from expressing opposition to the existence of the Boards, purport to aim at “the diversity of views touching the efficiency of the Boards as now *organized and located,*” “which diversity of views tends to impair and embarrass the action of the Boards,”—and suggest an inquiry as to three points: 1. Simplifying the *form* of the Boards to correspond with the fact, that they are Committees of the Assembly. 2. Requiring the Boards to act simply as organs and agents of the Presbyteries, not having to do with the concerns of individual Missionaries. 3. The expediency of locating the Board at different centres. So far as the two gentlemen named are concerned, therefore, they were parties to no such controversy. The Reports of debates, clearly show that neither Dr. Breckenridge nor Dr. Adger, were parties to such a controversy, at this or any other stage of the proceedings. On the contrary, the Boards found in the former a true helper

and friend, as they had before found him. But whether such a controversy was had in the Assembly or not, if the paragraph of the Repertory be the true exponent of the views of those who claim to be the special friends of the Boards, we venture to predict that events will show that never was there a presumption more unfounded, than "that the controversy will not be renewed." It is singular to observe how, in this language of the Repertory, is brought out again the idea which ever seems prominent in the minds of many of the leaders in these measures of the church,—that of all other evils to the Boards and the church, discussion, controversy, is to be feared, and quiet acquiescence to be of all blessings desired. The speakers on this subject in the Assembly, held the same tone, and for that chiefly, are lauded in the Repertory. "Dr. Musgrave," we are told, "closed the debate, by one of the most effective speeches delivered on the floor of the Assembly for a long time." Then the Reporters have manifestly done the speaker injustice—not less than his friends did at its close, in forcing the previous question by pre-concert, in face of the worthy Chairman of the Committee, (Dr. Adger,) and his parliamentary rights in the discussion of his own Report. The speech, as reported, contains but three points relating to the general subject,—one the implied logic of the question, "Why do they not say what is wrong,—and not bring vague charges?" To which question, a most satisfactory answer is found in the incident just alluded to,—the fact, that the "previous question," was the peroration of this discourse. The second point made, was a singularly unfortunate analogy between objections founded on the admitted failure of the Board so far, thoroughly to arouse the church,—and objections against Christianity itself, on the ground of its failure to conquer the world; which of course, has no force, except on the assumption that the hearts of God's people are, naturally, as averse to the work of Missions, as the hearts of natural men are averse to the spiritual truths of the Gospel. The third point, was an analogy still more unfortunate, on more accounts than its want of parallelism, between the case of the Board and the speaker's twenty years' Pastorate in Baltimore; in which, to grant the parallelism in the two cases, would by no means strengthen the argument on the Board's side of the question, as results prove. The chief purpose, however, of these illustrations, is to present prominently, the single point, of the seeming aversion of the more prominent

advocates of the present measures of the Boards, to all such discussion,—this being the marked characteristic of the tone, both of the speakers referred to, and of the Repertory. In connexion with this indisposition to discussion, it may not be amiss to point out, in this paragraph, the same vagueness of terms, in regard to the question of the Boards, that has already been referred to, as marking the discussions in education. Thus, on the one hand, it is asserted, “It seems, indeed, unworthy of debate, whether the body, &c., be called a Committee, and be appointed by the Assembly, or whether it be called a Board. In the one case, it would be a small body, in the other large.” This we take to mean, that the Board, as now organized, is simply a large Committee of the Assembly, nothing else, and it is “unworthy of debate,” whether a Committee be large or small. But have the advocates of simple Committees never made any other demand than simply a smaller Board? The Repertory need not be reminded that a Committee, constituted of Presidents and Vice Presidents,—under charter of incorporation,—a Committee in which membership may be bought for thirty dollars, and “directorship,” (a singular function in a Committee man,) for fifty dollars, is something out of the usual order of a Committee of a church court. After thus stating the case, as simply between a Committee, large or small, the Repertory itself, proceeds to argue the advantage of a Board over a “simple Committee,—as protecting the church against the effects of throwing a responsibility and power on the Executive Committee which they ought not to be intrusted with;” as “serving the purpose of break-waters,” &c.,—and finally, that the objection to the Boards, that they are not church courts, is the “*jus divinum* theory in its dotage.” Now, it is plain, that after thus comparing the several descriptions here given of Boards, the first and most difficult question to decide is, whether the Board be a *Committee* or not? Nor is this an unimportant question, since in this is involved the question, is “the church a Missionary Society?”—competent in her organized capacity, and provided in *her Constitution*, with all the agencies for carrying on her work. Or, is the Presbyterian Church, in this respect, no better off than the Independency, out of the defects of which grow up voluntary societies. This is the true issue involved in the old controversy between voluntary societies and Ecclesiastical Boards. The question of reporting or not reporting annually, to the Gene-

ral Assembly, of Directors appointed by the Assembly, or a close corporation,—is a minor question compared with the other. Strangely enough the Repertory makes the admission, that “the accountability of an Executive Committee,” (and, by parity of reasoning, of a Board,) to a body like the General Assembly,—a body, from its nature, incapable of effective inspection, would be *merely nominal*.” And again, “so long as every thing goes on well, the responsibility of the Executive Committee is *merely nominal*.” This admission gives up, practically, the whole ground once held as against voluntaryism,—and at the same time admits that the Boards are not Committees of the Assembly, but “a body intermediate between the Committees and the Assembly.” If so, then the Boards are something extra to the system of our church, and but a white-washed,—or rather, faintly *blue-washed* variety of the voluntary society; and then the whole question involved in the controversy of 1835 to 1838, would “seem to be, indeed, unworthy of debate.” Let the true issues on this subject be clearly and distinctly brought out before the church—Are our Boards simply Committees of the Assembly, representing the church in her organized capacity, working through her constitutional agencies? If so, then let us not speak “half the speech of Ashdod, and according to the language of each people.” Our objection to the paragraph of the Repertory, is precisely that of the Ancient Reformer in Israel, to the mongrel tongue,—and for precisely the same reasons.

As to the challenge given in the Assembly, to point out the objections to the present working of the Boards, it was not accepted, for the very sufficient reason above given,—no opportunity was afforded. The gentlemen challenged, moreover, showed then and before, that they were too earnest in their desires to see the work of the church done, even if not in a manner exactly to their mind, to engage with any pleasure in the work of criticism and fault-finding. The gentlemen who gave the challenge may rest assured, however, that it is no difficult task to accomplish, once a man has a heart for it. We set down here, for their mature consideration, in brief outline, what are some of the difficulties in regard to the Boards, *as now operating*, in the minds of a larger number by far, than care to incur the odium of a fault-finding spirit, and to be pointed to as dangerous, unsafe, and troublesome men.

In the first place, there are many, and some of them among

the most wise and experienced labourers in the work of the Boards, who cannot see the wisdom of the present structure of the Boards, with all the paraphernalia of Life Members, Life Directors, &c. 1. Because the *mongrelism* of the thing is, they think, in the way of making the people understand the obligations of this work upon them, as the regular, ordinary, and special work of the church, as such. 2. Because nothing is gained in the way of efficient superintendence, by Boards of 100 men, who are scattered over a continent, and a majority of whom, probably, never has assembled in any one meeting,—thus giving the power practically, to a few, while the corresponding responsibility is destroyed by being divided among so many. 3. Because the tendency is thus to make the responsibility of the church's agents to the Assembly practically *nominal*.

Again, others object,—that the results of the system after 16 years of trial,—in the way of bringing up the church to her duty, have not been such as to authorize us to feel satisfied with the efficiency of the measures employed,—one half the church, as yet, doing nothing,—and a large portion of the active part working irregularly, and apparently not realizing the obligation to contribute funds to the Lord's treasury, as an act of worship, spontaneously, but requiring to be incited thereto by appliances and means not in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel. Whilst even the Presbyteries, the constituted overseers of the work, in large part, are slow in assuming their proper responsibilities, and disposed to throw them upon the Boards,—who should be simply a bond of union to the Presbyteries,—not substitutes for them. There are those, also, who look with concern at the vast irresponsible power, now placed in the hands of the Secretaries, especially the Secretary of the Board of Domestic Missions, whose influence over the 4 or 500 men, whose support, practically and really, depends upon him, and who are as labourers in the field, responsible to him, may well excite alarm. The objections formerly urged against the power of the head of the Home Missionary Society, lie in nearly all their practical, though not their theoretical force, against the arrangement of our Domestic Mission system. The responsibility to the General Assembly, admitted to be nominal,—the responsibility to the Board, beyond a few members of it, being not even nominal,—at least, in all ordinary circumstances,—the Secretary of the

Board has, on the other hand, a power of patronage sufficient, at all times, to hold the balance of power in the Assembly, and the church has no guarantee, beyond the high personal character of the man, against the use of this power, so long as he is discreet enough to exercise it through the hundred channels through which it may be exercised, without rendering himself liable to any charge of gross dereliction of duty, which can be proven. And yet, while Professors in Theological Seminaries must be called to their office by the voice of the whole church through the Assembly, these officers, to whom so much power is intrusted, are appointed frequently by the voice of a handful of men in one city. Probably no Secretary of any of our Boards has been elected for years past, by a vote of one-third even of the members of the Board whom he serves. The present Secretary of the Board of Publication, holds his office by vote of a majority of a larger meeting of his Board, than has occurred for years past, and yet that meeting consisted of less than one-third of the whole body. One of his predecessors in office was elected at a smaller meeting, and then by a majority of *one* vote, which *one* vote was subsequently discovered to have been given in mistake by a gentleman who did not know even that he was *not* a member of the Board. We wish not to be understood as selecting this Board for illustration, because of anything peculiar in its history. This is contrary to the facts. The last election of a Secretary by the Board of Missions, was by a still smaller fraction of the Board, and that too, in the face of a protest spread upon the Minutes by some of the most influential members among even that small number. These facts are cited to show how little responsibility attaches to most important offices of the church under this system,—and that if, in view of such facts, there be those in the church who occasionally express doubts of the absolute perfection of our present methods, they should not be regarded in the light of enemies of the Boards, or of the men who control them.

There are, again, economists in the church, who gravely consider the relative expense of the Boards,—while such an argument might have had no force so long as the effect to arouse the church was in its incipient stages, yet it is an argument of great force now, that full time has elapsed to show the result of the outlay. The argument of Dr. Plumer's Report in 1848, that the expenses of our system would be no greater, if involving twice the amount of disbursement, it must be remembered, ought to be constantly losing its force

of application,—since one of the reasons which made the church content to bear the great expense at the beginning, was the expectation of increase of funds to be disbursed in future, at relatively less expense. If, therefore, that expectation has not been met, the reason for the large expenditure falls. In the light of this principle, many are disposed to doubt of the perfection of our system,—in view of scores of such facts as these: that the aggregate expenditure for management of funds in the Philadelphia offices, is \$25,000 per annum; that for fifteen years past the income of the Board of Education has been stationary at about \$33,000, of which sum \$25,000 are disbursed to candidates for the ministry, and \$8,000 for the whole cost of management; that the Publication House,—doing a business of \$80,000, (excluding colporteurs' salaries and expenses, which is altogether a distinct matter, and paid out of a distinct fund,) is managed at an expense of \$10,000 annually, for salaries alone. It is needless to multiply citations. The objection is not, then, that the labourers there are too well paid,—such may not be the case,—but that the system under which we are operating is a costly one, while it is not promising such expansion of the work as will diminish the relative cost.

The desire of others, again, that the Boards should be located at several centres in the church, and thus avoid the manifest evils, both to the work of the church at large, and to the Pastoral work in Philadelphia, from crowding thus, so much of the work, and the official influence of the Boards, into a single city,—has already been referred to, and needs not to be enlarged upon. Such are a few of the things which the gentlemen who were challenged “to point out what was wrong,” would probably have cited as cases in point, if they had deemed the occasion proper. As wise men, they cared not, perhaps, to point out evils, so long as they saw no disposition to look at them and reform them, among those whose position and relations to these matters best qualified them to reform them, with least injury to the church, and to the Boards themselves. Let it not be supposed, however, that those who see these evils, see nothing but evil in the present state of things. On the contrary, they see many a cheering and encouraging indication of progress in the right direction. The renunciation of the agency system is a great step. The resolutions on systematic benevolence, if once their force and meaning be apprehended by the church, are a still more important movement. But we must forbear.

Among all the grounds of discontent which have been enumerated, nothing has been said of the complaint of many, whose chief objection to the Boards arises out of this constantly manifested hostility to free, bold, manly discussion of the principles involved in their action,—and their taste for mere measureism,—and demand of acquiescence in mere measureism on the part of others. This is clearly not the wise ground, for the representatives of interests so immense.—The plea of unsettling the minds of the people, among such a people as ours, is utterly preposterous. The much-talked-of “confidence in the Boards,” if it can be impaired by manly, open inquiry, is a poor, piping, emasculated, unintelligent backing, which can do the Boards no good. It is manifest, that so far from being at the end, we are but at the beginning of the agitation, discussion and settlement of great principles, in the adaptation of our Presbyterianism to the glorious field which God has here given it to cultivate. It is too narrow and unworthy a view of our work, surely, to begin to talk of things ten years old, as finished and settled precedents. It must be remembered that many a measure, which the necessities of feebleness rendered expedient as temporary measures, may become subversive of the faith and order of the church, if recognised as permanent law. The plan of union of 1801, was not perceived to be hurtful in the days of the pioneers, but once the church grew up to power, its evils became so manifest as to require its utter abolition. Nor, as we have no precedents as yet, in our own church, for want of age, neither can we receive the acts of the Church of Scotland, or the Church of the Continent of Europe, with uninquiring acquiescence. A church united with the State, can have little in her acts of policy to furnish precedents to a church free from the State. It is closing our eyes on the light of the sun, and our ears to the calls of Providence, to permit ourselves, in our novel and amazing circumstances, to attempt to fetter the church with empty forms of mere authority. But it is equally blind, to turn aside to human inventions and expediences, wherewith to do this great work for Christ, if Christ himself hath left to his church a government and a form of working in the field. The conservatism we need, is simply the conservatism that seeks to abide by *principles*, not by *measures*. If there is danger of excess here, and of seeking to fetter the church, “with the split hairs of metaphysics,” that error is not so bad by half, in its results, as the error of fettering the church with the

drowsy cobwebs of a dull dogmatism. There are changes needed now,—there will be more changes needed. No sane man can hope, that the adaptation of our church to her new condition can be accomplished, without many mistakes first made, and continual reforms. One thing alone is sure and stable, the truth and order of Christ's house. We want no new machinery, no new measures, but simply, clearer developments of the Divinely appointed machinery and measures, in their adaptation to the new and ever varying phases of the work to be done. We are free to confess no sympathy with the spirit, which for years past has marked the movements, or rather want of movement, at our ecclesiastical centre. Great issues are at stake, and constant changes needful. And changes must come—the more for the peace of the church, if they come through the natural channels,—but come they must, either peaceably or forcibly, through the Boards, or over the Boards. It matters little whether at first, great truths have few or many advocates, if they be truths, they

“Wake—  
To perish, never.”

The result of a calm and close investigation into the various causes of the agitations of the church, will be the discovery that with great unity in doctrine, there are radical differences amongst us, as to the polity and measures of the church, in fact, two distinct Presbyterianisms, becoming more and more clearly marked, and promising, at some future day, to present themselves for choice to every officer in the church. It is a difference analogous in some respects to that which divides the two political parties of the country,—the theory of “strict construction,” as it is called, against the theory of large powers to the general government. As regards the church, one of these theories finds, in the written Constitution of the church, all the agencies and means necessary to carry out the purposes of the church, and inquires concerning all measures proposed, do they comport with the Constitution? The other theory, “rejecting the split-hairs of metaphysics,” argues the propriety of its measures from their expediency chiefly. The tendency of the one is ever, therefore, to stick closely to the book, and guard jealously the purity of the church. The tendency of the other, to overlook the book, and ever devise measures and expedients. The late Assembly leaned to the former of these theories.

THE END.