

A
S E R M O N,

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING

OF

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

MAY, 1811.

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“ SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE.”——EPHES. IV. 15

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ADVERTISEMENT.

TWO reasons have prompted the author to publish this Sermon, in compliance with the repeated solicitations of his friends.... The first is, that he has not seen the subjects which are here discussed, exhibited to the public within a small compass.... The second is, a hope that the attention of *Evangelical Presbyterians* throughout our country, may be so far excited, as to examine the grounds of their present separation from each other.... Such an examination, he is confident, must ultimately produce a union between them. He commends the publication to the blessing of the great Head of his Church, **JEHOVAH JESUS.**

New-York, July 26, 1811.

A SERMON,

&c.

EPHESIANS iv. 3.

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

THE form of our bodies, and the frame of our minds, irresistibly lead us to social intercourse. Without this, man would be a wretch, having no one to participate in his pleasures, or to sympathize in his pains. Jehovah has placed us in a wide world, dependent upon each other, not only for happiness, but for our very existence and necessary comforts. To assist each other, therefore, and to promote each other's good, is a duty which interest and benevolence prompt us to perform. Our helpless state in infancy, and gradual progression to maturity; the decline of life, and final decrepitude of age, all require the instruction and experience of a monitor, or the cherishing and fostering hand of a friend. Whatever, therefore, counteracts the exercise of our social nature, is criminal in itself, and destructive in its consequence.

Discord, with its train of evils, has awfully scourged our fallen race. It has embittered the enjoyments of individuals, convulsed the order of society, and made life itself a scene of distress. Nor has the visible Church of the living God escaped its ravages. Her members, in different periods, have separated from each other, and formed distinct communions. These divisions are not more disgraceful to their character, than contradictory to the spirit of their religion, and the express injunction of their blessed Saviour. They constitute *one body*, and one Spirit animates them all. They are all called to one hope of their calling. They serve one Lord, profess one faith, and have received one baptism. They worship one God and Father of all, who is over all by his providence, and in each of them by his grace*. Why should they, then, fall out by the way, and separate one from another? No reason can be assigned for such conduct, but what ought to humble them on account of their deficiency in duty one to another. They are brethren, to whom the Lord Jesus, by his Apostle, says, “ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you—Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”—Would to God that they had always cherished the feelings, and displayed the conduct which such an injunction is calculated to produce! But they have not. And we, who live in the present day, if we desire to comply with the injunction, must first

* Ephes. iv. 4, 5, 6.

break through the effects of previous prejudices. The task is indeed great, but the duty is obvious ; because the command is peremptory : and the issues, if we succeed, blessed and glorious.

We must, however, tread lightly on the ashes of generations which have descended to the tomb, whilst with firm step and unabated ardour, we avail ourselves of present opportunities and present advantages, to attempt the introduction of such a harmony among the followers of Jesus, as is demanded by our character, and the constitution of mercy under which we live.

As the Judicatory of Christ now convened, represents the largest portion of the Christian Church united in one body in our land, and its influence corresponds with the extent of its spiritual authority, no subject appears so worthy of our consideration on this occasion, as that which the text affords.

Your attention, therefore, is solicited **TO THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT—TO THE BOND OF PEACE—AND TO THE CARE WITH WHICH THIS UNITY MUST BE KEPT IN THIS BOND ;** three topics of discourse which the words of the Apostle suggest.

In discussing these topics, both the extent and the limits of union between different denominations

of Christians will be unfolded ; so that whilst the contractedness of bigotry will be unequivocally condemned, a warning voice will be raised against the destructive laxness of latitudinarian principles.

I. The first thing to which our attention is directed by the text is, “ **THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT,**” or that spiritual union between believers which the Holy Ghost produces by first uniting them to Christ, as “ members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones*.” It consists in the unity of the *Doctrines* which they embrace as divine, and of the *Affections* which they cherish toward each other as brethren. Each of these particulars will in order be illustrated.

First: Believers are united in the doctrines which they embrace as divine. These doctrines are the *principles* of that system of religion which God has revealed in his word for the salvation of sinners. Imbecility of intellect—prejudices of education—limited views of the Scriptures—superficial examination of their various parts, and want of suitable instructors, cause among believers a diversity of opinions about some of these doctrines: not, however, about those which are fundamental or essential to salvation, but those which are not fundamental or essential. Whilst about these last, believers are suffered to wander in by-paths, and to display inconsistencies,

* Ephes. v. 30.

the Spirit of God operating in them, through the written word, produces among them a pleasing and wonderful harmony about the former. Take a believer from each of the four quarters of the globe, bring them all together, and you will find that on these points they speak alike.

There is a class of doctrines, the belief of which is indispensable to the Christian name and to the hope of heaven. Perhaps it may be deemed rash to particularize them ; yet as the subject requires it, the attempt will be made. To be explicit, then, *the unity of the Godhead—the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost—the depravity of human nature—the atonement which the Lord Jesus Christ has made for sin—justification by faith in his righteousness—the regenerating, sanctifying, and comforting influences of the Holy Spirit—the necessity of personal holiness, and a future state of retribution, appear to be the doctrines, the belief of which is connected with salvation.* In these doctrines, God is glorified, and man exhibited in his true character, as fallen, helpless, and dependent. They are closely and inseparably connected together, so that the rejection of one leads to that of another, or at least to such a modification of other doctrines, as materially affects the sense of them. They are plainly revealed to us, so that the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err

concerning them. Some of them, indeed, exhibit to us mysterious truths—truths beyond the reach of our understandings. So, however, are many facts in the natural world. As we know the existence of the latter by the evidence of our senses, though unable to explain their nature; so believers know the former to be truths, by that spiritual perception which God has given them; which perception is less liable to deception than our senses. Their “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*.” In matters appertaining to their salvation, He who gives them this faith, keeps them from “damnable heresies†.” He also constrains them to think highly of fundamental doctrines; convincing their understandings of the necessity, and affecting their hearts by the influence, of these doctrines. They find in their own experience, that the belief of these doctrines necessarily produces holiness of life. With one consent, they testify that there can be no moral or spiritual good conduct, without the previous perception and belief of correct moral and spiritual doctrines. They thus reject the fashionable opinion, which multitudes, calling themselves Christians, have embraced, viz. that it is immaterial what a man’s faith is, provided his life be correct. And they do so for the best reasons; for if the doctrines of religion be unimportant, the doctrines of morality, as distinct

* Heb. xi. 1.

† 2 Pet. ii. 1.

from religion, must be so likewise. It can as justly be said of the latter, as of the former, that it is immaterial what they are, if a man's life be good ; in other words, it is immaterial what a man thinks and calls good or evil, if he only conducts himself well—if his life be good. As, however, it is impossible for a man to be virtuous in his deportment, if his doctrines or principles in morals be vicious ; impossible for him to do good, if he thinks or calls that good, evil ; or to avoid evil, if he thinks or calls that evil, good ; the opinion thus tested, carries with it its own refutation. Equally groundless is it in religion. Here, as in morality, correct principles or doctrines are necessary to a correct religious life.

How can he live in a religious manner, who does not know what religion teaches ? As well might we say, a man may be a good civilian, who knows nothing of the principles of law ; or a good physician, who knows nothing of the principles of medicine, as to say, a man may be a religious man, who knows nothing of the principles of religion ; or a moral man, who is ignorant of the principles of morality. They who advocate the opinion of which we speak, to be consistent, must say, the less definite a man's doctrines are concerning the nature of God, the more reverence he will display in his deportment to God ; the more loosely and vaguely he thinks of the person and work of the Lord Jesus, the

stronger and more correct will be his obedience to the Lord Jesus ; the less he knows of the demands of the divine law, the more universal will be his fulfilment of these demands ; in a word, the more ignorant he is of what constitutes the principles or doctrines of religion ; the less capable he is of discriminating between truth and error, the more fully he will be able to display that conduct which comports with truth, and avoid what harmonizes with error. The fashionable opinion, therefore, which so many have embraced, is merely another name for their *wilful and shameful ignorance of the revelation of God*. It annihilates effectually the eterna' distinctions between right and wrong, and pronounces them blessed against whom God has denounced a wo. God has said, “ Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil*.” But the advocates of this opinion reverse God's sentence, and declare, Blessed are they who are so ignorant or indifferent, that they see no difference between good and evil, or evil and good. No wonder, then, that they who are really united to Christ by the Holy Ghost, do reject this opinion ; for the Holy Ghost never teaches men absurdity and folly. His evident design in inditing the Scriptures, was to furnish us with a system of truths, as distinct from errors. Hence we are exhorted to “ buy the truth†,” and warned against errors‡. Faith which regards the

* Isaiah v. 20.

† Prov. xxiii. 22.

‡ Prov. xix. 27.

truths revealed, we are expressly told, purifies the heart*, works by love†, and overcomes the world‡.

Yes, brethren, that faith, which it is the object of this opinion to discredit, which infidels ridicule, and about which some Christians talk, as the licentious poet § did,

For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight,
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right—

this very faith, God says, *purifies* the heart. Now, I ask you, can the life be good, if the heart be bad? and can the heart be good, if faith does not purify it? *This faith works by love*. Can that principle with which love is connected be an indifferent one? *Faith overcomes the world*; that world which God says, lieth in wickedness**. Can there then be a good life, where the world is not overcome? and can that world be overcome without faith?

Let it be remembered here, that faith relates to truths which do not come under the cognizance of our senses, and are not the discoveries of our reason; but rest simply on the testimony of God. The passages of Scripture just quoted, do not merely prove the excellence and necessity of faith, but also the excellence and necessity of the doctrines

* Acts xv. 9. † Gal. v. 6. ‡ 1 John v. 4. § Pope.

** 1 John v. 19.

exhibiting those truths which faith embraces. Real believers, therefore, true members of the body of Christ, manifest their supreme respect for the Scriptures, together with their knowledge of the philosophy of the human mind, by the distinguished importance which they attach to doctrines. These are the *principles* of action which regulate their whole deportment. Concerning such of them which are fundamental, they agree; for the Spirit who moved the men that penned these doctrines, is the agent who has brought the believers of them into union with Christ. His *words* therefore, contained in the Scriptures, on those points which are necessarily connected with salvation, must harmonize with his *work* in the hearts of believers.

Thus united in the doctrines which they embrace, believers are united,

Secondly : *in the Affections which they cherish towards each other as brethren.* They regard all mankind with a *benevolent disposition*, but feel *real complacency* only towards those who agree with them in embracing certain doctrines as divine. They recognize in these persons, those requisites which their Lord has made necessary for their characters as believers, and their hopes of eternal happiness. Such is the importance of these requisites, that the conscience is aroused and interested in relation to them. This faculty has regained in the hearts of believers, the power which it once pos-

sessed, and thus constrains them to cultivate the kindest and most tender sympathies towards each other.

Their affection is not confined to a party, nor cramped by the limits of bigotry. It is co-extensive with the “fruit of the Spirit which consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth*.” Every believer says, concerning them who display this fruit, without respect of names or distinctions,—‘Behold my mother, and my brethren: for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother†.’ Between all those who think and feel alike on subjects which involve in them life and death, there is a common interest. Their understandings and their consciences harmonizing, ‘heart springs to heart,’ and they embrace each other as members of the same redeemed family.

But as this unity of doctrine and affection is spiritual, being the work of the Holy Ghost on the minds and hearts of believers, it is an interesting and necessary inquiry, how it becomes visible? To this the text furnishes us with an answer, viz. **IN THE BOND OF PEACE.** To the illustration of this

II. Head of discourse we now proceed. The mode of expression which the Apostle uses is borrowed from the practice of the Romans, who fas-

* Ephes. v. 9. Gal. v. 22, 23.

† Matt. 12. 49, 50

tened one end of the chain with which a prisoner was bound, to the arm of the soldier appointed to guard him*. Thus believers are *bound* or chained to peace, i. e. either to peaceable dispositions, or to a peaceable deportment towards each other. The latter must be meant in this place, for the former is included in the unity of the Spirit.

This peaceable deportment does not consist merely in avoiding hostilities, or in some cold, unmeaning courtesies, which the customs of the world require ; or even in discharging those duties of attention and assistance which social intercourse renders indispensably necessary. On the contrary, it corresponds with the unity of the Spirit, of which we have been speaking. It is the effect of that blessed change, which believers have experienced both in their views and feelings, displayed in the outward conduct, in the life and conversation. You see it in their affectionate treatment of each other, without any regard to the distinctions of worldly rank or affluence. Behold how they love one another! was once the exclamation of the Heathen concerning Christians†. Then the unity of the Spirit constrained believers to act as a band of brethren. And now it leads to similar consequences in their intercourse with each other. They studiously and cautiously avoid giving any offence to each other ; exercising mutual forbearance to

* *Pierce* on Acts viii. 23.

† *Tertullian's* Apologeticus, cap. 39.

each other's weaknesses ; and, where differences have taken place, holding out the hand of reconciliation to each other. They walk humbly, affecting no lordship over each other, but in honour preferring one another. They mutually assist each other in all their trials, by their counsel—their bodily exertions—their worldly substance. They—but time would fail me to enumerate the particulars which characterize this ‘bond of peace.’ They are, according to the Apostle’s summary in the verse preceding the text, “*lowliness, and meekness, and long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.*”

In what character, if I may so express myself, do believers display this peaceable deportment? as insulated individuals, occasionally meeting with each other? or as a visible company or body, associated together in some visible form? Unquestionably the latter. For, assuredly, God has not left the external manifestations of the ‘**UNITY OF THE SPIRIT**’ among the members of his redeemed family, to the caprices of accident, or to the contracted perceptions of the best of men. He has made provision in the constitution of his grace, for the *visible*, as well as the *invisible unity* of his people. Being made one body in doctrine and affection by his Spirit, he, by the ministry of his word, collects them together in various parts, into a visible fellowship with each other. This visible fellowship, thus formed, is virtually and essentially incorporated in the expression, ‘**BOND OF PEACE.**’ You readily

perceive, therefore, the propriety of attending to it in a distinct and particular manner.

That we may properly understand the subject, let us for a moment advert to the practice of the Apostles. According to the command of Christ, they went forth into the world, to convert the nations ; to initiate the converts into the Church by baptism ; and to instruct the baptized in all the duties of the Christian life*. Before they baptized any adults, they required from them a credible profession of conversion ; and with the administration of baptism, bound such professors to obey Christ in all things†. It comes not within the limits or design of this discourse, to enter into a minute detail concerning their conduct. Whoever will compare their *acts* with their *epistles*, will find, that the constituent features of Christian fellowship, in a visible form, are profession and subjection—a profession of faith and a subjection to authority. *The profession, relates to doctrines embraced as true—the subjection, to government acknowledged as legitimate in the family of Christ.*

First: *The profession relates to doctrines embraced as true.* The requirement of such a profession involves in it the principle on which Creeds rest. The object of the discourse, therefore, requires a

* Campbell's Note on Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

† Bingham's Orig. Eccles. book 16. chap. 1. sect. 1. vol. vii. p. 2
book 11. chap. 7. sect. 6. vol. 4. p. 286

brief explanation of the *nature*, the *lawfulness*, and the *operation of Creeds**.

1. *Creeds or Confessions of faith are merely summaries or compendious views of those doctrines which are believed to be true.* They never were designed to supersede the Scriptures; for the doctrines they contain are confessedly drawn from the Scriptures. They are not expressed in the language of Scripture, but give explanations of that language. This is done upon the same principle as that on which ministers of the Gospel preach to men. We do not repeat to our hearers the words of Scripture, but in our own words we exhibit to them what we think the Scriptures teach. Christ set us the example in this respect; for to the disciples whom he met on their way to *Emmaus*, he expounded from the Old Testament, the doctrines concerning himself†. Thus in Creeds, a number of men or of Churches in their own language express to the world, the manner in which they understand the Scriptures. They, in this way, avow what they believe God in his Holy Word has made necessary for our salvation, our comfort, or our establishment. Such is the *nature* of Creeds, against which many object, who neither know what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

* Whoever wishes satisfactory information on the subject of Creeds, is referred to *Dunlop's* account of the several ends and uses of Confessions of Faith, &c. See also *Erskine's Sketches*, vol. I. No. I.

† Luke xxiv. 27

2. *Creeds are lawful.* The principle on which they rest is the same on which private friendships and social connexions depend. There must be an expression of agreement in those things which essentially constitute the friendship or connexion. This expression must be made in a manner intelligible to each other; and the agreement itself must extend to all points which involve their personal or social interests. When was there a combination or union formed between men, without such an agreement expressed or understood? *Can two walk together except they be agreed*?* The principle is incorporated in all the various compacts which are voluntarily formed in the world. We can do no business—we cannot even live together in society, without recognizing it. Does the Gospel, then, contradict that which God has made necessary for our intercourse in friendship or in business with each other? No. As we stand or fall to our own master in matters of conscience, we are bound to determine the sense of Scripture for ourselves. We must read for ourselves, and think for ourselves, and judge for ourselves. This liberty which the Gospel guarantees to every man, is the *very foundation* on which the lawfulness of Creeds rests. I, as an individual, inform my friend or acquaintance, in the most explicit manner, what I believe the Scriptures teach. He does the same to me. We owe it to each other. If we agree, we enter into covenant with each other according to

* Amos iii. 3.

that form which we both think to be ‘ a form of sound words.’ Is he injured, or am I injured? Does he lord it over me, or do I lord it over him? If we differ, we separate. He retains his belief, I retain mine.

The use of words different from those which we find in Scripture, is also lawful. It conveys no more disrespect to the sacred oracles, than the use of different words in prayer or in preaching. The language of Scripture is perspicuous in itself, but by time it has become ambiguous. Different men use it differently, as it suits their purpose. They attach such meanings to it as their prejudices, pride, or errors may suggest. It is therefore necessary that they who desire to ‘ contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*,’ should intelligently express the meaning which they affix to the language of Scripture. Such was the opinion of the primitive Church, as is evident from the Creed, commonly called the Apostles’, which was adopted and used at a very early period† It also appears from the Nicene‡, the Athanasian§, and other Creeds, which at different times were adopted according to the prevailing errors of the day.

* Jude 3.

† *King’s History of the Apostles’ Creed. Mosheim’s Eccles. Hist. Vol. I. Chap. 3. p. 116.*

‡ Composed by the Council of *Nice*, ann. 325. *Mosh. Eccles. His. vol. 1. chap. 5. p. 414.*

§ Improperly ascribed to *Athanasius*. Dr. *Waterland* ascribes it to *Hilary*, Bishop of *Arles*.

The Reformed Churches have all acted upon the lawfulness of Creeds; for they have each adopted one of their own*. Even the Independent Churches, who are most strenuous in their objections to Creeds, have been constrained to adopt them. Not one of them is without a 'form of sound words,' according to which their members covenant with God and each other. Such strange inconsistencies do good men often discover in their conduct, condemning in others, what they themselves practise, though on a smaller scale.

3. The operation or effects of Creeds relate to the world at large, to ministers, and to the members of a Church.

Creeds give a fair and authentic account *to the world at large*, of the doctrines maintained by a Church. Thus misrepresentations are corrected, and calumnies refuted. These valuable purposes were particularly answered in the primitive Church, against the Pagans, and, at the period of the Reformation, against the Papists. Every body of Christians, as they can thus appeal to their public standards, are only to be judged from those standards. These standards contain their faith openly declared before all men. To make such a declaration, is the duty of all Christians. They are com-

* Thus, to mention some instances, the *Augsburg* Confession was published, ann. 1530; the *Basil*, 1532; the first, of *Helvetia*, 1536; the last, 1556; the *Saxon*, 1551; *Wurtemberg*, 1552; *French*, 1559; *Belgic*, 1566; *Bohemian*, 1573; *English*, 1562; *Scotch*, 1560; *Westminster*, 1647.

manded to confess Christ in the world—to own his truth at all times. How can they do this, better than by publishing the doctrines which they believe he has revealed. Thus doing, they acknowledge their principles, and enable men to form a correct opinion of them. They also thus promote mutual harmony and love among themselves. They design by their Creed, not to force the belief of others, but to give others an opportunity of judging, whether they can associate with them or not. Their knowledge of each other's principles gives them mutual confidence. They feel like members of the same family. They, also, in this way, speak the same language on the subjects of revelation, and mind the same things. Thinking alike, and acting alike, they are enabled to instruct, and comfort, and support each other. The causes of division and unhappiness are thus annihilated, and peace is promoted.

Creeds operate as a check upon *Ministers*, and prevent them from indulging themselves in the love of change, without being detected. Their freedom of inquiry is not destroyed, but they are restrained from disturbing a Church or Churches by that freedom. Churches also have an opportunity of discharging such men as do not fulfil their own engagements. By means of Confessions of Faith, solemnly adopted, men unsound in the faith can be deposed, and thus arrested in their course of evil doing. The privileges

of the ministry are not invaded or infringed in this way. Churches may justly require from their pastors an assent to the principles which they have adopted ; and if those principles are violated, bring the offender to punishment. When we reflect for a moment, on the influence which the ministry possesses in directing public opinion in matters of religion, the importance and necessity of their being arrested, when unsound or unfaithful, will appear obvious to all.

By Creeds, *the people of a Church* are provided with a short and useful summary of religion, to which they can constantly resort for information, and by which they can try all the doctrines they hear or read. In this way also, they commit to posterity the faith which they have cherished, and furnish correct materials for the history of the Church.

From this brief view of Creeds, their necessity, as well as their propriety, must be perceived. By the adoption of them, believers make a public profession of the doctrines which they have embraced as true, and thus display the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. They do so,

Secondly : *By their subjection to government acknowledged as legitimate in the family of Christ.*

Though all Christians grant the necessity of

government in the Church, yet they differ about the kind which Christ has established. My design is not to enter into a controversy which has so long, and often so fatally, destroyed the harmony of Christians. A few remarks only, explanatory of those principles which are deemed fundamental on this subject, will be offered.

Neither Christ nor his Apostles appear to have given the Church all the details of any particular form of government. Nor yet have they left the subject so undetermined as to permit Christians to follow their own fancy. Three principles they have established beyond doubt. We say beyond doubt; for all who call themselves Christians, either directly acknowledge them by words, or indirectly in their practice*. These principles are the following, to wit: the people of Christ have a *visible unity*, existing not in separate congregations independent of each other, but composing one body. They are subject to the jurisdiction of *an authorized ministry*. I say authorized, because the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to them the exercise of subordinate power in the Church. Remove this ministry, and you have good people left—real believers: but you have no visible Church—no public fellowship of the saints;

* Thus the Independents, who deny the visible unity of the Church in theory, act upon the principle of her unity, in their admission of members from each other's Churches by certificates. And the Episcopalians, who reject the parity of the ministry, do still in fact, admit Presbyters to lay on their hands with those of the Bishop, in ordination.

for you have no preaching of the word—no administration of the sacraments—no exercise of discipline ; since these duties are committed to the ministry. Among them there is *no distinction of orders* ; for government is connected with teaching, in the scriptural commission of every pastor ; and deacons are restricted to the care of the poor and serving of tables. They are bound mutually to counsel and aid each other, in such a mode as may be deemed most expedient. The modifications of their authority, must be regulated by the circumstances and necessity of the flock committed to their care.

These principles of *visible unity of the body, the authority of the ministry over the body, and parity among these ministers*, constitute the foundations of Church-government. In the exercise of government on these principles, *liberty of conscience* must be left to all believers, because unquestionably secured to them by Christ, who is the only Lord of the conscience : and *purity of life* must be assiduously promoted, because peremptorily enjoined by Christ.

Subjection to government thus founded, and thus exercised, constitutes another evidence of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. By Creeds, therefore, believers declare their agreement in doctrine and affection ; and by government, are morally constrained to manifest this agreement in their peaceable deportment.

'This agreement they are bound to keep one with another, by their strenuous exertions. Such is the apostle's exhortation in the text,—“ ENDEAVOURING TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE.” We now proceed in the

III. And last place, to illustrate the nature of this exhortation. The phraseology is peculiarly forcible*; denoting the utmost diligence—exertion—promptness—and firmness, as necessary on the part of believers, to secure this great object. It is liable to be lost; for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace may be broken. The sad experience of the Christian Church, proves this beyond all controversy. Look around you, brethren, throughout our land, and the old world. You behold altar erected against altar, by those who, in the Scriptural sense, have one altar. It is to be feared, that too many of these altars, like those of Ephraim†, have been made to sin; and thus altars have been to them to sin—sources of transgression, because stumbling-blocks in the way of Christian brotherhood. But once it was not so.

The primitive Church kept the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Believers of different regions considered themselves as members of the same body. They held the same faith,

* ΣΠΟΥΔΑΖΟΝΤΕΣ ΤΗΡΕΙΝ.

† Hosea viii. 11.

and acknowledged the same government. When they met together in the course of Providence, they recognized their relation to each other, and interchanged in the offices of Christian communion*. Whenever differences of opinion arose, the decisions of the acknowledged authority were considered as obligatory on the whole Church. They who refused subjection were cast out, and considered no longer as members. It is granted that this state of things at an early period was affected by the corruptions which crept into the Church. Yet the principle of unity was maintained, and the visible communion of saints throughout every part of the Church, observed. Thus a member of the Church from Africa, furnished with proper credentials, was acknowledged in Jerusalem, Rome, and Ephesus.

The divisions which now exist in the Church, originated in the circumstances under which the Reformation was commenced and carried on. In different countries, different Churches were formed. Yet whilst the hearts of the Reformed were warm, they preserved the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace to a very great and wonderful degree. Especially between the Churches of Geneva, France, Holland, England, Scotland, and those styled the Reformed in Germany, and in Switzerland, did this appear†. Ig-

* *Bingham's Orig. Ecc.* Book 16. Chap. 1. *passim*.

† Abundant proof of this is to be found in *Quick's Synodicon*, throughout the two vols. *Neal's History of the Puritans*, vol. I. *Mosheim's Ecc. His.* vol. IV. *Burnet's History of the Reformation*, especially during the life and reign of Edward VI. and other histories of the Reformation

norance, prejudice, and pride, however, soon prepared the way for a disruption of the ties which bound them together. They began to grow cold in their affections, and suspicious of each other. They separated from each other to a degree and extent that was no less injurious to their interests, than gratifying to the Catholics*.

The Churches in this country being founded by believers coming from different parts of Europe, preserved their original distinctions; in consequence of which, we exhibit the same diversity of ecclesiastical character, and the same want of brotherly union, with that which is exhibited in the Old World. The same reasons, however, for this state of things do not exist here; for we constitute one civil body, and are all, in the eye of the law, on an equality. The circumstances, then, in which we are placed, imperiously urge all believers to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

As this duty refers to the visible fellowship of believers in a visible form, it peculiarly demands the attention of this General Assembly. Constituting “ *the bond of union, peace, correspondence, and mutual confidence among all our Churches†*,” its movements will give, both an impulse and a direc-

* The cause of this separation is to be found, not in their difference of opinion about *doctrines*, but about the *form of government*.

† Form of Government of the Pres. Church, Chap. xi. Sect. 4.

tion to the movements of the Synods, the Presbyteries, the Sessions, and the individual members of our Churches. The explanation of that line of conduct which we must pursue to discharge the duty enjoined, will exhibit the general principles which ought to regulate the conduct of all our members in the fulfilment of their duty.

Our first concern is with ourselves ; our second with other Churches.

TO BEGIN, THEN, WITH OURSELVES.

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE, can only be kept in our Church, *by adhering sacredly to the doctrines we profess to have received as divine, and to the government we have pledged ourselves to obey.* These two particulars, have already been stated as constituent features of Christian fellowship in a visible form. A departure from either, destroys the visible unity of the whole body. We shall attend to each for a moment.

1. *We must adhere sacredly to the doctrines we profess to have received as divine.* They are appropriately called the doctrines of grace, and constitute both our glory and defence. We have received them as a precious legacy from our fathers in the old world, who lived under their invigorating influence, and died rejoicing in the hope

which they impart. They are contained in our Confession of Faith, with the Westminster Catechisms, larger and shorter, to which therefore we are bound to adhere. This involves in it the question, what obligations do Creeds impose upon those who adopt them? The answer is easily given by recurring to the nature of Creeds. *They are explanations of Scripture in our own words, for the purposes of union between those who find they think alike.* They thus constitute the bond of peace between a number of Christians, in the same manner that a written instrument of agreement, constitutes the bond of union between men in the business of life. Hence, they ought to be studied, known, and digested by all who adopt them. It is disreputable for the members of a Church which has published a Creed, to be ignorant of that Creed. As a *bond of union, as an expression of belief, as an explanation of Scripture,* it ought to be correctly understood. No one is forced to adopt it. The adoption on the part of every person is voluntary, and therefore ought to be done intelligently. It ought to be the result of sober examination, comparing the Creed with the Word of God, with our own experience, as originating in and directed by that Word, and, as far as we can, with other Creeds, or the opinions of other men. If it be not done in this way, the faith professed is credulity; because it is connected with ignorance: even an ignorance of those truths which we, by our public

act, profess to believe are Scriptural. In addition to this, it is incumbent on those who advocate Creeds, that they adhere to the spirit and to the obvious meaning of the language of their Creed, where the language conveys doctrines: for recollect that Creeds are the explanations of Scripture in our own language. They answer the purpose of a theological dictionary, giving a definition of terms used in Scripture; which terms convey to our minds important truths.

To talk, then, of adhering to the spirit of a Creed, whilst we alter its language so far as to alter its principles, is in fact destroying the very nature of Creeds as bonds of union between believers. After adopting a Creed, individuals among them may not attempt to change it for themselves; for others are concerned as well as themselves. The form in which they received it, is the form in which they must remain steadfast, whilst they continue in that body, whose Creed they have adopted. They are not obliged by any compulsory power, to continue this connexion longer than they please; but during their connexion, *conscience, honour, and integrity*, all demand that they should ‘hold fast the form of sound words*’, which the body have adopted. No alteration of this form, in spirit or language, where the alteration would affect doctrines, is admissible, unless the body permit it. Let it be granted that

* 2 Tim. i. 13.

an alteration may be made, to gratify one individual —another individual has the right of claiming the same indulgence: and thus we know not where the alterations will end. The admission of such alterations looks like *liberty of conscience*; but in fact is the *most disgusting species of intolerance towards the opinions of others*. It is constraining the many who have adopted the whole, to submit to the vanity, the prejudice, the weakness, or the ignorance, of a few, who wish to expunge a part. These few might unquestionably connect themselves with other bodies who agreed with them, or, if they could find none, form one of their own. For them to insist upon, or even to desire a modification of established, published principles, discovers no little self-conceit, though it may be cloaked with the garb of piety. Such conduct proceeds upon the principle that the majority must submit to the minority; and it leads to this conclusion, that Creeds are every thing, or any thing, just as men please to make them. But they are not; or the men who adopt them are absolutely insane. And they cannot be explained away, so as to alter the system which they exhibit, without removing and annihilating the very object which they contemplate.

In this respect, as well as the preceding, i. e. *in adherence to our Creed, and knowledge of it*, multitudes among us are deficient. They are as little acquainted with the principles avowed in our Creed, as they are with the principles of Mahomet. Un-

derstand me rightly. They may know distinctly the grand leading principles of the Scriptures, as they construe them, but they cannot tell from their own examination, whether these principles are contained in *our Creed* or not. And yet they are required in the administration of baptism to infants, to give their assent to the Confession of Faith of our Church, and the Westminster Catechisms. The same engagements, we must plainly infer from acknowledged premises, are necessary in adult baptism and the Lord's supper, as well as in the ordination of Elders, Deacons, and Ministers.

Ignorance of the contents of our *Creed*, has introduced many deviations from it. These deviations are indeed cloaked by the pretension, that the spirit is preserved inviolate. But such is the nature of our Confession of Faith and Catechisms, that the spirit is violated by a departure from the letter. Perhaps no instruments have been so cautiously expressed as these: and I candidly confess, that every examination of them increases my regard for them. I know of no religious documents in which the language is so perspicuous and definite. To a respectable proportion of our people, that language is familiar and dear. For reasons that are perfectly correct, they prefer it to any other kind of language. It is the language of *Scripture*—of *common sense*—and of *Christian experience*. We are bound, therefore, to defend it from the innovating hand of folly, of prejudice, or of conceit.

By thus doing, we shall maintain the spirit and design of our Creed, and in no other way, that I can discover : for the same reason which will warrant my friend to alter the language of this Creed, will warrant me. As this language has been adopted to explain the meaning of Scripture language, every departure from its obvious meaning, is a violation of *the design* of Creeds, and therefore injures the peace of our Church.

2. *We must adhere sacredly to the form of government we have pledged ourselves to obey ; that is, PRESBYTERIAN, as distinguished from EPISCOPALIAN and INDEPENDENT.*

In this form the fundamental principles of Church government, as already stated*, are distinctly recognized. By it liberty of conscience is guaranteed to all believers, and purity of life enforced upon them †. Its characteristics which distinguish it from other forms, are, REPRESENTATION, and REVIEW. In these two ways, that power which the Lord Jesus Christ has lodged in his Church, is exercised among us. Whilst we acknowledge the distinction between rulers and ruled, we reject the position, that the latter impart authority to the former. They derive their authority from the Head of the Church himself, through the medium of

* See page 25.

† Introduction to the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church

others like themselves, invested with authority. That authority is distributed among different judicatories, who are both *representative bodies*, and *courts of review*. A brief sketch of their nature and operations will be attempted*.

(1.) *All our judicatories are representative bodies.* The right of choice rests in the individual believers—the exercise of authority over them, in those whom they choose. In this way the minister and elders in session, derive their power over a congregation—ministers and elders delegated from these sessions, and convened in Presbytery, their power over as many congregations as they represent—and ministers, with elders delegated from these Presbyteries, convened in General Assembly, their power over as many Presbyteries, with their congregations, as are represented. Hence we consider such a portion of *the Church* as is represented, actually met together in these respective judicatories. And as this Assembly represents the whole body of believers in our connexion, the Presbyterian Church in this land is now convened in this Assembly†. Such is the natural result of the principle of representation, and obviously the theory of Presbyterian government.

* *Hill's Institutes*, 2d part, in which there is an able view of Presbyterian Government.

† “ The General Assembly is the highest judicatory of the Presbyterian Church : and shall represent in one body, the particular Churches of this denomination.” *Form of Government*, Chap. xi. Sect. 1. See also Note at the commencement of said chapter.

(2.) *Our Judicatories are Courts of Review.* The Sessions watch over the walk and conversation of the members—admit new ones on their profession of belief in the doctrines of our Creed, and their subjection to the form of government set forth in our book of Discipline—cut off offenders, or deal with them in any way which may be considered as most for edification. They possess no authority, unless properly convened, with a Minister present to preside. Their proceedings are subject to the review of the Presbyteries to which they respectively belong. These Presbyteries, in their turn, have their proceedings reviewed by the Synods, and the proceedings of these Synods are reviewed by this Assembly.

These two principles of *representation* and *review*, afford us a clear and satisfactory view of the manner, in which power is distributed among the judicatories of our Church. Every judicatory possesses power over that part of the Church which it represents. Hence, as this Assembly represents the whole Presbyterian Church in our Country, it possesses the power of this Church; which power it is bound to exercise, according to the letter and the spirit of our Constitution.

We come to the same result from a consideration of the principle of review. Every inferior judicatory is bound to submit its proceedings to its superior for approbation. And as this Assembly is the high-

est judicatory, it possesses the power of each of the lower judicatories, which must be exercised in the manner already specified. Thus we find our Form of Government expressly saying, “ *To the Assembly belongs the power of consulting, reasoning, and judging in controversies, respecting doctrine and discipline ; of reproving, warning, or bearing testimony against error in doctrine, or immorality in practice, in any Church, Presbytery, or Synod ; of corresponding with foreign Churches ; of putting a stop to schismatical contentions and disputations : and in general, of recommending and attempting reformation of manners, and of promoting charity, truth, and holiness, through all the Churches : and of erecting new Synods when they judge it necessary*.*”

The power which is thus distributed among the judicatories is threefold : legislative, judicial, and executive. The first, relating to the laws or regulations which are deemed necessary ; the second, to the issue of trials ; the third, to the enforcement of regulations, and of decisions. Each of the judicatories, in its sphere, possesses these powers ; this body possesses them throughout the whole Church, either through the medium of the lower judicatories, or by its *own inherent authority*. When the lower judicatories transgress or mistake, this Assembly must correct or rebuke them. When they have suffered a culprit to escape the punishment due to him for his misdeeds, this Assembly must arrest

* Form of Government, Chap. 2. Sect. 5.

him, as well as admonish the offending judicatory. In this there is no tyranny, unless the Church can be said to tyrannize over itself; for recollect, upon our own principles, the Church is present, acting by its representatives. Nor can the individual complain that he is injured, unless he supposes his rights, as he may call them, of more consequence than the welfare of the Church, and the preservation of that order which the Church has adopted.

Such is a very brief analysis of the theory of our Government, and its mode of operation. By adhering to this Government and to our Creed, we will preserve among ourselves the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

LET US NOW SEE HOW WE ARE BOUND TO ACT TOWARDS OTHER CHURCHES.

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE, must be kept with them,

1. *By seeking a real visible union with those who entirely agree with us in doctrine and government.* I mean not merely a brotherly correspondence, but a consolidation of our respective denominations into one. What is there to prevent the Reformed Dutch, the Associate Reformed, the Associate, the Reformed Presbyterian Churches, and our Church, from forming one **BODY**. Excepting the first, we all have the same Confession and Catechisms, and

the same Form of Government. The first differs from us only in words, and in a few trifling ceremonies.

Is it not cause of regret and of shame to all who desire the prosperity of Zion, that we should remain as if we really were different in Doctrine or Government? Our Fathers in the old world, on more occasions than one, forgot the distinctions of names. Between the Church of Holland and of Scotland there has ever been a good understanding*. And why should there not be the same between their descendants in this land? Let those who have been instrumental in preventing this Christian harmony, answer. I speak with more freeness and boldness to you; for this Assembly has ever displayed, on this subject, principles honourable to the Church whom they represent, and consistent with the spirit and letter of the Gospel.

2. *In relation to others who differ from us in doctrine or government*, our conduct must be regulated by the nature of the difference. With those who reject the principles of faith and government, which we consider fundamental, we can have no Ecclesiastical connexion, nor Christian fellowship. “Whosoever transgresseth,” saith the beloved apos-

* *Crookshank's Hist. of the Church of Scotland*, furnishes a striking instance of this understanding, in the case of Mr. *Renwick*, a Scottish Presbyterian, who, in 1683, was ordained by the Classis of Groningen, in Holland, a minister of the Gospel, to officiate in the Church of Scotland.

tle, “and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed : for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds*.” To act according to this direction, is not a breach of charity, for charity does not require us to approve of fatal errors, nor to countenance their advocates†. Whilst, therefore, we pity their mistakes, and discharge toward them the duties of social intercourse, we

* 2 John 9. 10, 11. *Irenæus*, speaking of *Polycarp*, says, “There are some yet surviving, who have heard him, (i. e. *Polycarp*,) relate, that *John*, the disciple of the Lord, going into the bath at *Ephesus* to wash himself, and seeing *Cerinthus* in it, leapt out, not having bathed himself, but said, let us make haste away, lest the bath fall in ; *Cerinthus*, the enemy of the truth being within it. This same *Polycarp* also, continues *Irenæus*, being met by *Marcion*, and asked—“Do you know me ?” returned him answer, “I know thee to be the first-begotten of the devil.” So exceedingly cautious were the Apostles and their disciples, not so much as by speech to have any converse with such as were corrupters of the truth : as *Paul* also said, *Tit.* iii. 10, 11.” *Irenæi* adver. Heres. lib. iii. cap. 3. Ed. Gr. p. 204. Both *Cerinthus* and *Marcion*, among other errors, denied the essential divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Mosh.* Eccles. Hist. vol. i. cent. 1. p. 144. 146. cent. 2. p. 218—20.

† See Dr. *Witherspoon* on the Scripture meaning of Charity. The reader will find in this essay the true meaning of this great Christian duty. No class of men, in words, do more strenuously advocate, and none in fact do more grievously transgress it, than they who differ from us in fundamental truths. Charity is for ever in their mouths—but its opposite is displayed in their conduct. They, in this respect, are like the adulterous woman mentioned in the book of Proverbs, who cateth and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness. (*Prov.* 30. 20.) Their charity, (like the tender mercies of the wicked, which are cruelty,) is nothing more than the display of the grossest illiberality, and the most despotic intolerance towards all who do not embrace their errors, or assent to their blasphemy.

cannot acknowledge them as brethren in the Lord ; and therefore cannot keep with them the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. But with those who maintain fundamental doctrines, and in their practice, though not in their theory, acknowledge the essential principles of Church government, our duty is to cultivate brotherly correspondence. They possess all the essential characteristics of real believers. It is our privilege, therefore, to interchange with them in the endearing offices of Christian fellowship, as often as we enjoy the opportunity. We thus manifest our love to them, and gradually prepare the way for the correction of those mistakes into which we think they have fallen. I do not mean to say, however, that when we sojourn with them, and they admit us to the rights of friendship and fellowship, we should improve the opportunity to introduce debates about those matters in which we differ. This would be discourteous in us, and is not less discourteous in them. If any of them choose to unite with us, they ought—they are bound in honour, to adopt *our standards, our modes of expression, our form of government*. If any of us choose to unite with them, *we must do so likewise*. To insist upon such adoption of each other's Creed and Government, necessarily produces an examination of these subjects. We thus become acquainted with each other's sentiments, with the points of difference between us, and the extent of our agreement. In this way brotherly correspondence can be preserved between us, and measures be maturing

to accomplish, in the end, a union with them, as well as with those who entirely agree with us.

Such an union between all the Churches who are essentially one, in faith and government, is a grand and glorious object, and richly worthy of the attention and exertions of this Assembly. What measures may be necessary to promote this purpose, and whether any ought immediately to be adopted by us, are questions to which no answers will be now attempted. Something, however, ought to be done, and that by the *General Assembly of our Church*, either now or on a future occasion.

The times require that such an effort should be speedily made; for these indicate an approaching season of severe trial, from the prevalence of iniquity. A day of darkness awaits the Church, in which her members will be constrained to contend, not for the peculiarities of a party, but for the very foundation of their hope. The prospect of such a day, ought to prompt them to unite as brethren in some visible form, that they may strengthen each other, and together fight the good fight of faith.

The cause we give to the enemies of religion to reproach us, and to condemn the religion we profess, requires that we should unite. They see our divisions; and finding upon inquiry, that there are no points of difference between us of any moment, we ourselves being judges, they ask the reason why

we remain divided? No answer can be given, but such an one as will fill their mouths with scoffs, and our hearts with pain. On this subject we cannot fairly and honourably meet their charges; for they have cause to condemn us for our conduct.

Our duty to ourselves requires that we should unite. We deprive ourselves of the delights of Christian intercourse. We are, moreover, guilty of a gross absurdity. We commune with one of whose want of piety and holiness we have just *suspensions*, though no proof, barely because he belongs to our denomination: but will not commune with one of whom we entertain no suspicion—whom we highly respect, and cordially love, and whom we hope to meet in heaven, because he belongs to another denomination. On this subject, Churches have a solemn account to render to their Head. They have made points of *external order*, about which there is no specific direction, the terms of communion, when there has been no difference in faith, or love, or hope.

Our duty to God requires a union. He, by his Spirit, makes sinners members of the Church, and by the same Spirit, enables these members to walk worthy of their vocation. We recognize the religious character of such persons, and we dare not object to their ecclesiastical character. We cannot say, they are no members of Christ's body, nor members of his visible Church. We, therefore, in

our intercourse with them, act in such a manner, as to cover ourselves with shame, because we do not hold fellowship with those, whom we in our hearts believe are admitted to fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

The future state of the Church requires a union between us. The time is approaching, when all the different denominations of Christians, who hold to the Head, Jesus Christ, shall be united together in one fold. In that fold, will meet Jew and Gentile, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Independent. They will then forget their former divisions, and, with thanksgivings to God for his mercy, acknowledge each other as heirs of the promise. It is delightful to contemplate that period according to prophetic description. There will be no parties in the family of Christ; for mutual love and endearing fellowship will prevail; bigotry will be unknown, and the prejudices which bigotry produces, cease to operate in the hearts of saints.

Where is the believer who does not rejoice—whose bosom is not filled with transport, at such a prospect? The present disjointed state of the Church—the party-feelings, and jealousies, which her members display—the want of visible brotherly affection among them, whilst they sicken the hearts of God's children, make them also glad in looking forward, and anticipating the day, when

there shall be “ new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*.”

Who, then, is unwilling to strive in his place, that he may be instrumental in hastening this issue? None, I trust, in this Assembly—none, I trust, throughout our Church.

I add no more.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. AMEN†.

* 2 Pet. iii. 13

† Ephes. iii. 20, 21.

A P P E N D I X.



THE Author is satisfied that the Union he has recommended in the preceding discourse, between the different parts of the *Presbyterian Church*, must be the result of serious and mature deliberation. He is not desirous, even if he could, of precipitating such a measure, great and important as it appears to him. If the subject only excites attention, so as to produce an examination of *its practicability*, he will be abundantly rewarded for his labour. He says *practicability*, for he cannot conceive that a single Christian can hesitate about *the duty* of promoting such a Union. Without entering into the subject, he only remarks—that the Scriptures teach us that *the Church* is One, and that she shall ever remain One. They also do most unequivocally condemn divisions among those who profess to be members of this Church. The *criminality* of such divisions among *Evangelical Presbyterians*, appears clearly, because there is actually no reason for them, in any one respect which involves in it, the present comfort of believers, or their future salvation.

Between the *Reformed Dutch* and the *Presbyterian Church*, there is no point of difference in which conscience is, or can be, interested. Let any man compare their Doctrines and Government, and he will soon be convinced of the truth of this remark. The Author speaks with the more confidence, because he was himself educated in the *Reformed Dutch Church*, and for some years a minister in her connexion.

Between the *Presbyterian*, the *Associate Reformed*, the *Associate* and the *Reformed Presbyterian Churches*, the principal difficulty of importance is *Psalmody*. But on

this subject, a Union is practicable, provided Christian prudence and forbearance be exercised. Two extremes, however, must at once be abandoned, viz. that no other system of psalmody may be used in the Church than that which is contained in the *book of Psalms* ; and, that such system is unfit to be used in the Christian Church. Let it be remembered, that there is no positive evidence for either of these opinions, since both are the result of reasoning by induction. The premises, from which both are drawn, are not clearly revealed in the Scripture. The duty of endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, is however positively enjoined upon the members of Christ's family. Is it right then, for a matter certainly not settled, by a ' thus saith the Lord ; ' nor so decidedly and unequivocally inferred from positive premises, as infant baptism and female communion—is it right for *such a matter*, about which sound, consistent, evangelical Presbyterians, have differed, and do differ, to risk transgressing a *positive duty*, viz. that of Christian communion ? Especially since the discharge of this duty is accompanied with real satisfaction and edification to believers.

These *hints* are merely suggested, with no intention of entering into the merits of the controversy. The author can with truth say, that he is edified in the use of the *book of Psalms*, and also in the use of uninspired psalms. God has given to both, so much of his approbation in blessing each to his children, that both ought to be allowed. Considering then, that the *proposed Union is practicable*, and that all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in these different denominations, cannot but grant that *it is desirable*, the following rude outlines of a plan to effect it, are suggested.

I. As the General Assembly of the *Presbyterian Church* is the largest body, let them propose to the highest judicatory of the *Reformed Dutch, Associate Reformed, Associate and Reformed Presbyterian Church*, respectively, the appointment of two, or more delegates, to attend the sessions of each such judicatory with power to take a

part in counsel and debate, but not to vote on any question whatever.

II. Let the General Assembly propose the appointment of two or more Commissioners from each such judicatory, who shall meet within one year from their appointment, and afterwards by their own adjournments, and report at their pleasure, a digested system of Ecclesiastical Union among all the Churches, so as to embrace,

1. The doctrines, of the standards of the Westminster Assembly, and of the Belgic or Low Dutch Reformed Churches.

2. A system of visible order, including Government and Discipline upon Presbyterian principles.

3. One form of religious worship, including one *Psalm Book*, which alone shall be used in the different congregations. This psalm-book to embrace, (1.) That translation of the book of Psalms in the Bible, which is the truest and most elegant that can be procured. (2.) The best collection of translations and paraphrases of other scriptural passages. And, (3.) the most judicious collection of religious hymns and songs. The whole to form such a copious and comprehensive system of Psalmody, as shall enable the officers of each congregation to make a suitable selection for their own use.

III. That these commissioners, when such digest is completed, have power to call a General Convention, to meet in Philadelphia, or elsewhere, and finally settle the system of uniformity. Such Convention to be composed of two, or more, representatives from each of all the Presbyteries or Classes in America.

The whole plan, of which the preceding imperfect outlines are with diffidence suggested, would require a considerable length of time to complete it, if it should be adopted by the different Presbyterian Churches. The first particular, however, can be carried into effect immediately, without violating the prejudices, or convulsing the peace of any Church. This measure will afford an opportunity, for the different Churches to become better acquainted with each other than they now are. The points of difference

will then be more correctly known, and their magnitude or want of importance, be accordingly estimated.

We have much to learn about what is really essential to Christian communion, as well as Christian character; and must, if we will conscientiously do our duty, make great sacrifices of *pride, conceit, vanity, prejudice, and illiberality*. The present divided state of the Churches, which are Evangelical in doctrine, and Presbyterian in government, is both mortifying and distressing to every one who longs for the prosperity of Zion. Nothing but IGNORANCE, or BIGOTRY, can keep those apart, who on all important subjects think, and feel, and act alike, if they will only exercise towards each other, that Christian prudence and Christian forbearance, which their duty to Christ and their regard for their own happiness, do require in the plainest and most peremptory manner.