

NARRATIVE.

OF THE

DIVISION OF THE

Reformed Presbyterian Church,

U. S., 1833,

BY REV. DAVID SCOTT.

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY OF SYNOD.

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1833.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE.

The Committee on the Narrative of the Division of 1833, report that they have carefully reviewed the Narrative, and are fully satisfied as to the accuracy of the statements of facts and the reasoning of the argument.

Further, that they recommend the striking out several short paragraphs, which they have marked, and which are merely amplifications of the argument; and the addition of one paragraph in regard to the homologation the United States Constitution on the part of the voter in the use of the elective franchise.

DAVID SCOTT,
Chairman of Committee.

MINUTE OF SYNOD ON THE ABOVE.

That Mr. Scott publish said Narrative as soon as funds can be obtained, and accompany said publication with a statement of the circumstances connected with the preparation of the Narrative.

S. BOWDEN,
Clerk of Synod.

Alleghany, May 29, 1862.

THE DIVISION OF 1833, &c.

A narrative of this period, including the facts which transpired, might be given in few words. Such a sketch, however faithful, would fail to satisfy the rising generations of the church, who may be supposed to take a deep interest in transactions so intimately connected with the peace and well-being of a Christian community claiming to be witnesses for the crown-rights and royal prerogatives of the King of Zion.

The actors in the scenes which led to the rupture are rapidly passing away from the stage of time, and with them, much that is necessary to a correct historical apprehension of the subject, unless it is committed to writing, and accompanied with such authority as may command future attention and respect.

In a social movement like the subject of this Narrative, there are exciting circumstances which precede and underlie the occurrence of the facts, without a knowledge of which the latter cannot be understood! These stand separated and apart, like the broken pieces of a colossal pillar, in which no lines of unity or relation of parts can be traced: they are only historical fragments. The circumstances which underlie the facts are the causes which produce them; and irrespective of these, of course there cannot be a truthful appreciation of the facts themselves.

The relation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church to the Constitution and Government of the United States is that of dissent. This position in regard to the civil relations of the country, involves the necessity of abstinence on the part of her members from such connection with the Government as requires an acknowledgment of the system, or that implies and takes it for granted, whether it be by holding office, doing acts of a judicial character, or by the exercise of the elective franchise in the election of officers whose office requires them to swear allegiance to the system.

The ground on which the Church dissents from, and declines the homologation by voluntary acts, of any civil government, is because of its immorality. In her testimony the Church holds this language: "God, the Supreme Governor, is the fountain of all power and authority, and civil magistrates are his deputies; in the administration of government, obedience is due to their lawful command for conscience sake; but no power which deprives the subject of his liberty—which wantonly squanders his property and sports with his life—or which authorizes false religion, (however it may exist according to Divine providence) is approved of or sanctioned by God, or ought to be esteemed or supported by man as a moral institution.¹ It is the duty of Christians, for the sake of peace and order, and in humble resignation to God's good providence, to conform to the common relations of society in things lawful; but to profess allegiance to no Constitution of government which is in hostility to the kingdom of Christ, the head of the Church, and the prince of the Kings of the earth."² The Church condemns as "errors," and testifies "against all who maintain them," the following as well as others: "That scripture revelation is not the rule by which Christians should direct their civil conduct; that it is lawful for civil rulers to authorize the purchase and sale of any part of the human family as slaves; that a Constitution which deprives unoffending men of liberty and property is a moral institution to be recognized as God's ordinance;³ that it is lawful to profess or swear allegiance to an immoral Constitution."⁴

It is thus that the testimony becomes a bond of union to the members of the Church, and a guide to direct them in regard to their civil relations in the United States.

The authorized history of the Church demonstrates the sense in which her doctrinal principles on this subject have been understood and acted upon in the past—how they were understood by the fathers of the Church in the United States—how the testimony was applied by those who wrote it and gave it their public sanction.

"In the course of this session (1806) two acts were passed which are important, as containing practical directions for the

1—Testimony, chap. 29, 3, Ed. 1849.
2— " chap. 30, 2

3—Testimony, chap. 29, errors condemned.
4— " chap. 30, "

conduct of individual members of the Church—an act respecting giving oath before the constituted authorities of the nation, and an act respecting serving as jurors in courts of justice.

“The Reformed Presbyterian Church approve of some of the leading features of the constitution of government in the United States. It is happily calculated to preserve the civil liberty of the inhabitants, and to protect their persons and their property. A definite Constitution upon the representative system reduced to writing, and rendered the bond of union among all the members of the civil association, is a righteous measure which should be adopted by every nation under heaven. Such a Constitution must, however, be founded on the basis of morality, and must in every article be moral, before it can be recognized by the conscientious Christian as an ordinance of God. Were every article which it contains and every principle which it involves perfectly just, except in a single instance, in which it was found to violate the law of God, Christians can not consistently adopt it. When immorality and impiety are rendered essential to any system, the whole system must be rejected.

“Presbyterian Covenanters perceiving immorality interwoven with the general, and the States’ constitutions of government in America, have uniformly dissented from the civil establishments. Much as they loved liberty, they loved religion more. Anxious as they were for the good of the country, they were more anxious for the prosperity of Zion. Their opposition, however, has been the opposition of reason and piety. The weapons of their warfare are arguments and prayers.”¹

In regard to giving oath when summoned before the constituted authorities of the nation, the members of the Church have not had any serious trouble. Such an act does not compromise the Church, or her testimony of it "be perfectly understood that the oath is an act of homage performed voluntarily to the Supreme Being, and by no means a recognition of the magistrate's authority, or communion with him in his official capacity."² The principles on which Presbytery acted in the deliverance just noticed, is so obvious that misunderstanding can scarcely exist; but if they "are not admitted, by those who called for the oath to be made, Covenanters cannot comply."³

1—Historical part of the Testimony, edition of 1849, p. 122.

2- " " " 193, 194.

8—Edition of 1849, p. 124.

It has been otherwise in regard of serving as jurors in courts of justice. The testimony of the Church connected with this and other civil relations involving the same principles, claims therefore special notice in this Narrative. The act of Presbytery respecting serving on juries is absolutely prohibitory.

"There are moral evils essential to the Constitution of the United States which render it necessary to refuse allegiance to the whole system. In this remarkable instrument there is contained no acknowledgment of the being or the authority of God. There is no acknowledgment of the Christian religion, or professed subjection to the kingdom of the Messiah. It gives support to the enemies of the Redeemer, and admits to its honors and emoluments, Jews, Mohametans, Deists and Atheists. It establishes that system of robbery by which men are held in slavery, despoiled of liberty and property and protection. It violates the principles of representation by bestowing on the domestic tyrant who holds hundreds of his fellow creatures in bondage, an influence in making laws for freemen proportioned to the number of his own slaves. The Constitution is, notwithstanding its numerous excellencies, in many instances inconsistent, oppressive, and impious. "The members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church have refused to serve in any office which implies an approbation of the Constitution, or which is placed under the direction of an immoral law. They have abstained from giving their votes for legislators or officers who must be qualified to act by an oath of allegiance to an immoral system. They could not themselves consistently swear allegiance to that Government, in the Constitution of which there is so much immorality. In all these instances their practice has been uniform.

"Some persons, however, who in other things profess an attachment to reformation principles, have considered serving on juries as consistent with their testimony. In order to expose the inconsistency of this practice, the Presbytery have determined at a convenient time to publish a warning against it, and in the meantime they deemed it expedient to pass a prohibitory act.

"Jurors are executive officers created by the Constitution, and deriving from it all their power. They sit on the bench of justice as the ultimate tribunal, from whose verdict there is in many

instances no appeal. They mingle together, the virtuous and the vicious, Christians and infidels, the pious and the profane, in one sworn association. They incorporate with the national society, and in finding a verdict, represent the nation. They serve under the direction of constituted courts, and are the constitutional judges of what is laid before them. The Constitution itself is, in criminal cases, the supreme law, which they are bound upon oath to apply; and in civil cases the bench determines the law by which the jury is to be directed! The juror voluntarily places himself upon oath, under the direction of a law which is immoral. The Reformed Presbytery declare this practice inconsistent with their testimony, and warn church members against serving on juries under the direction of the constituted courts of law."¹ The history of the Church on which we have largely drawn in the above extracts, exemplify her principles as explained and applied in practice. In consequence of these two acts, "Presbyterian Covenanters have no remaining difficulty about the proper application of their testimony."

The history of the Church possesses an authentic character, which claims the greatest respect as historical authority. It comes to us with all the safe-guards as to truthfulness and accuracy which the Church can give it; it is not the formal statement of doctrine, but it is an official historical statement of the law of the Church, in regard to doctrine. It is historical evidence as to the received meaning and application of the doctrines of the Church on the subject of civil relations. To repudiate the history, in this connection, is virtually to deny what "the Reformed Presbytery" judicatively declared to be truth, both as to the meaning of the law and its application.

It is important then to the subject of this Narrative, to bear in mind that Presbytery passed "two acts containing practical directions for the conduct of the individual members of the Church." These acts are as really part of the law of the Church as any chapter in the doctrinal part of the testimony; they are not invalidated as law, because they were not embodied at the time in the declaration of doctrine.² The validity of the acts depends entirely on the judicial action of Presbytery. This gave them

1—Historical part of the Testimony, edition of 1848, pp. 124, 126.

2—In regard to this, the edition of the testimony of 1854 assigns the following as the reasons, viz: that these and other judicative acts were to be published separately. The troubles of the Church, which followed soon after, and issued in the separation of 1858, accounts for the non-fulfilment of the promise.

all the authority of law in the Church : and of this fact, the history given by Presbytery is such proof as no Reformed Presbyterian can consistently reject in the premises.

The general statements of doctrine in relation to immoral constitutions of civil government, quoted from the testimony of the Church, furnish a rule by which her members are bound in principle to act, and the definite application of this rule to the government of the United States, leaves no room for honest difference of opinion.

In the faithful application of this principle the Church enjoyed an undisturbed peace of twenty years, but with her growth in numbers there came laxity of principle and unfaithfulness in the application of the laws of the Church as to civil relations. Members of the Church, especially in large cities, began to show an anxiety, if not to hold civil offices, at least to enjoy the elective franchise ; this was greatly increased by the felt-inconvenience frequently arising from practical adherence to the testimony of the Church. The desire to enjoy political privileges, and of course to evade the laws which stood in the way of this, received strength from the consideration of the loss suffered, or supposed to be suffered, by standing aloof from the enjoyment of political privileges. In whatever they may have originated, it is certain that sentiments in conflict with the testimony of the Church in regard to civil relations, were now freely expressed.

These sentiments attracted for some time but little notice, as they were at first cautiously uttered, and rather as a subject of speculative thought than as a matured conclusion. They were put forth as feelers to try opinion in the Church, and warily drawn back when it was found that they excited suspicion as to the soundness in the doctrine of the Church of those who propounded them.

Such tentative processes were not without success ; many honest and unsuspecting members of the Church were ensnared by fallacies, indirectly, though cunningly insinuated into their minds, without being at all aware of the real object which was intended, and thus gently drifted out into the open sea of unsettled opinion, whilst they falsely imagined themselves safely harbored in the doctrine of the Church ! In this way the truth and authority of the testimony was in part, though quietly, yet surely undermined ;

and it was only when this became prominent in the altered sentiments openly avowed by many who till this time were esteemed steadfast friends of truth, that serious danger was apprehended. But, emboldened by success, the policy was changed, and what had heretofore been proposed merely as suggestive or speculative matters by the leaders of the party, were claimed as consistent with the law of the Church.

The subject now assumed the form of controversy, and the members of the Church began to arrange themselves on their respective sides of this all-engrossing subject. The advantage gained by the process of a covert proselytism gave no little success to the innovation attempted on the testimony. And it was now that the antagonistic names of old-light and new-light came into use.

In a time so trying to the principles of men a great number of the people were faithful to their covenant obligations. In many congregations ministers and elders endeavored to act up to the well known law of the Church in the matters controverted; in others the change taking place was winked at; and in others it was eagerly encouraged. The exciting question of civil relations, with such diversity of feeling, could not long be kept out of the higher courts of the Church; it came before them in the various forms of memorials or appeals. In most, if not all, of the earlier cases which came up to the higher courts, innovation on the principles or practice of the Church was not avowed in the discussions which followed; the question at issue was seldom or ever fairly and promptly met, but was kept out of view by evasion while the principles of the Church were indirectly assailed. The conflict was thus, for a time, on the one side, maintained from behind a masked battery, and any attempt to dislodge those who took this position, and bring them into the field of fair discussion was denounced as intolerant and oppressive.

It was scarcely possible, in this state of things, to avoid personal collisions. The opponents of the testimony as it had all along been understood and acted on, were often maddened into passion at the efforts made to expose their want of good faith, and frequently scrupled not to use very offensive language towards those who opposed them. Acting in defence of the tes-

timony, its friends must have been more than human, if they had not sometimes retorted, perhaps with severity. But it would be wide indeed of the truth to say that the conflict which terminated in the division of the Church, was caused by personal hostility or dislike ; that there may have been something of this kind, the circumstances of the case make probable ; personal difficulties, however, were the result of difference, as to the policy of the Church in respect of civil relations, and in no wise the cause of them.

As the controversy assumed in 1832, a more public and tangible form, several theories were proposed in vindication of the innovation on the testimony.

The less wary of those, now moulded into the popular view of this subject, did not hesitate to place themselves virtually on the ground that it was not necessary to the homologation of a government, that it possesses a scriptural character ; in other words, that a government may be recognized, and office held under it, irrespective of its morality. And Nehemiah and Daniel were frequently adduced as examples of godly men, holding office under a pagan and immoral government.¹ They referred also to the answer of John the Baptist to the Roman soldiers, when asked, "What shall we do?" and he said unto them, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages."² Members of the Church who understood and adhered to her principles, were not much troubled with this class of arguments. Nehemiah, Daniel, and others similarly circumstanced and called to act in the service of the kings of Babylon, recognized no allegiance to the corrupt existing state of things, by oath or otherwise. The system was an unmixed despotism, in which there was no constitution of government ; the will of the reigning prince was law. In this state of things, commands lawful in themselves might be obeyed, and Daniel or any other man called to carry them into effect, might be so employed without being involved in any of the immoralities of the system ; because no acknowledgment of the government either by oath or implication, was required. And when unrighteous commands were given, any servant of the government, so circumstanced,

¹—This kind of plea was in common use by many of the people.

²—Luke 3, 14. This scripture was so used in the meeting of the members of Synod, held immediately before the separation, in the city of Philadelphia.

stood free and unfettered, by any obligation of allegiance, to resist them, as in fact Daniel did when the wicked decree was given "that whosoever should ask a petition from any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O, King, he shall be cast into the den of lions." In the case of the Roman soldiers, the answer of John presents no difficulty; these men were not members of the Church, nor had the answer of the Baptist a reference to any condition or terms of Church membership; it was given merely as a direction how they were to conduct themselves in a relation in which they already stood. In this light, the answer of John is pertinent, but in regard to the civil relations of the witnesses of Christ, it gives no instruction!

Others again, vindicated the views which they held as to civil relations, on the ground that defects in a constitution of government, do not invalidate its claim of being the ordinance of God.¹ There is truth in this, though not enough to make it available as an argument in the case. It is true that there may be defects in a constitution of government which do not invalidate its claim to recognition, but the defects as well as positive evils of a constitution, may be such as to destroy its claim to be the ordinance of God, and its title to the conscientious obedience of Christians. And this is what the testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church asserts in the application of its principles to the constitution of the United States.

Again, admitting it was said, the characteristics given by the Church, as necessary to a morally constituted government, it was claimed that the United States constitution possessed these characteristics, and might, therefore, be acknowledged without betraying the testimony of the Church. Some who used this as an argument, admitted that they had changed their minds in regard to the character of the constitution of the United States.² Others, less candid, evaded this admission, and acted and wrote, as if their minds had underwent no change on the subject.³ But whether avowing or not the change, both classes wished to be understood as holding the doctrine on civil relations, taught in the testimony; they admitted the doctrine as an abstract principle, but objected to the application of it to the constitution

1—McMaster's Four Letters—position 5th.

2—Dr. Wylie, as may be seen in his life of Dr. McLeod.

3—Dr. McMaster's Four Letters,

of the United States. But, it is difficult to understand how intelligent men, if honest, could have persuaded themselves that they did not oppose the testimony when they maintained that office might be held under, and the oath of allegiance taken to the constitution of the United States.

Apply this principle of action to any precept of the moral law, and the falsity of it at once becomes apparent; for example, a man takes his neighbor's property, and is consequently charged with denying the obligation of the eighth commandment; No! he indignantly replies. I admit the doctrine of the precept, and only make a new application of it! So, in the matter we are now narrating, the new application of the law of the Church on civil relations, is a violation of the law itself; for the Church has not only declared it to be an error, "to profess or swear allegiance to an immoral constitution of civil government;"¹ but, she has also said, that "there are moral evils essential to the constitution of the United States which render it necessary to refuse allegiance to the whole system."² The Church thus applies the principle so that a different application of it, is a violation of the principle itself. Though well fitted to draw the attention of the Church away from the real question in dispute, it may not have been relied on much as an argument; for, in other connections, the same parties insinuated that Covenanters asked more on this subject than ought to be expected.³ Insinuations of this kind, cautiously expressed, and coming from respected teachers, who had hitherto been known as the earnest supporters of the testimony, took effect, and largely leavened the minds of such as were not thoroughly instructed in the principles of the Church, or who were only too happy to have an excuse for enjoying civil privileges, which apparently saved the consistency of their religious profession.

Perhaps the most influential of all the theories to mislead, though not so prominently put forward, was one that did not ignore the moral character of a Constitution of government, as the first noticed does, nor assume like the second, and third that the Constitution of the United States is the moral ordinance of God. The leaders of the new party could scarcely succeed in satisfying the more intelligent portion of the people contrary to

1—Testimony, right of dissent: error first.

2—Historical part of the testimony as formerly quoted.

3—Dr. McMaster's Four Letters.

their own former teaching, that the United States Constitution was an exemplification of a Scriptural Government. This necessitated some more plausible reason for the attempted change in regard to our civil relations.

The view referred to is that the elective franchise and other political privileges, do not involve the parties voting or otherwise acting, in the evils of the Constitution under which they are enjoyed! This, though untrue, is much more plausible, and not so obvious to detection, as the other theories which have been noticed. The very novelty of this mode of practically doing away with the testimony, was not without an unfavorable influence, as the people were less prepared to deal with it than with the other modes of evasion, and it may reasonably be supposed to have been resorted to from an apprehension of their weakness to vindicate the enjoyment of political privileges by members of the Church. The evil influence which this plausible view of the subject has exerted, and may yet exert if not exposed, demands special attention in this connection; and the narrative will not be without a useful lesson, if the Church is warned by exposing the falsity of the pretence.

It is a scriptural principle that civil rulers should "fear God, and be men of truth, hating covetousness;" and, as the law-making power in a commonwealth is the highest exercise of rule in the government, members of the Legislature should be eminently possessed of a high, moral character. It may, therefore, be submitted, whether, under a Constitution in which moral qualifications are not required of the members of the Legislature, Reformed Presbyterians can consistently exercise the elective franchise? The want of such qualifications is a sufficient reason for declining the exercise of this privilege of citizenship; and the reason applies with not less force to the judicial and executive, than to the Legislative department of Government.

Again, the enjoyment of the elective privilege interferes with the application of the scriptural rule mentioned, because it cannot, in present circumstances, be exercised without violating that rule in another way. Ought a Christian then, it may be asked, to give his influence to exalt such men into places of authority and trust? And this he does if he exercises the elective franchise, while the present state of things

continue, for if he votes at all, he must vote for a party candidate. It is important to bear in mind that the prevailing ungodliness and immorality of legislators and other public officers may be traced, in part at least, to the ungodly and immoral character of our civil institutions. It may well be inquired whether a civil Constitution which requires no moral qualification of those who make and execute the laws of the land, that ignores the existence of God, the authority of Messiah, "the Governor of the nations," and which disregards and refuses to acknowledge the Christian religion, has not a direct tendency to foster immorality? How can a Reformed Presbyterian, with the testimony which he professes to hold regarding civil government as the ordinance of God for good to man, take any part in the election of officers to any branch of the government under such an immoral Constitution? It would be much more honest, and safer to his own conscience, to abandon the testimony of the Church, than to hold it, in pretence, and at the same time compromise its principles in regard to civil government.

It is a serious disregard of moral principle to use the elective franchise, to choose men to places of power and trust which the voter admits to be immoral; in such cases persons elected act under immoral conditions of office. But it is contrary to right moral feeling for any one to elect another to do for him what he scruples to do in his own proper person; he cannot with a safe conscience appoint another to do what he would not himself do. To form a correct judgment on this subject it is to be remembered that the argument for the use of the elective franchise, now under consideration, proceeds on the admission of the immorality of the Constitution, though it denies that the act of the voter involves him in the immorality admitted. And were this not, as it is, admitted, the result would be the same when judged of in the light of the Church's testimony. For it is of no importance to us in the decision of the question, that other Christians do not scruple to enjoy this political privilege, or even to hold office, under an immoral Constitution, because we must decide the question according to our own, and not by their principles. And from this stand-point the judgment is emphatically one of condemnation.

Further, the voter is identified with his elected representative. And this holds good in regard to all the branches of the government in which the officers are appointed by popular vote. One, who employs another to act for him, is himself the doer of what is done, by the instrumentality of the person employed by him. As an illustration of this, it is not unknown in the history of the world that persons have been employed by others to commit the crime of murder. In forming a moral judgment in such a case, no one hesitates to say that both parties are guilty of murder. And on what ground is the person who hires the assassin as well as the assassin himself guilty of this crime? Is it not on the principle of the identity of the one with the other, in relation to the act done? The man who does the deed is a murderer, and so is the man that employs him to do it; the latter is as truly guilty of the crime as if he had done it by his own hand.

In point of moral principle, the voter puts himself into a similar relation with the person whom he elects to office, as he who employs another person to do any act for him: that is, he identifies himself with the person who acts in his place. We have taken an extreme case in illustration, one about which there can be no diversity of opinion in a Christian community, that the principle may be seen in its full force. It depends not on the moral quality of the action, but on the nature of the representative relation of the parties: be the thing done, right or wrong, it is morally, at least, the act of the person who uses the agency of another to do it for him.

On no moral ground can a man be exempted from the responsibility of an action or course of action, which he has devolved on another as his representative; confined within the proper limits of representation, the acts of the representative are the acts of those who appointed him to act for them. And here too are involved the responsibility of whatever may be necessary to qualify him to act.

This principle is applicable to the relation of the voter and his representative; a member of Congress or of a State Legislature, acts for, and represents his constituents. The application of the principle is not affected in any way by the fact that a legislative representative is chosen, not by one, but by a number of elec-

tors; and he is as really the representative of each one, as he is of the whole number.

The end for which the members of a Legislature are elected, is to make laws for the government of the commonwealth, and the Constitution is the rule by which they are enacted; nor can representatives be elected, or have a right to act in making laws, except in conformity to constitutional provision. The representative acts, and can act only, by an acknowledgment of the Constitution; and this being necessarily included in the end for which he is elected; the voter also in this way acknowledges the Constitution.

The members of the Legislature are appointed by the electors, and could not take their seats there, without their authority given by means of the elective franchise. It is this, that opens to them the door of the Legislature, gives them the right to take their places there, and make laws for the commonwealth; and, if an immoral Constitution must be acknowledged by the representative, then, this, with all the immoralities involved in it, are also acknowledged by the voter, in consequence of the authority which he delegated to him, by the exercise of the elective franchise.

If any act is required of the representative necessary to qualify him to do what he is sent to the Legislature to perform, this too, is the act of all and every one of those who elected him. The oath which every member of the Legislature must swear before he can take his seat, is known to the elector before he uses the right of suffrage; and being necessary to his acting in his representative character, the elector virtually authorizes him to take the oath to the Constitution, whatever it may be, because the function of law-making which he is elected to perform, cannot be performed without it.

The Constitution is the work of the people; they framed and adopted it. It is the acknowledged Constitution of the voters of the country. Why does the Representative swear to support it? Because the people, the electors, have required it. And why have they required it? As a guide to their representative, and as a restraint upon him in his acts as a legislator, (a judge, or elective officer.) Hence every voter by the act of voting under the Con-

stitution, by which he sends a representative, recognizes the Constitution under which he sends him to act, not as an independent autocratic legislator, but as a legislator under instruction and advice contained in the Constitution which has been established by the popular will, as a safeguard to the right so so affirmed of the community. To this the representative must swear, that is, must swear that he will conform to, and not transcend the provisions of the Constitution; consequently, in the act of voting there is an immediate and direct recognition of the Constitution.¹

This rapid review of the moral conditions involved in the exercise of the elective franchise, shows that it cannot be used in this, or any other country, in which there are moral evils essential to the Constitution, without compromising the testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The difference of opinion on the subject of civil relations, assumed a distinct and unpleasant form in the meeting of Synod, 1881. Fears were expressed by some members, which subsequent events have justified. By other members of Synod, these fears were treated as groundless; they indignantly resented the suspicion which they supposed to be thus cast on them, of forsaking the testimony; they gave no precise explanation of their views, but satisfied themselves with general and vague denials of the implied charge. This cautious mode of treating the subject was, if not christian simplicity, at least worldly wisdom; for, it became known afterwards that the opinions of some of this party were fully matured before the meeting of Synod; and yet, they boldly affirmed that they were misunderstood, if not misrepresented, and pledged themselves to show this if an opportunity for mutual discussion was afforded them.

They proposed, therefore, to eliminate their views of civil relations, under the head of "Free Discussion," in the pages of "the American Christian Expositor," a monthly periodical, edited by a member of Synod. This apparently fair proposal was accepted in the spirit in which it was presumed to have been offered. It was not, however, understood by those who accepted the offer, that parties writing on the subject, were at liberty to

1—The above paragraph is that added by the Committee.

dispute the admitted doctrines and practice of the Church ; nor can they be supposed to have understood that it was so intended by those who made the proposal, for opposition to the testimony was the very thing which they had so indignantly repelled, and in regard to which they sought the opportunity of free discussion, that they might set themselves right before the Church. It was indeed subsequently avowed that the subject of civil relations was an open question, and the agreement referred to, was perverted to support the claim. But, had this been avowed at the time, the proposal never would have been accepted, and if it was so intended—as there is reason to fear it was—it deserves the scorn of every right-hearted man ! It is not capable of even an apology.

Whether this arrangement if it had been carried out in good faith, as it was apparently made and accepted, would have prevented the division of the Church, cannot now be known ; as it is, we recognize it as the initiatory step to other things which hastened and precipitated the final issue, which might otherwise have been prevented, by giving time to many of those who were tired of the restraint imposed on them by the testimony, to have quietly left the communion of the Church without disturbing her peace, or violating her unity.

The most prominent and exciting of the immediate causes which led to the separation of the Church was the publication of "the Pastoral Address." At a meeting of the Eastern Subordinate-Synod, held in April, 1832, a committee was raised to prepare an address to the people, under their pastoral charge. Of this Committee, Dr. Wylie was appointed Chairman ; on the following morning he reported a long and elaborate article. This was the first public avowal of the Doctor and his party, of a radical change of opinion, in regard to civil relations. A stormy debate followed, which ended in the rejection, by Synod of some of the more offensive portions of the report. The views of Dr. Wylie and those who supported him, were more fully and even more offensively developed in the debate, than they were in the report itself. The elaborate character of the report, and the promptitude with which it was brought out, leave no doubt that it had been previously and carefully prepared, and that the mo-

tion for a Committee on the subject was part of a pre-concerted plan, to throw out before the Church, under the sanction of the E. S. Synod, the deliberately matured views of the party of which Dr. Wylie was, if not the real, the nominal leader.

As far as the action of Synod was concerned, this attempt was a failure; though the fact that it had been debated in Synod, gave a prestige to the party, which was not without effect. They were strengthened in the pretention—false indeed—but which they were anxious to have the public believe, that their views on civil relations, were susceptible of explanation, in accordance with the principles of the Church.

Though foiled in Synod, the party determined to make the most of the circumstances in which they were thus placed, held a private meeting immediately after the adjournment of Synod, in which it was agreed to publish the address, as originally prepared, with the portions rejected by Synod. This was done and accompanied with an appendix remarkable for statements, so abusive, that one is led to question whether the folly or the malignity which they betray, is the greater. The document thus published, fell on the public mind like a spark of fire on a powder-magazine, and was followed by a justly merited indignation on the part of all who desired to maintain, unimpaired, the testimony of the Church. But the effects on another class, who were but too willing to have even the shadow of an excuse, for the coveted enjoyment of political privileges, were exceedingly injurious.

The hope of amicable arrangement, which till now, had been entertained by many members of the Church, was finally cut off by this unpresbyterial, as well as imprudent act. It was too great a divergence from recognized principle; too great a step in advance, and too openly made to admit of retreat; and, if possible, the difficulty was increased by the violent temperament and conduct of those who took the lead in this crusade against the testimony of the Church. The friends of order, too, were feverishly alive to the danger to which their principles were exposed, were justly irritated by the means used to foist upon them an application of the testimony, as untenable as it was suicidal!

The excitement caused by the Pastoral Address, was greatly increased by the almost simultaneous publication of the celebrated "Four Letters," on civil relations by Dr. McMaster. This, if not so offensive in the circumstances of publication, was by far the more injurious in its influence. It was in fact, a bold, yet cunning attack on the principles and position of the Church, and much better adapted to disturb the minds of the people, and excite doubts respecting the meaning of the testimony, than the Pastoral Address. Dogmatic in statement, sophistical in its reasoning, and unscrupulous in its pretensions; this publication was by far the most dangerous weapon that had yet been wielded against the testimony of the Church.

These arrogant and defiant attacks were not without success; the simple and unwary were seduced from the truth, and those who were disposed to abandon it, found encouragement in the plausibility of their arguments. The war against principle which had been privately waged for years, was now openly proclaimed; the gauntlet was thrown down, and the adherents of the testimony must either accept the challenge or abandon the field. The latter alternative could not be taken; whatever might be the result, the testimony must be maintained in its integrity at all hazards. Grieved, but not disheartened; alarmed, but not confounded by the arts which had been practiced on the Church; strong in number as well as in principle, her children clung to the testimony with the greater attachment, only the more endeared to them when menaced with danger.

In this state of things, a meeting of the E. S. Synod, became a necessity, to take action in regard to the publication of the Pastoral Address. A meeting was, therefore, called by the Rev. William Gibson, the moderator, on the requisition of two presbyteries of the Eastern Sub-Synod.¹ This meeting was held in the city of New York, Nov. 25th, 1832. The members inculpated in the publication of the Pastoral Address did not attend; all the other constituent members with one exception, were present, and a number of ruling elders. Some of those implicated in the publication of the Address, sent notices declining attendance at this meeting, and declaring against any action being taken in the premises. This attempt—which bore the marks of concert and

1—The Northern and Southern.

arrangement—to coerce Synod, was of course not heeded. As this meeting of the E. S. Synod has been much misrepresented and its legality denied, it therefore deserves particular notice in the history of the separation of the Church.

That an ecclesiastical court has the right to meet on the call of the moderator to attend to special business, is a fundamental principle of the Presbyterian system of government. "The moderator may, upon any extraordinary emergency, by his circular letters, convene presbyteries and Synods before the ordinary time of meeting."¹ "It is declared that by Divine, ecclesiastical and civil warrants, this National Kirk hath power and liberty to assemble and convene, in her yearly general assemblies, and oftener *pro re nata*, as occasion and necessity shall require."² The title, *pro re nata*, aptly expresses the fact that such meeting is cited to attend some specified business. The moderator, as the law now quoted shows, has the power—and he only, to call the members of the court together. He may be influenced by a requisition, but he cannot be compelled to call a meeting. The Court, when constituted, determines whether there was sufficient cause, and may declare their disapprobation of the call, and adjourn without taking action in the premises; but they cannot override the authority of the moderator to summon the Court to meet. The *pro re nata* meeting of E. S. Synod which met 25th Nov., 1832, was a legally called and constituted Court of Christ; the moderator exercised an authority vested in him by the law, and was justified in what he did by the approval of Synod, when met, and by all the subsequent action of the Court during their meeting. Any objection or protest of absent members was null and void, both in equity and law. It was the mere private expression of opinion devoid of authority, and therefore invalid; the attempt therefore, thus to control the action of Synod by an outside influence was illegal, and especially improper, as it was made by the parties whose conduct was to be investigated; had they met with Synod and a majority agreeing with them, it might have been adjourned without further action in the case; or, being in a minority, as they were, had they taken their seats in Synod,

1—Stuart's Collections, Book I, Title 9, 1.

2—Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Session 20th Dec. 20th, 1833; and Stuart's Collections, Book I, Title 15th, 5th.

they could have stayed proceedings by a declinature, and an appeal to the stated meeting of the Court. This would have been legal and unobjectionable on the ground of order, and would have allowed the whole matter to come before the stated meeting of Synod, in circumstances far less embarrassing and less liable to misapprehension. But, this fair course of procedure was not taken by the parties, doubtless from views of policy; they had reason to fear that they were in a minority in Synod, and, therefore, could not expect to be sustained in their hostility to the Church. It was deemed better, therefore, to allow judgment by default, than fairly meet the charges brought against them, in the hope of being able to carry their measures by means of General Synod, a hope which subsequent events proved to be groundless.

The Rev. J. N. McLeod, who, though present, declined to take his seat and act with the Court, was called on to give up the minutes of Synod, which were in his possession as clerk; Mr. McLeod refused, on the ground that the meeting of Synod was an unlawful assemblage; and persisting in his refusal and contempt of Court, after being duly dealt with, was suspended from the exercise of the ministry. This was the only course, in the circumstances, left open to Synod to pursue.

A Committee appointed by Synod, and to whom was referred the special business for which it had met, reported a libel, consisting of five counts, based on the Pastoral Address and the appendix accompanying it. Further action in the premises was remitted to the stated meeting of April, 1833, and Synod adjourned, *sine die*.

According to the adjournment of the former stated meeting, Synod met on the evening of the 9th of April, 1833, and immediately after constitution adjourned to meet next morning. When met, the members under libel, with several ruling elders associated with them, endeavored to prevent the orderly procedure of business, by insisting, though informed of the action of the *pro re nata* meeting of Synod in his case, that the Rev. J. N. McLeod, the former clerk, who had been suspended for contempt of Court and refusing to surrender the minutes, should be continued as clerk; without the authority of the Court, or its modera-

tor, Mr. McLeod attempted to call the roll of members; this disorderly procedure was instantly arrested by the adoption of a motion, that the Rev. James Chrystie, be clerk, *pro tempore*. On the motion being put by the moderator, Dr. Wylie called upon all who wished to sustain Mr. McLeod to withdraw from Synod, which they immediately did.

The libelled parties with their friends, thus singularly failing to control the action of Synod, withdrew, and claimed to transact business, as the E. S. Synod. Their violent conduct was unbecoming a judicature of the Church; but, however much disposed the party may have been to support Mr. McLeod, the real object of the factious opposition to the majority of the Court, was to cover their retreat from the application of discipline which they foresaw they could no longer evade. The clamor about the clerkship was only an indirect mode of testing the strength of the party. This alone can account for the extraordinary haste of Dr. Wylie, in hurrying out of Court and calling on the friends of Mr. McLeod to follow him. As they could not have been ignorant of public opinion in the Church, it is probable that the necessity of this course was anticipated, for it had become obvious that the action of the *pro re nata* meeting would be sustained by the stated meeting, now held. During the brief interval of time that had elapsed, affairs in the E. S. Synod, and particularly in the Southern Presbytery, had taken such a shape that it became very apparent that a majority of the Church were determined to abide by the testimony and support the Courts in the application of discipline in its defence.

Synod, now left by the withdrawal of Dr. Wylie and his friends, without annoyance, proceeded to its regular business, of which the libels found against several members of Synod, at the *pro re nata* meeting, held in the preceding November, was an important part. Though they had left the Court, it was agreed that the parties implicated, were not thereby freed from the jurisdiction of Synod. They were accordingly cited to appear and answer in the premises; this being done three several times with certification that if they did not appear, the Court would proceed with the trial of the libels as if the parties were present. Synod, therefore, though they did not appear after patient de-

liberation, resolved, that the ministerial members libelled, "having been found guilty by this Court: 1, of divisive courses; 2, contempt of the authority of Synod; 3, error in doctrine; 4, abandonment of the the testimony of the Church; 5, slandering Synod and its members, be, and hereby are suspended from the exercise of the holy ministry, and from the privileges of the Church." Before the vote was taken on the resolution, prayer was offered by the Rev. Dr. Willson. In the case of the ruling elders associated with the ministerial members in the publication of the "original draft of the Pastoral Address," it was resolved that they be referred to the cognizance of the inferior judicatories, to which they shall belong at the close of our present sessions." The clerk was instructed to "transmit to the several ministers libelled before this Synod, found guilty, and suspended, a notification of such suspension;" and also, that the clerk forward to the respective sessions concerned, "the order of Synod to put the elders, before this Court, on trial."

The withdrawal of the libelled parties and their adherents, from this meeting of the E. S. Synod, was in fact, the separation of the Church. This was so well understood at the time and from the accompanying circumstances indeed, so certain, that the formal division which afterwards took place, was an inevitable necessity.

General Synod met in the following August, in the city of Philadelphia. The moderator of the former meeting, the Rev. Samuel W. Crawford, who, in other circumstances, would have opened the Court and presided till another moderator was chosen, being suspended from the exercise of the ministry by the action of the Court below, was thus disqualified from taking any part in the business of General Synod, till his case was adjudicated, and he himself restored to regular standing in the Church and ministry. In the same predicament also were the others implicated with him in the publication of the Pastoral Address, and suspended by the E. S. Synod, of which they were members. Such were the circumstances in which General Synod now met. Unwilling to trust the decision of their cause to a body who they had good reason to believe from the demonstrations made in all parts of the Church during the past year,

would maintain the testimony in its integrity, the party clamorously demanded that Mr. Crawford should preach the Synodical Sermon and constitute the meeting by prayer. This could not, of course, be allowed. It is no breach of charity to presume that the party did not expect or even desire that the demand would be conceded; they knew that it was unpresbyterial; but they well understood also, that the demand made in the circumstances, would precipitate the crisis of separation, which now offered to them the only hope of escape from their present position,

Mr. Crawford was under suspension, which was notified to the members assembled, by the Rev. J. Chrystie, clerk, pro tem., of the E. S. Synod, and the action of the inferior Court, by whom it had been inflicted must be respected till it is regularly set aside by the action of General Synod. Mr. Crawford then could not be admitted to perform any ministerial act until restored according to the order of the Church. The action of the E. S. Synod needs no vindication; it is not necessary even to assume that it was a righteous decision. It was the judgment of a court that had jurisdiction in the case, and was, therefore, legally valid, till reviewed by General Synod, and set aside by its authority. If unjust, or even unreasonably severe, Synod might annul or modify it; but, till it came regularly before them, every member of the Church was bound to respect it. To act otherwise was to ignore the authority of the inferior Court without the intervention of the only power on earth that had the authority to review and set the judgment aside. The opinion of even a majority of the members had no legal value till Synod was constituted, because till then there was no court organized to review the deed of the inferior Court!

The ground on which it was claimed that the deed of suspension should be disregarded, was merely the opinion of interested parties, who were not entitled to vote, or to act in any way in the review of the case, except as parties; nor, had they, as has been already stated, the most distant expectation that the demand would be acceded to; but it was the only course left open to them to escape from the dilemma in which they were placed, as it compelled the order-loving portion of the delegates—though the more numerous—to leave the place designated by the act of adjourn-

ment and meet in another place, where the Synodical Sermon was preached, and the Court constituted by the Rev. Moses Roney, who had been appointed the moderator's alternate, at the preceding meeting of Synod. The necessity of leaving Dr. Wylie's house of Worship—the place designated by adjournment—arose from the desire to avoid unpleasant collision with the police, whose aid was said to have been invoked, and some of whom were understood to be near by, awaiting the call of the congregational authorities to compel the members of Synod to retire from their place of worship, as intruders! It is in this connexion also significant to mention the fact that, at an early hour in the evening the pulpit was occupied by Mr. Crawford, accompanied by several other ministers who acted with him in opposition to Synod. These two facts fully explain the necessity of leaving the place, where in other circumstances, Synod would have been constituted according to adjournment and have proceeded to business.

Thus ended the most painful conflict, in which the Reformed Presbyterian Church had ever been engaged, for the maintenance of her principles, on the continent of America—a conflict, however, which ended in the abandonment of much that is distinct in her testimony by a minority, respectable in numbers. And it is much to be lamented, that so many of her ministers and members should have now forsaken the testimony which for a time some of them had honorably maintained.

It is gratifying to know that while many showed themselves unfaithful in the hour of trial, a large majority of the Church adhered to their covenant vows. But though this is matter of gratulation, it is not on this ground that we claim to be the Reformed Presbyterian Church; for, however pleasing it is to know that there is a majority on the side of truth, it is the truth itself which they hold and not their number, that gives them ecclesiastical standing, and vindicates them in the sight of God.