

THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW.

VOL. XIII.—NO. 1.

APRIL, MDCCCLX.

ARTICLE I.

A FEW MORE WORDS ON THE REVISED BOOK OF DISCIPLINE.

From recent indications we are inclined to think that the tide of prejudice which, at first, set so violently against the Revised Book of Discipline, has begun to ebb, and that the current is now changing in its favor. Objections are daily losing their force, misapprehensions quietly subsiding, and the propriety of the changes becoming more obvious; and although the mind of the Church is not yet fully prepared to adopt the book, yet, the estimate which is now formed of it is very different from that which prevailed a year ago. Even the tone of its assailants is significantly changed; instead of the bold shout of confident defiance with which they at first rushed to the assault, as if victory were as sure as the attack, they have come at length to perceive that there are weapons on the other side as bright and as keen as their own, and that if they succeed in achieving a triumph it will be after a hard conflict, and with strong misgivings as to the inherent righteousness of their cause. In this posture of affairs we have thought that

2 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

an additional impetus might be given to the healthful re-action which has certainly begun, by a few more words in relation to those parts of the New Discipline which are still not free from difficulty, and of which a fuller discussion is needed. We are persuaded that much of the opposition which still lingers in the popular mind is due to misapprehension, that the subject is not completely understood, and that more light cannot fail to be productive of more harmony. We do not know that we can impart this light, but we feel it our duty to attempt to present this subject before others precisely as it lies in our own minds; and if we succeed in getting them to see it with our eyes we shall further succeed, either in bringing them to our conclusions, or in placing definitely before them the points on which we need to be corrected. We shall either set them right, or put it in their power to set us right, and in either case the cause of truth will be subserved.

I. The part of the book which has given least satisfaction is that which defines the proper subjects of judicial prosecution. Many who are prepared to adopt the other changes without modification boggle and hesitate here. They suspect a lion in the way; they seem to fear that in being called upon to abandon a crotchet of yesterday, which perverse logic, and neither reason nor the word of God has foisted into our discipline, they may be ensnared to renounce a portion of that venerable heritage of truth bequeathed to them by the fathers of the reformation. The opponents of the new principle, as for the sake of distinction we will permit it to be called, remind us of two prevaricating witnesses whose conflicting testimony establishes, beyond doubt, that whatever may be the truth, they are wrong. In one quarter it is assailed as a weak and timid concession to libertines, an unmanly shrinking from duty through fear of consequences. In another it is represented as a vain effort to realize the Puritan conception of the Church, in which the wheat is kept separate from the tares, and the tares bound in bundles to be burnt. The new book, accordingly, is at once too loose and too strict—veering equally, and at the same time, to the contradictory extremes of licentiousness and sanc-

timony. Both objections cannot be valid, and the presumption is that it occupies that safe middle ground in which the truth generally lies. This we shall now attempt to show. We shall attempt to demonstrate that the new principle is not only right in itself, but has been universally acknowledged by the Reformed Church, and articulately stated by some of its ablest Theologians. If we can make out these points we shall certainly exonerate the Committee from the charge of introducing novelties, and commend the change to the conscience of the Church. Before proceeding to the argument let us advert, briefly, to the state of the question.

It is not whether baptized persons are members of the Church—that is conceded on all hands; nor is it whether they are bound to perform all the duties of members—that is asserted as expressly in the new book as in the old; nor is it even whether they are subject to the government and jurisdiction of the Church—that also is freely admitted; but the precise question is whether the jurisdiction of the Church is to be exercised over them, as over professed believers, in the way of judicial prosecution. The question is not whether the Church shall assert in relation to them as well as to the saints, the supremacy of the laws of Christ, but whether she shall assert it in the same way. It is purely a question concerning the mode of dispensing her discipline. The new book restricts the mode of judicial prosecution exclusively to professed believers. Its opponents contend that the same mode should be indiscriminately applied to all church members without respect to the profession or non-profession of faith. We wish the state of the controversy to be distinctly understood, as involving not a question concerning the authority of the laws of Christ, but concerning the manner in which that authority should be enforced. This precise elimination of the issue reduces at once to a frivolous parologism all attempts to deduce subjection to judicial prosecution from the mere fact of church-membership. That only necessitates subjection to the laws, but determines nothing as to the mode in which the laws shall be administered. As well maintain that every member of the

4 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Disciplines.*

Commonwealth, whether bond or free, must be tried in the same way and by the same court, as that every member of the Church must be subject to the same form of process. His membership, in itself considered, only brings him under the jurisdiction and authority of the Church. The mode in which she shall exercise her power depends upon other considerations. It is strange that any human being should persuade himself that he was proving subjection to judicial prosecution, when he was only proving subjection to law; and still stranger that any one could imagine, with the language of the new book before him, that the Committee of revision ever meant to exempt any class of church-members from the obligation of performing all Church duties. It is idle to undertake to deduce the mode of treatment from the naked fact of church-membership. The ruling consideration must be the condition of the persons to whom the law is to be applied. Their ecclesiastical status must determine the manner in which they are to be dealt with. The freeman and the slave, though subject to the same law, are very differently treated.

Now we maintain, and the new book maintains, that the profession or non-profession of faith makes such a difference in the ecclesiastical status of church-members, that it would be absurd to apply indiscriminately to both classes the same form of discipline; that the mode of judicial prosecution is proper for believers, but altogether inconsistent with the status of avowed unbelievers. The first question is, what is that status? To answer this question we must revert to first principles. The two classes of which the Church consists are not equally related to the idea of the Church. The class of professors pertains to its essence; that of non-professors is an accidental result of the mode of organization. There can be no church at all where there is no professed subjection to the authority of Christ; there may be a church, and in the millennium, there, perhaps, will be a church in which all are saints. Make every baptized unbeliever a true disciple of Christ and you do not mar the integrity of the Church; remove all who have professed to be believers, and you destroy the Church as

a visible institute. If the non-professing element is not essential to the idea of the Church, the question may be asked, how it gets there at all? The answer is, that it results from the mode of its organization, and the circumstance of non-profession is, in the logical sense, simply accidental. The profession of the parent carries his household with him—the Church, like the state, is composed of families. It is not, as Owen has strikingly observed, “like the kingdom of the Mamelukes, wherein there was no regard unto natural successors, but it was continually made up of strangers and foreigners incorporated into it; nor like the beginning of the Roman commonwealth which, consisting of men only, was like to have been the matter of one age alone.”* If it be asked why the Church embraces the family and is not restricted to professing individuals, the answer is plain. The children of the faithful are the heirs apparent of the promises. God has graciously promised to show mercy unto thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments; the decree of election runs largely in their loins, and through their faithfulness in rearing a holy seed the Church is perpetuated, and new recruits are constantly added to the communion of saints. They are all incorporated into the Church, because many of them hereafter are to be of the Church. Mankind, according to these principles, is divided into three great classes: 1. The true children of God, among whom alone exists the genuine communion of saints. 2. Those whom we have ventured to call the heirs apparent of the kingdom, to whom pertain, what Calvin calls, the outward adoption, and a special interest in the promises of the covenant. 3. Strangers and aliens, who though not excluded from the general call of the Gospel, are destitute of any inheritance in Israel. This class is properly called the world. In relation to the second class, it is clear that while they are in the Church by external union, in the spirit and temper of their minds they belong to the world. Like Esau, they neither understand nor prize their birthright.

*Works—vol. 20, p. 368.

6 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

Of the world and in the Church, this expresses precisely their status, and determines the mode in which the Church should deal with them.

As in the Church, and in the Church as heirs of promises which they have not yet embraced, they are to be trained to a proper sense of their privileges, to be instructed in a knowledge of their duty, and induced and persuaded by every lawful influence to accept the grace which has been signified and freely offered in their baptism. They have been externally consecrated to God, and the Church is to seek that they may be likewise inwardly sanctified. Her peculiar obligations to teach and to persuade them grow out of their visible connection with her. They are born into her as children, and as children, the great duty she owes to them is to educate them. But in heart and spirit they are of the world. In this aspect how is she to treat them? Precisely as she treats all other impenitent and unbelieving men; she is to exercise the power of the keys and shut them out from the communion of the saints. She is to debar them from all the privileges of the inner sanctuary. She is to exclude them from their inheritance until they show themselves meet to possess it. By her standing exclusion of them from the Lord's table, and of their children from the ordinance of baptism, she utters a solemn protest against their continued impenitence, and acquits herself of all participation in their sins. It is a standing censure. Their spiritual condition is one that is common with the world. She deals with them, therefore, in this respect as the Lord has directed her to deal with the world. They are distinguished from the world by a special relation to the covenant. She deals with them according to this relation by striving to make them comprehend their calling. She presses the peculiar obligations which spring from their baptism, and warns them of the aggravated doom of those who perish with the seal of the covenant on their brows. It is overlooked by those who insist upon the judicial prosecution of this class of members, as if judicial prosecution were the only conceivable mode of discipline, it is overlooked or forgotten that exclusion from the communion of

the faithful *is* discipline. It is an authoritative exercise of power, retaining its subjects in the position which is suited to their character. The teacher who refuses to promote a pupil as really exercises discipline as if he had flogged him for his idleness.

There is, however, a very palpable incongruity in subjecting non-professors to judicial prosecution. As in that mode of discipline the charges must be specific and particular offences signalized, there is a tacit implication that, in other respects, the conduct of the accused is blameless. You single out certain actions and say these are wrong and must be punished. You imply that, but for these actions, the agent might be reputed a worthy member of the Church. Now can the Church hold such language in regard to those whom she knows to be dead in trespasses and sins? Is not their whole life a continued sin? Are not their very righteousnesses abominable before God? Repentance to them is not the abandonment of this or that vice, it is the renunciation of the carnal heart, which is enmity against God; and until they are renewed in the spirit and temper of their minds they can do nothing which the Church is at liberty to approve as done by them. When the body is dead it must be expected to putrify, and it is very idle to be lopping off, one by one, the decaying members, as if you could arrest the progress of dissolution. As the whole state of the non-professing members is unsound, let the discipline of the Church be directed against that state and not against individual transgressions. Let her consign them, by a single word, to the position which universally attaches to impenitence. This general persistent exclusion from the society of the living is a testimony against their nature as well as their acts, and pronounces them, in every view, to be unworthy of the kingdom of God. There is no tacit implication that in any thing they are sound; the whole head is pronounced to be sick, and the whole heart faint, and the whole body full of wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. This judgment is according to truth.

Judicial prosecution is further evinced, in such cases, to

8 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

be frivolous, from the circumstance that the severest penalties which the Protestant Church feels itself authorized to pronounce do not modify the ecclesiastical attitude of the offender. They leave him precisely where he was. There are three forms of censure, admonition, suspension, and ex-communication. The difference between suspension and ex-communication is a difference in degree and not in kind. Ex-communication is more solemn in form, and more permanent and stringent in operation. But in the Protestant Church it never amounts to anathema; it never dissolves the vinculum by which the person, in baptism, is related to the Church and the covenant of grace. It never consigns him to hopeless and eternal perdition.* The only case in which the Church would be at liberty to denounce such a censure would be one in which the party had notoriously sinned the sin unto death. That is the only crime which cuts off from the hope of mercy and the possibility of repentance, and is consequently the only crime of which the Church, in the exercise of her declarative power, is competent to say, that the man is excluded from all the benefits symbolized in baptism, and has become an alien and an outcast. But as God has furnished us with no means of knowing when this sin has been committed, He has virtually debarred us from this species of ex-communication. The highest censure left to us is that of permanent exclusion from the sacraments. To inflict this censure upon a baptized non-pro-

*"Ex-communication differs from anathema in this, that the latter completely excluding pardon, dooms and devotes the individual to eternal destruction; whereas the former rebukes and animadverts upon his manners; and although it also punishes, it is to bring him to salvation, by forewarning him of his future doom. If it succeeds, reconciliation and restoration to communion are ready to be given. Moreover, anathema is rarely, if ever, to be used. Thence, though ecclesiastical discipline does not allow us to be on familiar and intimate terms with excommunicated persons, still, we ought to strive, by all possible means, to bring them to a better mind, and recover them to the fellowship and unity of the Church; as the Apostle also says, "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." (2 Thea. iii, 15.) If this humanity be not observed, in private as well as public, the danger is, that our discipline shall degenerate into destruction."—*Calvin Inst., Book iv, c. 12, § 10.*

fessor, after the formalities of a trial in which nothing is proved but what was known before, and that is, that the man is a stranger to Christ, is obviously to leave him precisely where he was before, and that is, excluded from all the blessings of the communion of saints.

The King of France, with forty thousand men,
Marched up a hill and then marched down again.

The baptized non-professor is actually in the very position in relation to the sacraments and communion of the Church, in which ex-communication puts the professing offender. The key is turned, and both are shut out from the inner sanctuary. Voetius, accordingly, puts the non-professing children of believers in the same category in relation to their connection with the Church, as those who are under its censures. He distributes the people in contradistinction from the clergy, into two parts, those who are strictly and properly members of the Church, "*partes proprias*," that is communicants, or believers, and those who are only analogically members, "*partes analogicas*," which division includes the children of the faithful, the fallen, the relapsed, the penitent, the suspended, and all who are under the censure of the Church, as well as three other classes, *audientes*, *catechumeni*, *competentes*, whose interest in religion may justify us in ranking them under the general head of inquirers. In his judgment, therefore, an ex-communicated member was simply remitted to the place of a baptized non-professor.*

If it should be contended that there is an ex-communication which dissolves the *vinculum ecclesiae* without destroying the possibility of repentance, which simply consigns the party to the condition of the unbaptized world, which makes him a heathen and a publican, not morally and socially, but really and ecclesiastically—if we grant that such a censure is conceivable, then it would follow that the offender, upon the profession of his penitence and faith, would have to be re-baptized. If the Church consigned him to the condition of an unbaptized

*Polit. Eccles. Pars I, Lib. 1. c. 1. § 2.

10 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

person, if she really made him a stranger and an alien, then, like every other foreigner, he can only enter her through the door of baptism. Are our brethren prepared to become anabaptists? Are they willing to contend for a species of censure which, to all intents and purposes, nullifies baptism without anathema? It is certain that no Protestant Church recognizes any such penalty. The validity of baptism extends through the whole life, and we are never competent to say that it may not signify and seal the ingrafting of any individual into Christ as long as the offers of salvation are made to him, and therefore we never undertake to remit any human being to the ecclesiastical status he would have held if he had never been baptized. All that we do is to shut out incorrigible offenders from the society of the faithful. If they have been admitted to it, we show cause why they ought to be deprived of the privilege, and proceed to expel them—if they have never been admitted to it, we keep them where they are until they are prepared to come up higher. All this seems plain and natural, and we are wholly unable to account for the zeal which is not satisfied with it. To those who want to try our children in solemn judicial form, we propose the question. After you have convicted and sentenced them, what *change* have you made in their relation to the Church? Where have you put them? If *out of the Church*, how are they to get into it again without another baptism? If they are *still* in the Church, but *of* the world, how does their new situation differ from the old? We crave a solution of these questions from our stringent advocates of discipline. In either case they are excluded. How does the one exclusion differ from the other?

Then we should like to know what conceivable end it is imagined can be gained by judicial prosecution? The offences of such persons bring no scandal upon the name of Christ, because they do not profess to be governed by His spirit, nor to be subject to His laws. They do not defile the communion of saints, because their impenitence has already excluded them from the society of the faithful. There is no danger, on the part of the Church, of incurring the wrath of God, for “suf-

fering His covenant and the seals thereof to be profaned," because the doors have been effectually shut against all who are notoriously impenitent. What, then, is gained? Shall it be said that their guilty condition is more impressively urged upon them by selecting particular manifestations of their evil heart of unbelief, and subjecting them to special lectures on account of these? This is equivalent to saying that, in their case, censure is only a form of preaching. It is a part of the ministry of the word. It pertains to the potestas dogmatica, and not to the potestas judicialis, it is an exercise of the key of knowledge, and not of the key of government. This is to come precisely to the position which the new book maintains, that the Church owes it to these persons to train them, to teach them, to warn them and to persuade them by every motive of the Gospel to repent and believe. The only difference is, that the new book does not confound teaching and government, nor when the design is only to preach does it dispense its sermons in the form of judicial decrees. It does not arraign a man and try him for drunkenness or falsehood, and then, upon conviction, proceed to inform him, as the sentence of the court, that he must repent or perish. All this, it ventures to think, may be said to an impenitent sinner without waiting for special abominations. It is true that government and teaching are inseparably connected, and mutually support each other; the keys of doctrine and power can never be divorced. But still *censures* are specifically different from instruction, and even where they seem to run into one another, as in judicial admonitions, the distinction is not really abolished. Judicial admonition, as a censure, measures the ill-desert of the offender. It is the mildest penalty of the Church, and is to be dispensed only in those cases in which the degree of guilt does not, in the first instance, exclude from the sacraments. It disturbs without destroying the communion of the party with the saints. But admonition, as a lesson, is not the measure of ill-desert. It may pertain to the highest and gravest crimes, as well as to the lowest peccadilloes. Judicial admonition, a baptized non-professor is not in a condition to receive, because he can do nothing whose ill-desert is short of suspension.

12 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

We think we have now said enough to show that the principle of the new book is right in itself, and not an unworthy concession to libertines or puritans. It proceeds on the assumption that the mode of dealing with the members of the Church, as with the members of the State, or any other organized society, must be determined, not by the simple fact of membership, but by the state and quality of the persons. It finds that the status of baptized unbelievers can be exactly expressed by the formula, in the Church and of the world. They are in the Church as prospective heirs of grace, and hence are subject to it as a governor or tutor, that they may be trained, educated, fitted for the inheritance proposed to them. They are in the Church upon a definite principle, the general relation of election to the seed of the faithful, and for a definite end, that they may be qualified to continue the succession of the kingdom. As of the world, they are included in the universal sentence of exclusion, which bars the communion of saints against the impenitent and profane. They are sharers in its condemnation. They are put, as impenitent, upon the same footing with all others that are impenitent. As rejecters of Christ, they are kept aloof from the table of the Lord, and debarred from all the rights and privileges of the saints. Their impenitence determines the attitude of the Church towards them; for God has told her precisely what that attitude should be to all who obey not the gospel. What more can be required? Are they not dealt with, in every respect, according to their quality? We have further seen that there is a manifest incongruity in subjecting this class of persons to judicial prosecution, as it has a tendency to cherish the delusion that, apart from particular offences, their condition is not reprehensible; and in addition to this, the severest penalties which the Church is authorized to inflict would have no other effect but to leave them where they are. Put these considerations together, and is not the new book satisfactorily vindicated? It does not deny the membership of the persons in question, it expressly subjects them to law, to government, to training, to discipline in the wide sense of the term. It only says that they are unfit for that form of discipline which we call judicial prosecution.

To be capable of it they must be professed believers. We close this part of the subject by a familiar illustration. Suppose a commonwealth of free citizens, in which is found a number of slaves, existing in it for the express purpose of being trained for freedom, and on the express condition, that when pronounced duly qualified by competent authority, they should be admitted to all the immunities and privileges of freedom; how should that commonwealth deal with those slaves? Is it not clear that the end for which they are there precisely determines one line of duty? Is it not equally clear that their condition, as slaves, determines their treatment in all other respects, until they are prepared to pass the test which changes their status? Is not this precisely the state of things with the Church and its baptized unbelievers? Are they not the slaves of sin and the devil, existing in a free commonwealth for the purpose of being educated to the liberty of the saints? Should they not, then, be carefully instructed on the one hand, and on the other, be treated according to their true character as slaves, in every other respect, until they are prepared for their heritage of liberty? This is just what the new book teaches. It requires the most scrupulous fidelity in training; every effort to bring these people to Christ. But, until they come to Him, it as distinctly teaches that they are to be dealt with as the Church deals with all the enemies of God. She makes no difference between Jews and Gentiles, when both put themselves in the same attitude of rebellion against Him. She turns the key upon them and leaves them without.

We might take up another line of argument and show that, as the fundamental duty of the Church in relation to these people is to seek their conversion to God, censures are particularly incongruous, as censures are not the seed of regeneration. It is the word of promise, the word of the gospel through which alone we are begotten to the hope of salvation. Faith is allured by grace, and not impelled by penalties. But in our former article we said enough upon this topic. We shall simply endorse here all that we said there, with the solemn protestation

14 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

that we have seen or heard nothing that even modifies our opinion.

But the principle of the new book is not only right in itself; it has received the consent of the whole Reformed Church, and been either directly or indirectly maintained by its ablest Theologians. This proposition may astound some of our readers. The doctrine of the new book has been so industriously represented as a pernicious novelty, that many will, no doubt, be surprised when they come to find that the novelty is really in the principle of the old discipline. The new book only takes us back to the good old paths. The history of the innovation we have not taken the trouble to investigate. It is probable that it arose from some such logic as that which is now pertinaciously employed to defend it. All baptized persons are members of the Church; all members of the Church are subject to discipline; all subjects of discipline are liable to judicial prosecution, therefore all baptized persons are liable to judicial prosecution;—it is likely that a halting sorites of this kind lay at the basis of the change.

In pleading the consent of the Reformed Church, we do not mean to assert that the proposition for which we contend is found, *totidem verbis*, in any of the symbols of its faith or discipline. In an earnest age, and among a people who had been trained to regard attention to the external rites of religion as the mark by which they were distinguished from Heathens, Turks and Jews, it is probable that very few reached the years of discretion without making a public profession of their faith by coming to the Lord's table. In all the controversies concerning church government, and the right of excommunication, the main difficulty was with Erastians and Libertines who, intent upon retaining the prestige of Christian gentlemen without renouncing their sins, denied to the ministers of Christ the power to protect the Lord's table from scandalous intrusion. Two points were strenuously maintained by the reformers. 1. The right of the Church to detain from the communion those who had not the measure of knowledge necessary to discern the Lord's body; and 2. The right of the

A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline. 15

Church to expel from the communion those who, having been admitted, had proved themselves unworthy by heresy or ill manners. The only form in which they employed discipline in reference to those who had never been admitted to the Lord's table, was that of simple detention or exclusion, accompanied by the use of all proper means tending to conversion. Censures, specifically so called, they applied exclusively to professed believers. This point can be abundantly demonstrated from their creeds, confessions and formularies of discipline. It is impossible to read these documents without feeling that when the question was of censures, as dependent upon trial and conviction, the Church had in its eye none others but those who claimed to belong to the congregation of the faithful. When to this is added the explicit avowal of this doctrine on the part of able and influential Divines, the conclusion is absolutely irresistible. The posture of the Reformed Churches upon this subject may be collected from their general conception of the Church ; from their specific teachings in relation to the nature and ends of censures, and from their positive regulations as to the mode in which they should be dispensed.

1. The idea of the Church, according to the reformed conception, is the complete realization of the decree of election. It is the whole body of the elect considered as united to Christ their head. As actually existing at any given time, it is that portion of the elect who have been effectually called to the exercise of faith and made partakers of the Holy Ghost. It is, in other words, the whole body of existing believers. According to this conception, none are capable of being Church members but the elect, and none are ever, in fact, church-members but those who are truly renewed. The Church is, therefore, the communion of saints, the congregation of the faithful, the assembly of those who worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. That this conception is fundamental in all the reformed confessions, and among all the reformed Theologians worthy of the name, we will not insult the intelligence of our readers by stopping to prove. The Church was co-extensive with faith. As true

faith in the heart will manifest itself by the confession of the mouth, it is certain that the children of God, wherever they have the opportunity, will be found professing their faith in Him; and as there is no method of searching the heart and discriminating real from false professors but by the walk, all are to be accepted as true believers whose lives do not give the lie to their pretensions. The body of professors is, therefore, to be accepted as the Church of Christ, because the truly faithful are in it. The Gospel is never preached without converting some—these will profess their faith, and will vindicate to any society the name of a Church. As to those professors who are destitute of faith, they are not properly members of the Church; they are wolves among sheep; tares among the wheat; warts and excrescences upon the body. The visible Church is, accordingly, the society or congregation of those who profess the true religion; among whom the Gospel is faithfully preached and the sacraments duly administered. And it is simply because such a society cannot be destitute of genuine believers, that it is entitled to the name of the Church. Profession must be accepted in the judgment of men as equivalent to the possession of faith, and the body of professors must pass for saints, until hypocrites and unbelievers expose themselves. Now it is this professing body which the reformed symbols have in view when they speak of the visible Church. The idea of profession is not only prominent but fundamental. A society without this element, whatever else it might be, they would never have dreamed of calling a Church. That this is the true development of the reformed doctrine of the visible Church may be seen by consulting the Institutes of Calvin. In very few of the confessions does any other element enter. The Westminster, and perhaps another, are the only ones in the collection of Niemeyer in which there is any allusion to children; not that their external relation to the Church was denied, but the mind was intent upon the communion of saints, which was not to be looked for by man out of the professing body—and hence, as the real Church was there, that was the sole body that was contemplated. The general aim of discipline was to

A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline. 17

keep this body pure, and that could be accomplished in only two ways : by refusing to admit those who were too ignorant or scandalous to make a consistent profession, and by the reformation or expulsion of those who brought reproach upon the Gospel. Setting out with the idea that the Church is to be found only among professors, that it was and could be detected by the eye of man, no where else; it is intuitively obvious that these professors they must have made the sole object of reformatory and penal measures. They could not have been consistent with themselves upon any other hypothesis.

2. Accordingly, we find that when they treat formally of censures, they define the ends and regulate the degrees in terms which cannot, without unwarrantable liberties, be applied to any but the professedly faithful. The Prior Confessio Basiliensis makes it the design of excommunication to separate the tares from the wheat, in order that the face of the Church might, as far as possible, be preserved free from blemish.* The tares are supposed to be mingled in with the wheat, not growing up in separate and distinct portions of the field—*Zizania sese Ecclesie Christi immiscent*. The case is evidently that of hypocrites and reprobates joined in the same confession of faith and meeting at the same table of the Lord. There is no such mixture on the part of baptized non-professors. They are easily distinguished, and without difficulty detached from the communion of saints. The end of excommunication, in relation to the offender, is his amendment—*emendationis gratia*—which implies that prior to his offence he was in reputable standing and brought no spot upon the Church. Can this be said of those who are avowedly unconverted? In the Heidelberg Catechism,† in answer to the question, how is the kingdom of Heaven shut and opened by ecclesiastical discipline, we are told that the subjects of discipline are nominal Christians, whose life and doctrines are inconsistent with union to Christ. This language, taken by itself, may be applied to the

*Niemeyer, p. 97.

†Niemeyer, p. 449.

18 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

baptized ; they have the Christian name. But it is added that these nominal Christians must be more than once *fraternally* admonished—*aliquoties fraternè admoniti*—and then, if they prove incorrigible, reported to the officers of the Church, in order that, if they still remain obstinate, they may be interdicted from the sacraments and from the congregation of the Church. Surely such language implies that they were not only brethren by the common seal of baptism, but brethren also by a common profession of faith. We do not say that a different interpretation is impossible, but we do say that it is unnatural and forced. In the acts and conclusions of the Polish Synod at Wlodislave,* it is provided, after an enumeration of scandals and enormities which reveal a shocking state of manners, that ecclesiastical discipline in due degrees, *debitis gradibus*, should be used against the perpetrators of such crimes, if any of them should be found in the Churches of Poland. The pertinacious were to be cut off *from the use of the Lord's Supper* and ejected from the congregation *of the faithful*. Obviously the subjects of this discipline were previously partakers of the Lord's Supper and reckoned among the faithful. The same decree occurs again in the Synod of Thorn*, in which the degrees of punishment are varied in the expression, but the impression as to the status of the culprits made still more distinct. They are first to be admonished—then excluded from the Supper—and then excommunicated. There is a decree of this Synod which, at first blush, seems to insinuate that non-professing members were subject to censures—the decree which makes abstinence from the Communion and neglect of public ordinances a penal offence. But as the Reformed Churches always insisted upon a previous examination as the ground of a right to approach the Lord's Table, the neglect in question is the neglect, not of making a profession of religion, but of walking worthy of that profession, after it had been made. It

*Niemeyer, p. 575.

†Niemeyer, 583.

A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline. 19

was the remissness of professed believers, or their apparent contempt of their privileges, which the fathers meant to rebuke. Here, too, it is worthy of remark, the sentence is immediately excommunication. There is no interdiction of the Supper. The inference is that the intermediate step was omitted because the parties were in the voluntary neglect of that Sacrament. If so it would have been omitted in the other cases, if the parties had not been in the use of it. The argument, from the degrees of censure, is, to our minds, very conclusive. We find in all the reformed symbols that they are reduced to three, admonition, suspension and excommunication, and that, as a general thing, they follow each other in regular order. There is no intimation that offenders are not equally subject to all—on the contrary, the language of these documents is nonsense, unless the man who was exposed to one was likewise exposed to the others. He who was admonished, if he proved incorrigible, might be suspended from the Supper. He who was suspended from the Supper, if he continued perverse, might be excommunicated. There were crimes so flagrant that the degrees might be disregarded and excommunication at once pronounced. But still the parties were capable of suspension. It is not only in the teachings of Theologians, but in the formularies of discipline, we find these ever recurring degrees brought out in a manner that renders it absolutely incredible, that the authors of these manuals considered them as applicable only in a divided sense. In the discipline, for example, of the Reformed Churches of France, as given in Quick's Synodicon,* we have in canons xv, xvi, xvii, the process of censure. There are the three degrees. The offender is first admonished, then suspended from the Supper, and then excommunicated; and in the formula of excommunication it is expressly asserted that the other degrees of censure had been used in vain. We defy any man to read these canons and say that the person here excommunicated was not previously a partaker of the Lord's Sup-

*Vol. 1. pp. 81, 82.

20 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

per, that is, a professor of religion. These same degrees occur in our own Directory of Worship, and by the singular grace of God, while we have inserted folly in our book of Discipline, we have been kept from exemplifying it by the prescriptions of this manual. No man can be excommunicated, according to the provisions of our own book, who was not previously liable to suspension. Excommunication is always the penalty of obstinacy, or of crimes so flagrant and shocking that they supersede intermediate measures of reform. In every case the subject is a professed believer. He is one whom it has been found necessary to *cut off from the communion*, and the sentence, which, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the presiding judge is directed to pronounce, is a sentence which simply *excludes from the communion of the Church*.* Let the old Discipline, therefore, assert what it may, it is impossible to excommunicate, in the prescribed forms, any but communicating members of the Church. The Directory and the New Book are perfectly at one.

The doctrine of the Church of Scotland is even more unambiguously expressed than that of our own Church. "Church discipline," we are told, "serves chiefly to curb and restrain the more peccant humours of professors"†—a very pregnant intimation that these are properly its subjects. In section 7th of the same title from which this clause has been taken, we have what constitutes a satisfaction for scandal defined. The article evidently takes for granted that he who is required to give the satisfaction is a communicant with the Church. A distinction is made between the satisfaction which "admits the offender unto all Church privileges," and that which stays proceedings for the time. In section 12th it is required that the offender should confess his sin and "declare his sorrow for it, before absolution, *that the congregation may the more cordially re-admit him into their communion.*" How can such language be applied to one who was never in the communion of

*Directory for Worship, chap. x, § 7.

†Pardovan, Book, iv. Tit. 1.

A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline. 21

the Church? But the title, *of the order of proceeding to excommunication*, precludes all doubt as to the status of the offender to be punished. In the sentence itself, "he is shut out from the communion of the faithful, debarred from their privileges and delivered over unto Satan"—and in the distinction betwixt the lesser and the greater excommunication, it is obvious that neither can be employed except against one who has been admitted to the Lord's table.* We quote the whole section below.

If, now, the reader will put together the reformed conception of the essential nature of the Church, their specific teachings concerning the ends and design of censures, and their public provisions for inflicting them upon offenders, we think that he cannot resist the conclusion, that the doctrine of the new book has their sanction. Their language can be consistently interpreted upon no other hypothesis. Not a single note of discord comes from any quarter. From France, Scotland, Holland, and England, wherever the reformed doctrines were planted, and the reformed discipline enforced, we have but one testimony. The Committee of Revision have done nothing more than restore the ancient landmarks. They have followed the footsteps of the flock.

3. Our general conclusion in relation to the reformed Churches is reduced to certainty by the teaching of their most distinguished theologians. From the abundant materials which we have at hand, upon this subject, we shall select, in mercy to our readers, only a few passages, but they shall be from men who, on their own account, as well as on account of their influence in the Church, are entitled to be heard. The first witness we shall cite is Calvin. He is maintaining the nature of spiritual

*The 4th Art., Cap. 80, of our Confession of Faith saith, that for the better attaining the ends of Church censures, the officers of the Church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, for a time, and by excommunication from the Church. The difference, then, betwixt these two censures is: suspension from the Lord's Supper imports that the person so censured is in imminent danger of being excommunicated and cut off from the Church, but be-

22 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

jurisdiction as one branch of the power of the keys, and after having defined its ends in the language of Paul, he proceeds to enforce its necessity. We beg our readers to ponder the following passage :* “As this is done by the preaching of doctrine, so in order that doctrine may not be held in derision, *those who profess to be of the household of faith* ought to be judged according to the doctrine which is taught. Now this cannot be done without connecting with the office of the ministry a right of summoning those who are to be privately admonished or sharply rebuked, a right, moreover, of keeping back from the communion of the Lord’s Supper those who cannot be admitted without profaning the ordinance. Hence, when Paul elsewhere asks, what have I to do to judge them also that are without, (1 Cor. v. 12.) he makes the members of Churches subject to censures for the correction of their vices, and intimates the existence of tribunals from which no *believer* is exempted.” Connect this with his previous definitions of the visible Church†—“as the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who *profess* to worship one God and Christ, who by baptism are initiated into the faith, by partaking of the Lord’s Supper *profess* unity in true doctrine and charity,” &c., and there is no evading the answer which he gives as to the proper subject of Church censures. It is true that, in saying that all believers are subject to discipline, the

fore that heavy and finishing stroke be inflicted, there are further means to be used, such as prayers and admonitions, in order to his reclaiming, 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14, 15 : “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly. And if any man obey not our word by this Epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed, yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” Whereas, when a person is cut off by that high censure, he is to be looked on as a heathen man, (Matth. xviii. 17,) upon which the Church ceaseth to be his reprover, they give him over for dead or desperate, and will administer no more of the medicine of Church discipline unto him, 1 Cor. xii. 13 : “For what hath the Church to do to judge them that are without? but them that are without God judgeth.—*Pardovan, Book 4, Tit. vi.*

*Instit. Lib. iv., c. 11. § 5.

†Instit. Lib. iv., c. 1, § 7.

A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline. 23

proposition as to its form does not imply that others are not also subject. But it is equally true that, in all definitions, the predicates of universal affirmatives are distributed, and therefore, in the present case, the doctrine is that believers are the only proper subjects of judicial prosecution. To this must be added, that the whole spirit of the chapter and of the entire discussion concerning the Church exacts this view.

We shall next cite a witness from the Dutch, the celebrated Voet, who died in 1677. In his great work of Ecclesiastical Polity he devotes a chapter* to the consideration of the question concerning the proper object (subject) of discipline.† The

*Pars iii., Lib. iv., Tr. 2, c. 4.

†Hactenus de questione an sit, seu de necessitate disciplinæ ecclesiasticæ. Accedimus nunc ad uberiorem ejus explicationem. Hic primo occurrit Objectum, circa quod occupatur disciplina. Quod distingui potest in materiale et præsuppositum; idque aut remotum, aut propinquum seu mediatum; Et in formale, immediatum, proximum. *Illud* est homo, et quidem fidelis seu fidem profitens, in communionem et confederationem ecclesiasticam actu constitutus. *Istud* est, lapsus in peccatum aut crimen et quidem publicum in prima perpetrato, aut postea publicum factum, ita ut peccatum hic consideretur sub ratione scandali. *Hoc* est, fidelis lapsus, et in eo pertinaciter perseverans post et contra fraternas ac paternas inspectorum ecclesiæ admonitiones ac correptiones. De duobus posterioribus commodè agemus, ubi de causis disciplinæ. Sint ergo de objecto primæ considerationis ista problemata. 1. *Prob.* An in ulla creatura, præter homines viatores, anathema aut censura ecclesiastica sit dirigenda. *Resp.* Neg. contra catachresticum interdictum Pontificiorum, quod definitur, censura ecclesiastica sacramentorum usum, divina officia et sepulturam ecclesiasticam secundum seipsam prohibens. Et dividitur in locale, personale et mixtum: ita ut locale sit quo directe interdicitur locus, ne in eo divina officia audiantur ab in oculis aut extraneis; quamvis personæ loci interdicti possint alibi audire divina officia. Vide Zwarez in 3. Thomæ, ubi de censuris disp. 32, sect. 1 et 2. Et inter Casuistas, Navarrum, Toletum, Bonacinam. Sed refutantur ex iis locis ubi objectum disciplinæ dicitur frater Math. 18, v. 15. 1 Corinth 5, v. 11, 12, 13, et quidem peccator contra correptiones aut monitiones pertinax, Math. 18, Tit. 3, v. 10.

II. *Prob.* An objectum disciplinæ sint amentes, pueri, surdi, muti? *Resp.* 1. De duobus prioribus absolute negatur; quia non recipiuntur inter fratres aut fideles proprie dictos seu in membra ecclesiæ completa. Quod si quis antea fidelis fuerit, et in amentiam inciderit, disciplina coerceri non debet, quidquid tunc absurdi commiserit Pontificii more suo *περατολογούσι* de amentibus et pueris, quod non censeantur interdicti, interdicta communitate; quia non sint capaces doli et culpæ; priventur tamen ecclesiastica sepultura tempore interdicti; hoc sit interdictum locale quod directe afficit locum. Sic Zwarez loco cit. Et ex Casuistis Fillijucius, Sayrus, Baseus. 2. De posterioribus aff. Siquidem in membra ecclesiæ recepti fuerint: uti hoc aliquando fieri posse alibi docemus.

24 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

object of discipline he distinguishes into material and formal. The material object is *man*, and *man under the notion of a believer or of one professing faith*, in actual communion and confederation with the Church. He is further considered as fallen into sin, and sin which, from its having become public, is to be regarded as a scandal. As the formal object of discipline, he must further be considered as pertinaciously persisting in his sin against remonstrances and admonitions. Such is the substance of a passage so directly to our hands that there is no possibility of evading its sense. We give the original below. The meaning clearly is that none are subjects of discipline but professed believers. But as if to cut off all possibility of doubt, he proposes the question, whether those who have been baptized in infancy, and have not made a profession of faith, are amenable to censure. His answer is exactly in the sense of the new book. Though, says he, the antecedents and precursors of discipline—counsels and rebukes—may be applied to them, “*I do not see how it can be proved that discipline, properly so called, (that is, censures upon judicial prosecution) can be extended to them.*” Why? “*Because they have never been received upon a profession of their faith into the confederation of the Church and admitted to the Lord’s Supper*.*”

*III *Prob.* An extranei à fide et ecclesia? *Resp.* Neg. ex i. Corinth. 5, v. 10, 11, 12.

IV. *Prob.* An qui in infantia in ecclesiis nostris baptizati sunt? *Resp.* Hoc video velle scriptorem anonymum, cujus theses de disciplina ecclesiastica olim in vernaculum idioma translatae sub nomine Jacobi Arminii editae sunt: in quo tamen conjectura aut suspicio translatores fefellit. Quod ad hanc opinionem fateor antecedentia et praeambula disciplinae, uti sunt admonitiones et correptiones ecclesiasticae, peculiari cura talibus applicanda: non video tamen quomodo probari possit disciplinam proprie dictam ad eos extendendam: cum nunquam per actualis fidei professionem in ecclesiasticam confederationem recepti ad cœnæ communionem admissi sint. Quomodo ergo ab ea excludentur? Accedit, quod hac ratione ad myriadas hominum, qui ex parentibus Christianis orti sunt et in infantia baptizati, sed ante usum rationis abducti et in Muhammedismo aut Gentilismo educati sunt, censura extendi deberet: quod tamen absurdum videtur.

A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline. 25

To precisely the same purport is the testimony of another Dutchman, Van Mastricht.* “The material object of ecclesiastical discipline,” he tells us, “is an offending brother, that is, one who *professes to be a member of the Church*. The formal object is a sinner, offending either in doctrine, by fundamental heresy, or in manners.” He then goes on to specify different classes of offenders, having in his eye, throughout, none but the professed members of the household of faith.

The next witness whom we shall put upon the stand is no less a person than the venerable Puritan, old John Owen. In his treatise upon the origin, nature, &c., of Evangelical Churches, we find the following passage:† “There is a double joining unto the Church: 1. That which is, as unto total communion, in all the duties and privileges of the Church, which is that whereof we treat. 2. An adherence unto the Church, as unto the means of instruction and edification to be attained thereby. So persons may adhere unto any Church, who yet are not meet, or free on some present consideration, to confederate with it, as unto total communion. And of this sort, in a peculiar manner, are the baptized children of the members of the Church. For although they are not capable of performing church duties or enjoying church privileges in their tender years, nor can have a right unto total communion, before the testification of their own voluntary consent thereunto and choice thereof; yet are they, in a peculiar manner, under the care and inspection of the Church, so far as the outward administration of the covenant, in all the means of it, is committed thereunto; and their duty it is, according to their capacity, to attend unto the ministry of that Church whereunto they do belong.” This is one half of the doctrine of the new book. Let us see how much farther he goes. In chapter xi,‡ he answers the question as to the object of Church discipline.

*Theolog. Lib. vii, c. 6, § 8.

†Chap. 8, Russell's Edition, Works vol. 20, p. 187.

‡Works, vol. 20, p. 233.

26 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

That object, he tells us, "as it is susceptible of members, is *professed believers*, and as it is corrective, it is those who stubbornly deviate from the rule of Christ, or live in disobedience of his commands," that is, those professed believers, for these only he considers properly members of the Church.* One more extract, our readers will pardon us for making, from this venerable saint. It is from the first chapter of the Treatise on the true nature of the Gospel Church,† and it is so full and explicit as to the duties of the Church to the children received into its bosom, that independently of its pertinency to the question before us, it is worth being soberly and solemnly weighed. "Two things may be yet inquired into that relate unto this part of the state of Evangelical Churches; as, 1. Whether a Church may not, ought not to take under its conduct, inspection and rule, such as are not yet meet to be received into full communion; such as are the children and servants of those who are complete members of the Church? Answer: No doubt the Church, in its officers, may and ought so to do, and it is a great evil when it is neglected. For (1.) they are to take care of parents and masters as such, and as unto the discharge of their duty in their families; which, without an inspection into the condition of their children and servants, they cannot do. 2. Households were constantly reckoned unto the Church, when the heads of the families were entered into covenant, Luke xix, 9; Acts xvi, 18; Rom. xvi, 10. 11; 1 Cor. I. 16; 2 Tim. iv, 19. 3. Children do belong unto, and have an interest in, the parent's covenant; not only in the promise of it, which gives them right unto baptism, but in the profession of it in the Church covenant, which gives them a right to all the privileges of the Church, whereof they are capable, until they voluntarily relinquish their claim unto them. 4. Baptizing the children of church-members, giving them thereby an admission into the visible Catholic Church, puts an obli-

*Of. Treat. Ex-comm. Nat. Gosp. ch. c. 10, Works, vol. 20. p. 548.

†Vol. 20, p. 367.

A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline. 27

gation on the officers of the Church, to take care what in them lieth, that they may be kept and preserved meet members of it by a due watch over them and instruction of them. 5. Though neither the Church nor its privileges be continued and preserved, as of old, by carnal generation; yet, because of the nature of the dispensation of God's covenant, wherein He hath promised to be a God unto believers and their seed, the advantage of the means of a gracious education in such families, and of conversion and edification in the ministry of the Church, ordinarily the continuation of the Church, is to depend on the addition of members out of the families already incorporated into it. The Church is not to be like the Kingdom of the Mamelukes, wherein there was no regard unto natural successors; but it was continually made up of strangers and foreigners incorporated into it, nor like the beginning of the Roman commonweal, which, consisting of men only, was like to have been the matter of one age alone.

The duty of the Church towards this sort of persons consists, 1. In prayer for them; 2. Catechetical instruction, according unto their capacities; 3. Advice to their parents concerning them; 4. Visiting of them in the families whereunto they do belong; 5. Encouragement of them, or admonition, according as there is occasion; 6. Direction for a due preparation unto the joining themselves unto the Church in full communion; 7. Exclusion of them from a claim unto the participation of the especial privileges of the Church, where they render themselves visibly unmeet for them and unworthy of them."

We think that we have now accomplished the work which we proposed—that we have sufficiently demonstrated that the principle of the new book is right and proper in itself, that it is no pernicious novelty, but in perfect harmony with the general voice of the Reformed Churches, and with the testimony and teaching of the ablest Theologians. The principle, indeed, is in such striking accordance with the spiritual instincts of the Church, that even among ourselves it has been universally adopted in practice, in the very face of the letter of the law. The truth is, the doctrine of the old book cannot be carried

out without the most disastrous results. It would have the double effect of bringing infant baptism into contempt and of peopling the Church with hypocrites and formalists. Why not then make our theory and practice coincide? What the Church needs is not a more stringent discipline in the narrow sense of the term, but a more faithful discharge of the duties of inspection, prayer and training. If her obligation to educate the young for God, to commend them constantly to His grace, to be concerned for their spiritual welfare, if her obligation to labor and intercede for their early conversion and their consistent walk were more deeply felt and more earnestly discharged, we should soon experience the benefits of infant baptism upon a scale that would illustrate the preciousness of the covenant and the riches of the glory of God's grace. In the mean time we may be permitted to repeat what we have formerly ventured to pronounce, that the new book has done a real service in making plain and intelligible to the Church the real status of her baptized non-professing children, and in developing the principle upon which alone they can be consistently dealt with. The theory announced has, at least, the merit of being perfectly coherent, and as it comes to us with the prestige of illustrious authorities, it should not be dismissed at the bidding of idle prejudices or sophistical illusions. The Church may refuse to adopt the amendment; but though no prophets, we have little scruple in venturing to predict that, unless she loses her spirituality and becomes willing to accept a formal regularity of life for the graces of genuine penitence and faith, she never will be brought to execute the letter of the old law. It will stand on our book, a monument of folly as retained—a monument of life as disregarded. We should, perhaps, crave the indulgence of our readers for having dwelt so long upon this point, but the importance of the subject is our apology. The other topics of the discipline can be more rapidly dispatched.

II. The next to which we shall advert is the standard of offences. The old book refers us directly to the Bible, and leaves it an open question, in every instance of prosecution,

A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline. 29

whether the things charged are prohibited or not. The new book refers us to the Constitution of the Church as an accepted compendium of what the Bible is acknowledged to teach. According to the old book we are required to proceed as if nothing were agreed upon; according to the new, we abide by our covenants. It is admitted that our standards are a competent measure of heresy, but denied that they are a competent measure of morality. The reason is, that the fundamental doctrines of religion are few, definite and precise, and therefore easily digested into a human compendium—"the points of Christian practice endlessly varied," and therefore incapable of inclusion in any human manual. If "by points of Christian practice" is meant the fundamental principles of morality, the statement is absurd. They are even fewer than the essential doctrines of Christianity. The Platonists and Stoics reduced them to four—Christian moralists, the most eminent, such as Berkely and Butler, have reduced them to three, truth, justice and benevolence; others have still further reduced them to two, and an inspired Apostle has comprehended all human duty in the single principle of love. If "by points of Christian practice" is meant the concrete cases in which the principles of duty are to be exemplified, these are confessedly endless, and the Bible no more attempts to enumerate them than the standards of the Church. But the cases are as endlessly varied in which Christian doctrine is to be applied to the hearts and consciences of men, and for one question of casuistry, touching a matter of practical duty, every pastor has, at least, a dozen touching the relations of the soul to God, as determined by Christian doctrines. If, then, the principles of morality cannot be mastered without a knowledge of all their diversified concrete applications, how can the doctrine be mastered without a corresponding skill?

And why it should be easier for uninspired genius to contract the doctrine within comprehensive heads, than to contract the morals, it is particularly hard to understand, since in the matter of the doctrine we are wholly dependent upon Divine revelation, while in the matter of morals we have a source of

30 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

knowledge within ourselves. Redemption is, throughout, a supernatural mystery, and all that we know of it, in the language of Taylor, "descends to us immediately from Heaven, and communicates with no principle, no matter, no conclusion here below." The sublime truths which make up Christian Theology are precisely the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive. They transcend alike the sphere of sense and the scope of reason, and in order to be known, they must be revealed by God's Holy Spirit. Moral distinctions, on the other hand, are the necessary offspring of the human soul—there is nothing supernatural about them. Even the heathen are not insensible to their reality and power—and what the Bible has done in relation to them has been to re-publish with authority, and free from prejudice and mixture, and to enforce with new and peculiar sanctions, and to extend to new relations, those eternal principles of rectitude which were originally engraved upon the nature of man. It would seem, therefore, much more likely that the human understanding, without supernatural aid, could construct an adequate compendium of morals than an adequate compendium of doctrine. Surely it is easier to move in the sphere of the natural, without inspiration, than in the sphere of the supernatural. Accordingly there has been comparatively little controversy as to the right, the just, the pure, the honorable, while there have been interminable disputes as to redemption and grace. We regret that any Christian writer should represent the moral virtues as essentially obscure. Their clearness and authority, in a Christian country, are the means by which the conviction of sin is generated, which prepares the heart for the precious mysteries of the Cross. We do not see, therefore, but that the standards of the Church are as complete as to morals, as they are in relation to doctrine. The law of God, as He Himself wrote it upon the tables of stone and proclaimed it from Sinai, is given in the ipsissima verba of the Most High, and the people likely to study our standards are no more blind than the Jews. At any rate, our conviction is very strong that if any man will honestly practise all the duties prescribed in

our catechisms, in the spirit in which they are expounded and enforced, he will not only pass through the world without any just imputation of offence, but will be welcomed at last into the kingdom of glory, as a saint redeemed, purified, perfected. When any of our people find that law too narrow for them, it will be time to look about for a broader commandment.

But it seems that our standards are only *inferences* from the word of God. This, we confess, is news to us. When we assented to them upon our admission to the ministry, we verily thought, within ourselves, that we were assenting to the very doctrines and precepts of the word and not to the ratiocinations of men. We should like to know what are the original doctrines and precepts, if these are only inferences at second hand. If these are not the identical things which the Scriptures teach, but only conclusions which our fathers deduced from them, we would like to have the premises in their native integrity. But if our standards teach precisely what the Scriptures teach, then the explicit evolution of what is contained in them is the explicit evolution of what is contained in the Scriptures, and the man who is condemned by inference from them is condemned by the word of God. The whole question as to the propriety of making our constitution the standard of offences is contained in a nut-shell. The constitution is, with Presbyterians, the accredited interpretation of the word of God. It is not an inference from it, nor an addition to it, but the very system of the Bible. All cases, it is confessed, must be judged according to the word of God. But that word has to be interpreted. If the constitution is what we profess to believe, we have the interpretation to our hand—we have already wrought out for us the only result we could reach, if we made the interpretation anew in every instance of prosecution. Then the new book says, take the interpretation you have agreed on. It is what you will have to come to if you do not take it, and therefore you had as well abridge your labour and abide by your covenant.

But we are further told that our standards were never meant to be a rule of faith and practice—they are simply designed

82 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

as the measure of official qualifications and the basis of official communion. Why on earth then were they ever put in the form of Catechisms? That looks marvellously as if they were intended to *teach* the people; and we had always supposed, until this new light broke in upon us, that the very reason why the Church exacts an assent from ministers and elders to these formularies of faith, was that she might have a reasonable guarantee that, in their public instructions, they would teach nothing inconsistent with the word of God. We have always heretofore regarded subscription as a security for the sound dispensation of the word of God. It is for the sake of the people, whom the Church wishes trained to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not simply for the sake of the officers that she inquires so particularly into their life and doctrine. The things which they profess to believe she requires them to impress upon the faithful. Hence our standards are obviously a guide, a rule, a measure of their teaching. They contain exactly what the Church wants all her children trained to understand and to practise. Hence she reduces them to a form in which they can be most conveniently used in the offices of instruction. We do not require young Christians, upon their admission to the Church, to adopt them, for we regard them as pupils to be taught, and pupils are not ordinarily supposed to be familiar with the science which they are appointed to learn. But we do require, and peremptorily require, that all the teachers shall teach only according to this summary, and we do expect that the knowledge in which their hearers are to grow, is precisely the knowledge embraced in these symbols. That the Catechisms profess to give the substance of the word of God, as to faith and duty, is obvious on their very face. They reduce the principal instructions of Scripture to these two heads, and then articulately declare what is taught in reference to each; not some of the things, but the very things themselves, and that in their integrity. They omit only those parts of the Bible which do not fall under either of these categories, but there is no hint that they have only selected the principal points pertaining to the topics they have undertaken

to expound. They have given the whole essence of Bible doctrine and Bible morality.

III. The next subject to which we shall advert is the chapter in the new book entitled "Of cases without process." It provides, in the first place, for that class of cases in which the necessity of a trial is superseded by the circumstances under which the offence was committed, or by the confession of the offender. The question of guilt is a settled one, and the only point which is left to the court is the kind and the degree of censure. The objection lies, as we understand the matter, not against the dispensing with process, but against the extempore nature of the judgment. It is apprehended that, under the first specification, justice may be sacrificed to passion, and a sudden resentment take the place of cool deliberation. We have already said that there are instances in which the language of spontaneous indignation was the only language in which the rebuke could be adequately couched. The punishment should follow on the heels of the offence. The moral condemnation involved in an involuntary burst of honest indignation, would be more powerful than a thousand lectures. Every Society has the power of promptly visiting certain kinds of offences. There are outrages upon order and decency which bring down an instantaneous sentence of expulsion. It is a mistake to confound generous indignation with blind passion—such indignation is the natural sense of justice, and is one of the holiest emotions of our nature. The character of our courts and the rights of defence and appeal are a security against abuse. Under the old book, punishment may follow as promptly upon conviction as under the new. There is no provision for an interval of time between the finding of a party guilty and the pronouncing of the sentence, and it is much more likely that, in the process of a long trial, passions should be excited unfavorable to the calm administration of justice, than when the mind, without vexations and disturbing associations, is brought face to face with guilt. The second specification, under which the cases are likely to be most numerous, is too self-evident to need vindication. Trial is a mockery, where guilt is admitted. The remaining provision

34 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

of the chapter is in relation to the mode of dealing with the self-deceived. The principle which regulates the form is, that faith is an indispensable qualification for admission to the Lord's Supper. The session must judge as to the competency of those to be admitted. Those who make no profession at all are debarred from the table—those whose profession is subsequently discovered to be founded in mistake, are remanded to the condition of baptized non-professors. The key is turned upon them and they are excluded from the communion of the saints. Here is discipline—a lawful exercise of the power to open and shut which Christ has committed to his servants. The exclusion is on the ground of confessed disqualification—a ground which necessitates the sentence. A trial in such a case is absurd, and no other sentence is possible. The statement of the case is its own vindication. But that there may be no mistake as to our own personal opinion, we feel bound to say, while we admit that the new book treats the case as one of discipline, and makes the exclusion a judicial sentence, we, ourselves, are convinced that every man has a right to withdraw from the Church whenever he pleases, in the sense explained in our former article—a right in the sense that no human authority has the right to detain him. As before God, he has no more right to apostatize than to commit any other sin. He is bound to believe and keep the commandments. But men have no commission to force him to do either. If he wants to go, they must let him go. "They went out from us," says the Apostle, not that they were expelled, but they went out of their own accord, freely, voluntarily, "because they were not of us." They found themselves in the wrong place and they left it. The Church of France, in one of its canons, makes provisions for simply announcing the names of apostates. They had gone, and the Church felt that all jurisdiction over them had gone with them. This is our own deliberate opinion. Men may become voluntarily exiles from their Saviour and their Church as well as from their country—but we have not engrafted this principle in the new book of discipline. Of course, where apos-

tates, during the time of their professed subjection to the Church, have committed scandalous offences, they are responsible for the scandal. The injury they have done to its name and character they are as much bound to answer for, as any other offenders, and they are not to be at liberty to plead the right of withdrawal as a cover for their crimes.

IV. We shall say a few words about the right of inquest. The new book asserts that every Church court has the inherent power to demand and receive satisfactory explanations from any of its members concerning any matters of evil report. This is represented as arbitrary, tyrannical and oppressive. In the first place, it is said to be in contradiction to the sacred principle of the common law that every man is to be presumed innocent until he is proved to be guilty. For the life of us we are unable to see in what the contradiction consists? The meaning of the maxim is nothing more nor less than that no man is to be punished until he is convicted, and that no man is to be convicted without evidence. But surely it does not mean that no man is to be *suspected* until he is convicted, and that a man being suspected, the community must feel towards him precisely as it feels to the notoriously innocent. Such a maxim would not only subvert common sense, but annihilate, in every case, the possibility of a trial. It is clear as noonday, that suspicion must precede investigation, and that suspicion does affect the moral status of its object. The man against whom scandalous reports are in circulation, is not upon the same footing, in public estimation, as those whose names are free from reproach. He is injured to the extent of the rumor, and the Church is injured in him. Now these rumors are either true or false. If true, he is entitled to no protection for his character; if false, his brethren should be in a condition to defend him and to vindicate the Church. If true, no injury is done to him by reducing him to the necessity of confession—if false, his good name may be rescued from infamy. In no case can injustice be done him. If he is guilty he deserves to suffer, and if not guilty he is saved

36 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

from suffering. We cannot appreciate the objections. The whole case, to us, is an instance of fraternal guardianship and care.

But whether the principle is tyrannical or not, it has a noble history in our own Church, and has been enacted into law in relation to suspicions of heresy. During the New School controversy, it was strenuously and systematically maintained by the old school party, that every Presbytery had the inherent right to certify itself concerning the orthodoxy of every minister that sought to join it, no matter how clear the testimonials which he was prepared to present. Here was the right of inquest as to doctrine. The assembly solemnly recognized the right, and subsequently made the inquest an imperative obligation. If, in suspicious times, a man coming with clean papers could be righteously subjected to scrutiny in relation to his creed, surely when he himself is suspected, there can be no tyranny in precisely the same process, when the question is one of character. The Old School Convention which met at Pittsburgh, in 1835, in their memorial to the General Assembly, signalize it as their first grievance, that the Assembly of the preceding year had denied to the Presbyteries the right of examining all who applied to be admitted into them, whatever might be their testimonials, and proceed to invoke, in the name of faithful Presbyterians, "a return to the genius of the constitution; a restoration of the right and power of self-preservation; a repeal of the obnoxious act, and a distinct recognition of the inalienable right, in every Presbytery, of examining every applicant for admission into their number, be his credentials what they may, and of rejecting him, provided they think his admission would endanger their own purity and peace." In the resolutions adopted by the Assembly upon this memorial, it was solemnly declared, "that in the judgment of the General Assembly, it is the right of every Presbytery to be entirely satisfied of the soundness in the faith, and *the good character in every respect*, of those ministers who apply to be admitted into the Presbytery as members, and who bring testimonials of good standing from sister Presbyteries, or

from foreign bodies with whom the Presbyterian Church is in correspondence. And if there be any reasonable doubt respecting the proper qualifications of such candidates, notwithstanding their testimonials, it is the right and may be the duty of such a Presbytery to examine them, or to take such other methods of being satisfied in regard to their suitable character as may be judged proper, and if such satisfaction be not obtained, to decline receiving them." Here the whole principle is distinctly asserted, and that by the orthodox Assembly of 1835. The new book only completes the application of the principle, extending it to morals as well as heresy. It is idle to say that the right to examine before admission, and to demand explanations after admission, is essentially different. They are only different forms of the same fundamental right—the right to be satisfied concerning character and soundness. It is worthy of mention, too, that not a single objection has been raised against the provision of the new book which was not urged, with equal vehemence, by the new school against the right to examine. It was extra-judicial—it was arbitrary and oppressive—it violated the maxims of the common law—it was open and flagrant tyranny. The Church was unmoved by these fierce remonstrances then; we hope she will not be seduced by the sophistry and cavils of better men now. The cause is no better, though its advocates are changed.

V. The only remaining topic which claims our attention, relates to the changes in the administration of appellate jurisdiction. In order to the ends of justice, the case should be transferred to the higher tribunal, not only as it was made out by the original parties, but as it was viewed by the court below. The grounds of the original decision must be known and must enter as an essential feature in the new presentation of the case. Now there are three ways by which this can be done. The lower courts can be made parties, as in the present system, or the members of it can be made judges and retain their places as integral elements of the court above—as in the new book—or they can be made consulting judges without the privilege of voting. The objections to the first arrangement are that it

38 *A few more words on the Revised Book of Discipline.*

complicates the proceedings by a new issue—that it makes the members of the lower court attorneys and advocates, and weakens the sense of judicial responsibility under which they deliver their opinions. Their purpose will be more to defend themselves than to consult the merits of the case. The plan has been tried, and universal experience has condemned it. It has wrought nothing but confusion, embarrassment and mischief, and the Church has loudly demanded a reform. Ingenious pleas may be alleged to show that experience is wrong; but experience will be trusted in spite of all sophistry. The man who walks answers every argument against the possibility of motion. The choice then lies between the other two schemes. Both bring the whole case before the court. The advantage of the first is that it preserves the integrity of the court, deepens the sense of personal responsibility in the delivery of opinions, and represses the temptation in the courts below to become partizans and advocates. The only danger which can be apprehended is, that their minds will be biased by self-partiality to cling to their old judgments, and fortified by the ambition of consistency against all new light. The only advantage of the second method is that it avoids this danger. If the danger is real, the Church has to balance probabilities and choose the least evil. The whole question is one of great difficulty, and no expedient can be adopted which is free from objection. We think that, all things considered, the provision of the new book is most in harmony with the nature of our system, and though we cannot promise that it will never be abused, we are persuaded, for the reasons developed in our former article, that in the long run it will most effectually secure the ends of justice.

We are now ready to leave the new book in the hands of the Assembly. We cannot predict its fate—it may be rejected—it may be adopted—or it may be materially modified. Of one thing we are confident, the parts of it which have provoked most opposition are the parts which are least liable to exception. The only point in it which we think wholly indefensible is the anomalous extension of the right of appeal to

parties that are not properly aggrieved. The only point which we think at all doubtful is the constitution of the Courts of Appeal. In all other respects its changes seem to us to be clear and unquestionable. They are founded upon principles which cannot be shaken—and though, through the influence of a sentiment which styles itself conservative, prejudice may rule the hour, and righteous reforms be stigmatized as rash and lawless innovations, the time will come when truth will assert its supremacy, and crotchets give place to reason.

ARTICLE II.

THE RELATION OF ORGANIC SCIENCE TO SOCIOLOGY.*

In my address "On the Principles of a Liberal Education," delivered before the two Societies of the South Carolina College, and published in this Review, July, 1859, I attempted to show the important function of Organic Science and Geology in a scientific course, and of a scientific course in a general course of education. Again, in an Address delivered, May, 1858, at the Athenæum, and published in this Review, April, 1859, I attempted to show the close connection between Morphology (a branch of Organic Science) and Fine Art, a connection similar to that which exists between Physical Science and Useful Art. The present Lecture has been the result of the farther course of my reflections on the philosophy of Organic Science and Geology; in which I hope to complete the argument in favor of the transcendent importance of these subjects in a course of instruction. The subject of the present Lecture, then, will be the intimate connection of Organic Science and Geology with that most important of all sciences,

*Prepared originally as a Lecture to the Senior Class of the South Carolina College.