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ART. I.—RITES AND WORSHIP OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

From the German of Neander.*

As the idea of the priesthood of all Christians, became more and more superseded by the notion of a class of persons peculiarly consecrated to God, and set apart for divine service; in the same proportion, the original relation of united Christian worship to entire Christian life—a relation grounded in the very essence of the system—became more and more obscure. It was forgotten, that the divine worship of believers is confined to no certain places, times, or actions, but embraces the whole of a life consecrated to God. Distinguished theologians, however, such as Chrysostom and Augustin, acknowledged that vital Christianity could proceed only from that

* This article consists of a translation from the last volume of the Ecclesiastical History of Neander. The reader will bear in mind that all the statements which it contains relate exclusively to the period between A. D. 312, and A. D. 590; the *second period*, according to the division of this historian. It falls, therefore, within that part of the work which has not yet appeared in English; for the translation by Rose included the history of the first period only. The extract here given will probably be interesting, both as the specimen of a work which is attracting great attention in Europe, and as containing a body of instructive matter upon a very important branch of the subject.

[*Ed. Bib. Rep. & Theol. Rev.*]

be spilled), so that every day, before they proceeded to worldly employments, they might communicate, and purify, and strengthen themselves by communion with the Lord. Even on sea voyages, they took some of the consecrated bread, in order to communicate on the way.*

ART. II.—THE PRESENT CONDITION AND PROSPECTS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

THE radical principle of Presbyterian Church government, is, that all the ministers of the Church of Christ have received the same office; and however they may be distinguished by gifts, or other circumstances, are all upon an equality, as it relates to ecclesiastical power and privileges; that is, the ministerial acts which one is authorized to perform, all may perform; and in ecclesiastical meetings, whether for counsel or judicial decision, the voice of one is equal to that of any other. This is commonly called *PARITY*, among the presbyters to whom the government of the Church is committed. In regard to ruling elders, there is not a unanimity among Presbyterians, whether they are of divine appointment, or whether they are merely the representatives of the Church, who are delegated by the body to act in their place, just as our legislators, in the State, are the representatives of the people. The former is, no doubt, the opinion of much the larger number of Presbyterians, of different denominations; but many learned and eminent men have maintained the latter opinion. At present, we have no occasion to discuss this question; we are only concerned to ascertain, what are the essential principles of Presbyterianism? And, therefore, passing by all minor points, we assume it as a clear and radical principle, that according to this theory of ecclesiastical polity, a presbytery is essential to the complete organization and successive continuance of the Church; but no synod, or other ecclesiastical body, however it may be useful and convenient, is absolutely essential. A single congregation of believers, with their proper officers and pastor, is complete for certain purposes; for the administration of the word and sacraments, for example, and

* Hieron. Ep. 48 ad Pammach, § 16. Basil. Cæs. Ep. 93.

for the admission and exclusion of members, from the body: but a single Church, however numerous and well organized, agreeably to the congregational plan, has no power to perpetuate itself by supplying the vacancies which may occur in the pastoral office. Such a Church does not pretend to possess the power of ordination, which is essential to the perpetual continuance of the presbyterial office. This defect has been sorely felt by the advocates of INDEPENDENCY; and they have, in theory, proposed to remedy it in two ways; neither of which have been reduced, commonly, to practice. The first is, to constitute a presbytery within each congregation; that is, to have presbyters enough, in every Church, to form a complete presbytery, which should possess the full power of conferring the pastoral office, and excluding from it. Now, in theory, this does very well; we have no objections to a whole presbytery, within a single Church, if it is rich enough to support such a body. But whenever this is the case, the Church must be so numerous, and the members so scattered, that it will soon be found convenient, and even necessary, to meet in separate assemblies, on most occasions; and whenever this becomes expedient, it will of course be requisite, that the presbyters or pastors be distributed among the several assemblies, which compose the Church; and thus, we have the true origin of presbyteries, as they now exist. And thus it would ever be, in a rapidly progressive state of the Church.

Suppose half a dozen missionaries to gather a flourishing Church in a foreign land. At first they would all stand in the same relation to it, and would be a presbytery within a single society; but if this Church increased exceedingly, by the accession of new members, it would become inconvenient for all to convene in one place; and yet, there would be a repugnance in those united in bonds so sacred and tender, to separate entirely from each other's society:—and there would be no necessity for it. Let the missionaries distribute themselves among the several assemblies, into which the Church is divided; and let the usual routine of worship and instruction be conducted by them, respectively, in separate places: but when any business occurred, requiring the common counsel or consent of the whole body, let them come together into one place, as did the thousands of Jewish converts at Jerusalem, when they understood that Paul had returned from his successful mission among the Gentiles. Or, if the number should be too great for the commodious transaction of business

in one body, let them delegate a certain number of the wisest and most experienced of the members, to be their representatives; or, if they have other officers, besides pastors, let these convene with the preaching presbyters; and whatever might be the state of things in the beginning of the planting of Churches, very soon this plan of delegating the business to representatives would be adopted, almost as a matter of course.

To illustrate our meaning more fully, we shall suppose, that at first, the converts to Christianity, in the mother Church at Jerusalem, formed one assembly, and met in one place; say, in some large room about the temple. Three thousand were added on the day of Pentecost, and soon afterwards, five thousand more; or, as the words are ambiguous, let us grant that the whole number was now five thousand; yet as the work was rapidly going on, in a short time, we may conclude, there could not be fewer than ten thousand members in the Church at Jerusalem. Now most of these would need much particular instruction,—and the teachers were numerous; for all who received special Pentecostal gifts would be qualified to edify the body, in one way or another. Can it be supposed then, that all these would, or could be instructed by the voice of one man? or, that all the other teachers would remain idle, while some one with stentorian voice attempted to make himself heard by such a multitude? We have never known a man that could so speak, as to be heard distinctly, through a whole discourse, by ten thousand persons. It is said, that such was the clearness, and distinctness of Mr. Whitefield's voice, that he could be heard by a greater number, when circumstances were favourable to the easy transmission of sound. But if ten thousand disciples, or even half that number, must so hear as to understand, and be instructed, common sense would dictate to any people, that the best way would be to separate them into a number of assemblies, and appoint one or more teachers, to take charge of each. And as the Jews who constituted the first Christian Church, had been accustomed to worship and receive instruction in many synagogues, in Jerusalem, as we learn from the New Testament itself, nothing can be more probable, than that they would agree to meet for worship and instruction in different places; and that the whole body would come together, only when some matter of general concern was to be heard or proposed, and soon even affairs, which concerned the whole society, would be committed to

the male members, and after a while to the seniors, or wise and experienced brethren.

Here then, from the first Church, a presbytery, with its several congregations is seen naturally to spring up. For unless these affectionate Christians had received an express command to separate entirely from the mother Church, from what we know of human nature, we may be sure, that they would not have thought of a wider dissociation, than local circumstances made necessary; and that they would still, though worshipping in different places, consider themselves as members of the original Church. And thus we have one Church, consisting of many branches, each of which is furnished with one or more teachers, and other necessary officers, and, on certain occasions, all meeting together by a grand convocation of the individuals composing the body, or by their representatives, and respective presbyters. Is not this idea of the primitive Church much more probable, than that they would, in the same city, proceed to institute different independent societies? And even when another church was formed, in Samaria, another at Joppa, a fourth at Damascus, and a fifth at Antioch; all these would possess the feeling of affiliation, and would cling to the mother Church, as children to their parents. And, whenever any difficulty occurred, they would naturally be disposed to refer for counsel to the original society, at Jerusalem. Thus we find it was, in fact; for here the most of the Apostles remained for a long time; and those who travelled abroad, often returned to this sacred spot, and reported the things which were done by them, and the success which attended their labours. Thus, when Peter went into the house of Cornelius, and preached the Gospel and administered baptism first to the Gentiles, when he came up to Jerusalem, the propriety of his conduct was then questioned and discussed. And when Paul returned from a long tour of preaching, and reported to James what he had done, and what doctrine he had preached, and what course he had pursued in regard to Jewish rites, James informs him, that the brethren, as soon as they heard of his arrival, must needs come together, and "there be," said he, "many thousands who believe, who are all zealous for the law of Moses." And when a difficulty, respecting circumcision and other Jewish rites arose in the Church at Antioch, they sent up Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, to consult the apostles, elders, and brethren, who were there, respecting this matter. The Church, therefore, was

still considered as one body, the members of which were scattered abroad, and existed in a multitude of distinct, but not independent congregations.

It appears to us also, that upon the hypothesis here assumed, the origin of Episcopacy can most easily be explained. It cannot be denied, by the candid Presbyterian, that at a very early period, a distinction was made between bishops and elders, although no vestige of any such difference is apparent in the Scriptures, but the contrary. And although the names *bishop* and *presbyter* are used promiscuously throughout the New Testament; yet as early as the time of Ignatius, or soon afterwards, the former of these names seems to have been confined to the presiding presbyter in the bench of elders. Now this change in the usage is easily accounted for, upon the principles laid down above. For, in every regular body, which transacts business, civil or ecclesiastical, a presiding officer is necessary. No collection of people attempt to transact the most common affairs, without appointing a chairman or president, who, for the time being, is invested with authority to keep order, and often with power to convene the body after it is dissolved, if any emergency should require a meeting earlier than the time to which it stands adjourned. As, at Jerusalem, there were many teachers and preachers in the Church, when these met, they would, in conformity with common sense and common usage, appoint one of their number to preside. This would be the man most venerated, or whose talents were best adapted to the impartial and effective execution of the duties of the office. In those days of simplicity and ardent piety, no danger would be apprehended from continuing the same man in office from month to month, and from year to year. Thus, by common consent, or repeated suffrage, one by office on a par with the rest, is by them invested with a peculiar authority, *primus inter paribus*. And as a distinctive appellation becomes convenient, and is naturally resorted to, in all such cases; so, instead of inventing any new term to designate his office, they appropriated one of the names which had before been common to all the members of the body. Thus, while all continued to be denominated presbyters, the name bishop was particularly applied to the president of the presbytery; and as he was a kind of representative of the whole Church, it did not, upon the known principles of human nature, require a long time to establish a pretty wide distinction between him and his compeers. Men are

prone to increase the honour and power conferred on the incumbent of a high office; especially, when the gifts and character of the individual occupying it, render him estimable in the view of the people. In our opinion, nothing more than the natural, simple process here detailed, is necessary to explain all the well-ascertained facts, respecting episcopacy, in perfect consistency with the original parity of all the pastors of the Church; especially when that is recollected, which cannot be denied, that, for a long time, the jurisdiction of a bishop extended no farther than to converts of a particular city, and its immediate vicinity.

While the whole Church was confined to a city or narrow district, one presbytery would be sufficient for the government of the body, and no higher or larger judicatories would be needed. But, when congregations were gathered in remote cities or countries, if any union or communion were maintained in the body, it became necessary to have councils or ecclesiastical synods, in which the several distant members of the Church might meet, to consult about the interests of the general society. And however far the Church may extend, such representative meetings may occasionally be held with advantage, for they tend to promote unity, harmony, and brotherly affection, as well as afford opportunity of entering into important enterprizes which require the combined energies of the whole body. But when wide oceans, or almost impassable deserts, separate different portions of the Church, the unity of the body is not violated, nor the communion of saints denied, because these sections of the Church, far apart from each other, do not live under one and the same ecclesiastical regimen, or meet by their representatives, in the same synod. If they cherish Christian affection mutually, and cordially receive each other's members and ministers, when testimonials are satisfactory, they do still keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

The same may be observed, respecting Christian denominations, whose minor opinions and ceremonial usages are different. Although they inhabit the same city or country, yet an attempt to bring them together under the same rules of discipline and worship, would only tend to confusion; whereas, in their separate organizations, they can go along peaceably and comfortably, and may cultivate Christian communion with each other. Such distinct denominations, many of which are found in this land, cannot be considered as guilty of schism,

because they meet in their own synods, and carry on their ecclesiastical affairs, in their own way; unless they refuse all communion with other denominations, and reject them, as though they were not real members of the body of Christ. Those denominations, who pursue this exclusive course, do in fact excommunicate, as much as in them lies, all other Christians. But the existence of different denominations who hold all the essentials of Christian doctrine and worship, no more breaks the unity of the Church, than the existence of different presbyteries or congregations in the same denomination, whose customs, in indifferent matters, and also whose opinions in non-essential points, may be considerably different.

The intended bearing of the preceding remarks is to show, that the present organization of the Presbyterian Church, in these United States, is not essential; but that, in many respects, there might be a new-modelling of the body, without the least interference with the radical principles of Presbyterianism. And it is our purpose, in this paper, to suggest some alterations, which, we are of opinion, would tend not a little to the peace, unity, and prosperity of this large section of the Christian Church. We wish it to be understood, however, that we mean not to propose the smallest change in the constitution and form of church sessions, and presbyteries: the alterations which we think desirable, relate entirely to the synods, and the General Assembly.

There are two weighty reasons, and others of minor importance, which clearly demonstrate that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church ought to be new-modelled; and that there is urgent need for something to be done speedily. The first is, the unwieldy size of the body, which renders it impracticable to transact business with that calm deliberation, which is essential to the dignity of the Assembly, and the welfare of the Church of which it is the representative. And this inconvenience, instead of being diminished, is greatly increased every successive year. Several attempts have been made, by altering the ratio of representation from the presbyteries, to keep the body within moderate size; but so rapid has been the increase of the Church, that notwithstanding these measures, the number of members has gone on increasing; and unless something more effectual can be done, will continue to increase rapidly, until it will be found absolutely necessary to adopt a new organization. In legislative bodies,

a large number of members is not attended with so great inconvenience; but in judicial bodies, when the number of judges becomes very great, it exceedingly retards the progress of business, and obstructs the impartial administration of justice. In so great a number, the responsibility is too much divided, and a large proportion will feel too little the importance of paying a short and unremitting attention to all the evidence and arguments, which should have an influence on the decision. Besides, in such a crowd, it is impossible, on account of the noise and confusion, incident to such large assemblies, to hear the half of what is said; and retiring, modest men will not be forever complaining of not hearing, or calling for a repetition of what has been said; so, that when a complicated case has been gone through, and a vote is expected from every member, it would be found, if the trial were made, that a large number of the judges were not fully in possession of the merits of the cause. For it is a matter of fact, that members are often absent from the house, during the most important part of the trial; and surely *they* are not competent to give an intelligent vote. Others are so situated, in the midst of commotion, from persons going out and coming in, that they cannot possibly hear, or be composed, though ever so desirous of understanding what they are about. But I need not dwell on the inconvenience of transacting judicial business in a court consisting of between two and three hundred members. The thing is notorious to every person who enters the room in which the General Assembly meets. The evil would not be quite so great, if there was a room commodiously fitted up for a meeting of this sort; but the members are crowded together, on narrow benches, without desks or tables, and with scarcely room to pass from one part of the house to another, without creating disturbance. It is only the members who sit around the clerk's table, who have the convenience of writing-materials, or an opportunity of committing to writing any motion or resolution which they may wish to propose.

Another serious inconvenience of this overgrown body is, that it imposes an annual and unequal tax upon the Presbyterian population of Philadelphia, which, upon the most moderate calculation, cannot be less than two thousand dollars. Now, we profess, that we never heard any of the good citizens of Philadelphia utter a word of complaint on this subject; but the burden is not the less unjust on that account. Many of those who entertain a member, or members of the Assem-

bly, for two weeks, are in very moderate circumstances, and are only able, with strict economy, decently to support their families. And to say the least, these persons could afford to give more to the pressing calls of benevolence, if they were relieved from this burden.

It is also a known fact, that the making provision for the comfortable and gratuitous boarding of so many persons, of various habits and manners, is a matter of much embarrassment to those ministers and elders, who feel it incumbent on them to attend to the subject. And after all that can be done, a large number are obliged to be located, so far from the place of meeting, that it is exceedingly laborious, and not unfrequently injurious, to travel so far on the hard pavements, through sun and rain; especially if members are old, or in feeble health. We know that this is rather a delicate subject, especially as it relates to the hospitable citizens of Philadelphia: but we are of opinion, that it is one which the Church should look at, and provide such remedy as the case admits of; which, in our opinion, is no other than the reduction of the body to less than one-third of its present number.

Another evil produced by the number of ministers who attend the Assembly, not less than any which has been mentioned, is, that hundreds of pulpits are left vacant, during the period of its sessions, and some of them are deprived of the customary means of grace, on the Sabbath, for two or three months. Now, we ask, can any candid man persuade himself, that these ministers do as much good by appearing and giving their vote, in the Assembly, as by continuing their wonted labours in regions which are exceedingly destitute? We know that the business of the Church must be transacted, but we insist, that this can be done more speedily, and in all respects more judiciously, by fifty or sixty men, than by three hundred. If there was any probability that justice would be more impartially administered by three hundred than by fifty, we would cease from all objections; but to us the probability is entirely on the other side. The only reasonable ground on which an appeal is admitted from one court to another, is that the superior court is supposed to possess more wisdom or more impartiality; or because it is desirable to have the voice of a majority of the whole body. But in nine cases out of ten, a respectable synod is possessed of fully as much talent, and as much wisdom, derived from experience, as the General Assembly; and, in most cases, they are as impartial; and

always enjoy an opportunity of judging what is expedient, and what course is adapted to the character of the people, superior to that which can be possessed by the Assembly. It has been remarked by many, that of late our General Assembly contains an undue proportion of young, inexperienced men, many of whom have never been pastors, but have received ordination as evangelists, to labour in the extensive missionary field on our frontiers. We do not censure the presbyteries for sending such delegates, nor the young men for accepting the office. It is in fact the only thing which can be done, unless those distant presbyteries should consent to remain entirely unrepresented. But the constitution of a high court of appeals, so as to include a large number of persons who are almost entirely ignorant of ecclesiastical jurisprudence, and some of them not even accustomed to the laws and usages of the Presbyterian Church, cannot be favourable to the wise and impartial administration of its affairs. We wish every intelligent reader to consider, whether the General Assembly, as constituted, furnishes a better court for the ultimate decision of any cause, than many, perhaps all of our synods. When we give as a reason for making this body a court of appeals, that we thus come at the opinion of a majority of the whole Church, we do but impose on ourselves by a fallacious appearance. In matters of a judicial kind, and in cases of doctrine, we have in the General Assembly no more than the judgment of just so many persons as are there convened; and it never can add any weight to their opinion, that they are the representatives of the whole or a greater part of the Church. They can but express their own judgment, individually; and we do not see why an equal number of equally able and impartial men, located in the same district, would not possess just as much weight as the General Assembly. That is, we do not see that, except in peculiar cases, there is any real benefit in an appeal from a synod to the Assembly. Suppose the members of a synod to be as numerous as those who compose the General Assembly, and as honest and well-informed, we are at a loss to see why their decision is not likely to be as correct as that of the higher court. It will now be seen, that our object is to propose an organization of the General Assembly, which will take from that body the character of a high court of appeals; but of this we can speak more clearly, when we have proceeded further in the developement of our project.

The second reason for new-modelling the General Assembly is, that the existing and increasing spirit of party in our Church, requires some change in its organization, to prevent the supreme judicatory from becoming a mere arena for fierce contention. We mean not, in this paper, to appear at all as partisans. We do not, therefore, cast any reproaches on any party, or on any set of men. We are considering things as they exist, and inquiring whether any thing can be done to remedy the evils which are felt, and to prevent those which are feared.

That there exists a difference of opinion in the Church relative to certain doctrinal points, and as to the precise import of the act of adopting the Confession of Faith, by candidates, at their licensure and ordination, cannot be denied or concealed. It is also apparent, that the numbers who choose to range themselves under the one or the other of these parties, are pretty nearly balanced. Hitherto, in all questions which put the strength of the Old and New School, as they have been called, to the test, the majority has been found on the side of the former, until the meeting of the last General Assembly, when a decided majority appeared on the other side. It is true, indeed, that the points on which a division took place between them, on that occasion, were not doctrinal points, but certain ecclesiastical transactions, relative to missionary operations, and the training of candidates for the ministry; yet, it is understood, that, generally, the respective parties were agreed in their views of theology. This difference may be considered, therefore, as having its foundation in a diversity of theological opinion. But, whatever may be the origin, or true cause of these parties, it falls not within the scope of our design to inquire: the existence of the fact, is all that is necessary to be established, to answer the purpose for which it is adduced. And of this no one pretends to doubt. And it is also evident, that this state of things is not likely to subside. Every thing indicates, that the persons who take the lead in these parties are not only determined to maintain the ground which they have assumed, but are becoming more and more ardent; and sometimes even acrimonious, in conducting the controversies which have arisen out of the proceedings of the last Assembly. Nothing can be more probable, than that the next General Assembly, like the last, will be a scene of contention; and contention in such a body, and in so conspicuous a situation, will not only be accompanied with disorder, and

disgraceful warmth, but will do a lasting injury to the Presbyterian Church, and, as we believe, to the cause of truth and piety.

If it is now found that our differences are so wide, that we cannot live together in peace, let us peaceably agree to separate, into two distinct denominations. This should, however, be the last resort. The Church of Christ is ONE, and all who agree in essential matters should hold communion together, notwithstanding minor differences. And if division, on account of some diversity in sentiment commences, there is no telling where it will end; for we presume, there are no two men, who, in all their opinions, on every subject, entirely agree. And as, not only our presbyteries, but our congregations are, in multitudes of cases, composed of persons who agree partly with one and partly with the other side, a division of the Church by a line of difference on theological points, would split many Churches into two parts, neither of which would be able, without the other, to support the gospel among them. Endless controversies, also, respecting the Church property, would necessarily arise, and society would be agitated and convulsed to its very foundations. And as brethren, differing as we do now, have hitherto continued to live in peace, and in most places, in great harmony; and have loved each other as brethren, and have cordially co-operated in promoting the Redeemer's kingdom, why may not this still be the case, after the present exacerbation of feeling has subsided. Upon mature deliberation, therefore, we declare our sentiments to be opposed to all schemes which tend to the division of the Presbyterian Church. We do not know, indeed, that there are any persons who seriously wish or meditate any such thing. But sometimes, hints and rumors come to our ears, which seem to have this bearing. We deem it, therefore, a duty to take this opportunity of disclaiming every thought of this kind for ourselves, and of avowing our intention to oppose firmly all measures, wherever they may originate, which have a tendency to produce division in the Presbyterian body.

But while we are opposed to a division, we are of opinion that the present extended and enlarged condition of the body, requires a new organization of the higher ecclesiastical judicatories. And we will now proceed to delineate our plan; not expecting in this first draft, to have every arrangement perfect, but hoping to be able to furnish such an outline, as will

meet with the approbation of a large majority, both of ministers and people.

The first step which we propose in this new organization is, that the synods as now constituted, be dissolved; and instead of having a convention of all the ministers, and an elder from each Church, let the whole Church be divided into six synods, to be constituted by an equal representation from the presbyteries, according to the original ratio by which the General Assembly was formed. Let each of these synods meet annually, and possess all the judicial and superintending persons which now belong to the General Assembly. That is, let them be supreme in all judicial decisions which come up before them by complaint or appeal, from the presbyteries, or by the review of their ministers. In short, we would place each of these synods in the same relation to the Churches under their care, as the General Assembly now holds to the whole body. With this only difference, that the General Assembly would, upon the plan now proposed, be a Board of Union, and an advisory council to the whole Church.

The General Assembly, according to this organization, would no longer be a high court of appeals, as it now is; nor a judicial body at all; except that any synod might have the privilege of requesting the opinion and advice of this body, in any matter of difficulty and importance.

According to this plan, the General Assembly, instead of being formed by a delegation from the presbyteries, as at present, would be constituted by a deputation from the synods, in proportion to their numbers. It is not necessary now to fix upon the precise ratio of representation; say one minister and one elder for every twenty, more or less; but so regulated, that at no time, the Assembly should consist of more than one hundred members. It is not proposed to make any change in the time or place of meeting. Annual meetings are greatly to be preferred to triennial, or any longer period. To the Assembly, thus constituted, let it be made the duty of the synods to send up an annual report, containing the statistics of the presbyteries and churches under their care; together with a succinct narrative of the state of religion within their bounds respectively, from which the General Assembly might make out and publish a general view of the condition of the churches, and such statistical tables as are now usually printed, with the minutes, annually, or triennially. To this body it would belong also, to hold correspondence and friendly intercourse,

with other denominations of Christians, and with foreign Churches. Indeed, the proposed plan of organization would not in the least interfere with the existing relations between the General Assembly and the several evangelical denominations, with which there is now held a friendly intercourse, according to articles mutually agreed upon by the parties.

The funds which are now held by the General Assembly must still remain in their hands; for they have not the legal power of transferring them to any other body. They are held by corporate bodies, which depend on the General Assembly for their existence; and would be forfeited, if that body did not retain the possession and management of them. But it is not foreseen that any difficulty would arise, in regard to this matter, from the proposed organization of the body. As far as these funds are concerned, the Assembly would remain unaltered. The diminution of its members, and the curtailing of its judicial powers—which is all the change proposed—would not affect its capacity to hold these funds; and when the body should consist of fewer members, and have less business to transact, much greater attention might be paid to the management and appropriation of these funds than has hitherto been practicable. All the permanent funds possessed by the General Assembly are appropriated to specific objects. These are either the education of candidates for the ministry, or the employment of missionaries, to preach the gospel to the destitute. As these have been given to the whole Church, it would not be consistent with the intention of the donors, or the legal charters by which they are held, to transfer them to any one synod, or to divide them among the synods. Certainly, these funds, and the institutions supported by them, can be as wisely and impartially managed by a General Assembly, such as is here proposed, as by the body as now constituted.

The Theological Seminary at Princeton, and the Western Theological Seminary, are the only permanent institutions under the immediate care of the Assembly; no alteration would be requisite in the relation which these bear to that body; and the other seminaries would continue to be regulated by their respective constitutions, which of course could not be affected by the change proposed.

We have thus hastily and briefly drawn the outline of the plan, which we would wish to see adopted; and which, we sincerely believe, would greatly promote the peace and prosperity of the Presbyterian Church in these United States.

It remains to be shown, how such a division of the Church, into representative synods, may be most conveniently made. Perfect accuracy in the details of such a plan, upon its first consideration, cannot be expected, but it may be useful to give a general idea of the extent and boundaries of the several synods, according to our present views of what would be expedient.

Beginning then at the north, we would include in the first of these bodies, all the synods in the State of New York, together with such parts of New Jersey, as might choose to be connected with this synod.

The second would contain, besides the principal part of the synod of New Jersey, the whole of the synods of Philadelphia and Pittsburg, except the presbyteries of Lewes, Baltimore, and the District of Columbia.

The third would comprehend all the presbyteries in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and in the Territories north of Ohio.

The fourth synod would embrace all the presbyteries of Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, and Arkansas Territory.

The fifth, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida.

And the sixth, North Carolina, Virginia, the District of Columbia, Maryland, and those members of Lewes presbytery, who reside in the State of Delaware.

In the above mentioned division, respect has been had to two principles; first, geographical contiguity; and secondly, similarity in views and habits. The object is to promote peace among brethren between whom there are some shades of difference, both as it relates to doctrine, and church polity, and discipline. It ought, therefore, to be admitted, as a radical principle, in new-modelling the Church, that any presbytery—two-thirds of the members concurring—should have the privilege of connecting themselves with a synod different from that within the limits of which they are situated. This provision, although it may appear objectionable, on general principles, yet, we believe, in the present condition of our Church, is one of great importance, as its effect will be to prevent interminable controversies, about non-essential matters. Indeed, the professed and principal object of the proposed organization is, to bring together, respectively, those members of our Church who are pretty nearly agreed in their doctrinal and ecclesiastical views: and to separate those whose differences are such, as to keep them in perpetual agitation. We

are aware, that there are among us some polemical spirits, who are of opinion, that the best way is to fight it out, as they are confident that the truth will prevail. In regard to fundamental errors, we are of the same opinion; but in relation to differences among brethren, we think the case is very different. If these cannot agree, let them withdraw from one another, as Abram from Lot.

Let it be granted then, that a presbytery in the city of New York, or in any other part of that State, which would, from congeniality of views and feelings, prefer a connexion with the synod of Pennsylvania; or, that a presbytery in the latter synod, which would prefer belonging to New York, be permitted to do, in this respect, what was agreeable to them. Indeed, we must proceed upon the principle of allowing to others the same rights and privileges, which we claim for ourselves. Now, it is not our purpose to enter extensively into a consideration of the reasons which recommend to us, this change in the organization of the higher judicatories of our Church: we shall only throw out a few hints, leaving it to our readers to follow these out to the legitimate consequences.

In the first place, then, we would remark, that as it relates to the impartial and wise administration of justice, in cases of appeal from a lower judicatory, to say the least, nothing would be lost, by leaving the final judgment with these synods, constituted as described above. No reason can be assigned why these bodies will not be as competent to decide correctly, in all cases, which may come before them, as any General Assembly. The only conceivable advantage of the latter would be, that the members of the court, coming mostly from a great distance, would be more likely to be impartial; but let it be remembered, that these synods will be representative bodies; and as it relates to impartiality, in all common cases, it is as good for a judge to reside at a hundred miles distance, as at a thousand. And on some accounts, it is far better to have judges who are near enough to take an interest in the business, which may come before them; for, we think, that in the General Assembly, we have observed great inconvenience arising from the fact that a large portion of the court felt too little interest in the case of persons very remote from them, to give due attention to the evidence adduced. Certainly, judges who are within a moderate distance, will feel their responsibility more than those very remote. By this arrange-

ment, too, the number of the judges will be reduced within reasonable bounds; and persons who feel themselves aggrieved, will not be obliged to travel five hundred or one thousand miles in pursuit of justice: it will be brought to their own door.

In the synods, as designated above, there exists so much general similarity and homogeneity, and so much agreement as to the proper course to be pursued in ecclesiastical matters, that there is reason to think, that each of them would be harmonious in its operations; and it is our sincere belief, that general harmony of all the synods would be the result. Even those portions of the Church which are supposed to be less attached to her standards, according to the old interpretation, and less in love with Presbyterian church government, in its rigorous application, would, when left to pursue their own course, undisturbed, rally round their own standards, with a zeal which they do not now manifest. And when captious and acrimonious controversy is ended, a more calm and deliberate opinion will be adopted respecting the points in dispute. And we have so firm a persuasion, that the doctrines of our Confession and Catechisms are those of the Holy Scriptures, that we are confident, the more men love the truth, and study the word of God, the more highly will they esteem these summaries of doctrine. And here we will step out of our way to express our opinion, respecting creeds and confessions. No society of a religious kind can exist without them, written or unwritten. None of these formularies are infallible, unless so far as they contain the very words of Holy Scripture; when a man subscribes a creed, or asserts solemnly to any Confession of Faith, he does it, just as if he had composed it for the occasion, as expressing the opinions which he entertains on the different articles of faith which it comprehends. It matters very little, what the precise form of words may be, in which our assent is given; the understanding of all impartial men will be, that no man can be honest, who adopts, without explicit qualification, a creed which contains doctrines which he does not believe. To admit this, would render all such instruments and engagements perfectly nugatory; and is repugnant to the moral sense of every unsophisticated mind. But when a man composes a creed for himself, he will be ready to acknowledge that it is not infallible; that in many respects, the doctrines asserted might have been more clearly

expressed, and that his language may not always have been the most appropriate.

But to return from this digression, we would advert to another consideration, which, in our opinion, strongly recommends the organization now proposed. In a large extent of country over which our Church is spread, domestic slavery exists, and is practised by Church members, under the impression that, in existing circumstances, it is lawful, and authorized by the precepts and practice of the Apostles. But those parts of the Church where slavery is not tolerated, view the whole thing with abhorrence, and cannot exercise, in many cases at least, charity towards the holders of slaves. This subject has been threatening to disturb and divide the Presbyterian Church almost ever since it had an existence; and the evil has been only prevented by great prudence in the General Assembly. They have commonly continued to evade this agitating subject; but this course has not satisfied all, and, before long, it must come up, in such a form as greatly to disturb, if not to rend the Church asunder. But by the proposed plan of arrangement, all the Churches in the slave-holding States will be separated from those of the non-slave-holding States, and there will be no opportunity of their coming into collision in the ecclesiastical judicatories.

And we need not take up time in remarking, that there will not, upon the new plan, be such a consumption of time, in attending the judicatories of the Church, nor such a destitution of the means of grace, by the long absence of ministers, as at present. And as the places of the meeting of the synods contemplated in the plan, will be within moderate distance, the aged members will more frequently be able to attend, than at the General Assembly; and those bodies, in which wisdom and experience are so much needed, will not be so commonly made up of a majority of young and inexperienced men.

It is taken for granted, in all that has been said, that the standards of the Church, as they now exist, would continue to be adopted by all, as at present. The only thing which could require any change, would be the rule providing for alterations; but as far as it appears to us, this might continue the same as now; for at present, when a majority of the whole number of Presbyteries vote in favour of an alteration, the General Assembly do not consider themselves to be possessed of any power or discretion to counteract the will of the

majority, thus constitutionally expressed. And although, according to the new organization, the General Assembly will have no appellate jurisdiction from the judgment of the synods, nor any controlling power over these bodies, yet in the business of proposing standing rules or alterations, in the adopted standards, this body can act as the organ of the whole, in sending down proposals, and in receiving the opinions of the presbyteries, and declaring to the Churches what is determined by the vote of the majority.

If it be inquired, how can this new plan be brought into operation? the answer is, that it must be done constitutionally, as the original plan of government was adopted, and as all constitutional changes have been made since. Let a committee be appointed by the next General Assembly to propose an overture to the presbyteries, requiring them to send up their opinions on the subject, by the next meeting, and thus, if the plan should be acceptable to the presbyteries and the Churches, within a year from next spring, the whole matter may be adjusted, and a large proportion of the existing causes of heart-burning, contention, and confusion, be for ever removed.

But whether the plan for a new organization of the Church, which we have proposed, meet with acceptance or not, something must be done to alleviate or remove some of the inconveniences which at present attend the meetings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. The evil begins to be felt so seriously by many, that an effort will undoubtedly be made, at the next meeting of the General Assembly, to have some proposition sent down to the presbyteries, to effect such an alteration in the constitution of the Church, as will diminish the number of members in the Assembly. Some presbyteries have already had the subject under consideration, and at least one synod has directed that a memorial be laid before the next meeting of the Assembly, the object of which is to request, that measures be taken to reduce the number of members in that body. Different methods of effecting this object have been proposed. It is evident, that it will not do to increase the ratio of representation from the presbyteries, for this would be to allow the small presbyteries an undue advantage over the same number of members in the large presbyteries, unless it should be so ordered, that two small presbyteries should unite in sending delegates. Another method of attaining the object which has been repeatedly

proposed, is to alter the constitution so that the commissioners to the Assembly should be appointed by the synods, instead of the presbyteries, according to a ratio which would limit the number of members within moderate bounds; and provision might be made in the rule, which should be adopted, that the delegates should be chosen from the presbyteries composing the synod, so that each should have the privilege of furnishing its just proportion. Although we prefer a more radical reform, and are of opinion, that all other measures will prove mere palliations, and that the difficulty will recur, and the pressure be felt hereafter as sensibly as at present; yet we are so deeply convinced of the necessity of adopting speedy measures to reduce the Assembly to a convenient size, that we will concur in either of the plans yet mentioned, if this should be found agreeable to a large majority of the Church. Certainly, there ought to be no objection to sending down some one of these plans to the presbyteries. And we see no evil as likely to arise, from sending down all of them, and letting the presbyteries choose the one which, in their judgment, is the best; or, if they should, after all that has happened, be of opinion that nothing ought to be done, be it so. They have the natural and constitutional right to determine this matter.

We have been induced to bring this subject before the Churches, that there may be an opportunity of giving it an impartial examination; and that the delegates to the next General Assembly may come up to that body prepared to act on the subject. And if the Presbyteries, generally, would consider the subject, and instruct their commissioners in regard to this matter, it would probably prevent a great deal of unnecessary discussion in the Assembly. We should be gratified also, if what we have written should invite free and temperate discussion in the periodical papers, between this time and the meeting of the supreme judicatory of the Church. If a plan better than any which has been thought of or proposed by us shall be brought forward, we shall be ready to adopt it in the place of our own, and will promote it as cordially as if it had been devised by ourselves.