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NUMBER III.

ARTICLE.	PAGE.
I.—THE CHARACTER AND CONDITIONS OF LIBERTY. By the Rev. THOMAS SMYTH, D. D., Charleston, S. C., - - - - -	201
II.—RATIONALISM FALSE AND UNREASONABLE, - -	237
III.—REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF CONFERENCE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE UNITED SYNOD, ETC. By the Rev. JOHN MILLER, Petersburg, Va., - - - - -	253
IV.—THE PROPOSED PLAN OF UNION BETWEEN THE GEN- ERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE UNITED SYNOD OF THE SOUTH. By the Rev. B. M. PALMER, D. D., New Orleans, La., - - - - -	264

NUMBER IV.

I.—PURITANISM AND PRESBYTERIANISM, - - -	309
II.—SAINT PAUL'S VISION OF VICTORY. By the Rev. JNO. H. BOCK, D. D., Appomattox C. H., Va., - - - - -	326
III.—THE RELATION OF STATE AND CHURCH. By the REV. R. S. GLADNEY, Aberdeen, Miss., - -	349
IV.—LIFE AND TIMES OF BERTRAND DU GUESCLIN. By the Rev. A. F. DICKSON, Orangeburg C. H., S. C., - - - - -	376
V.—NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN VIEWS OF THE PROVINCE OF THE CHURCH. By the Rev. JNO. B. ADGER, D. D., Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Polity, Columbia, S. C., - - -	384

THE SOUTHERN
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APRIL, MDCCCLXIV.

ARTICLE I.

THE CHARACTER AND CONDITIONS OF LIBERTY.

Justice and equality the only stable foundation of all natural and moral rule, and of all rights under the government of God; and as such will be maintained and defended by God, who is the hearer and helper of the oppressed.

The Scriptures everywhere authorize us to plead with God, to whom reverence belongs, for His defence of a cause which is **RIGHT**, whether that cause be personal and private, or public and national. Whether we look to Abraham, or to Jacob, or to Job, or to Moses, or to Joshua, or to the Judges, or to the kings of Judah and Israel, or to Samuel and David, or to the prophets, or to the Maccabees during the lunar night which intervened between the setting and the rising again of the sun of inspiration, we hear one and the same appeal to God; the same humble acknowledgment of personal, national, and ancestral unrighteousness

VOL. XVI., NO. III.—26

Disgusted with the dreariness of the system which rationalism offers, they will cry out once more for the good old doctrines of the Bible, which alone are adapted to the wants of mankind. Like the prodigal son, they may now be wasting their substance in riotous living; but they will yet feel the gnawings of pinching hunger, and then they will return to their Father's house.

ARTICLE III.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEES OF CONFERENCE
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE UNITED
SYNOD OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES IN
THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA, ON
THE SUBJECT OF A UNION BETWEEN THE
TWO BODIES.

On the 29th of May, 1801, the General Assembly, at the instance of the General Association of Connecticut, adopted the celebrated "Plan of Union," which contained the following sentence:

"And provided the said standing committee of any church shall depute one of themselves to attend the Presbytery, he may have the same right to sit and act in the Presbytery as a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church."

In the month of May, 1837, the General Assembly passed an "Act of Abrogation," in part as follows:

"But as the 'Plan of Union' adopted for the new settlements, in 1801, was originally an unconstitutional act on the part of that Assembly—these important standing rules having never been submitted to the Presbyteries—and as

they were totally destitute of authority as proceeding from the General Association of Connecticut, which is invested with no power to legislate in such cases, and especially to enact laws to regulate churches not within her limits; and as much confusion and irregularity have arisen from this unnatural and unconstitutional system of union; therefore it is resolved, that the Act of the Assembly of 1801, entitled a 'Plan of Union,' be, and the same is hereby abrogated."

There followed the "Disowning Acts," by which four Synods, those of the Western Reserve, Utica, Geneva, and Genesee, formed under this "Plan of Union, utterly unconstitutional, and therefore null and void from the beginning, are declared to be out of the ecclesiastical connexion of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, and that they are not in form or in fact an integral portion of said church."

In the following year, these Synods appeared by their commissioners, and demanded seats in the next Assembly; and, on being rejected, were joined by other ministers, North and South, commissioners at the time, leaving the Assembly for the purpose, and formed another Assembly; thus inaugurating, of course, a separate Presbyterian Church.

In 1857, that new Assembly was divided by the secession of a body of Presbyterians in the Southern States, forming the present "United Synod;" and in 1861, the Old School Presbyterian Church, as it was commonly called, was also divided on the occasion of the war, and a distinct Assembly organized at Augusta. These are the grand facts that bring these churches together on Southern soil—the one, the Southern fragment of the Old School Church, driven to separation by lawless acts of their own Assembly in upholding a brutal usurpation; and the other, the Southern fragment of the New School Church, who went off with that body in 1838, though being, as all parties were even

then agreed, nearly all of them perfectly orthodox men, who went off without the slightest detrusion from the other side; who went off, not complained against, (for the most part,) but complaining; and who were complained against *after* they had gone off, chiefly for the act of going; who, in the eyes of most of us, would be relieving their chief mistake by coming back, or joining in with us in any mutually courteous way; but who, except in the instance of a few of peculiar doctrine, have been kept from doing so by objections to *us*—by objections (perhaps well-founded) to a formal individual examination, but also, to some extent, to our original “Disowning Acts,” which all their experience in respect to Boards, and in respect to fanatic peculiarities of belief, have failed to reconcile them to; and which it is not necessary that they should be reconciled to, at this late day, as a preliminary ground on which we may come together.

The union of these churches, therefore, as far as the Old School are concerned, is a subject thoroughly prepared for in history. We never detrudded this fragment. They never left us originally on any ground of an unconstitutional “Union.” We never considered them heretical. We have at all times invited them back. And if an individual examination is undignified, or a “coming over” less mutually courteous than a “union” on independent terms, we have a technical right to do either; and if there are unorthodox men, we can make them no manner of promises, it being no more possible to abdicate our disciplinary rights, even though we knew of such cases beforehand, than for either “Old” or “New” to cast overboard the discipline of the church, or to embrace a different standard of “review” for one or another of the ministrations of the sanctuary.

We mean by that, a church notoriously sound, may, with perfect technical right, effect a union with one of a similar character; but if there be sporadic cases of unorthodox belief, the new church will not for a moment suspend her

government. The red blood running through her veins will seek the health of the distant members. No *argumentum ad verecundiam* will avail, even though it be said that we knew of these eccentric cases. Otherwise the union is a curse. If it is growing larger, we perpetuate mistakes, let us forbear the union. Otherwise we are giving new citizens a franchise above the old; and if that should follow, we are inaugurating a "plan," some third of a century hence to be the *casus* of a new excision.

On the 1st of May, 1863, the Presbytery of East Hanover adopted an overture, asking the General Assembly "to take such steps as its wisdom may suggest, to bring about a union between the Old and New School Presbyterians in the Confederate States."

On the 13th, the General Assembly acceded to this request, and appointed a committee "to confer with a similar committee of the United Synod, touching the matter of a union between that body and the General Assembly."

On the 24th of July, the committees of the two church courts met in Lynchburg, and after a harmonious counsel, in which much that favored a union was made evident in the sentiments of both parties, unanimously adopted a report, which, if finally approved, will consummate this important union.

It is with a deep conviction that these brethren have committed one mistake; and that, with admirable harmony, and wonderful correctness in their statement of belief, and able gifts in inditing so sound a paper in so short a time as the first article in their intended report, nevertheless they should not present it to be adopted by the church, that we make it the subject of the present extended notice. No mortal men should have attempted such a "declaration" at a single sitting. No Presbyterian churchmen should have attempted it at all. We hope the General Assembly, with many expressions of respect for both committees, will quietly drop this *first article*. And we hope so for these

four reasons: First, that it is *unnecessary*; Second, that it is *unconstitutional*; Third, that it is *unprecedented*; and Fourth, that it will be *prejudicial to future discipline*.

We may say, for the sake of those who have not the paper before them, that the first article is one of six, (making up the original report,) that contains the whole of what the committees see fit to call their doctrinal "declaration." We may also add that the United Synod, from the nature of the case, as well as from statements repeatedly made to us, will be willing to acquiesce in such a contemplated arrangement; and also that the effect of foregoing that part will be to leave both bodies to the Confession of Faith, a symbol that they both adopt, without the medium of any ill-defined profession of belief to be improvised between it and the consciences of our ministers.

I. In pronouncing the article *unnecessary*, it becomes important, in the first place, to settle what it is. And we are reminded of that by a discrepancy on the part of its advocates, in respect to this most important particular.

On the floor of the Virginia Synod, it was defended against the very line of argument that we here intend, by calling it a "written examination." In view of the impossibility that independent bodies should be catechised in parts, this was called a general examination; and Dr. Waddel has said, "every one who wishes to belong to this new united church, is required to signify his approval of this plan of union." Now how is this? Where, in the first place, is any arrangement made for giving in their approvals? On the contrary, nothing of the sort is spoken of. The paper is to be passed in open sessions, and would be passed in the teeth of a minority.* How, therefore, is this minority, or, in fact, any one who chooses to stay at

* "Article VI.—Whenever the above written plan of union shall have been adopted by the General Assembly and the United Synod, it shall be in full force."

home, or is not a delegate, or chooses to go out of the court, or protests against the whole procedure as a usurpation of the church, to be considered as having joined the new body? Is there not something incalculably loose in this part of the committee's operation? And if anything so enormous could be conceived as that even *in foro honoris*, Old School men ought to drop quietly out of the church, because they cannot adopt this paper, who is to bring this fact to their notice? Where are they to go? Is it not hard that an old churchman should find himself expelled, because he can not think well of this few afternoons' work of the Lynchburg committees? If he will not be, then there is no examination in the case. If he will be, then it is as strictly a SYMBOL as we can dream of in any criterion we could erect.

And the committee virtually give in to this, by calling it a "declaration" of belief and a "Doctrinal Basis of Union." And in fact, Dr. Dabney, one drafter of the paper, calls it, in the "Southern Presbyterian,"* "a new formula," appeals as a precedent to "the days of Arius and the Nicene Creed," and speaks of "language adjusted with special reference to the existing differences, so that its acceptance will be a practical test of opinion."

Whatever it may be called, therefore, it is certainly an attempt at a test, and that test is either nothing, or else a thing to be enforced in adhesions to the new organization.

Now how is this necessary?

Dr. Waddel tells us:† "If we had dispensed with the rule, (*i. e.* of examination,) and then laid down no declaration of principles setting forth the true interpretation of our standards, in that case, there would have been grounds of apprehension lest unsound men might creep in among us, and then, if arraigned, they would have had us at a disadvantage.

* November 19, 1863.

† Letter from Lynchburg.

They would be able to say, I preached the doctrines of the Confession before this union, just as I do now, and you admitted me. I have a right to complain that you have entrapped me, and after receiving me into your pale, knowing my unsoundness, as you call it, you now arraign me for it. But after the plain declaration of principles laid down by the committee, no man can plead this against us."

The exact motive therefore—and that of the committee, we suppose, for Dr. Waddel had just left its sittings—was to give us a *right*, whether in the eye of order or taste, it matters not which, to discipline any preconceived case of error. Now, we boldly protest against any such idea. We declare the paper an evil on this very account, and denounce it, if it even seems the record of any such even half-entertained idea. We are opposed to any statement of our rights to discipline, because we cannot affect them. We cannot abolish them even if we would. We cannot increase them. The union clean and clear, without any breath on the judgments of the courts, is all that we can conceive. And if to-morrow the eye of the church falls on error, it can view it in no new light; else we are not Presbyterians. We must alter our constitution, or else the ministers we join ourselves to, under this new proposal, are orthodox men; or else we are unfair in our discipline, unless we deal with them precisely as with ourselves.

The other statement, therefore, that the method has been pretended in former times of adopting our symbols "for substance of doctrine," and to put an end to that, some more defined expression is necessary, we protest against on the same account. We will not sanction an error by providing against it. We will not countenance an immoral step which our whole church is known to have inveighed against, and which no man of handsome impulse, to say nothing of conscience, will repeat against us in this stage of our history, by supplying a test, as though distinctly to acknowledge that the other was unclear. We will not feed

the error. For what is the proof that our "new formula" will be any better treated? And which is wiser, our old Confession, digested after careful years, without even a word (and we are opposed to any) setting forth our horror of this "*substance of doctrine*," or an ancillary work done in a few nights of a stay at Lynchburg; done ably, but imperfectly, as such work must necessarily be; and recording itself in the history of the times as done to abate a pretext; as though that pretext could not be turned against itself; and as though providing against it, were not *per se* disrespectful to the church; disrespectful to the creed; disrespectful to their own work, which must feel the edge of just such an admitted objection; disrespectful to orthodox men, who are to have sent out to them by a majority vote the expressions of a test most extemporaneously prepared; and above all, disrespectful to the United Synod, if they be *ipso facto* entitled to the respect of being considered at the very time worthy of the union with the great body (at the South) of Presbyterian believers?

If therefore, this test *would hold*, we would regard it by all manner of means as singularly unnecessary.

II. But then, secondly, it will not hold. We mean by that it is *unconstitutional*.

Admit, for the sake of argument, that it is not a creed, and not a symbol; though that is a singular position. For even if it were a "written examination," (the very lowest ground,) it would remain on record; and is *in thesi* an established test. If it has not the creed feature, and that, as a codicil, or a thing over and on the top of the old Confession, (as Dr. Dabney expresses it, "a drawing up on the points where difference is suspected, a new formula,") we would like exactly to know what a creed feature is. But whether it be a creed or no, it is a "rule," loosely administered, it is true, or, as we shall show under the last head, not really capable of being administered at all; nevertheless an attempted "rule;" and our Book shows that nothing of

the nature of a constitutional rule is to be imposed upon the church, without the approval of at least a majority of all the Presbyteries.

Now, it may be said that this is *not* a rule enforced upon the church; and yet it *is*, beyond all question, in that part of its operation that extends to our own body. That we might have a right to treat with the United Synod, and ask *them* some questions in respect to their notions of doctrine, and to print the answers, (to give the most favorable construction of the case,) might be more plausibly insisted; but that a General Assembly should attempt a test upon itself; nay, to merge itself into a new body made up of the old and the United Synod; and that, on the basis of a formula prepared at a single sitting, its old ministers must either adhere or retire; is an act so presumptuously invalid that we wonder it could have been entertained by our very most intelligent Presbyterians.

III. We need not say that it is *unprecedented*. If it were *not*, it would not be positive proof; but that it is, should make these committees consider before they even report such a thing to their Assemblies.

An Assembly may utter a *testimony* just as a session may. It may *reprove*, and *rebuke*, and *exhort*, and, of course, do this in the matter of doctrine. It may print *homilies*, and make them, of course, as didactic as it please. It may do any thing that an individual preacher may, and yet is liable to be thundered against by another General Assembly, if, like an individual preacher, it errs from the truth. Hence all those papers that Dr. Dabney has adduced. They are pastorals, like his own sermons on Sunday morning. There are stronger ones in 1818 and 1839, which he has not adduced. They are acts and testimonies of irresponsible bodies of men, papers of Synods, in respect to which bodies there is no pretension of a power to found a test; but in no case, in the whole history of the continent, nor, as we are firmly convinced, of any other kirk or continent,

any act like that which, in those nights of July, those able committees were preparing for our Presbyterian Assemblies.

They remind one of those exquisite machines of Babbage, which, for ten million times, or, if you please, for ten thousand years, will move without the slightest aberration, and yet which, from some strange proclivity of their nature, will make just for once, and in the most unaccountable and sudden way, the greatest that can be possibly imagined.

We beg these brethren to make another report. This is a very able one, and sound to an extent we would not have been able to conceive. That a man should be able to put his pen to paper, and prepare such a test in a few excited hours, is an intellectual feat. But then, feats are not constitutions. Creeds are one thing, and high testimonies to the faith, even by assemblies, quite another. Those profounder things are impossibles at a sudden birth. And therefore, though we defend the paper, and as Virginians would be rather proud of it, yet it does fall into erroneous statement. It is not true that "the sinner has power of any kind for the performance of duty." It is not true that the atonement "leaves no other obstacle under the Gospel, save the enmity and unbelief of those who voluntarily reject it." It is not happy to talk of the "*righteousness of His sufferings* and obedience (as) is the sole ground for which God pardoneth all their sins." If Dr. Baxter said any of these things, or even the apostle Paul, in his uninspired moments, it makes it all the more dangerous. They are true in a certain tortuous and very side sense. But that is not the way we want a symbol. We understand that one of these very committee men has published in a pamphlet that a creed ought to be produced as the fruit of a many-sided and multitudinous debating of its principles.

IV. But if this test were even taken out of the Bible, with altered language, we should consider it *prejudicial to future discipline.*

For understand: there is no grip in it. It has in some parts an edge that would arrest the finest heretic; but it can arrest nothing. Its very appearance on the walls of Zion shows that we have daubed these for the very purpose to hide some imagined difficulty. But as it is perfectly invalid, it really can do no strengthening service. It shows that we gave way to a pretext; that we felt scared from our rest by the ghost of "substance of doctrine;" that we felt in this recentest courtship, we were conceding to the bride some shamefacedness in respect to discipline, but when that awkwardness was supposed to be revealed, the new garment has done nothing to cover it. The new basis is as perfectly without force as a blank parchment could possibly be made.

But then, ever so much without force, it is powerful on the side of others. As an appeal to honor, it is omnipotent. We must undo the union, or abide by this paper, when we have once passed it. And hence, as a sound paper, all it amounts to is, we must take the heretic on both Confessions. While he stands upon the new, we must battle with him on the basis of honor. When, after long worry, we have beaten him out of it, he has nothing to do but to claim the old. It annuls discipline. In other words, it gives the heretic the right of two Confessions, while we can appeal only to one. And if in those unwary passages, he takes refuge in the thought that the sinner has *some* power to perform his duty, we can not, after long debate, bring against him its stronger clauses without his appealing from the whole, and taking refuge, where he has a right, under the shadow of the old Confession.

We believe, therefore, that the Assembly, after a most cordial expression about the ability and good spirit shown in Lynchburg, will take interest in this paper in proving how nearly agreed those leading gentlemen were; will welcome the idea of a naked and cordial union; will utter nothing about the right of the new aggregated body to dis-

cipline heretics, from the *necessity* of such a right, and from the impossibility of any Assembly deciding for or against it; will utter nothing about "substance of doctrine," because all parties know our views about such a pretext; and therefore, founding no test themselves, they will allow none from the committee, but will gently demit the first article of their report, unless it be that the two committees, as would be infinitely better, see cause to withhold that part themselves.

Meanwhile the coalescing of Presbyterians may go on, perhaps, a great deal further. And without any new trammelling expedients or unlawful tests that must be inexorably maintained, there may be a great wholesome Presbyterian body at the South, not committed inviolably to any plans, or superinduced perpetual pledges of any sort, but partaking the old evangelical life, and submitting with no peculiarity of test to the old Presbyterian authority.



ARTICLE IV.

THE PROPOSED PLAN OF UNION BETWEEN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA AND THE UNITED SYNOD OF THE SOUTH.

In compliance with an overture from the Presbytery of East Hanover, the last General Assembly appointed a committee to confer with any similar committee of the United Synod, touching a formal union between these bodies. The two committees accordingly held a conference at Lynchburg, Va., in the month of July last; and agreed