

A printed letter, dated at Newark, and signed "James Richards," has, within a few days, come to our knowledge. It does not clearly appear, from the face of this letter, whether it is an official communication, or a private one. We have been informed, however, from what we deem an authentic source, that it is the latter. The Rev. Dr. Richards must, of course, be considered as responsible for its contents—and as it is, in our opinion, calculated to make an erroneous impression with respect to our conduct at a certain meeting in New-Brunswick, called for the purpose of organizing an Education Society, in the month of November last, and also in regard to certain steps taken by us, in conjunction with other brethren, to form an Education Society in Philadelphia, we consider some notice of it as due both to the public and ourselves.

The statement of facts in this letter, as far as it goes, is not materially incorrect. But several particulars, important to a full view of the subject, are wholly omitted; either because they were unknown to the writer, or because it was not his purpose to state them: and some facts are placed in such a light, and such inferences drawn from them, as entirely to misrepresent their real character. This, we think, will clearly appear from the following narrative, to which we respectfully beg your attention.

The design of attempting to form an Education Society, upon a large scale, had been seriously entertained by us, and had been made the subject of repeated conversations, more than a year ago. At a meeting of the Presbytery of New-Brunswick, to which we belong, in the first week of October last, a proposal was made to the members of that body, when in session, to form a local society, of this nature. When it was represented, however, that it would be much better to attempt to form a general society, for the whole church; and that the proper time and place for making such an effort, would be in Philadelphia, at the meeting of the next General Assembly, it was unanimously agreed to dismiss the subject, with the view of taking it up at the time proposed.

Two weeks afterwards, when the Synod with which we are connected, met in New-York, a respectable minister of that city inquired of one of us, in Synod, whether an education society for our Church had ever been thought of, and whether something of the kind could not be attempted? He was informed of the circumstances above related; and a decisive opinion was expressed, that it would still be better to wait till the meeting of the Assembly in May, that the representatives of the whole church might have an opportunity of commencing it with united counsel. To this he replied, that the *American Education Society*, in New-England, either had taken, or were then taking, measures for sending an agent to the South, to solicit contributions to their funds; and that he thought it better to anticipate them; to form a society of our own, without loss of time; and thus secure to our treasury a part, at least, of the funds which would otherwise fall into theirs. Yielding to these suggestions, we consented to attend a meeting for consultation and incipient measures. At this meeting a Committee was appointed to draft a Constitution; and also empowered to call another meeting, to consider and adopt it, when and where they might think proper.

The Committee, agreeably to the powers vested in them, called another meeting, at New-Brunswick, on the 26th of November following; when their draft of a Constitution was produced. The first important article which came under discussion was that which determined the object of the Society. This article confined the gratuitous education proposed to be furnished, to the Academical course, without making any provision for aid in prosecuting Theological studies.* This was objected to, as leaving a very important branch of the charity contemplated by the friends of this society unprovided for; and as very improperly prohibiting the extension of assistance even in cases of the most interesting urgency. But we were told, by the majority, that this was considered, by the framers of the Constitution, as one of the most essential features of the whole plan; that there were known to be differences of theological opinion among us; and that unless we left out the theological part of education altogether, it would be impossible to proceed harmoniously. We were both surprised and grieved to hear an argument of this kind introduced. We had hoped that the undertaking in which we were engaged, would not involve party views or feelings. The majority, however, persisted in this course of discussion, and repeatedly avowed their determination to act with a reference to those differences of opinion in forming the proposed society. Although

* See article 2d.

much dissatisfied with the article, and with this method of defending it; and although we verily thought it would prevent much of that benefit from the society which we had fondly anticipated; yet, so anxious were we to maintain harmony with our brethren, that we agreed to let it pass without further opposition.

The next important article on which difference of opinion arose, was that which provided for the appointment of *Executive Committees*, and prescribed the manner in which the funds of the society should be distributed among them.* This, we were told, by the majority, was, in their view, the vital part of the system. It appeared to us extremely complicated, and scarcely intelligible. To remove this difficulty, an elaborate exposition of it was given. We objected again, that these committees, as the article then stood, were free from all responsibility to the Society, and might abuse their privileges to any extent, without the possibility, that we could see, of applying a remedy. To remove this objection, the last clause of the article, as it now stands, was added. We had another objection still. The power vested in Executive Committees, to draw from the general fund, in proportion to the number of young men whom they should report, without any adequate restriction, appeared to us exceedingly likely to produce great dissatisfaction, and in the end, injustice in the distribution. The majority, however, would by no means yield or modify this point. It was declared to be, in their view, a necessary provision; and a leading individual of their number avowed, that it was their intention in New-York, to send to those places where the Lord had poured out his Spirit, and gather up all the young men of piety and talents they could obtain, and others might do the same; but that in the application of the funds, or in judging of the characters of the young men, they must not be controuled. To some of the minority this article appeared so objectionable, that they could not have subscribed the Constitution had there been no other obstacle.

The last article which gave rise to difference of opinion, was that which provided for a regular alternation of the annual meetings of the society, between New-York and Philadelphia.† It soon became apparent that this was not merely a favourite point with the majority, but one from which they were resolved in no degree to recede.

To this article we had strong objections. We stated to the meeting the steps, in detail, which we had ourselves taken on this subject. We urged, that the society, if placed permanently in Philadelphia, would command the confidence of the great body of our Church, especially to the South and West, more completely than any other location could possibly secure; that it would be far more easy for distant ministers and elders to attend its annual meetings there, than at any other place; that, as we had given to the Society the name of the "Presbyterian Church in the United States of America," it was demanded by fairness that we should make it, as far as possible, a genuine representative of that church; that if the annual meeting of the society should take place every other year in New-York, it would be in effect, every other year, cutting off by far the greater part of the members of the General Assembly from attendance upon it, since very few of the southern and western members were in the habit of going on to the meeting of the American Bible Society in New-York; that our church was scattered over such an immense territory, that there was absolutely no other occasion on which we could hope to bring any large number of her ministers and elders together, than at the General Assembly; and that even the pecuniary advantage of gaining the confidence and co-operation of the whole church, would certainly more than counterbalance the advantage of meeting every second year in the large and wealthy city of New-York.

In urging these considerations we solemnly disclaimed all party views. We declared our readiness to co-operate in any society, which should be the result of the fair and unbiassed expression of the will of our church, whatever views or opinions might predominate in such society. But we appealed to our Brethren, whether it was possible for a meeting so small, and so far from being unanimous, to form, with advantage, a society for our whole Church.

These considerations, however, were all urged in vain. The uniform and undisguised reply was, that the society, if permanently placed in the city of Philadelphia, would receive a stamp, which the majority of the then present meeting and their friends could by no means approve; and that a constant vibration between the two great Cities, would be the only method of secur-

* See article 7th.

† See article 9th.

ing to it that impartiality of character which they considered as essential. They consented, however, that the further consideration of this article should be suspended for a short time.

It was now late at night. Several ineffectual efforts were made by the minority, to adjourn before the final vote was taken. But the majority, notwithstanding every remonstrance, pressed forward, and adopted the Constitution before they adjourned.— They agreed, however, to meet in the morning, to appoint officers, and finish the business.

Reflection, in the course of the night, by no means diminished our dissatisfaction at what had occurred. In the morning we had some comparison of ideas with the Brethren from Philadelphia, whose impressions we found to agree with our own. We had an opportunity also of conversing freely with some of the leading members of the majority, to whom our views were fully explained. We distinctly stated to them the consequences which we anticipated, if they should persist in their course of measures. Dr Richards, in particular, in conversation with one of us, unequivocally assented to the prediction, that if the business went on as it was then going, the formation of another society must be the consequence; declaring, in so many words, that this was his impression. And we did believe, on the whole, from the tenor of their remarks, that these Brethren were convinced of the importance of conciliatory measures, and disposed to adopt them.

But when we came together again in public meeting, every hope of this kind, specifically vanished. We first moved to reconsider the motion for adopting the Constitution, which had passed the preceding evening, with a view that the whole business should be laid over, in an unfinished state, and taken up by a general meeting, in May next, in Philadelphia. We urged that it might then be resumed and finished with more deliberation and impartiality, and with a much better prospect of doing that which should be acceptable to our whole Body, than at present. But in vain. Our motion was rejected.

We then made one more effort. We moved that the first annual meeting of the society should be in Philadelphia, in the month of May next; observing, that as a handful of us had formed it without consulting the representatives of the several Presbyteries, it was nothing more than decorous to embrace the earliest opportunity of doing this; and especially of allowing them to share in the election of the remainder of the Board of Directors, *then to be chosen*. But still in vain. This motion shared the same fate with the preceding. It was acknowledged, indeed, without hesitation, that the arguments in favour of adjourning to meet at Philadelphia in the spring were very strong. But the consideration which outweighed all others, and which was openly avowed, and by none more explicitly than by Dr Richards himself, was, that if the first annual meeting were held in Philadelphia, and the election of the remaining Directors completed there, it would be in the power of the members of the Assembly, and the inhabitants of that city, to impress upon the society what character they pleased; and that, to guard against this result, they were resolved, that the first annual meeting should be held in New-York; and accordingly it was so decided by a large majority.

We now considered our business with this meeting as ended; and, important duties requiring our presence at Princeton, we "withdrew," but with neither violence nor passion, as some might infer, from the manner in which this fact is related by Doctor Richards. We knew, indeed, that we were under no obligations to remain longer than we pleased. Yet we respectfully asked leave to retire, and stated, each of us for himself, our reasons for taking this step.

The assertion, that we withdrew while the question of location was still pending, is partly true. The consideration of that article of the Constitution, which fixed the annual meetings of the society, had been suspended, and not resumed. But it was granted on all hands, that the last vote which was passed, previously to our withdrawing, decided the principle, and was as conclusive with respect to the main question, as if a formal vote upon it had been taken.

That the course which we took was unexpected and disagreeable to the majority, we do not question. It certainly was very unpleasant, and until this crisis in the meeting, quite as unexpected to ourselves. But a sense of duty constrained us to act as we did. What are Dr Richards' meaning, when he says, that in departing we "betrayed a feeling" which the majority were not prepared "to look for"? That our treatment of our Brethren,

in withdrawing, was perfectly respectful, we have never heard questioned. Was it a crime that we were not able to approve their plan? Were we bound to remain with them to the last moment that they might think proper to continue together, merely to see them finish a work in which we could not co-operate? What would it have availed to remain? Was it desirable to prolong discussions which evidently answered no other purpose than to irritate? There was not the least prospect that our votes or counsels would effect any alteration in the general result; and our subsequent course would not have been different if we had remained till the close of the meeting.

From this plain statement of facts, on the correctness of which you may depend, you will be able to decide who it was that, in this business, "acted with a bold and vigorous hand"; who it was that displayed more of "haste than of wisdom"; who it was, that evinced most of "a disposition to have the whole thing in their own hands"; and who it was that resolved to proceed with a "total indifference to the feelings and wishes" of their brethren.

The next complaint of Dr Richards relates to certain overtures of reconciliation made "to the gentlemen in Princeton," in the following week, to which we did not return a favourable answer. It is true that such overtures were made, by a respectable minister of New-York, who represented some other individuals as concurring in them. But this communication was entirely unofficial. It was uncertain, too, whether the majority of their Board of Directors would give it their approbation. We knew, moreover, that the Directors, if ever so much disposed, had no power to alter a title of the Constitution; that a proposal for that purpose could not be laid before the society until May next; and that it must then lie for consideration a whole year, unless it should command a unanimous vote. In addition to all this, we, as individuals, had no right to act. Others were interested, whom we were unable to consult. Steps had been taken to organize another society which we could not arrest. And, finally, the proposal made did not reach our views; and, therefore, could not have been favourably received, if all other objections had been removed.

But among the heaviest of all the complaints enumerated in this letter, are, the following,—that we proceeded *name* to form another society; that we assumed a general name; and we took no notice, in our letters of invitation of the Society formed at New-Brunswick; that we sent those letters even to the Brethren from whom we dissented; and chose, among our officers, individuals from the city of New-York. These proceedings Dr Richards and his friends appear to consider as violations of their rights, or, at least, as very reprehensible infringements of delicacy.

We did, indeed, take measures, as soon as convenient, to form another society, agreeably to our original plan. And does any one dispute our right to do this? Was it not as competent for us to engage in a plan of this kind as for other individuals? Were we deprived of our right because our brethren had exercised the same? As we could not concur with them, we have yet to learn that it was a violation, either of their "rights," or of their just "feelings," to pursue our own course. If there be any persons dissatisfied with both the existing societies, they certainly have, now, as perfect a right to form a third, as if these had never been projected. And we are free to say, that in doing so, they would violate none of our "feelings." In choosing a name, we recollected, that every society has the liberty of taking its own style at pleasure. And as we did hope and believe, that our society would eventually become, what we unfeignedly wished it should be, a representative of the great body of our church, we thought there was no impropriety in choosing a general name. Nay, we verily thought, that yielding to our Brethren, the sole use of the name which they had chosen, viz "the Education Society of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America," would be something like acknowledging, that they were the real and only representative of our church, and that we claimed to be nothing but a local and partial institution. Would this have been doing justice to ourselves? Besides; before we formed our constitution, or made choice of our name, a letter was written to Dr Richards himself, the express object of which was, to draw from him and his friends some suggestion or proposal with respect to a modification of their name. To this letter, which was written more than two months ago, a civil, at least, if not a satisfactory answer, was confidently expected; but none of any kind was ever received. If there had exist-

ed so great a readiness, as our Reverend Brother alleges, to take a less general name, and to contract into a more local society, why was no disclosure of it made in reply to this communication? After all, however, we have no disposition to contend about a name; and, for ourselves, have no objection to any such modification of that which our society has chosen, as may promote harmony.

That in our publications, we took no notice of any existing society, was the result, not of hostility or contempt, but solely of a desire of peace. We judged, on mature deliberation, that it would be best to attempt no detail of the unpleasant occurrences at New-Brunswick, nor even to allude to them. Nay, this principle of giving no offence was carried so far, that, although, in the original draft of our address to the Churches, there was a paragraph, in which the society formed at New-Brunswick was mentioned, in a pointedly respectful and amicable manner, yet, lest it should be misconstrued, or excite an unpleasant feeling in any one, it was stricken out. Had a similar course been pursued by our Brethren of the other Society—but we forbear.

As to the complaint, that letters of invitation to our meeting were sent to members and officers of the other Society; we have only to remark that we personally regretted this, when informed of it. But still we knew not how we could impute blame on account of it. Where was the line to be drawn between those who were, and those who were not to be invited? There was the best reason to believe that some whose names were published as officers of their Society, preferred ours, and would speedily join it. Let the line be drawn where it might, some offence would be given. Was it very blameable, then, to be of the opinion that it was better not to attempt to draw it at all?

Dr. Richards appears to mistake the import of the name assumed by our Society. It does not imply that the Society either claims or proposes to be under the care of the General Assembly; but simply that it is the Society of that Church which is under the care of the General Assembly.

We deeply regretted, from the beginning, that party considerations should have been brought into view on this subject. We still regret it. But since it has been done and persisted in, by our Brethren, we hope it will be offensive to none, if we most respectfully offer a few queries, founded on the acknowledged fact, that there are differences of opinion in our Church—Was it unreasonable to doubt whether Brethren all from one neighbourhood, and, with respect to theological opinions, all, excepting a single individual, of one party, were, or could be, qualified to form a Constitution impartially adapted to our whole Church? Of those who finally adopted the Constitution, was there a solitary individual, who did not belong to that party? Was it unreasonable in those, who, though a small minority at the meet-

ing in question, sincerely believed that they represented the sentiments of a large majority of our Church, to wish that an opportunity might be afforded for the deliberate and fair expression of the opinion of the whole Church? Was it unreasonable in the minority, when they well knew, not only that a great and powerful Education Society was in full operation in New-England; but also that another, no less powerful, and perhaps more rich, had also been organized in the state of New-York, and in the bosom of that part of our Church;—was it unreasonable, that on this, as well as on other accounts, they should think it highly expedient to carry the permanent seat of our Society at least as far south as Philadelphia?—Would the minority have been faithful to the church of which they are members, if they had either concurred in the measures pursued, or been silent, when they verily thought that both the interests and wishes of a great majority of that Church were not consulted? Did it “evince a disposition to have every thing in our own hands,” that we were unwilling to become subservient to a plan, which, however honestly intended, we were persuaded, in its operation, would be far from being either impartial or beneficial? These are serious questions, which we hope will be considered with coolness and candour.

We have no desire to foment divisions in the church. Peace is dear to our hearts. Scenes of strife are as abhorrent from our natural feelings; as they are from our religious principles. No charge can be more unfounded than that “we are indifferent to the feelings and wishes” of those highly respected Brethren from whom we have dissented. Those who are acquainted with us know, that we have repeatedly done our utmost to prevent the adoption of measures offensive to them. And if we are not deceived, it is one of the most unfeigned desires of our hearts, that every thing calculated to alienate or divide may be taken out of the way. In forming the plan of an Education Society, nothing was further from our minds than party views: and we yet feel ready, for ourselves, to form any union, or to co-operate in any association which appears to be impartially adapted to the benefit of the church. If measures of a divisive character and tendency are adopted, they shall not come from us. We hope they will be pursued by none. We sincerely hope that even the worthy Brethren from whom we have been compelled, on this painful occasion, to separate, when they calmly reflect on their conduct, will see it in a different light. We hope that we shall yet strive together with them, for the harmony and love, as well as the faith of the Gospel.

W^ho are, Sir, your respectful servants,

SAMUEL MILLER,
ARCH'D ALEXANDER.

Princeton, February, 12, 1819.