

A

# LETTER

TO

A Gentleman of Baltimore,

IN REFERENCE TO THE CASE OF

## THE REV. MR. DUNCAN.

---

BY SAMUEL MILLER, D. D.

*Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government, in the Theological Seminary, at Princeton, N. J.*

---

The wisdom that is from above is FIRST PURE, then peaceable.—JAMES iii. 17:

---

Princeton Press :

PRINTED BY D. A. BORRENSTEIN.

---

1826

BT  
990  
.D9  
M6



Gift  
Tappan Press, Ass.  
2-13-1932

## A Letter,

• Sr.

---

MY DEAR SIR,

Your communication of the second instant reached me a few days ago. For the many expressions of respect and kindness which it contains, I am very much your debtor. For the information which it gives me, I return you many thanks. And with the opinions which it intimates contrary to my own convictions of truth and duty, I am by no means offended; but rather feel thankful that your lot and mine are cast in a land in which to every man the privilege is secured, "et sentire quæ velit, et quæ sentiat dicere."

It has been, for some time past, my fixed purpose not to break silence on the principal subject to which you refer. And to adhere to this purpose, is still my prevailing inclination. Yet to queries offered with such a spirit, and for such an object, as those

which appear to pervade your Letter, I cannot refuse a short reply; especially as you seem to think, and assure me that others have thought, that the cause of truth requires me to say something.

I. Your first inquiry is, "Why I have so long delayed to take any public notice of the Reverend Mr. *Duncan's* volume on 'Creeds,' published nearly a year ago; and whether, as has been rumoured among some of my friends, it is my design to remain silent in reference to that publication?"

In answer to this inquiry, I have to say, that I read Mr. D.'s book, in a short time after its appearance, with all that attention, which the deep importance of the subject, and my own peculiar interest in the discussion, were likely to excite. Whether my perusal was an impartial one, it becomes not me very confidently to pronounce. But the issue of it was a prompt and firm determination, unless some unexpected occurrence should lead to a different view of the subject, never to take the least public notice of the work.

The reasons which led me to form this determination were the following.

In the first place; I have a native and strong aversion to controversy; an aversion which increases with my age.

In the next place; my professional avocations are very pressing; my health is infirm; and my mo-

ments of leisure, of course, are very few. These moments I am anxious to husband with the utmost vigilance, for the purpose of executing, if Providence permit, some plans which are with me peculiarly favourite objects, and from which I feel unwilling to be diverted by the further pursuit of this controversy.

Further; I had resolved, from the beginning, to have no public dispute with Mr. *Duncan*. Every man, it is presumed, who is at liberty to choose his antagonist, will take care to make a choice which will suit himself. Now, I early discovered, or thought I discovered, that Mr. D. although endowed with many highly estimable qualities, which invite acquaintance, and command respect; and capable of a sort of rhetorical writing which is well calculated to make an impression on a large class of readers; was still a controvertist by no means to my taste. He appears to me so singularly prone to miss the point of the argument which he undertakes to answer; and, at the same time, dogmatizes with such peculiar positiveness; is so perfectly sure of his own infallibility; and seems so confidently to expect that this will go for argument; that I felt insuperable reluctance to entering the lists with such a champion. Accordingly, when I prepared and published my "Lecture on Creeds," it was not without design that I excluded from it all reference, or even allusion to him. My purpose, for substance, remains the same. Nothing, that I can foresee,

shall drive me from my resolution to involve myself in no publick controversy with that Gentleman.

Again; I can perceive no benefit as likely to arise from a continuance of the discussion on Creeds. The sober and thinking part of the community, it appears to me, neither need nor wish it;—and, with respect to others, if ever so much were written, it would never be seriously read by them.

But the final and conclusive reason why I have forborne to make any answer to Mr. D's book, is, that it really *requires* no answer. He is so far from having invalidated, or even weakened, any of the arguments in favour of "Creeds," urged in my "Introductory Lecture," that he has hardly so much as touched them. If this were my own opinion, merely, I might, with good reason, suspect it of incorrectness. For every man's cause is apt to be "right in his own eyes," until "his neighbour cometh, and searcheth him out." But I have conversed repeatedly with some of the most acute and enlightened men in our country, and solicited their candid judgment as to the real force of Mr. D's book. And they have ALL, with a single exception, united strongly in the opinion, that he has written nothing which impairs, in the least degree, the strength of my reasoning; nothing which possesses such a degree, even of plausibility, as to demand a reply. Why, then, should I write again, even if I were ever so fond of theological warfare; when all my original

positions remain, not only unshaken, but really, unassailed? Shall I array new arguments? more are not necessary until the old ones are disposed of. Shall I repeat the old ones? I cannot prevail on myself to think this duly respectful either to Mr. D. himself, or to the publick. And, at any rate, it would be, if I am not totally deceived in my view of the subject, as purely a work of superrogation as ever was undertaken. For such undertakings I have neither time nor inclination.

I take for granted, indeed, that Mr. D. honestly views what he has done in a very different light. He, no doubt, believes that he has effectually demolished the citadel of Creeds, and scarcely "left one stone upon another." This is evident from the bold and triumphant style in which he closes many of his trains of illustration and professed reasoning. But I must be allowed to question whether reflecting readers, who are disposed seriously to examine this subject, and who look for solid argument from those who discuss it, will be satisfied with such logick as that with which his book abounds. In order to convince you that I am neither fastidious nor unreasonable, in saying, that I cannot and will not enter the lists of controversy with such a writer, let me beg that you will take another glance at what he has written—(a very cursory one will be sufficient,) and see whether he have not, most glaringly, laid himself open to the following charges.

1. It is evident that, in the warm appeals, and imposing declamation, which fill the greater part of his volume, HE IS CONTENDING WITHOUT AN ADVERSARY. When he labours, through so many pages, to shew—That “the Bible is the word of God;”—that as such, “it is obligatory on the human conscience.”—that “it is precisely suited to human beings as sinful and fallen, and embraces, in its provisions all that is peculiar either in their character or their condition;”—that “the Scriptures have expressed their most pointed disapprobation of all human institutions that interfere with the authority of God over the conscience;” that “the Bible is the paramount and ONLY infalible rule of faith and practise;”—and that, of course, to attempt to put any other rule in its place, is direct rebellion against the Supreme Head of the Church:”—When he employs, I say, so much impassioned declamation to establish these positions, a cursory reader would be apt to suppose that the friends of Creeds altogether deny, or, at least, do not fully admit them. Yet Mr. D. knows, and every soberminded man in the community knows, that this is not the fact. The advocates of Creeds perfectly agree with him in all these positions. There are no professing christians in the world who contend more earnestly than they do, for the divine excellence and supreme authority of the Scriptures; who deprecate more sincerely and unceasingly, the substitution of any other authoritative rule in the place of the Scriptures; or who admit more readily, that Creeds and Confessions,



as well as the opinions of those who form them, are to be tried by the Scriptures, and to be received or rejected according to their agreement or non-agreement with this perfect test. All these principles are set forth, in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of our church, with an explicitness and a solemnity which I should certainly suppose must preclude the possibility of misapprehension. Why, then so much formality of effort to establish them? I cannot, and do not, admit the supposition, that a gentleman of Mr. D's honourable feelings wished to make the publick believe that they were not allowed by those with whom he was engaged in controversy. But whatever might have been his motive, it is certain that in all he has said on these points, he has not a Presbyterian adversary in existence.

Nay more; not only are these principles avowed by our Church, in the most explicit manner, in her Symbolical Books; but she has uniformly acted in accordance with them. In all her publick acts, she is in the constant habit of referring to the Scriptures, as the only perfect and infallible test of truth. In support of every clause in her Confession of Faith, she formally adduces quotations from the Scriptures; and has never, to my knowledge, in any one instance, offered to set up any other test, either above them, or in competition with them. Of this a more striking proof is not necessary than an extract from that very Formula by which our candidates for Licensure and Ordination are called upon to subscribe the Con-

fession of Faith. The only two questions which have a bearing on this point, are in these words—

“Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, THE ONLY INFALLIBLE RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE?”

“Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, AS CONTAINING THE SYSTEM OF DOCTRINE TAUGHT IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES?”

Here we have the candidate, in one sentence, declaring, that he believes THE BIBLE to be the ONLY infallible rule of faith and practise; and, in the next, that he receives and adopts a certain Summary or Compend of Gospel truth, AS BEING, and BECAUSE IT IS, THE SYSTEM OF DOCTRINE TAUGHT IN THE BIBLE. If this be not acknowledging the Holy Scriptures as the only authoritative test of truth, and in the most formal manner referring to them as such, then I know not how it would be possible in words to make such an acknowledgment. Perhaps you will be ready to suppose, my dear Sir, that there are some other forms and occasions of subscribing our Confession of Faith, less respectful to the Scriptures. No such thing. No candidate for office in our Church, since the year 1788, ever was, or can be called upon to subscribe that Confession in any other language than that which I have just copied.

Mr. D. is also fighting *without an adversary* in all that he has said, at so much length, and with so much laboured rhetorick, respecting the character of many of the Christian Clergy, within the first three or four hundred years after Christ. That many of them were strongly characterized by a secular spirit; that they were ambitious, encroaching, and tyrannical, and appeared to have little understanding of the rights of conscience, and quite as little disposition to respect them; is amply attested by the best historians, and acknowledged, so far as I know, by all persons who have the least claim to liberal information. And, truly, we need neither the testimony of the former, nor the acknowledgments of the latter, to convince us that it must have been so, if human nature were the same in those days that it is now. If there were a *Judas* even among the twelve Apostles; if, amidst the inspiration and the miracles of the Apostolick age, the Church was disturbed by a *Diotrephes*, a *Demas*, an *Alexander*, and a *Hymenæus*, who "loved to have the pre-eminence;" if there were heresies and divisions among the professed followers of Christ, while *Calvary* was yet smoking with his blood, and while his precepts and his example were yet so fresh in their memory; what might not have been expected to appear in three centuries afterwards, when the state of the Church was, in almost every respect, far less favourable than it had been before?

I know of no one, then, who is disposed to have a word of dispute with Mr. D. as to the general representation which he gives of the character of many of the clergy, and of the character and effects of some of their ecclesiastical Councils, in the second, third and fourth centuries. If such a state of things had not occurred among men comparatively illiterate; universally subjected to despotick rule in the state; having no just ideas of religious liberty; and deeply infected with that love of pre-eminence and of power which is natural to men, it would have been something bordering on the province of miracle. But what is all this to the reverend Brother's purpose? When he infers, as an obvious lesson from his melancholy statement, that the Fathers were fallible men; that neither their opinions nor their doings are to be considered as the test of truth; that all they wrote and did is to be brought to the tribunal of Scripture; and that even the business of enforcing Creeds, was carried by them to a length which argued abuse, and which plainly shewed that they were unacquainted with the rights of conscience;—who is disposed to contradict him? I certainly know of no Presbyterian who is so disposed.

2. Again; Mr. D.'s CONCLUSIONS from these acknowledged premises, are among the most SINGULAR, AND EVEN LUDICROUS EXAMPLES OF INCONSEQUENTIAL REASONING, that were ever exhibited.

I am well aware that the ardent polemick is apt altogether to over-rate the potency of his own arguments, and is among the last to discern a flaw in the reasoning which he has carefully elaborated. Yet there are certain *extreme cases* in which one would think even self-flattery itself could hardly blind a man to the evident and total want of connection between his premises and his conclusions. Mr. D. however, is so completely the dupe of his own zeal (for I have no doubt of his real honesty in this thing,) that he allows himself to be entirely satisfied with conclusions which in any other man, he would see to be as perfectly illusory as can be conceived. Would you think it possible if the fact were not before your eyes, for his truly respectable mind to tolerate, much less to vaunt, such logick as the following?—

“Many of the clergy began, very early, to manifest an overbearing and grasping spirit; *therefore*, it is unlawful for the Church, at present, to take any measures to prevent her ministers from falling into the same evil courses, and, for this purpose, to ascertain their soundness in the faith, and guard the purity of their principles.”——“The Bible was the original rule of faith and practice, and in proportion as its decisions were either neglected, or postponed to the inventions of men, the Church degenerated; *therefore*, all attempts to decide what are the real doctrines and precepts of the Bible, to exhibit them in a compendious and lucid manner, and

to promote a sacred adherence to them, are mischievous and to be avoided.”——“ Ecclesiastical Synods and Councils became very early the hot-beds of cabal, and the instruments of clerical ambition and encroachment ; *therefore*, all systematick efforts to extract and arrange what the word of God really teaches concerning christian and clerical duty, and as far as possible to bind the clergy to its pure and simple dictates, are unlawful, and tend to corrupt the church.”——“The early fathers were all of them fallible men, many of them weak men, and some of them grossly inconsistent with themselves, and with one another, as well as with the Scriptures ; *therefore*, it is utterly wrong to endeavour to engage the ministers of Christ to understand and love his own Statute Book, to take measures for knowing that they interpret that Book in a sound and faithful manner, and to prevent their corrupting his sacred family with “another Gospel.”——“ The Bible is the word of the living God, and all that it says is necessarily obligatory on the human conscience for that reason ; *therefore*, it is criminal for the church to employ means for ascertaining what the Bible really teaches, and for agreeing to adhere closely to what it *does* teach.”——“ The Bible being the word of God, must necessarily be suited to our nature and circumstances, and contain all the provisions which are adapted to the great purpose for which it was given ; *therefore*, we insult and abandon it, when we attempt to express, in our own language, an exact summary of its contents, for the

purpose of excluding those false constructions of that precious Book which are acknowledged, on all hands, to abound.”——“The Scriptures have expressed their most pointed disapprobation of all human institutions that interfere with the authority of God over the conscience; *therefore*, Confessions of Faith which are taken simply from the Bible, which refer to the Bible as their sole authority, and which are formed for the express purpose of guarding against the inventions of men, and promoting a rigid conformity with the Bible, are anti-scriptural, and lead to endless evil.”——“Creeds have been often *perverted* and *abused*, and have not been effectual, *in all cases*, to guard the church against the heretical opinions which they were intended to exclude; *therefore*, as they have not proved a *perfect* and a *universal* remedy, it follows that they are worthless, nay highly injurious.”

I have marked these abridged syllogisms with inverted commas, not because they are all in the very words of Mr. D. but because they exhibit, most faithfully, the amount of his reasoning, so far as I understand him. He puts me in mind of the determined and ardent Papist, whose zeal for his superstitious creed so far outstripped his logick, that he promised, on the single concession, that “in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” to found a *demonstrative* argument, that the doctrine of *Transubstantiation* was taught in Scripture. Verily, a large part of Mr. D.’s reasoning is not a whit bet-

ter than that of the honest Romanist. If there be any readers who are satisfied with such reasoning ; who think it cogent, or even plausible, much good may it do them! I should think it a waste of time to argue with them, and an insult to the common sense of others to attempt a formal proof.that they are wrong. Can you blame me for declining to undertake such a task ?

3. The *third* charge to which Mr. D.'s book is most manifestly open, is, that his principal conclusions are not only as perfectly illogical as they can possibly be ; but, so far as they go, **THEY PROVE BY FAR TOO MUCH FOR HIMSELF.**

He contends, for example, that, if the Scriptures are the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practise ; if they are perfectly suited to our nature and circumstances, and contain all the provisions which are adapted to the great purpose for which they were given ; and if they have expressed their most pointed disapprobation of all human institutions which interfere with the authority of God over the conscience ;—then it clearly follows, that when the Church forms a Creed or Confession, and presents it to a candidate for the ministry for adoption, she commits sin ; for she attempts to add something to God's own rule ; she practically charges the Bible with not being sufficient to answer the purpose for which it was given ; she interferes between the Divine authority speaking in the word, and the human



conscience.—Now, my remark is, that these conclusions, and all that resemble them in Mr. D.'s book, *prove by far too much for himself*; for, if legitimate, they would equally prove, that **ALL PREACHING IS SINFUL**; that every **COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE** extant, is a monument of rebellion against God; in short, that every attempt, on the part of ministers or others, in whatever form, to **ILLUSTRATE, EXPLAIN, and APPLY** the truths of Scripture, is a presumptuous interference with the authority of God over the conscience! Are we prepared, my dear Sir, for such conclusions? Is Mr. D. himself prepared for them? It is manifest from his book that he is not. Yet they as clearly and infallibly follow from his premises, as the grand conclusion, which he draws with so much confidence and triumph. This absurd consequence was expressly stated in my "Introductory Lecture;" but no method of obviating it has yet been pointed out.

That Mr. D. is really reduced to this absurdity, is evident. His position is, that, as the Bible is a *complete and perfect* rule, it needs no *addition* by human wisdom; and as it is a *plain* rule, adapted to our character and circumstances, and, of course, easily *understood*, it cannot stand in need of any *explanation*, to make it more intelligible, or better adapted to edification. But is not **PREACHING** an attempt to explain, apply, and enforce the Scriptures? Are not all good **COMMENTARIES** on the Bible attempts to do the same thing? Do they not essential-

ly consist in endeavours to bring forth, arrange, and exhibit the TRUE SENSE of the word of God, and to impress it on the judgments, the consciences, and the hearts of men? And the more perfectly any preacher or commentator does this, the more excellent is his work considered. Yet, according to Mr. D.'s reasoning, every attempt of this kind is as presumptuous as it is unnecessary. No explanation of the Bible is needed. Every effort of the kind, either in or out of the pulpit, is criminal. Every arrangement of its doctrines, in the form of a catechism, for children; of a larger compend, for the purpose of popular adult instruction; or of a system of divinity for theological students, is a virtual denial of the excellence and sufficiency of the Scriptures. Nay, all books, whatever, which are written for the purpose of elucidating and confirming the doctrines of Scripture, are so many acts of daring rebellion against Him who has given us his word to be "a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path." And yet, with this reasoning in his mouth, Mr. D. does not scruple, every sabbath, to go into the pulpit, and, in his own language, to expound and apply the Bible; nor does he forbear to publish a book, which has for its object to illustrate and establish, at great length, and with much human rhetorick, what he deems the doctrine of Scripture in relation to the subject of which he treats. Now, all this proceeding, according to my doctrine, is rational and right enough. The Bible, though a plain and perfect Book, yet, because of our blindness and depravity,

is not understood alike by all, nor at all, by many. There is, therefore, great need of having it explained, applied and enforced, day by day : not because there is any fault in the Revelation which God has given ; but because there is a grievous fault IN US. On my plan, therefore, preaching, and commentaries, and good books of all kinds are much needed and inestimably useful. But how Mr. D. can reconcile the lawfulness of any of these things with his own reasoning, I do sincerely profess myself utterly unable to conceive.

Will Mr. D. reply to this difficulty by alleging that preaching is an ordinance of God ; and that we have therefore, a plain Divine warrant to plead in its behalf ? True ; and have we not an equally clear and unquestionable Divine warrant for taking effectual care, that those who are candidates for the important offices of teachers, guides and rulers in the church ; who are to dispense “ the word of life,” and to separate between “ the precious and the vile :” do really understand and embrace the “ truth as it is in Jesus,” that they are “ sound in the faith,” that they will not “ teach for doctrines the commandments of men ;” and for this purpose to receive their assent, in some form or another, to all the leading doctrines of the Bible ? I ask, is not this a duty as plainly enjoined on the teachers and governours of the Church, *collectively* ; as proclaiming the doctrines and duties of the Gospel, in the sanctuary, and “ from house to house,” is made the

duty of every *individual* ambassador of Christ? Nothing can be plainer than that we have just as much Divine authority for the one as for the other.

Neither is it a sufficient answer to say, that the cases are not parallel in another respect:—that in preaching and expounding holy Scripture, we do not, either really or virtually, set up another rule of faith; but that we only explain and apply the Divine rule itself: whereas, in forming a Confession of Faith, and in asking a candidate for the ministry to adopt it, we are not only proposing a new rule of faith, but even setting it above the Scriptures. Mr. D. after the most ample explanation and assurance has been given to the contrary, still insists on representing my doctrine of Creeds in this light; as placing them above the Bible; as giving them authority to bind the conscience independently of the Bible; nay, as imposing on men an obligation to believe that which the Bible never taught. He is incapable, I am persuaded, of designedly misrepresenting any thing. But the truth is, he has suffered his mind to be wrought up, on this subject, to a degree of excitement so perfectly febrile, that he is no longer able to weigh in the scales of impartial justice, either testimony or argument. Spectres of monstrous form are constantly flitting before his eyes; and, though most other people see them to be spectres only, *he* cannot be persuaded to believe that they have not a real existence. On such a feverish judgment, I have little hope of making an

impression ; but to *you*, my dear Sir, allow me to appeal, and to ask whether the doctrine of Creeds, as held by me has been fairly represented in Mr. D.'s pages ? By a Creed, or Confession of Faith, I have declared myself to mean, a Summary of the leading doctrines of the Gospel, faithfully drawn from the Bible ;—referring to the Bible as its only source ;—founding its authority solely on the fact, that all its articles are taught in the Bible ; and being, in truth, only a fixed and accredited form for ascertaining in what sense those to whom it is presented understand the Bible. That this is the simple, unsophisticated meaning, as well as profession of our Church, is evident from a great variety of sources, but from none more clearly than the Formula of subscription itself before recited. In receiving this formula, the candidate, as you have seen, first declares, that the Bible is the paramount and only infallible rule of faith ; and secondly, that he believes the doctrines contained in a certain compend to be those which are taught in the Bible. Is this setting up a rule above the Bible, or different from the Bible ? Is this claiming an authority, or making the attempt, to impose on the conscience what the Author of the Bible never required to be believed ? It is really difficult to repel such a charge without the use of terms which ought not to be applied to a Brother so truly respectable as he who have given occasion for this remonstrance. No demonstration was ever more clear, than that, if it be unlawful to extract

from the Scriptures a summary of their doctrines in human language ;—it is just as unlawful to address a congregation from the pulpit in human language ; or to expound a passage of the word of God, in human language, to an ignorant Pagan, or child, or anxious inquirer after the way of salvation. But will Mr. D. admit this conclusion. No ; he has too much good sense, and too much piety not to shrink from such a consequence. It only amazes me that he does not see that Creeds and Confessions, in the only form in which I would be their advocate--faithfully drawn from the Bible, and constantly ascribing to the Bible all their binding force, cannot be assailed by a single argument, which will not equally militate against every possible mode of expounding and enforcing Scripture. The Rev. Brother is truly unfortunate. He very seldom touches the real question. When he *does*, his arguments are such as, when traced to their unavoidable consequences, lead to gross absurdity ; are as much opposed to *himself* as to any body else; and are of course totally worthless.

4. A *fourth* charge to which you will perceive Mr. D's book to be liable is, that he has no where told us, how the IMPORTANT ENDS which in my "Introductory Lecture," I represented Creeds as calculated to attain, or rather as indispensably necessary to attain, CAN BE ATTAINED WITHOUT THEM. This is so radical a question in the whole controversy, that

until some tolerable attempt shall be made to answer it, I can never consider any thing that may be said as worthy of being listened to, and far less as worthy of a reply.

Mr. D. in his book does not give us the least intelligible hint how the Church can take effectual measures to exclude Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, Swedenborgians, Universalists, Arians, and Socinians from her ministry, without the use of Creeds and Confessions in some form. There are those, indeed, who think that men of such principles *ought not* to be excluded at all; nay, that the door to the ministry in every church ought to be left wide open, so that every man of every grade of opinion, from pure Calvinism to the grossest Socinianism, may be at perfect liberty to enter when he pleases. This, however, I am sure, is not Mr D.'s judgment; and if it should happen to be the sentiment of any who take up this pamphlet, I must, for the present set them aside, as not being, properly, parties to the existing dispute. I shall assume it as a conceded point, that it is not only highly desirable, but exceedingly important, that the Church be preserved from the intrusion of heretical men into her ministry. Now, I ask, how is she effectually to guard against the intrusion of such men, if she is permitted to exact no other profession from candidates for the sacred office, than a general belief in the Bible? How is she to ascertain, as her Master has expressly commanded her to do, that those whom

she is about to ordain to "the ministry of reconciliation," are "nourished up in the words of faith, and of good doctrine," that they are "established in the truth;" that they "hold fast the faithful word;" that they be "apt to teach," and qualified "rightly to divide the word of truth;" that they be able, "by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers?"—I say, how is she to ascertain that this is the character of her candidates for the holy ministry, when, according to the Brother whom I am constrained to oppose, she is forbidden to employ any other test than that which the most corrupt and unqualified will bear, just as well as the most excellent; and which is, of course, in reference to the point to be decided, no test at all?

Is it, or is it not true, my dear Sir, that, however plain the Bible may be in all its practical and most essential features; and however perfectly adapted to the character and wants of man, it is yet differently construed by different persons, who profess equally to receive it? Is it, or is it not true, that some men, calling themselves ministers of Christ, have deceived and corrupted their hearers by bringing in "another Gospel?" Is it, or is it not true, that such perverters of the word of God, and destroyers of the souls of men, have, either through ambition, avarice, or worldly affection, attempted to creep into the ministry in the purest churches, to the great offence and distress of the pious, and to the serious injury



of the flock of Christ? Is it or is it not true, that the inspired Apostle directs, that those who are known to be hereticks, should be *cast out* of the church? And if those who are already *in* the Church, ought to be *cast out* of it, for holding corrupt opinions, notwithstanding they may profess to believe the Bible; then, is it, or is it not true, that those who are *yet without*, ought to be *prevented from entering*, when they cannot and will not “witness a good profession,” on applying for admittance?— I repeat, are these things true, or are they not? If they be really true, then is it not the duty of the Church, as such, in all cases, before receiving men to be her teachers, and rulers, to examine faithfully whether they understand and teach the Bible aright? —And how shall this matter be brought to the test? Shall it be done by placing before the candidate, for his acceptance, a set of *definite, fixed and uniform questions*, which the Church has agreed upon, as expressing her sense of the doctrines of Scripture; or by calling upon him to *declare his belief in his own words*? One of these methods is indispensable; for in no other way can it be ascertained whether the applicant is a Calvinist or a Socinian. If it be said that the *second* method ought to be adopted; I answer, that, if, for arguments sake, we admit this, still it is equally liable to all Mr. D’s objections with the first; for it is a creed, expressed in *human language*, and *in addition* to a general profession of belief in the Bible. But I cannot admit that it is, in any respect preferable. It has the manifest dis-

advantage of being vague, fluctuating, and subject to numberless and indefinite modifications, according to the caprice of those who ask, and of him who answers. The *first* only can be considered as, properly speaking, a church-act, an ecclesiastical fulfilment of duty. And it is equally clear, that the first only can be expected to operate in a uniform manner, and to produce a uniform effect.

Now, it is not a little remarkable, that Mr. D. while he dwells so largely, and with apparently studied, amplification, on several other points, and even on those in regard to which he is without an opponent; should scarcely have deigned to touch this point, which every one perceives, to be more prominent and more vital than any other in the whole range of the controversy. Why this almost entire silence concerning a part of the argument which first of all, and above all, demanded his whole strength? Not, I am persuaded, because he had not discernment enough to see the full front and force of the difficulty; but because he had nothing to say. With all his eloquent declamation on other points, it is impossible, I think, that he should have satisfied any reflecting mind, in relation to this difficulty. And until he shall make some plausible, or at least, decent attempt to solve it, I shall feel as if nothing further could be demanded from *me*, further to defend and fortify the positions in my "Lecture." Here his doctrine labours most deeply and fatally. Until he shall relieve it from this difficulty, he will have ac-

complished nothing. It is a millstone about the neck of his cause, which, unless detached, must sink it irrecoverably.

We can scarcely conceive of a more striking exemplification of the real importance of this point, than that which is furnished by the proceedings of the Council of *Nice*, in the fourth century, in relation to the heresy of *Arius*.\* After the Council had gone through some preliminary inquiries, and adjusted some preliminary difficulties, they entered on the examination of the new opinions which had brought them together. The question to be decided was, whether the doctrines of *Arius* were heretical or not? *Arius* himself, and his followers, insisted that they were *not*; that they did not differ materially from the current doctrines of the church. They professed their entire belief in the Bible, and a perfect readiness to subscribe to all that it contained. This, however, did not satisfy the members of the Council. They examined the writings of *Arius*, and extracted from them a number of propositions; from which it appeared, that he utterly denied the Divinity of Christ, and considered Him as a mere creature; and affirmed that this was a doctrine

\* The leading particulars respecting the Council of *Nice*, detailed in this page, were mentioned in my "Introductory Lecture." They are here in substance, repeated, lest some of the readers of this letter should not have the "Lecture" at hand.

agreeable to Scripture. The Council, for the purpose of narrowing the ground of dispute, quoted a number of passages of Scripture in detail, in which the titles, the attributes, and the works of Divinity are ascribed to Christ; and inquired of *Arius*, whether, besides declaring his general belief in the Bible, he was willing to declare his belief of *those passages*? He answered that he *was* quite willing; that he fully believed them; but *that he put his own construction upon them*? What was to be done in such a case? To have separated and done nothing, would have been, most unfaithfully, to leave a mischievous heretick in the bosom of the Church, to corrupt and destroy the flock of Christ. To have contented themselves with simply repeating the very words of Scripture, "without note or comment," would have been allowing the Arians to explain every thing in their own way, and to tie up the hands of discipline. It soon became perfectly apparent, therefore, that without the use of some explanatory terms, it was impossible to proceed a step: and as the pious historian *Milner* justly observes, the Trinitarians had surely as good a right to comment on the declarations of Scripture, according to *their* judgment, as the Arians had according to *theirs*. The orthodox, then, proceeded to do what every principle of practical wisdom dictated; they collected together those passages of Scripture which assert the Divinity of the Saviour, and declared that, in their judgment, they taught, that the Son of God was an uncreated, eternal, and Divine Being, the

same in substance with the Father, equal in power and glory. A Creed, or declaration of belief, that such is the doctrine of the Word of God, was drawn up. *Arius* and his followers were asked whether they were willing to adopt that Creed as their own; and upon their refusing to do so, they were pronounced hereticks, and cast out of the Church.

Now I ask, what would Mr. D. have done, with his doctrine, had he been a member of the Council of *Nice*? Not a word of human comment or explanation could have been admitted. He could only have repeated the very words of Scripture. To all these the Arians would have yielded their prompt and full assent; and, for any thing that I can see, must have baffled and triumphed over him, and retained their places in the Church. Indeed we cannot, I think, be at a loss to decide what would have been Mr. D's plan of procedure, had he been a member of that Council, from a variety of intimations which his volume contains. One passage in page 109, and another in page 128, by no means obscurely hint to us, that he considers the Council as having been agitated by a dispute "ABOUT WORDS;" as having been engaged, very "unprofitably," in "arraying speculation against speculation." Had he been there, he would, no doubt, have done —JUST NOTHING. He would have left the whole matter to take care of itself, and the Arians to retain their standing in communion with the Orthodox. A precious comment, truly, on his doc-

trine! For indeed, adhering to that, he could not possibly have done otherwise.

I beg, however, my dear Sir, that it may be distinctly understood, that in offering these remarks on the Council of *Nice*, I am very far from approving *all* the treatment which the Arians received from the Orthodox. When the latter pronounced the former to be hereticks, and excluded them from the Church, they did nothing, in my opinion, but what the word of God, in all such cases, has enjoined. But when the Emperor went further, and, no doubt, with the approbation of the Orthodox, banished the Arians to *Illyricum*, and heaped upon them many secular penalties; I can without hesitation, adopt the language of the pious Patriarch, on another occasion and say—"Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel!" And with respect to the heat and violence which are alledged to have been indulged in the proceedings of the Council itself, I will only say, that, if they were such as some writers have represented them, let them be condemned without mercy. They make no part of the Trinitarian controversy. There was no orthodoxy in them. The truth of God stands in no need of such unhallowed weapons. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual." Let it always be recollected, however, that whatever violation of the rights of private judgment occurred on that occasion, is to be considered as the fault of the age, rather than of any particular party. Just ideas of

religious liberty, as was before observed, were then entertained by none. The moment the followers of *Arius*, who had been so severely persecuted, got into power, they began to persecute in their turn, "If *Constantine*," says Mons. *Bayle*, banished the ringleaders of Arianism, and threatened those with death who should not burn all the writings of the arch heretick, it is equally certain that *Constantius*, his son, and *Valens*, who raised Arianism to the throne, treated the Orthodox with even more rigour than *Constantine* had done the Arians."

Neither has Mr. D. told us, how the Church, without, in some form, adopting and publishing ecclesiastical Creeds, can fulfil one great purpose, can faithfully discharge one great duty, for which she was instituted, viz. to be a depository of truth, and to bear testimony, from age to age, in favour of the truth, against its numerous enemies, by whom she is constantly surrounded. He does not deny that the Church is required to maintain the truth, to "bear witness to the truth," to "contend earnestly" for the truth,—in the midst of "a crooked and perverse generation." He cannot deny, in particular, that there are special seasons, in which, when error "comes in like a flood," she is bound to "lift up a standard against it," by "holding forth the word of life." And he has been reminded of the impossibility of doing this effectually, without coming forth with a discriminating and specifick detail of those important doctrines, which are most point-

edly opposed and declaring her belief in them. Yet Mr. D. says it is unlawful for the Church to make any "summaries" of Gospel truth: nay, if I understand him, he would condemn a systematick arrangement, or compend of Bible doctrines, *even in exact Bible language*; but insists that in all attempts to communicate the truths of Scripture to men, not only the substance, but the precise *words, form, arrangement and order* in which they are found in the Bible, must be scrupulously retained, or else we are chargeable with an attempt to be wiser than God. I forbear to comment on such positions as these. They certainly lead to consequences, as before stated, which I should think, the Brother could not have duly considered. But one consequence undoubtedly is, that if it be so, the Church can never publish any peculiar or distinguishing testimony in favour of the truth, even when most boldly attacked. For, according to this doctrine, all that she is at liberty to do, is to profess her belief in the Bible;—and it must be the **WHOLE BIBLE**; for no *selections* can be made;—no *particular points*, which have been *specially attacked*, can be marked as the objects of special defence. She can only proclaim and reiterate that she believes the Bible, and, perhaps, publish, under her own name, a *new edition* of it! But to what does this amount? Are not the very worst hereticks in the community in the constant habit of doing the same? What, then, becomes of the Church's testimony to the truth, as a distinctive



and useful service rendered to the cause of Christ in the world? What do Christians, in this case, more than others? Verily, it appears to me that Mr. D's plan would divest the Church of the whole efficiency of her character as a *witness for the truth*, and reduce her to the station of a tame spectator of the most furious attack of its enemies:

The pious *Waldenses*, and other witnesses for the truth, during the dark ages, according to this doctrine, did wrong in forming abstracts of Christian truth, to which they required the assent of those who were candidates for the sacred office among them; by which they made known their holy faith to others; and by means of which they "shone as lights in the world." They did what was not "required at their hands." They ought only to have professed their general belief in the Bible, as the corrupt Papists around them did. But, then, where would have been their testimony? How should we ever have known wherein they differed, or that they differed at all, from the Papists? My dear Sir, my respect for Mr. D. prevents me from giving utterance to my impression of the length and breadth of the absurdity involved in this wonderful doctrine!

5. A still more remarkable charge to which Mr. D's. book is liable, is, that while he maintains, with so much zeal and vehemence, the utter unlawfulness of all Creeds and Confessions, HE DISTINCTLY ALLOWS THE INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY OF HAVING

A CONFESSION OF FAITH, AND CONFESSES THAT HE HAS, AND EMPLOYS ONE HIMSELF !

In page 99, he explicitly grants, if I understand him, that no man ought to be admitted to the communion of the Christian Church, who does not believe in the Divinity and atonement of the Saviour; and that the inspired apostles would never have baptized, and, of course, that a christian minister now, ought not to baptize the child of one who did not receive the doctrine of the Trinity. In page 81, he concedes, that, in the primitive Church, "hereticks were censured and avoided by common consent, under the operation of that inherent power, which *religious society has, like all other societies, to regulate itself according to its own constituent principles.*" And again, in pages 100 and 101, he concedes, that there must be, in all churches, and that by Divine authority, a reception of certain fundamental doctrines, "as a term of communion in spiritual things." Now, I ask, does Mr. D. mean, that those who apply for the privileges of church communion shall be received, of course, when they profess in general to believe the Bible; while they are known, from private conversation, to be Arians or Socinians in sentiment? Or does he mean that the Church, by her pastor or rulers, shall ascertain, by the use of human language, whether the applicants really adopt certain fundamental doctrines which the Church fully believes to be taught in Scripture? The latter is plainly intimated. Hereticks, however

loud their general profession of belief in the Bible, are to be "censured and avoided by common consent, under the operation of that inherent power, which all religious society has to regulate itself according to its own constituent principles." In other words, religious society must be considered as having the power to interrogate those, who solicit her to receive them, whether they believe certain doctrines which she considers as taught in Scripture, and as necessary to salvation? If so, *how many* of the doctrines which she deems highly important, and which she finds in Scripture, is she at liberty to make "a term of communion in spiritual things?" And who is to judge for the church in this matter? Must it not necessarily be left to her own judgment in the fear of God? Mr. D. tells us, that he most readily allows the use of a Creed; but then it must be a *Divine* not a *human* Creed. I ask, Did ever any church, calling itself christian, adopt a Creed, every article of which it did not fully believe to be taught in the word of God, and, of course, to rest on Divine authority?

The truth is, no church ever did, or ever can, get along, a single day, without a Creed, of more or fewer articles, and more or less formally exhibited. This I asserted in my "Introductory Lecture," and Mr. D. exemplifies and confirms the assertion. The *principle* is the same, whether the articles included in the Creed be few or numerous. No church, indeed, is at liberty to insert in her Creed, a single article that is not plainly taught in Scripture. Yet the

number of articles ought to depend very much on the state of the world and of the church, and on the number and malignity of the heresies which may be prevalent when a given Creed is formed. And on these points, the church must be left, as I said, on her own responsibility, to judge. But I will venture to say, that, however few and simple the articles, they must all of necessity, be expressed and enforced in human language. To exemplify my meaning. Suppose a church had a Creed of only *one* article, and that relating to the Divinity of Christ, and consisting simply of a literal copy of the most clear and decisive text in the whole New Testament in support of that doctrine. And suppose a zealous *Unitarian* were to apply to be received into the ministry in that church. If he were called upon to assent to that article, as a term of admission, he might, on his principles, do it without scruple. For, professing to believe the *whole Bible*, he could, of course, adopt, as a part of his Creed, *that particular text*. If asked, however, whether he believed in the true and proper Divinity of Christ, he would naturally reply—"No, certainly, I believe no such thing. The text in question, as I understand it, does not teach that doctrine. Your construction is a mere human gross. I am willing to subscribe to the text as a part of the Bible, and in what I consider as its real meaning; but not in conformity with your comment." A single case of this kind,—and such a case, or those analogous to it, might be supposed frequently to arise—completely proves, not only that Creeds *may* be

drawn up in human language, but that they *must* be, if we would wish them to answer the purpose of excluding those, who, while they profess to believe the whole Bible, may and do, notwithstanding, reject all its most fundamental and precious doctrines.

Mr. D. then, if I understand him, admits the general *principle* of Creeds: that is, though he will not allow a church to reduce to writing, in her own language, a series of doctrines, which she considers as drawn from the Scriptures, and require the assent to it of a candidate for her ministry; nor, as it seems, will he allow a church to form a series of extracts from the Bible, and require assent to them for a similar purpose; because this would be detaching the passages in question from the *connection* in which they stand in the Bible:—yet he does allow that every Church may have a Creed, and not only so, but that, keeping her own principles in view, she may and ought to exclude from her communion those whom she considers, according to the sense which she puts on Scripture, to be heretical. This is enough for me. It is virtually giving up the whole argument. But this is not the worst. It is placing the use of Creeds on the most dangerous possible footing. The questions by which it is to be ascertained whether the candidate for admission be heretical or not, are, of course, to be stated orally. By whom? No doubt by the minister or ministers who may be called to officiate in a particular case; and just in that shape, and in those terms, which

may suit the individual or individuals who propose them. Now, only suppose a deficiency of intellect, of prudence, or of principle, in the ministers who act in such a case, and it is evident that this nuncupative or oral Creed may be employed either as an instrument of personal hatred, to exclude the most worthy ; or of equally base favour, to admit the most unqualified and vile. Commend me to a church whose terms of admission are known, publick and open ; who cannot employ her invisible and intangible Creed, with inquisitorial caprice and malignity on the one hand, or with worldly suppleness and accomodation on the other : who has digested, recorded, published Formularies, which all who choose may study at their leisure, and which, of course, can put no unexpected trap in the way of any man's conscience.

6. The *sixth* and last charge, which I shall mention, to which Mr. D's book appears to me to be liable, is, that it is wholly irreconcilable with the constitution, not merely of OUR CHURCH, but of ANY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

I am of the opinion, that Mr. D's fabrick cannot stand, even on the principles of sober *Independency*. Nothing is more certain than that the late Rev. Dr. Fuller, of *England*, a warm friend to Independent church goverment, and surrounded by what might really be called the *imposition* of Creeds on the consciences of men—was yet wise enough to distinguish

between the use and abuse of them. He was a warm advocate of Creeds and Confessions, precisely on the principles of my "Lecture," and, very unceremoniously, pronounces some popular objections brought against them, in that view, as "*frivolous*." Many other distinguished Independents have taken the same ground. But that Mr. D's whole scheme is radically and essentially inconsistent with every form of real *Presbyterianism* I entertain not a shadow of doubt. Whatever else he may be, he is not a Presbyterian; and to call himself, or his Congregation by that name, is a burlesque upon every principle of ecclesiastical nomenclature.

The essential principles of Presbyterian church government—each of which may be considered as a *sine qua non* in the system, as such—are, the PARITY OF MINISTERS—conducting the discipline in each congregation by a bench of RULING ELDERS—and COURTS OF REVIEW AND CONTROUL. Where any one of these features in the plan is altogether wanting—there may be a church, and a very pious, exemplary, excellent church; but it cannot, properly speaking, be considered as a PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH. A number of particular churches, or congregations, may each conduct its internal government by Ruling Elders; but still, if they be not all bound together by a system of regulation which embraces them all, and which, by a series of ascending judicatories, gives to a larger part of the church, the power of inspecting and regulating the proceedings of a small-

er, until we reach the highest judicatory, constituted by representative from all the churches, and which forms the common bond of union, advice, and co-operation for the whole body ; they are, certainly, not organized upon Presbyterian principles. It is not necessary, indeed, that there be any particular number, or the same denominations of judicatories, in all cases, in order to form a Presbyterian Church. The Reformed Presbyterian, or Cameronian Church, had, a few years ago, only a single Presbytery in the United States. But although they had then, no higher judicatory, they were strictly Presbyterian ; because their Presbytery inspected all their Congregations, received appeals, when necessary, from all their church sessions, and judicially regulated the affairs of their whole body. They had no *need* of any higher judicatory, because their ministers were few, and could all meet in Presbytery. When this principle of joint representation of all the churches in their proper judicatories, and of mutual inspection, co-operation and controul, is abandoned, genuine Presbyterianism is abandoned. Just, as in the civil government, if all the townships in *New-Jersey*, or in *Maryland*, had a separate and independent constitution and system of laws ; each its own little executive, legislature and judiciary ; and each pursuing its own views of interest, without any reference to the rest ; and without any common government over the whole ; there would be a number of petty communities ; but there would no longer be, in the popular sense of that word, in our country, a *State*.



Just as necessary is it, in order to form a Presbyterian Church, that there be a regular, acknowledged, and uniform judicial constitution, binding all the individual churches together in one homogeneous body.

Now, it is not only evident, that Mr. D's whole book is hostile to this well-compacted and scriptural plan ; and that, while he calls himself a Presbyterian, he is really in principle and spirit an alien from at least one essential feature of the whole system ; but it is no less evident that his "no creed" doctrine, in particular, suits only the most lax and wild *Independency* that can be conceived ; and cannot, indeed, be easily reconciled with any other. It avowedly leaves every individual church to decide and act for itself, according to the ever-varying directions of human caprice. No one doubts that every church has a right thus to pursue its own pleasure. What is denied is, that when it takes this course it can be considered as acting upon Presbyterian principles. If a society were to adopt and avow the practice of *Lay-ordination*, proscribe all *Liturgies*, and reject all *Articles* of faith ; and yet insist upon calling itself a "Protestant Episcopal Church," and claim to be associated with the body which bears this name in the *United States*, would not every rational man consider the claim as an absurdity ? Precisely similar, as it appears to me, is the case before us. The very attempt to unite upon the Presbyterian plan, without an explicit, stipulated, and recorded agree-

ment as to doctrine ; in other words, without a Confession of Faith, common to all the churches forming the body, would be about equally preposterous and impracticable. The very essence of such a system is having a set of common rules, both of faith and order, explicitly acceded to by all, and by universal conformity to which, all the particular churches live and *act* together in harmony and love, forming "one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Were there, indeed, but one congregation in the United States, of the Presbyterian name, and that under the pastoral care of a wise, prudent, pious and orthodox minister, and also of an Eldership of similar character, it might possibly proceed in tolerable harmony and purity for a considerable time, without a written Creed :—but how the SEVENTEEN OR EIGHTEEN HUNDRED CONGREGATIONS belonging to the Presbyterian Church in this country, supposing them to be now on the whole, well united in doctrine, views and feelings, could expect to continue so for a single year ; much less for ten years together ; how the ministers or members in one part of the church, could expect, in travelling into another, to find brethren one with themselves in sentiment, habit, and affection, as well as in name, if there were no other pledge of ecclesiastical harmony, than the ever-varying caprices of individual feeling, and oral communication ;—is a problem which I should most deeply regret to see subjected to the awful solution of actual experiment !

You will not suppose, for a moment, that I impute it as a crime to Mr. D. that he is not, and with his present sentiments, cannot, be a Presbyterian. He has a perfect right to be an Independent, or what he pleases. God forbid that the rights of conscience, on this, or any other point, should ever be abridged or questioned! All I assert is, that his system is totally subversive of Presbyterianism; and that, considering his scheme in all its parts, nothing has surprized me more than his having the least disposition to call himself by our name, or to remain in our connection.

Such, my dear Sir, are my principal reasons for declining to take any publick notice of Mr. D's book, and especially for determining to involve myself in no controyersy with *him*. Not because I think the subject of less importance than I formerly did; for the longer I reflect upon it, the more momentous does it appear, to the best interests of the Church. Not because I am disposed to shrink from the task of defending the truth, when I see it really labouring; for, such as I am, I have humbly endeavoured to consecrate myself to a course of labour in this vocation, to my latest breath. And least of all, because I consider any one of my arguments in favour of Creeds as having been refuted or even seriously assailed by that Brother. But because I am perfectly persuaded that undertaking to reply to him would be a superfluous task. There is absolutely no need of it. If through a great part of

his book, he is labouring to prove that, which no body with whom he has any thing to do, denies; if, with singular infelicity, he scarcely ever perceives or touches the real point of the argument, and when he does for a moment touch it, draws conclusions which reduce himself to absurdity; if he has never yet condescended to tell us, how the all-important objects to the attainment of which Creeds have been hitherto considered as indispensable, may be attained without them; if, after all, he admits, that every church that would exclude hereticks from her bosom, must have and use a Creed; and if, while he calls himself, and wishes to be considered, a *Presbyterian*, he is opposing, and exerting himself to the utmost to subvert, some of the most essential principles of that form of church government.—If these things be so, it cannot be supposed that, in this community, such writing needs to be refuted.

I will only add, before proceeding to another particular, that if I could have persuaded myself that the uncommonly clear and powerful Review of Mr. D's work, by the venerable Editor of the "Christian Advocate," had been generally read by those who take an interest in this discussion, I should certainly have thought the foregoing detail altogether unnecessary. But, as you intimate that this, for various reasons, is not the fact, I have not scrupled to bring into view a number of points well treated in that able performance, for the sake of presenting a general survey of the subject.

II. You inform me, "that Mr. D. in the opinion of many people, by his large quotations from my "Letters on the Christian Ministry," published a number of years ago, has fixed on me the charge of inconsistency; that he has arrayed me against myself, in a manner not very much calculated to gratify my feelings."

I can only reply, that I perceive no such inconsistency as Mr. D. seems to triumph in exhibiting. On the contrary, I cordially thank him for giving new and extended circulation to sentiments, which are as fully mine at this moment, and which I deem quite as important, as on the day when they were first penned. If I were now about to write and publish on the same subject, I should not wish to modify a thought, or to alter an expression, unless it were to express precisely the same sentiments with still more force and point. And I am amazed that Mr. D. should think that he finds any thing in those pages which does not fully quadrate with the contents of my "Introductory Lecture." What is the amount of that which I maintain in the extracts referred to? Why,—that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practise;—that the authority of Christ can be claimed for nothing which is not found, in some form, in his own word;—that the apostolick church, or the church as it existed in the first century, and for a short time afterwards, exhibited a degree of simplicity and purity, which has, perhaps, never since been equalled;—that corrup-

tion both in doctrine and in practise, before the close of the *second* century, began to flow in on the Church, and, before the commencement of the *fourth* had made alarming progress ;—that the Synods and Councils of the first two or three hundred years, were employed by ambitious pastors as means of extending, their power, and of course, encroaching on the rights of others ;—that they very soon fell into the practise of postponing the decisions of Scripture to their own ;—that, consequently the early christian writers, called the “Fathers,” can never be safely referred to as a rule either of faith or practise ;—that, therefore, all the writings of the Fathers are to be brought to the test of the Bible, and to be judged by that test alone ;—that their Creeds and Confession are entitled to no respect whatever from us, excepting in so far as they agree with God’s own word ;—that, as a necessary inference from all these positions, historick fact, is not divine institution ;—and that whoever attempts to establish the Divine authority of any thing because it was early introduced, and extensively received, within the first three or four hundred years, abuses our confidence, and deserts the only infallible rule.

Such are the sentiments which Mr. D. finds me avowing, nearly twenty years ago, and with these sentiments he professes to think my present doctrine concerning Creeds utterly irreconcilable. But why so? What is there in all this, that militates in the

least degree with either the letter or spirit of my "Introductory Lecture?" Have I not defined a correct Creed (and surely I plead for no other than a correct one) to be a "summary of *Scriptural truths*;" to be worthy of respect only so far as it is a faithful extract from Scripture; and to have no authority whatever, excepting that which it derives from the consideration that it speaks "as the oracles of God" speak? Now, in what respect the advocate of such a Creed can be considered as taking ground inconsistent with the foregoing statements, I am utterly at a loss to imagine. I should just as soon have expected to find myself charged with having abandoned the christian doctrine of Miracles, *because* I believed in that of Prophecy. There is not the shadow of discrepance in the case. Nay, if I do not altogether mistake, every phraseology which I employ, and every statement which I make, concerning Creeds, are so far from placing them above the Bible, from giving them any authority independently of the Bible, or founding them on the decisions of Synods and Councils; that the contrary is uniformly and strongly expressed.

As Mr. D. however, has so totally failed of understanding the plain scope of those passages, which he has quoted from my former book: and as it is possible that some others may blunder as much as he has done; it may not be improper to make a remark or two, which will prevent the most careless reader from hereafter falling into a similar mistake.

Because in *one book*, I have maintained, that the Fathers were all of them fallible men, and many of them actually erroneous; that error and ambition early crept into the Church, and led multitudes to teach for doctrines the commandments of men:— and in *another book*, have asserted that Creeds and Confessions were found necessary in the Church, even in the Apostles' days; and that they became more numerous, and more necessary, in the third and fourth centuries and onward, as heresies and schisms, multiplied to corrupt and disturb the church — Because I have made both these statements, I am charged with inconsistency. But wherefore? Both are incontrovertibly true. If I had said, “the clergy of the third and fourth centuries formed and enforced certain Creeds, *ergo* those Creeds were sound and scriptural,”—I should indeed, have been inconsistent with myself. But I said no such thing. My assertion was, that Creeds and Confessions have actually been found necessary, and have been constantly resorted to in every age of the church. This assertion I endeavoured to illustrate and confirm by a reference, particularly to the early history of the church. Now the correctness of this general statement, in point of fact Mr D. himself does not deny. Nay he unequivocally vouches for it. But, then, he insists that as these Creeds were drawn up during a period when there were so many ecclesiasticks of questionable and suspicious character, we can by no means infer that they were all scriptural and orthodox; or even that



the practise itself of making such Creeds, is infallibly right. What is this to the purpose? Who had made any such assertion? Certainly I had not. Still may there not be something more than plausible in the argument, that a practise which began in Apostolick times; which has prevailed in all ages and countries since the christian church had an organized existence; and which retains a general prevalence at the present hour;—has, to say the least, very strong presumption in its favour? Nor is this argument materially weakened by the fact, that aspiring ecclesiasticks have perverted Creeds to unhallowed purposes, and even attempted to assign them an authority above that of the Scriptures. The existence of counterfeits, shows that there is some true coin.

Mr. D. strangely misunderstands my meaning in another case. Having quoted my assertion, that it is evident from the Epistles of *Ignatius*, that every particular worshipping assembly, in the time of that Father, was furnished with a Bishop or Pastor, a bench of Presbyters or Elders, and Deacons;—he observes---“ We understand this as asserting, what we have already expressed,---that, in those early ages, the Churches, though *Presbyterian* were *independent*.” I certainly had no thought of being understood as Mr. D. has stated; and have no doubt that every impartial man who reads the work from which this extract is made, will consider me as maintaining that the Christian Church in the days of *Ig-*

*natus*, as well as in the time of the Apostles, was STRICTLY PRESBYTERIAN; that is, that, in those days while every particular church was furnished with a Bishop, Overseer, or Pastor (which in those comparatively pure and simple times, were convertible terms) - with a body of Ruling-Elders, and with Deacons;---all the Churches were united under one common faith, government, and spirit;---forming one Church---one Body---all taking care to "speak the same thing," and to hold fast the same "form of sound words." The Apostolick Church, I *then* thought and *still* think, knew nothing of *Independency*, in Mr. D's sense of the word. *That* was a figment of error, invented I know not when. Let any man read the account of the Synod of *Jerusalem*, in the 15th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles; and, in the next chapter, of the "decrees" of that Synod being sent to all the Churches, "to be kept;" and he will see, in my opinion. the essential features of Presbyterianism as distinctly marked, as the warmest friend of that primitive and Apostolick form of church government can desire.

Further; when I say, in my "Introductory Lecture," that "the great Protestant maxim, that THE BIBLE is the ONLY infallible rule of faith and manners, is a precious, all-important truth, and cannot be too often repeated, IF IT BE PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD;"---Mr. D. seems to think that in the closing *proviso*, there is some mischievous, lurking reservation, which by no means corresponds with the spir-

it of what he finds in the extracts from my former book. He suspects that it is intended artfully to make way for *another* rule, co-ordinate with the Bible, if not superior to it. This is a total misapprehension. No such covert meaning was intended, or thought of. The more literally and strictly the maxim in question is understood, the better it will suit my purpose ; and the only design of the closing provision was, to give notice that it must be taken simply and without perversion. Without such perversions, for example, as those of which Mr. D. has too often given us specimens ; in which the plain import of words, and the manifest spirit of an argument, are made to give place to the creations of a heated fancy. For although these perversions, wholly unintentional, I believe, were not fully developed until after my "Lecture" had appeared ; yet the germs of them were sufficiently manifested in his first publication.

III. In reply to your request, that I would "give you my opinion on the proceedings of the Synod of *Philadelphia*, in the case of Mr. *Duncan*, and his Congregation, at their session in *Baltimore*, in October last," I scarcely know what to say. I am not a member of that Synod ; and, of course, have no right to sit in judgment on its acts. I was not present on the occasion referred to, and consequently cannot be supposed to know any thing, with certainty, respecting those acts, excepting what the printed Minutes of the Synod contain. Perhaps even the

expression of my approbation, may be considered by some as transcending the limits of that modesty and delicacy which peculiarly become a Minister of the Gospel, when a Judicature of Christ, with which he is only remotely connected, is concerned. Yet, as you have, with so much frankness, requested an expression of my opinion, in regard to one or two points in the Synodical proceedings, I shall, with the same frankness, give you my judgment, trusting to the christian candour of my Brethren of that Synod to appreciate the motives by which I am actuated.

Your first question, here, is---“ Whether it would not have been quite safe—more conducive to peace—and better calculated to conciliate the feelings of the religious publick generally, if Mr. *Duncan* had been permitted to remain in connection with the church, and with the Synod ?”—You are not alone, my dear Sir, in urging this query. “ Where would have been the danger,” others “ have asked,” of allowing him to retain his place? What harm could he have done? He, and the Gentleman whose case was connected with his, had they been received as members of the Presbytery of *Baltimore*, would have been but a small minority of that Body; and, of course, could have carried no system of measures, hostile to our Confession of Faith; and, as all allow them to be men of piety and integrity, no violent or dishonourable efforts on their part, could ever have been apprehended.”

It ought to be borne in mind, that Mr. D. was not, properly speaking, *cast out* of the Presbyterian Church ; but *voluntarily withdrew*, and declared himself “no longer a member of, or amenable to the Synod of *Philadelphia*, nor to any Presbytery within its bounds, or under the care of the General Assembly.” It is true, indeed, the Synod had just before passed a vote, which most unequivocally expressed, as the opinion of a large majority, that he could not regularly retain his connection with the Synod in consistency with the opinions which he had avowed. Still they did not formally exclude him. The act which severed his connection with our Body was, in the first instance, *his own*, and ought to be so understood ; although promptly followed up by an act of the Synod, ratifying and declaring the fact, that he was no longer to be considered as a Minister of the Presbyterian Church.

Now I have no hesitation in acknowledging that, so far from thinking Mr. D's continuance in the Church likely to promote peace and union ; I am persuaded it is more safe, more conducive to harmony, and more adapted to promote good feelings and edification on both sides, that he should be entirely separated from it. I know nothing of the arguments which were employed on the floor of the Synod, in favour of the course which was taken, nor of the manner in which they were uttered. But I argue thus : Mr. D. had published a book against Creeds and Confessions, which he avowed and justified. He declared to the venerable Committee of

the Synod, appointed to confer with him, that he still entertained the opinions published in that book; that he claimed a right freely to express them on *all occasions* on which he should think it his duty so to do, and to *act accordingly*. His companion in sentiment, and in conduct, the Rev. Mr. *Maclean*, made, most unequivocally, the same avowals. In these circumstances, the Synod was called to decide, whether it was for the purity, peace and edification of the church, to attach to one of their Presbyteries two Gentlemen who had avowed the most ardent opposition to all clerical subscriptions to Creeds and Formulas; who, a few months before, had actually concurred in licensing and sending forth into the church a Preacher without requiring him to adopt our Confession of Faith, and had thereby occasioned much trouble; and who, by their avowed opinions and persevering conduct, had given every pledge that whenever any subscription of that kind was to be exacted from candidates, either for licensure or ordination, they would zealously oppose a compliance with that part of our ecclesiastical Constitution. The Brethren in question, it is to be remembered, too, were of no mean or inactive minds. On the contrary, they had shewn themselves, to be ardent, determined, eloquent and indefatigable in the propagation of their hostile sentiments; and the candidate whom they had licensed without subscription, a few months before, was said to have manifested peculiar and unremitting ardour in the same cause. Is it wonderful, then, that the Synod, even

if they had consulted nothing but "the things which make for peace," should feel an invincible reluctance, to receiving into the bosom of one of their most important Presbyteries, seeds of discord and strife, so vivid, and likely to be so fruitful? Would they not have been likely to entail incessant warfare on that part of the Church, and eventually, perhaps, on the whole of it, rather than to promote its "peace?"

But this is not all. The Presbytery of *Baltimore* is, as to numbers, a small body: so small indeed, that on account of the advanced age and delicate health of some of the members, and the distant residence of others from the usual place of meeting, it has been sometimes extremely difficult to form a constitutional quorum. It, therefore, not only might, by possibility, happen, but would be often extremely likely, in present circumstances, in fact, to happen, that two individuals of Mr. D's sentiments, near at hand, and punctual in their attendance, would form a majority of the Presbytery, and, of consequence, be able, in all such cases, to controul its proceedings. Now we have only to suppose two or three such cases actually to have occurred, and, on each occasion, one or two members, "like minded" with themselves to have been brought into the Presbytery, and the *permanent* controul of its proceedings would, of course, have accrued to an anti-Confessional majority. And when once a single Presbytery was completely secured and subjected to such a party, it is easy to per-

ceive how it might be converted into a machine for multiplying its own advocates, to an indefinite extent, and sending them all over the church. Can any reflecting man for a moment, wonder that the Synod should be unwilling to run the risk of such a result ?

And all this, I am persuaded, my dear Sir, would strike you with much greater force, and present itself to your mind with much more solemn interest, if you were more familiar than you can be supposed to be, with the early history of our church in this country. Nearly a century has now elapsed since the first painful struggle, in reference to the very point of the present controversy, agitated to its centre the infant American Church. Some years after our ministers began to organize themselves into Presbyteries, they had no other bond of union than the Bible and their old habits : And as they came from different countries, and their early habits had been in many respects, different, so they knew, perfectly well, that many good men interpreted the Bible very differently. They soon found, therefore, by painful experience, the necessity of some more explicit test, or, in other words, of some explanatory statement, by the application of which they might ascertain in what manner candidates for licensure and ordination understood the Bible ; since all classes,—the heretick equally with the orthodox—were ready to profess a general belief in the holy Scriptures. After much controversy on the subject, a



majority of the Synod of *Philadelphia*,—then the only Synod in the American Colonies,—in the year 1729, passed what they called “the *Adopting Act*”—which required all the actual Ministers within their bounds, as well as all candidates for licensure and ordination, to adopt the *Westminster* Confession of Faith, together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as the confession of their faith. This was accordingly done: and amidst all the conflicts and changes in our beloved church, from that day to the present, the same ecclesiastical Creed has held its place among us, and been sacredly regarded; excepting that in the Formula of subscription which was adopted in 1788, and which has been in use since that time, nothing is said respecting the *Catechisms*. We have known, then, as a Church, the inconvenience and the mischief of being without a publicly adopted and accredited Confession of Faith. We have been happy enough to adopt one, after considerable delay, and much painful conflict. It has been blest to us, as a bond of union, and as a fence to keep out of the sacred fold many an unworthy person, who would otherwise have broken in. And shall we now be confidently told, by those who have entirely forgotten, or who never knew, all that has past, that our attachment to Creeds is a blind prejudice; that they are mischievous rather than useful; and that we ought to abandon them all without delay? It is too much!

The fact is, if our comparatively pure and happy

E

Church were unwise enough to suffer herself to be wheedled out of her unequalled Confession of Faith, and to try, for a time, the expedient of doing without one;—she would, no doubt, be compelled, in the course of a few years, by a train of the most disastrous consequences, to retrace her steps, and to try to regain what she had lost. But she would not be able to regain it. Ten or fifteen years of Confessionless laxness would admit into her ministerial ranks so many Latitudinarians and hereticks, that her harmony and strength would be gone, and like *Sampson* shorn of his locks, she would be to the Philistines around her a spectacle of despoiled and departed glory. Firmly believing thus, you will not be surprized to discover that I regard every attempt to cast odium on Creeds and Confessions, with very much the same feelings with which I should see the infidel, or the radical heretick, labouring to poison the principles of the community;—with unfeigned grief, and the deepest abhorrence. Those who are engaged in this unhallowed work, no doubt, think it just and right. They are verily persuaded, as some errorists, of no small turpitude, mentioned in the sacred history, were, that, by pursuing their object they are “doing God service.” I trust no other weapons will ever be raised against them, than those of argument and prayer. But they must allow others to have consciences as well as themselves: and to represent their efforts, as they honestly view them,—as, in proportion to their success, vitally and incalculably mischievous.

On the whole, then, it is evident to me, that it would have been so far from being conducive to "peace" to retain Mr. D. and his companion in our church, and to have a CONFSSIONAL BATTLE, if I may so express it, every time a candidate was to be licensed or ordained by the Presbytery with which they would have been connected; that the only way to secure "peace" with them was to separate them from our Body. As matters now stand, there is no necessity of quarrelling with them; for there is no *necessity* of having *intercourse* with them; which could not have been said if they were still connected with us. Whether we shall have harmonious and fraternal intercourse with them hereafter, will depend on circumstances. Allow me, for one, to say, that none will more cordially rejoice than myself, if circumstances should be such as not only to admit of intercourse, but to open the way for that which is of the most affectionate and edifying kind.

You intimate, further, that "some who do not condemn the Synod for deciding that Mr. D. could not, with his opinions and measures, regularly belong to their body; have yet considered them as acting in a very high handed, and even tyrannical manner, in proceeding to dissolve the pastoral relation between Messieurs *Duncan* and *Maclean*, and their respective congregations, and directing the latter to be placed under the care of the Presbyteries of *Baltimore* and *Carlisle*." I am aware that this measure has been the subject of much severe anim-

adversion ; which, however, I must think, has arisen, at least in many cases, from an entire want of acquaintance with the fundamental principles of church government, as well as with the facts on which the Synod proceeded.

You probably know, Sir, that those Congregations, —especially that of Mr. D. had repeatedly recognized their connection with our Church, by sending members of their sessions to the several judicatories of the church. The fact, that they were under the care of the Synod, though not of any particular Presbytery, (in consequence of the dissolution of the Second Presbytery of *Philadelphia*) was indubitable, and I presume, acknowledged. The fact of their *ministers* withdrawing from our church, by no means severed *their* connection with it. That connection remained untouched. And as their Pastors were declared to be no longer ministers of the Presbyterian Church, it certainly behoved the Synod to decide and to express something respecting the Churches committed to their care. They accordingly directed how those churches were to be disposed of, as long as they voluntarily remained under the care of the Synod. The Synod knew perfectly well that those Congregations, or any others connected with them, have a right to withdraw, at any moment they please, either for the purpose of being independent, or of joining any other body. And, I will answer for it, if the Congregations in question should withdraw, as I presume they will, if they have not done it already, from the jurisdiction of the Syn-

od, you will never hear of that venerable judicatory having attempted to reach forth her hand to reclaim or coerce them. The principle upon which all our Synods and Presbyteries act is this—Whenever congregations voluntarily put themselves under their care, they are always to be considered as under that care, until they actually withdraw ; after which all claim of jurisdiction over them ceases. It is with congregations as it is with individual church-members ; no man, or body of men, possesses or claims the power of preventing their departure from our communion, whenever they think proper, provided they do it in an orderly manner. And accordingly, I have known a congregation, originally Independent, after a while, requesting to be taken under the care of a Presbytery. Their request was granted. In a short time, wishing to call as their Pastor a man whom the Presbytery could by no means countenance, they voted to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the Presbytery, which they accordingly did, without, so far as I know, a word being uttered, or an effort made, on the part of the Presbytery, to retain them. But the history of the business does not end here. Within a few weeks, the same congregation has again applied to the same Presbytery to be again received under its care, and has been again kindly received. Can there be a stronger practical proof, that the principles upon which our ecclesiastical judicatories act, are as remote as possible from those of assumption or tyranny? They attempt no more—wish no more, than to exercise that mild and wholesome system of inspection, care and

discipline, which they have published to the world, over those who *voluntarily place themselves under that discipline*, and only so long as they *voluntarily choose to submit to it*. To charge a judicatory faithfully acting upon these principles, with ecclesiastical oppression, is surely something worse than absurdity.

The truly venerable and excellent members of the Committee of Synod, who were appointed to confer with Messieurs *Duncan* and *Maclean*, and who reported in favour of retaining them as members of the Synod, have been considered and pronounced, by a number of ill informed persons, as "*on the side of those Gentlemen*;"—and have received much praise, from certain quarters, evidently founded on this supposed fact. But there cannot be a greater mistake. The members of that Committee, in their Report, on record, and now printed, most solemnly declare—"That they *do not in the least concur* with these Brethren in their opinion relative to Creeds and Confessions; and most explicitly avow their *full belief of the utility of Confessions in the Church*, and especially of *the excellence of that* to which the Church to which they belong, adheres." On this point, there seems to have been no diversity of sentiment. Messieurs D. and M. had not, it seems, even a solitary individual in the body who undertook to support their opinions. The Synod was unanimous. The members differed only as to the *safety and expediency* of retaining in

their body the two Brethren alluded to, notwithstanding their opinions. And on this question a large majority decided in the negative.

From the foregoing remarks, you will perceive my opinion to be, that the Synod, in the case of Mr. D. acted regularly, wisely, temperately, and with a dignified and steady adherence to their published rules. What the immediate consequences may be, it is not easy to decide.—Perhaps painful, for a time, to both parties—as is often the case when an unwelcome duty is faithfully performed. But that the effect will be, in the end, salutary, I have no more doubt than I have that truth is mighty, and will prevail.

IV. You give me to understand, that, although “you are yourself friendly to Creeds and Confessions, *under certain limits*; that yet you have been constrained to doubt whether any Creed intended to be subscribed by all candidates for office in a church ought ever to contain any other articles than those which are *strictly fundamental* :”—in other words, whether we ought ever to insert among the terms of ministerial or christian communion, any more than some half a dozen items, the reception of which is generally considered as *absolutely essential to Christian character*. This is a question of real importance, which certainly deserves grave consideration, and a candid answer. And, for one, I have no hesitation in saying, that, in my opinion,

church Creeds not only lawfully *may*, but always *ought*, to contain a number of articles besides those which are fundamental. And to establish this, as it appears to me, no other proof is necessary than simply to remark, that there are many points confessedly not fundamental, concerning which, nevertheless, it is of the utmost importance, to Christian peace and edification, that the members, and especially the ministers, of every church should be harmonious in their views and practise. As long as the visible church of Christ continues to be divided into different sections or denominations, the several Creeds, which they employ, if they are to answer any effectual purpose at all, must be so constructed as to exclude from each those teachers whom it conscientiously believes to be unscriptural and corrupt; and whom, as long as it retains this belief, it ought to exclude.

To exemplify my meaning. The Presbyterian Church, and most other denominations, who have a regular system of government, believe that the christian Ministry is a divine ordinance, and that none but those who have been regularly authorized to discharge these functions, ought, by any means, to attempt to preach the Gospel, or administer the Sacraments of the Church. Yet there are very pious, excellent men, who have adopted the sentiments of some high-toned Independents, who verily think that every "gifted brother," whether ordained or not, has as good a right to preach as any man;



and, if invited by the church to do it, to administer the Sacraments. Now, no sober-minded Presbyterian will consider this as a fundamental question. Fundamental, indeed, it is, to ecclesiastical order; but to the existence of *christian character* it is not. Men may differ entirely on this point, and yet be equally united to Christ by faith, and, of course equally safe as to their eternal prospects. But would any real, consistent Presbyterian be willing to connect himself with a church, calling itself by that name, in which, while one portion considered none but a regular minister as competent to the discharge of the functions alluded to; as many of the other portion as chose, claimed and actually exercised the right, to rise in the congregation, and preach, baptize, and dispense the Lord's Supper, when and how each might think proper; and not only so, but when the ordained ministers occupying the pulpit in succession, differed no less entirely among themselves in reference to the disputed question; some encouraging, and others repressing, the efforts of these "gifted brethren?" I do not ask whether such a church could be tranquil or comfortable; but whether it could possibly exist in a state of coherence, for twelve months together?

Take another example. No man in his senses will consider the question which divides the Pedobaptists and the Antipedobaptists as a fundamental one. Though I have no doubt that infant baptism is a doctrine of the Bible, and an exceedingly impor-

tant doctrine; and that the rejection of it is a mischievous error; yet I have quite as little doubt that some eminently pious men have been of a different opinion. But what would be the situation of a church equally divided, or nearly so, on this point; ministers as well as private members constantly differing among themselves; members of each party conscientiously persuaded that the others were wrong; each laying great stress on the point of difference, as one concerning which there could be no compromise, or accommodation; all claiming, and endeavouring to exercise the right, not only to *reason*, but to *act*, according to their respective convictions; and every one zealously endeavouring to make proselytes to his own principles and practise? Which would such a church most resemble—the builders of *Babel*, when their speech was confounded; or a holy and united family, “walking together in the fear of the Lord, and in the consolations of the Holy Ghost, and edifying one another in love?”

Let me offer one illustration more. The question between Presbyterians and Prelatists is generally acknowledged not to be fundamental. I do not mean that this is acknowledged by such of our Episcopal brethren as coolly consign to what they are pleased to call the “uncovenanted mercy of God,” all those denominations who have not a ministry Episcopally ordained; and who, on account of this exclusive sentiment are styled by Bishop *Andrews*, “iron

hearted," and by Archbishop *Wake*, "madmen:" but my meaning is, that all Presbyterians, without exception; a great majority of the best Prelatists themselves; and all moderate, sober-minded Protestants, of every country, acknowledge that this point of controversy is one which does by no means affect christian character or hope. Still is it not plain, that a body of ministers entirely differing among themselves as to this point; though they might love, and commune with, each other, as Christians; could not possibly act harmoniously together in the important rite of ordination; whatever they might do in other religious concerns?

In all these cases, it is evident there is nothing fundamental to the existence of vital piety. Yet it is equally evident, that those who differ entirely and zealously concerning the points supposed, cannot be comfortable in the same ecclesiastical communion. But how is their coming together, and the consequent discord and strife, which would be inevitable, to be prevented? I know of no method but so constructing their Confessions of Faith as to form different families or denominations, and to shut out from each those who are hostile to its distinguishing principles of order. Perhaps it will be said, that all such precautions are unnecessary; that those who materially differ on such points as have been enumerated, would never attempt or desire to intrude, into churches with which they could not substantially co-operate. But the contrary has been found to

be most notoriously the fact in a multitude of cases. Nay, we need no other example in point than the case of Messieurs *Duncan* and *Macleane* themselves. If we may judge from Mr. D's book, they are, in principle, zealous *Independents*; at any rate, they are utterly at war, as we have clearly seen, with one of the most prominent and conspicuous features in our system of government. Yet they applied to be received into one of our Presbyteries; and it was, in fact, nothing but our Confession of Faith which prevented their reception. Of the same thing, examples almost numberless might be produced. One of the most remarkable that now occurs to my recollection, is that of the Rev. *John Glass*, founder of the sect commonly called *Glassites*, or *Sandemanians*. Mr. *Glass*, a little less than a century ago, was a minister in good standing in the Church of *Scotland*; a man of excellent talents, and of unblemished moral and religious character. After a time, he became a zealous, and even violent *Independent*; indulged, in public and in private, in the most unreserved vituperation of the Presbyterian form of Government, as anti-christian and mischievous in a high degree; and, when called to an account for thus incessantly vilifying and endeavouring to degrade a religious community of which he had solemnly vowed to be an advocate and defender, he attempted to justify his conduct, and declared that it was his intention to *continue* to pursue the same course as often and as long as he saw cause. At the same time, he professed

an earnest desire to remain in connection with the church which he thus continually reviled and opposed; and when excluded from it, he bitterly complained of the act of exclusion, as an “oppressive” and “persecuting” act! The fact is, there are many reasons why men often wish to enter, or to remain, in a church, the administration and order, and even doctrine of which, they entirely dislike. They do not intend to act dishonestly, nor are they conscious of doing so; but old habits, personal connections, an agreeable settlement, the plea of doing more good, &c. led many to take and to vindicate a course of conduct in relation to this matter, of which, in reference to any other subject, they would readily see the crookedness and criminality. I have even known a licensed preacher remain for years in connection with the Presbyterian church, from such considerations as were just mentioned—when his private convictions were in favour of the antipedobaptist doctrine; but as he was never ordained, and, of course, was never called to administer the ordinance of Baptism, he thought it allowable to follow his inclination, and remain in his original connection.

It is plain, then, that unless Confessions of Faith contain articles not, strictly speaking, fundamental, they cannot possibly answer one principal purpose for which they are formed, viz. guarding churches which receive the pure order and discipline, as well as truth, of Scripture, from the intrusion of teachers, who, though they may be pious, yet could not fail

to disturb the peace, and mar the edification of the more correct and sound part of the body.

V. You give me to understand, that many of your neighbours have received such impressions from the late proceedings of the Synod in *Baltimore*, that they are disposed to adopt, nay, that some of them *have* adopted the conclusion, that “the spirit of Presbyterian church government is encroaching, tyrannical, and utterly irreconcilable with the genius of American institutions, and with the liberal and conciliatory spirit of the day.”—

Never was there a more unjust charge. Let us judge of the spirit and character of Presbyterianism as it appears in **THIS COUNTRY**, where, for more than a hundred years, it has subsisted, in something like its primitive, and, truly apostolical simplicity; wholly unconnected with the civil government; never, in any case, seeking an alliance with it, or aided by it; repeatedly itself oppressed, but never oppressing; and every where commending itself to popular favour; to a degree, every thing taken into view, beyond any other denomination in the United States; not by intrigue; not by stooping to the arts of an accommodating and adulatory policy; not even by sending out a host of Itinerants, to penetrate into every nook, and corner, and neighbourhood of the land, to plant the standard of the cross, as some other respected denominations have commendably done, and as **WE OUGHT** to have done, in obe-

dience to the command of our Lord: But, under the divine blessing, by the character of our ecclesiastical government, and the spirit of our evangelical ministrations, commending themselves to the judgments and consciences of the people. Born and bred in the bosom of this church; knowing it well, ever since I have been capable of knowing any thing; and having been for more than thirty years a partaker, in its judicial transactions, I should be guilty of an act of gross injustice to my venerated spiritual Mother, if I did not declare that, so far as I know, there never was an ecclesiastical Body that intrigued less; that encroached less; that insisted less upon her own peculiarities; that was less disposed to contend even for her rights; and that manifested less of the spirit of sect, than the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Ever ready to meet other churches more than half-way in plans of intercourse and co-operation; often forbearing even to defend herself, when there was a probability that defence would lead to controversy; and constantly, as a church, expending her labour, and her funds, in sending the Gospel to the heathen and the poor, she has set as blameless an example of deference to the rights of conscience, and given as honourable a specimen of zeal for the welfare of all classes of her members, as any other church, to say the least, in this favoured land of liberty and privilege.

Of all this, the very constitution of our Church affords, as far as any such thing can do, a solemn

pledge and guaranty. Our judicatories, from the highest to the lowest, are all made up of *laymen* as well as *clergymen*; and in all of them, excepting the highest, if the theory of our government were carried into complete effect, there would be a larger number of the former than of the latter; and in the highest judicatory an equal number. This, of course, gives to the laity of our communion constant and intimate access to all our plans and measures, and all the opportunity that can be desired to exercise their full share of power in controuling those measures. The people cannot be oppressed, unless they conspire to oppress themselves!

And as the manner in which our judicatories are constituted, is well adapted to secure the rights of the people; so the principles upon which their jurisdiction is founded and administered, equally preclude the possibility of oppression. They claim, as I said before, no authority over any minister or any congregation, excepting those who, after examining the published doctrine and order of the Church, and declaring their approbation of the same, have voluntarily placed themselves under that authority. And even while such ministers or congregations remain under their jurisdiction, they claim no right to dictate to their consciences; and recognize their entire liberty to withdraw from that jurisdiction the moment they think the exercise of it no longer for their edification. In short, the sum total of their claim, on any minister or any congregation, is, that



as long as they think proper to remain under their inspection and care, they conform themselves to the rules of the church, and treat with respect and kindness their endeavours to guard them from error, and to promote their best interests. In other words, their sole object and claim are, to watch over the moral and spiritual welfare of THOSE ONLY WHO EXPRESS A DESIRE TO RECEIVE THIS SERVICE AT THEIR HANDS, and only AS LONG AS THEY CONTINUE to manifest a desire to receive it. Is this "tyranny?" Is this "contrary to the genius of American institutions?" Is this "hostile to the liberal and conciliatory spirit of the day in which we live?" It is impossible, I will venture to say, for a thinking man, who understands the subject, seriously to make such an assertion. On the contrary, it would be easy to show, by an induction of undeniable facts, that genuine Presbyterianism has been, in all ages, friendly to free government, and an advocate of the rights of conscience; and that instead of being hostile to the republican institutions of our country, it is, under Providence, their best pledge, and surest guardian.

Accordingly, who does not know, that this has been one principal ground of complaint, on the part of monarchists, against Presbyterianism, ever since that truly primitive and Apostolick form of government was restored to the Christian church? Other forms of ecclesiastical polity, indeed, have been justly deemed congenial with aristocratical

and monarchical government. Long before *James I.* in assigning a reason for wishing to put down Presbytery and elevate Episcopacy, delivered, as a royal maxim,—“No Bishop, no King;”—the same maxim had been repeated, in substance, a thousand times, as a favourite and acknowledged principle, by the enemies of civil and religious liberty; and from that day to this, the same class of people have been in the habit of repeating it a thousand times more, as one of the most indisputable of all doctrines. In support of this doctrine, an able writer in the *Quarterly Review*, who may be considered as one of the most substantial representatives of the friends of Prelacy, uses the following strong language—“Certain it is, that *Monarchy* and *Episcopacy* are much more nearly connected than writers of *bad faith*, or *little reflection*, have sought to persuade mankind.” On the other hand, the natural alliance between Presbytery and free government, has been alternately the theme of praise from its friends, and of reproach from its enemies, from time immemorial. On this fact, the same prelatival writer who was just quoted, goes on to make the following remark—“Besides the *insensible* but *natural* inclination towards *democracy*, which arises from the principles of a *popular church government*, there was another cause why the current should set in that direction; it was only under *commonwealths* that the Puritans saw their beloved discipline flourish. The sufferance which it had obtained in *France* was won from the crown, and was exposed to continued and

imminent danger from its known enmity." In support of the same fact, the lives and writings of *John Calvin* and *John Knox*, and the uniform history of Presbyterianism, as exhibited in the churches of *Scotland* and *Geneva*, of *France* and of *Holland*, afford the most overwhelming testimony. But there is no need of arraying this testimony. The enemies of Presbyterianism have, almost with one voice, acknowledged the fact. *Ciarendon*, and *Hume*, with all the bitterness of their hostility, acknowledge it. Indeed, I know of none, at the present day who deny it, excepting a few men of narrow views and sinister purpose, whose zeal outstrips their knowledge, and who endeavour to confine their own vision and that of the publick to a minute point or two of resemblance, instead of lifting them to great and general principles. To this class, however, candour constrains me to add, I have not the remotest suspicion that Mr. D. belongs.

If we compare Presbyterianism with the *Independent* form of church government, its greatly superior adaptation to secure, and maintain the rights of the people, will be most manifest. In all governments conducted by men, even by good men, wrong may be done; from ignorance; from misapprehension; from prejudice; or from passion. It is quite conceivable—would it were *only* conceivable—that this wrong may find its way into the church of Christ. An excellent church member, in a moment of popular excitement, may be, without just cause,

condemned and excommunicated. Now, in an Independent church, where is the remedy of such an oppressed member? He has none. There is no tribunal to which he can appeal for relief. The sentence is final. He must sit down under the wrong; and may be held under it as long as he lives. Cases of this kind have actually occurred, not once or twice, but **MANY TIMES**, in *Great Britain*, as well as in our own Country.

But in the Presbyterian church, there is a remedy in all cases of this kind, as complete as the imperfect state of human nature admits. All persons considering themselves as aggrieved by any act of discipline, have the right to appeal to a higher judicatory, in which those who had no concern in the origin of the proceedings, are brought to review them, and to annul or confirm them as they see cause. And finally, the complainant may appeal to the whole church, in its highest assembly, where he will have every pledge that the nature of the case admits, of an enlightened and impartial review of his case, and of the redress of every real grievance. And, accordingly, many cases arise, in which sentences of inferior judicatories, are reversed, almost unanimously, by the highest. The same remedy is attainable, as it ought to be, when congregations oppress and injure ministers, or when ministers brow-beat and injure congregations. On the plan of Independency, there is, in either of these cases, no remedy; that is, their *system* provides

none; unless, indeed, it be that terrible one, commonly denominated "club-law," which has been sometimes resorted to, but which is worse than the disease; and which no true friend of the church or of human nature, who has once witnessed its exhibition, will ever wish to see brought into use a second time.

It may, indeed, appear to some that there is an ample remedy in those special Councils, of which our Independent brethren speak so much, as the grand means of settling all difficulties among themselves. This remedy, however, is more imaginary than real. A council, in a given case of controversy, may be called or not, just as the parties please. Either party may be perverse or obstinate, and refuse to unite in calling it. If it do meet, it has no power but to "give advice;" and when given, the parties may take it or not, just as they please. But this is not the worst. Each party may call a separate Council. Council may be arrayed against Council. Nay, two or three Councils, called by different parties, may be sitting, and have been actually known to be sitting, at the same time, within the bounds of the same Independent congregation,—deliberating on the same matter of controversy,—and all coming to opposite results; so that the advice of no two of them could possibly be, throughout, adopted. And, in the mean time, the peace, and comfort, and even rights of the people were

bleeding at every pore. But there was no remedy.\* This can never happen in the Presbyterian church. For every controversy in our body, there is an appropriate tribunal; and there is but ONE TRIBUNAL. One, too, which all know, and all acknowledge; in which every man, whether a minister or private christian, may be impartially judged by his peers; whose judgment can never be reversed but by a higher judicatory; and thus, in almost all cases, within the compass of a single year, ultimate justice may be obtained, and controversy terminated. I ask, then, under which of these forms of ecclesiastical administration, are the substantial rights, both of people and of ministers, most likely to be secure? It is impossible, I should think, for any impartial man to hesitate a moment about the proper answer.

VI. When you ask me, "Whether my doctrine of the importance and necessity of Creeds, is really friendly to the circulation of the Bible, without note or comment?" I confess I am not a little surprized.

\* In the congregational churches of *Connecticut*, there is a remedy, in cases of this kind, which is found in the body called the "*Consociation*;" and which is, in fact, as far as it goes, the substance of Presbyterianism. That body, according to a system adopted more than a century ago, is vested with the power of giving, in all ordinary cases of controversy, judicial and authoritative decisions. This, however, is a perfect anomaly in the Independent system. It is presbytery under another name. And, the greater part of the other churches of *New-England* are strangers to its benefits. But the benefits of the system in *Connecticut*, have been more numerous and rich than could easily be described.

How it should ever have occurred to any one that there was the smallest inconsistency between this doctrine, and the most enlarged and liberal operations of Bible Societies in circulating the Scriptures, I can hardly imagine. It would be just as rational, and, indeed, is precisely the same kind of reasoning, to allege, that *preaching the Gospel, catechizing and instructing children*, and, in short, *every kind of religious instruction*, excepting simply reading the Bible,—ought to be abandoned by the friends of Bible Societies. An objection which would lead to such consequences, is surely frivolous and absurd.

It is said, indeed, continually, by those who are either strangely ignorant, or prejudiced, that the friends of Bible Societies avow and act upon the principle, that it is, *in itself considered*, the *best*, and, indeed, the *only proper* method of distributing the Scriptures, to send them “without note or comment.” This statement, by whomsoever made, is a gross misrepresentation. No such principle is avowed; no such sentiment entertained, so far as I know, by any one. If every Bible that is distributed, could be accompanied with an enlightened, perfectly orthodox, and judicious commentary, no doubt, it would be better, in order to correct the deplorable carelessness, and to remedy the almost incredible ignorance, with which many read the Scriptures. This would be, in a measure, supplying the place of the living Teacher, whom it has always been the plan

and the command of the great Head of the church to send with the written Word. But, divided as the christian world is into so many different denominations, where shall we find a commentary to send with the Bible, which will be equally acceptable to all sects and parties? It cannot be done. The moment any thing of this kind should be proposed, it would be a signal for discord in the most harmonious Bible Society in existence, and eventually for disbanding it. The only question, in reference to the thousands of Bible Societies with which christendom is filled, is, whether the Bible shall be distributed, "without note or comment," or NOT AT ALL. For there is no doubt that millions of copies have been sent, and are sending in this form, which would never have been sent in any other. For my part, however others may answer this question, I cannot hesitate a moment to say—Let the simple, pure Bible be translated into all languages, and sent to every habitation and every individual under heaven! Happily, in the distribution of this precious Book, all denominations of professing christians can fully co-operate, without the compromise of a single principle. Exertions to multiply and send forth its copies, may go on to increase, until they shall occupy every hand in christendom; and that without necessarily interfering, in the smallest degree, with the exertions of any and every particular church to spread the knowledge of its own doctrines and order as extensively as possible. In the mean time, the BIBLE ALONE is sufficient, I have no doubt, and has



actually been found sufficient, in many thousands of cases, when accompanied by that Spirit who inspired, it to make men "wise unto salvation." I am so far from believing, that it is necessary for him who is engaged in studying the Bible, to have Tradition, or the Fathers, or the explanations of the Church, or the framers of Creeds and Confessions, at his elbow, to enable him to understand it; that I am persuaded, without the shadow of a doubt, that any plain, honest man, who searches the Scriptures with a sincere desire to know the truth, will be at no loss to find in them the way of salvation.

Nor can I conceive that any thing but the blindest prejudice can suggest an inconsistency between this opinion, and at the same time believing, that sound preaching, good commentaries, well composed catechisms, orthodox creeds and confessions, and all truly pious books, which have for their object to explain and enforce Bible truth, are not only lawful, but inestimably useful. If I could send to the poor Hindoo, or Hottentot, or Tartar, a Bible, and with it a pious, faithful minister, to explain it, and to endeavour to rouse his attention, and direct his inquiries in perusing it, there can be no doubt that this would be the best thing I could do for him. If I could not send the living teacher with the inspired word, the next best accompaniment of it would certainly be, a sound, judicious, written exposition. But if I have it not in my power to send him either the living teacher, or the written exposition, shall I hesitate

to send him that precious Volume, which alone may be made to him, as it has been made to multitudes, "the power of God unto salvation?" Surely this is a question which those who love the Bible, and the souls of men, cannot take long to decide. Accordingly I contemplate the multiplication of Bible Societies, and the daily extension of their plans and success, with heart-felt pleasure. And I have no hesitation in avowing myself to be among the number of those who anticipate, from the distribution of the Bible, "without note or comment," the mightiest effects. That holy Book, if I mistake not, under the blessing of Him who gave it, is to be the means of regenerating the world; of raising the intellectual and moral character of man; of planting on the most barbarous and inhospitable shores the seeds of civil and religious liberty; of transforming the hearts and lives of millions; and of preparing our globe for the universal reign of righteousness and peace.

In all this, I am not conscious of holding or uttering a sentiment in the least degree hostile to my doctrine concerning Creeds. If I were, indeed, more anxious to make men Presbyterians than to make them Christians; or, if I supposed that no one could be a real christian without being a Presbyterian, I might, no doubt, feel and decide differently. But as, I trust, I can utterly disclaim both with sincerity, it is my earnest desire to send the Bible to every human being, and to leave the result

to Him who "has the hearts of all flesh in his hands." If that result should prove friendly to the saving conversion of thousands, but, at the same time, unfavourable to the growth of my own church, much as I love her, I should say, I hope from the heart, *Be it so!*—I have, indeed, no apprehension of such a result. There is no christian denomination in the world that has so little reason as ours, to be afraid of the consequences of a general study of the Bible, "without note or comment." But if it were otherwise, I should still say, *Be it so!* Let the Body of Christ increase, even if Presbyterianism decrease! When those who have happily profited by reading the Bible, come to unite themselves with the church of Christ; or, if it occur among the heathen, to be formed into a church; the question will arise, and to every conscientious man, a very serious and interesting question it is— with what particular denomination of christians they shall connect themselves? Then will naturally occur the question concerning Creeds, Confessions, and Forms of Church order, the utility and importance of which, in their proper place, it is hardly necessary to say, I should be the last man in the world to deny.

VII. From a clause of dubious import, toward the close of your letter, I should conjecture, my dear Sir, that you were under an erroneous impression with regard to one point. You seem to suppose that subscription to our Confession of Faith is required of all the private members, as well as the officers,

of our church. This is by no means the case. I know of no instance in which any thing of this kind has been attempted. At any rate, if done at all, it is done on private responsibility, not being at all prescribed in the constitution of the Church. We require the subscription in question only of those who are CANDIDATES FOR OFFICE; who are to be *teachers, rulers, and guides* in the house of God; "watchmen on the house of Zion;" "ensamples to the flock." Now that *special measures* ought to be taken to put to the test *their* "soundness in the faith," and their "aptness to teach," as well as their piety and prudence, is what I presume no one who has ever read the New-Testament, will deny. All church members, indeed, *ought* to be orthodox as well as pious; and appropriate measures ought certainly to be taken, by pastors and rulers, in the church, to promote this object. But the importance of securing these qualifications in the pastors and rulers themselves, who are to watch over all, to instruct all, to preside in the exercise of discipline, and to regulate and govern all;—is so evident, that no reasoning or illustration can render it more clear.

From the high praise which Mr. D. so frequently bestows on the Congregational form of church government, as, in his opinion, much more nearly conformed to the Scriptural model than the Presbyterian; you would naturally suppose that none of the Congregational churches of *New England* were in the habit of requiring their candidates for the min-

istry to give their assent to any Confession of Faith. The fact, however, is otherwise. A highly respectable minister of *Connecticut*, makes the following statement. "In this Association, before a candidate is *licensed* to preach the Gospel, he is carefully examined on the principal doctrines which are contained in the *Savoy* Confession of Faith, and in the Catechisms composed by the Assembly of Divines at *Westminster* ; and when he is *ordained*, he is expressly required to assent to the "*Say-brook* Platform," which contains the *Savoy* Confession, the Heads of Agreement assented to by the Presbyterian and Congregational ministers of *England*, and a few general articles for the administration of church discipline. This, I believe is the practise of all the Associations in *Connecticut*, except the one in *Windham* County, which never adopted the "*Say-brook* Platform."

It may not be improper to state, in passing, that the *Savoy* Confession, repeatedly spoken of in this statement, is, neither more nor less than an exact copy of the *Westminster* Confession of Faith at large, with a few verbal alterations to adapt it to *Independency*. It was adopted, by the *Independents*, at *Savoy*, in *England*, and prefaced, at the time of its adoption, by the following remarkable declaration :—a declaration which, if I were at Mr. D's elbow, little as he may be disposed to receive my advice, I should most earnestly urge him to peruse again and again—"Hitherto," say this conven-

tion of pious and enlightened Independents—"Hitherto there have been no associations of our churches, no meetings of our ministers to promote the common interest. Our churches are like so many ships launched singly, and sailing apart and alone, in the vast ocean in these tumultuous times, exposed to every wind of doctrine; under no other conduct than the Word and Spirit, and our particular Elders and principal brethren, without associations among ourselves, or so much as HOLDING OUT A COMMON LIGHT TO OTHERS, WHEREBY THEY MAY KNOW WHERE WE ARE."——But, to return to the practise of our Congregational brethren.

While it is confidently believed that there are some other Congregational churches in *New England*, besides those of *Connecticut*, who require their candidates for the ministry to adopt a Confession of Faith, and who have, under God, by this means, remained comparatively free from the radical errors around them; such as those of *Vermont*, and *New Hampshire*: it is well known that there are many others, who reject every thing like Confessions, and boast that they take the THE BIBLE, simply, as their rule. And what is the state of orthodoxy among them? Are they more pure and scriptural in their sentiments than any of their neighbours? This must, of course, be the case, according to Mr. D's doctrine. But is it so in fact? Ah! it is death to his cause to take a look into this part of the ecclesias-

tical statisticks of our country ! The only churches, or almost the only churches, in the United States, in conducting the affairs of which, all Creeds are rejected, are so far from being uniformly pure in doctrine, that they embrace all manner of heresy, from Semi-pelagianism to Socinianism. Almost the only thing that you are sure of not finding among them is a shred of orthodoxy. They are scarcely agreed in any one point, but the innocence of error, and in proscribing and hating what we deem the truth ! A goodly recommendation, truly, of the “no-creed” scheme, as the promised means of, at once, purifying and uniting the world !

You ought to know, too, that a great majority of the orthodox Congregational churches, throughout *New-England*, and especially those of *Connecticut*, GO FURTHER THAN WE DO, and require all persons who join their churches, *as private members*, to adopt a Confession of Faith. This Confession is solemnly formed by the Church ; regularly recorded, as the creed agreeably to which they have covenanted to walk ; formally read to the candidate at the time of his admission ; and assented to by him before he can take his place as a member. It consists, indeed, commonly of a small number of articles, usually not more than ten or twelve of the leading doctrines of the Gospel ; and is expressed in a few words. Still it is a confession—a written confession—and expressed in human language ; and involves the principle, in all its extent, for which I

am contending. A few of our churches imitate our *New-England* brethren in this practise. This is confined, however, I think, to those churches, who were either originally constituted, for the most part, by emigrants from *New-England*, or have subsequently become composed of a majority of such members.

On some other points brought into view in your letter, you must excuse me if I forbear to speak. I know not that the discussion of them, even in the best manner, would minister to the great interests of "brotherly kindness and charity." At any rate, if they be touched at all, they must be treated at considerable length; and for this, pardon me for again saying, I have not, at present, either time or inclination.

And now, my dear Sir, it is time to bring this long letter to a close. As you suggested to me the alternative of either addressing you in private, or answering your communication through the medium of the press; I chose, for various reasons, the latter. Among the reasons which thus influenced my mind one is, that, although the subject of these pages may seem, at first view, to be one in which the parties immediately implicated can alone have any interest, it is really far otherwise. It is, in many respects, a common concern of all the friends of religion. It is a subject deeply interesting to every individual who loves the church of God; to every ecclesiasti-



cal body who prize good order, and christian edification. In every church, diversity of views, and temporary conflicts, even among good men, will occasionally occur. "It is impossible but that offences will come." When they *do* arise, every reflecting man, one would think, must see the importance of treating them, on both sides, with a spirit of moderation, forbearance and charity; and, at the same time, of adhering to the established rules by which the body in question has agreed to be governed. In the church, as well as in the state, government ought to be the reign of law, not of men. I am aware that when almost any individual becomes a delinquent with regard to ecclesiastical order, he seldom fails, in the first stages of excitement, to find in a large mass of the community, a prompt advocate, and, for a while, to be almost canonized as a martyr. That noble sentiment which disposes men, anterior to all examination, to fly to the relief of those who are involved in difficulty, must and will have its course. Yet, methinks, it is rather asking too much to demand, that the church, in order to gratify the feelings of an individual, should abandon that order which she has published to the world, and virtually pledged herself to maintain; that she should deliberately allow her laws and authority to be trampled under feet; and, in a word, for the sake of avoiding the unjust imputation of persecuting *him*, to allow him really to persecute and injure *herself* without raising a hand to defend what she verily believes to be the cause of Christ.

But let us be patient. The issue of things, if I mistake not, will make very instructive disclosures. The present paroxysm of feeling and of clamour, will soon pass away. Prejudice and passion must ultimately yield to more sober sentiments: and when this shall be the case, the foregoing principles will, I am confident, begin to be appreciated. The religious publick of this happy Country is too enlightened to be, for any length of time, cajoled by flattering declamation; too well informed of its own unalienable rights, to be alarmed by the pictures of imaginary danger, which feverish minds create and exhibit, in the fulness of their honest delirium. Nor do I apprehend that this delirium will last long, even in those who are the subjects of its most threatening exacerbations. If they have as much both of principle and of intellect, as, amidst all their aberrations, I take them to have; if Mr. *Duncan* and his coadjutors should ever form an ecclesiastical community of their own, they will soon find the need of law and regulation for the maintenance of order. Some subscription, or acknowledgment of certain principles, on the part of those who are to be received as teachers and rulers, will be found necessary. If an attempt be made to do without any thing of this kind, their churches will in a little time, either degenerate into bodies of latitudinarians and hereticks; which will by no means accord with the views of those Gentlemen; or be constrained by dear-bought experience to retrace the steps which they are now taking. Then, if not be-

fore, they will discover the total want of practical wisdom which marks their present proceedings. Then, if not before, they will be brought to see and lament that they have been fighting equally against the purity and the comfort of the Church. God grant that this discovery may be made, and their steps retraced, with as few and as small wounds as possible to their own peace ; and with as little injury as possible to that great cause of the Redeemer's truth and glory which we all profess to love !

I am, Sir,

very respectfully,

Your friend and obedient servant,

SAMUEL MILLER.

*Princeton, N. J. }*  
*Jan. 25, 1826. }*