

A DEFENSE
OF THE
ECCLESIASTICAL BOARDS
OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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A DEFENSE OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL BOARDS.

The tendency of the human mind is to extremes. Man, by his fall, lost that perfection of wisdom, which would ever have preserved him in the middle path, safe from the dangers of latitudinarianism, on the one hand, and of ultraism on the other. At it is, we find the human mind like the pendulum perpetually verging from one extreme to the other.

This tendency is manifested in a very striking manner when the attention has been directed with absorbing interest to some great perversions of truth. When such errors, on whichever side of the line they are found, are sustained by all the force of apparent reason, and of persuasive eloquence ; and thus call forth in their refutation the utmost powers of intellectual vigour; it is not in human nature to resist that impulse by which the mind is insensibly driven to the opposite extreme.

So has it been in the recent controversies in which our church has been so warmly engaged. The truth of God as it is contained in the doctrines of his word, and the purity of those ordinances which have been established in his church, have been both assailed, and both triumphantly defended. And as the power, with which such opposing views were advocated, has been great, and is still threatening us with a renewed assault. So has it called forth a fiercer and more determined resistance. Every position occupied by the enemy has been reconnoitred, and every possible force brought to bear against them. It is unavoidably necessary that in such an attitude and spirit of hostility, we should be disposed to entrench ourselves on the most opposite grounds. That there should, therefore, be manifested in some quarters both as it regards doctrine and practice, a tendency towards extremes, every reasonable mind must have confidently anticipated. Such a tendency we must regard as the result of that internal pressure by which the spiritual machinery of our church was impelled when the heavy sea burst upon her, and threatened to impede her onward progress; and which after the storm has subsided, carries her forward with accelerated speed. Viewing it, therefore, as in itself good, and as meaning only good to the church, there is no occasion for trembling or alarm. Our present duty evidently is to look out calmly upon the present and the future, to make an accurate calculation of

our present bearings, to adjust and trim our sails, and in a confident reliance upon the propitious gales of heaven, to press forward in the glorious course before us.

The tendency of which we speak, has been especially manifested as it regards our ecclesiastical organizations. These have become the objects of the severest scrutiny, and are now regarded by some with feelings of jealousy and distrust. Rejecting, with conscientious reprobation, the arbitrary assumptions of those who would enslave the church to the despotism of merely voluntary associations, originated and controlled by men beyond the church, and irresponsible to it, and subject to no immediate and direct control of the church; these individuals are now found denying to the church the power of framing such organizations for herself, and denouncing those she has instituted as anti-scriptural, anti-Presbyterianism, and dangerous. Thus have these worthy individuals been led by their microscopic examinations into all the evils, actual and possible, connected with Boards and Agencies as found in the system of voluntary associations to impute the same deformities to Boards even when subjected to the entire control and review of our own ecclesiastical judicatories. Hitherto the controversy was between the claims of boards and agencies as existing under one or other of these conditions. The question propounded to every conscience was—not whether such means were scriptural and proper in themselves considered, but whether they were more scriptural and expedient when employed by the church or when controlled by voluntary associations. This and this alone was the dividing line by which the views so strenuously maintained by the opposing parties in our church were separated.

Both agreed in regarding such missionary operations as imperatively required by the spirit and precept of the gospel, and as of all commanding interest and importance. Both agreed in acknowledging the absolute necessity of some instrumentality by which these operations might be carried on. Both agreed that boards and agencies were necessary as this instrumentality, so as that without these, in some form, the duty, however plain, could not be discharged. But they differed, not as to the form or organization of these boards, but only as to their relations,—the one contending for their entire severance from, and the other for their perfect subjection to, the church. This position which I regard as important, on entering upon this discussion, is fully admitted. "It was not," says the author of the *Calm Discussion*, "a subject of discussion how the church could most efficiently conduct these matters in her ecclesiastical

capacity—by common consent it was admitted that societies or specific organizations for the purpose were indispensably necessary—and the church felt that she could gain her point and secure the desired oversight and control, by placing these societies or organizations under her own supervision.” —*Balt. Mag.* 1841, page 146.

It is, then, apparent, that the perfect propriety as well as the absolute necessity of boards and agencies was unquestioned during the recent agitations of our church. These things were laid down as first principles, and assumed data from which both parties started in their introductory demonstrations. The wide differences in the results to which these parties were led, arose not from any variance in the premises, but from the method by which they arrived at their respective conclusions.

This being so it is evident that the objections now raised against our system of ecclesiastical organizations are new. They “never occurred to the church” during all the period of her faithful contendings. They are, therefore, novel. They have originated with their present authors, and date no farther back than the present time. The doctrine of the church on this subject was established. That doctrine was never once questioned during the severe and scrutinising investigations to which this whole subject has been submitted. That doctrine she still upholds and upholds too as the golden treasure, which, at immense price and hazard, she has rescued from her foes. It was one of the prizes of victory for which she struggled. It was one around which her soldiers fought with most resolute bravery, and which after it had been seized by the enemy, she regained after many a hard encounter. It is therefore endeared, when by the recollections of the past, it is associated with the memory of striving times and noble exploits, while with its recovery, the recollection of the eminent firmness of some who would now restore it to the enemy, is sacredly entwined.

Still it is true that this doctrine and this system may be false. Our church, and these individuals among the rest, may have been short-sighted and mistaken. Grant that this may be so, still the presumption that it is not, is irresistibly strong. *Possibly* our church may have originated this system of means, and preserved in its approval through evil and through good report, and contended earnestly for the liberty of its full and unrestricted enjoyment—and all this time have been contending for that which is un-scriptural, un-Presbyterian and dangerous. All this is possible, but who will say that it is probable?

The presumption, then, is against these objections, and it is strongly in favour of that system against which such objectors are made. The *onus probandi* is therefore clearly on these objections. On them lies the burden of proof for the substantiation of each of these positions. They must prove that this system is what they thus declare it to be. It is not enough to object or to throw out difficulties. These attach themselves to every doctrine and to every system. They must establish against this system a charge of unscripturality and dangerous opposition to our standards and to our creed. Nor is this all. These objectors admit with us the absolute necessity of accomplishing that work which these boards and agencies are designed to perform. They acknowledge as fully as we do the necessity of the end. Our only difference is to the means by which that end may be best secured. The means we proposed are those already in operation. These means have been sanctioned by adoption—by long trial—and as is believed, by eminent success. Now it is incumbent on these brethren to show not merely that this means is liable to objection and abuse; or that it has been actually abused in time past. They must make it evident that it necessarily leads to such evils—and that these evils are inseparable from it. They must further provide a system of means by which the end, which, as they allow, must be attained—can be accomplished. This system of theirs, they must show, is free from all similar difficulties and objections—is not liable to similar abuses—and is in itself Scriptural, Presbyterial, and expedient. All this our objectors are under obligations to do before they can fairly call upon us to abandon the existing system, and to endanger our end of such necessary and transcendent importance.

If, then, such objectors either propose no substitute whatever for our present system, or one which is of doubtful expediency, it most clearly follows that all their objections, however plausible, fall to the ground—that our present system is to be necessarily retained—and that our church, in abandoning it, would be recreant to duty, and justly chargeable with folly. She would leave her ships and disarm her forces because chargeable with some deficiencies, and that, too, while the enemy was in sight, and she was under positive command to put forth to sea and war a good warfare against the powers of darkness.

I will therefore proceed to take up the difficulties in the objector's plan—and by showing its untenableness—construct a negative argument against his position. It is incumbent upon him to give us some system which will meet all the difficulties of the case, and failing to do this,

we are left to conclude that all his objections are vain. The very fact—if it is a fact—that while the necessity of this duty is admitted on the one hand—he utterly fails to provide a system adequate to the wants of the case—is conclusive evidence against him. Allowing, then, the existence of many incidental evils in our existing system, which nevertheless commends itself substantially to a large portion of the church, we will proceed to show there are difficulties as great, if not actually insurmountable, connected with the proposed substitute.

What, then, I ask, is the case where difficulties are to be met? It is simply this: The world is given to our church, in common with others, as a field to be cultivated for the Lord of the harvest. The heathen world is, according to our ability, to be provided with the preaching of the gospel, and all other things necessary to its full success. The present wants of our own country also, are to be met, by a continually increasing supply of good and faithful ministers. These claims require for their fulfilment, the education of candidates for the sacred office—and the sending forth and sustaining them when ready to enter upon their various fields of labour. For the accomplishment of this work which is of such evident greatness, the co-operation and assistance of every church is required to supply the men and the means—and in addition to this, some agency by which these men and this means may be disposed of to the best advantage, and by which all the operations involved in carrying out such a plan may be conducted under the most watchful responsibility, and with the greatest possible economy. Let any one for a moment consider the details implied in the prosecution of this entire work—the extent of the field to be overlooked and accurately surveyed—the number of the ministers to be sent forth—the number of candidates to be brought forward—the incalculable difficulties connected with their preparation, the sending forth, the locating, and the supervisions of these labourers in the vineyard—the indisposition of our churches to exercise liberality, and yet the absolute necessity of an unfailing supply of means—the wisdom, prudence, and toil, involved in the management and out-lay of the funds—and the daily and hourly demands which are made upon the church by these innumerable calls from all quarters for immediate direction, assistance and co-operation. Let any one fairly consider these things in connexion with the department of education, or of domestic missions, or of foreign missions—or of publication—or of our seminaries of instruction, and he will at once perceive how vast is the end to be attained, and how

wisely adapted must be the means for its attainment. Let it also be remembered that all these claims come upon the church in every period of the year—at all times—and in urgent demand for their immediate consideration and provision. Let it also be borne in mind, that the change of circumstances continually requires a change in the arrangements of the benevolent operations of the church. It will be thus most certain and evident that for the wise management of these operations, a permanent body of some kind, entrusted with discretionary powers, is absolutely necessary. If, therefore, as is admitted, the church is imperatively required to carry forward these enterprizes, then are some ecclesiastical bodies separate and distinct from the ordinary courts of the church not only occasionally and for a short term indispensably required.

Now, what is the system proposed as a substitute for our existing one. "It has been frequently admitted," says our objector, "that while everything connected with the spiritual aspects of domestic and foreign missions falls appropriately within the province of the Presbytery, there is no adequate arrangements in our book for conducting the pecuniary matters of the various stations with efficiency and success. This we apprehend, is a great mistake. In the first place, the Constitution expressly provides that the judicatory sending out any missionary, must support him—(Form of Government, chap. 18.) In the second place, the book provides that our churches should be furnished with a class of officers for the express purpose of attending to the temporal matters of the church, and these deacons might be made the collecting agents of the Presbytery in every congregation, and through them the necessary funds could be easily obtained and without expense. For transmission to foreign parts, nothing more would be necessary than simply to employ some extensive merchant in any of our large cities, who for the usual percentage would attend to the whole matter, or a committee of deacons appointed by the Assembly for the purpose. So far, then, as the collection and disbursement of funds are concerned, our Constitution has made most abundant provisions."

"We know of nothing which more strikingly illustrates the practical wisdom of the Divine provision of the deacons as collecting agents in each congregation, than the fact, that after long and mature experience, the American Board has recommended the appointment of similar agents in each congregation contributing to its funds as the most successful method of increasing its resources. Our book, however, does not confine deacons to particular congregations. There

should be a competent number of them in each particular church, but we insist upon it, that Presbyteries, Synods and the General Assembly should also have deacons to attend to their pecuniary matters. Those ordained at Jerusalem were not confined to a specific congregation, but acted for the whole college of apostles. By entrusting all pecuniary matters into the hands of men ordained under solemn sanctions for the purpose, our spiritual courts would soon cease to be, what they are to an alarming extent, at present, mere corporations for secular business. If all our boards were converted into mere benches of deacons, commissioned only to disburse funds under the direction of the spiritual courts, there would be no serious ground of objection to them; but in their present form they are lords and masters of the whole church. They are virtually the head of the church—their will is law—their authority irresistible; and they combine what God has separated, the purse and the keys.”—p. 151.

Such, then, is the system which after a year's agitation of this subject—after the fullest discussion—and the maturest reflection of one of the most capable minds—is to be substituted for our present ecclesiastical organizations. I have given it in his own words and in its full development, and would invite for it the most careful and impartial consideration. Let it be supposed unobjectionable and free from all censure on the ground of its innovating character. Let it be estimated simply in reference to its adaptation to the difficulties of the case. Bring, then, before your mind the outline already given. Contemplate all the interests involved in our missionary enterprizes foreign and domestic; in our education of the youth of our church who are destined to the sacred ministry; in the preparation and publication of works suited to the wants of our ministers, churches, and the community at large. And when you have spread out before you, these various portions of the one great field of labour which it is the duty of the church to exercise, then contrast with the work to be done the means here provided for its accomplishment.

In the first place, none are to be sent out into any department of this field but such as are deputed by some particular judicatory, to which and to which alone they are to look for their support. In the second place, as the instruments for procuring these necessary funds, no other collecting agents are to be allowed than deacons. In the third place, for the transmission of these funds to foreign parts, nothing more is to be permitted than some expensive merchant in some large city. In the fourth place, as standing bodies, “commissioned only to disburse funds under the direction of the

spiritual courts," we are to have "benches of deacons" instead of our several boards. In this form, says the objector, "there would be no serious objection to any of our boards."

I fearlessly stake the issue of this controversy upon the single question—Is this system of means adequate to the wants—or does it in any measure meet the difficulties of the case? Would any merchant in this mercantile country, entrust to such an agency the accomplishment of such ends, involving such interests, and requiring for their management such continual oversight, such deliberative wisdom? Would any sensible and prudent minded Christian man commit the affairs of our missionary boards, with their hundreds of employed missionaries—their numerous churches—and their continually increasing openings for enlarged usefulness,—or our board of education with hundreds of young men in its watch and care—or our board of publication, with all the responsibilities it involves—during the twelve months that intervene between one meeting of the Assembly and another—to "a bench of deacons commissioned only to disburse funds," which funds are to be raised only by deacons within the bounds of each several congregation? I will venture to say there is not a man to be found who believes in the necessity and importance of the ends to be attained by these several boards, and who is anxious for its accomplishment, that would adopt the system here proposed as in any measure adequate to such ends.

It is maintained by the objector, "that our Saviour constituted his church with a special reference to missionary operations," (page 157,) therefore the church is under obligation to carry on such operations by the best and most effective agency. But is this system such an agency? Are all the responsibilities which are inseparable from the conduct of these several departments of benevolent effort to be thrown upon a bench of deacons who are by the very supposition limited to the single object of disbursing funds? Most plain it is that these operations cannot sustain themselves. Money—the funds requisite for their support—these, however important, are not the moving principle—the life or soul of such enterprizes. They require supervision, direction, and control. These moral influences are even more necessary than the physical resources. The latter may exist and yet may the enterprize fail, just as there may be machinery and water and yet no motion where there is no superintending mind to bring these elements into such a combination as to produce and preserve that motion. Let, then, our several operations be committed to such a bench of deacons,

restricted in their powers to the mere supply of funds, and they must run down in a single year. Confusion must ensue. They will be inevitably paralysed.

There is to our minds, no adaptation in the system here proposed of the means to the end. It is perfectly chimerical. It bases a system of practical operation upon a mere theoretical hypothesis. It assumes a self-controlling, self-perpetuating principle, to exist somewhere or somehow within these operations. It attributes to our several judicatories a foresight and wisdom which can provide for the thousand contingencies which may arise during the course of every year, and that they could make all those provisional arrangements in the course of a brief session which now occupy busily during the entire year, our several officers and committees. It assumes that the funds will be voluntarily forthcoming from all our churches in every portion of the church. It seems to imply that such benches of deacons, and such general treasurers can be found to devote themselves to such agencies and duties, and to do so gratuitously. The whole scheme is built upon hypothesis and the most Utopian and gratuitous assumptions. It sets at defiance all consequences—all the calculations of prudence—and all the lessons of experience. It would pull clown, subvert and destroy existing institutions, before it has erected others to supply their place, and while there are no materials and no workmen by which such buildings can be possibly erected. The question then being whether our present system of agencies shall be suspended or this scheme be adopted—the alternative most assuredly is—the rejection of this hypothesis, or the suspension of all the benevolent operations of our church.

As early as the year 1802, the General Assembly found it impossible during the term of its sessions to devote to these operations the time and attention demanded for their successful prosecution. The Assembly therefore appointed a standing committee, to whom was entrusted the proper management of all their missionary affairs. For similar reasons in the year 1816, this committee was succeeded in their own recommendation by a board, to whom this whole business was handed over. That board has continued in succession until the present time, while the particular fields of education, of foreign missions, and of publication, have been respectively entrusted to the special oversight of special boards. Against this whole system, our objectors protest. They are, therefore, evidently bound to provide a substitute of more certain efficiency and power. And having, as we have just seen, utterly failed in this attempt, their objections fall to the ground, and our church is under obligation to con-

tinue her present system for the accomplishment of her necessary work.

Such is our conclusion on the supposition that the system here proposed is scriptural and proper. We now proceed to show, however, that this is not the case, and that this scheme is not only a novelty—an innovation—inexpedient—and destructive of all our benevolent operations—but that it is also unscriptural and unconstitutional. It is unscriptural. It cannot be traced to the scriptures directly. It cannot be deduced from them by necessary inference. It is therefore to be “denounced as a human invention.” But still, if it could be made to appear the wisest means to secure an end which the scriptures do make necessary, and for securing which no exact system of means is there provided in detail, it might be expedient and proper. But it is not only unsupported by positive scripture enactment, it is, we think, clearly contrary to scripture. The scripture teaches us that deacons were instituted officers of particular churches and for the single purpose of taking care of the poor, and of distributing among them the collections which were raised for their use. That deacons are recognized in scripture only as the officers of a particular church, we never before heard questioned. Nor is it at all necessary to establish this fact until some plausible evidence can be produced against it. Our objector does, indeed, affirm that “those ordained at Jerusalem were not confined to a specific congregation, but acted for the whole college of the apostles”—p. 151. We can hardly think this writer was serious when he made such a declaration. Does he mean to say that these deacons were appointed as ministers to the apostles, so as that when they left Jerusalem and were dispersed throughout the world, these deacons acted for the whole college of apostles? Did they accompany the apostles in their missionary tours as their attendant deacons? Manifestly not. They remained with the church at Jerusalem, to whose interests they were devoted. And doubtless as the churches increased in that city, other deacons were appointed to take charge of the poor connected with them. There is not a particle of evidence in the New Testament to support the idea that deacons were officers in the church Catholic and not officers of some particular church. There is positive testimony to the contrary, since they are enumerated among the officers in particular churches—(Phil. i. 1; 1 Tim. iii.)—and since the specific duty devolved upon them is only consistent with such a special change.

To make deacons, then, the officers of Presbyteries and Synods, is to create new officers unknown to scripture, and

to constitute benches of deacons for the purpose of disbursing funds for missionary and other operations, however proper such employment may be in itself considered, is nevertheless to assign to them duties not given in the word of God; and for which nothing like a precept can be any where discovered. The Bible knows nothing of deacons but as officers appointed in each particular church, for the single purpose of taking care of the poor, and distributing among them the collections raised for their use—(Acts vi. 1, 2.) This scheme, therefore, is wholly unsupported by scripture.

It is also unconstitutional. It contravenes the letter and the spirit of our standards. It assigns to deacons a character and duties which are unknown to those standards. What are deacons, according to our "Form of Government?" In chapter sixth it is taught—"The Scriptures clearly point out deacons as distinct officers in the church, whose business it is to take care of the poor, and to distribute among them the collections which may be raised for their use. To them also may be properly committed the management of the temporal affairs of the church."

In chapter thirteen it is said, "Every congregation shall elect persons ... to the office of deacon ... in the mode most approved in that congregation. But in all cases the persons elected must be made members in full communion in the church in which they are to exercise their office."—(§. ii.; see also §. vi.)

Deacons are thus expressly and repeatedly denominated the officers of a particular congregation, and they are never recognized in any other character throughout our entire standards. They are limited to a particular church, and they are not known beyond it. They are to act only under the direction and control of the session. They are not even empowered to raise funds, certainly not by their own independent authority. They are to "distribute the collections which MAY BE RAISED for their use." Our standards very judiciously add, as an inferential conclusion from the preceding, that "to them may be properly (tho' not as enjoined by any explicit scripture or as in itself necessary*) committed the management of the temporal affairs of the church." That deacons are not empowered of themselves to raise collections is farther evinced by the declaration in chapter vii., (Form of Gov.,) where "making collections for the poor and other pious purposes," is ranked among the ordinances of a

*Therefore does our church allow each congregation to manage its temporal affairs according to its own wisdom.

particular church, and of course under the direction of the session or the ministers and elders of that church.

To appoint deacons, therefore, "as collecting agents of the Presbytery, in every congregation," is to interfere with the established authority and duties of church sessions, through whom alone any such appointment can be constitutionally made. And to institute "a committee of deacons appointed by the Assembly" for "the transmission of funds to foreign parts," would be an interference with the provisions of the constitution, and as it regards the nature of the office thus assigned—the officers to whom it is given—and the body by which the appointment is made. No such duties can be constitutionally assigned to deacons, as deacons, nor by the Assembly as such, since it cannot remove from particular churches their particular officers without their full consent.

"If all our boards," therefore, "were," as this writer desires, "converted into mere benches of deacons . . . there would be" the most "serious ground of objection to them" on the score of constitutional propriety. Such boards or benches would be as certainly an innovation—a new court, or office in the church—as they would be utterly insufficient with the limited powers entrusted to them, for carrying on her operations. Our present boards are objected to because unknown to scripture and to our standards, and therefore as implying a defective constitution. But in framing a substitutionary system of agencies for the accomplishment of the necessary work, we have the creation of not less than three new officers unknown to scripture and to our standards. We have first in every Presbytery an order of permanent agents for the purpose of collecting funds in every congregation. To call these deacons, is a perfect misnomer and founded on the most gratuitous assumptions. Secondly, we are to have several merchant officers in our large cities, "who for the usual percentage would attend to the whole matter" of transmitting funds, and with whose accounts, salary, expenditures, defaults, &c. &c, our ecclesiastical judicatories are to be regularly occupied. And thirdly, we are to have boards consisting of men here called deacons, but which might be as well called aldermen, "commissioned only to disburse funds under the direction of the spiritual courts." As described on page 158, it does not appear to be even necessary that such a board of finance should consist of ordained officers at all. "The funds thus raised could either be transmitted by mercantile agents of the Presbytery, or by a central committee of the Assembly, consisting of *business men* charged only with executive duties," &c.

Here, then, are three new officers alike unknown to scripture and to our standards. Here we have provision made for the monetary department of our benevolent operations, a department which requires indeed, as much authority as any other, while it communicates to its managers more influence; but for the superintendence and direction of the spiritual and moral interests involved we are to have no provision whatever. These are to take care of themselves. It is not possible for our judicatories to arrange the monetary concerns of their several operations for a year, without several new offices and officers, while it is possible for them to provide every contingency affecting the moral bearings of their missionaries, their missions, their young men and their publications.

I confess the whole scheme appears to my mind preposterous in the extreme. It is, as I view it, altogether visionary, and in no degree adapted to the necessities of the case. And since our objectors have been again and again required to produce some substituted agency more conformable to scripture and more likely to secure the ends in view than those already established, and this is the only result of long and frequent meditation—our conclusion is that no such system, can be devised, and that while our existing system may be open to objection and may be susceptible of many improvements, it is notwithstanding necessary, proper, and to be faithfully preserved.

Sufficient has been said in order to expose the untenableness of the ground taken against our ecclesiastical organizations. Every reasonable mind will resolve against their destruction until some better system, free from the objections urged against the present, can be devised. Every such mind will conclude that since our benevolent operations must be sustained and carried forward, the existing agency must be maintained, unless it can be shown that those operations can be carried on by other means, and with increased energy and zeal. Our argument, therefore, might be here closed. But we are willing to meet the objections against our existing system, face to face, and sure we are, they will be found invalid, or altogether inapplicable.

What, then, is the real object of attack on the one hand and of defence on the other? Let our objector answer. "We do not," he says, (p. 146,) "object to this system" of ecclesiastical organizations, "on account of any slight or accidental evils which wisdom and experience may remove without affecting the essential elements of the system itself. Such evils or rather abuses exist. They are to be found in those regulations by which honorary membership is pur-

chased for money, an enormity similar to the sin of Simon Magus, for which he met the rebuke of the apostle; in their tendency to perpetuate themselves; and in the very partial amount of real investigation to which their proceedings are ever subjected. These are objections to the present plan on which our Boards are organized, but they lie not so much against the system itself as against partial and accidental abuses. The objections which have influenced our minds are radical and fundamental. We believe that the system in its essential principles is directly subversive of the Constitution of our church, unknown to the word of God, and unsupported by any arguments of expediency or necessity which can commend it to the understanding of a Christian man."

So also in his introduction, the writer speaks of "this system of measures which certainly has no surer foundations than that of prescription;" while in his conclusion he says, "we can have no reason to expect the assistance of the Lord, when we have trampled his institutions in the dust."

That, therefore, against which objections are now raised, and which we undertake to defend, is not our present ecclesiastical organizations in all their details, but only in their essential principles or elements. We do not, therefore, say that every part of our present system ought to be, or that it is necessary, it should be retained. The regulation by which honorary membership is purchased for money, may be safely abolished. To this we should not object. The tendency of our boards to perpetuate themselves, may be checked by any reasonable regulations. Their proceedings may be made the subject of a closer investigation until every one shall be abundantly satisfied. The boards and their committees may be merged into a single body—responsible directly to the Assembly—and in every respect subject to its control. And if there be any other evils, or defects in the present system, we are abundantly willing that they should be rectified. None of these things constitute the subject of our present controversy. We demand for our ecclesiastical agency no powers inconsistent with the supremacy of the Assembly or the spirit of our standards. The single question is whether for carrying on her missionary and other operations, the Assembly may scripturally and constitutionally appoint any body to whom shall be entrusted the management of these various operations during the intervals which elapse between the yearly sessions of that judicatory. This is the single question. That the Assembly has such power, is the only point for which we contend, and it is as plainly the principle against which the objector utters such a withering

condemnation. That the Assembly has such authority he denies—and we affirm;—“whatever, therefore,” he says, “is not done by elders and ministers, assembled in some one of the courts above mentioned, is not done by them as *Presbyterians*. It is only in these courts that we recognize the church as an organized body. Here, and here alone, do we find Presbyterianism. Now, we maintain that the system of boards gives us a set of officers and a set of ecclesiastical courts entirely different from those of the constitution.”—(See p. 147.)

The evils, abuses, or defects attributed to our existing boards, but which are separable from them—are not therefore to be considered in the present argument. These are fair matters for a separate discussion. But the propriety and necessity of boards or committees of any kind for the management of the various benevolent operations in which the church is engaged, with power to carry into execution any plans which it is competent for her to undertake—this, we repeat, is the question before us. We are thus earnest in calling attention to this point, which is so clearly laid down by the objector himself, because in a subsequent part of his discussion, he argues against our organization on the ground that the boards as distinct from the committees, are unnecessary. This question is, however, very different from the general principle, and one which is to be decided on very different grounds.

Such an agency, call it either a board or a committee, as he maintains, is “directly subversive of the form of government embodied in the constitution of our own church.” “These courts (i. e. Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly) are treated in our constitution as abundantly adequate to meet all the exigencies of the church, and to do all that God requires her to do in her ecclesiastical capacity.” It is, therefore, argued that since these agencies or boards are neither Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, or General Assembly, the Assembly in appointing them transcends the powers given to it by the constitution.

Now, in contrariety to this, we affirm that such boards, agencies, or committees, with such powers, and for such ends, are necessary to carry out the purposes for **which** the Assembly itself was organized, and are therefore constitutional; and that some such agency is contemplated by our standards, and is, therefore, to be considered as in unquestionable accordance with them.

We lay it down as a universal principle that the imposition of any duty implies the correspondent right to use such means as are necessary to its discharge. Where any

constitution, civil or sacred, requires from its officers the discharge of any functions, or the attainment of certain ends, it at the same time gives the power necessary to carry such provisions into effect. This principle has been admitted in our political controversies by the strictest sect of our most rigid constructionists. Upon this principle our church also, acted in her late crisis, and with its certain propriety must all her famous acts and the present reformation of the church stand or fall. Now, our church courts, and especially the General Assembly, are, as is admitted, under certain obligation to secure those important ends which are contemplated by our several benevolent operations. They are most assuredly bound to the utmost of their ability and in the very best manner possible, to provide for the education of young men for the work of the ministry—for the instruction of the people generally—and for sending the gospel where it is not enjoyed, as well in our country as in foreign lands.— (See Form of Gov. ch. xviii.) Such, then, being the duty imposed upon the General Assembly in particular, as the organ of the church, that body is necessarily empowered to order all the details of her plan of operations guided and restrained by the general principles of the Constitution. But as the General Assembly remains in session but for a very short period, and the necessity for continuous direction, supervision and assistance continues during the whole year, it is most obvious that either these operations must be wholly abandoned, which would be on the supposition sinful, or else some board, committee or agency must be entrusted with their management under a responsibility to that body. And as the supply of funds constitutes only one object for which such a body is necessary, and a general superintendence and control are still more necessary and important, this body must be entrusted not only with the power of disbursing funds, but also with the power to carry into execution all the plans of the Assembly, and with the entire management of its various operations. Now, whatever may be found in the constitution of our several boards which can be shown to be unnecessary for these ends, for any such features in their organization we do not contend. They are fairly open to discussion, and may be retained or abandoned as shall be thought most conducive to the peace and prosperity of the church. But to dissolve our several boards, and to limit the power of direct control over the various benevolent operations of the church, in all their details, to the single periods of the sessions of any ecclesiastical judicatory, is at once and utterly to destroy them. It is to render their maintenance an impossibility. And since their

vigorous prosecution is imperatively required, the argument which leads to such conclusions must be fallacious, and our boards in their essential and radical principles must be constitutional.

This reasonable conclusion is forced upon us not only by the consideration of those necessary ends for whose attainment the Assembly and our other judicatories are held responsible, but also by certain provisions which are expressly contained in our written standards. The power to organize such boards for the better accomplishment of required duties, is implied in the very constitution of the General Assembly. The Assembly is to “constitute the bond of union, peace, correspondence, and mutual confidence among all our churches,” and this it does by organizations for the wise conduct of those benevolent operations in which all the churches are equally interested. The Assembly is “to superintend the concerns of the whole church” and “to promote charity, truth, holiness, through all the churches under their care”—and this it does by such plans of benevolence as will best cultivate these Christian graces, and open up to them the freest, the sweetest and the most economical channels for the communication of their gifts. The organization of such boards or agencies is in so many words, referred to the Assembly in our Form of Government, and in the chapter “of missions” (xviii). In this chapter, every needy congregation is taught that it is proper for it to look to the General Assembly, for such assistance as it can afford, to enable that congregation to enjoy the frequent administration of the word and ordinances. But to meet all such claims—to examine into them—to provide the men and the means—and to do this effectually and throughout the year, the Assembly must devise some plan by which she can discharge these all-important duties. And thus will that body be necessarily required to organize some board in all essential principles equivalent to the present Board of Domestic Missions, nor is it possible to meet the wants of the case without such a standing body.

Further. It is here taught that “the General Assembly may of their own knowledge, send missionaries to any part (or to any country) to plant churches or to supply vacancies, and for this purpose,” &c.—*See Form of Gov.*

Now, in this provision of our book, there is given to the Assembly, as will be at once apparent, all the powers requisite for the formation of a distinct agency for the management of its foreign missions. For the field being the world, and the obligation being limited only by the ability of the church, there is evidently no assignable boundaries to the

extent of our missionary operations. There may be under the care of the Assembly, hundreds of churches and ministers in various parts of the world. And how, in the name of common sense, is the Assembly, during one brief session, to provide for all the interests involved in such operations for a whole year. The very statement of the case makes palpably demonstrative the constitutional power here given to that body for the organization of a board, appointed by itself for the effectual oversight and management of such extensive operations.

This is made further evident by the concluding declaration of this chapter of our constitution, which applies generally to Presbyteries, Synods, or the Assembly. It is competent to any of these bodies to send missionaries, "provided always," &c.—*See Form of Government.*

It is thus determined that our missionary operations shall be sustained by the body conducting them, which is here required to make every provision necessary not only for their support, but also for that more generous recompence which is implied in the word reward. The Assembly, therefore, is thus obligated to provide for all the wants of all her missionaries and missions. But this it cannot do by its own direct agency, or during its own sessions. As, however, "qui facit per alium facit per se," the Assembly can appoint a board to whom it can entrust the supervision of this work, which is nothing more nor less than our Board of Foreign Missions, in its essential principles. That board, however, implies great labour and responsibility. It requires the continual and toilsome efforts of most trustworthy and pious men—and since the church is equally bound to bear the expense necessary to secure the result as that which is involved in the result itself, so is it most just and reasonable that the Assembly should "provide for the support and reward" of its own agents (call them secretaries or any thing else) "in the performance of this service."

The same reasoning applies with equal force to the other branches of that benevolent enterprize which it is the sacred duty of the church to carry on with ever increasing energy.

That it is competent for the Assembly to organize such an agency, may be further argued from the admissions made by our objectors themselves. "The temporary agency of a pastor for a specific purpose," says the author of the *Calm Discussion*, "we acknowledge to be Scriptural." Now, suppose the necessity involved in that specific purpose to continue and to press its claims with increasing weight upon that minister—and upon the church. Suppose those claims are entitled to be heard and attended to by the authority of

Christ's commission given to the church. What, we ask, is the church to do? Is she not bound to continue such appointments so long as God in his providence presents to her the same wants to be supplied, and the same necessity to be met? If such an appointment for such benevolent ends, when the demand for it is temporary, is Scriptural, then assuredly a similar appointment, when the demand for it is permanent, cannot be unscriptural. The church has a certain duty to discharge, and she must therefore see that it is discharged. And if it is in any case scriptural and proper to appoint pastors to certain fields of labour as most suitable for its successful cultivation, then it is as plainly scriptural to continue such appointments until the work is done. And as in the present state of our country and the world, the work to be done, is beyond the utmost capacity of our church, and requires incessant labour, there must necessarily be those in office whose duty it is to labour continually in it. Again, this writer tells us that the funds raised for these benevolent operations, "could either be transmitted by mercantile agents of the Presbytery, or by a central committee! of the Assembly, consisting of business men, charged only with executive duties and not entrusted with discretionary power." He has also given us a scheme of his own for the accomplishment of these ends which we have already examined. Now, here the principle for which we contend, is certainly admitted. It is granted that some agency is necessary. It is granted that that agency must be distinct from the Assembly,—and it is granted that the Assembly may and of right ought to institute such an agency. But while he would confine it to the management of funds merely, we would extend it to the far more important and moral interests involved in these glorious enterprizes, of Christian charity. While he would make it a committee of finance., we would clothe them with spiritual and moral responsibilities becoming the work for whose prosperity they are needed. While he would invent a new class of officers, called deacons of Presbyteries, and deacons of Synods, and Deacons of the Assembly, and combine these into new bodies and assign to them extra constitutional duties; we would construct such important bodies out of constitutional materials, and select ministers and elders who are by divine right spiritual governors and overseers of the interests of the church—to whom the powers necessary for such a management of these operations are given by our Constitution—who are fit and proper members of our ecclesiastical courts—and to whom, therefore, such weighty responsibilities may be fitly given.

I will now notice as briefly as possible the several objections urged by this writer, against the Presbyterian character of our existing boards.

And, first, it is said they “give us a set of officers and a set of ecclesiastical courts entirely different from those of our constitution.” Now, to say nothing of the inappropriateness of such an allegation in the mouth of one whose proposed substitute implies the creation of “a new set of officers, and a new set of courts,” we deny the truth of the representation. Our corresponding secretaries—our general agents—and the members of our several boards are not new officers. They are not inducted into any new office. They are not clothed with any new character. They receive no new commission, nor any repeated ordination. They are the ministers and elders of our churches. They are chosen as such, and because they are such. Because they are officers of the church, they are placed in responsible situations by the church, and called upon to manage the most important operations which are conducted by the church. Neither do they cease to be elders or ministers by becoming officially related to our Boards. On the contrary, while the elders are still at their several posts—the ministers are expected and required, in the furtherance of their duties, to preach with frequency. They are most properly called ministers, since they serve the church and the cause of Christ by furthering their highest interests. It is hazarding nothing to declare that the ministers who have occupied these responsible situations, have fulfilled the work of the ministry in the proclamation of the ever blessed gospel and the edification of the churches—as effectually, as they could have done in any particular change, or as is done by our ministers generally. Besides, the objection would apply equally to all ministers who are professors in our colleges or theological seminaries,—at any rate, since it proves too much, and is founded on the mistaken supposition that when removed from a ministerial charge, such officers are removed from ministerial employment, or to some other work, than the work and duties of the church which she is under obligation to discharge—it proves nothing at all, and must be thrown aside.

But it is also objected that such boards are new ecclesiastical courts which come “in direct and unavoidable collision with the authority of the courts acknowledged by our standards.” Now, by an ecclesiastical court, I understand “an assembly of those who have the original and inherent power or authority of executing laws and distributing justice according to the constitution, and “in general, to order

whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the churches under their care.”* But as thus defined, our several boards are not ecclesiastical courts, but merely agencies for those courts already established. They neither claim nor possess original and inherent powers. They do not pretend by virtue of any such authority to execute laws and distribute justice. Nor do they assume any such prerogative as the ordering of whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the churches. These boards have no such powers whatever. They have no original, inherent or independent existence at all. They are the offspring of our highest ecclesiastical court—created by it—responsible to it—existing only at its will—performing only its work—and restraining in every thing by the code of laws sanctioned by that body. And as they have no original authority, so neither have they any final powers. Their business is unfinished until it receives the imprimatur of the Assembly, by which it *must* be reviewed, and by which it *may* be reversed or altered. They are merely the agents—the hands—the organs of the body, by which it wields its own power. Such an agency our standards recognize and our objector allows. In short, these boards, reviewed in their essential principle, are precisely what the writer defines to be committees. “They are appointed for two purposes, to prepare and arrange business for the body which appoints them, and to execute specific trusts by the order and direction of that body to which they are responsible.” They every year submit to the Assembly plans for future operation—and the record of their transactions according to the trust reposed in them during the year preceding. Our boards, therefore, are just such committees. They are and they ought to be no more, nor do we ask for them any greater power. That the board and the committee are now separate, is a feature in their organization which might be easily changed, and their identification with this definition of a committee be made as perfect in form as it is in fact.

But, says our author, “the possession and exercise of power distinguish a court.” But this clearly is not the case. This cannot be the definition of a court. These attributes may characterize a thousand things besides a court. They are descriptive of all Committees appointed either by our Presbyteries, Synods, or Assembly—and of our Boards of Directors. A court must have original and inherent authority appertaining to the laws of the society, and which are administered by it. And therefore are we forced to the conclusion that our boards are committees of a peculiar organization, and for objects of permanent necessity, and that they are not ecclesiastical courts.

*See an Ecclesiastical Catechism of the Presbyterian Church, chapter iv.

It is objected further, that “these institutions have the whole matter of preaching the gospel to the destitute and ignorant at home and abroad, entrusted to their charge”—“in other words, the power and jurisdiction granted by the constitution to the Presbyteries and vested by the Assembly in its own creatures.”

That our boards may not possess some powers which ought not to be committed to them, we do not affirm. If they do, let them be deprived of them, and at once reduced to constitutional limits. But that this representation is entirely visionary, we are perfectly assured. Our objector himself allows that our boards do not lay any claim to many of the chiefest branches of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. He allows that they cannot ordain—and that they cannot institute actual process for crime or heresy. But they are authorized “to *appoint* all missionaries and agents, and to designate their fields of labour.” Most certainly this is the very work which they are designed to do, in trust for the Assembly, and responsible to it. But let it be observed, these boards (we speak now of the missionary boards) have nothing whatever to do with such individuals until they are already tried, licensed or ordained by their respective Presbyteries. From the hands of these Presbyteries are they received by the boards, and unless so commissioned and authenticated, neither of the boards could receive them at all. Let it also be observed that when thus presented to them, our boards only *appoint*—they do not examine, license, or ordain as do our ecclesiastical courts. They *appoint* them as already ministers, and not in order to their becoming ministers. And this *appointment* of the boards refers merely to their field of labour, and not at all to their qualifications for the work of the ministry. The Assembly contemplating these numerous missions, requires its boards, in its name and by its authority, to act for it in this important matter. In this there is no infraction whatever of the rights of Presbyteries. Their authority remains undiminished. The boards can receive no man until the Presbytery has sealed his fitness by the impress of its solemn consecration, and in designating individuals so commissioned to their fields of labour, these boards only comply with the wishes of every Presbytery, through their common organ, the General Assembly. But should any Presbytery commence a mission of its own, it is at perfect liberty to select its field, and to appoint its men in entire independence upon either of these boards. As to domestic missions, each Presbytery may superintend its own field, and while acting through the Board, have the most perfect control of its entire management. And as it regards the foreign field, it is to be remarked that this field, lying beyond the limits of any Presbytery, cannot of course, be under their jurisdiction. It is hence incumbent upon the Board, on behalf of the church,

to take the oversight thereof, until a sufficient number of missionaries have been sent out to constitute a Presbytery. In this event, that distant territory is assigned to the newly erected Presbytery, and comes under its ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

Equally inapplicable is the objection that our Boards interfere with the parity of the clergy, and invest their officers with a control over their brethren, and a power in the church just as real and just as dangerous as that of a prelate!! That undue influence may be exerted by the officers of our boards, we grant, that is, their trust may be abused for their own personal aggrandizement. But would this influence be lessened by the appointment of benches or boards of deacons, and financial dictators under the style of treasurers, with unlimited control of the funds? Or would it be in any great measure removed, were this work to be conducted through the year, as it must be by some body or other, by a commission of the Assembly, instead of a board of the Assembly? Let, then, this power be guarded and restrained in every possible and proper manner, but let not an evil which is incidental, be made a sufficient ground for the abandonment of a most necessary office. It is perfectly idle to frighten us with the imaginary picture of new orders in these ecclesiastical functionaries. They are and can be no other than simple ministers or elders, nor is any individual subjected to their personal authority, or excluded from the privilege of presenting any symptoms of arbitrary conduct for the reprobation of the General Assembly.

It is further objected that by the organization of these boards for the management of these benevolent operations, the church ceases to conduct them in her appropriate character as required by her divine Head. But is not our church represented in her General Assembly? Does she not empower this body to conduct these operations? Does she not now in fact, leave **their** entire management and supervision to its legislative wisdom, in dependence upon the separate co-operation of all the churches, Presbyteries and Synods within her bounds? And is it not plainly impossible for the Assembly, or for all our courts together, to enter into all the details involved in the management of these operations, during their annual and brief sessions? But still they must be attended to, and by the Assembly in its appropriate character. The Assembly, therefore, appoints an agency to attend to these matters during **its** adjournment, and to report in full at its next sessions. This appointment is annually renewed—the reports heard—and all needful directions given. These agencies or boards acting for the Assembly—and under its authority—and for the accomplishment of its work, which could not otherwise possibly be done, are properly in the eyes of the constitution and of reason.

the church, by her Assembly fulfilling the trust committed to her by her glorious Head.

Our ecclesiastical boards are, therefore, necessary to carry out the provisions of the constitution—they contravene no principle or law of our standards. Being the creatures of the Assembly, and dependent upon its yearly appointments, and subject to its entire control, they may be in every thing conformed to the wishes of the church, and are, therefore to be regarded as eminently Presbyterian in their character, and worthy of the most entire confidence, and the most zealous support of every one who loves the church of his fathers—the true model of primitive and apostolic Christianity.

If the ends contemplated by our ecclesiastical organizations are necessary and all important—if to secure these ends some agency besides the authoritative legislation of our ecclesiastical courts is also essential—if the system of means proposed by the objectors to our present Boards is wholly insufficient to meet the difficulties of the case, and in itself seriously objectionable—then are our present Boards, in their essential principles to be retained, however they may be modified. That our standards empower the General Assembly to engage in those benevolent operations whose management is entrusted to our Boards, has been made apparent. That some such agency as our Boards is absolutely required by the Assembly, for their oversight and direction, has been also proved; while the futility of all objections against their constitutionality has been briefly exposed.

These Boards are, however, objected to on the very serious ground of their unscripturalness. “Now the total silence of the word of God in regard to such contrivances, seals their condemnation. Nay they are virtually prohibited by those plain directions of the Scriptures in regard to church government, which lead directly to a different system.” “The church is to add nothing of her own, and to subtract nothing from what her Lord has established. Discretionary power she does not possess.”

It is necessary, therefore, to show that such ecclesiastical Boards are in accordance with Scripture, and that in urging this objection, its authors proceed upon an entirely mistaken view of the real question in debate. In making this position clear, we might take two different methods. As we argue with those who acknowledge the perfect Scripturality of our standards, we might at once shut up the question. For as we have established the accordance of these Boards with our Constitution, they must necessarily be conformable to the word of God. This reasoning the objector himself admits. Or we may at once appeal to the word of God, and by exhibiting the con-

formity of these Boards with that word, thence conclude that they are certainly right, and must be supposed accordant with our ecclesiastical institutes.

Now that the Scriptures explicitly lay it down as the imperative duty of the church, to secure those ends which are contemplated by our several benevolent operations, we may assume as fully admitted. Indeed the furtherance of these objects, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, is the one great design of the church as a visible and organized body. We may also assume that this commanded duty, for which our church (that we may bring home our illustration) is responsible, can be best performed through that General Assembly which is her highest ecclesiastical court—in which all her churches and Presbyteries are represented—with which all can most conveniently cooperate—and to which the powers necessary for this purpose, are explicitly given in its Constitution. Our General Assembly, then, being, as the objector will admit, scripturally authorized and required, as the organ of the church, to prosecute to the utmost of its ability, these several branches of Christian benevolence—the only question is whether this work can be done at all, or at least done to any advantage, by the Assembly in tis own person, or whether it is necessary by the Assembly, as supreme director, guide and legislator, and several boards or agencies, which may outlive the sessions of that body and continue in vigorous operation when that body is defunct and incapable of action.

Now we unhesitatingly affirm that our general principle is as applicable here as it is to any human constitution. God having imposed upon our General Assembly, as the organ of the church, and by the desire of the church, these necessary duties which it may not neglect, but must see performed, and not having prescribed in detail the plan and measures by which these duties are to be discharged, has most certainly empowered that body, under the guidance and control of the general rules laid down in Scripture, to make use of every proper means for the successful prosecution of these Christian enterprizes. This principle we must affirm to be undeniably certain. Its rejection would lay the axe to many a fair branch of our ecclesiastical polity, and leave a bare and barren trunk behind it. It would tie up the hands and feet of our sacred polity and deprive it of all power of motion. It would emasculate it of all its strength and vigour and reduce it to a helpless and exanimate system. That which the church is required to do, she is empowered to do by all means not expressly forbidden, or implicitly countermanded, and it will not surely be pretended that the Assembly being scripturally ordained, an agency for the certain and efficient prosecution of its necessary duties, is any where so

forbidden. The church is the converter of the heathen—the regenerator of our waste and ruined world. But as represented in her General Assembly, she can act in this matter only for a few days, and therefore most imperfectly. She must, therefore, employ in subserviency to this court, subordinate agencies or boards which are therefore as plainly sanctioned by the divine word.

That “the total silence of the word of God in regard to such contrivances seals their condemnation,” or that “whatever could not be traced to them either directly or by necessary inference, is to be denounced ... as mere will-worship, which God abhors”—this principle, we say, taken in its unrestricted and absolute nakedness, would subvert the foundations of every church on earth, and leave not a wreck behind of church polity, order or arrangements. It would wipe out, as with a sponge, nine-tenths of all that is laid down in our Form of Government and Discipline. These Standards declare that this form of Government, as there delineated and drawn out into all the details of management and business, rests on the adoption of it by the church, as amended and ratified by the General Assembly in May, 1821—(See Form of Gov. B. 1, c. 1.) This whole form our church only claims “to be expedient and agreeable to Scripture,” but not so as to be exclusive of those which differ from it.—(F. of Gov. c. viii. §. 1.) For many of its specific regulations, our Book claims no express testimony from the word of God; it bases them upon the fact that they are accordant with its general principles. This we might illustrate at any length, from a consideration of the provisions respecting church Sessions—(See Form of Gov. c. ix.)—Presbyteries—(c. x.)—Synods—(c. xi.)—the General Assembly—(c. xii.)—Ruling Elders—(c. xiii.)—the Forms of Licensure, Ordination and Installation—and numberless other points. To every one of these the “total silence of the word of God” might be objected, and their condemnation sealed. The objection is evidently untenable—unsound—and utterly subversive of all liberty of action beyond the mere letter of the law. It is Judaical. It would overturn the glorious liberty of the gospel dispensation. It would again subject us to the bondage of the law—when as the objector states, “nothing connected with the worship or discipline of the church of God was left to the wisdom or discretion of man, but every thing was accurately prescribed by the authority of God.” But from this yoke of rules and ceremonies the Son of God has emancipated his church. She is now under a dispensation of principles and not of rules. The church has passed from a state of pupilage to the age of maturity. God now speaks to her as to a full grown, reasonable person. He has given to her, general laws and great funda-

mental principles. He has enjoined upon her certain great and glorious duties. By those laws she is to be restrained and guided in the exercise of her own wisdom, in devising the ways and means for the accomplishment of the greatest good in the best possible manner. This is most assuredly the doctrine of our Standards, as has been already practically demonstrated, and as may be preceptively declared. In the opening chapter of our Confession of Faith, and while treating on one of the most essential points in the whole Book, the following principle is maintained: "There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church, common to human actions and societies," as, for instance, the detailed plan by which any prescribed duty shall be best accomplished, "which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word which are always to be observed"—(ch. 1, §. vi.) So also in treating of Synods, which include our General Assembly, our Confession teaches us that "it belongeth to Synods to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and the government of the church"—(ch. xxxi.

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Such, also, was the view taken of this matter by all the reformers—and by the non-conformists even, the most strict constructionists among them. Our objector is here certainly mistaken. He confounds things which differ. He confounds that which is necessary as an article of faith—or as a means of grace—or as an important and enjoined part of the worship of God—with that which is necessary as a means for the accomplishment of a duty which is confessedly required in God's word or included under the general provisions of the church. The imposition of the former, the Reformers—the Puritans—the Non-Conformists, and our Presbyterian fathers, steadfastly resisted as a treasonable usurpation of the kingly prerogatives of the Head of the church. They contended against the assumed power authoritatively to interpret the Bible, and declare what is truth, and to decree rites and ceremonies as a necessary part of the worship of God—and to make forms and orders essential to the being of the church, in opposition to both Romanists and prelatists, when needs were—even unto blood. And right sure we are, that their spirit has not died with them, but is even now burning in the hearts of their honoured successors, who would exultingly bear testimony for this liberty of God's ransomed church, even on the scaffold or at the stake. But the framing of articles of faith—and the imposition of means of grace, with rites, orders and ceremonies, as parts of God's holy worship, is one thing, and the power to carry out the acknowledged provisions of the gospel and the commanded

duties which are imposed by divine authority on the church—by the wisest and best means, is another and a very different matter. Did our church undertake to declare that her ecclesiastical organizations were of divine right—were in all their detail instituted by Christ—were to be received as his, and to be implicitly obeyed—and that they were a necessary part of her divine polity, and thus binding on the conscience of her members, not as a good means toward a necessary end, but as in themselves necessary?—then indeed would she jeopard her authority and prelatize the church—and call forth from every true-hearted Presbyterian the strong language of indignant rebuke, and stout and unyielding resistance. But when our Assembly, for the certain and successful accomplishment of duties devolved upon her by the Head of the church, and by us, its members—appoints these bodies, as in her wisdom, the best instrumentality through which she can achieve these purposes—then indeed we are at liberty to point out deficiencies, and to correct mistaken policy, and to adjust the system to a perfect accordance with the general rules of scripture and of our standards—but to say that the appointment itself is unscriptural and un-Presbyterian, is preposterous in the extreme.

Power may be attributed to the church in several aspects. Without going into particulars, we may observe that an original, inherent, or legislative power over the house of God, we as consistent Protestants, utterly deny to the church. But a power ministerially to declare the will of God, and to carry out the requirements of heaven, in accordance with the general rules of God's holy word—this the whole church in every age warrants; this, reason itself demands; this the scriptures certainly allow.

Such were the views of the immortal Calvin, as expounded with consummate skill, in his inimitable *Institutes*. Turn to his lengthened chapter on "The Power of Legislation," (—B. iv. ch. x.) and these principles will be found fully developed. "This power," says he, "is now to be examined, whether the church has authority to make laws which shall bind the consciences of men." "Against such laws we contend, and not against the holy and useful constitutions of the church which contribute to the preservation of discipline, or integrity, or peace." "I only contend for this one point, that no necessity ought to be imposed upon our consciences on things on which they have been set at liberty by Christ." "If human laws tend to introduce any scruple into our minds, as though the observance of them were essentially necessary, we assert that they are unreasonable impositions on the conscience. For our consciences have to do not with men, but with God alone." "A second consideration . . . is, that human laws, I mean such as

are good and just, whether enacted by magistrates OR THE CHURCH, THOUGH THEY ARE NECESSARY TO BE OBSERVED, are not on this account, binding on the conscience, because all the necessity of observing them has reference to the general object of laws”—as in the case before us, the accomplishment of the work of missions—”but does not consist in the particular things which are commanded. There is AN IMMENSE DISTANCE between laws of this description and those which prescribe any new form for the worship of God, and impose a necessity in things that were left free and indifferent.” Again, in section xvi., he says, “if any one wish to have a simple statement of what are the human traditions of all ages which ought to be rejected and reprobated by the church and all pious persons, the direction we have already given is clear and certain, that they are all laws made by men without the word of God, for the purpose either of prescribing any method for the worship of God, or of laying the conscience under a religious obligation, as if they enjoined things necessary to salvation.” And now hear him speak in section xxvii.: “But, as many ignorant persons, when they hear that the consciences of men ought not to be bound by human traditions, and that it is vain to worship God by such services, immediately conclude the same rule to be applicable to all the laws which regulate the order of the church, WE MUST ALSO REFUTE THEIR ERRORS.” Under this head, which is all in point, he remarks, “The laws, therefore, which promote this end, (order,) we are so far from condemning, that we contend their abolition would be followed by a disruption of the bands of union, and the total disorganization and dispersion of the churches. For it is impossible to attain what Paul requires, that all things be done decently and in order, unless order and decorum be supported BY ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS,” &C. Thus clear and evident was this distinction to the mind of this illustrious reformer. We are the more full and particular in the exhibition of his opinions, because we have reason to know, that the force of the objections urged against our Boards, is based upon the principles developed in this very Book of the Institutes of Calvin. Here, however, it is expressly taught, that while the church has no authority to impose new articles of faith, or new laws, binding on the conscience, she has power for the attainment of prescribed ends, to devise such laws and regulations as shall best secure them, restrained only by the general rules of God's word.

This distinction, and this power and liberty of the church we might, if necessary, further illustrate.* But enough has been

*This principle of Protestantism is thus laid down by Dr. Owen, in his Answer to Stillingfleet, (Works, vol. 20, p. 282,) and he might be supposed to present it in its strictest form : “The first general principle the Protest-

said to detect the fallacy of the objection—to clear this obscure subject from that cloudy mist in which it is involved—and to present the conformity of our ecclesiastical Boards, in their essential principles, with the word of God, in a light so clear as not to be resisted.

Where Scripture requires any thing to be done, without specifying the manner in which it is to be done, we are of necessity left to the guidance of its general rules and right reason. So where our Standards enjoin, or imply, any duty, but do not specifically declare the way in which it is to be discharged, here also, are we left to select such means as are best adapted to compass the end in accordance with its general rules.

Thus far are we, as Christians and as Presbyterians, at liberty to consult expediency, in carrying out any measures of Christian duty. Only it is to be carefully observed that just where expediency begins—there does the power of binding the conscience cease. So that it were spiritual despotism to enforce as necessary, that which is enjoined only upon the ground of expediency.

We will only further notice the allegation, that under the existing system, there is no security whatever for the dissemination of the truth. This is a most grave and serious allegation—involving the deepest interests—and demanding for its substantiation the most satisfactory evidence. “Those who contribute to our Boards do not, it is said, know, and cannot know, whether they are sustaining Arminians, Semi-Pelagians, or Presbyterians. They do not know, in other words, whether they are building up or pulling down the kingdom of the Redeemer.” Now when the magnitude of our missionary enterprises is considered;—when the responsibilities under which our Boards, and through them our General Assembly and the whole church, are already laid, are realized—and the pressing necessities of the future are taken into account; when it is remembered how intimately associated are all the hopes of all our missionary stations, and of an unregenerated world, so far as the agency of our church is concerned, with our missionary Boards;—when these things are seriously contemplated, we

ants pleaded, was that the Scripture, the word of God, is a perfect rule of faith and religious worship ; so as that nothing ought to be admitted, which is repugnant unto it in its general rule or especial prohibitions, nothing IMPOSED that is not prescribed therein, but that every one is at liberty to refuse and reject every thing of that kind.” And in illustrating the evils which arose from the neglect of this principle, he says, “this persuasion in some places made further progress, namely, that it was lawful to impose on the consciences and practices of men such things in religious worship, provided that they concerned outward order, rites, rules and ceremonies, as are no where prescribed in Scripture, and that on severe penalties, ecclesiastical and civil. This almost utterly destroyed the great fundamental principle of the reformation, whereon the reformers justified their separation from the church of Rome.

cannot but deplore the utterance of such sentiments as these. Is it in truth so? Are these criminations borne out by the facts of the case? Then is it high time to abandon operations which instead of conveying the glad tidings of salvation to men perishing for lack of knowledge, are only channels through which the bitter waters of pestiferous and soul-destroying error diffuse their baneful influences. We cannot but say, that there is a most heavy responsibility involved in the publication of **such** bold and confident denunciations. Charity at best, is a feeble and sickly grace. It is so rooted in the soil of selfishness, and so surrounded by all the blighting influences of earthly passions, as to attain, in the large majority even of Christians, but a stunted growth. It requires little to repress its budding desires, or to wither its opening blossoms, or to dry up its ripening fruit. And when any argument is offered which wears any semblance of holy zeal, by the admission of which some excuse may be given for the withholdment of liberality, it is, alas, too easy, for the very best of us to yield to its influence. Now to hold up to the view of our churches, that system of benevolent operation through which its bounty is conveyed to the objects of its sympathy, as “fraught with nothing but mischief and disorder”—as what is to be “denounced as a human invention—as mere will-worship which God abhors so deeply that an inspired apostle has connected it with idolatry or the worshipping of angels”—as affording no security to their supporters, “whether they are sustaining Arminians, Semi-Pelagians, or Presbyterians”—or “whether they are building up or pulling down the kingdom of the Redeemer”—what is this, but at once to make it the duty of every truth-loving man, to withdraw his charity, and to shut up his bowels of compassion? Is there, then, that sufficient ground of terror and alarm for the truth as it is in Jesus, which could alone excuse denunciation so unqualified, and consequences so disastrous as these? We boldly say, that no such ground for any reasonable fears, on this account, can be pointed out. We confidently affirm that our Boards increase, and may be made still further to increase, and that they cannot possibly decrease, that security which would be afforded to the church for the orthodoxy of her missionaries sent out by their respective Presbyteries. Respecting, as we do so highly, the eminent talents of our objector, we wonder with an increasing amazement, at the strange and paradoxical conclusions to which he has been led. When missionaries are sent out by our Boards of Missions, we have no means, it is said, of knowing whether they are Pelagians, or Arminians, or Presbyterians, but when sent out by a Presbytery, or even by a neighbouring Presbytery, then we “have full security for the

soundness of the man whom (such Presbytery) was called on to assist"!!

What then is this infallible security? What can it be, in the first case, but the examination of the party by such members of his Presbytery as happened to be present? and in the second case, the report of such an examination, as made by one Presbytery to another. But our objector has himself told us, "*that Presbyteries are sometimes as mischievous as any other bodies.*" What if the majority of such a Presbytery are disposed to countenance error, or are incapable of discovering its latent springs? Or what if any individual is inclined to disguise his sentiments, and to assume a character of temporary orthodoxy? Absolute security we never can have, by any conceivable process, for the perfect correctness in every necessary doctrine of our licentiates or ordained ministers. And even if such certainty could be attained to day, by what means is such a condition of perfect orthodoxy to be perpetuated, in every such individual? It is perfectly idle, as our objector would say, to tell me that as a member of a Presbytery, I would have perfect security for the soundness, and for the continued soundness in the faith, of every missionary sent out to foreign lands, by that or by any neighbouring Presbytery. I would have no such thing. Probable and sufficient grounds of confidence I would have, but full and perfect security I would not possess, since even our objector teaches that "*we must have no confidence in the flesh, and that Presbyteries are sometimes as mischievous as any other bodies.*"

But as the matter now stands, there is, I contend, every security given, for the character and views of our various missionaries, that could be obtained by the limitation of their appointment to a single Presbytery; and an additional security, which on the plan proposed, never could be given. That the former proposition is correct, is evident from a moment's consideration of the facts of the case. Every missionary, employed either by the Board of Domestic or Foreign Missions, before he can come before them as a suitable candidate for any appointment whatever, must give evidence that he has been received and licensed or ordained, by some Presbytery in good standing in our church. This is a first principle in the organization of the Boards. They know nothing, as such, of the trials or licensure of candidates for the ministry. This whole business remains in all its entirety with each several Presbytery. Every Presbytery, therefore, and every neighbouring Presbytery, has, as it regards every employed missionary connected with either of our Boards, precisely that "full security from their position for the soundness of the man whom they are called on to assist," which the objector demands. This is, and

must be the fact, in every single instance. And if our objector cannot extend the limits of this security beyond a single Presbytery, and its neighbouring associate, then our Boards render it perfectly open for any one or any two Presbyteries to unite in the particular support of any one, or of any number of men, in whose soundness they have this full and sufficient confidence. Thus to illustrate: the Presbytery of Charleston sent forward to our Board of Foreign Missions, a year ago, a very worthy and esteemed young brother, who received an appointment as missionary to China. Now I ask the objector whether during all the stages of his progress towards the ministry—or in his final examinations, trials and licensure—any member of that Presbytery was in any measure hindered from attaining that “full security, which from his position he might easily possess, of the soundness of the man whom he should afterwards be called on to assist?” Most assuredly not. Of his soundness and qualifications, therefore, every member of the Presbytery of Charleston, and so also, of the Presbytery of Harmony, on the one hand, and of the Presbytery of Georgia on the other, had the “full security from their position.” Such, also, as our objector teaches, is the case in reference to other missionaries belonging to that same honoured Presbytery, which has representatives in China, and in Asia, and in Palestine, and in Persia. What then, is to hinder these Presbyteries from contributing their funds through the Board, supposing these missionaries all to be connected with it, and for the special support of such beloved brethren? Nothing whatever. Our objector, then, is evidently mistaken in his apprehensions of the real state of the case. Whatever the Boards have to do in the matter, they can, in no way, interfere with that full security which our objector requires, and which certainly should be possessed.

But there is, we contend, in the organizations of our Boards, a security for the perfect propriety and soundness of our several missionaries, additional to that which is enjoyed, in undiminished fulness, by every separate Presbytery. It is a very possible and supposable thing, that any single Presbytery might be itself lax in its doctrinal views, or that it might be mistaken in its estimate of any given man. Now in this case, the Board may have come to the knowledge of the facts in the case, and while it cannot institute any process against the party, it may dissuade him from the work—it may impede his immediate entrance upon it until the Assembly shall have been consulted—and the church shall have an opportunity of preventing the commissioning of such an unworthy herald of the cross. The Boards, as far as their authority extends, act not for any particular Presbytery, but for the entire church, as the organ of the Assembly. They leave, therefore, to each Presbytery, and

to the church, the full security given by our constitutional provisions, and they superadd to this a further measure of security in that vigilant circumspection they are required to exercise for preventing the introduction into any field under their care, of any unworthy candidate. These Boards, being representatives of the General Assembly—which is itself the annually delegated representation of every portion of the church—and being annually elected by, and subject to, the entire control of that body—cannot be supposed so likely to be generally corrupt as any single, isolated, independent and permanent Presbytery. And while it is very possible that in any given case, these Boards may err, and may transcend the bounds within which they should be certainly confined, their mis-management can, at most, extend only to the period of a single year. For whatever may be the present arrangement as to the term of office of each member, the whole matter, in all its bearings is in the hands of every single Assembly, and subject to its unlimited control.

Our objector, then, has allowed himself to be deluded, by an *ignis fatuus* in his just zeal for the purity of the gospel; and while seeking for the church greater security, would actually deprive her of that which she now enjoys. Most certain it is, that no warrantable pretext has been afforded him, for publishing such a sweeping condemnation, on such serious grounds, of these appointed agencies of the church. He has inflicted a wound, it may be very difficult to heal, and whose festering sore may long continue to give uneasiness and pain to the body spiritual. The objector and his colleagues in this work of opposition, have talents, influence, and power. They may carry their views with irresistible force to many minds. They may thus alienate the resources of the church, while she is but commencing her glorious course of heavenly charity. We would beseech and entreat them as brethren, to pause, before they advance further in this career, and not to hazard the peace, union, and prosperity of the church, and the successful prosecution of our benevolent operations.

That the ends contemplated by these brethren are holy, we believe. That their aims are high and Christian, we also rejoice in admitting. With these aims we desire to sympathize, and for these ends we would also strive. The glory of God in the salvation of men, through sanctification of the truth—let this be our only object. If in our present instrumentality, for the accomplishment of this purpose there be aught superfluous or wanting, let it be retrenched or added. We advocate no abuses. We patronize no existing evils. We may be found uniting with these very brethren in many of their proposed amendments. But in their responsibilities in thus publicly holding up

to reprobation, the whole machinery by which every benevolent operation of the church is conducted, we would not partake. And in the spirit of the most affectionate kindness, (and towards one, of the most respectful deference and regard,) we would entreat them to remember that while it is easy to destroy, it is most difficult to restore, and that over the ruins of our present noble charities, we may all have cause to weep in bitter lamentation.

The lawfulness and scripturalness of ecclesiastical Boards, have, we trust, been now demonstrated; and the untenableness of all objections urged against them exposed. There are many things in this "Calm Discussion," to which we might advert, but as we have no wish to cavil or oppose, we pass them by. Neither is it necessary for us at any length distinctly to consider the objection against the expediency of such organizations. This subject has been already necessarily considered in its principle, and the true source of the objector's difficulties pointed out. Expediency is unquestionably a necessary and lawful guide—not to the discovery or the determination of duty—but to its accomplishment, in every case where a detailed plan has not been prescribed. The duty of the church is, in the case under discussion, imperative. The specific mode in which that duty is to be carried into full effect, is not laid down—and therefore, while any wise plan which is accordant to the general rules of Scripture, is lawful, experience and prudence must determine which is most expedient.

Were any thing wanting to confirm the truth of these conclusions, it might be found in the fact, that while the Presbyterian church has ever been accustomed, both in this country and in Scotland, to the appointments of commissions, of more or less extent, with the full powers of the body constituting them, and for the execution of given trusts; so have the Presbyterian churches in Ireland and in Scotland been led to the organization of similar Boards or Committees for the very same purposes as our own, and with substantially the same powers. The church of Scotland has now her several committees, (who are not benches of deacons,) for the entire management of each of those five great schemes of benevolence in whose prosecution she is embarking with such commendable zeal and liberality. So also has the Presbyterian church of Ireland her Educational and Missionary Committees or Boards for the management of all the business connected with these several objects of Christian philanthropy. And while it is true of our own branch of the church, that her zeal and activity in all the departments of benevolent enterprise have been increased a thousand fold, by means of her various Boards, it is not less certain that with the stirring impulse of enlarged

charity, our sister, or rather mother, churches in Ireland, and Scotland, have been at once, and without hesitation, led to the organization of substantially similar agencies. And what, I ask, has been the teaching of experience as delivered to our own churches ? I will refer to the case of the Southern Board of Foreign Missions, with whose operations I am most familiar, and which may be taken as a fair criterion in drawing our conclusions. During the past two years, no general agency has been in the field. The churches were fully apprized that no agency might be expected, and that they must voluntarily put forth their strength. Our Synod passed resolutions encouraging such liberality, and our ministers made willing promises of co-operation. And yet during the last year, out of some one hundred and seventy churches, within the bounds of that Board and of the Synod of S. C. and Geo., not more than twenty, did any thing at all for foreign missions, and a still fewer number observed the monthly concert for prayer, at all. Strange, too, as it may appear, yet it is a fact, that the amounts raised in even these few churches were in more than half the number, collected through the assistance of some extraneous agency.

The perfect consistency of such ecclesiastical Boards or Agencies, therefore, with Scripture, and with our Standards, and their absolute necessity to the conduct of such extensive schemes of Christian charity, are thus made to rest upon the certain ground of universal experience—as well as upon the most clear, evident, and irrefragible arguments. Such Boards and Agencies are absolutely required for the furtherance of such benevolent operations. The one cannot exist and thrive where the others are wanting. They are, in the present state of the church, correlative the one to the other; so that where the one is necessary, the other must be introduced, and where the means are wanting, the end will never be secured.*

*We think it probable that the author of the "*Calm Discussion*," &c, whose paper has been so elaborately discussed, in this "*Serious Review*," &c, now completed—will reply to the reviewer, in due time, through our pages ; on which account we have not thought it necessary to add any notes to this, or the two preceding parts, pointing out, as the argument progressed—what appeared to us inconclusive, what unsound, and what Scriptural and Presbyterian. A great deal that has been said, we agree with; a good deal has appeared to us fully to sustain our views, while apparently adduced to confute them ; a portion, has seemed to us devoted to points purely speculative, and not going to the gist of the question ; and some things, we have been obliged to dissent from entirely. This much, with all respect for the excellent and able author, we feel it our duty to say.

In regard to the questions of practical interest, put at issue, in these and similar discussions—our own opinions have been deliberately made up, upon careful, and long continued observation and reflection. We consider our system of Agencies an absolute failure—in every view of it, whether reference be had to our individual or to our organized operations,—to Agents, properly so called, or to Boards as agencies for the church. We look on this as matter standing in *proof*—and not in *argument*; and are ready to maintain our opinion by *facts*—of the most complete and dia-

troubling character—covering a period of years. We are convinced, moreover, that the whole operation is founded on principles which it is extremely difficult to reconcile with the true nature of Presbyterianism and with the grand system of the gospel; and that a reform is equally obligatory and practicable. This is matter standing in argument, and to be made good by the word of God, and by our standards, as contrasted with the principles, the powers, the acts, and the influences of our Boards and Agents; and we are ready to maintain our convictions—by what appears to us a conclusive demonstration of the evils to be corrected and the method of cure. Meantime, our pages are free for the full discussion of the subject. A discussion, the importance of which they alone can appreciate, who believe that the Presbyterian church has a great and glorious work to perform ; who remember that after years of effort, not more, perhaps, than one-third of its congregations have ever been reached at all; who reflect that on the present plan, it seems nearly if not absolutely impossible ever to reach them all steadily, and rouse them to regular and zealous effort,—even if the plan itself was otherwise unobjectionable; and who consider, that from the enormous expensiveness of this decrepit plan, from the scruples of many as to the principles on which it proceeds, and from various other difficulties, which we cannot here enumerate, its hold on the churches, instead of strengthening daily, is scarcely and with great difficulty maintained *in statu quo*.—[ED.]