

THE ARGUMENT FOR CHURCH-BOARDS ANSWERED.

I AM glad that a Review of the Argument against Boards¹ has given me the opportunity of appearing again in defence of the venerable Standards of the Presbyterian Church. Fully persuaded as I am that those Standards contain the “mind of the Spirit” upon the nature, extent and proper distribution of ecclesiastical power, and just as strongly assured that the system of action to which our Church, in an evil hour, has lent the sanction of her name and authority is subversive of her peculiar- and characteristic principles of government and order, I must feel anxious to bring her back, so far as my efforts can be of any service, to her ancient platform, and to arrest the progress of those abuses which, in a general decline of all true religion, had silently and imperceptibly crept in among us. The cause of Missions will suffer nothing from a discussion conducted in the fear of God, and prompted by a single desire to glorify His name. Light is the friend of righteousness; and we never can expect the people of God to engage in any spiritual enterprise with interest and prayer unless its principles are addressed to their *faith*. It is by *faith* that kingdoms are to be subdued and righteousness wrought, the mouths of lions stopped, the violence of fire quenched, and the edge of the sword escaped. By *faith* alone can the weak be made strong, and the timid wax valiant in fight; and if ever the empire of darkness is to be overthrown and the armies of the aliens put to flight in this rebellious province of God’s dominions, the sacra-

¹ [See Appendix A of this volume.](#)

mental host of the elect must go forth strong *in faith*, wielding no other weapons than those which their Leader has commanded or approved. The great defect, as it strikes me, of all the missionary schemes of the day is, that the principles upon which they rely for success, their leading measures, the general plan upon which they are conducted, are addressed to the natural sympathies of men and not to the *faith* of the saints of the Most High. They are constructed in such a way as to conciliate public opinion in their favour, and the great instrument of their success is the popularity of their measures, leading to liberal and handsome contributions. Take away from them the approbation and the money of the world, and they wither and die instantaneously. They have no principle of life in themselves. Unlike the ordinances of God which thrive by opposition and flourish amid reproach, these sickly creatures of human benevolence and folly can accomplish nothing without the treasures of Egypt at their feet; and will attempt nothing until the great men and mighty men of the earth are duly consulted, flattered and cajoled. I will not say that, like the Jesuits of Rome, they become all things to all men for a valuable consideration; but I will say that if they were more spiritual they would have fewer friends among the enemies of God, if they were more scriptural they would be less vain-glorious, and if they were less crafty they would probably be much more successful. Addressed to perishing and fleeting passions, they rise and fall, ebb and flow, with the tide of popular favour and mercantile success. When their treasuries are empty the merchants of the earth have made "bad speculations," the commercial embarrassments "are distressing," and "the pecuniary affairs of the country" are involved in dreadful perplexity. There was a time when Herod and Pontius Pilate, the rulers and the people of the earth,, could league in malice against the Lord and His Anointed, and yet His throne be set upon the holy hill of Zion in defiance of all their opposition. There was a time when the rise and fall,

the prosperity and decay, of the kingdoms of this world were alike conducive to the advancement and success of that kingdom which the God of heaven had established in the midst of the earth. There was a time when the Church of God could grow and flourish and spread her conquests far and wide in the midst of scorn, persecution and reproach, and when she expected nothing from the world but its malice, and asked for nothing but to be patiently heard. Those golden days have either passed away, or those institutions which live only in the breath of the public approbation are radically wrong. Those were days of *faith*. Men did *what* they were commanded and as they were commanded, and then rested upon the sure Word of promise which was better than the favour of kings, the applause of subjects, or thousands of gold and silver. If we would be alike prosperous and alike independent of the fluctuations and vicissitudes of this world's interests, we must return to the *simplicity of faith*; and as no institutions can address themselves to the faith of God's people but those which are founded upon God's Word—for the Word is the measure and the standard of faith—we must abandon all the expedients of human wisdom, which, in scriptural matters, ever has been and ever will be *folly*; we must despise the elements of carnal policy, which, however conducive to success in the affairs of this world, brings nothing but disgrace and defeat in the affairs of the Church; and we must confine ourselves simply to what God has sanctioned, and rely for success upon His promises; and just as far as His favour transcends in importance the applause of men, and His Spirit excels in efficacy the co-operation of mortals, so far may we hope that the success of scriptural measures will exceed the success of our present contrivances. Whatever is addressed to faith can be made the matter of wrestling prayer, and brought home upon the conscience with the sanctions of duty. While discussion will inevitably prove fatal to every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted, and shiver into atoms many a fair fabric of

unhallowed zeal and will-worship, the simple appointments of God will commend themselves with additional force to the hearts of His people, and accomplish all their ancient achievements in the hand of His Spirit. Who shall say that discussion is not the very means by which God, in our day, is shaking the heavens and the earth in order that the things which are made, the devices and expedients of man, may be shaken and removed, and that those things which cannot be shaken, which rest upon the firm and solid foundation of His own Word, may remain ? I feel well assured that nothing is more dangerous than a blind zeal, and that, consequently, discussion must be valuable in disseminating light and knowledge as to the principles and plans of our benevolent operations. If they are found to be wrong, we know that the cause of God will suffer nothing, but gain much, from the total destruction of every Board connected with the Church; if they are found to be right, we can support them with a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

Believing that a full, thorough and candid discussion of this whole subject will be eminently subservient to the prosperity of Missions, both at home and abroad, by purifying the zeal of the Church, and enlisting more generally the affections, prayers and co-operation of all her true members, I embark in it with cheerfulness, trusting that the Lord may overrule my poor lucubrations to His own glory and His people's good. It is the welfare of Zion that I seek; but I cannot consistently pray, "Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces," without exerting every nerve and making every lawful effort to dispossess the strangers that are defiling the sanctuary and defacing the carved work of the city of our God. The Review before me furnishes an opportunity of presenting the principles for which I contend in immediate contrast with those upon which the Boards are founded. Let me invite my brethren to compare them carefully and make up their minds in the fear of God. If they have hitherto sustained the Boards as a mat-

ter of course, and taken it for granted that they were right without subjecting them to a severe investigation, let me beg them to remember that as he only is a sound philosopher who begins his inquiries in doubt in order to end them in conviction, so he only is a consistent Christian who forbears to believe until he is convinced that the Lord hath spoken. He who believes when he ought to doubt is liable to doubt when he ought to believe. He who begins in blind credulity may possibly end in absolute skepticism. When he finds principles which he had regarded as certain, merely because he had never examined them, gradually giving way beneath him, he is in danger of drawing the hasty conclusion that nothing is fixed, and that all truth is mere delusion. There is great danger, therefore, in taking things for granted; and hence I would urge my brethren to read this discussion with that cautious suspense of judgment which is indispensably required in the search after truth, and which is equally removed from partiality to any set of opinions on the one hand, and from indolence of understanding on the other. Let them be indifferent as to *what* may prove to be true, but earnest and fixed when the truth has been discovered. If this discussion should be conducted and received in this spirit, those who commenced it will never be reproached as troublers of Israel.

In replying to the Reviewer, I shall notice his defence of the Boards, and take up his objections to the Argument against Boards, in such order as the train of my own thoughts may suggest.

The Reviewer begins his article with a proposition, which, however just in theory, can never be of any practical importance in the search after truth; because it can never be applied till the truth is known. Like Aristotle's definition of virtue, it supposes you already in possession of what you profess to be seeking. No doubt the "middle path between latitudinarianism on the one hand and ultraism on the other" is always the safe one, but the difficulty lies in determining these extremes. The Reviewer, I apprehend, is a

master of rhetoric, and employs his whole introduction in illustrating this truism, with the obvious design of fastening upon those who are opposed to his views the unmeaning charge of *ultraism*—a charge which must always be unmeaning until the extremes are accurately denned, and the middle path clearly pointed out. Still words are the coin of fools, and he who appeals to a silly prejudice founded upon a name may succeed with multitudes in throwing odium upon principles which he finds himself unable to refute. The Reviewer is fond of drawing illustrations from the Church of Scotland. Does he know what class of her sons is called *Moderates*, and with what propriety the epithet is applied ? And is it beyond the compass of possibility that those among us, who, like the Reviewer, are glorying in their *moderation*, may be doing no more for the glory of God and the purity of His institutions than their namesakes across the water ? If, in fact, there *appears* to be as striking a coincidence in principle as there is in name between them—each labouring to put the inventions of man above the appointments of God, and virtually denying the undivided authority of Christ as King and Head of the Church—I hope it is only an appearance. But, after all, what is my *ultraism*? If I understand the Reviewer, latitudinarianism, so far as the present subject is concerned, consists in upholding voluntary associations, *ultraism* is maintaining that the Church of Jesus Christ is the true instrument of converting the world, while the middle path of safety and of truth is to be found in supporting ecclesiastical corporations. Now, for aught that I can see to the contrary, it is just as safe to make voluntary associations the extreme of latitudinarianism, ecclesiastical corporations the extreme of *ultraism*, and the Church of God, as organized by her glorious Head, the true middle between them. I have noticed this sly and artful introduction, because with many minds it may have the force of a negative argument. The question of voluntary associations is settled among us : to assert, therefore, that the opponents of Boards

are just on the opposite extreme will produce in some the calm and settled conviction that the friends of Boards are just what they ought to be. Their neighbours are all wrong, and as they are not like them, therefore they must be right. Many a conclusion has been obstinately supported by no better reasoning than this.

The considerations which the Reviewer formally proposes as arguments are of two kinds—positive and negative; and these again are direct and indirect. I shall answer them in the order in which they have been proposed.

1. First, then, he asserts that there is a presumption in favour of the Boards from the fact that they are established institutions, and that my principles are new and singular. This may be so, but let it be remembered that a presumption of the same kind existed against Christianity, when its doctrines were first promulgated, and against the Reformation of Luther, when he first commenced to testify against the iniquities of Rome. The only effect of such a presumption is to throw the burden of proof upon those who assail existing institutions. Whatever positive force it possesses depends upon the probability that whatever is settled must be right, or that institutions sanctioned by prescription must necessarily be founded in reason. It is an argument which may be pleaded just as strongly in defence of abuses as in behalf of righteousness, and, therefore, as an argument, it is absolutely worthless. Granting, then, that the presumption exists, it *proves* nothing, but only throws upon me the necessity of proving my point; but, in fact, no such presumption exists: the *onus probandi* rests upon the Reviewer himself and those who espouse his principles. The Argument against Boards insisted upon abiding by the Standards of the Church; and those who believe that the plans which every Presbyterian Minister has solemnly sanctioned are ineffectual and weak are bound to show the defects of our system. The presumption is, that our Standards are right until they are shown to be wrong. The true innovators are those who have grafted another system upon our ancient and ven-

erable platform. The Reviewer, throughout, labours under the singular mistake, that in the Argument against Boards a scheme was proposed separate and distinct from the provisions of our Book. A leading object of that article was to deny the right of devising schemes at all, and to confine the Church within the limits of Divine prescription. It takes for granted that the plan developed in our Standards is agreeable to the Word of God, and labours to bring back the churches to a cordial adoption of its principles. If, then, the real question at issue is, Shall we adopt the method of our Book, or shall we devise another of our own? the presumption unquestionably lies against those who depart from the Book. They must prove that Boards are scriptural, or acknowledge that they do not commend themselves to the faith and prayers of God's people. When they bring their strange inventions into the Church of God, and require their brethren to sustain their contrivances, we have a right to ask them by what authority they do these things; and if they can produce no sanction of their measures from the Word of God or the Standards of the Church—the bond of our ecclesiastical connection—we have a right to complain of them as innovators and troublers. They bound themselves by covenant to one plan, and, behold, they have introduced another. Hence, I can triumphantly retort the presumption upon the Reviewer himself. It is with pain, however, that I add—for I was astounded at his declaration upon the subject—that neither the Scriptures nor our Standards are decisive authority with him. The presumption in favour of Boards is so very strong, in his view, that neither the doctrine of the Bible nor the principles of Presbyterianism, however plainly opposed to them, should detract from their authority. Listen to his own words (the italics are my own): “ They,” that is, the opponents of Boards, “ must establish against this system,” the system of Boards, “ 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 neces-

sity 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 as to the means by which that end may be best secured. The means we propose 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, Presbyterian 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 an end of such necessary and transcendent importance.”¹ It seems, then, that even if the Boards should be proved to be unscriptural, and in dangerous opposition to the Standards of the Church, their friends cannot be called on to abandon them until a better system is actually provided. No matter if God forbids them, we are bound to uphold them until it can be shown that the scriptural plan is really the best. And what are those mighty arguments in favour of the Boards, which can silence the voice of God and annul our covenanted engagements as members of the Presbyterian Church? Why, they have “been sanctioned by adoption, by long trial, and, as is believed, by eminent success.” These weighty considerations, which can be pleaded in defence of every abuse under heaven, which apply just as strongly to the Propaganda at Rome, the Inquisition in Spain, and the infernal butcheries of Mohammed as they do to the Boards of the Presbyterian Church, are gravely

¹ [Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine for 1841, pp. 459, 460, and Appendix A to this volume, p. 584.](#)

brought forward to drown the voice of inspiration, and to silence the clamours of those who are zealous for the Lord God of hosts. Oh, tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon! I trust, however, that there are still those who will abandon the Boards if they are proved to be unscriptural and in “ dangerous opposition to our Standards and our Creed ;” and who will require no stronger argument in favour of a “ more excellent way “ than that it is both scriptural and Presbyterian—being fully assured that whatever plan God has prescribed He will certainly bless. For such I write; for such even the Reviewer has written, as he has entered into an elaborate argument to show that the Boards are scriptural; although, according to his own principles, it was a matter of no sort of consequence whether God approved them or not, seeing that they have been sanctioned by “ adoption, by long trial and by eminent success.”

2. Passing by the negative argument of the Reviewer, which will be sufficiently considered in another part of this discussion, I proceed to notice the principle upon which he lays out his strength, and which he felt to be of vital importance to the system which he has undertaken to defend. If I can show that this principle is false, unsupported by Scripture and condemned by our Creed, my task will be done, and every additional argument that I may choose to advance will be *ex abundanti*—over and above what can strictly be required of me. This principle is, that the Church, to a certain extent, is the confidential agent of her Divine Head, invested with discretionary powers, and left to the resources of her own wisdom. Two parts of the review are devoted to the discussion of this gratuitous dogma—one attempting to show that it is recognized in our Standards, and the other that it is sanctioned by the Word of God. The method of proof in each case is substantially the same. The Reviewer lays it down as an axiom, that where duties are required the necessary powers to discharge them are conveyed, if not directly, at least by

implication. Now it is admitted, on all hands, that the Gospel must be preached to every creature. It is assumed by the Reviewer, that God has made no provisions in His Word for sending out the heralds of salvation to the waste places of the earth; but as He requires that this should be done, and done by the Church, He has tacitly committed to her the full power of making such arrangements as to her, in her wisdom, may seem most meet. She is His agent, His minister of state, His prime adviser, authorized to act in His name and to do anything and everything not positively prohibited that may promise to subserve the end to be accomplished. Speaking of the Church the Reviewer says: “ 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 fundamental 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.” Again : “ That which the Church is required to do she is empowered to do by all means not expressly forbidden or implicitly countermanded.” The principle maintained in the Argument against Boards, that the Word of God is a perfect rule of practice as well as of faith, and that the Church has no right to add to it or to take from it, is pronounced to be Judaical and inconsistent with the glorious liberty secured by the Son of God.¹ We must make a passing remark on the expressions employed, because they are *ad captandum*. We are, then, distinctly to understand that subjection to the will of God is bondage, and that Jesus Christ has purchased for His people the glorious privilege of walking in the light of their own eyes ! It is certainly a new idea that the servitude of the Jews con-

¹ [Spirit of the Nineteenth Century for 1842, pp. 27, 28. See Appendix A to this volume, pp. 603-605.](#)

sisted in the fact that they were guided by the Lord in all their ways, and that they were at liberty to do nothing of a religious nature without Divine direction. I had supposed that their bondage consisted in the *burdensome* nature of their ritual, and that true Christian liberty, so far as the Levitical economy is concerned, implies an exemption not from Divine direction but from these particular services. The Christian is free, not because his dispensation leaves him to himself, but because God has not enjoined upon him the same laborious duties which he exacted from His ancient people. Still, what is his duty is just as much enjoined, just as strictly commanded, as the cumbrous sacrifices and painful ceremonies of the Jews. If it is Jewish bondage to be guided in all things by the wisdom of God, and Christian liberty to be left to the suggestions of our own wisdom under certain general limitations and restraints, I should say, by all means give me the bondage of the Jew rather than the freedom of the Christian. But the Church, it seems, is “now under a dispensation of principles and not of rules.” Had it not been for the subsequent illustration I should have found it impossible to catch the idea which the Author here intends to convey, and even with the aid of his simile I am not sure that I apprehend his meaning. What is the distinction between *rules* of action and *principles* of action? Does a moral principle differ from a moral rule in anything else but the form? A rule is a law prescribed by adequate authority. A principle is anything proved, acknowledged or assumed to be true. The truth of the principle is the foundation of the law. The principle, therefore, necessarily contains the rule, and the rule just as necessarily supposes the principle. If you make the principle more and the rule less general, the general must include the particulars; so that I do not see how it is possible to be under a government of principles without being under a government of rules. The principle states the general truth out of which the rules of conduct or particular duties arise, and therefore obviously includes them.

They are so intimately connected, that in moral subjects—matters of practical obedience—the terms may safely be used as synonymous. You may say it is a principle that truth ought to be spoken; you may say it is a rule, also, or law. That foolish talking and jesting are not convenient, you may regard as a principle; the proposition obviously contains a rule. There is a distinction, acknowledged by philosophers, between principles and rules; but it is a distinction which has no conceivable connection with this subject. When we inquire *why* truth, justice and benevolence are obligatory, or attempt to investigate the foundations of moral obligation, we are said to investigate the principles of morals; but when we lay down *what things* are right and binding, we may be said to prescribe the rules of morals. Now the Reviewer cannot mean that God has told us in His Word *why* righteousness and truth are to be sought and cultivated, and left it to ourselves to determine *what things* are just, lovely or of good report. The Bible confessedly contains a perfect code of moral rules; the law of the Lord is perfect. What, then, is the distinction between a government of principles and rules ? I presume that the Author means by *principles* the ends to be attained, and by *rules* the means of attaining them; and then the proposition will amount to this—that God has told us what to do, but not how it is to be done. In other words, he means that the Church is invested with discretionary powers, restrained only by the positive prohibitions of the Divine Word—that is, what, from the form of its enunciation, was evidently intended to be passed off as an argument turns out to be a repetition, in almost an unintelligible shape, of the very thing to be proved, a mere *petitio principii*. This principle, thus variously stated, is the hinge of the Reviewer's whole argument. A principle so important one would think would have been fully and indisputably proved, and yet it is a singular fact that not a solitary direct argument is adduced in its support. There is an appeal to the authority of Calvin, but the passages quoted have no

bearing upon the subject at all; they might as well have been adduced to prove that there are inhabitants in the moon. A passage from Owen is quoted in a foot-note, but it is directly against the Reviewer. The Confession of Faith is also quoted, but the passages unfortunately refer to a very different point. His indirect argument, which is everything in the shape of reasoning that I can find in his last two articles, amounts to this: God has required of the Church certain duties, without furnishing her with the means of performing them; upon the principle that where duties are commanded the necessary power is conveyed, she is at liberty to devise the means for herself. The whole force of this reasoning depends upon the proposition, that God has not furnished the Church with the proper apparatus of means for doing all that He has required. In other words, the real point at issue between the Reviewer and myself is, whether the Church as organized by Jesus Christ and His Apostles is *competent* to do all that her Head has enjoined upon her, or does she require additional Agents to assist her? This is the real question: Did Christ give the Church all the furniture she needed, or did He partially supply her, with a general direction to make up the deficiency? Upon this question I fearlessly join issue. So strong are my convictions of the adequacy of the Church as organized in the Scriptures to meet all exigencies, that, if it can be clearly shown that she is incompetent to discharge any office assumed to be imperative upon her, I should think it much more probable that the duty was not enjoined, than that the Church was thus relatively imperfect. What she clearly cannot do is not commanded. The Reviewer has evidently confounded—and it is the source of all his error on this subject—the acknowledged Protestant principle, that “there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, 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,"¹ with the general doctrine—universally condemned among all true Protestants—of discretionary power. Had he attended to the proper distinction upon this subject which is so clearly drawn by Calvin, and so unanswerably established by Owen, he might have spared himself the trouble of appealing to these illustrious men in behalf of his extravagant views of ecclesiastical power. They *do* sanction the doctrine of our Confession—a doctrine which was fully admitted in the Argument against Boards, but a doctrine which by no means covers the principle on which ecclesiastical corporations are founded. I shall let Calvin speak for himself. “ We have,” says he, “ an excellent and most certain mark, therefore, which distinguishes those impious constitutions by which it has been stated that true religion is obscured and men’s consciences subverted, and the legitimate regulations of the Church, which are always directed to one of these two ends, or to both together, viz., that in the holy assembly of the faithful all things may be conducted with suitable decorum and dignity, and that the community may be kept in order by the firm bonds of courtesy and moderation.”² Subsequently he remarks : “ We do not place order in those nugatory pomps which have nothing but a vain appearance of splendour, but in that well-regulated polity which excludes all confusion, incivility, obstinacy, clamours and dissensions. Of the first kind examples are furnished by Paul—as that profane banquets should not be connected with the sacred Supper of the Lord; that women should not appear in public without being veiled, and many others in common use among us—such as that we pray with bended knees and with our heads uncovered ; that we administer the sacraments of the Lord, not in a slovenly manner, but with due decorum; that we observe some decent order in the burial of the dead; and other things of a similar nature. Of the second sort are the hours appointed for public prayers, sermons and sacraments;

¹ Confession of Faith, ch. i., sec. 6.

² Institutes, book iv., ch. x., sec. 28.

quietness and silence under sermons; the singing of hymns; the places appointed for these services, and the days fixed for the celebration of the Lord's Supper; the prohibition of Paul, that women should not teach in the Church, and the like; but especially the regulations for the preservation of discipline, as catechising, ecclesiastical censures, excommunications, fasting and everything else that can be referred to the same class. Thus all the constitutions of the Church which we receive as holy and useful may be classed under two heads; some refer to rites and ceremonies, others to discipline and peace."¹ A little further on he adds: "I approve of no human constitutions except such as are founded on the authority of God and deduced from the Scripture, so that they may be considered as altogether Divine."² The reader is here requested to mark the difference between Calvin and the Reviewer: Calvin approves of *no* human constitution which is not founded on the *authority of God and deduced from Scripture*; the Reviewer approves of *any* human constitution *founded in expediency and not condemned* by the Word of God. The passages already extracted—to which many others of similar import might easily be added—show conclusively that the only discretion which Calvin allows to the Church is precisely that accorded by our Confession of Faith, and respects "some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the Church common to human actions and societies." The question concerning Boards is not a question of order and decorum. It is a question concerning a positive institution, which is itself to exercise this very discretion in regard to decency—a question concerning a grave and important addition to the government of the Church, and not about "some circumstances common to human actions and societies." Those "specific regulations" of our Book, which the Reviewer endeavours to trace to the same principle on which he defends the Boards,³ are mere matters of arrangement,

¹ Institutes, book iv., ch. x., sec. 29.

² Ibid., sec. 30.

³ *Spirit of the Nineteenth Century* for 1842, p. 28. See Appendix A, p. 605.

coming obviously under the doctrine of Calvin, and of a much greater than Calvin, who has solemnly enjoined by the Spirit of inspiration that “ all things be done decently and in order.” The essential difference between those “ circumstances common to human actions and societies” which may be regulated by the “ light of nature and Christian prudence according to the general rules of the Word,” and those additions to the worship of God and government of the Church which all true Protestants have united in condemning, is thus clearly stated by Owen in his “ Discourse concerning Liturgies”—a discourse which, *mutatis mutandis*, may just as conclusively be applied to Boards.¹ “ Circumstances are either such as follow actions *as actions*, or such as are arbitrarily superadded and adjoined by command unto actions, which do not of their own accord, nor naturally, nor necessarily attend them. Now religious actions in the worship of God are actions still. Their religious relation doth not destroy their natural being. Those circumstances, then, which do attend such actions *as actions*, not determined by Divine institution, may be ordered, disposed of and regulated by the prudence of men. For instance, prayer is a part of God’s worship; public prayer is so as appointed by Him. This, as it is an action to be performed by man, cannot be done without the assignment of time and place, and sundry other things, if order and conveniency be attended to. These are circumstances that attend all actions of that nature to be performed by a community, whether they relate to the worship of God or no. These men may, according as they see good, regulate and change, as there is occasion. . . . There are also some things which some men call *circumstances* also, that no way belong of themselves to the actions whereof they are said to be the circumstances, nor do attend them, but are imposed on them or annexed unto them, by the arbitrary authority of those who take upon them to give order and rules in such cases. These are not circumstances attending

¹ Works, vol. xix., p. 437.

the nature of the thing itself, but are arbitrarily superadded to the things that they are appointed to accompany. Whatever men may call such additions, they are no less parts of the whole, wherein they serve, than the things themselves whereunto they are adjoined." Circumstances of this sort, to which Owen indeed denies the name, are, according to him, unequivocally condemned in the Word of God. He maintains the principle—and what Presbyterian or Protestant can feel himself at liberty to deny it?—"that whatever is added is contrary to what is commanded, though not in this or that particular command, yet to that command that nothing be added."¹ To bring Boards or ecclesiastical corporations within the principle admitted by Owen, the Reviewer must show that they are circumstances necessarily attending the actions of ordaining ministers and sending them out to preach the Gospel to every creature, considered merely as *actions*; and unless he can establish this point, the noble discourse of Owen bears just as hardly upon his favourite Boards as it does upon human liturgies. It fully coincides with the opinion expressed in the Argument against Boards, that the *silence* of the Word of God concerning these inventions seals their condemnation. When the Reviewer shall have proved that ecclesiastical corporations are mere "*circumstances*, concerning the worship of God and government of the Church, *common to human actions and societies*," he may conscientiously sustain and support them without deserting Presbyterian principles for the extravagant pretensions of Churchmen, Prelatists and Papists. Let the Reviewer consider carefully Owen's definition of *circumstances*, and his account of the real extent of discretionary power in ecclesiastical matters, and he will surely be constrained to acknowledge that he understood neither what he said nor whereof he affirmed when he wrote, at random, about a "dispensation of principles and not of rules." My faith in the Divine authority of our Presbyterian forms is quite too strong to allow me, for

¹ Works, vol. xix., p. 444.

a moment, to suppose that a rejection of the Reviewer's preposterous dogma "would lay the axe to many a fair branch of our ecclesiastical polity, and leave a bare and barren trunk behind it; that it would tie up the hands and feet of our sacred polity, and deprive it of all power of motion; or that it would emasculate it of all its strength and vigour, and reduce it to a helpless and exanimate system."¹ On the contrary, I sincerely believe that the following remarks by an able reviewer of the Tracts for the Times and other kindred publications, with the exception of the historical allusions, apply just as forcibly to the Presbyterian Church in these United States as to the Church of Scotland : " It is not our smallest cause of gratitude to God as a Church, that He has left us nothing to wish for or condemn in the constitution of our Church, as laid at the reformation. All that is necessary is, that we fill up the outline which was then drawn, that we build upon the foundation which was then laid, that we carry out the principles which were then brought fresh and immediately from the Word of God. We need invent nothing, displace nothing, alter nothing. Our reformed Church was perfect in the economy of her creed, constitution, discipline and ritual. All we require is not to select among the institutions of modern innovators, or the antiquated relics of the Middle Ages: we have but to return to the condition in which our own Church existed at the period of the first and second Reformations, to find realized as pure and as perfect a transcript of the apostolic Church as can exist among uninspired men. This is an advantage which no other Church can lay claim to. And, accordingly, whenever a revival happens to other communions, they are led in consequence to depart from the principles and arrangements of their constitutions, while the more profound and powerful the revival we experience, it brings us back but with the greater force to a more perfect conformity to our own glorious con-

¹ *Spirit of the Nineteenth Century* for 1842, p. 27. See Appendix A, p. 604.

stitution. We fear we are not sensible of this our exclusive privilege, nor sufficiently thankful for it.”¹

Having now, as I conceive, clearly detected and exposed the singular confusion of ideas which led the Reviewer, with great parade of argument and corresponding hope of success, to quote both Calvin and the Confession of Faith in support of a principle which they both equally condemn, I proceed to the real question at issue: Is the Church adequately organized to discharge all the duties which Christ, her glorious Head and King, demands at her hands; or is she at liberty to supply the defects of her Constitution from the resources of her own wisdom ? In other words, Is the Church simply a servant of Christ, bound to do what she is commanded, and as she is commanded, acting in all respects according to orders; or is she a confidential agent, instructed only as to the ends to be accomplished, and left to invent the means for herself? The Reviewer and myself differ, and differ fundamentally, as to the true relation in which the Church stands to Christ. According to my views, the Church is commissioned to teach men to observe all things whatsoever which Christ has commanded. According to the Reviewer, she must add to the commandments of God those wise expedients of her own without which the commandments of God would be of none effect. It is true that, according to his own confession, these inventions of the Church do not exactly bind the conscience;² but then the commandments of God do, and these commandments cannot be kept without these inventions : so that a man, after all, is left to the alternative of sinning against God, or of observing the ordinances which the Church has instituted. This may not be binding the conscience, but it would seem to require a sagacity equal to his who could “ divide a hair ‘twixt south and south-west side “ to discriminate between being actually bound to do a thing, or being under the inevitable necessity of sinning—that is, of violating obligation—by not doing it.

¹ Presbyterian Review (Edin.), No. lv., p. 619, *note*.

² Spirit of the Nineteenth Century for 1842, p. 31. See App. A, p. 606.

The Reviewer is very acute—he can distinguish between a government of principles and a government of rules, and no doubt can resolve the difficulty in the case before us.

I might expose the fallacy of his principle by appealing to the great Protestant doctrine, that the Scriptures are a sufficient and complete rule of faith, and that through their instructions the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto *every* good work.¹ I might appeal to the equally acknowledged truth, that all the power of the Church is ministerial and declarative, and that she has no right to make laws, establish constitutions, or institute ordinances without the authority and sanction of the written Word.² I might show that the discretionary power demanded by the Reviewer, and actually exercised in the organization of ecclesiastical Boards, interferes with the royal prerogatives of Christ and the executive functions of the Holy Spirit. On all these grounds he might be met and triumphantly refuted. It might be shown that he is at war with the whole spirit of Protestantism, and is undesignedly making common cause with the friends of priestly intolerance and the foes of religious liberty throughout the world. But my present purpose will be best subserved by omitting all considerations of this sort, and showing at once that the Church *is* adequate to do, through her Divine organization, all that in the Scriptures is enjoined on her. In this way the only earthly pretext for ecclesiastical corporations will be removed, and the last lingering tie that binds the hearts of our people to these idols of men will be severed—I hope—for ever. As the work of Foreign Missions is confessedly the most difficult enterprise with which the Church is entrusted, if it can be shown that she is perfectly competent to conduct this department of labour without foreign assistance, extraneous agencies will hardly be demanded for any other part of her duty. Now what is required that our church-courts are not qualified to do, in order that the Gospel may be sent to “every creature under heaven” ? There is a pre-

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

² Form of Government, chap, i., sec. 7.

liminary office which the Holy Spirit must discharge before the Gospel can be preached either at home or abroad. Men must be called into the ministry, and qualified by a special unction from on high as well as by the subordinate teaching of man for its solemn and responsible duties. When men give satisfactory evidence to the Church that they are called of God and duly prepared to preach the glorious Gospel, this fact is declared by the imposition of hands, which the Presbytery alone can do. We have now the Preachers. The next business is to send them, that is, to support them by supplying their daily wants in their respective fields of labour. The money must be raised in the separate congregations ; and the Scriptures have appointed a set of officers who are ordained for the very purpose of attending to the secular affairs of the Church. When you have raised the money, the next step is to *send it* to the Preachers, which, with the commercial facilities afforded by the present condition of the civilized world, can surely be no hard matter. The Holy Spirit, then, supplies us with Preachers, the Presbytery ordains them, and the Deacons of the church support them. What more is required ? In what respects is this arrangement defective or inadequate? The character, qualifications and control of the Minister belong, of right, to the Presbytery, and when they send him out, they are furnished in every congregation with the necessary organization for supplying his wants. This is a plain and simple matter, and evidently requires none of the cumbrous and circuitous arrangements which characterize the Boards. The Presbyteries are courts acknowledged by our Constitution; Deacons are officers recognized in every particular congregation, and capable of being employed in the service of the Presbyteries and the higher tribunals of the Church. If one Presbytery should be too feeble to support its Missionaries, provision is made in our Book for its obtaining assistance from neighbouring Presbyteries. This is certainly the plan, and the only plan, contemplated by the framers of our Form of Government. Yet our Reviewer, though he has solemnly re-

ceived it as “agreeable to the Word of God,” has pronounced it to be preposterous and utterly inadequate to meet the wants of a dying world. The pith of his whole argument—if argument that may be called which arrives at a conclusion without any premises at all—is contained in the following extract: “ 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 tilings 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 consider, for a moment, 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 supervision 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 outlay 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 con-

sider these things in connection 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.”¹

Now this whole paragraph, which was intended to show the insufficiency of the plan proposed in our Book, contains nothing but a statement of the various details of the work to be done. The question still returns, Why cannot the Presbyteries accomplish this work just as efficiently as the Boards? The first thing wanted is good and faithful Preachers—a “continually increasing supply of good and faithful Ministers.” Now can Boards make them? Is it not the sole prerogative of God, the Holy Spirit, to call and qualify and send forth labourers into the harvest of the world? Does Christ require of the Church anything more than fervent and constant prayer to the Lord of the harvest, and can Boards infuse the spirit of love to a dying world, and the spirit of prayer to our ascended Lord? Boards can no more make a Preacher than they can make the hairs of our heads white or black. These Ministers are to be educated; granted. They are to be sent to the schools and colleges of the country, and if they are unable to pay their expenses they are to be supported by the bounty of the Church. Is there anything in this too hard or too mysterious for a Presbytery to perform? The money must

¹ Balt. Lit. and Eel. Mag. for 1841, pp. 460, 461. See App. A, p. 585.

be collected from particular congregations, and I do not see why the demands of a Presbytery should be less respected than the authority of a Board. I see no magic in an ecclesiastical corporation that shall infallibly open the purses of the people. These Ministers, having been ordained, must next be sent to their various fields of labour—that is to say, they must be supported and sustained. But what is to hinder the Presbyteries from supplying them with the means of going wherever God, in His Providence, may call them? Give them the money, and they can easily procure their own conveyances, and the comforts which their situations require. But the Reviewer begs us to consider the extent of the field. What of that? It is confessedly extensive, being no less than the world; but cannot fifty or a hundred Presbyteries survey it just as well as a single Board? And, again, is it not the duty of each missionary to select his own field? He cannot expect that others should determine for him where God has called him. This is a matter which he must settle for himself, and, having settled it, the Church is to help him on his journey after a godly sort. We are next to consider the number of Ministers to be sent forth. Why cannot the Presbyteries count them just as well as a Board? And why cannot the Presbyteries support them just as comfortably? The money, after all, must be collected from the various churches under the care of the different Presbyteries, and, for aught that I can see, this matter can be attended to just as well by those who have the immediate care of those churches as by a body five hundred miles off. Not to pursue the Reviewer's details any farther, I assert generally that he has not mentioned a single matter which the Church is not fully competent to manage through her regular and constitutional tribunals. And I here challenge him to construct a single syllogism, which will not palpably beg the question, out of any of the materials contained in the passage which has been fully quoted. I doubt, in fact, whether he can road his pompous enumeration of particulars, from which he has

pretended to draw his “most certain and evident” conclusion, without laughing at his own extravagance. It is really amusing to see a man start out with boasting promises of what he intends to prove, and then find that all his reasoning is nothing but a statement, in another form, of the very thing to be proved. The Reviewer’s proposition was, that Presbyteries are inadequate to send the Gospel to the heathen ; the proof is, that sending the Gospel to the heathen includes a great many particulars; and not a solitary reason is given, why these particulars, so elaborately detailed, are beyond the capacity of the Presbyteries to manage or conduct. If we should grant that his premises prove the necessity of a “permanent body of some kind,” we might still ask whether a Presbytery is not as permanent as a Board? It can meet as often upon its own adjournments, and frequency of meeting is all the permanence which any body of the sort can have. “Would any merchant in this mercantile country,” asks the Reviewer, with an air of triumph, “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?”¹ But here I am constrained to ask, Who ever proposed such a scheme? It is assuredly not to be found in the Argument against Boards. The plan there insisted on is, that the courts of the Church, the *Presbyte-*

¹ Balt. Lit. and Rel. Mag. for 1841, p. 463. See Appendix A, p. 587.

ties, are to do the business now done by the Boards, and to employ these Deacons, according to God's appointment, as their financial agents. And why are not the Presbyteries just as trustworthy, just as faithful, just as able, and just as efficient as the Boards that have been named ? We ask the Reviewer to give a sufficient and satisfactory reason, and until he does this all his declamation, however pompous, how full soever of " sound and fury," must still be taken as " signifying nothing." He must show us why it is that the "supervision, direction and control" which he pronounces to be the very life of our benevolent operations, " more important even than money or physical resources," cannot just as safely be committed to the Presbyteries of the Church as to ecclesiastical corporations. I ask triumphantly, Why ? and echo answers, Why ?

The Reviewer having shown, as he supposed, the inadequacy of the scheme drawn from our Standards and maintained in the Argument against Boards, next proceeds, with equal success, to prove that it is unscriptural and unconstitutional. " It is unscriptural," he asserts. " 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." Are we then to understand him as asserting that Presbyteries are unscriptural, and that Deacons are not recognized in the Word of God? Does he believe that our whole Presbyterian Form of Government is a mere human invention—not contained in Scripture nor deduced from it by necessary inference ? But how does the Reviewer establish his point that the plan set forth in the Argument against Boards is contrary to Scripture? By asserting, first, that Deacons are confined to particular churches, and empowered only to take care of the poor.¹ That Deacons are officers, elected and ordained in particular churches, is true. So are Elders; but as there is nothing in this fact inconsistent with an Elder's acting for the Church at large in our ecclesiastical courts, so there

¹ Bait. Lit. and Eel. Mag. for 1841, p. 465. See Appendix A, p. 589.

is nothing to prevent the Deacon from exercising his peculiar functions in a wider sphere. A Pastor is installed over a particular church, but is he at liberty to preach nowhere else? An Elder belongs to a specific congregation. Is our Constitution, therefore, wrong in permitting him to sit as a member of Presbytery ? If the mere fact of being an officer in a particular church necessarily confines one to that congregation alone, the Reviewer will find it a hard task to show how Elders and Pastors are ever formed into Presbyteries. He must either admit that the Presbyterian Form of Government is unscriptural, or that Deacons may act for Presbyteries as they act for their particular congregations. His only alternatives are Congregationalism or the abandoning of his reasoning upon the subject of Deacons. His syllogism is, that whoever is installed as an officer in a particular church can never be an officer of the Church catholic; Deacons are so installed; therefore Deacons can never be officers of the Church catholic. I might change the minor proposition and say, Elders are so installed, and how could he avoid the conclusion ? He must evidently abandon his major proposition or abandon Presbyterianism. Which horn of the dilemma will he take? By the same process of reasoning his objections drawn from the Constitution may be conclusively answered. But it seems that Deacons are to be entrusted with nothing but the care of the poor. Is the Reviewer yet to learn that the common method of instruction pursued in the Scriptures is to inculcate general truths by insisting on their particular applications, rather than dealing in abstract statements ? Our Saviour teaches the doctrine of a special Providence, by pointing to the fowls of the air, the lilies of the field and the hairs of our heads. Just as in the contemplation of the works of nature we rise to the abstract from the concrete, the general from the particular, so in the book of revelation we are often to pursue the same process of cautious and accurate induction. When our Saviour is asked, Who is our neighbour? He gives no formal and elaborate definition; He simply states

a case, and from that case the principle may be gathered. The Decalogue itself can be proved to be a perfect law only by admitting the principle that “ under one sin or duty all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded ”—many of the precepts containing only examples of a large class. As, then, it is frequently the method of Scripture to teach by example, where is the impropriety in supposing that the attention to the poor enjoined upon the Deacons was intended to include the whole department of secular business with which the Church was to be concerned ? It is certain that the reason assigned by the Apostles for ordering their election applies just as strongly to the collection and disbursement of funds for one purpose as for another. Their purpose was not to get rid of attending to the poor, but to get rid of secular distractions: “It is not reason,” said they, “that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”¹ What would they have gained by divesting themselves of the care of the poor, and continuing to be perplexed with the collection of funds for all other purposes ? It must be perfectly obvious to every candid mind that the entire secular business of the Church was entrusted to the Deacons; that one specific duty is mentioned, in accordance with the general method of Scripture, as a specimen of a class, and that the reason of the appointment determines the extent of the duties imposed. Here, then, is necessary inference deduced from Scripture, clearly confirming the general position of the Argument against Boards. It is plain, also, that the Deacons acted for the whole college of Apostles, not by travelling about with them in their various missionary tours, but by being under their inspection and control while they continued in Jerusalem. They stood in the same relation to them that I would have them occupy in regard to our Presbyteries. The office of Deacon, then, as set forth in the Argument against Boards, is both scriptural and constitutional, and all the Reviewer’s preposterous

¹ Acts vi. 2, 4.

efforts to make me the originator of new officers and a new set of courts are utterly abortive and ridiculous. The idea that a Deacon cannot attend to the secular business of the Presbytery or Assembly, without being removed from his particular congregation, is perfectly ludicrous and absurd. In reading this part of the Reviewer's article one finds it hard to believe that he is really serious. His whole train of reasoning has so much the appearance of a hoax, that one is tempted to fear at every step that he has, after all, been egregiously quizzed.

Still, although he cannot refute it either from the Scriptures or from the Constitution of the Church, the Reviewer obstinately maintains that the scheme defended in the Argument against Boards is "perfectly chimerical. It bases a system of practical operation upon a mere theoretical hypothesis." What! are our Presbyteries merely visionary bodies, incapable of being put into practical operation? Was it a visionary scheme which the Apostles adopted when they desired to be emancipated from secular distraction? Is our whole Form of Government a mere hypothesis which can never be carried into practical effect? If so, it is time to review our Standards and to abandon Presbyterianism as a mere chimera, which, however attractive in theory, can never produce any valuable results. It assumes," continues the Reviewer, "a self-controlling, self-perpetuating principle to exist some where or some how within these operations." This sentence I do not understand. I cannot see why it assumes such a principle in the case of Missions more than in the case of any other Presbyterial business. Nor do I see how, if the Presbyteries are liable to such a charge, the Boards are free from it. The whole sentence is unmeaning. "It attributes," he proceeds, "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 com-

mittees." I would simply ask how often the Boards meet,¹ how long they continue in session, and why the Presbyteries may not possess as large a share of foresight and wisdom as these contrivances possess? The objection lies just as powerfully against the one as it does against the other. If the Boards have Committees to carry out the details of their plans during the interim of their sessions, what is to prevent the Presbyteries from adopting the same arrangement, and

¹ This is an extremely important question, and whatever may be thought of the argument, the churches should know the manner in which these Boards manage the business committed to them. The four Boards of the Church consisted, in 1840, of the following number of members, viz., Board of Domestic Missions, 64 members, (*p.* 61 *of its Report*) ; the Board of Foreign Missions, 120 members, (*pp.* 31, 32 *of its Report*); the Board of Publication, 104 members, (*pp.* 18, 19 *of its Report*) ; the Board of Education, 68 members (*p.* 17 *of its Report*). The writer of this note was never a member of the Board of Domestic Missions (as he remembers), and therefore knows little about its internal economy or proceedings. He has been a member of all the remaining three, and has occasionally attended the meetings of each of them. The Board of Publication meets monthly, but if our personal notice is a just rule of judgment, we should say that exclusive of its Executive Committee, so many as one in ten of its members rarely attend its regular meetings. We have attended every meeting of the Board of Foreign Missions, we believe, from its organization ; its meetings were at first semi-annual; they are now annual only. The Minutes of 1840 (the latest in our reach), show that the Board held its annual meeting in Philadelphia, that its sessions continued *three* days, and that 40 (out of its 120) members were present, during *some part* of those sessions. Our recollection is, that in 1841 the ease was still worse; indeed that not more than a dozen persons regularly attended the short annual sessions of this important body. Now can anything be more ridiculous than to say that a few persons, met for a few days once a year, can fulfil the duties or discharge the obligations of the Church in regard to this vast subject? Or can anything be more insulting to the church courts, than to allege their incompetency *to do this work this well!* It would be a most edifying commentary on the urgent pleas for the incapacity of our church courts and the ardent commendations of the labours of our ecclesiastical corporations, if some one would publish a table of their times of meeting, and the attendance on their meetings, for a series of years. We unhesitatingly assert our conviction to be, that the result would be a new proof of what we long ago asserted to be the fact, viz., that the whole power of those Boards is ultimately vested in a few persons, who are virtually self-appointed. *Note by Ed. of the Baltimore Magazine.*

"Reply to a 'Serious Review of a 'Calm Discussion...'" by J.H. Thornwell.

what is to hinder the Presbyteries from meeting just as often as emergencies may require? In chapter xviii. of our Form of Government, such a Committee in each Presbytery seems to be contemplated; and this, by the way, is an additional proof that our fathers intended to entrust the whole work of Missions to the care of the Presbyteries. "It assumes," adds the Reviewer, "that the funds will be voluntarily forthcoming from all our churches in every portion of the Church." And do the Boards assume that these funds shall *he forcibly* forthcoming? The Lord loveth a cheerful giver, and we have no reason to expect that any but free-will offerings will be accepted of God. I do not see how Boards can raise money at pleasure, whether the people choose to give it or no. If there is not a spirit of love to dying souls and of zeal for the Lord's kingdom diffused among our churches, no organization on earth can make them do the work of the Lord. If the heart be not right, the acts will never be good; if the tree be not sound, the fruit can never be wholesome. The Reviewer evidently thinks that there is some magic in a Board which shall charm avarice into liberality, inspire a love of God where the Saviour's love has never been shed abroad, kindle a flame of zeal in the hearts of the formal and hypocritical, and discharge all the offices which the Scriptures attribute to the Holy Ghost. But I would beg him to remember that there was a point at which the magicians of Egypt were compelled to pause. There were some wonders which their enchantments could not compass, and which only the finger of God could achieve. "It seems to imply," he further asserts, "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." And why is it any harder to find Deacons for our churches than Elders? And why should they not be paid for their services if it should be found necessary? Is there none who love God in any of our churches, who would be as willing to serve the Lord in attending to the stuff as those who were ordained to a much more trou-

blesome business at Jerusalem? The Reviewer seems to think that there is no such thing as vital godliness in any of our congregations; that the Boards are a standing substitute for the graces of the Spirit; and that, consequently, if they should be removed, the wants of a dying world would never excite the first tear of sympathy, the first sigh of compassion, the first prayer for relief, or the first effort for its salvation. If this, indeed, be the condition of our multiplied churches, Ichabod may be written upon our walls. The glory has departed, and no inventions of man can ever save us from the withering curse of an insulted God. If this, indeed, be so, the heathen world may say to our people, as the Saviour said to the daughters of Jerusalem, “ Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves.” Our first work is evidently at home, in our own hearts, and we should give no sleep to our eyes, nor slumber to our eyelids, till the insulted Spirit of God has returned to our desolate Zion and built up the walls of our ruined city. If we are dead ourselves, we cannot expect to give life to others; our most laborious efforts will be only those of the dead burying their dead. If, on the other hand, we are alive to God, and He has enlarged our hearts, we will run in the way of all His commandments; our meat and our drink will be to do the will of our heavenly Father; and men in abundance will be found to fill all the offices which Christ has appointed in His Church. His people shall be willing in the day of His power.

I beg the reader now to review calmly and dispassionately the assumptions—which the Reviewer declares to be “most Utopian and gratuitous”—charged upon the Argument against Boards, in the passage which has been considered, sentence by sentence, and seriously ask himself whether they amount to anything more than this: that Christian men love the Lord Jesus Christ and His cause, and are willing, in their several stations and departments of labour, to spend and be spent in His service ? Is not this the whole of that violent hypothesis, on account of

which the scheme which I defend is pronounced to be preposterous in the extreme? And has it come to this, that all faith, all love, all zeal, have departed from our borders, and that a man who shall venture to assume that such things as grace and piety are to be found in the length and breadth of the whole Presbyterian Church in these United States of America, must be held up as utterly wild, Utopian and visionary—bereft of his senses and in love with chimeras ? Alas for the Church ! to what a pass are we come! And dost thou, my brother, read me a lecture for speaking disrespectfully of the Boards ? Shall the man who does not tremble, notwithstanding solemn vows, to denounce the institutions of God and to uncover the nakedness of the mother that has nursed him, who does not hesitate to revile the Lord's people as a nation of hypocrites and a race of evil-doers, who is shocked at the assumption that any man can be found so utterly Utopian as to love the Lord Jesus Christ and His cause and to count it a privilege to labour in his Master's vineyard, be yet astonished and amazed when the suspicion is expressed that Boards are not the best guarantees of the faith once delivered to the saints ? Whence all this zeal for the soundness of the Boards and all this contempt for the piety of the Church ? How comes it to pass that the Boards should be such guardians of orthodoxy, so zealous for the Lord, when all the Church is *dead, dead*, utterly dead ? And which is the greater sin, to question the excellence of ecclesiastical Boards, or to question the grace of all our churches ? He cannot deny that his whole argument against the efficiency of Presbyteries proceeds on the assumption that neither they nor the churches take any interest in the matter; and this is tantamount to saying that there is no real love to God or His kingdom among all His professing people. He is fairly shut up to the conclusion that the scriptural organization is sufficient, or that the spirit of piety is extinct in our churches.

I think, now, that it may be safely concluded that the Reviewer has totally failed to substantiate his position, that

the scheme which he opposes is “ preposterous in the extreme, altogether visionary, and in no degree adapted to the necessities of the case.” In other words, the ends to be accomplished by the Boards can be accomplished as easily, safely and efficiently without them, through the regular action of our ecclesiastical system. His defence of Boards, consequently, falls to the ground. His argument was, that the Church has a right to appoint them because she cannot do without them. For aught that appears, she *can* do without them ; therefore, upon his own principle, she has no right to appoint them. The necessity upon which the right was suspended does not exist, and consequently the right itself disappears “ *in levi aere.*” The Church can ordain Ministers just as well without them as with them. She can send them abroad just as well without them as with them. She can raise funds just as well without them as with them. She can attend to all proper secular and spiritual concerns just as well without them as with them. Therefore they may be safely given to the winds. And this is the conclusion of the whole matter.

There is an *a priori* argument against the principle of the Reviewer that God has prescribed only the ends to be accomplished, and left the invention and adjustment of the means to the wisdom and discretion of the Church herself, which, it would seem, ought to give satisfaction to every Christian man. That argument was fully stated in the Argument against Boards, and noticed in the review only to be perverted. Was there ever a more remarkable instance of evasion than the following sentence affords ?—” It is maintained by the objector, that our Saviour constituted His Church with a special reference to Missionary operations; therefore the Church is under obligation to carry on such operations by the best and most effective agency.”¹ The principle of the Argument against Boards is, that the visible organization of the Church, consisting of its courts and officers, was so constituted and arranged as that Mission-

¹ Bait. Lit. and Eel. Mag. for 1841, p. 463. See Appendix A, p. 588.

ary operations, through and by it, might be readily and efficiently conducted. Therefore, says the Reviewer, she is “under obligation to carry on such operations by the best and most effective agency.” That is, because God has made and ordained her as His instrumental agent in this business, she is at liberty to appoint and ordain another for herself. The Head of the Church is virtually charged with folly in all His arrangements, His plans are found to be utterly defective and inadequate, and unless the Church interposes with her wisdom the world must die without the light of the knowledge of God. Christ has constructed a machine for a particular purpose; the machine, however, is so clumsily put together, that it will not and cannot work until man has given it the finishing stroke. What an impeachment of Divine wisdom, and what an extraordinary specimen of reasoning! He who should seriously maintain that because God has given us eyes for the purposes of vision, therefore we are under obligation to use spectacles, or, because He has given us legs for the purpose of walking, therefore we are bound to resort to crutches, would reason precisely as the Reviewer reasons in the case before us—God has appointed the Church for the purpose of holding forth the Word of life to a perishing world, therefore we are under obligation to fabricate Boards. But passing by this miserable sophistry, is it so that Jesus Christ has constituted the Church with a special reference to Missionary operations? Is it her business to hold the truth as a precious deposit, to bear testimony to it among the dying sons of men, and to proclaim it fully to earth’s remotest bounds? What say our Standards and what say the Scriptures? “Unto this catholic, visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God, for the *gathering* [mark the expression] and perfecting of the saints in this life, to the end of the world; and doth by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them *effectual* thereunto.”¹ The reader will note that *God* makes

¹ Confession of Faith, ch. xxv., sec. 3.

His Ministers, Word and ordinances effectual by *His presence* and *Spirit*. So says the Confession. The Reviewer says that the *Church* makes them *effectual* by *her own Boards*. But possibly our Standards may be wrong. What say the Scriptures? “And he gave some, Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some, Evangelists; and some, Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”¹ It is plain, that Christ, in giving gifts to His Church, supposed that He had sufficiently furnished her for the work which He had set before her. The Church herself, at that time, thought nothing more was needed; for we find her going forward on her grand Missionary enterprise with no other agencies in operation but just those which Christ had appointed; and experience would seem to indicate that she was abundantly provided for her office, as no Missionary annals that the world has ever seen contain more signal and striking proofs of success than the Acts of the Apostles. But, however this may be, we are shut up to the conclusion, that Christ’s expectations were disappointed, and His plan was a failure, or that the Church, as constituted in the New Testament, is adequately furnished for discharging effectually all her obligations; and as the wisdom of the Son of God cannot be questioned, we are bound to believe that the “Word, the ministry, and the ordinances of God” will always be made effectual, by His presence and Spirit, in gathering His sheep from the four quarters of the globe. There is but one way of evading this argument, and that is, by denying that there is any model of church-organization divinely prescribed, or that it had reference to the duties and functions to be discharged by the Church; neither of which can consistently be done by any true Presbyterian. The scriptural view of the Church, as a visible institution, is that she is a mere instrumentality employed by Christ for the purpose of accomplishing His own ends. She is the body, and He the Head; and as the members can only

¹ Eph. iv. 11, 12.

move and act by the volitions of the head, so the Church is subject to the will of Christ in all things. She has no will, wisdom nor power of herself. She is the instrument, and He the agent. She is not His confidential adviser, to whom He reveals His purposes, and whom He consults concerning His plans. She is not His confidential agent, to whom He communicates His will, and leaves it to be executed as *she* may see best. She is a *positive institution*, and therefore must show a definite warrant for everything that she does. It is not enough that her measures are not *condemned*. They must be *sanctioned, positively sanctioned*, by the power which ordains her, or they are null and void. Like the Congress of the United States, she acts under a written Constitution, and must produce her *written authority* for all that she undertakes. Hence, so far is the Church from having the power to ordain means, that she is herself the *very means* by which her glorious Head accomplishes His purposes in the world ; and, therefore, as being ordained by Him, must be completely adequate to meet the ends in view: and this conclusion being once admitted, the argument of the Reviewer necessarily falls to the ground. If he should contend that where duties are enjoined, the power to perform them is conveyed, behold all the power in the Divine Constitution of the Church ! If he should still persist that where ends are proposed to be accomplished, adequate means must be adopted, behold! God has given us the means in the same Divine institution, and promised to render them effectual by His presence and Spirit. In this way I have sufficiently answered the Reviewer, by showing that his minor proposition is false, without entering into a full refutation, as I might do, and as I may yet have to do, of his major. At present, I have preferred the course which would give me the opportunity of showing that we might leave the subject of Missions just where it is left in our Standards. I have thought it sufficient to state that his fundamental principle is a fallacy into which he has been led by confounding two things entirely separate, and leave

it to his own candour to abandon it. I have felt no serious inclination to expose it, as I do not suppose that there are half a dozen Ministers in the Presbyterian Church who could seriously embrace it when fairly set before them in its naked deformity. He chose to rest the defence of Boards upon their *necessity*. On that ground I have fully met him. The argument between us might here rest. But I think it well, before closing this article, to notice briefly some of the objections to the Argument against Boards which have not yet passed under our notice.

One of its charges against the Boards was, that they give us a set of ecclesiastical officers and courts separate from those acknowledged in our Standards. This the Reviewer denies, and insists upon it, that those engaged in the service of the Boards are Ministers and Elders of the Church, and do not cease to be such in consequence of their relations to the Boards. The service of the Boards, let it be remembered, becomes their calling—their distinct vocation. Is it the service to which they were ordained ? Is it not a very different employment from the usual duties of Ruling Elder, Bishop or Evangelist ? I shall not quarrel about a name. If the duties of these men are different from those to which they were ordained, the purpose of my argument is answered. It signifies little what they were when they went there. The question is, What do they become after they go there ? As to the Boards being ecclesiastical courts, the Reviewer admits again and again that they have spiritual jurisdiction, that they are entrusted with the oversight of the spiritual affairs of the Missions, that they exercise spiritual functions in God's house. What more can be said of a Presbytery or a Synod ? If you should maintain that it is necessary to a court that its powers should be inherent and original, you may change the word which the Argument against Boards applies to the Boards, but the thing itself remains: the unlawful power is still possessed and exercised, and they only do what, if they were courts, they would do. The point of the argument is in the possession and exercise of the power,

and not in the application of the name. The Reviewer denies that Boards interfere with the parity of the ministry, and yet admits that undue influence may be exerted by them. I can only testify as to what I have seen and heard. I saw and heard a Ruling Elder give a solemn charge to two Ministers of the Gospel, just as they were preparing to leave their native land to labour among distant and perishing heathen. What more would a Right Reverend Prelate have done under the same circumstances? The Reviewer also maintains, that what is done by the Boards is done by the Church in her ecclesiastical capacity. He would be nearer the truth in saying that it is *appointed* by her, in her ecclesiastical capacity. The work is certainly done not by herself, but her agents.

Finally, the Reviewer demolishes his own argument by admitting that no one is under any moral obligation to support the Boards. They do not, according to his own statement which I leave him to reconcile with other statements which he has made upon the same general subject—they do not bind the conscience. Then we are at liberty to destroy them. They cannot surely be so vastly important as he makes them, and yet have their existence suspended on so slender a thread. Every dollar might be withheld from them, and yet no guilt incurred. They might all be destroyed, and yet no sin committed. As, then, according to his own confession, there is no sin in refusing to sustain them, and as many of his brethren believe that there is much danger in upholding them, the safest course is to let them alone or consign them to the tomb of “all the Capulets.”

Before closing this article, I wish to present a few additional considerations showing that the Presbyteries ought to take the whole business of Missions into their own hands.

1. The first is, that the Constitution of the Church absolutely requires it. Those who have attentively studied our Form of Government will perceive that two leading ends were contemplated by its framers. The first has reference

to the peace, union and harmony of the whole body, and the second relates to its extension and enlargement. The Church is regarded as one whole, and its visible organization is adapted to its unity. The General Assembly is the “bond of union, peace, correspondence and mutual confidence among all our churches.”¹ Our system of courts of appellate jurisdiction, and the distribution and arrangement of their powers, are admirably suited to bind all the parts of the Church together, and to preserve the unity and integrity of the body. But the Church must be *enlarged* as well as *united*. Now it is evident that there can be no extension without the formation of individual churches. This is the first step—the Church spreads by increasing the number of its particular congregations. Whatever provision, therefore, our Constitution has made for the formation of new churches is just its provision for Missionary operations. Wherever it has lodged the power to do the one, it has lodged the power to do the other. Now this power is expressly given to the Presbyteries,² and to the Presbyteries exclusively; and hence, by necessary inference, the Presbyteries are the Missionary agents contemplated by our system. The Synods and General Assembly cannot directly interfere until the Presbyteries have done their work and supplied the materials, in the formation of new churches out of which other Presbyteries and other Synods may be formed. The Synods and Assembly are courts of *union*, having reference only to churches already existing. The Presbyteries are also *formative* bodies, giving existence to the parts to be united. The only way in which the Assembly or Synod can plant a Mission is by “directing the Presbyteries to ordain Evangelists or Ministers without relation to particular churches.”³ How undeniably plain, then, that our Constitution never contemplated any other agencies for Missions but Presbyteries, with whom it has lodged the

¹ Form of Government, eh. xii., sec. 4.

² Ibid., ch. xviii., sec. 8.

³ Ibid., ch. x.

power to ordain Ministers and form new churches; which includes the chief business of Missions!

2. Another reason—which I repeat here because the Reviewer seems not to have understood it as stated in the Argument against Boards—is that, in this way, the churches will know what they are actually sending to the heathen, whether the Gospel of Christ or the traditions of men. The Boards require that all their Ministers should “be endorsed by Presbyteries. Very true; but what signifies an endorsement to me by a man or body of men of whom I am profoundly ignorant? *Personal knowledge*, either of the party sent or of the party recommending, is indispensably necessary in order that our churches may support a man with a good conscience. They should either know him themselves or know those who testify to his character. Under the system of Boards, the churches in South Carolina may be supporting a man sent out by a Presbytery denouncing them as unchristian and hypocritical—a Presbytery that would silence all their Ministers and excommunicate all their members. They do not know to whom their money goes. How then can their prayers and their alms go together? But let the Presbyteries take the matter in hand, and their churches will know who are supported; and as all the Presbyteries in the same Synod are personally known to each other, they can assist in sustaining each other’s missionaries, and know what they are doing. There is here a security against abuse—against an ignorant upholding of false men and false doctrines.

3. Another reason is, that by such an arrangement the undivided energies of our churches might be called into action. The whole body would be reached. Let it be made a part of the ordinary business of our Presbyteries to pray and provide for the wants of a perishing world, and a new and glorious order of things would speedily arise. But as this point has been urged in the Argument against Boards, I proceed to a reason drawn from the peculiar condition of the Church.

4. There are elements of division among us—points on which Presbyteries and Synods are known to be divided. A central plan of action, therefore, cannot be adopted with any hope that it shall be permanent. I need not specify. My meaning will be obvious to those who have watched the progress of discussion and the march of opinion on the subjects of slavery, temperance, and kindred topics. Prudence would seem to dictate that our combinations, if we would preserve peace, must be as few as possible. In this way Christian charity and the unity of the Church may be alike preserved.

I have now, as I think, sufficiently noticed the objections of the Reviewer to the Argument against Boards, and completely refuted him upon his own ground. His ideas of church-government and ecclesiastical power strike me as being exceedingly loose and exceedingly dangerous. His notions are even more extravagant than those of High-churchmen and Prelatists, for they do make the Church a *Divine* institution; but he makes it, to a mournful degree, a mere human association, and then clothes it with the same extraordinary powers which the strenuous advocates of the apostolical succession ascribe to it. If he believed that Presbyterianism rests on Divine authority, he would undoubtedly have more faith in its efficiency, and be less prone to try the expedients of man in its stead. My faith in the adaptation of our system is founded on my faith in its Divine origin. Believing that our Zion is the city of our God, and that he has promised to establish her for ever, I am fully persuaded, that, if we would carry our principles into thorough, practical operation, His presence and Spirit would attend us and make our walls salvation and our gates praise. Let us only have faith in the success and efficacy of Divine institutions, and we shall find experience more than justifying our highest expectations. The sickly sentimentalism, which for years has passed current for the spirit of Missions, which has been fostered and diffused by the American Board and kindred institutions, and which ap-

peals to the carnal sympathies of man rather than to the faith of God's elect, has had its day and done its work. The real spirit of Missions—a spirit of jealousy for the Lord God of hosts, of love to a glorious Saviour, and of ardent attachment to the pure, spiritual principles of His kingdom, combined with a godly desire to save the souls of men from death—is beginning to revive. The Church is waking up to the magnitude and importance of the contest with the powers of darkness; and knowing her enemies and the enemies of man to be strong, vigilant and active, she is inquiring for tried armour—for weapons which shall stand in the day of battle, and drive her enemies discomfited before her. She is returning to the simplicity of faith, and inquiring for the old paths of safety and success. It is a good omen. I trust that a glorious destiny yet awaits our Church ; that God has delivered her from a long, dark, mournful bondage to Pelagian principles and Pelagian measures, and is now about to deliver her from an equally galling bondage to human traditions, for the purpose of making her a joy and praise in the whole earth. As the Israelites were brought up harnessed out of Egypt to drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite and Hittite from the promised land, so we are brought up from as mournful a captivity, and girded with the whole armour of God, to take possession, in the name of our Master, of the revolted tribes of earth. God is preparing us for a noble enterprise. Let all our Presbyteries, marshalled under their glorious Leader, go out like the tribes of Israel under the conduct of Joshua; let them all come up in unbroken phalanx to the help of the Lord, the help of the Lord against the mighty, and they will soon have as signal wonders to celebrate as the ancient people of God. What we want is *faith*—faith in the Divine promises, faith in the Divine appointments; and when this faith is imparted, earthen pitchers and lamps will be strong and resistless in our hands. To this faith our Church is returning. God grant that she soon may be fully established upon the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone !