

THE SOCINIAN APOSTASY

OF

The English Presbyterian Churches.

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A DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED ON BEHALF OF

THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

BEFORE THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

IN THE

First Presbyterian Church, New York,

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## THE SOCINIAN APOSTASY IN ENGLAND.

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EXPERIENCE is the unerring touchstone of principles, plans, and systems. Tested by it, just principles and correct systems come forth, like gold from the refiner's crucible, the more lustrous, by virtue of the process; whilst the erroneous are exposed in undisguised falsehood and deformity. History fills the high and responsible office of tracing, with impartial eye, the ever-varying phenomena of these experiments; and faithfully recording the results, for the instruction of aftertimes. Ignorance or forgetfulness of the important lessons, which the voice of ages thus addresses to the Church, is the fruitful occasion of many of the greatest evils with which she is assailed. Hence, the multiplied experiments, pregnant with inevitable disaster, which meet us at every step in the history of her labors. Hence, the facility with which, from age to age, she anew falls an unsuspecting victim to the same specious heresies, which have so often already seduced her from the purity of her faith, and exposed her to nakedness and shame.

To no branch of the Church of Christ does the historic monitress address herself, in language more richly fraught with encouragement on the one hand, and warning on the other, than to the Presbyterian Church. To one of the most interesting and instructive of these lessons our attention will, for the present, be directed. The occurrence of the Socinian apostasy in England, constitutes, with a certain class of the opponents of Presbyterian government, a standing argument in demonstration that our system is no more effectual than any other, for protection from the assaults of the most deadly

heresy.\* We design in the present discourse to institute an inquiry into the facts and circumstances connected with the case thus presented,—the Socinian apostasy of the English Presbyterian Churches. In the progress of this inquiry, we expect to show, that there was not, nor had there ever been, since the Reformation, an organized Presbyterian Church in England, when that apostasy took place;† and that the first step in the defection,—a step which prepared the way for all the rest,—was the formal and definitive surrender by the Presbyterians, of every distinctive feature of that system of government, in a written treaty of union with the Independent Churches, upon a Congregational platform. The Church was betrayed, by the flatteries of a fair but false Delilah, chanting the song of unity and peace. Thus lulled into security and slumber, it awoke too late, to find itself shorn of the locks of its strength, and delivered, bound and helpless, into the hands of its enemies. From the day of that treaty, the declension progressed, by stages that perfectly corresponded with those which a later generation has witnessed, in the Unitarian Churches of New England.

The Presbyterian, was the normal constitution of the Reformed Churches. The principles of ecclesiastical order which belong to it, were unanimously embraced by the leading reformers, and were incorporated into the constitutions of the Churches, in every instance where the decision was not controlled by the civil authorities. In England, the tendencies toward the reformation which early and spontaneously appeared, were trodden down by the iron heel of the tyrannical Henry the Eighth; who shook off, indeed, the yoke of the Papacy; but only to substitute a tyranny, if possible, more intolerable still, more impious and absurd, wielded by his own capricious will, over the consciences and lives of men, and the faith of the Church of Christ. By him were devoted to martyrdom, with impartial cruelty, the Papist for his persistent allegiance to Rome, and

\* Such importance is, in the minds of some who ought to be better informed, attached to the defection here described, that an edition of the little ten or twelve page pamphlet, which contains the Constitution and By-Laws of the Congregational Association of Iowa, devotes a long marginal note to the citation of that occurrence, as an argument in condemnation of Presbyterian order.

† We, of course, use the word church, in a Presbyterian, and not the Independent sense; not as designating a particular congregation, but a denomination.

the Christian for his faith in the Son of God. The annals of his true daughter, the bloody Mary, are burdened with the groans of martyred saints. Nor did the accession of the imperious Elizabeth bring freedom from persecution, which still harassed those who ventured to dissent from the semi-papal theology of the throne. During her reign, the first open attempts were made to vindicate the divine authority of Presbyterian order, in opposition to the system which was established by royal prerogative. The learned and eminent Cartwright, venturing, in 1570, from his divinity chair in the University of Cambridge, to hold up the Scriptures as the only rule of discipline, as well as of faith, and thence proposing to reform the established Church, he was expelled from the university, and forced, by the malice of his enemies, to seek safety in flight from the kingdom. But, although it was an easy matter to drive him forth a second time an impoverished exile, it was not so easy to suppress the principles for which he suffered, and which he still continued, with vigor and success, to propagate and defend.

It was not, however, until 1572, that an attempt was made to organize a Church, with a polity moulded after the scriptural model. In that year, a number of Puritan Ministers and others, despairing at length of any satisfactory reform of the establishment, assembled privately in Wandsworth, a village in the suburbs of London, drafted and adopted a written constitution, which is known in history as "The Orders of Wandsworth," and under it, erected themselves into a Presbytery. In accordance with their constitution, eleven Ruling Elders were chosen, and ordained in the Wandsworth Church. Although the existence of this Presbytery was soon known, and elicited a royal proclamation for the enforcement of conformity, and the utmost vigilance of prelates and High Commission for the detection and punishment of the members, they remained for some time undiscovered. But they were ultimately arrested or dispersed, and the Presbytery dissipated. Similar organizations took place, in several other counties, with corresponding results. In 1575, the Churches of Jersey and Guernsey obtained from Cartwright a form of order and discipline, similar in its essential features to that which was afterwards framed by the Westminster Assembly. This constitu-

tion was continued in use among those people, until King James, after his accession, forced on their shoulders the yoke and ceremonies of the established Church.

Such is a very brief illustration of this period in the history of English Presbyterianism. Organization was impossible. If a Presbytery sometimes assembled,—if an ordination, in some rare instance, took place,—it was by stealth and in secret; under well-grounded apprehensions of fines and imprisonment, forfeiture and exile, perhaps, torture and death. Yet, still, though in troublous times, the walls went up. Before the death of Elizabeth, a pamphleteer of the time estimated the Presbyterians at not less than one hundred thousand; that is, about one-twelfth of the entire population of England. Twenty-two years of misrule and persecution consummated the career of the pedantic James; and when his son, Charles the First, ascended the throne, the Presbyterian party had acquired strength enough to exert a controlling influence in Parliament, to oppose a firm and uncompromising resistance to the usurpations of that unprincipled monarch; and, at length, to hurl him from his throne; though not enough to save him from the bloody doom, which his own perjuries drew upon him, at the hands of the usurping army, and the expurgated Parliament.

Such a catastrophe was not, however, on any hand, anticipated, when, at an early stage of the rupture between the king and the Parliament, the Westminster Assembly was called. The day so long postponed, seemed now at hand, when the Reformed Church of England, released from the thralldom of the civil power, should be permitted to frame a constitution, and institute the ordinances, in accordance with the teachings of her conscience, and the law of her King. The result of the deliberations of the venerable Synod, which now at the call of the Parliament of England convened, in the chapel of Henry the Seventh, was the production of those unsurpassed Catechisms and Confession, which are now recognized as the symbols of faith of by far the largest section of the Reformed Church; and that scriptural polity from whence we derive the symmetrical proportions of our own.

But how singular has been the providence of God in this thing! When the Westminster Assembly convened, this our land was the wilderness home of wild beasts and savage

tribes. Three or four campfires, twinkling on the coast, were all that betokened the presence of a civilized race. How little thought the assembled divines, as they pursued their arduous labors, weighing each word, and balancing every sentence of their incomparable testimony; how little thought they, amid the annoyances with which they were harassed by the pertinacious cavils of their Independent associates, and the embarrassments and alarms occasioned by Parliamentary insolence and menaces, of the thousands of God's Ministers, and the millions of his people, who, in the midst of this wilderness, should arise up to bless them, and sit in peace beneath the shade of the vine, which their hands then planted! How little did they anticipate, that again from this land, those same standards, emblazoned with the Mediator's crown, should be borne abroad, and planted by the heralds of salvation, among the many nations of Asia, and the teeming tribes of Africa, to teach their millions allegiance to Messiah's throne! Venerable men! How lofty your position! How illustrious your toils! How privileged your inheritance of usefulness and of hallowed fame! Here we enwreath a chaplet to your memory. We join with all the good and great, of after generations, to render God thanks, for your labor of wisdom and love. High and ever-growing renown shall coming ages accord, in the Church of Christ, to your imperishable names!

But whilst thus ordained to be a blessing to others, those men of God were not permitted, for themselves or the Churches for love of which they toiled, to witness, for so much as one good hour, the action of the system which their piety and learning devised. The doctrinal parts of the Confession and Catechisms were promptly sanctioned by Parliament. But the Book of Discipline did not meet with equal favor. After many delays, and much altercation, the Parliament passed an ordinance, which purported to establish a system of order on the plan of the Assembly. But provisions were introduced which altogether changed its character, and converted it into an Erastian, instead of a Presbyterian government. It was enacted "that if any person find himself aggrieved with the proceedings of the [parochial] Presbytery to which he belongs, he may appeal to the classical eldership [the Presbytery], from them to the provincial assembly, from them to the national, and from them to Parliament." An enumeration was made in the statute, of

the offences, of which and no other, the ecclesiastical courts might take cognizance. Not only so, but by a subsequent act it was further provided, "that an appeal shall be from every classis, to the commissioners chosen by Parliament out of every province, and from them to Parliament itself. That if any person commit any scandalous offences, not mentioned in the ordinance, the Minister may forbear to administer the sacraments to him for that time; but he shall within eight days certify the same to the commissioners, who shall send up the case, with their opinions, to the Parliament; by whose determination the eldership shall abide."\*

How utterly subversive such provisions were, of every distinctive feature of Presbyterianism, we need hardly pause to insist. In that system, the parity of the ministry, administration by assemblies, and gradation of courts, are indeed important and essential features; and a semblance of them still remained, even in this Parliamentary system. But the significance and value of these features, are to be sought in those radical principles which lie at the foundation of the whole system, and of which these are but some of the native results. Those foundation principles are: That the Lord Jesus Christ, and he alone, is King in Zion. That "as King and Head of his Church, he hath therein appointed a government in the hands of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate."† That the authority thus ordained by Christ, is vested primarily, not in church officers, as hierarchists contend; nor in the particular Congregation, as Independents insist; but in the Church Universal, "the mother of us all;" to be exercised by officers whose functions are designated by Christ, and who are elected and called to their ministry by his Spirit dwelling in the Church. In the words of the Westminster Assembly, "Unto the catholic visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering 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."‡ From this catholic Church, these gifts, and the accompanying graces, flow in a perpetual stream through the various parts, from the larger assembly down to the particular Congregation, and the individual believer.

\* Neal's History of the Puritans, vol. 2, p. 12.

† Westminster Confession, ch. 30 : 1:   ‡ Ibid. ch. 25 : 3.



Hence, arises the doctrine, contained in those same standards that "there is no ordinary possibility of salvation,"\* for those who are severed from the benefits, thus derived by every child of God, from this nourishing mother, the Church. From these principles, it results, that the subdivision of the Church, which is necessary for the purpose of local efficiency, is to be had in constant subordination to the paramount authority of the larger bodies, in subjection to the glorious Head.

These principles, which constitute the lifespring of the Presbyterian system, were, by the Parliamentary ordinances, trodden in the dust; and the authority of the magistrate substituted for the Headship of Christ. Thus were the divines of Westminster thwarted in their labors, and the result is scornfully stated by the prelatie historian Echard: "The Presbyterians never saw their dear Presbytery settled in any one part of England." Even the Parliamentary system was not brought into practical operation. The London Ministers, who were nearly all Presbyterians, were, indeed, forced, at length, by stringent enactments, reluctantly, and under protest, to assume the forms of organization according to the statute; and the same influence produced similar compliance in some other places. But the scheme was altogether unacceptable to the Presbyterians, opposed by the Independents, and unsatisfactory even to the Parliament itself. The disputes between that body and the army soon superseded all other questions. At length, Cromwell seized the reins; with him, Independency gained the ascendancy; and the Parliamentary discipline fell at once into disuse. In some instances, however, the Presbyterian Ministers voluntarily united themselves, in organizations more nearly corresponding to the scriptural system. The protectorate of Cromwell was characterized by a moderation on the subject of the rights of conscience, which we take leave to attribute, rather to the necessities of his position, than to enlightened principles of religious liberty. His frown rested on the Presbyterians, and they sometimes felt the weight of his iron hand. This was sufficient, with the anarchy of the times, to preclude any extended or efficient organization, and to dissipate those which had been partially created.

The restoration of Charles the Second brought in its train,

\* Westminster Confession, ch. 25 : 2.

the Act of Uniformity, and the English St. Bartholomew. The Act of Uniformity ordained that, "every parson, vicar, or other Minister whatsoever, shall, before the feast of St. Bartholomew, which shall be in the year of our Lord 1662, openly and publicly, before the Congregation assembled for religious worship, declare his unfeigned assent and consent to the use of all things contained and prescribed" in the Book of Common Prayer; under penalty of deprivation, *ipso facto*, of all spiritual functions, and every temporal benefice. And this, too, after material alterations had been made in the book; and the publication of the altered edition so delayed, as to render it physically impossible for Ministers generally to obtain it, in due time to comply with the provisions of the act. Under the same penalty it was, in another statute, enacted, that teachers and Ministers, of every grade, should subscribe a declaration, "that it is not lawful, upon any pretence whatsoever, to take up arms against the king."\* "It was made a crime to attend a dissenting place of worship. A single Justice of the Peace might convict without a jury; and might, for the third offence, pass sentence of transportation beyond sea, for seven years. With refined cruelty, it was provided, that the offender should not be transported to New England, where he was likely to find sympathizing friends. If he returned to his own country before the expiration of his term of exile, he was liable to capital punishment. A new and most unreasonable test was imposed on divines who had been deprived of their benefices for non-conformity; and all who refused to take it, were prohibited from coming within five miles of any town which was governed by a corporation, of any town which was represented in Parliament, or of any town where they had themselves resided as Ministers."† "The jails," says Macaulay, "were soon crowded with Dissenters; and among the sufferers were some, of whose genius and virtue any Christian society might well be proud." On the fatal day of St. Bartholomew, two thousand Ministers of the Gospel, the most of them Presbyterians, chose to abandon their livings and their homes, and to resign themselves to poverty and persecution, rather than violate their consciences, or deny their God. From this date, until the Revolution of 1688, through the successive reigns of Charles, and James the

\* Neal, vol. 2, p. 240.

† Macaulay's England, 8vo. ed. vol. 1, p. 166.

Second, a licentious court and obsequious Parliament were busied, in devising means to harass the harmless and unresisting men, who preferred obedience to God, before the favor of princes. Test acts, and conventicle acts, oaths of allegiance, oaths of abjuration, and oaths of supremacy, burdened the statute book. Vexations, fines, tortures, imprisonments, exile, and death, pursued the worn-out remnant of witnesses for a scriptural faith and order. Said the Earl of Castlemaine, himself a Papist, " 'Twas never known that Rome persecuted, as the bishops do, those who adhere to the same faith with themselves; and establish an inquisition against the professors of the strictest piety among themselves; and, however the prelates complain of the bloody persecution of Queen Mary, it is manifest that their persecution exceeds it; for under her, there were not more than two or three hundred put to death; whereas under their persecution, above treble that number have been rifled, destroyed, and ruined in their estates, lives, and liberties; being, as is most remarkable, men, for the most part, of the same spirit with those Protestants who suffered under the prelates, in Queen Mary's time."\*

At length the tyranny and misrule of the house of Stuart were brought to an end. The exhausted patience of England drove James the Second from the throne; and the nation threw itself into the arms of the illustrious William of Orange, a Presbyterian prince. With him came respite from persecution, and after long delay, by a reluctant Parliament, the Act of Toleration. Now may we see realized the hopes so long deferred: the inauguration on the soil of England of the polity so fitly conceived and framed by the joint wisdom of England's best divines. But alas! the Presbyterians who witnessed the accession of William, and thronged his palace with their congratulations, were not the same, who nearly half a century before had met in Westminster, and compiled those monuments. A new generation had arisen "which knew not Joseph;" a generation realizing too deeply the impress of hostile influences, with which they had been long in contact, and which were eminently unfavorable to the maintenance and transmission of sound principles.

\* Neal, vol. 2, p. 309.

Conspicuous among these influences was the reaction of sentiment, which resulted from the intolerant principles that darken the fame of the Westminster Assembly. That Assembly maintained opinions on the subject of religious liberty, of which we will only here in passing say, that they were on this point certainly and greatly in the wrong; an error, which was alike disastrous to them, and fatal to the polity which they framed. Yet it is much the easier, as it is the more fashionable way, to refer flippantly to that error, for the purpose of stigmatizing their memory, and inducing distrust of their opinions on other questions; rather than by a thorough mastering of the whole subject, to acquire the capacity to appreciate their true attitude; and whilst deploring their grievous fault, to do justice to the perplexities with which they were surrounded, and the integrity and nobleness of their motives. But the excellencies of good men do not neutralize, they rather intensify, the fatal effects of their errors. The arguments by which the Assembly opposed the proposal to tolerate dissent from the contemplated Presbyterian establishment, proved equally available, after the accession of Charles the Second, for vindicating the restored hierarchy, in the persecutions with which it harassed the now dissenting Presbyterians. The effect was a reaction of sentiment, which, in accordance with a well-known law of mental operation, in the recoil from the extreme of denying toleration to any other than their own system, flew off to the opposite extreme, of undervaluing the importance of those points of diversity, that subsist among the Churches of Christ. From the error of denying anything as due to the demands of mutual forbearance and charity, the opposite mistake was now the more prevalent. A willingness was induced to sacrifice principle, for the sake of peace; and to surrender the order of God's house, for the sake of union among his people; and especially among those who in past days had shared in common sufferings, under a common proscription.

It is the less surprising that the Presbyterians of that age should be disposed to undervalue their distinctive principles of church government, as those principles could, in the state of the case, have to them at best, no higher character than that of a well-constructed and beautiful theory, with the prac-

tical operation of which they were entirely unacquainted. In this respect, they were at a disadvantage, which was not shared by their brethren, the Independents. The one system involves elements which require extended co-operation, and therefore imply more or less of publicity, and consequent exposure to interruption and dissolution, by the agencies of persecution. But the other, the offspring of a bloody period, is pre-eminently fitted for perpetuation at such a time; since wherever a little company of believers is assembled for worship, with the presence of a Minister, it is complete in itself, to all the essential purposes of the system. Hence, the Independents emerged from the dark period which preceded the Revolution of 1688, fully organized; familiar with the practical working of their system; and prizing it the more, for all they had endured on its account, and for all they had experienced of blessing, in the stolen enjoyment of its ordinances, as secretly dispensed.

On the other hand, the Presbyterians came forth with nothing like this. Theirs was a traditional relation, rather than realized attachment to the Reformed polity, to any experiment of which they were entire strangers. They possessed, on the other hand, a practical familiarity with a system, which the pressure of their circumstances had moulded into essential agreement with that of the Independents; cherished memories of precious seasons, which they had enjoyed under the operation of that system; an affectionate regard for that party which had so long shared with them the anxieties and scourge of persecution; and a habit of compromise, in regard to principles of order, under the pressure of necessity; a habit, easily degenerating into a willingness to yield them to the arguments of expediency, or the suggestions of convenience. Philip Henry, according to the testimony of his eminent son, the Commentator, had no session in the Church which he gathered in his own house at Broadoak. Matthew Henry himself had none in either of his Churches; and, in his "Layman's Reasons for Joining the Dissenters," states it as the prevalent custom among them, that "discipline is managed by the Minister himself, with the advice and consent of the Congregation." Yet both of these were nominally Presbyterians. The manner of the ordination of Matthew Henry is illustrative of the system prevalent at the time. It took place during the respite from

persecution, which followed King James's sinister declaration for liberty of conscience. The ordination was conducted, not by a stately organized Presbytery, but by a council convened for the purpose; and it occurred, not at the distant place where his charge was to be, but in London. "The times," says his biographer, Palmer, "were such as rendered a private ordination most eligible, in the opinion of the ordainers; who were all of the Presbyterian denomination; and who conducted the service in the manner which was common among the Presbyterians of that day, and long after." We have no information respecting either a sermon or a charge, delivered as is usual on such occasions; but among Mr. Henry's papers was found the Latin thesis, which he delivered on the question, "*An justificemur fide, absque operibus legis? Affirmatur.*" Mr. Long has given an abstract of it, and has subjoined Mr. Henry's confession of faith, which perfectly agrees with the Assembly's Catechism. For the same reason that the ordainers chose to have the service performed in private,\* they declined giving a certificate of the ordination in the usual form; and only gave this brief testimonial: "We, whose names are subscribed, are well assured that Mr. Matthew Henry is an ordained Minister of the Gospel."† Such was practical Presbyterianism, at the accession of King William.

When, to the circumstances already indicated, we add, that new doctrines, of seeming innocence, but really pregnant with apostasy, were cherished by leading Presbyterians, and gaining strength in the party, we need look no further, to find causes abundantly adequate to account for the fact, that a less stringent order of discipline should be preferred to that of Westminster; that when it was just within their grasp, these degenerate sons of an illustrious ancestry should reject the prize, and sell their birthright for a mess of pottage. The Union of 1690, though devised and executed by eminent and honored servants of Christ, was unwise in its conception, and, as demonstrated by the result, was consummated under the frown of the Head of the Church.

To the circumstances of that union, we now turn our inqui-

\* The reason was, the possible revoking of King James's dispensation, and consequent renewal of persecution.

† Memoir of Henry, prefixed to his Commentary.

ries. For its origin, we must look to the Churches of New England. Although a majority of the early population of the New England colonies was of the Independent persuasion, still, many of the Ministers and people who sought refuge there from the persecutions of England, were, by conviction and preference, Presbyterians. Such was Wilson, one of the first pastors of Boston. Such was Hooker, the pioneer of Connecticut, "the light of the western Churches;" and Elliot, the Apostle of the Indians. The Governor and Council of Connecticut, in 1680, in reply to a series of questions, proposed to them by the Lords of Trade and Plantations, in regard to the character of the population, &c., state that "some are strict Congregational men; others more large Congregational men; and some moderate Presbyterians. And, take the Congregationalists of both sorts, they are the greater part of the people in the colony."\* Such was the composition of the most of the northern colonies. The commingling of these elements induced frequent debates and uneasiness; and gave occasion to the repeated assembling of councils and synods, by which schemes of discipline were constructed, and plans of comprehension devised, varying from the almost Presbyterian order of the Saybrook Platform, to the Erastian Congregationalism of that of Cambridge. Thus, upon a vaguely defined and varying basis, by the union of Independents and Presbyterians, were the Congregational Churches of New England created.

The example thus exhibited in the colonies, suggested frequent movements toward a similar union in the mother country. Baxter gives an account of three several schemes of this sort in which he was engaged; all of which failed, owing to difficulties encumbering the subject, which he labored in vain to remove.†

The union of the English dissenters had long been a favorite object with the Mather family. Mr. Samuel Mather, a graduate and the first fellow of Harvard College, having removed to England, after laboring some years in the ministry there, was one of those who were ejected by the St. Bartholomew's Act. "Beholding," says his nephew, the author of the *Magnalia*, "that they who appeared studious of reformation

\* Hinman's *Antiquities of Connecticut*, p. 141.

† Orme's *Life of Baxter*, vol. 1, p. 577.

in the nations, were unhappily subdivided into three forms or parties, commonly known by the name of Presbyterians, Independents, and Antipædo-Baptists, he set himself to endeavor an union, among all the good men of these three persuasions. To this purpose he did compose a most judicious Irenicum, afterwards printed.”\* Shortly before the accession of William and Mary, the Rev. Increase Mather, a younger brother of Samuel, being at the time President of Harvard College, was sent to England, and remained there several years, on business of the Province and College. Whilst there, he set himself with great zeal to bring about such a union in the mother country, as had long been familiar to him in the New England colonies. His proposals were seconded by Bates, Howe, Baxter, and others.

The result was, that in 1690, the Ministers of the three denominations in London, entered into articles of union with each other. These articles, or as they were entitled, “Heads of Agreement,” constituted a final and entire surrender of Presbyterian principles, by the Ministers of that name. The example of London was speedily imitated throughout the kingdom. The pious Flavel preached his last sermon, at Exeter, in the presence of an assembly, convened on this business, of which he was Moderator. At this meeting it was agreed, that the union “should not meddle with politics, nor the affairs of civil government, nor pretend to exercise church censures; but only to assist, advise, and counsel each other, in the propagation of truth and holiness, and in the preservation of their Churches from illiterate Ministers, and profane and scandalous communicants.” “A friendly intercourse,” say the historians of the Dissenters, “was, by this means, maintained among the Ministers and Congregations, in the two associated counties,” of Devon and Cornwall.† When, at this meeting, the union was consummated, Flavel “seemed to pour forth all the remaining energies of his soul, in the most exalted strains of prayer and praise. On the same evening he was seized, after supper, with a paralytic stroke, of which he died, June 26, 1691.”‡ “None considereth that the righteous is taken away from the evil to

\* *Magnalia Americana*, vol. 2, p. 42.

† *Bogue and Bennet's History of the Dissenters*, vol. 1, p. 387.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 428.



come." Could this eminent saint have then anticipated the apostasy, which that same city of Exeter was to witness, following so close on the heels of this seemingly so auspicious union, how different the emotions which had thronged his dying pillow!

The author of the *Magnalia Americana*, speaking of the Heads of Agreement, says, "The brethren of the Presbyterian way in England, are lately come unto such an happy union with those of the Congregational, that all former names of distinction are now swallowed up in that blessed one of 'United Brethren.' And now, partly because one of New England, namely, Mr. Increase Mather, then resident in London, was very singularly instrumental in effecting of that union; but more because that union hath been for many lustres, yea, many decads of years, exemplified in the churches of New England, so far that, I believe, 'tis not possible for me to give a truer description of our own ecclesiastical constitution,\* than by transcribing thereof, the articles of that union shall be here repeated."†

Of the system developed in the articles, it is enough to state, that it gives the Independent definition of the particular congregation. It declares that, "In the administration of church power, it belongs to the Pastor, and other Elders of every particular Church, if such there be, to rule and govern; and to the brotherhood to consent, according to the rule of the gospel." It states the office of Deacon to be "of divine appointment; and that it belongs to their office to receive, lay out, and distribute the Church's stock, to its proper uses, by the direction of the Pastor and brethren, if need be. And whereas divers are of opinion that there is also the office of Ruling Elders, who labor not in word and doctrine, and others think otherwise; we agree that this difference make no breach among us." No provision was made for stated meetings of church officers; but it was agreed, "1. That, in order to concord, and in other weighty and difficult cases, it is needful, and according to the

\* Mather thought it impossible to give a better account of New England Congregationalism, than by transcribing these articles. They were formally adopted by the Association of Connecticut, in 1708, (*Upham's Ratio Disciplinae*, p. 311), and are usually published along with the other traditional standards of the New England Churches.

† *Magnalia*, vol. 2, p. 233.

mind of Christ, that the Ministers of the several Churches be consulted and advised with, about such matters. 2. That such meetings may consist of smaller or greater numbers, as the matter shall require. 3. That particular Churches, their respective Elders and members, ought to have a reverential regard to their judgment, so given; and not dissent therefrom, without apparent grounds from the word of God." But, to preclude any assumption of authority in these councils, it was agreed, "That none of our particular Churches shall be subordinate to one another, each being endued with equality of power from Jesus Christ. And that none of the particular Churches, their officer or officers, shall exercise any power, or have any superiority over any other Church, or their officers." Thus, for no case that could arise, in regard to the discipline of members or Ministers, was there any tribunal, other than the particular Church; and for possible dereliction of Churches, no remedy whatever was provided. It is surely not necessary to enter any more into detail, in order to demonstrate, that by these articles of union, the nominal Presbyterians of England definitively abandoned every feature distinctive of the Westminster polity. Of the system now inaugurated in its stead we have some significant illustrations, in the personal observations of our own Samuel Davies, whose visit to England, on behalf of the College of New Jersey, enabled him to witness the operation of the system, in its heyday of success. In his journal, writing in London, he says,—“In the evening, I went to the Amsterdam Coffee-house, where the Independent Ministers meet for friendly conversation, and to consult about the affairs of the Churches; for they have no other associations, as the Presbyterians have no other Presbyteries. Indeed, there seems to be no government exercised jointly among either of them. The English Presbyterians have no Elders, nor judicatories of any kind; nor seem to me to agree, but in very few particulars, with the Church of Scotland. I find,” he further remarks, “the Calvinistic Presbyterians, as well as the Baptists, choose to frequent the Independent Coffee-house, rather than associate with their Presbyterian brethren of Arminian or Socinian sentiment, at Hamlin’s.”\* Of this last remark, we shall see the bearing hereafter. In view of the state of these

\* Foote's Sketches of Virginia, vol. 1, p. 250.

Churches thus developed, we might here conclude our discourse, in the language of Orme, the biographer of Baxter, himself a Congregationalist. Having given a history of the union of 1690, he adds, that, "from the date of this Agreement, Presbyterianism may be said to have existed but in name, in England."\* But there are some instructive lessons, in the history of the further declension and ultimate apostasy of these Churches, which we may not omit to notice.

We have already mentioned the existence of incipient heresy, as among the causes which indisposed the Churches of King William's time to seize the opportunity presented by his accession, for reconstructing a reformed polity. Arminianism had, since the days of Laud, now more than half a century, been dominant in the Established Church. The Presbyterians had long cherished the hope of such an arrangement, as might enable them conscientiously to take a place in the bosom of that Church. It was not until the Comprehension Bill was laid aside, that the Heads of Agreement were adopted. Standing thus at the door of the establishment, they were peculiarly liable to the infection of its lax theology. In fact, the same doctrines which Laud derived from Rome,—germinating anew from the speculations of Arminius and his disciples in Holland, and thence transplanted by Amyraut to the school at Saumur in France,—began at this time to infuse more or less of their infection into all the reformed Churches. Some of the English sought, and supposed they had found, a "middle way," between the harshness of the reformed theology, and the laxity of Arminius. That middle way consisted in the Neonomian or new-law theory. Of this scheme the following passages, from the pen of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Benion, one of the most distinguished of the party, exhibit some of the leading features, in the mildest form.

"Righteousness is conformity to rule, that is, to law. Conformity is complying with what is enacted. That which is enacted is disjunctively, either obedience, or the suffering of the nature it is prescribed to; so that the nature becomes as righteous by suffering to that degree which is satisfactory, as by doing." "If human nature can provide itself with an individual who is capable of satisfaction, that individual, ac-

\* Orme's Life of Baxter, vol. 1, p. 350.

ording to law, performs for all the rest, and brings righteousness on them." "The Son of God, of man (1 Tim. 2 : 5), is a human person of infinite value. Being so, his sufferings are satisfactory for human nature. Being so, that nature performs the secondary demand of the law, (endurance of the penalty.) Performing the secondary demand of the law, we are by him conformed to the rule ; so that he well deserves to be called, The Lord, our Righteousness. What he is called, he will be (to all who do not renounce him), by an intervening imputation. Imputation is the admitting the claim of all such to righteousness, because one of the body of beings they belong to has suffered the penalty." "They renounce Christ who will not submit to the economy God has established in order to his full reward. His full reward is the exaltation of his person, and the salvation of men. The exaltation of his person he absolutely expected. The salvation of men, only on conditions becoming the government of intellectual creatures. The establishing of such conditions is the introduction of the evangelical law, the observance of which is the only thing needful in order to justification. The excellency of this evangelical law, and the reasonableness of obedience, are to be accounted for in a new set of aphorisms, which may be thus conceived."

"Adam involves all his posterity in guilt, before any of them were born. They being so involved, are obnoxious to justice." "That the righteousness of God might be entirely clear, as it must be where mercy shines with it, it pleased God to place man again in a state of fair trial. The contrivance, in short, was, that Jesus Christ, satisfying by his sufferings for human nature, should make a way, that God, with the security of his own honor, should propose life and happiness, on terms proportioned to the abilities of lapsed creatures." "These terms are sincere faith and repentance." "Serving God thus with our minds, we are conformed to the gospel rule, and our service is our evangelical righteousness. Being our evangelical righteousness, our title to the highest instance of Divine favor is founded, and our precluding guilt removed." "The Spirit being poured out on all flesh, it is impossible that those who are condemned should bring any imputation on God, for they are put on as fair trial as Adam; have righteousness as

much in their reach as he, and perish, not for his guilt, but their own."\* So far Dr. Benion.

The following, from the *Magnalia Americana*, not only exhibits some of the leading features of the new system, but also the esteem in which it was held by the fathers of New England. "As in those elder days of New England, the esteem which our Churches had for that eminent man [Mr. Baxter], did not hinder them from rejecting that new covenant of works, with which they thought he confounded that most important article, upon the notions whereof the Church either stands or falls; thus it is a grief of mind unto our Churches at this day, to find that great and good man, in some of his last works, under the blinding heat of his indignation against some which we also account unjustifiable, yea, dangerous opinions and expressions of Dr. Crisp, reproaching some of the most undoubted points of our common faith. We read him unaccountably enumerating among errors, which he says have corrupted Christianity, and subverted the Gospel, such things as these:

"They *feign* that God made a covenant with Adam, that if he stood, God would continue him and his posterity; and if he fell, God would take it as if all his posterity then personally sinned in him.' 'Feigning God to make Adam, not only the natural father and root of mankind, but also arbitrarily, a constituted representer of all the persons that should spring from him. Whence they infer, that Christ was, by God's imposition and his own sponson, made the legal representative person of every one of the elect, taken singularly; so that what he did for them, God reputeth them to have done, by him. Hereby they falsely make the person of the Mediator, to be the legal person of the sinner.' 'They *forge* a law, that God never made, that saith, "Thou, *or thy surety*, shall obey perfectly, or die.'" 'They *feign* God to have made an eternal covenant with his Son.' 'They *feign* Christ to have made such an exchange with the elect, that, having taken all their sins, he hath given them all his righteousness; not only the fruit of it, but the thing in itself.' 'They say that by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, habitual and actual, we are judged perfectly just.' 'They talk of justification in mere ignorant confusion. They say that to justify, is not to make

\* Benion's Life, in Henry's Miscellaneous Works, p. 1022.

righteous, but to judge righteous.' 'They err grossly, saying that by "faith imputed for righteousness," and our "being justified by faith," is not meant the act, or habit of faith, but the object, Christ's righteousness; not stickling thereby to turn such texts into worse than nonsense.'

"All these are Mr. Baxter's words, in his 'Defence of Christ,' Chapter II. These things, which our Churches with amazement behold Mr. Baxter thus calling fictions, falsehoods, forgeries, ignorant confusions, and gross errors, were defended by Mr. Norton, as the faith once delivered to the saints; nor do our Churches, at this day, consider them as any other than glorious truths of the Gospel."\*

A comparison of these quotations with the following account, from the pen of an antagonist, will give us a sufficiently accurate idea of the "new method"† of justification. The Rev. John Beart, of Bury, Suffolk, in a rare but valuable little treatise, entitled "The Eternal Law and Everlasting Gospel," in which he powerfully assails the new theory, which struck at the root of both law and gospel, describes some of the leading features of the Neonomian system, as follows: "The people with whom I have to do, in this part of this *vindication*, teach, 1. That Christ, having satisfied for the breach of the old law of works, hath procured and given a new law, a remedial law, or a law of lower terms than the old, suited to our fallen state, and accepting of sincere obedience, instead of that perfect obedience which the old law required; this is the *Πρωτον Ψευδος*, or foundation falsity, of their whole doctrine. 2. That the whole world is under the law of grace, and consequently that they who perish, do perish as transgressors of the new law, and under the penalty thereof; though they are also left to the condemnation of the old, in not complying with the grace held forth in the new. 3. That Jesus Christ did not fulfil the precept of the law for us himself; but by his death and sufferings obtained, that our obedience should be accepted, for a gospel righteousness, and that therefore we are truly justified before God by gospel works. 4. That Christ died to render the whole world salvable, or to put them

\* *Magnalia Americana*, vol. 1, p. 266.

† Undoubtedly hence the name of Methodists, which was attached to the Wesleys, and their followers, at the University, on account of their Arminian theology.

into a capacity of being saved, by their fulfilling the conditions of this new law. 5. That faith and repentance are not the purchase of Christ for us, but given out of the grace of election. 6. That the gospel is a law, even that new law which they contend for; containing precepts, and also promises and threatenings, as the sanction of those precepts. And that it saith 'Do and live,' in some alloyed and milder sense than the first covenant. 7. That the covenant of grace is conditional, and that justification and salvation are to be sought in this way, viz., of our fulfilling of the conditions. 8. They don't heartily relish the terms 'surety' as spoken of Christ, and 'imputation' as spoken of his righteousness; nor admit them in the full and proper sense. They abase the texts that speak of God's righteousness, as meaning only man's righteousness of God's accepting and appointing. For it seems man's righteousness must stand, whatever becomes of Christ's. 9. They obscure and legalize the doctrine of faith and works. Faith in justification must be the same as covenanting or consenting to have Christ as Lord and Saviour; or as Christianity itself; viz., it is considered a duty performed by us, as a condition of our justification, and as a principle and root of all obedience. Again, that works are the express condition of the continuance of our justification, having the same kind of causality as faith; though of somewhat less efficacy. 10. That Paul, by works which he excludes from justifying, understands, either works of the law of Moses, as such; or else works of the law of innocency, viz., perfect works: but gospel works must by no means be excluded; yet under their gospel works, they include all the duties of the law, only they must be imperfect, else they will not justify; and so they surely are, and therefore can't justify. 11. They speak of two courts, in which, or two bars, at which men must be justified: the bar of the law, and the bar of the gospel; which will well-nigh bring in the Popish double justification. 12. That a believer is not perfectly justified in this life. A perfect and complete justification is not to be expected till the day of judgment."\* Thus Mr. Beart describes the system of the "new methodists."

The most eminent advocate of the Neonomian theory was Richard Baxter; to whom, indeed, its invention is attributed.

\* Beart's *Eternal Law and Everlasting Gospel*, p. 3.

The reputation of his learning and piety, and the fame of his sufferings under the persecutions of the High Commission, gave ready and extensive currency to his views; although they were met with determined opposition from the beginning. Soon after the institution of the Pinners' Hall Lectures, in 1672, the introduction there of his favorite opinions created uneasiness, and induced some controversy with the adherents of the evangelical theology. It was not, however, until after the death of Baxter, that the seeds which he had profusely sown, germinated in an open rupture. About that time, a work was published by the Rev. Dr. Daniel Williams, one of the most eminent of the Presbyterian party, which, under pretence of opposition to Antinomianism, strove to obscure and overturn the received doctrines of grace, and to substitute Baxterianism in their stead. The result was a heated controversy, and the ultimate exclusion of Dr. Williams, by the patrons of Pinners' Hall, from the lectureship which he there held. The partisans of the new theology, together with many others who aspired to a character of moderation and "eandor," now united in establishing a rival lectureship, which was instituted at Salters' Hall, in 1694. In consequence of this separation, the meeting at Pinners' Hall, where the Independents were predominant, became the rallying point of the defenders of the Calvinistic theology; whilst that at Salters' Hall was the headquarters of the United Brethren, where the new theology was cherished and propagated.

But the pregnant character of the heresies which had now obtained foothold and recognition, was not the only ominous indication in the United Churches. A false moderation had, in the minds of many, usurped the place of zeal for the truth. By this, not a few were ensnared, who were still free from the infection of doctrinal error. Under the pretence of superior "eandor" and liberality of sentiment, was veiled a real intolerance towards those who felt that they were set for the defence of the gospel, associated with a slothful indifference to the errors of its assailants. Carried away by this influence, some of the most eminent and excellent men of the age, themselves sound in the faith, gave their countenance to the authors of innovation, and thus lent themselves to weaken the hands of the witnesses for the truth. Such was Henry, the commentator,



himself untainted with unsound doctrine, yet the biographer of Dr. Benion, to whose Neonomian theology he gives the implied sanction of publication without censure. Such was Howe, the chaplain of Cromwell, the most eminent of the Independents, who withdrew with Williams from Pinners' Hall, and aided in establishing the rival lecture. "He had truly a great soul," says Calamy, his biographer, "and at the same time, a very cool and moderate spirit; and was an utter enemy to that uncharitable and censorious humor that is visible in so many. He did not look upon religion as a system of opinions, or a set of forms, so much as a divine discipline, to reform the heart and life. In lesser matters, he could freely give others the liberty of their own sentiments; and was as unwilling to impose, as to be imposed on."\* So says Dr. Calamy, his contemporary and biographer, and in describing Howe, he expresses his own and the prevailing sentiments of the age. Opposition to error was stigmatized as intolerance and persecution; and earnestness in defence of the truth was looked upon as indicative of bigotry and narrowness of soul.

Near akin to this, was a growing disposition to decry doctrinal preaching, and substitute in its stead the enforcement of the practical duties of religion and of common life. Since "religion was not a system of opinions, or a set of forms, so much as a divine discipline, to reform the heart and life," as we have seen Calamy insist, it immediately followed, that the preaching of doctrinal truth, the promulgation of systems of opinions, was unprofitable; and that the preacher's business ought rather to be, the laying down of appropriate rules of discipline, for the reformation of the feelings and conduct; the enforcement of practical duties, instead of the propagation of theories and systems.

A forcible illustration of this disposition to disparage and supersede all doctrinal instruction, presents itself in a volume of catechisms, of which we shall have occasion to say more hereafter. In the preface, parents are thus admonished. "They are considerable errors in the method of education, that parents take more pains to teach their children the doctrines, than the duties of religion,—though the doctrines are revealed for the sake of the duties; that they are more careful

\* Howe's Life, prefixed to his works, superroyal 8vo. p. li.

to instruct them in the abstruse and darker, than in the plain doctrines of Christianity, though these are always the most important; that they too much neglect duties to men, and those inward virtuous tempers, which are the spring of these duties; tho' duties to men, who need our love and service, are as strongly insisted on in Scripture, as duties to God, who needs them not."\*

Another circumstance conspired to facilitate the process of declension. We have seen that when Matthew Henry was ordained, instead of adopting the Westminster, or any other public Confession, he exhibited a creed of his own composition, which is described as "perfectly agreeing with the Westminster Catechism." The Heads of Agreement declared, that "As to what appertains to soundness of judgment in matters of faith, we esteem it sufficient that a Church acknowledge the Scriptures to be the word of God, the perfect and only rule of faith and practice; and own, either the doctrinal part of those commonly called the Articles of the Church of England; or the Confession, or Catechisms, Shorter, or Larger, compiled by the Assembly at Westminster; or the Confession agreed on at the Savoy, to be agreeable to said rule." Thus with abounding liberality, these articles esteem it sufficient to acknowledge either of five several documents, to be agreeable to the word of God. But even this rule, moderate as are its demands, applies only to the Churches. For the ministry, no provision whatever is made. The course adopted in practice, was that of which we have seen an illustration in the case of Henry. The candidate drafted his own creed, on presentation of which, if satisfactory to the selected council, he was ordained. Ultimately, as liberal principles became prevalent, even this was refused, and the whole matter was reduced to a mere profession of faith in the Scriptures, as being the word of God.

With such facilities, it had been strange if heresy had not grown apace. The progress of error is forever the same. The whole history is comprehended in a few brief lines, in which a restored wanderer of our own Church, speaking in the third person, describes the downward career which he himself traced, a century after the occurrence of the English apostasy. "He set aside the Confession of Faith, because that book and

\* Bourn's Catechisms, p. xxiii.

he could not walk together, for they were not agreed. He then had access to the Scriptures, without respect to man. He passed through Pelagianism, carrying it with him, and Arminianism, too, and settled down on Arian Socinianism." Such precisely was the process of the English defection. The Neonomian heresy, nourished by freedom from the trammels of creeds and church courts, was soon matured into thorough Pelagianism. Thence there was but an easy step to the platform of Arius; and that point gained, the Socinian scheme was without alternative.

A more satisfactory and interesting illustration of the process here indicated, could hardly be desired, than is presented in a work, to which allusion has already been made; a volume of catechisms for the instruction of children and youth, published, during the progress of the apostasy, by Mr. Samuel Bourn. It consists of a short, and a large doctrinal, and an historical catechism, from the pen of Mr. Bourn; to which is added, an edition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, altered and amended by another hand. In a preface to this improved edition of the Catechism, we are informed, that "'Tis now generally thought, that the religious principles set forth in the Bible, have been better understood in this present age, through the free and diligent researches of the learned, than they had been in any, since the primitive times. As there are still farther advances made in critical learning, and by the later annotations on the Scriptures, great improvements are made upon those that went before, no considerate person can reasonably think, that in ninety years space, men of letters and study, should see no cause for giving such accounts of the doctrines of revelation, as would some way or other, vary from what had been taught before that period; especially, considering that the teachers of Christianity in this nation, had been no very long while out of the anti-christian darkness; how much of their time had been taken up in defending the reformation against the Romanists, as well as in their ordinary ministerial work; and how little they had left, for thoroughly studying the inferior points of gospel divinity.\*

It might be an amusing exercise, did our time permit, to glance over the lessons, which these theological illuminati

\* Bourn, p. 276.

of the brilliant dawn of the last century, unfold to us, in the first three catechisms; to listen, for example, as the youthful catechumens are informed, that "As God is everywhere, but hath his chief seat in heaven, so is the soul in the whole body, but hath its chief seat in the head. How do you prove that? 1st. One may almost feel one's self think, in the head. 2d. The soul is most visible in the eye, the window out of which it looketh; which is the reason we look at a man's eyes, when we speak to him; because we speak to the soul. 3d. The noble senses or organs are planted in the head, to be near the soul, for the sake of a quick conveyance, and ready ministry."\* But we must turn away from this tempting "feast of reason," for our time is precious, and graver matters are before us.

We will glance rapidly at a few of the questions of the Shorter Catechism, as here amended; which may serve as a clue to the whole system. In answer to the fundamental question, What is sin? we here read, that "Sin is any voluntary want of conformity to, or transgression of the law of God." "The fall brought mankind into a state of sin, as in consequence of the fall, men are born with less perfect constitutions than Adam was created with, were more liable to do evil, and less able and disposed to do good; which became an unhappy inlet to actual transgressions, and habits of wickedness." "God, having out of his mere good pleasure, purposed from eternity, to show special favor to mankind, did enter into a covenant of grace," &c. "Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, by which, in concurrence with his word and providence, and our own sincere endeavors, he so convinceth us of our sin and misery, and enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renews our wills, as to persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel." "Justification is that act of the free grace, or favor of God, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, through Jesus Christ, upon our believing in him." "Faith in Jesus Christ, is such a firm and hearty persuasion of the truth of his Gospel, as is productive of obedience to it." One additional answer will complete the outline, and reveal the landing-place of this scheme. Instead of the Westminster question on the Trinity, we here have the

\* Bourn, p. 63.

inquiry, "Do not the Scriptures give an account of more divine persons than one? The Scriptures give an account of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and that this holy Trinity were entirely united, in completing the most glorious of all God's works."

We cannot trace in detail the progress of the apostasy. The first open avowal of Arianism was in Exeter; where the Rev. James Pierce was, after much trouble, and the call of repeated councils, excluded by the trustees, from the church of which he had charge, for refusal to preach the doctrine of the Trinity. He had previously maintained an obstinate silence on that subject; but, immediately upon his exclusion, erected a separate Congregation, and proclaimed his Arian sentiments. In London, the defection was less rapid and extensive than in the country; although the poison was there, too, spreading its secret infection. In 1730, of forty-four Presbyterian Ministers in the city, nineteen were professed Calvinists; twelve, Baxterians; and thirteen, Arminians; not one avowed Arian. Yet among them was Lardner, who became an Arian, and died a Socinian.

As the defection originated in the doctrinal views of leading Presbyterian divines, so several circumstances conspired to induce its development, particularly among the Churches of that name. Their union with the Independents had stripped them of every safeguard of their own system, without compensating them with even the feebleness of Independency. The moral power of that system is essentially dependent upon the conscientious conviction of the divine right, and consequent duty, of each Congregation, to exercise the functions of government and discipline over its own officers and members, irrespective and independent of any other tribunal. Repudiating as they did this opinion, it was not to be expected, that the Presbyterian Churches should assume the exercise of functions, and the burden of responsibilities, such as those of prosecution for heresy; which were odious in themselves, and not enforced by their own conscientious opinions, as to the order of God's house. Hence, the authors of innovation were much less liable to be brought to account, in a Presbyterian than in an Independent Church.

The respectable social rank of the Presbyterian body,\* and

\* See Davies' Journal, in Foote's Virginia, pp. 245, 253.

the rich endowments which it gradually accumulated, were also a snare to its own people, and an inducement to the corrupt and designing to unite with it. The reputation of tolerance and "candor" naturally caused the erroneous to coalesce with the Presbyterian Churches, rather than with the stricter Independents, with whom, on the other hand, the faithful Ministers and people of God, everywhere sided. Any Churches, of whatever antecedents, in which the new doctrines became prevalent, readily arrayed themselves under the respectable and tolerant banner, on the folds of which was inscribed the Presbyterian name. On the contrary, individuals who loved the truth, withdrew from the backsliding Churches, and united with Independent Congregations. Sound parts of Arian Congregations, separating themselves, formed Independent Churches; and whole Congregations, as their pulpits became vacant, sought Independent Pastors, and assumed that name.

It is not, however, to be understood that in this process, there was realized the creation of two separate denominational organizations. We have already seen, that prior to the adoption of the Heads of Agreement, there had been no more extensive organization than the particular Congregation, among either of the united denominations. The Heads of Agreement did not change this feature. That document made no provision for any advisory or consultative association; much less for any invested with authority. The preamble declared it to be designed, "not as a measure for any national constitution, but for the preservation of order in our Congregations, that cannot come up to the common rule by law established,"\* that is, to the rites of the Established Church. It created, in fact, no organic bond of union among the Churches; but rather precluded anything of the kind; and merely ascertained and defined the social relations, which should subsist between the several Churches of the contracting denominations; to all the particular Congregations of which it guaranteed an Independent constitution, and freedom from all exterior control. The effect therefore of the distractions which we have described, was merely to determine the social intimacies of the Congregations and Ministers, severally, according to the laws of elective affinity. Special councils, when called for any purpose, were

\* Bogue and Bennet, vol. 1, p. 382.

selected according to the sympathetic relations of those by whom they were convened. The Calvinists sustained the lecture at Pinners' Hall; while that at Salters' Hall received the support of the "liberal" party. Ministers of the former class, Presbyterian as well as Independent, frequented the conversations at the Amsterdam Coffee-house; whilst the reunions of the others took place at Hamlin's. In other respects, we are informed by Calamy, that soon after the erection of the second lecture, "the heat and strangeness abated by degrees, and they learnt to keep up a friendly correspondence with each other, making allowance for diversity of sentiments, but acting in concert in all matters of common concernment; which was found by experience to be much more comfortable than the continuance of strife and contention, which tends to confusion, and every evil work."\*

The coffee-house conferences to which we have already referred, gradually assumed a protective oversight of the secular interests and civil relations of the several denominations, and were recognized by the bodies at large in that capacity, under the designation of Boards. "In affairs that concerned them all as Dissenters, they united their counsels, in what is called, the general body of the three denominations, consisting of the three Boards united. For affairs that required continued attention and activity, a committee, chosen from the three Boards, was appointed. The Presbyterians, as being the most numerous and respectable, claimed that there should be two of their numbers on all such committees, for one from [each of] the other bodies. To these Boards the Dissenters throughout the kingdom looked for protection. It was likewise considered a part of their duty to correspond with the executive government, on all proper occasions; and to render due respect to the supreme magistrate, at his accession to the throne, and in seasons of remarkable public calamity or success."† Such was the only common organization, which has ever been recognized by the so-called Presbyterians of England, since the restoration of Charles the Second. Such is the nearest approach which they have ever made, to the erection of a Presbytery, or other standing courts of superior control.‡

\* Life of Howe, prefixed to his works, p. xli.

† Bogue and Bennet, vol. 1, p. 390.

‡ Of course, the language of the discourse has no relation to the existing Synod

We have now taken a rapid glance at the history of the English Socinian apostasy. Beginning in the moderate and apparently harmless theory of the sainted Baxter, and rapidly traversing the system of Pelagius, it attained to the ripeness of its normal results, in the heresies of Pierce, and the blasphemies of Emlyn. Originating among Churches, to whom the reformed polity had never been anything more than a cherished theory, and at a time when the weight of persecution had long forced them to Independency, as the only practicable resource, its first stage is signalized by the gratuitous surrender of every principle distinctive of the Presbyterian name. Its career was then run, and the consummation attained, under the auspices of a Congregational plan, which removed any protective barriers, which even pure Independency might have interposed. It created obligations of covenant and courtesy, which threw open the Churches to free intercourse with the erroneous, but made no provision against the infection of their heresies.

Such were the circumstances, and such the history of the apostasy of Churches, which, once green and fruitful as the garden of the Lord, now parched and barren, bring forth nothing but briars and thorns, and are nigh unto cursing. Their declension is sometimes cited as proof of the imbecility of our polity! So far from constituting any evidence of imperfection in it, they on the contrary exhibit an additional and weighty argument of its inestimable value. It were as reasonable and true, to charge on it the similar history which the annals of the Churches of New England unfold, and the intrusive heresies that now occupy the chair which was consecrated, in olden time, to the theology of the Catechism, in the halls of old Harvard. Many of those Churches, too, were planted in the wilderness by men who loved the Presbyterian order, and transmitted to their children the name, now the only memorial of what they were in former days. The same union was formed and Heads of Agreement adopted on both sides the Atlantic, under the auspices of the same policy of compromise. The same "new method" theology has been elaborated, and like downward proclivities too fatally developed, in these Churches, as in those. In one point, indeed, an important diversity occurs.

of the English Presbyterian Church; a body of Scotch origin, and no otherwise related to the native Presbyterian Church of England than by community of name.



From the wreck of ecclesiastical order which the Heads of Agreement left strewed upon the waters, the Presbyterians of New England, more faithful or more favored than their transatlantic brethren, were successful in rescuing a semblance of the Westminster system of organization, and some vestiges of its conservative powers. It is also a fact of no little significance, which the past history and the present position of those Churches unite to attest, that just as the doctrines of the reformed system fall into disesteem, or are supplanted by the "new method" theology, in any of its successive stages toward avowed Unitarianism, is a corresponding tendency developed, to break away from the comparative strictness of Consociational authority, and revert to the "liberal," and accommodating policy of the Heads of Agreement.

The moral of the history here sketched needs no enforcement. Compromise of principles, however unimportant, is abandonment of safety. Slight deviations from the system of sound doctrine, may seem harmless in the beginning, but they never fail, if tolerated in the bosom of the Church, to re-enact the Trojan tragedy, in the end. Sound principles of polity are not indeed essential to the salvation of the individual believer, but they are of the last necessity to the permanent purity of the Church, and through this to the ultimate redemption of the world.

Let our beloved Church heed well the instructions which all experience confirms. As we ponder the momentous annals of past generations, we are everywhere taught, to cherish with new confidence and ever-growing affection, those doctrines of grace, and those principles of order, which are inseparably linked together, in the constitution of our Church; and to view, with watchful jealousy, every, even the slightest deviation from the one, or innovation on the great principles which lie at the roots of the other. All history attests, that whilst heresy has found quiescent retreat, and formed cordial and congenial alliance with all other forms of polity, it has never, in any of its Protean shapes, entered a Presbyterian Church, without assailing with persistent hostility her principles of order;—that whenever such a Church has deviated from these, such divergence has invariably proved to be the first step in a path, which, if not promptly retraced, has led to inevitable apostasy

from the doctrines of grace; and that, where the principles of our polity have been firmly and consistently maintained, they have always proved adequate to overcome, in the end, such heresies as may have come in, and to bring back the Church, from any transient wanderings, to that way of truth which the Scriptures reveal, and her standards display.

The world has rarely, if ever, seen an example of the Pauline system of theology preserved in unimpaired purity, in permanent connection with any other than Presbyterian order. On the other hand, it has never yet witnessed the spectacle of a Church maintaining the integrity of Presbyterian government, in permanent alliance with an heretical theology. As "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh," so have Presbytery and heresy been ever found contrary to each other; and when brought into contact, the incongruous elements will struggle together, until one or the other is left sole master of the field. If, therefore, the doctrine of justification by the alone righteousness of Christ, the *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*, be the richest jewel, with which the glorious King in Zion has adorned the brow of the Church, his beautiful and beloved bride,—this scriptural polity is the costly and fitting casket, in which he has bestowed the gem. Here enclosed, and guarded with ever-wakeful vigilance and assiduous care, here only, and thus, can it ever be safe from the subtle and untiring arts of her many and insidious enemies.