

Queries Considered

JOSEPH S. BAKER

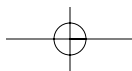
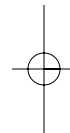
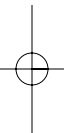




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Baker, Dr. Joseph S., was born in Liberty Co., Ga., in 1798, of Presbyterian parents, and died at Quitman Co., Ga., in 1877. He was educated at Yale and at Hampden Sidney College, Va., where he graduated in 1823.

On leaving college he returned to Liberty Co., Ga., and engaged in farming and merchandising, having inherited considerable property. He was then, at the age of twenty-five, a member of the Presbyterian church near Riceborough, and placed himself under the care of the Presbytery with a view to entering the ministry at a session held with the Midway church in the fall of 1823. The Presbytery assigned him, as the subject of his first thesis, "Was John's

Baptism Christian Baptism?" The investigation of the subject by him led to his adoption of Baptist views a few years later. He removed to Virginia in 1825, having sold all his property in Georgia. He graduated in the medical department of Columbian College, D.C., in 1828, and practiced medicine in Nottaway Co., Va., until 1831, when he moved to Petersburg. There he united with the Baptists, was licensed and ordained. He preached in Virginia at Petersburg, Norfolk, and other places, part of the time as a missionary, until 1839 or 1840, when he moved to Georgia and settled in Columbus. In 1843 he became editor of the *Christian Index*, and moved to Penfield, where the paper was then published. For six years he occupied the editorial chair with an ability so distinguished, and with a pen so trenchant and powerful, evidencing at the same time so much of genuine piety and such a thorough acquaintance with Baptist doctrines and practices, that he acquired a denominational influence that expired only with his life.

He resided for a while with a son who was a lawyer at Jacksonville, Fla., and mayor of the town. He then served the churches at Albany and Palmyra, Ga., and Jacksonville, Fla., until the war. During that struggle he preached to the soldiers as an evangelist. After the war he moved to Quitman, Ga., where he resided until his death, in 1877, ripening more and more to the last for the skies. Dr. Baker was a man of great natural abilities. He was a deep thinker, a perspicuous writer, and he did much to assist denominational progress in Georgia. He was a most decided Baptist. He had read much, was a fine scholar, and he was deeply versed in the polity and principles of all denominations. An excellent preacher, he was a man of strong faith in divine providence, and bore the severe sufferings of his last days with great Christian fortitude and resignation. For years he exerted a strong and healthy influence among the Georgia Baptists, and it was always employed in favor of sound doctrine and practical godliness.

—William Cathcart, 1881

QUERIES CONSIDERED

OR

AN INVESTIGATION OF VARIOUS SUBJECTS

INVOLVED IN THE EXERCISE OF

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

BY REV. JOSEPH S. BAKER

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INTRODUCTION.

After a long and unexpected delay, induced by causes which the publisher could not control, the fourth and last number of the first volume of this work is laid before our readers. We had contemplated republishing in this number an interesting little work, published originally in the land of the Waldenses, but when the printer called for it, it was not to be found. In our emergency, we have concluded to lay before our readers a series of Essays, on various subjects connected with practical Church Discipline. Some of these have been in print before, and have been extensively copied into Baptist papers, and, indeed, one or two of them have also appeared in papers that do not support our denominational views. This fact, together with the frequency with which the queries discussed have been propounded to us and others, encourage the hope, that they will not only prove acceptable to our readers, but will assist them, either directly or indirectly, in forming correct views of the subjects investigated—subjects involving the best interests of individuals, and the peace and purity of our churches.

Some of the Essays in this number are prepared expressly for the occasion, others have been amplified and amended, and all have been revised with more or less care. We submit them to the public with a deep sense of our solemn responsibility to the great Head of the Church, for the views which we aid in propagating, and with an earnest desire and humble prayer, that they may be made to subserve the cause of truth and righteousness.

We tender our most grateful acknowledgments to our subscribers for their patronage, and for their kind indulgence and patient forbearance, amid the provoking delays which have occurred in the publication of our last two numbers. The work will not be continued unless we can insure *regularity* in future emissions. We have on hand a valuable article, prepared expressly for the Periodical Library; by one who wields the pen of a “ready writer.” We would have substituted it for the present number, but for its length; it would probably fill 120 pages. Negotiations now pending, will decide, in the course of a few weeks, the question, Shall the Periodical Library be continued? We feel but little *personal* interest in its decision. Its publication, so far, has subjected us to a small pecuniary loss. We leave the decision of the question, “to be, or not to be,” with Him whose it is to order all events for the advancement of his own glory.

THE PUBLISHER

QUERIES CONSIDERED; OR
AN INVESTIGATION OF VARIOUS SUBJECTS
INVOLVED IN THE EXERCISE
OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Personal Differences.

QUERY I. *What course should one member of a church pursue toward another, by whom he has been aggrieved?*

This query is very explicitly answered by the Saviour, in Matthew xviii., 15–17:

“Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

“But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”

Were it not that our moral affections have been perverted, and our understandings beclouded by sin, a word of comment on the above passage would be wholly superfluous; but such are the imperfections of our frail natures, that we often misapprehend truth—even when it is expressed in the most lucid manner—and have need to have it exhibited in a multitude of forms, and accompanied with various elucidations, before we can fully comprehend it. Clear as are the instructions given by the Saviour, relative to the course we should pursue in a case of trespass, events are almost daily occurring, which plainly indicate that they are not properly understood, by many of those who profess to have been taught by his Spirit. This consideration seems to us to justify our commenting, somewhat in detail, on the passage which contains an answer to the query at the head of this article.

“*If thy brother shall trespass against thee.*”—The supposed case, in this instance, is one of an actual trespass, committed by one brother on the rights of another. Observe that these words limit the application of the rule given to cases of *personal* differences, between individual members of the body of Christ; but, at the same time, extend it to every *kind* of trespass, that one may commit against another. The wrong done may have been committed wilfully, or may have been committed inadvertently; it may have been of a very flagrant character, or it may have been attended with many palliating circumstances. If it be sufficient to abate the ardor of our affection for the brother, or in the slightest degree to impair our confidence in him, we ought, by observing the rule prescribed, to place it in his power to restore himself to that place in our affections and confidence, which he occupied before the commission of the offence. On the other hand, no aggravation of the offence, on the part of the offender, can exonerate us

from our obligation to obey the express instructions of our Saviour. It is frequently the case, in serious difficulties between brethren, that the aggrieved individual, when reminded of this rule, and urged to observe it; inquires, "what is the use?" or responds, "it will do no good. He knew that he was doing wrong—I know the character of the man, and know that he will refuse to make reparation." It is an old adage, that two wrongs cannot make one wrong right. His having sinned against you, is no sufficient reason why you should sin against your Saviour, by refusing obedience to his injunctions. Do *your* duty, and leave the result in the hand of God. He often corrects the most incorrigible. If the offender prove obstinate, his very obstinacy may lead him to reflect upon the impropriety of his conduct, and be the means of his conviction. If he fail to repair the injury he has done, God will not fail to make you amends. Whether he repents or not, you will be rewarded with the smiles of an approving God, and the possession of what will be worth more to you than all the world—a *quiet conscience*.

But there is another view of the subject which you should take. If the offender has offered you a wanton injury, he has, through you, inflicted a wound upon the Church: for if "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." 1 Cor. 12. 26. And if he possess the incorrigible character ascribed to him, the sooner he is out of the church the better will it be for the cause of Christ, and the cause of humanity. As long as he continues in it, he will prove but a "root of bitterness," and a cause of reproach; a hindrance, instead of a help to her advancement. You therefore owe it to your God, to the church, and the world that is yet to be evangelized, to adopt those measures, which are necessary to precede the introduction of the case, in a proper way, before the church. If you bring it into the church before you have pursued the course directed in the rule before us, you give the offender an advantage over you, of which, if he be an evil-minded man, he will not fail to avail himself; for you do, by that act, manifest a contempt of divine authority, and place yourself by his side, in the seat of the criminal. When one, in manifest violation of this law of Christ, complains to you of the injuries done him by another, beware of him, and believe but little of what he tells you of his adversary; for he who scruples not to act falsely toward his Saviour will rarely scruple falsely to accuse his brother, if he may thereby justify himself in the eyes of others, or palliate his own offences. We are always more or less suspicious of one who is disposed to vent in our ear, long and doleful accounts of the injuries, he has received from others. In a large majority of instances, those will be found to complain most frequently of trespasses who are most frequently guilty of trespassing on the rights and feelings of others. Such manifest far more reverence for the demands of self-interest, than for those of truth, justice or mercy. Self is the god whom they adore, and at whose shrine they hesitate not to sacrifice all whose will or interest succumbs not to their own. They demand of others what they are unwilling to grant, and expect to be treated as they are unwilling to treat others.

"If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."—Our attention is here directed to the *end* which we should have in view. That end is the recovery of a brother from the error of his ways, and not the gratification of a spirit of revenge, or the ministering to our pride, by triumphing over the infirmities of another. Let this end be kept in view, and the means of effecting it, will rarely be wanting. We will feel the importance of avoiding every thing that savours of a disposition to upbraid or censure. Let it be remembered, that "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man," Prov. 27. 19. Whatever, therefore, in another, would prove repulsive to us, will, in us, prove repulsive to others; and, on the contrary, whatever would be most likely to conciliate our affections, will be most likely to conciliate the affections of others. We should manifest, by our actions, words, and even by the expressions of our countenance, that we are more grieved that our brother should *do* wrong, than that we should *suffer* wrong. A look or a tear has often effected what which all the terrors of the law, backed by the elegant declamations of the orator, could not effect. It was a look that touched the heart of Peter and wrought repentance in his soul. To gain a brother, by the manifestation of a meek, gentle and condescending spirit, would be a far greater triumph than to extort from him, by the force of law, a reluctant reparation for the wrongs he has done us.

"If he will not hear thee"—What then? Abandon the case as hopeless? No. Arraign him before the church? No; but make another effort. Go to him again, and, now "take with thee one or two more." But be judicious in your selection, Select such as are discreet, pre-eminent for their piety, and least likely to be suspected as partisans in the affair.—Proceed, as before, to lay the matter before him coolly, respectfully and affectionately. Manifest every disposition to settle the difference amicably.

The object of taking "one or two more," is twofold. First, that they may exert their influence in endeavors to adjust the difficulty. That this is one of the reasons for the rule, is obvious from the next verse—"if he refuse to *hear* them, &c. They must speak before they can be heard. They are therefore, to counsel, advise and admonish. It is often the case, that an offender will listen to an admonition coming from a disinterested party, which would be rejected if offered by the individual aggrieved. But a second reason for this direction is, that if the offender continue incorrigible they may serve as witnesses in the case, when brought before the church. This leads to the considerations of the Law of Evidence.

"That in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established." Note; the Saviour here establishes, as a rule necessary for the administration of justice, under the new or christian dispensation, a rule which had been observed under the old or Jewish dispensation. By this, no individual was to be condemned upon the simple testimony of another. For the word of one man is to be considered as good as that of another, until one or the other of the parties is proved unworthy of confidence. The testimony of one man, however, added to the testimony of the accuser, is recognized as sufficient for

the conviction of the offender. This is evident, from its being left to the aggrieved to decide whether he will take with him *one* or *two* others.¹

It has been objected to this rule, that if we adhere to it rigidly, it will often be difficult to exclude delinquent members. In reply to this, we have three remarks to make; 1st. It is always safe to adhere closely to the rules which infinite wisdom has prescribed, and always dangerous, inasmuch as it is sinful, to substitute the deductions of human reason, for the teachings of the Holy Spirit. 2d. It is better that ten should escape merited punishment, than that one should suffer unjustly. This is a principle which God himself sanctioned, in the case of Lot and the idolatrous cities of the plains—(See Gen. 19.) 3d. The rule does not interdict the passing judgment against an individual, where the testimony of one man is sustained by circumstantial evidence, or the indirect testimony of others. Suppose, for instance, a member is charged, by one who sustains an irreproachable character, with the commission of a criminal act. In the investigation of the case, it is ascertained, upon the testimony of others, that his general conduct has not comported with the gospel of Christ, but has rather accorded, in character, with the act with which he stands charged, and circumstances are developed which clearly indicate, in the accused, a disposition to commit the act with which he is charged. We would not hesitate to say, that the laws of Christ's kingdom afford no protection to such. They require that he should so walk as to maintain a good report without, and that upon the testimony of two or more witnesses, every word should be established. In the supposed case, the *direct* testimony of the accuser, is sustained by the *indirect* testimony of the many. The law therefore is not violated, but fulfilled.

“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.”—This is the last scriptural resort. Do not mistake it. We are not instructed to report the case for a decision to the priest, or the deacons, or the ruling elders, or the select men, or the class, or the vestry, or to any judicial committee; but to *“to tell it unto the church.”* The object should still be, not to punish, but to reclaim him. Should the church find it necessary to withdraw her fellowship from him, she should do it in such a manner as to evince, that she claimed no right to punish, but simply exercised the right vested in her of

¹A case has been reported to us, in which a brother objected to the course pursued by another, because he took with him three brethren, instead of one or two, when he went the second time to attempt the settlement of a personal difficulty; and this article, the substance of which had been but recently published, was adduced as evidence that the views of the author accorded with his own. It may not, therefore, be improper to add, that we do not suppose it was the design of the Saviour to fix definitely the number that we should take with us to aid in settling a personal difference with a brother. The phrase “one or two” is itself indefinite. It is used, not unfrequently, as equivalent to “a few;” and, in our opinion, is so used by the Saviour. The aggrieved was to take with him a few brethren—that is, a sufficient number to ‘establish the word,’ but not enough to embarrass the settlement of the difficulty, or to give to it undue publicity. We can very readily conceive of cases in which it may be desirable to have as many as three brethren present. If there should be only diversity of opinion between the first two, the presence of a third person might greatly aid in adjusting the affair.

protecting herself, and the cause of Christ from reproach. When therefore the painful necessity is laid upon her, of excluding a member, it is always better that the motion should be made to *withdraw fellowship* from him, than that it should be made to *expel* or *excommunicate* him. The former expression seems to intimate, that we are influenced, not by any ill feeling towards the offender, but by a view of the sinfulness of his conduct, a respect for divine authority, and a regard for the purity of the church; while the latter expression, will inevitably convey the idea of an abhorrence, not only of the person's *sins*, but of the *person* himself.

Closing Remarks. 1. The query answered involves both a case of conscience and a case of church discipline. The rule upon which we have commented is designed for the regulation of the conduct of individuals, and is a rule by which the church should require her members to walk. If any fail to observe it, their conduct should not be suffered to escape the notice of the church.

2d. It is a manifest perversion of the rule to apply it to cases of public offences; that is, to offences committed against the common cause of Christ. To extend a rule beyond the limits assigned it in the word of God, is to establish a dangerous precedent, and to recognize as correct, principles upon which Paedobaptism and Popery have reared their fabric.

3d. The rule is given for the direction of the person aggrieved or injured. The neglect of it cannot therefore be justified upon the common plea; "I have not injured him—he has injured me, and therefore it is his place to come to me." The rule for the offender is distinct from that here given for the offended. In a subsequent part of this volume, we shall notice what is taught of offenders, and the course to be pursued in cases of public offences.

4th. It will be difficult for one, whose heart has not been properly subdued by divine grace, to submit to this rule; but to one full of the Spirit of Christ submission will prove easy. Such will ever realize the truth of the Saviour's declaration: "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matt. 11. 30. Hence if we feel a disposition to refuse obedience to this, or any other rule of Christ's kingdom, we have sufficient reason to conclude that our hearts are not right before God.

INFRACTIONS OF THE RULE PRESCRIBED BY THE SAVIOUR.

Infractions of the rule, upon which we have commented, frequently occur. There is one error in reference to these, prevalent in many of our churches, which should be corrected. We allude to the opinion, that a violation of the rule by the aggrieved, in bringing an offender before the church before he has pursued the course prescribed by the Saviour, relieves the church from the obligation to deal with the individual thus arraigned before them.

Were the effects of personal difficulties confined to the parties more immediately implicated, such an opinion might be maintained with some degree of plausibility; but it should be remembered, that every offence committed by one individual against another, is an offence committed against the whole body, and against the cause, for the furtherance of which that body was incorporated. While, therefore, the irregularity in the course pursued by the person aggrieved might subject him to censure and preclude from him the right to complain of the church, should she neglect to act upon the case, it is certain, that such neglect could not fail to afford just cause of complaint to others.

On this subject we lay down two distinct propositions, and request our readers to test their correctness by the touchstone of God's word. If they be found correct, let them be carried out in the acts of their respective churches, to the honor of God, and to the good of his cause.

I. A church is bound to take cognizance of every manifest violation by its members, of any of the laws of Christ's kingdom, with which it becomes acquainted, whether the information of such violations is communicated in a regular order or not.

The reasons for this rule are obvious. The church is required to set the seal of her disapprobation on every transgression of the law of God. Her obligation to do this is not made to depend, in the slightest degree, upon the means by which she arrives at a knowledge of the transgression; for the character of an offence is not affected, in the least, by the manner in which it is made known. The magistrate is as much bound to have a band of robbers arrested, when information of their acts of robbery is communicated by one of their own number, who has turned a traitor, as when it is communicated by an honest and orderly citizen. And so is the church as much bound to notice offences committed, when she receives her intelligence through one who is himself an offender, as when she receives it through the most harmless and exemplary of her members. So long as she is ignorant of the offences committed by her members, she is not chargeable with them; but the moment she is made acquainted with them, if she fails to adopt measures for calling the offenders to account, and for preventing the recurrence of the like offences in future, she virtually sanctions those offences, bids the offenders God speed, becomes a partaker of their evil deeds, and renders herself amenable both to God and man. [See Ps. 1., 18—1 Tim. v., 22—2 John xi.]

II. While an act, which is subsequent to another, may be affected by that which is anterior to it, that which is anterior cannot be affected by that which is subsequent.

Were the plain, obvious truth contained in this proposition borne in remembrance, it might save our churches from many errors and from much merited reproach. But further to illustrate our views and point out the

course to be pursued under certain contingencies, we will suppose a case, and offer some comments upon it.

A. charges B. with trespasses committed against himself, before he pursues the course prescribed by the Saviour. B., in return, charges A. with a violation of the rule to which we have referred, and pleads, perhaps, that the church has no right to deal with him, as the case was informally brought before it. Such a plea is evidently invalid. The truth is, they are both offenders, and the church is bound to investigate and act on the cases of both. But as she cannot act on both simultaneously, the question may arise, which case should be first taken up? We answer, unhesitatingly, the case of B., and that for two reasons: 1st. Because the offence of B. was committed prior to that of A., and was first brought to the notice of the church; 2d. Because A's offence grew out of that of B. Properly, therefore, to adjudicate the case of A., we must acquaint ourselves with those circumstances in the conduct of B. which tended to aggravate or palliate the offence of the former. But to do this, it would be necessary to enter fully into the investigation of the conduct of B. The case is as clear as the sun in a cloudless sky at noonday.

We have frequently known churches to dismiss cases indefinitely, because there was some irregularity in the manner in which they were brought before them. In other instances, the cases were dismissed until the accuser brings his accusation in the prescribed form. These generally prove, too, *final* dismissions. If we are right in the views expressed in the preceding part of these courses. "He that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." By a parity of reasoning, that church which knows of the existence of an evil in it and neglects to correct it promptly, must be viewed as guilty before God.

When an individual is charged with criminal conduct, if instead of replying to the charges brought against him, he endeavors to criminate others, he affords strong presumptive evidence of his own guilt. He acts upon the same principle with the thief, who, when the officer of justice and the mob are at his heels, raises the cry, and cries loudest of all, "Stop thief! stop thief!" His principle is to evade justice by diverting attention from himself to some other individual. To prevent your plucking the beam out of his own eye, he would set you to picking at the mote in his brother's eye.

PUBLIC OFFENCES.

QUERY II. *Is it invariably our duty to admonish a public offender privately, before we report his case to the church?*

We think it is not. We know that the opinion is very prevalent, in our southern Churches, that even public offenders should not be arraigned before the church, until we have labored with them in private and found all

our efforts to produce a reformation fruitless. This opinion appears to be founded, in part, upon a misunderstanding and a consequent misapplication of the rule in Matthew xviii, 15–17, upon which we made some annotations in our reply to the preceding query and, in part, upon a contracted view of the end of church discipline. We have already stated, that the rule in Matthew is limited to cases of personal difference, and cannot therefore be extended to cases of public offences, without sanctioning a principle most manifestly erroneous and highly pernicious in its tendency. The question then occurs, is there any other foundation in the word of God for the opinion to which we have alluded? We answer, No more than there is for pedobaptism and popery. There is neither precept nor example in the word of God to justify the belief, that it is our duty, ordinarily, to admonish a public offender privately, before he is called to an account publicly for his conduct.

To satisfy the reader of the correctness of this assertion, we would direct his attention to the numerous injunctions given in the sacred writings in reference to public offences. The following are some of the many to which we refer:

Romans xvi, 17.—“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have leaned; and avoid them.”

1 Cor. v., 4, 5.—“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (The Apostle, in this passage, prescribes the course to be pursued in the case of a certain fornicator who had married his father’s wife.)

Verse 11.—“But now I have written unto you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one, no, not to eat.”

Verse 23.—“Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person”—(the fornicator, to whom he had previously referred.)

2 Thess. iii, 6.—“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”

Verse 14.—“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”

1 Tim. v, 20.—“Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” See also Prov. xx., 10—Gal. i., 7, 9—2 John v., 10, &c.

On these passages of Scripture we have but two remarks to offer: 1st. They are addressed, with but one exception, to the people of God, or the Church; and, in the passage excepted, the Apostle gives to the highest officer in the church a rule, which is evidently designed not so much for the regulation of his own conduct, as for the government of the church over which he presides. This is apparent from the instructions which precede it,

relative to widows, unmarried women, elders, &c. 2d. In these passages there is not the most distant allusion to any preliminary steps, required to be taken, as in the case of personal differences,—no direction to go to the offender and “tell him his fault between thee and him alone,” and “if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more,” &c.

As it respects the examples of Christ and his Apostles, they are adverse to the opinion which we are combating. Christ publicly charged the scribes and pharisees, and even his own disciples, with their derelictions of duty. But as some may question the propriety of making the acts of an Omniscient and sinless Saviour a precedent for short-sighted and erring mortals, in matters of this kind, we will refer to the acts of his disciples, after the administration of the affairs of the church was delivered up into their hands.

At an early period, while yet the disciples held their possessions in common, Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of a novel species of fraud, and of a barefaced falsehood. Peter received intelligence of the fact. It is not stated whether he received it by a direct communication from the Searcher of hearts, or through individuals who were acquainted with the circumstances of the case; for it was a matter of no consequence to us to know by what means he obtained his information. But as it was of importance that we should be acquainted with the course of conduct which, under such circumstances, Infinite Wisdom would approve, the particulars of the proceedings in the case are given in full. Ananias and Sapphira appeared successively before the Apostles and those who were assembled with them. Peter did not take them aside and expostulate with them on the evil nature of their sin, and urge them to an acknowledgement of their guilt and a profession and penitence, but interrogated them, respectively, relative to the transaction in which they had offended, and publicly charged them with the guilt of lying unto the Holy Ghost. God set the seal of his approbation upon the course pursued by Peter, by visiting them with a most awful and speedy judgment. It should be borne in remembrance, that the infliction of the punishment, in this case, was not the act of the Apostle, but the immediate act of God.—See Acts v., 1–11.

On a subsequent occasion, Peter himself, it appears, was guilty of pursuing a course which did not well comport with his Christian vocation. For this the Apostle Paul passed his censures upon him, not in a private interview, but in the presence of an assembly of the disciples,—“*before them all.*” Gal. ii., 11, 14. Moreover, the proceedings in this case were recorded, sent abroad and read to the churches. While empires have risen and fallen, that record has been preserved by the kind providence of God, and is still read to the churches for their edification. We do not learn that Peter, after the manner of modern offenders, objected to the course pursued by Paul, in order to screen himself from censure. Nor does it appear that he manifested, at the time, or subsequently, any hostile feelings towards him who had thus publicly accused him of conduct inconsistent with his Christian

character. So far from this, when he had occasion to mention Paul, in one of his epistles, he speaks of him as "*our beloved brother Paul.*"—2 Peter iii, 15.

Enough has been said, we conceive, to evince, that the precepts of the gospel and the examples of the apostles, so far from teaching that it is our duty invariably to admonish a public offender privately, before we arraign him publicly, sanction a course of conduct directly the opposite of this.

But we have heard it objected, that the apostles acted under the immediate and special influences of the Holy Spirit, and therefore their examples are not safe precedents for us. In reply to this objection we have several things to say: 1st. Satan and his subjects are ever fruitful in inventions. An offender, therefore, will seldom want for a plausible objection to every rule of discipline that is applicable to his case, even though such be expressly given in Scripture. 2d. If we admit what is objected to the examples of the Apostles, it will by no means follow, that an opposite course of conduct to theirs would be correct. 3d. If the simple fact that the apostles acted under extraordinary influences of the spirit, renders it improper to follow their examples in one instance, in which it is possible to imitate them, we see not why it should not render it equally improper to follow them in any other of their public acts. 4th. We cannot believe that the Holy Spirit would dictate a course which was repugnant to the principles of moral rectitude or natural equity. As these principles are as eternal and unchangeable in their nature as the being of God, we cannot conceive that what was morally right in the days of Peter and Paul, can be morally wrong now. 5th. The examples of the apostles and primitive disciples, we are expressly taught in Scripture to follow. (See 1 Cor. iii, 10; Phil. iii., 7—I Thess. i., 7—2 Thess. iii., 9—&c.) This of itself should be sufficient to obviate every objection.

As we have answered an objection to the views which we entertain, we will now proceed to state an objection or two to the rule of those who differ from us in opinion.

1st. Their rule must necessarily prove invalid. It can bind no one; for what is every man's duty is evidently the duty of no one in particular. When an individual is guilty of a public offence, the knowledge of his guilt becomes, as it were, public property, and every member of the church suffers equally from his defection. The duty to go to him, therefore, cannot devolve upon any one in particular. Moreover, if you require the public offender to be admonished privately, before his conduct is submitted to the church for investigation, you do virtually extend over him the aegis of your protection, and insure impunity in sin to the grossest offenders. The greater the offence, too, the greater would be the security of the offender; for who would ever report to the church the case of the confirmed drunkard, the notorious gambler, or the abandoned prostitute, if he were required first to admonish such in private?

2d. We further object to the rule in question, that if it be observed, it cannot secure the ends which we should have in view. The rule is based upon the mistaken notion, that the reformation of the individual is the principal thing that renders action necessary. But interests have been affected infinitely superior to the individual interests of the offender. His misconduct has brought reproach upon the cause of Christ, and served to fortify the ungodly in their unbelief, and confirm them in all their hard speeches and ungodly deeds. He has fixed a stain upon the Christian name, which all his tears of penitence can never wash away; and he has rolled a stone against the sinners heart, which no subsequent exertion of his power can ever remove. If there is not an action of the church on his case, her neglect will fix, indelibly, a stain on her own character. So long as she holds in fellowship the offender, she must and will be considered as holding fellowship with his deeds of darkness. The prominent objects which should be kept in view in dealing with public offenders, should be the preserving untarnished the honor of the cause of Christ and the good name of the church. But these objects could not be advanced by requiring the offender to be admonished privately, before he is brought to the bar of the church. Should he repent and make acknowledgments in private, this could not supercede the necessity of an action of the church; as nothing but an action of the church could evince to the world, that she had no fellowship for his unchristian acts. The argument *cui bono* must be allowed, therefore, to have its full force here.

We close the present article with a few general deductions drawn from the preceding remarks:

1. There is no authority in Scripture for requiring public offenders to be admonished privately before their cases are submitted to the action of the church.
2. Both Scripture and reason teach the impropriety of incorporating such a rule in the constitution of any church.
3. The individual who is guilty of committing a public offence, has no right to complain, if he receives his first admonition in the presence of the whole church.

PUBLIC OFFENDERS.

QUERY III. *Under what circumstances is it our duty to go to a public offender and admonish him in private?*

While we affirm that there is no law of Christ's kingdom which imposes upon us the obligation to admonish an offender privately, before we introduce his case to the notice of the church, we would not be understood as pronouncing it *unlawful* in any case to pursue such a course. Circumstances

may render it not only lawful, but manifestly our duty to labor with an individual in private, before we act upon his case in public.

There is a wide and material difference between a positive obligation and a moral duty. The one rests upon a positive precept or express example; the other upon general principles directly or indirectly recognized in the word of God. Thus we may speak, with propriety, of a positive obligation to perform a moral duty; for there are positive precepts to do the whole will of God, and the will of God is revealed, in part, in the general principles to which allusion has been made. It may, therefore, be our duty to do what it would be very unlawful in the church, by an express rule, to require us to do. The church has no right to pass any law for which it has no express warrant in the word of God; but we are morally bound, as individuals, to do many things for which there is no express precept. Were an express precept necessary to impose a duty, what an endless number of volumes must have been written to teach us "the whole duty of man." The long life of a Methuselah would have proved insufficient to enable one to acquaint himself with the thousandth part of those precepts, which it would have been necessary to give; and, consequently, insufficient to teach him the thousandth part of his duty!

The question at the head of this article then occurs,—Under what circumstances is it our duty to go to a public offender and admonish him in private? Before attempting to answer this query, we would premise, that the Scriptures certainly justify us in making a distinction between offenders. Jude, in his Epistle, speaking of certain false teachers, and those who were led astray through their artifices, says. "And of some have compassion, making a difference; And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh,"—v. 22, 23.

The sum and substance of the instructions on this subject appear to be this: That gross, wilful and obstinate offenders are to be promptly excluded from the church, while such as have been misled by them, and have sinned inadvertently,—not through a settled purpose to do evil, or any perverse disposition of the heart, but through the weakness of their frail natures, and the infatuation of the moment,—should be treated with greater lenity. If they are tractable, can be made sensible of their errors, are ingenuous enough to confess their faults, and honest enough, not only to reform their conduct, but to seek to make some adequate reparation for the wrongs they have done, they should be retained in communion. But even in such cases, it is necessary that the church proceed in such a manner as to evince, very clearly, that while she retained the offender in fellowship, she held his sins in utter abhorrence.

Churches, in the present day, are ready enough to make distinctions in the treatment of offenders; but the distinctions of which they make are too often founded upon the influence which individuals possess in the world,—upon an influence which is produced, not by a holy fire, but by the adventitious

circumstances of place, property or worldly reputation. If one animadvert upon that improper conduct of a member who is thus favored, the reply is, "O, he is an officer of government, he is a man of wealth, or he is a man of talents, a man of great erudition—we must bear with him." It is thus, in the church, as it is in the state: wealth, office, and worldly reputation cover more sins by far than the robe of charity. Christians, as well as men of the world, but too frequently verify the truth of Shakespeare's remark:

"Through tattered clothes small vices do appear;
Robes and furred gowns, hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks:
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it."

It is scarcely necessary to add, that the only distinctions which are warranted by the word of God, are those founded on differences in moral character.

These remarks, we trust, have prepared the reader, in some degree, to give a due consideration to the views which we shall express in answer to the query we are considering. In reply to that query, we would observe in general terms, that when three things occur in the case of the offender, we may safely conclude that it is our duty to reason with him in private, before we arraign him publicly. 1st. When the offence committed is evidently ascribable more to an error of the head than of the heart, and savors more of what the world would call an impropriety, than of an immorality; 2d. When it is in the power of the individual, by his own act, effectually to secure the church from all unjust imputations on his account; and, 3d. When the general character of the individual is such as to justify the belief of his willingness, when convinced of his error, to make any reparation in his power, for the wrongs committed. If any of these things be wanting in the case of the offender, the duty to admonish him privately will be, at least, very questionable. If all are wanting, it certainly cannot be proved the duty of any one to do it.

If the offence consist in some grossly immoral act, such as the sin of drunkenness, the commission of assault and battery, fornication, &c., no acknowledgments, no professions of penitence on the part of the offender, can shield the church from reproach. It will, therefore, be absolutely necessary that the church should act upon his case. She should act promptly, act with decision, and act effectually. Our churches, almost uniformly, are guilty of two flagrant errors in reference to such cases. The first is, that of delaying action unnecessarily; and the second, that of receiving an acknowledgment, perhaps reluctantly made, as a sufficient satisfaction for the injuries done to the cause of Christ,

1. *The delay of action.*—The church of Rome, in the height of her arrogance and in the supremacy of her power, issued her decretals, that the ordi-

nance of baptism should be administered only on specified days, at Easter and Whitsuntide.² We, while loud in condemning this usurpation of power, scruple not to imitate her example, by adopting a rule which requires that offenders shall be tried only on certain appointed days; and the number of these days amount only to twelve,—on only twelve days out of the 365 is it lawful, according to the usage of very many of our churches, to investigate and act upon the moral delinquencies of our members! Where is the Scripture to justify such a restriction? The truth is, there is no more sanction given in Scripture to the restriction which we adopt, than there is to that adopted by the church of Rome. Whenever the disciples assemble in the name of the Lord, they are as fully authorized to investigate and act upon cases of church discipline, as they are to unite in the worship of God. “When ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto Satan,” &c. (1 Cor. v. 4, 5,) was the direction given by an inspired apostle.

According to the rule which custom has established among us, if a man in our church meeting day gets drunk, murders his neighbor, or commits highway robbery, we can do nothing with him, until the next church meeting. His case is then perhaps introduced; but the offender is generally absent, consequently nothing final can be done. A committee is appointed to cite him to appear before our next church meeting. Another month rolls round—his case is taken up—some one notifies the church, that it was out of his power to attend that day—he had a friend to meet, a neighbor to visit, a debt to pay, or something of the kind to do, and requests that the case be deferred. It is deferred, accordingly, another month; and sometimes it is put off from month to month, for six months or more. We knew an instance in which a member committed murder, was tried by a civil court, condemned, and came near being hung before the church could act upon his case! And why was this? Because she had bound up her hands, not with the rules of God’s word, but with the rules of her own invention. We are sticklers for the rules which God has prescribed for the administration of gospel ordinances. It is well, but, brethren, let us be equally tenacious of the rules which he has prescribed for the regulation of our own conduct, and the government of our churches.

Perhaps some may respond, you condemn the course which custom has established amongst us; what course would you have us pursue? We answer, the first time the disciples are “gathered together” after the offence becomes known to the members of the church, let the case be taken up. If the offender be absent, let persons be appointed to apprise him of the charges alleged against him, and cite him to appear at your next meeting. Let your meeting be appointed at an early day. If you should not be able to dispose of the case at your next meeting, *adjourn from day to day*, and be

²Wheatly on Book Com. Prayer pp. 214, 311, London Edition. 1759. Histor. Sacr. Biblioth. Art. Bapt. &c.

sure to make a *final* disposition of the case *as soon as practicable*. Remember, that every day the offender continues in the church, the wound he has inflicted upon her honor is kept open, and her spiritual strength is wasting. Moreover, promptitude in acting upon the case of offenders, will have a tendency greatly to restrain others from the commission of evil.

If it be deemed too much for an individual to assume the responsibility of laboring to produce a reformation in this matter, could not something be done in our ministers' meetings, or at our Associations, which would have a tendency to direct the attention of our churches to this subject and lead to the correction of the existing evil?

2. *The receiving acknowledgments as a satisfaction for public offences.* This practice, which is also very prevalent, seems to us to savor of the Romish practice of forgiving sin, granting indulgences, &c. If there be a difference, we know not but that it is in favor of the Romanist; for he receives an actual compensation, something substantial for the injuries done his church; but we receive nothing but a wordy acknowledgment—and what are words but empty air? A member gets drunk—we arraign him before the church—he makes his confession—sheds, perhaps, a few whiskey tears, and—is freely pardoned! In two or three months he is drunk again. The same scene is acted over—he is arraigned and pardoned as freely as ever. We doubt not that there are members in some of our churches, (we trust not in many,) who have been drunk half a dozen times since they have been united with us, and have been as often pardoned! These are blemishes which are noted by our adversaries and pointed at. Exaggerated accounts of them are dealt out with an unsparing hand, both from the pulpit and the press. We have recently seen some to these accounts in a public print. While we deplore the existence of such a state of things in any church, we cannot but pity the man whose depraved taste leads him to feed on such unsavory food; to nourish his pride and arrogance with the offals of the church. But we leave such to their loathsome diet, while we proceed to recommend a remedy for the prevailing evil.

We would have it established as a general principle in our churches, *that every member guilty of a scandalous public offence should be excluded and kept out of the church, until he had sufficient time to evince the sincerity of his professions of penitence and restore himself, in some degree at least, to the confidence of the community.* Amongst the many reasons which we have for favoring the adoption of such a rule, we will specify the following:

First. The Scriptures expressly teach us to withdraw our fellowship from such, without making any exceptions in favor of those who are willing to compromise the matter with an acknowledgment.

Second. They require, that members of the church should maintain a fair character in the world. The offender, in the supposed case, has broken his fellowship with the saints by his own acts, and justly forfeited all claims upon the church. The question, therefore, virtually involved in his trial, is not, Shall we *keep* him in fellowship? but, shall we *renew* our fellowship

with him? If there exist causes which would justify us in rejecting his fellowship, when proffered for the first time, we see not why the same causes should not justify us in rejecting his fellowship, when proffered a second time. But ill report in the world, would, probably, be considered as a sufficient cause why we should not receive him into the church, were he presenting himself before us for the first time; and, if so, it should be considered an equally valid cause why we should not receive him, a second time, to our communion. Allow him time to vegetate anew and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

Third. The Scriptures, moreover, require us to labor to preserve the church pure and promote its prosperity. The injunction to do this, of course, involves the duty to use the means necessary for the accomplishment of these ends. But no church can be preserved pure and prosperous that will receive an acknowledgment of error as a sufficient satisfaction for a scandalous offence; or a promise of amendment as a sufficient security for the future good conduct of a gross offender.

Fourth. Such a rule as that we propose, would exert a restraining influence on the members of our churches. It would inculcate circumspection more effectually than all the labored arguments of their ministers. An individual would be much less likely to yield to temptation when he knew that, if he yielded, the inevitable consequence would be exclusion from the church and a consequent loss of character.

Fifth. The rule would be galling only to the evil-doer. To the true Christian it could never prove oppressive. An enlightened Christian, if in an unguarded moment he were hurried into the commission of any gross sin, would be the first to insist on enforcing the rule in his own case; for however much he loved himself, he would love his Saviour more; and however reluctant he might be to sustain an injury in his own character, he would be still more reluctant to be instrumental in fixing a stain upon the character of the church. Amid his greatest aberrations from the path of moral rectitude, the cause of Christ would still be dear to his heart, and rather than subject the best of causes to unmerited reproach on his account, he would prefer to suffer anything in his own person. A temporary exclusion from the church could do such an one no injury. It might assist in humbling him before God, and in his own estimation, and thus prepare him for subsequent exaltation. It would afford him an opportunity of giving the most satisfactory evidence to the church, and to the world of the genuineness of his professions and the sincerity of his penitence.

With the view of illustrating, confirming and enforcing what we have written on this point, we will report a case with which we became acquainted in Virginia:

An aged and prominent member of a church was overcome by drink. At the first conference meeting that was convened after his misfortune, he reported himself to the church, deplored his sin, expressed his penitence

with a flood of tears, but called upon the church to do her duty, and shield herself from the reproach which his misconduct was calculated to bring upon her. The deep distress of this hoary-headed sire excited commiseration in every bosom—the whole church was in tears. As soon as their feelings would allow it, a proposition was made to pass over the offence and dismiss the case. Many were the voices immediately lifted in its favor. One tremulous voice alone was heard to oppose it—it was the voice of the offender himself. At length the pastor, who was a man of intelligence as well as of approved piety, arose. Every eye was fixed upon him with intense anxiety. He expressed his regret for the misfortunes of the brother,—the same regrets were felt by all;—his sympathy for him in his present state of mental suffering,—this was in perfect unison with the feelings evinced by the audience;—but he concluded with adding, that he concurred with the brother in thinking that the honor of the church required that she should express, in the most decided manner, her disapprobation of the act of which he had unfortunately been guilty, and that the offender should be excluded. Disappointment of a most painful character was depicted on every countenance. The church, however, yielded reluctantly, to the concurrent views of the pastor and the offender himself. The latter was excluded, but after a month or two was restored. He has never since, within our knowledge, done anything to dishonor the cause of his Saviour.

In the case above reported, the honor of the church was preserved untarnished, while no real injury was done to the individual by enforcing the rules of the gospel. The course which he wisely pursued, gave the church and the community greater confidence in him, if possible, than they had prior to his fall. While no one thought *worse of the offender*, every one thought *better* of the church, for the course which she pursued. To the offenders, and to churches, we would say, Go ye, and do likewise.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

OBJECTION I. *By your rule you would exclude many a true christian from the Church.*

Answer. The character of the *offence*, and not that of the *offender*, should influence all our decisions, in ecclesiastical as well as in civil tribunals. When a member is arraigned before a church, it is no part of our business to enter into a general investigation of his claims to be considered a christian. The question to be decided is not, Is he a christian? but, Is he guilty? It therefore devolves on us, in the first place, to endeavor to ascertain whether he is actually guilty of the charges preferred against him. If the charges be sustained by satisfactory evidence, it is our duty, in the next place, to recur to the '*law and the testimony*,' to learn what course they direct us to pursue, towards one guilty of the offences supposed to be

proved on the accused—whether they would justify us in conniving at his sin, by retaining him in fellowship. Now the word of God teaches us, expressly, to withdraw from such as depart from the faith, or walk disorderly amongst us. There are no exceptions made in favor of those who may hope to be christians. Considerations of personal character are to influence us, only in cases such as that to which we refer on a preceding page.

By complying with the Gospel rule to which we refer above, we do not declare a belief that the accused is not a christian, but merely decide that the acts charged upon him are infringements of the law of God, and such infringements as require us to set upon him the seal of our disapprobation;—that they are derogatory to the character of a christian, reproachful to the cause of Christ, and hurtful to souls. If there be a stain on the character of the church, we must seek to wipe it off, no matter by whom it has been affixed. We should give no more countenance to sin in one individual than in another;—we should be, at least as careful not to sanction it in the christian, as in the unconverted. The fact that a sin has been committed by a christian, does not lessen its evil, in any respect;—it rather increases it. A sinful act committed by one who has hitherto sustained a fair character, is calculated to exert a wider and more baneful influence than the same act committed by a loose professor or an avowed unbeliever. It is with rays of moral darkness as with rays of solar light;—the more elevated the object that reflects them, the more extensively is their influence spread abroad and felt. Shall we, then, plead in extenuation of sin, that which increases its power to harm? God forbid.

That the simple act of withdrawing fellowship from an individual does not amount to a declaration of a belief that he is no christian;—in other words, that the general character which one sustains as a christian, should not shield him from the consequences of his guilt, in any particular instance, those who raise the objection we are endeavoring to answer, not infrequently admit by their practice. They withdraw fellowship from a certain class of offenders, of whose christian character they entertain no doubt, as is evident from their uniting with them, subsequently, in acts of religious worship which clearly indicate *christian* fellowship. We allude to the course they pursue, in common with us, towards those who are guilty of overleaping the barriers, which separate us as a church from other denominations of christians. We never pretend, that we separate ourselves from those who have adopted the creed and practice of another denomination, because we believe them to be deceivers or false professors; but base our justification solely on the ground, that our views of duty will not allow us to sanction, in any one, what we believe to be violations of the word of God.

“Here is firm footing: here is solid rock;
This can support us; all is sea besides,
Sinks under us; bestorms, and then devours:”

Involves us in counter currents of inconsistency, and in a maelstrom of strife and confusion.

We trust that what we have written on this subject, will be sufficient to satisfy the reader of the correctness of the principle laid down in the first sentence of this article; and, if so, that he will ever, hereafter, in his church conferences, regulate his course in accordance with it.

OBJECTION II. *The apostle Paul teaches, in Gal. vi. 1, that if a brother be overtaken in a fault, we are to restore him, not exclude him as you direct.*

Answer. The passage referred to in the above objection, like that in Matt. xviii, 15–17, is but too frequently misunderstood and misapplied. From few things have our churches suffered more injury, than from the perversion and misapplication of the discipline rules laid down in the sacred Scriptures.

Can any one read attentively the writings of Paul, and notice the utter abhorrence which he expresses for the immoral practices which prevailed in his day, as well as in ours, the urgency with which he enjoins on the church to withdraw from those who indulge in them; the heavy censures he passes on some for retaining such in fellowship, and then suppose, for one moment, that he had reference to open immoralities in the passage to which we are referred? Who would charge the apostle with such inconsistency? Certainly no one;—but note,

1. The apostle speaks of “*faults*,” not of *vices*; of errors that originate in the head, or in the infirmities of the flesh, and not of those that originate in a corrupt heart, and are associated with a perverse will. This is evident from the reason he assigns why they should restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, “*considering thyself lest thou also be tempted.*” Can it be possible that the apostle, who contended so strenuously that the people of God were predestined to good works, and that they would be preserved in a state of holiness, by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, intended to intimate, that they were themselves predisposed to be guilty of drunkenness, fornication, adultery, theft, murder, &c., and therefore should deal gently with such as were guilty of these offences, that they might not be treated with severity when guilty of the same? We cannot believe it. If the apostle had designed to intimate that they were predisposed to commit such acts, we cannot believe that he would have sought to influence their present conduct, by holding out a hope of impunity in the future indulgence of their sinful propensities.

2. But, let it be observed further, that the apostle supposes the case of one who is seeking to *evade*—*who is running away from* his faults, but is unfortunately *overtaken* by them. Now, there is a wide difference between such an one, and one who seeks evil, runs into temptation, and plunges into vice. The latter overtakes his faults, the former is overtaken by them. It would be exceedingly pernicious, as well as absurd, to apply, in the one case, a rule given to direct our conflict in the other. The apostle evidently

speaks of one who errs involuntarily. We have spoken of those who voluntarily, and in a flagrant manner, transgress the laws of God. The direction of the apostle, therefore, cannot be properly applied to cases like those of which we are treating.

3. But again—"Ye that are spiritual, restore such a one"—restore such a one to what? To the fellowship of the church? No; we have no reason to believe that the apostle has any allusion to an *excluded* member. And if he does allude to such, the passage is inapplicable when we are discussing, not whether an individual shall be *restored* to the church, but whether he shall be *retained* in fellowship, after being guilty of an open immorality, provided he is willing to make an acknowledgment and profess penitence. It is in the latter case that the passage is generally objected to us. As to the propriety of restoring excluded members, first to a godly life, and then to the fellowship of the church, there exists no diversity of sentiment amongst us. But the apostle is not speaking of *retaining* a member in fellowship; he is speaking of *restoring* one to something. We have seen, that it cannot be to church fellowship, as the individual is not supposed, even by our objectors, to have been an *excluded* member. The question then again occurs, to what are such to be restored? We answer, first, to our affections, if in an unguarded moment they have done anything to alienate them; secondly, to their right reason, if through the infirmities of the flesh, they have suffered their tempestuous passions, or the cares and vexations of the world, to distract and disturb their minds; and, thirdly, to the consolations of the gospel, if through the weakness of their frames they have been drawn away from these, and are now mourning the absence of their former joys. Whatever may be the meaning of this passage, one thing is certain, it can have no possible allusion to the course to be pursued, when dealing with individuals who are charged with gross immoralities.

RUMORED OFFENCES.

QUERY IV. *How are we to proceed when a member of the church is charged, by common rumor, with criminal conduct?*

This is an important inquiry. It presents before us a subject on which it is much more common to err than to act correctly, and one which involves interests in no respect inferior to those involved in our preceding articles on private and public offences. In our answer we shall speak, first, in reference to the action of individuals, and, secondly, in reference to the action of the church.

The action of individuals.—1st. It is not our duty to notice every evil report that we hear of a brother; for evil reports, of some kind or other, will ever be circulated about those who are active in the cause of Christ. The word of God declares, that if any man will live godly, he shall suffer per-

secution; and where persecutors are prohibited the use of fire and faggot, and the sword, by the civil law, they will never fail to resort to the "scourge of the tongue." He that will busy himself with every evil report which he hears of a brother, will find but little time to attend to anything else, and will seldom hear any good of himself or of others. As a general rule, therefore, we would say, give no heed to reports of a vague, indefinite, unauthenticated and improbable character. But, on the other hand, beware of turning a deaf ear to every evil report. If we were to adopt the rule, never to give ear to an evil report, it is evident that offenders could never be arraigned or convicted of guilt. If report charges a brother with a criminal act, of a *specific* character, we are bound to notice it. Our duty to the accused, as well as to the church, requires that we should notice it, and trace it, if possible, to its source.

2d. We should carefully avoid giving currency to an evil report, however confident we may be of the truth of that report. Many violate this rule, unintentionally. They profess, perhaps, great regret that such a report should be circulated, and a strong desire that it should be suppressed. At the same time, they roll the ball as it were forward, give it a new impetus, and a new direction. It is sent into their neighbor's family circle, and thence into many others. They thus act, effectually, as agents for the transmission of the evil which they profess to deplore. Another repeats the evil rumor, and excuses himself by saying, it is no secret; he supposes there is no harm in repeating what is in every man's mouth. We would remind such, that we are cautioned in Scripture against following the multitude to do evil, and that sin is not the less sinful because it is committed by the many.

3d. It is our duty, in but very few instances, if indeed in any, to give information of the report to the individual principally affected by it; for if the report be of a comparatively trivial or of an indefinite character, it is worse than useless to apprize him of it. On the other hand, if the report contains specific charges of a criminal character, to acquaint him with it, without taking previous steps to ascertain the truth or falsity of those charges, cannot fail to be productive of evil, whether he be innocent or guilty. If innocent, it will greatly harrass his mind, damp the energies of his soul, embarrass his actions, weaken his efforts, and, consequently, diminish his usefulness. If he be guilty, it will serve to place him on his guard against the consequences of his guilt, and afford him an opportunity of seeking to conceal his sin and evade justice. It would be like notifying a thief before hand, of our intention to search for the goods which we suspect him of having stolen. A man, it should be remembered, who is base enough to commit a grossly criminal act, will seldom be found honest enough to confess it. These remarks may serve to prepare the way for the rule which we would recommend to be pursued, in every instance in which a brother is charged, by common report, with some criminal act.

Our rule is simply this, *endeavor to trace the report to its origin, with as*

little delay as possible. Demand of him who repeats the report in your hearing, his author. Go to his authority and proceed, in like manner, from individual to individual, until you are well assured that the report is false, or until you have obtained evidence sufficient to prove it true. In either event, you will be rewarded with the consciousness of having discharged your duty. Yours will be the satisfaction to reflect, that you have been instrumental in vindicating the innocent, or detecting the guilty, and unmasking the hypocrite. Were this course generally pursued, it would tend, evidently, to restrain the circulation of evil reports. Individuals would be led to reflect well before they gave currency to a report.

4th. Having obtained evidence of the truth of an evil rumor, it is your duty, in the next place, to bring it, or cause it to be brought, before the church; not in the form of a *report*, but in the form of a *charge* against the member implicated. When the case is brought up for trial, it will be your duty, farther, to adduce the evidence upon which the charge was based.

The action of the church.—In reference to the question, as it affects the church, we have but two remarks to make. 1st. An evil report should never be brought before a church, unless brought in the way above directed, or by the individual chiefly implicated in the report. 2d. Should information, however, of a report affecting injuriously the character of a member, be lodged with the church, it will be her duty, whether the case was formally or informally brought before her, to adopt such measures as may be necessary to a thorough investigation of it. She should use every lawful means in her power to obtain sufficient evidence, either to exculpate or convict the reported offender. In all such cases, however, it should be remembered, that *every man is to be presumed innocent, until he is proved guilty.* By this rule we expect others to regulate their conduct towards us; by the same rule we should regulate our conduct towards others—"Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Phil. iii, 16, and Matt. vii, 12.

"Blessed Redeemer! how divine,
How righteous is this rule of thine,
Never to deal with others worse
Than we would have them deal with us!"

RIGHTS OF OFFENDERS.

QUERY V. *Is it right to exclude a public offender without giving him a hearing and affording him an opportunity to defend himself?*

We answer, certainly not in ordinary cases. The grossest offenders have rights, and it becomes the christian and the church of Christ to respect the rights of every individual. We are required, in the Scriptures, not only to love mercy and walk humbly, but to deal justly, Mic. vi, 8. To render "unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are

God's;" Matt. xxii, 21. Caesar, it is certain, was not a friend of God; for it was by Caesar's laws that the Son of God was immolated upon the cross: yet even Caesar was to receive his due.

Is our civil government the guardian of our civil rights? So should the church be of our spiritual privileges. Is it necessary, in the one, that before a person can be disfranchised, he should be fairly tried and condemned, upon the testimony of credible witnesses? So should it be in the other. But instead of this, we have known a charge brought against an offender, and, in several instances, the motion made and *carried* to exclude him, although the charge was sustained only by the testimony of the accuser—the whole process occupying, perhaps, not more than five or ten minutes; and all this occurring—where? Not in the confessional of a son of apostate Rome; not in the classroom or closet of a tyrannical itinerant; not in the sessions convened by a haughty and aristocratic presbytery; but in the conference of a church that has ever gloried in being the champion of equal rights and of apostolical practices! Brethren, we write these things not to shame you, but to profit you; not to blazon forth your failures in duty, but to point out errors for your correction, "that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." View us not as an enemy, who glories in your shame, because we speak the truth; but as one whose interests are identified with yours; who is honored when you are honored, and who bleeds when you are wounded.

A procedure, like that we have noticed, has not the least semblance of justice in it. It is in direct opposition to the teachings of God's word, tends to the establishment of a dangerous precedent, and frustrates the ends which should be had in view in the exercise of church discipline.

I. It is at variance with the rules of God's word, for,

1st. The word of God teaches, that an individual is not to be condemned except upon the testimony of "*two or three witnesses.*" See Deut. xvii. 6 and xix. 15, for the original law on this subject. In the latter passage, it is said, "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth; at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." For evidence of the incorporation of this law in the christian code, see Matt. xviii, 16; 2 Cor. xiii. 1; 1st Tim. v. 19. We would refer the reader also to our remarks on this subject in our preceding articles.

2d. From the word of God, it further appears, that witnesses were required to give in their testimony *in the presence of the accused.* This is evident from all the reports of trials recorded in Sacred Writ. In that most iniquitous trial, the most unparallel for injustice of any recorded to the annals of criminal jurisprudence—in the trial of the Prince of Peace—the right to confront his witnesses was not withheld. That the witnesses gave in their testimony in his presence, is apparent from the whole narrative as well as from the interrogatory of Pilate; Matt. xxvii. 13. "Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?"

Reason and observation concur in teaching the importance of respecting

this rule of right; for there are many persons, who are sufficiently malicious to accuse one behind his back, but are not sufficiently bold to sustain their accusation before his face. The consciousness that the accused *knows* the accusation to be false, has often confounded a false witness: and this it will generally do, where the accuser is not hardened in iniquity. Thus this rule is calculated to afford protection to the innocent, against at least a dastardly enemy. We have not infrequently been pained and disgusted at the course pursued by accusers, and truly mortified, when the accuser has happened to be a brother in the church. That which had been affirmed as a matter of fact, behind one's back, turns out to be, before his face, but a matter of opinion, or an unwarrantable inference; and the charge which was thought to be based upon personal observation is found to be based upon nothing more substantial than a very questionable 'hearsay.'

3d. The same authority teaches us, that the accused should be allowed *to answer for himself*. This privilege was conceded to the Saviour, by the high priest, when the false witnesses gave in their testimony, "and the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?" Matt. xxvi, 52. The same right was conceded to the apostle Paul, on the occasion on which he delivered his eloquent and ever memorable address before Agrippa. "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand and answered for himself," &c. Acts xxvi. 1, &c. When the Pharisees, on one occasion, manifested a disposition to condemn the Saviour, unheard, Nicodemus appealed to them, John vii. 51. "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" He evidently considered their conduct, in this instance, as of a most unjustifiable character; abhorrent alike to the principles of natural equity, and the spirit and letter of their judicial code.

Testimony may be given that appears direct, that is strong and true, as far as it goes: it may appear so conclusive as to leave no doubt on our minds relative to the guilt of the accused, and yet, when circumstances are explained, and important omissions in the testimony are supplied, the case may present a very different aspect from that which was at first presented. A case which occurred under our own observation will serve for an illustration. A very excellent brother brought a charge of intoxication against another. He stated, that he passed from one town to another with the accused; was in his company some ten or fifteen minutes—the time occupied in the passage—that the accused was very talkative, but was so much intoxicated, that he could not speak distinctly. As it was known that the accused had once been in the habit of taking an occasional glass of liquor, and as the witness was one in whose veracity all had confidence, the impression made on every mind was, that the accused was guilty. Subsequently, the case was taken up. The accused being allowed to answer for himself, stated, what was known to every one, that he labored under an

impediment of speech, and that certain variations in the atmosphere, or any mental excitement, tended greatly to increase that impediment. He added, what had not been known, that his mind had become somewhat excited, by his anxiety to reach the neighboring town in time to secure a passage to some place which he was about to visit. He ascribed his inarticulate address to the combined influence of his mental excitement and the cold and damp atmosphere to which he was exposed on his passage, and affirmed, that on the day on which he was said to have been intoxicated, he had not touched a drop of spirituous liquors, nor, indeed, had he tasted any for many months previously. The church was satisfied with the defence, and the accuser apologized with, "I *thought* he had been drinking, and *thought* that it was the influence of liquor that caused him to speak so indistinctly."

In this case, it will be observed, that the facts stated by the accuser, as proof of the charge of intoxication, were admitted to be true by the accused; but when the circumstances were explained, they were not deemed sufficient to justify the inference deduced from them.

II. To try and condemn an individual, either in the church or out of it, without giving him a hearing, and allowing him to face his accusers, is to establish a precedent that is dangerous in the extreme. If this thing may be done with impunity, the character of no one can be secure; for there is no man who has not his enemies, and no man who has not failings, which may serve as the ground work for the basest of charges. How often have those, who have been engaged in tracing reports to their origin, been astonished to find how great a fire a little matter is capable of kindling, and to how odious a tale a little imprudence may give rise. We will not hazard the assertion that it is never lawful to exclude a member from the church, without affording him an opportunity to confront the witnesses and defend himself, but we will say, that if such a course is ever lawful, it is only in extreme cases, which but rarely occur, and which should not be allowed to serve as precedents for other cases. To justify even this departure from the usual routine, three things must hold true. 1st. The offence committed must be of a highly criminal character. 2d. The proof must be such as to admit of no possibility of a refutation. 3d. The circumstances of the case must also be such, that the character of the church would suffer by the delay which would be necessary for a formal trial. It should ever be remembered, that it is much easier to inflict a wound than to heal one. The injuries committed in an hour of excitement, a whole life time may be insufficient to repair. If, therefore, we err, it is ever best to err on mercy's side.

III. To withhold from an offender any of his just rights, is to preclude the likelihood of effecting the ends for which we resort to the exercise of church discipline. To inflict a wanton injury upon an individual, is certainly not the most effectual way of bringing him to acknowledge the injuries he has done, either to the church or to the cause of Christ. The slightest deviation from the rule of right, on the part of the church, will tend rather to

confirm the offender in his offences. It will excite prejudice against us, close the doors of his head and heart against our appeals and remonstrances; and, like a coat of mail, render him invulnerable to the most pointed reproofs. Such a course of conduct, moreover, instead of shielding the church from reproach, will expose her but the more. While she is attempting to stop up the breach which the offender has made in her walls, she pulls down a whole broadside.

Learn, then, to respect the rights of offenders, if you would have them brought back to the exercise of a godly sorrow for their sins, and would shield yourselves, and the cause of Christ, from reproach. These, as we have stated in our former articles, are the great ends, for the accomplishment of which, the exercise of church discipline has been enjoined. Much wisdom and discretion is needed, to preserve us from an undue laxity on the one hand, and an unjustifiable severity on the other. In seeking to be lenient, we may be over-indulgent: and in seeking to be just, we may be tyrannical and oppressive. May He who is the light of the world and the head of the church, enable his people to steer clear of each extreme. But to do this, beloved brethren, we must cultivate a spirit of prayer, and diligently study the word of God.

OMISSIONS OF DUTY.

QUERY VI. *Is it right for a church to exclude a member, against whom there is no charge of immorality, for simply neglecting some christian duty; such, for instance, as the duty to unite in celebrating the Lord's Supper;—to contribute according to his ability to the support of the Gospel, to keep up family worship, &c.?*

We feel but little hesitation in answering the above query in the affirmative, and are very confident that we shall be able to make it apparent, that our views on this subject are sustained, both by the Sacred Scriptures and the usage of the more intelligent and efficient portion of our churches.

A proper regard for the preservation of discipline in our churches, imperiously require, that our church members be exercised in the practice of all the moral and social virtues enjoined in the word of God. The scriptures not only require of us that we “cease to do evil,” but that we “learn to do well.” The requisition to love and serve one another, to minister to the necessities of the needy, not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, to contribute for the support of the ministry, to aid in diffusing abroad the blessings of the gospel of Christ, are as express as the prohibitions of immoral acts. But, unfortunately, we seem to lose sight of this important fact, and attach more importance to negative than to positive duties;—that is, to the duty to abstain from evil, than to the duty to do good. We make that primary which should be secondary, and that secondary

which should be primary. We are more careful to punish an offending member, than we are to instruct and train the unoffending. We would not hesitate to exclude from our communion a servant who positively refused, in but one or two instances, to obey his master, while we retain in fellowship those who habitually neglect the most peremptory commands of their God! We thus declare, by our acts, that we esteem it a greater offence to neglect a duty to a fellow creature, than to neglect our duties to God. If a member will but abstain from open immoralities, and attend his church conferences once in two or three, or six months, we hold him in full fellowship, and report him to be in good standing, though he afford no fruit, either of his love to God, or his interest in the prosperity of the church!

To see that our church members are employed in doing good, is one of the most effectual means of keeping them from the commission of evil. The more they are employed in the duties of religion, the more will they delight in them, and the less will they relish those sinful indulgences which expose one, not only to the censures of the church, but to the displeasure of God. Knowing then, as we do, that the neglect of duty prepares for the commission of crime, if we connive at the one, we cannot but be held responsible for the other. With what justice, or with what propriety can we sit in judgment upon an offending brother, if we witnessed his first derelictions of duty and neglected to admonish him? If, when he first turned aside from the path of duty, we said, by our silence, if in no other way, "brother, go on; you are in the right way; God speed thee?"

There must be a reformation also in this department of discipline, before the church can appear to the beholder as a beautiful fabric, completely built of polished stones. If we would have our church members to be as a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariot, we must put them in the harness, attach them to the chariot of the gospel, and be as careful to make them pull forward, as we are to keep them from running backward. The whip and the spur must be applied when they stop and refuse to work, as well as when they make attempts to break loose and shake off their gear. Why was the barren fig tree withered by the curse of the Saviour? We read not that it bore evil fruit; but it was barren—it yielded no good fruit, (Matt. xxi, 19, 20. See also the parable xxiv, 32.) 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is to be hewn down and cast into the fire.' (Matt. iii, 10.) This is declared to be an ordinance of heaven, by him who was sent to prepare the way for the building up of the church of Christ. The Saviour confirms the decree and declares, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away" (John xv, 2.) And again, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." (v, 6.)

This branch of church discipline merits, and should receive, more attention than we have hitherto given to it. It is with church members as with orators; the main thing to secure commendation and success in their holy

vocation, is “*action*.” Like good soldiers and good scholars, they must be regularly and systematically exercised in their several duties. We should watch over each other, therefore, not only that we may reprove each other’s offences, but that we may stir up each other’s languid affections, and excite to good works. We represent the neglect of duty as a very little sin, (and so does Satan,) but in the word of God, it is represented as a sin of so great a magnitude as to justify the excluding from heaven all such as are guilty of it: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. ii, 3.) “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these (his disciples) ye did it not to me,” is represented as the language of the Judge of all the earth, when sentencing to final banishment from his presence, those who claimed to be his peculiar people. (Matt. xxv, 45.) Observe, that they are excluded, not because they persecuted, oppressed, impoverished, or imprisoned his disciples; but because they neglected to visit and administer to their necessities. But if this afford just ground of exclusion from heaven, it must—it does afford just ground of exclusion from the privileges of the church.

The inference which we would draw, from all that has been said on this subject, is, that to be faithful to God, and just and impartial in our administration of the laws of Christ’s kingdom, we must subject to the censures of the church, not only those who do evil, but those also who neglect to do good; for the word of God admonishes, “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” (Jas. iv, 17.) Let this be borne in remembrance, and let the actions of our churches be regulated accordingly, and our church registry will be less frequently stained with the record of the guilt of our members; its pages will be more frequently embellished with entries of acts of benevolence, and with the names of new recruits in the cause of Christ.

Baptist churches have repeatedly sanctioned the principle for which we contend—the principle which leads us to deal with members for the neglect of duty. The Kehukee Association, in 1783, considered the following query:—“What shall a church do with a member who shall absent himself from the communion of the Lord’s supper?” They returned the answer, “That it is the duty of the church to inquire into the reason of his absenting himself from the communion, and if he does not render a satisfactory reason the church shall deal with him.” Hist. Keh. As. p. 68.

In the minutes of the Georgia Association, for the year 1835, we find the following queries and answers, in reference to the same subject. 1. “Is it the duty of church members to partake of the Lord’s supper, when regularly administered in the church? *Answer, Yes!* 2. Are members excusable who take their seats in order, but refuse to partake of the elements? *Answer, No!* 3. Is it the duty of the church or not, when members take their seats and do not commune, to inquire into the reason thereof? *Answer, Yes!* 4. When members take their seats at communion, and fail to partake on account of a want of fellowship with some brother or brethren, and yet do

not lay charges against those for whose sake they refuse to commune, ought the church to deal with them who thus act? *Answer, Yes, after gospel steps have been taken!*"

In the minutes of the same Association, for 1798, is the following query. "What shall be done with those professors who do not hold worship in their families?" They answer, "It is our opinion that the churches to whom such professors belong, *first admonish, exhort, and reprove* them, but if they will not be *reclaimed*, then deal with them as neglecters of *known* duty." In the minutes for 1808, the following query and answer occur: "Should a brother be continued in fellowship who, though able, will not assist in supporting the gospel? Ans.—We are of opinion where the ability is *obvious* on the one hand, and the unwillingness positive on the other, and the brother cannot be brought to his duty by proper means, he ought to be excluded." Hist Ga. As. p. 130, 132, 138.

Our views on this subject are thus sustained by the sacred Scriptures and by the express decisions of large and respectable portions of our denomination. Our misfortune is not that we lack light on this subject, but that we lack the zeal, energy and moral courage which is requisite to the faithful discharge of our duty. Our churches are often as neglectful of their duty as the most unfaithful of their members.

OF WITNESSES.

QUERY VII. *In the trial of offenders, may we receive testimony from the world? and, if so, are we to allow it equal weight with testimony received from church members?*

In the trial of offenders, regard must ever be had, both to the character of the witnesses, and to the circumstances under which their testimony is given, and that, too, whether the testimony be for or against the offender.

1st. *The character of the witness.*—Some churches, we are fully aware, adopt the rule, that the testimony of no one, who is not a member of the church, shall be received against one who is a member. Of this rule we would say a few things.

We are at a loss to know upon what foundation it is based. We know of no passage of Scripture, which restricts us, in the receiving of testimony to the members of the church. In the absence of any specific instructions on the subject, we must recur to the general principles established in the word of God. These, in our estimation, favor the idea, that the testimony of the world is not to be disregarded. For they teach, that christians should be of good report without, and live above reproach in the world; but how is a professor's standing in the world to be known, but by the testimony of persons of the world? Should A and B, members of the church, testify that C, a fellow member, sustains a very bad character in the world; that he had been

engaged in a fraudulent transaction with some of his neighbors, or had been seen beastly drunk on some festival occasion; that these facts were of great notoriety, and attested by multitudes, it is ten to one, that the church, which professes to reject the testimony of the world, would reject C. upon such testimony, and, perhaps, never dream that it was rejecting him solely upon the testimony of the world. Yet, that under such circumstances, he would be rejected wholly upon such testimony, is very evident. A and B, it is true, are members of the church; but they have no personal knowledge of the facts in the case. They only certify what is the testimony of others, who are unconnected with the church, and upon the reported testimony of persons of the world, C is excluded.

Again suppose a member of the church is arraigned before a civil tribunal, and after a fair trial, by an impartial jury, is convicted of theft, murder, perjury, or any grossly criminal act. Is there a church in christendom that would retain such an individual in fellowship, because his guilt was not attested by members of the church? We presume not; but if he is excluded, upon whose testimony will it be? Will it not be upon the testimony of the world? Whatever may be the rule in her code of discipline, the church that excludes a member under such circumstances, would most evidently give a direct sanction to the receiving of testimony from the world.

The general principles of the gospel, moreover, teach us that we are to use all lawful means to keep the church pure. If it be necessary to this end, to admit the testimony of the world, and if the admission of such testimony be not actually prohibited in the word of God, it is not only lawful, but an imperious duty to receive credible testimony from the world, when adduced. A very little observation and reflection will be sufficient to satisfy any one, that without the admission of such testimony, it will be impossible to keep the church pure. The designing hypocrite will always be careful to avoid manifest improprieties of conduct before his fellow member. Give him to understand, that you will not receive against him the testimony of the world, and, when he is out of your sight, he will not fear to throw off the mask, act without restraint, and give a loose rein to his vicious propensities.

To adopt such a rule, would be, moreover, to hold out an inducement to those who had lost their character in the world, to unite with the church; for it would afford them a prospect of sustaining their sinking reputation. Instances have frequently occurred, in which individuals who were guilty of grossly criminal acts, and feared the consequences of dejection, have sought to unite—and, indeed, have actually united with a church, with the view of screening themselves from merited reproach. What incalculable injury is done to the cause of Christ in such instances! Alas! how often is the Saviour wounded afresh in the house of his friends! The rule in question would most evidently tend to make the church a shelter for the guilty and a refuge of lies. Can the great Head of the church approbate a rule that has such a tendency? What church can do it after mature reflection?

Churches that have adopted the rule to which we have alluded, we doubt not, have acted from the purest motives. But we are all liable to err, and that, too, while influenced by the best of motives. Pastors and people are alike frail and fallible.

The rule in question has probably grown out of an apprehension of the evils which would be likely to result, were we to admit testimony from the world indiscriminately. We are no advocates for the indiscriminate admission of testimony. It is equally important that we should have respect to the character of the witnesses, whether they be out of the church or in it. But would we not have greater confidence in the testimony of some persons in the world, than in that of some who are members of a church? And why is this? Is it not because there are persons out of the church, who sustain a better character than some who are unfortunately in it? Pause for a time, and when you have settled these questions satisfactorily, ask yourselves, will either reason or revelation sustain you in rejecting the testimony of the more worthy, and receiving the testimony of those who are less entitled to confidence? Would this be complying with the rule of God's word, which prescribes "honor to whom honor is due?"

2d. *Circumstances under which testimony is given.* To deal justly, we must not only have respect to the character of witnesses, but to the circumstances under which their testimony is given. If testimony be given under the influence of prejudice or passion, or if the interests or the character of the witness be involved in the trial, we cannot be too cautious how we receive his testimony. In other words, we must have respect to the motives by which the witness may be presumed to be influenced. The native disposition of an evil heart, ever leads its possessor to seek to reduce others to a level with himself. Hence the evil-minded are ever found ready to impeach the character, torture the words, and misrepresent the conduct of those, whose uprightness conveys a silent, but severe censure upon their own loose deportment. Even a holy Saviour did not escape detraction. Many were the calumnious reports circulated, and false charges alleged against him.

We cannot do better than to close this branch of our subject with an extract from the charge given to the jury, by Judge Cushman, a few years since, in the trial of a libel suit, instituted against Edward C. Delavan, by John Taylor, one of the brewers of Albany.

After adverting to the fact, that a larger number of witnesses had been sworn on the part of the plaintiff than on the part of the defendant, the Judge proceeds: "The number of witnesses, gentlemen, is never to be the governing consideration in such a case. You are to look at the character of the witnesses for intelligence and integrity; how far they may be under the influence of bias or interest, the relation in which they stand, and their opportunities for observation. Hence the value of an open examination; that the candor of a witness may be noted, the manner in which he testifies, and

his willingness to tell the whole truth. While, therefore, you are not to leave out of view the number of witnesses, you are to look to the circumstances mentioned, rather than to the number, to decide upon the weight which is to be given to the evidence adduced." A Report, &c., p 47.

3rd. *The mode of admitting testimony from the world.* Those who admit the testimony of persons of the world, frequently err in the manner in which it is admitted. It is admitted at second hand, or by report. The witnesses are exonerated, by the church, from the duty of submitting to an examination in the presence of the accused, and the accused is deprived of the right of facing his accuser. These things certainly ought not so to be. It is paying greater deference to persons of the world than we usually pay to members of the church. It may be argued, that the witnesses are generally unwilling to come forward and give in their testimony at a church meeting, and that we have no means of compelling their attendance. This reasoning is more plausible than valid; for under no circumstances should the accused be condemned, without affording him an opportunity of confronting the witnesses. This we have shown, in our last number, is an established rule of Christ's kingdom. But it may be asked, what is to be done, if they persist in refusing to come before the church? We reply, if the accused *denies the charge*, and *wishes to face his accuser*, the church should, under such circumstances, go with him to the accuser. This she may do by the appointment of a committee as her representative, to act for and in her name. But it may be objected, this would be attended with great difficulty and trouble. We admit this fact; but is it not better to encounter any difficulty, and endure any trouble, than infringe upon the rights which are conceded to an individual in the institutions of heaven? Let us labor to keep the law of God, as well as the ordinances of the gospel, "as they were delivered to the saints." If we infringe on the *judicial* code of heaven, with what consistency can we reprove others, for infringing on those ordinances of the gospel which are ceremonial in their character? Is it less important that we should observe those institutions which are judicial, than it is that we should observe those which are ceremonial? Do they not both emanate from the same authority? And do they not both conduce to the same end—the advancement of the glory of God, in the recognition of his authority, and the acknowledgement of his wisdom and goodness? Are they not both, therefore, equally binding? Brethren, let us not make distinctions where God has made none.

We add an extract from the *Biblical Recorder*, giving the views of Mr. Meredith on this subject—than whom there is no better disciplinarian in the South.

"In all cases testimony should be sustained according to its true value, that is, according to the amount of credible evidence it contains, whether the witness be in the church or out of it. We see no good reason for rejecting a person's testimony, in such cases, merely because he is not a professor of religion.

While on this subject, we would take occasion to observe, that testimony against an accused ought always to be received with extreme caution. It would be better to let half a dozen guilty persons go unconvicted, than to have one innocent brother unjustly condemned. Besides, where there is the least exacerbation of feeling, men are generally much more liable to *overstate* their testimony than to understate it. It is surprising to see how much some professedly good men can make out of a very little thing, and sometimes indeed out of nothing at all. We recollect a case in which two members of a Baptist church, of reputed veracity, gave their testimony before a council of ministers, in which they conjunctively charged a brother with the most scandalous behavior—which testimony we *knew* to be substantially untrue from beginning to end. Indeed we knew that one of the witnesses was *himself* guilty of the very offence which he thus alleged against his brother, and thus *ostensibly proved* by the testimony of a second person. We presume, if these witnesses had been testifying before a court of justice, they would unhesitatingly have sworn to the truth of their statements. The only explanation that we can give of the affair is, that the parties were strongly exasperated against the accused, and were interested to some extent in his conviction and ruin. With their motives we have nothing to do: we speak only of the *facts*. The circumstance made an indelible impression on our mind, and taught us, most forcibly, how easily a man's reputation may be ruined when he is opposed by interested witnesses, and happens, at the same time, to have no one, by whom to confront them. From that day we have been doubly cautious how we receive testimony *against* a person, when the witness was in any way interested in the conviction of the accused, or was even under the influence of ill-will or prejudice against him."

From all that has been said, the following inferences are to be drawn:

1. Testimony from the world is not to be rejected in the trial of church members.
2. The weight given to any testimony must depend upon the character of the witness and the circumstances under which his testimony is given.

SUSPENSION FROM THE CHURCH.

QUERY VIII. *Has a church the right to suspend a member for a limited time?*

We think not. If an individual is convicted of unchristian conduct, and does not give ample satisfaction, he ought to be *excluded*, and not *suspended*. If he has not been convicted of unchristian conduct, to suspend him is to do him great injustice—it is to censure him before he is proved worthy of censure.

Many of our ablest writers on church discipline, seem to be involved in

a labyrinth of difficulties, when they engaged in the discussion of this subject. Even the astute Mr. James, seems somewhat bewildered here. He admits that there is no scriptural warrant for an act of suspension, yet argues, inconclusively, we think, in favor of such an act. He asks, "What is to be done in those cases where neither the guilt nor the innocence of an individual is at once apparent to the church; but still a strong, very strong case, so far as *prima facie* evidence goes, is made out against him; or where there is some appearance of penitence, but yet that penitence is equivocal? Are we to admit that individual to the full privileges of communion? what, while his conduct is under examination, and his character, to say the best, suspicious?" Church Memb. Guide, Note on p. 154.

We answer, there is no need of an act of the church in this case. The Great Founder of the church has met it with a rule: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Matt. v, 23, 24. This rule interdicts the presenting a public offering to God while a brother has aught against us, and requires us to use all lawful means to be reconciled to our brother; to restore ourselves to his confidence and affections, before we present our offering. Now to a case like that supposed by Mr. James, not only an individual, but the whole church are suspicious of him and disaffected towards him. "Are we to admit that individual," Mr. James asks, "to the full privileges of communion?" The scriptural rule quoted directs, that he should first be reconciled to his brethren; and to do this, he must clear himself of all just grounds of suspicion. The spirit of the rule clearly inculcates, that no individual having a difficulty with another, or, (a necessary inference,) with the church, should participate in any religious acts of a public character that is *peculiar* to church members. It cannot be intended to interdict private acts of devotion; for the same authority enjoins on us to pray for them that despitefully use us; and those that maltreat us must certainly have something against us. But what it is the duty of an individual to do, it is the duty of a church to see that he does. It is her duty, therefore, to see that no one repairs to the communion table who is lying under suspicion, or has unsettled difficulties with any portion of the church.

But is not the enforcing this rule the same, in effect, with an act of suspension? Certainly not. The rule is general. It is not made for any one individual in particular. It does not pre-suppose either the guilt or innocence of the individual upon whom it is enforced; for the innocent, as well as the guilty, are required to observe it. But an act suspending a member, is a rule made for that individual in particular. It *presupposes some degree of guilt*, and is an *act of censure*. We object to such an act, that it is unnecessary. It moreover violates the rights of the individual; and that principle, admitted in all legislation human and divine, which requires that every individual be presumed innocent until he is proved guilty. The act to which we object presumes him to be guilty, and punishes him accordingly.

The question discussed above is not a novel one. It has often been considered in our church conferences, and in our Associational and Ministerial meetings; and the general sentiment and practice of our denomination, as far as we have had an opportunity of acquainting ourselves with it, harmonize with the views expressed above. As early as 1783, the Kehukee Association, which met at Meglamare's M. H., Va., recorded it as their opinion, in answer to a special query on this subject, that "there is no degree of church censure to be inflicted on an impenitent member, after a public hearing in the church, besides excommunication." Hist. Keh. As. p. 67.

In conclusion, we would impress upon the mind of every one who desires to be instructed in things pertaining to the kingdom of Christ, the absolute necessity of seeking wisdom of Him who giveth liberally and upbraideth not. The preservation of due discipline in our churches and the discriminating between different offences, and proportioning the censure to the offence, will call for the exercise of great patience and prudence, in the investigation of difficulties, unwearied assiduity in ferreting out evil, and great firmness and meekness in awarding justice to all. And the exercise of these, again, will require much of the grace of God, and much of the influence of the spirit of Christ. May the Lord, in his mercy, conform us to his will in all things, and preserve us "holy, and unblameable, and unreprouvable, in his sight."

ALTERATION OF CREEDS AND TRIAL OF MINISTERS.

QUERIES IX and XX. 1. *Has a church the right, without the aid of a presbytery, to alter an article of faith, upon which she was constituted?*

2. *Has she the right, without the aid of a presbytery, to excommunicate an ordained minister?*

The above queries we find in the *Biblical Recorder*, of Nov. 20th, 1847, edited by Rev. Thos. Meredith, Raleigh, N.C. They are so well answered by the editor that we copy his reply entire. The latter query is intimately connected with subjects discussed in our preceding articles. The editor says, in his reply,

"It will be seen at once that the answers to be given to the above queries must depend on the opinions entertained respecting the independence of our churches.

If our churches are absolutely independent, as is generally contended, then they are competent, of themselves, and in their individual capacity, to the execution of every duty, essential to their existence or to their prosperity. To deny this would be clearly to deny that our churches are strictly and absolutely independent of each other.

If our churches are absolutely independent it will follow that they have the right, not only to alter an article of faith in their Constitution, and to

excommunicate a minister, without the aid of a presbytery, but also to ordain their ministers, and even to effect their own constitution, without the concurrence of any foreign or adventitious aid. Being absolutely independent, there is a manifest contradiction in terms in representing them as dependent on a presbytery, or any extraneous agency whatever, for the performance of any act of government, of discipline, or of legislation. Those therefore who contend for independence in its strict and absolute sense, to be consistent, should set aside all presbyteries, councils, and all such things, and proceed to the work of ordination, excommunication of ministers, and all such acts, by virtue of the power constitutionally inherent in themselves.

But if, on the other hand, our churches are not independent, in the absolute sense of the term:—That is to say, if they are dependent on a presbytery consisting of ministers or members from other churches, for their ordinations, and even their constitution, then it is no denial of their legitimate powers, to say that “*they*” *have not the right*, either to alter their constitution or to exclude their ministers, without the aid of a presbytery. On the contrary, consistency would seem to require that neither the one nor the other should be done without such aid. If it be true, as is generally believed, and which we can see no cause to deny, that the same authority is required to take away an office, that is requisite to confer it—to destroy or essentially modify a contract, that is requisite to constitute it—then it will clearly follow, as a consequence resulting from established principles, that neither a minister should be deposed, nor a church constitution altered, without the concurrence of a power fully equal to that which is accounted necessary to create the one and execute the other. This seems to us to be clear and conclusive reasoning, and we can see no ground on which it can be fairly contested by those who admit the dependence of our churches on the action of presbyteries at all.

Our own opinion is this:—That, although our churches are independent, so far as independence can be of any essential advantage to them, yet, as *associated bodies*, and also as holding members recognized as parties to a common fellowship, it is not practicable in the nature of things that they can be strictly independent of each other.

For example, if a member from one church bring a letter of dismission to another, of the same faith and order, on the faith of the letter the said member is admitted to membership, without baptism and without inquiry. Now the question to be asked is, what gives the letter from one church such ready credit with another? The reply is, the latter has full confidence in the piety, the purity, and the good order of the former. Very good. Then the question arises—what is the ground of this confidence? It is the fact that the said church claims to be one of the same “*faith and order*”—that is, one holding the same religious belief, and conforming to the same form of government as the other. And on what is this claim rested? Is it the fact that she

is independent—that is, that she ordains and deposes, and excommunicates her ministers, and forms and modifies her constitution, at pleasure, without recourse to presbyteries or ministers from other churches? It is not. On the contrary, were such known to be the facts connected with anyone of our churches, her letters of dismission would have no more credit with us than would letters brought from churches of another denomination. On the other hand, the confidence of our churches in the orthodoxy and good order of each other, is founded mainly on the facts, that their constitutions and ordinations all take place under the cognizance of presbyteries consisting of ministers from other churches, who are generally known, and whose acts of concurrence are regarded as guarantees that said proceedings are valid and correct.

The same is true of any minister who passes among our churches. He is certified as a minister on account of the credit of the church that sends him forth. And that credit is rested mainly on the fact, that that church was herself constituted, and ordains her ministers, only with the consent and concurrence of an assisting presbytery.

Again, suppose a minister long known to the churches should be expelled by the church to which he belongs. To that act all the other churches are required to conform, by declining further to receive his ministrations. Here is an act of conformity demanded, which if yielded, implies that the said churches are governed in this respect by the act of another church—and if not yielded will afford ground for complaint that the act of one church has been set aside by that of another. In such case the latter church will be apt to inquire whether the minister concerned has been *regularly* and *justly* tried and expelled—and in order to settle this question, they will doubtless feel it important to know whether he has been tried by a presbytery or council of ministers; or whether his case has been disposed of by the church, in her exclusive and independent capacity. And it is scarcely necessary to add, that they will be much more liable to yield their concurrence in the former case than in the latter.

These, and other similar considerations, go to show, that, whatever may be said of churches in their individual and isolated capacities—as members of one great community of churches, such as they really are in a denominational point of view, they sustain to each other divers mutual relations, giving rise to corresponding mutual obligations, which are utterly incompatible with a state of strict and absolute independence. We might just as well talk of the absolute independence of the several States of the Union—or of the absolute independence of the several members of a church—or of the absolute independence of the individual citizens of any civil community. And should it be said, that in all these cases the parties are bound by the stipulations of a written compact or constitution, the reply is, that, in our community of churches, forming the great commonwealth of our denomination, though there be no *written* constitution, yet we have the articles of a compact

as clearly understood, and as rigidly observed, as though they were engraved on tablets of stone or of brass.

In view of the foregoing considerations we therefore give it as our opinion, that, whatever a church may be said, strictly speaking, to have a *right* to do, as a matter of expediency or consistency, she ought neither to modify her articles of faith, nor expel nor depose her ministers without the presence and concurrence of a presbytery or council. Should a church wish to stand aloof from all others, asking neither their confidence nor their fellowship, and asserting the claims of an absolutely independent community, then she may proceed to depose her ministers, modify her articles of faith, and even perform her own ordinations, by virtue of her own sovereign and absolute power. But if she would be considered as a party to a great religious fraternity, sharing the confidence and fellowship of the whole, and claiming to have her acts respected and legalized by all other churches, then she must recollect, that she is necessarily bound to give as much as she receives, and must therefore conform to those usages which the nature of such relations imperatively enjoins."

Mr. Wm. Sands, editor of the *Religious Herald*, Richmond, Va., has an editorial on the exclusion of Ministers, in his paper of the 25th November, from which it appears that his views accord with those of Mr. Meredith. We extract from it the following paragraph.

"Another evil which occasionally occurs amongst our churches, is the exclusion of ministers without calling a council of ministers from neighboring churches. We are aware that the churches which act thus contend that as each one is an independent body, they have full power to deal with all their members, not excepting their pastor. Granting this alledged authority, we still question very strongly the expediency of such a course, since the general practice based on experience has sanctioned the calling of council. A principal of law founded in true wisdom, is the right of an offender to be tried by a jury of his fellows. It is deemed necessary when a brother is ordained to the work of the ministry, to call in a presbytery or council of ministers; and when placed on trial for an offence which may lead to his expulsion and exclusion from the ministry, it seems but reasonable to let his case be tried by his fellow-laborers. In nearly every case in which a minister has been excluded on insufficient grounds, which has come under our knowledge, the church has acted without a council. A minister is placed in a different position from the private members. He has or ought to have constant intercourse with all his fellow-members. If popular, he may have many warm friends; if unpopular, equally warm enemies. When charges are alledged against him, too often parties are formed, heated discussions ensue, and the church is unfitted to act on his case, calmly and with due impartiality. It would therefore, in all cases, be much better to call in the aid of a Council."

We concur in the views expressed in the above extracts, and deem it wholly unnecessary to follow them with any additional remarks of our own.

EXCLUSION BY MINORITIES.

QUERY XI. *Has the minority in a church the right to demand the exclusion of an individual whom the majority believe to be innocent?*

The Sacred Scriptures give no intimation that such a right has been vested in the minority of a church; but there are *precedents* to the point, recorded with great clearness and precision.

The Scriptures teach us, that decisions of the church were ordinarily made by the lifting up of the hands of its members, as will appear from an examination of the following passages of Scripture in the original. Acts xiv, 22; 2d Cor. viii, 19. Now we cannot account for this voting, by the lifting up of the hands, if it was not to ascertain the will of the *majority*.

But we are not left to infer from *general* principles the course pursued by the primitive church in the exclusion of members. We have the *express* testimony of an inspired apostle, that, in at least one case of exclusion, the individual was excluded, not by the *few*, but by the *many*. "Sufficient to such a man (one that had been excluded) is this punishment which was inflicted of many." 2 Cor. ii, 6. The word here rendered "many" is *pleionon*, which signifies the *greater part—the majority*. On this subject, then, the Scripture is explicit and conclusive—NOTHING CAN BE MORE SO. That passage is sufficient, of itself, to show what was the practice of the church in apostolic times.

The Scriptures teach, that we are to esteem others better than ourselves, Phil. ii, 3, and to submit to one another, Eph. v, 21; 1 Cor. xvi, 16; 1 Pet. v, 5. Now when two or three set up their judgment against that of a large and respectable majority, do they comply with the precepts to which we have referred? Do they not rather say, stand off, for we are holier than you all? Is, lxv, 5. We are the people (the people of God—the church) and wisdom will die with us? Job xii, 2.

But note again, that it is as much the duty of the church to *protect* and *defend* those of her members, whom she believes to be innocent, as it is to *censure* or *withdraw* from those whom she believes to be guilty. Now if she neglect this duty, and an innocent member suffer in consequence thereof, will she not have to answer for it to the great Head of the Church? Would it be deemed satisfactory, when the blood of our brother is required at our hand, to answer, "Lord, nine-tenths of us believed him innocent—we were reluctant to give him up, but A, B and C said he was guilty and must be sacrificed?" Can we throw the responsibility upon A, B and C? We do not see how it can with justice be done, unless we assume that A, B and C constitute the *church*—for the rules of discipline are given to be enforced by *the church* and not by *individual members*.

If a member is to be excluded because two or three insist on it, then the excision of the Saviour was not so reprehensible as we had supposed. One of the twelve favored his excision, and none was found to advocate his cause. Ps. 69, 20, and 142, 4. When we eject a member, to gratify a small minority, it does appear to us that we condemn the Saviour anew; for he identifies himself with his disciples. "But when ye sin so against the brethren, ye sin against Christ." 1 Cor. viii, 12. It is a maxim universally received, that in all doubtful cases, we should adopt that interpretation of a rule which inclines to mercy.

OBJECTION I. *I have ever believed that in the reception of a member and the restoration of one, as well in as the dismissal of one by letter, unanimity was indispensable.—See Minutes of the Georgia Association for 1829, Article 14.*³

This we have always understood to accord, with a certain restriction, with the practice of Baptist churches generally. The restriction consists in this: That the one objecting to the reception, restoration, or dismissal of the applicant, *assign a satisfactory reason for his objection*, when so required by the friends of the applicant. All the decisions of the Georgia Association, to which the objection alludes, refer to the rejection, restoration, or dismissal of members by letter. Now the practice of our churches, in reference to this matter, is founded upon no *specific* scriptural rule, but upon views of *expediency* derived from the *general* principles of the gospel. It is deemed inexpedient to receive or restore one to membership in the church, while a member urges a serious objection, because this would be to *introduce* a cause of dissension in a church that is presumed to be in a state of peace and quietude. The Sacred Scriptures require that we remove every root of bitterness that is calculated to produce trouble. Heb. xii, 15, and it is argued, that if it be our duty to *remove* such a "root of bitterness," it must be equally our duty to labor to *prevent its introduction*.

But the question of *exclusion* is a very different thing. The "root" is already in the church. Who is to decide whether it is a sweet or bitter root? The church in its collective capacity, or one or two individuals? Suppose that a truly godly member is charged with high crimes and misdemeanors by his enemies. (The godly will ever have enemies, 2 Tim. iii, 12, and they are frequently of his own household, Matt. x, 36,—in his own church. The worldly minded professor is generally ready to believe any evil of the one whose zeal and self-denial reproaches him for his worldly mindedness and vanity.) Suppose the evidence adduced to sustain the charges against this godly man are deemed, by nine-tenths of the members, insufficient to establish the charge—shall he be excluded because one-tenth, upon insufficient testimony, believe him to be guilty? Sanction that principle gener-

³This objection we give as we find it in print, in one of our Baptist periodicals.

ally—adopt it in our churches—and the *character of no member can be safe in a Baptist church*; for every man—the best of men, are liable to have enemies; and it is too often the case, that the more innocent a man is, the more violent and implacable are his enemies. We would far prefer to trust our character to a jury, composed of men of the world, than to the members of a church, which adopted the principle that she was bound to exclude a member, though she believed him to be perfectly innocent, if two or three persisted in their belief of his guilt.

OBJECTION II. *I have always understood that in civil cases, the dissent of one individual was sufficient to nullify the decision of the majority.*

In the case of a jury, a man cannot be condemned by a minority. The jury must all concur in his guilt, or he is acquitted; so that reference to our civil courts makes not for, but against the objector. We certainly would never place our membership in a church in which one individual, should we be so unfortunate as to make him our enemy, would have the power to exclude us—that is, if aware of the fact at the time. This would be far worse than the arbitrary policy of Peodobaptist churches, in vesting the power of exclusion in the hands of an itinerant, a vestry, or a body of select men.

As the practice of some few of our churches is contrary to that of the church at Corinth, we will take the liberty to add a word or two in reference to "*Baptist usage*."

We resided in Virginia eight or nine years after we became a Baptist, was extensively acquainted with some of the oldest churches in that State, and never knew one that did not coincide with the Georgia Association, in reference to the receiving and restoring of members into fellowship and dismissing by letter; but we never knew an individual excluded, during our sojourn in that State, by the vote of a minority; nor did we ever hear, but once, a question raised on the subject. We were also called, in 1842, to assist in a council convened to settle a difficulty in a large church in Western Georgia, growing out of the fact, that a small majority had retained in fellowship one that was charged with unchristian conduct. The minority being large and respectable, and much dissatisfied with the decision of the church, had taken letters. During the whole of the examination no one pleaded the *right of the minority to exclude a member*. The council was composed, we think, of six experienced ministers; and several other ministering brethren were present, when the case was examined and subsequently reported before the church. We never, until very recently, knew a case of one's being excluded by a minority vote. This is the sum of all we know about the *usage of Modern Baptist churches*.

We would recommend to our brethren in conclusion, to investigate the subject for themselves, and not to pin their faith to the sleeves of any one. We are no pope, and therefore do not presume to claim infallibility. We know that we are liable to err, both in judgment and in our acts, and often have erred, but the *scriptures are unerring*—search them.

PUBLISHING EXCLUSIONS.

QUERY XII. *Should the exclusion of offending members be published from the pulpit?*

Some christian societies think the scriptures require it, and act accordingly. It was the practice of the Independent Church, within whose pale we were raised, to read out, before the congregation, the names of excommunicated members, and declare them to be no longer members of the church. But this practice has never, within our knowledge, prevailed among Baptist churches in our country.

The question was brought before a general conference of the Kehukee Association, in 1782, in the following form: "Has a church any authority from God's word, to lay it upon their minister to get up in a congregation and publish the excommunication of a disorderly member?" The conference answered, "We think that the offending member being dealt with in a public conference, is sufficient without any more publication." The question indicates that some church or churches thought that the exclusion should be made public. The answer, which was sanctioned by the Association at its next annual meeting, evinces that the practice was not generally approved by the churches of that day, though it evades the question relative to the "authority of God's word."

There may exist a necessity for the publication of exclusions in those societies in which a few select individuals, met in secret session, are allowed the right to excommunicate members; but as in Baptist churches, members are tried and acquitted or excluded by the *whole* church, met in public conference, as they were in the days of Christ and the apostles, such necessity does not exist.

CONCLUSION.

TO OUR READERS.—In laying before you this little volume, friends and brethren, we do not expect your concurrence in every sentiment it contains. Our hope is, that the discussion of the several subjects introduced will lead you to investigate them for yourselves, and excite an interest in our churches generally, on the subject of Gospel discipline. It is but too evident, that many of our churches have no fixed principles of discipline. They pursue one course at one church conference, and an opposite course, perhaps, at another. This is ruinous, both to the church and its individual members. A multiplication of crime and laxity in discipline are the inevitable results. To aid in correcting these evils has been our aim and desire. How far we may succeed time will shew.