

BROAD CHURCHISM.¹

"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."—2 TIM. i. 13.

"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."—TITUS i. 9.

FATHERS AND BRETHREN: It has been hitherto both the characteristic and the boast of our branch of the Reformed Church that it was a strict advocate of doctrinal correctness. Our Confession is one of the longest and most detailed, as it is the most orthodox and judicious, among the symbols of Protestantism. It has been the fixed principle of Presbyterianism in all its better days, that its teachers must subscribe its honored standards in the strict sense of the system of doctrine which they embody. The following statement of facts evinces the correctness of my assertion:

I. All the members of the original Synod, except one, adopted in 1729 every doctrine of the Confession, as expressing his own faith, save certain clauses relating to the power of civil magistrates in matters of religion. II. The Synod in 1730 declared that they required all "intrants" to receive the standards as strictly as the existing members had done the year before. III. In 1736 the same declaration was made in stronger terms. IV. When the two Synods were united in 1758, after the schism, it was on the following basis as to doctrine: "1. Both Synods having always approved and received the Westminster Confession and Larger and Shorter Catechisms as an orthodox and excellent system of Christian doctrine, founded on the word of God, we do still receive the same as the Confession of our faith, and also adhere to the plan of worship, government and discipline contained in the Westminster Directory; strictly enjoining it on all our ministers and probationers for the ministry that they preach and teach according to the form of sound words in the said Confession and Catechisms, and avoid and oppose all errors contrary thereto. 2. That no Presbytery license or ordain to the work

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of the ministry any candidate, until he give them competent satisfaction as to his learning and experimental acquaintance with religion and skill in divinity and cases of conscience, and declare his acceptance of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms as the confession of his faith, and promise subjection to the Presbyterian form of government in the Westminster Directory." In 1788, when the present constitution was adopted, the same ground was taken.

This time-honored principle is, in these latter days, by many misunderstood, and by not a few despised. I propose, therefore, to invite this venerable Assembly of the guardians of God's church and truth to a scriptural discussion of it, founded upon the injunctions of the holy apostle to Timothy and Titus.

The introductions to the epistles (1 Tim. i. 3, 4; Titus i. 5,) inform us that the two evangelists had been already instructed in their duties. Why then did the Holy Ghost move the apostle to write these pastoral epistles, and why has the providence of God preserved them among the canon of Scripture? The obvious answer is, that they are intended to instruct not only the ministers to whom they were first sent, but all the presbyters of the church in all ages. And I shall assume, what none here will contest, the express application to us, "on whom these ends of the world have come," of every permanent precept and principle the epistles contain.

The two texts which I have presented speak substantially the same thing.

To Timothy the apostle says: "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me." It is not necessary for me to assert that this phrase indicates literally a verbal formula enjoined upon Timothy as a fixed "confession of his faith." But "the form of sound (or healthful) words" was a pattern of doctrine which Timothy had heard of Paul, and which the disciple was to preserve jealously, and transmit (2 Tim. ii. 2) to succeeding presbyters and evangelists. The succeeding verse calls it a deposit, or trust, of an excellent and responsible nature, committed to Timothy by God, to be kept by the aid of the Holy Ghost. This description clearly implies that the doctrinal code was a definite thing, marked by clear characters, and that Timothy had no discretion or license to remit or modify any part of it.

So in the parallel injunction to Titus (i. 9), the man who is appointed presbyter or bishop over a Christian church must "hold fast the faithful word as he had been taught." The most competent expositors agree in construing this to mean the word which is trustworthy, as of divine authority, being in accordance with Paul's apostolic teaching. The purpose of this orthodox fidelity sufficiently evinces its nature. That purpose is to exhort and edify Christians, and to confute gainsayers, by "sound (healthful) doctrine."

In both precepts the authorized doctrinal code is called a "word," [pattern of sound words], and notwithstanding the concession which was made above, this language docs at least authorize us to infer that the system committed to the Christian ministry is to be preserved and taught by them with exactness in all its parts. The solemn iterations with which the holy apostle urges this duty may both assure you that we do not misrepresent its nature, and teach you the importance which he attached to it. The minister of Christ is "a steward of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." (1 Cor. iv. 1, 2.) The heterodox teacher "who consents not to wholesome words, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, is proud, knowing nothing, but doting," etc. (1 Tim. vi. 3, 4.) The minister must be "a workman approved unto God, rightly dividing the word of truth," (2 Tim. ii. 15.) Timothy must "continue in the things which he had learned and been assured of, knowing of whom he learned them." (2 Tim. iii. 14.) Titus must "show in doctrine uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned." (Titus ii. 7, 8.)

In enforcing upon church teachers and rulers the sacred obligations of strict orthodoxy, Presbyterians fully admit that some doctrines of the Christian system are not fundamental to salvation. By this we mean that a soul who embraces the fundamental and necessary points will be saved, notwithstanding his failure, through ignorance or misconception, to embrace the former. We accordingly gladly receive into the body of Christ's church catholic, and into the communion of saints, all such persons, although they do not receive sundry truths which we are assured God has revealed. Again, in obedience to Rom. xiv. 1, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful

disputations," we uniformly receive private or lay members to the full communion of our own branch of the church who profess only the primary rudiments of the faith, and we require nothing more of them than that they confirm that profession by a life of repentance. Our Directory, Chap. IX. Sec. 1, instructs pastors to inquire only whether the life of the applicant be consistent, and if he has knowledge to discern the Lord's body. As to the flock, there is no church under heaven more catholic and liberal than ours, in receiving all, whatever their doctrinal differences from us, provided they truly receive Christ as their Redeemer. We believe, indeed, that of the shepherds who undertake to guide the flock, our divine Head exacts more perfect knowledge and agreement. But even where they fail of that doctrinal harmony with us to such an extent that we dare no longer to entrust to them a part of the flock for which God has made us responsible, we still act with respectful consideration for the uncertainties of the human reason, and draw a broad distinction between the misfortune of honest error, and the criminality of wilful transgression. (See Book of Discipline, Chap. V., Sec. 14).

But with these allowances we are compelled to conclude that our text requires of all church teachers and rulers a strict and harmonious conformity to revealed doctrine.

I. Let the farther proof of this proposition be introduced by some admissions which all are ready to make. Every honest man believes that the individual teacher in the church is absolutely bound to declare the "whole counsel of God" as he himself conscientiously understands it. He is Christ's herald; the duty of a herald is to convey precisely the message of his king without addition or diminution. He is a steward of the divine mysteries, bearing an office of trust, whose first virtue is fidelity to his charge. He can only claim to be clear of the blood of all men by claiming with the apostles (Acts xx. 27) that he "hath not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God." Now, God has set down in his word some truths which are not fundamental to salvation in the sense we have agreed on above. If he has not, how does any one come to know that there are doctrines which are true and still not fundamental? Moreover we can point to such in the New Testament, as while Paul tells us (Rom. xiv. 14) that distinctions of meats are no longer obligatory, and yet

that the believer ignorant or incredulous of this proposition may be redeemed by Christ (verse 15). Now, then, God certainly put these doctrines into his word to be preached. "All Scriptures given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Such truths, therefore, are profitable, though not fundamental. The preacher is expressly enjoined to make full proof of his ministry (2 Tim. iv. 5). So that no herald of Christ does his duty who keeps back any known divine truth. Its suppression may ruin some soul, and must mar, to some degree, the sanctification of all whom he guides.

All Protestants admit the sacred right of private judgment, and most of all must the latitudinarians do so, since their peculiarity is to urge it into an excess. Then the meaning of the Scriptures is to each man the Scripture, and this meaning each must deduce for himself. In other words, each man's honest judgment must be his own standard in interpreting what the word contains. There is no infallible umpire, as in the apostle's day, between competing interpretations. The reason, even in renewed men, can be only an imperfect agent, so that good men will sincerely differ to a partial extent. The only honest preaching, then, is that in which each man delivers all that which he believes, when, judging in the fear of God, he intended to deliver in his word.

These admitted truths will be found to contain two inferences, first, That there must be different denominations of Christians, amicably respecting each other's liberty of doctrine not fundamental, within the visible church catholic. Second, That each denomination is bound to bear a full witness for God according to its agreed understanding of God's message.

But here we are met by a rival conclusion, adopted by those who style themselves "advocates of comprehension," and sometimes by a less truthful euphemism, advocates of liberal subscription in doctrinal beliefs. They claim that the doctrinal standards of the church shall be so lowered as to embrace in one denomination all whom we recognize as within the church catholic, and as holding the truths fundamental to salvation. Let the advocates of strict doctrine say they preach all their higher creed if their consciences impel them, and let the moderate have equal liberty to propagate their lower system, all in the same

communion. If the more strict are the more correct, the truth has thus, they claim, as full opportunity to assert itself, and to discredit the looser and erroneous code, as it can have, unless men are ready to recur to violence and persecution. By this method charity would, according to them, be much promoted, the scandals and weakness of the divisions of the sects removed, and the unity of Protestant Christianity displayed. In support of such comprehension they attempt also to array Scripture against us. They remind us that when the apostle enjoined ministers, under the penalty of exclusion, to consent "to the doctrine which is according to godliness," or to "hold fast the form of sound words," it was even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the "pattern received from him." But they urge, the strained hyper-orthodoxy of the sects can claim no "thus saith the Lord" for its peculiarities. To the fair mind the reply to this shallow plausibility is clear. We think we have a "thus saith the Lord." We are as honestly convinced that every point of our orthodoxy is received from Christ and his apostles, as they are concerning their different creeds, which are always found, by the way, to include at least as many points of detail, and which they assert at least as tenaciously as orthodoxy does its peculiar features. But our conscientious conviction of what our Lord hath delivered unto us must be our imperative rule, in the absence of an infallible umpire between us and them. And when they seek to enforce their different convictions upon us, who have as much right to judge for ourselves as they for themselves, what is this but elevating their latitudinarianism into the starkest spiritual despotism?

These advocates of comprehension also recite very confidently all the precepts of the epistles where Christians are exhorted "to mind the same things," to have no "divisions among them," not to be called by the names of men, and to avoid strife and schisms. The express command of the apostle (Titus iii. 10) "to reject the man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition," is transmuted by a species of exegetical jugglery to an opposite meaning, namely, that every friend of orthodoxy who seeks to "reject" a heretic shall be himself rejected as a heretic for doing so. The only refutation which this needs is the obvious remark that it contradicts itself; the proposition commits a logical *felo de se*. Grant that the "heretical man"

of the text is a "sect-maker," rather than a speculative errorist, it is impossible to exclude the fact that it is always the doctrinal error which generates the sect, whence the criminality arises out of the false doctrine as its source.

The issue being thus developed between the scriptural and the latitudinarian theory of church obligations to the truth, I proceed, in the second place, to reinforce our views,

II. From the fact that a visible church, in its organic capacity, is as truly a witnessing body as an individual herald of the gospel. "For he established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children, that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children." (Ps. lxxviii. 56.)

"This is my covenant with them, saith the Lord: My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed." (Is. lix. 21.) "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. xxviii. 19-20.) "The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Tim. iii. 15.) "The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus." (Rev. xii. 17.) And hear, above all, that dying testimony which the divine Head of the church sealed with his martyrdom: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." (John xviii. 37.) If these declarations of the Word need any confirmation, it is found in a very short deduction. The end of the church's corporate existence is unquestionably "the gathering and perfecting of God's elect." But the instrument of this work is chiefly gospel truth.

Now, we saw a few moments ago that the individual minister is indisputably bound to declare the whole counsel of God, according to his honest conviction. His commission is from Christ, but it is through the church. Moreover, the church's organ, through which she officially performs her witnessing function as a body, is her ministry. Their official testimony is her

testimony. Is not the church ordained by her Head to have an organic life and action? Surely; and the practical object is as obvious: that the truth may receive all the additional force of associated or combined support. By this divine law all Christians, who would otherwise contend only with the disjointed strength of separated integers, are trained to the might of a disciplined army, multiplying manifold their natural forces.

The church, then, must bear an official witness, which is the act of the body, and not merely of the individual agents. Hence it must follow that the body, and also each ruling part thereof, is responsible to God for the tolerated official acts of each member. If I, then, a ruler in this body, lend to an officer or member of it any portion of my official weight or countenance to aid him in proclaiming religious error, contradicting in any point more or less essential that code of redeeming truth which Christ has committed to us, I am, to that extent, recreant to my obligations—unfaithful to my Master. I am prostituting power with which he has clothed me for the edification and guardianship of his redeemed sheep.

Nor can the force of this conclusion be evaded by saying that, on the theory of comprehension, the public distinctly understands that each minister in the church is alone responsible for the details of his own doctrinal system. Practically it is not so; it cannot be so. I ask, with emphasis, when a minister of the most latitudinarian communion in the land stands up in her pulpits as her ordained minister, does the public receive his declarations as worth absolutely no more than his individual word? Is he practically no more her representative to them than the unordained lay-preacher, who has no church ties whatever? Obviously he is more. The public hears his church in him. Were he not, his office, character, work, and ordination thereto would be an absolute nullity, and the very end of a church organization vanished!

Thus is suggested to us a fatal objection to this so-called theory of comprehension: that the church as a body will bear no distinctive testimony for Christ, co-extensive with his commission to her. As a body, she arrests her testimony at those fundamental truths which all must adopt in order to hold the Christian name in the judgment of charity. Whenever any such weak brother in the faith takes exception against any of the

other doctrines, all of which are profitable for instruction in righteousness, she forthwith drops that from her organic testimony, though she may be convinced that it is a part of Christ's teaching. Then is she, to that extent, recreant to her great end as an associated body. It may be that persons in her pale deliver a distinctive and full testimony for Christ, but it is also testimony against their own comrades, who claim an equal ecclesiastical right to deliver a testimony against them and against Christ their master. There may be much individual right testimony, but there is no complete church testimony. The tendencies of such a state are either to make the body a "house divided against itself," which "cannot stand," or to resolve it into a mob of discordant individuals, and thus to terminate its visible church character. That this conclusion is just, the latitudinarian himself virtually proves when he is constrained to repudiate the official declaration of some brother who has come to dispute some article of the short creed which has been adopted as their church covenant. The communion must disavow and exclude that dissentient from the ranks of her ministry, or he ceases to have even the short latitudinarian creed. The principle is conceded. Then if we are right in believing that Christ has given his church a fuller creed to witness, the same principle sustains us.

This demonstration is enhanced by the fact that the truths of redemption are a connected system. To say that it carries evidence to the human reason is to admit that its several propositions must have a logical dependence; for if the reason of man has any methodical law, a corresponding method must appear in that set of affirmations which are to commend themselves to the reason as truths. When, therefore, the advocates of doctrinal license say, meaning to utter a reproach, that "orthodoxy is remorselessly logical," they have in fact spoken the highest praise. That it is logical in the dependence of its propositions is one of the prime signatures of truth. The revealed system is a regular arch; the removal of the smallest stone loosens another, and that another, until the very keystone is shaken and the whole structure endangered. The surrender of a point of doctrine not fundamental to salvation endangers others more important than itself. When men once begin to drop out a part of "the testimony of Jesus," "their word will eat as doth a can-

ker." (2 Tim. ii. 17). What pastor does not know how original sin and regeneration stand or fall together, or Christ's divinity and justification? But let us consider an instance less obvious. Does God's foreknowledge of the future generate his purpose concerning it, as in some of the thoughts of his rational creatures? Or is the reverse true of the infinite supreme cause: that his eternal purpose generates his foreknowledge of the future? A question this, you will say, nice, abstruse, far remote from the practical issues of faith and redemption. Well, I believe that many an imperfect believer who has answered it wrong is now glorified through the mercy of God in Christ. But he who follows the two propositions to their strict consequences must at last admit that if it is true that God's foreknowledge always generates his purpose; then the "election of grace" is conditioned on some foreseen spiritual good in man. Then the sinner's will must be self-moved, in its first action, to quicken itself to choose God as his spiritual good. And then native depravity is not radical; and the lost sinner should be taught to look to himself, rather than to Christ, to initiate his salvation and to preserve it. Thus this very remote abstraction will become so practical as to modify every prayer which comes out of the believing sinner's mouth, if he is only sufficiently consistent in his logic.

Thus the rejection of a truth not fundamental may jeopardize those that are. Do you ask: Will not this virtually abolish the distinction, making all error, even the least, necessarily destructive, since the less leads on so logically to the greater heresy? I reply, there is always some liability to such a result, in the man who adopts any substantive error in theology; but he is not regularly subject to it, because the spirit and providence of God, who loves him if he is a true penitent, guard him against the natural consequences of his error, and maintain in him a principle of holiness whose tendencies are stronger than the logical tendencies of a defective creed. But the herald and teacher of others is expected to be thoroughly informed and to have logical consistency of mind. "Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." (Matt. xiii. 52.) There are two reasons for not tolerating in them, as teachers, the error which we lament in

the private Christian whom we yet embrace as a brother. That the mind of the educated, professional man is more likely to be consistent in its error, and to push it to mischievous results; and that he who undertakes to guide others, especially where immortal souls are the irreparable stakes, is justly required to attain unto a fuller accuracy.

Let us now return; seeing each communion is sacredly bound to deliver some one consistent testimony, which one shall it be? There can be but one answer, that one which is conscientiously believed by its associated teachers; and the principle of association must be this, that those who can honestly see eye to eye shall associate into one body or branch of the visible church. Does it necessarily follow hence that there will be several denominations of Christians within the church catholic, limiting partially its external unity? We answer, so be it; it is the smaller of the unavoidable evils, unless all human minds which imbibe any Christian truth can be rendered infallible, or unless the right of private judgment be destroyed, or else unless an inspired umpire in doctrinal differences can be found on earth. The position of the pope is a very expressive avowal of this conclusion, for in attempting to exact of all Christians a formal unity he professes infallibility.

The former cannot be reasonable without the latter. The result which we have embraced is found as conducive to peace as to purity of doctrine. The Presbyterian communion, the strictest of all in exacting full orthodoxy, according to her standard, of all her ministry, is also the most truly catholic of all the Protestant churches. Her overtures to other branches of Christ's church, and, whenever they are accepted, her actual relations with them, are of the most fraternal character. But if all these denominations were aggregated, there must be either unfaithfulness to truth or strife. The debates of denominations over doctrinal differences are far less bitter than those of earnest men differing within the same pale. Witness the comparative heat of the strifes between the Old and New Schools before their separation, and of the Evangelicals and Puseyites in the Anglican Church.

So true is this that there is no communion on earth formed in this theory of comprehension that is true to it. None include all who hold the essentials of the faith. None can include all

who, on their own theory, are faithful to all the fundamental doctrines ; but they find themselves compelled to make a term of full ministerial communion of one or another of the lesser points. Suppose two bodies, one of which heartily admitted lay preaching, and the other as sincerely believed it anti-scriptural and disorganizing. How could they possibly administer a common government in the same church courts? Pedobaptists and immersionists cannot join in the same spiritual family. Those who hold that prelatic ordination is essential to a valid ministry cannot work in the same government with us, who hold that presbyterial ordination is not only sufficient, but more scriptural. Now we, at least, are willing to admit that neither lay preaching, nor immersionism nor prelatic ordination is a fundamental error. Yet in a communion of the opposite belief they necessarily exclude their advocates. The theory of comprehension, if consistently attempted, would be found impossible.

Indeed, as though its advocates were fated to demonstrate its falsehood by the greatest possible absurdities, we find them combining a rejection of some brethren, on grounds not fundamental, in the teeth of their own theory, with the cordial embracing of other false brethren, in spite of differences which are fundamental, in the teeth again of their own theory. The "Church of the Reformers" in our land is avowedly constructed by the founder, Alex. Campbell, on the broadest plan of comprehension. It glories in having no creed. It began by declaring that the test for communion should have but one question in it, "Do you receive Jesus as Saviour?" But let the brother seek admission into its fold who purposes to practice the amiable weakness of "baby-sprinkling," and he is strictly excluded, notwithstanding every other grace of an eminent Christian. Yet this charity which is too narrow to allow this error so obviously non-essential, if an error, is yet capacious enough to embrace him who discards the whole office work of the Holy Ghost and the very calling of grace by which alone any soul ever became Christian. The time was when for long years the Anglican Church, while glorying in their wide comprehension, refused ministerial communion to their own brethren in America, like themselves prelatially ordained and retaining their own standard and ritual, because they were not ordained by Anglican prelates. But at the same time they willingly extended this ministerial

communion to Arminians, Arians and Rationalists, whom their own articles should have excluded as fundamentally erroneous. Thus did they violate their own theory of comprehension at once in both its parts. Northern Calvinism, as it styles itself, has no charity for the holiest man in our land who declines to insert the creed of a humanitarian politics into his gospel; but it has comprehension enough to receive a Pelagianism as outspoken as was ever condemned by the church of all ages in Celestine or Pope Zosimus. So did the world see that association which announces its great mission to man to be the patronizing of comprehension and fraternity, the "Evangelical Alliance," spurn from it the purest church on earth in creed and character, because it was not ready to declare criminal that relation of domestic servitude in which all the patriarchs and prophets lived, and which Christ and his apostles authorized. But they could gladly embrace the Reformed Church of France, which tolerates those who flout the central truths of redemption, the divinity and vicarious satisfaction of Christ, the fall of man, and the person and work of the Holy Ghost. Are such hands, I ask, the ones to heal the breaches of Christendom? If a true Protestant unity is ever to exist, it must be the work of a broader wisdom and equity than theirs. If we may learn from these various instances, this theory of comprehension appears to be more a composition of indifference to truth, and factious zeal for human crotchets, than the temper of Christ.

III Thus is suggested to us a third argument: A church, whose teachers are not heartily agreed in doctrine, can only have peace within itself at the cost of a Sadducean indifference to truth. Suppose a higher and lower theology beside each other in the same communion, and the former advocated by men who entertain an honest zeal for God's truth. None but men of this stamp are of any value in propagating the truth and making an effective impression upon the kingdom of darkness. Suppose, also, that the erroneous teachers are equally zealous for their false creed. What can result, except the most unseemly strifes? A part of the testimony of one pulpit is contradicted by another; and both speak by the same ecclesiastical authority! Which shall the laity follow? Or shall this disgraceful contradiction be arrested by a compact, that both parties shall preach only the fundamentals in which both are

agreed? Such a covenant the erroneous are never willing to keep, and the orthodox dare not. For no revealed truth is valueless. Every doctrine of the Scriptures is a part of the herald's message. Any suppression is liable, though not necessarily certain to mislead a soul. Shall I conceal it, and thus possibly get the blood of souls upon my skirts, when the sword comes and takes them without adequate warning? I dare not, and will not. Thus we should be always liable to that preposterous result which a few years ago was presented in the latitudinarian Reformed Church of Paris; in the same pulpit, and by the same authority, A. Monod might be heard, with matchless eloquence, defending that divinity of Christ which his colleagues, the next Sabbath, would assail with equal ingenuity.

Indeed, the ends designed by this so-called comprehension can only be gained by indifferentism. The theory has an obvious tendency to disparage the importance of truth. What clearer proof is needed that, when even we hear the most pious of its advocates, while asserting their own personal orthodoxy, speak of the points assailed by the opponents of the doctrines of grace as the "uncertain" points of the Christian system; while those in which errorists condescend to concur are borrowed as the "certain points"? Tried by such standards, what precious truth would not be uncertain; for which one has not, by its very holiness, provoked numerous dissentients? Such representations are mischievous, as well as unjust to the history of the church catholic. For when we examine the testimonies of its different branches in the purer ages of the reform, we find that they are unanimous in condemning the errors which this modern latitudinarianism would now fain comprehend, as not being certainly erroneous, as the church has always been in asserting the fundamental doctrines of the faith. These loose statements are not true to the glorious consensus of the true Protestant churches. Are any so ill-informed at this day of the church's history, as not to know that indifference prompts negative preaching, and that this, sooner or later, ripens into positive error? A darker phase of this loose temper appears, when we see men eager to subscribe a creed which they do not believe, and to explain away their unbelief and opposite convictions, as not adverse or new doctrines, but merely new methods of adjusting the philosophic relations of the old dogmas. What have we

not seen cloaked under this glossing pretext! Too often have men been known, under it, to sign an undoubted Calvinistic creed, while advancing, "as explanation of it," a false philosophy, which every intelligent Pelagian and even Socinian hailed as his own, and which every candid student of history recognized as the traditionary and utter opposite of Calvinism.

So benumbing is the spirit of indifferency begotten by this comprehension, that its tendency is to extinguish all true life in the church which practices it. Nothing except a prevalent secular motive has usually been able to restrain this tendency; and that motive has usually been presented in the form of a state establishment, or a common political project. An established and endowed church has indeed been seen to survive this spirit of moderatism more than once, and to survive it long. In those cases the power of honest conviction and attachment, knitting kindred minds around a common centre of precious truth, has been so far substituted by the carnal desire for the "loaves and fishes" of preferment, as to keep a heterogeneous body peaceable and numerous. But where this cohesive power of money and place is lacking, the only permanent bond of union, the only effective energizer of concerted action, is a sincere community of convictions. Experience presents us two results from this policy of comprehension, where it has been attempted by unendowed churches: either peace is banished by intestine struggles, which, operating like a harsh medicine, remove the danger of spiritual torpor by separating the discordant elements; or else peace is preserved at the expense of life, and the motley body dies in the stupor of its own indifference. The latter seems to have been the issue of the alliance of 1691, between the Presbyterians of England and a part of the Independents. In that "plan of union," it was covenanted that the diversities in the testimonies of the two should be suppressed for the sake of outward unity. The bargain was kept; and the result was, that, despite the presence of a Watts and a Doddridge, English Presbyterianism was at the end of the eighteenth century virtually dead, asphyxiated by this dishonest peace, into Socinianism.

IV. But the advocates of comprehension plead that if the laxer theologians in this mixed communion do preach negative truth or partial error, the more orthodox have equal liberty to

preach the whole truth. Thus, say they, The remedy may go along with the contagion, if contagion it be, as fully as any other system. I reply, Not so; the application of this remedy is fatally obstructed by the complication of dissimilar elements. And this is my final plea against the system: that the effectual defence of orthodoxy is excluded by it. There is, first, a homely maxim which substantiates this objection, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." It is much easier to keep out error than to conquer it after it is in. How imprudent is this plan of campaign, which brings the enemy into your own camp and arms him from the resources of your own power before you begin to contend against him! Again, the friends of truth have found, to their cost, that as one cannot fight his adversary until he gets him at arm's length, so an effective testimony against error can never be borne until the struggling elements separate themselves. Either the internal strife against error tends directly to that separation, or it is futile. Witness the abortive struggles of the evangelicals in the Anglican church. They have had on their side numbers, learning, zeal, orthodoxy, honesty of purpose. But they were resolved, at the outset, that the glorious comprehension and unity of the church should in no case be sunk for the interests of doctrinal truth. Consequently their very anxious testimony has mainly gone for nothing. Their adversaries advance steadily Romeward, regarding their protests only as impertinence, carrying, it is to be feared, the body of churchmen with them. So in Scotland, the only men who did anything to rebuke "moderatism" and "patronage" were the Gillespies, Erskine, and Chalmers, who did it by seceding. The reasons of this are plain. In such a communion the orthodox Protestant is borne down by a practical consciousness that he cannot assail his own brethren and equals. They would raise against him the cry that he is disturbing the peace of the church. The temptation is thus powerful to suppress all reference to disputed dogmas and usages, and the testimony of the whole body becomes merely negative. Again, according to the constitution of such a church, the laxer creed is as fully authorized by her as the better. The testimony which denies the distinctive points of orthodoxy is the church's testimony also. The world, which holds a Pelagian creed by natural inheritance, finds, of course, the lower testimony more acceptable than the

stricter. As no fortress is stronger than its weakest bastion, so the doctrinal weight of a denomination never goes for more with the outside world than that of the lowest doctrine which that communion teaches. A church may have a decided Calvinistic creed and many Calvinistic ministers; but I appeal to the sense of every intelligent hearer, if she tolerates Arminianism, does she ever, as a body, make a Calvinistic impression upon Christendom?

We conclude, then, that if we would be faithful to our charge and our Master, we must, like the apostle, require all our ministers "to hold fast the faithful word as they have been taught, that they may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince gainsayers." Should it be that our little Zion will remain the last advocate of faithful subscription and a strict adherence to doctrinal purity in this land, and possibly in the Protestant world, then how solemn yet illustrious is the mission to which Christ calls us! In strict fidelity to that mission will be our very existence as a church. Forfeit that, and the world will judge, may we not say that Christ himself will conclude, that the ground of our useful existence as a denomination is gone.

But let us not forget that this testimony for the "form of sound words which we have heard of" the apostles must be borne "in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." Unhallowed is that zeal for the truth which is animated merely by rivalry, or the spirit of party, which is not founded in solemn conviction, the result of faithful study and earnest prayer, which contends for wrath, and not for conscience's sake. The apostle here teaches us, in two words, what is that spirit of orthodoxy which God requires. It values revealed truth because it has humbly received it with adoring reverence, as the gift and trust of infinite wisdom and love, and because it sees in those doctrines the instruments of glory to God and endless blessing to blind, erring man; yea, to our enemies and opposers. Let us, then, while we hold fast to the pattern of sound words, ever study to do it in faith and love.