

## OUR POSITION.<sup>1</sup>

---

WE have elsewhere given an explicit, and, as we hope, satisfactory answer to the inquiries of an esteemed New School brother with regard to the meaning of a sentence in a former editorial about which he asks an explanation. We are aware that many of his brethren in the South agree with him when he says, "We believe your statement with regard to the condition of your own Assembly, and we greatly prefer a reunion with our brethren of the Old School to the formation of a new Assembly."

Moreover, correspondents and friends in our own connection have, by letter and by personal application, requested some expression of opinion with regard to the course proper to be pursued by our church towards our brethren of the New School in the South, should they desire a reunion with us. We regard this as a proper time to define our position, inasmuch as the opinions expressed in the letter above referred to open the way for a declaration of our views, without making us liable to the suspicion of intermeddling with other people's matters, or of desiring to bring over to our side any who would prefer another connection.

We shall endeavor to express ourselves so plainly that none can misunderstand or misrepresent us.

We address ourselves to candid men, who prefer truth to misrepresentation, and who earnestly desire to promote the true interests of Christ's kingdom. The circumstances which now surround us are such that we can give the freest utterance to our opinions with regard to the true policy to be pursued by ourselves and by our Southern New School brethren, without the imputation of officious obtrusion of advice or the spirit of unworthy proselytism.

It is conceded by all, and we refer to it in no boastful arrogance, but with humble gratitude to the great Head of the church, that

---

<sup>1</sup> This article appeared in *The Central Presbyterian*, July 11, 1857.

the Old School Presbyterian denomination in these United States is now strong, prosperous, and steadily progressive in its growth, power and usefulness. We need no accession from other ecclesiastical bodies to enable us to pursue our onward march to those successes and blessed victories to which we aspire under the guidance and beneath the banners of Christ our King. All we need is the blessing of God upon our present organization, and those accessions which come from the world, when he adds to the church of such as shall be saved. We regard a desire to absorb the members of any other Christian organization, merely for the purpose of increasing our numbers, as unworthy of such a church as ours; and, still more, we regard the admission of men who do not sympathize with us in doctrine and church government as the introduction of an element of weakness and disorganization earnestly to be deplored, and if possible positively to be interdicted.

We do, however, believe that among Southern New School Presbyterians there are thousands who are sound in doctrinal views and steadfast in attachment to the standards of our church, *one with us* in principle, sentiment, and all that constitutes true denominational fellowship and unity. And while we have no overtures to make, we will not permit the fear of being wilfully misrepresented prevent us from taking that dispassionate view of their present posture and proper course for the future which our independent position happily enables us to do.

Conscious of the purity of our motives, in this spirit of transparent candor and freedom, we have no hesitation in avowing our conviction that a reunion with us, on the proper basis, will *for them* be the wisest, safest, and happiest solution of the difficulty into which our New School brethren have been driven by the unrighteous action of their late Northern associates.

We therefore address our correspondent and those who, in his own words, agree with him in preferring a reunion with the Old School church to the formation of a new Assembly, and respectfully leave for their consideration some of the reasons which have brought us the conviction which we have just expressed as to the true policy of the New School Presbyterians in the South.

First, If you persist in forming a separate denomination, it will be limited to your Southern members. Your leaders tell you that they expect the adhesion of many conservative North-

ern brethren, so as to form a national church. June -will leave them sadly mistaken. If there was such a sympathy for you in the Northern mind, why did not some of it show itself on the test vote? You told them that to pass this vote was virtually to decide your excision. Did they spare? Did one single delegate from a free State fail to vote against you? That was the time to show it if they had any purpose of good will or friendship. And now, after an exhibition of hostility so universal, so deliberate, so excisive, how chimerical is it to expect extensive support at the North? We have watched the tone of Northern presses; while a *few* persons regret your excision, a still smaller number, probably *none*, will follow you into what they believe to be your exile. Now you say you don't wish to form a *sectional* denomination. You say, rightly, that it is injurious to the union and to feelings of national fraternity. If your leaders persist, they will inevitably find themselves in that unfortunate position. Should you conclude to join us, you will be, at least for the present, in a national church.

Second, Your denomination will be numerically small and scattered; and this is always a misfortune to any body. Small denominations are liable to be perpetually depleted by the passing over of their most active churches and ministers to that large denomination near them which is most kindred in doctrine. A thousand practical influences ensure this. Rising talents demand a wider field of enterprise. If you embark in this enterprise of a separate denomination, we do trust that no seductions will ever be employed with your ministers or churches by Old School Presbyterians; but you will assuredly lose frequently. You would be surprised to know how many men are now of our denomination, brought among us by the various influences described, who were *educated* and *ordained* among the various secession churches of the Presbyterian family; and they are usually just the men whose activity and talent confer strength. Again, it is impossible for a smaller denomination to hold the same doctrinal and ecclesiastical theories and yet continue a separate denomination, on the same ground with an older and larger one, without incurring mistrust. The public mind will ask: "If these men are also Presbyterians, why are they not one?" Both parties will be injured in public confidence; and, the younger especially, will have an *onus* to bear, which will be

a heavy incubus before the public. *You have already suffered severely from this*; do not persuade yourselves that this conscious *difficulty* of your position before a Southern public arose hitherto only from your connection with an abolition assembly. The public did not trouble itself about this. It knew that *you* were *sound* on this question; this was all it cared for. The difficulty was that the hard-headed, common-sense public *would* say to themselves: "If this younger party are also Presbyterians, as they avow, why are they not one with the older?" You will experience the same difficulty still.

Third, You have been almost exclusively dependent on the North hitherto for ministers. This supply must now cease. Without ministers your churches must soon die out. Your leaders tell you, "We will have our own college and seminary, and rear our own ministers." Ah! you will find this, as we know to our cost, no easy thing. You are not numerous; you are scattered. How much less desirable is a weak, struggling, poor institution, than one established and strong? Should you prefer to unite with us, you will share the advantages of ours, without money, and without cost. We have enough already established, enough for both, and they are already tolerably endowed. We have now, in Union, Columbia and Danville, seminaries; and in Washington, Hampden-Sidney, Davidson, Centre, Oglethorpe, Oakland and other colleges, apparatus enough to supply all our churches with ministers. Should you join us they will be equally beneficial to you. Again, in the separate position proposed, you can hope for no aid beyond your own borders in home missionary operations. The Home Missionary Society has already cut you off. Should the General Assembly (New School) establish a denominational agency for Home Missions, as it assuredly will do some day, their aid will, of course, be limited to their own ecclesiastical connection. There is nothing but the Southern Aid Society to help you; and this is limited and weak. How long will it be able to resist the same clamor under which the American Board Home Missionary Society, and even the American Tract Society, have succumbed? But associated with us, you would share all the resources of our numerous connection.

Have the body of the Southern Presbyterians known as

New School, who were born on Southern soil, *any feeling or interest* to keep them out of the Old School denomination? Have their ruling elders and laity any such feeling or interest? We believe not. Then—and we mean the question to be significant—for *whose* gratification; for whose behoof; for whose interest are all these burdens to be assumed, and this difficult, unnatural, disastrous position to be maintained? Who are the men to whose preferences, advantage, prejudices, or pride, all the rank and file, the laity and eldership, are to make these sacrifices?

Again, the active leaders of the separation in 1838, on the side known as New School, declared explicitly that Southern Presbyterians separated, not because the action of the Assembly in 1837 injured them one whit, “but out of sympathy with Northern brethren maltreated in that action.” Now, we will not urge the consideration, which might be discourteous at present, that *time* has verified most of the arguments which enforced and justified, in the hearts of Old School men, those measures of 1837. We only ask: Has not this duty of sympathizing testimony for Northern brethren been sufficiently performed? Have they not, with a vengeance, requited you in such a way as effectually to liberate you from further obligations of this nature? Will it not be advantageous to you to return to that place whence this generous sympathy, so foully misrequited, drew you at first? By returning, you do not endorse the policy, the rightfulness, not even the constitutionality, of those measures of 1837; nor do we ask you to do so. You will only place yourselves where many good and able men have stood all along, who thought with you, but remained with us. *They* said: “We believe these measures wrong, even unconstitutional; we testify against their wrong, but we leave the responsibility of them to the majority who enacted them, and whose will must prevail in all republican bodies. Their wrongfulness does not compel us to separate from this, which we believe to be the true church of Jesus Christ, though in this matter erring. We exercise our Christian liberty in testifying against her fault, but we go on as before, to labor for her good; for though in fault, it is Christ’s bride.”

This is so obvious, so just, that no attempt is made in the

document, or manifesto, proposing the course of the Southern session, to gainsay it. The *only* reason there assigned against such a reunion as is proposed is, that the Old School is also so tainted with abolitionism that it is not worth while to go there for peace on that subject. Now let us, brethren, look calmly and practically at this. Consider that the action of our Assembly against abolitionism was so satisfactory that *all* secular papers at the South endorsed it; and *all* Southern Presbyterians, Old School, were satisfied with it. Consider that this action was adopted by an overwhelming majority, embracing every vote except about thirteen. Consider that from that day to this, during the sessions of twelve Assemblies, not one instance of agitation has occurred in our meetings; and that in the last Assembly, amidst all the political storms elsewhere over the land, in our Assembly there was yet "*perfect peace.*" Now, is not this enough? Your leaders say, we desire to form an organization, national, not sectional. But can any body, formed of slavery and anti-slavery men, promise more than our Assembly has realized? Your leaders say, the new body will be formed under a pledge against all slavery agitation. But we reply, when did ever a pledge bind the course of free discussion, or chain opinion? And what scriptural warrant have you for such a basis or term of church-fellowship? No; you will be as safe from abolitionism in our body as you can be in any national church. Should you join us with your one hundred and thirty-six ministers and thousands of communicants, our conservative strength, already immensely preponderant, will be farther increased. And if those funereal vaticinations in which a few for special purposes indulge, that we also must ultimately divide on this abolition point, should ever be fulfilled—which may God forbid—will not that be time enough for you to secede with us? Will not *one, grand*, mighty secession of Southern Presbyterians be better when that day of extremity and woe shall come, than two broken, divided ones, of which one was premature? But bear with our candor; when your leaders teach you to say, "the Old School church cannot be trusted on this subject," let us ask you to remember who are the men who affect this peculiar, excessive sensitiveness for Southern rights? Where were the most of them born and reared? Does it bear telling, that *they*

cannot be satisfied with a state of things in our denomination, on this point, with which all the ten thousands of your Southern Old School brethren, *born here, born slave-owners*, are fully content?

Should this union be formed, we have no humiliations to impose on our brethren commonly known as New School, no concessions to demand of them, but expect to meet them as equals. Should the inquiry be made, "What are the precise terms on which such a union would be agreed to by the Old School," we believe we express the general feeling of our denomination when we say, that we would receive any given church, session and minister, into any given Presbytery, in exactly the same way in which one Old School Presbytery would receive them from another Old School Presbytery. We would receive you precisely as we would receive each other. Can more be asked of us? Here is the Old School church A with an Old School pastor B, belonging to the Old School Presbytery C. They wish to be transferred to the Old School Presbytery D. How would we proceed? We would enroll the church A on the roll of the Presbytery D immediately on its giving us a simple assurance that its *church session*—not each of its individual members—held the doctrines and church order of our books, and the delegate of its session would, without further formality, be admitted to his seat in Presbytery. The Presbytery D would examine the pastor B on his views of personal piety, doctrine and church government, and if they were satisfied, would admit him also to a seat. We would do the same among the brethren known as New School. Is the examination of the minister seeking to pass from one Presbytery to another objected to? How can we be suspected of anything invidious when we do just the same with our own brethren? Should we do otherwise, it would be our own brethren who would have the right to call us invidious. But as to the admission of a church and its session, even this seeming difficulty does not exist. We do not speak by authority, but we doubt not that all church courts among the Old School will show themselves ready, as they have hitherto actually done, cheerfully to proceed as far for a cordial union as reason and fairness can demand. And we know that we can safely give to our brethren of the other connection these two as-

surances—the giving of which will perhaps do all which this article could do—that on the one hand we all feel a respectful friendship, a sympathy with the difficulties which injustice has imposed on them, and a sincere desire for any wholesome and hearty union of our interests; and on the other hand, that no approbation of a reunion is prompted by any self-interest on our part, or will ever be followed by any annoying solicitations.