

## "PAN-PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE."<sup>1</sup>

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THE smoke of the conflict has now had time to clear away from the debates of our last Assembly upon its external relations sufficiently to allow a moderate spectator to estimate the conditions and results fairly. This the writer would beg leave to attempt as to the proposed "Alliance" of all Presbyterians. The numbers and vigor of the opponents to this project in all the earlier debates gave evident promise that the Alliance, in its first posture, would either have been rejected by a majority or relinquished by its friends out of respect to the minority. The seeming unanimity reached at last was procured by apparent concessions near the close of the meeting. One of these was the resolution adopted, that the funds of the Assembly shall in no case be taxed with any expenses of its commissioners to the Alliance. The other was Dr. Hoge's resolution that "the Alliance is not to be regarded as another and a higher court, but as an assemblage of committees, for the purpose of joint conference and joint report," etc. As for the rest, it cannot be said that the debate in the Assembly had modified the points of objection so strongly made by the opponents before and during the discussions. All that had been effected by the advocates up to this time was to predict some supposed possible gains from the Alliance, which remained uncertain and indefinite in their nature, and to stimulate an enthusiasm of taste in those whose temperaments were of a kind to be fascinated by this species of pious junketings. The great constitutional argument was virtually admitted by the majority in their adoption of Dr. Hoge's explanatory resolution.

To the argument that the Alliance must be broad-church, unless it is to be unfair and one-sided, because it had so much broad-church constituency, no effective answer was made, and the attempted answer was nugatory.

The point so clearly put by Dr. Dabney, in the interests of

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<sup>1</sup> Appeared in *The Southwestern Presbyterian*, December 14, 1876.

our own self-respect, was not even mentioned by the majority, so far as the reports of debate show. They seem to have adopted the only discreet course—a prudent silence; for, in fact, that point is, to the calm and independent mind, unanswerable. Every constituent body to the Alliance, save one or two of the smaller, have bitterly, and even contemptuously denounced the position actually and still held by the Southern church as to slave-holding, and have made it a ground for refusing to us communion and alliance. Meanwhile slavery in the United States has been destroyed by violence, so that no Christian among us is now formally a slaveholder. But, as a matter of doctrine and morals, our church really holds identically the position these proposing allies have always anathematized. Thus both candor and common honesty towards them and decent respect for ourselves and our fathers obviously require that we shall come to an understanding with our new comrades how it is that they now propose to embrace us, whom they lately rejected. Will any one say, No! because slavery is now a thing of the past? The resistless answer is that with us, as a church, IT IS NOT, for we to-day refuse to confess and retract as to our doctrine; and it is for this doctrine touching slavery we are, as a church, responsible. The only solution of this knot which had ever been spoken "out aloud" was one of so offensive a nature that it seemed amazing any gentleman in the South could fail to regard it as a positive affront. It was that proposed by Dr. McCosh, the actual inventor and main promoter of this Alliance, in 1866, in the Central Presbyterian Church, Baltimore. Dr. Dabney stated it thus: "That Dr. McCosh, then speaking for the 'Evangelical Alliance,' said the American churches had been properly excluded for their complicity with slavery; but that that Alliance was now willing to receive them, because slavery in America had been abolished." This extraordinary statement raised, to every Southern mind, these questions: Are we, then, to be whitewashed before the Christian world from this asserted black and damning stain by the mere fact that material force keeps back our hands from the act—our principles remaining the same avowedly? And if this is the idea, does it not reveal, first, a moral profligacy and deceit in the inviters, such as to cure us effectually of all desire for their embraces? And, second, are Southern gentlemen, conscious of rectitude in this matter and

justly aggrieved by a long train of gratuitous libels and insults about it, to accept *this* as amends sufficiently full for their self-respect and the good name of sainted fathers? Now, the attitude of Dr. McCosh, and of most of the Northern, British and Continental churches, is to-day such as to renew the point of these questions, as to this second Alliance, with irresistible force. We do not see how the majority could have looked each other in the face and attempted to argue these questions without blushing. They did well to be silent about them—well for their weak cause! It was all they could do. The *Central Presbyterian* did, indeed, make a sort of vacillating attempt to break the fatal point of the questions by professing to doubt the authenticity of the incident in Baltimore. But there are here two remarks: one is, that if Dr. McCosh did not put it thus, it does not seriously modify the case, for the essential facts remain. The other is that we understand Dr. Dabney cites Dr. Thomas E. Peck as express eye-witness of the facts stated, and that he considers himself warranted to refer publicly, if needful, to his authority.

In the second place, the concession which the Assembly made touching the travelling expenses really concedes the argument founded by the opponents upon the unwarrantable cost. The Assembly resolves that she will not pay a penny of the expenses for her own commissioners. But why not? If it is right for her to send them, it is right for her to pay. If she actually does delegate the duty of representing her to certain brethren, then she is morally and scripturally bound to pay their expenses. Who "goeth a warfare at his own charges?" Why, then, does the Assembly claim the right to send, and yet shirk her duty to pay? It is because her conscience tells her, that this is not an errand on which it would be righteous to expend God's revenues. Then it follows, that it is not an errand on which she can righteously expend the time of God's servants. The plea is put in, that if it does not suit the feelings of the commissioners to pay their own expenses, some liberal persons or churches will produce the money. But the objection is: that these commissioners should not represent these liberal persons, as they virtually do on this indirection; they should represent the church, and be paid by the church. And again: The Assembly ought to instruct these liberal persons that it is their duty to feel concern-

ing their money devoted to pious uses just as the Assembly feels about hers, viz.: that this "religious pic-nic" is not an object to which God's revenues may be righteously perverted. We are compelled, with pain, to admit that the unanswerable force of this argument against the Alliance has been the occasion of the Assembly's taking an attitude just such as our British neighbors characterize by the word "shabby."

But the main argument against the Alliance is the constitutional one. If it is a new court, our adhesion is a revolution of our constitution. If it is not, it is a "voluntary" association; a human invention which our church has always refused to meddle with in any official capacity, regarding all such recognition as both unconstitutional and un-Presbyterian. This inexorable demonstration the *Central Presbyterian* endeavored to evade by a pleasant story, whose fun was very good, but whose logic was very bad: An Irishman heard a debate, whether a given adjective was to be pronounced "*Neether*" or "*Nyther*." He, demurring to both proposals, said it was "*Nayther*." So saith the *Central Presbyterian*. The Alliance is neither a new court, nor a voluntary association; but a bundle of committees. This was the resort adopted by the Assembly, under the guidance of Dr. Hoge. Such a view could never have prevailed in an Assembly of ours, had time and circumstances allowed its thorough examination. But the Assembly had, on the motion of Mr. Grattan, of Virginia, already committed the anomalous disorder, of allowing Dr. Hoge to *speak ad libitum and to amend, after it had passed, what was, as to all other members, the previous question!* So that the real discussion of this *committee-plea* is yet to be undertaken.

The very word sufficiently shows the nature of "committee." It is the passive past participle of an old French verb (modernized). It is the set of members of a legislative body, to whom is committed some matter by the body. The essential, the rudimental idea of a committee then is, that it discusses only what is committed to it by the body which appoints it. And it only reports back the results it has reached to the same body. In *Jefferson's Manual*, Sec. 11, are the following principles: "Nor can a committee receive a petition but through the house." "As soon as the house sits . . . the chairman (of the committee) is in duty bound to rise instantly." In Sec. 26:

"No bill shall be committed (referred to a committee) until it shall have been twice read." "The report being made, the committee is dissolved, and can act no more without a new power." In our Assembly, all the "standing committees," the number and importance of whose duties require something of a constitution, have their rules and by-laws always framed for them by the house. Thus, the true nature of a committee, as a mere creature of the Assembly, is distinctly maintained.

But how does this Alliance appear fore us? Did it originate in a free action of our Assembly Or, indeed, of any Assembly? No; it is the handiwork of irresponsible persons; who having first developed the creation in all but its details, bring it to sundry supreme courts—ours among others—and demand their adhesion. The Alliance makes its own constitution; made it last July in London; and then comes to our Assembly, saying in substance, "If you like it, you may adhere; and if you don't like it, you may let us alone." Does this wonderful cluster of "committees" wait to have business committed to it? Not at all. It assumes its own lines of business, of its own discretion. It has been demonstrated in the most literal manner that it is not committees. The whole precedent is utterly revolutionary and pregnant with danger and usurpation. Are we consoled with the plea that its determinations will "carry only a moral power?" This is the only kind of power carried by the Assembly itself; yet is the Assembly a spiritual court, and, if uncontrolled by a constitution, capable of fearful aggressions on Christian liberty. The truth is, that this Alliance, in the mode of its inception a voluntary association, must be, in its virtual working, a church court, or else a nullity. The most practical hope of the friends of Southern Presbyterianism is that the good sense and native independence of our people will defend them from the usurpation implied in the former character, and that the Alliance will therefore become the latter—a serious but useless farce. The action of our Assembly, in claiming to treat the Alliance as a mere cluster of committees, is so clear a change and rejection of the real character which it has selected for itself that the natural result would be our exclusion. The Alliance, if consistent in its adhesion to its principles, should say to our commissioners: "The thing to which *your* Assembly proposes to accede is wholly another thing from what we pro-

pose. We cannot submit to have our whole structure thus coolly transmuted at the bidding of one of the lesser applicants. You cannot enter on your terms." "So mote it be!" But we apprehend that no such consistency rules in the Alliance. Their appetite is for accessions and *eclat* on any terms, consistent or inconsistent. Provided they can get numbers, names and a virtual power unknown to our constitution, they will not boggle at an inconsequent action or an impertinence.