

ARGUMENT AGAINST CHURCH-BOARDS.

THE policy, which has so extensively prevailed for the last half century among all denominations of Christians, of conducting what are called “benevolent enterprises” by the instrumentality of Boards, we are fully persuaded, has been adopted by the Presbyterian Church in this country without examination and without reflection. Professing to be regulated in doctrine, discipline and order by an exclusive regard for the Word of God, and a firm rejection of all human authority in matters of religious faith and practice, it is not a little remarkable that she should yet be so ready to fall in with the current of popular opinion on questions of such momentous importance as those connected with the work of Missions Foreign and Domestic, and the business of training a rising ministry and providing for the diffusion and defence of the truths of the Gospel.

In the very midst of her earnest efforts for reformation and for truth, whilst contending against unscriptural doctrines and remonstrating against unscriptural abuses, she forgets her zeal for the Divine authority, and lends her sanction to a system of measures which certainly has no surer foundation than that of prescription, and that not even of an ancient date.

This singular inconsistency may be, at least partially, accounted for by the peculiar circumstances in which the Church found herself placed during her great and glorious

contest.¹ All reformations are gradual. The evils of ancient abuses do not develop themselves *at once*. The light breaks in upon the mind slowly and feebly at first, like the first beams of morning, and, like them, also waxes stronger and stronger until all darkness is dissipated and the hidden things of dishonesty are openly revealed. Great principles are clearly apprehended and acknowledged before their application in all their bearings and to their full extent is distinctly perceived. Some prominent corruption arrests the attention, awakens inquiry, and leads the mind to a clear perception of the remedy in some great truth which has been overlooked or abandoned. And it is not until the remedy has been successfully applied to the pressing evils which first excited the spirit of examination, that a larger application is perceived to be possible or felt to be desirable. Absorbed in one great subject of attention, the mind overlooks all smaller matters or matters of less immediate urgency.

In our recent contest, one great principle for which the Church was so zealously contending was that of ecclesiastical responsibility. The first enormous and commanding evil of the voluntary societies, which arrested attention and aroused opposition, was their absolute independence of the authority and jurisdiction of the Church. For years, consequently, her efforts were directed to the single point that the *Church*, as such, should have the control of all the spiritual enterprises of Christian benevolence. It was not a subject of discussion *how* the Church could most efficiently conduct these matters in her ecclesiastical capacity: by common consent, it was admitted that societies or specific organizations for the purpose were indispensably necessary; and the Church felt that she would gain her point, and secure the desired oversight and control, by placing these societies or organizations under her own supervision. It never occurred to her to discuss the yet farther bearing of the great principle which she was labouring to carry out upon the actual

¹ [That of 1837 and 1838—Eds.]

organization of the Boards themselves. It never occurred to her to ask the question, whether what she does by an organization unknown to her Constitution is really any more done by her in her *ecclesiastical capacity*, than what she did by the voluntary societies. In her anxiety to throw off an abuse of the former system, she overlooked the inherent evils of the system itself and destroyed nothing but its voluntary character. Her Boards are only substitutes for the voluntary societies, and can no more justly be regarded as the *Church* than the Home Missionary Association or the American Education Society. The principle is, that these enterprises must be carried on by the Church as a visible, organized body ; the fact is, that they are conducted by institutions appointed by the Church, and not by the Church in her ecclesiastical capacity. The Church pushed the application of her principle no farther than to the arresting of the operation of purely voluntary societies; it was reserved for less troubled times to carry it out and put her and all her institutions upon the venerable platform of Christ and His Apostles.

That time, we trust, has arrived; and we do humbly hope, that the next General Assembly, standing upon the same principles of ecclesiastical responsibility with its illustrious predecessors of 1837 and 1838, and having its attention confined to no single and absorbing evil, will take a wide and commanding view of the whole subject, and make all the changes which are necessary that our Church, as such, and without the aid of substitutes and agents, may fulfil all the trust which God has committed to her. We are fully satisfied that the system of Boards and permanent Agencies falls very far short .of the spirit of our Constitution, and, so far from being a blessing, will in the end prove a deplorable calamity unless speedily abandoned. We do not object" to this system on account of slight and accidental evils which wisdom and experience may remove without affecting the essential elements of the system itself. Such evils or rather abuses exist. They are to be found in those regula-

tions by which honorary membership is purchased for money, an enormity similar to the sin of Simon Magus, for which he met the rebuke of the Apostle; in their tendency to perpetuate themselves; and in the very partial amount of real investigation to which their proceedings are ever subjected. These are objections to the present plan on which our Boards are organized ; but they lie not so much against the system itself as against partial and accidental abuses. The objections which have influenced our minds are radical and fundamental. "We believe that the system in its essential principles is directly subversive of the Constitution of our Church, unknown to the Word of God, and unsupported by any arguments of expediency or necessity which can commend it to the understanding of a Christian man.

I. These positions we shall endeavour to establish in order. First, then, Boards are directly subversive of the Form of Government embodied in the Constitution of our own Church. They involve a practical renunciation of Presbyterianism. The essential features of our ecclesiastical polity are the parity of the ministry; the office of Ruling Elder; and, a series of church-courts, rising one above another, and cementing the whole body together as one harmonious whole. " That," says Dr. Miller, " is a Presbyterian Church, in which the Presbytery is the radical and leading judicatory; in which Teaching and Ruling Presbyters or Elders have committed to them the watch and care of the whole flock; in which all Ministers of the Word and sacraments are equal; in which Ruling Elders, as the representatives of the people, form a part of all ecclesiastical assemblies, and partake in all authoritative acts equally with the Teaching Elders; and in which, by a series of judicatories rising one above another, each individual church is under the watch and care of its appropriate judicatory; and the whole body, by a system of review and control, is bound together as one homogeneous community. Wherever this system is found in operation in the Church of God, there is Presbyterianism." The only permanent officers in the

Church of God, which our Constitution recognizes, are Bishops, Elders and Deacons; the only courts are Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and the General Assembly. These officers and these courts are treated in our Constitution as abundantly adequate to meet all the exigencies of the Church, and to do all that God requires her to do in her ecclesiastical capacity. We profess to trace this system to *I* the Scriptures. We believe that it embodies the leading principles of Church government established by the Apostles of the Lord; and we cannot question its sufficiency without bringing a serious and blasphemous reproach upon the Spirit of inspiration. Whatever, therefore, is not done by Elders and Ministers, assembled in some one of the courts above mentioned, is not done by them as *Presbyterians*. It is only in these courts that we recognize the Church as an organized body. Here, and here alone, do we find Presbyterianism.

Now we maintain that the system of Boards gives us a~7 set of officers and a set of ecclesiastical courts entirely different from those of our Constitution. The Corresponding Secretary and the General Agent of these Boards are discharging the peculiar functions of neither Minister, Elder nor Deacon. They certainly are not Pastors, and are just as far from being Evangelists. They do not claim to be Ruling Elders, and much less would they submit to be called Deacons in the sense of our Book. What, then, are they ? Where are their mixed and heterogeneous functions recognized as belonging to any single individual from the first to the last of our Constitution ? They combine into one discordant whole some of the duties of every officer acknowledged in our system—they are two-thirds Deacons, one-sixth Elder, and one-sixth Preacher. The duties, and not the name, make the office. You may call them *Ministers*, and ordain them as such, but if they do not discharge constantly and faithfully the duties of Ministers, God assuredly does not regard them in that light, and man should not; and if the Church has marked out a routine of service which our

Constitution and the Word of God do not sanction as binding upon any single individual, if she has created a new sphere of labour and appointed men to fill it, she has been guilty of creating new offices and appointing new ecclesiastical officers. The offices under these Boards are not temporary trusts; they are a permanent vocation, just as much so as the pastoral office itself, and they who fill them live of their employments just as much as Ministers of Jesus live of the Gospel. They are permanent officers in the Church ; and they are as perfectly distinct from the Deacon, the Elder and the Bishop, as these respectively are distinct from each other. We have no objection to the name *Corresponding Secretary, General Agent*, or any other mere name; but we do insist upon it, that new offices are made by human authority in the Church of God, in which various conflicting duties are brought together, and a discordant whole created, like Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold, silver, brass, iron and clay. The temporary business of a secretary or scribe in any public meeting we understand; the temporary agency of a Pastor for a specific purpose we acknowledge to be scriptural; but the appointing of men to a permanent and standing vocation, in which it is impossible to be faithful in any of the standing offices of the Church, we do not understand; for we have not so learned Presbyterianism.

But we object still farther, that the Boards themselves are to all intents and purposes ecclesiastical courts, exercising a power and jurisdiction in the Church of God in direct and unavoidable collision with the authority of the courts acknowledged by our Standards. It is a common but a very mistaken apprehension that Boards are merely Committees, invested with no other power and acting upon no other principle. Committees are usually appointed for one of two purposes—either to prepare and arrange business for the body which appoints them, or to execute some specific trust by the order and direction of the body to which they are responsible. Of the first kind are the Committees of Bills

and Overtures, and the Judicial Committee appointed by the Assembly at every meeting; and of the latter kind is a Committee of Presbytery to install a Pastor, or to receive the testimonials of Ministers from other Presbyteries, labouring within its bounds. It is clear that in neither of these views can any of the Boards of the Church be regarded merely as Committees. They neither prepare and digest business for the action of the Assembly—for they do it themselves; nor execute any specific trust according to the direction or command of the body which appoints them. They are confidential agents, acting upon their own suggestions and their own views of expediency and duty, without pretending to wait for positive orders from the General Assembly. They are clothed with plenary power to act and do as to them shall seem most advisable in all matters embraced in the general subject entrusted to their care.

This ample investiture of power renders them to all intents and purposes ecclesiastical courts. They exercise dominion in the Lord's house. To say that this is not their true character, because they are responsible to the General Assembly, would be to deny that the Presbytery is an ecclesiastical court, because it is responsible to the Synod, or to strip the Synod of its true character, because it in its turn is amenable to the Assembly. The possession and exercise of power distinguish a court; and since these are found in the Boards by a most unwarrantable perversion of our Constitution, they are promoted to a level with Sessions, Presbyteries and Synods. Here, then, we have a new system of ecclesiastical order. In addition to Pastors, Elders and Deacons we behold General Agents, Corresponding Secretaries and Executive Committees; in addition to the ancient and established judicatories of our Church we behold—as though Christ had left her inadequately furnished for her great work—a mighty system of Boards of equal authority and much wider operation; and already have these institutions become so intolerably arrogant in the exercise of their unlawful dominion, that they speak of the true judicatories of

the Church as their auxiliaries. They receive reports from Presbyteries and issue their directions, not in the spirit of a servant accounting to his master, but in the style of a feudal lord to his humble and obedient vassals.

If, then, these institutions are new ecclesiastical courts composed of new ecclesiastical officers, they are not Presbyterian, because no provision is made for them in our Constitution. The rule is universal, that in all positive grants of power no more can be claimed than is formally conveyed. A Constitution is a system of fundamental laws; whatever is not expressly stated or virtually implied is understood to be denied.

But we maintain further, that our Constitution contains acknowledgments of a power vested in our regular courts which is utterly inconsistent with the power vested by the Assembly in the Boards. We will take, for example, the Boards of Domestic and Foreign Missions. These institutions have the whole matter of preaching the Gospel to the destitute and ignorant at home and abroad entrusted to their charge. There are two great departments of the missionary work—spiritual and temporal; and the provisions for each of these are made in our Book. The power of ordaining the Evangelist belongs exclusively to Presbytery; so does the oversight of him and his charge if he should succeed in gathering a people to the Lord from among the outcasts of ignorance and sin. To the Presbytery, according to our Constitution, and to that alone, he is immediately responsible. To it he must give an account of his labours; from it he must seek counsel and direction; and in conformity with its requirements he is expected to walk. But, with the single exception of the power of ordaining and of instituting actual process for crime or heresy, the entire supervision of Missionaries and their work is committed to the Boards—in other words, the power and jurisdiction granted by the Constitution to the Presbyteries are vested by the Assembly in its own creatures. Look at the following grant of power to the Board of Foreign Missions in the 4th article of its

Constitution: "To the Executive Committee, etc., shall belong the duty of *appointing* all Missionaries and Agents ; of designating their fields of labour; to authorize all appropriations and expenditures of money; and to take the particular direction and management of the Foreign Missionary work subject to the revision and control of the Board of Directors." Here is unquestionably the power of judging of the qualifications of Ministers—their fitness for particular stations; and here is a right conveyed to control and manage and direct their labours. Turn now to the Constitution of the Church. In chapter x., section 8, of the Form of Government it is written: " The Presbytery has power to examine and license candidates for the holy ministry; to ordain, install, remove and judge Ministers." Here the same powers, in part, are evidently granted to two different bodies — in the one case, they are granted by the Constitution, in the other by the Assembly. The Assembly unquestionably had no right to take from the Presbytery its constitutional authority, and to vest it in any other organization. It has no right to set aside the Constitution for any purpose whatever. The absurdity and confusion of vesting the same powers in different bodies are not likely to be felt except in cases of collision. If the Board should determine to send out a man as an Evangelist whom the Presbytery pronounced to be utterly unfit for the work, the Board might do it, and leave the Presbytery to lament the existence of a worm slowly eating out the very vitals of Presbyterianism. And in the same way the power which is delegated to the Board of Education interferes with the exclusive right of Presbytery to receive candidates for the holy ministry, and to regulate their studies during the period of their trials. The Boards introduce a plan of action and a system of operations which our fathers never contemplated, since they have made the most abundant provisions for doing successfully, and by the regular process of our courts, everything connected with the real interests of the Church which these recent and anomalous institutions undertake to

accomplish. It is plain that under the present system so far is Presbytery from being the radical and leading court, which in all Presbyterian Churches according to Dr. Miller it is, the Boards themselves are all in all, and the poor Presbyteries are dwindled down into mere auxiliaries—into hewers of wood and drawers of water.

The other department of duty connected with the Missionary work respects the making of adequate provision for the temporal support of the Evangelists and their families. For this business it is supposed that the Presbyteries are wholly unqualified. It has been frequently admitted that, while everything connected with the spiritual aspects of Domestic and Foreign Missions falls appropriately within the province of the Presbytery, there is no adequate arrangement in our Book for conducting the pecuniary matters of the various stations with efficiency and success. This, we apprehend, is a great mistake. In the first place, the Constitution expressly provides that the judicatory sending out any Missionary must support him.¹ In the second place, the Book provides that our churches should be furnished with a class of officers for the express purpose of attending to the temporal matters of the Church; and these Deacons might be made the collecting agents of the Presbytery in every congregation, and through them the necessary funds could be easily obtained and without expense. For transmission to foreign parts, nothing more would be necessary than simply to employ either some extensive merchant in any of our large cities who for the usual percentage would attend to the whole matter, or a Committee of Deacons appointed by the Assembly for the purpose. So far, then, as the collection and disbursement of funds are concerned, our Constitution has made the most abundant provision.

We know of nothing that more strikingly illustrates the practical wisdom of the Divine provision of Deacons as collecting agents in each congregation than the fact that, after long and mature experience, the American Board has recom-

¹ Form of Government, chap. xviii.

mended the appointment of similar Agents in each congregation contributing to its funds as the most successful method of increasing its resources. Our Book, however, does not confine Deacons to particular congregations. There should be a competent number of them in each particular Church, but we insist upon it that Presbyteries, Synods and the General Assembly should also have the Deacons to attend to their pecuniary matters. Those ordained at Jerusalem were not confined to a specific congregation, but acted for the whole College of Apostles. By entrusting all pecuniary matters into the hands of men ordained under solemn sanctions for the purpose, our spiritual courts would soon cease to be what they are to an alarming extent at present—mere corporations for secular business. If all our Boards were converted into mere benches of Deacons, commissioned only to disburse funds under the direction of the spiritual courts, there would be no serious ground of objection to them ; but in their present form they are lords and masters of the whole Church. They are virtually the head of the Church: their will is law, their authority irresistible, and they combine what God has separated—the *purse* and the *keys*.

If the foregoing remarks are well founded, and the whole power which is now lodged in the Boards in reference to every department of their work, whether spiritual or temporal, belongs constitutionally to other bodies, the argument is unanswerable that these Boards are subversive of Presbyterianism. It is vain to urge that our fathers never contemplated the extended scale of benevolent operations which God in His Providence has enabled us to carry forward. They were men deeply imbued with the Spirit of all grace; they understood well, for they had faithfully studied, the appropriate functions of the Church; they had looked narrowly and closely into the nature, arrangement and powers of the system of ecclesiastical action which Christ and His Apostles had established; they felt it to be adequate to all the exigencies of any age or any part of the world, and in

the fear of God they endeavoured to construct all things according to the pattern shown to them in the Mount. We, however, in the fulness of our wisdom and the enlargement of our views, have constructed a different system; and the question is now forced upon all sound and conscientious Presbyterians, whether they will abide by their ancient, venerable and scriptural Standards, or swear allegiance to the new order of things which has imperceptibly grown up and silently stolen upon us.

Independently of the fact that the Boards are ecclesiastical courts, possessing, to a considerable extent, co-ordinate jurisdiction with the Presbyteries themselves, their unconstitutionality will farther appear from the tendency of their practical working to introduce a system of virtual Prelacy. The parity of the ministry is a fundamental principle among all Presbyterians. Whatever differences superior piety, learning and talents may make in the *man*, we allow no difference in the *office*. We tolerate no official authority in one Minister above another. Our system does not admit it. But the fact is unquestionable that the various officers of our Boards are invested with a control over their brethren, and a power in the Church, just as real and just as dangerous as the authority of a Prelate. They constitute a college of ecclesiastical functionaries who determine the character and shape the destinies of the Presbyterian Church in these United States of America. Ministers receive commissions from them, and upon them are dependent for their daily bread; and no slavery is more abject than that which grows out of a hopeless dependence upon others for the necessaries and comforts of life. This tie will bind to obedience much more firmly, in ordinary cases, than the ordination vow of the humble priest to reverence and obey his superior lord. We will dare adventure the assertion that there is not a Presbytery in the land which possesses so real a power, and which can exercise it so speedily and efficiently, as the Corresponding Secretaries and Executive "Committees of our different Boards. In 1837, we rebuked

the operations of the Home Missionary and American Education Societies, not only on account of their irresponsible character, but also on account of the enormous power which they were able to wield against us. And what less power do our own institutions possess ? Are they anything more than substitutes for the voluntary societies, possessing the same inherent elements of mischief and disorder if they should ever fall into the hands of bad men ?

The following remarks, in confirmation of our own views, we quote from a source entitled to much consideration :

“Our experience teaches us, as reason also shows, that the great effect of these Boards is to cast all power into a few central hands, and render them as independent as possible of the action of the Assembly. The notion of any *responsibility* in these Boards is a mere figment. Two or three persons control the proceedings of the Executive Committee; and then when the Board comes to review their doings, they have become the doings of the *Committee*, and have the weight of that whole body; and for this reason should be, as they argue—and generally are—confirmed by the Board; then the same doings are, for a like reason, approved in the Assembly; and the Church, having Committee, Board and Assembly to vouch, of course, approve; but remotely A and B, after all, did the thing, and there never was any just or real supervision of their action. These Boards with other nominal ecclesiastical operations are all so located and filled, that, in truth, the Presbyterian Church is managed, through these contrivances, by about two or three dozen persons, in all its great practical operations. Their efficient managers are as absolute a hierarchy as exists upon the face of the earth ; and if they are the best hierarchy of all—nay, even a Presbyterian hierarchy—still let its true nature be distinctly seen and known. There are, in effect, residing in Philadelphia, about one dozen persons, Ministers and laymen, who are the real Board of Missions, Board of Publication and Board of Education ; and who have the official power to be largely all the rest if they

please.” Well and forcibly does the writer add : “ Now, is there a man in the whole Church who would be content to admit such a result, if it were *nakedly* propounded ? Not one. But interpose a variety of contrivances called *Boards*, *Committees*, and what not, and then the whole Church very calmly submits to it; though really the result is nearly the same. Is there a man in the Church who believes that any four or five Ministers in Philadelphia are at all superior to four or five hundred of their brethren—much less, so much so as to justify such a result even if it were otherwise scriptural, constitutional, profitable, modest or presbyterial? Not one.” And, from the very nature of the case, this undue accumulation of power in a few hands must always be the practical result of this system. This single fact shows that it is rotten to the core and utterly alien from all our habits, feelings and associations as Presbyterians. The machinery which no human wisdom can put into operation without destroying the official equality of the ministry—which always and inevitably works a few men to the uppermost seats in the synagogue—may answer for Papists and Prelatists, but it is death to Presbyterianism. His holiness the Pope may in consistency with his ecclesiastical principles encourage the Propaganda as a prodigious engine for the accumulation of all power, but Presbyterians renounce their creed and deny their polity when they lend their sanction to any institutions even remotely modelled after such instruments of ecclesiastical despotism.

Under this general head of the anti-Presbyterian character of the Boards, we will suggest another consideration which has commended itself very forcibly to our minds. It appears to us that this whole system involves an abandonment of the great principle that it is the duty of the Church, as such, in her ecclesiastical capacity, to conduct every department of the work which the Saviour has committed to her. To this principle the Presbyterian Church is pledged ; for this principle she earnestly contended through years of darkness, anxiety and apprehension. In this contest we

participated heartily and warmly according to the measure of grace which was given us, and we can see no reason for abandoning it when victory is now within our reach. "We believe," said the Assembly of 1837, in her circular letter to all sister Churches, "that if there be any departments of Christian effort to which the Church of Christ is bound, *in her appropriate character*, to direct her attention and her unwearied labours, they are those which relate to the training of her sons for the holy ministry, and sending the Gospel to those who have it not, and planting churches in the dark and destitute portions of the earth." Here the obligation of the Church in her "*appropriate character*" is distinctly admitted, and given as one reason for rebuking the various voluntary associations which, without any warrant from God, had taken these matters into their own hands. The question now arises, whether what is done by Boards is really done by the *Church as such*, "*in her appropriate character*," or, as Dr. Miller expresses it, in her "ecclesiastical capacity"? Are the Boards, in other words, the Church? Have they been constituted its authorized Rulers by its glorious Head? Do they pretend to exercise dominion in the Lord's house by a Divine warrant? Are they Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods or Assemblies?—the only courts, according to our Constitution, in which we find the Church as a visible organization or "*in her appropriate character*" or "ecclesiastical capacity"? Unquestionably not. Then to act by or through them is not to act in our ecclesiastical capacity. It is to renounce the principle for which we have struggled for years just at the moment when complete and glorious victory is within our reach. The Boards are *Agents*, *confidential agents*, for the Church, but they are not the Church herself. They are no more the *Church* than the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was when the Assembly recommended it to general confidence, and employed it as the medium of its own Foreign Missionary transactions. The only difference in the two cases is the difference between consent and appointment. She consented

to delegate her duties in the one case to an existing institution, and in the other she creates and delegates by the same act. The one is made to her hands and she consents to the exercise of a certain trust by it; the other she makes herself: but the real and only important question is, not, Who made the institutions? but, *What* are they after they *are made*? And if they are not the Church in her appropriate character or ecclesiastical capacity, the plighted faith of the Assembly requires it to abandon them: that faith is pledged that the *Church* shall attend to these things and entrust it to no foreign hands. It is vain to reply that the transactions of our Boards are really the doings of the Church in her appropriate character, because in her ecclesiastical capacity and by her highest judicatory she actually created them, and they act only by the authority which they received from her; so that the power of the Boards is the power of the Church turned into a particular channel by her own act. This reasoning establishes nothing more than the confidential agency of the Boards, but does not identify them with our acknowledged ecclesiastical courts any more than a power of attorney identifies the agent with his principal. The Church puts the work out of her own hands under such circumstances that she can recall it at any moment, or superintend to a certain extent the operations of her Agents, but still it is these Agents who do it in her name, and *not she herself*; and her favourite principle is as completely abandoned as if she had left the whole matter in the hands of the voluntary societies. But we maintain still farther, that, if that sort of unity which an agency implies could establish the identity of the Boards with the Church in her appropriate character or ecclesiastical capacity, she has no right to entrust her own peculiar functions to any agent, no matter how closely connected with herself. The duties of the Church are duties which rest upon her by the authority of God. He has given her the organization which she possesses for the purpose of discharging these duties. She can, therefore, no more throw them off upon others, than a man

can delegate to his neighbour the care of his own family and abandon himself to idleness and ease. If our form of church-government is such as God prescribed, it is adequate for all emergencies; if our church-courts are based upon the platform of the Bible, God requires from *them* the discharge of their peculiar duties, and not from *another*. He appointed *them* for this very purpose, and gave them no authority to shift the responsibility, the heat and burden of the day, upon creatures of their own. If the Church can delegate one part of her work, she can delegate another. Presbyteries might form Boards to receive, license, ordain, install and remove Ministers, and it would be as much done by the Church in her ecclesiastical capacity as the work of Missions and Education as now conducted. We can see no conceivable difference in principle between the right to settle Evangelists in foreign lands or to prescribe their fields of labour and the right to settle Pastors at home; and if the one can be entrusted to the care of a Board, the other may be also. But if, as it will perhaps be universally conceded, a Presbytery cannot delegate the power of receiving calls to any other body, no more can it renounce the equally important functions growing out of its relations to the Evangelists connected with it. The general introduction of the principle of delegating the power of ecclesiastical courts to any other body whatever would produce nothing but confusion, misrule and mischief; and a principle which cannot be carried out in all its legitimate applications, without an entire subversion of all the distinctive features of our ecclesiastical polity, is evidently foreign to our institutions and wholly un-Presbyterian: and yet upon this principle is founded the strange delusion that what we are doing by our *Boards* we are doing as a *Church*, in our “*appropriate character*,” or in our “ecclesiastical capacity.”

We are aware that it may be said that this reasoning proves too much—that it takes away from any ecclesiastical body the power to appoint Committees for digesting business or executing a particular trust as well as the power to

organize Boards. But the two cases are widely different. A Committee, even when acting in the name of the body that appoints it, acts *by particular direction*; the body first determines what is to be done, and the Committee is nothing but the instrument of execution. The planning, devising and deciding upon the matter are not in its hands. It possesses no discretion; it is like the tool in the hands of the carpenter, or a pen in the hands of a scribe. Power is not so much delegated to it as wielded through it by its original possessor. But in the case of Boards, the power is given into their hands; they consult, deliberate and act according to their own wisdom; they possess as truly a real jurisdiction as the Presbyteries themselves; and all this they have received as a *trust*. Here, then, for the purposes specified in their Constitution, the power passes from the body appointing them to the bodies appointed. The Boards are not the instruments by which the *Assembly acts* according to its views of duty and necessity, but they stand in the place of the *Assembly*, and wield *its* powers in their given fields of operation. The difference, then, between Executive Committees and Boards is just the difference between an instrument and an agent—between acting in a particular way and having another to act for you. In the one case the Church does act and in the other she surrenders her power of action; and it is against this delegation of the authority which she derived from her Head for specific purposes we feel ourselves bound most solemnly to protest, as fraught with nothing but mischief and disorder. We insist upon it, that the Church has no right to retire from the work of the Lord, and, folding her arms in dignity and ease, commission others to do for her what Christ commanded her to do for Him. Her instructions are not to see that the work is done, but to do it herself; and she is faithless to her Lord, to her high and solemn obligations and to a dying world, if she does not gird up her loins and buckle on her harness and give herself to active service in the field of the Lord of lords.

II. The argument from the Scriptures against the system of Boards is, of course, a very short one to all those who sincerely receive and adopt our Standards. If our model of church-government is according to the pattern revealed in the Mount, whatever is subversive of its fundamental principles must necessarily be unscriptural and destitute of all Divine authority. The great object of a visible church-organization or definite system of church-government is to put the Church in a situation, and provide her with all the necessary furniture of officers and means, for building up the kingdom of God and extending its conquests throughout the world. When our adorable Redeemer ascended up on high “ He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” As under the Old Dispensation nothing connected with the worship or discipline of the Church of God was left to the wisdom or discretion of man, but everything was accurately prescribed by the authority of God, so, under the New, no voice is to be heard in the household of faith but the voice of the Son of God. The power of the Church is purely ministerial and declarative. She is only to hold forth the doctrine, enforce the laws, and execute the government which Christ has given her. She is to add nothing of her own to, and to subtract nothing from, what her Lord has established. Discretionary power she does not possess.

Christianity in its living principles and its outward forms is purely a matter of Divine revelation. The great error of the Church in all ages, the fruitful source of her apostasy and crime, has been a presumptuous reliance upon her own understanding. Her own inventions have seduced her from her loyalty to God, and filled her sanctuary with idols and the hearts of her children with vain imaginations. The Bible cuts at the very root of this evil by affording us a perfect and infallible rule of faith and practice. The absolute perfection of the Scriptures as a directory to man

was a cardinal principle of the Reformation, and whatever could not be traced to them either directly or by necessary inference was denounced as a human invention—as mere will-worship, which God abhors so deeply that an inspired Apostle has connected it with idolatry or the worshipping of angels.

Now the total silence of the Word of God in regard to such contrivances as Boards seals their condemnation. Nay, they are virtually prohibited by those plain directions of the Scriptures in regard to church-government which lead directly to a different system. But, however this may be, it certainly rests on those who maintain and uphold them to produce the warrant by which they have been formed. No system of measures so important in its results, so solemn in its bearings upon the kingdom of Christ, should be adopted by any denomination of Christians without the clear and unambiguous sanction of Him who alone is King upon the holy hill of Zion. To our minds it is clear that our Saviour constituted His Church with a special reference to Missionary operations, and we shall be slow to believe that the most successful method of conducting them was never discovered until eighteen centuries after His ascension.

The only plausible pretext by which a scriptural sanction can be pleaded for such institutions proceeds upon the supposition of a defect in the Constitution of the Church. It takes for granted that our regular ecclesiastical courts are inadequate for the work, and then, upon the general principle that where duties are clearly imposed the necessary means of compliance are implied, the Church bases the right of resorting to such inventions as shall enable her to obey the commandments of God. But before this reasoning can be allowed, the inadequacy of our ecclesiastical Constitution should be fully established; and then, instead of patching up its defects, our proper course would be to abolish our whole system, and to seek for one which would be adapted to our duties and responsibilities. The argument

would prove, not, that the Church possesses a purely legislative power, but, that in the first instance she had exercised her declarative power very badly, and had set forth a Constitution in the name of the Lord, which, in its fundamental defects, carried along with it a shocking impeachment of His wisdom. In other words, if Presbyterianism is a total failure, our proper plan is not to bolster a rotten system, but to re-examine the Word of God, correct our mistake, and adopt that plan, whatever it was, which in the hands of the Apostles was eminently successful.

There is another line of argument by which the unscriptural character of these Boards can be fully made out. The foundation on which the Church rests her authority for engaging in the work of Missions is the Saviour's command to preach the *Gospel* to every creature. It is obvious that whatever system of arrangements for accomplishing this purpose may be adopted, it should give the fullest security that the contributions of the Church go to support *nothing but the Gospel*. The people should know the character and sentiments of the Missionaries sustained by their liberality. Otherwise they are not complying with the Saviour's command. But what security do the Boards give ? None but the endorsement of the Presbytery or Presbyteries that ordained the Evangelists. The Assembly has virtually declared this to be no security by requiring every Presbytery to examine Ministers from any other Presbytery coming within its bounds. We do not allow men to preach at home without a better security than we require from them, by the present system, when we send them abroad. We, therefore, leave our churches in fearful uncertainty as to what they are actually sending to heathen lands in the name of the Gospel.

It would be well for the Church if all her benevolent arrangements were as happily framed for the preservation of truth as they are for the raising and disbursing of money. To maintain, defend and propagate the *truth* is unquestionably her great business. Money is valuable only so far as

it can be rendered subservient to this high purpose; it should never be made the *end* of any system of ecclesiastical action. Nothing but a criminal indifference to the purity of the Gospel could ever have reconciled the Church to a plan of operations in which there was not afforded the strongest evidence which the nature of the case would admit, that the “ Word of the truth of the Gospel,” and that only, was encouraged at home and spread abroad into foreign lands. Those who contribute to our Boards do not know and cannot know whether they are sustaining Arminians, Semi-Pelagians or Presbyterians. They do not know, in other words, whether they are building up or pulling down the kingdom of the Redeemer—whether they are obeying a Divine command, or whether they are not. It is idle to say that we must have confidence in all our Presbyteries: the experience of the past teaches us too plainly that we should have no confidence in the flesh, and that Presbyteries are sometimes as mischievous as any other bodies. This difficulty would be obviated by carrying out the provisions of our Book. The Presbytery that sends a man *would know him*; the churches within its bounds would know him, and consequently would know what they are supporting. If the Presbytery that sends him should be unable to support him, it can call upon a neighbouring Presbytery, to which it is perfectly well known, for assistance ; and that Presbytery would have full security from its position for the soundness of the man whom it is called on to assist. Such is the spirit of the provisions in the eighteenth chapter of our Form of Government. The funds thus raised could either be transmitted by mercantile agents of the Presbytery, or by a central Committee of the Assembly, consisting of business men charged only with *executive duties*, and not entrusted with discretionary power.

III. We pass now, in the last place, to consider those motives of expediency and necessity by which Boards and permanent Agencies have been commended by their friends, and even by the highest court of the Church itself. And

at the very outset of our remarks upon this head, we would utterly protest against the principle that expediency is any measure of duty or obligation in the Church of God. We acknowledge no law but the Divine will, and we acknowledge no successful method of ascertaining the will of God but His own written revelation, which we believe to be perfect and adapted as well as designed to furnish the man of God thoroughly for *every* good work. We can cordially adopt the language of the immortal Calvin when speaking of the Divine Word, for it is the language of truth and soberness: "*Ab eo si deflectimus, ut nuper dixi, quamlibet strenua enitamur celeritate, quia tamen extra viam cursus erit, nunquam ad metam pertingere continget. Sic enim cogitandum est: fulgorem Divini vultus, quern et Apostolus inaccessum vocat, esse nobis instar inexplicabilis labyrinthi nisi Verbi linea in ipsum dirigamur: ut satius sit in hac via claudicare, quam extra eam celerrime currere.*"¹ The position that expediency is an adequate guide in any department of religious duty proceeds upon a principle having a much closer affinity to the atheistic philosophy of Epicurus, especially as developed in modern times, than to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Word of God uniformly represents man as blind and ignorant, incapable of seeing afar off, perverted in his judgment, warped in his understanding, seared in his conscience and misguided in his affections ; and therefore requiring a heavenly teacher and a heavenly guide at every step of his progress. He has no light in himself in reference to Divine things. He is a child, a fool to be taught and led. Utterly unqualified by the narrowness of his faculties to foresee the future, he cannot tell even what is good for himself all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow, and much less can he determine upon a large scale what is expedient for the Church of God. Surrounded by his natural darkness, he has a light, most graciously bestowed, which penetrates its gloom—even the sure Word of prophecy—and to this he is

¹ Inst. I., vi., 3.

required to give heed. No more uncertain and fluctuating guide can be followed than calculations of expediency depending upon contingencies which no man can foresee, distorted by the conflicting interests of society, and shaped by the visionary impulses of imagination or the selfish purposes of pride and ambition. If the test of expediency can be introduced in one case, it may in another; and it would be impossible to set limits to the confusion and disorder growing out of the manifold inventions in which it would be found most fearfully prolific. To remove a single chink from the obstructions which bank up a mighty body of waters is to prepare the way for the desolations of a flood. The only safe principle is the noble principle of Chillingworth—the Bible, the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants. When this great sun arises, all meaner lights retire as the stars disappear before the dawning day. If, then,

“Boards are unscriptural, Christians cannot entertain the question whether they are expedient or not; their doom is sealed. And here we might safely rest the matter. But as in some minds there is a mystic spell by which they are strangely tied to these inventions of the flesh, as Solomon himself was marvellously led away by the splendid idolatry of the groves, we shall endeavour to show, that even in the estimate of a carnal policy the ordinary pleas of expediency or necessity by which they are recommended are utterly worthless.

1. And, first, they are wholly unnecessary. All that they do is to diminish the sense of responsibility in the real agents by interposing a medium between them and the body to which they must account. The Executive Committees, in point of fact, do the business of the Boards ; and it would certainly be wiser to connect them immediately with the Assembly, than to construct a circuitous route by which their transactions shall come to its knowledge.

Boards occupy the same position to our Church which voluntary societies occupy in relation to the Christian community in general. But the same necessity which led to the

formation of the latter does not exist to justify the continuance of the former. When the spirit of active benevolence and enlarged operation began to be aroused about the close of the last century, those who felt most warmly interested organized themselves into societies for the purpose of enlisting a more powerful and extended co-operation in their schemes of philanthropy and piety. Each member of these societies became a centre of influence in his own community—the warm and zealous advocate of its claims, through whose diligence and industry the slumbering energies of the Church were waked up, and the means acquired of successful and animating action. But it is very certain that the Boards are wholly unnecessary for this purpose among Presbyterians. If our churches are asleep, there is a shorter, simpler, safer method of breaking up their slumbers. Let the provisions of our Constitution be carried out in their true spirit, and we need no other centre of influence, no other advocate of philanthropy and duty in any community, than the faithful Pastors in our numerous and growing congregations.

Upon any view of the subject which we have been able to take, the Boards strike us as a mere encumbrance. If the present central plan of operations must be continued, abolish the larger body and make the smaller directly responsible to the Assembly. The larger body, the Board, is only in the way, a sort of shelter to the smaller—the Executive Committee—a wall between it and the General Assembly. As to any counsel and advice which the Boards might give, we presume that the wisdom of the Assembly is abundantly adequate to prescribe any directions to its Standing Committees which they might require or be disposed to ask.

2. The plea, that these institutions concentrate the energies and resources of the Church, that they diffuse information in regard to the necessities of a dying world and the efforts of the Church to relieve them, is to our minds exceedingly futile. If by the *energies* of the Church is meant its money, we think that this is very far from being a rec-

ommendation; but if its prayers and graces and zeal are intended, we cannot conceive how they are concentrated. We cannot understand how God's people are made to take a livelier interest in His work when carried on by foreign hands, than when conducted by institutions of His own appointment. The convenience of foreign transmissions is the only plausible pretext, and surely the Boards, as such, afford no sort of assistance in this matter. The diffusion of information through the whole Church would be as certain and as expeditious through the one channel as the other.

It has been said, and gravely said, that without some central organization our Evangelists, not knowing the efforts of the Church, might many of them be found together in the same field. In the first place, such ignorance would disgrace an educated gentleman, much more a Minister of the Gospel; and, in the second place, it assumes that these Missionaries seek their fields of labour without consulting the special guidance of the Holy Ghost. It is His province to allot men to their different stations as well as to crown their efforts with the desired success; and if at His call a thousand Evangelists should be found upon the same heathen shore, it would only be a token for good.

Our own impression is, that, on the score of diffusing religious intelligence among all classes of our church-members, a special organization is not so efficient as the regular action of our church-courts promises to be. If these benevolent operations were treated by the Presbyteries as a part of their ordinary ecclesiastical business, if the communications of their Ministers from abroad were read and discussed as the documents sent from the churches at home usually are, and the necessities of a dying world which they disclose made the subjects of special consideration and earnest prayer,—the effect upon the Church at large would be incalculably greater than under the existing arrangement in which these things pass in the solemn conclave of a chosen few, and are known no farther than the circulation of a meagre, monthly periodical can make them known.

3. But the great plea which is urged for these institutions is, that without them, in the present state of Christian feeling, nothing would be done: no one would put the shoulder to the wheel. If we understand the force of this plea, it recommends the Boards and a system of permanent Agencies as an excellent substitute for vital godliness in the churches. Surely, if our Ministers and congregations were what they should be, something would be done. They would count it all joy to engage in the work of the Lord according to His own appointment. If the spirit of love and zeal does not exist among us, it is vain to offer unto the Lord any other oblation. He will not accept a substitute for the heart. He will pour contempt upon our most splendid enterprises, and blast with the breath of His mouth our most imposing organizations. The Church, the whole Church—all the living members of the Redeemer's mystical body—must be awake and active in his service, each in his own particular province; and if our congregations are now asleep, our first step should be to peal the trumpet in their ears, to break their carnal slumbers, and to tell them, in the name of God, that the Master has need of them. Let us take and propose no substitutes for vital piety and active godliness. Substitutes will only increase and perpetuate the evil. But let us lay the axe at the root of the evil—begin reformation at the right point, and God will smile upon us and bless us. Let the provisions of our system be carried out and sustained in their true spirit by every Session, every Presbytery, every Synod, and the General Assembly; let a healthful circulation be diffused through all the veins of the Presbyterian body; let the spirit of primitive Christianity pervade and animate the whole mass; then will the righteousness of Zion go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth; then she will lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes and enlarge the borders of her tent; then she will feel herself fully equipped by her great Commander for all the battles of her glorious warfare, and in the joy and

strength of her revival it will be matter of astonishment and shame that she ever went down into Egypt for help, or called in the carnal principles of the world to fit her for her contests with the powers of darkness.

In conclusion, all that we ask is Presbyterianism, simple, pure, unadulterated Presbyterianism—the regular, uniform, healthful action of our noble system. We oppose no good work, but we cannot go out against the foe unless the Lord go with us, and we can have no reason to expect His assistance when we have trampled His institutions in the dust. When the law goes forth, it must go forth from Zion; and because we have told her towers, and marked her bulwarks, and considered her palaces, and have been fully assured that she is the city of the Lord of hosts, the city of our God,—we are resolved neither to rest nor to hold our peace till out of Zion shall go forth the law and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.