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REPORT

On Fellowship with Slavery, *and the Churches*

[Republished from the Minutes of the Evangelical Consociation, Rhode Island.]

BARRINGTON, June 14, 1853.

Rev. S. Wolcott, by permission of Committee on Overtures, submitted the following Resolution on the subject of Slavery.

Resolved, That this Consociation with a view to bear its solemn and emphatic testimony against the system of American Slavery, will refrain from appointing a delegate to any Ecclesiastical Body which tolerates slaveholding among its ministers or churches.

The resolution was referred to a Committee for report at our next annual meeting in Providence.

PROVIDENCE, June 14, 1854.

This Consociation is not invested with ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and the resolution involves no ecclesiastical discipline; it is not an excommunication, nor an excommunicating measure. It relates to the formal interchange of Christian courtesies, and prescribes our own course—defining a principle which this body will henceforth respect, in sending its Christian greetings to other ecclesiastical bodies. We think the principle a sound one, and hold that its practical recognition is demanded by the cause of humanity and of Christian charity.

Our Consociation, though catholic in feeling, has never entered into a general correspondence with other Christian denominations, and does not appear, at the outset, to have contemplated any foreign correspondence. It was organized in 1808, held its meetings semi-annually, and for thirteen years sent no delegation abroad. In 1821, it appointed delegates to the General Associations of Connecticut and Massachusetts, and in 1825, to that of New Hampshire. In 1831, twenty-three years after its formation, it proposed and obtained a similar correspondence with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church; its delegate being received by that body, on the recommendation of a committee, "after making careful inquiry of the delegate concerning the faith, order and present state of the churches forming the body which he represents." After the division of the Presbyterian Church, delegates were sent to the two General Assemblies; and as new Congregational Associations were formed in other States, they have been added to our original list. This is the extent to which we have gone in this direction; with the Reformed Dutch, and other denominations, with whom we symbolize in doctrine, and towards whom we sustain cordial and fraternal relations, no formal intercourse has been proposed; our correspondence has never been ecumenical.

The great object of the Consociation is a domestic one; it is "the promotion of the general interests of the churches" connected with it, in this Commonwealth; and its value and usefulness depend chiefly on its stated members, the pastors and delegates of these churches. With the prosecution of this leading object, it is pleasant to be able to combine an interchange of Christian courtesies with other religious bodies, and thus incidentally secure benefits which are not slight, if they can be had without an improper sacrifice. How far, then, is it desirable that we should attempt this reciprocation of Christian confidence; and what are the principles which should guide us, in its exercise?

It manifestly cannot be extended to all who call themselves Christians; the most corrupt community, perhaps, in our land, claim the appellation of "Saints." We cannot be released from the obligation of forming a judgment of our own, respecting the Christian standing of those, who may ask a recognition as members of the household of faith. This may be an easy decision for us, or it may be perplexing and trying; but the responsibility of it can in no case be evaded. In the discharge of this delicate duty, we are equally to avoid a spirit of pharisaism on the one hand, and a laxness of principle on the other. Nothing can be more unlovely and unavailing than a self-righteous censoriousness; neither can anything be more foolish and fatal than a timid compromise with evil. With true liberality of feeling, we are to combine a fearless devotion to principle. Wherever this may require us to draw the line of separation, we must take a final stand, and refuse any further fellowship—confronting the unwarranted imputation of narrowness and intolerance, with the calm consciousness of a consistent adherence to our convictions of truth and duty.

Slavery in the U.S. - Colver and Andrews, 1853



In deciding on a basis of *Christian correspondence and spiritual fellowship*, it is not our province to read the hearts of men, nor can we rest on a professed religious experience, without a reference both to *doctrinal belief* and to *practical morality*; neither of these points can be safely disregarded. In a relation not of covenant, but of correspondence, we cannot, of course, enter into personal examinations; it is sufficient, if the general sentiments and practices of the corresponding bodies are known to be in harmony with our own. While we lay no claim to infallibility, and are bound to judge charitably, and treat with uniform courtesy and kindness, those whose speculative sentiments may differ from our own, we cannot recognize as fellow-Christians, those who reject what is to us an essential tenet of the Christian faith, and adopt what we regard as fundamental error. This decision, as is well known, has separated us from those with whom we still share many sacred memories and hopes, whom in the private walks of life we highly respect, and with whom we cheerfully co-operate in many public enterprises. On other subjects we may agree; but as soon as we touch vital issues, "the inner life" and the doctrines interwoven with it, we become painfully conscious of a duality of sentiment and feeling, and are constrained to withdraw. We even decline the proffered hand of fellowship, not with anger or scorn, but in sadness—persuaded that we thus bear our faithful testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, and are not chargeable with exclusiveness or bigotry. That must be a strange religious fraternity, which recognizes no doctrinal basis, in form or fact, and freely allows the pretensions of every claimant.

That flagrant immoralities are as liable as pernicious errors, to creep into the Christian fold, is the clear record of history. It was a vicious practice in the Church, which first roused the great Reformer to his struggle with the papacy; and some of the grossest forms of wickedness are still sheltered in the bosom of professedly Christian churches. Many of our American churches are included in this condemnation. They are implicated in the heavy guilt of oppression; they bear the burden of an awful responsibility, for the perpetuation of that system of slavery, repugnant to every sentiment of natural and revealed religion, which degrades man to a brute and a chattel, and makes merchandise of the image of God. There are ministers of the gospel and church-members connected with ecclesiastical bodies, with which we are in correspondence, who by the aid of unrighteous and inhuman laws, can use the labor of their fellow-beings without wages; can arbitrarily and permanently separate husbands and wives, parents and children, sisters and brothers; can debar immortal beings, in a Christian land, from access to the word of life, (from which they pretend to derive their warrant for such heathenism;) can sell their fellow-Christians at auction for their own pecuniary benefit, without any forfeiture of their regular standing as church-members and ministers of the gospel. There are scores and hundreds of churches in our land, in which not one of these practices is treated as a disciplinable offense. The Synod of Kentucky, in 1831, candidly confessed and deplored this outrage. They say:

"There is not a village or road that does not behold the sad procession of manacled outcasts, whose chains and mournful countenances tell that they are exiled by force from all that their hearts hold dear. Our Church, years ago, raised its voice of solemn warning against this flagrant violation of every principle of mercy, justice, and humanity. Yet we blush to announce to you, that this warning has been often disregarded, even by those who hold to our communion. Cases have occurred in our own denomination, where professors of the religion of mercy have torn the mother from the children, and sent her into a merciless and remorseless exile. Yet acts of discipline have rarely followed such conduct."

During the twenty years since the date of the above, it is not known to the public, that in all the Southern Synods there has been *one* act of discipline for such offenses as these, which, it is notorious, are still practised throughout their bounds. Churches which harbor such members, bear the guilt of slavery, with its countless and nameless crimes and woes; the ecclesiastical bodies which enroll them as members, endorse the iniquity; and those which invite and welcome them as corresponding members, connive at it also. If this be not so, we confess ourselves wanting in moral discernment.

We are convinced that the Church is the present stronghold of slavery in this Republic, and that if professing Christians, in the spirit of their Master, had borne their consistent testimony against it, it would long since have ceased to vex our politics. In this view we are confirmed by the history of emancipation; it was through the action of the Church, that the evil was expelled from our own borders. One of the churches belonging to our body, is said to have been the first in this country, (the Friends, perhaps, excepted,) to lay the ban of excommunication on slaveholding. This Commonwealth participated largely in the iniquitous gains of slavery; Bristol and Newport, especially, were deeply involved in the slave-trade, and wealth and social influence were arrayed in its support. But a moral influence, stronger than all, was brought to bear against it, for the Congregational Church in the latter town fortunately possessed, in its pastor, a man not more eminent as a learned divine, than as a practical reformer—Dr. SAMUEL HOPKINS, whose grave is still with us, and honored as the sepulchre of a prophet. No minis-

ter of the gospel in the Southern States occupies at this day a position, requiring more of the martyr-spirit for a faithful exhibition, from the pulpit, of the guilt of American slavery, than was demanded in Newport, in the year 1770. But the pastor was equal to the crisis, and we quote with pleasure the words of his biographer, (Prof. Park.)

"He believed that if he lifted his voice in behalf of the bondmen, he should advance the interests of his race and the honor of his Maker. He offered himself as a sacrifice; he did it deliberately, solemnly. Anticipating the indignation of his people, and the anger of the community, he preached a sermon against the kidnapping, and purchasing, and retaining of slaves. A New England poet, (Whittier) has said, 'It may well be doubted whether, on that Sabbath day, the angels of God, in their wide survey of his universe, looked upon a nobler spectacle than that of the minister of Newport, rising up before his slaveholding congregation, and demanding, in the name of the Highest, the deliverance of the captive and the opening of prison doors to them that were bound.'"—*Works* 1: 157.

We accord with the last writer, in the belief that the just fame of Hopkins, as theologian, cannot be higher, than as "a friend of the oppressed, and the fearless rebuker of popular sin." His persevering labors in the cause were crowned, at length, with complete success; and under date of March 5, 1784, seventy years ago, the following resolution, in his own handwriting, appears on the records of the church, marking the brightest page in its history.

"Voted, That the slave-trade and the slavery of the Africans, as it has taken place among us, is a gross violation of the righteousness and benevolence which are so much inculcated in the gospel; and therefore we will not tolerate it in this church."

This vote was the death-warrant of slavery in Rhode Island. The next year, 1785, we read that "a number of churches in New England have purged themselves of this iniquity, and determined not to tolerate the holding of Africans in slavery."

We are here furnished, in the proceedings both of the Pastor and the Church, with a happy illustration of the manner in which the present slave States are to be freed from the curse, if it is to be extinguished by Christian and peaceable means. Individual churches and ecclesiastical organizations must begin the work of self-purification, and proceed with it until the whole Christian body is clear of the evil; and its existence in the Republic will then be short-lived. We are happy to corroborate this position, with the following weighty sentences from the pen of the Rev. ALBERT BARNES.—(*Spiritual Views of Slavery*, p. 183.)

"Let the time come, when, in all the mighty denominations of Christians it can be announced that the evil is ceased with them forever; and let the voice of each denomination be, lifted up in kind, but firm and solemn testimony against the system; with no mealy words with no attempt at apology, with no wish to blink it, with no effort to throw the sacred shield of religion over so great an evil—and the work is done. There is no public sentiment in this land—there could be none created—that would resist the power of such testimony. There is no power out of the church that could sustain slavery an hour, if it were not sustained in it."

The work which the churches in the present free States have to perform, is to diffuse a correct moral sentiment, and sustain by their moral sympathy, and if necessary, by their pecuniary contributions, the churches at the South, in taking the ground of slavery-exclusion. The church in Newport exacted of one of its deacons a pledge of manumission to his slave; and we are to encourage those churches in the slave states, (and about a dozen of this class are already known to us,) that are ready to enforce the same duty on slaveholding elders and members, and refuse the ministrations of slaveholding preachers. But we are now doing the very opposite of this; we are weakening our brethren at the South who have taken this position, and disheartening those who are disposed to take it, by extending the hand of Christian recognition and fellowship to the holders of slaves, and the abettors of the system. Ecclesiastical bodies, composed in part of slaveholders, may and do appoint members of this class, to bear their fraternal salutations to the religious bodies with which they are in correspondence. We are consequently liable, any year, as members of this Consoeciation, to be called to welcome to our deliberations and our sacred ordinances, and to treat with special courtesy as honored representatives of sister churches, and virtually invited guests, individuals whom, if they were members of our own churches, we should deem fit subjects of church-discipline, and should proceed against accordingly. Such inconsistency cannot be defended; and it is the object of the resolution before us, to do away with it. Not one of the pastors in this body, probably, would invite a slaveholder into his own pulpit; not one of these churches, certainly, would have slaveholders invited to their communion-table, and some of them have recorded their votes to that effect. What we would scruple to do, individually, we are to refrain from doing, collectively.—What would be wrong in the one relation, cannot be right and proper in the other.

We will now endeavor to consider fairly such objections to the proposed measure, as have come to our knowledge.

It is said that we may inquire into the antecedents of a delegate, and decline receiving him, if he is a slaveholder. We think, on the other hand, that comity forbids us to go behind the credentials of a delegate. It would be an affront to any ecclesiastical body, corresponding with us, on terms of reciprocity, to require their chosen representative to purge himself on any question. It is no incivility to dis-

continue the mutual correspondence which we invited; but while we continue it, it would be a manifest breach of courtesy, to alter its original basis, and make it inquisitorial. We know how the bodies, to which the resolution refers, are constituted—that slave-holding ministers and elders are members in good standing. If we choose to send delegates to such bodies, and they send us slave-holders in return, we are under obligations not only to receive them, but also to extend to them the usual courtesies, and assign them a prominent part in the religious services of the meeting. To continue the relation on any other footing, would be incompatible with good faith and good fellowship. As we cannot do this with a clear conscience, we can quietly drop the correspondence, and thus escape the dilemma—neither treating our corresponding members with neglect, nor giving our countenance to injustice and oppression.

It is said that a large proportion of the members of these bodies are free from the guilt of slaveholding, which they detest as much as we do, and that by this proceeding we sever ourselves from them. Our personal intercourse with non-slaveholding pastors and their churches, will not be affected unfavorably by this act, which touches only their ecclesiastical relation to slavery. There are brethren in both divisions of the Presbyterian Church, whom we highly love and honor; and our pleasant Christian intercommunion is not dependent on our sending a Delegate to their Annual Assemblies. That formality may cease to-day, and our free fraternal correspondence with them, individually, will be undisturbed. The members, who sympathize with us on the subject of slavery, will not complain of our act, but rejoice in it. Those who at the recent meeting of the General Assembly in Philadelphia, entered their protest against the ominous silence of that body at this crisis, and the virtual annulment of their last year's testimony, will feel confirmed and supported by our decision.* And it is to be borne in mind, that the relation against which we protest, is one which these bodies cannot justifiably continue, and some of their Presbyteries have taken the same view of it.† This is their responsibility; and should they see fit to remove this obstacle, the formal correspondence could be easily renewed, if it were mutually desired. Were they now taking any steps towards its removal, it might reconcile us to the patient continuance of the correspondence; it would give us much pleasure to cheer them on. But to any one who has watched the proceedings of the two Assemblies, it must be obvious that the opposite is true of both of them. Instead of making any progress in the right direction, their steps are either stationary or retrograde. There is left but one course by which we can separate ourselves from what is evil in the relation; and this necessary act will detach us from little that is truly valuable in it.

It is said that there is nothing new in the connection of these bodies with this evil, and why should we discontinue a correspondence which we proposed? Because new light has been thrown upon the whole subject; and both their obligations and ours, if not greater than before, are better understood. It is hardly more than a quarter of a century, since excellent religious men were engaged in the manufacture and sale of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, without any forfeiture of their Christian standing. The evils of intemperance were not less than they now are; but light has been shed on the morality of that traffic, and it is now banished from the Church. The evils of slavery are not greater than they formerly were; but the guilt of slaveholding is greater, in view of the light which the present century has accumulated on this question. And this more than justifies us, in taking higher ground than our predecessors took, a quarter of a century ago.

It is said that we have sins of our own, which it behooves us to put away, before withdrawing our fellowship from slaveholders. We do not claim to be free from sin,

*The following is the protest referred to, signed by twenty-eight members:

“*Protest on the Subject of Slavery.*—The undersigned respectfully protest against the action of the General Assembly upon the report of the Committee on Bills and Overtures of several Presbyteries relative to the subject of slavery; because that action, under the circumstances, is virtually saying to the Presbyteries in the slaveholding States, that the action of the last preceding General Assembly, in requesting “distinct and full statements” touching the three points there specified, is not approved by this General Assembly, and that the present Assembly is satisfied with the neglect and refusal to answer those inquiries, and does not deem them even of sufficient importance to the peace or purity of the Church to repeat the request for an answer at the next General Assembly; also, because it will and must be construed into a willingness to cease all direct effort to disconnect itself from the sin of slavery, and in this particular is a receding from the high and laudable position heretofore assumed; and for the further reason that it places this branch of the Christian Church in the apparent position of diminishing its efforts to eradicate a great and growing evil, at every period when the efforts for its extension and perpetuity are strongest and most reprehensible, as well as unscrupulous, and when there is, also, the best prospect for the labors of the Church to be successful; and has the appearance of being willing to abandon the field, rather than stem the flood of iniquity rolling in upon the Church and the country.”

† The Oswego (N. Y.) Presbytery, in 1853, passed a resolution, “declining to send Commissioners to the General Assembly, until it be disconnected from Slavery;” and to this purpose they have adhered, and were not represented in 1854—furnishing an exact precedent for the measure proposed to this body.

nor that we have not abundant reason for personal humiliation and penitence. But we are not cognizant of any sin which is *tolerated* among us; and if we are incurring any reproach, we should like to have it specified. We know of no system of iniquity, like slavery, which has entrenched itself in our churches; if any such has been discovered by others, let them have the kindness to name it, and we engage either to repudiate and expel it, or to justify all good men in withdrawing from us their confidence.

It is said that the continuance of the correspondence is desirable, that we may the more effectually testify against this very sin. Such, it seems, is the view of our brethren in Massachusetts and New York—their General Associations, at their last meetings, having each adopted the following resolution:

“Resolved, That, in continuing our correspondence with ecclesiastical bodies, having churches in slaveholding States, this Association, so far from expressing any satisfaction with the practice of slave-holding, desire it to be understood, that in connection with other objects, it is for the purpose of bearing their continued and earnest testimony against the sin of slave-holding, and exerting their appropriate influence in favor of its speedy removal.”

We highly appreciate the sentiment which prompted this resolution; although we might question the strict propriety or courtesy of putting on record, that a correspondence, which was supposed to be perfectly equal and reciprocal, is continued by the one party, not with a view to mutual reproof and edification, but as a convenient channel for reaching and rebuking the sin of the other party. The records of our Massachusetts brethren, especially, show that they have for years borne their faithful “testimony” on this subject; of which an instance or two may be adduced here. In 1845, the following vote was unanimously passed:

“The General Association of Massachusetts, having often and earnestly expressed their abhorrence of slavery, grieving that the system yet exists and is sustained by some Christians and Ecclesiastical Bodies, as authorized by the word of God, do solemnly re-affirm, their faith—that the word of God is utterly opposed to slavery as it exists in these United States, and that as far as the Bible obtains the ascendancy in the conscience and heart of Christians, and of the Church, such Christians must and will separate themselves from all responsible connection with the system; and in the spirit of fraternal fidelity, we would earnestly beseech all Christians and Ecclesiastical Bodies connected with that system, to be living examples of the Gospel, and in the light of God’s truth carefully to review their opinions and practice, and to do their utmost to free the church of Christ from the pollution of this guilt.”

In 1849, they were even more explicit and definite.

“Resolved, That in maintaining correspondence and connection with the two General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church, we took with deep and fraternal solicitude upon the position of those Bodies with respect to the sin of slavery; that our strong sympathies are with such brethren in those Assemblies, as are laboring, in an earnest and Christian spirit, to put an end to this evil; and that we desire our Delegates to those Assemblies, in a decided but courteous manner, to express our deep conviction, that the rights of the enslaved, the cause of true religion, and the honor of the great Head of the church, require those ecclesiastical bodies to use all their legitimate power and influence, for the speedy removal of slavery from the churches under their supervision.”

The encouragement which our Associations have, to continue this kind of “testimony,” may be gathered, in part, from the response to the above courteous resolution, which was sent by the Old School General Assembly in 1850, and which defines the present position of that Body:

“Resolved, That our Delegate to the next General Association of Massachusetts, be directed to inform that venerable Body, that this General Assembly must consider itself the best judge of the action which it is necessary for it to take, as to all subjects within its jurisdiction; and that any interference on the part of that General Association with its action on any subject upon which this General Assembly has taken action, is offensive, and must lead to an interruption of the correspondence which subsists between that Association and the General Assembly.”

The meaning of this is very plain; the continuance of the correspondence is desired by them on no other condition than that of silence on the subject of slavery.—The General Association, however, unwilling to “put an extreme construction on the action of the General Assembly,” a construction “which must reduce all correspondence to an unmeaning and worthless formality,” expressed their readiness, “in the exercise of that charity which hopeth all things,” to continue the correspondence with that body, and in the mean time “wait to be informed of their meaning.” Thereupon, the General Assembly, in 1851, passed the following vote.

“That, as to the communication from the General Association of Massachusetts, this Assembly, before receiving it, had appointed a Delegate to that body, for the present year; but can by no means recede from the resolution adopted last year.”

The charm of a mutual correspondence is gone, after one party has deemed it necessary to remind the other, that they are overstepping the limits of propriety; and rather than do this a good deal of chagrin will usually be devoured in silence. The Old School Assembly must have felt reluctant to embarrass the correspondence by this expression; but although the original resolution had equal reference to the two Assemblies, and the New School Assembly have never taken the slightest exception to it, the other Assembly have an undoubted right to prescribe the terms, of which a continued correspondence will be acceptable to them. And after a dignified body have

twice declared, in plain but courteous language, that a correspondence which embodies an anti-slavery testimony is offensive and undesired, must they be compelled to resort to some other process, in order to convince corresponding bodies that they mean what they say? Shall our Associations exhibit, in this matter, a pertinacity which would be unbecoming the intercourse of Christian gentlemen?

We submit the candid inquiry, whether resolutions, of the kind above given, have not had their day? They are righteous in their tone, and were imperatively called for; our Associations could not, and cannot dispense with them, and continue the correspondence. Every year that our delegates visit these bodies, and partake of the communion with slaveholders, without such protest against this wickedness, we certainly "suffer sin upon" those whom we are charged to "rebuke." But if this method of delivering our bounden testimony produces, as apparently it does, no other than an irritating effect on the party to whom it is addressed, entirely defeating the ends for which the correspondence was established, why should it be persisted in, when another mode is open to us, more emphatic, and not liable to the same objection? Our present course, moreover, fails to relieve us of complicity with the evil; reiterated testimony, without corresponding action, is a nullity. Our church in Newport has been vainly waiting seventy years for the Southern churches to take her own high ground of principle in this matter. If we are in earnest, we must take an advanced position; our protestations amount to nothing, if after it has become evident that they are productive of no good, we continue the interchange of delegates. The suspension of this, for the reason assigned, would be the most decisive and effective testimony; and were the General Associations of New England and New York to unite in it, it would, in our estimation, be the most signal rebuke to slavery, which it has received in our land.

It is said that, to be consistent, we must go still further, and abstain from the use of slave-labor produce. It is unquestionably our duty to discourage slavery by every practicable method. As a Consociation, we propose to deal with that feature of the system, which meets us in this relation. If in other relations we can also act against the evil, commercially and politically, as well as ecclesiastically, such action will claim our attention in its proper place. The discussion of it does not belong to this Report, and no argument drawn from it can possibly weigh against the proposition before us.

It is said that there is a latent anti-slavery sentiment in the Southern Churches, which, if left to itself, will correct the evil; and that proceedings like this only restrain its development. This story, which has been long repeated and believed by many, is destined to gain little further credence. The views and feelings of professing Christians in the South, have been thoroughly tested, the present year, not with reference to the abolition of slavery, but to its extension and perpetuation; and the hollowness of their anti-slavery pretensions has been most lamentably exposed. While the whole land has been deeply agitated by the proposed and effected violation of a compact which the South should have deemed sacred, menacing the dearest interests of freedom and humanity, and the safety of our Republic, and while a few southern statesmen have, with rare courage, denounced the villainy, the ministers and churches of the South have been portentously dumb; the unholy act has been consummated, without a word of remonstrance from them. Henceforth, we understand their position; it must now be patent to all, that there will be no efficient anti-slavery sentiment among them, until the North has taken higher ground. All surrounding Christendom must utterly discard and disfellowship the frightful enormity to which they cling, before they will make any effort to free themselves from its fatal embrace.

It is said that slaveholding is not in all cases sinful, and that in declaring non-fellowship with it, we confound the guilty and the innocent. It is cheerfully granted, that a person, who is not in heart a slaveholder, may sustain the outward relation for a season, simply with a view to the complete emancipation of the slave.—Owing to obstructions created, purposely, by slave laws, this forced temporary relation may be a necessary part of the process of legal manumission.—Instances like these, (would that they were more numerous!) are exceptions to the general rule of slavery, and do not require us to modify any general statement respecting the system; for no one constructs it as applying to such exceptional cases. This may be clearly illustrated by reference to another practice. The American Tract Society, among the sterling issues of its press, devotes not less than twenty-five tracts, in its general series, to the exhibition of the evils of Intemperance; and arraigning the guilty authors of the mischief, is unqualified and unsparing in its denunciations of the makers and vendors of alcoholic poison. This Society, which stands dumb in the presence of American Slavery, anxiously suppressing any censure of its abominations, even in the faintest breath, waxes very bold in its alarms to distillers and its warnings to rum-sellers. Now under existing laws, there are men engaged in the manufacture and sale of alcoholic liquors, for proper and praiseworthy ends—no persons in the community more honorable than they, and more calling more reputable than theirs. In the technical sense in which some

men may be slaveholders, these men are distillers and rumsellers; but they are not the class whom, under those names, the Tract Society so righteously denounces, and are never confounded with them. In like manner, when we arraign slaveholding without qualification, no class are further from feeling aggrieved, than those who sustain the external relation, solely for the purpose of effectually emancipating their slaves, at the earliest practicable moment. Their relation is a constrained one, caused by the system against which our efforts are directed, and our condemnation of which, in all its features, so far from doing them an injustice, is an acceptable aid to them.— And the fastidiousness which objects to a hearty denunciation of slavery and slaveholders, because, forsooth, there is some actual, or possible, or conceivable form of the nominal relation, which does not necessarily involve personal guilt, would seem to argue either an unfortunate mental idiosyncrasy, or a want of genuine sympathy with freedom. When the church in Newport declared that it would not “tolerate slavery,” the language was perfectly definite; and the similar phraseology of the resolution before us is equally intelligible. It is a blow aimed at guilty American slaveholders, and at nothing else; and it will wear no other aspect to any candid mind.

The example of other ecclesiastical bodies, and of prominent benevolent societies, is appealed to, in support of our present usage. In the decision of a moral question we are to be governed, not by example, but by principle. Somebody must always take the lead in breaking up an improper custom. If it be now an honor to one of the churches of this body, that it was the first in New England to eject slavery from church-communion, it will not be less to the honor of this Consociation, in coming years, that it was foremost among our State Associations, in withdrawing fellowship from the same iniquity. That the evil has found shelter and impunity in our Mission-churches, is a disgrace to our Christianity. The American Board cannot reach it there by ecclesiastical process; and its only method of relieving the churches which contribute to its treasury, of any support of slavery, is by refusing to sustain, with their funds, missionary pastors over slaveholding churches. Its reason for declining to take this course, has been recently stated by one of its Secretaries, (Rev. Dr. Poineroy,) as follows:

“We have not supposed it to be the proper way of conducting Christian Missions, to go and say to a people, ‘If you will not abandon your sins, you shall be deprived of the Gospel.’ The Board does not manage its missions in this way.”—*Jour. of Miss. March 1854.*

Of course, the Board does not manage in that way; it could have no missions, if it did. To say to a people, “If you will not abandon your sins, you shall be deprived of the gospel,” is one thing; to say to them, “If you will not abandon your sins you cannot, through our missionaries, be admitted to Christian fellowship,” is another, and a very different thing. The one is a threat to leave them to their heathenism; the other is an attempt to convert them to a pure Christianity. The churches will recognize this distinction, nor can the Secretary be blind to it. The position of the American Home Missionary Society, which has uttered true words for freedom, appears to be practically the same—refusing to commission slaveholding ministers, but rendering assistance to slaveholding churches—a distinction, the moral grounds of which are not obvious to us all. The American and Foreign Christian Union employs a District Secretary in the South, to solicit of those, who deem imprisonment a suitable reward for a benevolent lady who teaches their own free colored population to read the Bible, funds for circulating the Bible among the subjects of a foreign despot who imprisons them for reading it—asking slaveholders piously to assist in a work of benevolence abroad, which they will not permit at home. And the American Sunday School Union, “the Society which takes care of the children,” vies with the Tract Society, in expurgating its publications of every sentence condemnatory of American slavery; dropping even the narrative of Joseph, as revised by the excellent Gallaudet, because offensive to the lords of southern bondmen, “whose feet they hurt with fetters.” We leave it to those, who find in this mournful subserviency to the slave power an argument for silence rather than indignant remonstrance, to array the force of such examples against the resolution before us.

No aspect of our public affairs is more disheartening, than the manifest decline of the spirit of liberty; and for this sad result our churches must be held mainly responsible. We have been watching, with intense anxiety, the proceedings of Congress; it is time for us to look into the proceedings of our Churches and Ecclesiastical Bodies, for our legislation will never be purer than our morals, nor will our morality exceed our spiritual standards. The problem of our national destiny will find its solution in our churches, for the question whether our Republic shall be ephemeral or immortal, is involved in the question, whether our Christianity shall be corrupt or pure. Our public men, of the present day, have not, as a body, swerved more widely from the principles and aims of the early founders of our government, than our ministers and churches, as a body, have departed from the elevated ethics of HORTON and EDWARDS, who, with masterly logic, condemned slaveholding as essentially criminal, “a very great and crying sin, there being nothing of the kind equal to it on the face of the earth,” as “robbery” and “manstealing,” yea, as “a greater crime than fornication, theft, or robbery;” and who, with theological consistency,

urged the instant renunciation of the sin, and demonstrated the duty and safety of immediate emancipation. The bitter fruits of wretched compromises, which we are gathering in the State, have grown on the tree of degenerate principles in the Church.

Some of us were witnesses of the recent humiliating and appalling spectacle in the capital of our sister State, which saddened the week of our religious solemnities.—When we beheld a fellow-immortal, in the dignity of manhood and confessedly innocent of crime, treated as the most of guilty of criminals and outcasts in the land of the Pilgrims, to which, like them, he had fled for shelter and freedom, we felt, with a sadness for which language has no name, how imperfectly Christianity had performed its mission among us; and when we saw the civil and military array, which could be brought to execute the foul behests of the slave power, on soil which had drank the life-blood of Warren, “the iron entered our soul,” as we realized what a mockery and a farce our Declaration of Independence and our Bill of Rights had become, among a people that had inherited, from their brave ancestors, such legacies as the Mayflower and Faneuil Hall, Plymouth Rock and Bunker Hill.

The audacious claimant of that unoffending Christian man, though covered with deeper turpitude than the wretch who kidnapped the colored ancestor of the same, on the coast of Guinea, has done nothing in this matter, and should he, on getting the unfortunate again in his power, do what other monsters have done to captured fugitives—apply the scourge to his back, and then sell him to a southern slave-driver—he will have done nothing, which, on any principles recognized by the southern Presbyterian churches, or in relation to them by their highest judicatories, would disqualify him for a seat in either of the General Assemblies, or for an appointment as Delegate to this Body. While we consent to sustain such relations to the tyrant, we must not wonder at the base relations which others are willing to sustain to the victim—like the heartless Mayor, who forces him into slavery with the bayonets of freemen, or the “merciless” Judge, who complacently pockets the infamy and the gold.

Had some doctrinal error, which we deemed fundamental, crept into an ecclesiastical body, with which we are in correspondence, and were it tolerated there, so that we were liable, in the interchange of delegates, to be compelled either to show discourtesy to a corresponding member, or lend our countenance and fellowship to a dangerous heresy, we should feel, after suitably remonstrating without effect, that our only alternative was a discontinuance of the correspondence. This, precisely, is what our resolution proposes, not with reference to a point of doctrinal belief, but to a point of practical morality. And we know of no surer method of crippling our moral power, than to subordinate a question of morality to a question of faith. How could we more effectually expose ourselves to the derision of the world, than by announcing that we cannot, consistently with our principles, extend Christian recognition to a man, however exemplary his life may be, who rejects from his articles of belief the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, but can welcome to full fellowship a man whose creed may be orthodox, though in his daily practice he trample upon the humanity of his brother? We earnestly hope that this Consociation will not occupy a position morally so low.

To those of its members who may not accept the argument of this Report, it may be proper to suggest the consideration of what is due to the scruples of their brethren who do, and with some of whom it is a conscientious conviction, that they cannot continue to share the deliberations of a voluntary ecclesiastical organization, much as they may value its benefits, on the basis of a proffered fraternal communion with slaveholders and their representatives and allies. This position they adopt, as they believe, in no pharisaical mood, but in simple fidelity to their principles, from an earnest desire to discharge their duty to the oppressed and the oppressor, and with a single purpose to maintain their Christian integrity; and their brethren, who dissent from them, would probably take similar ground, if the issue raised were a doctrinal one. In all matters relating to our own vineyard, and which directly concern us as affiliated churches, as well as in those pertaining to our intercourse with sister churches, with which our relations are intimate, there is entire harmony among us, a cordial unanimity; and in the discussion and promotion of these cardinal interests, we can remain an united brotherhood.

The resolution is not incriminating, nor invidious, in its terms. The effect of its passage will be, that the nominating committee will report the names of delegates only to the several Congregational Bodies with which we are in correspondence, and that will be the conclusion of the matter. We shall still be free to address courteous communications to any ecclesiastical body in the world, and shall always be ready to receive such; but we will not continue to send our formal Christian greetings, and solicit the reciprocation of the same, to those bodies which cherish slavery in their bosom; we will not thus connive at this great crime.

We therefore recommend the adoption of the resolution.

Resolved, That this Consociation, with a view to bear its solemn and emphatic testimony against the system of American Slavery, will refrain from appointing a delegate to any Ecclesiastical Body, which tolerates slaveholding among its ministers or churches.

Resolved, That the Secretary be directed to transmit a copy of this resolution to the several Ecclesiastical Bodies with which we are in correspondence.

All which is respectfully submitted.

SAMUEL WOLCOTT,
Chairman of the Committee.