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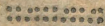
TO THE

BRETHREN OF

SOUTH ELKHORN CHURCH.



J. FICKLIN—Printer.



1821.

1861

WILMINGTON

TO THE

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OF THE DELAWARE CANAL

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1861

AN ADDRESS, &C.



DEAR BRETHREN,

YOUR situation at present is one which merits your most serious and dispassionate consideration. It is to be feared you have already stepped one step too far, without mature consideration, but it is not too late to step back on your former ground. If you advance on the ground you at present occupy, you plunge yourselves into difficulties, out of which you cannot extricate yourselves without much distress. You took this ground without exercising that discretion which the subject required. You were hurried into it on the spur of the moment, by men whose design was to entrap you before your better judgments were exercised. You come now with your minds well prepared to act with that wisdom and decision which so important a subject requires. A subject of no less magnitude than one which involves your lives and liberties as members of this body: but the pastoral life and liberty of your venerable and worthy preacher, whose nights and days have been so zealously devoted to your service for so many years, stands arraigned at your bar for excommunication. You ought to have rejected this novel and unprecedented case of brothers Singleton and Craig against our old Father in the Gospel, at the very threshold, as out of order, and as introducing into society a mode of dealing unheard of, and unprecedented in the annals of church history. A mode fraught with the most direful effects upon the peace and happiness of society. By this roundabout way of dealing, in the place of the direct course as laid down in the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, you involve the church in difficulties, and set it on fire without effecting any thing but the destruction of the church. When an interview between the parties directly aggrieved, might result in the most happy consequences, by producing a complete reconciliation between them. This indirect method precludes this opportunity, and frustrates the design and intention of the Saviour in the mode he introduces, the object of which was, love and harmony among the brethren. This rule, as laid down in the Gospel, is one upon which all church discipline is founded among the Baptist churches. The commencement of which rule, as laid down in the book is—"If thy Brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone."—Is thi the situation of the cases as

exhibited by Singleton and Craig against your preacher? No, essentially and entirely different. Brethren have taken a Brother under dealing, for trespassing against another brother; as exhibited in the first charge. Is this the language or meaning of the rule? Is it even your custom, or the custom of any other church within your knowledge? Did you ever hear of one brother, or two brothers dealing for another? This is the true situation of the case on the first charge. There might have been more plausibility in it, if the aggrieved person had been absent; but this is not the fact, he is in your neighborhood: yet he is not so aggrieved himself as to call upon the brother for a reconciliation, or satisfaction; but must *deputise* others to call for him, or they have been *officious* enough to *deputise* themselves in his behalf. Either is extremely reprehensible, and out of good order; and contrary to the better judgment of those very men. For common sense (of which they are not destitute) must tell them, if any member gives cause of offence to his brother, no matter where he lives; that brother must privately, and individually, seek satisfaction and a reconciliation, before the case can come properly and legally before the church: or otherwise, the church must act disorderly in receiving it. If a reconciliation cannot be had, you must take one or two more; merely as witnesses that the offended person has done his duty. Then the case is properly and legally prepared for the church, and not until then. But those men would get up in the top of the tree, to trim it at the bottom. They would bring a man to trial and have him condemned without an action against him by the proper person. To further illustrate the case, I call a man a rogue, and his neighbor, instead of the man, sues me for slander. Ought this man to recover damages of me merely because he was angry; when the injured person is silent on the occasion? or would you not, if you were a chancellor, non suit him with costs? If you done justice you would; because he was not the injured person. In a case of this kind, no man can legally empower another to bring a suit for him, it being an essential requisition of the law, that he file his own declaration, and attend to it personally, or be nonsuited and thrown into the costs also. So that you see, when men's feelings and characters are jeopardised in civil matters, prosecutions will not do by *agencies*, or *substitutes*; the injured person must attend to it himself. So among christians in religious matters, wounded feelings cannot be redressed legally by *substitutes*.

If in this case however, for the first time, it is tempted, will the church so far forget her duty and commit herself, as to act on a case so unprecedented and so fraught with disorder? No, she has

more wisdom, and understand too well good government and good order. She can never forget herself so far as to bring down the animadversions of the whole association upon her head.

The rule as laid down by the Saviour, if pursued strictly, and in brotherly kindness, in nine cases out of ten would have a happy and beneficial effect between the parties. They, by talking the matter over between themselves, become reconciled by mutual concessions. Their feelings become harmonized by the free confession of each others faults. Proper acknowledgments restore harmony and love between them. When on the other hand, by this *new* mode of dealing the passions become irritated, and the breach made wider as a natural consequence of this course; and the reason is obvious. The offending person concludes from this distant and *round-about* way, that a trap is set to catch him, that spies are about him, and the person whose feelings he might have wounded (but of this he is not certain, which still adds to his suspicions) cares not to be reconciled; but has another object. One perhaps that is to bring about the exclusion of the other, on false and untenable ground, or to disorganize the church to which he belongs. That one of those objects is the design of the parties in the present case, no one will for a moment doubt, who is not blind with prejudice. Is not this disorganizing spirit spreading far and wide? Is not society bleeding at every pore with difficulties and sore distresses, produced by a few disorganizing men?*

* Certain Preachers.

ting with the most indefatigable industry the pillars of your religious government. And wilt brethren never open their eyes? Will they permit the enemy to pull the house down over their very heads, without even being aroused? Why is this lethargy? Why sleep the friends of order and good government? Will they suffer the Syren song of their enemies to throw them off their guard while on the verge of destruction? Brethren there is an evil among you and it must be rooted out or your churches—nay it will come nearer home—your neighborhoods—yes even your families must bleed under this state of things

I have hinted to you the consequences which will naturally result, if things do not alter. Permit me now to point out to you the remedy. We will make one general remark previously. All societies, if they wish to live happily, must have a government. Without it no peace, no quietness, no happiness can be enjoyed. And in proportion to the strict observance of your constitution or laws, so in the same proportion will you live peaceable and happy. But so soon as you become indifferent in those essential points, so

soon will you begin to smart under your own errors. Order is the first principle of nature, and exists throughout all her works. Even your own corporeal system is under this same regulation, and the least change in any part, gives pain.

The only remedy which will ultimately restore peace and happiness among you, is, to discard those new and *wild* ideas of church government, so strenuously urged, of late, by equally *wild* and *unstable* men. They scoff at your constitution and degrade it on all occasions. You took those men into your bosoms as friends, and now they are returning the favor by putting you out of doors, and encouraging disorder and confusion among you.— Will you suffer yourselves to be thus treated at home? you certainly will not. You all must acknowledge, you lived many years under your constitution, in much harmony and peace; and it was not until you made this irrevocable blunder into the *union*, that you had any distress among you of so serious a nature. It is not too late yet to recover your lost ground; but it is only to be done by clinging to your constitution as the ark of safety. You ought to re-organize yourselves under it, as the only way to get shut of those disorganising spirits. You must have a rallying point—a strong hold when assaulted by the enemy: let this be your constitution in all its purity. You cannot do this and embrace doctrines immediately in opposition to it. If you prefer those new notions, go where they are, “for two cannot walk together unless they are agreed.”

I have wandered somewhat from my subject; but it was imposed upon me almost as a matter of course—being so immediately connected with the state of things existing among us.

To proceed. Can these *tender* brethren, whose feelings are so *susceptible* of touch, inform us why their *injured Parson* did not take this brother under dealing, instead of themselves? Is it not probable if this only correct course had been pursued that you would have been clear of this troublesome case? But at the same time let me ask, would this course have answered their purpose? Oh no: this might have defeated their object. The old Father would have retained his standing, and the church undivided. Here lies the secret. Is there any man among you so ignorant of gospel dealing as to say, the *injured Parson* ought not to have been the legal and only legitimate dealer under the gospel? and is this case legally prepared as it now stands for trial? You must say it is not. Perhaps it may be said it was a public offence, and requires public dealing. How will you apply this to individual cases. Who is properly the aggrieved person but the *Parson* against

whom the offence was aimed. *His* feelings received the *shock*, therefore he must seek redress under the gospel rule. A public offence is very different and of this kind: One brother sees another drunk—hears him tell a lie—hears him swear—or detects him in any vice—these are public offences, and the person committing them may be dealt with by any one. It is the whole churches business to have a brotherly care over all its members; and it is even the duty of members in any baptist church, to have a brotherly care over all other members than her own, and may deal with them for vicious offences, or offences against their own feelings. But for the sake of common sense, do not blend trespasses against individuals with vicious offences, where all is equally concerned. Suppose a brother was to tell you another tells falsehoods, he will take bribes, he is dishonest, all behind his back. Would you take him under dealing for saying so? (If you did you would err.) No: you would tell him he was out of his duty, that he must confer with his brother on these charges; if he did not, you would bring him to the church for slandering his brother. Or you would, more properly, tell the offended brother, to take those steps against the one who was speaking those things against him. If he did not then you might deal with him, for this neglect of duty. That this is the true gospel course, no one is so ignorant as to deny.

But instead of this christian course, they pursue the old Father with that invidious spirit, which always accompanies prejudice and bigotry. They seize the faithful servant of God, as it were by the "throat," and require of him the last "farthing," or "cast him into prison."

Read for your more serious consideration, the whole of the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, and see how far this spirit corresponds with the instructions, given to the disciples on the subject of christian forbearance.

We will now take a view of the charges exhibited against the brother by those *zealous* advocates of *order*, in relation to corruption; of which the association had been guilty, as well as a certain church, (in his opinion.) What did he mean by corruption, but that the association and the church had deviated from their established rule, or custom, from an improper bias, or vicious motives? How is it possible you can attach criminality to the mere expression, of corruption? A word of such loose signification, and one which admits of so many shades of blame, before it diverges into crime. How will you define it in this case, so as to make the mere expression of it criminal? Is not the smallest deviation from a long established rule, or law, wilfully blameable? Cannot you then say it was corruption, although merely a shade in color? But

where this departure is, in opposition to remonstrance, and that too by respectable numbers, does it not border on crime? and cannot you with the greatest propriety say, that body acted corruptly? Most assuredly you can. Would you not say a judge acted corruptly, if to-day he departed from common rule, and to-morrow under similar circumstances he acted up to them: to say nothing about the laws or the constitution, from which, if he departed, would be a flagrant case of corruption and punishable!

Is a mere opinion, which is free to every man, (and to the right of which, no man of common rationality, and who is not a slave to bigotry, or a friend to tyranny, will deny the right to any one,) to be chargeable upon a brother as criminal? Can you not trace in all those proceedings a vein of prejudice against the brother in question? You certainly can; and your justly aroused indignation ought to be poured out on those evil doers—those *discordant spirits*, who would rend every church asunder to aggrandize themselves. But admit this member to have expressed himself in relation to corruption, definitely, to the injury of the feelings of a brother, who might have been in the association chargeable with corruptio; has an indifferent member, legally, a right to deal with him?—or rather, ought not the offended brethren to do it agreeable to strict rules of order? This question, I hope, has been satisfactorily answered in the beginning of this address, in relation to the first charge.

It is further contended in this case, under the charges of corruption, that the church has no business with it, unless legal dealings appear; which they cannot shew in either instance; for neither of those men belong to the church charged with corruption, neither was personal allusions aimed at them, if in the association; and if this was the fact, they did not deal with the brother for those personal allusions, but as organs of other bodies, or other men. From this view of the subject, nothing can be plainer than the course for you to pursue. You ought to throw the case out of the church as entirely out of order, and contrary to the very spirit of gospel discipline. Let those men return home and take lessons on their duty, before they again pester their neighbors with their non-sense.

A FRIEND TO THE CONSTITUTION.