

ART. V.—DR. NEVIN AND HIS ANTAGONISTS.

THE Synod of the German Reformed Church, convened in Baltimore in October last, unanimously elected the Rev. B. C. Wolff, D.D., Pastor of the Third German Reformed congregation of that city, to the Professorship of Theology in the Seminary in Mercersburg. Provision has thus finally been made to supply the vacancy occasioned in that Institution by the previous resignation and retirement of its much esteemed late President, the Rev. Dr. J. W. Nevin. It was only after a year's delay, and then with great reluctance, that the Church thus yielded to the earnest solicitations of one whose efficient services in the department which he had filled so long and so well, she could, at the present juncture, so badly spare. The work of rapid Church extension, prosecuted so briskly at this time by the German Reformed section of the American Protestant Church, and the great difficulty of enlisting a number of zealous laborers, adequate to the annually increasing demands, seems to make every one of her ministers an indispensable component of the particular charge he serves; so that in case of congregational vacancies, it is almost impossible to supply one important post without depriving another of pastoral services as greatly needed there. The difficulty of supplying a vacancy in her Theological Seminary is greater in proportion to the higher responsibilities of the place. It will not be surprising, therefore, that the Church was thrown into great perplexity by Dr. Nevin's withdrawal, and hesitated a year in the hope that he might yet be induced to return to the post which he had occupied so honorably for himself, and so faithfully for the Church. But as he felt justified, after protracted consideration, in reiterating his desire to be relieved, for a season at least, from the burden of his official responsibilities as Professor of Theology and President of the Seminary, and renewed his formal notification to that effect, it was at length believed to be due to his personal feelings and claims to acquiesce in his wishes.

Dr. Nevin occupied the chair of Systematic and Pastoral Theology, thus vacated by his resignation, for more than twelve years. He came to it, at the earnest call of the German Reformed Church, well worn already by arduous labors undergone in previous stations of a similar character. In his

new sphere he devoted himself to the severe and responsible duties of his Professorship, and position in the Church at large, with untiring assiduity and distinguished ability. No Theological Professor of this, or probably any other country, ever labored more faithfully and more indefatigably at his post than he; none ever better understood, or more deeply and solemnly realized the weight and value of the vast interests depending so largely upon the intelligence, piety, and fidelity of a Theological Professor. His view of the proper extent of his sphere of labor was far more intelligent and just than to suppose it limited by the precincts of the Seminary grounds, or the number of students actually present in the several classes of the Institution. Keenly conscious of the great moral influence with which his office naturally invested him, especially in the Church to which he had pledged his services, he cheerfully recognized the corresponding duty imposed by the possession of such influence. Occupying a high tower upon the walls of Zion, one from whose upper windows he could have an unobstructed and comprehensive view of the wants and perils of the city spread out beneath, it was his duty, not simply to qualify others for being wise and faithful watchmen, but to be one himself. So he evidently believed, and few, if any, will dissent from this conviction. In addition therefore to the more immediate duties of his professoral office, he constantly and conscientiously labored to warn the Church of what were supposed by him to be most seriously threatening dangers, and to direct her in that course honestly believed by him to be the best and safest. Whatever else therefore his many, and in some cases indeed apparently malignant adversaries, could or did say against him, none ever dreamed of charging him with being a drowsy slave to traditional systems, sometimes so gladly seized and appropriated, to escape the annoyance of toilsome thought, and the drudgery of disgusting penmanship, and none ever hinted or suspected that Dr. Nevin was becoming obese upon a sinecure. Manifestly fitted and designated by natural endowments, for laborious study and profound research, his whole life has been almost unremittedly and always intensely devoted to those pursuits for which, by constitutional predilection, he had so strongly marked a preference. Indeed he seems for many years, if not during his whole life, to have accustomed himself to double duty. This, as an early friend and classmate has recently told us, was a characteristic of his collegiate course already. Of the distinct nature and

extent of his labors during his official connection with the Princeton and Western Theological Seminaries, we cannot speak with certain knowledge. But it is well known, that since the death of the lamented President Rauch, Dr. Nevin has been sustaining the double burden of the Presidency of both the Theological Seminary and Marshall College, and that of the latter gratuitously. The amount of actual mental and physical labor performed during this period, may be partially calculated from the numerous and lengthy contributions of his pen, formerly to the weekly periodicals of the Church, and of late more exclusively to the *Mercersburg Review*, the work of such leisure moments as the stated duties of the offices he filled allowed him. These contributions have always been upon subjects of the highest theological moment, and such as were most intimately interwoven with the practical life of the Church. And it may be remarked, by the way, that by his treatment of the various themes thus discussed, and the palpable influence which they have exerted and are still exerting, Dr. Nevin has most effectually quashed the indictment for vapory idealism, and misty transcendentalism, which several prosecutors have preferred against him. On the contrary, he seems to have thereby proven himself capable of being most significantly, and, for some, most harrassingly practical, even in the discussion of the profoundest topics. It would not be easy, however, from what is thus known to have been mentally and physically achieved by him, to estimate the amount of mental and moral anxiety, endured by one so conscientious in the discharge of duty, and so heartily concerned for the true prosperity of the Church, especially when the peculiarly trying circumstances, in the face of which all was done, are duly considered. Few men, occupying a similar position, have encountered so much misrepresentation in the prosecution of their work. And we know of no one, whose words and warnings, from the first utterance of his protest against the pernicious extravagances of the Anxious Bench system, to his latest reprehension of Leakey-itical anti-popery harangues, have been so diligently caught up and improved, and who has yet at the same time been so unsparingly denounced for uttering those words and warnings.

Nothing of all this however was suffered to deter him from firmly maintaining his position, and elaborating his views upon the momentous questions at issue, until he has fully developed his theory of the Church and her institutions, and avowed and defended his convictions of her dangers and her duties. This

done, the Church to which he has been devoting the best years and energies of a vigorous life, has felt that he had a right to ask release from at least one of the burdens resting upon him, and to seek the privilege and comforts of a temporary retirement from the more stirring and noisy arena of an official theological life. And the circumstances under which this has been at length assented to, must be as grateful to the heart of Dr. Nevin as they seem to have been annoying to some of his more violent opponents. To state, or even specifically refer to the various appliances employed, for the greater part outside of the German Reformed Church, with the professed design of counteracting what were supposed to be pernicious errors, but the success of which would inevitably have brought about Dr. Nevin's official and theological bankruptcy and ruin, could serve no profitable purpose, and is assuredly not to be undertaken for the pleasure of the thing. Their utter failure moreover to injure him in the estimation of the Church, would render such a detail doubly gratuitous. For his own solemn repudiation of the charges preferred against him, and his voluntary reiteration of the pledge of faithful adherence to her standards, always proved sufficient to assure the Church, that notwithstanding all the gainsayings of his opponents, Dr. Nevin stood truly *rectus in ecclesia*. He therefore takes with him to his retirement the most undoubted testimony of the Church's continued confidence and esteem, her cordial thanks for his past important and self-denying services, and her sincere prayers, that the Chief Shepherd may bestow upon him, in abundant measure, His richest blessings. This indeed, temporally considered, may be a meagre compensation for the services rendered. But it is the best the Church can give. And we are confident, that in Dr. Nevin's appreciation, its value will be above that of golden medals, or of silver plate.

The event thus noticed, and for which a justifying reason has been so definitely assigned, because we regard it as one of the grievous faults of the times, that men, on whom rest solemn ordination vows, binding them for life to the public service of the Church, often too lightly relinquish their calling and abandon their work,—manifestly forms an *epoch* in the history of the Church, within whose limits it has occurred, and brings us theologically and ecclesiastically to a momentary *pause*. The occasion seems therefore to furnish a fit opportunity for a calm and candid review of the important and earnest controversy between Dr. Nevin and such antagonists as have, rather irregu-

larly it must be allowed, assailed him and his theory, for the most part from beneath some overshadowing newspaper ambuscade, a controversy which will now most probably cease, at least for a season. The intrinsic magnitude of the subjects involved in this controversy invests the discussion of them with immense interest, and renders a brief review appropriate. They form the very foundation of all Christian faith, and constitute the vital elements of the Church's being. For many generations English and American Theology has been well nigh all-absorbingly engaged in the adjustment and defence of the leading five points of more rigidly defined Calvinism. The consideration and development of these, either positively or negatively, have been the great burden of almost every theological discussion, as they have been the most notable occasion of nearly all the ecclesiastical dissensions by which the Protestant Church has been variously agitated for the last hundred years. And so ardent have been these discussions and attendant dissensions in which the various parties concerned have been enlisted, from the fatalistic supralapsarian to the flattest Arminian, that no time or place was allowed for the more general consideration of other doctrines. However clearly therefore the actual condition of the Protestant Church interest, in this country especially, indicated the importance of giving attention to other subjects, subjects more nearly affecting the actual life and edification of the Church, the voice was unheard or unheeded amid the din of zealous or angry debate of Calvinist and Pelagian, Old School and New School, Andover and Princeton. Amid these earnest, and perhaps vastly important, contentions for the precise form and terms of certain speculative doctrines of the evangelical Church, the still greater necessity of correct apprehensions of the fundamental facts, upon which the very life and subsistence of the Church depend, and of intelligent and active faith in those facts, was at least measurably lost sight of, or undervalued. However high our estimate of the thoroughly tested, and most prominent tenets of orthodox Calvinism may be, and however hearty may be our adherence to them, it must yet be admitted that Christianity, or the Christian Church, as a system of supernatural means, divinely devised and developed, for the moral redemption of the world, merits far higher regard, and far heartier devotion. For after all, a theoretical system, and a living and life-giving economy are not necessarily identical. Indeed there are many mournful illustrations at hand of their being widely sundered from

each other in actual life. But it is far otherwise with regard to principles and facts which concern the actual relation of Christ to believers individually, and to the Church collectively, and of them and the Church to each other and to Him. It is otherwise with reference to the ordinances of the Church and the divinely invested virtue attendant upon their proper administration, especially the dispensation of the Holy Sacraments, God's appointed signs and seals of that grace without which there is no salvation. And it is otherwise finally with regard to the actual constitution of the Christian Church,—not her outward construction, or the form of government by which her affairs may be externally managed, and her occasional domestic difficulties may be adjudicated,—but, that real internal organization which constitutes the law of her life, and conditions its historical manifestation and growth. Here we have themes, which, like the arteries of the human system, connect with the very heart of Christianity, themes which form the veritable "marrow of divinity."

This now is the immediate character of the topics discussed in the various treatises of Dr. Nevin, which have given rise to the controversy under consideration. Laying hold of doctrines which had come to be comparatively neglected, although they were the glory of the theological labors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he has brought their vast importance into view once more, in a light which has amazed, and even disturbed defenders of the faith, moving in quite another sphere of thought, and comforting themselves meanwhile with the belief that they were contending for the only opinions worthy of a theologian's study or a Christian's zeal. The first announcement of these seemingly new themes, appeared indeed only to excite a sneering smile, or was treated with contemptuous silence. Those occupying the higher places of American theology, and especially metropolitan editors of religious newspapers, felt disposed rather to be merry at the idea that any thing really significant, or worthy of serious notice, should issue from the mountains of Judea, and least of all from the Zoar of the German Reformed Church. But the inherent power of the truths discussed soon made itself felt, and the persevering earnestness and pious solemnity with which they were advocated speedily commanded for them a hearing. The notes proceeding from a small secluded hamlet, deeply concealed in the shadows of the North Mountain, in one of the retired parts of Cumberland Valley, extended and spread,

until they penetrated the farthest limits of New England Puritanism, and aroused the attention of Protestants and Papists, orthodox and heterodox, both on this and on the other side of the great deep. It may therefore assuredly be assumed, that discussions involving the treatment of such subjects, and constraining such general consideration, must be intrinsically entitled to some special notice of the manner in which they have been conducted, and the results thus far reached.

But the consideration which, in the present case, is paramount to every other motive for the volunteering of this review, is derived from the intimate official relation sustained by Dr. Nevin to the German Reformed Church, during the whole course of this controversy, and his close identification with the Collegiate Institution with which the Association, responsible for the character of this Quarterly, is filially connected. In view of the highly important and responsible position he occupied, as President of the Theological Seminary of that Church, the Church has been held answerable for the influence of his teachings, and the character of his productions. At least it has been assumed as the Church's duty to preserve her own fountains pure and unadulterated by commixture with pernicious error, and also secure the Protestant evangelical interest at large against being overrun by poisonous streams. Those Christian denominations especially, with which the German Reformed Church is more closely allied by ecclesiastical correspondence, have held that Church under particular obligations to this effect. We have no disposition to dispute the justice of this expectation. Unquestionably the German Reformed Church is bound, by a most solemn moral guaranty, to the Evangelical Protestant Church of the land, and indeed to the Holy Catholic Church in the world, to maintain inviolate the sacred treasure of truth with which she believes herself, and is acknowledged by others, to be entrusted. By the holiest obligations is she pledged not to permit the acknowledged foundations of her faith to be moved or altered, nor to connive at the agitation and advocacy of theories and opinions, the legitimate effect of which would be to undermine and to subvert those foundations. And no considerations of strong personal regard, or of heavy claims for past services, would be sufficient to acquit her of the charge of denominational perjury and deceit, if she could be convicted of such connivance. Has she then given just reason to fear that she has been unfaithful to her solemn trust? Has she so connived at error taught, and

defended, with almost unparalleled boldness, and yet with the adroitest subtlety, in her high places, and by those exposed by their official elevation to constant inspection, as to have forfeited all claims to the continued confidence of the Evangelical Protestant Churches of this country? None have ventured exactly openly to affirm this, and charge upon that Church such guilt. And yet, as much as this has more than once been insinuated. It is not easy either to see how she can escape an indictment to this effect, if all the theological crimes and ecclesiastical obliquities charged upon Dr. Nevin, be really sustained. If Dr. Nevin has indeed revived Eutychianism, charged our Lord Jesus Christ with being a sinner, denied the divine authority of the Scriptures, rejected the Reformed doctrine of the atonement and justification, plead for purgatory, and prayers for and to the dead, advocated the worship of the Virgin Mary, taught the crassest transubstantiation, reviled Protestantism, and made common cause with Popery as far as this could be done by him in the existing premises, then the German Reformed Church, which has all the while not only looked calmly on, but refused to listen to the alarm-cry raised by two or three watchmen within her walls, and repeated with magnified force by thrice as many more without, must either be most irretrievably astute, or most perversely set upon ruining herself, and doing mischief to others. And this precisely is what some of those professedly concerned for her peace and prosperity fear and prophesy. For ourselves we feel assured that their fears are gratuitous, and that their dire prognostications will prove most happily delusive. The grounds for this assurance will appear in the prosecution of this review, in which we think it will be made manifest, that the Church had no good reason to sustain the charges preferred against Dr. Nevin, but the very best assurance of his theological orthodoxy and ecclesiastical integrity, and that she is therefore not chargeable with a breach of trust, in retaining his services to the last, and finally furnishing him with so strong a token of her confidence and regard as he takes with him to his retirement.

Retrospectively considered, the various charges brought against Dr. Nevin in the course of this seven year's war, as it has been fitly termed, arrange themselves into two distinct classes, viz.: first, charges of specific heresies, and secondly, charges of a general betrayal of Protestantism and a zealous though cunningly cloaked vindication of Popery. We shall

find it most convenient to our purpose to pursue the subject in the order thus presenting itself.

The antagonists of Dr. Nevin have brought five distinct charges of heresy against him, either one of which, if sustained, would be sufficient to merit his immediate exclusion from an orthodox Protestant Church, and to brand him with reprobacy to the Apostolic faith; and the patient toleration of either one of which in her midst, would justly subject the Church guilty of it to the most painful suspicions, and the severest remonstrances of evangelical Christendom. What evidence, pro and con., has been presented to the mind of the German Reformed Church in reference to the several items of this grand indictment?

The first charge, chronologically, (for this prosecutory controversy is not without its gradual historical development,) and that which, on account of its comparatively minor importance, may as well be primarily disposed of, is, that the sole supremacy of the Bible as the Divine Rule of Faith for the Christian Church has been denied by Dr. Nevin, and that the necessity of Tradition, as co-ordinate with Sacred Scripture, has been advocated by him. In other words, it is affirmed, that upon this point the fundamental Protestant doctrine of the supremacy of the Holy Scriptures in all matters of faith and practice has been virtually repudiated, and that the papal error of the divine authority of Church Tradition, or a subtle modification of it, has been substituted in its place. With this serious and alarming charge for his theme the counsel for the prosecution opened the case against Dr. Nevin more than seven years ago, at the Synod of York. It was professedly based upon sentiments detected in the translation of Dr. Schaff's Principle of Protestantism, and their endorsement by Dr. Nevin. That able and interesting Tract, published originally by the request and with the approbation of the Synod, was accused of teaching and defending the error set forth in the above charge, "of asserting that Scripture may, under some circumstances, be undervalued in favor of human addition and tradition," and the special attention of the Synod was challenged in the case. A full and fair discussion was accordingly allowed to take place. To this discussion far greater latitude was granted than could have been asked or expected for a prosecution sprung upon the Synod with such flagrant irregularity. Ultimately the leader of the opposition, Dr. Berg, finding himself sinking in the pit dug so deep for the Mercers-

burg Professors, tried to help himself out of it again, by making the manly confession that the charge had been rashly preferred, and that it could not be sustained. It was even conceded, in the solemn and cautious paragraphs of a recorded Protest, that the Book in question "*certainly did admit, that the Holy Scriptures constitute the pure and proper source, as well as the only certain measure of all saving truth; and occupied ground which in his opinion was safe, with the single exception,*" (fortunate fugitive, to find so convenient a covering for so humiliating a retreat!) "*of that distinction which is denominated formal dogmatic tradition!*" It might have been expected that after such a defeat, the more mortifying because of the exulting menaces with which the onset was introduced, and after such concessions, the more significant for being incorporated into a Protest, this item at least would be stricken out of the indictment, and that the prosecution would confine itself to the remaining points. This, however, is not found to be the case. On the contrary, the charge has been reiterated from that day to this, almost as often as Dr. Berg, and his friendly coadjutors in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, and "our faithful brother" of the so-called Lutheran Observer in Baltimore, have found it opportune and expedient to excite the interest of the Christian community in behalf of the Professors and Institutions in Mercersburg, or to revive fraternal concern for the true prosperity of the German Reformed Church.

And what is really the offence committed by Dr. Nevin in regard to this vital dogma of Evangelical Protestantism? What sin has he actually perpetrated, (for of course the Church, as an ecclesiastical judicatory, can only take cognizance of overt acts, or of a spirit and tendencies made palpable by such acts,) to render him obnoxious to the charge in question, and obligate the Church to condemn and chastise him for the error? Has he any where denied or questioned the Divine Authority of the Sacred Scriptures, or hinted at their being deficient at all as a revelation of divine truth and human duty? Has he any where argued that in a case of manifest discrepancy between the doctrinal confessions, canons or traditions of the Church, and the Holy Scriptures, these should be made to yield in subservient deference to such traditions, as being of higher authority and superior force? Has he ever most remotely suggested that the teachings of the Church, speaking through her adopted symbols, could or should be used as an

all-sufficient substitute for the circulation of the Bible? Judging him and his theory from the tone and character of the various newspaper and other expositions of it, through which the public has been made acquainted with both, all this, and more and worse, would certainly have to be suspected and believed concerning them. No wonder therefore that the Church, which not only tolerates but clings to a man, who holds and advocates such views, should be considered recreant to the good old faith of her fathers, by those who derive all their knowledge of the case from such warped extempore misrepresentations. But does not Dr. Nevin hold views corresponding with those expositions of his sentiments? We answer, most assuredly not, if the public and unreserved avowals of his sentiments, which have been freely spread out during the last ten years before the gaze of the Christian community, are to be taken as an honest and sincere exponent of his views. Of his veneration for the Sacred Scriptures, his profound deference to their divine authority in matters of faith and piety, and his exaltation of them above all human traditions, the Church has had such evidence as cannot easily be shaken by the alarm-cries of those who have constituted themselves watchguards of her citadels, or the anxious warnings of those who have become notorious as panic-mongers in her midst, crying ever and anon, "the wolf, the wolf," but still exposing their own nervous timidity, or presumptuous dishonesty, by failing to point out the wolf, when the Church answered to their false cry, and showed her readiness to catch and expel the intruder. Freely as Dr. Nevin has written, and frankly (some have thought quite unnecessarily so), as he has declared and published his opinions, the Church may safely challenge his opponents to adduce a single sentence, or expression, from all his writings, which, being fairly interpreted, is in the least collision with the views upon this subject under consideration at the Synod of York, and in regard to which we have already given Dr. Berg's concession. Upon what then is this charge based? It is hardly supposable that so much ado would be made about nothing, or that sensible men would permit themselves to become so fearfully agitated, or would toil so strenuously to excite the fears of others, without some reasonable show of actual peril! At least their loud and reiterated shouts of treachery! treachery! have received far more attention than would otherwise have been paid to them, but for their presumed plausibility. It was rather naturally assumed that

no true friends, and certainly no members or ministers, sincerely devoted to the interests of the German Reformed Church, or cherishing, as neighbors, the fraternal affection professed, would wantonly hold her up to suspicion, endeavor to distract her with internal dissensions, or expose themselves ultimately to reproach and condemnation as false witnesses. What motive could tempt or incite to such an unkind and unchristian course? The desire of notoriety could not justify it? No fair vindication of it could be found in strong predilections for the puritanizing influences notoriously at work in the old stock German Churches of Pennsylvania and adjacent States, and upon the efficacy of which a few ministers within their limits might build their expectations of furthering God's glory and their own renown, as the chief instruments in the hands of Providence of accomplishing the revolution in the entire structure and character of those churches, aimed at by the operation of those foreign influences? Why should puritan modes of thought, however good in their way, and puritan forms of worship and church economy, however suitable and excellent in their place and circumstances, be preferred by the posterity and successors of German Christians and German ministers, to the peace of their Church, or to the inestimable legacies bequeathed by their fathers? And yet if we take up all that is tangible, and most scrutinizingly review all that is visible in the case, we can find nothing upon which a verdict against Dr. Nevin upon this first accusation could be based. Do we ask him, through his written avowals of his opinions, Do you believe "that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which are called the canonical Scriptures, are genuine, authentic, inspired, and therefore divine Scriptures?" He answers, I do believe "that the word of God, as it has been handed down to us in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, is the pure and proper source, as well as the only certain measure, of all saving faith." Do we further inquire, Do you acknowledge that those Scriptures "contain all things which relate to the faith, the practice, and the hope of the righteous, and are the only rule of faith and practice in the Church of God; that, consequently no traditions, as they are called, and no mere conclusions of reason, which are contrary to the clear testimony of these Scriptures, can be received as rules of faith and life?" His response before God is: "If therefore there be any unerring fountain of truth needed to satisfy religious want, it can be found only in THE

WORD OF GOD, who is himself the truth; and this becomes consequently the HIGHEST NORM and RULE, by which to measure all human truth, all ecclesiastical tradition, and all synodical decrees." (Principle of Protestantism, p. 78.) Does this import a repudiation of the supremacy of the sacred Scriptures as the Christian norm of truth and righteousness? How could the German Reformed Church condemn, as heretical on this point, the man who solemnly avers that the above declarations set forth his faith? But his accusers call for a cross-examination. They desire to ask whether Dr. Nevin has not affirmed and does not hold that, in addition to the Bible, some suspicious thing, termed *formal dogmatic tradition* (this tail-word "tradition" makes them see a bear!) "is indispensable to the completeness of the rule of faith"? We say *no*, it is nowhere affirmed to be indispensable to complete the rule of faith, but "indispensable absolutely as a channel for carrying forward in history the contents of the Scriptures, and to the onward development of Christian doctrine and Christian life." Is it insinuated that this amounts to the same thing as is charged, and that it savors of Rome, to say the least, to speak of *tradition* in any form as necessary in addition to the Scriptures? Then we ask these opponents, whether they and their Churches do not hold in fact to the same necessity? Or do they deny the indispensableness of the ministry, as instituted and ordained by Christ? Do they consider that Paul did not speak by authority, when he declared that "faith cometh by hearing," and then asks, "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Is not the PREACHING of the Gospel, held and maintained by the Church, to be the great means of heaven's appointment and choice, for the spread of the truth, the salvation of souls, and the final prevalence of Christ's kingdom? Is not the living Church set for the light of the world; and the salt of the earth, though indeed by an honest and upright reflection of the rays that fall upon her from the sun of righteousness through the medium of the sacred Scriptures? Is it not of the living Church that the Giver of this very Rule of Faith affirms, "Ye are my witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth?" With which could the world at any time more easily have dispensed, according to the plain teachings of the Bible itself, with the written word, or with the living Church? We put this question not by any means as a suggestion of the

comparative superfluity of the Oracles of God, but merely that it may present the indispensableness of the traditional testimony of the living Church, in the most forcible light. Now a legitimate inference from the terms of this charge, and the manner in which it is pressed against Dr. Nevin and the Church, is that those who prefer it do not consider the continual testimony of the living Church, by its public preaching, its oral or written confessions of faith, &c., indispensable to the prosecution of its work in spreading the Gospel and converting the world. Are they willing to accept of this inference? Can they hold to such Quakerism, or Radicalism, and yet each in their several ecclesiastical homes, stand "*Erectus in ecclesia*"? Is Gibraltar strong enough to detain a man of such loose views? But we need not ask questions which proceed upon any doubts as to their views upon this matter. The antagonists of Mercersburg do hold that the living ministry is indispensable to the spread and growth of the living Church? They have as little faith as any of us in the all-sufficiency of the Bible for the conversion of sinners, and the universal spread of Christ's kingdom; are as strenuous as any in urging, not the expediency only, but the necessity of the Church's having some definite understanding of the true sense of the Scriptures, whether that understanding be memorized or written. But what is this else than holding to the necessity for formal dogmatic tradition? And yet, for advocating this view, Dr. Nevin is to be banned, or the Church that refuses to ban him to be blockaded and besieged as a violator of the charter of union which binds together the Evangelical Protestant Confederacy of this country, and a dangerous foe to the peace and purity of American Christian Orthodoxy! Assuredly it must be conceded that injustice has been done, as well to the German Reformed Church as to Dr. Nevin, by stigmatizing the latter as the advocate, and the former as the virtual abettor of dangerous and anti-Protestant opinions upon this particular subject.

The next *count*, in this special indictment, claiming consideration, is the charge of the denial of the rights of private judgment, or of such a curtailment and limitation of this right as involves a virtual annihilation of the right itself. This accusation is regarded as far more serious in its character and bearings than the preceding. And although it is found usually in the second place only in the chronological enumeration and ascending grade, it is clearly held forth as most deserving of

all proper ecclesiastical rebuke and Christian condemnation. Commonly we find the charge presented with a solemn flourish of premonitory rams-horns. "The denial of the right of private judgment, in the interpretation of Scripture, we cannot but regard as the *πρωτον ψευδος* of those systems of bondage, Popery and Puseyism. The 'Man of Sin' would never have been able to introduce his most monstrous errors, if the liberty of the individual had not first been trampled under foot. And yet for Popery we have some respect. . . . Puseyism, on the other hand, besides grief awakens only contempt. (The proper climax is wanting, but in lieu thereof we are asked a few sentences lower down!) What are we to think when learned men, who are far from avowing sympathy with either Rome or Oxford, can speak of the 'questionable right of private judgment,' and can compare the relation of the individual member to the Church, to that of the child of immature years to its parent?" Thus did "a member of the Reformed Dutch Church" mourn over Dr. Nevin's depreciation of the right of private judgment, in an elaborate, though not remarkably homogeneous article on the subject in the Protestant Quarterly for January, 1847. If there were "babes" in the Church in Paul's days, who needed to be nourished with milk, and "little children" even so late as towards the close of the aged and beloved John's Apostleship—he thinks that by this time a travailing Church should bring forth only full grown men, able, like partridges, to set up and set off for themselves right from the shell. And he finds cause for dolorous lamentation and complaint in any denial or doubt of such ability, and that it should be thought expedient, on the part of the Church, to attempt to interfere with the freest exercise of such ability. The article is written as a review of this particular feature of the Principle of Protestantism, and a triumphant reply to it. Of course the writer gives his own interpretation and paraphrase of what he considers Dr. Nevin's view as set forth in the publication under review, enlarges or eliminates, as best suits his purpose, or rather perhaps as his sincere but very violent and blear-eyed impulsive zeal, for what he supposes to be the right assailed and truth jeopardized in the case, impetuously leads him to do, and then leaves the alarmed reader to weigh the evidence, and pass sentence upon Dr. Nevin, and the Church tolerating such a man, according to his honest conviction of their mutual guilt. As far as can be gathered from this article, and accusations upon this same point made by likeminded

antagonists of Dr. Nevin, he is charged with denying to the individual Christian all right and liberty to think, decide and act for himself in every thing pertaining to Christian truth and duty, and requiring him blindly to bow to the dictates and decisions of a Church claimed to be invested with supreme authority and infallibility of judgment for this purpose.

Now so far as the Church to which Dr. Nevin has been amenable in his official capacity, for the views he promulgates, has the means of knowing or ascertaining his sentiments, he has taught no such sentiments as those he is accused of advocating, and does not now hold them. On the contrary, he has been laboring all along most strenuously and heartily, to vindicate the rights of the individual Christian against the claims of a tyrannical hierarchy. This is the burden of his masterly criticism upon Popery, in his review of Brownson, in which he does the very thing, only with a much sharper axe, and more powerful stroke, which his adversaries desire to have done, namely, cuts with a sure and deep aim, at the very taproot of the Romish system. And it would take more theological skill than we believe even Dr. Nevin possesses, to heal the gash then inflicted, or bind together again the parts then severed, sufficiently to enable him to draw life for his faith from a trunk so mangled by his own sharp cleaver. Speaking of Romanism, he says: "The theory involves a general wrong against our human constitution, naturally considered, inasmuch as it will not allow its ordinary law of freedom to have force in the sphere of religion, which is precisely that in which it is required to make itself complete. The general law of our nature is that mind must fulfil its mission, not by following blindly a mere outward force of any sort, but by the activity of its own intelligence and will, both as general and individual. It must move in the light that springs from itself, and the power it generates continually from within. This moral constitution includes complex relations, laws, organic interdependence, action and reaction, as in the world of nature, on a vast and magnificent scale. Still to the idea of it as a whole the conception of freedom appertains, in the form now stated, as a necessary universal distinction. The theory of Mr. Brownson, however, if we rightly understand it, requires us to assume that in the highest form of religion, that which is reached in Christianity, the human mind ceases to be directly active in the accomplishment of what is brought to pass in its favor and is a passive recipient simply of foreign action brought to bear upon it in

an-outward way. It does not help the matter, that it is taken to be active with regard to Christianity in a different sphere; the difficulty is that no activity is allowed to it, in the realization of Christianity itself, as the highest fact of the world. Christianity claims to be the perfection of man's life; this, in its ordinary constitution unfolds itself by its own self-movement, in the way of thought and will; but just here all this is superseded by another law altogether; the supernatural comes in as the outward complement of the natural, in such sort as to make the force of this last null and void in all that pertains to its higher sphere. This wrong against human nature becomes most immediately plain, in the violence which the individual mind is made to suffer, by the theory in favor of what is taken to be general. Romanism makes authority to be every thing and freedom nothing. The authority too is cut off from the proper life of the subject, and in this way comes to no real union with his intelligence and will. It comes from abroad, stands over him in an outward way, and requires him to submit to it as a foreign force. Authority thus is not mediated at all by man's actual life; is in no sense living and concrete, but altogether mechanical, rigid and fixed. It is from the start a given quantity, just so much, and nothing either more or less. It excludes private thought and will according to Mr. Brownson." (*Mercersburg Review*, January 1850, p. 60, 61.)

Does all this sound at all like a renunciation of the right and duty of exercising private judgment in matters of religion? Is this covert treachery to the good cause of Protestant evangelical liberty? Remember too that these sentiments were published only two years ago, five years after Dr. Nevin's heresy on this subject was first broached. Because he then denounced the self-willed licentiousness which distinguishes radicals in religion, calling themselves Protestants, to the great scandal of our cause, he was denounced as a masked Puseyite or Papist. He had declared it to be "an abominable presumption for a single individual to cast off all respect for Church authority and Church life, and pretend to draw his faith immediately from the Bible only, and wholly through the narrow pipistem of his own private judgment." Compare this with the above unanswerable scientific defence of the right of private judgment in its proper form, consider the difference in the dates of the two utterances, and then say whether the *Mercersburg* heresy has indeed been advancing, at least in reference to this point,

with such rapid strides, towards the abominations of Rome? So far again as palpable progress is concerned, the Church has good reason to believe that it will take D. Nevin longer than an average lifetime to get to Rome at this gait, unless he reaches it by the Oregon railroad and Pacific route. So far from Dr. Nevin's approving of the wrong which Rome does to human freedom in a gospel sense, he has shown himself a strong champion in its defence, not only against the infringements of the Papal hierarchy, but also against the equally perilous violence of individual, mobocratic tyranny. Who that knows the temper of the unsanctified, unrestrained human heart, or the historical exhibitions of its inflamed and maddened passions, does not know, that human liberty, private judgment or whatever you choose to term it, has as much to fear from anarchy as from a hierarchy, not to say more? There was no Romish Pope to muzzle men's mouths in France during Robespierre's reign. Neither was gospel Protestantism there to curb, with the gentle reins of evangelical authority, the madness of the mob. But was there liberty of thought, of speech, of action? Was private judgment free then, or in chains? In chains! It dared not *look* a free thought or feeling, much less utter it. Suspicion, the least suspicion of its exercise, doomed the suspected to the guillotine, and so summarily saved the poor pregnant mind or heart the tears of travail and the pangs of birth. Here is a foe to religious freedom and to the rightful prerogatives of private judgment, as deadly and as relentless, as ever Rome has been, though history has as yet not afforded it quite so much space or time for the development of its temper—which God grant it never may! But that this may never be, we need to be as earnestly admonished against its insidious influences, and therefore to have its true character as fully exposed, as the perils which may threaten us from a reinvigoration and prevalence of Popery in the land. This, as we apprehend him, and as we believe the Church apprehends him, is the aim and purpose, of what Dr. Nevin has said in reference to this subject. He sees and deprecates the danger of being engulfed in the Roman "whirlpool on the one side." Equally conscious of the existence of a fatal rock on the side of lawless authority and defying religious licentiousness, he speaks out in no uncertain tones of the necessity of the most cautious steering to escape ruinous peril here. This can be done, he believes, only by a proper subjection on the part of the individual member of the Church, to the authority of the

Church herself. With such subordination of the part to the whole, the member to the law of life conditioning the very existence of the body, the individual component to the community in which he is embraced, the doctrine now practically prevalent in the wilder sects, and even to a great extent theoretically contended for by the legitimate branches of the Protestant Christian Church, is in hostile conflict. True the advocates of this theory belonging to these branches, find themselves no little perplexed in reconciling their sworn allegiance to the standards of faith and practice on which their respective denominations rest, with their zeal for personal liberty, and individual right. They seem incapable of comprehending how man can enjoy the truest freedom under the highest authority, if his inmost life is only in full harmony with that authority, or that for the true and perfect Christian law ceases to be a bit and bridle, or a scourging lash, and becomes only a friendly guide, or lamp-bearing companion. And yet the necessity of some such directory or canon, or standard of faith, dare not be repudiated. What shall be done? Sure enough! Here is a sad dilemma! And yet those thus brought to face it, like not horns, ever since they have learned to know the Romish beast. What then can they do? But let these good brethren tell their own troubles.—"What then?" it is asked. "Are we to reject creeds, and catechisms, confessions and symbols? Shall we make a bonfire of them, and just take the Bible without any extraneous help? Assuredly not. Here is, for instance, a very valuable book, containing a vast amount of most important knowledge, distributed over thousands of pages. This book has an index, a table of contents, an epitome of the whole volume. This has cost great labor in its preparation; and it enables the reader to refer to the passages and points in the volume, as occasion may require their use. Shall I tear this index out, because it is only an epitome, and not the book? Shall I burn it in the fire, because I can find all that it teaches, and more than it designates, in the body of the work itself? No; I will do no such foolish thing. Suppose even that this index is full of errors, what then? (Hear, hear!) I will refer to the book itself, and rectify those mistakes. I will prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." Frankly and fearlessly spoken this, for a candidate knocking at the gates of Gibraltar. There could be no misunderstanding of the terms on which admission was sought, and consequently no fault can be found with any

attempt made at correcting the "Index," if by and by some mistakes should be detected. How those stationed to guard the "canons" mounted there will bear the questioning even of their make, their calibre, and mounting, one need not curiously conjecture. But we may hope for peace sake, that all due investigations were made previously to enlistment there, so that no errors will be likely to be detected, or only such as may be conveniently endured.

Such then are the prerogatives which Dr. Nevin's antagonists ask for Private Judgment. And because he not only refuses to allow them, but unqualifiedly denounces the claims thereto as preposterous, and the exercise thereof as destructive of the holiest interests of truth and the Church, he is condemned as Puseyistic and Popish. And yet if he had held and practiced such views as the above, he would have been false to his solemn oath to the Church which called him to serve her in her highest post of responsibility. For him the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Constitution of the German Reformed Church were to be more than merely an *index* to the contents of the Bible; they were the form in which he was to receive the teachings of the Bible for himself, and the dogmatic rule to guide him in instructing others. As such he was pledged to hold and maintain them. Suppose he should find errors in them, in his opinion? What then? Why first suspect that the error might be in his own logic, or in his own glasses. And next fear the discovery of error might after all spring from some corner of self-exaltation in his own mind. And at long last allow himself to hope that after all the Church might be right and he himself wrong, or if it could not after proper struggling conscientiously come to this, *modestly* and *decently* retire to some "more congenial home." But with this his antagonists would not be satisfied. No; far from it. If he finds mistakes in the standards of the Church he must lay hold forthwith and correct them. Well would this satisfy them? Let an illustration answer. In a case of no doctrinal importance whatever, a matter purely historical in its character, Dr. Nevin did suggest, in a work published, if we mistake not, after his resignation as Professor took effect, that one question in the Heidelberg Catechism did not properly belong to the book in its original plan, and had better been omitted as not quite in harmony with its prevailing peaceful spirit and tone. That is, in a very small matter, and in a most modest way, he ventured for once to exercise the right of private judgment, according to his

antagonists' definition of that right. We all know what followed. Even the amiable and excellent Dr. Proudfit lost all patience with the man, and administered a most zealous scourging.—Really between the sibboleths and shibboleths which these worthy opponents put into our mouths, it would be impossible for the most genuine Gileadite to hit the true sound. But we may congratulate all concerned, upon the felicitous inconsistency with which these worthy defenders of the faith, can at one time contend most valorously for some favorite theory, as though it were "one of the institutions" of Christianity, and as though the least attempt at a proper limitation and modification of it were proof of lurking treason against the kingdom of righteousness and truth; and yet forthwith visit that man with swift and condign displeasure and condemnation, who may venture to put their theory into practice, in a way that seems in the least derogatory to the minutest item of their chosen creed. It is fortunate indeed, if not for the integrity of their argument, yet for the integrity and perpetuity of interests worth vastly more than any hobbling theory, that they are in fact far more orthodox and rational in their real sentiments, than they sometimes seem to be. Their controversy with Dr. Nevin and the German Reformed Church, furnishes very decided, though rather amusing, illustrations of this fact. Under other circumstances, and with other objects in view, much more caution and conservatism would have been exhibited in their defence of the right of private judgment, and their indignant rejection of the claims of ecclesiastical authority. When men have committed themselves in various ways, and for many years, to one or another of the several phases of the rabid radicalism of the present day, and find their influence and popularity well nigh inextricably involved, in the maintenance of those errors in whose meshes they have heedlessly and rashly become entangled, it must be hard for them to humble their pride of opinion, forego their love of fame, and regardless of the reproaches of those who may formerly have applauded, confess their error, and acknowledge the truth of what they had unwittingly or through blind prejudice opposed. A difficulty of this sort evidently embarrasses some of Dr. Nevin's antagonists. Not but there are those among them whose natural tenacity of *their own* opinions and confidence in the infallible correctness of *their own* views, would lead them to reject to the last, with cordial disdain, every supposed infringement not only upon their "right of

search," but also upon their right of discovering what they please. This, avowedly, is the ground upon which Dr. Berg stands. He was very candid in declaring, as he stood on the desert beach opposite the Gibraltar of Protestantism, that upon this condition alone, would he bestride the intervening strait, and take his place within the strong embattlements. Not a whisper of disapprobation dare be raised, if upon due examination of the "*Index*" of Dort, (will the excellent T. D. W. like "*Index*," as a substitute for "*Canons*," any better than confession?) some errors are detected, exposed, and corrected. They were duly forewarned that this would be done, and yet extended the cordial right hand of fellowship. Badly as the German Reformed Church needs laborers in her vineyard, we opine that that man who should prescribe such conditions, would be allowed to stand long enough at the gate to repent somewhat of his presumption. To say nothing of the cool self-complacency betrayed in the case, such conditions involve an insinuation made with bad grace by so young a man against a Symbolic "*Index*," now nearly three hundred years old!

But there is little danger that any such attempt at tinkering with old established creeds will ever be tolerated by any of the evangelical denominations, which now seem to be in theoretical sympathy with those who claim the right of practising it. The Reformed Dutch Church, the representatives of genuine Lutheranism, or the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, have no more idea of permitting the *Canons of Dort*, *Luther's Catechism*, the *Augsburg Articles*, or the *Westminster Confession*, to be reduced to the low level of a common *index rerum*, to be altered or amended according to the user's "honest conviction" of its deficiency or mistakes, when tested by his comparison of it with "the Book itself," than Dr. Nevin has of dealing gently with such individual presumption, or than the German Reformed Church would have of conniving at it, should any one attempt such presumptuous tampering with her own adopted symbols. They, and even many of those particular antagonists of Mercersburg, know very well, that the Church is invested, both by an explicit charge, and by her very constitution, with "the power of the keys," in some significant and efficient form; and that unless she did possess spiritual authority within her proper sphere, and when need be exercised it, she could not possibly maintain her integrity, preserve her purity, or even perpetuate her existence. But if the Church has authority over matters of Christian faith and prac-

tice, and is invested with the right not only of claiming but exercising such authority, then assuredly those bound to her communion, and constituting her membership, owe her a corresponding duty, the nature of which is clearly indicated by this *right to rule*. Morally, not politically, spiritually, not civilly, as members of the Church, not as citizens of a temporal government, they are under obligations of the most solemn force to submit to her authority and acquiesce in her decisions, so long as she does not flagrantly abandon her faith, and arbitrarily trample upon the laws of her own existence. Of course men that are "lovers of their own selves, boasters, proud, disobedient to parents, . . . heady, and highminded," will scorn and scout at a doctrine so obnoxious to their wilful vanity. Your Jacob Albrights, and Alexander Campbells, and John Winebrenners, to name no others whose enumeration in such a list might be deemed invidious, are of higher metal than to suffer their necks to be galled by such a yoke of bondage, or their mouths to be gagged with such an hierarchical bit. Why should not they stand up as new Luthers, and second Zuinglis, to re-reform a Church, proved by their impregnable demonstrations, to be in as great need of purification and reconstruction as was the corrupt and apostate Church of the sixteenth century? But Alexander Campbell, and John Winebrenner, and Jacob Albright, are not exactly considered commendable illustrations of the glorious prerogative contended for. And we presume that reflecting man is not to be found in either of the denominations cited above, who would justify either of those renowned reformers, for the schisms they occasioned to gratify their personal vanity, or the peace they sacrificed as holocausts to their self-glorifying zeal, under the pretence of a self-immolating offering to Jehovah-Nissi! Not one among them, unless the disorganizing radicalism of French infidelity, is regarded with more real favor than we are willing to believe it is, would yield to the individual Christian the right to set himself up against all existing law and order, excepting only what his own arbitrary presumption may approve, and so, if it were possible for him to succeed, to subvert the established organization of the Church, and throw Christianity into anarchy wild as the raging sea, and dark as a starless night.

About this, assuredly, there can be no serious diversity of opinion between the opposite parties. None of us believe in our hearts, that the Church's authority is but a powerless leaf, with an impotent confession impressed upon it, possessing no

higher significancy or force than the index of a book! To affirm this were to cut the sinews of ecclesiastical government, and resolve every act of Church discipline into the tyrannical exercise of power. But the opponents urge that there is a difficulty in the way here, and that in the perplexity which it occasions, we must be scrupulously careful to guard the right of private judgment against pernicious infringements. Unquestionably, the proper harmonizing of the right of the individual with the authority of the collective body with which he is incorporated, presents a problem which is not to be solved by a few bold dashes of the pen in the Protestant Quarterly. The concession is gladly accepted, and it is hoped, for candor's sake, it will never be recalled. But it is a difficulty by no means confined to the sphere of Church life, or peculiar to theological casuistry. It confronts us at the family fireside, and demands how far a child is bound to honor his father and mother, by obeying his parents, and desires us to fix the definite boundary, beyond which a child is at full liberty to think and act for himself, and in defiance of parental rule;—to say distinctly at what age (if ever,) and under what circumstances, (if any) the son may rise up and say to his father, "I can no longer submit to your commands, release me from your authority, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me, that I may depart and henceforth be a law unto myself." It faces us in the forum, and asks us to define moral treason against existing civil power, to tell in unequivocal terms, how far the citizen is required to bow to the powers that be, and at what point he may refuse such obedience, resist the law (if ever,) and, ringing the tocsin of revolution, summon the oppressed to a violent vindication of their rights, and the riddance of their necks from the chafing chains of tyranny. Here indeed are nice questions to be settled, questions which are not to be disposed of in a passionate newspaper editorial hastily written, and which may puzzle the sagacity even of as profound thinkers as Dr. Nevin's antagonists.

Of this character now precisely is the difficulty of determining the proper limits of the Church authority, and private judgment. And how do the accusers of Mercersburg meet the difficulty? By respectfully acknowledging that ecclesiastical authority is a very good and useful thing, and that it is indispensably necessary to maintain it in some form, whilst at the same time, all power of any efficient exercise of such authority is wrested from the Church, and the fullest right is guaranteed

to the individual to do as he pleases, provided he only acts conscientiously. That is in a word, Church authority is rendered nugatory, and individual presumption, or private judgment enthroned. No quotations need be made to prove that this, substantially, is their solution of the troublesome problem. Their assumption of the defence of the prerogatives of private judgment in an age so notorious as the present for running into the wildest extremes upon this very point, as well as the ardor of their zeal in denouncing Dr. Nevin, for uttering some earnest words of warning against the growing evil, furnish the most satisfactory evidence of their views. It is therefore by a virtual nullification of "the power of the keys," that the difficulty is settled by this party. How does Popery meet and settle it? By wresting all right of personal thought and will from the individual, forcing from him a full surrender of his whole being, soul, body and estate, into her hands, assuming infallible authority, and exercising irresponsible power over him, not only for this world, but long after he has been launched into the next. That is, she forges "the keys" of Church power, into an iron sceptre of violent and arbitrary rule, with which she graciously subdues resistance to her overtures of peace, by striking the man down to the ground, and extending over him the protection of her heavy foot. And how does Dr. Nevin meet this solemn question? He has told us in his articles on Brownson's Quarterly, in terms so plain that no room is left for honest misapprehension, and with such a cogency of argument against the Romish doctrine on this subject, as to have defied all Mr. Brownson's skill at evasive refutation. This is Dr. Nevin's language:

"Unitarianism and Romanism are the contrary poles of Christianity, freedom and authority, the liberty of the individual subject and the binding force of the universal object, carried out each, by violent disjunction from each other, into nerveless pantomime and sham. Thus seemingly far apart, they are in reality always closely related; just as all extremes, by the force of their own falsehood, have an innate tendency to react, pendulum-wise, into the very opposites from which they seem to fly. Hence the familiar observation that Romanism in many cases leads to Rationalism and Infidelity. In bursting the bonds of mere blind authority, a Ronge has no power to stop in true Protestantism, but swings clear over into the dark void of full unbelief. So it is not unnatural, on the other hand, that Rationalism should lead the way occasionally, to popery

and superstition. This transition we see exemplified in the case of Mr. Brownson. . . . Having violently given himself away to a theory of the Church which puts an end to all private thinking in religion, he makes a merit apparently of the most violent consistency, in following it out to its most difficult consequences on all sides. The Christian salvation is for him a process that goes like clock-work. To his New-England mind, the operation of the *machine* is all settled, as clearly as two and two make four, by the fixed nature of its pulleys and wheels. . . . Has it become thus a maxim of reason with him, to obey with unquestioning faith the Roman Church? He will be *rational* then in such style to the full end of the chapter. . . . He will play the very *Yankee* himself in this new game; he will be a Puritan Romanist; making nothing still of his own mind, and wilfully allowing his will to have no freedom whatever. . . . This is the natural extreme of Romanism. Against it the Reformation formed a legitimate and absolutely necessary reaction and protest. . . . It is as true now as it was at the beginning of the sixteenth century, that the *actualization* of truth in the world is something which can be accomplished only through the medium of intelligence and will on the part of the world itself; that liberty in its genuine sense is not simply the outward echo of authority, but the very element of its life, and the co-efficient of its power, in that which it brings to pass; that man is no passive machine merely in the business of his own salvation; that the *free activity of the individual subject in the world of mind, never can be paralyzed or overwhelmed by the sense of law*, as a nature foreign and transcendent wholly to its own nature, without such bondage as involves in the end the overthrow of reason altogether." (Mercersburg Review, January, 1850, p. 33, 39, and, as they sometimes add, though with less reason than in this case, *et passim*.)

This manifestly is not the Popish theory. Whatever else the opponents of Dr. N. may make out of such declarations, they must candidly concede that they betray no disposition to surrender human liberty to the tyrannical claims of Rome. And yet the German Reformed Church is held responsible, under heavy penalties, for retaining a Professor, who holds such opinions of private judgment, and even complimenting him with a unanimous vote of thanks for past services! She is asked to forget, that sentiments like the above, and much more of the same character than we dare venture to re-occupy these

pages with quoting, were ever published, and consider instead thereof only their caricature-paraphrase of a sentence published some seven years ago, as sufficient evidence to prove this count! But the Church would not do "any such foolish thing"! And sober, reflecting Protestantism will commend her wise and prudent judgment in the case, even though at present the disappointed antagonists of Dr. Nevin should cry out with vexation and chagrin: "We have a law, and by that law the man and the Church ought to be condemned."

The *third charge*, in this list of heresies tabled against Mercersburg, accuses Dr. Nevin of advocating views of the sacrament of the *Lord's Supper*, which are denounced as unprotestant and pernicious. Upon this subject Dr. Nevin has written so fully and so freely, that it would be a work of supererogation to occupy a moment or a line, in presenting even only a condensed statement of his theory, but for the pertinacity and partial success with which his opponents have persisted in caricaturing or misrepresenting it. In their attempts at this, they seem to have had no small advantage in the fact already, that Mercersburg was so diligent in its investigation of this subject, and so earnest in its discussion. It was assumed to be suspicious at least, that the German Reformed Professor should think and write so much about what engaged so little attention among others. To be so zealous for the honor of an ordinance which afforded so little opportunity, in the administration of it, for the display of human ingenuity and power, stood in such strong contrast with the manworshipping mania of the age, as made those exhibiting such zeal appear to lean most dangerously in a wrong direction. Although but very few, therefore, of those who sympathized with the alarm-cry raised against the sacramentarianism of Mercersburg, pretended at all to examine or know for themselves what really were the views advanced by that school, it was taken as *prima facie* evidence against Dr. Nevin that he meddled at all with such an old bone of contention in the Christian Church, and revived the discussion of what others seemed to consider as long since settled to the full satisfaction of orthodox Protestantism. Taught in their early youth a system of religion which assigned to other services of the sanctuary an importance and efficiency which threw the sacraments comparatively into the shade, and accustomed by long habit to consider it an evidence of superstition, to attach any special virtue to such external forms of worship, it was to start

serious misgivings, as to the actual aim, and probable issue, of a discussion which clearly invested the subject with greater significance than it was supposed to possess. From this vantage ground now, the assailants of Dr. Nevin attacked him with an impetuosity of argument which threatened at once to overwhelm him, and unanswerably prove him a reprobate to the Protestant faith. He has been charged with maintaining the ubiquitarian heresy, the opus operatum abomination, and in a word with teaching Popish transubstantiation in the Protestant dialect. His theory is accused of ubiquitarianism, because he teaches the real spiritual presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Supper, and the participation of believing communicants in his glorified humanity. He is charged with advocating the opus operatum error, because he insists upon the presence of an inherent power in the sacraments, to convey the grace they are designed to symbolize and seal. And he is accused of holding views in general upon the subject, which must be popish in their prevailing spirit and bias, because they do not harmonize with his antagonists' theory of Protestantism. And assuredly the man proved guilty of so serious a departure from the old paths, is not fit to be continued in the post which Dr. Nevin has been permitted so long to occupy; and the Church, tolerating his wild vagaries, merits the severest censures of her more orthodox neighbors!

The better to see how Dr. Nevin does stand with reference to the genuine Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper, it may be well simply to enumerate the four most prominent theories held upon the subject. *First*, we have the Roman Catholic dogma, of transubstantiation, avowing the total transmutation of the natural elements of the Supper into the natural flesh and blood of Christ, and the unconditionally saving efficacy of participation thereof under this form. *Then* we have Luther's characteristic modification of this old Romish fancy, in which he so vainly strives to shun the manifest absurdity of insisting upon a gross physical change which has yet evidently not taken place, by his peculiar scheme of consubstantiation, which allows the elements to remain in their natural form, but insists upon the actual presence of the natural body of Christ in the elements, and the real communication thereof to all that partake of the sacramental bread and wine, though only to believers in an efficacious manner. A *third* theory still holds to a presence of the Lord in the sacraments, in a form so real and so actual as to make it perfectly easy and

natural for its advocates to speak of believing communicants eating Christ's crucified body and drinking his shed blood, of their thus becoming more and more intimately incorporated with Christ, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, of the presence in the Holy Supper, of some real mysterious virtue, constituting it, by God's appointment, the channel of the communication of certain special grace, and investing it therefore with peculiar sacredness, and claims to extraordinary reverence as the concentration and symbolical embodiment of the most holy and consoling mysteries of the Gospel; and yet we find this theory guarding itself at the same time most cautiously against the errors involved in the two preceding schemes, denying any physical change in the elements, any concorporation with them of the body of Christ, and rejecting wholly the idea of their being any saving or sanctifying efficacy in the consecrated elements themselves. The *fourth* doctrine concerning the Lord's Supper is that which strips it entirely of all these enveloping mysticisms, and casts them away as the swaddling clothes, in which it was natural enough for puerile Protestantism to dress up its superstitious fancy concerning the sanctity of the Holy Eucharist, but which badly become the manly form to which the evangelical doctrine has grown in the space of three hundred years. Completely divested now of all the absurd and childish conceits, which it was naturally difficult for the early Reformers at once to prune off and cast away, we see in the Lord's Supper the severely simple commemorative meal described in the Gospel as instituted by our blessed Saviour. He is present indeed to believers in the Sacrament, but in a purely spiritual manner, just as he is always and everywhere present to his people's minds, when in their pious meditations they rise up to more intimate communion with him. He manifests himself to them there as he does not manifest himself to the world, but only by assisting their memories, by means of the figurative breaking of the bread, and figurative pouring out of the wine, to call vividly up before their mind's eye, as by the help of a suitable picture, all that Christ did and suffered on their behalf, and more intensely to meditate upon it. And in this way alone, by having pious feelings excited, and past events called vividly up to review, are communicants said to eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus, and enter into closer fellowship with his flesh and bones and life. The entire transaction is resolved into a purely rational operation, involving no mystery at all in its nature or observance, and possessing no special virtue.

now. But that it is not, requires no more special proof than the cordial reception into its bosom of the man who with the Canons of Dort bound up with the Heidelberg Catechism in one hand, and the other uplifted in solemn appeal to heaven, could say, "If I believed that in that sacrament, I received the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, or that the glorified humanity, or that the Person of Christ was by some stupendous miracle communicated in the supper to the believer, I too should insist upon the intrinsic virtue of the sacraments, but as a German Reformed Protestant I am taught differently. I can find no such doctrine in the Bible. I can find nothing of the kind in the symbol of the Church's faith." Whether this inability to see the doctrine thus ceremoniously repudiated, arises from obtuseness or perversity of vision matters little for our purpose. It is quite enough to prove our charge of the Dutch Church's departure from its original faith, that it applauds so flat a renunciation of the very terms even of its catechism and confession, and espouses so cordially the cause of the author of it.

But if the Reformed Dutch Church has bartered its ancient creed upon this subject for the more rational and unmythical theory of New England Puritanism, it does not follow that the German Reformed Church must do so too. She prefers the old doctrine in its good old substantial sense, and is glad to have found the man in her midst, who was willing and able to defend her doctrine against the encroachments and mockeries of modern improvements. The German Reformed Church, continues, in the simplicity of her heart to believe, that sincere Christians, do, in the holy sacrament, receive the body of Christ, eat his flesh, and drink his blood, and that the sacrament possesses inherent power to unite them ever more and more closely to the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the same spirit which animates Him, may more and more animate them, just as one soul animates all the members of the same body. This would be hard doctrine for the Puritan Recorder to swallow; but this is not the only bone in the Heidelberg Catechism at which a New England Congregationalist of the New Haven school would choke. We however who are bred and born in the old Reformation family, have probably, a different physical organization, which makes such food our natural aliment, so that we find no inconvenience at all in using it. Accustomed to walk much more by faith than by sight, and implicitly to believe many things which we do not pretend to understand,

we find it much easier to humble our reason than turn recreant to our Church, when some "mystery of the kingdom" is to be received.

Now the issue between Dr. Nevin and his antagonists, and between those who sympathise with his antagonists and the German Reformed Church, is manifestly this: Shall the old Reformed doctrine concerning the sacraments be retained, or shall the modern Puritan theory be substituted in its stead. Dr. Nevin has labored indefatigably and nobly to resuscitate and defend the old view, or what he has clearly shown to be its full and fair equivalent. The Church in whose service he has toiled has witnessed his labor, weighed its results, and rejoices in finding itself so far restored again, to those old foundations from which the strong current of modern innovations had somewhat pushed it. And we think she does well to rejoice in it, and has no reason to deplore her present trials, so long as her opponents can prove nothing worse against her or her Professors, than that they have shown themselves more consistent and firm in the maintenance of their evangelical integrity, and their resolute adherence to their ancient standards, than those who arrogate to themselves a higher and more intelligent standard of orthodoxy.

Altogether the hostility evinced by the opponents of Dr. Nevin, against the old sacramental doctrine of the Reformed Church, as reviewed and defended in his *unanswered*, and we presume unanswerable, tract upon this subject, furnishes occasion for serious alarm, and sincere regret. There is, to be sure, something unpleasantly and painfully ominous in the ardor with which they espouse the disorganizing and sect-engendering tenets of ultra independency, and in their cordial animosity against the churchly conservatism, or constitutionalism, for which Morcersburg has been contending so courageously for the last ten years. It augurs any thing but good for the great Protestant interest of this country, that those desiring to be regarded, and most commonly accredited, as its most intelligent and valiant champions, should seem thus to make common cause with the authority-despising *freigeisterei* of the age, and virtually sanction its impatience of ecclesiastical restraint, by rearing its radical error into one of the proudest pillars of Protestantism. But allowance must be made for the blind and mistaken zeal exhibited upon this point, in view of the agitations and convulsions of the times; especially, considering, as has been seen, how happily their practice contra-

dicts, and so disproves their argument. For their abandonment however of the old Reformed doctrine concerning the deep mysterious import and efficacy of the holy sacraments, and most emphatically that of the Lord's Supper, no such consoling palliative presents itself. Indeed the *form* of their opposition to it, involving not merely a renunciation, but a denunciation of it, and furthermore a solemn condemnation, by their crimination of Dr. Nevin and the German Reformed Church, of the most renowned and venerated among the old Reformers, (Zwingli, Melancthon, Calvin) who have been incontrovertibly proved to have held the very doctrine for which we have contended, this betrays a radical departure from the ancient landmarks, and a repudiation of time-honored dogmas,—a disposition and readiness to barter the most sacred verities of the past, for the more popular conceits of our more rational era—which cannot fail to awaken in every thoughtful heart, the most distressing anxieties for the future. It may serve the present purpose of these antagonists of Mercersburg, to render Dr. Nevin's views odious by charging them with being identical with the grosser fancies of the Popish doctrine. But to prefer a charge, and to prove it are different things. Dr. Nevin has nowhere taught such a presence of our Lord in the sacraments as involves the *ubiquity* of Christ's body. His positive and unqualified denial of this charge, would have satisfied more generous antagonists than he has had the fortune for the most part of meeting with, that they had wrongfully accused him in this respect, especially as his language could hardly be made to bear the sense they put upon it, even by the most forced construction. If they cannot make the distinction which he most clearly makes, between humanity and corporeity, between the grosser flesh and blood, bones and sinews, muscles and limbs of the human body, and the human nature they outwardly invest, why that is no fault of his. The doctrine of the Catechism he was bound to go by in his instructions, manifestly implies and calls for such a distinction, and so he was fully justified in making and maintaining it. And so again in reference to the *efficacy* of the sacraments as means of grace. In order to make their accusation the more plausible and popular, the adversaries of Mercersburg have charged Dr. Nevin with advocating a sentiment synonymous with the pernicious error of the Romish Church upon this point, although he has repeatedly repudiated the calumny (for such it really became upon their reiteration of it in the face of his solemn

denial) and shown wherein they misapprehended his language and distorted his view. If his opponents are unable to see any difference between the *opus operatum* efficacy maintained by Rome, and that adaptedness of the sacraments to be the actual seals of the grace they so appropriately signify, and therefore to be possessed of divine efficiency as media for the actual conveyance of the grace they offer, which our standards most unequivocally teach, assuredly he and the Church are not to be ostracised for that. The difference is not annulled by their inability to discern it, neither is Dr. Nevin's duty to teach and defend it, or the Church's right to sustain him in so doing, thereby annulled. Indeed it is a fortunate circumstance for the old Reformed faith, that there are yet left those who can see what others slur or slight.

Instead therefore of frightening the German Reformed Church from her proper and natural position in reference to these subjects, the strong disposition betrayed by those, whose more orthodox pretensions justified the hope of better things from them, to fritter away the ancient faith of our fathers until its beauty is marred, and its strength destroyed, has only convinced her of the necessity of adhering to that fire and storm-proof faith with the more unflinching fidelity. Whatever else the adversaries of Mercersburg have failed to prove to her mind, they have most fully satisfied her of this. Incidental evidences of a growing tendency on the part of Corresponding Denominations to fall in with the current anti-sacramentarianism of New England theology, had indeed not been wanting previously. But not until recently had any of the Churches claiming blood-affinity with the old Reformed Theology, of the sixteenth century, given its formal sanction to this mournful defection. It was time therefore for the legitimate representative of the oldest daughter of the Reformation in this country, to fix her foot more firmly upon her ancient foundations, and declare her determination not to be moved from thence. Those she knew were compactly built and of solid material. The homlock of these modern "*platforms*," and the slim slabs by which they appeared to be propped, seemed insecure to those accustomed to rest on rocks. Even "*Plymouth Rock*" seemed not as fair and firm in her eyes, (had not the security of which ages of trial gave assurance,) as the "*Rock of Ages*" on which her fathers built, and taught her implicitly to trust. To this therefore she has resolved to cling. And the more violently the storm of opposition strives to beat her off from her refuge,

the more closely does she cling to it, and prove to those who may choose to observe her struggle, that though her form be slender, and her hand be small, she still has a heroic heart, and a believing grasp!

It may indeed grieve her to find herself the object of unkind suspicions among those whose friendship she desires to merit and enjoy. We do not think that she can be charged with contempt for the confidence and good will of sister Churches. But it is surely better, if it must be, to forego the present favor of misjudging friends, than to forfeit her faith. Conscious of integrity, and convinced that she is falsely accused, and unrighteously suspected, she seems to think it best to bide her time, endure her present wrongs, and patiently await the acquitting vindication of the future. And we are fully confident, that she will then find, in a retrospective view of the unappreciated service she is now, according to her humble means, seeking to render the cause of genuine Protestantism, an abundant recompense for all the reproaches now endured.

Reserving the consideration of the other points involved in this controversy for the next issue of the Review, we herewith close for the present.

J. H. A. B.