

**THE PROCEEDINGS AND  
DOCUMENTS RELATIVE TO  
CERTAIN MEMBERS SEPARATING  
FROM THE CHURCH IN WILTON**

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The Proceedings and Documents Relative to Certain Members Separating from the Church in Wilton by Samuel Abbot & Jonathan Livermore

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**SAMUEL ABBOT & JONATHAN LIVERMORE**

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US 11905.10.5

1864, June 1.

Bequest of  
Rev. Conwers Francis, D.D.  
of Cambridge.  
(76.2.1815.)

## INTRODUCTION.

In submitting the following pages to those, who may take an interest in the affairs of this church, it is not designed to excite or prolong contention, but to furnish the means of more correct information of the late dissension manifested here, that truth and candor may be promoted. The church have no desire to obtrude upon public notice the internal management of their concerns, or to criminate the conduct of others; their object is to vindicate themselves from unjust imputations, that the salutary influence which they may justly possess, in promoting pure religion, may not be impaired. It has been evident that great misapprehensions concerning the foundation of the complaints made against the church have been entertained, and that very injurious impressions against it have been disseminated, not only in this place, but in the vicinity, by industrious attempts to create and promote disaffection towards the church. In consequence of this, and to afford better means of correct information to those who might desire it, the church a considerable time since authorized a committee to publish the writings, which related to the late subject of dissatisfaction. This measure has been delayed from a hope that it would become unnecessary,—that when the feelings excited upon the occasion had become more calm by time, correct views of the subject would be taken, where inaccurate and unjust ones had been entertained. It is pleasing to observe, that this effect to a considerable extent has been produced, though not so far as would be desirable, or as might be expected if the means of information were increased. As many also among us are urgent to possess a copy of these papers, it has at length been thought expedient, that their wishes should be gratified.

The offence, which caused the dissatisfied members to separate from the church, so far as it can be understood from their memorials, lies in a small compass. We have a right to presume that they, in their memorials, stated the real op-

erating cause of their renouncing communion and fellowship with the church; otherwise they must be supposed to have been guilty of flagrant duplicity and incincerity in assigning one thing as the cause, if in reality it were something else, which they have not declared. The offence appears to be, that the church had adopted a regulation and pursued a practice according to it, which permitted, or rather required candidates for admission to make a satisfactory declaration of their faith, without insisting that it should be done in one unvaried form of words.

It is true, that in their writings, they labored more in attempting to shew, contrary to the declared understanding of the church, that the regulation had in one way and another been repealed, than they did to prove that the regulation or practice was either unscriptural or evil. But still they might be unwilling it should be inferred, that they were more offended, that the church did not submit to their opinion about the actual existence of the regulation, than they were with the regulation itself.

Whatever else either of their *ex parte* councils may have pleased to insinuate or assert to have been a grievance, but which has not been presented as such by the disaffected members for redress, surely could make no part of the case between the church and those members.

It has never been so much as pretended to the church by those members, that in consequence of the regulations of the church any person unsound in faith, or of an unchristian character, or who ought to be rejected for want of sufficient qualification, has ever been admitted into the church. It was the regulation itself, or the votes that recognised its existence and permitted a practice according to it, and not any corrupt state, or oppressive conduct in the church, that was complained of as the "weighty grievance."

From what is mentioned, the subject at issue may be so far known as is necessary for understanding the documents.

After a candid examination of the transactions, the reader will be prepared to decide without difficulty, whether the church have so conducted in this matter, that the communion

and fellowship of other christians ought in good conscience to be withheld from them, or that they have given sufficient cause to any of their members to raise the banner of religious party, and rend in twain a church of Christ.

It is not without concern we have observed the evils proceeding from such a state, the disaffection spread against the church, the course of proselytism pursued by so operating upon those sensibilities which adorn and better fit the minds of females for acting in their proper sphere, that they are beguiled into the ranks, involved in the inquietude, and induced to the restless activity and incessant importunity of sectarian partizans. Though the unhappy effects of such proceedings may not be very prominent subjects of general observation, yet they come near the heart, and intrench deeply upon the enjoyment flowing from the tender charities of life. The mutual confidence which lies at the foundation of domestic happiness is unsettled. The kindly influence of parental instruction and example in piety, becomes chilled and enfeebled by the dark shades of distrust, which may be interposed between the heads and between the members of families, who all with equal apparent sincerity profess a desire to learn of the same divine Teacher, and to obey the same Prince of Peace.

While we lament these evils so unpropitious to the cultivation of the christian temper, and which result from attempts to rend in pieces a christian church, that church, conscious of the rectitude of their intentions, clearly indicate by the course they have directed to be taken, that they do not shrink from the closest scrutiny into their proceedings. Those who will judge, they wish may possess the means of judging correctly.

The editors are sensible that the transactions disclosed, and the principles by which they were directed, might have been exhibited as intelligibly and with more brevity; but it has been preferred in this publication, though at the expence of brevity, to give all the papers on both sides of the question at full length, as presenting the case in the most authentic form.



The reports of committees, though accepted by the church, might not perhaps be strictly considered as acts of the church; yet, as they would exhibit more accurately, than could easily be done in any other way, the views of the church and the general reasons of their proceedings, they have been inserted entire.

To a reader who should look upon them as written for the public, they might appear needlessly prolix. It might appear to him that a particular refutation of such positions and arguments as these,—that the death of the pastor annulled a regulation of the church which had no reference to that event,—or that the church had annulled one of its express regulations by approving a formulary adapted to facilitate the execution of the regulation, might well have been spared; and that it would be making a low estimate of his penetration and sagacity to suppose, that the dispassionate reader would not observe their futility without comment. But the reader will candidly call to mind, that these papers were produced not in the process of public discussion, but as having reference to members of the church, whose feelings and whatever might be urged in their behalf in the way of argument, should be treated with tenderness and regard; and that with feelings warmly engaged in an object, arguments of little or no weight, furnished by their confidential advisers, might appear to them to possess a most convincing force. More minuteness in examining and refuting what had been advanced, might in such circumstances be expedient, and excuse the prolixity it occasioned.

The editors appointed by the church are alone responsible for the parts, which are interposed between the documents for the purpose of continuing the narrative, and also for the marginal notes.

With these observations, it is submitted to the candid consideration of the reader.

SAMUEL ABBOT, }-Publishing Committee  
JONATHAN LIVERMORE, } of the Church.

Wilton, Feb. 1824.

## PROCEEDINGS, &c.

**T**HE church in Wilton, for some years after its formation, which was in A. D. 1763, like many and perhaps most of the churches at that time in New England, had no distinct form of a confession of faith, to which the assent of candidates for admission was required. General professions of belief in the being and attributes of God, belief in Christ, and a belief and reception of the holy scriptures as a rule of faith and practice, were expressed publicly in a covenant to which candidates assented on admission.

The church, A. D. 1779, departed from this course so far as, among other regulations adopted at the same time, to prescribe, "that every candidate previous to his admission give his consent to a confession of faith, or exhibit one of his own, or a relation, satisfactory to the church." From its adoption to the present time, the church have uniformly admitted members in accordance with this rule, receiving, however, members from other churches upon proper testimonials of regular standing and dismissal.

Pursuing this course, the church under divine blessing have been greatly prospered and apparently edified, and for more than forty years enjoyed unusual peace and harmony among its members. No dissatisfaction concerning the mode of admitting members was ever manifested to the church, until April, A. D. 1822. Some months previous, a spirit of discontent had been promoted. An opinion was sedulously impressed upon the minds of some individuals, that the course pursued in admitting members was unauthorised and reprehensible.— This was done without examining the particular regulations of the church concerning the subject, or inquiring of the pastor the reasons of his procedure in the admission of members. A knowledge of this uneasiness had then been confined to a small circle, consisting of a few church members and some others. Information coming to the pastor, that dissatisfaction was entertained, he laid the subject before the church in a meeting, at

which a full attendance of the members had been, in public notice, particularly requested. After a free discussion the church passed the following votes :

“ Voted, that the usage of the church granting variations from the confession of faith as accepted by the church be continued.”

“ Voted, that when any persons, wish for admission to this church, and choose to make their declaration of faith with variations from the customary form, they shall, before they are propounded, leave in writing, such variations with the pastor of the church, or, if there be no pastor, with the deacons, for the inspection of members, and the said variations shall be read to the church at some church meeting previous to their admission.”

These votes it appears were offensive to certain members ; and a few of those who finally separated from the church neglected attending the communion service on the Sunday following. A memorial to the church was prepared remonstrating against the votes, and circulated to procure subscribers. It was presented to the church on Sunday the 4th day of August, and the church assigned the 6th day of the same month to take it into consideration.

The church having met at the time assigned, the memorial, which had been presented to the church, was read and was as follows:—

### MEMORIAL.

*To the Pastor and Members of the Church of Christ in Wilton.*

THE undersigned, a minority of the said church, tenderly and respectfully represent, that whereas soon after the ordination of the present pastor, it seemed good to the church to revise their constitution, and accordingly, by a vote of the church, June 22, 1803, a confession of faith and a covenant were accepted as the ground of their christian fellowship and communion ; and whereas, for aught that appears, this revised constitution remained unaltered for a course of years, and no act of the church is known to have made or authorised any deviation from it ; and whereas, by a vote of the church, April 22, 1822, it is implied, that deviations have been made by the church unknown to the undersigned,