

**THE ALLEDGED
DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES
OF THE OLD AND
NEW SCHOOL EXAMINED**

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The Alleged Doctrinal Differences of the Old and New School Examined by William Bacon

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WILLIAM BACON

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Doctrinal Differences
OF THE
OLD AND NEW SCHOOL
EXAMINED,
BY AN OLD DISCIPLE.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE following is an amended and abridged edition of a tract, entitled, *The alleged reasons for the act of secession and consequent division of the Presbyterian Church, examined by An Old Disciple.*

One reason for issuing this edition is, that the former one has so many typographical errors. Another is, that since the former edition went to press, Dr. Judd's History of the Division of the Presbyterian Church has come to hand. Finding that he has gone over much of the ground which I had traversed in relation to that Division, I have concluded to omit it in this edition. And another reason is, that new editions of "Old and New Theology," by Dr. Jas. Wood, and "Old and New School," by Dr. N. L. Rice, have been recently published; and that some additional remarks in relation to them seem to be needed.

## INTRODUCTION.

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MANY a religious controversy is prosecuted needlessly. On this subject much wisdom might be learned from the history of the altar "E D," as given in the 22d chapter of Joshua. After the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh had aided the other tribes of Israel in subduing the Canaanites, they returned with the blessing of Joshua to the possessions allotted to them on the other side of Jordan. And on their way "they built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to." But when the other tribes heard of it, they were filled with suspicion, that this was but a signal of revolt, and of rebellion against God and his people. And "the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them." But previous to the commencement of hostilities, they concluded to send a deputation to the supposed offenders, to inquire why they had been acting thus. And the explanation given by the two and a half tribes showed, that it was not for the purpose of revolt, that they had reared this altar; but rather for the purpose of preventing it in after time.—Verse 24-29. This explanation satisfied their suspecting brethren; and thus a bloody war was prevented. And if in the commencement of the difficulties between the Old School and New, the like explanations had been candidly asked and given, how much evil might have been avoided. The present essay is an humble attempt to furnish the explanations that should have been long since asked and given.

Religious controversies are sometimes needful. But they are always to be deplored; and the love of them is an unlovely and unsafe propensity. Said Dr. Scott, "We must have controversies, but we must take care of our tempers." Few controversialists heed this caution as they ought. Often the contending parties "know not what spirits they are of." While they think they are "very jealous for the Lord God of hosts," their spirit is sectarian,

and their object mastery. The Lord keep the writer from such self-delusion.

When Dr. E. S. Ely was an Old School man, he wrote his "Contrast," to show that Old and New Divinity are very wide apart. And since that, I have heard him speak of his mother's saying to him, "My son, you have written a Contrast, and now I wish you would write a Harmony." Such a work was much needed *then*. But, as we have had several other Contrasts since, the Harmony is now needed more than ever. And in the absence of better hands for the work, I volunteer my own. I am anxious that this little work shall have at least one excellency, that of candor. I shall aim also to be simple and plain enough to be understood by common minds, even though it should be at the expense of my reputation as a writer.

I am aware that the enemies of the truth are now attacking it in a new and most adroit manner—not by directly denying and opposing it, but by admitting and corrupting it. The friends of truth should therefore be the more watchful, "lest Satan spoil them and others, through philosophy and vain deceit." And, if such be the policy and practice of the New School, let the Old be keen-sighted to discover, and loud in warning the community away from them. But if, on the contrary, the New School are the staunch advocates of the cardinal doctrines of revelation, then it is not only very unjust, but very unwise to denounce them as semi-infidels, and semi-Pelagians. To confound them with such errorists, pouring upon them the like imprecations, is not only doing great injustice to the former, but giving great advantage to the latter. If the Old School and New are standing on the same side of the grand line between truth and error, (as I hope to show that they are,) then, they ought not to turn their weapons upon each other, but bear down with united force upon the common enemy.

I am far from thinking that the New School have monopolized all the correctness of opinion, conduct and spirit in the Presbyterian Church. I am free to admit that some of us have been so loose and indefinite, so extravagant, (and wild, shall I say ?) in the statement of our doctrines, that taking them for a sample, it is not so strange that our Old School brethren misunderstand us.\* And I doubt not that many of us (myself particularly) have been much



wanting in candor, respecting their views and conduct. I know there are faults on both sides, and they are more equally balanced, perhaps, than either side suppose. I would keep it ever in mind, that if I occupied the stand point of my Old School brethren, I should see fewer faults in them, and more in ourselves. And as it is, I see in some on my own side, a want of candor in weighing the statements of the other party, for which I feel no fellowship. Still I believe the New School (yes, and the Old School too) have in the main the right spirit, and hold the essential doctrines of the Gospel.

Such is the state of the controversy between us, that it should have more attention just now. Grievous charges have been brought against us, both of *hypocrisy* and *heresy*. And if they are true, they ought to be more fully known, and more pointedly condemned. But, if they are false, this should be more fully known, that our characters may be vindicated, and the obstruction to our usefulness may be removed.

Dr. William D. Smith, in his Dialogues of a Minister and Convert, holds the following language:

Minister. "That which is called 'New Divinity' is not the system of doctrine taught in our standards, with points of difference only. It is entirely a different system, one principal feature of which is, that it dishonors God, and exalts man; which you know is the reverse of the Calvinistic system, taught in our standards."

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\* Dr. J. Wood, in his late and enlarged edition of "Old and New Theology," gives us, pp. 224-8, an account of certain observations made in the Auburn Convention of 1837, and to himself individually, as proof of the "Prevalence of Error" in the New School. This proof I consider very lame in several respects. In the first place, it is doubtful whether he infallibly understood the meaning of these New School brethren; for nothing is more common than for disputants to misunderstand each other. In the next place, it is doubtful whether he could recollect their language for sixteen years so as to report it exactly. And though his report were exact, it is more than doubtful whether the observations reported express the views of the New School correctly. According to the Doctor's own showing, those who made the remarks mistook the meaning of the Confession of Faith, thinking it taught the identity of Adam with his posterity, or transfer of his sin to them; while he and I believe it teaches no such thing. And as to the statements of others respecting the prevalence of errors as given pp. 229-31 it is doubtful whether they are infallibly correct; and whether some of those who made them were not *then at heart*, and are now *by connection*, Old School men.

Convert. "But do they not receive and adopt the Confession of Faith?"

Minister. "As a body, they receive and adopt it, in a certain way; that is, they adopt it so far as they believe it, which is little better than mockery. In that way we may receive the Turkish Koran. It says there is a God, and it inculcates some moral duties; and so far, any one could adopt it. Indeed, I do not know of any system that might not be adopted in this way. Others pretend to adopt it as a whole, but reserve the privilege of explaining it so as to accord with their own views.—They either make it mean nothing at all, or something the very reverse of its obvious sense.—As a body, they have most pernicious errors fostered among them."—pp. 133-4.

These are grave charges, and ought to be examined. Is it indeed true, that we are holding a *system* entirely different from the one taught in our standards—one that dishonors God and exalts man? Is it indeed true, that we adopt the Confession of Faith in a way that is little better than mockery? a way in which we might adopt the Koran? Do we explain it in a way which makes it mean nothing at all, or something the very reverse of its obvious meaning? Do we as a body have most pernicious errors fostered among us? If so, it ought to be more widely known, that all men may abhor and avoid us.

But other and perhaps severer charges are brought against us by Dr. J. C. Lord. In his Introduction to Mr. Cheeseman's Doctrinal Differences between Old and New School Presbyterians, he says: "With strange, yet characteristic inconsistency, they (the New School) caricature the doctrines of grace, and of the Confession of Faith, as though they embodied all that is inconsistent and perverse and monstrous." Yet if their conduct is so shockingly profane, why have they not encountered the universal remonstrance of the evangelical world? But Dr. Lord continues:

"Could it be made to appear to that large and respectable body of members of the Presbyterian Church, who, though sound in the faith, yet remain in the New School connection, that the principles for which the General Assembly (Old School) contended, and in defence of which they intended to bear testimony in the exclusion act of 1837, are the same maintained by Paul the apostle against the

gainsayers of his day, the same afterwards defended in the fifth century by Augustine against Pelagius, and the same which were revived by Luther, and with which as with a battle-axe he smote the gates of the great apostasy, they would not and could not give support and countenance and comfort to the enemies of the truth, by remaining one hour within the ecclesiastical walls of the New School General Assembly."—pp. 7, 8.

And just so I think. Only make it evident that the New School are holding those same grand errors which Paul and Augustine and Luther opposed, and the New School would *forever* itself. But the marvel is, that Dr. Lord and his associates do not furnish the adequate evidence. And the mystery is the greater as he adds, "If there be anything clear, which may be *determined beyond a doubt*, it is that the theological contest between the Reformers, and the Romanists in the sixteenth century, is the same now waged between the Old and New School Presbyterians. No intelligent reader can peruse the controversy between Luther and Dr. Beck, the champion of the papist, without perceiving this. No degree of prejudice or blindness can conceal the fact. It is written as with sunbeams—it is graven as with the point of a diamond in the face of a rock. The doctrines maintained by all the reformed Churches have been rejected by them (the New School) for the theological tenets of the papacy. Nothing can be demonstrated by history, if D'Aubigne's account of the Reformation does not establish this."—p. 8.

But how happens it that what is "so clear" as to be "beyond all doubt," is disbelieved by so many, viz: that the contest between the Reformers and the Romanists is precisely the present contest between the New and Old School Presbyterians? Many "intelligent readers" have "perused the controversy without perceiving this." How is it, then, that they have failed to do what the Doctor tells us they cannot fail to do? Is it through prejudice? Oh, no; for he tells us, "No degree of prejudice or blindness can conceal the fact." And yet I doubt whether *any* have perceived it, except himself. Nor is it the less strange, that it took him so many years to find it out. So groundless and preposterous are these allegations, that it would seem at first thought, they would need no refutation. And yet we know that many honest, yet un-