THE Hartford Central Association

AND

The Bushnell Controversy

An Historical Address

Given Before
THE HARTFORD CENTRAL ASSOCIATION
February 3, 1896

By
Edwin Pond Parker, D.D.
Pastor of the Second Church of Hartford
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PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION

HARTFORD, CONN.

Press of The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company

1896
ADDRESS.

The Legislature of Connecticut, in May, 1708, saw fit to ordain and require,—

"That the ministers of the churches in the several counties of this government shall meet together at their respective county towns, with such messengers as the churches to which they belong shall see cause to send with them, on the last Monday in June next, there to consider and agree upon those methods and rules for the management of ecclesiastical discipline, which by them shall be judged agreeable and conformable to the word of God; and shall, at the same meeting, appoint two or more of their number to be their delegates, who shall all meet together at Saybrook, at the next Commencement to be held there, where they shall compare the results of the ministers of the several counties; and out of and from them to draw a form of ecclesiastical discipline, which . . . shall be offered to this Court at their sessions at New Haven in October next."

This ordinance, as at first presented, contained no provision for any representation of the churches by their lay members, but contemplated a clerical synod, to be composed of delegates appointed by the several county meetings of ministers only. As amended, so as to permit the attendance of "such messengers" as the churches should see cause to send, and after protracted consideration, it was passed.

In compliance with this order of the civil government of the colony, but not in pursuance of any expressed wish of the churches, the ministers assembled in their respective county towns, conferred together, chose their delegates,—sixteen in all, of whom four were laymen,—and on the 9th of September (20th by our reckoning), 1708, these delegates convened at Saybrook, and constituted what is known as the Saybrook Synod.

The business expected of them was promptly done, and the skillfully constructed Saybrook Platform was forthwith pre-
sented to the Legislature, which passed the following remarkable ordinance:

"The Reverend ministers, delegates from the elders and messengers of the churches in this government, met at Saybrook, Sept. 9, 1708, having presented to this Assembly a Confession of Faith, Heads of Agreement, and Regulations in the administration of Church Discipline, as unanimously agreed and consented to by the elders and messengers of all the churches in this government; this Assembly do declare their great approbation of such a happy agreement and do ordain that all the churches within this government that are, or shall be, thus united in doctrine, worship and discipline, be, and for the future shall be, owned and acknowledged, established by law: provided always, that nothing herein shall be intended and construed to hinder or prevent any society or church that is, or shall be allowed by the laws of this government, who soberly differ or dissent from the united churches hereby established, from exercising worship and discipline in their own way, according to their consciences."

As for that clause of this act which reads, "as unanimously agreed and consented to by the elders and messengers of all the churches in this government," it must suffice to say that it was inserted in total misapprehension or in utter disregard of the facts in the case. So far from agreeing or consenting to the Saybrook Platform, the churches had not even the opportunity of considering it before it became, by act of legislature, their ecclesiastical constitution. It did not emanate from them, nor was it referred to them, but it was imposed upon them by the legislature at whose mandate it was framed and offered.

One conspicuous feature of this new ecclesiastical establishment under which the churches found themselves by law confederated, was its provision for the grouping of the churches in District Consociations, and of the ministers in District Associations. The Consociation was a permanent ecclesiastical council or court, and was composed of the ministers of the churches in a given district, and of delegates from those churches. The Association comprised the ministers only, and was for the promotion of ministerial fellowship, for mutual assistance in the pastoral office, for the examination and approval or disapproval of candidates for the ministry, and for one other purpose, as the 13th article of Discipline shows:

"The said associated Pastors shall take notice of any among
themselves that may be accused of scandal or heresy, unto, or cognizable by them, examine the matter carefully, and, if they find just occasion, shall direct to the calling of the Council, where such offenders shall be duly proceeded against."

The thirteen churches of Hartford County were confederated in two Consociations, and their ministers were united in two Associations,—Hartford North and Hartford South. Each of the other three counties became one distinct ecclesiastical District. The General Association, whose first meeting was at Hartford, 1709, was composed of delegates from the several District Associations, and was, therefore, a purely ministerial body, with no jurisdiction over the churches.

The consociational system has been, for the most part, abandoned. The associational system survives.

The Hartford North Association, formed in 1709, comprised the pastors of the following seven churches:—Hartford First, Hartford Second, East Hartford, East Windsor, Windsor, Simsbury, and Farmington. These were all the churches then existing in the northern half of the county, including Litchfield and Tolland.

The Hartford South Association, formed a little later, comprised the pastors of the following churches:—Wethersfield, Middletown, Haddam, Windham, Colchester, Glastonbury, and Waterbury. The total number of churches in the colony, at that time, was thirty-nine.

For one hundred and thirty-four years there were only these two Associations in Hartford County, but in 1843, on the 10th of October, a third was organized, composed of ministers set apart, for that purpose, from the Hartford North. This was named THE HARTFORD CENTRAL ASSOCIATION.

Dr. Noah Porter says that the reason for this creation of a third Association in this region, was the inconveniently large number of members in the Hartford North, and the extent of the territory it covered. An examination of the records of Hartford North will convince one that the meetings of that body were not inconveniently large.

I will briefly state several facts which, taken together, indicate other reasons.

1st. In the year 1833 the "Pastoral Union" was formed in Connecticut, and in the vicinity of Hartford, under a constitu-
tion and a creed, for the purpose of vindicating and promoting an unquestionable orthodoxy; and, one year later, under the auspices of said Union, a Theological Seminary was established at East Windsor. The ministers connected with that Seminary became members of Hartford North Association.

2d. In that same year, 1833, Rev. Horace Bushnell began his ministry in the North Church of Hartford, and soon afterwards joined the Hartford North Association. The people of this vicinity, and his brethren in the ministry, were not slow to discover, from his sermons and addresses, that he was a man of original and peculiar theological views, differing in many and important respects from those current in that time.

3d. As early as 1838, the Pastoral Union had adopted, published, and sent to various Associations in the State, a protest against certain doctrinal errors which, as they alleged, were prevailing among the Congregational churches and ministers of the State. I have searched in vain for a copy of this protest, but, in 1838, Rev. Leonard Bacon criticised it in a series of letters printed in The New Haven Record. To these letters the Rev. David Calhoun of Coventry vigorously replied in a dozen letters published in pamphlet form. A perusal of these controversial epistles shows that the protest contained seven articles or heads, each of which described a theological defection, and, under each head or article, numerous citations from the teaching of Dr. Taylor of New Haven, in support of the allegation of error. The seven articles describe the differences between the East Windsor and the New Haven theology. In 1839, the Pastoral Union —

Voted.—“That it is inconsistent for members of the Union to license, ordain, or instal any person who holds the errors stated in the above Protest.”

4th. In all that controversy as between East Windsor and New Haven, between Tylerism and Taylorism, the following ministers,—Joel Hawes, Noah Porter, Oliver E. Daggett, Horace Bushnell, and Rev. Mr. Spring of East Hartford, were on the New Haven and Taylor side, and, strange as it may now seem, were regarded by many as defective in theology.

5th. Taken together with the foregoing items, another fact, derived from extant records, becomes very significant, to
At a meeting of Hartford North Association, at Canton, June 6, 1843, Dr. Bennet Tyler "presented a petition in his own behalf and six other members, asking a division of the Association." This petition was repeatedly referred to a committee, and after prolonged discussion, and not until the next day, the division was voted. A geographical line was adopted "to run between East Windsor and East Hartford, westward," and this line seems to have been very convenient for the flocking together of birds of a feather, since it set apart into the new Association, the three Hartford ministers, with Spring of East Hartford, Porter of Farmington, and McLean of Collinsville, all of whom were New Haven theology men.

Such was the origin, in 1843, of the Hartford Central Association, for which, at the time, there seems to have been no better reason than the local convenience and theological diversity of its members, but which, in the light of subsequent events, may seem to many to have been providentially set apart to serve as a strong bulwark for the protection of freedom in religious thought and faith in the churches of our commonwealth.

Horace Bushnell was the first moderator of this Association. We write his simple name thus, because, at the first regular meeting, on his motion, which was seconded by Noah Porter, it was voted, "That we dispense with the use of distinguishing literary titles in the meetings and records of the Association."

The history of the Association for the six or seven years subsequent to its organization, is uneventful. Nor does it seem worth while to enumerate its successive moderators and registrars, or its other appointments to office or service. Down to the year 1860, its meetings were held, by a system of rotation, in the towns and at the churches where its members had their residences and pastorates.

From 1860 to 1864 the Association regularly met at the Fourth church in Hartford; then, for two years, at the Pearl street church; and from 1867 to 1876, at the Second church, or at the house of the pastor of that church. Since 1876 its sessions have been held, with occasional exceptions, in rotation, at the churches of which its members are pastors.

Among those who have been members of this Association, but have passed away from earthly scenes, are some whose
names and memories are justly held in peculiar honor and affection by their surviving brethren: Porter, Hawes, Bushnell, Spring, Daggett, McLean, Patton, Griggs, James A. Smith and his son, J. Morgan Smith, Skeele, Dorman, Newcomb, Wilder Smith, Burton, Gage, E. A. Smith, and many others who, being dead, yet speak.

Of those who have gone from our Association to other fields of usefulness, mention may be made, not invidiously but affectionately, of Moses Smith, Paine, Jenkins, Spaulding, Gould, Trumbull, Gregg, Hatch, Pratt, Taylor, Hicks, and Nash.

This Association has been, from the beginning, "a goodly fellowship of prophets," with here and there men of pre-eminent gifts and apostolic graces.

The year 1849 marks a new epoch in the history of The Hartford Central Association. However peaceably its course may have been ordered until then, internal controversies, and contentions with other associations, long-enduring, but finally issuing in good results, were forced upon it and courageously undertaken by it.

Should it now seem to my audience that "arma virumque cano," let me say that without somewhat thus singing of "the man," and the battles that were fought concerning him, any history of this Association would be a meagre and comparatively insignificant chronological recital. This Association was the storm-center of the theological and ecclesiastical tempest which raged so dismally among our churches from 1849 onwards for several years, and which, thanks in great measure to the wisdom and steadfastness of our brethren in this body, cleared off, at last, so brightly and gloriously. When this storm broke out, Dr. Bushnell had been preaching in the North church of Hartford for fifteen years. A light like his could not be hid under even the capacious measure of that church. The doctrines which he preached with such freshness and power were reported far and wide. He came into suspicion of doctrinal unsoundness, as he mounted to eminence as a preacher. In 1839 he made an address at Andover, Mass., in which he said some things in regard to the Trinity which, to use his own words, "will make a little breeze!"
"I have been thinking," he wrote at that time, "that I must write and publish the whole truth on these subjects, as God has permitted me to see it. I have withheld till my views are well matured, and to withhold longer, I fear, is a want of moral courage."

In the same year, Deacon Seth Terry, a member of his church, sent him a very plain letter of remonstrance against the tenor of his public teaching.

In 1846, the little volume entitled "Christian Nurture," appeared, called out by some dissent in this Association from essays read there by him, and by articles elsewhere published in criticism of the subject treated in his book.* Our records contain only obscure references to this matter. The controversy that ensued over this volume, fierce as it was, proved to be only the preliminary skirmish of a far greater contention.

Early in the year 1848 Dr. Bushnell received, not by study alone, but by both intellectual and spiritual illumination, what he believed to be a revelation of Christ to him—a conception of Christ which dominated his faith, thought, and life. That year (1848) was a memorable one in his career.† In July he delivered an address at Cambridge on The Atonement; in August he preached the Concio ad Clerum at Yale on The Divinity of Christ; in September he discoursed at Andover concerning Dogma and Spirit.

These discourses, revised and re-ordered, and prefaced by the famous "Dissertation on Language," were published in the winter of 1849 in a volume entitled "God in Christ." The appearance of this volume was the signal for a general engagement of the opposing theological parties in Connecticut. The

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* "At the time of my settlement, I came near being rejected by the Council, because of my indefinite and unsatisfactory answers concerning Infant Baptism. . . . I found, after a considerable period of suspense, that I had wholly misconceived the true idea of Christian Nurture. . . . After some years the results of my inquiries were given to the public in two discourses on Christian Nurture." (Life of Dr. Bushnell, page 283).

† "When it now pleased God to conduct me into a fuller experience of divine things, and to open my spiritual understanding as never before to the great mysteries of godliness, I found that certain reserved questions, before dark and insoluble, were correspondently cleared. Whereupon I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision; but, being called, immediately after, to speak on these very subjects, I did so without hesitation, and gave my discourses to the public."—(Life of Dr. Bushnell, page 284.)
closing sentences of the preliminary essay show clearly that Dr. Bushnell was not unprepared for what befell him and his book.

The movement to bring him to trial before the Consociation for heresy was first made, in accordance with Article XIII. of the Saybrook Platform's Rule of Discipline, in this Association, of which he was a member. At a meeting of the Association at Avon, June 5, 1849, Rev. Walter Clarke introduced the following Preamble and Resolutions:—

"Whereas Brother Bushnell, a member of this Association, has lately published a book entitled 'God in Christ,' which is extensively believed and declared to contain doctrines inconsistent with some cardinal articles of the Christian faith; therefore

Resolved, That ——— be a Committee to examine the book in question, and confer with Brother Bushnell, and report at an adjourned meeting of this body whether he have, in fact, published views fundamentally erroneous."

This Preamble and Resolution were adopted, and Noah Porter, Joel Hawes, Walter Clarke, Charles B. McLean, and Merrill Richardson were appointed to serve as the Committee for carrying the resolution into effect.

At the adjourned meeting in September this Committee presented their report, or series of reports:—

1st. A statement of what Dr. Bushnell's book denies as revealed truth concerning the Trinity, the Personality of Christ, and the Atonement, without expressing any opinion as to the error of such denials—in which statement all the members of the Committee were reported as concurring. The book, they said, denies that the following doctrines are revealed truths:—

(a) the reality of a Trinity in the Divine Nature;
(b) the distinct personality of Christ anterior to the Incarnation;
(c) the Atonement as standing in a cancellation of the claims of condemning law by Christ's voluntary offering of his own sufferings and death, as a sufficient satisfaction therefor.

It came out, in discussion, that three of the Committee had concurred in this statement under some misapprehension. They expressed regret for having done so, and withdrew their concurrence.
The report of a majority of the Committee, lucid and judicial, containing a summary statement by Dr. Bushnell, and expressing the following opinion:—

"We are satisfied that whatever errors the book may contain, it furnishes no sufficient ground for instituting a judicial process with him. We regret his departure, in some of his statements, from the formulas of the church. We adhere to these formulas; but we regard him, notwithstanding the exceptions he has taken to them, as holding whatever is essential to the scheme of doctrine which they embody.

"He could not, in our view, be properly or justly subjected to the charge of heresy, and a consequent trial, or be denied the confidence of his brethren." (Signed by Porter, McLean, and Richardson.)

3d. A minority report of great length, giving reasons for the opinion that the book in question does contain fundamental errors, justly subjecting the author to the charge of heresy. (Signed by Hawes and Clarke.)

After much discussion, Dr. Clarke offered a resolution to the effect that Dr. Bushnell's book "contains serious and important errors" — the word "fundamental" softened now into "serious and important."

Dr. Bushnell entered upon a defensive argument, before the close of which the meeting adjourned to the 22d of October.

At the adjourned meeting, Dr. Clark withdrew his pending motion. The question was then stated,—Shall the majority report be adopted? Long discussion ensued, and the meeting adjourned over night. The forenoon of October 23d was spent in discussion and finally it was —

Voted — "That the majority report be adopted."

The vote stood seventeen to three.

Before this vote was reached, one of the minority "declared his willingness to vote with the majority if they would append an assertion that Dr. Bushnell taught serious error." Still another of the minority, "when the vote was declared, offered, in the presence of the association, to exchange pulpit services with Dr. Bushnell, so soon as it should be mutually convenient." I have quoted from the written statement of Drs. Porter and Patton.
It should be said here that in May, 1849—a month before the above-mentioned investigation and action, Fairfield West Association had taken steps to memorialize the next General Association concerning "opinions extensively propagated among us, tending to undermine the faith of ministers and churches in the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement"; that the churches should be duly warned against such opinions, and that the District Associations should apply discipline for the removal of heresies among them.

The General Association of that year, on the presentation of this overture, voted that it belongs exclusively to the District Associations to institute Christian discipline in cases of error among their members; "and as we have no information of culpable negligence in this particular, on the part of any of our Associations, we believe that any action on the part of this body, at this time, would be unseasonable."

Failing to secure the interposition of the General Association, or even their indorsement, and checked, as has been told, by the investigation and decision of the Hartford Central Association, the next step taken by Fairfield West was as follows:

At a meeting held at Stamford, January 29, 1850, they adopted and sent to Hartford Central their Remonstrance and Complaint against the action of that Association in the case of Dr. Bushnell. This document, long enough to make a printed pamphlet of thirty pages, is, first, a review and severe arraignment of Dr. Bushnell's book as abounding with doctrinal heresy; and, secondly, a condemnation of the decision of Hartford Central concerning it; and, thirdly, an urgent request for a reconsideration of the case, and a redress of the injury already done to the churches and to the cause of truth.

At a special meeting of Hartford Central, in March, 1850, the following resolutions were adopted and sent, by way of answer, to Fairfield West Association:

"Resolved, That we acknowledge the receipt of a Remonstrance and Complaint from our brethren of Fairfield Association, on the subject of our decision respecting the publication of Dr. Bushnell, entitled 'God in Christ'; that we gratefully accept their fraternal admonitions, and sympathize with them in their attachment to those
doctrines of the Gospel which have been supposed to be controverted in the above-mentioned publication.

"Resolved, That having carefully examined the book of Dr. Bush­nell, and heard his vindication of himself against the charges of heresy brought against him from various quarters; and, after solemn deliberation, come to the conclusion of which our brethren complain; we cannot, with all respect for their judgment, think it consistent with the established rules of judicial proceedings, or with justice to ourselves or to Dr. Bushnell, to review that decision, or institute a new investigation of the case, until new evidence of a decisive character shall be presented to us.

"Resolved, That we have carefully considered the statements and arguments presented to us by the Fairfield West Association; that in making up our decision we allowed greater weight to the statement of Dr. Bushnell, as published in connection with it, than our brethren of that Association appear to be willing to allow it; and that we protest against the conclusion that we give our sanction to any peculiarities of Dr. Bushnell's scheme of doctrine."

Forthwith, on receiving and considering this reply, Fairfield West Association (March 19, 1850), —

Voted, "That our remonstrance and complaint to the Hartford Central Association, and their answer to the same, be printed, and that a copy be sent to each member of the several District Associations in the State."

It was also —

Voted, "That we address a letter to each District Association (excepting Hartford Central) earnestly requesting them to meet and consider this subject, and let us know the conclusion to which they come."

In that letter they say: "It is our belief that Dr. Bushnell, in his book 'God in Christ,' has denied nearly all that is precious in the Gospel of Christ." They rehearse their communications with Hartford Central, and otherwise appeal for counsel and assistance.

Answers from many associations were received — notably one from Hartford North (May, 1850) — containing a preamble and resolutions, which was sent not only to Fairfield West, but, for publication, to the Puritan Recorder, New York Evangelist, and Religious Herald, the tenor of which may be readily guessed.
Rev. Dr. Tyler, of East Windsor Seminary, sent a letter to Hartford Central, complaining of their action, which was answered June 4th by the following resolution:

“That in the case of Dr. Bushnell we have decided only that we find no just occasion to charge him with fundamental error; and that, in the result to which we came in the investigation of his book, we intended no more.”

Let me digress, for a moment, to note how, six years later, Dr. Tyler was called to taste some drops of the same medicine which he had so freely prescribed for Dr. Bushnell.

In 1856, certain members of the Pastoral Union freely expressed their opinions to the effect that Dr. Tyler, Professor of Theology in East Windsor Seminary, was so far defective in his faith as to be “openly hailed as an ally of fundamental error”! The Pastoral Union considered this matter, and, without any investigation, adopted resolutions expressive of their unabated confidence in Dr. Tyler’s orthodoxy. But there were five members present at that meeting who not only voted against the resolutions, but put in and had recorded their vigorous protest against such action of exculpation without any investigation. The leader of that interesting minority was Dr. Nathaniel Hewitt, who had been among the foremost of those who, in Fairfield West Association, attacked Dr. Bushnell and the Association to which he belonged with such vehemence and pertinacity.

If the Pastoral Union, without investigation, might exonerate Dr. Tyler from a charge of theological unsoundness, in the face of a dissenting and protesting minority of five members, how should Hartford Central be censured for exonerating Dr. Bushnell from a similar charge, after a most careful investigation, with only three of its members dissenting, and none of them protesting?

The scene now shifts to the meeting of the General Association at Litchfield, in June, 1850. A memorial was presented to that body from Fairfield West, reviewing all proceedings in Dr. Bushnell’s case; setting forth his heresies; complaining of Hartford Central’s decision and adherence thereto, as a most injurious shielding and sanction of dangerous errors; requesting that some action be taken to compel said Association to so far heed their remonstrances as to reopen the whole case; and
earnestly urging that explicit declaration be made of what are essential doctrines, touching the points in controversy.

That meeting at Litchfield was a memorable one, and your essayist, with difficulty, has resisted the strong temptation to linger upon it. Behind Fairfield West were many able, energetic, earnest men of other Associations, alike bent upon suppressing Dr. Bushnell; and, in order thereto, upon breaking down his guard in his own Association. The combination was a compact and formidable one, and its plan of action had been skillfully made.

The memorial of Fairfield was referred to a Committee of Thirteen, who brought in a report which had been carefully made at New Haven several days before. This report upheld the right of any District association to remonstrate with any other association in respect to any proceedings supposed to involve the faith and purity of the churches; and, also, "the duty of any association receiving such remonstrance, to reconsider the case in question, and, if they do not see reason to bring charges themselves, to afford an opportunity for any person who may desire it, to bring up the case for judicial investigation." Had that remarkable deliverance been adopted, the weight of an obviously unconstitutional judgment of the General Association would have been cast against the Hartford Central Association. But there were men in that body capable of statesmanship, who, understanding and respecting their ecclesiastical constitution, could not be induced to sanction a flagrant violation of its plain provisions, even for the sake of so laying hold upon an heretical brother. The debate was warm and long. Dr. Bushnell, as a delegate from Hartford Central, argued the points of law and order, and defended the rights of his Association with his customary ability. The result on that point was the adoption of the following amendment, offered by Dr. Bushnell himself:

"That we regard it as the duty of any Association receiving such remonstrance, to reconsider the case in question; and, if they do not reverse their former action, to use their best endeavors to satisfy the complaining Association, in respect of their proceedings so complained of."

The General Association also made a declaration of certain
doctrines as so fundamental that the denial of them is heresy; and that their declaration might be clear and satisfactory, they fortunately used the language of the Westminster Confession, touching the doctrines of the Trinity, the Person of Christ, Atonement, and Justification,—language which Dr. Bushnell could and did substantially adopt.

At the same time they declined to express any opinion on the burning question whether these doctrines are denied in Dr. Bushnell's book, and distinctly disclaimed any responsibility for the book, or for any of the views supposed to be contained therein.

So ended that memorable contention, during which this Association maintained their rights with signal ability and a good degree of success. Dr. Bushnell not only defended their case, in which his own was involved, in a manner that commanded respect and confidence, but exhibited there, amid excitement and provocations, such a bearing and spirit, such patience, courtesy, and dignity, and such an unmistakably Christian mind and temper, as deeply impressed many who had hitherto regarded him with suspicion and aversion. Such was this impression, that, according to the written testimony of one who was present in that assembly, "they proceeded carefully and earnestly, because they felt that they were dealing with a man of God, though he might be a man of God in error. A sort of holy fear, lest they might do wrong, brooded over the assemblage and guided their decision." Many other like testimonies are on record, and the unconscious influence of Dr. Bushnell's presence and behavior on that occasion was so salutary, so wide reaching and far enduring, that it may be questioned whether, on any other single occasion, he ever appeared more to advantage, as a man, not only of singular genius, but of singular grace.

In October, 1850, Fairfield West sent a second letter to Hartford Central, complaining and remonstrating anew, and insisting upon a reconsideration of Dr. Bushnell's case. They referred to the declarations of the late General Association as justifying them, both in asserting Dr. Bushnell's heresies, and in asking a reversal of judgment in his case. "Our minds find no relief in your answer," they said.
"We take your meaning to be that the doctrines which he denies, though perhaps true, are not essential doctrines of the Christian religion. There is a great difference between you and us, as to what are essential doctrines. . . . The very doctrines which, as we assert and prove, Dr. Bushnell has denied, have been declared by the General Association to be fundamental, and the denial of them to be heresy. . . . Consider whether your published decision is not an untrue and unrighteous judgment."

It is not strange that a communication so abundant in offensive imputations provoked some feeling of resentment in the minds of our brethren. It virtually accused them of insincerity in their own profession of faith. It attributed their decision in Dr. Bushnell's case, and their adherence to that decision, to a disbelief, on their part, of the essential character of those doctrines which Dr. Bushnell was accused of denying; whereas, from the first, they had explicitly asserted the contrary; and Dr. Bushnell himself had publicly declared his substantial agreement with the doctrinal declaration of the late General Association. To such a discourteous and even calumnious conclusion were the Fairfield brethren carried, moving on the assumption of infallibility for their private interpretation and judgment of Dr. Bushnell's book.

In May, 1851, Hartford Central sent a temperate and conciliatory answer to this document, to this effect:—

"We cannot undertake the onerous and unprofitable task of discussing doctrinal questions with another Association; the General Association did not make any such issue between you and us, nor did they decide any such points against us, as your letter alleges.

"The question is not as to what doctrines are fundamental, for on that there is no controversy, but how far the essential elements of doctrines conceded to be fundamental are denied by Dr. Bushnell. The General Association did not condemn our judgment on this question, but distinctly declined to express any opinion concerning it.

"Our action, hitherto, amounts simply to a decision that we did not find just cause, ourselves, to present and prosecute a charge of heresy against Dr. Bushnell. Should your body, or any responsible prosecutor, present such a charge, and desire us to convene the Con­sociation for the trial, it would present a new case, and would be decided as should seem right and wise to a majority. We cannot say, in advance, what the decision would be."
It must be considered, in connection with that closing suggestion, that the aspect of things was gloomy and threatening. Nine of the fourteen associations had expressed their conviction that there should be a reconsideration of Dr. Bushnell's case. There was open talk of a division of our churches.

Dr. Porter, whose heart was exceedingly burdened with the whole subject, wrote to Dr. Bushnell that the Hartford Central Association should—

"disabuse the public mind of the notion that we have closed the door against a trial. . . . For though we have a right to decide for ourselves whether we will turn prosecutors in the case, and nobody can call us to account for so doing, yet we have no right to stand between you and a prosecution on the part of others, when the public sentiment demands a trial."

Why, then, did not Fairfield West, or some responsible prosecutor, adopt this suggestion, embrace this proffered opportunity, present charges, and request Hartford Central to convene the Consociation for a trial?

Because they well knew that the unrevoked decision of Hartford Central was a legal and insuperable bar to such procedure.

I quote from Fairfield West's appeal of 1852:—

"Suppose they (Hartford Central) should be thus inconsistent, and actually vote to call the council for his trial, while still adhering to their decision of October, 1849; would not their act in the case be null and void? And could the council, when properly convened, proceed to try the case?"

They knew too much to walk into that trap. Hartford Central had not risked much by that suggestion. The brethren who clamored for Dr. Bushnell's trial insisted that, first of all, Hartford Central should rescind their decision of 1849. And Dr. Porter spake for them valiantly and truly, saying, "This we shall never do!"

All through the summer and autumn of 1851 Fairfield West Association were busily preparing another campaign. At meetings held in July, October, November, and December, they were hearing and discussing and putting together the reports of committees on Dr. Bushnell's books—for "Christ in Theology"
had now appeared—and were gradually getting into satisfactory shape their "Appeal of the Association of Fairfield West to the associated ministers connected with the General Association of Connecticut." This formidable document was completed and adopted at Norwalk, Feb. 3, 1852. It was ordered to be printed, and distributed throughout the state. It made a pamphlet of nearly one hundred pages. It is unnecessary to linger upon it. It reviews all proceedings up to date, and contains several papers not elsewhere now obtainable. It contains elaborate and painful criticisms of Dr. Bushnell's books; points out the barrier in the way of his prosecution for heresy; wants to know if there is not some way of securing not only his condemnation, but also that of the Association which has publicly shielded and countenanced his heresies; and announces that Fairfield West will send delegates to the next General Association, instructed to present to that body suitable questions on that subject.

But at the very meeting which took this action a bomb-shell exploded in the camp. Several members objected to going any further in that direction. A solemn Protest, signed by Linsley and Merwin, and later by seven others, was presented, read, discussed, and entered upon the records. It is a remarkably sensible paper, and presents six reasons against the action of said Association in sending out their appeal. I will quote only the closing words of it:

"We cannot hold our peace when we see a course of action adopted that seems likely to drive the wedge of division through the entire body of our hitherto united pastors and churches; and that, too, under circumstances which promise little good to the cause of Christian truth."

It gives me pleasure to add that this noble Protest was written by a former Pastor of the Second Church in Hartford, Joel Harvey Linsley, as pure and saintly a man as ever served our churches in the Gospel ministry.

Notwithstanding, the appeal was sent out to all the ministers in the State, and did its work. Hartford North Association rejoiced in it, and, on motion of Dr. Tyler, voted that in their opinion Fairfield West "have conclusively shown that Dr. Bushnell has denied what the General Association have declared to be fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion."
and "that it is highly important that their questions shall be fairly met and distinctly answered."

At the next General Association, at Danbury, June, 1852, Fairfield West's delegates appeared with their questions and requests. The Protest by Dr. Linsley, signed by nine members of Fairfield West, was circulated with marked effect. Dr. Bushnell sent an earnest remonstrance against any action of interference in the case, saying, however, that he hoped the brethren would not imagine that he was at all anxious for the result. The event proved that he had no occasion for anxiety.

The General Association declared again that "we are not a legislative or judicial body, but a body for mutual consultation, advice, and brotherly love." And they gave their opinion "that in the present state of feeling in regard to Dr. Bushnell's books, all parties, in the exercise of Christian charity, should remove, so far as possible, every obstacle, real or supposed, to a full and fair investigation, according to our ecclesiastical rules."

So ended that campaign, not unsatisfactorily to Hartford Central Association.

It has been said that, as a last recourse, Dr. Bushnell might have been brought before the Consociation for trial on a complaint of three members of his church. The rule of the Consociation did provide that a minister might be brought before it on such a written complaint, accompanied by a certificate from the Pastor of another church. But the same rule explicitly provided another way of the same discipline, and that was through the Association to which the suspected or accused minister belonged. It is very doubtful, therefore, if Dr. Bushnell could have been brought to trial on complaint of members of his church, since already, in one of the ways provided by the Consociation, his case had been investigated and decided.

However this may be, the North Church, of which Dr. Bushnell was Pastor, annoyed and disturbed by the industrious efforts of outside busybodies, thought it best to withdraw from the North Consociation of Hartford County, and, at a largely attended meeting held June 27, 1852, unanimously voted so to do. This action was taken with Dr. Bushnell's consent, of course, but not at his suggestion, nor from any apprehension
on his part, or on the part of the church, of an unfavorable re-
sult of a trial by the Consociation, in case a trial should occur. *

For their own convenience and peace, the church elected to
stand on the same footing with the twenty-nine other uncon-
sociated churches in the State, and with all Congregational
churches outside of Connecticut.

The swift decay of the Consociational system, peculiar to
this State, which followed this withdrawal of one church from
one of its confederations, seems to indicate a vital impairment
of whatever usefulness it may have had in earlier years, if not,
indeed, such an inherent incompatibility with the genius and
growth of genuine Congregationalism as must needs, sooner or
later, be disclosed, and ensure the abandonment of the system
itself as no longer serviceable or tolerable.

Once again, the battle, twice fought in the General Associa-
tion, must needs be renewed in the same body. I quote a few
sentences from the minutes of a meeting of Hartford Central in
June, 1853:—

"A printed complaint, addressed to the General Association,
and said to have been secretly and generally circulated for signa-
tures, in the State, among the ministers sympathizing with its views,
a copy of which had providentially fallen into the hands of one of
the brethren, was read: said complaint was found to express cen-
sure upon this Association for its action in the case of Dr. Bushnell,
and to call upon the General Association to cut this body off from
its fellowship."

This information was true. The records of Fairfield West
disclose the preparation, nature, and object of this complaint.
The signatures of fifty-one ministers were obtained for it by
private circulation, and the whole business was carefully kept
from the knowledge of all who were supposed to sympathize
with the Hartford Central Association, until just before the
meeting of the General Association. This document alleged
that Hartford Central Association had given public allowance
and sanction to a scheme which "is a corruption of God's holy
truth, a subversion of all vital and fundamental doctrines of
Christianity, and destructive of confidence in revelation itself."

* "There has never been a time when they (the North Church) were not certain
of a vote of the Consociation in my favor of at least two to one; but they had no
character to spend in such a contest."—(See Life of Dr. Bushnell, pp. 343, 344;
and also pp. 285, 286.)
It also accused Hartford Central of "subverting the doctrinal basis of our union and fellowship in the General Association," and requested that the same be excluded from that union and fellowship.

In the brief time left to them after learning of this desperate purpose for their excommunication, Hartford Central adopted a counter-memorial to be presented to the General Association. It was prepared by Drs. Porter and Patton, and is a singularly able and exhaustive statement of our entire proceedings in the case, and a temperate but unanswerable defense of those proceedings. Its illustrations are felicitous, its exposition of the violations of candor and courtesy by the complainants is forcible, its protest "against this invasion of our rights . . . this subversion of our ancient constitution," is vigorous, and its remonstrance against action of interference in the case by the General Association is solemn and earnest. It concludes with the following paragraph:—

"And now, respected Fathers and Brethren, while for the sake of removing misapprehensions we have made this statement of our own and what we conceive to be Dr. Bushnell's belief, as expressed in his books; we desire it to be remembered, that the question before you is not whether his views or our own judgment be correct; nor whether, if his views are erroneous they are fundamentally so: but it is, whether our honest and, if you please to say, mistaken judgment that they are not fundamentally erroneous, made in the discharge of an office which we could not avoid, accompanied with the express declaration of our adherence to acknowledged standards of orthodox faith, makes us justly liable to the charge of 'subverting the doctrinal basis of our union and fellowship in the General Association.'"

It is morally certain that Dr. Porter wrote that paragraph.

The General Association convened at Waterbury, in June, 1853, and considered both these documents. There was an acrimonious debate, in the course of which it became evident that no such action as the complainants urged would be taken. Dr. Leonard Bacon finally secured the adoption of a resolution, with which Hartford Central was quite content, substantially as follows: "with the opinions imputed to Dr. Bushnell by the complainants, we have no fellowship. Candidates for the ministry who profess them should not be approved. Ministers reasonably charged with holding them are properly subject to disci-
pline, in due form and order. But whether these opinions are justly imputed to Dr. Bushnell, or not, depends upon the construction given to certain quotations from his books; and upon that question we have nothing to say.”

Resolutions were then offered that the General Association advise Hartford Central to secure a trial of Dr. Bushnell before a mutual council. These were immediately tabled. A protest was entered against this action as closing the door to all redress; and this protest was answered by a flat denial of both its reasonings and conclusions. “There is no necessity for further action, nor can we encroach upon the powers and liberties of a particular Association.”

Neither the General Association nor Hartford Central were afterwards seriously agitated by such revolutionary endeavors. This desperate attack at Waterbury was already too late. The long storm, “its burst of passion past,” was even then breaking away; and we have to notice only its mutterings and moanings — ever fainter in the distance.

At the annual meeting of the General Association, in 1854, at New Haven, Fairfield West and their allies fired their last gun in this long war, which proved to be harmful at the breech rather than at the muzzle. Having utterly failed in repeated endeavors to induce the General Association to interfere in their behalf, they now attempted to discredit that body and to break its bond of ministerial union and fellowship. They offered resolutions to the effect that they would no longer vouch for the orthodoxy of any minister or Association in virtue of its good standing in the General Association, but would exercise judgment for themselves in every case, — requesting the General Association to cease from certifying the standing of ministers in its connection; declining to be responsible for such certificates, and adding that they sent delegates to the General Association with the explicit understanding that, in so doing, they incurred no obligations inconsistent with the foregoing resolutions. The disrespectful temper and schismatical tenor of this document provoked general indignation, and but for Dr. Bushnell it might have been tabled for effrontery. Its only good effects were a disclosure of the complete breakdown of the campaign, and the great speech by Dr. Bushnell which it called forth. His plain, severe, and yet kindly characterization of the
indecisive policy pursued, year after year, by the General Association was, in some degree, merited. But another aspect of that matter may best be shown by quoting from Fairfield West's records the remarkable preamble to the above-mentioned resolutions:—

"Whereas, the efforts which have been made by this and other Associations to procure an investigation of charges solemnly and formally preferred against the Hartford Central Association of so shielding, in one of their members, several fundamental errors as to subvert the doctrinal basis of our union as a General Association, have failed, after all due labor used either to procure said investigation by that body, or by any other competent tribunal, or to procure any direct labor or action, of any sort by the General Association with Hartford Central: and whereas, upon the complaint of 52 ministers of the State against Hartford Central Association charging (them) with shielding opinions which the General Association had unanimously declared ought to exclude from the ministry those who hold them; and hereupon the General Association, after refusing to investigate and issue the complaints, declared that it was neither necessary nor proper to take the only possible remaining step for securing an impartial trial of the charges alleged; and whereas it is difficult to suppose any case of malversation in any district Association in which greater labor would be used by a larger number of persons, to obtain any corrective action from the General Association, or in which such labor would not be liable to be frustrated by similar questions of jurisdiction, and other difficulties," etc.

In that indirect but frank confession of their total defeat and discomfiture, largely owing to the failure of their repeated efforts to secure the interposition of the General Association in their behalf, may we not read a considerable, if not complete, justification of the policy pursued by said Association?

One other occurrence should be noted. At the very meeting of Fairfield West Association which adopted the foregoing preamble and resolutions, the Rev. G. M. Porter asked for a letter of dismission to Hartford Central, and his request was refused, on the ground that Fairfield West could have no fellowship or correspondence with Hartford Central Association. In October next his request was granted and a letter given him, only three members dissenting and protesting. That straw showed how the winds were blowing, even down Fairfield way!
The minority in Hartford Central Association, unable to purge that body of what they deemed heresy, unwilling to abide in it except as purged, and doubtless feeling the discomfort of strained personal relations with some of their brethren, had already taken the initiative in withdrawing to join other Associations, or to organize a new one. In June, 1852, our Registrar gave letters of dismission to Robbins, Hawes, Clarke, Spring, and Hale to join such other Association as they might choose. That same day, these same brethren met at Dr. Hawes’s house to discuss the following question: “Can we best serve the cause of truth by remaining, as an impotent and dissenting minority, in the Hartford Central Association?” It was decided to withdraw and form a new Association, together with others “who may sympathize with us.” And so the Hartford Fourth Association was organized, according to Dr. Clarke, an “anti-Bushnell Association.”

It was a matter of regret to the majority of Hartford Central that a new Association should be thus formed on the principle of elective affinity, tending to perpetuate division by obnoxious lines of personal and theological sympathy. It was contrary to the letter and spirit of the Saybrook constitution, and contrary also to a rule of the General Association passed in 1811, for the express purpose of preventing such occurrences.

The Hartford South Association, and also the Stratford South, at this time, passed resolutions disapproving such action, and recommending to the General Association not to receive into their body delegates from Associations so formed. The letters were granted, however, and the Hartford Fourth Association began its brief and uneventful career.

Its records are of interest only as showing the insufficient reasons for its formation, the comparatively insignificant history of its precarious existence, and the final, sensible judgment of its members that, after fourteen years of independence, it should be discontinued as a separate body. In 1866 it was united with the Hartford North, from which time the two in one have been called the Hartford Union Association.

We venture to express a regret that by the terms of that consolidation, the old Hartford North Association should have parted with the geographical and historic name which it had borne for more than 150 years.
Though diminished in number by the withdrawal of so many of its members, the Hartford Central Association held on in its course with no abatement of vigor and interest. In due time congenial and able ministers came into it.

I was admitted to membership in 1861, and the brethren whom I generally met at our sessions were Bushnell, McLean, J. A. and Moses Smith, Taylor, Burton, and the venerable Dr. Porter.

At one meeting, in a little room in the Fourth Church of Hartford, I read, by appointment, a sermon. It had been very tenderly nursed for the occasion, and seemed to its fond and youthful parent, a promising thing of its kind. In turn the brethren criticised it, as was customary. Dr. Bushnell took it in hand, and when he had quit, not much seemed left of it. But he handled it so intelligently, kindly, and sympathetically, with such an obvious desire to be of assistance to me, and with such an appreciation of my inexperience, and of some grains of saving goodness in the sermon itself, that whatever of chagrin I had at first felt was swallowed up in an abounding feeling of gratitude to him for the most valuable homiletical lesson ever given me.

Along in the sixties, our Association languished, I know not why, until it came to be seriously considered whether we should give up and disband. Then Dr. Bushnell pleaded with us to have faith and courage and perseverance, and we yielded to him, of course, and soon our state was revived and enlarged, so that we have continued until now, in prosperity and harmony.

At one of our meetings — it was at my house — Dr. Bushnell first read his notable sermon on The Virgin Mary.

At another meeting, in the South Church,—one of the last he attended,—he began to fulfill an appointment by saying,—“Brethren, I am going to read what is probably my last sermon,”—and then announced his subject,—Our Relations to Christ in the Future Life. We listened with eager, tender attention. When he finished, there was a long silence. No one cared or dared to speak. At length the Doctor said,—“Come, Burton, tell us what you think of it!” Dr. Burton hesitatingly said,—“Dr. Bushnell tells us that this is his last sermon!” He got no farther, but bowed his head and wept.
And we all wept together. Then we knew how we loved him, and how he loved us, and what an irreparable loss his departure would be for us. The dear old Doctor, calmest of all, his deep eyes full of tears, his wan face radiant, looked on as with heavenly grace and benediction.

Except for a reminiscence or two, I have confined myself within the proper boundaries of my subject, writing of men and of ecclesiastical bodies only as they were intimately related to our Association.

I have not presumed to defend Dr. Bushnell's views and opinions as controverted and condemned by his numerous and powerful opponents, nor to weigh or even consider the merits of the case as theologically discussed by both parties to it. All such discussion, besides being superfluous, lies outside the scope of this paper.

Nor have I willingly written a word in disrespect of those men who, deeming Dr. Bushnell guilty of holding and proclaiming fundamental errors, felt constrained by a sense of duty to secure, if possible, his trial for heresy.

"As it was," says Dr. Bushnell himself, "I had always my strong personal friends and confidants, even among the pillars of their side. Indeed, I had a certain peculiar sympathy with the style of piety among the old-school brethren, especially in all the points where it was contrasted with the flashiness of a super-active, all-to-do manner, such as then distinguished the movement party of the times. I loved their deep-drawn sentiments, and the sense of God that reverberated in their Christian expressions. I was drawn to their prayers, and to them personally by their prayers; and it has always been my conviction that if they had been a little more old-school, if they had been able to comprehend in their antiquity more than one century, they would have been as much drawn to me as I was to them." And he speaks of some of these brethren, "who had breadth enough to allow some variations of form when the substance was so manifestly preserved," and who "stood by me firmly to their death."

Dr. Bushnell maintained, to use the words of Dr. Bacon, "that his heterodoxy was more orthodox than the provincial and comparatively recent orthodoxy which assailed him."
Permit me now to add that having carefully and laboriously studied the case, on either side, in the obscure records and pamphlets of the time, I do not much wonder at the excitement, apprehension, and earnest determination of his opponents. From their standpoint, which was that of a provincial and mechanical orthodoxy, Dr. Bushnell's teachings were a serious, audacious, and dangerous assault upon the line of dogmatic truth. Putting myself in their place, I marvel at his confidence, courage, freedom, and boldness. Nor am I much impressed with the efforts made by many of his friends to harmonize his utterances with the current theology. I think his opponents were quite right in believing that the systematic forms of Christian doctrine, in which they supposed saving truth was enshrined, were directly assaulted and distinctly imperilled by him. If they erred in confounding those systematic forms with essential truth, if they failed to see that the time had come for a thorough revision and restatement of Christian doctrine, and that the man had also arrived who should lead in that work, their error is so common that the historian readily extenuates it. He marvels not so much at it, or at the antagonisms and the passion; it generated, but rather at this, that, beleaguered on every hand, vehemently assailed from every point of attack by eminent, earnest, and representative men, composing an overwhelming majority of theological authorities, with a tumultuous sea of often angry opposition storming in upon him, Dr. Bushnell could have found an organized body of orthodox ministers ready, with clear intelligence and a good conscience, to stand steadfastly by him, even in peril of excommunication, and assist him in maintaining his position as a Congregational minister.

My brethren, there was a man sent from God, whose name was Horace Bushnell; sent to prepare a highway for our God, and to bear witness of the Light. Whatever ignorant zeal might have done to him, he would somehow have fulfilled his mission and borne his witness. In the Providence of God it became the duty and the privilege of this Association to decide whether or no he had departed, in his teachings, from the ways of essential truth; and, having decided in his favor, to stand between him and those who, believing him heretical, left nothing undone that they might silence and suppress him.

As members of this Association, we recall, with gratitude
and pride, what our fathers and brethren then did, by light and help of Divine grace, to shield Horace Bushnell from ecclesiastical censure and, perhaps, degradation in this commonwealth; to save our Congregationalism from the indelible disgrace with which such action of discipline would have stained it, and to preserve his name and fame to be for a crown of rejoicing, forever, in the Congregational churches of Connecticut. All honor to them who, disagreeing with him in many things, and openly regretting much that he wrote, yet did discern the man, did perceive his deep grounding and rootage in the everlasting Gospel of Christ; and, thus discerning and perceiving, ranged themselves around him, for truth and freedom's sake, in a firm circle of protection and support that could not be dissolved nor broken.

In particular, all honor to that humble and holy man, of singular meekness and modesty, of eminent wisdom and goodness, the best friend Dr. Bushnell then had; to whom his brethren in this Association looked, and whom they followed as their natural leader; and who, as by common consent, guided the Hartford Central Association through all those years of perplexity and conflict, in the right way—Dr. Noah Porter of Farmington.

At the close of his great speech before the General Association at New Haven, in 1854, Dr. Bushnell paid a eloquent tribute to the rare virtues and graces of this faithful friend and venerated father in our Association; and what he said of him, in the following words, we may say of Dr. Bushnell himself, as we close this paper:—

"Now appears the true wisdom of a mind so tempered in the truth as not to be incapable of enduring other and different forms of thought; and it is shown, as clearly as it may be, that no agitations or criminations, or combined forces of assault, here or elsewhere, can have power against a man who is armed before God in the spiritual integrity of his truth."