

ple, or for the vindication of the rights of the oppressed. These indeed, in reference to the State are political questions; but in reference to the Church, they are religious; and they cannot be overlooked by the latter, without an awful dereliction of duty. It is on this ground that the question of slavery might very properly be entertained by a spiritual court; to determine its moral characteristics—to declare what spiritual discipline is adapted to these, and to make its influence bear upon civil legislation that “the oppressed may be free.” But, though this be a very legitimate function of a spiritual court, in such an Assembly as that of the Presbyterian Church of the United States, it must often prove very embarrassing. This seemed to be particularly felt in the last Assembly on the question of slavery, a term, whose repulsive associations, have of late been attempted to be softened by connecting with it the epithet “domestic.” It was reported that the ministers and commissioners from the slaveholding states, had instructions from their Presbyteries to withdraw from the Assembly, in the event of that question being entertained at all, on the ground that it was a purely civil question belonging to the legislatures of these states, and not within the jurisdiction of an ecclesiastical court. While many commissioners from the states in which slavery does not exist, were determined, if possible, to obtain from the Assembly a declaration, that, any member of the Church, holding slaves, was guilty of an immorality, and amenable to discipline. Between these extremes, we understood, there was a middle party, whose object was not to compromise the Assembly on either side, but to get rid of the question by some general and evasive resolution. A casual observer cannot, of course, affirm that this was

the actual state of parties and opinions on this subject. We give it from report as something near the point; and we allude to it at present for the purpose of shewing, that some of the political questions which disturb the Union, may often be expected, in their religious bearings, to disturb ecclesiastical judicatures; and that this will occur in a greater degree in a Church subsisting in, and spreading itself over, a congeries of small republics, having different political institutions, and occupying different positions in the march of improvement.

But beside these disturbing influences, flowing from the external relations of the American Church, there are others arising from its own proceedings and policy not less embarrassing. It appears that for a number of years past, it has been customary to admit ministers of the Congregational body, as ministers of Presbyterian congregations, and members of Church courts. Reasons, very specious in the circumstances of the American Church, might be adduced in support of such a measure. The Congregational body, in general, adhere to the same doctrinal standard as the Presbyterian; it is very numerous, especially in the New England States; and it might have seemed to many, a step toward that unity in the Church which pious minds so ardently desire and pray for, to overlook, in their agreement on doctrinal points, their disagreement on the minor questions of ecclesiastical government, and to desiderate mutually the enjoyment of ministerial communion; besides, it often happened amidst their fluctuating population, ever hiving into new settlements, that Congregationalists and Presbyterians, found a home in the same locality, united for the attainment of divine ordinances, and obtained a minister from one Church or the other, accord-