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**Reply of a Missouri Presbyter, To Charges Published Against Him  
on the Ground of Common Fame, and Without Trial, by the  
Presbytery of St. Charles**

Hiram Chamberlain

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REPLY  
OF  
A MISSOURI PRESBYTER,

TO CHARGES PUBLISHED AGAINST HIM, ON THE GROUND OF COMMON FAME,  
AND WITHOUT TRIAL, BY THE PRESBYTERY OF ST. CHARLES.

The Missouri Republican of May 5th, has the following note:  
"TO THE PUBLIC."

1 The last St. Louis Observer contains an assault on my character, injurious to me as a man, as a citizen of this community, and a minister of the gospel of Christ. To me, as to all, character is valuable; and this publication, I deem, requires prompt and efficient notice. Such notice it shall receive on my return from Pittsburgh, where I am now going, as a delegate to the General Assembly from the Presbytery of Missouri. Until I am fairly heard in my own defence, I request a generous public to suspend their judgment. This will be just to me, and honorable to themselves.

H. CHAMBERLAIN.

2 St. Louis, May 5th, 1836."

This brief note was replied to, by an anonymous writer, whose ignoble effort, with all others of his class, I pass in silence.

3 But the published records of a Presbytery, which has no jurisdiction over me, are widely different. I would silently pass them—would most gladly cast a mantle over the faults of all my brethren—and would hide them forever. But self-defence is an imperious law of our nature. When wantonly assailed, every man must yield a right loyal obedience, or be driven from among his peers, as a pusillanimous wretch. I avoid the alternative, and cheerfully submit to this law. I must do violence to my very being, if I did not. But necessary self-defence is the only ground which I propose to occupy. Farther than this, I will not expose the faults of others.

4 When a public effort is made to blast the reputation of a citizen, without trial and without a hearing; when the condemnatory records of a judicatory are published to the world, with no other basis than rumor; when every shield of character, and personal happiness is thus torn off and prostrated, the principles of the American Constitution are outraged, and every man is interested in the result. If the citizen so treated is a minister of the gospel, the government of the Church is trampled on, in its most obvious rules; and every other minister, and every member has rights in jeopardy, because the vital principles of the church compact, and of the social compact, are violated, and such violation is a wide-spread public evil.

5 June '36 - I do not remember what the as-

spall was, but cannot observe of new paper attacks.



Under these circumstances, I believe that the ministers, churches, and people of Missouri, will bear with me, and sympathise with me, while I set before them the grievances of which I complain, and appeal to their sense of public justice, and individual right. I do this with entire confidence, because I have found by an extensive intercourse, and a ten years' residence among them, that their love of character and liberty is ardent, and their abhorrence of persecution, is strong. If the facts in this case shall show, that I have been unjustly assailed in a public journal, I can anticipate the award of their judgment. Well am I assured, it will be prompt and efficient, and the *author* of these aggressive act, will, in the end, have no reason to pride himself on the fruits of his labors, persevering and abundant as they may be.

While I am the subject of unmanly attack, and am published in broad sheets over the land as a man of defective veracity, it is proper the public should know, that my standing at this moment, in the Synod and Presbytery of Missouri, is perfectly fair. That I share largely in the confidence and affections of the people of this county, that one entire church is united in my support, and a majority of another continue to cherish me, as the minister of their choice. And these are churches, who have had an acquaintance with me for the last *ten years*. They have known my losses, trials, and labors among them. Why then am I persecuted? Why do my brethren, that live remote, and have been a shorter time in this State, now combine to destroy me? Why?

The following plain matters of fact, deserve the serious consideration of every reader.

On the 31st of March, 1836, the Reverend John S. Ball presented in my behalf, to the Presbytery of Saint Charles, then in session at Troy, a certificate of "*good, regular, and fair standing as a minister of the gospel.*" Whereupon, the Rev. W. P. Cochran, Moderator, left his seat, and opposed my reception. He read a list of injurious and offensive charges against me, and sustained them by broad and vehement assertions. Less privileged, at this bar, than the chained felon, I was permitted no reply to this public and unmanly attack. But the Moderator having resumed his seat, the vote was taken on the motion to receive me, and lost, one minister, Rev. G. C. Wood, and two or more elders voting in opposition to me. Against this high handed and oppressive act, the Rev. John S. Ball, one of the oldest, and most venerable of our clergy, entered on the record his solemn protest, remarking that he had known me ever since I had come to the State, and he believed me to be an honest man, and a christian.

#### PROTEST.

The undersigned feels himself constrained to protest against the proceedings and vote of this Presbytery, in the case of the Rev. Hiram Chamberlain, upon the presentation of his letter of dismissal from the Presbytery of Missouri, directed to this Presbytery for admission as a member thereof; and which they have rejected.

The following reasons are assigned for this protest:

1. The letter of dismissal contained a full and fair testimony to the moral and ministerial character of the said brother—no objection being made to the letter.
2. That the Synod of Missouri had, during their session last September, at the request of the said Rev. H. Chamberlain, investigated certain, and sundry evil reports, which had been industriously put into circulation, injurious to the moral character of the said brother; and upon his exhibiting evidences of his innocence of those charges, did not only express their approbation of the sufficiency of those evidences, but moreover, expressed their entire confidence in him as a brother, and in his ministerial character.
3. Because the proceedings of the Presbytery in this case, is conceived to have been harsh and contrary to the rules of our discipline, Book 2, chap. 2, sec. 3d,

which forbids complaints or information of offences, before those means have been first resorted to which are required by Christ, in Mat. 18, ch. 15, 16; and contrary to that caution which is recommended in chap. 4, sec. 4, and more especially in the case of a gospel minister. See chap. 5, sec. 5 and 6. But a number of accusations, of a highly offensive character, were made gratuitously by one of the members of Presbytery. Some of which had been decided by Synod, and the brother acquitted thereof; while others for contumacy properly fall under the case now pending before the General Assembly, by appeal, wherein the said Rev. H. Chamberlain is the appellant from a decision of Synod.

11 = Finally, the undersigned protests against the vote and proceedings of Presbytery, not only for the injury done the brother in question, who had no opportunity of defending himself, but also for the disrespect which is conceived to have been thereby shown to the Presbytery of Missouri, to whom, it is conceived, a complaint, or charges should have been lodged against the said Rev. H. Chamberlain, in case there had been any charges well founded, and as the said Rev. H. Chamberlain would then have had a fair opportunity of defending himself.

12 = [Signed,] JOHN S. BALL.  
My certificate of *fair standing* was returned, marked "rejected," to the Presbytery of Missouri, then in session at Columbia, April 4th, 1836. On receiving it, they unanimously complained to the General Assembly of "*the gross disrespect*," offered to them by this act; re-asserting in their complaint, that I was "in good, and regular, and fair standing." They also appointed me their delegate to the General Assembly by unanimous vote; the Moderator, Rev. J. L. Yantis, voting. Thus they expressed the confidence of the entire body in a persecuted member.

13 = Meantime, the Presbytery of Saint Charles, having taken one step in violation of ecclesiastical law, and of individual rights, resolved to proceed in their work.— They accordingly adopted the following paper, and not content with spreading it on their minutes, with all its gross improprieties, to be read, when the frosts of death have swept over us all, they published it to the world.

14 = To the Reverend Presbytery of Missouri:  
The Presbytery of Saint Charles now in session, in the town of Troy, Lincoln county, do most respectfully present to your Rev. Body that the Rev. Hiram Chamberlain, a member of your Rev. Body, is in our bounds, disturbing the peace of one of our churches, viz: the church of St. Charles, and persisting contrary to our expressed desire and advice, to continue there, to the great detriment of the cause of Christ. We do request your Rev. Body, to take such constitutional steps as shall withdraw the said Chamberlain from our bounds.

15 = Further, we would inform your Reverend Body, that the said Rev. H. Chamberlain presented to us a letter of dismission and recommendation from your Reverend Body, to unite with us, and that we refused to receive said Chamberlain upon the following grounds:

16 = I. The last General Assembly so interpreted the constitution of our Church, as to empower each Presbytery to examine, admit, or reject any Presbyter, who shall ask admission with *clean papers* from any other Presbytery, as the Presbytery may deem proper.

17 = II. The Book of Discipline, Chap. X. 1—3, expressly declares that no member of the Church, or minister of the gospel, can be tried for offences, that are known prior to his becoming a member of that session, or Presbytery.

18 = The following are a list of offences loudly proclaimed by *fama clamosa*, against said H. Chamberlain.

19 I. Mr. Chamberlain's attempt to impose upon the Synod by reading certain papers, now on the file of Synod, and declaring that these covered the whole of his difficulties with Rev. Salmon Giddings; when it is known to some of the members



of this Presbytery, that one of the grounds of difficulty occurred in 1827, a year posterior to the date of said papers.

II. Mr. Chamberlain stated to Dr. Graham, Mr. Jordon, and Mrs. Garvin, that Mr. Thomas Lindsay, Sen. had told him that he (said Lindsay) had nothing against him, as a christian or minister of the gospel, which said Lindsay and also Mrs. Durfee, (who was present during their interview,) says is not correct.

III. Mr. Chamberlain told R. F. Gray, that if his name (i. e. Chamberlain's) had been before the St. Charles Church, at the time said Gray was chosen minister, he (said Chamberlain,) would have had a majority. This is untrue in fact. Mr. Gray told this to Mr. Thomas P. Copes, and Major Sibley.

IV. Mr. Chamberlain stated in Synod at its last session, that Mr. Rob't. Spencer, a member of St. Charles church, was a reformed man, when Mr. C. certainly knew, or ought to have known, before he made that assertion, that he *was not*: Witnesses, Samuel Watson and Wm. Spencer.

V. Mr. Chamberlain stated in Synod that he had nothing to do with the church of Saint Charles, other than that of a missionary passing through, &c. until after the election of the *new elders*. When the fact as known is, that he was the prime mover of the whole business, and did actually go through the party of the Church he supposed favorable to his views, and designate the persons proper to be elected. Witnesses, Mr. Garvin, Mr. Jenkins, Members of Synod.

VII. Mr. Chamberlain's disturbing the peace of the St. Charles Church—Witnesses, Elders and Deacons of St. Charles Church.

VIII. Mr. Chamberlain told Mr. Gray that there was but three opposed to him in the St. Charles Church, when he knew, or ought to have known, that that was *utterly untrue*. Told by Mr. Gray to Thos. P. Copes and Maj. Sibley.

IX. Mr. Chamberlain stated to his congregation on the Sabbath he read the first acts of Presbytery in relation to the Saint Charles difficulties, that the decision of the Presbytery was the result of *Old-School* prejudices, when Mr. Chamberlain had avowed to Mr. Watson, and others, that he was Old-School in his theology, not six months before. Witnesses, Thos. Gridley, Samuel Watson, and Mr. Black.

A true copy,

GEO. C. WOOD,

Stated Clerk.

My first remark on this singular production is, that it is the work of a party.—The Presbytery is a party opposed to me, and to the people of my charge, in several cases of appeal and complaint, now pending before the Assembly, and continued for final decision, until May, 1837. The Rev. Wm. P. Cochran has aided, abetted and led this party as a Moderator of nearly two years standing. His hand is seen as the spider, weaving his web for his victim, in all this business.

The witnesses named, also, with the exception of Messrs. Graham, Spencer, and Jenkins, are partisans. The written charges of this party, I long since met and refuted before my own Presbytery and before Synod. They begin. They make a "common fame," among themselves. Then, without the benefit of a hearing or trial, they publish charges against me over the land, on the ground of such common fame. Who, I ask, will receive, without very serious qualifications, such prejudiced and suspicious testimony as this? A good man ought to suspect himself as a witness, when so related by ardent party feelings to a pending cause.

My next remark is, that some of these statements are *untrue*: some of them vague and trifling, and some of them may be true, without any fault on my part. Two of them refer to *hear-say testimony*, universally admitted to be the worst in the world. And the whole are thrown together in such a manner as to produce the general impression, that I am guilty of falsehood.

In regard to the *first* on the list of offences, here published, I have the affidavit of one very respectable witness, and can procure others, equally as good, to prove that



one of my papers presented to Synod, bears date September 6th, 1827.— Now I am here, and elsewhere in the publication of this Presbytery, charged with *untruth*, because my papers did not reach the date of 1827. At whose door, then, will the falsehood lie, as charged by them, when we come into an ecclesiastical court?

In regard to the second, I will save them the trouble of proof, in part at least; and I now say, what I have before said, to Dr. Graham and others, viz: That when as a matter of christian duty, I called on Mr. Lindsay in January, 1835, and asked him this question, "Have you any thing against me as a christian, or minister of the gospel?" I understood him to say, in his usual Scotch dialect, 'Nothing in the world.' If, indeed, Mr. Lindsay denies the call, the question, or the answer, and appears in court, as a witness against me, I am prepared to meet him there. Let him come.

In regard to the third offence, it is plainly a trifling thing, founded on opinion and supposition, and from the very nature of the case, never can be proven to be a truth or an untruth. I am amazed that a Presbytery should ever bring such a charge against any man. Admit that I told Mr. Gray, that if I had been a candidate, before the Church of St. Charles, at the time he was, I should have had a majority of votes. This even seems probable. For a clear majority were in my favor in 1827, 1835, and 1836, and are so still. But even if there were none of these facts in the case, who shall accuse? Suppose a citizen should say, that if General Harrison had opposed General Jackson, in his first canvass, General Harrison would have been elected, and the hero of New Orleans driven from the field. And suppose on a charge of expressing such an opinion, a judicatory were gravely to publish that citizen, as guilty of an untruth. How absurdly ridiculous! Now the Presbytery of Saint Charles say, that my opinion of what would have been the result of an election between me and my brother, on the supposition that I had been a candidate, "is untrue." How do they know it is untrue? Let them prove it; or let them at least, contrive how they are ever to prove it, before they charge me with a high crime.

In regard to the fourth offence, it was insinuated in Synod, that Mr. Robert Spencer was in fault. I said in an under tone, "he has repented of that, we hope." I apprehend this hope has been realised. But suppose it has not. How many hopes are disappointed? And who, of that Presbytery, would wish their veracity impeached, because they had hoped for that which never happened? What perfect trifling with the character of a man.

In regard to the fifth offence, I did make in substance, the statement alluded to, and the assertion that I went through the church, and designated the persons proper to be elected, is *untrue*, and I can prove this by many witnesses. I did what every minister and missionary has a right to do, I visited the members of a vacant Church, and I asked some of them, who of their number were suitable persons to fill the office of ruling Elder.

The seventh offence, as charged, is also erroneous. I have not intentionally, knowingly, or willingly disturbed the peace of this Church. Some of its members, unhappily, have very much disturbed themselves on my account. But troubles and divisions of this sort, have existed here for several years, and in reference to other ministers. Under the ministry of the lamented Robinson, of Hall, Woods, and Nichols, there were difficulties. And moreover, whether it is proper for me to remain here or not, or in other words, whether a majority shall govern in our church, is a question now before the Assembly in a case of appeal, from what we deem, the unjust, exparte and oppressive acts of this same Presbytery. Until that high judicatory decide, they cannot touch the case. If they do, they are guilty of contempt against the higher court.



32. In regard to the eighth offence, it will be very unfortunate for Mr. Gray, if he should attempt to sustain this statement, made on his authority. For I shall prove by his own letter, that I told him no such thing.

36. The attempt in the ninth and last item, to fix on me the charge of being an Old-School man, or of representing myself to Watson as such, is one of the most weak and preposterous that I have ever met with. At Princeton, at Andover, on my arrival in this State; at Saint Louis, at Saint Charles, in the hearing of Watson himself and of the whole Church; at Boonville, Columbia, in Marion County, and many other places, have I boldly and explicitly proclaimed, what has been denominated "New School doctrine"—the doctrine of a general atonement. That "Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." If to do this, is to be an Old-School man, then do I claim to be ranked as such. For I freely admit, that I am as old as the Bible in this Theological sentiment. But a different distinction has prevailed in our Church, and those who hold the reverse of this, have been generally called Old School men. To this latter class I do not belong. Nor have I ever said I did. I love and cherish brethren on both sides of this question, and denounce no man for differing from me in opinion: and so am I the last man in the world to conceal an opinion, which I do hold, as many, who know me, can testify.

37. Such, honest reader, are the circumstances under which a Presbytery have gravely presented me to the public, as a man of "untruth." They have done it on the precarious ground of rumor—of floating testimony. They have done it, in violation of law, and justice, and with no jurisdiction over me. [See note A.]

38. Now the civil Constitution of this State, and of the United States, provides, that an accused person shall have due notice of trial—shall be heard in his own defence—shall be confronted with witnesses—shall be permitted to introduce witnesses in his favor—shall have the verdict of impartial men. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, equally just and righteous in all its parts, makes similar provisions; and furthermore, especially guards the character of a minister of the gospel who, from his profession, is known to be peculiarly liable to misrepresentation. It also declares—"if any person shall spread the knowledge of an offence, unless so far as shall be unavoidable, in prosecuting it before the proper judicatory, or in the due performance of some other indispensable duty, he shall be liable to censure as a slanderer of his brethren."

39. The third Presbytery of New York say, in the case of McDowell, "In the judgment of this Presbytery, a most unwarrantable and unchristian use is made of the public press, in impeaching and censuring individual conduct and character, to a total disregard of the law of Christ, respecting the manner of dealing with those who have offended, and that this great and crying evil, should receive the universal reprehension of the friends and followers of Christ."

40. In cases of high crime, and imprisonment, the public journals also, as a matter of common prudence and propriety, generally abstain from giving the facts to their readers, until they are investigated before a civil court.

If, then, these plain and well settled principles of law and justice are to prevail—and who will consent that they shall not?—in what language shall we speak of, or in what light shall we view, the act in question? Where is the brotherly kindness, charity, prudence and pious reserve which has characterised the Church, in its dealings with its members? Where is law? Justice? All that is dear and sacred?—If the charges are true, I have a right to complain. But if, as I am able to show, they are grossly erroneous, who, beside, would be willing to take upon his shoulders the responsibility of so abusing an innocent brother, laboring for the good of men?

They say fama clamosa loudly proclaims this long list of offences. Now I ask, and I have an undoubted right to ask, how came this clamorous fame? Many persons

in Saint Charles never heard of some of these charges, until they appeared in print. I myself never heard of some of them, until they were read out, in the Court House at Troy, in the hearing of many, by the Rev. Wm. P. Cochran. Were they not indeed, gathered up by him, from the party, during the ten days' visit which he made to this Church last winter, when he came not near its minister; but did *certain things*, which I forbear to name, which nevertheless caused so strong a burst of public indignation, that many fears were entertained of his personal safety? And were they not, when printed, shown by him privately to the members of the Assembly, in a way suited to prejudice their minds against me?

I honestly declare, I wish this brother no earthly harm. I have long known what to expect from him, and been silent. However righteous his course, for the last three years, may appear to the judgment of his own mind, it has more than once reminded me of Saul in the pursuit of the innocent David. He may pursue. I will remember David's example and bear the persecutions of Saul with all meekness and charity. But he shall not destroy me, if I can help it.

When charges against me had been widely circulated in 1835, of unchristian conduct toward the Rev. S. Giddings, of dishonesty as an agent, of disturbing the peace of the churches, the Presbytery of Missouri took up the subject, at my earnest request, and having examined it to their perfect satisfaction, they say:

*Resolved, unanimously,* That this Presbytery is entirely satisfied, that the said reports are wholly false.

*Resolved, further, and finally,* That in view of the whole case, we feel not only authorised, but bound in justice to an injured brother, to express not only undiminished, but entire confidence in his honesty, as a man, and in his faithfulness as a minister. [See note B.]

Synod, at their meeting in October last, heard my defence against, substantially, the same charges, entered on the files of the Saint Charles Presbytery, and they say, "It is with unfeigned satisfaction, that Synod emphatically declare, they have seen nothing in all the proceedings before them, that does, in the least degree, implicate the moral character, or purity of motive of any individual concerned, and they desire especially and particularly to apply this remark to brother Chamberlain.—  
*They are both unimpeached.*

Yet in the face of these decisions of my own Presbytery, and of the superior judicatory, a Presbytery to which I do not belong, prepare and publish a portion of the same charges, with new matter, and all on the ground of common fame. Whoever heard of such proceedings before in any church? There must be an unwonted anxiety here, to impeach the character of a man. I appeal to that public, before whose bar this subject has been very improperly brought, yet not by me. And I now ask, what public man, what private citizen, what minister of the gospel can be found in this land, so unenvied, so unrepached, that an active agent could not find, in the course of ten days' industrious effort and enquiry, from house to house, quite as much matter, for common fame, as would fill her brazen throat? What father, what husband, what man would be willing to have the same experiment tried on him and to the same extent? Suppose it tried on the Moderator, in Franklin, in Columbia, in Palmyra, where he has resided. Suppose it tried on the witnesses named, one of whom is personally unknown to me. On Thomas P. Copes, who happens to be very well known to the records of this county, with a fair prospect of having his memory perpetuated.

Fellow citizens, I ask justice; and I ask it at your hands. I ask the privilege of standing erect among you, as an honest man and a christian, until some more truthful and responsible personage than that harlot, common fame, pronounces me guilty.

H. CHAMBERLAIN.



NOTE A.—Justice to respected brethren, who had no share in this business, induces me here to state, that several important members were absent during the sessions, who, I am persuaded, never would have given their assent to any such measures as those, of which I complain. I also deem it necessary to state, that I have requested the action of my own Presbytery, on these publications.

NOTE B.—WHEREAS, it has been reported, that brother H. CHAMBERLAIN has been guilty of unfaithfulness in the management of certain funds which have been placed in his hands, by benevolent individuals in the East and West, for the purpose of building a house of worship, for the use of the Presbyterian Church of Boonville—and of dishonesty in retaining certain articles of bed-clothing, collected by him, as agent of Marion College, for the use and benefit of said College—and also, that the said brother has been instrumental in destroying the peace and harmony of many, if not all, the churches with which he has been connected—and whereas, these reports have extended beyond the bounds of his particular acquaintance, and are calculated to ruin his character as a man and a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is therefore,

*Resolved, unanimously,* That brother Chamberlain be permitted, in conformity with his own particular solicitation, to produce such evidences of his innocence of the above charges, as he may be able to do, for the purpose of disabusing the minds of his brethren, and relieving his character from all suspicion.

Whereupon, brother CHAMBERLAIN proceeded to make a statement in relation to all the reports, which statement was amply sustained by satisfactory vouchers. It was therefore,

*Resolved, unanimously,* That this Presbytery is entirely satisfied, that the said reports are wholly false—that in relation to the first and second, they feel called upon, in justice to him, to say, that he has acted with scrupulous regard to honesty and to his responsibility, as entrusted with the benefactions of the generous—and that in relation to the third, he has been misrepresented and injured, without any cause, and in relation to every charge affecting his moral character, he manifested a perfect willingness to go into a judicial investigation, whenever it may be deemed expedient.

*Resolved, further and finally,* That, in view of the whole case, we feel not only authorized, but bound in justice to an injured brother, to express, not only undiminished, but entire confidence in his honesty as a man, and in his faithfulness as a minister.

A true copy of the minutes of the Missouri Presbytery.

R. L. McAFEE,  
Stated Clerk of Presbytery.