

THE PRESBYTERIAN CREED.

The *New York Herald*, discussing the proposed change of the creed of the Presbyterian Church, makes the following editorial comment on the subject: –

"If the Christian of a century ago were to return to New York he would find almost nothing to remind him of his own time except the creed of the Presbyterian Church, and he would wonder why, in the progressive evolution, visible everywhere else, that alone remains unchanged. If he caught the spirit of our time he would see that we are just as eager for the eternal verities, far broader in our charities, more generous in our bequests, and quite as earnest in our pleas for public and private morality as he and his contemporaries were. For that matter he would discover with mingled surprise and gratitude that the chief reason why young men turn away from a clerical career is that they are too conscientious to subscribe to doctrines which neither brain nor heart will allow them to accept.

"Here, for instance, is an illustrious example of the stern theology of the old school. We take it from Edwards' works, and from a sermon which curdled the blood of the last generation. The preacher singled the sinner with the flames not of an avenging but rather of a revengeful justice. Dr. Edwards says: –

"'The God that holds you sinners over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you. He will crush you under his feet without mercy. He will crush out your blood and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on His garments so as to stain all his raiment.'

"After a sermon on that line of thought it would seem to be somewhat difficult to repeat the Lord's Prayer. The Fatherhood of God would not be easily established on that statement, and the parable of

the shepherd wandering in the dark over hill and through dale to find the one lost sheep after the ninety nine had been safely folded is robbed of all its significance.

"Imagine, if you can, Dr. John Hall or Dr. Howard Crosby, the soundness of whose faith is beyond question, indorsing such language and pronouncing it a fair description of God's relation to the human race. And yet it is strictly within the limits of the creed of a century ago, a creed which the younger Presbyterians desire to have modified. If it is true, why not emphasize it boldly, and if it is not true, why not revise the dogmas which appear to have raised a revolt in the Church?

"The doctrine of foreordination, with its logical consequences, has broken many a man's head and heart. The picture of a burning lake, where writhing wretches curse the day of their birth and execrate the Deity who doomed them to unending misery 'for His own pleasure,' seals the lips of an ardent man who is filled with the desire to bless and help and save a falling world. His eloquence would be that of despair without a ray of hope. He turns from the pulpit and chooses the profession of the law.

"From a purely secular point of view the picture is simply awful. What kind of a government could we have on earth if an emperor should throw three-quarters of his subjects into a prison house, to be tortured, including your father or mother or sister, and then require you to sing his praises and rejoice at their torments? The direful experiment has never been tried, and if it were tried we should either approach the sovereign with servile sycophancy or rebel with the courage of desperation. It would be as impossible to call him wise as it would be false to call him good.

"It is no more strange, then, that the Assembly should be asked to revise such dogmas than that our fathers should have accepted them as true. That the demand is made in the name of vacant pulpits, only shows that to-day is more reverent than yesterday was, that fear of God

is giving place to love, and that the world yearns to think of Him as Our Father, with all the words imply.

"Holmes touches the heart of the new age in "The Chambered Nautilus," and we commend these lines to the Assembly as indicating the changes that should be made in the creed of the Presbyterian Church: –

"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!"

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It strikes us as scarcely fair to say that the only reminder of the "eternal torment theory" is to be found to-day in the Presbyterian Church and its creed. It was their candor and honesty to their convictions which led the framers of the Westminster Confession to state themselves so pointedly; and however much we feel their views to be erroneous, we should respect them for their candid statement of them. Other denominations believed as fully as the Presbyterians in the doctrine of eternal torment, and still do, and just as zealously now claim to be "orthodox" on this subject – that they now hold the teachings of the founders of the various sects. It is this very candor, too, no doubt, which prevents many Presbyterians from now changing, to suit the public, a creed which still expresses their honest convictions of the teachings of the Bible. Let us honor and respect their candor, however much we may disrespect their creed.

We wish it were true that all other Christians had outgrown that horrible nightmare conceived by Papacy during the dark ages. But it

is not true: the majority of Christian people, including the ministers, still hold to this horrible doctrine though their reasons and hearts rebel against it. The reason is, that they think it to be the teaching of the Bible, and it is their very desire to remain anchored to God's Word, that (through a *false* interpretation of its parables, dark sayings and symbols,) holds them to a doctrine which they feel keenly is a slander upon the character of any just and holy being.

Under these circumstances *doubts* and *fears* take possession of their minds. They doubt the Bible and everything and yet they fear that to let go their hold would plunge them into infidelity, or perhaps atheism. Their next resort is to stand perfectly still, – to go neither forward, nor backward; to neither affirm, nor deny; to neither believe, nor disbelieve anything; and on all doctrinal subjects they say, "Let us alone! We are not [R1158 : page 5] theologians and don't want to bother ourselves on such subjects." And this is the attitude of Christian people in general to-day. They do not really and heartily believe the Bible (being hindered by their erroneous view of its teachings), and hence are uniting more and more upon a social and moral platform as sects, instead of on the grand doctrines of God's inspired revelation.

Their attitude calls for sympathy and pity and tender help over their misunderstandings, rather than for abuse and cutting and lashing sarcasm, from those who have escaped from the horrible nightmare which still enthrals them. But we must not *let them alone* as they desire us to do; love for them, and for our Master's honor, and for the Truth, compels us to cry aloud and spare not, but show God's people their errors (Isa. 58:1), and cause such as really are earnest and honest and seeking for the truth, to *see* the beauty and grandeur of God's Word and his gracious plan therein revealed.

Nor must those who have the harmonizing truth be slack in this work: the time for labor is short. If not soon convinced of the true teachings of the Bible, which so fully satisfies and convinces the sanctified reason, they will soon openly reject it. The opportunity for

convincing them of the real grandeur of the Scriptures is while they yet hold on to them and to some extent respect them. They cannot stand still; for if those who have the truth should, as they so much desire, let them alone, the devil and the world and awakening reason will not let them alone, but will upset all their faith in the Bible and leave them naught but faith in men and in sects of human organization.

Let every soldier of the cross press nobly on for the deliverance of his brethren, for the honor of his King and for the uplifting of the one and only Standard of truth – God's Word.
