

PRESBYTERIAN CREED REVISION.

"The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." – Isa. 29:14.

The various Presbyteries of the United States are severally discussing pro and con the proposed revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The meeting of the New Brunswick (N.J.) Presbytery is one of the more notable, because it includes Princeton College, an institution under Presbyterian control. We extract the following from the report of the discussion published in the *New Brunswick News*: –

"The Princeton faculty members were out in force at the meeting of Presbytery, all prepared to discuss the question, and among them was Dr. McCosh, the venerable ex-President of the College. The greatest interest was, of course, felt in what he should say on the subject.

"Dr. McCosh expressed himself wholly in favor of revision. 'There is danger,' he said, 'in stirring up this matter, but there is more danger in ignoring it or postponing it. The movement in favor of revision has been pushed very earnestly by the young men, and it will as surely be pushed in the future. Revision seems likely to come, and if it must come it is better that there should be no hesitancy, but that the movement should be guided by the older and more conservative men, and guided courageously and openly.

"It may be doubted if some passages are contained in the word of God. Now in logic it is law that there shall be nothing in the conclusion for which there is not a foundation in the premise, hence what is not in the word of God must not be in the confession.'

"Dr. McCosh spoke briefly of the language of the clause declaring that 'God, for his own glory, hath fore-ordained some men to everlasting life and some to everlasting death,' and then continued: 'There is a want

in our confession of a clear and prominent utterance such as we have in the Scriptures everywhere of the love of God to all men and of the free gift of Jesus Christ and of salvation to all men, not to the elect alone. I find that some of our best and soundest young men are turned from their inclination to enter the ministry, or having entered upon it are annoyed and hindered, by a few obnoxious phrases that keep staring them in the face, and by the absence of the complete recognition of the infinite love and mercy of God. Leave out, then, these obnoxious phrases, and put in the very front as the most prominent expression of our doctrine this one of God's love to all and of the free offer of salvation. Our confession meets the heresies of the seventeenth century, but not the heresies of the nineteenth.'

"I confess, too, that I should like to have in the Presbyterian Church a shorter and clearer creed than the Westminster Confession. Our theologians do not accept it as a whole. I know these theological seminaries; I know them. Some reject one part, some reject another, all reject something.' In conclusion the ex-President spoke of the nature of the fight which the church in this age is entering upon as an argument for the revision. He was too old, he said, to enter into a fuller discussion of the subject, but he thought the time had come when all should take a stand on it; do it honestly and not be a coward.

"There was a pause when Dr. McCosh had concluded, and then Mr. Slaid, a prominent Trenton layman, arose. 'What do we ask,' he said, 'when we demand revision? Are we going to throw the confession aside? Are we going to put it at naught? No, we are merely to place it in the hands of a picked body of men, who will bring it into conformity with the best thought of this century and make it express what we believe.'

"In conclusion Mr. Slaid said: 'One of two courses is open to us; to put this confession aside as a relic, that shall only show what people believed centuries ago; or to put it in shape for use now. I care not which is done: if I have any preference it is putting it in use. But if it is to be kept as a relic let us have it understood that it is a relic and nothing more. Let us not keep it as a relic and yet pretend to use it.'"

In one sense these are noble, bold words, as well as words of truth and soberness. And yet, one cannot help wondering that these gentlemen, and others who took the same side of the question with them, should manifest their boldness *only in words*. They surely have not reached present conclusions suddenly; they probably have held them for months or for years. Why, then, have they remained Presbyterians in name while at heart they utterly repudiate those tenets which represent Presbyterianism? Why do they now stand before the world as the slaves of a sect and its creed, praying the *majority* to ease up some of the tighter bonds which gall and fret them? Why, if really courageous soldiers of the Truth, do they not step out of sectarian bondage into the liberty wherewith Christ makes free all who appreciate his work and doctrines? Really, instead of considering these men as brave heroes, we cannot help pitying them in their ludicrous position, when we see that the bonds which hold them, and [R1165 : page 3] against which they so vehemently declaim, and from which they pray to be released, are not really chains of rusty steel which are cutting the flesh but only some old paper chains, hard and ugly and strong looking from age, but really so fragile that the smallest "babe in Christ" could shatter them, yet so grim and horrible to look upon that they terrify many gray haired ministers and college professors, so that while some weep and pray that the burden be lifted, the majority decide that the chains are too sacred and too strong to be touched.

On the other side of this question, Dr. Warfield, professor of theology in Princeton Seminary, is reported to have "opposed the revision, on the ground that *the present Confession is the correct expression of the general sentiment of the Church, and a satisfactory interpretation of Scriptural faith, if itself properly interpreted.*" This agrees well with a statement made by Rev. I. N. Hays before the Pittsburgh Presbytery, discussing the same question. He said: "I am a Calvinist through and through. There is not a doctrine essential to our system which I would have altered, modified or softened, if I had the power to do so. As I see it, the Bible is just as full of God's sovereignty as it is of free grace. To get the Calvinism, which is in it, out, you must get a new Bible."

From these and from the expressions of many Presbyterians, it is our opinion that there are four parties in the denomination: (1) a radical class which believes as thoroughly as Calvin ever did that in the counsels of eternity, before man was created, God predetermined not only the creation, but also fixedly determined who should be so "effectually called" to salvation and so thoroughly environed by circumstances, etc., that they could neither will nor do anything which would in any way affect or alter that predetermination to land them in glory; and that regarding the others of mankind God just as fixedly predetermined that they should not get an effectual call, and should have no opportunity for salvation, and that nothing that they could either will or do could prevent them from being everlastingly tortured – that they might thus by unending groans and curses illustrate God's power and sovereignty, as the elect would illustrate (by no work or merit of theirs, they claim) God's sovereign power to save whom he would: (2) a class which says, quietly, Calvin was probably all right, we do not dispute it, but we prefer not to think or talk on this side of the subject; let us rather talk about God's goodness and love to the elect, and hope that we and our friends are not of the non-elect who are to be tormented; and especially let us not make this election doctrine prominent; let us revise the creed, not because it really belies our faith, but because in this day of refined sensibilities the creed expresses our views too clearly and shocks outsiders as well as grates harshly upon our own feelings: (3) another class totally repudiating the above doctrines and vainly endeavoring to prove to themselves and others that Calvin never believed thus. They construct for their finer sensibilities an election without any special predestination of individuals, and contrary to Calvinism they recognize the freedom of the human will and the importance of the individual both willing and doing according to his ability. These think themselves capable of twisting and turning and explaining away the objectionable features of Calvinism, and object to a creed revision, claiming that it would show weakness and fallibility to change it, and that it really needs no change, but should be understood not logically and as it reads but according to the gloss they are able to put upon it. These represent the majority of the educated men and of the ministers. (4) A fourth class is represented by Dr. Schaff, of New York.

They hold practically the same views as class three, except that they are too honest or too logical to claim for Calvinism and the old Westminster Confession of Faith any other meaning than their plain statements will honestly and logically justify. These admit that Calvin and their creed teach what in the present light they can clearly see is a horrible, God-dishonoring doctrine of which they are heartily ashamed. This class, to a man, desire the revision.

But why do men of so different ideas cling together so tenaciously and insist that they are all Calvinists, all Presbyterians, while really only classes 1 and 2 are such? Is it from loyalty to Christ? No; Christ never told any to believe in Calvinism or to call themselves Presbyterians. Quite the contrary, indeed, loyalty to Christ would lead to the remembrance that "one is your Master" and teacher, even Christ, and would show that fealty to Calvin and the owning of his name as their great teacher is really disloyalty to Christ – the putting of another in the place of the true head of the Church.

Can their anxiety to stay together as one be accounted for as love of the Truth or love of each other? No; they admit as above that they are not agreed as to what is Truth and often find in other denominations fully as congenial persons for associates. What then holds them thus? It is sectarianism and the fact that they have a sure thing of a certain amount of honor, support, etc., where they are, which they would run, at least, a risk of losing by changing. Besides, would it not prove that they were fallible teachers and that they and others whose teachings they had endorsed had really taught more or less error? This would be very much more humbling to pride than to stick to the old creed, claim that it is infallible and seek to turn and twist its various declarations to keep pace with the growing enlightenment of the people, which they cannot restrain. Would that we could see some of the noblest step entirely out from all man-made creeds, and declare themselves *disciples* (learners) at the feet of Christ, students of his Word (and not learned D.D.'s), and see them seeking and planning as diligently how to harmonize God's Word, as they now are seeking to sustain the false doctrines of mistaken men.

Concerning the real import and ultimate effect of changes, at present under consideration by great religious systems, the secular press seems to be fully aware. They realize the situation as fully as the theologians, and much better than many of them. The editor of a New York daily thus reviews the matter: –

"The General Convention of the Episcopalians now in session at St. George's will not be disturbed by controversies over questions of doctrine. Such differences of opinion as there may be will be concerning matters of form; the revision of the prayer book and hymnal, the basis of representation in the Convention, and also a change in the title of the Church.

"Meantime, in the Presbyterian Church the movement for a more or less radical revision or transformation of the standard of faith is gaining force, and this subject of controversy will unquestionably occupy the chief attention of the next General Assembly as the most important which has arisen in the communion during all its recent history. Even President McCosh of Princeton expressed the opinion at the meeting of the New Brunswick Presbytery on Tuesday last that this discussion is bound to come, and that it will be more dangerous to try to head it off than to give it encouragement. He went further and declared himself squarely in favor of revising the Westminster Confession of Faith. It seems to him too harsh, and as lacking in 'a clear and prominent utterance, such as we have in the Scriptures everywhere, of the love of God to [R1165 : page 4] all men and of the free gift of Jesus Christ and of salvation to all men, not to the elect alone.' The younger Presbyterian clergy, according to Dr. McCosh, 'find the doctrine of election as expressed in the Confession a serious stumbling block in their way. They are unable or unwilling to defend it, and for his own part he discovers that it meets the heresies of the seventeenth century, but not the heresies of the nineteenth.'

"The same feeling prevails in Scotland and England. There also the doctrine of election is becoming more and more unpalatable, especially when it is put thus remorselessly in the Westminster Confession: –

"By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and some angels are predestinated to everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.

"These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished."

Certainly, the unscriptural doctrine of a hell of torment for any to suffer in eternally must go along with or shortly after the doctrine that God predestinated a fixed number of his creatures to endure such an eternity. Because the *foreknowledge* of God, at least, must be admitted; and if he foreknew such an eternity for any, why did he create them; or to put the matter in another form, Why should God – a just and loving God – foreknow that he would do thus with the wilfully wicked? Why should he not make a much more reasonable plan and arrange to *destroy* and not preserve such wicked ones, and foreknow that? Such, as we have frequently shown in these columns, is God's plan and such *an end* of the wicked he foreknew and has foretold by the prophets, by his Son, and by his apostles.

*See Old Theology Tract, No. 1, "Do the Scriptures teach that eternal torment is the wages of sin?"

But some great theologian will perhaps answer, – God cannot destroy a man. He [R1166 : page 4] can destroy all lower animals' lives, but man is immortal and must therefore live forever somewhere; and since such could not be allowed to mar the harmony and bliss of the righteous, God had to provide a place for such to spend their eternity, and that place we theologians call hell.

Well, well! Who would have expected that a wise God would so overdo his work of creation as to make creatures whose existence he could not terminate. But do not all theologians agree with us that God is *infinite* in power and in wisdom? But, if infinite in wisdom, he would not have made man so great as to be beyond his own control. And, if infinite in power, it follows true that there is nothing that he has not the

power to destroy – angels or men. Theologians have a theory on this subject of man's power and God's weakness, as well as on the subject of the predestination of the non-elect to everlasting torment. But both theories are erroneous; both are thoroughly opposed to Scripture teachings; both are dishonoring to God and injurious to the church and to the world; and both are belittling to the reason and common sense of the great theologians who concocted such flimsy subterfuges, – subterfuges which any man of unfettered reason and any knowledge of the Bible, or willingness to study it with the help of a concordance, can today easily and quickly see through.

In this connection we give the views of another celebrated Presbyterian minister, of Union Theological Seminary,

PROFESSOR SCHAFF D.D. COMMENDS DR. M'COSH'S POSITION.

To a Tribune reporter who called upon him on Saturday Dr. Schaff said that he was in favor of a revision of the creed, and was willing to state his reasons for his belief that the time had come for a change in the Standards of the Church. In the main he agrees with Dr. McCosh.

He said, "I am glad that the Tribune published the testimony of this venerable scholar in favor of a revision. His testimony will have great weight, owing to his long experience and representative position. Not only for Princeton University, but also for Ireland and Scotland can he speak. He is certainly right when he asserts that revision must come sooner or later. He touches the vital point in the Westminster Confession when he says: 'There is a want in our Confession of a clear and prominent utterance such as we have in the Scriptures everywhere of the love of God to all men, and the free gift of Jesus Christ and of salvation to all men, not to the elect alone.'

Reporter. – "What are the special parts of the Confession that need revision?"

Dr. Schaff. – "The chapters that relate to predestination and the loss of non-elect infants are specially under fire now, but I am in favor of

dropping the reference to the pope as 'Antichrist,' and the two hundred millions of communicants in the Roman Catholic Church as 'idolators.' Such a judgment is untrue, unjust, uncharitable and unsuitable in any Confession of Faith. But that is not the special point to which attention is called. Let us keep to the text. Take the subject of 'elect' and 'non-elect' infants. You cannot escape the logical conclusion that if there are 'elect' infants, there must be 'non-elect' infants, that may be lost. Now, it is the general belief of the Presbyterian Church to-day that all infants dying in infancy are saved, while in the seventeenth century all Calvinist divines believed that some of them were lost forever. But the opponents of revision do not teach or preach this doctrine now; why, then, have it in the Confession?"

THE WONDERFUL LOVE OF GOD.

Reporter. – "Is not the Westminster Confession broad enough to include all men?"

Dr. S. – "It is a Confession framed for the benefit of the elect, while, at the same time, the most prominent and the most cheering doctrine, which may be read on every page of the New Testament, is this: 'God loves all men; God made absolute provision for the salvation of all men; God wishes no man to be lost, but would have every one come to a knowledge of the truth.' I scarcely need to quote a verse to prove this, though many might be given, which are not used as proof texts in the Confession, because that doctrine is not contained in the text.

"'How often,' said the Savior, '*would I* have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not:' the emphasis is on the '*would not*' of the people. 'God so loved the world,' the whole world, not the elect merely, 'that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever [embracing all men] believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' 'God, our Savior, willeth that all men should be saved.' 'The Lord is long-suffering to you-ward not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,' and so I might go on."

Reporter. – "But if this doctrine is emphasized, does it not destroy Presbyterianism, and make us all Methodists?"

Dr. S. – "By no means. The doctrine of divine sovereignty is still maintained; the doctrine of election is not destroyed, but alongside of these important doctrines is placed that other, the groundwork of our religion, namely, the doctrine of the universal love of God. The Calvinist to-day, whatever be his theory as a theologian, stands on this basis. He preaches and works as if salvation depended on men; he prays as if all depended on God. The Calvinist preaches like an Arminian, and the Arminian prays like a Calvinist."

Rep. – "But is this not inconsistent?"

Dr. S. – "If it be logically inconsistent, it has the high support of the great Apostle to the Gentiles, who bids men work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, adding, 'For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.' *That seems inconsistent, but it is Scripture.*"

In the above expressions by Dr. Schaff we find two points for brief comment. (1) Note that he objects to Papacy being considered Antichrist; he considers this unjust, untrue and uncharitable. In this he merely follows the liberal worldly sentiment which is rapidly spreading over and influencing the judgments of the entire nominal church of all denominations of Protestants. As we have attempted to show before, Protestants to-day are such only in name; they hold so much of doctrine, custom and form in harmony with Papacy, that neither they nor the world see any reason for either one to call the other antichrist; for in so doing they practically implicate themselves as at least blood-relatives of antichrist. Nevertheless, as we have sought clearly to show in DAWN, Vol. II., (and will further show in Vol. III.,) there is the strongest of grounds for knowing that Papacy is the great antichrist system of the Bible, and for getting farther and farther from her and her false doctrines of the dark ages, which continue to stain and taint every Protestant creed to the extent that it contain, much or little of the same false doctrines.

(2) We object to Dr. Schaff's concluding remark, relative to the Apostle Paul's teaching. We have no right nor wish to object to the branding of Dr. Schaff's theories on the subject of election as illogical as well as inconsistent; for that is just what any sensible, thinking man must conclude; but we do object when by his claims that greatest and most logical and inspired writer, Paul, is made to appear foolish and illogical also, by the claim that his words agree with the confessedly illogical and inconsistent theory of Dr. Schaff and Calvinists generally, of all shades, on this subject of election.

We cannot here discuss this question in detail. We have already done so, and refer the reader to the TOWER for March 1886, pages 3 and 4. Suffice it here that we very briefly notice the two texts which seem to Dr. S. to be illogical and inconsistent, thus: –

We find the Scriptures everywhere teaching that God *has a plan* or fixed arrangement for human redemption and recovery from sin and death, according to which he is working; and that all his purposes in that plan shall be accomplished in his own due time. In that plan he arranged that our Lord Jesus was to be the great and chief divine agent in the work of redemption and recovery. In that predetermined plan he had provided, also, that a few, a "little flock," should be chosen or *selected* from among the many of the redeemed world, to be the bride, joint-heirs, under-priests and co-workers with Christ Jesus, their Lord and Chief-priest, in the execution of God's great plan of blessing all the families of the earth by bringing all men to a full knowledge of God (1 Tim. 2:4-6) and restoring to mental and physical perfection (Acts 3:19-21-23) all who, when they know the Lord fully, shall delight to serve and obey him.

This "little flock" God had not only predetermined should be selected from among redeemed men, but he had also predetermined that only such should be of that select band as should in a trial develop a spirit of loyalty and full consecration to him; in other words, they must each be "*copies* of his Son," their Redeemer. (Rom. 8:29.) The trial or testing time of this "little flock" has been during this Gospel age. These are not only being tried to prove their *worthiness of everlasting life*, but

also to prove whether they shall, by very full, hearty, prompt and faithful obedience to the very spirit of God's will, manifest the likeness of Christ Jesus and be accounted worthy to be of the little flock, his select (elect or chosen) joint-heirs in the coming kingdom.

It is for this that they must "*strive*," "run," "seek," "fight," "lay hold," [R1167 : page 4] and "work," for to "make your calling and election sure:" "So run that ye may obtain" the prize: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling [careful lest you should fail of this great favor of God to which you have been called]; for it is God that worketh *among* you both to will and to work his good pleasure." In other words, – Highly esteem the high calling to the great honor set before you in your call to joint-heirship with Christ in his Millennial kingdom. Slight it not; esteem it not lightly. Remember that the call is of God, that it is his exceeding great and precious promises that have worked and are working in you to *will* to do God's will and become copies of the great Redeemer; and remember, too, that the same promises are still the power of God, and will enable you, not only to *will*, but also to *do*, what would be pleasing to God.

The great mistake made by so many, on the relationship of work and salvation, is this: they see properly, though very indistinctly, that the work of redemption, the giving of the ransom, is entirely a *work of Christ*, our Lord, in which we can have no share, but which we must accept and appropriate by *faith alone*. There is no room at all in that redemptive work for our *works* to come in. We must accept it as a gratuity in full, or not at all, as the poet truly expresses it:

"In my hand no price I bring:
Simply to thy cross I cling."

This work of Christ *cancel*s the original condemnation, to everlasting destruction, which had passed upon all through the disobedience of Adam, our father and representative. It entitles every man to a fresh trial – an individual trial – and offers life everlasting to each one who (after accepting of Christ's finished work) shall by *his will* and *his works* prove his willingness to be obedient to God. Here

faith has its part, in which works cannot share, – in accepting of Christ's work; then the works of the redeemed, justified ones, come in and join hands with faith to make use of the benefits provided freely by the grace of God in Christ.

The trial of the world in general waits until the trial of the church, which is much more severe, is complete. Then the chosen, the elect, the bride with her Lord, shall judge and bless all the families of earth.

Thus seen, the selection of the church means the very reverse of a curse upon the great remainder of mankind. Though [R1167 : page 5] the close of the selection, when the last one of the predetermined number has been tried and approved, will reprobate or cut off the remainder of mankind from all hope of sharing with Christ in the honors of his great restitution work of blessing the masses, it is far from the ordinary idea of reprobation. An illustration of this reprobation is found in politics. When the full number of members of Congress or Parliament, fixed by law, has been selected or elected, the remainder of the people are *reprobates* thereto. But are they injured thereby? No, they are blessed; for the selection of the few is for the benefit and not for the injury of the many. And much more so God's selection of the Parliament and ministry of the Millennial Kingdom, under and as co-workers with Christ Jesus the King of kings – they are elected for the *expressed* purpose of blessing all the families of earth. – Eph. 2:5-10; Gal. 3:16,29.
