

## VIEW FROM THE TOWER.

Our Presbyterian friends are still holding general public attention. The reports of the discussion, for and against the revision of their Confession of Faith, before the various Presbyteries, occupy prominent places in the daily papers, and the public scans the arguments on both sides with deep interest. These discussions are doing great good in the direction of waking up thought among Christian people of all denominations. It is thus kindling the fire which shall burn out the wood, hay and stubble of traditional errors from not only Presbyterianism but from all isms.

The discussions and votes of the various Presbyteries settle nothing, however. They are only preliminary: the question of revision or no revision can be decided only by the General Assembly, when it shall finally pass upon the question. The pity is that great men will tie themselves up to a doctrine and stick to it, though they believe it to be erroneous and God-dishonoring, *until the majority* of their sect agrees to let them confess and preach the Truth.

The New York Presbytery has developed some strong men and opened their lips; and they have said so much that they can never retrace their steps, and would be ashamed to remain in the denomination should the conclusion be a refusal to revise the creed. The vote of the New York Presbytery was almost unanimously in favor of revision, but it furnishes no criterion as to others, for only forty-eight out of a total of two hundred and eleven Presbyteries have yet voted on the question.

Below we give extracts from the Press reports of some of the pointed utterances before the New York Presbytery during its discussion of the subject.

Rev. Dr. Crosby took the floor – his first appearance in the Presbytery since the debate began. He was one of the committee who reported in favor of the revision of the Confession. He said:

"The only permanent standard for any church of Jesus Christ is the Word of God. Any church that has its standard in human philosophy or inner consciousness will disintegrate by its own weight. Consequently, when the question of revision of our standards of faith came up, the only question I wished to consider and examine was, Are these standards in accordance with the Word of God?

"When I examined the foundation of our faith for the hundredth time, with especial reference to this occasion, I found one, and only one statement in the Confession which, to my mind, is clearly and diametrically opposed to the Word of God. The more I have examined it, the more I am convinced that this one in particular is contrary to the Word of God, pernicious to the church, and injurious to the highest and holiest interests of religion. That one phrase or declaration is the use [R1182 : page 1] of the verb, pass by, in the seventh section of the third chapter. When I say that only this one phrase contradicts scripture, I don't mean to say that I approve of all the others. Still, I can allow them but when I see a statement teaching a fatalistic doctrine, contrary to the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, my soul revolts at it. Here is the section:

### **THE OBNOXIOUS SECTION.**

"The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.'

"Now what is meant by the phrase 'Pass by?' In the parable of the Good Samaritan the priest passed by the man who fell among

thieves; the Levite also passed him by. Here it is said in our standard of belief that God treats his creatures as the priest and the Levite treated the traveler, and this in the face of statements declaring that he loves the whole world.

"Our creed, although in some respects the grandest ever penned, is confessedly imperfect, acknowledged to be so by those who are opposed to revision. Now this is the best time for revision, and for this reason, if for no other, I am in favor of the committee's report."

Rev. Dr. G. Wylie, a young man, made an appeal in behalf of the Confession as it is, in which he said it was in harmony with the creeds of other Protestant churches. He quoted the free will part of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Episcopal Church to show how Calvinistic it was. He said he didn't believe in putting new cloth into an old garment, in patching the seventeenth century creed with nineteenth century doctrine. As to infant damnation, he said:

"We refuse to baptize children of notoriously immoral parents, but if they are of the elect, what right have we to refuse them baptism?"

Dr. Paxton did not favor revision. He thought that if the Creed should be revised the great body of people known as Presbyterians, losing the label of Calvin, would be like a dog which, being sent by express with a tag on his collar giving the name and address of his master, on the way ate his tag and lost his identity.

The Rev. Dr. Van Dyke began one of the most striking speeches of the entire discussion, with Dr. Paxton's parable of the dog which had "ate his tag" for his text. "The Westminster Confession as it now stands," he said, "affixes a tag to the human race, to this effect: 'Part is consigned to heaven and part to hell, and no man can find out to which part he belongs, nor would it make any difference if he could.' Now, if I were an expressman I would refuse to forward a

tagless dog, so I refuse to believe this unintelligible, improbable dogma.

"We have voted for revision. Now, what is the revision to be? I am in favor of the committee's report because it eliminates reprobation from the Confession, and suggests the formation of a new Creed, more Scriptural than the Confession, as a basis of union with other reformed churches. But first, the elimination of reprobation should be done as soon as possible.

"Ante-natal damnation! No man ever died for that doctrine. Why, then, should any one clasp it to his bosom, and weep tears at the thought of losing it, as if it had been bathed in the blood of martyrs? Such a position is like that of the old woman who said: 'There's that blessed doctrine of universal depravity. What a comfort it is, if we only lived up to it.'

"The Heavenly Father spreads a feast for all; is it for us to say that he refuses to let the poor sinner eat of the crumbs which fall from his table? And for what reason? To satisfy our logic? It is but measuring the mind of the Almighty with the wisdom of the seventeenth century. The doctrine is unscriptural. As for the text about the potter – who ever heard of a potter making a vessel merely to destroy it? Reprobation is a 'horrible' doctrine. The adjective is not mine, but Calvin's, who pushed it to its logical conclusion, and taught the damnation of infants. I don't weep for the tears shed over the destruction of part of the Confession, but for the tears of the mothers who have been taught to believe that their harmless, newborn babes were torn from their breasts to be plunged into everlasting perdition; I would weep for the unhappy creatures in mad-houses, whose light of **[R1182 : page 2]** reason has been put out by the heresy of ante-natal perdition.

"I know not what others may do, but as for me, I intend to keep on disbelieving, ignoring, and denying the doctrine of reprobation. I intend to teach that there are no infants in hell, no limits to God's

love; that there is salvation open to all mankind, and that no man is punished but for his own sin. Is that Calvinism? Before God, I don't know or care. It is Christianity."

Dr. Parkhurst said: "If we are going to retain the preterition idea in our Confession, then we must be true to it in our preaching as Presbyterian ministers, and on occasion declare it in all frankness. We shall be obliged to address our congregations somewhat after this manner: 'My friends, I am sorry to say it, but as a Calvinistic Presbyterian I am bound to say it, that Christ did not die for all. There is a certain amount of fatalism in the case. Some men are damned, and not only that, but congenitally damned; damned before they are born, hated of God even in the moment of conception.'

"The story of Jacob and Esau, as interpreted by the hyper-Calvinists, means all that, when you tell the whole thing out in flat-footed English. Now, if I concluded that that was a Scripture doctrine, and that salvation was not absolutely free to every creature, I would tear my Geneva gown to shreds and rip up my Bible into paper-rags before another Sabbath.

"This thing is in the air. It has come to stay and come to grow. It is futile to talk about repressing it. You may box up your reservoir, but the closer you box it the more destructive the outburst you are preparing for yourself, if, while you are boxing, the brooks are flowing down into it from off the hill-slopes."

The Rev. Dr. Vincent, Professor in the Union Theological Seminary, said: "God's Word is for all time; creeds for the age in which they are formulated. It is a mistake to call the Westminster divines giants; it implies degeneracy in us. The Scripture is better understood to-day than it was then. It is well to pay respect to Augustine, Calvin and the Westminster divines, but why should we take a rigid faith from their dead hands!

"Augustine, Calvin and some of the Westminster divines believed in infant damnation, and I heard it asserted 25 years ago by a Presbyterian minister, who subsequently went over to rationalism. If that horrible implication can be found in the Confession, where is the humanity of leaving it in that record of exploded belief and torment of weak hearts? The Confession does not give the heathen a ghost of a chance. The fair inference from it is that countless millions who never heard of Christ are damned for not believing in him. Why do we stand up so stoutly for Calvin? *Was Calvin crucified for us, and in his name are we baptized?*"

### **AN IRREVOCABLE STEP.**

In conclusion, Dr. Vincent, after setting forth still more strongly his disbelief in the Confession, said the Church had already taken an *irrevocable* step; that it had cut loose from its position of six months ago and *could not go back*.

Dr. Hastings said, speaking for those favoring revision: "What we have said we mean, like honest men, without concealment or fear, and *we* shall stand by it whether the Presbytery stands by it or not."

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While our friends are thus gagging over their unsavory mess (Isa. 28:8), how clear and beautiful is the doctrine of election when rightly understood.

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