

[R2830 : page 195]

VIEWS FROM THE WATCH TOWER PRESBYTERIAN CREED REVISION.

THE General Assembly of the Church of the Presbyterians, whose names are written on earth, (compare Heb. 12:23), has again been forced to discuss its creed in response to the general clamor of its people, who want to be told whether or not they still believe it; or whether or not they may do just a little thinking for themselves.

When the Assembly convened in Philadelphia, Pa., its committee reported: – a majority favoring some sort of an amendment or revision, and a minority favoring no revision, no change. The Assembly sided with the majority, and the discussion pro and con showed considerable warmth at times.

Rev. D. S. Kennedy was the bravest of the brave in defending the creed which has so nauseated the tender-hearted, and so severely tried their faith's unreason. He repudiated the statement that "ministers of the gospel and elders in the church do not believe the oath of ordination they have taken." He challenged any man on the floor to dispute his statement! And, strange (?) to say, not one of the Assembly was willing to sacrifice himself by admitting himself to be a violator of his conscience and of his oath of consecration; – by admitting that he neither believed the Westminster Confession, nor taught it.

Judge J. K. Ewing took the same stand against all revision, saying: –

"I protest against changing the Confession for the sake of popularity; for as the church goes up in popularity, it usually goes down in spirituality. When the church flirts with this idea

it falls into a ditch. You will never convert the world by popularizing the doctrine of the church. The Confession in its present form is popular enough for me."

But the majority, without, perhaps, being more conscientious, were less brave. If their consciences could have a little relief they wanted it. It was at this time, after several days of discussion, that Rev. Moffat, D.D., brought order out of confusion, and a rainbow in the Assembly's clouds by some skilful word-strategy. He is reported to have said: –

"What is this whole matter about? Is it revision? There is no revision before this Assembly. I don't know what I am, a revisionist, or an anti-revisionist, for revision is not before us at all. This majority report only asks for more time and authority. Probably revision will be before us next year; if it is, then the speech Dr. Kennedy made this morning will be right in place. How do these men know that a new creed will be the outcome of the adoption of the majority report? I admire their imagination, but I do not admire their exegetical ability.

"I will guarantee that if there is any heresy in the report they bring in next year, the Assembly of 1902 will burn the whole document. This new creed proposed is to sustain the same relation to the Confession of Faith that the Shorter Catechism sustains to the Larger Catechism. The Westminster divines maintained that the Shorter Catechism was better suited to the wants of the common people than the larger one, then why be afraid to go on with this subject? The whole thing is under proper ecclesiastical supervision. The presbyteries asked for it. The last Assembly discussed it and appointed the committee and they have done their work well. I am sorry to see men belittle this work. One hundred and fifty presbyteries asked for some change. What would be your attitude if that number asked for the dismissal of the whole subject?

"I claim it is not wise for this Assembly to disregard the voice of the church in this matter, and we should hesitate long before we say to them, Be still. Preachers who come to the General Assembly ought to practice what they preach. I have sympathy with the common people, and they are demanding some changes. Theologians can get along with the creed as it is; but the common people cannot, and I only [R2830 : page 196] want our belief stated so they can understand it, and when it is thus stated, and not till then, will all denominations say: *'Why, they believe just what we do!'*"

"The saddest declaration I have ever heard was: 'We simply cannot tell the world what we believe.' This is not true. Adopt the majority report and we will then get a statement of what we believe, and all the world will believe it.'

"Tremendous applause followed the address."

The dis-ease affecting Presbyterianism, the Assembly would have us think a *very peculiar one*. They wish their Christian neighbors and friends to think that the Westminster Confession of Faith, framed shortly after emergence from the superstitions of the "dark ages," is an *infallible* statement of the truth, and therefore unalterable, unchangeable. Neither their own nor other hands must shatter their idol. Neither will they admit that it has an ugly and a repulsive look, and if not broken up and burned should at least be veiled from public view. The resolution which now comforts and rejoices the Assembly and the large and intelligent, but blindly stubborn body of Presbyterians, is that their idol shall not be harmed, nor covered nor veiled; – it will be merely set back in the rear, so as not to be so conspicuous to outsiders and new beginners, and it will be represented at the front door by a more lovable-looking, a more angelic idol.

In other words, Doctor Moffat tells the world and the mass of Presbyterians and the vast majority of the Assembly, that the Westminster Confession is so "deep" that few but himself can really understand and interpret it. He assures them that what appears to them to be black is really the purest of white, and that men of sufficient ability to demonstrate this to the Christian *world*, have been put upon the committee which is to report such a modernized *explanation* of the Westminster Confession. No wonder there was applause at such a suggestion; – that the idol need not be destroyed nor even maimed. Moreover, it was not merely the idol that they cared for, but more especially themselves, the priests of that idol; for whatever would discredit it, would discredit them. If it were proven faulty, fallible, the same would be true of them; for had they not sworn themselves and each other to the reliability of this idol? And if they now were to admit error, falsehood, misrepresentation of the divine character and Word and plan, who would receive their testimony as infallible hereafter? Would there not be great danger that some of the best of the "sheep" would cease to follow traditions of men and seek instead the voice of the Good Shepherd Jesus and his leading into the green pastures and by the still waters of his Word?

Later Dr. Moffat put his thought into the following words which were adopted as a part of the Assembly's instructions to its committee, which has a year in which to fix up the substitute idol and see how lovely it can be made, and yet bear some faint traces of family likeness to its still to live parent, the Westminster Confession, to which it will bear the relationship of *representative*, but not of *substitute*. The resolution follows:

–

"We recommend that this committee be instructed to prepare and submit to the next General Assembly for such disposition as may be judged to be wise, a brief statement of the

reformed faith, in untechnical terms, the said statement to be prepared with a view to its being employed to give information and a better understanding of our doctrinal beliefs, and not with a view to its becoming a substitute or an alternative of our Confession of Faith."

FAMISHING FOR THE BREAD OF LIFE.

Some who are awaking are crying out for *bread* – the bread of truth, instead of the stones of error offered by the various creeds. The Rev. T. Chalmers voiced the sentiments of an increasing number, when, not long since, he said: –

"We cannot resist the inevitable. The creed of Calvinism is like a coat which is becoming too small for the rapid growth of human thought. With every movement of the arms it will be sure to rip somewhere, unless we refrain from all vigorous exercise. We do not want any coat which binds us so tightly that we cannot act with freedom. It is folly to attempt to keep pace with the ripping of the coat by a little sewing here and there. It is too small, and no amount of sewing and patching will help it any. It may have a good deal of good material which may be kept and still used, but the system of Calvinism, as a system, has done its service for humanity. We don't want systems any more. We want liberty and truth and love and righteousness. We want more of Christ and less of creed. We want still to grow – to grow until we come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto the perfect man, unto the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ."

RELIGIOUS FEDERATIONS AND TRUSTS.

Long ago we pointed out that combination would be the order of the churches and the world for the new century; – that these will be the great giants of the end of this age, and make necessary the symbolic fire which will destroy present systems,

corresponding to the giants, whose wisdom and super-ability and tyranny preceded the literal destruction of the first order of things (*kosmos*) by a flood of literal waters. The financial giants of Christendom are growing rapidly – beyond the wildest dream of the world's financiers – in every part of Christendom. It must be near the time for the religious combines to begin. Indeed, the leaders in finance are closely related to, and in many instances the real manipulators of, the *nominal* [R2831 : page 197] church machinery. Money moves Christendom to a degree that the masses are not aware of. And who can doubt that the spirit of federation, or "confederacy" as the Scriptures designate it, is growing in all directions; and that financial successes will encourage religious combines. It is not long since the Disciple denomination passed the following resolution: –

"The national congress of the Disciples of Christ, lately held at Lexington, appointed a committee of seven to take charge of a movement in behalf of an international confederation of religious denominations. According to this scheme, the different religious bodies are to retain their own creeds, but will be auxiliary to an international congress and will affiliate with all other churches on a common platform. The ultimate aim is to create one international church. This movement is the first of its kind in America, and is in line with the widespread tendency to church federation and church unity, and with the rapidly growing spirit of internationalism in literature, social reform, and art."

Now the *Literary Digest* has the following to say under the caption: –

WILL BRITISH CONGREGATIONALISTS AND BAPTISTS UNITE?

"The movement toward church union and federation, evident of late in nearly every part of Christendom, has been

particularly noticeable in Great Britain during the past year. Closely following the organic union of the Free and United Presbyterian churches of Scotland and the proposed union of all evangelical bodies in that kingdom, has come the first joint assembly of the Congregational and Baptist churches of England. Both these bodies are strongly Congregational in church polity and Calvinistic in theology; and there seems to be every reason to believe that their corporate union is only a question of a comparatively short time. Indeed, Mr. Alfred Dawson, English editor of *The Congregationalist*, speaks of that union as a consummation 'sure to take place.' The *rapprochement* which has been going on for a long period, this year culminated in two joint sessions of these bodies, which Mr. Dawson pronounces 'the most wonderful series of religious gatherings' he has ever attended. He writes (*The Congregationalist*, May 11):

"There were two joint assemblies: on Tuesday, April 23, when Dr. Parker presided and Dr. McLaren delivered his address as president of the Baptist Union; and on the following Thursday, when the positions were reversed, Dr. McLaren presiding and Dr. Parker delivering his address as chairman of the Congregational Union. The experiment was in every way a success; perfect harmony and the warmest fraternal feeling prevailed throughout, and not one single jar-note was struck....

"Reverting to the paramount question of Baptist and Congregational union, the committee of the latter body frankly remarked in their annual report: "Neither of the joint assemblies can meet without the idea occurring to many minds that a permanent union of Baptists and Congregationalists should not be an impossible dream." Certainly many of the leaders and rank and file on both sides do not so regard it."

WHAT LEADING JEWS SAY ABOUT JESUS.

The views of Jewish notables respecting Jesus have been secured, and here we give extracts from some of them:

Dr. Isadore Singer, editor of the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, says:

"I regard Jesus of Nazareth as a Jew of the Jews, one whom all Jewish people are learning to love. His teaching has been an immense service to the world in bringing Israel's God to the knowledge of hundreds of millions of mankind.

"The great change in Jewish thought concerning Jesus of Nazareth I can not better illustrate than by this fact: When I was a boy, had my father, who was a very pious man, heard the name of Jesus uttered from the pulpit of our synagog, he and every other man in the congregation would have left the building, and the rabbi would have been dismissed at once. Now, it is not strange, in many synagogs, to hear sermons preached eulogistic of this Jesus, and nobody thinks of protesting – in fact, we are all glad to claim Jesus as one of our people."

Dr. Max Nordau, wrote, –

"Jesus is soul of our soul, as he is flesh of our flesh. Who, then, could think of excluding him from the people of Israel? St. Peter will remain the only Jew who said of the son of David, 'I know not the man.' If the Jews up to the present time have not publicly rendered homage to the sublime moral beauty of the figure of Jesus, it is because their tormentors have always persecuted, tortured, assassinated them in his name. The Jews have drawn their conclusions from the disciples as to the Master, which was a wrong, a wrong pardonable in the eternal victims of the implacable, cruel hatred of those who call themselves Christians. Every time that a Jew mounted to the

sources and contemplated Christ alone, without his pretended faithful, he cried, with tenderness and admiration: 'Putting aside the Messianic mission, this man is ours. He honors our race and we claim him as we claim the Gospels – flowers of Jewish literature, and only Jewish.'

Prof. Emil G. Hirsch, of Chicago University:

"The Jews of every shade of religious belief do not regard Jesus in the light of Paul's theology. But the gospel Jesus, the Jesus who teaches so superbly the principles of Jewish ethics, is revered by all the liberal expounders of Judaism. His words are studied; the New Testament forms a part of Jewish literature. Among the great preceptors that have worded the truths of which Judaism is the historical guardian, none, in our estimation and esteem, takes precedence of the rabbi of Nazareth. To impute to us suspicious sentiments concerning him does us gross injustice. We know him to be among our greatest and purest."

Dr. Kaufman Kohler, a rabbi of New York City, says:

"He was a bold religious and social reformer, eager to regenerate Judaism. True, a large number of sayings were attributed to the dead master by his disciples which had been current in the schools. Still, **[R2831 : page 198]** the charm of true originality is felt in these utterances of his when the great realities of life, when the idea of Sabbath, the principle of purity, the value of a human soul, of woman, even of the abject sinner, are touched upon. None can read these parables and verdicts of the Nazarene and not be thrilled with the joy of a truth unspelled before. There is wonderful music in the voice which stays an angry crowd, saying, 'Let him that is without sin cast the first stone!' – that speaks the words, 'Be like children, and you are not far from the kingdom of God!'

"The Jew of today beholds in Jesus an inspiring ideal of matchless beauty. While he lacks the element of stern justice expressed so forcibly in the law and in the Old Testament characters, the firmness of self-assertion so necessary to the full development of manhood, all those social qualities which build up the home and society, industry and worldly progress, he is the unique exponent of the principle of redeeming love. His name as helper of the poor, as sympathizing friend of the fallen, as brother of every fellow sufferer, as lover of man and redeemer of woman, has become the inspiration, the symbol, and the watchword for the world's greatest achievements in the field of benevolence. While continuing the work of the synagog, the Christian Church, with the larger means at her disposal created those institutions of charity and redeeming love that accomplished wondrous things. The very sign of the cross has lent a new meaning, a holier pathos to suffering, sickness and sin, so as to offer new practical solutions for the great problems of evil which fill the human heart with new joys of self-sacrificing love.

"All this modern Judaism gladly acknowledges, reclaiming Jesus as one of its greatest sons. But it denies that one single man, or one church, however broad, holds the key to many-sided truth. It waits for the time when all life's deepest mysteries will have been spelled and to the ideals of sage and saint that of the seeker of all that is good, beautiful and true, will have been joined; when Jew and Gentile, synagog and church, will merge into the church universal, into the great city of humanity whose name is 'God is there.'"

***"THEY SHALL LOOK UPON ME WHOM THEY HAVE
PIERCED AND THEY SHALL MOURN FOR
HIM." – ZECH. 12:10.***

Quite evidently the way is preparing for the fulfilment of this Scripture in the near future. If a few of the Jewish "common people" are already "looking unto Jesus," despite the opposition of their leaders and the violent persecution, and generally disinheritor, sure to follow the acknowledgement of him, what may we not expect soon – when the changed sentiments of their leaders begin to be widely understood.

Let us not forget, however, that every such evidence of the return of divine favor to fleshly Israel – every evidence that their blindness begins to pass away – is an equally sure evidence and proof that the Gospel age is closing, and that its mission (the selection of spiritual Israel) is nearly accomplished, that the time in which we may make our calling and election sure is gradually closing. – Rom. 11:25.
