

VIEWS FROM THE WATCH TOWER. A PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER'S LONGINGS.

REV. HENRY VAN DYKE, one of the prominent ministers of the Presbyterian denomination, has felt constrained to give utterance to his conception of the needs of his church for a better and clearer statement of its present belief. We clip the below quotations: –

"There is a twofold need for revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith. In the first place, the church has been studying her supreme standard, the Bible, for two hundred and fifty years since the Confession was written. She has been educated by Christ for one hundred years in the great work of missions. It is reasonable to suppose that she has learned something. Why should she not express it in her creed?

"Another reason for revision arises out of the fact that the Westminster Confession was made in a time of fierce conflict and controversy. It was natural that certain things should be stated then with greater emphasis than they would have otherwise received; that the metaphysics of the seventeenth century should creep into certain chapters; and that certain points should represent a judgment of that age rather than a permanent truth. For example, the Westminster Confession speaks of the Pope of Rome as the Antichrist. Presbyterians today do not generally believe this. Again, by expressly mentioning 'elect infants,' the Westminster Confession leaves open the supposition that there may be 'non-elect infants.' Presbyterians today believe that all who die in infancy are saved by Jesus Christ. The Westminster Confession has a long metaphysical chapter on God's eternal decree, which at least *seems* to teach that some men are created to be saved and others created to be damned. The Presbyterian Church today does not believe this, and to guard against misapprehension on

the subject it wishes to say clearly and unmistakably that God has not put any barrier between any human soul and salvation.

"Moreover, the Westminster Confession has no chapter on the love of God for all men, on the Holy Spirit, on the Gospel, or on missions. Now the Presbyterian Church has come to believe in these things with all its heart; and it wishes to put its belief into words.

"Therefore revision is needed, not because of a conflict in the church, nor because of a lack of liberty, but because faith, deepening and broadening through the study of God's Word, craves an utterance in the language of living men.

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"Finally, this revision movement should give us a stronger emphasis on the truth that God is love.

"Sovereignty and grace have always been the two great pillars of the Reformed faith. Sovereignty [R2984 : page 99] means that God is supreme. Grace means that God alone can save.

"Take these two words separately, emphasize the sovereignty, limit the grace, and you have a hard creed. But take them together, believe in the sovereignty of grace and the grace of sovereignty and you have a creed that is infinitely sweet and glorious.

"No man can be saved without God. There is no man whom God is not willing to save.

"That is the whole of it. That is the creed which is incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. That is the creed which our faith longs to utter."

We rejoice that this gentleman, and others of the Presbyterian connection, realize the situation *thus*, if not more intensely. We hope

they may soon secure all the relief they so earnestly and so properly crave. At the same time we cannot avoid a few reflective questions: –

(1) Have these learned men, who have been posing for years as ambassadors for God, only now awakened to thought upon so important a subject? – only now begun to feel uncomfortable in respect to their creed? Their answer would probably generally be, – No; we have long been troubled, – long felt our bondage.

(2) Why, brethren, did you not end your difficulties long ago by asserting your moral and religious [R2984 : page 100] stamina, and withdrawing from the denomination whose creed, you admit, has not been the creed of your heart for many years, – possibly was not such even when you subscribed to it and took your present ministerial vows to uphold and teach it? Was it because you supposed that creed inspired? Was it because you believed that our Lord and the twelve Apostles established the Presbyterian system? – Surely not; surely as educated men you made no such mistake, but knew that it was instituted nearly fifteen centuries after the death of the founders of the Lord's one true Church. – What can have held you, fettered you, in thought and word and act so long and so thoroughly? The answer should doubtless be; – No good opportunity presented itself, until now. We could not think of withdrawing from the system on so slight an account as that of a defilement of our consciences and a misrepresentation of the divine character and plan. We, therefore, bore the burden without much inconvenience until now popular thought favors a change; – yes, we might almost say demands it. No, we hope to carry the denomination for a creedal restatement.

(3) Another query, friends: – Since you knew that the Presbyterian system was no more the church which our Lord and his Apostles founded than others of the sects, – Methodist, Roman Catholic, Lutherans, Episcopalians, etc., etc., and since that idea did not hold you all these years, and still, – was it not the honor, the salary, the good name, the social standing you had in Presbyterianism that

fettered you? And, if so, instead of praising and lauding your present belated movement, which you hope will bring you some "honor of men," should we not rather pity you and sympathize with you, not to say despise you, for your supineness? – for having failed to break your creedal fetters long ago? Should we not fear for you that for years you have been willing to sell God's character and your own consciences for earthly considerations? Indeed, since you now admit that your present action is because you believe it the more popular, can we give you any credit at all, or see cause to believe you one whit more honest or noble than you were in previous years? Their answer to this would doubtless be, – We all stand or fall together, and we do not believe that the world or the nominal churches take a higher plane of thought or action than we have taken. And their estimate is probably a correct one; alas, that Christian conscience in general is not on a higher plane!

THE ABSURDITIES OF THE HIGHER CRITICS.

Dr. Eaton, editor of *The Western Recorder* takes firm ground against the absurdities of the methods and logic of the so-called higher critics of our time. As illustrating their fallacies he furnishes the following incidents: –

"At the Baptist Congress in Detroit (1894) Dr. Howard Osgood – the greatest Hebrew scholar in America – in the presence of men who were well informed on the subject and who were quite favorable to the alleged 'results of the higher criticism,' stated what those 'results' are, as told by their advocates. He asked to be corrected if in any particular he erred; but no correction was offered. From slips of paper he read statements of these 'results,' and when all present had assented to the correctness of the presentation, Dr. Osgood startled them by saying that all his quotations were from Thomas Morgan, a Deist of the early part of the eighteenth century, and from Tom Paine, the well-known infidel of the latter part of that century."

"Not long ago two leading ministers in the North united in writing an account of a great religious gathering, and they sent their combined

article to a number of 'higher critics,' requesting that they separate it into the two documents, giving to each of the two authors his portion. Their failures were most egregious, and no two of them agreed, because they worked independently. And yet these men, utterly unable to resolve an article, avowedly written by two men, in plain English, and written in their own time and country, into its original documents; these men are cock-sure they can correctly divide a book, written in Hebrew thousands of years ago, with no evidence of composite authorship, so as to give each supposed author his exact portion! And they claim to do this so accurately that they divide a single sentence among three authors, with perfect confidence!"

