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I. THE NEGRO IN ECCLESIASTICAL RELATIONS.

THE negro question, as it is called, presents one of the most perplexing problems of our age. Every phase of it, social, political, and ecclesiastical, involves difficulties sufficient to tax the wisdom and philanthropy of the most enlightened. The difficulty is increased by the malign influence of sectionalism. Both sections of our common country essay the attempt, and each embarrasses the other. The North would speedily settle it were it not for the South; and the South would have settled it long ago but for the North. The conscientious convictions of each party stand in the way of the best intentions of the other, so that the well meant efforts of both fail, to the scandal of religion and the sorrow of philanthropy. Two opposing policies are presented by the two sections. This want of harmony was at first explained and excused by the heat of passion lingering like smoke around the recent battle fields, and there was confident prophecy of its speedy disappearance. The passions of war, however, have long since subsided, and the hostiles have "shaken hands across the bloody chasm," and the lines of opposition, like those of breastwork and battle-field, have been long ago obliterated, while this conflict still rages. These policies have confronted each other now for a quarter of a century, and they are as unreconciled if not as irreconcilable in 1889 as in 1865. There is something very significant in this.

Moreover, whatever suggestion is offered by either fails of influence on the other, each being discounted—the South by the North upon the allegation of prejudice, the North by the South upon that of ignorance.

## VII. NOTES.

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### THE PROPOSED REVISION OF THE STANDARDS OF WESTMINSTER.

THE question of creed-revision is now fairly before us for discussion, if not for action. Some of our churches are under stress of action, and the bond of ecumenic Presbyterianism is so close, the points at issue so vital, the consequences involved so grave, that churches under no such stress share the solicitude and join eagerly in the discussion.

With us of the Southern Church of America there is no call for action. The ordinary channels for the public expression of opinion convey no desire for revision;<sup>1</sup> and enquiry has failed to discover any private leanings in that direction. We are content with the Standards and with the terms of subscription as they are. Yet we do not live within a Chinese wall; our church is a member of the one body holding the Reformed Confessions, and we are vitally concerned with all that affects that body; and so, grateful as we are for the repose and content we enjoy, we share the interest in this movement and watch its progress with unconcealed anxiety.

Already the discussion has spread far beyond the limits of the question, and threatens to prove endless; and if any definite conclusion is to be reached, it must be recalled and held close to the points at issue. Pending this discussion, the church cannot take time to vindicate her right to make and to maintain doctrinal symbols as against the so-called Scripturalists (Plymouth Brethren and Campbellite Baptists,) who ostentatiously reject all subordinate standards; nor can she pause to prove her fidelity to the Westminster system of doctrine as against those who have for so long a time been prophesying the death of Calvinism; nor yet is it incumbent on her to enter the Augustinian controversy and to show anew the accord of the Westminster symbols with

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst this note is passing through the press the development of the discussion has shown the statement above to be incorrect. Dr. A. W. Pitzer, in the columns of a representative journal of the Church North, announces himself as in favor of revision; and one of our own papers remarks editorially, "We find that there are advocates of revision even in our staid old Southern Church."

the Word of God; nor can she tarry to restate her relation to these documents as subordinate and not final, implying as this does her perpetual right to "revise, purge, and add to" them, as Dr. Wilson, Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland, in 1866, expressed it, and carrying for the advocates of revision ample protection against charges of heresy, apostasy, iconoclasm; yet all of these questions have been imported into the discussion.

I. The standards of the Presbyterian Churches in Great Britain and America were produced by the Assembly of Divines which sat at Westminster from July 1, 1643, to April 12, 1648, and which was composed of representatives of all the counties of England and Wales, the two Universities, and all parties except extreme High Churchmen and Anabaptists. Commissioners from Scotland took seats later, in the hope of thereby producing documents that would effect throughout the entire island unity in faith, government and worship. The Assembly first attempted to revise the Thirty-nine Articles, but upon the entrance of the Scotch commissioners abandoned the attempt, and on July 7, 1645, began work upon a new Confession, which was completed and sent to Parliament for approval on December 4, 1645. The Larger Catechism was sent up on October 15, 1647, and the Shorter Catechism on November 25, 1647. The rest of the time of the Assembly was occupied in the preparation of proof texts.

From a statement of Anthony Tuckney, Dr. Briggs infers that the Standards were not composed with a view to subscription, and he maintains that subscription was imposed upon the Church of Scotland by Parliament in the interest of liberty, and as a protection to Episcopal clergymen; but Mr. Taylor Innes finds the origin in that "solemn league and covenant" of the two nations who banded together to be free under Charles I., for the sake of which Scotland was willing to forget its Confession of 1560, prepared by John Knox, and to adopt this Puritan Confession.

Up to 1867 the chief churches of Scotland were bound by this unrevised Confession. In the Free and the Established Churches the subscription of 1711 was still in force: "I do sincerely own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession to be the truths of God, and I do own the same as the confession of my faith."

In America the Synod of Philadelphia introduced subscription in 1729, when it passed the adopting act in which the ministers—

"declare their agreement in, and approbation of, the Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster,

as being in all *essential and necessary articles* good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine, and do also *adopt* the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of *our* faith."

In 1788, when the General Assembly was formed, the Confession was revised in Ch. XXIII. 3; Ch. XXX. 1; Ch. XX. 3; and Question 109 of the Larger Catechism; also in 1887, Ch. XXIV. 4. The Form of Government and Discipline was revised in 1788, in 1805, by the Southern Church in 1879, by the Northern in 1885. The Directory for Worship was made anew in 1788, revised in 1821, amended in the North in 1886, and a new revision has for several years been before our Southern Church.

To the Assembly of 1804 a committee, appointed the previous year to consider whether any, and if any, what alterations ought to be made in the Confession, reported adversely—

"In a word, what was true when our Confession and Catechisms were formed, is now true. We believe that this truth has been most admirably and accurately drawn into view in these excellent performances. They have become venerable from their age. Our church has flourished under their influence, and we can see no reason to alter them."

The history of the Standards thus briefly outlined develops several important facts:

*First*, The doctrine of the Presbyterian Church concerning the plan of salvation has continued unchanged in statement since 1645. The revisions effected have not touched any chapter before the twentieth, and no one will seriously maintain that in that plan of salvation the doctrines of civil magistrates, synods, marriage, occupy the same place as the doctrines of God, of Christ the Mediator, of effectual calling. The revisionists cannot, therefore, argue with unbroken force from past revisions to proposed revisions. The only possible exception is the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which, in 1814, revised chapters III. and X.; but the exception is more apparent than real, as that revision is commonly held to have put that body beyond the pale of the Churches holding the Reformed Confessions, and its admission to the General Council has for many of us deprived that body of its distinctive character.

*Second*, Doctrine has ever been more emphasized than government, discipline, worship. To-day we *adopt* the former, we *approve* the latter, and the Synod of 1729, which fixed the term of subscription to doctrine as above, thought it enough to "declare the Form of Government agreeable to the Word of God *in substance* and recommended it to be

observed *as near as circumstances will allow and Christian prudence direct.*" This impairs somewhat the force of the argument: You have revised the Form of Government, even made it anew; why not revise the Confession?

*Third,* Terms of subscription in America mark an advance upon those in Great Britain. We "receive and adopt the system of doctrine;" they receive "the whole doctrine as the confession of my faith." That is, since 1729 we have been subscribing to the standards in terms which, if adopted to-day in Great Britain, would go far towards solving the difficulty there, even if they should fail of that entire relief which Dr. Warfield thinks they would afford. We have therefore no occasion to revise merely because the British churches are revising, and they might well be content if the present agitation brought them to our historic position.

II. In Great Britain, according to Mr. Taylor Innes, the present state of the question is the culmination of a movement begun in 1866. Even before that date the United Presbyterians had disclaimed "anything in these doctrines which teaches compulsory and intolerant principles in religion," and required subscription to the Confession "as an exhibition of the sense in which I understand the Holy Scripture." In May, 1879, their Assembly passed a "Declaratory Act," setting forth as vital and important doctrines three, which the Westminster Confession does not "sufficiently emphasize," "the love of God to all mankind, his gift of his Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and the free offer of salvation to men without distinction on the ground of Christ's perfect sacrifice," together with liberty of opinion on such points as do not enter into the substance of the faith, as the six days of creation.

In the Free Church, the movement dates from the agitation concerning the views of Prof. W. R. Smith, beginning in 1876, who, curiously enough, defended himself as maintaining the confessional doctrine against his prosecutors. At the end of his second trial, Dr. Norman Walker, the editor of the official magazine, declared that the time had come for parting with the Westminster Confession in its capacity as modern standard. In 1884, deacons were released from the Confession of Faith, and bound only to the "system of evangelical truth . . . set forth in the Westminster Shorter Catechism." The last Assembly, after electing Dr. Marcus Dods to the chair of New Testament Exegesis in Edinburgh, on the ground, as one member stated, that he put Christianity first and the documents of Christianity unmistakably second, adopted the following motion:

“The General Assembly having taken up the overtures regarding the Confession of Faith, and recognizing alike the importance and difficulty of the question thus raised, and the indications of a present call to deal with it, hereby resolve to appoint a committee to make inquiry and to consider carefully what action it is advisable for the church to take, so as to meet the difficulties and relieve the scruples referred to in so large a number of overtures—it being always understood that this church can contemplate the adoption of no change which shall not be consistent with a cordial and steadfast adherence to the great doctrines of the Confession.”

The motion was that of Principal Brown, of Aberdeen, who, in supporting it, said that “the Confession, like Mr. Gladstone’s bill, was ‘dead.’” In a full house the motion was carried by a vote of 413 to 130, and the dissentients have so far withdrawn their opposition as to serve on the committee.

In the Established Church of Scotland, Dr. Cunningham, of Crieff, supported by Dr. Tulloch, first propounded the now popular theory of the Confession as a “historical monument,” and last May an overture was adopted, under the approval of a majority of the presbyteries, requiring church officers other than ministers only to endorse in general “the doctrines, worship, discipline and government of the church, and to accept the Confession as the sum and substance of the doctrines of the Reformed Churches.”

The Presbyterian Church of England first undertook the question of revision at the Synod of 1883, in London. It adopted a paper, affirming its unabated adherence to the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession, and appointing a committee to consider what, if any, changes were desirable in the formulas of subscription; whether an explanatory declaration was desirable; and whether a briefer and more available compendium ought not to be prepared by the next council. In 1884, the committee recommended that subscription be required to “the system of doctrine” rather than to “the doctrine”; in 1885, it laid before Synod a declaratory statement; and, in 1888, the Articles of the Faith were submitted; but as yet none of these has been adopted, and Dr. Dykes writes: “We have determined upon no change, and it is very difficult to see what it is best to do.”

III. In America the movement is in the Church North, as distinguished from the Church South and the United Presbyterian Church. The Presbytery of Nassau overtured the Assembly of 1888, asking for a revision of the third chapter of the Confession. That overture was referred to the Assembly of 1889, and in the meantime was adopted by fifteen other presbyteries. The Presbytery of Newark sent up an over-

ture, prepared originally in the Presbytery of New York, asking that the following questions be propounded to the presbyteries:

1. Do you desire a revision of the Confession of Faith?
2. If so, in what respects and to what extent?

The Assembly sent down an overture embodying these questions, which is now before the presbyteries.

The discussion thus arising is three-sided:

1. The revisionists very properly realize their responsibilities, and are setting forth the grounds on which they propose changes. Dr. Van Dyke would amend Ch. III., 3, so that it would read, "God foreordains men to eternal death *simply and solely for their sins*;" he would give expression to what Dr. Chas. Hodge calls the "general belief of Protestants," that all infants dying in infancy are elect, and therefore regenerated and saved; and for Sec. 7 he proposes the insertion of the following, or of something like it:

"God's eternal decree hindereth no one from accepting Christ as he is freely offered to us in the gospel; nor ought it to be so construed as to contradict the declarations of Scripture that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Dr. Monfort looks forward to a time when Westminster, Heidelberg and Dort will adopt new standards for the sake of unification and coöperation. He would eliminate Chap. III., 4; he favors Dr. Van Dyke's amendment; he thinks the church does not believe that the Pope of Rome is antichrist, and for Chap. X., 3, he would substitute:

"All elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word, are saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, where and how he pleaseth."

Numerous suggestions are made, apparently diverse, yet sufficiently alike to justify Dr. Van Dyke's claim that there is substantial agreement among the revisionists.

2. Dr. Briggs occupies a position quite unique. That he has thus far attracted but little open support does not impair the force of his vigorous argument, or deny to it a wide, even if a silent, influence. He is satisfied with the Confession as it is, and with the terms of subscription as they are; they are not too exacting for him; they are the highest attainment of doctrinal advance in the Christian Church. The people lack systematic training in the doctrines of the church, because the ministers do not expound the Confession of Faith as in former times; they preach the Scriptures or sermons for the times. The revisions now asked

for enter into the very pith and marrow of the system; they have to do with the Calvinism of the system; . . . any revision that proposes to satisfy the cries for relief will be so thorough that the greater part of the Confession and Catechisms must be revised. Yet along with these admirable statements are others which will startle the church. The ministry and people have drifted away from the Westminster Standards; officers-elect examine the doctrines with amazement and are troubled; young men hesitate to become candidates in a church which seems to them to compel men to an iron-clad creed and to discourage theological research and Christian liberty; the ministry are unable to preach the doctrines of the Standards because the people will not listen to them; the Presbyterian Church is at an angle with the Confession of Faith, and modern dogmaticians have led the church into contra-confessional views of Scripture, and consequently (*sic*) there is a conflict between the common doctrine of the Bible and biblical criticism (this cannot fail to suggest the line of defence adopted by Prof. W. R. Smith before the Free Church Assembly); biblical critics will not much longer tolerate persecution (*sic*) on the part of a contra-confessional majority; slowly but surely the more humanitarian views of the Arminians have entered the Presbyterian Church, and even the ministry; among us to-day are Arminians, Premillenarians, Annihilationists, Second Probationists, Kenotics, Non-churchmen, Scripturalists.

Yet "Broad-churchmen will agree with the conservatives that new doctrinal standards are not practicable at the present time in the American Presbyterian Church." The only relief is in the historic interpretation of the Standards, as distinguished from the dogmatic systems of the Seminaries, and in the historic interpretation of the terms of subscription as against the presbyteries which are constantly transgressing the bounds set by the Confession and imposing the opinions of a majority. Doubt as to one's accord with the Confession can be solved by Presbytery, and on appeal by Synod, General Assembly, and ultimately the civil courts (*sic*). For the mixed multitude which Prof. Briggs finds in the church, "the only possible relief is toleration. They cannot be officially tolerated under the constitution of the Presbyterian Church, but they may be unofficially tolerated so long as no one undertakes to play the part of a heresy hunter and bring them to trial."

One cannot be surprised by the almost indignant remonstrance with which these views are disowned by different writers in the Church North. Dr. Spear emphatically denies an Arminian tendency. Dr.



Monfort asserts that "the great body of our church was never sounder than now;" an editorial writer challenges Dr. Briggs to name five who have left the church on account of the *yoke* of their subscription vows, and claims that among six thousand ministers there are hardly so many heretics as there are fingers on a man's hand. To this I may add, that if the mixed multitude enumerated by Dr. Briggs has made its way into the church under the present terms of subscription, their consciences are probably strong enough to allow them to remain, and that it would scarcely be worth while for the church to attempt legislation that would satisfy such very "tender" consciences as these.

3. The third party oppose revision, but on grounds quite different from those of Dr. Briggs. Dr. De Witt opened the discussion by suggesting that "if any one wants revision on any subject, let him try his hand at a formula correlated to the formulas which he does not want revised;" he thinks the proposed revision would make the Confession a narrower and less liberal symbol than it now is; and he criticises Dr. Van Dyke's proposed amendment as violating the fundamental idea of a creed statement, which is composed of dogmatic propositions constituted of language other than that of Scripture, of the church's interpretation of Scripture, and also because the verses quoted by Dr. Van Dyke will revive the unhappy controversy begun before 1838 and only ended in 1869.

Dr. Warfield maintains that, as long as the church remains as heartily convinced as she at present undoubtedly is, that what is known as the Augustinian system is the truth of God, . . she is without grievance in her relation to her standards. The term of subscription is an ideal one. It does not ask us to affirm that the Westminster Confession is perfect or infallible, or that we adopt every proposition in it; but only that we heartily accept the system of doctrine taught in it and all the doctrines essential to the integrity of the system. The individual's relation to the creed might be improved by letting him make his own creed, but just as this fitted his idiosyncrasies, it would be unacceptable to every other individual.

In reply, the revisionists say that we subscribe, not to the necessary and essential articles, but to the system of doctrine; that every Presbyterian office-holder not only "recognizes" the Confession as an "adequate expression," but adopts it; that we want, not a loose and qualified subscription, but a sound creed, and that this method would result in as many different creeds as there are subscribers to the Confession; and that, besides all this, the Confession, as a public document, should

reflect accurately the faith of the church, and that mere relief in the terms of subscription will not accomplish this.

This is the state of the discussion at the present writing. Each day brings some fresh contribution, however, and changes to some extent the aspect of the question, making it less and less possible to foresee what the ultimate combinations will be. Still, the lines indicated above will scarcely be entirely obscured at any stage of the discussion.

The discussion is only begun, and it may not be amiss to indicate at this early stage certain open questions in Symbolics which, unless promptly met, will introduce confusion and delay needlessly the final result. They concern the purpose to be subserved by a Confession, and may be grouped in three pairs of alternatives. Thus, are the Standards to be:

1. The expression of our faith? or the monument to our fathers' faith—the register of my opinions? or the tombstone over the opinions of my ancestors? The difference is apparent: we need our opinions every day, but we repair to our ancestors' monuments only occasionally; theological bric-a-brac is interesting to the connoisseur, but for common life we need something more; and greatly as we admire the ecclesiastical antiquarian, we cannot fail to distinguish him from the man that holds fast the form of sound words. If the Confession is only a historical relic, we can dismiss all anxiety, for discussion cannot change history; but if that Confession is the statement of God's truth for us, we must scrutinize closely, and even severely, every proposition to alter it.

2. An authoritative guide? or a popular compendium? Some laymen are clamoring to be heard in the proposed revision on the ground that they know what the people want; and they are quite right if the purpose is to provide a statement of essential truth to which the most immature believer can assent. But if the purpose is to exhibit the doctrines essential, not merely to the existence, but to the perfection, of Christian character; to set forth not what all Christians believe, but what they ought to believe: the aid of the untrained layman is not needed, but rather that of him who best knows the truth of God in its completeness.

3. A symbol of scriptural doctrine? or an instrument of Christian unity? If the Standards are to be the basis on which we bring into union with us the various Christian bodies of Methodists, Episcopalians, Baptists, etc., etc., it must be greatly reduced in size and in range. It must lose in intension what it gains in extension. If we re-

gard unification as our great mission, we will reduce the scope of the symbols to the barest necessities of Scripture truth. But if our first duty is to exhibit the whole truth of God, that Confession will be as complete as possible, and will contain truths denied by many evangelical bodies, thus furnishing a basis of contrast rather than of unity.

Upon these questions there is in the church no formulated consensus, and variations abound; still, I believe the weight of opinion is towards the first alternative in each of the three cases, and that the desiderata in a symbol of doctrine, are: an expression of present faith, an authoritative guide, and an exhibit approximately complete of the revealed truth of God.

W. S. PLUMER BRYAN.

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### A PLEA FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY.

IT is a disputed question whether there is such a thing as progress in theology. Some theologians claim that revelation, as a historical process, having been completed, and the doctrines of Christianity having crystallized in creeds, henceforth the office of theology is to expound and defend those truths which have been defined by the church. Fresh light on the great doctrines of sin and grace and redemption is not to be expected. Our views may be clarified, our doctrines set in better order, and some further logical consequences may be drawn from them; but the work of the theologian is essentially conservative, not aggressive; it is expository of received doctrine, not inventive or constructive, so far as new materials are to be dealt with. Others of a more advanced school demand greater liberty of thought, and claim that new factors should be admitted into the science of theology. The Christian consciousness, the spirit of the age, the enlightened reason, must have their place and their authority in constructing a system of theology.

Between the two extreme positions is there no middle ground? The great body of evangelical churches holds that the Scriptures contain the only and the complete revelation of God. Nothing is to be added, nothing to be taken away, but the Scriptures constitute the norm by which all theories, all doctrines, all systems are to be tested.

The duty of carefully studying the Holy Scriptures becomes then all the more necessary. The Bible being the word of God, is not to be overlaid by any system of scholastic theology, nor obscured by any pre-conceived opinions of theologians. No human creed, however ancient, no opinion of men upon religious truths, however widely spread,