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THE CONTINENT

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The Presbyterian Charter of Liberty

Liberty!

It is a word which stirs the heart of the English-speaking race.

Others, of course, have lifted the cry, "For freedom," but it is the Anglo-Saxon above all others who, throughout modern history, has struggled and sacrificed unceasingly to break off the shackles which have bound him and win fuller liberty for all the people.

The great historic documents of Great Britain and America are those which guarantee civil liberty—such documents as Magna Charta and the Declaration of Independence; and among our most cherished traditions are the stories of the men who suffered and died for the cause of freedom, civil and religious.

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We Presbyterians have our charter of liberty. It is found in what we call our "Constitution," the Westminster "symbols," particularly the Confession of Faith and the Form of Government, as amended and revised when first adopted and on subsequent occasions. Those documents do not represent, as some seem to think, an effort to bind and restrict and thus limit the development of religious liberty. Rather, like the Declaration of Independence, they constitute a platform of great principles, principles on which it was expected there would be erected a temple of true religious liberty.

One has only to read the history of the times when those documents came into being to discover the dominating motive of their authors. The purpose which led to their making was not primarily that of setting forth a summary of Scripture teaching in general. That had been very well done in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. The fact is that there was no great disagreement concerning what we usually call "doctrine" among the members of the Westminster Assembly except on one point—that which related to church government. So far as other "doctrines" are concerned, the original purpose was merely to revise the Thirty-nine Articles.

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And, indeed, the Westminster Confession is practically such a revision, with greater emphasis on predestination and election, the only points of radical departure being those which relate to the government of the church, especially as treated in chapters XXIII and XXXI. The dominant purpose which brought the Westminster Assembly into being was to secure freedom from control by either civil or ecclesiastical rulers, and to place the power to govern

the church in the hands of the people themselves.

What is the story back of that historic Westminster Assembly? Very briefly, it is this: For centuries the whole Christian church had been under the absolute control of the pope at Rome and the Vatican council. Then came the Reformation. In 1534 a bill was passed in England abolishing papal supremacy. At the same time, however, the king being made the head of the Church of England, the church thus was placed under the control of a civil ruler instead of a foreign pope. Still later control passed from the person of the civil ruler to bishops and archbishops—the prelacy.

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But whether the ruling power was in the hands of pope or king or prelates, it was not in the hands of the people. And for 100 years the people sought for freedom from burdensome requirements and from enforced conformity to rites and ceremonies of which, believing them to be unscriptural, they did not approve. Finally, in 1643, "convinced that the king would make no concessions in behalf of civil and religious liberty," parliament ordered the meeting of the Westminster Assembly. The ordinance definitely states that "the present church government . . . depending upon the hierarchy, is evil and justly offensive and burdensome" and harmful to the development of religion. Therefore it was determined "that the same shall be taken away, and that such a government shall be settled in the church as may be most agreeable to God's holy word." It was for this purpose that the Assembly was called, the main object being to secure for the people freedom from civil and ecclesiastical tyranny and oppression.

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The freedom sought was ultimately won.

Even greater liberty was provided by the American Presbyterian Church when, in 1788, the General Synod of New York and Philadelphia made further radical amendments in chapters XX, XXIII and XXXI and prefixed to the Form of Government those significant "Preliminary Principles" which breathe the spirit of freedom. In them we are reminded that "if the preceding scriptural and rational principles be steadfastly adhered to, the vigor and strictness of its discipline will contribute to the glory and happiness of any church."

Our Confession is a charter of liberty. Let us beware of the possibility of its being converted into an instrument of oppression.

When I Was Only 12

By MARION HARLAND

The accompanying account of an important experience in my mother's life I have copied from the pages of a manuscript book of her reminiscences, found among her papers after her death. It has never heretofore appeared in print. At the time the incident occurred she was staying at College Hill, Prince Edward county, Virginia, at the home of her aunt, Mrs. Rice, widow of the first president of Union Theological Seminary. This institution, together with Hampden-Sidney College, made, as "Marion Harland" states in her autobiography, "an educational center for a community noted for generations past for intelligence and refinement." Virginia Hawes and her sister spent a winter here, studying with a tutor, Robert Howison. Several students from the college and seminary took their meals with Mrs. Rice, and in her autobiography Mrs. Terhune makes reference to her enjoyment of the table talk. "It was the informal, suggestive chat of men eager for knowledge, comparing notes and opinions, and discussing questions of deep import—historical, biological and theological."

This brief notice is given to make clear the setting in which the experience described took place.

CHRISTINE TERHUNE HERRICK.

IN THE church connection in which I was born and bred, people believed, at the time of which I write, in the absolute necessity of a certain process of conversion, identical in its main features in every creature born of Adam, and lost through his transgression until conviction of and sorrow for sin had been felt, and conversion followed as a legitimate consequence. From babyhood I had known that when I attained "the age of accountability"—an undetermined period, dependent upon training and natural intelligence—I must go through this ordeal and come out a regenerated soul; or take the consequences. The gentlest and most charitable of Christians believed in hell as devoutly as in heaven. When a mere infant I was haunted by dreads of the lake of fire and brimstone, dreads so present and vivid that I have lain awake for hours, tormented by fear of dying in sleep and awaking in torment.

I was what would be now termed "of a religious turn of mind," given to much contemplation of sacred subjects, taking comfort in prayer, leaning upon it as upon a tangible staff, and trying, so far as lay in an unregenerate child of wrath, to shape my conduct in accordance with the line upon line and precept upon precept inculcated by godly parents. I had

always loved my heavenly Father and the thought of the divine Son who had died for a sinning world was as familiar and as dear to me as thoughts of my beloved mother whom I knew.

Nevertheless, it did not occur to me or to any of my associates to doubt that before I could have a right to consider myself "saved" I must go through a prescribed course of "exercises." The agony of "conviction" and the rapture of "conversion" must shake the soul to its depths.

When I was only 12 years old and staying with my sister at the home of my aunt, in Prince Edward county, my former tutor, who was one of the students from seminary and college who boarded there, stopped me on the porch one day with the words, "I wish to have a little conversation with you, Virginia," and without further preamble began to talk to me upon "the subject of religion." That was the invariable phrase of the day. How it got into circulation I know not. It was common to all classes and everybody knew that it meant business of weight.

Up to this moment James N (the tutor) had never intimated to me his consciousness of the unimportant circumstance that I had a soul. The harangue upon which he now launched himself was perfunctory and hard. A revival had begun in the neighborhood, sinners all around me were inquiring the way of salvation and it was a good time for me to repent and turn from my evil ways. Then he thundered into my ears "the terrors of the Lord." I recall the scope of the discourse and the tone. But one sentence is distinct.

"The matter with you, Virginia, is that you are ashamed of your Saviour; ashamed to confess him!"

I was fighting hard with sobs I would not let him hear, and could not speak, but at this horrible accusation I shook my head vehemently. I might be the hell-deserving sinner he had described, but this was going a step too far. In the bottom of my shivering soul I knew that I loved the Friend of sinners. Had I been called upon at that instant to choose between "confessing" this love, or going to the stake, I should have given my young body to be burned. Had I put this into words it would have availed me nothing, so long as the prescribed regi-

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The Angel That Missed Christmas

By William E. Brooks



LONG the hills the echoes died away
And the great light grew dim, till Bethlehem's plain
Lay dark again as any plain of earth.
And while the shepherds sped to find the Babe
Straw-cradled in the windy cattle shed,

The choiring host swept back the long white road
To heaven's portals, and the portals closed
Behind them. Swiftly in their train
Came a young angel from a task of God,
And learning from the glad excited throng
How he had missed his part in their great song,
He sought with downcast eyes the amazing throne,
To render his account of duty done.
And the All-father as he heard his tale
His shadowed face beheld, and knew his woe,
And bending low he whispered to him there:
"You, too, shall sing that song they sang tonight;
The hour will come when he shall need it more,
And you shall be my messenger of peace."

The long years passed and deeds in heaven were done
For help of mortals, while that life begun

The night the heavens sang drew to its close.
Then came a summons to the amazing throne
For him who missed the song. A whispered word
And off he sped the long and star-hung way
To where some olives made a garden old,
And pale beneath the olive's shade a Man.
Great drops that gleamed as blood were on his brow,
His eyes, like coals, burned in their agony,
And burdens like the mountains of men's sin
Lay on his shoulders in a crushing load.
To the wide skies he lifted up his face.
"May this cup pass," he cried. "Yet as thou wilt."
Swiftly to him the eager angel ran
And poured into his ears the well-learned song:

*"Gloria in excelsis Deo et
In terra pax hominibus bonae
Voluntatis."*

And for a moment broke
A light upon that garden like the light
That shone o'er Bethlehem. Straight from the ground,
The agony all gone, the doubting past,
The stricken Man arose, held up his head,
Moved steadfastly where coming torches gleamed,
And the world's Christ was ready for his cross.

As for the British museum one feels that a year would not suffice to study all the lore that is gathered there. You run out of exclamations before you have got a tenth of the way through. Not otherwise is it with the National Art gallery and the Tate gallery for British artists. The most perfect painting in the world in the former, Raphael's "Virgin and Child," has a worthy companion in the other in Rossetti's ethereal "Annunciation."

St. Paul's is tremendous, but Westminster Abbey is sublime. Wherever else you may go or whatever you may be doing, you insensibly drift around to one or other of these magnificent churches every day or so. You cannot help yourself for all the attraction of the empire is in them. In the abbey especially is the genius of Britain seen and felt. The history of all the English centuries is centered here.

Most sacred spot of all to me was the slab that marked the last resting place of Livingstone. The black boys who brought that body out of the dark continent, after burying the heart in the land he loved and died for, were the first fruits of the vast harvest of cultured Christian character that some day will be a blessing to Christendom.

Explain it as you please, the fact is I did not relish the daily service in the abbey. The boy choir sounded insignificant with all the voices of the mighty past echoing in the heart. The high intonation of the minister seemed almost an impertinence, it was so disagreeable. One's body felt the chill of the atmosphere and the soul detected no note of spiritual warmth in the stiff and lifeless liturgy. It seemed as though it were a perpetual funeral for the heroes buried there. It seemed as though God himself were dead.

Coming out of the abbey gates I looked across the street at a statue I always loved to behold—Abraham Lincoln standing in the midst of roaring London and gazing pensively at Westminster hall and abbey. The westerling sun lighted up his kindly face and my heart was aglow with pride for him as he stands there, the representative of a young world, not yet so cultured as the old, but full of strength and possessed of a kindly tolerance, a human sympathy that yet will bless the earth with peace.

As I sauntered along Whitehall back to the luxurious Cecil I found myself humming Van Dyke's "America for Me":

"Oh, London is a man's town; there's power in the air;
And Paris is a woman's town, with flowers in her hair;
And it's sweet to loaf in Venice, it's great to study Rome;
But when it comes to living, there is no place like home."

When I Was Only 12

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men of poignant distress for sins imputed and personally done, and of joy in believing had not been gone through in orthodox fashion.

Thirty years thereafter, Rev. Joseph Berg, D. D., of blessed memory, said to me, after overhearing part of a Sunday afternoon Bible reading I was holding with my eldest daughter:

"My dear, as your children arrive at the age when they can choose the right way for themselves, they will come, naturally, into full communion with the rest of the church. We have covenant promises for that belief. They are already heirs of the kingdom."

His words were prophetic. I had learned by that time that the "little ones" should not be driven from the Father's house for the sake of welcoming them back as once lost but now found. The sheep who strayed from the fold wandered of his own will, not because the door was closed upon him. I cannot exaggerate the thoroughness of the belief in the contrary dogma which obtained in every branch of the church militant at the time of which I write. I was not angry with my mentor for driving in upon my conscience the fact of my exceeding sinfulness and the imperative duty laid upon me of fleeing from the wrath to come. When I escaped from him, rather, when his admonition concluded, he thrust a dreadful tract into my hand and saying, with stiff solemnity, "This night thy soul may be required of thee," left me to my meditations. I leaned over the porch railing, looked up through blinding tears to stars that were as severe and cold as they had been friendly and warm an hour before, and cried myself sick. I honestly believed I was under conviction of sin. (God help us all! Are we not that every day and every hour of our lives?)

On the way to Sunday school the next morning my sister, who had never before intimated her knowledge of the unim-

portant fact that I had a soul, advised me to "give my heart to the Saviour."

"The Lord has done great things for me," she added, in the conventional tone of the converted.

I recognized it at once and bethought my wretched self that she had always been a pattern child and had not found the gate of mercy hard to open when she laid her hand upon the latch. "Just what might have been expected!" I groaned inwardly.

Aloud I said in a broken voice, "I am trying!"

"Well," with the air of one dismissing a delicate subject, "don't despair!"

Not then, nor to the best of my recollection, for forty years thereafter, was the matter of personal religion ever mentioned between us. It was an accepted truism that members of the same family could not converse freely upon such topics. Why, I wondered then and I comprehend it as little now.

Preaches the Terrors of Sin

Dr. Sparrow, the pastor of the college church, preached a violent sermon that morning. "One calculated to awaken the most impatient," remarked my aunt at dinner, and there was a silence fraught to my imagination with personal meaning.

The revival spirit was in the air. Little was said of it in general conversation, but all looked appreciation of the imminence of the season's dangers and opportunities.

As I walked silently that evening beside by aunt through the grove road leading to the seminary chapel, I formulated the muttered hope to myself—"Mr. Howison's sermon (he was to preach that evening) will certainly bring me through!"

That last word expressed it all. A certain process must be accomplished, ordered and sure.

Well! "Bob" Howison, the gentlest of judges where the delinquencies of his fellow mortals were considered, chose the text: "I will destroy all transgressors together."

I have never found it in the Bible. I have never looked for it. I went home sullen, discouraged, resentful. I had had four or five tracts given to me that day, all "awakening." I read none; I do not recollect saying my prayers before going to bed. I suppose I went through the form from habit. I do recall the sick feeling that stole into my soul at supper time as my eyes swept the board and I reflected that I was the only unregenerate creature there. This thought was the last that possessed my mind before I fell asleep.

It must have been about 4 o'clock when I awoke, slipped out of bed without awaking my sister, who lay wrapped in the slumber of a saved soul, and crept to the window. The harvest moon was bright; the world was still; from the garden arose the scent of dew-drenched roses. The stars were dying before the spreading glory of the eastern horizon.

"My Father made it all!"

The quotation came, unbidden, to thought and lips, and with it revelation. In the exaltation of the instant I fancied I could see the Father's face and on it a smile of affectionate amusement! There was no irreverence in the imagination:

"You have been seeking me, sorrowing, and all the while I am here! The loving, pitying Father, more ready to answer than you are to call. Dear child! always and everywhere my child. Trust that love and rest in it! Tears and anguish and fear are doubts of it."

I felt all this without formulating it.

The sun was looking at me over the hills when I crept back to bed, calmed in spirit, "as one whom his mother comforteth."

With delicacy for which I did not give them credit at the time, nobody asked any questions as to my "frame of mind" but it was soon known that I was "at peace."

"Hope" Comes at Last

On Wednesday afternoon Mr. Bingham, who was the gravest and oldest as he was the best beloved of the group of seminarians that helped make up my aunt's family, joined me on my way home across the fields, and talked to me so naturally out of the sincerity of a true, tender heart, that I told him, in the stiff vocabulary of the period (I had no other at command) that I thought I had "experienced a hope." I wonder that he did not smile at the bit of unchildlike cant, as I do now.

He received it kindly and with the sweet sincerity which had marked his manner throughout the interview. His look is before me now. His name, in my grateful memory, will ever be Nathanael—without guile.