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I.

THE REVISION OF THE WESTMINSTER CON-
FESSION OF FAITH.

REVISION is in the air. Some years ago it was the revision of the Bible ; now it is the revision of the creeds. The former has been successfully accomplished without doing any harm either to the Bible or to Bible readers ; the latter will be accomplished at no distant day, with the same result of sundry improvements in minor details without detriment to the substance. The Bible revision movement extended over the whole Protestant world, and resulted in a material improvement of the Authorized English, German, Dutch, Swedish, and Danish versions ; the Creed revision movement so far is confined to the Presbyterian churches of America and Great Britain, but may soon spread to other evangelical denominations which have formulated confessions of faith.

We live in an age of research, discovery, and progress, and whosoever refuses to go ahead must be content to be left behind and to be outgrown. Whatever lives, moves ; and whatever ceases to move, ceases to live. It is impossible for individual Christians or churches to be stationary : they must either go forward or go backward.

Revision of creeds is not a new thing. It runs through the history of Christian doctrine. Creeds are the mile-stones which mark the stages of development in the knowledge of revealed truth. Every creed is the result of preceding theological controversy. The Confession of Peter and the baptismal formula are the basis of the

II.

REVISION OF THE CONFESSION OF FAITH.

ONE of the editors of the REVIEW has requested me to take the place of a distinguished theologian of the Church, who had engaged to prepare, for this number, a paper directed against the Revision of the Confession of Faith, but who has been providentially prevented from writing it. The time allotted is so short for the purpose, as to render its composition by me an act of recklessness, even if I were not sufficiently occupied already with preparations for the Seminary session, which will commence a few days hence. This much may properly be said, not as an apology for this article, but by way of taking care that a good cause shall not suffer from what must be an inadequate presentation of it.

It must also be remembered that, at present, a paper against revision cannot well be made either very elaborate or very impressive; for the case in favor of revision has not yet been presented to the Church. Should a large number of the Presbyteries answer the first question of the General Assembly in the affirmative, and, in response to the second, should they suggest specific amendments; one would have before him a considerable body of matter for criticism, and in exactly the form required for antagonism, should he then desire to antagonize revision. But no amendments have as yet been proposed by the Presbyteries; and it is impossible to anticipate their general drift; much less their exact phraseology, which most probably will prove to be the specific object of criticism. It is not forgotten, that individual ministers have proposed, in a tentative way, several changes in the language of the Confession, and have defended their proposals with ability. Some of these will be noticed in this paper. But there is no evidence yet before us that they are likely to command the votes of a large number of Presbyteries. Moreover, one must attack revision with a reservation. For it is possible that proposals, hereafter to be made, will command the vote of one, like myself, who, with the light he now possesses, is opposed to revision. We have been told, so often lately, that the Confession is not a product of Inspiration, that we are not likely, even momentarily, to

let the truth sink below consciousness. And, in respect to an uninspired document, it would be going much too far to say, in advance, that no amendment can be offered which one will approve. No minister of the Church possesses a wisdom equal to that of all its Presbyters; nor can he predict how admirable a scheme of amendment they or any one of them will propose.

Indeed, the discussion of the subject at this stage of legislation is greatly embarrassed by the fact, that, behind the action of the General Assembly and compelling it, there was no large, united, and public demand; at least, no such demand as could serve the purpose of a "case stated," and so aid the preparation of this article. In an interesting Editorial Note, published in the July number of the REVIEW, Professor Briggs says truly: "It is difficult to determine how far the movement for revision has gone." But I cannot adopt his conclusion, that, because the opposition to the Assembly's action was slight, and because the action was taken with great heartiness, "it would appear that the movement had already assumed great dimensions, especially among the younger and more silent members of the Presbyteries, and that the leaders of the Church have come to recognize this fact." No evidence is presented in the Note to sustain this conclusion, beyond the heartiness and unanimity of the Assembly's action. But what was the action? It was simply the proposal of two questions, in the answers to which the Assembly expected to find the information, which confessedly it did not possess, touching the breadth and depth of the desire for amendment. It is true, that the second section of the preamble recites that, "in the opinion of many of our ministers and people, some forms of statement in our Confession of Faith are liable to misunderstanding, and expose our system of doctrine to unmerited criticism." But, in the first place, the term "many," employed by the Assembly, is a numeral adjective so very indefinite, that it may designate any number from a dozen upwards; and, in the second place, the preamble recites no dissatisfaction, on the part of ministers or people, either with the Confession's system of doctrine or with its language, except as the latter may expose the former to criticism, presumably originating outside the Church, and avowedly "unmerited."

I do not forget that the Assembly's action was taken in response to an identical overture from sixteen Presbyteries. The number sixteen is a large number when considered without reference to the remainder; large enough, no doubt, to justify the Assembly's questions to the Church; but not large, when compared with the whole number of Presbyteries; nor large enough to make an adequate basis for the statement, that the movement "had already assumed great

dimensions." And, if the common report—that the Presbytery in which the overture originated communicated it to the other Presbyteries of the Church, and thus sought to secure their co-operation—if this report is accurate, the fact that only sixteen out of the two hundred and two Presbyteries responded favorably to the appeal, would point rather to the conclusion, that the dimensions of the movement are anything but great ; unless among those " more silent members of the Presbyteries," to whom Professor Briggs refers.

The most striking incidents in our recent Church history point to the same conclusion. The reunion of 1869 on the basis of the Standards ; the friendly proposals on the same basis now for ecclesiastical union, and now for co-operation, made by our Church to the Southern Presbyterian Church ; and the eulogies pronounced, at the Centennial Anniversary of the General Assembly, on our symbols and the system of doctrine they embody, would seem to indicate a general contentment throughout the Church with the Confession of Faith as it is, and with the mode of subscription prescribed in our Form of Government. Nor is this general contentment inconsistent with the highly probable fact, that a large number of the ministers of our Church can point to phrases or sentences, or even sections of the Confession, which might, by amendment, be made more exactly to define their individual beliefs. No doubt, this has always been the state of mind of our ministry. For this state of mind the Confession itself is largely responsible. Our form of subscription both contemplates and provides for it. The Westminster Confession of Faith, it is not too much to say, has stimulated theological inquiry as has no other similar and contemporaneous document. It has been a powerful factor in the creation of a ministry far more than ordinarily inquisitive and speculative ; and far more than ordinarily quick to receive impressions and to form opinions on dogmatic subjects. In this way, it has made not only possible, but also necessary, a continuous criticism of itself. It would be surprising, indeed, if careful inquiry should fail to show, that a large proportion of the Presbyters of our Church are cherishing formulas, largely of their own composition, which, they severally believe, would render the Confession less " liable to misunderstanding," and " would expose its system of doctrine" to less " unmerited criticism" than " some of its present forms of statement." But this kind of private criticism of the Confession has always been offered. It is made necessary, as I have already said, by the habit of ministerial mind which the Confession legitimates. To refer to it as evidence of a movement for revision, would show a failure to distinguish between two very different states of mind. Such criticism is not of the slightest value, as

evidence of a real dissatisfaction with the Confession of Faith as subscribed by our ministers, the outcome of which must be a serious demand for revision. A movement for revision is by no means the inevitable nor even the natural result of this continuous critical study of the Confession and the consequent formation of "pious opinions." For revision is no remedy for the process. If it should be made as thorough-going as possible, the changes would prove to be like the dragon's-teeth sown by Cadmus at Thebes, out of which sprang a new race of warriors. A new host of criticisms and a new set of "pious opinions" would appear, just as they do now, with every generation of ministers. And if these in any sense disturb the peace or destroy the unity of the Church—as I believe they do not—revision will secure neither the one nor the other. This was finely expressed in the resolutions of Professor Warfield at a meeting of the Presbytery of New Brunswick. "However much or little," say the resolutions, "the Confession were altered, we could not as a body accept the altered Confession in a closer sense than for system of doctrine; and the alterations could not better it as a public document, however much it might be made a closer expression of the faith of some individuals among us. In any case, it could not be made, in all its propositions and forms of statement, the exact expression of the personal faith of each one of our thousands of office-bearers."

Now, apart from criticisms of the kind of which I have been speaking, and apart from the general theological restlessness of the age (a state most unfavorable to a work like that of Confessional amendment), I have not been able to detect the evidence of any movement, certainly any movement entitled to be called considerable, behind and impelling the action of the General Assembly. An intelligent, powerful, and widespread movement for the revision of the Confession of Faith would be distinguished by certain bold and outstanding features. Of such a movement, we should be able to affirm something more than criticisms of the Confession in the interest of individual opinions. It would be marked by a single *terminus ad quem* as well as by a single *terminus a quo*; by a general prevision of the new Confessional statements, distinct enough to render their formulation a comparatively easy task. Our religious newspapers, instead of publishing proposals, many of which so conflict with each other that they seem anything but the products of the same or similar sentiments, would find their hospitality strained by a multitude of communications, owning a common impulse and directed toward securing a common positive result. One might well question his right to oppose such a movement. At least, one would acknowledge

that the burden of proof would lie upon him if he opposed it. But the present movement is clearly not of this kind. So far as its positive and ultimate aims are concerned—if these may be inferred from the communications in the newspapers—it ought scarcely to be described as a movement, but as an aggregation of differing and often conflicting suggestions.

We call attention at the outset to the state of mind—so far as it has been disclosed—touching revision, in which the Assembly's action finds the Church; for two reasons: first, because, in discussing the subject which gives a title to this paper, it is well to begin at the beginning; and, secondly, because the absence of a general and spontaneous movement in behalf of revision adds a distinct element of strength to that strong presumption against the amendment of a venerable church symbol, which all should bring to their consideration of the Assembly's questions.

I say there is a strong presumption against the wisdom of revising the Confession of Faith; one far stronger than that of a man's innocence, until his guilt has been established beyond a reasonable doubt. In a well-ordered state, the burden of proving the necessity of altering the established order, and of discrediting or amending the ancient documents which embody or authorize it, is no ordinary burden of proof. It is remarkable, and in this connection instructive, to observe the weight, which that great system of organized justice, the Common Law, gives to the doctrine of presumption in favor of the existing. No other principle of the law is so fundamental. I mean, that no other is so widely or so thoroughly regulative of the interpretation of law and of its application to particular cases. If the unwritten law of England can be described by a single phrase, the phrase which must be employed to describe it, is, presumption against change. The law itself is constituted of ancient customs, which, because they have survived, are presumed to be founded in justice. These find literary embodiment in the decisions of the courts; and of these, the doctrine of the law is, that precedents and rules must be followed "unless flatly absurd and unjust." This is true, even when no reason can be given for them; for what has persisted as custom is presumed to be well founded. It is true, that these customs and rules of law may be changed by statute; and the temptation, for the sake of immediate convenience, to change the rule, when its original purpose could not be detected, has often been too strong for successful resistance by Parliament. In his discussion of this subject, Blackstone makes the remark, that "it has been an ancient observation in the laws of England that, whenever a standing rule of law, of which the reason perhaps could not be remembered

or discerned, hath been wantonly broken in upon by statutes or new resolutions, the wisdom of the rule hath in the end appeared from the inconveniences which have followed the innovation." And in this connection, to make clear that the Common Law of England in this respect is not peculiar, he quotes the following strong statement to show its agreement with the Civil Law: "*Non omnium, quæ a majoribus nostris constituta sunt, ratio reddi potest. Et ideo rationes eorum, quæ constituuntur, inquiri non oportet; alioquin ex his, quæ certa sunt, subvertuntur.*" It was not singular, therefore, that, when Mr. Greenleaf, a great Common Law lawyer and the author of the treatise on the Law of Evidence, entered the field of Christian Apologetics, he began his argument for the credibility of the four Gospels with the statement of the doctrine, that the law takes care that an ancient document, surviving in its proper repository, shall not be lightly discredited; the doctrine that the law presumes it to be genuine.

If this strong presumption, raised by the Common Law against amending or discrediting ancient customs or documents, were the product simply of regard for antiquity, it would not be entitled to much respect. Indeed, if this were the whole of it, it would not be the pervasive and regulative principle that it is in that great system. But it is not a mere sentimental regard for the ancient that gives to it its place and power; but respect for a notable quality, of which antiquity is only the evidence. That quality is persistent life; the commanding vitality, by which the customs or documents have survived the long and repeated battles of opposing interests or of conflicting opinions. It is not all the customs which, originating centuries ago, still live in history, but only the select remnant, which have continued in actual being during the period which proved fatal to all the others, that make the fabric of the unwritten law of England. Touching these, not because they are ancient, but because they survive although they are ancient, there is, in the judgment of the law, a strong presumption that they originated in reason; that they survived because they were the fittest to survive; and that, having continued in being so long, they are entitled to continue in being still.

Now for the continuance in being of the Westminster Confession, we claim this strong presumption. Its antiquity and its survival united entitle it to remain unamended, except in the face of the clearest necessity for revision, or to secure most important and unquestioned advantages. No small benefit to be gained and no slight inconvenience to be escaped should be sufficient to induce the revision of a document which remains with us unamended after such

a career. It has been the Confession of more Churches than any other Protestant creed. In all of them it has been exposed to the severest critical study. For the Churches, whose confession it has been, have been more thoroughly pervaded by the spirit of theological study than any others in Christendom. Disruptions and secessions have occurred in them so often, that the tendency of Presbyterianism to division has become a proverb. But the separated branches, with but a single notable exception, have maintained it as their standard during their separate careers. Being the common confession of so many Churches, it has kept alive in all of them, however separated, a strong desire to heal division; and in more than one instance has proved the sole basis, if not the sole cause, of ecclesiastical reunion.

Indeed, the presumption against revision is, at the present time, changed almost to positive proof of its rare unwisdom, by bringing to view the fact that the single ground of hope, now in sight, for the union of the English-speaking Calvinistic Presbyterians of America in a single Church, is that no one of them has amended the Confession's distinctively doctrinal statements. We are all hoping that the day will come, when the two largest Presbyterian Churches in the country will again be one Church. It is a consummation devoutly to be wished. Besides the social and ecclesiastical inconveniences growing out of the existence of two Churches absolutely alike in their doctrine and order, the evangelization of extended districts and of most needy peoples is seriously retarded by the division. The problems in ecclesiastical policy which separate the two Churches are serious and difficult of solution. But, because they are problems in policy and not in doctrine, we have reason to hope that the movement of time, and patient and friendly study will show that they are not to remain forever unsolved. Already, a plan of co-operation has been agreed upon by the two Assemblies. We may rationally anticipate that the wisdom which secured the plan will attend its execution; and, leading to more intimate relations, will prepare the way for an ecclesiastical reunion, perhaps, before the beginning of the new century. But who does not know, that the impulse, which has driven these Churches, first, to lament their separation, and, secondly, to organize a mode of co-operation, is born of the fact, that during the period of division—now almost as long as that between the Old School and the New School Churches—each Church has maintained unrevised the same doctrinal standards? And who needs to be convinced, that if reunion is to take place between them hereafter, it must be reunion on the basis of these standards as they were when the division occurred?

The presumption against any revision of the words of the Confession is still further strengthened by the consideration, that the words of the Confession are not received and adopted by the officers of the Church. In the form in which the standards are subscribed, our Church stands in very favorable contrast to most of the other Churches organized by the Westminster documents. The various modes of subscription adopted and in use by the several Churches belonging to the "Alliance of the Reformed Churches" are to be found in the report of a committee, appointed by the Alliance at the Edinburgh meeting in 1877. The report was presented to the Alliance at Philadelphia in 1880; and is published in the volume containing the proceedings of the Philadelphia meeting. No one, who has not examined that report, can understand the force of one of the causes of the present agitation for relief in the British Churches. Nor can he know how deeply the ministry of our own Church are indebted for their liberty, "for their free and safe relation to the standards," to the debates and conflicts and divisions out of which issued our wise formula of subscription. This is so important a subject, in this connection, that I invite attention to the following formulas, either subscribed or verbally adopted by the ministers of other Churches.

Beginning with a Church closely allied to our own, because it is an American Church, because its ecclesiastical life is scarcely to be distinguished from that of the Presbyterian Church, and because of the free exchange of ministers and families between us, it will do us good to read in part the formula of the Reformed (Dutch) Church in America. After examination for ordination, and before the ordination takes place, the candidate subscribes, as a member of Classis, the following statements among others: "We, the undersigned, ministers of the Word of God, residing within the bounds of the Classis of N. and M., do hereby sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord declare by our subscription, that we heartily believe and are persuaded, that all the articles and points of the doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Church, together with the explanation and points of doctrine made in the National Synod held at Dordrecht in the year 1619, do fully agree with the Word of God. We promise, therefore, diligently and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either, directly or indirectly, contradicting the same by our public preaching or writings."

Passing to the Presbyterian Churches in the United States—except our own Church and the Southern Church—which demand a subscription to the Westminster Standards, the questions to which an

affirmative response must be given before ordination are as follows ; in the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America : “ Do you sincerely own the doctrines contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms, Larger and Shorter, as these were received by the Church of Scotland? ”, in the United Presbyterian Church in North America : “ Do you believe and acknowledge the doctrines professed by this Church, contained in the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, Larger and Shorter, and in the declarations of the testimony as agreeable to and founded on the Word of God ; and are you resolved, through divine grace, to maintain and adhere to the same against all opposing errors? ”

In the Dominion of Canada the various Presbyterian Churches were united in 1875, and formed the “ Presbyterian Church in Canada. ” This Church, as Protestant, adopted as its supreme standard the Holy Scriptures, and as its subordinate standard the Westminster Confession of Faith. The following question is put to ministers at Ordination or Induction : “ Do you believe the Westminster Confession of Faith, as adopted by this Church in the basis of Union, to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and in your teaching will you faithfully adhere thereto? ”

In the Presbyterian Church of Victoria (and the committee preparing the report inferred from the communication sent to them that this is true of all the Australasian Presbyterian Churches), ministers and elders at their Ordination subscribe a formula, from which the following is extracted : “ I own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Standards of this Church as an exhibition of the sense in which I understand the Holy Scriptures, and acknowledge it as the confession of my faith. ”

In the Presbyterian Churches of the United Kingdom the modes of subscription are, as a rule, even more exacting. In the Presbyterian Church of England ministers and elders are required to “ sincerely receive and adopt the doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith as in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Scripture. ” The Synod of United Original Seceders and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland require, in order to ordination, an affirmative answer to several questions, similar in the two Churches, of which I quote the following : “ Do you sincerely own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith? . . . Do you own the whole doctrine contained therein as the confession of your faith? ” The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland proposes the question : “ Do you acknowledge the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as an exhibition of the sense in which you understand the Holy Scriptures? ” The Free

Church of Scotland requires a satisfactory answer to the question : " Do you sincerely own and declare the Confession of Faith, approved by former General Assemblies of this Church, to be the confession of your faith ; and do you own the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine, which you will constantly adhere to?" The present formula of subscription in the Presbyterian Church of Ireland is : " I believe the Westminster Confession of Faith to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and as such I acknowledge it as the confession of my faith." Finally, in the Church of Scotland, the following formula is subscribed (I quote in each case only that which refers to the acceptance of the Confession): " I do hereby declare that I do sincerely own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, approved by the General Assemblies of the National Church, etc., to be the truths of God, and I do own the same as the confession of my faith."

It was with these formulas, or some of them, before his mind, that Professor Warfield, when both accounting for the agitation for revision or supplementary declarations in the Presbyterian Churches of Great Britain, and indicating out of the happy experience of our own Church the best method of satisfying the demands of these Churches, made the remark, that " the true relief for a Church that finds itself too strictly bound to a creed " is " simply to amend the strictness of the formula of subscription." This remark has been criticised as, if not loose itself, at least tending toward looseness ; and, as not unlikely to lower the high ideal of morality in subscription which our Church holds before its ministers. I distinctly remember, for example, the metaphor employed by Dr. G. M. Maxwell, of Cincinnati, in the *Herald and Presbyter*, to indicate his moral dislike of the proposal. Dr. Maxwell asserted, that a liberal formula of subscription is a rolling stone under the consciences of a ministry, to give additional ease to a downward movement. Now, even setting aside for a moment, what was obvious, that Professor Warfield was exalting the formula of subscription in our own Church, what ground is there for the criticism ? There is no more moral looseness in endorsing a note " without recourse," than there is in endorsing it in such a way as to incur responsibility. If one is called, as every pastor is at times, to express his opinion of a volume, proposed to be offered for sale in his congregation ; it is quite within his rights to refrain from endorsing every word of it, or every step in the procession of its argument, or every rhetorical implement used in illustration, or every picture used in embellishment, and to content himself with a general assent to its conclusions. So it is with a Church and a Creed. The mode of subscription has nothing to do with morality,

except as the subscribing members are loyal or disloyal to that which they subscribe. The strictness or liberality of a formula is not to be confused with the strictness or the looseness, with which a minister regards the obligations under which he has placed himself.

But Dr. Warfield was simply calling attention to the "more excellent way" which the American Churches had adopted in their subscription of the Confession. The agitation in Scotland sprang largely from the existence of formulas of subscription far stricter than ours. This is the *raison d'être* of the agitation. A similar agitation must lack the same ground in our Church, for our formula is not open to the same criticism. The best mode of relief for the Scotch Established Church, for example, is not to amend or revise the Confession, but to amend the formula, and to adopt one like our own; requiring their ministers simply "to receive and adopt the Confession as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." So, at least, I understand the argument as Dr. Warfield employed it; and I desire to adopt it. It is for the purpose of making clear to the readers of this article its cogency that I have quoted the strict formulas of subscription in use in other Churches, and especially in those in which the agitation is going forward. It is not necessary to criticise any of these formulas in detail. A single reading of them is enough to convince one of their stringency as compared with ours. But it will be helpful to detain ourselves for a few minutes with the history and with the interpretation of our formula, in order to make perfectly clear that so long as our formula remains, a revision of the words of the Confession (the system of doctrine still remaining) would be of no benefit whatever to our relations to our Creed.

The Adopting Act of 1729 declares "that all ministers of this Synod, or that shall hereafter be admitted into this Synod, shall 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 the essential and necessary articles good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine; and [we] do also adopt the said Confessions and Catechism as the confession of our faith." From the date of this adopting act until the separation of 1741, which led to the formation of the Synod of New York, in 1745, certain causes operated to establish two parties. There is no evidence that one party was more strictly Calvinistic than the other. Jonathan Dickinson was the leader of the New Side; and if the Calvinism of the New Side may be inferred from his discourses published by the Board of Publication, with the short title "The Five Points," the New Side were quite as loyal to

the Confession as were the Old Side. Undoubtedly when they separated, the Synod of Philadelphia, in readopting the Confession and Catechisms, emphasized the stricter phrase, "as the confession of our faith;" and the Synod of New York were disposed to emphasize the less strict expression, "declare their agreement with and their approbation of the Confession, etc., as being in all essential and necessary articles good forms of sound words and systems of doctrine." But the two Synods were not so far apart doctrinally, that they did not easily reunite, after a separation of seventeen years, on a doctrinal basis which asserts the continuous orthodoxy of both Synods; and which, in its language, approaches the formula of subscription now in use. "Both Synods, having always received and approved the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms as an orthodox and excellent system of Christian doctrine, founded on the Word of God, we do still receive the same as the confession of our faith."

This was the formula of the United Synod until the formation of the General Assembly, by the action of the Synod in 1788. It is noticeable that the two phrases in this formula, to be found in the declarations of subscription common in other Churches, were omitted from the new formula of subscription; the phrase "receive the same as the confession of our faith" being given a place in the new adopting act alone, and the phrase "founded on the Word of God" being displaced by "taught in the Holy Scriptures." The new formula of subscription was placed by the Synod in the Form of Government. It appears as a question, to be answered in the affirmative by ministers and elders at their Ordination and Installation, and by probationers when licensed to preach the Gospel; and is as follows: "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?"

The question, What is accepted when one answers this question affirmatively? was often discussed during the separate existence of the Old and New School Churches. It is not impossible to find, in the polemic literature of that period, declarations that the two Churches answered this question very differently. I have read New School declarations that the Old School construed this as meaning that unqualified assent is to be given to every word and phrase in the Confession; and I have read Old School declarations that the New School construed it as meaning that the Confession is to be received only for substance of doctrine. But each branch denied the charges: the one denying that they required the very words to be subscribed, the other that they accepted the standards for substance of doctrine only. At the time of the Reunion, it was not uncommon to inter-

pret the phrase by the systems of doctrine with which the system of doctrine set forth in the Confession has been in conflict ; just as we define a lot of ground by the lots which stand over against it. So the late Henry B. Smith wrote : “ We receive the Confession not as a rule of faith and life, for this only the Scriptures can be ; but as containing our system of faith in contrast with Arminianism and Pelagianism, as well as Socianism and Romanism.” Since the Reunion, the formula has been commented on by ministers and teachers, with a view to showing, first, the abiding loyalty of the Church to the Calvinistic system ; and, secondly, the liberty to criticise or to withhold assent from confessional expressions, clauses, and sentences. In respect to one thing, all who have written in explication of the phrase, “ system of doctrine,” are agreed—namely, that the Church does not demand of her office-bearers an adoption of every statement of the Confession ; just as all who have written on the subject agree in affirming that no one, not a believer in the Consensus of the creeds of the Reformed Churches, can legitimately answer affirmatively the question which tests doctrinal belief.

Of course, the formula of subscription has at some times been more stringently applied by Church judicatories than it has at others. Nor is it possible to point out the exact words of the Confession, which, in the judgment of the Church at a particular time, are—to use the words of the adopting act—“ essential and necessary” to the system, and what are its mere “ elaboration.” It is not possible to say in advance of judicial action in a particular case, what declarations—like the declaration concerning the Pope of Rome, if that be one of them—are, in the view of judicatories authorized to try cases, unessential to the system we sincerely receive and adopt. If these had authoritatively been pointed out, our subscription, while formally the adoption of a system, would be really the adoption of certain *ipsissima verba* to be found in the Confession. There is a vagueness—if one chooses to designate it by that word—in our formula, from which, it must be confessed, the Scottish mode of subscription is entirely free. It does not define the Confession we adopt by its words, but by its system of doctrine. And this system of doctrine, whatever it is, however inclusive of particular types or tolerant of variations on particular subjects, is not, it is agreed by all, an Arian, but a Trinitarian system ; is not Pelagianism, but Augustinianism ; is not Romanism, but Protestantism ; is not Arminianism, but Calvinism ; is not either a Sacramental or a Rationalistic, but an Evangelical system.

It ought to be said, at this point, that it is at least a question, whether even a subscription of the *ipsissima verba* would avail to

prevent, among perfectly sincere subscribers, differences of opinion as marked as any that are prevalent in our Church to-day. For the very words, when accepted, must still be officially interpreted, if differences arise. And the abundant litigation to secure the official interpretation of the words of statutes serves to show, that it is well-nigh impossible, by the use of the utmost care in the preparation of laws and by the most stringent imposition of words, to prevent the emergence of disagreements. However that may be, the points I desire to emphasize are, that the Form of Government defines the Confession as we receive it, not by its words, but by its system of doctrine ; and that the history of the Church and the attitudes of great parties, as described by themselves, have been in accordance with the definition in the Form of Government.

This being so, the question arises, Is it worth while to disturb the phraseology of an ancient and surviving document, the confessional bond of our Church, the one basis of reasonable hope of reunion with Churches with which we are in alliance, but from which we are now separated—is it worth while to disturb the words of this Confession, “the wisest and ripest product of the great Reformation, which was so fruitful in symbolic literature,” because we suppose its phraseology to be at some points capable of improvement? If we had no relief, if we were bound to the words of doctrine instead of to the system of doctrine, if we were in the position of our Scotch brethren, we might well take up the question, whether we would better revise the Confession or amend the formula of subscription in such a way as to make it what ours now is. But if revision means such a revision of words as shall retain the system of doctrine now embodied in the Confession, it would seem clear that it is not worth while to undertake revision, with all its dangers. The Confession already embodies the system of doctrine. Revision will not make it embody it more really. And it is the system of doctrine, and not the words, that we adopt.

The general argument against revision, certainly against revision within the system of doctrine, is re-enforced by the fact that no amendment will do anything toward preventing criticisms of the system by those who do not accept it. The Presbyterian Church must expect its doctrinal system to be antagonized by the Arminian, even though as Evangelical as the Arminian of the Methodist Episcopal Church ; and by all others against whose views the Confession is explicitly or by implication polemic. This is the necessary result of having, as our doctrinal basis, one of the Reformed Confessions. Now, before setting ourselves to the work of amendment, we may well ask, How much intelligent inimical criticism from

sources like these would be prevented by any amendments that could be made, if only the system of doctrine shall remain unimpaired? I risk nothing in saying that the amount prevented would be inappreciable. The reason is, that the antagonism is directed specifically not against this or that embodiment of our system, but against the system itself. Those, who are familiar with the literature begotten by the Old and New School discussions, may remember a volume entitled, I think, the "New Divinity Tried." Its author was a distinguished Methodist Episcopal minister, who examined, from the point of view of an Evangelical Arminian theologian, the views supposed to be distinctive of the New School ministry, and which, by some of the Old School writers, had been characterized as Arminian. But the concessions of the New School theologians—if they were concessions—were rejected by the author. In his judgment they were not concessions. The "New Divinity," thus tried at an Arminian bar, was found guilty, as promptly and decisively as if it had been the theology of Gomarus, and the judge had been Episcopius or Arminius himself. There will be no other result, if, in order to prevent misapprehension, we shall change the article concerning "Elect infants," and insert a qualifying clause in the first statement of the chapter on the Decree. We shall not even drive the critics to "fields and pastures new;" or if we shall, the Confession, unless we take out of it the Reformed faith, will continue to offer a multitude of phrases, just as inviting to hostile critics as those I have mentioned. So far, then, as revision contemplates a commendation of the Confession to those who are hostile to Calvinism, or a better apprehension of our system on their part—and from the preamble to the action of the Assembly this would seem to be contemplated in favor of revision—it will completely fail to secure the object in view.

Among the general objections to revision, that, founded on the present attitude of the world and the Church alike toward theological statements, ought not to be overlooked. The history of the great creeds of Christendom shows nothing more clearly, than that the permanently valuable symbols of the Church have been the product of continued and enthusiastic theological study, directed by strong positive belief. These great creeds are not the product of doubting, critical, inquiring periods, when for the time beliefs were in solution; but of periods during which beliefs crystallized into symmetrical form. This is true of all those creeds which, by means of careful discriminations, seek scientifically to reassert the Word of God. The Nicæno-Constantinopolitan Creed could not possibly have been wrought out in an age during which the Church was engaged in

defending itself against unbelief. In point of fact, the age of the Apologists produced no theological confession. The fight against disbelief was fought, and for the ancient Church finished—at least so far finished that it was no longer the characteristic battle of the Church—before the conflict began within the Church which terminated in the adoption of the Nicene symbol. That which organized the forces and engaged the powers of the Church to secure a confessional statement of the Biblical revelation of the Trinity in Unity was not unbelief, but heresy. The *regula fidei*, as it has since been called, was not at all a prominent subject of discussion. The claims of Christianity on the attention and acceptance of men had been presented. The age of Apology had passed. But with the victory of Christianity came heresy—the heresy of belief, not of unbelief. That “important intellectual and literary struggle with the ancient world” which, to employ Dr. Schaff’s language, “Christianity was to pass through, and from which it came forth victorious and conscious of being the perfect religion for man,” was ended for the time; and another struggle succeeded it. This was the struggle for confessional expression of the truth revealed in the Word of God concerning the modes of God’s subsistence, and the constitution of Christ’s person. The period that witnessed this struggle is the period in which the Nicæno-Constantinopolitan Creed and the declaration of the Council of Chalcedon were formulated.

In Dr. Schaff’s description of the intellectual life of the period, a picture is presented very different from that of the previous age. Christianity was rejoicing in its self-consciousness as the perfect religion for man. Doubts did not disturb it. Unbelief had been answered or silenced. And thus, untroubled and unmolested by unbelief within or enemies without, the Church began its great work of theological discussion, which gave us the two great confessional statements of which I have spoken. The exact habit of mind from which permanently valuable creed statements may be expected is well brought before us in Dr. Schaff’s most happy description. “The fundamental nature of these doctrines,” says Dr. Schaff, referring to the Trinity and the Person of Christ, “the greatness of the Church Fathers who were occupied with them, and the importance of the result give this period the first place after the apostolic in the history of theology. In no period, except the Reformation of the sixteenth century, have there been so momentous and earnest controversies in doctrine and so lively an interest in them. The Church was now in possession of the ancient philosophy and learning of the Roman Empire, and applied them to the unfolding and vindication of the Christian truth. In the lead of these controversies

stood Church teachers of imposing talents and energetic piety, not mere book men, but venerable theological characters, men all of a piece, as great in acting and suffering as in thinking. The theological controversies absorbed the intellectual activity of that time, and shook the foundations of the Church and the empire. With the purest zeal for truth were mingled much of the odium and *rabies theologorum*, and the whole host of theological passions; which are the deepest and most bitter of passions, because religion is concerned with eternal interests. The leading personages in these controversies were of course bishops and priests. By their side fought the monks as a standing army, with fanatical zeal for the victory of orthodoxy, or not seldom in behalf even of heresy. Emperors and civil officers also mixed in the business of theology, but for the most part to the prejudice of its free internal development; for they imparted to old theological questions a political character, and entangled them with the cabals of court and the secular interests of the day. In Constantinople, during the Arian controversy, all classes, even mechanics, bankers, frippers, market women, and runaway slaves took lively part in the questions of Homousion and subordination, of the begotten and the unbegotten." ("Schaff's Church History," pp. 600, 601.)

I offer no apology for this long quotation from Dr. Schaff's History, for it brings vividly before us the character of an age from which might have been expected, and from which actually issued, two great and permanent creed statements. These controversies and discussions, these violent ebullitions of feeling, and this pervading and absorbing interest are traits of an age of strong belief, and indicate the character of the struggles, which must precede the abiding and articulate utterances of the Church on the high mysteries of the faith. And this is exactly Dr. Schaff's interpretation of them. "The history of the Nicene age," he says, "shows clearly that the Church of God carries the heavenly treasure in earthly vessels. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was likewise an incessant war, in which impure personal and political motives of every kind had play; and even the best men often violated the apostolic injunction to speak the truth in love. But we must not forget that the passionate and intolerant dogmatism of that time was based upon deep moral earnestness and strong faith, and so far stands vastly above the tolerance of indifferentism, which lightly plays with the truth or not rarely strikes out in most vehement intolerance against the faith." ("Church History," Vol. III., p. 602.) In these admirable descriptive passages Dr. Schaff has brought out the striking and pertinent fact that the periods which gave to us the Nicene Creed

and the Westminster Confession were both of them distinctly periods of faith ; and of conflict, within the Church, for its formulation. In this respect, they stand in striking contrast to other periods of the Church. Moreover, the fruit in each case is like the tree from which it sprang. We do not, and we have no right to, expect that a period, like that which culminated with the composition of the Westminster Confession, will yield Apologetic products like the Analogy of Butler, and Clark's Evidences, and Waterland's Vindication. Nor have we a right to expect that, when the Church is engaged in conflict with doubt and unbelief, it will yield on demand, as though it were a product to be brought to maturity without a long preparatory process, a valuable creed statement ; and this, whether a new statement or an amendment of the old. Certainly, this is one of the legitimate generalizations of Church history.

Now, what is the character of the religious thought of the present age, as indicated by its characteristic literary products on religious subjects? Undoubtedly there is much to encourage faith in the outlook. Never before in the history of the world has the Christian ethics been so influential in the organization of society ; and never before has the Church been so active in missionary and philanthropic labors. Besides, as compared with doubt and unbelief during the age of the earliest apologies, or as compared with unbelief during the eighteenth century, the doubt and unbelief of to-day are marked by candor and reverence. I believe, moreover, that we have passed the period of greatest unbelief, and that the years lying immediately before us are likely to be years of more settled faith in the supernatural and of a more friendly attitude toward Christianity on the part of the world. But undoubtedly the greatest foe of the Church to-day is not heresy, but unbelief. And the distinctive labors, in which the Church must continue to engage for years to come, are apologetic rather than dogmatic.

That the Church's habit of mind is not affected by its main controversies, no one of course will believe. That it will bring its prevalent habit of mind to a work like that of creed revision, is almost self-evident. Individuals in the Church may suppose that they are proposing amendments to the Confession of Faith under the influence of a theological spirit like the powerful spirit that led to its composition. But a study of those which have been proposed will yield to any reflecting mind most striking evidence, that they have been formulated under the influence of the apologetic habit of mind now dominant in the Church. Than this habit of mind, I can conceive of none more likely to render a confessional statement valueless. It is almost inevitable that a series of amendments, formulated

during its ascendancy, will either derive from the present conflict a polemic character, or reflect the tendency of the Church to suppress explicit statements, which an age, given distinctly to theological exposition of the Word of God, would find necessary to the declaration of his whole counsel.

That a new creed statement may not be an advantage hereafter, I am unwilling to say. Light broke from the Word of God upon the Church of the Reformation, and made new creed statements a necessity. But it broke upon the Church, just as it did in the Nicene period, during an age of faith, when the Church, having accepted the Scriptures anew as the Rule of Faith, was engaged, not in their defence against unbelief, but almost exclusively in their profoundly believing exposition. And if, hereafter, light shall again break from the Word on the Church, and make possible a valuable creed revision, it is reasonable to believe that it will be during a similar period, and not in an age like ours.

Nor, in considering the presumption against undertaking at this time the alteration of the Confession, must the perils that are incident to the work be omitted. It has been shown, I think, that the general arguments against revision are so strong that they can be overthrown only by showing clearly, that most important benefits will accrue to the Church from specific changes in the standards, or that great evils will be escaped or cured by them. But the very method of cure proposed involves the menace at least of very serious evils.

There is the peril, for example, that one amendment will necessitate another ; that, revision being once begun, the inevitable demand for logical unity will require, not so much a revision, as a revolution of the doctrinal basis of the Church. This is not an imaginary peril. Professor Shedd—who has brought to the consideration of revision not only large theological and historical knowledge, and such a special knowledge of the document itself as an eminent dogmatic theologian must have obtained by severe and long-continued study of it, but also a fine sensitiveness to logical sequences and rhetorical unity—has called attention to this peril and to the source of it. "Revision is inexpedient," he says, "because there is no end to the process. It is like the letting out of water. The doctrine of the divine decrees is the particular one selected by the Presbytery, whose request has brought the subject before the General Assembly. But this doctrine runs entirely through the Westminster documents, so that if changes were made merely in chapter third of the Confession, this chapter would be wholly out of harmony with the remainder. Effectual calling, regeneration, perseverance of the saints,

are all linked with the divine decree. The most cursory perusal will show that a revision of the Confession on this one subject would amount to an entire recasting of the creed."

The peculiarity pointed out by Dr. Shedd—namely, that the doctrine of the Decree "runs entirely through the Westminster documents"—is the first feature of the Confession seized upon by those who criticise it. Thus Dr. Schaff, who appears in this number of the REVIEW as an advocate of revision, in his critical estimate of the Westminster System of Doctrine ("History of Creeds," Vol. I., p. 791), says that "the chief characteristics of Calvinistic scholasticism, as it prevailed in the seventeenth century, are that it starts from God's sovereignty and justice rather than from God's love and mercy, and that it makes the predestinarian scheme to control the historical and christological scheme. This brings us to the most assailable point in the Westminster Confession and Larger Catechism, the abstract doctrine of eternal decrees, which will always repel a large portion of Evangelical Christendom." Dr. Schaff undoubtedly places his finger on the feature of the Confession which awakens antagonism. And, with a frankness which does him honor, he states his own preferences. This feature is the Confession's architectonic principle. It is a system of doctrine, organized *sub specie eternitatis*. Starting with God, the entire history of the created universe is presented as the unfolding of the eternal purpose, the decree of the Trinity in Unity. Dr. Schaff has clearly stated the principle which governed its construction. And when he goes on to say, "We believe that the divine-human Person and work of Christ furnish the true key to the full understanding of the plan of salvation, and the solid platform for the ultimate agreement of all evangelical denominations," he does not leave us in doubt concerning the character of the revision he desires. I can make nothing out of his remark, unless he means, that every system of Christian doctrine and the creed which embodies it ought to be organized historically, *sub specie temporis*; and that the great defect of the Westminster Confession is to be found in the principle which is formally constitutive of its system of doctrine—namely, the decree of God. At this point it is not necessary to enter upon an argument as to what should be the organizing principle of a great creed. I will say only, that if the Westminster Divines were wrong in their selection, they at least followed the example of those who framed the Œcumenical Creeds of Christendom. Setting aside the Apostles' Creed, which is a liturgical and not a doctrinal document, the response of the regenerated heart, and not distinctively of the scientific intellect, all of them are like the Westminster Confession, in that they start with God and present

revealed truth *sub specie eternitatis*. Dr. Schaff, however, is exactly right in his characterization of the methodology of what he calls the Calvinistic theology of the seventeenth century. Indeed, the central place given in the Westminster Confession to the Decree is the more remarkable, in view of the Arminian controversy lately closed, which seemed likely to displace it, and in view also of the introduction of the historical conception of the Covenants, which had been put forward as a competing principle of construction. Though the Westminster Divines introduced the Covenant of Grace, it was still subordinate as an organizing principle to the Eternal purpose.

In view of all this, Dr. Shedd's statement that a revision which begins at the Westminster doctrine of the Decree must logically go forward until the entire creed is recast, is not extravagant. Those who are familiar with the history of New England theological thought know how thoroughly the Calvinism of that section of the country has been modified by the "improvements" of the Augustinian Anthropology. But the Anthropology of the Confession is not so dominating as its theology. Its doctrine of Original Sin is not so constitutive as its doctrine of the Decree.* To begin revision at this point is to begin, not a revision, but a revolution.

Allied to this danger is that of diminishing respect for the Confession itself. I am not speaking of respect for the unamended document, but of respect for the document as revised. And I am not prophesying disrespect, but speaking of the danger of it. On this point I do not wish to be misunderstood. If the revision is to be followed by great benefits, if great evils are to be cured, if impending disaster—arising from the failure to secure either wise ruling elders or an earnest, intelligent and devoted ministry—is to be averted by a revision that will improve its presentation of the system of doctrine it embodies; then we should undertake it, with all its perils. But meanwhile, at least until all this is made clear, it behooves us to look the dangers of revision fairly in the face. And

* There is a striking difference between the doctrine of Predestination as wrought out by Augustine, and the doctrine of the Decree as wrought out by Calvin. Augustine reached the doctrine of Predestination through the doctrine of Original Sin. Hence what I have said of the Confession of Faith—namely, "its doctrine of Original Sin is not so constitutive as its doctrine of the Decree," cannot be said of historical Augustinianism. But in Calvin's system, the doctrine of the Decree issued not from his doctrine of Original Sin, but from his doctrine of God. In Calvinism, therefore, the Decree is fundamental, and not, as in Augustine's system, a corollary. To revise here is to begin a revolution. Let me add, that I think it susceptible of historical proof, that this difference between Augustinianism and Calvinism is an important element in the explanation of the fact, that Calvinism rather than Augustinianism inspired, began, continued, and still continues the one large successful movement, narrated in history, in behalf of civil liberty and self government.

that this is one of them, no one who has studied the history of the revision of creeds, particularly in the Eastern Church, will for one moment doubt. I do not, of course, believe that a Church like ours will fall into the theological and missionary indolence of the Eastern Church after the Monophysite and Monothelite controversies. But that passage of Church history may well teach us to pause, before entering upon a movement like that, which once ended only with the exhaustion of the evangelical and theological energies of a great Church ; and which left the later development of theological science and the evangelization of Europe to be undertaken by her Latin sister.

Let it be supposed, however, that these are imaginary perils ; that there is no danger of a theological revolution, and no danger of losing our interest in the high mysteries of Christian doctrine. There is an alternative peril, which lies on the surface of the movement—so far as it is a movement for the revision of the words of the Confession—I mean a peril to the liberty which we now enjoy. Let the attention of the Church be fixed upon the very words of the Confession ; let it be understood that while the system of doctrine is to remain, it is to be relieved of this mode of statement, and of that unhappy expression ; that while the chapters are to be retained, there are clauses and sentences to be amended or stricken out or inserted—is there not great danger, that we shall change our attitude toward the Confession itself ; that, instead of standing in the “ free and safe relation ” which we now sustain, we shall move back toward that “ house of bondage ”—an *ipsissima verba* subscription—from which our Scotch brethren are crying for deliverance ? Let me say, that this was the peril which first made me fearful of the movement ; and it still seems to me the most obvious, if not the most real danger. Nor are my fears allayed by the fact, that several of the proposed amendments—those, indeed, which have been pressed with the greatest urgency—are of a kind to contract the limits of our present liberty of opinion. I need no assurance, of course, that the present undertaking for revision originated in no such desire ; or that those, who are promoting it with so much energy and ability, are just as anxious as myself to preserve our present liberty. But who is to assure me that this diminishing of liberty is not finally to be the result of this verbal revision ? And who cannot see that, should a party hereafter arise in the Church determined to impose a stricter formula or to demand a harsher interpretation of the formula now in use, such a party would, in case of their adoption, appeal to the verbal revisions now proposed as wholly in their interest ? Though both space and time are wanting for its adequate statement,

I do most earnestly ask of my brethren a serious consideration of this danger. For if it is real at all, it is a danger that threatens a schism in the future by moving us from the free and safe basis of our most happy reunion.

These are some of the general considerations against revision. Doubtless there are others which the theologian who was expected to write on this subject would have urged on our Presbyters. But these which I have mentioned constitute, to say the least for them, a strong presumption against the wisdom of the undertaking. Of course, a strong presumption is not a conclusive case. As I have already said, though not easily destroyed, it may be destroyed by the proposal of amendments, which will obviously confer great benefits on the Church or relieve us from serious and oppressive evils. But amendments less valuable ought not to be permitted to destroy it. No amendments have up to this time been proposed by the Presbyteries; nor can any one predict whether, in the view of any of them, except the Presbytery of Nassau, there is an amendment or series of amendments sufficiently valuable to justify its proposal, in spite of this strong presumption against the revision of a document like the Westminster Confession. We have before us only the tentative proposals of individuals; and some of these have not been presented in confessional form.

It is, of course, impossible in a paper like this to examine tentative proposals in detail. This has already been done in the religious newspapers. The high character of their authors and the ability with which many of them have been supported, however, makes it necessary to notice some of them in this article, though the criticism of them must, of course, be brief.

The proposals for revision are of three classes: first, those originating in a desire for a less scholastic statement of truth than the present Confession; secondly, those originating in a desire for a closer ecclesiastical union among Protestants than at present is possible, if, in order to ecclesiastical union, all must adopt the system embodied in our standards; and, thirdly, those originating in a desire to commend the Confession, with its system of doctrine, to a larger number than at present believe it, by removing or amending specified phrases or sentences or sections. As might have been expected, the originating impulse in every case is an honorable and noble desire to promote the interests of the Kingdom, which is greater than either the Confession or the particular Church which has adopted it as its symbol. For the most part the discussions in the newspapers have been conducted in a spirit in harmony with the spirit that led to the proposals. Since the meeting of the General

Assembly, it has been shown that a theological question can be debated by theologians without the appearance of a single symptom of the *rabies theologorum*. Nor is this because the question of revision has excited only a languid interest, or an interest which, if not languid, is confined to but a few of our ministers. As all of us know, the interest in the subject is both profound and wide-spread. In my criticisms of these proposals, I shall endeavor to govern myself by the spirit, which, up to this time, has prevailed.

The first class of proposals can scarcely be called proposals. They have appeared in the form of expressions of dissatisfaction with the Confession, as unduly intellectual or scholastic in its organization. If I should say, without explanation, that the dissatisfaction itself is not intellectual but emotional, I might be misunderstood. Every man, however, feels precisely this kind of dissatisfaction with certain men and certain literary products. We call them cold, severe, harsh, repellent. When a Congregational minister, whose remark one of the advocates of this kind of revision quotes, said of the Confession of Faith, "there is no heart in it," he was doubtless endeavoring to describe the Confession, and to mark his own disapprobation of it, as too exclusively intellectual in its spirit. He might have gone further, and said of it, that so severely and exclusively scholastic is it, that the assent which it asks of ministers may be formally yielded without the stirring, and, indeed, without the presence of a single Christian emotion.

It is impossible to determine how extensive or how deep this kind of dissatisfaction is ; or how far it accounts for the general movement in behalf of revision. It will be readily understood, however, that such a feeling, so far as it prevails, would naturally co-operate with any movement for revision, however different its source. At all events, this source of dissatisfaction with the standards has found voice and is entitled to notice. Moreover, one who, like myself, has been occupied with the duties of the pastoral office during the greater part of his professional life, can easily understand the feeling. When one is called day after day to meet individual men and women, to console them in afflictions which are real and bitter, or to excite them to activity in labors of immediate and pressing necessity, or to encourage them to resist fleshly impulses and worldly temptations that press upon them with tremendous and obvious power—when one is a pastor, called to the "cure of individual souls," and is in the midst of his work, it is true, as every pastor knows, that the subtle distinctions of scholastic theology seem often as distantly related to his work as are the inflections of the Hebrew verb, and even to be obstacles to the movement of religion in the

human heart. The question, no doubt, often arises in the minds of many of our active and intelligent ministers, "Why cannot the Creed of the Church be suffused with the Christian emotion which throbs in the great hymns of the Christian ages?" If, as Dr. Charles Hodge does, we can appeal to the Hymnody of the Church in support of the Creed, why cannot the Creed of the Church take a form which will excite the emotions which the hymns both awaken and express? That both the loftiest and the severest doctrines of the Church lose nothing of their power to impress the soul by being embodied in language "heightened by emotion," is proved by the *Te Deum Laudamus* and the *Dies Iræ*. Indeed, there is in this respect a great difference between the several symbols of the Reformation period; as, for example, the obvious difference, in emotional character, between the Heidelberg Catechism and the Catechism of the Westminster Assembly. It is easy, and especially easy for an earnest pastor, to cultivate dissatisfaction with a creed so severely precise in definition and so severely logical in its movement as ours is, on the very ground that its exclusively intellectual or scholastic character is inimical to the growth and even the existence of Christian emotion.

Nor can we set aside dissatisfaction with the Creed as scholastic, as something scarcely requiring serious notice. However plausibly it might, a half century ago, have been accounted for on the ground of inadequate theological cultivation, we cannot do so now. For the influences, which are breeding this dissatisfaction with reflective theology, do not all issue from the Evangelical Revival. The Moravianism, which taught the Wesleys to exalt a religion of inner experiences, was the most influential religious teacher of Schleiermacher also. The divorce of theology and Christian emotion was the very end, which the late Matthew Arnold placed before himself, when he began the composition of his most popular, perhaps his most influential volume. And the "formal principle" of "the coming theology" of Germany, the theology of Ritschl, is "the banishment of all philosophical reflection from the sphere of religion." That the general attack on scholastic theology in the interest of "the religious feeling" must to-day be referred to a complex of causes, some of which have no bond of union with the rest except this specific object of attack, and many of which are inimical to what the Presbyterian Church must continue to hold as fundamental in Christianity or die, I need take no time to prove. For this reason, I do not stop to show—what is evident in itself, and what has been shown in thousands of individual instances, and by the whole history of Presbyterianism—that the scholasticism of the Confession is no more inimical

ical to the most profound and vivid Christian emotion, than are the exact definitions of the Constitution of the United States to the most fervid patriotism. But, this being so, the present crisis—when not only the system of doctrine in our Confession, but the whole science of systematic theology, as we understand that term, is put in peril by the exaltation of “the religious feeling”—is not an appropriate time to revise out of our Creed the precise definitions, the careful discriminations, and the logical spirit which characterize it.

That a large number of our ministers have been seriously considering a revision on the lines just indicated is not probable. It would be strange, indeed, if their training had not made it almost impossible for many of them to think favorably of it for a moment; so closely has their emotional experience been allied to, and so thoroughly has it been determined in its special character by their creed. But this is not true of the second class of proposals—those originating in a desire for a closer, and more visible union of Christians. Professor Briggs, though not in favor of revision, has given eloquent and exact expression to a prevalent feeling, when he says of himself: “I hold before me the ideal unity of Christ’s Church. I think the present divisions in Christ’s heritage are sinful, and that the separation of Christians into different denominations, because of differences of opinion on unessential matters, is greater heresy than the errors in doctrine that have produced the separation. True progress for Christ’s Church in every denomination is in the path of Catholicity, removing one after another the barriers that separate Arminians from Calvinists, Episcopalians from Congregationalists and Presbyterians, Lutheran from Reformed, until at last they may be united in one Holy and Catholic Church organization.” A profound longing for greater intimacy, to say the least, with brethren in Christ, now separated from us by ecclesiastical barriers, is no new longing in the Presbyterian Church. Those who heard, in Philadelphia in 1867, Dr. Charles Hodge’s address to Bishop McIlvaine, as the head of a delegation sent to a Presbyterian Conference from a Conference of Episcopalian ministers, might well have asked the question, whether one of the great theologians of our Church would not, at that moment, have been willing to relegate what is distinctly Calvinistic to the realm of “pious opinion,” if thereby he could have secured the visible unity of Christians in the conquest of the world for Christ. The noble passage which concludes Dr. Henry B. Smith’s discussion of Christian Union, in his sermon as Moderator of the General Assembly, is conceived in exactly the spirit of Dr. Hodge’s address. Nor is this strong desire for Church union simply a product of the Evangelical Revival. Nearly two centuries before

the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield, Calvin wrote to Cranmer expressing his willingness "to pass over ten seas" to "bring the separated Churches into one."

Christian thought, especially in America, has busied itself with the problem of Church co-operation and alliance ever since the beginning of the century. That the plans for a visible unity have up to this time failed to secure the suffrages of the several Churches, is no proof of the absence or the weakness of the desire. The desire is probably stronger to-day than it has been at any previous time. Nor is it going too far to assert that in no denomination is it stronger than in our own; or that there is none in which it has revealed itself more conspicuously in action. The cordial support which the Presbyterian Church has given to the great voluntary societies which followed the Evangelical movement, the friendship it has shown to the Evangelical Alliance, and the hospitality it has always extended to the ministry of other Churches in its pulpits, are proofs of this desire and evidences of its strength, on which it is not necessary to dwell.

Now it may be said, as it has been said, that something more is needed in order to give effect to this profound desire to heal the divisions of Christ's body. Besides the great Evangelical doctrines on which Protestantism is united, the Confession of Faith unfolds a distinctive and, in respect to other great denominations of the Church of God, a separating theology. Has not the time come, it may be asked, not, indeed, to remove this theology from the Confession, but to cease its imposition as a condition of ministerial standing in the Church? Why should not the relation of our clergymen to the Confession be so changed that an Evangelical Arminian, unobjectionable in other respects, will be regarded as *rectus in ecclesia*? What right have we to invite these brethren to occupy our pulpits and to preside at our communion-tables, as brethren beloved, and as able to instruct our congregations, when we refuse to make them our co-presbyters, on the ground of theological differences? If these differences should exclude them from our ministry, should they not exclude them also from our pulpits? If, in spite of them, we admit them to our pulpits, why do we refuse them seats in our Presbyteries?

An adequate discussion of the question thus raised would require far more space than has been allotted me for this article, and far more time than I have had for its preparation. But it is possible to say very briefly two or three things, which in such a discussion must be taken into account. And one of them is, that the most conspicuous instance now presented of visible Church-unity is that presented in the Roman Catholic Church. A vast organization, comprising

almost, if not more than, one half of Christendom, existing in almost every country, and uniting people of almost every race in allegiance to the one "Vicar of Christ," invites us all to return to the one fold, and to accept the loving guidance of the one divinely appointed Shepherd. Here is visible Church-unity. But, if the unity of the Roman Catholic Church offers to us any lessons touching the method to be pursued in securing the visible unity of Christendom, the adoption of a liberal creed, and the release of the teaching body in the Church from its sincere reception and the obligation to teach it, are not elements of the method it commends. What is the creed of the Roman Catholic Church? It is constituted of the Œcumenical creeds, the Decrees and Canons of the Council of Trent, and the two great dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Infallibility of the Pope. Whether the Syllabus of 1864 should be placed among its symbolical documents, as is done by Dr. Schaff, is a question which I will not now undertake to answer. But should Dr. Schaff be in error at this point, he is clearly right in designating the Roman Catholic Church as "the Church of the binding law;" and this, whether he has in mind the detailed character of its creed, or the character of its imposition on the *ecclesia docens*, or its system of discipline, or the military exactness and remorselessness by which its discipline is enforced. In the face of this obtrusive example of visible unity, and of the method by which it was secured and is maintained, it may well be questioned, whether a loosening of the bonds which unite us to our Creed will do anything to promote the unity intended to be thereby secured.

Moreover, the present value of a visible ecclesiastical unity is not so clearly taught by the history of the Christian Church, that we need to invite the perils involved in this kind of revision, in order to secure it. I say the *present* value. I believe, of course, in the ultimate visible unity of the Church of God—that there will be one fold as well as one flock. This should engage both our prayers and labors. Certainly, this is to be a feature of the ultimate society. But that the visible and organic unity of Christendom is contemplated in the Word of God not only as a reward and consequence, but also as an instrument of the world's conquest to Christ, is by no means clear to me. However that may be, the condition of the Church, during the period in which a large part of it was organized into one ecclesiastical whole, does not encourage us to believe that it is necessarily a benediction. I have never permitted myself to indulge in violent denunciations of the system by which, during the Middle Ages, the Christianity of Latin Europe was made to stand before the eyes of the world as a unity, and by which its whole

power as an organization could be concentrated at a single point. Undoubtedly, the mediæval system enabled Christianity advantageously to engage in great conflicts in the interest of reform and rapidly to bring the barbarous nations under its influence. But on the whole, and especially at the last, this system, and especially its most obvious feature, a visible unity, was the source of evils which became unbearable, and a large part of Europe rose in revolt. We praise this revolt in the name by which we designate it—the Reformation of the Church. But the most striking feature of the Reformation, so far as its relations to visibility and unity are concerned, was the breaking away from the idea of an external unity. How firmly it has fixed, in the minds of all of us, the distinction between the Visible and the Invisible Church! And how powerful has been its constraint upon us all, to dissever completely the two great conceptions of visible unity and spiritual union! Undoubtedly, the first ecclesiastical impulse of the Reformation was toward the formation of national Churches. But even these were the product, not so much of the Reformed impulse, as of the necessity of the Church, which needed the protection of the princes of Europe. And how soon the visible unity exemplified in the several national Churches proved a bottle too old to secure within it the new wine of the Reformation! If the history of the mediæval Church government teaches us not to place too high a value on Church-unity made visible in a single organization, the history of the national Churches of Protestant Europe teaches no different lesson. It is impossible, of course, to recite enough of their history to confirm this proposition, and it is not necessary. Nothing is plainer, I take it, than that the denominational system in America is the result, in the main, of the fact that this lesson had been learned. Of course, we in America see the evils of denominationalism with great clearness, for they are a part of our ecclesiastical life. And I am not prepared to deny that they are many, or that many are serious evils. But the evils are not so many or so serious as those of the only form of undenominational Church organization which historically we know anything about. And, therefore, I say that the time has by no means come, certainly the teachings of history by no means invite us, to set aside by revision the system of doctrine which organizes us as a visible denomination, in order to take a step toward the visible unity of the American Church.

The truth is, that the visible unity of the Church must be the consummation of a long process of history. It cannot be hastened by expedients. The present duty of these "sister Churches," as our Form of Government, I think, somewhere beautifully designates

them, is, while engaging in the work which has historically, that is providentially, been assigned to them, to cultivate also the spirit of love. My colleague, Dr. Skinner, has said this in striking language. "For the Presbyterian Church and ministry," says Dr. Skinner, "to sink their peculiarities of faith and surrender their profound convictions, would not be for the peace, unity, and advancement of the Church universal, but the very reverse. We ask nothing of the sort from our sister denominations. Such a general surrender would put in fearful jeopardy the fundamental truths in which we agree. We rejoice in all their struggles after the full truth of those things of which they have caught glimpses of a fuller vision. In this holy and earnest pursuit of sacred verities, over and above the common and precious faith to which we have all attained, we shall gradually come nearer and nearer to each other; but it will take time. We are all urging our way slowly, steadily, into the mystical temple of absolute truth; and we will not rest till, through the rent veil, we enter the Holy of Holies, and worship together before the Shekinah of everlasting truth and everlasting love."

The two methods of revision of which I have been speaking have made a more favorable impression on my own mind than the method which I must finally consider. The formula of subscription in our Confession of Faith does not either compel or invite our judicatories to study the Confession with what Pope calls the "microscopic eye." And whenever our judicatories have engaged in this work, particularly when they have done so as judicial in distinction from legislative bodies, separations and bitterness have followed. The "system of doctrine," as distinguished from the *ipsissima verba* of the Confession, is the law and the testimony under the Bible to which the Presbyter, whether as plaintiff or defendant, appeals. So much is suspended upon our judicatories holding this truth clearly and persistently before them, that one may be excused for regretting deeply a movement, which distinctly turns their attention away from the system of doctrine, and, if successful, will fasten it for years to come on the words; and this for the purpose of magnifying their relative importance. For the object of the movement is not to change the words in order to change the system of doctrine, but to change the words in order to make the system more explicit, in order to bring it to more nearly exact or precise expression. Such a movement is well calculated (I do not say, for I do not believe, designed) to raise in our Presbyteries and Synods an army of legislative precisianists in respect to the Confession and its interpretation. And in a Church, in which the legislative and judicial functions are

entrusted to exactly the same persons, and in which these separate functions are fulfilled in exactly the same corporate bodies, and in exactly the same meetings, the transformation of legislative into judicial precisianists is only too easy a transformation. For this reason, if these proposed amendments were in themselves most desirable amendments, if they commended themselves to the minds of our most able and learned Dogmaticians as great improvements of the work of the Westminster Divines, I should still regard the movement with real and grave apprehension. I do not need to say that, in deprecating legislative action based upon the erroneous supposition that the very words of the Confession are the bond which unites us as a denomination, I mean to deprecate the closest discussion of the Confession elsewhere. On the contrary, I believe that it will be studied far more genially, if not far more earnestly, by our theological students and by our ministers if we are loyal to our present mode of subscription as interpreted by the history of the Church.

The proper limits of a paper like this prevent even a catalogue of the different verbal amendments proposed tentatively by ministers of our Church ; and a selection of some of them for criticism in this REVIEW might be regarded by the authors of the others as unbrotherly discrimination. I prefer, for this reason, not to take up the proposed revisions, but to employ the little space remaining to me in order to say something in defence of the two statements of the Confession which, so far as I know, have been most often referred to as needing amendment. One of these is the third section of the third chapter, and the other is the third section of the tenth chapter.

The first of the two statements is in these words : “ By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.” Of this statement, it has been said by those who propose its revision, first, that it has “ a supralapsarian bias,” and, secondly, that the only method of making it express the historical Calvinism, the Calvinism for which our Church stands, is to amend it by inserting the words “ for their sins” after the word “ foreordained.” In opposition to these propositions, I contend that it is obvious, first, that there is nothing in the statement which commits those who accept it to the supralapsarian view of the decree ; secondly, that the amendment proposed confuses the sovereign and eternal or timeless decree—which is consummated within the divine mind, and which of itself effects nothing in the history of the world, and the causes of which God derives from and has hidden within Himself—with the judicial act in the succession of time, and in the

sphere of second and voluntary causes, by which, for a reason external to Himself and explicitly stated ("for their sins") He "ordains" certain men "to dishonor and wrath;" * thirdly, that in order to make the statement an explicit statement of sublapsarianism, the amendment proposed should have been substantially the insertion of words like "being sinful" after the word "others;" fourthly, that the amendment approaches and must compel finally the Arminian view, that the cause of a sovereign decree is outside of God; fifthly, that its adoption, even should it be interpreted in the sublapsarian sense, would narrow the Confessional basis, by excluding the supralapsarian Calvinist; and, sixthly, that it needs no

* Those who propose to insert in this section the phrase "for their sins" have hidden from themselves the fact that the section is a statement concerning the decree of God in eternity, and not a statement concerning His activity in time. Of course, the sins of men, committed in time, are the cause of their condemnation in time; but they could not have been the cause of their foreordination, in eternity past, to everlasting death, for their sinfulness was then *non ens*. What the proposers intend to say is, that God's *eternal foresight* of their sins is the cause of God's eternal foreordination of them to death. But this cannot be the cause of His foreordination of *them* to death, for the reason that He had the same foresight of the sins of the elect. The question arises at once, Why did the alleged cause fail to produce a like effect in the case of the elect? Unless we can reply, with the Arminian, "Because in the case of the elect God fore-saw also the exercise of saving faith," we can escape the difficulty only by saying, "After all, the decree is a sovereign act of which the causes are in God and are unknown." And this is the safe agnostic position of the Confession and of all historical Calvinism. This is the position of Calvin himself. "*Id est quod principio dicebam, redeundum tandem semper esse ad solum divinæ voluntatis arbitrium, cujus causa sit in ipso abscondita.*" [Inst. Lib., III., Cap. XXIII., Sect. 4.] Had the revisionists only made the proposal of a phrase clearly relating to the sphere of the divine activity of which the section treats, had they proposed the insertion of the phrase "because of God's foresight of their sins," instead of the phrase "for their sins," the Arminianism of their amendment, now somewhat latent, would have been patent.

They would have been more successful in preserving the Calvinism of the clause, while amending it, if they had proposed to insert the words "to be, for their sins condemned," instead of the words "for their sins;" so that the clause would read, "and others foreordained to be for their sins condemned to everlasting death." With such a revision, the section would declare the sins of the non-elect to be the cause or reason of their *condemnation*, which all Calvinists believe, and not the cause of the *foreordination* to condemnation, which no Calvinist believes, although, temporarily, he may suppose he does.

Indeed, had it been proposed to insert the words, "for their sins," at the close of the section, instead of immediately after the word "foreordained," the proposal would not have been so objectionable as it now is. The clause would then read, "foreordained to everlasting death for their sins;" and it might have been said, in favor of it, that it contemplates the sins of the non-elect as the cause of their "*everlasting death*," and not as the cause of God's *foreordination*. But the arguments by which the proposal has been defended are of an entirely different character. All of these arguments assume that the human mind, instructed by Revelation, is able to discern and to state the cause or reason of God's foreordination of a particular event in time. This assumption is the contradictory of the fundamental doctrine of the Confession.

revision in order to make it an exact statement, so far forth, of the historical Calvinism.

These are the propositions which, if more space were at my disposal, I should endeavor to confirm. Most of them, however, seem to me so obviously true as to render their formal confirmation needless. One thing only I will say ; that the Calvinistic theology, if it makes any distinctions at all, draws a broad and deep line between that sovereign and timeless act of God, completed within the divine Being, and called the Decree ; and the judicial, temporal acts of God, which are terminated outside of Himself. If the distinction is improper, a mere baseless refinement of schoolmen, then Calvinism is utterly wrong ; and we should change our entire system of doctrine. There the distinction between the two acts, the decree and the condemnation, the foreordination and the ordination, is. All Calvinistic theologians recognize the distinction. The one is eternal, the other is temporal ; the one is sovereign, the other is judicial ; the one is complete in God, the other is complete only in history ; the reasons for the one God has hidden within Himself, the reasons for the other are known or may be ascertained. Arminians and Calvinists alike believe that men "are ordained to dishonor and wrath for their sins." But when they are asked why, in the eternal decree, are some foreordained to everlasting death, their answers are wide apart. The Arminian replies : "I know why ; because of the foresight of their sins." The Calvinist replies : "I do not know. The causes of the decree are hidden in God. I know only that He is infinite in wisdom, in goodness and in justice." This safe agnostic position, the position that it is impossible to apply temporal reasons, any reasons, indeed, outside of the nature of God, to an eternal decree, is the position of historical Calvinism.* It was never more

* I call this a "safe agnostic position." Agnosticism is the only safe position, when the cause of the eternal decree is the subject under consideration. The Arminian supposes that another safe position can be taken concerning the decree in respect to the universe of *voluntary activity*. But even the Arminian may well occupy this agnostic position when considering the eternal decree concerning beings which, though not voluntary, are still sensitive or capable of enjoyment and suffering. I will cite a case. Here is a horse, which at birth is owned by an imbruted and devilish man. Kicked, beaten, underfed, and overloaded all his life, the horse at last dies. The horse, being unmoral, cannot be said to have merited a treatment so horribly opposed to the treatment implied in his structure. And the ill-treated horse has no compensation in another life. The only escape from the statement, that God eternally decreed this treatment for the horse, is by the unthinkable hypothesis called *scientia media*. What are we to say of such a decree ? Several answers have been given. Bolingbroke would explain it by the assertion that the Decreeing God, like the horse, is without moral attributes. Leibnitz would account for it by the assertion that the best possible universe is a universe in which there are careers like the career of this horse. Calvinism neither denies

carefully stated than it is in this third chapter of the Confession. To alter it in the way proposed will be to move from this position, and to go where we shall be compelled to assign reasons for something of which we know absolutely nothing, except that since the attributes of God qualify all His acts, whether or not they were completed in Himself in eternity, the decree must be infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. From this safe position in respect to the decree of God, I earnestly hope our Church will not suffer itself to be moved.

The other statement of the Confession, in behalf of which I wish to say a word, is the statement : " Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth."

In the first place, as Dr. Warfield has shown, the position which it occupies in the Confession, under Effectual Calling, proves conclusively that it is simply a statement of the method by which a class of the elect, incapable of being called externally, are in fact called by God ; and that to make it, by revision, a statement of fact instead of a statement of method, would be to put such a statement in the wrong place, even if it should have a place in the system. In the second place, to change the word " elect" into the word " all" would be to narrow the Confessional basis, by leaving room but for one opinion, instead of the four opinions which it now permits. In the third place, the statement " all infants dying in infancy are saved," though the most of us—perhaps all of us—believe it to be true, is one of many statements, held just as strongly, which should remain individual beliefs instead of being imposed as dogmas of the faith. In the fourth place, such a change of the statement as would remove all mention of infants, in order to stop the baseless charge that it teaches that some infants dying in infancy are lost, would be the most unwise action possible. For, first, it would not stop clamor at all, because those who now arraign us for this statement can easily find statements equally severe if turned away from this ; and, secondly, a change of this declaration, in obedience to misrepresentation, would at once raise the cry, " We were right, and have compelled the deletion of the obnoxious sentence." Indeed, this

God's absolute moral perfection with the Deist Bolingbroke, nor takes refuge in the Optimism of Leibnitz, nor denies the difficulty which the case presents. But, first, it confesses both the fact and the difficulty—" *decretum quidem horribile, fateor*" [Calvin, Inst. Lib., III., Cap. XXIII.] ; secondly, it asserts the perfection of God's moral character ; and, thirdly, it confesses the absolute ignorance of man in respect to the reasons for it. From this safe agnostic position, the theology of the Reformed Churches has never been moved by the speculations or the sensibilities of men. To move from it is to sail, from a safe, though shut-in shelter, out to the pathless sea of mere fancy.

particular revision in the circumstances would, in the end, be found to be like nothing else so much as like the payment of hush-money in order to put a period to a scheme of blackmail. In the fifth place, the statement in its present form, interpreted in the light of the History of Doctrine, is one of the noblest statements to be found in the Confession. The Roman Catholic Church conditioned the salvation of infants on the completion of a specific sacramental act, to be done by a fallible man, and thus made their salvation dependent on contingencies over which man's control is imperfect. The Lutheran Church was unable wholly to free itself from this pernicious belief. But our fathers boldly asserted that the salvation of infants dying in infancy is absolutely independent of all human acts. No lack of baptism can prevent it, and no lack of the disposition to baptize can prevent it. The salvation of infants is dependent solely on the activity of the Holy Spirit, who is not limited in His gracious activity by any human instrumentalities; but "who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth." If only we knew it, there is no other statement in the Confession of Faith which so strikingly announces the great victory of our fathers over the sacramentarianism and priestcraft of the mediæval Church, as does this very statement which it is now proposed to revise out of the Confession. In this view of it the proposal is very much as if a citizen of Massachusetts should propose to remove Plymouth Rock from its place on the New England shore.

One other subject calls for remark. I shall not, however, use my own words in criticising the proposal to amend the Confession so that it shall assert, more explicitly than it now does, the love of God to all men, the universal sufficiency and adaptation of the atonement, and the universal invitation; as though it were defective at these points. The defence of the Confession in respect to this subject made by others has been complete and admirable; so admirable that I shall do the readers of the REVIEW a favor, and shall give value to my paper, by placing before them quotations from some of the defenders.

Says Dr. R. M. Patterson, most pertinently and clearly :

"We open the Confession at the beginning. The first chapter treats 'Of the Holy Scripture.' The second is 'Of God and of the Holy Trinity.' And there at the very outset, in the first section, portraying God, we meet with this statement, which has a fullness of sweep that human language can scarcely excel, that God is '*most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin,*' and in that 'perfection,' as well as in His other perfections and His being, He '*is infinite.*'"

Professor Warfield discusses the subject at length in the *Herald and Presbyterian* of September 4th. I wish that I had space to repro-

duce here his entire discussion. I must content myself with the following extract :

“ It can hardly be said that the Confession nowhere teaches that ‘ the eternal decree of God hinders no one from accepting the Gospel,’ when everywhere the Confession teaches that God is not the author of sin (would it not be a sin to refuse the Gospel ?), and that by the decree no ‘ violence is offered to the will of the creature ’ (III. 1), nor is his liberty taken away (III. 1), and when it teaches that God freely proclaims the Gospel to all, as we shall immediately see. For to affirm that the Confession does not teach that the offer to all men is free, and that their acceptance of it would be saving, is to forget some of its most emphatic passages. The Confession indicates the duty of translating the Bible ‘ into the vulgar language of every nation,’ on the ground that thereby, ‘ the Word of God dwelling in all plentifully, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope ’ (I. 8). Here is clearly asserted the duty of the free proclamation, and the value of the truth as proclaimed to all—that all may through it be brought to ‘ hope.’ Again (VII. 6) it is declared that the ordinances of the New Covenant differ from those of the Old, in that the Gospel is held forth in them ‘ in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy to all nations ’—certainly a broad enough basis for any preaching. But the Confession goes further than this, declaring with the greatest explicitness (VII. 3) that the Lord has ‘ *freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved.*’ ”

Professor Shedd replies to the revisers in the following language :

“ It is said that it is not sufficiently broad and liberal in announcing the boundless compassion of God toward all men indiscriminately, and in inviting all men without exception to cast themselves upon it. But read and ponder the following statements :

“ ‘ Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached in season and out of season by every minister of the Gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ. It is every man’s duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, particularly. Every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof, upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy. Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men. Prayer is to be made for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter, but not for the dead. God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth, and in secret each one by himself. God in His Word, by a positive moral Commandment, binds all men in all ages. The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that He freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation in Him. The ministry of the Gospel testifies that whosoever believes in Christ shall be saved, and excludes none that will come unto Him. God is able to search the heart, hear the requests, pardon the sins, and fulfil the desires of all.’ ”

“ These declarations, scattered broadcast through the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, teach the universality of the Gospel, except no human creature from the offer of it, and exclude no human creature from its benefits. Their consistency with the doctrine of election is assumed, but not explained in the Confession of Faith. And no revision of this, by the mere interpolation of a few words or clauses, will make the subject any clearer, or stop all objections.”

It is not necessary to criticise other proposals. But even if the proposed amendments were far better than they are, if they were wisely framed, and if they really improved the Confession, the questions would still be pertinent : Will they remove great evils? Will they

secure great benefits? Are they sufficiently valuable to overbear the strong presumption against the amendment of this most beneficent document, which, ancient as it is, is still instinct with a vitality so commanding? These, after all, are the important and determining questions. Deeply impressed by the considerations, which I have inadequately set forth in this paper, I expect to cast my vote in behalf of the Confession as it is.

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