

Vol. 70

May 23, 1900

No. 21

THE PRESBYTERIAN

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PHILADELPHIA
NEW YORK

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Creed Samples.

Various specimens of a new creed for our Church are being put on the market. One is the "Articles of Faith" of the English Presbyterian Church, and the other is the "New Evangelical Catechism." These are given prominence and urgency by "The Interior:" but if nothing more definite and valuable than these are to be submitted to our Presbyteries for consideration they will fall flat and stale upon the Presbyterian public. They will not stand the test of careful criticism and will never carry enough votes to secure their adoption. They are at best compromises, and would put the Presbyterian Church at a disadvantage in view of her past deliverances on important fundamental questions, and because of their defective character in several particulars, as expressions of what she has heretofore maintained as her full and abiding faith. Neither ultra-conservatives nor ultra-liberals will be satisfied with such formulations, and they would prove strong enough to prevent their ratification.

But the new creed-movement has a far more faith-minimizing tendency. It means only a minimum of truth-affirmation. It calls for merely generalizing statements. The idea seems to be to give the ministers and people as little as possible to believe, so as to bring in all shades of opinion and build up our Church on broader lines. For instance, one Presbytery suggests the Lord's Prayer as a creed. Dr. Parkhurst regards the declaration, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," as sufficient. Another agitator suggests that our "one Confession be the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man." This is belittling the whole subject, but shows what absurd ideas in regard to it prevail among innovators upon old-fashioned Presbyterianism.

But our Church still has positive convictions. It represents something distinctive. It stands for witness-bearing. According to its genius it must have more in its creed than that which is common to all denominations. It has a peculiar life of its own, and must maintain a distinct development. It is the product of ages of belief, culture and service, and will go to pieces if it loses its distinctiveness of faith and order. Its chief right to live as a denominational organism is its creed and polity, which have made it a blessing and power in the world; nor is its mission ended as a distinct religious agency; it is still needed as an educating, dominating and saving agency. Mankind would be the poorer without it, and there could be nothing to take its place along lines where it has accomplished great things for the home, for the State and for the race.

The more the new creed is discussed, the more the difficulties in its way multiply. It means so many changes, and the harmonizing of so many conflicting views, that it seems neither wise nor politic to commit our Church to its preparation, especially when we are in the midst of agitation, and when so much work is to be done by our ministers and members at home and abroad.

High Ideals.

We hear much in art and in religion about high ideals. Every profession in life sets a mark of excellence, and bids all in its pursuit to strive to reach it. Every trade or vocation has a standard of superior accomplishment to stir the ambition and to excite to emulation. If this were not the case, there would be only mediocre performances. It is the desire to climb to the highest round in the ladder of fame, or to attain the largest possible success in an enterprise, that rouses the most heroic, the strongest, the worthiest and the finest elements of our natures. It is this that makes the eminent statesman, the renowned warrior, the skilled mechanic, the great manager, the successful merchant, the distinguished barrister, the noted orator, the famous writer, the celebrated preacher and the far-famed explorer.

But one may have so high an ideal as to be to him a discouragement, or a deterrent. He may think of a position so long, and view it so constantly in the light of particular persons who have pre-eminently filled it, as to feel utterly unable to enter upon it when called to it, or when providence urges him to assume its responsibilities.

This thought was brought vividly to a pastor's mind recently as the result of a congregational meeting for the election of additional elders. Three worthy men were elected by decisive votes of the congregation. One saw his way clear to accept the office, but the others declined, largely upon the ground that they had so long entertained such high ideals of what an elder should be, and felt so far below them, that it would be neither right nor proper for them to attempt to discharge the duties of so honorable and responsible an office. Their brethren who were equally good judges of their fitness for it, held a different opinion, but that counted for naught in their estimation. That high ideal completely over-shadowed all else, and blocked the way to an acceptance of what the people regarded as their duty.

This is no new experience in either individual or ecclesiastical relations. Men are constantly making their sense of their inability to come up to a certain standard of performance an excuse for declining office and work in the Master's cause. One has a lofty idea of public prayer, and because he cannot measure up to it, his voice is never heard in the prayer meeting. Another is wanted in the Sabbath-school as superintendent or teacher, but he stands aloof because he cannot superintend or teach as he thinks he ought to, or as some one else has done. Again, missionary work goes begging because this one and that one cannot officer the society, or do what is required, according to his conception of the situation. Thus it goes all through the circle of church life and activity. God's cause suffers and declines in this way, and many persons shirk responsibility, thinking it is theirs to take the humbler places and let others, whom they imagine to be better fitted for special service, come to the front. This might do if there were those on the ground better qualified than they and more disposed to meet emergencies, but usually the ideal men and women are not to be found,

May 23, 1900.

A Short Creed.

By Prof. William Brenton Greene, Jr., D.D.

Many—some say most—in the Presbyterian Church desire a short creed. They would not set aside our Confession of Faith, but they would have a brief, popular statement of evangelical doctrine for common use. They are not lacking in loyalty to our time-honored Standards. Indeed, it is largely because these are misunderstood and so decried that they would put, not in their room, but before them and thus between them and those who object to them, a simpler or more irenic, a more attractive formulary. This, they claim, would imply all that the Confession expresses and would not antagonize the carnal heart, as the latter is bound to do. This world would see in such a short creed little that was objectionable, while the Church would still find in it "the deep things of God."

With this considerable and influential class the writer confesses to much sympathy. He is sure that they mean well. He is confident of their soundness in the faith. He can readily conceive of circumstances in which their course would be the wise one. That the present juncture does not, and can not, render it such, he is, however, convinced.

1. The agitation for a short creed is certain to be misinterpreted. It is natural to men to attribute to others the motives by which they themselves are actuated. Those who believe in a protective tariff may not think it expedient to press it, but those who hold to free trade will ascribe their inaction to a change of political faith. Now the present is an age of agnosticism. In so far as it has a philosophy of its own, this is agnosticism. Our day would repudiate, or at least shorten creeds, because, in its view, the things to be believed are few, and the only thing that can be known is that there is nothing to be known. There could not, therefore, be a time more unfavorable for agitation for a short creed. Such agitation is bound to lead the world to suppose that the Church is becoming agnostic. She that should be "the pillar and ground of the truth" will be regarded as going over to the side of that prince of agnostics who cared so little for truth that he crucified his Lord, who is himself the truth.

2. A short popular creed would react unfavorably on the faith of the Church herself. It would not only be regarded by the enemy as the sign of a tendency toward agnosticism; it would develop such a tendency. Indeed, the desire within the Church for such a creed is really in the case of many the evidences of such a tendency. On the 247th page of the first volume of his "History of Christian Doctrine," Dr. Shedd writes as follows: "General statements of Christian doctrine satisfy two extremes of religious character. They are sufficient for a warm and glowing piety, which, because it already holds that truth in all its meaning and comprehensiveness within the depths of a believing spirit, can dispense with technical and scientific statements. They are satisfactory to a cold and lifeless religionism, which, because it rejects the essential truth in the depths of an unbelieving spirit, prefers an inexact phraseology, because of the facility with which it may be twisted and tortured to its own real preconceptions and prejudices. The absence of a scientific phraseology is characteristic, consequently, either of

the most devout, or the most rationalistic periods in Church History." Now, the present can scarcely be called one of the most devout periods of Church History. Critical rather than worshipful is our religious life. The objection, therefore, on the part even of many within the Church, that the Westminster Standards are too full and too scientific, is an unfavorable sign. It indicates that destructive criticism has been at work. We must remember that the Church no more than a man can go back to youth. When a man can assimilate only milk it means, not that he is young again, but that he is near his end. And this end the present agitation for mere reduction and destruction must in itself tend to hasten. Give up the implications of a doctrine, and the next step will be to give up the doctrine itself. Put preterition out of the Confession, and the next move will be to revise election out of it. Say nothing as to election, and it will not be long before the divine sovereignty will be repudiated. Nor could it be otherwise. We are essentially logical, and hence logic is bound to assert itself, at least in our thinking. Because we are men, we must follow out principles to their conclusions or reject the principles themselves. An Episcopalian has well said, in what is probably our ablest work on the Christian Evidences ("The Truth of Christianity," by Major W. H. Turton, p. 485), "A great truth, such as the Divinity of Christ, has many necessary deductions which are not apparent at first sight. But yet when once they are suggested and discussed, they must be accepted, or else the great truth itself will be virtually denied." Thus, a short creed would result in no creed. It would destroy the Church's faith as well as misrepresent her devotion to it.

3. Finally, and very briefly, such a creed would check and at length kill the Church's life and work. These, as all life and work, depend on nourishment. This nourishment is divine truth. As our Confession says, this is "in order to holiness;" and as the Bible declares (2 Tim. 3:16), "Every scripture is inspired of God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is righteousness; thus the man of God may be complete, furnished completely with every good work." Even such an assertion of preterition as 1 Peter 2:8 must, therefore, have a practical bearing. Now, truth affects us largely in proportion to the clearness with which it is stated and apprehended. The Holy Spirit applies it in accordance with the ordinary laws of the mind. He nourishes Christian character and activity with clear and full presentations, not with vague and meagre generalizations. In view of this, what can a brief indefinite creed mean but stunted Christian growth and crippled Christian effort?

And all this is confirmed by history. The heroes of the Church have been men of definite and full faith. Liberty, civil as well as religious, has been won by men who magnified and delighted to elaborate the very doctrines which now it is desired to slur over in our Confession. It was these doctrines which made them what they were and inspired them to do what they did. It would be very strange, therefore, if the Church were to enter on her campaign for the deliverance of the world from sin by ignoring and dishonoring these doctrines and by decrying definite statement of doctrines in general. It would be as absurd as if the athlete who had grown strong in

consequence of rigorous adherence to a precise diet, were to train for his greatest contest, on the principle that any kind of food would do, and that, anyhow, food was of little consequence.

Practical Atheism.

By Rev. Henry Collin Minton, D.D.

The psalmist speaks of the wicked man as the godless man; "God is not in all his thoughts." In our common speech, we make godlessness or ungodliness about equivalent to wickedness. The godless man is a reprobate; he is pre-eminently the irreligious man. He looks up at the stars and out into the spaces and down into the depths, but he sees no place for God. He looks from nature up—but he does not find "nature's God." Like the French government, in its statute prohibiting the use of the name of the Deity in its school-books, he has erased the sacred name from his speech, except for conveniences of profanity upon occasions of emergency. He knows well the Golden Rule, relating to his fellowmen, but those other words of the Great Teacher are jargon in his ears, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength."

There are two kinds of atheism. There is an atheism of the books and schools, and there is an atheism of the heart and life. The one affects to be scientific or philosophical, and is for the most part confined to the dry regions of speculative thought. Dr. Chalmers used to distinguish between what he called anti-theism and atheism. The first is a dogmatic denial of theism. It says, "I believe that there is not a God." The second is skeptical. It only says, "I do not believe that there is a God." The former is the bolder position. "Truly the fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Only a God is competent to affirm dogmatically that there is no God. One must have visited every corner of space and swept up every atom of world-dust and analyzed every grain and germ of potential being; one must himself be omnipresent and omniscient, else the traces of the Divine might, conceivably, elude one's gaze or escape one's grasp. Few men have ever been so foolish. Mr. John Fiske has happily said, "Atheism is bad metaphysics." Science is possible because God has brought his intelligible thought-like world into being. But there is also a skeptical atheism. Agnosticism is virtual atheism. The man who says at his highest reach, "I do not know;" who answers all other men, "You do not know;" and who gathers up his whole philosophy into the dictum "Nobody can know," is very little better off than is the man who has settled down into the negative position, once for all.

But there is an atheism of the heart. It does not deny God; it simply ignores him. "God is not in all its thoughts." Formal atheism thinks and reasons about God, but practical atheism entirely passes him by. It is always less cruel to be hated than to be forgotten. Even contempt remembers its object, but to have passed entirely out of mind is the unkindest cut of all.

There is a good deal of this kind of atheism in Christian countries to-day. Without professing atheism, men practice it. If they do not "untenant their creation of its God," they untenant their hearts of a God. Many a business man lays his plans and works hard to carry them

out; he takes into the account every contingency and forecasts every factor in his shrewd calculations; only "God is not in all his thoughts."

Professor Pfeleiderer, of Berlin, in responding to a toast one evening in Edinburgh, is said to have gotten a trifle tangled in his English, and, in referring to his first answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, quoted it as saying, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy himself forever." But if the practical atheism of which we speak about should gather up its policy into a creed it would run thus, "Man's chief end is to glorify himself and to enjoy himself forever."

The godless man looks not at the things which are unseen, but at the things which are seen, for the things which are seen are eternal, but the things which are not seen—are not. He lives and acts, and talks and works, and plans and eats, and sleeps, precisely as he would if there were no God. He is without God, however it may be about his hope in the world. "He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved; for I shall never be in adversity." He feeds upon the bounties of God's providence and luxuriates amid the riches of his kingdom as heedlessly and as ungratefully as the goat that picks its food from the rocky mountain-side or the dumb ox that grazes in the sweet clover of the meadow. Was it the French philosopher who observed that he did not need the hypothesis of a God? Certainly, the self-sufficient, self-complacent, self-satisfied soul of man can take up the remark. This is the atheism that dwarfs and atrophies all that is good and god-like in man. It is not the atheism of the creed, but of the conduct; it is not the atheism of the head, but of the heart. It has no God to worship, to obey, or to love.

That is a striking passage in Coleridge's "Sybilline Leaves," in which he pictures the sombre folly of the atheism of human thought:

"The owlet Atheism,
Sailing on obscene wings athwart the noon,
Drops his blue-fringed lids, and holds them close,
And hooting at the glorious sun in heaven,
Cries out, "Where is it?"

But darker and more dreadful still is the creedless atheism of a soul that has never said to itself nor to the world, "There is no God," and yet goes on day after day and year after year, as if "God" were but the name of an Infinite and Unfathomable Blank in the spheres of men's hope and life.

Serving God With What We Have.

By Rev. Gerard B. F. Hallock, D.D.

All great works for God are done by doing our best with what we have. Moses was keeping sheep in Midian. God told him to go and deliver Israel from bondage. He shrank from the undertaking. We do not wonder that he did; for he was without training in warfare and without any visible means for prosecuting the work. He had nothing but his shepherd's rod, cut out of a thicket, the mere crab-stick with which he guided his sheep. Any day he might throw it away and get a better one. But God said to him: "What is that in thine hand?" And he said, "A rod." God then told him that with that rod, that mere stick, he should save Israel. "And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs." And so it proved. A