

THE Presbyterian Quarterly.

NO. 54--OCTOBER, 1900.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF PREACHING THE ETHICS OF CHRISTIANITY.

Shortly after the writer of this paper entered on his first pastorate, he preached a sermon from the third chapter of the Epistle of James on "Sins of the Tongue." At the close of the service a visiting minister came forward, introduced himself, expressed his interest in what he had heard, and also remarked that ethical sermons were both quite unusual and would be very useful in Presbyterian churches. This remark impressed him at the time, and during the nineteen years that have passed since then it has often recurred to him. In either one of its assertions it would seem to be true and important.

I. Directly ethical teaching does appear to be uncommon in our pulpits. In some quarters there is even a prejudice against it. There are places where, were a minister to expound duty at considerable length, it would be broadly hinted that his views of righteousness were becoming legal.

Where this prejudice against ethical teaching does not exist, the latter is still widely neglected. One of the worst features of the present state of religion among us is the frequent failure to receive the Bible as the infallible rule of practice as truly as of faith. Many who regard it absolutely authoritative in the latter sphere ignore it in the former. Not a few of those who are most earnest in their demand for Biblical theology seem unconscious that there

EDITORIAL.

THE FOOT-NOTE ON THE ELECT INFANTS CLAUSE.

While the Northern Presbyterian Church is considering the questions of revising the Confession of Faith or supplementing it with a shorter creed, the Southern Church has been discussing with some degree of animation even the addition of a foot-note to the same Confession. The last Southern Assembly answered an overture proposing an amendment of the Confessional statement as to elect infants, in the negative, adding in the resolution adopted that "the language of the Confession cannot by any fair interpretation be construed as teaching that any who die in infancy are lost."

This was seen to be such an exact and accurate expression of the truth of the matter that Dr. Lupton, of Virginia, offered a resolution, directing the Publication Committee to print this statement of the Assembly as a foot-note to the elect infants' clause in all future editions of the Confession. The resolution went to the docket and remained there for two days. There was a very general expression of satisfaction at this expedient as a convenient answer to the old slander as to the belief of the Presbyterian Church in the damnation of infants. There was a leisurely clearing of the docket on Saturday, the last day of the session, and the matter was taken up. Some spoke in favor of it, none opposed it and it was unanimously passed by the body.

It was proposed by some who objected to this action that the Publication Committee should delay obedience until the Presbyteries should be heard from or until the next Assembly should meet. But the Committee being the creature of the Assembly and of the last Assembly, not the next, has no option as to carrying out the mandate of the Assembly unless it is plainly unconstitutional. The Committee is not a judge of the expediency of the Assembly's action.

It has been very ably maintained that the foot-note is in

effect an amendment of the text, that therefore the Assembly had no right to take the action before submitting the addition to the Presbyteries to be voted on by them and enacted by a subsequent Assembly. This position involves some questions of Presbyterian history.

The Assembly of 1816 settled the status of the foot-notes to the edition of the Confession extant in that day. The first American edition of the Confession was printed without the proof-texts, A committee appointed by the Assembly brought out another edition, including the proof-texts and a few explanatory foot-notes, and the Assembly, not the Presbyteries, adopted this edition. Therefore the proof-texts are not a part of the Confession themselves. When the question arose as to the authority of the foot-notes added by this Assembly's Committee, the Assembly of 1816 answered thus:

"That the book referred to was first published with nothing but the simple text, without any Scripture proofs, or any notes of any description whatsoever. This is evidently not only from the minutes of the General Assembly, but from the numerous copies of this first edition of the Standards of our Church, which are now in existence. It is also equally evident from examining the records of the General Assembly, that not a single note in the book has been added to, or made a part of the Constitution of the Church since it was first formed and published in the manner above cited. Hence it follows beyond a doubt, that these notes are no part of the Constitution of our Church. If then it be inquired how these notes obtained the place they now occupy, and what is the character as to authority which they possess, the answer is this: When a second edition of the Standards of our church was needed, it was thought by the General Assembly that it would be of great use in itself, highly agreeable to the members of our church generally, as well as conformable to the example of the Church of Scotland, from which we derived our origin, if the Scripture proofs were added, in support of the several parts and clauses of the Confession of Faith, Catechism and Form of Government. A committee . . . accordingly appointed by the Assembly, reported along with these proofs the notes which now appear in the book, and which were approved by the General Assembly, and directed to be printed with the proofs in the form in which they now appear.

"On the whole, in the book containing the Standards of our Church, the text alone contains the Constitution of our Church; the notes are an exposition of principles given by the highest judicature of that church,

of the same force while they continue with the other acts of that judicature, but subject to alterations, amendments, or a total erasure as they shall judge proper."

This same Assembly in the exercise of its prerogative dropped two of the foot-notes from future editions, one saying that a Synod was a "larger Presbytery" and the other dilating on the sin of manstealing in the Larger Catechism questions on the Eighth Commandment.

The Assembly of 1831 appointed a committee to edit another edition of the Standards. This committee proceeded to eliminate the other foot-notes remaining, the Assembly having conferred upon them the power to prepare the edition for publication without further approval of the Assembly.

In the Assembly of 1836 an overture was presented to restore some of these foot-notes, especially the one with regard to manstealing, on account of its bearing on the slavery issue. A committee brought in the following report in answer to the overture:

As the notes * * * were introduced irregularly, never had the sanction of the Church, and, therefore, never possessed any real authority the General Assembly has no power to assign them a place in the authorized Standards of the Church, and does not deem it necessary to take the constitutional measures to effect their restoration."

Moore and Baird in their Digests report this as having been adopted by the Assembly. But the records show that the whole subject was indefinitely postponed by the Assembly and hence the minute quoted from the Assembly of 1816 is the last word of our Highest Court and is conclusive as to the right of an Assembly to add an explanatory clause to the Confession, which shall have not the force of the Constitution itself, from which it is separate, but which has the same force with the other acts of the Assembly.

Remains the question of expediency.

The argument against the insertion of the foot-note is of an opposite character. It is claimed that the Confession already teaches that all infants are saved and that it is the generally accepted belief of the Church that all infants dying in infancy are elect and that therefore elect infants

dying in infancy include all infants dying in infancy. It is pointed out with truth that the contrast intended here is not between elect and non-elect infants dying in infancy and elect infants growing to the age when they are no longer incapable of being called by the ministry of the word. That is the chapter that treats not of election or who are to be saved, but of effectual calling, or how the elect are to be saved.

Others contend that the foot-note is a breaking up of the harmony of the Confession, that it is silent on the question as to whether all infants dying in infancy are elect because the Bible is silent. This issue of the *QUARTERLY* contains an able presentation of this view from the pen of Rev. Eugene Daniel, D. D.

We believe that the Confession is silent on the question of the salvation of all infants who die in infancy. The history of the doctrine would indicate this. Strange to say, Augustine was one of the first who taught the damnation of infants, although he taught also that their sufferings were of the mildest character.

The Roman Catholic Church, accepting Augustine's view, assigned a separate place for unbaptised infants called the *Limbus-infantum*.

John Calvin pushed away all the cobwebs of tradition and boldly declared that it was not a question of the baptism or non-baptism of infants, and not even a question of whether they were the children of believing parents or not, but that the Holy Ghost did his work of regeneration in the infant heart. Some of Calvin's expressions on this subject are exceedingly clear, if we interpret others by them, in which he speaks of some infants being saved we can argue that he believed in the salvation of all. For example, in his controversy with Servetus he speaks thus, *Institutes*, book 4, chapter 16, paragraph 31: He adduces the declaration of Christ, that "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth in him;" (g) and concludes that infants who are incapable of believing remain in their condemnation. I answer, that in this passage Christ is not

speaking of the general guilt in which all the descendants of Adam are involved, but only threatening the despisers of the Gospel, who proudly and obstinately reject the grace which is offered them; and this has nothing to do with infants. I likewise oppose a contrary argument: all those whom Christ blesses are exempted from the curse of Adam and the wrath of God; and as it is known that infants were blessed by him, it follows that they are exempted from death.

Again in controverting the Romanish doctrine of baptismal regeneration he says, *Institutes*, book 4, chapter 16, paragraph 26: By this I would not be understood as implying that baptism may be despised with impunity; for, so far from attempting to excuse such contempt, I affirm it to be a violation of the covenant of the Lord: I only mean to evince that it is not so necessary, as that a person, who is deprived of the opportunity of embracing it, must immediately be considered as lost. But if we assent to their notion, we shall condemn all, without exception, whom any circumstances whatever prevents from being baptized, whatever faith they may otherwise have, even that faith by which Christ himself is enjoyed. Moreover, they sentence all infants to eternal death by denying them baptism, which, according to their own confession, is necessary to salvation. Let them see now how well they agree with the language of Christ, which adjudges the Kingdom of Heaven to little children. But though we should grant them every thing they contend for relative to the sense of this passage, still they will gain no advantage from it, unless they first overturn the doctrine which we have already established respecting the regeneration of infants.

Here is another passage which is not so clear as to the salvation of all, but we may argue from it that all are saved since all admit that some are saved. For if the plentitude of life consists in the perfect knowledge of God, when some of them, whom death removes from the present state in their earliest infancy, pass into eternal life, they are certainly admitted to the immediate contemplation of the

presence of God. As the Lord, therefore, will illuminate them with the full splendor of his countenance in heaven, why may he not also, if such be his pleasure, irradiate them with some faint rays of it in the present life ; especially if he does not deliver them from all ignorance before he liberates them from the prison of the body? Not that I would hastily affirm them to be indued with the same faith which we experience in ourselves, or at all to possess a similar knowledge of faith, which I would prefer leaving in suspense ; my design is only to check their foolish arrogance, who presumptuously and securely assert or deny whatever they please.

Zwingli has taught clearly that all elect children who die in infancy are saved, and that all who die in infancy are elect.—Schaff.

While Luther taught the baptism of infants as necessary to salvation, opinions were divided in the Westminster Assembly, though we believe that the great majority of them all accepted the doctrine that all infants dying in infancy were elect. Dr. Twisse, however, left this on record. He was the prolocutor of the Assembly but was in a beggarly minority as to his supralapsarian views. "Many infants depart this life in original sin, and consequently are condemned to eternal death on account of original sin alone. Therefore, from the sole transgression of Adam condemnation to eternal death has followed upon many infants."

The Synod of Dort had already made the distinction between the children of believing parents and others. "Since we are to judge of the will of God from his word (which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended), godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.

In view, therefore, of the controversy on this subject we think that the Westminster Confession was silent on the question as to whether all infants are saved. But, at the

same time, it was far from teaching that any were lost. This is the statement which our Assembly has made and ordered to be printed as a foot-note. We hope that the matter will remain where the Assembly has left it, because we are convinced that if much further discussion of the subject is entered into, and the hesitating views of some of the people are further expressed as to the salvation of all infants, there will be a loud demand for the revision of the Confession in this particular.

In the meantime the Northern Presbyterians through their Presbyteries are voting on the question of revision, and we hope to report the general opinion in the next QUARTERLY.