

A STUDY IN STANDARDS

MEANT TO BE A COMPANION-PIECE TO

"THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S MANUAL,"

A BOOKLET OF THE SAME ORDER, APPROVED
BY THE SYNOD OF NINETEEN HUNDRED
TWENTY-NINE, AT WINONA LAKE,
INDIANA

By

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"Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take
thy crown."
Revelation 3:11.

FOREWORD

This evening, May 4, 1937, at 7.45, I finished this little labor of love. Within its covers my soul resides, and will continue to reside long after this fragile, fleshly tenement of clay shall have turned to dust. More than half a century ago, in a village of Pennsylvania, known then as Centreville, I accepted the standards of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and avowed my allegiance to them, because I believed them to be true. I believe them yet. I have tried to say as much in this "brief candle" which I cherish more than anything else I have ever done. In my heart I feel assured that everyone that loves the Church will like the book.

It is not always easy to march breast-forward. One night when I was considerably depressed in spirit, wondering where the modernistic drift would land us all, my hand accidentally, and providentially, overturned an old scrap of paper on which the following lines had been all but illegibly inscribed. They helped me then, and I like them still.

"All which is REAL now—remaineth,
And fadeth never;
The hand which upholds it now, sustaineth
The soul for ever.
Know well, my soul, God's hand controls
Whate'er thou fearest;
Round Him in calmest music rolls
Whate'er thou hearest.
What to thee is shadow, to Him is day,
And the end He knoweth,
And not on a blind and aimless way
The spirit goeth."

A STUDY IN STANDARDS

It was once my privilege—and not so many years ago, after all—to share the blessings of a Communion Occasion with Charles Clyde, who was then the pastor of our congregation in Lochiel, Ontario. On the table of his study lay two little volumes. One was the Iliad, the other was the Odyssey. During the preceding winter, as he was led on to say, he had translated thirteen books of each of these two masterpieces in the art of human expression, and had committed the same to writing in the best English he was able to command. As for aids, he had but two—his grammar and his lexicon. Almost shamefacedly he talked about it, and tossed the whole affair aside with a wave of the hand, as if it were a mere passing episode of no interest to anybody except himself, and of but little moment.

Now about the only pulpit work that Mr. Clyde did at that Communion was to explain the Terms. Yet the way he did it was amazing. Homer himself, had he been favored with Mr. Clyde's ecclesiastical backgrounds and sublime convictions, could hardly have surpassed him in the language that poured from his heart and lips on that sacred Saturday afternoon. Every sentence was a classic. I tried at first to capture some of his thoughts with pen and notebook, but every time I started to write a sentence down I missed a better one. So I gave it up, and just sat and listened, fairly spellbound to the end. Again and again I found myself saying, "The lines have fallen to us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage." All too soon he stopped, but his last sentence is with me yet, and will travel with me to the Judgment Seat. I felt transfigured. He paused a moment, closed the book, and said:

**"THESE ARE NOBLE PRINCIPLES, AND THEY
OUGHT TO BE ADORNED BY NOBLE LIVES."**

I

Unfortunately for us all, or at least inconveniently, and to our spiritual chagrin, we are living in an age when these

"noble principles," instead of being adorned by noble lives, are being attacked, and undermined, and eventually abandoned, not with mere indifference, but with virulence and rancor, and not by the world at large alone, where opposition is natural and is to be expected, but by many as well who have named the Name of Christ within the boundaries of the church itself. Apostasy is in the air. It is eating like the "worm that dieth not." In one quarter its prevalence has driven men of stalwart character, men of "noble lives," to create a new Denomination. Accordingly, I venture to hope that half an hour or so spent in the reconsideration of our venerable and historically established standards may serve to clear our minds with reference to some of the things at issue among us at the present time, and may prove to be of some value in helping us to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

II

To begin at the bottom, we may say that all that we hold dear in the way of past attainments, present purposes and ideals, and future ends and aims, has been summarily comprehended for our convenience, for many years, under six brief statements, familiarly known among us as "The Terms of our Ecclesiastical Communion." The title is accurate. It specifies that the document it designates is a series of "terms" or stipulations—not a Creed, not a Confession of Faith, but a group of definite and explicit requirements laid down by the Church as a Corporate Society, and without a professed adherence to which membership in the body, in any true sense of the word, is impossible.

Creeds, on the contrary, belong, as is evident, to an entirely different category. They are articles of belief. They may be, though for that matter it is not at all necessary that they should be, appropriately itemized under the phrase "I believe," or "We believe." If I, for my part, say that "I believe" this or that doctrine, and say it sincerely from the depth of my heart, I simply declare that I purpose to stand by that belief as long as I live, whether any person else in this wicked old world of ours accepts it or not. If we, as a Church, say that "we believe" the Bible and what it teaches and exemplifies, and say it honestly and intelligently, as a true expression of the regenerate life which the profession

presupposes, we in turn simply declare, as a Church, that we intend to stand by our belief unflinchingly to the end, whether anybody else on the footstool cares to do so or not. Creeds are our beliefs put into writing, our beliefs affirmed in such a way as to amount to a public declaration of what we hold to be true and are willing to have both our character and our conduct measured by.

"Terms of Communion," on the other hand, mark a distinct and positive step in advance. They **presuppose** that all the articles of belief have been considered, carefully stated, firmly buttressed, and **built**, upon an accurate interpretation of the Word of God, and have been instilled, in season and out of season, into the minds of the membership of the Church, by good and honest pastors, by an intelligent eldership, by loyal and zealous teachers in the Sabbath School, and by discreet and pious parents in the home. With this done, with this as our basis and background, our path is clear. "These," we say, "are the views which we hold to be Scriptural, and to be vital to salvation; as a Church, we have entered into covenant, in the 'great and dreadful name of the Lord our God,' to cherish and maintain and advocate the truth as set forth in these **articles of faith** as long as we continue to exist as an ecclesiastical body; accordingly, if you should like to become one of our number, we shall of course be obliged to ask you to give your adherence to the same standards to which we have already set our own hand and seal; we shall require you to make a public 'acknowledgment' that we are right in the position we have taken and in the profession we have made; these are our **TERMS OF ADMISSION**, the 'terms,' as we call them, 'of our ecclesiastical communion.'"

And this, as is obvious, is precisely as it should be. For when we make our articles of faith our "terms" of admission, or "terms of ecclesiastical communion"—it matters not which form of expression is used, for the Communion Table in any Church, as all will agree, is but the crowning privilege of its membership—when we lay our beliefs down as "terms," provided of course that our beliefs are Scriptural, we are adopting the exact method of Christ Himself and of His Apostles as exhibited for our guidance in the New Testament. Passages involving this idea and requirement are numerous. In Hebrews 11:6 the writer says, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." On these

words, Delitzsch, that prince among exegetes, has this to say: "He that draweth nigh to God, that is, in order to serve or hold communion with Him, must have faith, or firm belief—(1) that God **is**, not indeed as an object of sense, but as a living unseen reality with whom we may hold communion, and stand in mutual relations of love and duty; and (2) he must believe that he does not draw nigh to this God in vain, that His promises to them that seek Him diligently are no deceptions." Now the word "must" in this text, as should be explicitly noted, is not merely our little commonplace English auxiliary; it is a finite verb; it signifies that the "faith" spoken of throughout the chapter is a moral and spiritual, as well as a logical, **necessity**, in order to the end in view; that it is an indispensable prerequisite to acceptable worship and service; in short, that it is God's own ultimatum, as we may say, laid down as a "term" of holding "communion with Him."

It is "impossible," then, to please God without "faith," without believing that God **exists**, and that He **rewards** men with salvation if they but seek Him in the way of His appointment, namely, by accepting His Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, as their Saviour. This, in reality, is the theme of the entire Epistle, and may be appropriately epitomized in what Jesus said to Thomas (John 14:6)—"I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Than this calm declaration of our Lord no more explicit "term" of communion with the Father of spirits has ever been put into human language. We become partakers of divine grace if we assent to the condition stated; otherwise, we are lost; and there are no exceptions. It is a broadside fired from the great heart of Jesus Christ for the illumination of humankind, and every reverberation of it trembles with the ring of finality.

Another "term," impliedly enunciated on almost every page of the New Testament, is the obligation to accept the Scriptures, unqualifiedly, as the Word of God, and the only rule of faith and conduct. "They are they," as Jesus Himself declares, "which testify of me" (John 5:39)—"of me," "the way, and the truth, and the life," apart from whom no man can ever come to the Father. Furthermore, He says, point-blank, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35)—meaning, for one thing, that the Word of God "liveth and abideth for ever" (I Pet. 1:23). Then at another time He says to the Sadducees (Mt. 22:29), "Ye do err, not

knowing the Scriptures"—which was but to tell them that if they could have understood their own Guide-book, they would not have come to be such blundering blockheads. Also, in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Jesus places the power of the Inspired Word above the might of a message coming directly from the lips of a herald raised from the dead for the specific purpose of proclaiming that very message. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Lk. 16:31). Indeed, so fundamental and vital is this 'noble principle' of making the Word of God the sole source of appeal as touching matters of religion and moral behavior, that Jesus was constantly saying, in one way or another, as the setting required: "It is written"; "The Scripture saith"; "Hath not the Scripture said?" "This day is the Scripture fulfilled." Moreover, Jesus Himself, God equal with the Father though He was, never swerved by so much as an iota from a strict observance of this same principle. How clearly He states His attitude: "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:49, 50). **Even for Jesus** obedience to Scripture was a "term" of acceptance with the Father. Should it be less than that for us?

Nor is the demand merely general and indefinite. It descends to particulars. It insists on sincerity, on intelligence, and not only on an unbroken, but on an unbreakable, spirit of loyalty. It issues from the Infinite Demander, in whose presence posing and pretense are absurd and abhorrent. Even things right in themselves, if done "to be seen of men," amount to nothing in view of this requirement. The language of our Lord Himself, in His Sermon on the Mount, is so pointed and explicit that it leaves no room for any misunderstanding whatsoever. Towards the beginning of it (Mt. 5:20) He says, "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of heaven;" and later on (7:21), when He is bringing all that He has said on this occasion to an acute conclusion, He adds, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." The

"entrance requirements" specified in such statements as these are ineluctable. They stand at the gateway of the Kingdom as "terms" of admission. And in this respect the Kingdom and the true invisible church are the same. Moreover, the outward, visible church is ideal precisely in proportion as its demands are of a similar order. Call them "terms" or stipulations or conditions, or what you will, these divine pronouncements are the essential requirements laid down in Scripture for such as would be "added to the church" (Acts 2:47)—requirements without a compliance with which salvation is impossible.

And so we might go on indefinitely. Give the capitalized words their full force and significance, if you will, and mark the impression which they inevitably leave upon your mind, in the following citations: "EXCEPT a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3); "EXCEPT ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6:53); "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, EXCEPT ye abide in me"—"IF a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered"—"IF ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you"—"IF ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love"—"Ye are my friends, IF ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:4, 6, 7, 10, 14); "IF ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall KNOW THE TRUTH, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32); "And you * * * hath He reconciled, * * * to present you holy and unblamable and unrepugnant in His sight: IF ye continue IN THE FAITH, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:21-23); "For we are made partakers of Christ, IF we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Heb. 3:14); "Now the just shall live by faith: but IF any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38); "Toward thee, goodness, IF thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:22); "EXCEPT ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 18:3); "Sirs, what MUST I do to be saved,"—what is it NECESSARY that I should do,—"and they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And THEY SPAKE UNTO HIM THE WORD OF THE LORD, and

to ALL THAT WERE IN HIS HOUSE" (Acts 16:30-32); "And the Lord said unto him (Paul), Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou MUST do"—what it has become a NECESSITY for thee to do: then to Ananias "the Lord said," "Go thy way: for he (Paul) is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how great things he MUST suffer for my name's sake"—how great things it will be NECESSARY for him to suffer (Acts 9:6, 15, 16); "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him MUST worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24); "FOR THIS CAUSE left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst SET IN ORDER the things that are wanting, and ORDAIN ELDERS in every city": * * * for (an overseer)—the New Testament knows nothing of "bishops"—an ELDER to whom has been committed the OVERSIGHT of a flock, "MUST be blameless, as the steward of God" (Titus 1:5, 7); "For thou shalt be a WITNESS unto all men, of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:15); "But rise and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a WITNESS both of the things which thou hast seen, and of those in the which I will appear unto thee: * * * having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day WITNESSING" (Acts 26:16, 22); "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be WITNESSES unto me" (Acts 1:8); "And I saw the souls of them that were BEHEADED for the WITNESS of Jesus, and for the Word of God" (Rev. 20:4).

No serious person of normal intelligence can read the foregoing passages, not to mention many others to the same effect, with anything like the consideration they call for, without becoming conscious—shall I not say breathlessly conscious—that he is being confronted by **conditions** laid down as indispensable, by **demands** that must be met without any equivocation, by "**terms**" that must be accepted and complied with, by **stipulations** divinely prescribed and drawn up so as to involve and constitute a definite bargain, a specific agreement, a **solemn covenant**, as between "the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God," on the one hand, and as many as would like to become His servants and friends, on the other. Even in these few selections, to go no further, our "Terms," just as they stand, are unqualifiedly vindicated and exemplified.

For one thing, those citations undoubtedly teach us that **the Word of God is the sole source of final appeal** in arriving at a knowledge of "what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man"—which most assuredly falls in line with our first Term. Also, they lay it down as obligatory and imperative, that men must **"continue in the faith"**—"THE" faith, mind you, the **well known faith, that faith**, namely, "which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, R. V.), and to which Paul refers when he says, "I have kept the faith" (II Tim. 4:7); precisely what we mean when we speak of **"the system of grace,"** or **"the plan of salvation,"** or **"the doctrines of redemption,"** or sound **"systematic theology."** Upon this adamant system in all its particulars the Colossian Church had been **founded and built**, and on the throne of the system's glory it was even then firmly **seated**, and was accordingly being warned by the Apostle not to allow itself to be "moved away from the hope of the gospel"; that is to say, from the hope which it had **because of** its acceptance of **THE SYSTEM IN ITS ENTIRETY.** If there were no other passage in the New Testament of the same import, this one alone would justify us in keeping our second Term intact.

From the same limited list, again, we learn that there is one, and only one, form of church government authorized in the New Testament; a form therefore which has **"divine right"** behind it, and is consequently **"unalterable";** a government, namely, which is lodged in "elders" or presbyters, and hence is Presbyterian; as over against the Papal and Prelatic and Congregational forms, for none of which is there even a scintillation of Scriptural support. When we add to this the technical and exact meaning of Christ's own words, where He says that the "true worshipper" is he that worships the Father "in spirit and in truth," it surely dawns, or ought to dawn, upon us, that our third Term is based on nothing less than the "rock of ages."

Then, too, **keeping** covenant, or, negatively, **breaking** covenant, as already intimated, is in the very nature of the case implied in the **PRESCRIBED CONDITIONS**, not only in the texts quoted, but everywhere else in the entire Bible. **"If ye abide in me"; "If ye keep my commandments"; "If ye continue in my word,"** and, **"in the faith"—such conditions as these,** in essence, and self-evidently so, resolve themselves to this: IF you lay hold of Christ Jesus as the

"Mediator of the **new covenant**" (Heb. 12:24), and accept Him lovingly as the Saviour of your soul, as your Substitute and "Advocate with the Father" (I John 2:1), as **the only Mediator between God and man,** THEN God will "remember **His holy covenant**" (Lk. 1:72), and all will be well with you, for then, as Jesus says, "Ye shall abide in my love," and ye shall be "my friends" and "my disciples indeed," and "ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Similarly on the other hand, **"If a man abide not" in Christ, "if any man draw back,"** making up his mind to **ignore** God and not to continue "in His goodness," then **that man is "cut off,"** and "cast forth as a branch and is withered," since he has decided to take his stand with the **"strangers from the covenants of promise,"** who have "no hope, and (are) without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). In short, the authority for our fourth Term of Communion is implicitly embedded in every book of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It is simply our method of bringing to mind the **covenanting principle** apart from which salvation is impossible, whether for men individually and personally, or for churches, or for nations.

Once more, in alluding again, in this connection, to the instances formerly cited, it was found expedient, for the sake of brevity, to use but one passage in praise of loyalty and **the spirit of martyrdom.** But let anyone be as great-hearted and as good as the Apostle John was, and he will **never lose sight of** "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God." As John "saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (Rev. 6:9), so every true believer ought to be made to see **those "souls" of men "under the altar,"** those loyal spirits, that is to say, that in all past ages have suffered martyrdom for the cause of Christ, even as the Messiah Himself was thought of by the saints of old as laying down His life on behalf of men on the altar of burnt-offering. "The faithful contendings of the martyrs of Jesus" have enveloped the mighty heroes of ecclesiastical history in "trailing clouds of glory," and the illustrious deeds of their "noble lives" will challenge the admiration of all true, honorable, high-minded Christians to the end of time. What the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle John to set before us in Holy Writ for our "approbation" need give us no uneasiness when we find it confronting us in our fifth Term of

Communion. Only a churl, incapable of appreciating the value of worthy, stalwart character, could heistate for a moment to pledge himself to what that princely Term has to say about "the martyrs of Jesus."

Of the many obligations laid upon the people of God to **bear a faithful testimony** to the truth as it is in Jesus, and against all kinds of errors in every domain of life, and against all forms of unrighteousness wherever the iniquity of the human heart makes itself manifest, only a few instances, of course, have been referred to. To cover this vast field Scripturally would require one to reproduce the major part of the entire Bible. The world has always hated good men, and for the simple reason that good men are always bringing it to task for its chicanery and crookedness. To His own blood brothers, who at the time were as yet of the earth earthy, Jesus, you will remember, said, "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7). By our sixth Term of Communion, which will come up later on for further consideration, we propose to take **our** stand, and to have all who desire to align themselves with us, ecclesiastically, take **their** stand, with the Lord Jesus Christ, in this respect, defying, as He defied, the scorn and hatred of the world, and preaching righteousness, as He "preached righteousness in the great congregation" of humankind, so that when the end comes each one of us may be able to say, "Lo, (that) I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest" (Ps. 40:9).

III

After all, the climax of our needs in this matter, it seems to me, is clear thinking and a turn or two at consecutive reasoning. I cannot help but feel that the farther we have gone, up to date, the more unwittingly have we contributed our quota to Milton's "confusion worse confounded." For example, merely as a twofold declaration of patent facts, no one perhaps could have any very serious faults to find with what was proposed as a second "Term of Communion" in the Synod of 1935, namely, "The acknowledgment that all men are sinners and in need of salvation, and the acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer and Lord of the whole life." Yet good and all as the assertion is in itself, it has no more place in Terms of Com-

munion, simply as Terms, than a paragraph on Baptism from Calvin's Institutes or Hodge's Theology would have in Hamlet's Soliloquy. Shelley's "Ode to the Skylark" is an exquisite piece of poetry, but who would ever think of inserting it into a textbook on Arithmetic or a treatise on Zoology? A good thing is a good thing **as long as** it is kept in its proper atmosphere, its proper setting, its proper domain, but when it intrudes itself where it does not belong, it becomes a travesty, a subject for criticism, a source of dissention, and in the end a mere object of ridicule. My question accordingly is—Would it not be well to rethink the situation through, and to strike a sounding here and there along the coast we are skimming, to ascertain how near we are to the rocks that are under our lee?

IV

Owing, therefore, not merely to the distinction, but to the fundamental **difference**, between Creeds, or Articles of Belief, and Terms of Ecclesiastical Communion, to wit, that the second **presupposes** the first, let us take the time and the pains, before proceeding to anything else, to inlay both hemispheres of our mental world with this plain, primary, essentially characteristic FACT, seeing that it will come into evidence and challenge our attention in each and every one of the six instances with which the sequel is to be concerned. It is undeniably true, and lucid enough to be grasped by any one who is candid enough to do it—that **Terms of Communion** are not designed to **itemize and enumerate** beliefs, but are designed, on the contrary, to indicate just **WHERE** the beliefs in question **ARE** itemized and enumerated. Here is a man, let us suppose, who comes before one of our Sessions to ask what he must do in order to become a member of our Church. The Session, which, for the matter in hand, **is** the Church, **the whole Church in miniature**, informs him, that if he has not already done so, he will be required to familiarize himself with a certain Book called the Bible. The Session does not take him aside, or appoint a committee to take him aside, and read the Book to him from cover to cover; under the circumstances, that would be a sheer impossibility. It simply places before him for his consideration and acceptance our first Term of Communion—a Term which quotes no passages, as though one passage were more vital or important than another,

and goes into no particulars, but which, in its own way, says to the man: "There is the Book; get it for yourself; read it through; study it; acquaint yourself with all it has to say on the theme with which it deals; and then, if you wish to come into fellowship with us as a Church, make an open "acknowledgment" before the world that you believe both the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and the only rule for the regulation of faith and life." That is to say, the TERM presupposes the BOOK to which it undertakes to BIND the approaching applicant. And let it also be noted, that it contemplates **even more than a sincere belief** and a **whole-hearted acceptance**; it demands an open "ACKNOWLEDGMENT" to that effect. In other words, it names the DOCUMENT with which it assumes that the applicant is acquainted, or is at least willing to acquaint himself at his earliest opportunity, and which contains, in its full-orbed entirety, the information needed for the salvation and well-being of the human soul. It does not attempt to tabulate the ten thousand times ten thousand wondrous things which the Bible has to say about redemption; it sends its readers TO the Bible, and bids them MASTER ITS MESSAGE FOR THEMSELVES.

V

Obviously we are in the same general atmosphere when we approach our second Term. One of the commonest things, as well as one of the most disastrous things, that have retarded the progress of the Christian religion down through the ages, has been the MISINTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE. It has been MISUNDERSTOOD, not merely in scattering texts here and there, but frequently on a vaster scale, involving, indeed we may almost say **periodically** involving, a practical subversion of the whole system of grace. It has been so wrested from its meaning as to be made a buttress for errors that have strewn the battlefields of history with millions of men who had to **lay down their lives** to purchase the right to its true interpretation. In the light of this dismal circumstance, reinforced as it is today by a virtually identical state of affairs in the field of exposition, where about the only thing it takes to recommend an explanation of Scripture to the popular fancy is that it shall be shallow enough, and consequently faulty enough, to be attractive to the unthinking and emotional

type of mind,—in the light, I say, of these facts, what a comfort to be able to turn to a brief, comprehensive CREED, drawn up by an Assembly of devout, courageous, and scholarly men, whose fervor, and intelligence, and loyalty to the Word of God, have never been surpassed by any similar assembly since time began.

Speaking of the **Reformation Creeds**, with the **Westminster Confession of Faith** self-evidently uppermost in his thought, James Orr, in his "**Progress of Dogma**" has some very arresting things to say. For example: "We shall greatly err if, following a prevalent tendency, we permit ourselves to think of them (the Creeds) only as archaeological curiosities. These creeds were no dry-as-dust productions, but came molten and glowing from the fires of a living faith, and enshrine truth which no Church can part with without serious detriment to its own life. They are the classical products of a distinctively **creed-making** age, by which I mean an age that possesses a faith which it is able to state intelligibly, and for which it is ready, if need be, to suffer—which, therefore, cannot but express itself in forms that have enduring worth. Such ages do not come at men's bidding, and till they do come, the process of creed-making, or creed-tinkering, will not have much success. It is a significant fact that the creeds of the Reformation age remain, as I have said, in practically unchanged form; to this hour the doctrinal bases of the great Protestant Churches. What modifications have been made on them are unimportant, and the efforts to displace them by newer symbols have not had much success. The Lutheran Church, for example, notwithstanding the rationalism that has abounded within its borders, still stands broad-based on its Augsburg Confession; the Anglican Church on its Thirty-Nine Articles; our Presbyterian Churches on the Westminster and similar Confessions. These creeds have stood as witnesses, even in times of great declension, to the great doctrines on which the Churches were established; have served as bulwarks against assault and disintegration; have formed a rallying-ground for faith in times of its revival; and have always, perhaps, represented with substantial accuracy the living faith of the spiritual part of their membership."

"There is another point of view, however, in which," as he goes on to say, "those creeds more nearly concern us. It follows from the line of thought I have endeavored to pur-

sue in these lectures, that only now had the Church obtained a position in which it was possible for it to exhibit in the form of a creed the whole round of Christian doctrine. So long, for example, as the Church was occupied only with Theological questions—that is, with the doctrines of God and the Trinity—it could but give expression to the results attained in that department; so long as it was concerned only with Christological problems, it could but formulate Christological results: not till a practically complete survey had been taken of the entire round of Christian doctrines did it become possible to produce creeds embodying the whole Christian system. This now is the peculiarity of the creeds of the Reformation. The Reformation creeds **do** give, and give practically for the first time a survey of the Christian doctrine in all its great articles. Framed as they were with special reference to justification by faith and its connected doctrines, they could do no other wise. For these doctrines look back upon and presuppose the statement of all the doctrines that precede.”

This somewhat lengthy quotation from those wholesome Lectures of James Orr, which came from the press in 1901 is so timely, even after the lapse of thirty-five years, that it will be well worth our while to linger over it long enough to bring several of its items out into the limelight.

To begin with, the then **“prevalent tendency”** to relegate the magnificent Reformation Creeds to the “archeological curiosity shop has not by any means become less insistent than it was. One of the ominously outstanding incidents in our own recent attempts to remodel our standards has been the **fact**—explain it as we may, but none the less the **FACT**—that in no draft of the proposed new **Terms of Communion** as yet submitted for the Church’s consideration has the WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH been accorded anything like its proper and rightful evaluation that is to say, the **place**, the **DEFINITIVE POSITION** which it now holds in our Terms as they stand. The first draft, 1932, is equivocal, deplorably so; it leaves the way open for “mental reservation” and double dealing; “the doctrines of the Bible as they are set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith” is a form of expression which seems to affirm what in reality it denies; it is capable of being construed so as to mean “the doctrines of the Bible **in so far as I, PERSONALLY, may happen to regard the Confession of Faith as being in agreement with them; it**

transfers the **STANDARD** from the **“Confession,”** which the Church has adopted, to the **individual**; which is but to say, that it **abolishes** the “Confession” as our recognized and publicly declared **SYSTEM OF FAITH**. The Committee, to be sure, may not have intended to leave this opening, but the opening is there, whether designedly or not.

The next draft, the one submitted to the Synod of 1934, contained no reference whatsoever to the Confession of Faith. Evidently in the Committee’s mind it was to be excluded. Yet as a form of statement this mode of procedure was essentially superior to its predecessor, for oblivion is to be preferred world without end, as we will all agree, to anything that even remotely savors of equivocation or paves the way for mental reservation. At all hazards we must be honest. If there are those in the Church who really want to shelve the Confession, by all means let them face the fact straightforwardly. As much as this the report, as presented to Synod, undoubtedly did. **It left it out.** What more could it do? The unanimity, however, with which the Synod on that occasion almost instantly restored the Confession and the Larger Catechism to their accustomed place was tremendously reassuring. The so-called “growing sentiment”—which, after all, is but a ward politician’s method of soliciting votes—is not nearly so formidable as some eager enthusiasts would like to make it appear. There have only been two critical votes taken, up to date, and they have both been calmly but decisively against the thought of breaking with the past.

The report, printed in the Minutes of 1935, practically eliminates for ever **ALL OUR BLOOD-BOUGHT STANDARDS** “in one fell swoop.” The limping reference to our Declaration and Testimony as a document worthy of our approval “as far as understood” is pathetic. If the item should be passed as it stands, it would pillory the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America as a laughingstock to all coming ages. It occurred to me at once to have a recognition of the Confession and the Catechisms, here as in 1934, inserted by direct action of the Court, but on second thought it seemed to be more advisable to allow it to go into the records exactly as it came from the hands of the Committee, for as it stands it supplies its own commentary. **IT LEAVES THE CHURCH DESTITUTE, BE-REFT OF THE FIRM GRANITE FOUNDATION OF SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE ON WHICH IT HAS STOOD**

AND UPON WHICH IT HAS BEEN BUILDING FOR ALL BUT THREE FULL CENTURIES. The project, should the Church agree to carry it through according to the plans thus far outlined and followed by the sponsors of the movement, would steer our splendid white-winged ship into that swirling current of indifference and apostasy, where

"the slow and silent stream,
Lethe, the river of oblivion, rolls
Her watery labyrinth."

It would mean THE END; and I, for one, am unwilling to lend a hand toward the hastening of that black catastrophe.

For one thing, then, the "prevalent tendency" has not spent its force. We still need to be on the alert against its fatal inroads.

Yet this is not the only thing which the paragraphs quoted from Orr's Lectures invite us to ponder. They bring to light the circumstance, that every distinctive era in the history of the Christian church has been divinely furnished with precisely that type of thinkers, and that particular equipment, which the current problems of the period needed for the purpose of grappling with the task committed to its trust. When the problem was to state clearly, first, the doctrines concerning God and the Trinity, and later on, concerning the Person and twofold nature of the crucified, risen, and exalted Redeemer, the men with the insight and genius to do it were already in the arena, and clothed with the armor of God for the occasion; so that, as a consequence, the work to be done was so superbly done that it has never had to be recommitted to other hands. Those were two "creed-making" epochs, and the two Creeds then made, as all the world knows, or ought to know, were no merely casual formulations that just happened at random, but blocks of pure gold that "came molten and glowing from the fires of a living faith." It was in no "dry-as-dust" climate that they had their origin. They stand as two polished pillars in the great temple of God.

Time, however, has its own way of rolling on and grinding out its grist. A millennium passes by. The powers of darkness are operant. Ecclesiastically, as the centuries multiply, faith is perishing from the earth. The system of grace is being supplanted by the system of works. The horizon is rimmed around with night's black circle. The END, it

seems, is at hand. Howbeit, at last the smothered flames leap through the rotten fabric. The fires of persecution are lighted. Men in myriads are done to death. But once again the tide turns. Truth and righteousness prevail. The Reformation, dripping with the blood of the martyrs, comes out of its murderous 'Edom, with dyed garments, glorious in its apparel, and travelling in the greatness of its strength.' Faith triumphs and looks down upon a conquered world, having reached a height which it had taken more than fifty centuries of toil and agony to gain possession of. And then, not to lose the priceless treasure thus acquired, and at the same time to pass it on to posterity, a chosen group of clear-thinking, mighty men of God, providentially selected for the end in view, are called together and enabled by divine grace to formulate a Creed anchored in the Word of God, and worthy of all succeeding ages—a Creed which, in Orr's way of putting it, takes in **"the entire round of Christian doctrines,"** "framed as they were with special reference to justification by faith," and therefore obliged to **"look back upon and presuppose the statement of all the doctrines that precede."** To think of the magnificence of it all fills my heart with gratitude and great delight.

Here, for the sake of clearness, let us revert for a moment, if you will, to our former illustration. Suppose an applicant for membership should say: "I am perfectly willing to accept the Bible as the Revealed Will of God and my sole Manual of Guidance in all matters of religion and morality, but I am at a loss to know **how to understand it;** I am unable to interlace its doctrines and weave them into anything like a consecutive system; Denomination after Denomination has arisen, and every one of them has its own view as touching the Scriptural grounds on which it claims to stand. What am I to **accept as right,** and what will I be expected to **maintain as right,**—Unitarianism? Russellism? Premillennialism? Dispensationalism? Swedenborgianism? Arminianism? Calvinism? Among these, and no end of others, what am I to hold? what am I to teach? what conception of salvation am I to carry to perishing sinners as the one supported by a faithful interpretation of the Word of God?"

Manifestly these are pertinent questions. Everybody meets them, or their counterparts, every day. Do we propose to answer them, together with ten times as many others of an equally essential character, by simply saying,

as in the second Term published in 1935, that we require "the acknowledgment that all men are sinners and in need of salvation, and the acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer and Lord of the whole life?" How pitifully inadequate! It leaves the whole domain of Revealed Religion practically untouched. What about a hundred other **collateral considerations** without a proper knowledge of which the aforesaid statement would amount to nothing but an empty platitude? Yet it is not the fault of the statement, let us bear in mind; it is the **FALSE POSITION** into which it finds itself to have been thrust. In its very nature it comes under the category of **Articles of Faith**, and not under **Terms of Communion** properly so called; the trouble being that it is only **ONE** out of at least **ONE-HUNDRED-SEVENTY** others, as the Sections in the Confession so carefully and explicitly indicate, **ALL OF WHICH ARE OF EQUAL STANDING IN THEIR APPROPRIATE PLACES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SYSTEM OF GRACE**. Have we deteriorated, as a Church, to the extent of being satisfied with about **ONE ONE-HUNDRED-SEVENTIETH** of what the Holy Spirit has revealed for our edification, and equipment for His service? As already noted, it is not the **province** of ANY Term to go into particulars, **as though some items were important and others indifferent**, but to direct the applicant to the **DOCUMENTS** where the subject **AS A WHOLE** is handled, and where the **items** are not only **specified and accurately stated**, but are supported by passages of Scriptures that have been subjected to **sound exegesis**.

Our second Term, as everybody knows, binds our entire membership to the "**whole doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith**." And right here is where the objective of the opposition presumably resides, as the persistent effort to drop this peerless Creed into the deep sea of forgetfulness fully reveals. Under these circumstances, a bird's-eye view of that fine documentation of Biblical truth may serve to re-ignite our smouldering loyalty and clear away some of the mists that have settled round the head of that mighty monument of **straight-thinking and dependable exposition**. At all events, it will do no harm to devote a little time to the pleasure of recounting a few of its commanding excellencies.

VI

The Westminster Confession of Faith is an **explanation of the Bible**. It is short, concise, accurate, and comprehensive. Short, I mean, as compared with other expositions. No intelligent person is satisfied to read a book without knowing what it is talking about. The honest, scholarly interpreter has always been in demand, and always will be. But consider for a moment what that means. One of the best series of commentaries on the Old Testament is that of Keil and Delitzsch. There are twenty-five volumes, with an average of about 500 pages each, with 40 lines to a page, making in all about 500,000 lines of reading matter. Meyer's commentaries, despite their premillennial bias, are among the best on the New Testament—ten volumes, with about 600 pages each, and 50 lines of fine print to a page, making in all about 300,000 lines. These commentaries, or others of like calibre, must be read by any scholar who means to master the Holy Spirit's message to men. Nor is the task any less exacting for the layman. He must go to "Matthew Henry," or "Doddridge," or "Scott," or "Barnes," or "The Expositor's"—with its 700,000 lines, fine print, two columns to a page, **large portions of which are unreliable and misleading**, if he wishes to acquire a commendable grasp of the Scriptures. Expositions by the thousands are at hand, whether for the scholar or the layman. Some of them are wholesome, and some are putrid. Some are excellent in many respects and deplorable in others. How is anyone to read them with safety? Our answer as a Church has been, and yet is, and let us hope will continue to be, that we have the Westminster Confession of Faith, in which the whole Bible is clearly and classically explained, as the revealed system of salvation, in about 1000 lines, that can be read, leisurely and thoughtfully, in 100 minutes, in **less than two hours**.

To begin with, then, the Westminster Confession is **BRIEF**—to which it may safely be added, that it is easily the most delicately balanced exposition of the doctrines of the Word of God, in credal style, that has ever been formulated and put in writing. And just here, let it be noted, is where its loftiest function comes into play; for precisely thus it is that it is so admirably suited to be the **ACKNOWLEDGED STANDARD** by which all other expositions are to be **TESTED AND MEASURED**. **Being** brief,

it has, of course, to be supplemented by wider reading, by more extended commentaries, and by scholarly works on theology and related themes. But while it has to be expanded and enlarged upon in order to cover the field in greater detail, it is nevertheless superlatively noteworthy that it **has never had to be REVISED**. The system it sets forth, no one has ever been able successfully to assail. Our latter day Modernists, to be sure, have no use for it, but like others of their kind they will simply have their day and cease to be; and when that happy hour shall have come, all right-minded men who have succeeded in crossing the storm-tossed sea of unbelief will 'thank God and take courage.'

For my own part, I find myself, in all my reading, accepting this view of a passage, or comment on it, as **RIGHT**, and this or that other view or comment as **WRONG**, precisely in proportion as they respectively measure up, or fail to measure up, with the system of doctrine which the "Westminster divines," in those days when true scholarship was the rule and not the exception, drew with such loyal appreciation and unerring insight from the Holy Scriptures. To say that this is to put the Confession **BEFORE** the Bible is to talk nonsense. The Confession **IS WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ON THE POINT**. Charles A. Hodge in his *Theology*, Archibald A. Hodge in his, William G. T. Shedd in his, Henry B. Smith in his, all of them standing high in the first rank of colossal thinkers, hew to that line. In such company no one needs to be ashamed.

A part of a paragraph from the last chapter of Shedd's "Calvinism: Pure and Mixed" ought to have an illuminating and solemnizing effect on the minds of us all. "Denominational honesty," he says, "consists, first, in a clear unambiguous statement by a Church of its doctrinal belief; and, second, in an unequivocal and sincere adoption of it by its members. Both are requisite. If a particular Denomination makes a loose statement of its belief, which is capable of being construed in more than one sense, it is so far dishonest. If the creed of the Denomination is well-drawn and plain, but the membership subscribe to it with mental reservation and insincerity, the Denomination is dishonest. Honesty and sincerity are founded in clear conviction, and clear conviction is founded in the knowledge and acknowledgment of the truth. Heresy is a sin. * * * But heresy is

not so great a sin as dishonesty. There may be honest heresy, but not honest dishonesty. A heretic who acknowledges that he is such, is a better man than he who pretends to be orthodox while subscribing to a creed which he dislikes, and which he saps under pretense of improving it and adapting it to the times. The honest heretic leaves the Church with which he no longer agrees; but the insincere subscriber remains within it in order to carry out his plan of demoralization."

The lay of the land, therefore, is like this. The Confession is **BRIEF**, can be **READ THROUGH IN LESS THAN TWO HOURS**. In ten years from now it will have been **THREE CENTURIES** since our Church has adopted it as the **ACKNOWLEDGED STANDARD** for testing and measuring **OTHER EXPOSITIONS OF THE BIBLE**. Is it **WORTHY** of the **HONOR WE HAVE ACCORDED IT?** Have we outgrown it, or have we simply neglected it so long that we have lost that "clear conviction" which is "founded in the **KNOWLEDGE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT** of the truth?" A little excursus may help us to see the light. To this end accordingly let us centre our thought for a few pages on—

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH.

* * *

CHAPTER ONE

The first thing a student who proposes to master any department of human knowledge has to do is to secure something that will serve him as a **textbook**. It is precisely so, and for ten thousand reasons more **necessarily** so, in the field of religion and theological research. There must be some **STANDARD** to begin with, some **FINAL SOURCE OF REFERENCE** to which one may **APPEAL** in order to be sure of arriving at **RIGHT CONCLUSIONS**. This **necessity** the Confession recognizes as **FUNDAMENTAL**, and takes account of it **WHERE IT LOGICALLY BELONGS**. It sets out by treating "**OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURE**"—the **TEXTBOOK** to be used in all that follows.

CHAPTER TWO

When at length we venture to open this singularly exceptional TEXTBOOK, which claims, as chapter one has told us, to have had its origin in Heaven's own holy light, and to have been given to man as his MANUAL OF GUIDANCE through this world of sin, we are led to feel, even before we have finished its initial sentence, that we are actually beginning to read what Karl Barth, with fine felicity, has called the "AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF GOD." If we may compress it into one word, the THEME of the Textbook is the TRINITY. Of this SUBLIME and otherwise UNDISCOVERABLE REALITY the Confession has grasped the import. Accordingly, in its second chapter, it treats, as its title tells us, "OF GOD, AND OF THE HOLY TRINITY;" so that at the outset we have before our minds the TEXTBOOK and the BEING with whom it deals.

CHAPTER THREE

Now it is manifest, as even a child can easily be brought to see, that this "one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection," could not exist as the ETERNAL TRINITY without having ETERNAL THOUGHTS and PLANS, and COUNSELS, and PROJECTS, and ARRANGEMENTS, ready to be revealed and developed at the appropriate moment. It is inconceivable that the "only wise" MIND could ever have been a BLANK. Of this illuminating fact the Confession, with indefinable tact and delicacy, apprizes us, when in its third chapter it gathers up for us what the TEXTBOOK has to say "OF GOD'S ETERNAL DECREE." Thus far, then, we have the TEXTBOOK, the BEING with whom it deals, and what THAT BEING was THINKING ABOUT "BEFORE THE WORLD WAS."

CHAPTER FOUR

But THOUGHTS and PLANS and PURPOSES call for ways and means of EXPRESSION; for implements, as it were, to work with; for materials suitable to the end in view; for intelligent agents, such as angels and men, to whom they may be communicated, and through whom the enterprise in mind may be carried forward—all of which

the TEXTBOOK brings to light from time to time within its sacred pages, and all of which, as well, the Assembly, in its turn, connotes in a scientifically compact form, and in a most engaging manner, and in the exact logical and psychological place to which it belongs in THE SYSTEM OF GRACE, when it devotes the fourth chapter of the Confession to the TRINITY'S METHOD OF PROCEEDURE in bringing all things INTO EXISTENCE. THOUGHT made articulate in MATTER AND MIND—that is what the Confession lays before us in the chapter that treats "OF CREATION."

CHAPTER FIVE

That "OF PROVIDENCE" should be the title of the fifth chapter of the Confession was but a matter of sheer logical necessity. CREATED things have to be PROVIDED FOR. "All creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least," have to be upheld, preserved, sustained, kept in their orbits, made to serve the ends they were designed to accomplish. As much as this, of course, is obvious. But what a theme of thought it opens up! The scheme of divine oversight, which leaves nothing in the whole universe of mind and matter untouched, is so immense and intricate that even the greatest of created minds can only say, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out." The excellence of this absorbing chapter is that **it knits together the teachings of the Holy Spirit** on this all-embracing subject in such a manner as to unveil for us the majesty, "almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God," who, in ordering all things, including the sins of men and angels, to His own glory, has always done it "yet so as the sinfulness" of the sinner, in every instance, proceeds "only from the creature," and not from Himself, since He, "being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin."

If there is any one subject more than another concerning which even PROFESSING CHRISTIANS themselves need to have their thinking clarified, in the present black night of skepticism, it would be difficult to imagine what it could be. The idiotic articles from time to time in the public press—denying and ridiculing the living God's connection with

storms and floods and weather conditions in general—a nothing but atheism in embryo. If such writers could be induced to master the fifth chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, they would be in position to handle the subject with some degree of intelligence. Do we then propose to throw it overboard when it is the very thing the world is blindly groping for and needs to know?

CHAPTER SIX

According to the TEXTBOOK, then, which the Confession so faithfully and rationally interprets, creation, it came from the hand of God, was perfect. Men and angels, its crowning stroke and feature, were perfect. **Provision** for their continuance in their original condition was perfect. In short, creation in its entirety was a perfect piece of work brought into existence by a PERFECT CREATOR.

THIS IS THE BACKGROUND. From this time on, however, the **material** side of things, except incidentally or as the situation requires, is dropped out of view, and the interest passes over into the realm of the more especially spiritual—into the two worlds, as we may say, of FREE MORAL AGENTS, the world of angels and the world of men. And what a delicate article FREE MORAL AGENTS is! To **compel** it is in so far forth to **destroy** it. It HAS TO BE LEFT TO ITSELF; otherwise it CEASES TO BE. It is the FINEST thing God made, and the KEENEST; but **being so**, it is also the MOST EASILY MARRED.

At length angels, untempted, used their FREEDOM disastrously, and in unreckonable myriads rebelled against their holy and beneficent Sovereign. Following this, the chieftain induced man to do the same, and thus

“Brought death into the world, and all our woe.”

Of all this, in its natural and logical place, the Confession of Faith takes accurate account in the **sixth chapter**, which treats, as its title tells us, “OF THE FALL OF MAN, OF SIN, AND OF THE PUNISHMENT THEREOF.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

With Adam, at his creation, God was pleased to deal lovingly and approvingly through **the medium of a cov-**

enant, conveniently called “The Covenant of Works,” a covenant administered “upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” Thus all was well until sin entered, but when **that** occurred the first covenant, of course, was wrecked. As far as man’s inclinations and capacities were concerned, **THE END HAD COME**. In His goodness, however, God was minded to open a way back into His favor once more, and in doing so to adhere, as formerly, to **the medium of a covenant**, appropriately called “The Covenant of Grace.” In the plan of salvation this provision is BASIC. Here men must start, if they are to start at all. The Confession, accordingly, but follows and explains the TEXTBOOK when it begins to unfold the theme of redemption, as a historical transaction, by devoting its seventh chapter to the foundational subject “OF GOD’S COVENANT WITH MAN.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

God and man were now at INFINITE ODDS. Man by his disobedience had put himself under the burden of INFINITE GUILT. Consequently, before the holy, just, and righteous God could have pleasure in him again man’s sins would have to be atoned for. Since they were INFINITE in their nature and extent, being against an INFINITE PERSON, none but an INFINITE PERSON could render the INFINITE SATISFACTION WHICH JUSTICE OF NECESSITY REQUIRED. For this emergency, the TEXTBOOK informs us, the Triune God had already made provision. The Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, and hence HIMSELF GOD, the equal of the Father, and with whom accordingly the Father could deal on EQUAL TERMS, would come in the flesh, die on the cross, pay the penalty due to sin, ransom the sinner from destruction, and put him once more in friendly relationship with the Creator and Lord of all. In a word, He would become the MEDIATOR OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE, “the only Mediator between God and man,” the only Person through whom any PROGRESS TOWARD THE SALVATION OF SINNERS COULD BE EFFECTED.

With this essential **entry**, as we may call it, in the SYSTEM OF GRACE, the Confession, at the very stage and instant to which the consideration of it belongs, and in as comprehensive a chapter as has ever been written on the

subject, acquaints its readers, when it unfolds the doctrine "OF CHRIST THE MEDIATOR" to a helpless world.

CHAPTER NINE

The next essential step in the process of gaining an intelligent apprehension of the way of salvation has to do with the **freedom of the will**. Did man by his fall lose his capacity to **make up his mind**, as we say, to do this or that? The answer is "No"—PROVIDED ALWAYS that we are careful to confine our thought solely to the "natural man" in his natural world. Any sane person is able to decide whether he will or will not pursue a decent, respectable course of life. Yet at the same time the entrance of sin marred man's power to will, to the extent of making him utterly incapable in and of himself to will "**any spiritual good accompanying salvation**." Sin set a limit to his will. It was thenceforth short-circuited. It was still free within its boundaries, but its boundaries were now so narrow and contracted as to enclose but a small portion of its former acreage.

This aspect of the matter, which is absolutely indispensable to clear thinking, is set forth with exquisite propriety and insight, and in the exact notch where it fits into "**the whole doctrine**" not merely of "the Westminster Confession of Faith," but of the ENTIRE BIBLE, of which the Confession is but a truthful interpretation ideally expressed in this ninth chapter, which introduces us into the mysterious province "OF FREE WILL."

CHAPTER TEN

The **ninth** chapter prepares the way for the tenth; for it casts it, in fact; contains it in perspective; leads the mind to the extremity where it is inescapably confronted with REGENERATION AS A SHEER NECESSITY, as a SIN QUAM NON, as the lovers of Latin would say. The **tenth** chapter treats "OF EFFECTUAL CALLING"—of the CHANGE OF CHARACTER which emerges, as a **historical reality**, in each individual case, at the instant of the NEW BIRTH. This "effectual calling," as Scripture teaches and the Confession exhibits, comes to a focus, or to a climax, in an omnipotent ACT of the Holy Spirit, and results in enlightening the mind "spiritually and savingly

understand the things of God," in taking away the old "heart of stone" and replacing it with what the Bible calls a "heart of flesh," and in RENEWING THE WILL—enlarging its BOUNDARIES once more, so as to enable it to act now, as originally, in unison with the WILL OF GOD. The chapter makes it plain that man carries out his passage in keeping with his ANTECEDENT CHARACTER; which is but to say, that a good man wills according to his **previously regenerated** state of mind and heart, whereas an ungodly man still chooses to remain within his narrowed confines and continues to will according to his **fallen** nature. In other words, with the tenth chapter we come into NEW SURROUNDINGS, and find ourselves in the presence of the "NEW MAN" in a NEW WORLD.

CHAPTERS ELEVEN, TWELVE, THIRTEEN

These three chapters, which, as their titles inform us, treat "OF JUSTIFICATION," "OF ADOPTION," and "OF SANCTIFICATION," are drawn up so as to acquaint us with what the TEXTBOOK reveals as touching these great cardinal doctrines of salvation, and consequently so as to make us see how, in the plan of God, EFFECTUAL calling becomes EFFECTIVE, namely, through an ACT of pardon, through an ACT of friendship, and through a WORK of grace. Regeneration, justification, and adoption are **instantaneous acts**, and all three of them take place AT THE SAME INSTANT. Shallow objectors used to cry down the doctrine of justification by faith on the ground that if a man should, by a single divine **act** at the outset, be freely pardoned of all his sins, past, present, and to come, he would feel free to go right on in sin and lead a riotous life—assured that in the end everything would be well with him anyway. Such a view, of course, is perfectly ludicrous. It is so pathetically inane, as a mere mite of clear thinking ought to make obvious.

REGENERATION regards man as DEAD, and therefore in need of being RAISED from his spiritually LIFELESS condition. Once raised, however, he is for ever afterward "ALIVE UNTO GOD," and, **being in this state**, he is of necessity a hater, yes, as nearly as possible an **infinite** hater, of sin in all its forms and phases.

JUSTIFICATION regards this LIVE MAN, who now hates sin with all his heart, as standing GUILTY, yet

PARDONED AND OPENLY ACQUITTED, before God, "the righteous Judge," at the BAR OF JUSTICE—pardoned and acquitted because of the INFINITE MERITS of his SUBSTITUTE, the SINLESS CHRIST. **Morally** however, justification, as one can readily see, leaves the man **just where it finds him**. Because of **it**, considered in and of itself, he is neither better nor worse. It simply lifts the BURDEN OF GUILT from his shoulders. It makes him happy and exultant, to be sure, but only because he is **rid of his load**. Presumably, were this all, he might plunge into sin again as outrageously as before. But as the Confession, guided by the TEXTBOOK, so admirably arranges and states the two doctrines, the matter of CHARACTER is dealt with first, and completely taken care of, in the chapter on "Effectual Calling." Logically, by the omnipotent ACT of the Spirit in regeneration, the man hates sin **before he has been pardoned**, hates it because he has already been made a "NEW MAN" in Christ Jesus. Manifestly there could be no risk in pardoning a man like that.

BUT HE IS MORE THAN PARDONED. The first two acts terminate in a third, the welcoming, home-bringing act of ADOPTION. The **new man**, justified now and openly acquitted, is instantly admitted into the celestial household of the Father of spirits, becomes a filial member of that blessed heavenly family to one and all of whom sin is inherently abhorrent, and is at once accorded "the liberties and privileges of the children of God."

Thus, in terms of **time**, these three acts belong to the SAME INSTANT; whereas, if thought of in terms of their **logical sequence**, they occur as they stand in the Confession, and constitute a **single united whole**.

Effectual calling, though it centres round the omnipotent ACT of regeneration, is itself, however, a WORK, a PROCESS including other operations of divine favor, among which is the concurrent, lifelong WORK of sanctification. In other words, effectual calling IS "effectual"—EFFECTIVE CLEAR TO THE END. In the chapter on "Free Will" it was noted that though a person, at his conversion, is freed from his "natural bondage under sin," his liberation is yet not of such a kind that the man, from that moment on, wills "perfectly" and "only" that "which is good, but doth also will that which is evil." Sin, that is to say, is a stubborn malady, has to be "more and more weakened and mortified," until by "the sanctifying Spirit

of Christ," as the chapter on Sanctification so clearly enunciates, "**the regenerate part doth overcome;**" so that as a result and consequence "the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Indeed, when we stop to consider it, the Confession's presentation of what the Bible teaches as touching these essential steps in the system of grace is so faithful, so complete, so full-orbed, and withal so intrinsically attractive, as well as so inseparably interwoven with the soul's eternal welfare, that it is hard to see why every boy and girl in the Church, with but even a little intelligent parental and pastoral oversight, should not be led to grasp, and delight in, the truth of it all, at as early a stage in life as eight or ten years of age. Boys and girls are taught many things by that time that are quite as difficult to master and are of infinitely less importance. Why should this be neglected?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Viewed from the divine side, as we have now seen, the plan for man's salvation becomes articulate in a series of **omnipotent acts**, the effects of which, when prolonged through the sinner's life, constitute a **work of grace** set on foot and superintended by the Holy Spirit. Naturally the next consecutive question of the thoughtful mind must be—How is MAN to come, or rather to be **brought**, into CONNECTION with this supernal system of the Triune God? The Confession answers, by "the grace of FAITH," that "work of the Spirit of Christ" in the heart by which "the elect are ENABLED to believe to the saving of their souls." FAITH is the first act of the SAVED MAN. Therefore the title of the chapter is not simply "OF FAITH" but "OF SAVING FAITH." **Every word is weighed.**

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

As soon as man is connected by "saving faith" with the Spirit's WORK OF REDEMPTION he begins **so** to hate "his sins as to **turn from them all unto God.**" This chapter, accordingly, which treats "OF REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE," stands in its exact logical niche, seeing that the FIRST REACTION of faith in the heart of the sinner is to make him abhor "the filthiness and odiousness of his sins," and to make him realize that "as there is no sin so small

but it deserves damnation, so there is no sin so great that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

This chapter, as its title tells us, treats "OF GOOD WORKS"—of the kind of life, that is to say, which a man who has now, by "saving faith," laid hold of Christ as his Saviour and has thus already come to hate sin, OUGHT TO LIVE. "Good works" are therefore such, and only such, have their source and origin in an ANTECEDENT SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE. They can never **precede** or **procure** salvation, for a man has to BE saved BEFORE he can do them. They are not deeds **because of which** the man has been rescued from destruction; they are "the fruits and evidences" of a rescue previously effected; so that "let them believers MANIFEST THEIR THANKFULNESS and 'GLORIFY GOD.'"

This chapter on "Good Works" is a classic. As a statement of what the Bible teaches on this age-long and sagaciously controverted question, it is as scrupulously careful and as delicately balanced as anything that has as yet been written. Furthermore, theologically it stands precise where IT BELONGS. Are we ready to lay it aside and FORGET it?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Thus launched on the voyage of the good life, man immediately feels impelled to ask—Is it ever possible to fall away from it, or, to put it colloquially, to "fall from grace"? This question is answered, and answered moreover in its logical and psychological place, in the present chapter which directs our attention to the subject "OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS." It spreads before us what the TEXTBOOK TEACHES, namely, that a person ONCE SAVED can never be LOST. True believers may "fall into grievous sins" and "bring temporal judgment upon themselves," but they "can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace." When God **begins** a process God is **behind** it, and GOD NEVER FAILS.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Saints, then, if they ARE saints, will, through the indwelling energy of the Holy Spirit, **persevere** in the Christian life TO THE END. As much as this is set forth in chapter seventeen. But what is to be said of the doctrine "OF ASSURANCE OF GRACE AND SALVATION?" Is anyone ever justified in being fully persuaded in his own mind that he IS a saint, or, as we would say it now, is a **true believer**? This question, too, the Bible answers plainly in the affirmative. The Confession accordingly simply interprets the TEXTBOOK when it asserts, as it does in its own most carefully guarded way, that if Christians would only live as they ought to live, and as the grace of God enables them to live, they would never need to be in doubt of their ultimate salvation. What a comfort it is, and must always be, to a genuine Christian that he has Scriptural warrant for "**an infallible assurance of faith!**"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Confession has now led us up step by step, after the very manner of science, to the place and significance "OF THE LAW OF GOD"—particularly with reference to its applicability, or the part it is designed to fill, **in the life of the believer**. If "the saints" are to **persevere**, or hold out, in the Christian life TO THE END, and are to enjoy "**an infallible assurance of faith,**" it will be owing in part to their having arrived at an intelligent apprehension of the STANDARD by which character is to be measured, and because of a deep-set determination to exert their energies to the uttermost to live up to that standard. The same LAW which required "personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience" **before the fall**, still continued, **after the fall**, "to be a perfect rule of righteousness"—a "rule of life" for true believers, "informing them of the will of God and their duty," and directing and binding them "to walk accordingly," and giving them "**a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of His obedience.**"

THE LAW OF GOD IS THE STANDARD OF CHRISTIAN LIVING. And no one needs to be confused about it if he will but take the pains to read and study this nineteenth chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Why throw away the very thing that the appalling crisis of the hour is blindly feeling after if haply it may find it?

CHAPTER TWENTY

The LAWS of **Absolute Monarchs** are apt to be, as often are, unjust, inherently wrong, and consequently oppressive and tyrannical, not infrequently robbing men completely "OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY, AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE," to which subject the Assembly, with its usual keenness of perception, next invites the logic thinker's undivided attention. For accuracy and comprehensiveness the chapeau is a marvel. Back of it lies an intimate knowledge of the whole Bible on the question hand.

God is the unlimited Sovereign of the Universe, but **His law is perfect.** It gives men the LIBERTY TO DO RIGHT. And when a person becomes a "NEW MAN" in Christ Jesus, and has been PARDONED of his sins and relieved of their GUILT, and by the indwelling of the Spirit is being made more and more anxious day by day to "grow in grace" and in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour **THAT IS ALL HE WANTS.** Against the things which his soul longs to do **"there is no law."**

From this, of course, it follows that **lawful power**—"whether it be civil or ecclesiastical"—in order to BE "lawful," must ask nothing in the premises except what God Himself would ask under the circumstances. As long as it does that in either sphere, and nothing more than that, is the "ordinance of God," and is not to be resisted. But on the other hand, men persist in pursuing courses that "are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church"—note carefully the word "EXTERNAL"—"they may lawfully be called to account." That is to say, that to be called to account **under such conditions** is not in any wise to have one's "Christian liberty" encroached upon, since "Christian liberty" never gives one the right to mar or molest what Christ has established. Such an offense, **if it is wholly ecclesiastical**, throws a person open to "the censures of the church," that is, **the church alone.** If on the other hand, however, it is broader still, and is at the same time an offense against the state as well, then of course it will in so far forth fall within the scope and "power of the civil magistrate," too,

deal with it. When a man is **IN THE WRONG** it is no infringement of his liberties to be censured either by the church or by the state, or even by both **if his case should be of such dimensions as to involve action in both domains.** Anything that a man **OUGHT** to do he is **FREE** to do, but no man has a **RIGHT TO DO WRONG**, whether in church or state.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE AND TWENTY-TWO

Here the Confession leads us right up into the Holy of holies, so to speak. The chapter on **THE LAW OF GOD** has ushered us, as it were, into the immediate presence of "the eternal, immortal, invisible, only wise God," whose law is of His own essence, the transcript of His character, as holy as He is Himself. He has made it known to men as the **STANDARD OF THEIR THINKING AND OF THEIR CONDUCT.** It leaves them **FREE** to exercise **ALL THAT THEIR NATURE IS CAPABLE OF** in the way of purity, comeliness, moral achievement, mental expansion, and whatever else there is that can help to make the "beauty of holiness" a realized experience.

Up to this point, that is to say, the Confession has traced for us the **PLAN** of God, arc by arc, in its orderly arrangement, until the immense circle of His gracious thoughts toward men, as the **TEXTBOOK** itself reveals them, has been completed—though chiefly, as should now be noted, with respect to its bearing on the **individual soul**; the plan, in other words, as it touches "this and that man," whoever he is or wherever he is, who is to find himself possessed of life eternal. And never for an instant has the Assembly lost sight of the supernal truth that **ALL IS OF GOD.** He, and none but He, is—

"the mighty Source
Of all things—the stupendous force
On which all strength depends;
From whose right arm, beneath whose eyes,
All period, power, and enterprise
Commences, reigns, and ends."

To Him, accordingly, all praise is due. He is "to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the

might." Moreover, "the **acceptable way** of worshipping the true God is **instituted by Himself**, and so limited by HIS OWN REVEALED WILL, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture." He is worthy of all our gratitude, adoration, reverence, allegiance, loyalty, avowed devotedness, and of everything else that can be thought of in the way of rendering Him any laudatory recognition. No oaths or vows are to be taken "vainly or rashly," or with any "equivocation or mental reservation," in "that **glorious and dreadful name**." Only when "all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him" will earth's ideal day be here.

To the intent that this ineffable truth might be considered in its appropriate place in the plan of redemption, the twenty-first chapter of the Confession, which treats "OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP, AND THE SABBATH DAY," and the twenty-second, which treats "OF LAWFUL OATHS AND VOWS," follow as a climax upon all that precedes them, and at the same time with splendid suitability open the way for all that is to come. THEY CONSTITUTE THE GREAT DIVIDE.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Thus, then, we have reached the pinnacle from which we can survey the entire world, and all that it contains, in its essential relationship to its Creator, and from its RIGHTFUL SOVEREIGN'S point of view. For the moment, we see no one any more save God only, in whom we live and move and have our being. Like Moses on the mount—if we have followed the reasoning faithfully and sympathetically—we are, or ought to be, ready to say, each for himself, "exceedingly fear and quake;" and also, like the Sweet Singer of Israel, who in this instance may have been the seraphically eloquent Isaiah, we ought to train our heart and voices to the accents of that inspired song which all peoples, and kindreds, and tongues, and nations, should unite in singing: "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: He sitteth above the cherubim; let the earth be moved. The Lord is great in Zion, and He is high above all the people. Let them praise thy great and terrible name for it is holy."

Now from this delectable mountain top of clear thinking, this mount of mental, moral, and spiritual transfiguration, how will the Confession proceed? Over what highways will it advance in its progress toward the end? To this query the Confession gives its answer in the three chapters that immediately follow. In chapter twenty-three it tells us that the STATE owes its allegiance to God, and is morally bound to acknowledge and obey Him in all things; in chapter twenty-four, that the FAMILY owes its allegiance to God, and is bound to acknowledge and obey Him in every way; in chapter twenty-five, that the CHURCH owes its allegiance to God, and is bound to acknowledge and obey Him without swerving in any particular whatsoever from HIS WRITTEN INSTRUCTIONS.

According to its title the present chapter treats "OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE." Not of the STATE, let it be noted, merely **as an institution**, but rather of the state **in action**, of civil government **in operation**, as it is being put into effect by **the officers of the law**.

The chapter is a masterpiece. It has sometimes been criticized in certain respects, but only because of the critic's failure to differentiate, as the Assembly was so careful to do, between the spheres and functions of the church and the state.

The fundamental assumption, on which this whole chapter is erected, is, that a Christian is under an absolute, unqualified obligation, beneath the piercing eye of God, TO BE a Christian **in every domain of life**. It takes it for granted, that it would be a mere travesty, for example, to undertake to be a Christian in private life, and NOT in family life; or in private life and family life, and NOT in church life; or in private life and family life and church life, and NOT in civic life. If a magistrate is a Christian personally, it is incumbent upon him to be a Christian **in the exercise of his office**, and always, above all else, to keep the honor of Christ and the interests of the Christian church UPPERMOST in his mind as an end and aim **never to be lost sight of**. Christianity, that is to say, leaves no loopholes, makes no provision for evading any duty or obligation in any field of human activity, enlists life as a whole, accepts ALL or **rejects everything**. As much as this, I say, is PRESUPPOSED at the outset—in this chapter as in all the rest.

It would hardly be possible, in one short sentence, to state the source, the nature, the manner, and the purpose of civil government better than the Confession does it, when in opening the chapter it declares that **"God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under Him over the people, for His own glory, and the public good."** How brief! How keen! How comprehensive! And withal, how Scriptural! God only is **sovereign**; magistrates are **under Him**; they are **"over the people;"** and more than that, they are so entrusted with authority and so empowered to rule—not that they may be "empanoplied and plumed" with earthly honors, not that they may seek their own aggrandizement and personal advantage, but that they may perform all that their hands find to do for **THE GLORY OF GOD**, and in such a way as to secure and further the **"good,"** the right conduct, the moral prosperity, of their subjects, and eventually the welfare of the whole human race.

AND YET, with all the dignity they have and are rightfully entitled to because of their divinely delegated power and authority, and because of the coign of vantage they occupy in the administration of civil government, they are not even so much as to **THINK** of crossing the line which **SEPARATES THE STATE FROM THE CHURCH**. The magistrate is to **STAY IN HIS OWN PROVINCE**. It is with nothing less than scientific exactitude that the Confession proceeds to assert this **distinctively Scriptural doctrine**. Note the language: **"The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven."** On reading that statement, the dog falls. It clicks with **mathematical finality**. It is the Assembly's way of saying, that the civil magistrate has **NO JURISDICTION WHATSOEVER** within the church. This **"power of the keys,"** which no magistrate has a **RIGHT**, or **SEMBLANCE** of a right, to "assume," includes, as Principal Cunningham puts it, **"the whole practical administration of the ordinary necessary business of the church as a visible organized society."** To the "magistrate" that little sentence, in almost so many words, says: **"Thus far, Your Honor,—or, Your Majesty,—but NO FARTHER."**

Howbeit, while this is true, and touches bottom once for all in so far as this aspect of the question is concerned, while the magistrate may not, **under any circumstances**

cross over into **the precincts proper to the church**, he still, **as a man and as a magistrate**, has his duties to perform, within **HIS OWN CIVIC SPHERE**, in conserving and promoting **THE INTERESTS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**. The mere fact that he may not **OBTRUDE HIMSELF** upon the church does not for a moment relieve him of his obligation to do **WHAT HE OUGHT TO DO** in the state, for Christianity has its place in **THE STATE** as well as **IN THE CHURCH**. Accordingly, to the statement quoted above the Confession immediately adds a distinct and definite **counterpart**—a correlative, synchronous, concurrent consideration, namely, that the magistrate is to undertake, to the best of his knowledge and ability, all the while keeping **WITHIN HIS OWN SPHERE**, to **co-operate** with the church in its efforts to honor and obey the law of Christ.

Right here is where a hasty indiscriminating reader is apt to draw immature and contradictory conclusions. The Section—if we miss this, we miss everything—is dealing with **THE POINT OF CONTACT** that exists between these two divine institutions; the **POINT** where **CHURCH AND STATE**, as it were, clasp hands; where therefore, though still distinctly **SIDE BY SIDE**, they should move forward **TOGETHER** for the accomplishment of the same sublime purpose, namely, to **GLORIFY GOD**. The Section **TAKES IT FOR GRANTED**, as a matter that is perfectly **SELF-EVIDENT**, that the things mentioned in the five concluding clauses of the first sentence stand to begin with, both radically and exclusively, within **THE JURISDICTION OF THE CHURCH**. It is the **CHURCH** that decides what will be for its own "purity and peace;" the **CHURCH**, that defines how "the truth of God" is to be "kept pure and entire;" the **CHURCH**, that reserves the right to say what are and what are not "blasphemies and heresies;" the **CHURCH**, that determines what constitutes "corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline," and how "all the ordinances of God" may be "duly settled, administered, and observed."

But now, **WHEN** the church, in the exercise of its own right, and altogether independently of the state, has ascertained the thought of God as set forth in the Scriptures concerning these far-reaching spiritual interests, which are common to both church and state, the way is prepared and the door is open for the magistrate, still within his own

proper domain, to **mould** civil affairs throughout his territory so as to create **favorable conditions** for a veritable reign of righteousness. And **if at any time** he may be at a loss to know the best means of "**effecting**" these ideal chapter, but CIVIL SYNODS, called "synods," rather than conditions, he has "power to call synods"—NOT ecclesiastical synods, as will be brought out more fully in a later conventions, because they should be composed of "**ministers and other fit persons,**" who have spent their lives in making "the things that are God's" a subject of continuous and conscientious research, and who are therefore competent persons for the magistrate "**to consult and advise with about matters of religion.**" (See XXXI, § II).

There is another phrase in this Section, however, that calls for remark—the declaration, namely, that the civil magistrate has "authority, and it is his duty, to take order," and so on. "**TO TAKE ORDER**"—what did the Assembly mean by that? Those men, remember, were scholars. They read Latin as easily as we read English. With them, "to take order" was but the **classic rendering** of the Latin terms used in the REFORMED CONFESSIONS of that era—of **procurare**, to have a CARE for, to be SOLICITOUS about; of **providere**, to PROVIDE for, to SEE TO IT that; of **dare operam**, to give ATTENTION to, expend LABOR on, EXERT ONE'S SELF TO EFFECT. Principal Cunningham, in his discussion of the Section, makes everything plain. The Section, he says, "was intended merely to convey the idea that these were all objects which (the magistrate) was **bound to aim at**, and NOT subjects in which HE HAD JURISDICTION;" for "all the objects which ecclesiastical office-bearers are BOUND TO AIM AT, the civil magistrate is ALSO bound to aim at, just as EVERY PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL is bound to aim at them." Indeed, Cunningham makes this whole chapter, and the others that deal incidentally with the same question, not only luminous, but fascinatingly attractive in setting forth a truth which comparatively few Christians, even yet, have been led to see or have had the courage to maintain. For the ulcerous civic conditions throughout the world at the present hour this chapter, if it could be made incarnate in the life of nations, would furnish a complete and unfailing PANACEA. We need it **desperately**, and we need it NOW.

To sum the matter up briefly for convenient use, this, then, is what we have:

- I. Every magistrate should be a Christian.
- II. The magistrate's Christianity should be equally manifest in his private life, in his domestic life, in his church life, and in his civic life.
- III. The magistrate's duty to live and labor as a Christian in the realm of state gives him no jurisdiction whatsoever in the church.
- IV. What the church of Christ has antecedently found to be the teachings of the Word of God concerning the spiritual interests alike of the church and the state, the magistrate should aim and exert himself to further and advance in his official capacity, in so far as it falls within his civic province to do so.
- V. If at any time the magistrate should be in doubt concerning what would be for the best interests of his country as touching its spiritual welfare, he has the right to call "synods," civic synods, "to consult and advise with about matters of religion."
- VI. Since these "synods" are civic in their origin and constitution, like the Westminster Assembly itself, and are wholly distinct and separate from ecclesiastical synods or assemblies, the magistrate in his capacity as a magistrate, has a right to be present in them, to preside in them if he so desires, and above all else to insist, and make definite provision, that "whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Recall now, if you will, for the sake of lucidity, how the Confession, in the first twenty-two chapters, has unfurled, as it were for the **individual** believer, the vast system of grace in all its fulness, tracing it out for us, segment by segment, upon the cerulean arch of "yon rich sky" clear to the zenith, and how, following upon that, it has led us to see, in the twenty-third chapter, that this celestial provision is designed to be utilized and exemplified by **all men** and **all magistrates** in their civic life and relationships.

But there is another institution, which, like the state, is founded in nature, to wit, the family. The church, on the other hand, is founded in grace. Accordingly, the Assem-

bly, adopting Paul's method of approach, namely, that "that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural," next proceeds to take up the subject "OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE," and to exhibit to the reader the divine ideal for a holy, happy home, and to unfold the only way by which that ideal can be realized and made perpetual.

CHAPTERS TWENTY-FIVE TO TWENTY-NINE

These chapters, as also the thirtieth and thirty-first, have to do with the church—with the church as the fourth and last channel by means of which the manifold grace of God is to make itself articulate in the lives of men. There is of course no intimation here of anything like priority of importance. Everything in the entire plan of redemption is intrinsically important in its place and for its purpose. The order followed is but a method of unfolding.

The twenty-fifth chapter treats "OF THE CHURCH," that is, of the church as an institution—"invisible," as consisting "of the whole number of the elect," and "visible" as established for "the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life, to the end of the world."

The twenty-sixth treats "OF COMMUNION OF SAINTS"—showing that since all true believers "are united to Jesus Christ their Head" they are also "united to one another in love," and have "communion in each other's gifts and graces," and should all live so as to "conduce to their mutual good," and to "their mutual edification." Thus the "visible" church is always to be thought of as being held together by **invisible bonds**.

The twenty-seventh chapter treats "OF THE SACRAMENTS"—of their nature and number; the twenty-eighth, "OF BAPTISM" in particular; the twenty-ninth, "OF THE LORD'S SUPPER" in particular. These three chapters do two happy and measurelessly valuable things: first, they **set forth** clearly and explicitly the plain teaching of the TEXTBOOK on every vital phase of the sacraments **as a divinely ordained means of grace**; and secondly, in doing so, they **rule out** the entire accumulation of those senseless misconceptions which have always, not only in the Middle Ages but even yet, appealed with such power and fascination to the ignorant and superstitious, wherever a carnal priesthood has been able to gain a foothold.

CHAPTER THIRTY

We come now to the chapter that treats "OF CHURCH CENSURES"—the subject, incidentally, which called forth the keenest debates of the six years' sittings of the Westminster Assembly, and yet, in the end, to the everlasting credit of those patient and painstaking scholars, was settled, as we may say, unanimously, seeing that there was but one dissenting vote, namely, that of Lightfoot. The controversy centered in Erastianism, the doctrine that "**a Christian magistrate, as a Christian magistrate, is a governor in the church**"—a doctrine which, in keeping with the teachings of Scripture, received its merited death-blow, when the Assembly, evidently under the guiding hand of Gillespie, passed this inimitably worded resolution: "The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate;" the very sentence, by the way, which, word for word, stands as the opening statement of the present chapter.

Concerning this act, Hetherington, in his "History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines," takes occasion to say: "The affirmation of this proposition was regarded, both by the Assembly and by the Erastian party, as containing a complete rejection of the Erastian principle; for in their clear style of reasoning, they perceived, that if church government were admitted to be 'distinct from the civil magistrate,' then the civil magistrate could exercise no jurisdiction in church matters, as that would be to break down the distinction."

The church, therefore, was divinely ordained with a perfect equipment for taking care of its own affairs. To it, and to it alone, pertains the right, as the Bible teaches, to take charge of **matters of discipline**, and to apply such censures, and only such censures, as are proper to it **in its spiritual character as an ecclesiastical institution**. How explicit the language is! "The officers of the church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's supper for a season, and by excommunication from the church, according to the nature of the crime and demerit of the person."

For what rivers of blood, in ages gone, have mistaken views on this disputed subject been responsible! Yet here it is, cleared up for us, in four short sentences!

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

This chapter, which treats "OF SYNODS AND COUNCILS," ranks easily among the finest in the Confession. It first of all asserts, that "for the better government, and further edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called Synods or Councils"—the chapter's own way of stating its theme.

Then, following immediately upon this declaration, the Assembly proceeds to give the final touch to the doctrine dealt with from the magistrate's side of the question in chapter twenty-three. "As magistrates"—for this has already been affirmed—"may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with about matters of religion;" SO, if magistrates FAIL to do this when they OUGHT to, "ministers of Christ" and "other fit persons" may do it "OF THEMSELVES," that is, may do it NOT as churchmen, but as CITIZENS PERFORMING A CIVIC DUTY, leaving the magistrates who neglect this "duty," owing to the fact that they are "open enemies to the church," to think what they will.

This second Section nestles amid the mountain heights of the present chapter like a smiling lake in the sunlight every wavelet of which is tremulous with the radiance of an **unfaltering independence**. Magistrates SHOULD do precisely what the magistrates—in this case the Parliament—HAD done in calling into existence the Westminster Assembly, a Convention, as we would call it, understood by all concerned to be a CIVIC gathering, convoked in order that the magistrates might "consult and advise" with it concerning what the nation ought to do, in its own sphere, toward realizing the Scriptural conception of a Christian state. Yet, if at any time magistrates should be too ungodly to take such a step, ministers and other fit persons, in their capacity as citizens, ought to do it OF THEIR OWN ACCORD. The solemn, unruffled MAJESTY of the Assembly in its calm enunciation of this second Section is insurpassable.

For us, it is true, now that the word "synod" is seldom, if ever, applied to any but **church** courts, the Section would be somewhat more lucid, perhaps, if in its first clause the word "civic" were added, thus changing it to read—"may lawfully call a (civic) synod of ministers;" though in the thought of the Assembly the word "**ministerially**" in the

third Section, and the definite declaration in the fourth, that church synods are to handle "**nothing but that which is ecclesiastical**," were quite enough to make the meaning of the chapter perfectly clear.

That this view is correct is unquestionable. The hand of Gillespie is traceable throughout the chapter. His in all likelihood was the towering mind in which it was minted. Moreover, he and Baillie, though Baillie did little or none of the work, laid before the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in 1647, in the meeting during which the Confession of Faith was adopted as the doctrinal standard of the Scottish Church, a document called the "One Hundred and Eleven Propositions," which was drawn up for the purpose of making everything transparently plain before the act of adoption should be passed. In this document, item 51, Gillespie says: "The magistrate calleth together synods, not as touching those things which are proper to synods, but in respect of the things which are common to synods with other meetings and civil public assemblies,—that is, not as they are assemblies in the name of Christ, to treat of matters spiritual, but as they are public assemblies within his territories;" and further, in item 65, "By his command he assemblith synods when there is need of them. He maketh synods also safe and secure, and in a civil way presideth or moderateth in them (if it so seem good to him), either by himself, or by a substitute commissioner: in all which the power of the magistrate, though occupied about spiritual things, is not for all that spiritual, but civil."

That is to say, that, so long as "synods" are NOT ECCLESIASTICAL, constituted in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's King and Head," to conduct "ministerially" the affairs proper to the church, but are SOLELY CIVIL, though convened for spiritual ends, and hence called "synods," the magistrate is clothed with the same authority and privileges in them as in any other civic assembly. In a word, the chapter as a unit constitutes the high watermark of Christian thinking as touching the mutual relationship existing between church and state, allotting to each its definite place and work, forbidding any crossing of the lines into each other's territory, yet distinctly indicating the ideal pathway over which it is possible for them to travel together for the good of both and the ultimate welfare of the whole human race.

'The framers of the thirty-first chapter of the Confession were anything but tyros.

CHAPTERS THIRTY-TWO, AND THIRTY-THREE

When the four concentric circles of our earthly life—the individual, the domestic, the civic, and the ecclesiastical—have at last been simultaneously rounded out, each returning to itself at the end of its own orbit, and thus "orb in orb" completing the divine purpose in our mortal pilgrimage, what then? As Browning puts it—

"When earth breaks up, and heaven expands,—
How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands?"

With the TEXTBOOK'S teaching on this imperishable theme of human existence the Confession, beatifically for the redeemed, appallingly for the lost, soars serenely into the blue empyrean of eternity; for in the thirty-second chapter it treats "OF THE STATE OF MAN AFTER DEATH, AND OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD," and finally in the thirty-third, "OF THE LAST JUDGMENT."

* * *

This, then, in rapid survey, is **"the whole doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith."** How blissfully grateful we ought to be that we have the complete system of salvation accurately and comprehensively summed up for us, and unfolded in sound and logical sequence, in such a compact form as to bring it within the reach of any serious, normally intelligent person of ten years of age, within the compass of two short hours of continuous reading! Indeed, it is quite possible, with a little study and concentration, to epitomize and envisage, by the help of the Assembly, the entire scheme of redemption in a **single lucid sentence**. As a credal document it surely is beyond dispute that the Confession is

"judicious, clear, succinct;
The language plain; the incidents well linked."

It puts on the screen, before the mind's eye, the BIBLE; the TRINITY; GOD'S ETERNAL DECREE, by which, "before the world was," He "foreordained whatsoever comes to pass;" the CREATION, in which the decree was bodied forth objectively and given form; the works of PROVIDENCE, by which all created things are sustained in continued existence, and made to serve their purpose; the FALL, turning humankind into a race of sinners; the immediate establishment of a second COVENANT to take the place of the first; Jesus Christ the infinite and only possible MEDIATOR of this new and gracious covenant; the provisions of the covenant so delicately balanced and adjusted as to do no violence to man's FREE WILL; salvation, in consequence, made possible in no other way than by EFFECTUAL CALLING, in connection with which the soul is "born again" "after the image of Christ;" is freed from guilt by JUSTIFICATION; is honored with a place in the family of God by ADOPTION; is enabled to grow in grace day by day through SANCTIFICATION of the Spirit; all of which, as an eternal thought of God, the sinner is offered as a gift, to be **laid hold of** on his part by the simple act of SAVING FAITH; to be **enshrined in experience** by a genuine REPENTANCE; to be **evidenced in the world** by the practice of GOOD WORKS, "done in obedience to God's commandments;" a salvation, accordingly, which justifies the PERSEVERENCE OF THE SAINTS, seeing that "they whom God hath accepted in His Beloved" can "neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace;" a salvation, moreover, the possession of which gives consistent believers the right to go through life with a FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH, cherishing a hope that "shall never make them ashamed;" a consummation growing out of the practical fact, that they have set the LAW OF GOD before them, once for all, as the standard of their "personal, entire, exact and perpetual obedience;" in this wise putting themselves in the category of those who can always enjoy CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE, inasmuch as no righteous law can ever stand between them and what they long to do; from first to last, therefore, a vast and boundless mystery of grace, exhibiting "God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," as the sole object of RELIGIOUS WORSHIP, to the contempla-

tion of whose excellencies every SABBATH DAY should be unbrokenly devoted; the one Being in whose "glorious and dreadful Name" alone, whether in church or state, **LAWFUL OATHS** are to be taken, and to whom with "religious care" and "faithfulness" all **VOWS** are to be performed; a religion for the **CIVIL MAGISTRATE**, to guide him in the affairs of state; a religion for the family, to give it light and direction concerning the sacred institution of **MARRIAGE**; a religion for the **CHURCH**, to equip it for the task of reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ; a religion, that is to say, with the aptitude and the power to effect a world-wide **COMMUNION OF SAINTS**, since it unites all true believers "to Jesus Christ their Head," and gives them a consciousness of "fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory," and in so doing prompts them to seek the same ideals **in the performance of duty**; all in all, a religion so sublime and yet so simple that it can be placed before the minds of men symbolically, in silent, solemn grandeur, by means of two significant **SACRAMENTS** instituted by the Lord Himself as "holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace;" the sacrament of **BAPTISM**; and the sacrament of the **LORD'S SUPPER**; to maintain and guard the purity of which, "church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate," clothed with divine authority, are to take their stand, as the agents of their Saviour, to exercise ecclesiastical discipline, and to administer such **CHURCH CENSURES** as may be found to be "necessary for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren;" and finally, "for the better government and further edification of the church," which is "to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical," and is never to "intermeddle with civil affairs," are to organize themselves into a gradation of **SYNODS AND COUNCILS**, in which they are to determine "ministerially" all things that may arise within the circumference of ecclesiastical jurisdiction; thus, in the divinely appointed way, rounding out the church's task of preparing men for **DEATH** and for the **RESURRECTION**; so that, in the **LAST JUDGMENT** the church's membership, with no one missing, may "go into everlasting life, and receive that fulness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord."

VII

Back of our third Term of Communion lies a rich array of historical data interspersed with not a few instructive incidents. A glimpse or two in that direction may help to disclose the lay of the land. In England, of course, the Papal rule had had its day and ceased to be. It at least, as Paul once said of a somewhat similar situation, was "out of the way." But so also, **as an affair of state**, was the Prelatic system. By an act of Parliament, September 10, 1642, it was ordained that the Prelatic form of church government should be abolished "from and after November 5, 1643." "Thus," as Hetherington says, "was the English hierarchy overthrown by a Parliament which even Clarendon admits to have been composed of men favorably disposed to Episcopacy; and this overthrow took place at a time when the Parliament had not resolved to what form of church government a legal ratification should be given, a whole year being allowed to elapse before the act of abolition should take effect, to allow ample time for the deliberations of an **assembly of divines** which they intended to call together for that purpose." This Assembly was called on June twelfth to meet on July first, 1643. The Parliament, however, that "the whole subject might be fully discussed," included in its appointment to the Assembly men of all persuasions—Episcopalians, Puritans, and Independents. The Episcopalians, numbering about thirty in all, four of whom were Bishops, soon withdrew. When the Solemn League and Covenant was signed on September 25, 1643, they—that is, as many of them as had appeared at all and had remained as long as that—vanished from the scene. Yet, in so far as the results were concerned, this contingency was of but little moment; for when Bancroft preached a sermon in which he maintained that Episcopacy was "**of divine right**," the greater part of even the Prelatic party themselves were startled with the novelty of the doctrine; for none of the English reformers had ever regarded the order of Bishops as anything else but a human institution." As for Episcopacy, therefore, the Assembly had no reason, nor incentive, nor occasion, for considering it. It was a dead issue.

Another party in the Assembly consisted of the Independents, or Congregationalists. Of these there were about a dozen. As their name indicates, they held that the right

and power of church government inhered in the congregation. Hetherington says that they were "men of considerable talent and learning, of undoubted piety, (and) of great pertinacity in adhering to their own opinions." He also says that while they "were but a small minority in the Assembly, yet various circumstances combined to render them by no means a weak or insignificant party." They were able men, and their views were such as had to be reckoned with.

Erastianism, too, was represented, ably represented, in the Assembly, although there were but two Erastian "divines" in it, namely, Thomas Coleman and Lightfoot. Lightfoot, however, was a real scholar. His reasoning accordingly was weighty. It demanded attention and had to be answered. Of the laymen who held this view "the learned Selden" was easily the ablest. Speaking of him, Baillie says, "This man is the head of the Erastians; his glory is most in the Jewish learning; he avows everywhere * * * that the Parliament is the church."

Concerning the Puritans, it is enough to say, with Hetherington again, that they "were nearly all Presbyterians, or at least quite willing to adopt that form of church government." And, as everybody knows, the Scottish Commissioners were Presbyterians *per se*, dyed in the wool. This, in a word, was the composition of the Assembly, and obviously the variety of views was wide enough, and deep-seated enough, to make it impossible for any deliverance on the subject of **church government** and **manner of worship** to get by unchallenged. No aspect of the question, we may rest assured, would escape the scrutiny of any one of these keen groups.

Now the principle at issue in the present instance—as indeed in **all** the problems that came before the Assembly to be solved and settled—centred in what the classic scholars of that day uniformly and familiarly referred to as **jus divinum**, or **DIVINE RIGHT**. Their question was—Behind what form of church government does the **BIBLE** stand? What form did the Holy Spirit ordain and establish, and authorize the Apostles to sanction and place His imprimatur upon? Was it the Papal form? or the Prelatic? or the Congregational? or the Presbyterian? Which of these existed from the outset in the Apostolic church **jure divino**—BY **DIVINE RIGHT**?

The Assembly's answer to this question is set forth and

Scripturally substantiated in a short, concise document entitled "**The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government, and of Ordination of Ministers**"—commonly cited under the briefer title, "**THE FORM OF CHURCH-GOVERNMENT**." As we all know, or ought to know, it constitutes the **FIRST PART** of our present **BOOK OF DISCIPLINE**. There is no argument properly so called; no reasoning from premise to premise; merely statement upon statement backed up unassailably by **THE WORD OF GOD**; assigning to **Congregational** jurisdiction exactly what Scripture assigns to it—nothing more, nothing less; assigning to **Presbyteries, Synods, and Assemblies** the jurisdiction with which the New Testament has clothed them; and all of it done so neatly, so unobtrusively, so inevasively, and yet so convincingly, that the intelligent attentive reader is disposed, when he reaches the end, to lay the little document aside with a feeling that the case is closed. That **PRESBYTERIANISM IS OF DIVINE RIGHT** is at least **BIBLICAL**. From as much as that there is no escape.

Moreover, from the distinguishing principle of the **REFORMATION ITSELF**, that vital principle which constitutes the essential difference between **PROTESTANTISM** and **ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, and gives Protestantism its **RIGHT TO EXIST**, namely, that **DIVINE INSTRUCTION** on any subject, let it be what it may, is **FINAL**, and **SETTLES PERMANENTLY**, for all time to come, whatever it touches upon or pertains to—from this principle, I say, which the Assembly regarded as **FOUNDATIONAL**, it follows inevitably that no man or body of men can ever have any right to veer from anything that the Holy Spirit has inspired the authors of Scripture to prescribe. Prescribed, therefore, as Presbyterianism was, by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, through His inspired Apostles, it is **UNALTERABLE**.

When it came to the "**MANNER OF WORSHIP**" there was fortunately nothing to debate about. On this subject the Parliament and the Church of Scotland were happily of one mind with the Assembly which framed the document. In their enacting clause the "**estates of Parliament**" profess that they "do heartily and cheerfully agree to the said Directory," and "do, without a contrary voice, ratify and approve (it) in all the Heads and Articles thereof." Similarly the **Church of Scotland**, in its adopting act, declares that it "doth unanimously, and without a contrary

voice, agree to and approve the following Directory, in all the Heads thereof, together with the Preface set before it." On turning to the Directory, then, what do we find? This—to our present day amazement—and nothing but this, to wit, A PURELY SPIRITUAL PROGRAMME OF WORSHIP. That is to say, the **Directory for the Public Worship of God** reaffirms, in effect, and itemizes under fifteen particular "Heads," precisely what our Lord said to the woman at the well: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

Think, if you will, of those thronging multitudes in "the three kingdoms, lately united by the Solemn League and Covenant," as the act itself asserts, going up to the house of God in their various localities, and engaging in the public worship of the sanctuary every Sabbath day—by prayer, by the singing of Psalms, by the reading of Scripture, by the preaching of the Word, and then as being quietly dismissed by the minister in charge "with a solemn blessing!" And all of it done "IN SPIRIT"—as apart from the sensuous worship of the Old Dispensation, particularly of THE TEMPLE, with its "carnal ordinances" and "weak and beggarly elements," which were but "A FIGURE FOR THE TIME THEN PRESENT" (Heb. 9:9); and "IN TRUTH," or rather IN REALITY, as apart from the TYPICAL INSTITUTIONS of the Old Testament, which at the best served but as the "SHADOW of good things to come" (Heb. 10:1)!

Once more the illustration which has already served our purpose twice will perhaps be elucidating. An applicant for membership, let us suppose again, would like to know just what "form of church government," and just what "manner of worship," the Bible prescribes for our acceptance and adoption under the present SPIRITUAL DISPENSATION OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE. He wants the whole matter cleared up definitely and in detail, and withal so thoroughly buttressed by appropriate Scripture as to leave no exegetical, that is to say, no just, no "DIVINE" grounds for any contrary opinion. Obviously, offhand, at least for the commonality, this would be a difficult undertaking; all but impossible, in fact; in many cases wholly so. Consequently in our third Term of Communion we make the bare statement, in the brief space of seventeen words, and then immediately cite the applicant to the two documents in which the statement is Scripturally established.

That is, this Term, like the others, does not attempt to ITEMIZE the particular steps by which the doctrines we hold in the premises are supported; it simply directs the inquiring applicant to the DOCUMENTS WHERE THIS IS DONE—the PRESUPPOSED documents, with which, if parents and teachers and pastor and elders have been faithful, the applicant has already been made familiar, at least in general outline, namely, "The Form of Presbyterial Church Government," and "The Directory for the Public Worship of God," two polished pillars that frame and adorn the gateway into the heavenly palace of 'pure and undefiled religion' in the presence of God the Father.

Backed as they are, therefore, by the history out of which they emerged, and descriptive as they are of the heights to which the Westminster Assembly had patiently climbed through its unflinching devotion to the Revealed Will of God, the two words DIVINE RIGHT, and the word UNALTERABLE, as they stand in our third Term of Communion, challenge, or ought to challenge, the unmeasured admiration and enthusiasm of everyone who has the mental balance and the courage to look down upon the black waters from which by the grace of God we have been so heroically rescued.

VIII

And now we come to the COVENANTS, the "BANDS," the "BONDS," that bound our unconquerable ecclesiastical forefathers together, and to GOD. It is simply impossible to give this segment of Scotland's history anything like the consideration it deserves without being borne aloft on a rising tide of tremulous emotion. The barest mention of the "Covenants" should transport our thoughts back not merely over four hundred paltry years, but through four millenniums, to that wondrous day when at the base of Horeb a greater man than any of us could ever dream of being witnessed, with awe and ecstasy, the oath of Israel to live and die for righteousness, that they and their posterity might enter into and enjoy "the glorious liberty of the sons of God." The bridge between the eras, it is true, spans an arch of thirty centuries; yet in this at least they are alike—their mightiest minds felt the need of compacting a definite alliance with the Lord of glory to bring

the world to the feet of its Messianic KING. Shall we drop the torch, or pass it on?

Three hundred and seventy-seven years ago, to wit, on August 24th, 1560, the Scottish Parliament annulled THE PAPAL JURISDICTION, and thus, in point of law, freed the land from the civic grasp of the ecclesiastical Usurper and Arch-deceiver on the banks of the Tiber. It was a glorious deed. But particularly marvellous for the times was the fact that the enactment made no provision whatsoever for ANY OTHER JURISDICTION to take its place. It is therefore, as Hetherington says, a distinguishing characteristic of the Church of Scotland, **"that it owes its origin, its form, its jurisdiction, and its discipline, to no earthly power."** Of their own accord, in virtue of the authority vested in them by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the ministers and elders of the Church of Scotland resolved to meet in a General Assembly. With this step the Parliament had nothing at all to do. It had not even so much as intimated that such a course should be pursued. Church and state had thus at last become two independent and separate entities. The unholy alliance was dissolved. On the strength of no other authority, and under no other jurisdiction, than that of the Lord Jesus, the King and Head of the church, was the FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REFORMATION PRESBYTERIAN "KIRK OF SCOTLAND" called into existence.

The date of that event was **DECEMBER 20, 1560.** It ought to be memorized by every man, woman, and child who loves the LIBERTY with which the Lord Christ has made His people FREE. In it the vital principle of EC-CLESIASTICAL INDEPENDENCE was embedded and exemplified, and was made illustrious as a **historical achievement** for all time to come; for since that immortal day this basic principle of self-government on the part of the Church has spread its blessings over the whole of North America, and shed its radiance upon every land beneath the shining sun. Why forget it? Why not note it, and talk about it from time to time?

Thus far, however, the snake was only scotched. It was anything but dead. In its Papal form indeed it was fairly well disposed of, but in its Prelatic form its vitality was still intact, ready to pour its "leperous distilment" into the veins of Presbyterianism as soon as the opportunity would come to strike again. On the death of Knox, the civic power

—Morton in particular—was resolved to "change the entire constitution of the Church of Scotland, till it should become as Prelatic and as accommodating as that of England." The crafty regent, in his smooth insinuating way, even went so far as to try his cunning on Andrew Melville, the ultimate outcome of which was a dainty little dialogue to this effect:

Morton—"There will never be quietness in this country till half a dozen of you be hanged or banished."

Melville—"Tush, Sir, threaten your courtiers after that manner. It is the same with me whether I rot in the air or in the ground. The earth is the Lord's. My country is wherever goodness is. * * * Let God be glorified; it will not be in your power to hang or exile His truth."

And so for twenty years the combat deepened. Almost unbrokenly the struggle was continued. In spite of every subtle onset; however, the grand old Church of Scotland held its ground. One thing was clear and undeniable; the New Testament Church was Presbyterian; and there were no two ways about it. Underneath that system of church government stood the everlasting adamant of the Word of God. It was built upon a rock—JUS DIVINUM, as they were accustomed to call it then. Moreover, since it had DIVINE RIGHT behind it, it was UNALTERABLE. The "Tulcan Bishops," to use the expressive epithet so common at the time, had 'climbed up,' or rather had been pushed up and over, **"in some other way."** They were mere intruders, thorns in the flesh, boils on the periphery. "Accordingly," as Hetherington says, "the Assembly which met in Dundee in July, 1580, passed an act declaring, that the office of a bishop, as it was then used and commonly understood, was destitute of warrant and authority from the Word of God, was of mere human invention, introduced by folly and corruption, and tended to the great injury of the church." Nor was the stand they took ineffective. "So great was the influence of the Assembly," continues Hetherington, "that notwithstanding the reluctance of the pretended bishops to relinquish their usurped power and wealth, * * * the whole assumed order submitted, with the exception of five, in the course of the year in which the act abolishing Episcopacy was passed."

No sooner, however, had the Church gotten rid of its Prelatic eruptions and abrasions than it was threatened

again with the sarcoma of Catholicism. "The Duke of Lennox and other nobles, who either openly avowed their adherence to the Church of Rome, or were suspected of attachment to the creed of that dreaded and detested perversion of Christianity," were known to be planning to put their sinister designs into effect at the earliest available opportunity. To forestall this menacing disaster the General Assembly, which met at Glasgow in April, 1581, sanctioned a "Confession of Faith" drawn up by John Craig, and solemnly enacted it as **THE FIRST NATIONAL COVENANT OF SCOTLAND**. It is a masterpiece. It contains **THIRTY** entries against Roman Catholicism which are just as appropriate today as they were in 1581, and which should call out just as decided a **PROTEST** now, on the part of the true Christian, as they did then. This Covenant, with additions, was **RENEWED** in 1638. It was followed in 1643 by **THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT**, which has been called "**the wisest, the sublimest, and the most sacred document ever framed by uninspired men.**" Hetherington states but the naked truth, when he says that "the most important of man's interests for time and for eternity are included within its ample scope, and made the subjects of a Solemn League with each other, and a sacred Covenant with God." The scene at its taking was overwhelmingly impressive. Mr. Nye "read it from the pulpit, slowly and aloud, pausing at the close of every article, while the whole audience of statesmen and divines arose, and, with their right hands held up to heaven, worshipped the great name of God, and gave their sacred pledge."

IN THOSE COVENANTS LIES LATENT ALL THE CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ENJOYS TODAY. This **immense fact** we tersely but fully recognize when in our own classic Covenant of 1871 we, "with our hands lifted up, do jointly and severally swear by the Great and Dreadful Name of the Lord our God," that we will commit "ourselves with all our interests to the keeping of Him in whom we have believed: in **faithfulness to our own vows**, and to **THE COVENANTS OF OUR FATHERS.**"

Of all this our fourth Term of Communion takes adequate account. It makes no attempt indeed to enumerate the principles and objects, or even the **leading** principles and objects, which those notable documents of Reforma-

tion days embody and enunciate, and which they bind their signers to live for, and, if need be, die for; but, like the other Terms, it sends us right back to the **DOCUMENTS THEMSELVES**, to the **IMMORTAL COVENANTS** in which these principles have been so splendidly incorporated, and so fearlessly stated, and binds us in perpetuity to the principles **as principles**, and to the **objects and ends in view** until these shall have been attained.

What then do we propose to do? to abandon those eternally illustrious principles? to live in ignorance of them and forget them? or, on the other hand, to assume the divinely ratified attitude and plan prescribed for all true believers, once for all and forever, in the first fourteen verses of the **SEVENTY-EIGHTH PSALM**? Hostility is not so bad, for hostility usually stirs the loyalty of such as love the truth, and paves the way for its defence; but inertia, and indolence, and indifference, and ignorance, mean death. Shall we waken up and live, or are we ecclesiastically ready for interment?

IX

What a commanding vista opens up before our eyes when we turn our thoughts to the departed centuries! How great a "cloud of witnesses" is overshadowing us! "**WITNESSES,**" mind you; not spectators merely, not idle lookers on, but spectators and onlookers who have **SEALED**, or who at least have held themselves **IN READINESS** to seal, **THEIR TESTIMONY WITH THEIR BLOOD**. Richter I think it was who said, "**To die for truth is not to die for one's country, but to die for the world.**" He also affirmed that "**every pillar on which the temple of truth rests is grounded in a martyr's grave.**" In the light of these **realities**—for that is what they are—what a debt of gratitude the whole wide world owes to the **eighteen thousand men and women and little children** who in the twenty-eight years between 1660 and 1688 were done to death, or worse than death, by satanically outrageous cruelties "inflicted in the vain endeavor to destroy the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and establish Prelacy on its ruins."

Suppose we browse around a little while among the martyrs of Scotland with Alexander Smellie as our guide and spokesman—just long enough to enable us to sense the spirit that actuated and adorned those "noble lives."

Andrew Hislop, a lad of seventeen, is facing Claver-

house. The guns are loaded. The boy is told to pull his bonnet over his eyes. He refuses, and stands confronting his slayers with his Bible in his hand. "I can look you in the face," he says; "I have done nothing of which I need to be ashamed. But how will you look in that day when you shall be judged by what is written in this Book?" Here his sentence ended—as did his life.

John Gibson was taken, and with him four others. "He was allowed to pray: and so familiar and tender and appealing his prayer was that, in spite of themselves, the very dragoons were moved. * * * (Then) from the matchlocks death came, rapid, sweet, a boon and not a curse. His four comrades were shot together. The volley killed three; but the fourth, while he was fatally wounded, was still conscious. One of the soldiers saw it, and ran on him with his sword. Even yet the indomitable witness-bearer could give his testimony. 'Though every hair of my head were a man,' he cried, 'I am willing to die all those deaths for Christ and His cause;' and so he went through the River singing."

John Bell was a man well born. With four associates he fell into the hands of Sir Robert Grierson of Lag. "Cain was bloody; but 'he to Lag's latches never came.' 'Doeg the Edomite did slay fourscore and five priests in one day;' but 'brave Lag did Doeg far exceed.' * * * Quarter had been promised, but Lag laughed at the promise; he commanded that they should be shot instantly. 'Let me spend a few minutes in prayer,' said Bell. 'What have you been doing so many years in these hills?' Grierson retorted—"No, no! you have prayed enough." And, when the good man was dead, he would not let them bury him; his vengeance must be wreaked on the lifeless frame."

Or who does not know by heart how Margaret Wilson awaited the tide on the sands of Solway, singing,

"My sins and faults of youth
Do Thou, O Lord, forget;
After thy mercy think on me,
And for Thy goodness great?"—

Margaret Wilson,

"the intrepid maid for whom
Old Solway piled his waters monumental,
And gave that glorious heart a glorious tomb

Speaking of John Brown "one knows not whether the courage of husband or of wife is the more admirable. But hers were the loss, the cup of gall, the weighty heritage of pain. He went instantaneously from his moorland croft to the 'lovely city in a lovely land,' where 'pleasures flow as rivers flow.' She lived on in widowhood, dowered with ineffaceable memories." Claverhouse: "What thinkest thou of thy husband now, woman?" Read her answer in verse.

"What think you now of your braw goodman?"

Ah, woe is me!
My heart was high when I began,
My heart was high, and my answer ran,
"More than ever he is to me."
But when I laid him on his bed—
Ah, woe is me!—
And spread the face-cloth over his head,
And sat me down beside my dead,
O, but my heart grew sair in me.
It's well for men to be heroes grand—
Ah, woe is me!
But a woman's hearth is her country, and
A desolate home is a desolate land:
And he was all the world to me.

These, together with 18,000 more who as equally good soldiers of Jesus Christ laid down their lives in defence of the truth as it is in Jesus, particularly as it came to a focus at the time in the apostolical doctrine of "THE DIVINE RIGHT OF ONE UNALTERABLE FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT," constitute that clear and luminous galaxy of martyrs that adorns our ecclesiastical sky and spreads across it in streams of crimson such "a noble example for US and our POSTERITY to follow, in contending for ALL divine truth, and in testifying against ALL contrary evils, which may exist in the corrupt constitutions of either church or state."

Self-evidently our fifth Term of Communion could not even so much as begin to name or enumerate the martyred witnesses who purchased for us the priceless liberties both in church and state which we today enjoy; such an undertaking, as anyone can see, would be wholly alien to the

purpose which such an instrument is meant to serve; all it can do, or could be asked to do, is to send us back to **the records of the past**, that we may ourselves, by our own industry, enrich our minds from that inexhaustible mine of history where the sacred memorials of our loyal forefathers are so abundantly treasured. In a word, this Term, like the others, **PRESUPPOSES** enough knowledge on the part of members, or of applicants for membership, to justify them in assenting to the happy obligation involved in the avowal, and enough integrity and faithfulness on the part of pastor and people to warrant the assurance that the consent given will be fervid, and vibrant with the very essence of genuine enthusiasm. Surely it is always a thrilling experience, if the soul is not dormant, or indeed already dead, to feel that in taking this significant and stately step we are moving onward amid the corridors of that magnificent temple of truth every pillar of which has been grounded in a martyr's grave. Can you do it without trembling? If so, **when did you die?**

X

To regard the **Confession of Faith** as covering the same ground as is covered by our **Declaration and Testimony**, or as dealing with the same subjects for the same purpose, is about as wide of the mark as it is possible to get. In general, of course, and of necessity, the two documents have to do with the same theme both in broad outline and in particular items, but the respective ends in view are anything but similar. The Confession enunciates the **REVEALED SYSTEM OF GRACE, AS A SYSTEM**, irrespective of what it may condemn or not condemn. "Here," it says, "is the **DIVINE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION** as a mere **MATTER OF FACT**. You may accept it, if you choose, or reject it; but **THERE IT STANDS**, a gift from God, ordered in all things, and sure."

The Testimony, on the other hand, is different, intrinsically so. Since it has to lay a **firm foundation** for the distinctive building it aims to erect, it must, to be sure, begin with, and anchor itself to, the immutable principles and doctrines of the Word of God. It must have an admittedly divine **point of departure** from which to launch out into the deep, an authoritative and final **source of appeal**. Some-

thing to **substantiate the charge** it is about to make against the skeptic, or the misguided believer. Accordingly it states the doctrine **distinctly**, though at the same time not nearly so comprehensively and elaborately as the Confession does—just fully enough, in fact, to **serve the particular purpose** in evidence at the time. To go to the Testimony to find the doctrines of grace arranged systematically, that is, in their strict theological order, would be a good deal like turning to the Multiplication Table for a description of the Parthenon. The Testimony takes it for granted that the scientific aspect of the matter has been attended to in the Confession; all it proposes to do is to say enough to pave the way for an unequivocal condemnation of existing "**ERRORS**."

And this, by the way, is why the accurate students and exegetes of the Bible are never willing to allow the Westminster Confession of Faith to be subjected to change; for it stands to reason that a doctrine stated **correctly** at any given time, and fitted into its proper setting **once**, is like a stone in a cathedral—it is **THERE TO STAY**. The theology of the Confession is the theology of the Bible. **BEING** so, it is not to be molested. The truth in any chapter or section may most assuredly be explained, and expanded, and illustrated, and utilized for the comfort and edification of believers, or for the winning of unbelievers, but if it has been so expressed as to exhibit the exact teaching of Scripture on the point in question, and has once been mortised into its appropriate place in the system of salvation, the case is closed; there can be no call for change.

It is decidedly otherwise with the Testimony. It pertains to the very genius of such an instrument to adjust itself to the demands of the times. "**ERRORS**" never cease. There is no end of them. New specimens keep looming into view continually. The Testimony accordingly needs to be recast from time to time, and enlarged, and made more specific, so as to deal explicitly with the exigencies of the hour. For example, instrumental music in divine worship is an item in point. It had not made its appearance above the horizon when our present Testimony was formulated, at least not to such an extent as to have been regarded as an immediate menace. Consequently it is only by implication, though indeed by **necessary** implication, that this worldly innovation is condemned. The Testimony should have an added section to **declare the truth** on this important subject, and

to place the introduction of instrumental music in the worship of God among the "errors" to be condemned.

In confirmation of what has just been said, compare and contrast, if you will, for a moment or so, the two parallel chapters that treat "OF GOD," in the Confession and in the Testimony. Even when we condescend to counting words, the Confession takes the lead by about two to one. More than that, the Testimony, even in its brevity, includes, either definitely or impliedly, what the Confession, in keeping with its aim to systematize, devotes three additional chapters to the consideration of—the chapters, namely, that set forth the doctrine of the "Decrees of God," and of "Creation," and of "Providence." It takes but a glance to make even the casual reader aware that the "errors" condemned in the first chapter of the Testimony depend for their validity on the doctrine, that there is but ONE GOD, who exists in the form of a TRINITY (2 and 6); that He has eternally decreed whatsoever comes to pass (3); that He is the Creator and Lord of all (1); and that He maintains a **providential oversight** over all things, which is never to be questioned (4 and 5). That is to say, that the Testimony, in conformity with its design to put the Church on the WITNESS STAND, elaborates the doctrines with which it deals only in so far as it is necessary to do so in order to EXPOSE THE ERRORS WHICH IT IMMEDIATELY PROCEEDS TO CONDEMN. It is a blunder of the shallowest kind to confound the two documents in their purpose and aim.

Manifestly, at the time of his appearance for admission into the Church, Sessions could not be expected to confront any candidate with next to two hundred "errors" in doctrine and life that ought to be condemned and witnessed against. It would be preposterous even to think of such a mode of procedure. At that stage in the process all this, it is assumed, HAS BEEN DONE. Wherever there has been FIDELITY on the part of those to whose care the duty of teaching has been entrusted, the whole end can be accomplished by a single syllable or a mere nod of the head. All that our Terms of Communion ask for is our ASSENT, and our AGREEMENT to be BOUND by whatever is "NOMINATED IN THE BOND." The "bond" contains a COMPLETE LIST of our ARTICLES OF FAITH; that is to say, a complete list of the principles and doctrines to which THE ASSENT IS GIVEN. By this time the distinc-

tion, it is hoped, has been made apparent. "Terms" do not ITEMIZE; were never meant to ITEMIZE; CANNOT itemize without engendering CONFUSION; they simply bind to that which has been ITEMIZED ELSEWHERE.

And now "by way of application"—as the preachers used to say when they said it all over again, and put the last of our forefathers soundly to sleep. Few things, perhaps, could be more dismal and disappointing today than the TOPICS prepared for the various kinds of Young People's Societies. For the most part they are so insistently inane, or so trite and commonplace, that one can easily anticipate almost all that will be said about them by a single glance at the folder. Yet all the while we have about TWO HUNDRED TOPICS in our Testimony, stated, it is true, in the form of "errors," but which, by the change or addition of a few words, could be turned into as timely and interesting a set of subjects for study and straight-thinking as can be found anywhere within the field of religious literature. Take, for example, the first of the "errors" condemned in chapter I. Change it into a positive statement to this effect,—"The World of Mind and Matter the Work of an Intelligent Creator,"—and you have the finest conceivable kind of an opportunity to fortify the youthful minds of the congregation, or better still, to have the young people fortify **their own** minds, against the inroads of evolutionary skepticism that are making their way into the children's MODES OF EXPRESSION nowadays **even before they leave the Grammar Grades in the public schools.** Notice too, that the "error," as stated, not only supplies the TOPIC, but the **divisions** of the topic. 1. No created thing can be "eternal." 2. Chance, or a "fortuitous concourse of atoms," cannot account for creation. 3. To account for the universe RATIONALLY we must go back in thought to a Being who NEVER BEGAN TO BE, and consequently was Himself UNCAUSED, the Creator and Lord of all. Furthermore, back of the statements derived from the "errors" stand the "doctrines" as enunciated in the chapter to which they are attached; and then finally, back of the doctrines stand the citations of Scripture by which the doctrines themselves are substantiated—thus keeping the thoughts riveted from first to last on the teachings of the TEXT-BOOK. What an arsenal of splendid equipment we have right at hand to make the young people of our Church the most intelligent and up to date group in the world on scien-

tific and religious themes, and with what criminal indolence and unconcern we allow it to rust away unused!

XI

The reason why the Terms of Communion have been chosen as the basis of thought in this brief study of standards is because they cover the entire range of our Christian beliefs and moral obligations and ecclesiastical activities. They leave nothing out. As "Terms," therefore, they BIND us to everything INCLUDED, in order that, as Ezekiel has said it, we "may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, AND DO THEM." And to what conception of things could we pledge our loyalty and our lives that would even so much as approach these blood-bought standards in clearness, in timeliness, in comprehensiveness, and in heavenly grandeur and sublimity?

XII

For my part the Terms of Communion satisfy me completely as they stand. I have not officiated, or helped to officiate, at more than A HUNDRED communions since my licensure, conscious that in each and every instance I have lifted up my hand, though invisibly yet in spirit, in "the great and dreadful name of the Lord our God," putting myself under oath that I believed our standards and would be true to them till death, only to be ready at this late day either to throw them overboard or to "recede from a more clear and particular testimony to a more general and evasive one." The Terms, as they are at present, survey the field. Technically they serve their purpose perfectly.

Not that a word or two here and there might not be altered to advantage perhaps; that, of course, is nearly always possible in any document. For illustration, "faith and manners" might better be "faith and obedience," as the phrase occurs in a similar setting in the Larger Catechism. "Obedience" is a wider term. It includes not only the THING TO BE DONE, but the WAY as well which the Scriptures lay down for THE DOING OF IT. Back of the English word "wiles" (Eph. 6:11) is the Greek word "methods." The METHOD is as important as the END TO BE REACHED. The means as well as the end MUST BE RIGHT. "Obedience" covers them both. As Paul says to

the Philippians (2:5, 9), "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," who was "OBEDIENT unto death." Also, without in any wise affecting the meaning, the fourth Term might be made a trifle more symmetrical grammatically by a little readjustment, and the fifth might be shortened without detriment by the omission of the particulars inserted in the body of it; and this, after all, if aptly done, might prove to be what the Church has been seeking, if haply it may find. In view of all that has been said, therefore, the following emendations are suggested—not merely as offering a way out, but as offering a way out that would probably be **more universally satisfactory** than any other way that has as yet been proposed.

XII

TERMS OF ECCLESIASTICAL COMMUNION

in the

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

in

NORTH AMERICA

I. An acknowledgment of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and the only rule of faith and obedience.

II. An acknowledgment that the whole doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, are agreeable unto, and founded upon, the Scriptures.

III. An acknowledgment of the divine right of one unalterable form of Church Government, and Manner of Worship—set forth in substance and outline in the Westminster "Form of Church Government" and "Directory for Worship."

IV. An acknowledgment that public covenanting is an ordinance of God to be observed by the church and by nations; that the obligations of such covenants are perpetually binding; and that we are solemnly bound by our Covenant of 1871, and by the covenants entered into by our

ecclesiastical forefathers in so far as the ends and ideals of those covenants are as yet unrealized.

V. An approbation of the faithful contendings of the martyrs of Jesus, particularly in connection with the Reformation in the British Isles, as containing a noble example for us and our posterity to follow, in contending for all divine truth, and in testifying against all contrary evils which may exist in the corrupt constitutions of either church or state.

VI. An approbation of the doctrines contained in the Declaration and Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, in defence of truth, and in opposition to error.

THESE, together with due subordination in the Lord to the authority of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, and a regular life and conversation, FORM THE BONDS OF OUR ECCLESIASTICAL UNION.

XIV

And so we come eventually to the point from which we started out, and are able once more to say with Mr. Clyde—THESE ARE NOBLE PRINCIPLES AND THEY OUGHT TO BE ADORNED BY NOBLE LIVES. My one absorbing thought from the beginning to the end has been to bring the plain historical truth concerning our unparalleled and priceless standards out into the limelight and home to the hearts of the young people of the present generation, and to do it in a way that will enlist their loyalty and allegiance to Jesus Christ and His cause, and inspire them to pass their fervor on to generations yet to come, even on down to that GLORIOUS DAY when the books shall be opened and the Judgment set, and the whole membership of the Covenanter Church in every land shall hear the Lord Jesus, "the Sovereign Seer of Time," saying, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into THE JOY OF YOUR LORD."

THE END.