

Vol. 70

June 27, 1900

No. 26

THE PRESBYTERIAN.

. CONTENTS .

EDITORIALS	3
Revision a Probable Failure—The Missionary Situation in China—Doctrinal Awakening— The Gutenberg Celebration—The Purpose of the New Creed, etc.	
ADDRESS AT DEDICATION OF MONU- MENT OF REV. JOHN BOYD.....	8
By Rev. Dr. Wm H. Roberts.	
SHALL WE ABOLISH SUBSCRIPTION?....	10
By Rev. W. B. Noble, D.D.	
THE OLD SCOTS MEMORIAL.....	23
By Rev. H. B. MacCauley.	
IN A LIBRARY CORNER.....	27
By John N. Crawford.	
With Church News and Special Missionary and Lit- erary Articles.	

PHILADELPHIA
NEW YORK.

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Revision a Probable Failure.

We have been somewhat surprised that the revision of our Confession of Faith is regarded as a pretty sure failure by some of our exchanges, which formerly advocated it, but which are now bent upon securing a new creed. The Interior is quite persuaded that the present movement to change the Westminster Standards will not succeed. It says "No attempt should be made at revision. This is regarded as in every aspect undesirable and unnecessary, and would in all probability fail. There is a religious reverence for the Confession that would be offended by any cutting or reconstruction." This is well put, and means a good deal, considering the source from which it comes.

The Michigan Presbyterian seems to be of a like opinion, when it declares: "The plans of revisionists are likely to fail for several reasons. Some want very radical changes and some merely verbal alterations in some objectionable expressions. Some want a new creed instead of the Confession of Faith. Some want a brief new creed as a supplement to the old Confession. Some believe that a satisfactory revision of the present Confession can be made. It may be accepted as true that an overwhelming majority in our ministry and eldership will vote against any radical revision. It also seems clear that a large majority favors some revision." Our contemporary thinks the only possible way to prevent a miscarriage of the movement is for the "Presbyteries, if they desire, to ask for one or both of these plans: a brief supplementary creed, and also for a conservative revision." But there will be almost as much practical difficulty along this line of action as in any other, as some Presbyteries that desire a few verbal changes are opposed to a new creed, and others that want a new creed take little or no stock in slight Confessional amendments. Divided sentiment between revisionists and short creedists is likely to kill both movements.

But there is another factor to be considered. A considerable party in our Church would like to have the previous revision-report sent down to the Presbyteries for adoption. They regard it as the best thing possible along Calvinistic lines, and many favor it, and it alone. But there are a number of facts that militate against its success at the present time. 1. It is weighted with the odium of having been tried under favorable conditions, yet having failed. 2. It proposes too much for some revisionists, and too little for others. 3. It has lost the enthusiasm of the first love for it. 4. It retains many of the objectionable features about election and reprobation, to which many of our ministers seriously demur. 5. It is hard to warm over old fare. 6. Ardent new creedists will have none of it, but would have the old document remain as it is, but as the Interior maintains, with a "new statement of doctrine," to which "alone ministers and elders should be required to subscribe." 7. The times have changed since the revision-movement of ten years ago, and many who favored it then, do not to-day. 8. Those

who voted against it, when previously submitted to their consideration, have not, at least apparently, changed their views as to its unadvisability.

As far as we can read the surface indications, we do not find as much desire for revision, or even for a new creed, as we noted years ago. The spontaneity is almost gone out of it. It is largely a warmed-over affair. It has also now associations that are not in its favor. When first started there was no Briggsism and Smithism involved in it. It was undertaken within Calvinistic lines. There had been no doctrinal disturbances. It meant the fewest possible alterations. Now it stands associated with much radicalism. Those who inaugurated it this time were pronounced liberalists. It is true, many sound men, and numbers identified with the conservative side during our Church trials, have since joined in it in the hope of removing some false and odious constructions placed upon some Confessional statements, but it still remains an undisputed fact that almost all those who sympathized with Briggsism and McGiffertism and advanced theology are the warmest and loudest in favor of large creedal changes, or of an entirely new creed. All this tends to cause many ministers and elders to fear it, or discount it, and to hold on to what we have, believing that it has stood us in good stead in past agitations, and that it will help us to weather the doctrinal storms of the future.

A still further consideration operating against the success of the present revision movement is the growing feeling in the Church that we have had enough of Confessional agitation, and should get down to more solid and aggressive work. The past ten years have been trying and testful years, and the beginning of the new century ought not to be disturbed by disputes over either the old, or a new, creed. Rest is needful for adjusting ourselves to arising conditions of Christian activity. We have a thoroughly tested system of doctrine and polity, and the call seems to be to push the cause of Christ in all possible directions under the old "blue banner."

Nor must the silent force of a conservative eldership be overlooked. We note an increasing sentiment among the rank and file of our working laymen, to let well enough alone, and give ourselves to pushing forward the practical work of our Church. There are those who talk and feel that ministers are giving too much time and thought to revision or to a new creed, and not enough to the more pressing questions of the day. They feel that the old Church should be talked up, not down, both as respects her doctrine and her polity. They find no difficulty in subscribing to her Standards, and they do not see why their ministers should make such an ado over the matter. They are becoming more and more convinced that the present is not the time to revise or set aside the old Confession, but to show more activity and zeal in building up Church life at home, and for extending Christ's Kingdom abroad. When it comes to voting in the fall, many who thus think and feel will array themselves on the anti-revision and anti-new creed side.

not use that richest gift of God to his Church, the power of the Holy Ghost. Our churches have always rejected alike unsanctified learning and pietistic ignorance as among the qualifications of religious teachers, and have insisted in addition that preachers of the Gospel shall approve themselves as called to their great work by the Living Head of the Church. Learning, and the evangelistic spirit as a result, have been two of the abiding characteristics of the Presbyterian ministry. They have made that ministry mighty both for the maintenance of the truth and for the extension of the Kingdom of Christ. As we think upon the record of the growth of the Presbyterian Church in this land, we cannot but feel that there is providential significance in the fact that the first existing record in connection with the proceedings of our chief Church Judicatory, should be the record of the examination of the Rev. John Boyd, with a view to his ordination; and that his lecture was entitled, "De regimine ecclesiæ," and that the text of his sermon was John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." The Church of Christ and the power of Christ unto salvation, were fitting themes for the first ordination by an American Presbytery. From that hour the Church has moved forward along these lines, led by a ministry which has made effort in every generation to be, as true servants of Christ, workmen not needing to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, and earnestly and efficiently proclaiming the message of salvation. Our Church, because of its learned and Christ-called ministry, has been a truly evangelistic Church, correctly appreciating the Gospel and pushing the work of evangelization, according to the need in every quarter of the country. John Boyd was the ecclesiastical ancestor, short though his life was, of the many men who, under God, have wrought wonders of salvation in these United States. In one branch of our Church alone, the apostolic band of twelve has grown to 7,400 ministers, and the score of churches have become 7,700 in number. The communicants number more than one million, and the gifts in a single year for missions and benevolence amounted to more than three millions of dollars. The total of these contributions for the spread of the truth, during the closing century, amounted to more than \$87,000,000, and the converts added to the Church numbered more than 2,200,000. To-day, as we look upon the Presbyterian Church, with its widespread institutions in the United States, with its vast missionary enterprises at home and abroad, with its highly organized schemes of benevolence, with its officers and members in large part rightly appreciating the mission of the Church, and seeking to fulfil all duty, let us acknowledge the debt of gratitude which the Church owes to those men, dead and living, who through two centuries have steadily upheld the banner of the cross within our borders, carrying it forward with the advance of population in every year, rejoicing to serve him who is the divine Saviour of sinners, and living and dying in the faith which finds its source and sustenance in him who century after century accomplishes in the earth the counsel of his own Almighty, gracious and holy will.

I close with a quotation. Next to the name of Washington in our history as a nation, stands the name of

Lincoln. Speaking above the dead at Gettysburg, our martyred President said, "We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our power to add or detract. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to their unfinished work." This sentiment should be within all hearts. Here there should be a renewal of vows to the Church of which Christ is the Head, and above all to the great Head himself. Here there should be the purpose of a renewed devotion to the New Testament principles of Church Government, to the system of faith contained in Holy Scripture as it finds expression in the Westminster Confession, and to the continuance and maintenance of an educated and consecrated ministry. This monument summons us and all Presbyterians to loyalty—loyalty to the Church, loyalty to the Church's creed, loyalty to the Christian ministry, and above all loyalty to the Great Head of the Church, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him for all the past, in all the present and for all the future, be the glory.

Shall We Abolish Subscription?

By Rev. W. B. Noble, D.D.

As a solution of the problem of Revision, the Outlook, in its issue of June 2d, proposes that the Presbyterian Church should abolish the subscription to the Confession of Faith required of her ministers and elders, and let admission to the Presbyterian ministry depend merely on examination by the Presbytery.

The Confession of Faith, it would have us believe, is not really the Standard of the Presbyterian Church; subscription to it counts for nothing; therefore, subscription may be abolished and the whole difficulty of the situation be relieved.

Or, stated more fully: "The Westminster Assembly's Confession of Faith," it says, "is the Standard of the Presbyterian Church in this sense only: that every Presbyterian elder, whether a ruling or a preaching elder, is required before ordination to answer affirmatively the following constitutional question: 'Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?'"

But if "in this sense only," then in no sense at all is the Confession of Faith the standard of the Presbyterian Church; for, says the Outlook, "no man is admitted to the ministry merely because he gives an affirmative answer to this question." The examination by the Presbytery which every candidate for the ministry is required to pass, is after all the real test. "And if it is the real test, why not make it also the formal and the only test? Why not in other words abolish the subscription altogether, and leave admission to the Presbyterian ministry to depend upon the examination by the Presbytery?"

If it be objected, (as it doubtless will be), that this course would deprive the Presbyterian Church of all Standards, the Outlook answers that in fact it would bring that Church back to the standard of Protestantism, and to that which the Confession of Faith itself declares to be the only Standard of faith and practice. "The Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture would remain the standard of the Presbyterian Church as it now is, and it

would be for each Presbytery to determine concerning each candidate for the ministry whether he sincerely accepted this simple and spiritual standard, and was sufficiently in accord with the Presbyterian ministers to work in harmony with them."

Such is the proposition; let us consider it. Certainly its artless simplicity is refreshing, and at first sight one is hardly inclined to take it seriously. But as it comes from a high source and seems to be seriously made, it deserves serious consideration.

After reading it and the arguments for it one wonders a little that the writers of the Confession of Faith, who so stoutly declared the Scriptures to be the only infallible rule of faith and practice, should have written a Confession at all. Why were they not content with "the standard of Protestantism?" The necessity for a Confession of Faith, as every one knows, lay in the fact that Protestantism, while universally accepting the Scriptures as authoritative, was divided into various schools of interpretation. The great words of Scripture, such as atonement, election, justification, sanctification, righteousness, sin, grace, etc., were interpreted in different senses by these different schools. Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism divided the religious world. Our Presbyterian and Congregational forefathers, while accepting the Scriptures as the revealed truth of God, were not indifferent to truthfulness in the interpretation of the Scriptures. They held that the Calvinistic system, which recognizes the sovereignty of God over all his creatures and finds in him the fountain of all saving love and grace, was the true and the only true interpretation of the Word of God. They set it forth in the Confession of Faith in opposition to the errors of Arminianism and Socinianism. And in order to secure uniformity of doctrinal instruction and the preservation of the faith in its purity and entirety, the Presbyterian Church requires of her ministers and elders subscription to the Confession of Faith.

Now subscription to "the standard of Protestantism;" though of course required of all ministers, does not meet all the requirements of the case. Every Protestant minister receives the Scriptures as the Word of God and the supreme rule of faith and duty. Yet under such subscription one may preach Calvinism, another Arminianism and another Socinianism in all sincerity. Unless we sink into absolute indifferentism we must have some sort of creed or confession as a form of instruction and basis of union. And the clearer and more definite the statement of doctrinal belief is, the stronger and more united will the Church be. And not only so, but the greater will be the liberty and safety of the individual. A vague, indefinite creed, which attempts to be all-comprehensive, is a menace to personal liberty. It leaves wide room for misunderstanding and debate; and instead of securing larger freedom, subjects the individual to the tyranny of whatever opinion may chance to prevail at the time, or in the body of which he is a member.

And at this point lies a special objection to the Outlook's plan of putting examination by the Presbytery in place of subscription to the Confession. It is hardly fair to say, as the Outlook does, that in our present practice subscription counts for nothing, and that examination is everything. The examination, as far as it

is doctrinal, is intended rather to be a test of the subscription. It has the statement of doctrine set forth in the Confession as its subject matter; and its purpose is to ascertain whether the acceptance is as full and complete as in the judgment of the Church it ought to be. A large measure of liberty is allowed; but there are limits beyond which the Church feels it unsafe to go. In the cases cited by the Outlook, those of Drs. Briggs and McGiffert, these brethren held that they were within the limits of the system of doctrine taught in the Confession. But the Church, comparing their teachings with the Confession, judged otherwise. After all, it was not examination by the Presbytery, but the Confession of Faith that excluded them.

And in all examination by Presbytery there must be some standard to which both the Presbytery and the candidate may appeal. "To determine concerning each candidate for the ministry whether he was sufficiently in accord with the Presbyterian ministers to work in harmony with them," would be a difficult task, and with uncertain result. For with no standard of doctrine the members of Presbytery might differ among themselves; and with whom or what party must the candidate be in accord? Or the whole Presbytery might have drifted so far into error as to reject a candidate sound in the faith. Or a candidate rejected by one Presbytery might be accepted by another. At best the individual must ever be subjected to the tyranny of opinion prevailing in the particular Presbytery to which he applies for admission, and must ever be uncertain as to what he is expected to believe and teach.

Surely, to this proposal to substitute examination for the Confession, every candidate for the Presbyterian ministry will say, "No; give me the Confession of Faith. Give me a clear and definite statement of the doctrines I am expected to teach. Give me a standard by which I can vindicate myself when my orthodoxy is questioned. By it I will stand or fall; but not by the uncertain and changing views of my fellowmen."

God told Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house, and there he saw the potter take a piece of clay and place it on a wheel. As he stood there to watch, the potter shaped it; it rose beneath his hand to a fair and lovely shape. But just as it was complete, and it seemed as though nothing more was needed, it crumbled beneath his hand. Some part of it fell upon the wheel, some part upon the ground. Jeremiah thought that the potter would take another piece of clay and make that clay fulfill his plan, but instead he stooped and gathered the broken clay with his hand, picked it from the ground, and kneading it with his hand he placed it once more upon the wheel and began to make that clay again; and presently a vessel as fair as possible stood complete, ready to be taken to the kiln to be baked and made permanent. Away back in your life God took you and placed you upon the wheel, and for these many years God has sought to make you fair. But I know not why, I cannot tell—God knows—you know—there has come a flaw and a break, and you are a piece of broken pottery. Your life is a marred life, your ideal is a broken ideal, and all around there lie the littered pieces of the man or the woman that you might have been. But now what shall you do? God put you in that place for a high purpose, but you have missed your mark. Shall God take another man and give him your wealth, another woman and give her your position? . . . Not yet, not yet. He might take another piece of clay and make that a vessel, but instead he comes again to seek you. The hand of God is laying hold upon the broken pieces of your marred and spoiled life, and if you will let him, he will now begin to complete your nature by making it to be what he meant it to be years ago when you were cradled at the foot of the cross.—Rev. F. B. Meyer.