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# THE PRESBYTERIAN.

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# THE PRESBYTERIAN

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## Moral Wars.

Vice stalks abroad. Evil is manifest in high and low stations. Immorality abounds. The agents of iniquity are active. Intemperance works havoc in every direction. Corruption in municipal and governmental circles is on the increase. Defiling literature is being widely circulated. Profanity, gambling and adultery are not confined to secret places, but are open and flagrant. Sin in all forms and degrees assumes alarming proportions. The world is in Satan's grip.

Warfare upon wrong in all its varied ramifications and relations was never more imperative. The summons to determined opposition and special activity is loud and pressing. Christendom cannot mistake her duty. It is hers to battle against the foes of God and of humanity. The citadels of evil must be stormed, taken and destroyed. God's people are not to sit still and do nothing. As the servants of the Most High God they must rally to his side, and in his name effect reforms wherever possible.

In their moral wars they must be actuated by the purest and highest motives, and display at all times an upright character. Reformers should be above suspicion. The Lord wants warriors, not only of the finest mettle, but of the most unquestionable principle. He calls for earnestness of spirit, intenseness of purpose, steadfastness of endeavor and nobleness of action. Both the end sought and the means employed must be worthy. It is the men of decided conviction, of acknowledged worth and of righteous conduct who carry the day in moral undertakings. They are able to gather about them a following that is not to be despised, to produce an impression that is potential, to elicit a respect that heightens their influence and to speak and act with an authority that commands recognition. They develop a heroism that withstands opposition and threatening. They obtain an inspiration that impels them to the greatest exertions and a support that sustains them under all circumstances. They are under the guidance of him, whose wisdom is infinite and whose power is equal to all accomplishments. They are strong and successful as they manifest his grace and do his will.

In all successful warfare upon evil united effort is necessary. Too often those who ought to be helpers, hold back, or turn critics. They cannot see that the time is ripe for action, or that the means employed are suitable or practical. God's army of reform is too frequently a divided host. This is a source of weakness as well as a hindrance to aggressive movement. What the Christian Church to-day needs to overcome sin and Satan and to push on the cause of Christ at home and abroad is the co-operation of all her members. The battle is not to be handed over to the few, however zealous, skillful and experienced they may be, but one and all must come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. He has committed to the entire body of believers the work of teaching and saving the world. The

layman as well as the minister has his part to do in breaking down the strongholds of iniquity and in lifting men out of the degradation and bondage of sin. When the whole Church realizes her high mission, when criticism of workers and their plans ceases, when the fault-finders fall into line, when all Christians enter heartily and fully into the contest for truth and right and are animated by a true faith, holy enthusiasm and great boldness, success will attend Zion's onsets upon the evil forces that confront her on every side.

Equally important are tact and judgment in moral warfare. The situation must be taken into account and shrewd management displayed. There is a place for keen penetration and judicious action. Our Lord tells us to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Cunning must be joined with innocence, and prudence with purity. The Church must be in advance of the world in its forecasts and adaptations. She must keep crowding evil back with all legitimate agencies. She must not shut herself up in seclusion nor operate merely in out-of-the-way places, but must be equal to all occasions and wide-awake to all demands upon her resources. She is not to make too much of respectability and conventionality, but adapt her instrumentalities to existing conditions. She is to seize strategic positions and attack the enemy as the occasion requires. She is to show regard to men, needs, circumstances, seasons, and occurrences at home and abroad, and adjust her agencies accordingly.

Nor must she relax her efforts at any time, or in any manner. She must fight the Lord's battles by day and by night, year after year, and age after age. The struggle can only end with the complete overthrow of the powers of darkness, and it will require more than the Twentieth Century to effect this result. We are in the conflict for life. Others will take our places when we depart to our reward. The Church at large is marching on to victory. The time is coming when Christ shall have put down all opposing rule, when the Cross shall be planted in China, India, Japan, Siam and Africa, and other parts of heathendom. When misrule, oppression and superstition shall disappear, and when righteousness, peace and salvation shall everywhere prevail. Meanwhile, there must be a steady, persistent and undaunted pushing forward of Christ's Kingdom in our own and other lands.

We must not be content with the mere destruction of evil, but introduce elements that will forever preclude its return. There is a need for a positive, not a negative, religion. The altar is demanded where the abomination existed. The constructive must supplant the destructive. The reformation must be thorough and abiding, a pure Gospel quickening heart and life, and the law of righteousness and grace reigning supreme. Society cannot do without its Christ. The world can alone be transformed by truth, and right, and Christianity.

## The Westminster Standards in Our American Presbyterian Church.

By Rev. Dr. R. M. Patterson.

Our American Church was Presbyterially organized in 1706, or fifty-eight years after the completion of the Westminster Standards. During the seventeenth century there were a few scattered congregations and ministers in the colonies that were Calvinistic in doctrine and Presbyterian in principle, but there was no formal ecclesiastical bond between them. Near the opening of the eighteenth century, however, three ministers, Francis Makemie, Jedediah Andrews and John Hampton came together and formed the first or General Presbytery.

The first leaf of the Minutes of the Presbytery has been lost. What has been preserved opens thus: "De Regimine ecclesiæ which being heard was approved and sustained. He gave in also his thesis to be considered of against next sederunt."

From what follows, this appears to be part of a record of the examination of Mr. John Boyd for ordination, which took place on the next Sabbath, December 29th.

Of the organization of the Presbytery we have, therefore, no official information; nor did any of the participants leave any record of it. It seems evident, however, that no written Constitution was adopted by it. When, in 1717, the Presbytery divided into three subordinate meetings, or Presbyteries, and developed itself into a Synod, still no formal act of adoption of any Standards was recorded. But, in 1728, the Rev. John Thomson presented an overture to the Synod, wherein he called attention to the danger to which the Church was exposed, because it had no authoritative Standards, and proposed an expedient for preventing the increase and spreading of dangerous errors among the ministers and people. The consideration of this was postponed for a year; and then in 1729, on September 19th, action was taken in conformity with the overture.

The Synod agreed that all the ministers then in the body, and who should come into it, and every candidate for the ministry before his admission to the exercise of the sacred functions, should "declare their agreement in, and approbation of," the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Longer and Shorter Catechisms, "as being in all the essential and necessary articles good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine," and should "adopt" them as the confession of the faith; and that any who had scruples about any article should make them known, and the Synod, or Presbytery, as the case should be, should determine whether they were about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government."

Then, at the afternoon session, all the ministers present (except one who was not then ready, but afterwards fell in line,) eighteen in number, listened to and met the scruples of each other, and "unanimously agreed in the solution of those scruples and in declaring the said Confession and Catechisms to be the confession of their faith, except only some clauses in the 20th and 23d Chapters, concerning which clauses the Synod do unanimously declare that they do not receive those articles in any such sense as to suppose the civil magistrate hath a controlling power over Synods with respect to the exercise of their ministerial author-

ity, or power to persecute any for their religion; or in any sense contrary to the Protestant succession to the throne of Great Britain."

Let it be noted that in this action on the relation of Church and State, Presbyterians at that early day took the lead in proclaiming what has since become the universally accepted American doctrine. Presbyterians, while often, and in many countries persecuted, have never been persecuting; and in this country they were in the van in their declaration of the true relation between Church and State. Of course allowance must be made on this subject for the difficulties which surrounded the Westminster Assembly; from the very authority by which it met; from the trammels which bound it, and from the different governmental views that prevailed in it, and its words were very easily perverted and carried further than they intended.

Following the adoption of the Doctrinal Standards, on the 22d of September, the Synod unanimously acknowledged and declared that they judged the Directory for worship, discipline and government of the Church commonly annexed to the Westminster Confession to be agreeable in substance to the Word of God and founded thereupon; and therefore earnestly recommended the same to all their members to be by them observed, as near as circumstances would allow and Christian prudence direct.

On September 17th of the next year (1730) to meet dissatisfaction at the wording of the action of 1729, some expressions being thought not to be sufficiently obligatory upon intrants, it was unanimously declared that the Synod understood the clauses that respect the admission of intrants or candidates in such a case as to oblige them to receive and adopt the Confession and Catechisms in the same manner and as fully as the members of the Synod did that were then present.

In 1736, in order to allay some further dissatisfaction with what were charged to be reservations in the first or Preliminary Act of 1729, the Synod declared "that the Synod have adopted, and still do adhere to, the Westminster Confession, Catechisms and Directory without the least variation or alteration." And it emphasized this declaration by expressing the "hope and desire that this, our Synodical declaration and explication, may satisfy all our people as to our firm attachment to our good old received doctrines, contained in said Confession, without the least variation or alteration."

When the friendly schism of 1745 took place, there was no abandonment by either party of the Westminster Standards. The members of the new Synod of New York, at its first meeting, placed first, among the articles which they agreed to as the plan and foundation of their Synodical union, the agreement that the Westminster Confession, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, should be the public confession of their faith in such manner as was agreed to by the Synod of Philadelphia in 1729, and their approval of the Westminster Directory as the general plan of worship and discipline. In 1751, it declared and testified its "Constitution, order and discipline to be in harmony with the established Church of Scotland. The Westminster Confession, Catechisms and Directory for public wor-

ship and Church Government, adopted by them, are in like manner received and adopted by us." In 1756 it asserted that the Confession was received as a "test of orthodoxy in this Church; and it is the order of this Synod that all who are licensed to preach the Gospel, or become members of any Presbytery in our bounds, shall receive the same as the confession of their faith, according to our constituting act, which we see no reason to appeal." And in the plan of union on which the two Synods merged into each other in 1758, the first article was:

"Both Synods having always approved and received the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as an orthodox and excellent system of Christian doctrine, founded on the Word of God, we do still receive the same as the confession of our faith, and also adhere to the plan of worship, government and discipline contained in the Westminster Directory, strictly enjoined on all our ministers and probationers for the ministry, that they preach and teach according to the form of sound words in said Confession and Catechisms, and avoid and oppose all errors contrary thereto."

An important declaration, which carries great weight as another official explanation of the early and continued position of our Church, was made in 1785. It is part of an incident in our history that has almost fallen out of knowledge. The Synod, the Low Dutch Reformed Synod of New York and New Jersey, and the Associate Reformed Synod had appointed committees to confer with each other on a union. They held a convention in which, in response to prepared questions, the committee of each stated the ecclesiastical standpoint of its Church. Ours was thus presented:

"The Synod of New York and Philadelphia adopt, according to the known and established meaning of the terms, the Westminster Confession of Faith as the confession of their faith, save that every candidate for the Gospel ministry is permitted to except against so much of the 23d Chapter as gives authority to the civil magistrate in matters of religion. The Presbyterian Church in America considers the Church of Christ as a spiritual society, entirely distinct from the civil government, having a right to regulate their own ecclesiastical polity, independent of the interposition of the magistrate.

"The Synod also receives the Directory for Public Worship and the Form of Church Government recommended by the Westminster Assembly as in substance agreeable to the institutions of the New Testament. This mode of adoption we use, because we believe the general platform of our Government to be agreeable to the Sacred Scriptures; but we do not believe that God has been pleased so to reveal and enjoin every minute circumstance of ecclesiastical government and discipline as not to leave room for orthodox churches of Christ, in these minutiae, to differ with charity from one another.

"The rules of our discipline and the forms of process in our judicatories are contained in Pardovan's (alias Stewart's) collections in conjunction with the acts of our own Synod, the power of which, in matters purely ecclesiastical, we consider as equal to the power of any Synod or General Assembly in the world. Our Church judicatories, like those in the Church of Scotland, from

which we derive our origin, are sessions, Presbyteries and Synods, to which it is now in contemplation to add a national General Assembly."

In view of that development of the Synod into the General Assembly and the creation of the present Presbyterial and Synodical system, the Book of Discipline and Government was referred, by the Synods of New York and Philadelphia, on May 22, 1786, to a committee to digest such a system as would be accommodated to the Presbyterian Church in America. The committee was instructed to have 300 copies of their report printed in advance of its presentation next year, and circulated among the Presbyteries for observations and suggestions. The report was made May 17, 1787, to the Synod, which spent ten days, two sessions each day, considering it paragraph by paragraph; and as amended, a thousand copies were ordered, May 28th, to be distributed among the Presbyteries and churches for further consideration before final action.

On the same day on which that was done, the Synod took into consideration the last paragraph of the 20th Chapter of the Confession, the third paragraph of the 23d Chapter, and the first paragraph of the 31st, the portions which relate to the connection between Church and State, amended them; and ordered the amendments to be printed for consideration, together with the Draught of the Plan of Government and Discipline. It also instructed the committee to revise the Westminster Directory for Public Worship, and have it, when revised, printed together with the Draught for consideration.

The amendments thus made to the Confession struck out the provisions that offenders against the laws of the Church may be proceeded against by the power of the civil magistrate; that the magistrate may take order for the preservation of the unity and peace of the Church; that blasphemies and heresies should be suppressed by him, and corruptions in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; that he may call Synods and be present at them, and provided that whatever is prosecuted shall be according to the mind of God. Removing these errors the amendments positively denied that civil magistrates may assume to themselves the administration of the word and sacraments or the power of the keys, or in the least interfere in matters of faith, but should protect the Church, without giving preference to any denomination, so that all may enjoy free worship; and no law of civil government should let or hinder the regular Government of the Church.

The final acts of adoption, after this very careful and protracted consideration, took place in 1788 and 1789. After fully, from May 23d to May 29th, 1788, considering the Draught of the Form of Government and Discipline, revising and correcting the Draught of the Directory for worship and appointing it as thus amended to be the Directory for the worship of God in the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America; considering the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and amending the Larger by striking out "tolerating a false religion," as one of the sins forbidden in the Second Commandment, and ratifying and approving the Catechisms as the Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; the Synod in 1788 ordered that the Directory and Cate-

chisms be printed and bound up in the same volume with the Confession and the Form of Government and discipline, "and that the whole be considered as the Standard of our Doctrine, Government, and Discipline, and Worship:" the true intent and meaning of the ratification being "that the Form of Government and Discipline and the Confession of Faith is to continue to be our Constitution and the confession of our faith and practice unalterable, unless two-thirds of the Presbyteries, under the care of the General Assembly, shall propose alterations or amendments, and such alterations and amendments shall be agreed to and enacted by the General Assembly."

In 1789 a committee appointed by the Synod to revise the Chapter of the Directory entitled, "Of the mode of inflicting church censures," reported to the General Assembly (into which the Synod had transformed itself,) the Chapter as revised, which being amended was finally enacted by the General Assembly and so ordered to be printed and published with the Constitution. This was the final and complete act in the adoption of our national ecclesiastical Constitution.

This work was carried on from 1786 to 1789. By it the Westminster "Form of Church Government and of Ordination of Ministers," was very much transformed; chapters were re-arranged; they became less argumentative; the whole was made more practical in details. What still appears in our "Form of Government as the first Chapter, on Preliminary Principles" was then added. There was nothing like that in the Westminster book. It is a compact and far-reaching statement of the relation in which the Church stands to the State, and to other Churches, and of the nature, limitation, and effect of its ecclesiastical discipline, which the writer does not believe can be improved upon. It shows how truly Catholic the Presbyterian Church is, with all its tenacity in holding to orthodox doctrine and strong Presbyterianism.

The Directory for the Public Worship of God was also considerably transformed. It was shortened. The long proleptic Preface against liturgies in general and the Book of Common Prayer in particular, was omitted as unnecessary then and here. The book was also made (against a frequently repeated assertion to the contrary) even less formal, less liturgical: extremely anti-liturgical as the Westminster Directory was. There was a liturgical party in the Synod, under the influence of such men as Drs. Rodgers, McWhorter and Ashbel Green, the committee of revision reported a liturgy of complete forms for use in the churches; but the Synod would not have them, and it went so far in the contrary direction, in its protest against forms, as to drop out the Westminster direction that all the canonical books should be read over in order, a chapter from each Testament at every service, and this also: "Because the prayer which Christ taught his disciples is not only a pattern of prayer, but itself a most comprehensive prayer, we recommend it also to be used in the prayers of the Church." That declaration was in the Westminster Directory: it does not appear in ours. In this the Synod was rather more than perpendicular against forms; it bent far backward; but it was a significant practical protest against the effort that had been made to prepare forms.

Among the Westminster Standards there was nothing like our present Book of Discipline. The five Westminster books were: the Confession; the Larger Catechism; the Shorter Catechism; the Form of Presbyterian Church Government and of Ordination of Ministers; and the Directory for the Public Worship of God. In our Church, by the adopting measures recorded in this article, the Form of Presbyterian Church Government and of the Ordination of Ministers became the Form of Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Appended, as a part of it, were "Forms of Process in the Judicatories of this Church:" very vague and general, consisting of only two chapters and thirty-one paragraphs.

Following the Form of Church Government appears, in all the Scotch Standards, a "Directory for Family Worship approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (1647) for piety and uniformity in secret and private worship and mutual edification." This fell out of our Standards. To the Shorter Catechism was also appended "The sum of saving knowledge: or a brief sum of Christian Doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures, and holden forth in the aforesaid Confession of Faith and Catechism: together with the practical use thereof." It may well be questioned whether those two omissions were not a serious two-fold error.

The care and thoroughness with which the whole work of revision was done should be noticed. As has been stated it extended over four years. Able committees were engaged in it between the sessions of the Synod; and the Synod itself, not taking the work on the faith of the committees, spent long sessions and days in minutely considering it. As to the whole work, the writer does not hesitate to say that when we place the Westminster books beside the Philadelphia revision of them: in condensation and compactness of statement; in thoroughness and sharpness of practical directions; in terse and clear English; the Westminster Assembly yields the palm to the Philadelphia Synod.

Our national Church, with the formation of its General Assembly, started out in 1789, under the Standards as they have been summarized.

Between 1804 and 1821 there were a succession of revisions and amendments of the Form of Government, Discipline and Directory, which brought the Constitution substantially to its present form. It was carefully noted, however, that these changes did "not alter, but only explain, render more practicable, and bring nearer to perfection the general system which has already gone into use."

In 1821 the Book of Discipline appeared as a separate book, and then a further complete revision of it was enacted, after several years' labor by a large and able committee, in 1884.

Other particular amendments have been made from time to time by special overtures to the Presbyteries: in the Form of Government, the successive changes in the ratio of representation in the General Assembly; the change in the minimum size of Presbyteries from three to five ministers; the authorization of the limited term eldership; the enlargement of the powers of Synods, making them courts of last resort in all cases that



do not involve questions of constitutional law, and authorizing them to become delegated bodies; the modes of amending the Constitution: in the Directory for Worship, the chapter about offerings; in the Book of Discipline, the Chapter, and in the Form of Government, the clauses authorizing Judicial Commissions; in the Confession, erasing the statement that "a man may not marry any of his wife's kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own, nor the woman of her husband's kindred nearer in blood than of her own."

Whatever differences of interpretation of particular doctrines were connected with the Old and New School controversy in this century, and whatever alleged violations of the Form of Government, there was no admitted abandonment or revision of any of the Standards by either branch of the Church, and the reunion was on the basis of them.

The Proof Texts appended to the Confession, the Catechisms, and the Form of Government have been twice carefully revised. In 1792 a committee was appointed to select and arrange the texts. It reported in 1794, and its work was committed to another committee to compare the texts with the Westminster, to revise the whole and publish. In 1888 a committee to revise them again was appointed, and continued its work until 1894, when it made its final report, which was adopted by the General Assembly.

Attempts have been made to get a revision of the Confession. In 1804, a committee which had been appointed the preceding year, to take into consideration the expediency of publishing a new edition of the Confession of Faith, etc., of the Church, and to consider whether any, and if any, what alterations ought to be made in the said Confession of Faith, made a report which contained the following paragraph, and was adopted by the Assembly:

"After a very serious attention to the subject committed to them, your committee have resolved to propose no alterations whatever in the Confession and Catechisms of our Church; and are clearly of opinion that none ought to be attempted. The creed of every Church, as it ought to be derived immediately from the Word of God, must be considered as standing on ground considerably different from that which supports the system of forms and regulations by which worship shall be conducted and government administered; and, if it be once rightly settled, can never be altered with propriety by any change of time or external circumstances of the Church."

The general principle announced in that paragraph is undoubtedly correct, and our Church has through all its history acted upon it; but the last clause is too sweeping and unqualified in its claim for uninspired doctrinal statements. The General Assembly (O. S.) of 1844 antagonized it. It adopted the report of a committee consisting of Drs. Hoge, Hodge, Spring, Leland and Rice, in which was the following paragraph:

"It is contended that there is, and ought to be, no method of altering our doctrinal formularies. And in support of this opinion, it is said, that while prudential rules may be changed with circumstances, the doctrines of religion remain ever the same. But to this it is a sufficient answer that although the Bible, and the truth which it contains, are unchangeable, yet human compo-

sitions, such as our Confession of Faith undoubtedly is, are not infallible, but may err; and when any such error in the expression of truth is discovered, it ought to be corrected in an orderly manner. This was certainly the opinion of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, when they adopted the Constitution of the Church."

The committee which made that report had been appointed in 1843, to consider the propriety of amending the Confession on "the marriage question." Nothing was then done; but at a later day (1887) in the reunited Church an amendment was made.

In 1859, the Old School Assembly was overtured by a minister in relation to changes in the language of our Confession regarding the doctrine of the Trinity and other doctrines; but the reply was: "No change in the language of the Confession respecting the points suggested is desirable or consistent with the Word of God."

Another wide-spread movement came to a head in 1890-3. That is recent, and its particulars are familiar to all.

And now we are surging upon another. May the compact sketch which has been given, suggest to the Church what should be its procedure? The article could be expanded into a volume, giving in full the changes through which the Standards have passed, and which could not be drawn out at length in newspaper articles. Such a volume would be timely and valuable at this stage in our history, and should be prepared. But this skeleton sketch may be helpful in suggesting what should be the present action of our Church.

Through all the changes, and struggles, and controversies, and progress in the two hundred years of our American church history, the doctrinal system of the Westminster Standards, as a whole, and in every single doctrine, and every shade of expression, has remained in its integrity, and it stands intact as the doctrinal system of our Church. The Shorter Catechism has been absolutely untouched, and no one has ever proposed to touch it. The Larger Catechism has had one clause erased from its statement of the relation of the civil magistrate to false religions. The Confession has been amended in its Marriage Chapter, and in the Chapter concerning the relation of Church and State. But none of these are in the doctrinal system. That remains the same, *ipsissimis verbis*, as adopted by our Church in the beginning, and as it came from the hands of the Westminster Assembly. That has been, however, not because of any contention that the doctrinal expressions of the book are too sacred to be modified. Such a position did seem once to be taken; but it was speedily abandoned. If to three successive General Assemblies and to two-thirds of the Presbyteries changes appear necessary by way of revision—by erasure, addition, modification, substitution in the text of the Confession and Catechisms—or by dropping them, or any of them, altogether—or by adding to, or substituting for, them, a new creed, shorter or longer—or by making a declaratory statement, explaining the Confessional system of doctrine, and repudiating misrepresentations: the ecclesiastical and sound Protestant right to do this exists: what the civil effect on some property interests would be, is another question. But the presumption of two centuries is against the doing of these things; and only the profound conviction of dangerous error in the text of the books, as they are, should cause any change to be made.