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ADDRESSES
REUNION



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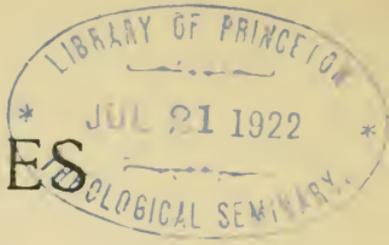
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Addresses delivered at the
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ADDRESSES

DELIVERED AT THE

QUARTER-CENTURY ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

REUNION

OF THE

OLD AND NEW SCHOOL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES

HELD IN THE THIRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PITTSBURGH, PA.

MAY 23, 1895

WITH A PREFACE AND OTHER INTRODUCTORY MATTER

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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THE
FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BY THE

REV. FRANCIS LANDEY PATTON, D.D., LL.D.,
President of Princeton University

THE FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

Moderator, Fellow-Moderators of past Assemblies, Fathers and Brethren constituting this General Assembly, and Christian Friends:

I am asked to speak to-night on the fundamental doctrines of the Presbyterian Church. We are a doctrinal Church. The division between the Old and the New School was a division based largely upon doctrinal differences. The Reunion of the Old and New Schools was a reunion effected upon a doctrinal basis.

Some of us, perhaps, took part in the discussion that ended in the Reunion. Many of us remember the discussion, the efforts that were made to secure some sort of agreement which would make a Reunion safe. Some of us remember the Smith-Gurley resolution, to the effect that certain modes of viewing, stating and explaining doctrines

should be freely allowed in the united Church, as they had been freely allowed in the separate Churches. It seemed fair, but it nevertheless failed to satisfy the negotiating parties; and at last the Churches came together on the basis of the Standards pure and simple. There was no stipulation; there was no contract; but there was an understanding, and where an understanding exists, creating in the minds of either party a legitimate expectation, there is a moral obligation.

I believe in theology, but I believe even more in moral obligation. We came together, I say, on the basis of the Standards pure and simple, and we have stood together ever since; and we mean to stay together on this simple basis of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

There has never come to the bar of this Assembly, to my knowledge (and I think I know something about the cases that have occurred in these twenty-five years), there has never come to the bar of this Assembly, and so far as I know there has never come to the bar of any Presbytery in the land, any case involving the differences which ex-

isted between the Old and the New School ; and if a case should ever come in the course of appellate process to the notice of the General Assembly, I know what the result will be.

If any minister who formerly belonged to the Old School and holds Old School ideas should ever be brought to book for his supralapsarianism or his belief in premillennialism, I can safely say for you, Mr. Moderator, that you will see that the Assembly goes right upon the case. And, if any New School man, holding New School ideas, should ever be brought to the notice of the General Assembly, on the question of the distinction between moral and natural inability, or on the subject of a general as distinguished from a limited atonement, I hope that I may have the privilege of being a member of that Assembly, that I may vote for his acquittal. These differences have existed all along ; they exist now. Princeton is alive ; Union is alive ; Auburn and Lane are here ; and these differences will continue.

Seeing, then, that differences of opinions on minor matters existed in our Church, the question very naturally arose whether we

might not revise the Confession so that it might be made more comprehensive. Men wondered whether we could not frame our confessional statements so that they would include all these differences. Some thought it was not a wise or a necessary thing to do, but the majority thought it was best at least to try. We did our best, and we presented the results to the General Assembly. You know what became of our report. The Church was not satisfied with our work. The simple fact was that there were just three courses open. We had either to cut the Confession down to a minimum and make it very small, or else we had to write it up to date and make it very large, or else we had to let it stand as it was; and I take it that the last was the best disposition to make of the matter. So it comes to pass that after twenty-five years of reunited history, we find the same condition of things that existed at the beginning. There is the living, thinking Church on the one hand, and here is the fixed creed on the other.

The real attitude of the Presbyterian Church is the attitude of a Church that holds generic Calvinism, as distinguished

from specific Calvinism. I think this generic Calvinism is enough to include not only our Church, but other Presbyterian Churches. They talk about a Greater New York and a Greater Pittsburgh, I think we can talk about a Greater Presbyterianism. The time for these other unions, I take it, is not yet, but the basis of these unions, when the time comes, is none other than the Westminster Standards, pure and simple.

Sometimes we are told that we are organized theologically to perpetuate and keep alive the peculiar doctrines of the Presbyterian Church. There is a certain sense in which that is true, and yet that is not a fair way to state it. The best statement, we believe, of evangelical religion, is the Calvinistic statement, but for Calvinism without the evangelistic elements that it holds in common with the creeds of other Churches, we should not have much zeal. I am free to say that it is pretty small business for a great Church like ours to engage in, if she has no other function, if she can render no greater service, than that of keeping alive an interest in the five points of Calvinism.

The reason why we are organized theo-

logically and on the basis of a long creed, is because it is the belief of this Church that our ministers should hold and should present to the people a complete statement of the great plan of salvation. It so happens that when we do make a complete statement, we find that we differ from our Arminian friends, who are trying to do the same thing in respect to their doctrines, and from our Lutheran friends, who are trying to do the same in respect to their doctrines, and from our Episcopalian friends, who are trying to do the same thing in respect to their doctrines.

We sometimes insist so much on the differences that emerge when these denominations formulate their creed statements, that we overlook the large amount of common ground they occupy. But it is well for us to remember that the doctrines which we hold in common with our Arminian and Lutheran and Anglican friends are of far more importance than the doctrines in which we differ; we are, therefore, doing them a service, as well as ourselves, when, in defending our specific doctrines, we also defend the doctrines that we all hold in common. Our sister Churches do not accept

our creed so far as it is Calvinistic, but it is a matter of great moment to other Churches what the Presbyterian Church is doing for generic Calvinism, for in doing service for generic Calvinism, she is doing service for the great cause of evangelical religion.

I believe that we are peculiarly fitted for rendering this service, for our Church has very special interest in systematic theology. She is fond of presenting the doctrines of her system in their relations to one another, and in a way that reveals their interdependence; and this interdependence of doctrines, when it is realized, is a very strong argument in their support.

I believe that this system of doctrine of which I am speaking, which is implied in all our preaching, and which pervades it all, should be more particularly emphasized. It ought to be preached, and not only preached but defended. I doubt whether it is preached as much as it should be. Now the way to preach doctrine, I think, is to preach it in relation to the discussions of the present time. It is a mistake to suppose that the Church will not listen to doctrinal preaching; but doctrinal preaching, to be interest-

ing, must relate itself to living issues, to the books men are reading and the questions men are discussing to-day. I believe in Calvinism, but I have no great respect for fossilized Calvinism. I believe in Augustinianism, but in an up-to-date Augustinianism. This system of doctrine is not simply to be preached; but we are bound to defend it.

The debate of to-day is not a discussion between Presbyterians of this school and Presbyterians of that school; it is not one between Calvinism and Arminianism. You see no articles in the reviews that are dealing with supralapsarianism or infralapsarianism. Men do not wax hot in controversy over the distinction between mediate and immediate imputation. One of the interesting features connected with the present discussion is, that the great debate is between those who believe in evangelical Christianity—whether they be Calvinists or Arminians, whether they be Baptists, Presbyterians or Episcopalians—and those who do not believe in it. I believe that a large share of this debate falls upon us. It is not over, and it will not be over for years to come. In this great debate, unless the Presbyterian Church

shall be untrue to her past, false to just expectations and unworthy of her equipment, our denomination must have a great place, and render great service in support of evangelical Christianity.

. Now, how does it happen that the necessity is laid upon us of debating this issue between evangelical and non-evangelical Christianity? It is because there are so many in these days who do not believe that we have any objective norm of truth. Nearly all of the current heresies involve this question. Look at it a moment. We are told that doctrine is of no importance; that we can afford to dispense with dogmatic statements or reduce them to a very few words. You ask in reply: How can this be? Do we not find Paul insisting upon doctrine? Are not the Epistles to the Romans and the Ephesians doctrinal epistles? But if you had come to regard Paul as a philosopher who had added his metaphysical speculations to the simple teachings of the Master, you might feel as others do, who say, "Back to Christ," and who are ready to resolve Christianity into a morality based upon the Sermon on the Mount.

There are men who tell us that the Christian consciousness must be reckoned with when we are asking what we are to believe. But you reply, How can that be if the Bible is our rule of faith and practice? If, however, you come to believe, as some have come to believe, that the books of the New Testament are the recorded experiences of men, inspired it is true, but with an inspiration in no way differing in kind from the inspiration that the Church has always had, you may come then to the conclusion above stated in regard to the Christian consciousness.

Some, again, tell us that emphasis has been laid too much and too long on what we know as dogmatic Christianity, and that we must see more than we have hitherto seen the ethical side of our religion. You naturally think, that we do not err in laying emphasis on the dogmatic side of Christianity, when you think of the way in which Paul emphasized the fact that Christ is the propitiation for our sins and that we have redemption through His blood. But if you should ever be convinced that the Church has altogether overestimated the value of the

Pauline literature, it might be very easy for you to fall in with this desire for an ethical Christianity.

The question of to-day is, therefore, the old question concerning the sufficiency, the authority and the inspiration of the Scriptures.

I have been asked to speak on the fundamental doctrines of the Presbyterian Church. It is really very hard, as I go over these doctrines—the Trinity, the person of Christ, sin, atonement, the purpose of God, justification, sanctification and the future state—to say which are and which are not fundamental. They are all fundamental. Some of them are of the very essence of Christianity, and being fundamental to Christianity, are, of course, fundamental to Calvinism. Some of them, though not of the essence of Christianity, are nevertheless fundamental to Calvinism, and therefore are fundamental in a system of theology that is Calvinistic.

There is, however, one doctrine that stands apart from all others, for it is the doctrine on which all others depend. I refer to the doctrine concerning the Bible. We must know what the Bible is in order that we

may know how we are to esteem what the Bible teaches. And the great question of our time is simply this: What is the Bible?

There are two ways of dealing with this question: one is the ecclesiastical way, the other is the way of scholarship. It is the prerogative of the court of last resort to say whether this or that utterance does or does not contravene our confessional statements regarding inspiration. The Church, in her judicial capacity, however, cannot settle the great debate upon this question, neither can she stop it. The debate is going on and will go on, and it must be in the hands of men who have special aptitude for the work.

This question that we are called to grapple with in this age, is the greatest that has ever come before the Church. It is not an inquiry as to what the Bible says, but an inquiry as to what the Bible is. If the books of the Bible are simply the expressions of the highest levels of thought that men have reached in religious matters by a naturalistic evolution of belief, they have no authority. To us it is of no moment that men believed in Christ's resurrection and

had faith in his atonement, if, as a matter of fact, he did not rise and made no atonement. The record of Christianity, to be of value, must contain satisfactory evidence of the occurrence of certain great supernatural events. For supernatural Christianity there must be satisfactory evidence. I may say that the New Testament record of certain supernatural occurrences is true. But even this would give us only a very meagre dogmatic faith. For if we are to accept Paul's commentary on the death of Christ and Paul's exposition of Christ's atonement, we must feel assured that he is not simply expressing his private opinions. We must be certain that his utterances are authoritative utterances; that we have in them not only the record of supernatural events, but a supernatural record of those events. We need for the support of what we call evangelical Christianity an inspired Bible. I will not insist upon the word "inerrancy." It is enough when we are assured that the Bible is the infallible rule of faith and practice, and that it is given by inspiration of God.

This question cannot be adequately han-

dled by quoting proof texts out of the Bible to prove its inspiration. It involves a great deal more than some persons suppose. Men are handling a very large topic when under the conditions of modern thought they ask, What is the Bible? What does it mean? How did this great literature step into the place it holds, and by what right does it claim to rule the hearts and consciences of men? I have great faith in the outcome of this discussion. I believe that we shall know the Bible, and value it and reverence it as we never did before. But I am not, I cannot be, blind to the fact that the discussion is a broad one and a deep one, that it involves history and philosophy and literary criticism; that it was inevitable; that it is irrepressible; that it could not have come earlier; that it could not be postponed, and that the attitude which men are taking in science, philosophy and criticism, make it a foregone conclusion that the Bible must be subjected to the critical handling that it is the subject of to-day.

The effect of this will be to force men to study the Bible more closely than they have ever done before; to neglect, if need be, all

other forms of theological inquiry in order that undivided attention may be given to the Scriptures. The Bible will vindicate itself, I do not doubt.

Nor do I doubt that the discussion that is going on will give new interest to our study of the Bible. The John Calvin of the new theological era will believe, I doubt not, in the same doctrines that the Calvin of Geneva believed in; but when he gathers up the results of all this modern discussion, he will present them not only as doctrines that have a logical relation in a system, but as divine ideas that have a chronological sequence in the unfolding of a plan. The historical method will leave its mark upon theology we may be sure. And whether that theology of the next era be called Calvinism or Anselmianism or Augustinianism, it will certainly be Paulinism. And as evangelical Christianity is Paulinism, then if Paulinism is true, we can say to-day, as fearlessly as Paul said it to the Galatians: "If any man preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed."

