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THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SHORTER CATECHISM.

BY REV. JAMES HARPER, D. D.

FEW productions of uninspired men have received higher encomiums, and few, if any, deserve them better than the Shorter Catechism prepared by the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Had nothing more than the framing of this little manual for the instruction of the young, or rather, as its title almost ironically bears, this “directory for catechizing such as are of weaker capacity,” been accomplished by that Assembly, not in vain would the money, time and energy expended in its meeting have been spent. Presenting, as it does, in terms admirably concise and exact, a well-knit system of theology, this catechism is fitted to train its students to precision of expression and of thought, and as an instrument of merely intellectual culture would merit attention. Unlike the books commonly prepared for children, it never can appear childish, even though scrutinized by the eyes of mature manhood or of hoary old age. Its statements of doctrine are so lucid, guarded and complete, that Dr. Charles Hodge, one of the greatest theologians with whom America or the world has been blest, has gratefully availed himself of its aid in formulating the teachings of holy writ. Indeed, the chief objection urged by those in sympathy with its doctrines against putting it into the hands of the young to be committed to memory, is that it is too abstract and deep to suit the juvenile mind. To this objection, however, we attach little importance; for, while the Catechism transcends in many respects the comprehension of the young, and, it may be added, of many of the old, it presents much which any of these may understand or apprehend; and, besides, contains mystery enough to stimulate inquiry and afford room for the expansion of the faculties of its students, so that none of them shall ever attain in this life to a position to look down upon this companion of their youth as a childish thing. Of signal advantage is it to have the weighty and clear-cut propositions of this little question-book lodged in the mind at an early age, ready for use as occasion may require; even as it is of great practical utility in the common business of life to have the multiplication table at command. The objection just stated proceeds in part from a misconception as to the order in which the powers of

The American revisers have been of equal scholarship and worth with the English. They have met in New York and have ever been determined, energetic and thoroughly scholarly in their work.

The whole work is now far advanced towards completion which may be during next year, 1880. It will no doubt be subjected to the closest criticism. In no sense will it be found absolutely perfect, and it is not probable that it will come into general use so as to displace the version that since 1611 has been the authorized one of the Holy Scriptures. But beyond any question it will be found of great service to the student of the Bible and be more worthy of the Book.

JOHN RODGERS (1745-1812).

BY REV. J. B. SCOULLER.

“AND the prophets, do they live forever?” It is not to be expected that we, amidst the comforts and pleasant surroundings of the present day, can fully appreciate the difficulties and dangers with which our pioneer fathers had to contend, when they laid the foundations of our church in the new settlements of our new country. Still, as we have entered into the fruits of their labors, common gratitude should constrain us to erect at least a tablet to their memory, that the story of their sacrifices and toilsome labors might not be wholly forgotten. In many instances this memorial work has been neglected so long, that it has now become a very difficult, if not impossible task. Much, however, could yet be done, for there are still many family papers and local traditions, which, if properly investigated, would yield a rich reward; and if every one would interest himself in this matter and bring his little, we would be astonished to see how much valuable biography could yet be recovered.

In 1764, John Cuthbertson was the only ministerial representative of Covenantism in this country, and James Proudfit, of Pequea, Matthew Henderson, of Oxford and Pencader, John Mason, of New York, Robert Annan, of Marsh Creek, and William Marshall, of Deep Run and Neshaminy, were the only Associate ministers, and they were Antiburghers. But during that year Thomas Clarke, a Scotch Burgher, who had been settled for thirteen years in Ireland, arrived and was cordially admitted by these brethren, upon specified conditions, to membership in the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania. In 1769, Messrs. Telfair and Kinlock, Burgher ministers from Scotland, came, and they too were admitted to membership upon the same conditions. The Antiburgher Synod of Scotland, to which this American Presbytery was subordinate, immediately repudiated this last transaction, and in 1770, appointed John Rodgers and John Smith as missionaries to this country, and instructed them to require the Presbytery to annul their act of union with these Burghers

and in case of refusal, for them, in connection with those who might join with them, to constitute a new Presbytery and hold no intercourse with the old. The Synod was very positive that, even in the wilderness of this far-off country, no Burgher follower of Ebenezer Erskine and James Fisher should be permitted to hold ministerial fellowship with the Antiburgher followers of Alexander Moncrieff. William Wilson was in heaven before the breach and separation of 1747.

It is of the first of these commissioners that I propose to write, for while his ending was not equal to his beginning, yet his twenty years of hard and successful work deserve a grateful remembrance and kind mention.

John Rodgers was born in or about the year 1745, in Crieff, at the foot of the Grampian Hills, in Perthshire, Scotland. He was graduated at St. Andrews, and studied theology with Professor Moncrieff, of Alloa, and added to this a full course in medicine. In 1770, he was appointed by the General Associate Synod as a missionary to America, and ordained to this work. On the first day of October, 1770, he was married to Elizabeth Blackwood, of gentle and wealthy parentage, and shortly afterwards, accompanied by his fellow commissioner Smith, they sailed for America. They had a long, tedious and stormy winter passage in one of the slow sailing vessels of a hundred years ago, and it was towards the end of winter before they landed.

On the 4th of June, 1771, Messrs. Rodgers and Smith met with the Presbytery of Pennsylvania at Pequea, in Lancaster county, and submitted their instructions from Synod, requiring the Presbytery to annul their union with the Burghers, and to obliterate their minute respecting it. On the evening of the next day, the Presbytery took action upon this matter, and admitted that "they had taken some steps inconsistent with their subordination to the Synod," but unanimously resolved, that "They do not judge it for edification, in their present peculiar circumstances, explicitly to comply with the Synod's demand." The commissioners were sensible men, and when they got on the ground and fully understood the circumstances of the case, they concluded that the Presbytery had acted more wisely than the Synod, and quietly took their seats as co-ordinate members, and this was the last trouble that the Scotch Burgess-oath ever gave to Seceders in America.

Mr. Rodgers spent the subsequent summer in visiting and strengthening the young churches in Cumberland Valley, and as a result, the churches on the Conococheague and the Big Spring gave him a call to become their pastor, which on the 12th of November he accepted, but "craved that it might be marked that, when he accepted the call of the people, it was with this view, that as soon as any one of the two places that had now put the call in his hand was able to support a minister, he should be disjoined from the other, as he reckoned it impracticable to have them both under his pastoral care for a long time, considering the distance of the one from the other." They were about thirty miles apart. Mr. Rodgers was not immediately installed, for neither congregation had any house in which to worship; and Presbytery at its meeting in Philadelphia, April 8th, 1772, directed these congregations to "erect decent

places of worship with all convenient speed," and as an incentive ordered that his installation be delayed until this was done. It is believed that during the next summer these congregations erected "decent" log churches; the one on the Big Spring, where the third successor now stands; the one on the East Conococheague, about four miles northeast of Green Castle, near Brown's mill; and the one on the West Conococheague on Slate Hill, a mile and a half east of Mercersburg. His installation most probably took place in the autumn of 1772, and it is believed that he regularly supplied these churches for the year preceding that event. He preached half of the time at Big Spring, and divided the other half between the two churches on the Conococheague. These latter paid him seventy-two (or three) pounds, Pennsylvania currency, per year, and Big Spring gave about the same. As the Revolutionary war progressed, gold and silver disappeared, and Continental paper money became so plenty as to become worthless, and in 1780 the bushel of wheat was recognized by common consent as the measure of values, and Mr. Rodgers was paid in bushels of wheat delivered at the mill. Mr. Rodgers lived at the Big Spring, on a farm bought by Mrs. Rodgers, over a part of which Newville has now spread. In 1772 Mrs. Rodgers gave to the congregation about an acre of land out of one corner of her farm as a site for their meeting house and their graveyard, and it has been so used ever since, and in that "God's acre" her own dust has long rested without any stone to mark the precise spot.

The Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania at its meeting in October, 1777, resolved "That the Presbytery consider the case of Mr. Rodgers, of whom it is known, that he has taught a number of tenets which the Presbytery judge not agreeable to our received principles. The Presbytery hereby order him to give his sentiments in a plain and inensive manner to the next meeting, on the following heads, viz.: Concerning the obligation of the Covenant of Works in Adam's posterity as to the positive and penal part; concerning mankind having a legal right to common benefits; concerning Christ's yielding obedience to the preceptive part of the moral law, whether for himself or his people; concerning Christ's purchasing blessings for his people." Mr. Rodgers could not attend the meeting, April 16, 1778, because of sickness in his family. It was about that time that his wife died. At the autumn meeting he explained his views to his brethren to their satisfaction, and Presbytery resolved to drop the matter, and to expunge all previous minutes in reference to the case. But in May, 1779, the affair came up again on a complaint, and was again dismissed. In the Fall it came up once more, and they resolved to terminate the case in May, 1780, at which time he explained his views and failed to give satisfaction; so he proposed to resign his seat in Presbytery, hand over his charge and suspend his ministerial labors until he finally made up his mind upon the subject in dispute. This was certainly amiable for a Scotchman, and liberal for an Antiburgher, and the brethren accepted it; but when the October meeting came around, his opponents were in the majority, so they regularly libeled him, and ordered the case to be issued at Philadelphia, April 4, 1781. In the absence of himself and the witnesses, it was then issued and he was

"deposed from the ministry, and excommunicated from the fellowship of the church, with the lesser sentence of excommunication."

The doctrinal errors charged were "That mankind in their fallen state are not under the law as a covenant; that the law written on Adam's heart and the law given at Sinai are two distinct laws; that the latter is no part of the Covenant of Works; that Christ did not purchase by his obedience and death any blessings of the Covenant of Grace." The vacillating course of Presbytery can be easily explained. Messrs. Clarkson, Henderson, Marshall and Proudfit, were always opposed to him, while Messrs. Logan, Murray and Smith, defended him and voted against his conviction; so when Presbytery met in the east amongst his opponents the current was against him, but when it met in the west, his friends were in the majority and undid what the others had done. Smith was the best theologian in the Presbytery, and Logan and Murray were just as orthodox, if not as learned, and yet they were always Mr. Rodgers' friends, which would seem to indicate that he was not so much an errorist in substance and reality, as that he had invented a faulty mode of expression and explanation. And thus it often is that men gain the reputation of being heretics, when in reality they only assume a singular, and perhaps obscure and faulty, style of exposition. This action of Presbytery of course terminated Mr. Rodgers' pastoral charge of his congregations, although for two years he continued his home at Big Spring. During these troubles Mrs. Rodgers died, most probably in the spring of 1778, leaving three children, Thomas, Margaret and Irene, all under six years of age. In due time Mr. Rodgers married again, taking for his second wife Isabella Ireland, of Cumberland county, by whom he had seven sons, all of whom survived him.

After being deposed for a little over a year, Mr. Rodgers was again restored to the ministry and his place in the Presbytery. There is no known record of the time and cause of his restoration, but concurring circumstances would indicate the following as the probable facts in the case, viz.: The Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania at its meeting in Pequea, in June, 1782, adopted the basis of union already adopted by the Presbytery of New York and the Reformed Presbytery, thereby consummating the union which gave birth to the Associate Reformed Church. Messrs. Marshall and Clarkson protested against this act of adoption, and withdrew, and never met again with the old Presbytery; Mr. Henderson had gone to his new home, west of the mountains, and was not at this meeting; so, of all those who had voted against Mr. Rodgers, only Mr. Proudfit remained. At this meeting and under these circumstances, Rodgers was most likely restored to the ministry, for we find him taking his seat in the following October in the first Synod of the Associate Reformed Church, as a member of the Presbytery of Pennsylvania.

In the summer of 1783, Mr. Rodgers was installed as the first pastor of the Associate Reformed Churches at Timber Ridge in Rockbridge county, and Old Providence in Augusta county, Virginia. It is believed that he was at least reasonably successful in this pastorate, for he left it in a very fair condition for his immediate successor, John Young. But a man can more easily

change the place of his residence than his individual characteristics, so trouble came again to Mr. Rodgers, and very largely from the same source. Complaint came up to Synod in 1789, and Messrs. Dobbin, Boyse and Smith were appointed a commission to visit Virginia and investigate the charges, and upon their report, Synod in 1790, suspended him from the ministry. Here and thus terminated the ministry of Mr. Rodgers, for he never again sought restoration. Having received a thorough medical education in Scotland, he now turned his attention to the medical profession and soon acquired a large practice, and so continued till his death, which took place in 1812, on his farm at Timber Ridge.

Of the personal traits and characteristics of Mr. Rodgers very little is now known. He was, however, a man of very liberal education, and several passages of his history would indicate that he possessed an amiability of temper and softness of manner considerably beyond the ordinary Scotchman. We infer that he was a man of fair ability and met with reasonable success in the ministry. Something certainly got wrong with his theology, but whether his errors were radical and dangerous we have no means of knowing. They were probably more of a speculative than practical character. He left a large family, one of his great-grandsons is an elder, and six of his *great-great-grandchildren* are members of the United Presbyterian Church in Mercer, Pa., and doubtless many others of his descendants are now worthy members of the church he helped to plant. His oldest son, Thomas, settled in Gallipolis, Ohio, and died there in 1860, aged 87, and his descendants moved to Mercer and other places. Margaret died unmarried in 1823; Irene married James McCormick of Rockbridge, Va.; John became a farmer near Gallipolis; Aniel, Aleri, and Andrew, settled on farms near Monmouth, Ill.; William settled in Xenia, and Samuel in Chillicothe, Ohio, and Alexander in Cass county, Michigan.

HEB. IX. 16-17.—“TESTAMENT” OR COVENANT?

BY REV. J. T. COOPER, D. D.

THE Greek word which is rendered Testament in the New Testament Scriptures is the same word as the one rendered covenant. “This word διαθήκη occurs thirty-three times in the New Testament, and is almost uniformly translated Covenant when it refers to the dealings of God with his ancient church, and Testament when it refers to his dealings with his church under the Gospel dispensation.” This remark is taken from “The Outlines of Theology,” by Dr. A. A. Hodge, and I have no doubt of its correctness.

Now, as defined by Webster, a testament is “a solemn, authentic statement in writing by which a person declares his will as to the disposal of his estate and effects after his death.” Our translators in using the word *Testament* in so many instances instead of the word *Covenant*, must have had in their minds