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I. SOME PERILS OF MISSIONARY LIFE.¹

I suppose we all recognize that missionaries are the cream of Christians. They may say with Paul, in the whole length and breadth of his meaning, that unto them the grace has been given to preach unto the heathen the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. iii., 8). They are the bold and faithful spirits who bear the banner of the cross courageously to the front. We who abide at home, hope that we are at home by the will of God and to his glory; but we cannot withhold our admiration from those whom God has chosen to form the advance-guard of his conquering host. We recognize that these "picked men" are the *elite* of the army of the cross. Their bearing justifies this recognition. There is no body of men in the world of equal numbers who so thoroughly meet the trust reposed in them and the lofty sentiments entertained towards them by their fellow Christians.

So exalted is our well-founded appreciation of the character of missionaries in general that it comes with something of a shock to us to discover, as we are now and then led to discover, that even missionaries are, nevertheless, men, and are sometimes liable to the temptations, and shall

¹An address to a body of prospective missionaries.

II. THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION AND CATECHISMS.

In every age men are confronted by the question, Is religion rational or ritual? Is it a matter of faith or of form? On one side of that question the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments takes its stand, and over against it is arrayed every other religion known to man. We need not stop to inquire whether this was the original attitude of all forms of faith beside the Jewish and the Christian, or whether in some instances it has been brought about through the perversion of their primitive character and intent. The fact is obvious that among the religious systems of the world to-day the Scripture alone maintains that religion is not ritual but rational, is not a matter of form but of faith. Character is more than conduct. Motive gives quality to action. Religion has its seat in the mind and heart, and the soul of religion is faith. Faith has two elements, belief, the faith of the mind; trust, the faith of the heart. Faith is not reason, but faith is rational. Scripture appeals to reason, must be received, interpreted and applied by reason. Truth must be apprehended by the understanding before it can touch the heart or shape the life. John Locke said truly that to decry reason in the interest of faith is to put out the eyes in order to look through a telescope. The wise man applies the glass of faith to the eye of reason. "Come, now, and let us reason together," is the word of the Old Testament; "Come and see" is the word of the New. The Bible is a plain book for plain men. "All things in Scripture," says the Confession (I. 7), "are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or

other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in the due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them." The Scripture has no hidden shrines, no veiled divinities, no mysteries but such as spring from the laws of our nature and the limitations of our powers. The truth lies open before us like the heavens, where no bounds are set to vision but those which the eye itself imposes. However it may be, then, with other systems, theology, creed, confession are the inevitable outgrowth of Scripture. A rational religion invites logical statement. Theology is related to the Word as science to the works of God. In the study of his works and of his Word alike it is the prerogative of reason, as Kepler said, to think God's thoughts after him. We cannot live out of doors in the realm of thought, and we fashion a creed as instinctively as we build a home.

Two hundred and fifty years ago the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church were framed, the Confession and the Catechisms, and they remain substantially unaltered to this day, not as a venerable relic, a historical monument, but as the living exponent of the faith of one of the largest bodies of Christians on the globe. It becomes us to inquire what are the qualities that have given them this permanence and vitality. Great revolutions have taken place in Church and State, the face of the world has been changed, yet these symbols of faith remain almost untouched by the finger of time and the progress of the age.

The most striking and important characteristic of the Confession is that it is Scriptural throughout. It proposes and endeavors to draw its material from the Word of God alone without intrusion of human philosophy or speculation. God reveals himself in many ways, but the truth conveyed in every other mode of revelation is comprehended and interpreted in his Word. The Scripture, therefore, is the sole and sufficient source from which our theology may be drawn. Nature and providence may confirm

and illustrate the truth of the Word; they have nothing to add or to detract. The Confession is not perfect, it is not free from all taint of speculation; but it is an honest, and in the main, successful attempt to set forth the teaching of the Scripture, and that alone. Even those who believe that the Westminster divines have often erred in their interpretation will yet rejoice that they have put such abundant honor upon the Word of God.

Moreover the Confession aims not only to expound in logical order the teaching of the Scripture, and that alone; but to comprehend the whole range of Scripture truth, what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. Observe how clearly and comprehensively the great truths of the Word are marshalled, with what logical skill and completeness the system is wrought out and compacted. First, the Scripture is treated, the authoritative source from which our knowledge of God and his relation to man is derived. Then God is declared, as he has made himself known in his Word, Almighty Maker and Ruler of heaven and earth, subsisting in the form of the Trinity, three Persons in One Nature. Next is set forth his eternal decree, the program of the universe, of which all the events of time and eternity are the orderly unfolding, "Through the ages one increasing purpose runs." In the mighty sweep of that purpose all things are comprehended, to it all creatures are subservient, as it marches on in the strength of omnipotence to its eternal consummation. Then follow the works of creation and providence, in which God executes his decree. Man is introduced as the glory and crown of the creation, and the story of his origin, his fall, his punishment is told. The promise of salvation followed hard upon the sin, and the covenant of redemption, with the Son of God as the Redeemer, is unfolded. The part of God in the work of redemption is shown—effectual calling, which lays the foundation of man's hope not in himself but in God; justification, adoption, sanctification. Then

man's part is declared, saving faith, repentance unto life, good works, perseverance, assurance. Then the new life thus described in its general character is treated in various particulars—the law of God, Christian liberty and liberty of conscience, religious worship and the Sabbath day, lawful oaths and vows, the civil magistrate, marriage and divorce, the Church, the communion of saints, the sacraments, church censures, Synods and Councils. Thus the Christian life is set forth first in its own nature, then as it is related to the law of the State; and as it is organized in the Church. And the survey is closed with the vision of the world to come, death, the resurrection, the judgment, life and death eternal. Thus the Confession essays to trace in broad outline the sweep of the divine decree from its birth in the counsels of eternity to its fulfillment in the unending triumph of the kingdom of God.

Observe again the breadth of the Confession. It is broad because it is Scriptural. It is constantly affirmed, indeed, that the Confession is harsh, narrow, illiberal. On the contrary, it may be shown that in most important respects the Confession exhibits a breadth of view and a spirit of charity which reflect the largeness of the Word of God.

(a) Its recognition and defense of the right of private judgment. "The authority of the Holy Scripture dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or Church, but wholly upon God." (I. 4.) "The only infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself." (I. 9.) "The Supreme Judge, by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of Councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." (I. 10.) "God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doc-

trines or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience ; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also." (XX. 2.) Civil magistrates may not interfere in matters of faith, and all denominations of Christians should stand upon an equal footing before the law. (XXIII. 3.) The decrees of Synods and Councils are to be received with reverence and submission, if consonant to the Word of God. (XXX. 2.) "All Synods or Councils since the Apostles' time, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred ; therefore, they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both." (XXXI. 3.) To these broad assertions of Christian liberty the progress of two hundred and fifty years has little to add.

(b) Its conception of the visible Church. "The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law) consists of all those throughout the world, that profess the true religion, together with their children." (XXXV. 2.) No hard, exclusive, *jure divino* Presbyterianism is maintained. "We hold it to be expedient, and agreeable to Scripture and the practice of the primitive Christians, that the Church be governed by Congregational, Presbyterial and Synodical Assemblies. In full consistency with this belief, we embrace in the spirit of charity those Christians who differ from us in opinion, or in practice, on these subjects." (Form of Govt. VIII. 1.) The remains of Erastianism were erased when the Confession was brought across the sea, and the noble breadth and simplicity of this conception of the Church is one of the chief glories of our faith. It is easy to believe that the men who framed it cherished the hope of the reunion of Protestant Christendom. To our standards our practice is conformed, and in every man who accepts the gospel which Paul preached, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures ;

and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, we recognize a brother in the Lord.

(c) Its freedom from the polemic spirit. Creeds are generated by controversy. The Church is driven to define its position by the assaults of heresy, and the truth under God owes much to its enemies. Certainly the Westminster Confession is not devoid of the controversial temper. But error is refuted by the exhibition of truth. Heresy is overthrown, but no anathemas are launched against the heretic. To this rule there is a single unhappy exception, in the case of the Church and the Pope of Rome. Here the Confession is at fault, and has transgressed the principle of strict adherence to the Scripture to follow what is at best a doubtful interpretation of obscure passages of the Word. Apart from this the Confession is notably free from the polemic spirit. Contrast it in this regard with the so-called Athanasian creed, still in use in the services of the Church of England, with its fine-drawn definitions, its subtle distinctions, its labored attempt to compass the mystery of the Godhead, and its declaration that he who does not keep this faith whole and undefiled without doubt shall perish everlastingly; he that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity; "this is the Catholic faith; which, except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved."

It is worthy of special remark that the Confession contains no polemic against Arminianism, though the echoes of the Synod of Dort had not yet died away upon the troubled air. The truth, as the Westminster divines conceived it, was set forth with matchless clearness and precision, and left to bear its own witness. The kingdom of God is not promoted by the maledictions of the Church.

It is important to emphasize this aspect of our standards because they are often misrepresented. We are prone to magnify our differences, but the main value and highest glory of the Confession is not that it furnishes to one branch of the Christian Church an arsenal of controversial weapons,

but that it draws out and sets in order with masterly skill and completeness those great truths of Scripture which form the common faith of Christendom. For the larger part of the doctrinal contents of the Confession we hold in common with all branches of the Evangelical Church. Let us accustom ourselves to think of the Confession not merely as a barrier, but rather as a bond.

It becomes us to recognize this characteristic of our standards because there is no prospect that the Christian world will be united in the faith of Calvin. Centuries of conflict have brought the questions at issue between Calvinist and Arminian no nearer a decision. The battle has been fought in the cabinets of kings, in the halls of learning, with all the resources of scholarship. The strong arm of the civil power has been invoked. There are no reserves on either side ; there is no heavier artillery than that which is already engaged. Substantially all has been said that can be said on either side. The relative emphasis laid upon divine sovereignty and human freedom is largely determined by the inborn disposition of men, and the difference between Calvinist and Arminian is as deeply rooted in temperament as in theology. So long as both systems give birth to saintly and heroic souls, and bear fruit in holy living and good works, both will endure. Calvinism and Arminianism are not circles tangent at a single point, but circles described from a common centre, though they embrace different areas of truth. The relation between them ought to be one not of antagonism, nor even of an armed truce, but of cordial and brotherly alliance in the service of Jesus Christ.

This is not to say that the questions at issue are of no importance. They have an important bearing upon theology and life. Calvinism pursues at once the bolder and the more logical course. When propositions are submitted which appear contradictory, but which are both attested by sufficient evidence, it is the part of reason to accept

them both, even though we cannot reduce them to harmony. That is the attitude of Calvinism toward the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man. It can hardly be denied that upon the face of Scripture both appear, and that to eliminate either is, if not to do violence to the words of Scripture, at least to turn them from their natural and obvious meaning. There are three possible positions that may be assumed. 1. Fatalism. God's sovereignty denies man's freedom. Hyper-Calvinism approaches the faith of Islam. 2. Arminianism. Man's freedom abridges God's sovereignty. 3. Calvinism. God's purpose respects man's freedom, man's freedom fulfils God's purpose. God is sovereign, man is free. Without entering upon the vexed question of the nature and limits of the freedom of the human will, or rather of the human soul, of which the will is only a single faculty, it is sufficient for our purpose to observe that the Calvinist goes with the Arminian in carrying the freedom of man to the point of moral responsibility. It is further true, indeed, that Calvinism recognizes the freedom of man, emphasizes the sovereignty of God. That it does not undertake to reconcile these apparently discordant doctrines is a weakness, if such it be, that Calvinism must be content to share with the Word of God.

But while these questions are important, they are not vital either to religion or to theology, the science of religion. The essential truths of the Gospel are few and simple, and in them the Church of Christ must find its unity. The greater number of the branches into which the Church is divided can show no sufficient reason for existence. There are possible only a very few distinct forms of polity. All besides are only modifications of one or other of these original types. There are simply not enough points of doctrine or of polity to go round, unless we accept the mathematical definition of a point, as that which has no magnitude. Set the Confession over against any other evangeli-

cal creed, even those which diverge most widely from the system which it embodies, and the points of agreement are far more numerous and weighty than the points of difference. To the greater part of the teaching of our Confession the staunchest Arminian will respond with a hearty Amen.

Time will not suffer me to speak of the Catechisms, which present the same system of doctrine in the form of question and answer. The definitions which they furnish of such conceptions as God, sin, effectual calling, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, sacrament, baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, are models of accuracy, clearness and precision. He who has mastered them is in possession of a theological equipment of the highest value. And it must be remarked that the catechetical method of instruction has been approved and employed by the wisest teachers of all time and of every people, and is commended by universal experience. To train our children in the Catechism is to set them in the way of clear thinking and holy living.

The Confession is not a polemic tractate. In spirit and intent it is not merely or mainly controversial. If that had been its character, it might long since have been remanded to that historical museum where so many pieces of theological ordinance are stored away, that have fought their battles, and are consigned to silence and oblivion. Because it is more than a controversial pamphlet, because it is a compact, logical, complete exposition of that system of doctrine which was taught by Calvin, by Augustine, by Paul, inwrought as we believe with the whole texture of Scripture truth, however it may be modified in detail, in its essential features it will remain unshaken while the world stands, to magnify the wisdom and the grace of God.

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