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V.

THE NATURE, VALUE, AND SPECIAL UTILITY
OF THE CATECHISMS.

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ANALYSIS.

Catechetical teaching.—By question and answer.—Its history.—Scripture instances.—The law.—The Passover.—Ezra.—The Talmud—Jewish catechetical schools.—Josephus.—Jewish schools in later times.—Apostolic age.—Teaching and preaching.—The early Fathers.—Christian catechetical schools.—Dr. Schaff quoted.—Early mission work.—Not used in Dark Ages.—Reformers revived it.—Gave it large place.—Its value felt.—Summary.—Best method of instruction.—Especially religious teaching.—Reasons.—Brings truth clearly before the mind.—Calls attention to it.—Tests knowledge.—Exposes ignorance.—Presents all aspects of truth.—Secures accuracy and completeness.—Aids practical application.—Gains spiritual ends.—Summary.—Yet public preaching of utmost value.—Primal value.—Church leaders also use catechetical method.—Luther.—Calvin.—Zwingli.—Beza.—Knox.—Cranmer.—Ridley.—Usher.—The testimony of enemies confirms.—Romish catechism checked Reformation.—Catechetical instruction defended the Waldenses against Rome.—The Westminster Catechisms are of the highest value.—They are fitted to be so.—Their authors were competent men.—Had full knowledge.—Had other catechisms to aid.—Made with great care and patience.—Several committees acted.—The Larger and Shorter Catechisms.—No other catechisms made with equal care.—Compared with Heidelberg and Romish.—Contain all the essential truths of the gospel.—God.—Sin.—Christ.—Salvation.—Duty.—Death.—Destiny.—Truths stated with great accuracy.—Stated in positive form.—Yet it wards off error.—Doctrine of justification, to illustrate.—Summary.—Objections considered.—Young people cannot understand the teaching.—But may understand much.—Honest effort will master it.—Hard to remember.—Not more so than many secular things learned.—Reasons for using our own catechisms.—If not learned in childhood, likely never learned.—Youth the best time for lasting impressions to be made.—Rain-marks upon stone slab, to illustrate.—Denominational prosperity requires it.—Young people thereby protected against attacks, and able to hold their ground.—Inspiration of Bible.—Decrees.—Predestination.—Election.—Depravity.—Regeneration.—Perseverance.—Save our people from dangers.—The truths thus taught build good and great characters.—This the crown of all.—A closing exhortation.

V.

THE NATURE, VALUE, AND SPECIAL UTILITY OF THE CATECHISMS.

TEACHING, by the catechetical method, has marked the history of the church almost from the beginning down to the present time. A divine warrant for it, if not requirement of it, may be found in such passages of God's word as Deut. vi. 6, 7: "And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." And Exodus xii. 26, 27: "And it shall come to pass that when your children shall say to you, What mean ye by this service?" (the service of the passover) "that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses." In these instances, in order to give children the full and accurate instruction they needed about the commandments of the Lord referred to, and about the important sacrament instituted in the church in the passover, it was necessary that a number of questions should be asked and answered; and then, that the truth about these and other subjects, once learned, might not be forgotten, but kept ever fresh in the memory, and in constant and influential contact with the mind and heart, it was necessary that it should frequently be reviewed;

that there should be "precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little." Thus, we may say, the catechetical method of instruction was instituted at the very beginning of the Mosaic dispensation.

Not only, however, was it then instituted, but there is evidence that it was afterwards more or less faithfully made use of during at least portions of that long period of time; and that it was most efficient in preserving amongst the Israelites a knowledge of the revelations that, at different times, God made to them. At any rate, just before, and at the dawn of the new dispensation, this mode of teaching was in general use amongst the Jews. Students of the Talmud and of the Targums find that there were then catechetical Bible schools in all the synagogues; and that they were very numerous; sixteen, for instance, in such a city as Tiberias, and more than four hundred in Jerusalem. Some say four hundred and sixty; others four hundred and eighty. They find also that the Jewish teachers attached to these schools so much importance that they were tempted to ascribe their origin to the remotest antiquity; to claim that they were in existence before the flood, and that many of the illustrious men mentioned in the Scriptures—Enoch, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, Elisha, and a number of others—belonged to them, first as pupils, afterwards as teachers; that these schools constituted a special privilege and a peculiar honor that God had bestowed on his true people in all ages. Of course such claims, to the full extent that they were thus made, have little historical value. Yet they seem to furnish strong evidence that such schools had been in existence in their past history for a long period of time. Josephus claimed that they had been

in existence from the days of Moses, and that in them many of the people had not only been taught the commandments of the Lord, but had learned them so well that they could recite them as accurately as they could give their own names. It seems to be evident, then, that such schools were in existence at our Saviour's advent. Indeed, if the testimony of the rabbis may be relied on, they were not only in existence, but were regarded as an integral part of the religious system of the country, and as essential to its welfare. A number of proverbs were then in existence expressing this view. . It was said that the world continues in existence only by the breath of the children of the schools—the Bible schools; that the true guardians of the country were the teachers of those schools; that if any one would destroy the Jews, he must first destroy their schools; and it was one of their religious laws that no one should live in a place where one of those schools had not been established. There seems thus to be clear evidence that the catechetical method of teaching had marked the history of the church from the beginning of the Mosaic dispensation down to the inauguration of the new.

But there is evidence equally clear that it then passed over into the new. The Jews, as we have seen, were accustomed to this mode of instruction. Those who became Christians had been accustomed to it. No doubt the apostles themselves had learned much that they knew about the Old Testament Scriptures in such schools; and, therefore, when they became disciples, and were commanded by the Saviour to go forth and make known the great truths of the gospel which they had learned from him, we may be sure that they made use of the catechetical method, with which they were already so fa-

miliar, as well as of the public and formal discourse. Traces of this fact seem to be found in the accounts given in the New Testament of their modes of instruction, especially in the distinction sometimes made between teaching and preaching. It is said that our Saviour went about "*teaching*" in their synagogues, and "*preaching*" the gospel of the kingdom; that the apostles ceased not to "*teach*" and to "*preach*" Jesus as the Christ; that on one occasion Paul and Barnabas tarried at Antioch "*teaching*" and "*preaching*" the word of the Lord. Thus a distinction is sometimes made between teaching and preaching; and, no doubt, in such instances, by teaching is meant the catechetical method, the method by question and answer; while by preaching is meant the public formal continuous discourse, to which the same term is still applied. There seems to be no reason to doubt, then, that the catechetical method of teaching was in use under the old dispensation, and that it passed over from the old into the new.

That it was employed under the new by the early fathers, after it was introduced by the apostles, is a fact of church history so familiar that little need be said about it. Baron Bunsen says that "the apostolic church made the school," the Christian school, "the connecting link between itself and the world." Celsus, one of the earliest and most powerful opponents of the church, charged that Christians propagated religion through their schools, and Origen admitted the truth of the charge; but defended the policy of the church in employing that method of propagation, by pointing out the great moral and spiritual benefits the children received in the schools. Dr. Schaff calls attention to the fact that although the early church had no societies for dissemi-

nating the gospel, no Home and Foreign Missionary societies, such as we now have, nevertheless in about three centuries the whole population of the Roman empire was nominally Christianized; and that this great achievement was wrought by the divinely approved plan of "the child-reaching and child-teaching methods" of which the church then made use. It is a familiar fact that there was early established in the church a kind of institution called the catechuminate, or classes of catechumens; that when any of the surrounding pagans wished to come into the church, they were first placed in those classes, and, as a rule, kept there for two or three years; that often the best talent of the church was employed to give them instruction before they were admitted to the enjoyment of the sacraments of the church, and that this was one of the grand instrumentalities by which the church was spread abroad over the world, and by which her conquests were preserved, and converted into the means of future and still greater victories.

When the Dark Ages came on, of course this method of instruction, as well as every other, fell into disuse. Those ages became dark for that very reason; for the darkness was the darkness of religious ignorance. When, however, the Reformation dawned, this mode of teaching was at once revived, and most actively employed in disseminating the gospel. Luther wrote two catechisms; Calvin wrote two; a large number were prepared by others; and they continued to multiply down to the meeting of the Westminster Assembly; and in that Assembly there were twelve men, perhaps fourteen, who had written catechisms and efficiently employed them in the religious training of their people.

Thus, under the old dispensation and under the new, down to the Westminster Assembly, and, indeed, ever

since, the catechetical method of instruction has been employed by the church in doing her great work; and I have furnished the foregoing evidence of the fact that we might see *that this mode of teaching has resting upon it the unqualified endorsement of the church in all ages, especially in her best ages; and that it has been one of the most efficient of all the agencies which God has made use of to secure those blessed results by which the past history of the church has been marked.*¹

Of course, for such a fact as this there must be a good reason, and that reason it is not difficult to discover: the catechetical mode of teaching has the endorsement of the church in all ages, and has been employed by her great Head as one of the most efficient of all means for accomplishing his work in the world, *because it is the best mode for giving thorough religious instruction.* It is the best for a number of reasons.

One is, that this mode, better than any other, brings before the mind of the pupil the subject that is to be the matter of consideration. It brings up that subject in the form of a question. That question distinctly raises the point to be considered. It invites special attention to it. It secures special attention to it. It fixes special attention on it; and further questions may keep the attention fixed on it until it has been fully explained and fully understood. The other usual method of instruction, the formal continuous discourse, does not so certainly secure these ends, so necessary to thorough work. It may, indeed, as distinctly raise the point to be considered; but it does not so certainly secure attention to it. It may find the mind of the pupil in a passive state, indifferent

¹ For fuller information on this subject, see the larger Encyclopedias, art. "Catechisms," *Princeton Review*, January, 1849; especially Turnbull's *Yale Lectures on the Sunday-School*.

to the subject, or even in opposition to its consideration; but, having no means of ascertaining that fact, may dismiss it long before it has been understood, and so long before the very object of the attempted instruction has been gained. In this important respect, therefore, the catechetical method is much the better for thorough instruction.

It is the better method, also, because it makes the student more distinctly conscious of any ignorance of a given subject by which he may be characterized. We may very readily imagine that we are quite well acquainted with a subject until we are closely questioned in regard to it. Augustine once said, in regard to an important point in theology, that he thought he knew all about it until he was subjected to thorough interrogation; but that he then discovered that he knew very little about it. Questions that go down to the very roots of a subject; that pursue it in all its different ramifications out to their remotest terminal points; that present it in all its different aspects, and in all its important relations to other correlated subjects, and in all its practical bearings on religious experience, and character and life, such questions, persevered in as long as may be necessary, are absolutely essential to ascertain whether a subject is fully understood. And if there be any indistinctness of view in reference to it, or any ignorance in regard to it of any kind whatever, these questions will make the student conscious of the fact, and will reveal to him his need of further information; and will, also, enable the teacher to perceive just where further efforts for his benefit should be made. The public continuous discourse does not possess these advantages to anything like the same degree. It must, indeed, be diligently used, for it is at first the only means we have of arrest-

ing the attention of men ; of exciting their interest in the truth ; and of bringing them under its influence and within the reach of the church ; and, therefore, according to the divine command, we should employ it for these purposes, with all constancy and earnestness. But when those points have been gained, if we would ground men in the knowledge of the truth ; establish them in the faith ; bring them fully under the sanctifying influence of the great essential doctrines of revelation, and thoroughly equip them for every good work, and for efficiency in communicating those doctrines to others, we must make use of the method now insisted on—the catechetical method—the method by question and answer. This fact is too plain to need further enforcement.

✠ This suggests another reason why this is the best method of teaching : it furnishes the best opportunity for *accurate* instruction. Nothing but the truth is of any value anywhere. Nothing but the truth is of any value in science or in philosophy ; and, especially, nothing but the truth is of any value in religion. Nothing but the truth can enlighten the mind. Nothing but the truth can awaken the conscience and purge it from dead works to serve the living God. Nothing but the truth can exert a sanctifying influence on the soul. Nothing but the truth can be a lamp to the feet, and a light to the path. Nothing but the truth can we expect the Spirit of truth to employ to transform us into his image who is the truth. What men need, then, is “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Any admixture of error with the truth is as injurious to the soul as the admixture of poison with wholesome food is to the body. The catechetical method of teaching, it is evident, can secure this end much more perfectly than any other.

✠ By questions and answers alone can the teacher find out

in regard to any given subject what the pupil knows, and what he does not know, and so by that method only can he ascertain what instruction is needed to give a scriptural view of it. (The public discourse may give accurate instruction, but it has no means of securing an accurate reception of the instruction.) The consequence is that there are multitudes in our churches who have been sitting under that kind of instruction for years—ten, twenty, thirty, forty years—who yet could not accurately define a single subject which, during that long period of time, they have so often heard discussed. If closely questioned, they could not tell what faith is, or repentance, or sin, or, guilt, or justification, or sanctification. Their views on these, and on all other important subjects, are indistinct, incomplete, insufficient, perhaps, for their own safety; certainly insufficient for their comfort and for their efficiency in communicating the truth to others. Thus the public discourse may give accurate instruction, but it has no means of securing an accurate comprehension of it. The catechetical method has. When the truth on any subject has been stated, by questions and answers the teacher may ascertain whether it has been understood, and if it has not been, he may continue those questions and answers until it has been fully mastered. It is clear, then, that this method furnishes by far the best method for securing accurate instruction.

Still another reason why this is the best method is, that it furnishes the best opportunity for an efficient practical application of the truth to the spiritual wants of the learner. By answers to questions, the teacher may find out as accurately as is possible just what is the state of the mind and heart of the pupil, and so find out just what ministrations he needs. He may rightly divide the word of truth. He may give to each one his portion in due

season. He may impress on the attention the warnings of the Scriptures just when he sees they are needed; the threatenings, or the promises, just when he sees they are needed; all their great lessons, just when they are seen to be requisite for the wants of the soul. Thus this method furnishes an opportunity for the most effectual personal application of the truth to each individual that we can possibly enjoy.

Such are some of the reasons why this is the best method of religious instruction. Better than any other method, it secures attention to the subject to be considered, and, more distinctly than any other, makes the learner conscious of his intellectual and spiritual wants; and, besides, furnishes the best opportunity we can have for giving accurate instruction, and for making a seasonable and successful application of the truth to the personal wants of those placed under our care. *And it is in such considerations as these that we find the explanation of the great historical fact that this method of teaching has had the unqualified endorsement of the church in all periods of her history, and that God has made so much use of it in the extension of the kingdom of his Son.*

Of course, in these remarks, I am not to be understood as in the slightest degree depreciating the public preaching of the word. That is absolutely necessary, in the first instance, to arrest the attention of men; to arouse their interest; "to convince of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment to come," and to bring men within the reach of the church, and under the influence of further agencies that may be employed for their spiritual good; and for these purposes the gospel is to be preached with all diligence, "in season and out of season," as the Saviour commands. But when that has been successfully accomplished, if we would establish

them in the knowledge of the truth, and properly train them for future usefulness, in their turn to make the gospel known to others, and efficiently to labor for the establishment of the kingdom into which they have been brought, we must employ the method now insisted on—the catechetical method—that the church has always found most useful for this purpose. This has always been the theory of the great leaders of the church.

But the excellence of this method is not simply a matter of theory. It has in a remarkable way been confirmed by the unmistakable experience of the church. Here a multitude of facts might be mentioned; but there is time for only two or three.

—One is that the great leaders of the church have always relied upon it as the best means for the indoctrination of the people and for fitting them for usefulness. Luther made great use of it for this purpose. He lifted up his voice and proclaimed to the world, then awakening out of a long sleep in ignorance and sin, with an energy with which he hardly proclaimed any other truth, “Children are the seed of the church, and for the church’s sake Christian schools” (catechetical schools) “must be established and maintained.” So decided was he in his views on this subject that he declared that no man was fit to become a minister, or ought to be allowed to enter the sacred office, who had not already proved himself to be a competent catechetical teacher. Calvin held similar views, and Zwingli and Beza, in Switzerland; Knox, in Scotland; Cranmer and Ridley, in England, and Usher, in Ireland. They all relied upon this method of instruction for securing satisfactory and lasting results *as upon no other*.

Another fact is that the excellence of this method is confirmed in a very instructive way by the testimony of

the enemies of evangelical truth. The Council of Trent said "the heretics have chiefly made use of catechisms to corrupt the minds of Christians," thus recognizing and asserting the great success with which they had been employed for instructing the people; and, therefore, that council decreed that this agency should be met and counteracted by a similar agency amongst their own people; and a catechism was prepared under the immediate supervision of the Pope himself, and all the teachers of the church were specifically charged to see to it that it was learned by the people; and from that day down to this that church has not failed to make use of it to retain her children under her control. At the beginning of the Reformation, that church, indeed, observing what advantages were being gained by means of catechisms, addressed itself to similar work with greater energy than ever before, and it is the statement of one of their principal historians that by that means it, in a single generation, arrested the reform movement, and that it has ever since by the same means substantially confined that movement to the geographical limits which it had then reached. In this remarkable manner does the Church of Rome attest the efficiency of this method of instruction.

Still another fact, bearing on this subject, is that all the evangelical churches that have maintained their existence in spite of the persecutions to which, at different periods in their history, they have been subjected, have done it by indoctrinating their children in a knowledge of the truth by the catechetical process. In the thirteenth century, for instance, Rome sent an emissary to the Waldenses to ascertain what might be done to win them to its fold. When he returned he reported that by means of catechetical schools the people had been so

thoroughly established in their views of truth that they could not be prevailed on to listen to anything else.

Thus it is demonstrated, both by theory and experience, both by the testimony of the enemies and of the friends of the gospel, that the best means of imparting thorough and lasting religious instruction, and of training the children and youth of the church for future usefulness in her service, is the method which I now advocate—the interlocutory method of question and answer. (*If, then, we wish to make use of the best method for accomplishing these great ends amongst our people, this is the method which we must employ.*

And now, in the next place, I shall endeavor to show that in our Catechisms we have already provided, in the best possible form, the matter necessary for this great work. Several facts will make this evident:

—One is, that our Catechisms were most carefully prepared by men fully competent for the task. It may very truly be said that a body of men more competent for the work could not have been brought together. It was not to them a new work; a work of which they had no knowledge; in which they had no experience. As already stated, a number of them had already, before the Assembly met, prepared catechisms of great excellence for the instruction of their people. These furnished a basis on which to begin their work; and then they had to assist them all the great catechisms of the Reformers, the catechisms of Luther, of Calvin, of Ursinus, and of a number of others. And they did their work most laboriously and carefully. Early in the sessions of the Assembly they appointed a committee, composed of men who were known to have had most experience in such work and to possess most ability for it, to begin the undertaking. Soon afterwards that committee reported;

but its report was not accepted. Another committee, somewhat differently constituted, was appointed. After much consideration, it reported the results of its labors; but still the Assembly was not satisfied. Still another committee was appointed, its composition again somewhat changed. After long deliberation, this committee presented a catechism so acceptable that it was approved almost to the end, when again the Assembly became dissatisfied with the result, and determined to make still another effort to obtain something more perfect. A fourth committee was constituted, its composition again somewhat altered; and that committee was instructed to prepare two catechisms—one larger, for more mature catechumens; the other smaller, for the younger members of families and congregations. That committee reported, and the Assembly adopted the two Catechisms which we now have in our possession. In this way, for about five years, committees of the Assembly, and the Assembly itself, labored on these two little books. Not a sentence was admitted into them until after the most protracted and thorough consideration. Not a word was allowed a place in them until it had been subjected to the closest scrutiny, and had proved itself to be just the right word to express the meaning intended. It is probable that there is not another catechism in existence on which one-tenth of the time and labor and ability and learning was expended that was employed in the production of these two with which God has so highly favored our denomination. They are the work, not of one man, as Luther's and Calvin's; nor of two men, as the Heidelberg Catechism was; nor of four, as was the catechism of the Church of Rome; (but they are the product of some five years of the most earnest and prayerful deliberations of the whole Westminster Assembly) If,

then, it is possible for the most conscientious efforts of most competent men to prepare suitable catechisms for the religious instruction of the people, we ought to have them in the little books we now possess.

But their value is further seen in the fact that they contain all the essential truths of the gospel. The truths of the Scriptures in regard to God and his attributes, the law and its penalties, sin and its consequences, Christ and his salvation, the Spirit and his work and graces, life and its duties, death and its issues, eternity and its final rewards for the righteous, and its final retribution for the wicked; these, and all other doctrines that must be known and believed in order that men may be saved and fitted for full usefulness in the divine service, these little books contain, as any one may see who gives them a careful examination. They are thus complete manuals of the great fundamental doctrines of divine revelation; we think we have sufficient reason for believing *the most complete in existence*. Not only, however, do they contain all the essential truths of religion, but they contain them in the most accurate form. Although these Catechisms have been in existence two centuries and a half, and although, for that long period of time, they have been subjected to all the severe and decisive tests of the experience of the church, and of the closest scrutiny of her most perfect scholarship, no change in the form of the statement of any one of their great doctrines has ever been made. No suggested change has ever appeared to the church to be of sufficient value to deserve serious consideration! How grateful we should be to the great Head of the church that he has graciously placed in our hands so perfect a means for training up our children and youth in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord!"

Another excellence that our Catechisms possess is that they not only thus state the essential truths of religion with so marvellous accuracy, but that they so state them, that, while expressing them clearly in a positive form, they, at the same time, negatively, at every important point, guard against the most serious errors by which, at those points, they have ever been assailed. Almost any answer to the questions of the Catechisms might be taken as an illustration of this fact. Take, for instance, the answer of the Shorter Catechism to the question, "What is justification?" "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." It is an "*act*," thus guarding against the error that it is a process, sometimes long protracted. An act of "God's *free grace*," guarding against the error that it is by works. "Wherein he pardoneth *all* our sins," guarding against the error that pardon is only partial, some sins being reserved for expiation by penance and the fires of purgatory. "And accepteth us *as* righteous in his sight"—already righteous—guarding against the error that he accepts us only that we may afterwards become righteous. "*Only* for the righteousness of Christ," guarding against the error that our own righteousness forms a part of the ground on which justification is based. "Only for the righteousness of Christ *imputed* to us," guarding against all the errors held, that his righteousness avails for us in some other way. "And received by faith alone," guarding against the error that any other grace is necessary for the purpose. Thus, in this answer, not only is the truth in regard to justification stated with sufficient fulness for the instruction of our children and youth, but it is so stated that, at every

important point, the learner is guarded against every serious error with which at those points it has ever been assaulted. This is an excellence of our Catechisms of great value. It equips our people with scriptural tests, in convenient form, and of easy application, by which every erroneous doctrine with which they may be confronted may be tried.

(Still another excellence of our Catechisms is, that they not only state the truth in regard to every essential doctrine of God's word, but state it in the form of a *complete system*, every doctrine in its right place and in its right relations to other doctrines. *This is true of no other catechism.* Yet it is a point in their favor of great importance. It is to be remembered that the truths of the Scriptures, although scattered hither and thither over their pages without regard to scientific order, and although all that is taught on any important subject cannot be found, perhaps, in any one passage, but must be found in a number of different and widely-separated passages, nevertheless those truths, when collected out of the book, and brought together, and rightly adjusted one to another, form a system of truth, a divine system, more harmonious and perfect than any other that was ever excogitated by human learning and genius. It is also to be remembered that no truth can be fully understood and appreciated until it is seen, not only in its own light, but in the light of all the other truths to which it stands related. The death of Jesus of Nazareth, for instance, looked at only in itself, would have been regarded as a very insignificant event. It would have been noticed only for a moment by only a few as the pitiable fate of a poor Jewish peasant of extraordinary, but most visionary, pretensions, under the deserved penalty of violated law. But when looked at, not in itself alone, but in the light

of all correlated truths, how different does it appear! So of all the essential truths of religion. It is a great excellence of our Catechisms, then, that they not only contain the fundamental doctrines of revelation, but that they present them in the form of a system, in which every truth can be contemplated, not only in its own light, but in the additional, and clearer, and only sufficient light of all correlated truths; and thus can be so seen as to be most thoroughly understood and most fully appreciated.

Such is only an imperfect exhibition of the merits of our Catechisms. Enough has been said, however, I trust, to make it plain that in them we have furnished to our hands, in the best possible form, the matter necessary to indoctrinate our people with the great truths of religion by that process which has received the approbation of God's people in all the past, and which God has always so much blessed.

* It has been objected to these Catechisms, indeed, that it is difficult for young people to understand them; and, no doubt, this is true. *But it is by no means impossible*; and, therefore, the only question is, are the truths which they contain worth the effort necessary to acquire them? Human ability has never yet succeeded in stating them correctly in an easier form. Unless our young people, then, master them in this form, they must remain ignorant of them. Is that alternative, with all its consequences, to be preferred to the labor necessary to acquire them? Besides, even if in early life they do not fully understand them, they may readily learn enough abundantly to compensate them for all the time and effort they may expend on them; and clearer views will certainly come later.

* It is also objected to these Catechisms that it is diffi-

cult to remember them; and no doubt that, too, is true. But it is not more difficult than to remember a number of lessons taught in our secular schools, which we require our children to remember, and which they must remember if they would be fitted for the secular duties of life. Moreover, memory needs training. What better training can be given it than by storing up in it those great facts and truths of God's word that are "able to make them wise unto salvation"? Alas! for the children whose parents excuse them from so necessary and valuable a study on grounds so trivial!

But now, in conclusion, let me tax your patience long enough briefly to point out some reasons why we should use these Catechisms for the great purpose for which they were intended and for which they are so eminently suited:

1. Unless they are learned in childhood and youth, the strong probability is that they will never be learned at all. Not one in five hundred of our people, perhaps, learns them later in life. They must be learned, then, early in life, or never. Are we willing for the latter alternative? Are we willing that our children shall never *accurately* know the great truths of religion? Are we willing that they shall never accurately know what is meant by such doctrines as faith, and repentance, and justification, and sanctification? Would that be wise? Would that be safe?

2. We cannot too early impress the great truths of the Catechisms on their minds and hearts. We should never forget that in childhood and youth the soul is most susceptible of deep and lasting impressions. In our great museums we sometimes see stone slabs with the marks of raindrops on them that fell before man had any existence, and the impressions of the feet of tiny birds that

walked over them when time was yet young. The explanation is, that those slabs were once in a formative state, so soft that objects so light would thus impress them; and then, as time passed by, those slabs, with those impressions on them, hardened into the solid rock; and thus those impressions became as enduring as the slabs themselves are. So, in childhood and youth, the souls of our children are most susceptible of impressions for good or evil; and then, as the years elapse, those souls, with those impressions on them, indurate; and thus those impressions become as lasting, as everlasting, it may be, as the souls themselves. How important it is, then, that these earliest and most enduring impressions should be made in behalf of right and truth and God by the inculcation of the great truths of our Catechisms! How important that those truths should, in the very beginning of their histories, be laid down deep around the very roots of their young natures, that up out of them their future characters may grow, and that by them their future lives may be determined and controlled!

3. It is necessary to our success as a denomination that our Catechisms be intelligently and faithfully taught. Our doctrines are constantly and bitterly assailed. In much of the literature of the day, especially in that kind which, unfortunately, our children too much read, they are caricatured as severe, harsh, unreasonable, antiquated; as belonging to a remote and ignorant past; as being entirely out of harmony with the progress that has been made in better views of the benevolence, of the divine nature, of the dignity of man, and of the vastness and freeness of redeeming love. Multitudes of our people do not know how to meet these assaults. They do not know what to say in answer to the attacks

that are made on the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures; the absolute sovereignty of God; the doctrine of the divine decrees; of predestination and election; of the total depravity of the human race; of the necessity of the regeneration of the Spirit, and of the perseverance of the saints. Those who make these assaults see that they do not know what to say; and this fact invites and provokes additional assaults. Nor is this the only and the worst consequence. Seeing that so many of our people do not know how to defend the doctrines which we hold, they have not that respect for us, as a denomination, that is necessary to give us such influence over them, and over the world, as we must have, if we would win them to our views, and do the work amongst them that our Saviour requires at our hands. Every intelligent observer in our churches must see that this is true to a most painful extent. It has been true long enough. It is high time that this state of things were brought to an end; and I trust that as one result of these celebrations of the formation of our Standards our ministers and elders and deacons and intelligent members will arouse themselves, and by a proper inculcation of our doctrines *bring it to an end!* Why cannot the ministers and officers in our denomination so instruct our people as to these great doctrines, that in every church there shall be a number, at least, who shall know how to maintain them against any of the popular assaults that are so frequently made upon them? We shall never succeed as we may and ought until this is done.

4. We should diligently teach the doctrines of our Catechisms, because if faithfully inculcated they will do in the future what they have already so often done in the past. In former years they have made great and good churches—churches as great and good as any the world

has yet seen. They have made great and good denominations—denominations as great and good as any that have yet marked the world's history. They have made great and good men and women—men and women as great and good as any with which God has yet blessed the human race. They have purified and elevated and ennobled all the institutions of the world—the family, the state, the church. They have brought to bear upon them as beneficent an influence as any to which they have ever been subjected. *No system of doctrines has such a history for good as ours has.* Search and see. But what these doctrines have done in the past they may do again in the future. Let us teach them, then, as we ought, and our “Zion will arise, and shine, her light having come,” and God will honor us with a noble part in disseminating his truth, and in taking this poor apostate world captive, and in bringing it to the Saviour's feet, and laying it down there, the splendid trophy of his redeeming grace!