

THE CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN.

No. V. — MAY, 1879.

CHRISTIANITY, CALVINISM, AND CULTURE.

EVANGELICAL religion, that is, Protestant Christianity in its most developed form, is often charged with cutting down human nature, narrowing to a single matter all that ought to engage men's attention, and putting a brand on many human interests and pursuits,—which, however, cannot be dispensed with altogether. The one great interest of evangelical Christianity is salvation. On this, and on what is immediately connected with it, it is charged with bestowing such exclusive attention that it hardly allows any place to human culture, including such matters as science, philosophy, art, and literature. Of course, it cannot entirely shut them out. It cannot prevent them from engaging the attention of intelligent Christian men and women. But it is charged with a tendency to view them as enemies, not as friends or allies; as matters lying outside the sacred enclosure of the kingdom of God, and pertaining to the god of this world; and as having an influence and tendency adverse to that which it is the great object of earnest religion to promote. They are like unwelcome visitors at a Pension or Hotel, who do not amalgamate with the rest of the party, but cannot be got quit of. It is often thought that if the leaders of the religious world had their way of it, they would, as the diplomatic phrase is, present them with their passports, and request them to be gone.

To some extent this is laid to the charge of all definite religion,—of every system that represents the favour of God, and the welfare of the soul in the life to come, as the paramount concern of man. But Calvinism or Puritanism, being the most thoroughly developed form of Christian faith, is usually charged with sinning in this respect beyond all its brethren. Its hard and fast lines, it is said, make this almost a necessity. Dividing very rigidly between the human and the Divine, between the secular and the sacred, between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, between man condemned and thoroughly corrupted by sin, and man accepted of God and learning to please God through faith in Christ,

them to the various monthly meetings, and that they be desired to consider the possibility of employing some more effectual means, either of a denominational or undenominational character, than have hitherto been employed for the furtherance of the temperance cause.

At a meeting of Assembly, held in Liverpool, May, 1877, it was resolved to petition the House of Commons in favour of closing public-houses on Sunday.

Our Church, in all its highest interests, and notably in that of temperance, has sustained a great loss in the death of the Rev. Dr. Charles, Aberdovey, referred to in your Memorial-Tributes in March. He was educated at Oxford, purposing to take holy orders in the Church of England, where he would have attained his degree. But failing conscientiously to subscribe to the articles, he was obliged, after having graduated B.A., to relinquish that intention, and soon afterwards threw in his lot with the Calvinistic Methodists. His grandfather, Rev. Thomas Charles, of Bala, was often spoken of as God's gift to Wales, and he, the grandson, proved himself a precious gift to his country, especially to his adopted denomination. He at once gave himself to work. It was just then the total abstinence movement was first started in the country, and he threw himself into it with much vigour, lecturing up and down the country, inducing thousands in Wales to take the total abstinence pledge. He is said to have been the first in North Wales who came forth publicly on the question.

Of his services to the cause of theological education, and the advancement of the Gospel generally you have already spoken. Few men could have been more missed in our Church.

JOSEPH EVANS.

DECAY OF PRESBYTERIAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE UNITED STATES.

[THE following article is almost wholly of local application. We insert it in conformity with one of the designs of this Journal,—that the various Churches may be made aware of each other's experiences, whether for good or for evil. Even where this paper is not at present applicable, it may be useful as illustrating tendencies, especially in the case of Churches much exposed to the changeful spirit of the age. If any question arise out of this paper, whether of fact or of policy,—if the facts be challenged, or if the remedial policy here advocated be disputed, our pages are open to temperate statements on the other side, written in a brotherly spirit, with a catholic aim, and within moderate limits.—Ed.]

THE design of this article is to direct attention to certain points of practical deflection from the form of government, adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. It is hoped that this may serve to arouse those concerned to remedy the evils that have sprung from these variations. Although the subject has a special reference to the body familiarly known as the Reunited Presbyterian Church in the Northern States, it may yet be assumed to be adapted, more or less accurately, to the condition of Presbyterianism in general in this country.

It is not asserted, nor implied, that there has been a widespread or vital repudiation of the main principles of Presbyterian administration. To show the real nature of the change, we will present an orderly state-

ment of undisputed deviations among us from the letter of the Book of Government,* and attempt to trace sundry pressing evils in the Church to their legitimate root, in the deviations thus noted. The articles of government from which deflection will be noted, are all contained in Book First of the "Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church in U.S.A.," and the relative position of these deflections will be marked by reference to the several chapters of that book.

In the first chapter, in which the "preliminary principles" of government are announced, it is affirmed in the last article, that "if the preceding scriptural and rational principles be steadfastly adhered to, the rigour and strictness of its discipline will contribute to the glory and happiness of any Church." A warning is here conveyed by inference, that want of rigour or laxity of discipline arising from neglect of steadfast adherence to such scriptural and rational principles, will detract from the glory and happiness of any Church. Inattention to this prophetic caution will be seen to have become the source of various serious evils that prevail in our Church at the present time.

We begin our examination of the variations with the sixth chapter, that relates to "deacons." The chapter reads as follows:—"The Scriptures clearly point out deacons as distinct officers in the Church, whose business it is to take care of the poor, and to distribute among them the collections which may be made for their use. To them also may be properly committed the management of the temporal affairs of the Church." Now the office of deacon has fallen into well-nigh complete desuetude among us, or lingers only in an indefinite and inefficient exercise for the lifting of collections and for the dispensing of scant charities. Particularly is the latter clause grown obsolete. "The management of the temporal affairs of the Church" is now, as a rule, committed to trustees, officers of the congregation, for whose existence no provision is made, and who are recognised only incidentally in the Book of Government (chap. xv. 7). These officers who now have charge of making provision for ministerial support, and to whom all temporal control, even of the church building, is committed, are selected from popular and influential men in the congregation. They are not necessarily church members, nor usually are they *all* communicants. This departure from the recommendation of the book confers upon the congregation, rather than upon the actual membership, predominating power in the choice or retention of a minister, and renders the minister answerable, not so much to the Christian conscience seeking the truth, as to the popular

* [When the American Presbyterian Church was organised in 1788 as a General Assembly, it issued, for the instruction of its members, a little manual called "The Form of Government," in which the doctrine of the Church as to its officers, courts, and a few other subjects, was briefly set forth. This is now regarded as the constitution of the Church. To this document there was prefixed, in 1821, a few statements of a general character, respecting the design of the Church itself. It is to this book that the writer of this article refers.—Ed.]

taste demanding spiritual entertainment. It is a vital point in which the world has invaded the Church, and vigorously wields the power of the purse against the spiritual control of the pulpit. Moreover, these officers of the congregation are entirely irresponsible to Presbytery, and have no connection with it. They form an independent power, zealous oftentimes of control. And this is one of the wedges, which, in connection with others tending in the same direction, has led to the enfeebling of Presbyterian authority over the churches.

In the seventh chapter, pertaining to "ordinances in a particular church," the ordinance of "*catechising*," is distinctly named. But catechising no longer exists as an ordinance in our churches. Excepting rarely in private families, or it may be by the asking of one or two questions each Sabbath in the Sabbath school, and this not under the direction of church officers, the old-fashioned Shorter Catechism is unused. Owing to constant local church emigration and immigration, our church membership has become ever-shifting, while its body consists of a large mixture of members of other denominations with our own people, persons drawn to us by local convenience or popular preference. This mixed multitude, with its varied tastes, and lack of early training, has served to render the catechising ordinance unpopular in many places. As a result, churches have become liberalised in doctrine, through neglect of catechetical instruction in the system of truth we hold. Not becoming Presbyterianised in views of truth, they naturally do not sympathise with our mode of government, and can hardly be expected willingly to submit to the rule of that which they have not learned to love as a system. Thus the idea of submission to church authority, so sacred to the Fathers, has become seriously weakened, while the practical control has been transferred from Church to congregation. To what extent a change in the style of preaching from the doctrinal and exegetical may have also aided this relaxation of Church principles, it does not fall within our scope to discuss. But it may be assumed that those who, from whatever cause, are untrained in the doctrines of a Church, will be correspondingly indifferent in maintaining its discipline.

Again, from the above-named influences, and from a spirit of increasing independence, springing from other causes, the exercise of *discipline* on erratic or unfaithful members has been rendered unpopular, and in some instances well-nigh impossible. This duty is assigned to the session in chapter ninth, but has fallen into perilous decline. Worldly habits and customs, deadly in their effect upon spirituality and upon the faithfulness of ministerial utterance, have thus by tolerance enthroned themselves in the house of God. By connivance of the spiritual power, or by its weakness of protest, a spirit of compromise with the world prevails in many quarters. Owing to causes already mentioned, the courage of the pulpit is likely to fail in the presence of preponderating congregational power. Thus the average tone of piety falls, while activity in external church enterprise is swift to assume the sphere of spiritual

energy and of the strict maintenance of pure Christian living. With the lack of discipline naturally comes the loss of respect for authority, and a continually increasing unwillingness to submit to any other guidance than that of men's own self-indulgent wills.

From these minor lapses of government that aid in preparing the way for shrinkage of ecclesiastical bonds, we now pass to still more serious infringements of the constitution of the Church, through foreign methods of action introduced into our Presbyteries. Owing to the poverty of many candidates for the ministry, to their late entrance upon the work of preparation, and consequent haste on their part to enter upon their labours, and owing likewise to the vast needs calling for young blood in our extensive western home missionary fields, certain habits of indulgence in reference to the enforcement of the requirements of educational preparation in candidates have invaded a number of our Presbyteries. For the same reasons in part, ordinations *sine titulo* have multiplied. Thus the educated character and spiritual force of the ministry have been appreciably lowered, where these concessions have been yielded. That a corresponding loss of authority in the ministry must result from this indulgence needs no argument to prove.

We may further note a serious practical change in the composition of Presbytery, due to the gradual lessening of the number of ruling elders that attend its sessions. Upon this subject it is impossible, without great difficulty, to obtain reliable statistics, or to make an exact estimate. But from wide observation and careful conference with ministers in various quarters, it may be confidently stated, as entirely within bounds, that, over the whole Church, not more than one quarter of the churches are thus represented in the stated meetings of Presbytery. Whether this absence of representation springs from that spirit of independence of control already mentioned, or whether the latter is due in good measure to the former, is a problem that deserves careful examination. However, in either case, a decline of interest on the part of churches in the proceedings of Presbytery, and their growing separation in spirit from Presbytery, with ignorance of its rights and indifference to its supervision, would seem to be the inevitable consequences. Thus the pressure of ecclesiastical control over the masses of the people is gradually lessened year by year, and their attachment to church order wanes proportionately to their removal from its courts and consequent unconsciousness of its plans and modes of operation. To what extent this slackening of interest in the proceedings of Presbytery on the part of the ruling eldership, with its attendant loss of ecclesiastical power, may be connected with the spread of term-service in the eldership, recently incorporated into the constitution of the Church, will bear rigid consideration. Certainly a less amount of zeal for Presbytery may be naturally expected of one who may be chosen a delegate but once or twice during his brief term of office, and who possesses no assurance of a prolongation of his office by re-election.

What opportunity is afforded him to become sufficiently familiarised with the workings of Presbytery to secure from him any active part, and hence any deep personal interest, in its proceedings? Hence the eldership, like the diaconate, may gradually decline from its position of authority and influence in the congregations. When a session shall once lose the impression of the authority of Presbytery behind it, its work will gravitate into a formal and mechanical routine of functional details.

We next pass to the consideration of another instance of evident and dangerous subversion of Presbyterial power. The published "Minutes of the General Assembly" for the last year, show the existence in the Church of actually 368 fewer ministers than churches. An accurate account in the minutes of 1875 proves that fully one-fourth of our ministry is retired, or engaged in other avocations, and not employed at all in the supply of churches. The deficit of ministers thus arising may be partially balanced by the fact that, in many instances, a minister is employed in the service of two, or of even three, small charges. Yet, for all that, the supply of efficient ministers is limited and evidently inadequate especially to the wants of our home-mission fields. There is no cry more senseless than that of a surplus ministry. Add to the above consideration, the rapid growth of many towns or neighbourhoods and of their churches. Consider the intense rivalry of other denominations upon the same fields. Take into account the wide diffusion of knowledge through the press, and the intellectual impulse of the sudden development of communities, creating a demand for the best pulpit talent. Include the insufficient salaries oftentimes offered, and the possibility of advancing one's ministerial position, with enlargement of spiritual influence. Reflect upon the constant opportunities of promotion to larger churches through the incessant transfer of the ministry. Consider all this, and we may readily predict a ceaseless tendency to change in both churches and ministers.

That such a movement exists to an alarming extent is a fact, undeniable as it is lamentable. Now it will scarcely be denied that our form of government directly contemplates the retention of the control of all such transfers within the judgment and action of Presbytery. The very theory of Presbyterial government involves, as its first principle, the power to regulate the relation of the ministry to the churches, in individual cases.

Now consider, first, the case of the removal of a minister from one charge to another. Chapter sixteenth of our book distinctly provides for this case. We quote only the parts of the chapter essential to our purpose, as follows:—

"I. No bishop shall be translated from one church to another, nor shall he receive any call for that purpose, but by the permission of the Presbytery.

"II. Any church desiring to call a settled minister from his present charge, shall, by commissioners, properly authorised, represent to the Presbytery the ground on which they plead his removal. The Presbytery having maturely considered their plea, may, according as it appears more or less reasonable, either

recommend to them to desist from prosecuting the call, or may order it to be delivered to the minister to whom it is directed. If the parties be not prepared to have the matter issued at that Presbytery, a written citation shall be given to the minister and his congregation to appear before the Presbytery at its next meeting. . . . The Presbytery being met and having heard the parties, shall, upon the whole view of the case, either continue him in his former charge, or translate him, as they shall deem to be most for the peace and edification of the Church ; or refer the whole affair to the Synod at their next meeting, for their advice and direction."

This legislation refers to a change of *pastorate within the bounds of one Presbytery*; and it involves "hearing the parties," a "whole view of the case," "maturely considering," and the rendering of a decision as a court of Christ, while having in view a deliberate judgment as to what will best secure the peace and edification of the Church at large. This is the law of the Church ; but as to the practice, the reference of such a case to Synod, as contemplated in the last sentence, is so rare, that the writer cannot recall from the history of the Church the existence of a single instance. Further, while it is also true that no such changes as herein described are consummated without the formal consent of Presbytery, yet it has grown to be the prevailing custom in most parts of the Church, excepting only some of the oldest Presbyteries, for all such transfers to be quietly arranged between the minister and the churches concerned. Frequently, indeed, his actual charge is not fairly consulted, but only informed, after a plan of union between the minister and another church has been agreed upon. Often the minister hands in his resignation to his people ; a congregational meeting being called, his resignation is accepted ; resolutions of respect and regret are adopted ; and commissioners are appointed to Presbytery, and instructed to unite with the pastor in the request for the dissolution of the pastoral relation. Meanwhile the minister may have removed to his new charge before Presbytery meets ; and it has occurred that the church he is to leave presents a call to a new pastor at the same Presbytery that is requested to dissolve the old relation. When Presbytery convenes, it goes through the motion of acting, but merely passes a cut-and-dried decision, confirming that which it seems powerless to contradict,—the practical control of the matter having been wrested from its hands. In such cases Presbytery becomes only a court of record. It is the rarest of events for Presbyterial interference to be made in such removals ; and, indeed, it would not ordinarily be wise to attempt reversal, since growing custom has surrendered the affair to church and pastor, excepting the function of formal endorsement. There are a few Presbyteries in which the old authority and method are insisted upon ; and in cases where the minister rests in serious doubt as to duty, the question is sometimes submitted to Presbytery ; while, now and then, a minister is sent back to a church after an attempt to leave. But ordinarily Presbytery looks on while minister and church settle their own affairs, and then steps in to pronounce the blessing. What power over the

spiritual welfare of a church this custom places in the hands of a congregation that is governed in temporal matters by its trustees, need not be declared.

Section third of this same chapter provides for the calling of a minister settled within the limits of another Presbytery as follows:— "That congregation shall obtain leave from the Presbytery to which they belong, to apply to the Presbytery of which he is a member, and that Presbytery having cited him and his congregation as before directed, shall proceed to hear and issue the case. If they agree to the translation, they shall release him from his present charge; and, having given him proper testimonials, shall require him to repair to that Presbytery within the bounds of which the congregation calling him lies," &c.

This enacted mode of transfer is sometimes respected, but ordinarily the minister called, if he decides in his own mind to accept, merely requests his Presbytery on his own motion to release him from his charge, provision having been made for announcing, at the same time, the concurrence of his congregation, and to dismiss him to the Presbytery to which the calling church belongs; upon his reception by which Presbytery the call is put into his hands, and the new relation is formally constituted. This short method saves time and trouble; and it also relieves Presbytery from its judicial office of deliberating and deciding in such transfers as the good of the whole field may require. The congregations and the ministers transact the business, and few Presbyteries will venture to interfere, or to utter a protest, but graciously vote endorsement, and enter it upon the minutes. The inference as to where the real power resides is the same as in the previous case.

Chapter seventeenth provides that when a minister, not having a call to another church, "shall labour under such grievances in his congregation as that he shall desire leave to resign his pastoral charge, the Presbytery shall cite the congregation to appear by their commissioners at their next meeting to show cause, if they have any, why the Presbytery should not accept the resignation." "And if any congregation shall desire to be released from their pastor, a similar process, *mutatis mutandis*, shall be observed." And the Presbytery is to deliberate and decide. Custom, however, permits the congregation, and not the Presbytery, to accept the ministerial resignation, and afterwards to ask Presbytery to go through the form of release. In case, however, of inability on the part of pastor and people to agree in action, the affair is then referred to the next Presbytery, the commissioners coming up, of their own accord, to have the difficulty settled at once.

Now this improved method may, or may not, be wiser than that one ordered in the book. It is true that our book implies that much freedom is to be left to the several desires of church and minister. But actually many instances of serious injury occur. Separations are effected that in the judgment of Presbytery seem unnecessary and unwise. Trifling differences, growing often out of questions of salary, or of the undue

prominence of some individual in the congregation, or of technical administration, which belong to Presbytery to settle, produce alienation and separation. That firm and safe adjudication of a higher court of appeal, so much needed for the defence of both parties, is practically abandoned. Presbytery stands helpless where she should direct and guide ; her interference, if proposed, comes after the event, since her calm adjudication has not been sought in time. Too frequently she can only render a coroner's verdict. Ministers are rarely returned to a charge after the mutual and hasty motion of separation has been made. And as a result, parties are formed, congregations are torn with internal strife, and seriously injured for years, by dissensions that might have been healed had old-time Presbyterian authority been regarded. This looseness of Presbyterian control having crept in, both ministers and churches are swift to take advantage of it ; a feeling of independence is widely inculcated ; and an incipient Congregationalism usurps the management, leaving in such matters only the nominal Presbyterian power of "ratification."

Out of this state of affairs still greater evils have developed, concerning two of which we must speak. *First*, the pastoral office itself has lost dignity and standing. In its stead has arisen a relation nowhere recognised or contemplated in our form of government ; an office, indeed, of pure Congregationalism, and alien to original Presbyterianism. Churches and ministers have fallen into the way of constructing their own temporary connexions, regardless of the permanent pastorate, referring the matter indeed to Presbytery by asking leave, to which Presbytery too readily yields undemurring concurrence. This new relation is marked upon our Assembly minutes as that of "stated supply." It is a stipulation between a minister and a church or churches for his services during a stated period, usually a year, or year by year. When the engagement expires the relation ends, unless the contract be renewed. It will be profitable to examine the exact figures illustrating this system. These figures are presented from personal inspection of the "Minutes of Assembly" for the past year. The entire number of churches reported in 1878 is 5269. Of these 963 are marked "vacant"—that is, having no ministerial supply whatever, many of them being small, others undergoing a transition of ministers. Subtracting these vacant churches from the whole number, we have left us 4306 churches that employ ministers. Now of this latter number, 2058 are marked "stated supply"—that is, having ministers who are uncalled to the pastorate, and ministering to them temporarily, under contract. Thus only the remaining 2248 churches have settled pastors, leaving 3021 churches without pastors, they either being vacant or having stated supplies. Further, of these 2248 churches with pastors, it frequently occurs that two churches are united under one pastor, leaving, at the lowest estimate, not more than 2000 of our 4901 ministers reported as holding the pastoral relation. Thus the uninstalled ministers equal in number the

pastorless churches,—in either case the proportion being nearly three-fifths of the whole number.

This system of stated supply is not merely the refuge of feeble churches on our western missionary borders. It prevails to a wide extent over all the Church, more, however, in the smaller churches as compared with the larger. In our 178 Presbyteries only two are absolutely without stated supplies, these being Brooklyn and New Brunswick; while the number is smallest in the Synods of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York City, where the Scotch-Irish element most largely prevails. It is evident that Presbytery can exercise but slight and indifferent direction in such a condition of affairs, over either churches or ministry as to the pastoral relation, which is the organic connection between preachers and people. Under stated supply pre-eminence, church and minister manage matters to their own convenience, and Presbytery confines itself to more agreeable functions.

This grievous lapse from constitutional principles, with its entailed consequences (which we sincerely believe are not overstated), has been pictured for the purpose of fixing attention upon the absolute necessity of devising and applying some effective remedy. Whether the present decline of Presbyterian power has been forced upon us by the perplexing social conditions of the country; whether it is now possible to regain what has been lost, and to get back to former authority; whether, if possible, this reaction be desirable; whether ancient Presbyterianism is adapted to American ideas of popular liberty; or whether certain changes in our form of government are necessary to fit our system to the progressive spirit of the times and to present customs, are questions that crowd upon us, and that will ere long demand an answer at the peril of our constitutional life.

But has Presbytery no authority under our form of government to put an end to these public evils that deeply injure us in our spiritual life and in the eyes of the observing world? Is there nowhere in our system power to secure pastors for churches, and to insist on their permanency except for reasons of pressing necessity? If Presbyterian government be truly scriptural, it should be observed and enforced. If it cannot be enforced, then it is probably not scriptural, and should be replaced by some other form that is capable of exerting enough control to prevent confusion in the churches, and to carry the Gospel to every community. Any government silently abandoning its authority is on the path to revolution. This loss of authority is evidently due to want of ecclesiastical supervision; and our Presbyterianism, while exercising its authority sufficiently in other respects, is like to merge into a nominal control of our churches that will land us in the bog of an irresponsible Congregationalism. And when our churches shall have grown still more independent and saucy, Presbytery may take care of itself as a convention existing to license and ordain young ministers, and to pass ineffectual resolutions. It would seem that the time and talent

of the General Assembly might be expended to better purpose in considering these vital wants and insidious dangers than in discussing impracticable schemes of representation and general questions of needless or inefficient legislation, pertaining to the branches and the leaves, but not touching the decay that is working at the root of the tree. If it be true, as it has been strongly stated, that the Church is absolutely going to pieces for want of exercise of its constitutional authority, it is high time that Presbytery be summoned to arise, gird on her strength, and courageously wield her lawful and sufficient energies for the remedy of those invading evils that, from their very nature, magnify the peril as they increase the lawlessness of our churches.

A. A. E. TAYLOR.

THE LAW OF SCOTLAND ON CAMERONIANISM AND CHARITABLE BEQUESTS.

THE Presbyterian world, throughout all its provinces, is interested in Cameronianism, as a feature in Church history and in the history of Scotland. That peculiar type of our system is represented in Ireland as largely as in the mother country, and in America a great deal more so. The law, too, of charitable bequests, varying in different countries, is becoming in all of enormous importance to the Churches. In the United States in particular, the communications with which from year to year I am honoured from lawyers and churchmen there, show that questions of the interests of Churches in bequeathed endowments excite the most intelligent discussion. All this makes me willingly comply with the request to give some account of the late Ferguson Bequest problem in Scotland and its judicial solution. It is true that I was of counsel in the cause, and the uninitiated may suppose that a lawyer's intimacy with the question he pleads is unfavourable to subsequent impartiality. People who know the Courts will scarcely hold this even in the general case; and if interest in such questions is a disqualification, I am afraid that mine was sufficiently keen before I had to do with this one forensically.

What is known as the Ferguson Bequest in Scotland originated in a sum of about £300,000 which was left by John Ferguson, of Cairnbrock, in Ayrshire, at his death in 1856. Ferguson was an old bachelor, not remarkable for religious or ecclesiastical leanings; but in his will, after giving large sums of money to such relatives as he had in America as well as here, he left this amount to be held by trustees for religious or charitable purposes in Scotland. These are defined as follows:—The yearly funds were to be applied to “the maintenance and promotion of religious ordinances, and education and missionary operations, in the first instance in Ayr” and the five adjacent counties, “and