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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

JANUARY.

I.—THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY,	I
By PROF. WILLIAM M. PAXTON, D.D., LL.D.	
II.—THE RIGHT OF THE POOR,	17
By the REV. ALFRED YEOMANS, D.D.	
III.—ARE OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS GODLESS?	26
By the REV. H. D. JENKINS, D.D.	
IV.—ASSYRIAN AND HEBREW CHRONOLOGY,	41
By the REV. JAMES ORR, D.D.	
V.—THE IDEALISM OF SPINOZA,	65
By PROF. J. MARK BALDWIN, PH.D.	
VI.—A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AND NOW,	77
By PROF. HERBICK JOHNSON, D.D., LL.D.	
VII.—HISTORICAL NOTE: The Organization of the Synod of Brazil, by the Rev. J. Aspinwall Hodge, D.D.	101
VIII.—EDITORIAL NOTES: Ministerial Education, by Prof. C. A. Briggs, D.D., p. 107; the New Creed of the Presbyterian Church of England, by Prof. B. B. Warfield, D.D., p. 115.	107
IX.—REVIEWS OF RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE. Dods' Introduction to the New Test., p. 125; Blaikie's Second Samuel, p. 125; Cassel's Esther, p. 126; Curry's Job, p. 127; Bradley's Job, p. 127; Speaker's Commentary, Apocrypha, p. 128; Williams's Book of Acts, p. 130; Schne- dermann's Gefängnisbriefe, p. 132; Kübel's Pastoral Briefe, p. 132; Burger's Katholische Briefe, p. 132; Kübel's Offenbarung Johannis, p. 132; Luthardt's Briefe Johannis, p. 132; Renan's Histoire du Peuple d'Israel, p. 135; Stade's Gesch. d. Volkes Israel, p. 136; Kittel's Gesch. der Hebräer, p. 136; Hurlbut's Lesson Commentary, p. 139; Strack's Einleitung in d. A. T., p. 139; Meinhold's Beiträge z. Daniel, p. 139; Dillmann's Adlergesicht Ezra's, p. 139; Strack's Aboda Zara, p. 139; Strack's Hebrew Exercises, p. 139; Jacobs's Arabic Bible Chrestomathy, p. 139; McCullagh's Peerless Prophet, p. 140; Bruce's Training of the Twelve, p. 140; Usteri's Gleichniss von den Arbeitern im Weinberge, p. 140; Steinmeyer's Auferweckung Lazarus, p. 140; Heinrici's I. Brief an die Korinther, p. 140; Beyschlag's Brief des Jacobus, p. 140; Bennett's Archæology, p. 141; Heron's Church of the Sub-Apostolic Age, p. 142; Schwartz's Tatiani Oratio ad Græcos, p. 142; Harnack's Pseudo-Cypri-	

anische Tractat de Aleatoribus, p. 143; Augustine's Book of Psalms, p. 146; Chrysostom's Homilies on Matthew, p. 146; Walford's Guilds, p. 146; Preger's Tischreden Luthers, p. 147; Schauenburg's Täuferbewegungen, p. 147; Schweiz's Neutralität und Glaubensfreiheit, p. 147; Kraus's Briefe Benedicts XIV., p. 147; Fiske's Critical Period of American History, p. 147; Whitsitt's Origin of the Disciples of Christ, p. 148; Moore's Bibliographical Notes on Witchcraft, p. 148; Shedd's Dogmatic Theology, p. 148; Preiss's Religionsgeschichte, p. 151; Alexander's Biblical Theology, p. 152; Sheldrake's Medium Theory of the Atonement, p. 155; Ross's Church-Kingdom, p. 157; Beet's Christian Baptism, p. 158; Etter's Christian Baptism, p. 158; Hawes' Baptism, Mode-Studies, p. 158; Bush's Bible Baptism, p. 158; Thompson's World and Kingdom, p. 160; Fisher's Manual of Christian Evidence, p. 160; Calkins' Keystone of Faith, p. 161; Salmond's Shorter Catechism, p. 161; Porter's Celestial Home, p. 161; Hartranft's Scope of Theology, p. 162; Cooke's Church Creed, p. 162; Ackerman's Man a Revelation of God, p. 162; Burrell's Religions of the World, p. 162; Gibson's Christianity According to Christ, p. 163; Burrage's Baptist Hymn-writers, p. 163; Waugh's Messiah's Mission, p. 165; Prime's Autobiography, p. 165; Pirscher's Quellen unserer Kraft, p. 166; Tholuck's Ausgewählte Predigten, p. 166; Bräm's Briefe an Frauen, p. 167; Bindemann's Predigten, p. 167; Von Göler's Wege und Ziele, p. 167; Co-operation in Christian Work, p. 167; Dorchester's Romanism versus the Public School System, p. 168; Newton's Bible Animals, p. 168; Taylor's New Africa, p. 168; Macmillan's Roman Mosaics, p. 168; Parker's Spirit of Beauty, p. 169; Murray's New English Dictionary, p. 169; Green's Hebrew Grammar, p. 170; Harper's Hebrew Syntax, p. 172; Balg's Gothic Glossary, p. 174; Problems of American Civilization, p. 175; Tolstol's What to Do, p. 175; Salmond's Princetoniana, p. 175; Blackie's Robert Burns, p. 176.....	125
--	-----

APRIL.

I.—THE AMERICAN SUNDAY SCHOOL,	177
By the REV. MANCIUS H. HUTTON, D.D.	
II.—THE THEOLOGY OF RITSCHL,	192
By the REV. GEORGE GALLOWAY, B.D.	
III.—THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ORATORICAL AND THE RHETORICAL STYLES,	210
By PROF. THOMAS S. HASTINGS, D.D., LL.D.	
IV.—CONCESSIONS TO SCIENCE,	220
By PROF. GEORGE MACLOSKIE, LL.D., D.Sc.	
V.—ROMANISM AS A FACTOR IN CANADIAN POLITICS,	229
By the REV. T. F. FOTHERINGHAM.	
VI.—THE EGYPTIAN NILE AS A CIVILIZER,	245
By PROF. J. G. LANSING, D.D.	

VII.—CONSILIA EVANGELICA,	256
By the REV. TALBOT W. CHAMBERS, S.T.D., LL.D.	
VIII.—WOMAN'S POSITION AND WORK IN THE CHURCH,	267
By the REV. SAMUEL J. NICCOLLS, D.D., LL.D.	
IX.—CRITICAL NOTE.—Manifold Personality. By Prof. Nicholas Murray Butler, Ph.D.	280
X.—EDITORIAL NOTES.—Presbyterian Deaconesses, by Prof. B. B. Warfield, D.D., p. 283; The Study of the English Bible in Theological Semina- ries, by Prof. C. A. Briggs, D.D., p. 294.	283
XI.—REVIEWS OF RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE.—Stearns's Introduction to the Books of the Old Test., p. 301; Behrmann's Einführung in die Heilige Schrift, p. 301; Schultz and Strack's Die Psalmen und die Sprüche Solomos, p. 301; Maclaren's Colossians and Philemon, p. 303; Edwards's Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 305; Weiss's Die drei Briefe des Apostel Johannes, p. 306; Cheyne's Jeremiah, p. 307; Cheyne's Hallow- ing of Criticism, p. 307; Gloël's Der Heilige Geist in der Heilsverkün- digung des Paulus, p. 309; Gunkel's Die Wirkungen des Heiligen Geistes nach der populären Anschauung der Apostolischen Zeit, p. 309; Issel's Begriff der Heiligkeit im N. T., p. 309; Everling's Paulinische Angelologie und Dämonologie, p. 309; Delitzsch's New Commentary on Genesis, p. 311; Wietzke's Der Biblische Simson der Aegyptische Horus-Ra, p. 312; Wendt's Apostelgeschichte, p. 312; Eremita's Voll- führung des Geheimnisses Gottes, p. 313; Robinson's Lambros's Col- lation of the Athos Codex of Hermas, p. 313; Bert's Aphrahat's des Persischen Weisen Homilien, p. 314; Harnack's Akten des Karpus, des Papyrus, und der Agathonike, p. 314; Schaff's History of the Christian Church, p. 315; Benrath's Hagenbach's Dogmengeschichte, p. 318; Blaikie's Preachers of Scotland, p. 320; Keil's Biblical Archæol- ogy, p. 321; Hunt's English Church in the Middle Ages, p. 321; Mul- linger's History of the University of Cambridge, p. 321; Balzani's Popes and the Hohenstaufen, p. 321; Keller's Johann von Staupitz und die Anfänge der Reformation, p. 321; Montague's Arnold Toyn- bee, p. 322; Cooke's Credentials of Science the Warrant of Faith, p. 323; Horton's Inspiration and the Bible, p. 324; Cave's Inspiration of the Old Testament, p. 324; Witherow's Form of the Christian Temple, p. 330; Candlish's Christian Doctrine of God, p. 333; Dykes's Gospel According to St. Paul, p. 334; Salmond's Perfectionism, p. 334; Schmalenbach's Das Wesen der persönlichen Bekehrung zu Christo, p. 334; Murray's Spirit of Christ, p. 334; Kennedy's Self-revelation of Jesus Christ, p. 335; Keizer's De ethische Richtung, p. 335; Wächter's Sociale Bedeutung der Evangelischen Kirche, p. 336; Dorchester's Romanism versus the Public School System, p. 337; Johnston's Cen- tury of Christian Progress, p. 338; Pattison's Gospel Ethnology, p. 338; Liggins's Value and Success of Foreign Missions, p. 338; The Ser- mon Bible: I. Kings to Psalm LXXVI., p. 339; Girardeau's Instrumental Music in Public Worship, p. 339; "Blacksmith's" Path to Wealth, p. 340; Stone's David, p. 340; McCosh's First and Fundamental Truths, p. 341; Zeller's Philosophie der Griechen, p. 343; Brown's Musical In- struments and their Homes, p. 344; Lundie's Alexander Balfour, p. 345; Bryce's American Commonwealth, p. 346; Kennedy's Introduc- tion to Biblical Hebrew, p. 347; Nestle's Syrische Grammatik mit Lit- eratur, etc., p. 348; Kennedy's Nestle's Syriac Grammar with Bibliog-	

raphy, etc., p. 348; Mrs. Stevenson's Life and Letters of W. Fleming Stevenson, p. 349; Emma Lazarus' Poems, p. 351; Thompson's Songs in the Night Watches, p. 351; Laidlaw's Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the U. S., in German, French and English, p. 351; Stevenson's Arabs in Central Africa and at Lake Nyassa, p. 352. 301

JULY.

- I.—DR. SHEDD'S SYSTEM OF THEOLOGY, 353
By PROF. EDWARD D. MORRIS, D.D., LL.D.
- II.—A CHURCHMAN'S VIEW OF CHURCH AND STATE IN ENGLAND, 388
By the REV. CANON W. J. KNOX LITTLE, A.M.
- III.—THE PLANET MARS, 400
By PROF. CHARLES A. YOUNG, PH.D., LL.D.
- IV.—THE BABYLONIAN FLOOD-LEGEND AND THE HEBREW RECORD OF THE DELUGE, 415
By PROF. JOHN D. DAVIS, PH.D.
- V.—NATURE AND MIRACLE, 432
By the REV. WM. W. HARSHA, D.D.
- VI.—THE HEROIC SPIRIT IN THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY, 444
By the REV. WM. M. TAYLOR, D.D., LL.D.
- VII.—EDITORIAL NOTES: The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of England, by Robert Whyte, Esq., p. 456; The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, by Prof. Chas. A. Briggs, D.D., p. 464. 456
- VIII.—REVIEWS OF RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE. Abbot's Authorship of the Fourth Gospel and Other Critical Essays, p. 475; Cheyne's Commentary on the Book of Psalms, p. 476; Smith's The Book of Isaiah, p. 477; Chadwick's The Gospel according to St. Mark, p. 479; Findlay's The Epistle to the Galatians, p. 479; Abbott's The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, p. 481; Stade and Holtzmann's Geschichte des Volkes Israel, p. 486; Renan's Histoire du Peuple d'Israël, tome deuxième, p. 486; Renan's History of the People of Israel, from the Reign of David up to the Capture of Samaria, p. 486; Bähgen's Der Gott Israels und die Götter der Heiden, p. 488; Schultz's Alttestamentliche Theologie, p. 491; Vallings's Jesus Christ, the Divine Man, p. 492; Terry and Newhall's Commentary on Genesis and Exodus, p. 492; Macgregor's Exodus i-xiv. p. 493; Skinner's Historical Connection between the Old and New Testaments, p. 493; Miller's Greek Testament Primer, p. 493; Burton's Syntax of Moods and Tenses in the New Testament Greek, p. 494; Houghton's John the Baptist, p. 494; Fischer's Das Alte Testament und die Christliche Sittenlehre, p. 494; Fischer's Biblische Psychologie, Biologie, und Pädagogie, p. 494; Handmann's Das Hebräer-Evangelium, p. 495; Purves's The Testimony of Justin Martyr to Early Christianity, p. 497; McGiffert's

Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew (Papiscus and Philo), p. 499 ;
 The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers : John Chrysostom, p. 500 ; Licht-
 enberger's History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century,
 p. 500 ; Schaff's The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, p. 501 ; Foster's
 Brief Introduction to the Study of Theology, p. 501 ; Ward's The Coun-
 ter Reformation, p. 501 ; Van Pelt's A Church and her Martyrs,
 p. 501 ; Boyce's Abstract of Systematic Theology, p. 502 ; Dieckhoff's
 Das gepredigte Wort und die Heilige Schrift, p. 504 ; Dieckhoff's Das
 Wort Gottes, p. 504 ; Vatke's Religionsphilosophie, p. 507 ; Monier-
 Williams's Buddhism, p. 508 ; Smeaton's The Doctrine of the Holy
 Spirit, p. 510 ; Strong's Systematic Theology, p. 510 ; Weir's The Way,
 p. 511 ; Wythe's The Physiology of the Soul, p. 511 ; Scott's The
 Church and Scepticism, p. 511 ; In Kampf um die Weltanschauung,
 p. 511 ; Delitzsch's Der tiefe Graben zwischen alter und moderner
 Theologie, p. 512 ; Salmund's Pilgrims towards Plymouth, p. 512 ;
 Luthardt's Geschichte der christlichen Ethik, p. 513 ; Luthardt's Zur
 Ethik, p. 513 ; Hinds's Charles Darwin, p. 513 ; Ritschl's Die christliche
 Vollkommenheit, p. 514 ; Mudge's Songs of Praise with Tunes, p. 514 ;
 Hamilton's Beyond the Stars, p. 515 ; Cust's Notes on Missionary
 Subjects, p. 515 ; Christlieb's Aertzliche Missionen, p. 516 ; Schultze's
 Textgemässe Predigt-Entwürfe, p. 516 ; Kütper's Evangelische Zeug-
 nisse aus dem Alten Testament, p. 516 ; Kübel's Christliche Bedenken
 über modern-christliche Wesen, p. 517 ; Briggs's The Sabbath, p. 517 ;
 Twelfth Report of the Council of Missions co-operating with the United
 Church of Christ in Japan, p. 518 ; Roche's Life of John Price Durbin,
 p. 518 ; Day's The New Interpretation, p. 518 ; Thomas's Through
 Death to Life, p. 518 ; Spurgeon's The Lord and the Leper, p. 519 ;
 Cox's The House and its Builder, p. 520 ; McConnell's Sermon Stuff,
 p. 520 ; Whiton's The Law of Liberty, p. 520 ; Dewey's Psychology,
 p. 521 ; Cutler's The Beginning of Ethics, p. 522 ; Patrick's The Frag-
 ments of Heraclitus of Ephesus on Nature, p. 523 ; Gosse's History of
 Eighteenth Century Literature, p. 524 ; Winsor's Narrative and Critical
 History of America, p. 525 ; Mutchmore's A Visit of Japheth to Shem
 and Ham, p. 528 ; Lee's Thomas Hard—Priest, p. 528 ; Edison and his
 Inventions, p. 528..... 475

OCTOBER.

I.—THE REVISION OF THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, 529
 By PROF. PHILIP SCHAFF, D.D., LL.D.

II.—REVISION OF THE CONFESSION OF FAITH, 553
 By PROF. JOHN DE WITT, D.D., LL.D.

III.—CHURCHLY, CHRISTIAN, AND SCRIPTURAL MODES OF ETHI-
 CAL WORK, 590
 By the REV. ABRAHAM GOSMAN, D.D.

IV.—THE ATONEMENT, 605
 By PROF. RANSOM B. WELCH, D.D., LL.D.

V.—THE MINISTRY OF THE DEACONESS, 624
 By the REV. LOUIS H. JORDAN, B.D.

VI.—EDITORIAL NOTES: General Synod of the Reformed (Dutch) Church, by the Rev. T. W. Chambers, D.D., LL.D., p. 638; United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, by Prof. Henry Calderwood, LL.D., p. 640; The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, by Principal William Caven, D.D., p. 642; The Presbyterian Churches and the Westminster Confession, by Prof. B. B. Warfield, D.D., p. 646.....	638
VIII.—REVIEWS OF RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE. Bartlett and Peters's Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, p. 658; Parallel-Bible II. and III., p. 659; Douglas's Short Analysis of the Old Testament, p. 660; Westphal's Les Sources du Pentateuque, p. 660; Workman's Text of Jeremiah, p. 662; Vincent's Word Studies, p. 664; Dods's First Corinthians, p. 666; Kölling's I. Brief an Timotheus, p. 667; Hesse's Entstehung der Hirtenbriefe, p. 667; Plummer's Pastoral Epistles, p. 667; Delitzsch's Genesis, p. 668; Macgregor's Exodus, p. 669; Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature, p. 669; Sayce's Records of the Past I., p. 670; Deane's Daniel, p. 672; Deane's David, p. 672; Howe's True site of Calvary, p. 673; Mombert's Charles the Great, p. 674; Kedney's Christian Doctrine Harmonized, p. 676; Lightfoot's Essays, p. 678; Simon's Redemption of Man, p. 679; Cochran's Moral System, p. 679; Gratacap's Analytics of a Belief in a Future Life, p. 683; Pattison's Essays, p. 683; Moule's Outlines of Christian Doctrine, p. 685; Gors's Ministry, p. 686; Salter's Ethical Religion, p. 686; Conn's Moral Problems, p. 687; Martin's, Dr. Girardeau's Anti-Evolution, p. 687; Foster's Grotius' Defence of Satisfaction of Christ, p. 687; McGill's Church Government, p. 688; Barrett's Congregational Hymnal, p. 689; Missionary Year Book for 1889-1890, p. 690; Haygood's Man of Galilee, p. 690; Thompson's Christian Manliness, p. 691; Sermon Bible, Ps. LXXVII. to Song of Solomon, p. 691; Islam and Christian Missions, p. 691; Spurgeon's Salt-cellars, p. 692; Bosanquet's Logic, p. 692; Mivart's Truth, p. 692; McCosh's Tests of various kinds of Truth, p. 694; Young's Text-book of General Astronomy, p. 696; Gilman's Profit Sharing, p. 697; Curry's Christian Education, p. 698; Snyder's Geography of Marriage, p. 698; Crocker's Principles of Procedure....	698
GENERAL INDEX.....	699

made by Dr. Middlemass, as representing the Presbytery, and Dr. Maclaren, as representing the Synod. Dr. Laing moved that the appeal be dismissed, and that the appellants be affectionately entreated to reconsider their views and position in the light of all that had been said during the discussion of the case, and to submit themselves in Christian love and meekness to the session and the courts of the Church. This was the finding of Assembly with almost entire unanimity. The brethren from Galt signified their submission to the Assembly's decision; and we may now hope that good will arise from the earnest consideration of fundamental doctrine to which many have been led in connection with this case. Nothing can be clearer than that perfect sanctification implies the removal from our nature of all tendency toward sin—all *concupiscentia*—and that while the flesh continues to exist beside the Spirit and to strive against it the work of grace is incomplete. But the day will come when the believer shall be presented "faultless."

WILLIAM CAVEN.

Toronto.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES AND THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION.

THE last few years have been marked, throughout the Presbyterian world, by a widespread agitation regarding the relation of the churches to the Westminster Standards, which has seemed to culminate during the ecclesiastical year that has just closed. Its formal beginnings* may be assigned to the movement which issued in the adoption by the Scottish United Presbyterian Church, in 1879, of a Declaratory Act, giving forth an authorized explanation in regard to certain subjects in the Standards, respecting which it was found desirable to set forth more fully and clearly the view which the Synod took of the teaching of Holy Scripture. The subjects treated in this document are especially the love of God for all mankind, and his provision, by the gift of his Son, of a salvation sufficient for all, adapted to all, and offered freely to all; man's responsibility; infant salvation and the salvability of the heathen; Church and State; and such minor matters as creation in six days, and the like. This was followed in 1882 by the passage of a somewhat similar act by the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. Since 1883 the Presbyterian Church of England, while "unabatedly adhering to the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession," has been busily engaged in considering its relations to that document; in the course of which consideration it has framed for itself a brief compendium of fundamental doctrines, designed, "not of necessity to supersede the Westminster Confession as the standard of orthodox teaching from the pulpit, yet for sundry other practical uses," "as, for example, the clear presentation to the public of the Church's exact doctrinal teaching, or for the indoctrination of catechumens, or even for an intelligent profession of their faith by ruling elders and deacons." †

* Compare an interesting account of the movement in Scotland, from the competent hand of A. Taylor Innis, Esq., in *The Andover Review* for July, 1889, pp. 1-15.

† Dr. J. Oswald Dykes, in *The Catholic Presbyterian*, ix. 469, June, 1883.

Accordingly, it was proposed to the Synod at its last meeting to adopt these new "Articles of Faith," "as a sufficiently full statement of this Church's belief on fundamental doctrines to serve for a testimony to those beyond her communion, and for a summary of her creed to be recited upon special occasions of public worship"—in a word, to take some such place as its *Summary of Principles* does in the United Presbyterian Church. At the other end of the world, again, the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland in Southern New Zealand appointed a committee at their meeting in the autumn of 1888, to consider the whole subject of the relation of the Church to its subordinate Standards, and report to the Synod of 1889.* In Scotland, the Established Church has during the last year voted to revert for ministerial subscription, from the formula framed in 1711, which required acceptance of the whole doctrine of the Confession as truths of God, to the simpler one which has hitherto been used by the elders, and which rests on the act of the Assembly of 1694; while the elders hereafter are only to express their approbation of the Confession. The Free Church, after a year's debate, has appointed a large committee to report to the next Assembly what relief is needed. In America, two overtures looking toward revision, were presented to the Canadian Presbytery of Toronto, but voted down; while the General Assembly of our own Church has overtured its Presbyteries with a view to discovering whether there is any widespread or important call for revision among us.

Such a chronicle as this is apt to leave upon the mind an impression of a deep and almost universal disaffection under the pressure of the Westminster Standards. It certainly does prove that there are men everywhere who are dissatisfied either with the Standards themselves or with the relation they find themselves occupying to them. But we must not imagine that the causes which produce this restlessness are everywhere the same, or that all are agreed as to what is needed for relief. Even among those who really object to the Standards themselves, different men object to widely different things, so that if the attempt were made to exclude everything concerning which any individual cherished doubt, "it would be a poor church" in the paradoxical language of Dr. Macgregor,† "which has not in its adult membership a sufficient amount of immaturity to cast out by this process the whole round of Christian doctrine." And it is more important still to remember that the circumstances of the several churches are widely different, and the relations they bear to the Standards very

* A somewhat similar overture to that sent up to the Synod of Otago and Southland by the Presbytery of Dunedin, on the basis of which the action mentioned above was taken, was sent up by the Presbytery of Auckland to the last General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, but was set aside on the ground that the modified formula of subscription in use in that church secures all that is necessary. That formula reserves liberty of opinion "on the teaching of the said Confession in regard to the duty of the civil magistrate, marriage with a deceased wife's sister, and the forms of expression in which the several doctrines are stated."

† *Freedom in the Truth* (Dunedin: 12mo, pp. 72), being Dr. Macgregor's speech in the Synod of Otago and Southland in opposition to the overture of the Presbytery of Dunedin, on which the Synod's action was based.

diverse, so that the causes of restlessness that are operative in one are wholly absent in another. There is obviously, for example, a very great difference between objecting to be bound to an extended doctrinal treatise in all its propositions and rejecting the whole Calvinistic theology. If we, however, range the world over and gather together indiscriminately all the objections that have been made to the Westminster Confession during these last years, we are in danger of confusing even such opposite points of view as these.

1. Among the causes of the present appearance of restlessness with reference to the Westminster Standards, the first place is undoubtedly due to the over-strictness prevailing in some churches, in the formula of subscription which is required of office-bearers. And it is worthy of notice that where the formula seems overstrict, dissatisfaction seems to be most widespread, most pronounced, and most difficult to satisfy. The Established and Free Churches of Scotland, for example, have hitherto required of their ministry "sincerely to own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith . . . to be the truths of God." Dr. Candlish has, indeed, argued that in its historical sense, even this formula asks only acceptance of the Confession as a whole ; * but, as it seems to us, unsuccessfully, and certainly without effect on the convictions of the churches. We do not wonder, therefore, that the ministry of these churches are earnest in seeking relief. It may savor of exaggeration to say with Mr. Taylor Innis (presuming that he means single propositions), that "there is no honest or sane man who will pretend that any proposition in religious truth constructed by others, exactly expresses his own view of that religious truth ;" † but this is surely apt to be true of an extended confession, and we must certainly agree with the words which he adds in a note : "Properly speaking, the Confession is not the confession of faith of any one who signs it, but of all. None of them exactly agree with it, but none of them contradict it." In a word, a public confession, by virtue of the very fact that it is public, cannot be, and ought not to be pretended to be, just the expression of his faith which each one who accepts it as representing his faith would have framed had he only himself to consider. The most we can expect, and the most we have right to ask is, that each one may be able to recognize it as an expression of the system of truth which he believes. To go beyond this and seek to make each of a large body of signers accept the Confession in all its propositions as the profession of his personal belief, cannot fail to result in serious evils—not least among which are the twin evils that, on the one hand, too strict subscription overreaches itself and becomes little better than no subscription ; and, on the other, that it begets a spirit of petty, carping criticism which raises objection to forms of statement that in other circumstances would not appear objectionable.

Where the formula of acceptance is such that no one signs without some mental reservation, some soon learn to sign without reference to mental reservation ; and gross heterodoxy becomes gradually safe, because there is no one

* *The Relation of the Presbyterian Churches to the Confession of Faith.* Glasgow, 1886, p. 6.

† *The Law of Creeds in Scotland*, p. 479.

so wholly without sin that his conscience permits him to cast the first stone. That such a state of things has not been unknown, the history of Scottish Moderatism may teach us. That in the estimation of some, some of its features are not wholly unknown now, there are not lacking phenomena which may indicate. It is even occasionally openly asserted. Thus Dr. Watt is reported as declaring on the floor of the Established Presbytery of Glasgow that "he took it, that no man signed the formula without mental reservation more or less;" * and Professor Storey is reported † as pleading in his opening address, last autumn, that "some such terms of official subscription of the Confession should be adopted as shall openly sanction the liberty which is tacitly exercised in qualifying or modifying some of its propositions." Now, such a state of affairs is a great evil; and the dangers attending it have never been better pointed out than by Dr. Charles Hodge, who writes: "To adopt every proposition contained in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms is more than the vast majority of our ministers either do or can do. To make them profess to do it is a great sin. It hurts their consciences. It fosters a spirit of evasion and subterfuge. It forces them to take creeds in a 'non-natural sense.' It at once vitiates and degrades. There are few greater evils connected with establishments than the overwhelming temptations which they offer to make men profess what they do not believe. Under such strict requirements, men make light of professions, and are ready to adopt any creed which opens the door to wealth or office. The overstrict world over are the least faithful." ‡

Not less surely, however, does overstrictness of formula wound tender consciences and produce a restlessness as over against the creed itself to all the propositions of which they are obliged to assent as the profession of their faith, even when they would not find these propositions objectionable when considered only as one statement of the faith they profess. Tender consciences must revolt from a confession to which they are too closely bound, if they do not find themselves in absolute agreement with its every word; and revolt once begun, battens on what it feeds on, until a great war breaks out against the Confession with which, nevertheless, most of the combatants are in substantial agreement. Thus overstrictness in the formula is the real account often to be given of what emerges as objection against the creed, rather than against the formula. Relief is to be sought in such a relaxation of the formula as will give all the liberty to individuals which is consistent with the Church's witness to the truth. What is needed seems to us admirably expressed by Dr. Marshall Lang in a speech in the Established Presbytery of Glasgow, advocating the change of formula which has since been accomplished in that Church: "The point they desired to emphasize was this," he is reported as saying, § "that they did not bind men to the mere letter. They did not insist that a man should accept all the propositions and all the phraseology of the Confession. What they asked was that a man should honestly and truly subscribe to the system of truth that was

* *The Glasgow Herald*, March 28th, 1889.

† *Ibid.*, November 13th, 1888.

‡ *Church Polity*, p. 332.

§ *The Glasgow Herald*, March 28th, 1889.

presented in the Confession of Faith, and not merely to the words of the letter in which it was presented. He thought a substantial relief was given to persons of scrupulous conscience." So far as the present agitation in the Scotch churches arises from this cause and tends to this result, it is an effort to attain a situation as over against the Standards which the American churches have always enjoyed, and it must have the hearty sympathy of every American Presbyterian.

This advocacy of a liberal formula, however, is not to be understood as if we could at all accord with those who would so relax the formula as to make the Confession of Faith little more than a venerable relic of a past age, still honored as such by the Church. Such a change as that made in 1816 by the Church of Holland by which ministers were no longer pledged to the Standards, *because (quia)*, but only *in so far as (quatenus)* they accord with the Word, is justly pointed to by Mr. McEwan* as fatal. That there are, nevertheless, some in the Scotch churches who might desire it, seems to be hinted by some words of Mr. Taylor Innis.† Unfortunately there are some even who act as if this were all that the present very strict formula bound them to, as was evinced, for example, by the amazing plea put in by Mr. James Stuart, author of that very remarkable book, *The Principles of Christianity*, when arraigned before the Presbytery of Edinburgh.‡ Nevertheless, it is surely not nearly so difficult as Principal David Brown expresses himself as thinking, to frame a formula which will "let in all right men and keep out all wrong." The American churches have such a formula. Of course it lies in the courts of the Church to decide what is and what is not "of the system," and Church courts are not infallible, nor always faithful. But Church courts can afford, and do venture, to hold men strictly to the terms of a liberal formula, when they could not to an illiberal one. Overstrictness demands and begets laxity in performance; while a truly liberal but conservative formula binds all essentially sound men together against laxity. In pleading for a liberal formula, therefore, we wish it distinctly understood that we do not plead either for a lax

* *The New Movement in the Free Church* (Edinburgh, 1889), pp. 10 and 11.

† *The Theological Review*, November, 1888.

‡ As reported in *The Scotsman* for January 31st, 1889, Mr. Stuart is reported as saying: "He could not see how the subordinate standard and the ultimate standard were on an equality. He regarded the subordinate one as valid only in so far as it was based on the ultimate one." Thus, he confused his duty to himself and his God, with his duty to the Church as a society; and so refused to withdraw from a Church whose formularies he no longer accepted. For reply, we should only need point Mr. Stuart to the brochure of his brother "liberal," Mr. Macintosh's *The Obsolescence of the Confession of Faith*, p. 63, one of the few bright spots of truth in this remarkable pamphlet. We hardly know what to think of such words as are ascribed to Rev. T. B. Kilpatrick, of Aberdeen, on the floor of the Free Church Assembly (*The Scotsman* for May 31st, 1889), who is reported as saying that he spoke for himself and for many of the younger ministers of the Church, and that "they were adherents of no system of theology that was at present in existence." Yet they had signed the Confession of Faith by the strictest of formulas.

formula, or much less for a lax administration of any formula—within which an essential dishonesty lurks. The American formula appears to us the ideal one, and as nothing more lax than it would be acceptable or safe, certainly a lax administration of it would be unendurable, and, as we have said, essentially dishonest.

2. Overstrictness of formula is not, however, the cause of all the restlessness, as over again the Westminster Standards, which is, at present, exhibiting itself in the churches, nor even of all that arises apart from doctrinal disharmony with the Westminster Confession. It has grown quite common to hear objections directed wholly against its form ; it is alleged that it is too long, too full, too detailed, too analytical, too scholastic, too logical, or too polemic to serve properly as a creed for the profession of a Church's faith. In one form or another and on one ground or another (by no means always on the same ground), this objection has found much expression during the past year. Thus the Presbytery of Brechin even overtured the Free Church Assembly to revert to the Reformation Confession of the Scotch Church ; and it has not been uncommon to hear contrasts drawn between it as a document which is vital, religious, and biblical, and the Westminster Confession as scholastic, theological, logical—between the one as the natural product of a period of living faith and earnest preaching, and the other as the equally natural product of a period of controversy. Perhaps this phase of opinion has never been better expressed than by Mr. J. Murray Garden in seconding Dr. Brown's overture in the Free Church Presbytery of Aberdeen. "If the Westminster Confession is a perfect building," he is reported as saying,* "perfect in all its parts, and true in all its proportions, I should rather prefer to liken the Confession of John Knox to a tree, living and springing and adapted to the life of the Church. If the Westminster Confession is clear, it is cold ; if it is purifying to the intellect, it is very often chilling to the faith ; whereas such a document as I have referred to is bright and warming like a living fire, and you cannot wonder, for it was born at a time when men were instinct with life." There is not apparent here any objection to the doctrines of the Confession, but only to its forms of statement. It is no doubt a very pleasing picture that Mr. Garden paints for us of the model Confession ; but wherein does the Westminster Confession not fully satisfy it ? We very much fear that in most cases when this general position finds expression, it is founded on an erroneous idea of what a Confession like ours is and the purposes which it is intended to serve, if not also upon an insufficient appreciation of the true character of the Westminster Confession itself. "Fancy attempting to recite the Westminster Confession as part of the worship of God," cries Mr. Robert Macintosh,† and many more appear to share his idea that a creed must be in its essence "an immediate utterance of faith," couched in "religious form" and intended as a vehicle through which the people at large periodically bring their belief to verbal expression. It could be

* The (Aberdeen) *Daily Free Press* for February 6th, 1889.

† *The Obsolescence of the Confession of Faith* (Glasgow, 1888), p. 28.

wished that so good a treatise as Dunlop's, *A Full Account of the Several Ends and Uses of Confessions of Faith*, should not be permitted to grow obsolescent until in some way men attained a somewhat rounded view of the functions of Confessions. It ought to require very little consideration, however, to discover that they are not intended to take the place either of the sermon, applying the truth of God to the heart, or of the professional element of prayer, in which we acknowledge God's truth to him. Their three chief ends are rather to serve as testimonies, tests, and text-books. As testimonies, they (we revert to old Dunlop's words) "give a fair and authentic account of the doctrine maintained," and clear misapprehensions and calumnies; they enable Christian societies "in the most solemn manner to make profession of the true religion and glory in it before the world"—a duty especially binding when the truth is ridiculed and despised in the world, or is being deserted by the churches; and they bring together and bind into one communion those who stand for the truth, contributing to their mutual comfort and edification. As tests, they are established as Standards of sound teaching and bulwarks against error; and especially as protections to the people against ecclesiastical tyranny and the vagaries of individual teachers, enabling them to demand and secure that they be fed with the sincere milk of the Word. As text-books, they provide the people with short and useful summaries of the true doctrines of religion, and so maintain purity of faith among them. For all and for each of these purposes, they ought to be full, detailed, theological, clear, logical, discriminating—not without the breath of vital piety blowing through them; but not merely a summary of those truths necessary for salvation, but rather of the whole circle of the fundamental truths of God. It is because, strong in moderation and true catholicity, the Westminster Standards are creeds of this sort, that they were "cried up," as Bailey tells us, at the time as the best yet extant, even by the "opposites" of the divines who framed them, and have continued to win the praise of their candid-minded "opposites" ever since. The late Dr. Currey, for example, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, bore testimony that the Westminster Confession is "the ablest, clearest, and most comprehensive system of Christian doctrine ever framed," "a comprehensive embodiment of nearly all the precious truths of the Gospel." It is "its intrinsic worth alone," as Dr. Schaff reminds us,* that "can explain the fact that it has supplanted the older Standards of John Knox and John Craig in the land of their birth, and has been adopted by three distinct denominations." Even its very completeness and length is one of its excellences; how otherwise shall we bear testimony to the whole truth of God? Mr. Taylor Innis, certainly no prejudiced witness in such a matter, truly says: † "In the history of Scotland, and in the Reformed Churches generally, it does not appear that the men who

* *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. i., p. 788. "For its sake," says Mr. Taylor Innis, "Scotland, long before the Revolution of 1688, was willing to forget its own national Confession—that laid by John Knox on the table of the Parliament, 1560." (*The Andover Review*, July, 1889, p. 1.)

† *The Law of Creeds in Scotland*, p. 480.

sought for the minimum of truth to confess, were the men who had the most of the Divine spirit of truth. The greatest men and the best men (with some exceptions, like Baxter) seem hitherto to have been in favor of full creeds. Churchmen of capacity and earnestness—the men in whose heart the question, *How is THE KING'S Government to be carried on?* continuously burned—have felt their practical need of creeds for keeping the Church together, and have argued that they are essential, if not to the being (*esse*), at least to the well-being of the Church. And, on the other hand, the men of tenderness of conscience and pure heart toward God and men, have leaned not only to the Confession of the permanently central truths, but to the eager and solemn Confession of whatever truth the time and its trial called for—to its Confession not only individually, but by the unanimous and accordant voice of the witnessing Church of Christ.”

As for those who find the Westminster Confession a harsh or extreme document, or a cold and undevout one—or who speak of it as the product of controversialists rather than of godly preachers of the Word—we simply cannot understand them. It marks the extreme of Calvinistic development only in the sense that it embodies the cream of Calvinistic thinking. Framed, as Dr. Alexander F. Mitchell so eloquently tell us,* “when the Church was still under the happy influence of a marvellous revival, when the Word of God was felt as a living, quickening, transforming power, and preached not as a tradition, but as the very power and wisdom of God;” and “by men of ripe scholarship and devoted piety, who have remained our models of earnest preaching and our guides in practical godliness, even unto this day;” and primarily for the purpose of vindicating the doctrine of the Church of England as in harmony with the consensus of Reformed Christendom, and therefore with a constant effort to make its decisions unanimous † and to secure moderation and catholicity; ‡ it not only stands to-day as the representative (in Dr. Schaff's words) of “the most vigorous and yet moderate form of Calvinism,” as (in Dr. Macgregor's words) “a model of guarded strength in moderation,” but also as a document so filled with vital godliness that its every section seems to have been framed in the consciousness of God's presence, and no one can feed on it without feeling that he is in the very temple of the Most High.§ If men would only study the Confession! Take a single example of how recklessly it is not infrequently quoted. In speaking of the interpretation of the Scriptures (I. ix.) it sets aside the patristic and mediæval method of torturing a “multiple sense”—literal and spiritual, allegorical and anagogical—out of each text

* *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, etc.* Introduction : p. lxxv.

† *Ibid.*, p. xlv.

‡ *Ibid.*, pp. liv., lv., lxxiv.

§ Cf. Dr. Candlish (the elder) : “I think it worthy of special notice how our Westminster Standards, sometimes held to consist of hard and dry abstractions, place so much stress on personal union to Christ as the explanation of our being made partakers of the benefits of redemption.” (*The Fatherhood of God*, edition 5, p. 196.) The whole passage, pp. 192–197, will repay perusal in this connection.

of Scripture, by the decided assertion that the sense "of *any* Scripture" "is not manifold but one." On this perfectly obvious and thoroughly scientific statement Mr. Robert Macintosh founds page after page of assault on the Confession, incredibly misinterpreting it to mean that all parts of the Bible teach the same thing! This is just one quarter of his whole argument to prove the Confession to be obsolete.*

3. There is still another attitude which has led to objection in some quarters during the last year, to the Westminster Standards, without necessarily implying lack of harmony with their doctrine. This is a feeling that the creed is too exclusive and a desire for Church union and greater catholicity of Church life, based on the undoubted facts that on the one hand the Westminster Standards, while moderately and catholically Calvinistic, are yet exclusively Calvinistic, and on the other that Christendom is broader than Calvinism. This position is fairly represented by the overture presented by Mr. Macdonnell to the Presbytery of Toronto,† which was based primarily on the proposition that "the Church of Christ should be careful not to exclude from the ministry any man whom the Lord of the Church would receive." Mr. Macdonnell illustrated his meaning by pointing to godly men in the Methodist and other churches, admired by us all and gladly acknowledged to be true ministers of the Gospel, whom, nevertheless, we would not admit as teachers into our hedged and walled portion of the Church. We cannot but think, however, that we should be as loyal to God's Word as charitable to our fellow-men; and this position appears to us to be founded on a mistaken view of the nature of the Church and of Church unity as well as on an insufficient realization of the difficulties of minimum Confessions. Its apparent liberality may after all prove not to be wholly out of affinity with the illiberal conception which identifies "our" Church with the Church of God, and seeks the fusion of all denominations into one external body on account of difficulty in conceiving of the Church as one amid multiplicity of forms of organization, creed, and life. The last few years have given birth to many schemes to secure Church unity by some external means, or in some external sense—by inclusion in a common organization, as if unity were attainable "by building a great house around a divided family," or by enforced uniformity in forms of worship, or the like—none of them the product of a truly liberal spirit. We have but to open our eyes to see that the living Church of God is already one in the unity of the Spirit, or awaits for its full realization only the spirit of oneness in our hearts. If it were, indeed, true that "our Church" constitutes the whole true Church of God, then we should beware of excluding from our pulpits any whom God has called to preach his Word. But if we all who, under many names, hold fast to the one head, are by common communion with him, united into one spiritual body, it by no means follows that each member is not required to do its own work in its own appointed way. Every colonel in an army has not an inherent right to command every

* *The Obsolescence of the Confession of Faith*, pp. 44-55.

† Reported by *The Toronto Mail* for April 3d, 1889.

regiment ; and yet the army is one. In a word, the matter so put raises the whole question of the right of denominational existence. If we have a defensible right to be Presbyterians, we have as just a right to our separate creed as to our separate organization.

And who is to determine for us the minimum of truth which Christian men are bound to confess ? Is it so easy a matter to distinguish between such essential doctrines as we dare not mar our witness to, and the unessential ones which we may suppress public confession of for the sake of outward unity of organization ? Does not the line of division fluctuate from age to age ? May not even a secondary question—say such as circumcision—on occasion become vital (Gal. v. 2) ? Can we innocently consent permanently to testify in a public manner to no truth except the most fundamental, nay, the most commonly recognized, and therefore the least in need of our testimony ? And, finally, if all these difficulties were surmounted, and we had attained a minimum creed, would it not be embarrassing to possess a creed from which we could allow no deviation—deviation from which *ipso facto* (just because it is the *minimum*) excludes from heaven—of the whole of which we must say, “ Which faith, unless every one do keep whole and entire, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly ? ” We should consider well whether this liberal pathway leads not in the end to tyranny.

4. We must not fail, however, to recognize frankly, that after all these causes of dissatisfaction with the Westminster Standards are eliminated, there remains a residuum—a small residuum—of objections which arise out of doctrinal grounds. There are, no doubt, several kinds of objections to be recognized even here. Some arise merely from the opinion that the truths of the Gospel do not receive the same relative emphasis in the Confession as in the Bible ; and these are probably the most frequently urged of all forms of doctrinal objection. Dr. Candlish, in supporting his overture in the Free Church Presbytery of Glasgow, supplies a good example of how they are presented. “ The Confession,” he is reported as saying, “ did not express in their scriptural proportions some aspects of the Gospel, and these were such vital and precious truths as the love of God to the world, his free offer of salvation to all men, and the responsibility of every one who heard this gracious call for accepting or refusing it. It was not meant that these truths were not contained in the Confession. He strongly contended that they were in it, but they were not so prominent in it proportionally to the statement of other truths—those of the sovereignty and almighty power of God’s grace—as they were in the Bible.” * It will be remembered that it is with these points that the Declaratory Acts of the United Presbyterians and the Presbyterian Church of Victoria deal. Other objections arise out of real recalcitration from some of the doctrinal statements, or even from some of the doctrines stated in the Confession. A fair example of these is supplied by the overture of the Presbytery of Nassau praying the American Assembly to revise Chapter III. *Of God’s Eternal Decrees* ; and others

* *The Glasgow Herald* for February 12th, 1889.

would seek a far more thorough, if not more radical revision. Lastly, some objectors are objectors because they have consciously drifted into a wholly un-Calvinistic or even anti-Calvinistic position. A fair example of this attitude is supported by Mr. Robert Macintosh, who in his pamphlet on *The Obsolescence of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, constantly speaks of "Calvinism" from the outside, and thinks that the Bible, "but for its occasional language as to election, coincides not with Calvinism, but with evangelical Arminianism." *

That objectors of all these sorts, even of the most radical, have made their voice heard in the course of the last few months, is surely in no wise strange. When the Confession was framed there were those who did not accept its system of doctrine; and it is no wonder that there are such to day. If those who are wholly out of sympathy with it are to hold office under it, of course it must be "revised," as to have obtained a like result two hundred years ago, it would need to have been very differently framed. The only peculiarity of the present situation is, that the churches seem now troubled by the objections of this small minority whom we have always with us, and who so confidently demand a revolution of our whole scheme of doctrine for their personal comfort and ease of conscience, that they appear at times almost in danger of getting it. Such a situation appears, however, not so much to put the Confession of Faith, as the churches, on trial; and its issue is apt to determine less whether the Westminster doctrines be true than whether the churches who profess them remain faithful.

Before we close let us very briefly read the lessons which this widespread agitation can teach us in America in our present circumstances. We observe, then, (1) That so long as we remain a Calvinistic Church, the American Church, with its free and yet safe formula of acceptance of the Confession, is without the impulse which drives on some other churches to seek to better their relation to the Standards. We have always accepted the Confession only for "the system of doctrine" contained in it, and hence since 1729 have possessed what the great Scotch churches are now seeking after. (2) Our situation with reference to our Standards is incapable of any real improvement. A revised Confession could still be acceptable to us only for "system of doctrine;" and so long as we heartily believe the system brought to expression in the Westminster Confession, we have everything in it which we could possibly obtain in any other creed, however wisely framed. (3) In these circumstances, the historical integrity of so venerable and noble a document seems worth preserving. Only if we could make some substantial gain by change, should we seek change. (4) There seems no prospect of materially bettering any important statement of the Confession by any further revision that we are capable of making. So wisely drawn, so carefully framed, so logically concatenated are these statements, so earnest were the framers to suffuse it all with the glow of vital piety, and so intent were they to give each article a truly moderate, irenical,

* *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

and catholic expression, that it is exceedingly difficult to touch a single article without both hardening and narrowing it. It would be well if the American Church could realize fully that the wisdom of its fathers in the seventeenth century has framed for it an almost ideal creed, and the wisdom of its fathers in the eighteenth century has instituted an ideal relation to it ; and hence determine to adopt in this matter the late Principal Candlish's advice : " By all means, let them (the Westminster Standards) stand untouched, as monuments of the vast erudition and mental power of other days, and as safeguards of truth and bulwarks against error for ages yet to come."*

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* *Fatherhood of God*, edition 5, p. 194.