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## THE FUTURE OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN THE UNITED STATES.

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PRESBYTERIANISM in the United States of America derived its life and its principles from the Presbyterian churches of Great Britain. England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales each contributed important factors. The home of Presbyterianism is Scotland, where the national church has been Presbyterian, with the exception of a few decades, since the Protestant Reformation. Presbyterianism in Ulster was of Scottish origin, but it soon assumed a provincial type which it has retained with great tenacity and which the Ulster contingent in America has maintained as if it were the genuine original Presbyterianism. English Presbyterianism had an independent origin through Cartwright, Travers and their associates in the Puritan struggle within the Church of England. The English type of Presbyterianism influenced Wales, Dublin and the south of Ireland.

Presbyterianism derived its name from the ecclesiastical polity and discipline which it advocated over against Prelacy on the one hand and Independency on the other. In the sixteenth century doctrinal differences did not emerge, for the Presbyterians were no more rigid Calvinists than were the Prelatists and the Independents. In the seventeenth century a considerable portion of the Prelatical party became Arminian, but Calvinism always remained a potent factor in the Church of England, entrenched in the Thirty-nine Articles. The Independents in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were more rigid Calvinists than the Presbyterians. The conflicts of Presbyterianism with its foes and the internal conflicts of Presbyterianism itself in Scotland have

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been chiefly ecclesiastical. Few doctrinal conflicts have taken place in Scotland, and these have never wrought division. All of the divisions in Scottish Presbyterianism have resulted from differences in opinion on ecclesiastical questions. Presbyterianism in England gradually wasted away. Under the policy of comprehension, which was maintained by many of the English bishops in the last half of the seventeenth century and in the early part of the eighteenth century, large numbers of Presbyterians returned to the Church of England. The subscription controversy still further weakened them. They maintained Puritan liberty and refused subscription. But this gave the more radical type of Presbyterianism such an advantage that in the course of time the whole English Presbyterian body became Unitarian, so that in England Presbyterianism and Unitarianism are synonymous terms. In Ireland the Anglo-Irish and the Scotch-Irish types came into conflict in the subscription controversy and Presbyterianism was divided. As a resultant of the subscription controversy English Presbyterianism became too broad and Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism too narrow.

Presbyterianism in America resulted from a mingling of all the British types, with the addition of elements from the Reformed churches of France and Switzerland, and a numerous body of New England Congregationalists who, on migrating to the Middle colonies, became Presbyterians in accordance with a policy of non-intrusion, agreed upon by Congregationalists and Presbyterians at that time. Presbyterianism was organized in Philadelphia in the spring of 1706 by Francis Makemie, John Hampton and Samuel Davis, Irishmen; George McNish, a Scotchman, and Jedediah Andrew, John Wilson, and Nathaniel Taylor, New England Puritans. In ten years they increased to eight Scotchmen, seven Irishmen, three Welshmen, and seven New Englanders.

The two great types of Presbyterianism came into conflict upon the question of subscription in 1728. John Thomson, an Ulsterman, introduced an overture in favor of strict subscription to the Westminster standards. This was opposed by New Englanders. But a compromise was effected by the genius of Jonathan Dickinson, who devised a plan of subscription to "all the essential and necessary articles" of the Westminster standards; and to the Presbyterian government and discipline as "agreeable

in substance to the Word of God," to be observed "as near as circumstances will allow and Christian prudence direct."

This fundamental agreement in the act of adoption of the Westminster system lies at the basis of the constitution of the American Presbyterian Church and is the pivot of its history. The strict subscriptionists were not satisfied. They agitated in several of the presbyteries for a narrow interpretation of the Adopting Act. At last they accomplished their purpose in 1741, by taking advantage of an accidental majority, which they obtained by the absence of an unusual number of ministers, especially from the large Presbytery of New York. A synod of forty-seven ministers was broken up by a majority of two in a total vote of twenty-two, and twelve ministers succeeded in casting out eleven. After several years of earnest effort for harmony the Presbytery of New York united with those who had been cast out and organized the Synod of New York, which became known as the New Side over against the Synod of Philadelphia, which was called the Old Side. On the New Side were liberal subscription, considerate discipline, vital piety and aggressive evangelization; on the Old Side were strict discipline, ecclesiastical domination, conformity to rigid types of doctrine and traditional methods of work. The Presbyterian Church at that time was about to unite with the Reformed churches from Holland and Germany, in accordance with the advice of the mother synod. But John Thomson and his eleven associates frustrated a union which might have been of immense advantage to American Christianity, and wrought an unhappy division which disorganized for some years the work of evangelization on the frontiers and among the American Indians.

During the period of separation the Old Side did not prosper; they gained only four ministers, while the New Side grew from 20 to 72 ministers. The reunion in 1758 was accomplished by falling back on the Adopting Act of 1729. It was agreed that the synod should determine only such things as were "indispensable in doctrine and Presbyterian government;" and subscription was limited to the "system of Christian doctrine" of the Westminster standards. The Presbyterian Church thrived from 1758 until 1788 when the General Assembly was organized, the Westminster symbols revised, and the constitution adopted. Terms of subscription were framed which, in accordance with

the Adopting Act of 1729 and the Terms of Union of 1758, limited subscription to the "system of doctrine."

Besides this main stock of Presbyterians, the several non-conforming Presbyterian bodies of Scotland and Ireland established colonies in the United States which, after many subdivisions and reconstructions, resulted in several branches of Reformed Presbyterians and United Presbyterians.

In 1810, by an act of intolerance and wrong to a little body of pious evangelists, the Presbyterian Church provoked a schism of several ministers who organized the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which has grown during the century, in the valley of the Mississippi, into a great Presbyterian organization with a General Assembly and many subordinate synods and presbyteries.

Doctrinal controversies sprang up early in the century in the Presbyterian Church, respecting the extent of the Atonement and the imputation of Adam's sin and of Christ's righteousness; and a New School party was formed over against an Old School party. These parties were simply the renewal of the Old and New sides of the previous century, and indeed of the English and Ulster types of Presbyterianism, under new circumstances and with regard to new questions. Albert Barnes and Lyman Beecher were tried for heresy, and although ultimately acquitted by the General Assembly, yet the Old School was dissatisfied with the verdicts and in 1837 "finding themselves for a second time only within seven years in the majority, took advantage of the occasion to excise simply by an act of power, irrespective of constitutional limitation," four synods with all their churches and ministers. The aggrieved New School held a convention at Auburn in August, 1837, and at the Assembly of 1838 demanded the enrollment of the representatives of the four excised synods. When this was refused two Assemblies were organized, the Old School and the New School. These continued apart until 1870. During the War of the Rebellion each school threw off the Southern synods. These organized the Southern Presbyterian Church, which still continues its independent life. The Old School and New School Assemblies united in 1870 on the basis of the Constitution of 1788 with an understanding of mutual respect and toleration to both sides on all matters which had been in contention. This reunion did not remove differences in spirit, in doctrine, or in ecclesiastical principles. The two parties were united

in one comprehensive church instead of remaining apart in different organizations.

There was an era of peace and good will which lasted about a decade, when strife again broke out between the same old parties. The aggressive minority again strove to impose their provincial theology and their ecclesiastical domination upon the whole Church. Several trials for heresy and for irregularity were held in different parts of the Church, which were not regarded as sufficiently important to rally the parties in battle array. The Swing case in Chicago, the McCune case in Cincinnati, and other lesser cases in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and elsewhere, were regarded by the New School as breaches of faith on the part of the Old School; but they were patiently endured in the hope that better feelings and actions would ultimately prevail. A greater peril came when the united Review, after the death of Henry B. Smith, passed into the hands of those who were not sensitive to the delicacy of the situation, but the misunderstanding was removed by the establishment of the *Presbyterian Review* in which all the theological seminaries were proportionately represented. It was evident that the reactionary party were becoming more and more aggressive, and it needed only the emergence of some great questions to rally them to a new act of ecclesiastical domination. In the meanwhile the liberal party became more and more discouraged, and large numbers of ministers and laymen sought refuge especially in Congregational and Episcopal churches, and the conservative party became constantly more ambitious as it captured one after another of the strong pulpits of the New School party, and secured the control of all the Presbyterian newspapers, with the single exception of the *New York Evangelist*.

The Revision movement, which burst forth from the people without any ecclesiastical leadership, took the Presbyterian Church by surprise and threw the conservative party into a panic. It was the last straw which broke the back of the combination of interests in the *Presbyterian Review* and brought about its dissolution. The conservatives rallied about a new Review, and then by shrewd management at Saratoga in 1890 gained control of the committee appointed to revise the Confession. They then recommended such minor and trivial revisions as failed to satisfy the demands of the revisionists. Ac-

cordingly liberals and conservatives united in defeating the proposed revisions, and the Revision movement came to a halt in the last General Assembly at Washington. The revisionists were divided into two bands; the one seeking relief by amendment of the Confession, the other by a new and simple creed. The latter were called by the reactionaries radical revisionists. The two bands of revisionists worked together until the Assembly at Saratoga. There the conservatives succeeded in dividing them with the aim of destroying them in detail. The dissatisfaction with the revision offered by the compromisers greatly increased the numbers of those who desire a new creed; so that the Revision movement has now passed over into a movement for a new creed. But this movement was not strong enough to gain recognition from the ultra-conservatives, who held the General Assembly at Washington entirely in their power. It is evident, however, that the movement for a new creed will increase in impetus until in 1894 or 1895 the ultra-conservatives will be forced to yield to it, and there will be another effort made by ecclesiastical politicians to stoop to conquer. They will probably go so far in the movement as to gain the control of it; and then so direct it as to render it inoperative and unsuccessful. They will probably succeed in these tactics, as they have just succeeded in destroying the Revision movement. Then will come a movement which the ecclesiastics will be unable to control—a strong, irresistible demand of a deceived and oft-betrayed ministry and people, for such a revision of the terms of subscription as will make it evident to all the world that a man of the most scrupulous conscience may adhere to the Westminster symbols as the historic monuments of the Presbyterian Church without risking his manhood under the ecclesiastical domination of an ultra-conservative faction which may think that it can dominate the faith of the Church, or force from the Church of their fathers by accidental and worked up majorities ministers more truly orthodox than themselves.

The attention of the ministry and people of the Presbyterian Church has been withdrawn from the movement in behalf of a new creed by a band of ecclesiastics who have thrown them into a panic about the Bible because of the Inaugural Address of Professor Briggs on the Authority of Holy Scripture, delivered January 20, 1891. That address, as is well known, did not

promulgate new and strange doctrines. The doctrines stated in that address are but the summary statements of the doctrines which Professor Briggs had been teaching for many years, and which had been before the public for several years in his several printed books, such as *Biblical Study, American Presbyterianism, Messianic Prophecy, Whither*; and in numerous articles in the *Presbyterian Review*, which were condoned by the Presbyterian Church, even if they were regarded as erroneous, during all that time in which Professor Briggs was joint editor of that *Review* with Dr. A. A. Hodge and Dr. F. L. Patton. There was nothing in the Inaugural Address as such which could have excited such a panic, if it had not been so misinterpreted and misquoted by partisan Presbyterian newspapers, and by reactionary ecclesiastics to mislead and deceive the Presbyterian ministry and people, especially in the outlying districts and in the more remote regions of the country.

It is quite true that the Inaugural Address and the other writings mentioned raise many important theological questions which seem new, startling and dangerous to those who have been trained in the traditional theology, and who have not kept in touch with the modern scientific study of the Bible and of Church History. But to those who know the currents of theological thought in Great Britain and on the continent of Europe, it seems surprising that the great Presbyterian Church should have been thrown into a panic by such an address. The panic has accomplished the purpose of those who excited it, and Professor Briggs has been suspended from the Presbyterian ministry for teaching doctrines which "strike at the vitals of religion." These doctrines are the following: (1) The Bible, the Church and the Reason are historically three great fountains of divine authority; (2) There may have been errors in the original autographs of Holy Scripture; (3) Moses did not write the Pentateuch, and Isaiah did not write half the book which bears his name; (4) There is progressive sanctification in the middle state between death and the resurrection. These doctrines are beyond the range of those defined in the Westminster Confession, are extra-confessional, and within the area of the liberty guaranteed by the constitution of the Church. And yet the General Assembly at Washington by a great majority declared them to be errors which "strike at the vitals of religion," and for holding and teaching

them Professor Briggs was suspended from the Presbyterian ministry.

If the General Assembly had the power to determine the faith of the Presbyterian Church by such a decision it would put all liberal Presbyterians in a serious situation, in which they would either be obliged to submit to these decisions or else to retire from the Presbyterian ministry. But a General Assembly has no such power. It cannot determine the faith of the Church either by deliverance of opinion or by judicial condemnation of a minister. The constitution prescribes the way in which the faith of the Church may be determined, namely, by the agreement of two-thirds of the presbyteries to a statement of doctrine submitted to them by the General Assembly. Therefore the only effect of the suspension of Professor Briggs, for the reasons assigned, is that his doctrines are declared to be hurtful errors by the majority of the last Assembly. But the minority of that Assembly, who have declared that his doctrines are not hurtful errors, have a legal right to hold those opinions, and to contend for them until they are declared to be hurtful errors by amendments of the Confession of Faith.

Furthermore, the minority contend that the Assembly at Washington was guilty of usurpation of power and of ecclesiastical domination of the same general character as the act of John Thomson and his eleven associates in 1741, and of the General Assembly of 1837. For the General Assembly violated the constitution of the Church and all the precedents of Presbyterian practice in these three respects: (1) It recognized the right of a public prosecutor to appeal against a verdict of acquittal; (2.) It recognized that a committee appointed by the Presbytery of New York was independent of the Presbytery which appointed it; (3.) It usurped the jurisdiction of the Synod of New York by assuming jurisdiction of a case which was under the jurisdiction of the Synod of New York and not yet determined by that synod. These unconstitutional acts of the Assembly at Washington have not yet been recognized by the Synod of New York, and until the synod has yielded its jurisdiction and officially given its consent to these actions of the General Assembly, the minority of the Assembly are legally justified in declining to submit to them.

A General Assembly is not a permanent body. It has no con-



tinuous life. It is composed of representatives of the presbyteries who meet together for a few days and then dissolve forever. One, two or three General Assemblies in succession may usurp power, may do grave injustice, may make breaches in the constitution of the Church. But all these wrongs may be righted by a fourth or a fifth, or any subsequent Assembly. There are numerous examples of such things in the history of Presbyterianism. The minority of the last Assembly and those who agree with them throughout the Presbyterian Church are therefore justified in the continuation of the struggle for liberty, for truth, and for right.

The majority of votes in favor of the suspension was very great. But if the votes are weighed as well as counted the disparity will not be regarded as serious. The basis of representation in the General Assembly gives the small presbyteries in the country districts and on the frontiers a vastly greater power than they are entitled to by their numbers or influence, while the strong presbyteries in our large cities and in the great communities are put at a serious disadvantage. The General Assemblies as they are now constituted represent the least intelligent portion of the Church, and not infrequently a majority in the Assembly really represents a minority of the ministers and people in the denomination. A majority of a General Assembly is not taken seriously by intelligent Presbyterians.

The only danger of another disruption in the Presbyterian Church at present is in such an assumption of power on the part of another Assembly as would by an act of violence exclude at a blow large numbers of ministers and people from the Presbyterian Church. Such action is improbable. It is probable that there will be a series of heresy trials for several years until the ultra-conservatives exhaust themselves and tire the patience of the Church, when there will be a reaction so strong, so sweeping, so irresistible in its demands for breadth of thought, liberty of scholarship, intelligent appropriation of the wealth of modern science and the efficiency of modern methods of work, that the reactionaries will be swept all at once and forever into insignificance. The onset of modern scholarship and of scientific methods of study and of work is as steady and sweeping as the march of a glacier. It grinds to powder everything that obstructs its path. The Presbyterian Church will probably not be seriously

injured by it; but the ultra-conservative party in the Presbyterian Church will be crushed by it in due time.

All American churches are in the stream of that tendency which is rushing on towards the unity of Christ's Church. The hedges which separate the denominations are traditional theories and practices; but they are no longer realities to thinking and working men and women. The liberals of every denomination of Christians are more in accord with one another than they are with the conservatives in their own denominations. The problem in the near future is this: Can the liberals remain in comfort in their several denominations and so become the bridges of Church Unity; or will they be forced to unite in a comprehensive frame of Church Unity outside the existing denominations; or will they rally around the more liberal communions? There seems to be little doubt that the liberals at the present time are quite comfortable as Episcopalians and as Congregationalists, and not altogether uncomfortable as Baptists and as Methodists, and that there is no other denomination in which they are so uncomfortable as in the Presbyterian Church. It is possible that they may, after a year or more of battle for liberty, be compelled to retire from the existing Presbyterian Church and abandon it to a traditional, unscholarly and fossilized majority; and then organize a liberal Presbyterian Church as has been done twice before in this country. But this is not probable at the present time. The liberals will still continue to make themselves as comfortable as possible during the brief period of theological war, until a final struggle may determine their destiny. They will go on in theological investigation; they will continue the study of the higher criticism of Holy Scripture; they will seek more light upon the dark problems of the future of the earth and man; they will continue to seek God through the Church and the Reason as well as through the Bible; they will remain the great constitutional party; they will be patient, brave, painstaking and heroic, until the Presbyterian Church becomes as broad, catholic and progressive as her Congregational and Episcopal sisters; and then Church Unity will be nigh, at the doors, and a happy end of controversy will be seen in a united Protestantism, which will be then encouraged to seek a higher and grander unity, in which the Roman and Greek communions will likewise share.

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