

THE
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I.

NOTES ON THE REVISED NEW TESTAMENT.

THE long-expected Revision is at last before the public. The first rattling volley from the newspapers has spent itself with the result which might have been predicted; aiding to stimulate the general curiosity, but doing very little to satisfy serious and intelligent inquiry as to the true merits or demerits of the work.

Too much has not been said, too much cannot be said of the general excellence and the wonderful value and power of our Authorized Version. The interest awakened by the Revision is the grandest of all testimonies to these. All that has been so eloquently written concerning its racy, nervous English, its service to literature, and the tenderness, dignity, and inspiring character of its associations, may be reaffirmed with emphasis; and hence the Revisers were no more than judicious in laying down as one of their first and principal canons—to avoid all unnecessary changes in that which years and associations have made so precious. But on this point two things may be said, the one concerning the Revisers, the other concerning the readers.

As to the Revisers, it may be safely affirmed that nothing in their admirable preface justifies extravagant expectations on this head. Their clearly stated rule is, that the alterations to be introduced should be expressed, *as far as possible*, in the language of the Authorized Version or of the Revisions that preceded it. They are, moreover, at pains to set forth their endeavor, when compelled to use other words, to find such as

ogy of faith may come in as decisive, but certainly not elsewhere. Otherwise, criticism ceases to be a science, and subjective experience takes the place of sober demonstration.

In the first part of the volume the author makes good use of the fact now well known that the original manuscript of Dr. Franklin's autobiography was lost sight of for many years, while an alleged copy, revised and greatly altered by his grandson, had been published and received everywhere as the genuine work. He uses this to exemplify the possibility of mistake in criticisms of the text founded on the comparison of manuscripts. Still this is a possibility which no reputable critic denies or doubts. But no one can argue from the unknown or the simply possible. In judging of the genuineness of a disputed passage one must decide upon the testimony that is accessible. If the authorities preponderate against the passage, and no plausible reason can be suggested why the words if ever in the text should have been omitted, but on the contrary, much for their insertion if originally omitted, then fidelity to truth requires us to decide against them at whatever sacrifice of feeling.

TALBOT W. CHAMBERS.

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH. With Introduction and Notes, by the Rev. JOHN MACPHERSON, M.A., Findhorn. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 38 George Street, 1881. A special edition imported for use in this country, price 80 cts., by Scribner & Welford, New York City.

This admirable book is one of a series of treatises entitled "Handbooks for Bible Classes," prepared by different authors, and the entire series edited by Rev. Marcus Dods, D.D., of Glasgow, and the Rev. Alexander Whyte, D.D., of Edinburgh. These cover, as far as already published, commentaries on several of the most important books of Scripture, and treatises on such capital topics as the "Life of Christ," "The Sacraments," "The Reformation," "The Doctrines of Grace," "Church and State," "Christian Ethics," etc., etc.

It is obviously impossible to exaggerate the importance of such a series, and if, as a body, these topics are treated with the learning, ability, and fidelity to truth which distinguishes the "Notes to the Confession of Faith," we ought to secure their republication and general circulation in America.

As already said, the "Notes," or rather the introduction to, and exposition of, the Confession of Faith, is learned, able, judicious, and doctrinally sound. The recently recovered historical information as to the members, and as to the discussions, of the Westminster Assembly, is freely used by Mr. Macpherson in interpreting the sense of the Confession, and its relation to the various schools of Reformed Theology. The author takes, in the main, the true ground as to the moderation and breadth of the statements of our Confession upon points in controversy among Calvinists, and high ground as to the truth and permanent significance of the essential principles of the Calvinistic system, and the moral obligation resting upon every subscriber to the Confession, to maintain those principles inviolate. The five knotty points of Calvinism "may not be stated now in exactly the same phraseology, but the points themselves remain as theological attainments, constituting the very essence of the Calvinistic creed. All true Calvinists cling to those characteristic expressions of doctrine, as tenaciously as their precursors did in the Synod of Dort, and in the Westminster Assembly. He who renounces the doctrinal positions underlying those so-called knotty points, does not thereby pass from high to moderate Calvinism, but actually passes over to the ranks of the anti-Calvinists, and abandons the standpoint of the Reformed Confessions."

There are two positions taken in the exposition to which we would take exception. In the first place, the author (p. 21) identifies "Calvinism" pure and simple with the special form that doctrine takes in the writings of Calvin himself, and distinguishes this from the non-essential variations which characterized as specific dif-

ferences the various schools of his disciples. We believe this to be entirely a mistake. Calvinism is just a general term to express a system of Christian doctrine, including in the genus all the specific variations. This system existed from the times of Paul and Augustine, and it includes many varieties. It has a history, and hence the term has a sense fixed by that history. In that sense its standard is the consensus of the Confessions of the Reformed Churches, and of the great classical Reformed theologians. In this *consensus* we have the generic essence of the system, while in the variations of the Confessions, and writers, we have the specific differences.

In the second place, the author maintains that the Westminster Confession of Faith was alone designed to be the public doctrinal standard of the subscribing Churches, while the Catechisms, prepared by the same committee, and issued by the authority of the same Assembly, were designed simply to be used for the purpose of conveying catechetical instruction. Hence that the Catechisms, as affirmed by an act of the Free Church Assembly in 1851, have no confessional authority; and that in consequence of this difference of design, the Westminster Assembly, in drawing up the Confession of Faith, confined itself to general statements of the essential principles of the Calvinistic system, while the same Assembly, a year afterward, introduced more precise statements, on points upon which Calvinists differ into the Longer and subsequently into the Shorter Catechism. And that while these peculiarities of the Catechisms express the personal opinions of their authors, they were not intended either directly to bind the churches, or to explain the meaning of the Confession.

It seems to us, on the other hand, that an authoritative formula for catechising the children of the Church cannot be supposed to contain elements of doctrine which the Church as such does not profess to believe, or to go further into details of doctrinal definition than the formula intended as the standard of ministerial communion. What we are authoritatively instructed to teach the children, we are *ipso facto* instructed to believe and profess. Besides the fact that the Catechisms were prepared by the same men, and issued by the deliberate vote of the same Assembly, after a lapse of months of further study and discussion, necessarily cause them to be the most authoritative possible exposition of the sense the corresponding definitions of the Confession were intended to bear.

And whatever may be the state of ecclesiastical law in the several Presbyterian Churches of Scotland on this head, the Catechisms, as well as and as much as the Confession of the Westminster Assembly, are the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Churches of America.

The Adopting Act of 1729 declares that the "Confession and Longer and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of divines at Westminster" were "adopted as the Confession of our faith." This Adopting Act was referred to and accepted as the common historical basis of both Branches by the terms of Reunion, adopted 1869.

The printing and binding of this little book is perfect; and ought to direct the taste and excite the emulation of some of our American publishers.

A. A. HODGE.

MESSIAH THE PRINCE; OR, THE MEDIATORIAL DOMINION OF JESUS CHRIST. By WILLIAM SYMINGTON, D.D., late Professor of Theology in the Reformed Presbyterian Church. With a Memoir of the Author by his Sons. London: T. Nelson & Sons, Paternoster Row; Edinburgh; and New York. 1881.

Dr. Symington is best known in America by his admirable work on the "Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ," which for many years was a text-book in our theological seminaries, and still retains its place as a classic in our Presbyterian theological literature. It is also remembered as the first volume republished at the suggestion of Dr. Archibald Alexander, by those eminent dispensers of religious truth in its purest and sweetest forms, Robert Carter & Brothers, of New York City.