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THE CHARACTERISTIC AND DISTINCTIVE
FEATURES OF THE REFORMED CHURCH
IN AMERICA.

BY REV. DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D. D.

THE *Reformed Church in America* has no noteworthy "characteristic features" to distinguish it from the larger branches of the "Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System." It is, to all intents and purposes, identical in doctrine and polity with the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches.

Nevertheless it holds a separate existence, because of a belief, more or less prevalent among its adherents, that it has a real *raison d'etre*. There are those who aver that its power for good—which is not inconsiderable—would be greatly increased by an alliance with one of the larger Presbyterian bodies. Overtures looking to such a union have been made more than once, but for various reasons have come to naught.

I. The Reformed Church has an honorable history. It is the oldest evangelical organization in America. The first Dutch immigrants came over in the *Half-Moon*, Hendrik Hudson, skipper, in 1609. This was the year of Holland's armistice with Spain after a century of bloody conflict for religious liberty. The *Half-Moon* returned to Holland the following year, reporting an exploration of the Hudson River in vain search for the fabulous open passage to the Orient. An allusion to "fertile lands and fur-bearing animals" tempted the thrifty spirit of the Dutch

"A GLORIOUS CHURCH."

BY REV. R. P. KERR, D. D.

The church, a part of which is triumphant in heaven and a part militant on earth, is the kingdom of Christ, and is one and the same in all ages, and should have the love, reverence, and obedience of all its members.

The church is the greatest thing in the universe except God. Among human governments the kingdom is greater than the king, but in this kingdom the King is greater, because he is God; nevertheless this kingdom in dignity is second only to the King.

The Presbyterian Church is the largest branch of the kingdom of Christ on earth, and we believe that its doctrine, government and worship are according to the Holy Scriptures, but we acknowledge all Christians as members of the church of God.

We ought to love, reverence, obey and serve the church.

(1) *The church is glorious, first of all, because it is the kingdom of Christ.* The greatest glory of the kingdom is the King. The Father says in the second Psalm, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." Again he is called "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords." When Christ was asked by Pilate, "Art thou a king then?" he answered, "Thou sayest that I am a king; to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world."

The kingdom began in Eden with the first promise of salvation by "the seed of woman," which seed was Christ.

Christ gave laws to his kingdom, by the Holy Ghost, through holy men who were inspired to write the scriptures, and he has ruled his kingdom from generation to generation, subduing his people unto himself, and "restraining and conquering all his and their enemies." This shall continue until he present the completed kingdom before his Father in heaven at the end of the world.

(2) The church is also glorious because Christ the King redeemed it with his own blood, shed on Calvary's cross.

The church is not worth the price paid for its ransom, made

up of men who, though believing in Christ, are sinners; but the death of Christ gave the church immeasurable value and glory, because it was redeemed by an infinite sacrifice. Every member, however humble, may boast, "I was saved with precious blood," and the church may proudly say, "I was bought with the blood of the Lamb of God."

The church is glorious thus in its own eyes. It is also glorious in the sight of God because his Son died to redeem it; and it is precious to the heart of Christ because of what it cost him to rescue it from sin and death and to bring it to glory on high.

(3) The church is glorious, moreover, because Christ renews and sanctifies its members and dwells in them by his Spirit. We are born again, born of water and the Spirit, born sons of God, in the image of God, and the new life thus given is indestructible. No one born of God can perish, but hath everlasting life.

The Holy Spirit was the author of the order and life of creation. He is the fountain of light and truth. The Bible is his inspired word. He begat the human body and soul of Christ. By his power Christ performed miracles and he raised Christ from the dead. The church is his greatest creation.

He effectually calls men into the kingdom, he calls the ministers and other rulers of the church. He sanctifies the church, and will make it holy without spot or blemish at the last great day.

(4) The church is glorious because Christ has appointed it to evangelize the world. Its mission is to conquer the nations for Christ by the preaching of his word. The King uses the kingdom for his war of conquest. He says, "Lo, I am with you always," and as in the campaigns of the religious wars of France the Protestant soldiers were guided by the white plume of King Henry of Navarre, always in the front of battle; so in the subjugation of the world the church follows her Leader on his white charger, clad in a crimson vesture and bearing on his thigh a name written "King of kings and Lord of lords." The church fights the battles of the King, shall partake with him of the glory of victory, and every member of it shall wear a crown. The church's weapon is like that of her Leader—the Word of God. And so it goes through the centuries preaching the word, and administering the sacraments which are signs and seals of salvation by the gospel the church proclaims, and all that is most

beneficent and most beautiful in the annals of mankind is the work of the church of God.

(5) The church is glorious because its unity includes all the saved in heaven and on earth in one glorious fellowship.

The saints in heaven are one with us. Prophets, priests, apostles, martyrs, kings that have lived on earth for God and to bless the world, whose names shine with imperishable lustre on the pages of history, are the brethren of those who still fight the good fight. We are one with them, and loved ones gone before are still one with us, and are ours for evermore. This is the only kingdom in which a friend can never lose his friend, nor loved ones be perpetually parted. In this kingdom alone all true friendship and all sacred ties of blood and affection become immortal. When loved ones depart in Christ, we still have—

"Mystic sweet communion

"With those whose rest is won."

"Oh! blest communion, fellowship divine!

"We feebly struggle: they in glory shine!

"Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine."

(6) Finally, the church is glorious because it shall endure for evermore.

It is the only immortal organization on earth. It shall outlive time, and when the world has dissolved like a snowflake in the eternal sea, the church shall rise resplendent to abide in light and glory everlasting.

Every kingdom that sets itself against the kingdom of Christ goes down; all human organizations shall fail: this only shall endure. Its life is divine, and it shall live as long as God lives. To this celestial glory the church is ever travelling. In this expectation the church preaches the word, looking for the coming of the King, and when the holy supper is celebrated, it is with the thought that we must do this "till he come."

"Mid' toil and tribulation

And tumult of her war,

She waits the consummation

Of peace forever more:

Till with the vision glorious

Her longing eyes are blest,

And the great church victorious

Shall be the church at rest."