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THE APOSTLES' CREED.

III. Its Material Structure or Organism.

THE articles of the Creed, in its full form, gather themselves up, in the first place, into three parts; the first treating, as our Catechism has it, of God the Father and our creation; the second of God, the Son, and our redemption; the third of God, the Holy Ghost, and our sanctification. Christianity rests throughout on the mystery of the Ever Blessed Trinity, as revealed for the apprehension of faith through the incarnation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In this way, however, the three parts of the Creed now mentioned, fall back ultimately upon a single proposition, affirming the fact of the revelation thus made by Christ. The whole Christian faith, as we have had occasion to say before, finds its primary central utterance in the confession of Peter: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This accordingly must be taken as the foundation article of the Creed, on which its whole subsequent structure is to be regarded as resting from the beginning. This does not imply, of course, that Christ is in any way the ground or source of the Trinity itself, but only that the being and presence of God under this form come by him to an

ment and refinement of the human race. Owing to the fearfully intense activities now at work, the improvement of society is no longer permitted to be carried on as a regular growth, but must necessarily be hastened by a kind of high-steam pressure. Human appliances, often carried to violence, are employed without regard to the hidden principles of life, that are enfolding themselves in society, and bidding fair to yield an abundant crop. The sword has not as yet been unsheathed, and standing armies have not as yet been summoned as a backing to argument and reason, but how often has it been attempted to coerce public opinion, and employ it as a rod! How much of the thinking of our days is performed by voluntary associations! The most marked form, perhaps, which Cromwellianism has assumed in our days is represented to us in *modern abolitionism*, that is, the abolitionism of the extreme *left side*. Here we meet with Cromwellian zeal and impatience in abundance, and at the same time a practical denial of a vital Christianity. Our precious institutions, the freest and the best which the world has witnessed, are too corrupt to embody their ideals of perfection. Changes in the constitution, the dissolution of the Union, or if it must be, steel itself, alone can realize their views of the kingdom of God. According to these chivalrous reformers, we may wait till the day of doom for a better era, if we must rely upon the mere preaching of the fundamentals of Christianity. If Cromwell were permitted to revisit our earth, and to settle in America, it is not unlikely that he would know where to find sympathy, and how to turn our distractions to account. Happy is it for America that her military characters, know how to enjoy their honors, and to cultivate the arts of peace.

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ART. XXIII.—THE CLASSIS OF MERCERSBURG.

THIS body held its annual meeting lately in Greencastle. In some respects, it may be considered one of the most important

ecclesiastical occasions in the history of the church to which it belongs. The meeting was full. The best spirit prevailed among its members. Less time than usual was lost on the dull formalities of mere outward business, and more room in consequence allowed for strictly church transactions. Questions of deep theological interest were brought forward for discussion, not in any cold abstract view, but under the pressure of the most direct and urgent practical want. These discussions were conducted with unusual earnestness and animation, and no small amount of spiritual ability; while, at the same time, the zeal to which they gave rise, was happily tempered and governed by the true spirit of Christian charity and peace. We know not that we ever attended an ecclesiastical meeting, in which what seems to us to be the proper idea of such an occasion, might be said to have been, on the whole, better sustained. Among other good things, the Classis resolved, with the help of God, to carry up its subscription towards the endowment of the Theological Seminary, to the mark of at least *Ten Thousand Dollars*. More than half of this sum had been secured within its bounds previously; under the reasonable expectation that the other parts of the church would have been stimulated by such noble example to come up also, with a moiety at least of the same liberality, to the completion of the work; in which case the endowment would have been long since out of the way, and the Seminary placed on a sure and firm foundation. By some strange fatality, however, the example seems rather to have worked just the other way; some of the Classes even, of which we might have hoped better things, making use of it, apparently, as a reason for sitting still and doing almost nothing. All this formed no inconsiderable temptation to anger as well as discouragement. Happily, however, this temptation was surmounted, and sorrow became tributary, by the grace of God, to the sacred interest of piety and love. The Classis fell back on the vast solemnity of the cause at stake; counted the cost as in the presence of God; and calmly concluded to shoulder again its own full proportion, and more, of all that still remained to be done, as though it had done nothing before, trusting in God, by such "coals of fire," to move finally the tardy energies of the church at large, to some corresponding zeal. In-

deed the feeling seemed to be, in the end, that if it were found *necessary*, the Classis would even dare, in God's name, to shoulder, single-handed and alone, the entire work, so far as it remains still incomplete. No such necessity, however, is likely to exist. The action which has since taken place on the part of the other Classes, may be taken as a full guaranty that the endowment will now be consummated by the church as a body. Never before has there appeared so much union of mind, and determination of will, and consciousness of strength, in the body at large. All this, as carrying direct respect to the institutions at Mercersburg, is highly encouraging and full of significance. It shows that they are *not* at war with the true genius and spirit of the German Church; that they have not led the way within it to discord and disunion; that in proportion precisely as their real character is understood, they find a responsive chord of sympathy and love and truth through the whole length and breadth of its communion. Such a testimony, coming in such form, is well entitled to consideration, and ought not to pass without grateful notice.

Our object, however, in referring to the Classis of Mercersburg, is not merely nor mainly to bring into view the interesting fact now mentioned. The whole action of the Classis, at its last meeting, deserves to be commemorated, as forming a significant advance in the direction of a sound and healthy church consciousness, in this particular section of our Reformed Zion. As illustrative of this general fact, we note particularly two very important results, which were reached with great unanimity after the most full and earnest discussion; namely, the rejection of the Albright ordination as invalid, and the full affirmation of the old catechetical system, as the true and only legitimate order of the church, in opposition to the theory and fashion of religion, by which in modern times it has been so generally brought into disuse, or turned into an idle form.

The first question came up, in connection with an application from a most worthy and pious minister of the Albright connection, to be taken under the care of the Classis as a candidate for ordination in the German Reformed Church. The request in such form could not, of course, relieve the Classis itself from the

responsibility of deciding either for or against the validity of his ordination as it stood before, and so indirectly, for or against the right of that body to be recognized as a part of the true Christian Church. This was felt very properly to be a most momentous and solemn issue; and much was urged, with great plausibility and force, in favor of a comprehension of this sect in the general Protestant Church, and against any action in this case which must imply the contrary. The Albright body, it was said, must be allowed to include in it some true piety; Christ, we may trust, will own many who belong to it for his own dear people; the doctrines of grace are acknowledged in it, the authority of the Bible, justification by faith, the influences of the Spirit, &c.; and how should we then, without a breach of charity, deliberately proceed to unchurch them as a sect in the presence of the whole world? Must we not, to be consistent, unchurch also other sects? And how in the end could we assert the validity of any Protestant ordination at all, over against the exclusive claims of the Church of Rome? Must we not maintain the universal priesthood of Christians, as the only ground on which to justify the Reformation; and why should not this universal priesthood be of as much avail to legitimate the ministry of Jacob Albright and his successors, as it is acknowledged to be in favor of Luther and Zuingli and Melancthon and Calvin? All this was earnestly and powerfully pleaded, on the floor of Classis. On the other side, however, it was urged, that if the Church be a divine fact, schism must be also a most real and sore evil, which we are bound to make account of just as much as we make account of heresy; that in such case, we have nothing to do with charity or courtesy, but are called in the fear of God to bear manful testimony to the truth; that if it be a solemn thing to unchurch a body of professing Christians, it is a thing no less solemn, to fling the doors of the Church wide open, and thus virtually turn it into nothing but a word and a name; that in the providence of God, the Classis was here called to face a question, on whose decision the most vast consequences might be found to hang in time to come; that the Albright body never had any call to become a church; that its ministry started from nothing, and was of no force; that it was a solemn duty to bear this testimony to the Albright Breth-

ren themselves, and that to refuse to do so must involve great unfaithfulness to the world generally, encouraging people to make no account of the danger of falling into schism in any way, but rather to take it for granted that all religious connections are alike good and alike safe. Pains were taken, besides, to show that the case of the Reformation was in no proper sense parallel with the rise of this upstart sect; that the universal priesthood of Christians involves not at all the power of starting a new church in every corner and on any occasion; and that Protestantism must be considered a failure outright, if it carry no force in its constitution sufficient to distinguish it here from the universal prostration of all bounds and metes on the side towards the open world.

In the end, an almost unanimous vote was given, with unusual heartfelt solemnity, in favor of the petition for new ordination, and so, as before said, against the validity of the Albright ministry—virtually declaring that body to be no part of the proper Church of Christ. No question was raised in regard to the baptism of the applicant. This had taken place, not among the Albrights, but at an earlier date in the Roman Catholic Church, whose ordinances, notwithstanding the great corruption of that communion, have been regarded as valid by the Protestant Church generally, from the beginning. The vote now mentioned, was taken with only four *non liquets*, and not a single negative. The lay delegates, to a man, and apparently without the least hesitation, gave their voice firmly and fully in its favor.

As to the correctness of the decision, there ought not, we think, to be the least doubt. There might be cases presented, where it would be exceedingly difficult to bring the question of church character to any such practical resolution; but no such difficulty can be allowed to hold in the case here brought into view; unless, indeed, we choose to give up all faith in the divine constitution of the Church, under any view, which would be virtually to dismiss the whole question from the start, as one of no meaning or worth. If the Church be of any force at all outwardly, as an object of faith and trust, and if schism in the old ecclesiastical sense, is to be regarded as still possible, in any shape, it must be plain that such self-constituted upstart bodies as the Albright Brethren, the followers of John Winebrenner, &c., have no right

or title whatever to be recognized as any part of the heavenly corporation. According to its own account of itself, (Rupp's Hist. of Rel. Denom. 2nd edition p. 274ff.) the Sect of the Albrights, (Albrechts-leute,) took its rise about the year 1800, not quite fifty years ago, "in one of the middle free States of America." One Jacob Albrecht, an illiterate man, of obscure origin and connections, became awakened to a sense of his sinful state, and "after a long and very severe struggle, received at last, by faith in the Son of God, the remission of his sins and the spirit of adoption." Gradually he gained notoriety as an exhorter, made disciples, and finally "after a very severe conflict respecting his call to the ministry, commenced travelling as a preacher; in which vocation we are told, God richly blessed his labors, by giving him many souls for his hire. "Having now continually a feeling and tender regard for the Germans of this country, as among them true Christianity was at that time at a very low ebb, and almost extirpated, he united himself in the year 1800, with a number of persons, who by his preaching had been awakened and converted to God, into a Christian society. This is the origin of the Evangelical Association. In the year 1803, this society resolved upon introducing and instituting among and for themselves, an ecclesiastical regulation. Jacob Albright was therefore elected as the presiding elder among them, and duly confirmed by the other preachers, and by their laying on of hands ordained, so as to authorize him to perform all transactions that are necessary for a Christian society, and becoming to an evangelical preacher. They unanimously chose the sacred Scriptures for their guide, &c." How is it possible to recognize such a body, self-originated within the last half century in a corner of Pennsylvania, as part and parcel of the Holy Catholic Church, the mystical one and universal Communion of the Creed, which started in Christ eighteen centuries ago, and against which, we are told, that the gates of hell can never prevail! If Jacob Albright had a right to originate a new church in this way, every pious Tom, Dick and Harry in the land, has a right to do the same thing, and to make himself also, in like style, the fountain and source of a new ministry—provided, only, he can find a few simple disciples to submit themselves to his ghostly authority, and

lay their hands upon him afterwards in confirmation of his commission. Thus in the end, each Christian family might set up for the dignity of a separate Christian denomination, and have its own ministry and sacraments in its own way. It is worse than idle, in any such view, to pretend any faith in the Church at all, as a divine historical institution. We believe in the universal priesthood of Christians, as we believe also in their universal kingdom; but for this very reason, we have no faith in the idea of a particularistic atomistic exercise of any such high function in either case. The priestly power starts in Christ, and from him passes over to his body the Church, to be exercised from its life as a whole, through organs created for this purpose, and not to be snatched away by profane hands for the use of any and every sect, which may take it into its head to set up a separate priesthood and kingdom in its own name. Is it asked then, how we are to justify the Reformation, and vindicate the validity of our Protestant ministry? The answer is short. Not by any outward succession in the case of the ministry, nakedly and separately considered; but certainly not by any theory either, which overthrows the necessity of a true historical succession in the life of the Church, and makes it competent for any body of Christians, under any circumstances, to start an entirely new church. It is the life of the Church as such, the life of the Church as an organic historical whole, which alone can fully legitimate and clothe with power the needful organs of this life, and their necessary functions. If then we must admit some disturbance in the ordinary law of ministerial succession at the Reformation, it does not follow at once that the succession itself for this reason fell to the ground; the true succession lay in the life of the Church as a whole; and if it can be shown that *this* gave birth to the Reformation, it must be allowed to have been sufficient at the same time to make good, in the way of inward reproductive force, any *unavoidable* defect that was found to attend, in this revolution, the outward genealogy of the Protestant ministry. After all, it is the Church, the presence of Christ's life in his Body, which supports the true line of the ministry, and not the line of the ministry that upholds mechanically the being and authority of the Church. On this broad principle, we justify the Reforma-

tion ; It was the product of the old Catholic Church itself ; the central consciousness of the Christian world had been struggling towards it for centuries before ; it was, in the end, the organic outburst plainly of the life of Christianity, as an objective historical whole, which simply laid hold of the Reformers, and brought itself to pass by them as its organs, without any calculation of their own. In no other view can it be successfully defended ; and on this principle, accordingly, we find no difficulty in distinguishing between it and all minor religious revolutions and secessions, that seek to shelter and excuse themselves under its august shadow. Let them show a like necessity for their appearance, in the organic life of the Church as a whole. What a parody on every such imagination, is presented to us in the free and independent rise of the *Evangelische Gemeinschaft*, the self-unchurching brotherhood of Jacob Albright ! Was it the power of Christianity, in its universal organic life, that gave birth to *this* mushroom ? That would be indeed the mountain laboring to produce a mouse. Did the enigma of centuries and ages, which had lain like a heavy burden on the heart of the Church before, come to its magnificent solution finally in this small spiritual phenomenon, the mission of such a man, the creation of such a sect ! There is absurdity in the very thought. The thing rose in a corner ; it had no historical necessity ; it came no one can tell whence, and so it is fast going also, no one can tell whither. There is no room for any rational comparison here with the Reformation ; and so not the least reason for fearing that the honor of this great interest may be brought into jeopardy, by allowing the full truth to be both spoken and acted in so plain a case. Luther was the organ of the Church ; Jacob Albright was the subject of mere private fancy and caprice. No deep, general force, the accumulated world-sense of ages, came to its uncontrollable and necessary outbreak in his person. He had no call to form a religious denomination. His sect is no birth of the Church, but a schismatic denial of its objective historical authority from beginning to end.

In these circumstances, the Classis had no right to shrink from the solemn decision it has been called to make ; as it should have no wish either, now that it is made, to conceal or disguise its true

• purport and sense. The action took place, without haste or passion, under the most calm conviction of duty, and in full view of the critical responsibilities involved in it on all sides. In no other way, could true Christian fidelity have been shown towards the Albright Brethren themselves. We owe it to the souls of those who are led away by this delusion, to warn them plainly of their danger. The Church is bound moreover by duty to her own children, not to keep silence in regard to so great an interest. If she have no faith in herself, no power to condemn and abhor schism in any quarter, how can we expect those who are growing up in her bosom, to place any true value on their birthright, or to make any account of her authority? We are sorrowfully and solemnly persuaded, that the unfaithfulness of the Church just here, forms one of the greatest evils under which the Christian world is made to suffer at the present time. A sound church faith, on the part of the Church herself, by which she may be enabled firmly to assert her own *divine* prerogative over against all merely human associations or sects, is necessary to authenticate fully her commission itself, and forms at the same time, an indispensable element in the power of the Christian salvation, which is administered by her hands.

• No less important, as regards right church feeling, was the general ground taken by the Classis on the subject of what is called the *system of the catechism*, as it stood in the original practice of the Church. It is generally known, that this had been widely supplanted a few years since, by another system altogether, which for the sake of a name, may be denominated the *method of the anxious bench*; under the influence of which, even the excellent institution of *confirmation* itself, was in danger of losing altogether its meaning and credit. Happily, this tendency has received a check, and it is now common, on all sides, to honor the Catechism again, and observe at least the form of Confirmation. It would be a great mistake, however, to suppose all done here which the case requires, by a mere outward transition from the use of the anxious bench to the use of the catechism. All turns at last on distinguishing properly between the inward life and genius of the two systems, which these shibboleths are employed thus outwardly to define. It is quite possible to put away the

bench, and bring in the catechism, and still remain bound altogether to the theory of religion, of which the first only, and not the second, is the natural sign and type. The great thing needed, is some true insight into the difference that exists between the two schemes of religion which underlie the different tendencies in question, and an inward return thus, with love and faith, to the "old paths" from which the practice of the Church has so widely swerved. Much was gained in this way, at the last meeting of the Mercersburg Classis, by means of resolutions and discussions brought to bear from various sides on this point. It was encouraging here also, to find, that on a fair understanding of the questions at issue, the judgment of the body, and especially the instinctive sound feeling of the elders *always*, went fully in favor of the old church spirit, and in opposition to the foreign way of thinking, which has been seeking to drive it from its place. It was felt that to shake off the power of that foreign system effectually, something more is necessary than to change a few outward forms, and a few watchword phrases for the lips. The result of all, we trust, has been a general clearer apprehension than before, of the true design and significance of the old Reformed practice; its dependence on the idea of the Church, as a divine organization; its relation to the conception of sacramental grace; a more solemn sense of the real membership of baptized children in Christ's kingdom; and of the duty and privilege of treating and training them accordingly; a much larger faith in the high import of educational religion, the use of the catechism, as a direct preparation for the second sacrament, and the true solemnity of Confirmation as the necessary and proper completion of the holy sacrament of baptism. All this implies, of course, a great deal more than a polite toleration simply of the church system, in the way of appendage only to its unchurchly opposite. That may be taken as the hardest fate of all for this system, when men who have no power to understand it at all, but are completely saturated with the other scheme, pretend, notwithstanding, to tack it externally to their own favorite theory, in the way of compliment merely and condescension. How far this wrong has been carried in our own church, and more still a great deal in the Lutheran, need not here be said.

N.