

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

NO. 18.—OCTOBER, 1891.

I. CALVINISM AND CONFESSIONAL REVISION.¹

OUR brethren in America cannot sufficiently realize to what an extent they have excited the interest of the Dutch Calvinists by their efforts to reach a revision of their ecclesiastical symbols. There are three causes to which this interest is due. First of all, the remembrance of the ever-memorable fact that the first Reformed Christians to set foot on American soil embarked for the New World from the Netherlands. On this account, Dutch Calvinists still feel a most intimate bond of sympathy with the Reformed in America, and thank God for each token of brotherly affection by which the latter country has so repeatedly strengthened this deep-rooted attachment. In the second place, the Dutch Calvinists have hailed with great enthusiasm the development of American church-life, as called forth by the principle of a *Free Church*, and emulate their brethren in America in their strenuous efforts to make this only true principle victorious in the Old World as well. To which must be thirdly added, that the Dutch Calvinists fully share the conviction of their American brethren, that the symbols of the sixteenth century were the product of a battle of spirits somewhat different from that in which the church is engaged at present, and cannot, consequently, inspire us with the same enthusiasm with which they stirred the race of our fathers. For such reasons, we feel ourselves closely allied with

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IV. GOD'S PROBLEM FOR THE SOUTH.

GOD is the greatest of all problem makers. Neither nature nor metaphysics nor grace contains a single problem that is not his by origination and proposal. The mystery of the milky way or the doctrine of perception or the method of reconciliation between God and man are not human. Since no human mind has ever fully understood them, it is but just to infer that they are super-human in origin. When God sets a problem before the human mind he usually indicates general principles by which it is to be solved. He never ciphers out the details for any man. God told Moses to go lead his people out of Egypt. "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. (Ex. iii. 10.) When Moses had insisted upon Jehovah's telling him something about the details of the work, he was at last asked, "What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. Cast it on the ground. He cast it on the ground and it became a serpent, and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said into Moses: Put forth thine hand and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand and caught it and it became a rod in his hand; that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers hath appeared unto thee." (Ex. iv. 3-5.) Moses' problem was *to lead out the people*; his method of solution was to be *miracles*. Jesus stood in the midst of his disheartened disciples on the mount in Galilee, and gave them the greatest problem ever committed to human head, heart and hand. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Such a problem had never been given to men in the past history of the church; it has not been modified one jot or one tittle since its first announcement. It was original, startling, overwhelming. It gave the world a new estimate of the power of the human soul, that it could embrace with loving solicitude the entire human family. The problem carried within its depths its own solution as a granite mass bearing its imbedded dynamite. The problem was *Go*;

its solution lay in one word—*preach*. The problem is now before us. It is divine; so is its solution. The church must, and, by God's good grace, will work it out.

In working it out, the church in the United States has some peculiar conditions to meet. It is better equipped in brains, in money, in spirituality than ever in its history. More people are easily accessible than ever before. Cries for the preached word come from every quarter of our own country and in tumultuous mobs beneath our windows alarm our sleeping consciences. Mute appeals of unnumbered millions of heathen call us irresistibly to their help. The Syro-Phœnician woman in the coasts of Tyre begs for crumbs from the spiritual feast that our Lord spreads before us. Poor Lazarus, outcast, sore-covered, dog-licked, lies at our door piteously pleading, "Give, or I die!" Let us attend to this cry from Lazarus for a little while. We'll not stop to speak of the Chinaman, for he is removed from us by law, nor the Indian, who is fast being removed by powder, rascality, and liquor. Our problem in the South is how to reach the negro with the Gospel. It may be solved perhaps by first reaching the *white man*. For until his brain is cleared and his conscience aroused, very little can be done. What are the conditions of the problem? 1. Many millions of white and black people live in the same territory. 2. The whites once owned the blacks. 3. The whites are vastly in the majority, have indefinitely more money, education, and spirituality. 4. Against the will of the intelligent majority, the minority was freed. 5. By law both black and white are equal citizens of the same government. 6. Powerful influences have for years been at work causing ill-will between the two races. The question that we have to answer is, Can these two races live in peace on the same soil as equal citizens of the same government? If so, how?

What does history say about it? Before the general diffusion of Christianity when two alien races came into contact, one or the other was exterminated or enslaved. Rome and Carthage fought until it was written *Delenda est Carthago*. But what lesson do the records of nations since our Lord's ascension *even down to the year 1891* teach us? An elaborate experiment was made in Spain. But the Moors were expelled in spite of their superior science and

art. Spain and Portugal came into contact with the natives of Mexico and South America only to enslave and destroy them. The Puritan and the cavalier met the proud red man on his own soil and have killed him until only a small remnant remains to build the camp-fire and recall the deeds of ancient braves, with no hope for the future except his ration of blue beef and abuse. Slav and Hebrew, though not even of different races, cannot live together unless the Jew will submit to oppression nearly as galling as slavery. What says history? She says emphatically that the experiment that we are making in this country is a crime against humanity—that either slavery or death must be its end.

What says the Constitution of the United States? Before the adoption of Article XIII. of the amendments of the Constitution abolishing slavery, its existence had been simply ignored by that immortal document. Perhaps no greater experiment in making laws has ever been attempted than the adoption of the last three amendments, making citizens out of slaves up to that time kept ignorant by law. Questions as to the wisdom of their enactment or perpetuation are purely theoretical. They are there, and nothing short of a revolution can remove them. What does the Constitution, our highest and most unchanging law, say about these two races living together? It simply says to all alike, "You shall live together in peace!" This may not be the voice of conscience, but it is the fiat of authority. The Constitution therefore says to us, say we yea or say we nay, "I know that history declares it can't be done, but my voice is louder and my arm is stronger than history. Let there be peace!" The Constitution sought to create peace and interject it between the discordant and warring elements of society. As loyal citizens of our land and as staunch defenders of the Constitution, we must *obey the law*.

What says the Gospel of God? "As ye would that men should do to you do ye even so to them likewise." "Follow peace with all men." "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." We are perhaps too prone to apply these wholesome precepts to the lives of others, forgetting for the time their direct bearing upon our own consciences and lives. It is to no purpose that we say that we once did our religious duty to the negroes. Satisfying

reflections on our past performances may soothe us into present neglect. Energetic resolutions to do our duty in the future may be a subtly delusive way of calming the cryings of an urgent conscience to-day. A shifting of responsibility that God has laid, is impossible, for the only method of discharging responsibility to God is by doing the duties demanded.

A condition of society exists to-day in the South the like of which has never before been seen. Ignorance and intelligence, poverty and plenty, have always existed side by side everywhere. But when in the history of the ages has a people who were never in bondage to any man, conferred on an alien race, once their slaves, the equal legal rights and privileges which they themselves have created and enjoy?

When we have set aside all political considerations and social fears, we find that the essence of the whole matter lies in the question of, How shall two men, equal before the law, behave towards one another? History is eloquent with illustrations, and the Constitution speaks with the voice of authority. But to consider this question, neither history nor the Constitution is sufficient. For the Christian, there is but one code of morals, but one yard-stick for measuring this cloth, but one voice—and that of law and love united—that has inherently the power of solution. Political expedients are, at best, mere temporary aids. The law is useful as an educator, but it has no power of producing in its own subjects sympathetic obedience. We must have a solvent more permanent than party platforms, more powerful than all law. Something is needed to arouse the conscience, engage the heart, and direct intelligent effort. There are three persons concerned in this matter—the white man, the negro and Almighty God. The white man knows his weakness, the negro is expectant, and, unless the Lord show the strength of his right arm, the pessimism taught us by history and aggravated by the demands of an unfailing law, will soon change to discord and open strife. A learned divine once said, “Unless the gospel solve this matter, then it will be *bang! bang!*” Says the apostle “I can do all things in him that strengthens (*en-dynamites*) me.” What says the gospel: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel.” “For it is the power of God unto

salvation to every one that believeth"—"Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." So long as we walk in such light as that, there is no pessimism, not even a shade of doubt.

Again, says this same gospel, 1 Thess. ii. 3, 4, For our exhortation is not of error nor of uncleanness, nor in guile; but even as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which proveth our hearts. That is, we were made by Christ, at his ascension, trustees of his Gospel, for the benefit of all mankind. Shall not this stir up our consciences? A trustee must be *faithful*. Have we, as individuals, or as a church of Jesus Christ, done our duty to the negroes? At the judgment seat of Christ it will be too late to attempt an answer. It is called to-day. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," said Jesus, "because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Man can have no higher duty, he can enjoy no more sanctifying privilege than to do the works and speak the words of God to men everywhere. Is there a finer field in our South-land for preaching Christ than is afforded by the negroes? Humble, bound by Satan in chains of lust, enslaved to sin, blinded by the god of this world, ignorant of the time of God's calling—amongst such, surely ought the gospel to be preached.

The Southern Presbyterian Church is just entering upon the great evangelistic period of its history. For the coming of this time God has been patiently preparing us. He has endowed us with a pure doctrine and an adaptable polity. He has enlarged our borders. He has filled our barns with plenty. He has unstopped our ears to the cry of the heathen. He has opened our eyes to the destitution at home. He has been perfecting us by the sufferings of persecution, dissension and discord from within and from without. Uniform and unified we stand before him to-day. In his own hand-writing he gives us our problems. The great home-problem is how to evangelize our colored fellow-citizens, who are our friends and neighbors. Surely, God's people will not halt now.

To halt will be to retreat. With heart and head and hand, intelligently, wisely, humbly, patiently, cheerfully, sympathetically, for God's own glory, let us now do our whole duty *to the negro*. Let North, East and West be patient and charitable, while aiding us to adapt the Gospel to these hitherto untried conditions. Let all the people consciously introduce God into this mighty problem. It will soon be solved then, and, until then, *never*.

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Tuscaloosa, Alabama, September 4, 1891.