

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I.

THE REVISED CONFESSION.

THE Northern Presbyterians have published their Revised Confession of Faith, and it is proper for other Presbyterians, not of that communion, to review the changes which have been made, with a view to ascertaining whether they are alterations in the mere superficialities or in the substantive body of the Calvinistic system. The hilarity with which the revision has been received by such diluted Calvinists as the Cumberland Presbyterians, together with the promptness and enthusiasm with which they offered organic union on the basis of these changes, awakens apprehension, and calls for cautious examination.

An inventory of the changes which have been made will show that the Northern Presbyterians have, (1) explained their former doctrine of Predestination, (2) interpreted their doctrine of the salvation of Dead Infants, (3) restated their doctrine of works done by unregenerate persons, (4) amended their doctrine of Oaths, (5) withdrawn their charge that the Pope of Rome was Antichrist, (6) added a new chapter on the Holy Spirit, (7) and added a new chapter on the Love of God, and Missions.

We are not going to take up these points in detail, but elect, for animadversion, the changes which seem to affect the integrity of the Calvinistic system.

We quote now the new language which is the basis of our fault-finding:

II.

ATHANASIUS.

EARLY LIFE.

IN the long ago, a number of children were playing on the smooth, sandy beach that separates between the city of Alexandria and the sea. One suggested that they play church; all heartily agreed, and elected one of the number bishop. The newly made bishop went through the service with becoming gravity, catechising the other children, and then baptizing them in the sea.

In a house overlooking this part of the beach, the Bishop of Alexandria had that day assembled a number of his clergy for conference. Happening to look out of the window, he saw the children engaged in their innocent mockery. Sending one of the clergy for them, he soon had the children before him. At first the children were frightened, but the good bishop soon quieted their apprehensions, and they freely confessed that they had been imitating the rites of the church. The strange part of the story is that the bishop and his clergy, after considering the matter, concluded that the baptisms, performed in sport, were nevertheless valid, and so anointed and confirmed the children as communicants of the church. The name of the boy-bishop was Athanasius.

This is the first mention that either history or tradition makes of a name destined to become illustrious beyond almost all other names of early church history. We do not know the names of this boy's parents, nor the date of his birth, nor even the race to which he belonged, whether Greek or Coptic. The name indicates that his parents were Greek, and the fact that at an early period he was familiar with the rites of the church would indicate that he was reared in a Christian home. It was fortunate for him that he was born in Alexandria, for that city was especially celebrated for its schools, and the culture of its people. It was

here that the first great Christian school came into being, developing naturally out of the catechetical instruction which was given to those who came out of heathenism into the Christian Church. Before the days of Athanasius, this school had attained to such a position as to give a good training in philosophy and theology, and had numbered among its teachers such names as Pantenus, Clemens and Origen. We know nothing of the school days of Athanasius, but his writings reveal the fact that in addition to theological instruction, he had enjoyed the benefit of a liberal course in the Greek classics. He quotes from the poets and philosophers. It is said that his education was presided over by the same bishop who had taken an interest in his boyish sports. At any rate this bishop had the pleasure of ordaining him as deacon, and of having him after that in constant attendance on his person. No doubt this association had much to do in shaping the career of the younger man.

THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY.

We cannot understand the life of Athanasius without understanding the Arian controversy, for his whole public life was given to the championship of one side of this controversy. Chiefly what he did and what he suffered grew out of this. The controversy was precipitated by Arius, a presbyter of the church of Alexandria. He was a man of vigorous and restless mind, strong will and ascetic piety. He propounded the view that Christ, being begotten of the Father, could not be coeternal with the Father; that he must have had a beginning, and that he must be placed in the category of creatures. Arius exalted Jesus above all other creatures, and taught that through him God made all other creatures. He taught that Christ was not of the same substance with the Father, but was created by the will of the Father out of that which before did not exist. While the church at this time had no carefully defined views of Christ's relation to the Father, yet it was the general doctrine of the church that Christ had existed eternally, and that he was consubstantial with the Father. These views of Arius were, therefore, very offensive to the Bishop of Alexandria, and to a large part of his clergy. He

tried to get Arius to modify or recant them, and failing in this, he called a council of Egyptian bishops in 321, and deposed and excommunicated Arius as a heretic. But Arius was not without a following. He had commended his views to many persons of influence, and by his winning address had attached to himself quite a circle of devoted friends, including many noble ladies. Excommunication did not end, but only embittered and enlarged the controversy. When Arius was driven from Alexandria, he travelled through Syria and Asia Minor disseminating his views. Some bishops of eminence gave him sympathy. Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, wrote circular letters, announcing his deposition, and warning against him. Soon a perfect conflagration of theological strife was sweeping over all the Eastern provinces of the church. "Bishop rose against bishop, and province against province." It is impossible for us to conceive the eager, and even fierce, avidity with which the acute Greeks entered into the controversy. "Sailors, millers and travellers sang the disputed doctrines at their occupations, or on their journeys; every corner, every alley of the city (this is said afterwards of Constantinople, but must have been still more true of Alexandria) was full of these discussions—the streets, the market places, the drapers, the money changers, the victuallers. Ask a man, how many oboli; he answers by dogmatizing on generated and ungenerated being. Inquire the price of bread, and you are told, the Son is subordinate to the Father. Ask if the bath is ready, and you are told, the Son arose out of nothing." It so happened that just at this time Constantine, the first Christian emperor, had put down all political rivals, and had extended his sceptre over the undivided empire. He was disturbed by this great church quarrel, and tried to stop it by negotiations with the principal parties. This method failing, he called a council.

THE COUNCIL OF NICEA.

This was the first œcumenical council. Not till this time was such a council practicable, for two reasons: the pagan emperors would not have permitted it; had they done so, the bishops could not have borne the expense. But when Constantine summoned the

bishops from all over the church to meet at Nicea, he ordered the public conveyances to be put at their disposal, and their expenses, both while travelling and while in attendance on the council, to be paid from the public treasury. The number of bishops attending has been variously stated, the later historians generally agreeing on the number 318. Each bishop was instructed to bring a presbyter, and might be attended by three servants. Many things conspired to make this council memorable. It was the first council called by an emperor, the first to represent the whole church, the first to frame a creed for the whole church, and the first to use the civil power for enforcing its decrees. Nicea was only twenty miles distant from Nicomedia, one of the royal residences. Constantine himself attended the council, and we are told that the "moment his approach was announced by a given signal, the bishops all rose from their seats, and the emperor appeared like a heavenly messenger of God, covered with gold and gems, a glorious presence, very tall and slender, full of beauty, strength and majesty. With this external adornment he united the spiritual ornament of the fear of God, modesty and humility, which could be seen in his downcast eyes, his blushing face, the motion of his body and his walk. When he reached the golden throne prepared for him, he stopped and sat not down till the bishops gave him the sign. And after him they all resumed their seats." Constantine professed to have nothing to do with settling the doctrines of the church. He was there to show his interest, and to urge them to bring their contentions to a speedy end, and thus restore peace to the distracted church. He found it easier to set their tongues to wagging than to get them to wag in harmony. Charles the Fifth spent his last days in trying to regulate a number of clocks so as to make them run exactly together. The task was too much for him. But it was child's play compared to the task of Constantine in trying to make three hundred and eighteen theological tongues keep perfect time and tune. They wrangled on and on for weary weeks, and finally framed a statement which, under pressure of imperial influence, all but two of the bishops were induced to sign. It expressed the doctrine concerning the Son's relation to the Father which is still

counted orthodox. Along with this was the condemnation of Arius and his friends who stood by him. Athanasius, though a very young man, and holding only the rank of a deacon, had a greater influence probably in shaping the conclusions of the council than any other one man in it. He ascribed the chief influence to Hosius, Bishop of Cordova, Spain, who was an intimate friend and confidential adviser of Constantine. But from this council dates the beginning of Athanasius' career as leader of the orthodox party, and his ascendancy may be gathered from the fact that against him were directed the fiercest assaults of the enemies of the Nicene faith.

RELATION OF THE EMPEROR TO THE CHURCH.

We must pause to note the relation of the emperor to the church. As already intimated, Constantine's professed relation was one thing, his real relation another. He called himself "Bishop in Externals," and said he would make it his business merely to execute the decrees promulgated by the bishops. Of course, even such a relation is abhorrent to our ideas. In accordance with this notion, he banished Arius and his friends, and also sent the two bishops who refused to sign the Nicene Creed into exile. It was a most regrettable precedent for the first Christian emperor to set. Others will follow his example, and it means the crushing out of religious liberty, liberty of dissent by the minority. All must think with the majority, or suffer civil pains and penalties for venturing to differ. This policy was inconsistent with the noble edict which he and Licinius had jointly issued before Christianity became the dominant power. That edict declared for "the sacred rights of conscience." Alas! neither the emperor nor the church whose interests he sought to guide knew the meaning of the sacred rights of conscience. The majority in the Nicene Council were perfectly willing to have their decrees executed by the emperor. They thought it a happy omen for the church that one sat on the throne of the Cæsars who felt a sufficient zeal for the truth to suppress with a strong hand those who dared to oppose it. They seem not to have considered that

the emperor might not always be on the side of the truth, and that in such case he might turn his hand against its friends.

Moreover, Constantine and his successors went very much further than he claimed the right to go. Instead of waiting for the bishops to settle doctrinal questions, they took a hand and used their power unsparingly to have their views of doctrine prevail in the councils. It is not too much to say that councils usually went their way, and their way was often determined by political considerations. It seemed, indeed, a sure method to secure unity in the church, to call a council, let the majority decide and then have the emperor constrain the minority either to accept the decision, or to go into exile. But unfortunately for the method, emperors sometimes changed their minds; and they always died sooner or later, generally sooner; and their successors were liable to take the other side. Thus it came to pass that heresy had the support of imperial power about as frequently as orthodoxy, and it was just as effectual on the one side as the other. To-day heretics were paying the penalty of their errors; to-morrow the champions of orthodoxy were suffering martyrdom for the truth. It was a sad day for the church when Constantine took it upon himself to help regulate the affairs of the kingdom of Christ; a sad day when the servants of Christ availed themselves of his help. It was the beginning of an unholy and unhappy mixing of the things of Cæsar and the things of God, which through long, long centuries converted the church into a battlefield on which fierce and fiendish passions displayed themselves, and wrought havoc with human life by means of tumults, tortures and flame. How the Saviour's wisdom has been justified, "Render, therefore, unto Cæsar," etc.

PERSECUTIONS OF ATHANASIUS.

The Council of Nicea determined the ultimate doctrine of the church, but it by no means put an end to the controversy. Those who signed the creed under compulsion began at once a warfare of intrigue. They began to devise all manner of accusations against Athanasius, who had become Bishop of Alexandria in 328. Among other less atrocious crimes, they accused him of

murder. Some of his enemies exhibited a hand which they said had belonged to an Egyptian bishop, by name Arsenius, whom Athanasius had slain, and whose dissevered hand he had used in the practice of magical arts. They finally prevailed on Constantine to appoint a council, and to summon Athanasius before it. This council was held at Tyre by the bishops who were on their way to dedicate a splendid church which the emperor had built in Jerusalem. Athanasius had got on track of Arsenius, whom he was accused of murdering, and who had been kept in a place of concealment. He was able to lay his hands on him, and to have him present at Tyre when his trial was called before the council. When the accusation of murder was undergoing investigation and the hand was exhibited in proof, Athanasius had Arsenius brought in, muffled in a cloak. Throwing back the cloak from his face, he asked the judges if they recognized the man. Receiving an affirmative answer, he then threw back one corner of the cloak, revealing his right hand, then the other corner, revealing his left hand, and then asked, "Will you please tell me from what part of his body this severed hand could have been cut?" This question was a poser. Of course, the charge of murder had to be dropped; but they had other charges, and it became evident that by fair or foul means they were bent on destroying the object of their malice. Athanasius watched his chances, and stole away from the council. He boarded a vessel, and went to Constantinople to appeal to the emperor for justice. The council proceeded to depose and condemn him. Then they sent deputies to Constantinople to have the emperor execute their sentence. Greatly were they surprised to be confronted with their intended victim. But they were ready with other accusations. One of these touched Constantine in a tender place. They said that Athanasius had interfered to prevent the shipment of the usual corn supplies from Egypt to Constantinople. It is hardly conceivable that the emperor should have believed this, but he had by this time modified his theological views, and so he made this accusation a pretext for confirming the sentence passed at Tyre, and banished Athanasius to Trier, in Gaul. It is just ten years since the Council of Nicea, where the first Christian emperor used for the

first time the imperial power to secure the victory of orthodoxy; and here is the first Christian emperor using the same imperial power to silence the great champion of orthodoxy. Surely, "it is better to trust the Lord than to put confidence in princes." Constantine had already recalled Arius, and had ordered that he be restored to the communion of the church. The day was set for this ceremony, and it was not carried out, solely because of the sudden death of the noted heretic. What a commentary on the policy of royal interference in the affairs of the church!

I shall not follow in detail the fortunes of Athanasius, but hastily sketch the principal incidents of his remarkable career. When he reached the city to which he had been banished, he found there the eldest son and namesake of Constantine. It is much to the credit of this young prince that he conceived a strong liking and a great admiration for the persecuted bishop. When the emperor died in 337, the empire was divided between his three sons. To Constantine II. were allotted Gaul and part of Africa. He at once restored Athanasius to his see, amid the rejoicings of the people, the clergy especially "esteeming that the happiest day of their lives." His stay, however, was short, lasting only one year, four months and twenty-four days. Constantius, the second son of Constantine the Great, to whom the government of the East had fallen, exercised jurisdiction over Egypt. He was an Arian, and all the piety he had was concentrated in his zeal for this party. The enemies of Athanasius, now enjoying imperial favor, soon devised a way to oust him from his position. Finding his life endangered, he escaped from Alexandria, and went to Rome. There Julius, Bishop of Rome, received him kindly, gathered a council of Italian bishops, investigated the charges against him, and pronounced him innocent. But the time had not yet come when the Bishop of Rome could speak with a voice which all Christendom must obey. Athanasius spent three years in Rome, during which time he enjoyed the friendship of Constans, the youngest son of Constantine the Great, who ruled in the West. This young emperor, like his eldest brother, heartily espoused the cause of Athanasius. He called a council at Sardica, which acquitted him of all the charges

preferred against him, and lifted the sentence which had rested on him since the Council of Tyre. Then Constans wrote to his brother in the East requesting the recall of Athanasius, and intimating that a refusal would be construed as a *casus belli*. Constantius yielded, recalled Athanasius, and sent him back to Alexandria with letters of commendation from his own hand. As the returning bishop approached Alexandria, the citizens of all ranks and classes poured out for miles along the road to meet him, and escorted him back through the gates with the wildest demonstrations of joy. Never did conqueror returning from victorious battle receive a more generous ovation. He was now forty-eight years old, and for nearly ten years he remained peacefully pursuing the labors of his high office. This has been called the "golden decade" of his life, and was the longest season of quiet he ever enjoyed. But Constans was assassinated, his eldest brother Constantine had long since been killed in battle, and Constantius, the zealous Arian, was now left sole emperor. He hated Athanasius with a peculiarly bitter hatred; and it was not long until the prefect, whom he had appointed over Egypt, with a strong band of soldiers, broke into the church where Athanasius and a large congregation were worshipping. In the tumult that ensued, Athanasius was carried out through a back door by his friends, more dead than alive, and concealed from his enemies. For six years he was hidden away, no one knows where, but presumably among the monks in the Nitrian desert, or far up the Nile, in the neighborhood of Thebes. In 361, Constantius was succeeded in the throne by Julian the Apostate. He was the avowed enemy of all the bishops; but one of his first acts was to recall all the bishops whom Constantius had banished, thinking thereby to throw the churches into utmost confusion. But when Athanasius returned, he found the see vacant, and was gladly welcomed once again by his people. Julian looked upon his growing influence with an evil eye, and soon wrote to the church of Alexandria that in inviting Athanasius to return, he did not mean to restore him to his bishopric, and he ordered Athanasius into exile again. The people gathered about him, bemoaning their loss. Athanasius said, as he prepared to take his leave, "Be

of good heart; it is a little cloud, and will soon pass away." These words were prophetic. Julian's reign lasted less than two years. He was succeeded by Jovian, who wrote a letter to Athanasius, which is a beautiful tribute to his character, and in which the emperor invites him back to his church. Only eight months passed by, and Jovian was dead. Then the empire was divided between Valentinian and Valens, the latter having the East, and therefore swaying his scepter over Egypt. Indifferent at first to theological controversies, he soon fell under the influence of the Arians. This meant further trouble for Athanasius. Valens issued an edict commanding him to vacate his see, and to take himself beyond the borders of Egypt. This was his fifth exile; it was very brief, and proved to be his last. Valens found that it was bad policy to continue the persecution against the man whom all Egypt venerated, so he recalled him. Athanasius had yet seven years to live. He filled these years with noble efforts to heal the long and disastrous contentions, and to bring the whole church to acquiesce in the creed of Nicea. He showed a conciliatory spirit, and by judicious concessions, which involved no sacrifice of fundamental truth, he did much to win for the doctrines, in behalf of which he had suffered so much, a substantial and permanent victory. This was the crowning achievement of his life, and by it, in the language of Jerome, "he snatched the whole world from the jaws of Satan." He was busy to the last, and died in the seventy-fifth year of his age, having been Bishop of Alexandria forty-five years, twenty of which he spent in exile.

Many things indicate the rare greatness of the man. He was but twenty-seven years of age at the Nicene Council, where he mounted at once to a position of leadership, and carried the day against the most eminent men of that age, such as the learned Eusebius of Cæsarea, and the able statesman and bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia. He was barely of canonical age when he was elected Bishop of Alexandria, the most commanding bishopric at that period in the whole church, not excepting Rome. From the first his influence was dominant over all Egypt, its people, its clergy, and the monks that occupied its distant solitudes. He

lived through the reigns of five emperors, and was persecuted by all these except Jovian, whose reign lasted but eight months. While the intrigues of his theological adversaries had much to do with bringing upon him these persecutions, yet there is reason to believe that jealousy of his political power also had much to do with it. Certain it is that Magnentius, the murderer of Constans, who attempted to seize the throne which his crime made vacant, sent a deputation to Athanasius to secure through him the help of Egypt. Constantius, in alarm, pleaded piteously with him to remain loyal to him, and promised in return a continuance of his royal favor. But when the danger was over Constantius, moved evidently by jealousy of Athanasius' commanding influence, played into the hands of his enemies and drove him with violence from his church. The very fact that the Arians, all over the empire, made him the center of their assaults, attests his supremacy. They felt that while Athanasius could lift his voice in opposition their victory would be neither complete nor secure, and consequently they left no stone unturned to silence that voice forever. Gibbon says he was better fitted to rule an empire than any of the degenerate sons of Constantine.

AN ESTIMATE OF HIS CHARACTER.

What were the elements of his greatness? Vigor of intellect and elevation of character. He is not to be classed among the great scholars, or the great theologians of the church. What he might have achieved in these directions, had the circumstances of his life been different, we cannot say. But as a matter of fact, the greatness of his intellect is to be seen in his ability to discern the proportion of things, the relative importance of truths, to grasp that which is fundamental, disentangle it from metaphysical perplexities, and give it its proper dominating position. He saw more clearly, he felt more profoundly than any of his contemporaries the absolute necessity of vindicating to the last jot and tittle the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. He was not obstinate from arrogance, for he gave conclusive evidence of rare humility; he was not contentious because he loved strife, but

for a half century he lived in the midst of violent controversy, and frequently put life in peril, simply and solely because he saw in the doctrine of Christ's unqualified divinity the very hinge on which the whole scheme of redemption hung. He wrote to the bishops of Egypt, "We are contending for our all." No arguments could mislead him, no sophistries could veil the truth from his eyes. His gaze was steady and penetrating, his grasp of principle firm and unwavering.

Of course, this clearness of vision would not have made him great had it not been associated with a courage which nothing could daunt, and a steadfast loyalty to conviction which nothing could shake. If ever courage and firmness were put to the test, his were. Councils, embodying the highest learning of the age, met and condemned his views, and invoked upon him the curse of God. Emperors banished him time and again, chased him from place to place, and set a reward on his head. At one time all the bishops, in all parts of the empire, were persuaded or coerced into pronouncing against him. Thus the phrase originated, "*Athanasius contra mundum*"—Athanasius against the world. But with all this pressure bearing on him he yielded not an inch. We admire Luther, and justly admire his sublime obstinacy, as he stands before the brilliant and august Diet at Worms, refusing to recant, "Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen." Athanasius furnishes an example of heroism equally sublime. They were kindred spirits, inspired from the same source. Each was called to bear, like fabled Atlas, the weight of a world. Each, sustained by a courageous faith, than which nothing could be grander, bore it without staggering. What would have become of the Reformation had Luther given way? Apparently it would have died in its birth throes. What would have become of the early church had Athanasius given way? Apparently it would have slipped from its moorings, and drifted out on the sea of error, without a chart, a star, or a pilot. He alone held it anchored to the throne of a divine Mediator, the only safe anchorage.

Having mentioned these two names in connection, we may

note one other point of similarity; Athanasius, like Luther, sometimes gave way to righteous indignation, and sought relief by hurling thunderbolts of coarse invective against his adversaries. Such choice epithets as "devils," "antichrists," "maniacs," "Jews," "polytheists," "atheists," "dogs," "wolves," "lions," "hydras," etc., chase each other through his polemical writings. If not excusable, the sin of both him and Luther is greatly palliated by the fact that they were contending with adversaries who were thirsting for their blood, and who, to accomplish their purpose of destroying them, would scruple at no iniquity. In fighting with such furious beasts, the sweet amenities of life are out of place.

In one respect, Athanasius more resembled Calvin than Luther. It is a common remark that Calvin never changed his theological belief. He sprang into the arena of public debate, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter, full-grown, full-armed. From the twenty-seventh year of his age till his death, at fifty-five years of age, he published several successive editions of his famous Institutes, enlarging each time, but never correcting or modifying, only expanding. From the first his system was complete. Apparently he did not emerge from darkness through shadows into clear shining, but stepped at once from night into day. The like reflections apply to Athanasius. He wrote his first theological treatise at the early age of twenty, and at that time laid down lines from which he did not swerve through all the years of after life. He did not commit himself to positions hastily; but once having thought over the ground, he took positions for all time. He was a stranger to motives of policy; he knew no self-interest, except that highest self-interest which results from eternal loyalty to God. It was this supreme devotion to truth, this unswerving adherence to the right as he saw it, that placed him on such a conspicuous pedestal in the eyes of his cotemporaries, and at length drew to his side all the choicest spirits of the church.

Such men as Athanasius are the chronic need of the church. Our age needs them: men of clear vision to discern the truth,

of devout spirit to feel its value, and of courageous faith to declare it and fight for it in the face of a gainsaying world. A false liberalism that ignores the boundaries set by the Bible; a weak charity that condones recognized error; an easy-going indifference that treats all creeds alike—these and kindred tendencies call for men of the Athanasian mould to smite them hip and thigh, and to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.”

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