

THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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I.

THE MEANING AND VALUE OF THE DOCTRINE OF DECREES.

THE proposal to revise the Westminster Standards has brought the doctrine of the Divine decrees into the foreground. The controversy turns upon this pivot. Other features come in incidentally, but this is capital and controlling. This is the stone of stumbling and rock of offense. If election and reprobation were not in the Confession and Catechism, probably the fifteen Presbyteries would not have overtured the Assembly. It is for this reason that we purpose to discuss the *Meaning and Value of the Doctrine of Decrees*, so plainly inculcated in the Scriptures, and from them introduced into the Westminster symbol. We are certain that the Biblical truth of the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners, and of His just liberty to determine how many He will save from their sin, and how many He will leave to their self-will in sin, is greatly misunderstood by many who profess the Presbyterian faith, and who sometimes describe it in much the same terms with the anti-Calvinist, and inveigh against it with something of the same bitterness. The conservative and the radical reviser meet together at this point, and while the former asserts that he has no intention to make any changes respecting the doctrine of decrees that in his opinion will essentially impair the integrity of the Calvinistic system, he nevertheless practically coöperates with the radical in bringing about a revolution in the sentiment and creed of the Presbyterian Church concerning one of the most distinctive articles of its belief. Because revision, be it conservative or radical, contends that there is more or less that is *un-Scriptural* in the tenets of election and reprobation as they are formulated in the Standards, and that

they are bad in their influence. The amount of error in them, and the degree in which they are erroneous, is variously stated by advocates of revision. But the general opinion of this class is, that they require more or less amending to get rid of certain elements that are derogatory to the character of God, and are inconsistent with the Christian redemption. Anti-revision denies this. The only question of importance, therefore, in this juncture, is: Revision or No Revision. And this, as we have said, turns mainly upon the third chapter of the Confession, entitled "Of God's Eternal Decree," together with the kindred declarations growing out of this, in other parts of the Standards. It will therefore be our aim to show that the doctrine of decrees, as it is found in the Westminster Standards, is neither un-Scriptural nor erroneous; and that it is a highly useful and edifying doctrine in the formation of the Christian character. We heartily adopt the affirmation of the Thirty-nine Articles, that "the godly consideration of predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the workings of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members, and drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith, and fervently kindle their love towards God."

In carrying out our purpose, we shall mention certain characteristics of the Westminster doctrine that are both Scriptural and rational, and of great value both speculatively in constructing the Christian system, and practically in forming the Christian experience.

1. The first characteristic of the Confessional statement that we mention is, that it *brings sin within the scope, and under the control, of the Divine decree*. Sin is one of the "whatsoevers" that have "come to pass," all of which are "ordained." Some would have the doctrine that sin is decreed stricken from the Confession, because in their view it makes God the author of sin. The Confession denies this in its assertion that by the Divine decree "violence is not offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty of second causes taken away, but rather established." In so saying, the authors had in mind the common distinction recognized in Calvinistic creeds and systems, between the efficacious and the permissive decree, though they do not use the terms here. The latter, like the former, makes an event *certain*, but by a *different mode* from that of the former. When God executes His decree that Saul of Tarsus shall be "a vessel of mercy," He works efficaciously within him by His Holy Spirit "to will and to do." When God executes His decree that Judas Iscariot shall be "a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction," He

does not work efficaciously within him "to will and to do," but permissively in the way of allowing him to have his own wicked will. He decides not to restrain him or to regenerate him, but to leave him to his own obstinate and rebellious inclination and purpose; and accordingly "the Son of man goeth as it was determined, but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed" (Luke xxii, 22; Acts ii, 23). The two Divine methods in the two cases are plainly different, but the perdition of Judas was as much foreordained and free from chance, as the conversion of Saul. Man's inability to explain how God can make sin certain, but not compulsory, by a *permissive* decree, is no reason for denying that He can do it or that He has done it.

The permissive decree is supported by Scripture, in the statement that God "in times past suffered (ἐξῆσσε) all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts xiv, 16); that "the times of this ignorance God overlooked" (ὕπεριδόν) (Acts xvii, 30); that God "gave rebellious Israel their own desire (Psalm lxxviii, 29); that "He gave them their request" (Psalm cvi, 15). This phraseology is never employed when holiness is spoken of. The Bible never says that God *permits* man to be holy, or to act righteously. He efficaciously influences and actuates him to this. Accordingly the other Reformed creeds, like the Westminster, mark the difference between God's relation to holiness and sin. The Second Helvetic, Ch. viii, says: "Quotiescunque Deus aliquid mali in Scriptura facere dicitur atque videtur, non ideo dicitur, quod homo malum non faciat, sed quod Deus fieri *sinat* et non *prohibeat*, justo suo judicio, qui prohibere potuisset, si voluisset." The Belgic Confession, Art. xiii, asserts that God's "power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that He orders and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner even when the devil and wicked men act unjustly. We are persuaded that He so restrains the devil and all our enemies that without His will and *permission* they cannot hurt us." The Dort Canons, i, 15, teach that "God, out of His sovereign, most just, and unchangeable good pleasure hath decreed to *leave* some men in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion, but *permitting* them in His just judgment to follow their own way, at last, for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins."

And here is the place to notice the error of those who represent supralapsarianism as differing from infralapsarianism by referring sin to the *efficacious* decree, thereby making God the author of it. Dr. Schaff, for example, asserts that "Calvin carried the doctrine of the

Divine decrees beyond the Augustinian infralapsarianism, which makes the fall of Adam the object of a permissive or passive decree, to the very verge of supralapsarianism, which traces even the first sin to an efficient or positive decree" (Creeds, i, 453). But both schemes alike refer sin to the permissive decree, and both alike deny that God is the author of sin. Supralapsarians like Beza and Gomar repel this charge, which anti-Calvinists made against both divisions of the Calvinists. Calvin, Inst. III, xxii, says that "man falls according to the appointment of Divine providence, but falls by his own fault."* The difference between them relates to an altogether different point: namely, the order in which the decrees of election and reprobation stand to that of creation. The supralapsarian asserts that in the logical order of nature (not of time, for all the decrees are eternal), the decree to elect and reprobate certain men is before (*supra*) the decree to create them; the infralapsarian, that it is after (*infra*). The former contends that God *begins* by electing some men and reprobating others, and in order to execute these two decrees creates man and permits (not efficiently causes) the fall. The infralapsarian contends that God begins by creating man and permitting (not causing) the fall, and then out of this fallen and guilty race elects some to life, and leaves others to their voluntary sin and its just penalty. The supralapsarian order is liable to the charge that "God creates some men in order to damn them," because creation follows from reprobation. The infralapsarian order is not liable to this charge, because creation does not follow from reprobation, but precedes it. The Westminster Assembly, in common with the Calvinistic creeds previously made, adopted the infralapsarian order, though some theologians, like Dr. C. Hodge, find a concession to the supralapsarians in some of their phraseology.

The doctrine of the permissive decree has great value in two respects: (*a*) In taking sin out of the sphere of chance. (*b*) In explaining the tenet of preterition, or "foreordination to everlasting death."

First, by the permissive decree, sin is brought within the Divine plan of the universe, and under the Divine control. Whatever is undecreed must be by haphazard and accident. If sin does not occur by the Divine purpose and permission, it occurs by chance. And if sin occurs by chance, the deity, as in the ancient pagan theologies, is limited and hampered by it. He is not "God over all." Dualism is introduced into the theory of the universe. Evil is an independent and uncontrollable principle. God governs only in part. Sin with all its effects is beyond His sway. This dualism God condemns as error, in His words to Cyrus by Isaiah, "I make peace and

* Shedd: "Dogmatic Theology," i, 409 (Note).

create evil;" and in the words of Proverbs xvi, 4, "The Lord hath made all things for Himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." "We believe," says the Belgic Confession, Art. xiii, "that God after He had created all things did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment; nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed."

Secondly, by the permissive decree, the preterition of some sinners and thereby their "foreordination to everlasting death" is shown to be rational as well as Scriptural, because God, while decreeing the destiny of the non-elect, is not the author of his sin or of his perdition. Preterition is a branch of the permissive decree, and stands or falls with it. Whoever would strike the doctrine of preterition from the Standards, to be consistent must strike out the general doctrine that sin is decreed. If God could permissively decree the fall of Adam and his posterity without being the cause and author of it, He can also permissively decree the eternal death of an individual sinner without being the cause and author of it. In preterition, God repeats, in respect to an individual, the act which He performed in respect to the race. He permitted the whole human species to fall in Adam in such a manner that they were responsible and guilty for the fall, and He permits an individual of the species to remain a sinner and to be lost by sin, in such a manner that the sinner is responsible and guilty for this.

The Westminster Standards, in common with the Calvinistic creeds generally, begin with affirming the universal sovereignty of God over His entire universe; over heaven, earth and hell; and comprehend all beings and all events under His dominion. Nothing comes to pass contrary to His decree. Nothing happens by chance. Even moral evil, which He abhors and forbids, occurs by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God;" and yet occurs through the agency of the unforced and self-determining will of man as the efficient.

Why should such a truth as this, taught by Scripture and supported by reason, be stricken out of the Confession? On the contrary, why should it not be proclaimed boldly and everywhere, that above all the sin, and the misery caused by sin, in this world of mankind, there sits on the throne a wise, benevolent and omnipotent Sovereign who for reasons sufficient in His view *permitted*, but did not *cause* or *compel*, the fall of angels and men, with the intention of guiding the issue of it all to an ultimate end worthy of Himself—namely, the manifestation of His two great attributes of mercy and justice: of mercy, in the salvation from sin of "a great multi-

tude whom no man can number ;" of justice, in leaving a multitude that can be numbered to the sin which they love and prefer, and its righteous punishment.

2. The second characteristic of the Westminster doctrine of decrees is *the union of election and preterition*. It includes both tenets and is consistent in doing so. The discontent with the Confession is greater upon this point than upon the first that we have mentioned. Many do not object to what the Standards say upon the abstract subject of the Divine decree, who particularly dislike its concrete teaching upon election and preterition. The discrimination which the Confession makes between sinners; the Divine purpose to save some and not all; they assert to be un-Biblical and unjust. "The foreordination of some men to everlasting life, and of others to everlasting death, and preterition of all the non-elect, are equally inconsistent with a proper conception of Divine justice," is the assertion of a strenuous advocate of revision. Some would strike out both election and preterition; others would strike out preterition and retain election. We shall endeavor to show that one of these proposals is as destructive of the integrity of the system as the other; that both tenets must stand, or both must go.

That individual election is taught in the Bible is very generally conceded. But individual preterition is taught with equal plainness. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, is as explicit upon this subject as He is upon that of endless punishment. Upon two occasions (Matt. xiii, 14, 15; John xii, 38-40), He quotes the words of God to Isaiah vi, 9, 10: "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and convert and be healed." The prophet was instructed to declare the preterition of a part of Israel, and our Lord endorses the doctrine. And He frequently connects the voluntary and guilty rejection of His gracious offer of mercy with the eternal purpose and plan of God. The impenitence of Capernaum and of Chorazin and Bethsaida was guilty, and punishable with a punishment greater than that of Sodom; yet these sinners were "the wise and prudent" from whom the "Lord of heaven and earth" had "hid the things" of salvation (Matt. xi, 20-26). "Many," He says, "are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. xxii, 14; Luke xvii, 34-36). With grief and tears over the hardness of heart and the bitter enmity of the Jerusalem sinners, He at the same time declares their reprobation by God. "Upon you shall come all the righteous blood shed upon earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias. Behold your house is left unto you

desolate" (Matt. xxiii, 35-38). That the Apostolical Epistles teach preterition, we need not stop to prove. One principal objection made to the Pauline Christianity by its opponents is, that it is full of predestination both to holiness and sin. The Dort Canons, I, vi, enunciate Paul's doctrine in the following statement: "That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God's eternal decree. According to which decree, He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe; while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy." "Unto you," says our Lord "it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matt. xiii, 11).

Not only are both election and preterition taught in Scripture, but both are necessary in a creed in order to self-consistence. Preterition is the contrary of election, and one of two contraries necessarily implies the other. Right implies wrong; light implies darkness. No one would contend that there is light but not darkness; right but not wrong. And no one should contend that there is an election of individuals, but not a preterition. It is impossible to think of individual election alone by itself, or to teach it alone by itself. Individual election implies and suggests individual reprobation. The elect himself (that is, one who hopes he is of the elect) sometimes fears that he is one of the non-elect. St. Paul kept his body under, lest he should be a reprobate "cast away." That Christian who denies the doctrine of preterition, and does not sometimes fear that God may pass him by, is not a model for imperfectly sanctified men. If God does not elect a sinner, He must of course reject him. If God decides not to convert a sinner into a saint, He must of course decide to let him remain a sinner. If God does not purpose to make Judas Iscariot "a vessel of mercy," He must of course purpose to leave him "a vessel of wrath." Election without its antithetic preterition is only one-half of the circle of Divine truth. When God operates efficaciously in the sinner's heart, to overcome his resistance of common grace, and his enmity to the law of God, this is election. When God does not work efficaciously, but permissively leaves the sinner to himself, this is preterition. And He must do one thing or the other, in the instance of every sinner. And He must purpose to do one thing or the other, in every instance. And the purpose is an eternal one. Consequently to affirm in a creed the decree of election, and deny that of preterition, is the height of absurdity.

Accordingly, the Reformed creeds contain both doctrines; sometimes both of them verbally expressed, and sometimes preterition implied from election verbally expressed. Both doctrines are spec-

ified in the following symbols : Second Helvetic, Gallican, Belgic, First Scotch, Irish, Lambeth, Dort, Westminster. Election alone is specified in Augsburg, First Helvetic, Heidelberg, and Thirty-nine Articles. That the decree of individual election necessarily involves the antithetic decree of individual preterition, is evinced by the fact that Ursinus, one of the authors, and the principal one, of the Heidelberg Catechism, which verbally affirms election, but not preterition, presents an elaborate statement and defense of reprobation in his "Christian Theology" (Qu. 54), composed in explanation of this creed. *

What is preterition ? It is God's passing by a sinner in the bestowment of *regenerating*, not of common grace. All men are blessed with common grace. There is no election or reprobation in this reference. God's mercy in *this* form and degree of it is universal and indiscriminate. But common grace fails to save the sinner, because of his love of sin, his aversion to holiness, and his unbelief. The martyr Stephen's words are applicable to every man in respect to common grace : "Ye stiff-necked, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost" (Acts vii, 51). Consequently, in order to save any sinner whatsoever requires a still higher grade of grace which, in the phrase of the Larger Catechism (67), "powerfully determines" his will by regenerating it. Here is where the Divine dis-

* Dr. Schaff, in *The Evangelist*, for November 14, 1889, asserts that the Gallican, Belgic, Second Helvetic, First Scotch, and Dort symbols, "are silent on the decree of reprobation and preterition." The following extracts from his "Creeds of Christendom" show that this is an error. Gallican, Art. xii : "God calleth out of corruption and condemnation those whom He hath chosen without consideration of their works, in order to display in them the riches of His mercy; *leaving* (laissant) the rest in this same corruption and condemnation, in order to manifest in them His justice." Belgic, Art. xvi : "God is merciful, since He delivers from perdition all whom He hath elected in Christ Jesus, without any respect to their works; just, in *leaving* (laissant) the others in the fall and perdition wherein they have precipitated themselves." Second Helvetic, Cap. x, 4, 6 : "Though God knows who are His, and sometimes the fewness of the elect is spoken of, yet we are to have hope for all, and no one is rashly to be numbered with the *reprobate*. We do not approve of the impious words of those who say : 'If I am elected, I shall be saved, however I may act ; if I am one of the *reprobate*, neither faith nor repentance will be of any use, since the decree of God cannot be altered.'" First Scotch, Art. viii : "For this cause we are not afraid to call God our Father, not so much because He has created us, which we have in common with the *reprobate*, as that He has given to us His only Son to be our brother." Dort Canons, i, 15 : "Holy Scripture testifieth that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree ; whom God out of His sovereign good pleasure hath decreed to *leave* in the misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, permitting them to follow their own way. And this is the doctrine of *reprobation*, which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares Him to be a righteous judge and punisher of sin."

crimination comes in. It is with reference to *this* kind and degree of grace that God says: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Ex. xxxiii, 19; Rom. ix, 15). And this is the Scripture truth which is now on trial in the Presbyterian Church. This is the particular doctrine which excites animosity in some minds, and which it is contended must be cut out of the Confession like cancerous matter that is killing the body. Let us consider the objections that are made to it.

1. It is objected that preterition is *inconsistent with the infinite compassion* of God for the souls of all men, and cannot be squared with such assertions as, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die. God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish but have everlasting life."

The first reply to this is, that these and many similar affirmations of the Divine pity for the sinful soul and the Divine desire for its salvation, are written in the same inspired volume that contains such assertions as the following: "Many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able. He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, and be converted, and I should heal them. The Son of Man goeth as it was determined; but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. The children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand not of works but of him that calleth, it was said, The elder shall serve the younger. The disobedient stumble at the word, whereunto also they were appointed." Since both classes of passages come from God, *He* must see that they are consistent with each other whether man can or not. Both, then, must be accepted as eternal truth by an act of faith, by every one who believes in the inspiration of the Bible. They must be presumed to be self-consistent, whether it can be shown or not.

But, secondly, there are *degrees* of mercy. Because God does not show the highest degree of it to a particular sinner, it does not follow that He does not show him any at all. He may grant him the mercy of common grace, and when this is resisted and nullified by his hostile self-will and obstinate love of sin, He may decide not to bestow the mercy of special grace, and yet not be chargeable with

destitution of love and compassion towards him.* Any degree of love is love ; and any degree of compassion is compassion. To contend that the Divine love must be of exactly the same degree towards all creatures alike or else it is not love, is untenable. It is certain that God can feel love and pity towards the souls of all men, as His creatures and as sinners lost by their own fault, and manifest it in that measure of grace which "leads to repentance" (Rom. ii, 4,) and would result in it if it were not resisted, and yet not actually save them all from the consequences of their own action. The Scriptures plainly teach that God so loved the whole world that He gave His only-begotten Son to make expiation for "the sins of the whole world;" and they just as plainly teach that a part of this world of mankind are sentenced, by God, to eternal death for their sins. The Arminian and the Calvinist both alike deny the doctrine of universal salvation, yet believe that this is compatible with the doctrine of God's universal benevolence. Both deny the inference that if God does not save every human being, He does not love the soul of every human being; that if He does not do as much for one person as He does for another, He is unmerciful towards him. It is a fallacy to maintain, that unless God does *all that He possibly can* to save a sinner, He does not do anything towards his salvation; as it would be fallacious to maintain, that unless God bestows upon a person all the temporal blessings that are within His power, He does not show him any benevolence at all. This fallacy lies under the argument against preterition. It is asserted that if God "passes by" a sinner in the bestowment of regenerating grace, He has no love for his soul, no desire for its salvation, and does nothing towards its welfare. But if God really felt no compassion for a sinner, and showed him none, He would immediately punish him for his sin, and the matter would end here. The sinner's doom would be fixed. Just retribution would follow transgression instantaneously, and forever. And who can impeach justice? "As all men have sinned in Adam, and are obnoxious to eternal death, God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish, and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin, according to the words of the Apostle: 'That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God'" (Dort Canons, I, i). But God does not do this. He suffers long and is forbearing with every sinner without exception. There is not a transgressor on earth, in Christendom or heathendom, who is not treated by his Maker

* Man is compelled to speak of God's decision or decree in this way, though strictly there is no before or after for Him. All His decrees are eternal and simultaneous. Yet there is an order of nature. Special grace supposes the failure of common grace.

better than he deserves ; who does not experience some degree of the Divine love and compassion. God showers down upon all men the blessings of His providence, and bestows upon them all more or less of the common influences and operation of the Holy Spirit. This is mercy to the souls of men universally, and ought to move them to repent of sin and forsake it. This common grace and universal benevolence of God is often spoken of in Scripture. "Despisest thou, O man, the riches of God's goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering ; not knowing [recognizing] that the goodness of God leads [tends to lead] thee to repentance ? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath ? " (Rom. ii, 4, 5). Here is the common grace of God enjoyed by men universally, and thwarted by their love of sin, and obstinate self-will in sin. But is God unmerciful and destitute of compassion towards this man, if He decides to proceed no further with him, but leave him where he is, and as he is ? Is all that God has done for him in the way of long suffering, forbearance, kindness, and inward monitions in his conscience, to count for nothing ? If this treatment of the sinner is not benevolence and compassion, what is it ? It is mercy in God to reveal to every man the law of God—nay even "the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness"—for by this revelation, the man is warned and urged to turn from sin and live. This is one way in which God says to the sinner, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die. As I live I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth." It is mercy in God, and is so represented by St. Paul, when He "does not leave Himself without witness, in that He does good, sending rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling men's hearts with good and gladness, and makes of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and determines the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us" (Acts xiv, 17 ; xvii, 26, 27). That this gracious and fatherly interest in their souls' welfare is repelled and nullified by their preference for sin and love of worldly pleasure, and comes to naught, does not alter the nature of it as it lies in the heart of God. It is Divine mercy and love for human souls, notwithstanding its ill success.

Common grace is great and undeserved mercy to a sinner, and would save him if he did not resist and frustrate it. In and by it, "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent," and whoever repents will find mercy. In and by it, God commands every hearer of the written Word to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and whoever believes shall be saved. The common grace

of God consists of the written, or, in the instance of the heathen, the unwritten Word, together with more or less of the *convicting* operation of the Holy Spirit. Says Hodge (ii, 667), "The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of truth, of holiness, and of life in all its forms, is present with every human mind, enforcing truth, restraining from evil, exciting to good, and imparting wisdom; or strength, when, where, and in what measure seemeth to Him good. In this sphere, also, He 'divideth to every man severally as He will.'" Whoever is in any degree convinced of sin, and is in any degree urged by his conscience to confess and forsake it, is a subject of common grace. And whoever stifles conviction, refuses confession, and "holds down the truth in unrighteousness," resists common grace. St. Paul charges this sin upon both the heathen and the evangelized. Common grace, we repeat, is great and undeserved mercy to a sinner, and by it God evinces His pity for his soul, and His desire for its salvation. But man universally, unevangelized and evangelized, nullifies this form and degree of the Divine mercy, by his opposition. The opponent of preterition comes in here at this point, and contends that God is bound to go yet further than common grace with sinful man, and subdue his enmity by creating him anew in the spirit of his mind; and that if He "passes him by," and leaves him where he is, and as he is, He has no love for his soul. The sovereignty of God in this matter of bestowing *regenerating* grace is denied. To bestow it upon Jacob but not upon Esau, upon some but not upon all, is said to be injustice and partiality.

Scripture denies that God is under obligation to follow up His defeated common grace with His irresistible special grace. It asserts His just liberty to do as He pleases in regard to imparting that measure of grace which produces the new birth, and makes the sinner "willing in the day of God's power." The passages have already been cited. And reason teaches the same truth. Mercy from its very nature is free and optional in its exercise. God may manifest great and unmerited compassion to all men in common grace and the outward call, and limit His compassion if He please to some men in special grace and the effectual call. He may call upon all men to repent and believe, and promise salvation to all that do so, and yet not *incline* all men to do so. No one will say that a man is insincere in offering a gift, if he does not along with it produce the disposition to accept it. And neither should one assert this of God. God sincerely desires that the sinner would hear His outward call, and that His common grace might succeed with him. He sincerely desires that every one who hears the message: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; yea, come buy wine and milk

without money," would come just as he is, and of his own free will, "for all things are ready." The fact that God does not go further than this with all men and conquer their aversion, is consistent with this desire. No one contends that God is not universally benevolent because He bestows *more* health, wealth, and intellect, upon some than upon others. And no one should contend that He is not universally merciful, because He bestows *more* grace upon some than upon others. The omnipotence of God is able to save the whole world of mankind, and to our narrow vision it seems singular that He does not; but be this as it may, it is false to say that if He does not exert the *whole* of His power, He is an unmerciful being towards those who abuse His common grace. That degree of forbearance and long suffering which God shows towards those who resist it, and that measure of effort which He puts forth to convert them, is real mercy towards their souls. It is the sinner who has thwarted this benevolent approach of God to his sinful heart. Millions of men in all ages are continually beating back God's mercy in the outward call and nullifying it. "A man who has had common grace, has been the subject of the Divine compassion to this degree. If he resists it, he cannot charge God with unmercifulness, because He does not bestow upon him still greater mercy in the form of regenerating grace. A beggar who contemptuously rejects the five dollars offered by a benevolent man, cannot charge stinginess upon him because after this rejection of the five dollars he does not give him ten. Any sinner who complains of God's 'passing him by' in the bestowment of regenerating grace after his abuse of common grace, virtually says to the high and holy One who inhabitseternity, 'Thou hast tried once to convert me from sin; now try again, and try harder.'"

God's desire that a sinner should "turn and live" under common grace, is not incompatible with His purpose to leave him to "eat of the fruit of his own ways, and be filled with his own devices"—which is the same thing as "foreordaining him to everlasting death." A decree of God may not be indicative of what He desires and loves. He decrees sin, but abhors and forbids it. He decrees the physical agony of millions of men in earthquake, flood and conflagration, but He does not take delight in it. His omnipotence could prevent this suffering in which He has no pleasure, but He decides for adequate reasons not to do so. Similarly, He could prevent the eternal death of every single member of the human family, in which He takes no pleasure, but decides not to do so for reasons that are wise in His sight. The distinction between the revealed will and the secret will of God is a valid one; and the latter of these wills may be no index of the former, but the

exact contrary of it. This is particularly the case when evil is the thing decreed.*

2. Secondly, it is objected to preterition that it is *partiality*. It would be, if sinners had a claim upon God for His regenerating grace. In this case He could make no discrimination, and must regenerate and save all. Partiality is impossible within the sphere of mercy, because the conditions requisite to it are wanting. It can exist only within the sphere of justice, where there are *rights and duties ; claims and obligations*. A debtor cannot pay some of his creditors and "pass by" others, without partiality. But in the sphere of mercy, where there is no indebtedness, and no claim, the patron may give to one beggar and not to another, if he so please, because he "may do what he will with his own"—that is, with what he does not owe to any one. The parable of the talents was spoken by our Lord to illustrate the doctrine of the Divine sovereignty in the bestowment of *unmerited* gifts; and the regeneration of the soul is one of the greatest of them.

This is a conclusive answer to the charge of partiality and injustice, but some would avoid the charge by striking out the tenet of preterition, and retaining that of election. In this case, election becomes *universal*. If no men are rejected in the bestowment of regenerating grace, all men are elected. This is universal salvation, because all the elect are infallibly regenerated and saved. And this is the manner in which the Later Lutheranism handles the doctrine. It denies preterition, and strenuously opposes this article of the Reformed creed. If the Presbyterian Church, after having adopted preterition for two centuries, shall now declare that it is an un-Scriptural and erroneous tenet, the meaning of the revision will be, that God has no sovereign liberty to "pass by" any sinners, but must save them all. This is the form in which election is held by Schleiermacher and his school. They contend that there is no reprobation of any sinner whatsoever. All men are elected, because to pass by any is injustice and partiality. "Calling (*vocatio*)," says Dorner, "is universal, for the Divine purpose of redemption is just as universal as the need and capacity of redemption, so that *the notion of a Divine decree to pass by a portion of mankind, and to restore freedom of decision only to the rest*, is out of the question" ("Christian Doctrine," iv, 183). It is this form of Universalism,

* The difference between will as general desire and inclination, and will as a particular volition or decision in a special instance, is seen in human action, and is well understood. For sufficient reasons, a man may decide in a particular case to do by a volition something entirely contrary to his uniform and abiding inclination—say, to have his leg amputated. This decision is his "decree," and is no index of what he is pleased with.

which postulates the offer of mercy to all men as something due to them, if not in this life then in the next, and denies that the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is confined to earth and time, but goes on in the intermediate state, that is percolating into the Scotch and American Calvinism from the writings of one class of German divines. Should the Presbyteries reject the doctrine of preterition they will help on this tendency. A creed like the Heidelberg, or the Thirty-nine Articles, may not have preterition verbally stated, and yet *imply* it by its statement of election and by other parts of the symbol. But if a creed like the Westminster, which has both doctrines verbally stated, is subsequently revised so as to *strike out* preterition, then this tenet cannot be implied. It is positively branded as error, and rejected by the revising Church. If therefore the Presbyteries shall assert that God does not "pass by" any sinner in respect to regenerating grace, they will commit themselves to universal salvation in the form above mentioned. Election will no longer be balanced and limited by preterition, but will be unlimited and universal.

And with this will be connected another fatal error : namely, that God is *under obligation* to elect and regenerate every man. If justice forbids Him to "pass by" any sinners, and "ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin," He is bound to elect all sinners and "predestinate them to everlasting life." He has no liberty or sovereignty in the case. He cannot say, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, and whom I will I harden [do not soften]" (Rom. ix, 18). This transmutes mercy into justice. Pardon becomes a Divine duty. The offer of Christ's sacrifice, nay even the providing of it, becomes a debt which God owes to every human creature. This is the assumption that lies under all the various modes of Universalism. Sinful men, loving sin, bent on sin, are told that they are entitled to the offer of mercy and regenerating grace; that they must have a "fair opportunity" of salvation, if not here, then hereafter. Sinful men, full of self-indulgence, confessing no sin and putting up no prayer for forgiveness, and who have all their lifetime suppressed the monitions of conscience and quenched the Holy Spirit's strivings with them in His exercise of common grace, are taught that if God shall pass them by, and leave them to the sin that they prefer, He is an unmerciful despot.

And here is the point where the *practical value* of the doctrine of election and preterition is clearly seen. Without it, some of the indispensable characteristics of a genuine Christian experience are impossible. Hence it is that St. Paul continually employs it in producing true repentance for sin, deep humility before God, utter self-distrust, sole reliance on Christ's sacrifice, and a cheering hope and

confidence of salvation, founded not on the sinner's ability and what God owes him, but on God's gracious and unobliged purpose and covenant. This is the doctrine which elicits from him the rapturous exclamation, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. For who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen." This is the doctrine which instructs the believer to ascribe all his holy acts, even the act of faith itself, to the unmerited and sovereign grace of his redeeming God, and with Charles Wesley to sing:

"Hangs my helpless soul on Thee."

It is said that the doctrine of preterition is not and cannot be preached. It does not require technical terms and syllogistical reasoning, in order to preach a doctrine. Who so preaches the doctrine of the Trinity, or of regeneration, or of original sin, or of vicarious atonement? The doctrine of preterition is preached whenever the herald proclaims to the transgressor of God's law that sin is guilt and not misfortune; that the criminal has no claim upon the pardoning power for pardon; that the Supreme Judge might justly inflict upon him the penalty which his sin deserves; that his soul is helplessly dependent upon the optional unobliged decision of his Maker and Saviour; and that it is nothing but God's special grace in regeneration that makes him to differ from others who go down to perdition. That these humbling and searching truths are taught more thoroughly at some times than others, is true. That they will empty some pews at all times, is true. It may be that they are less taught now than formerly; and if so, this is not the time either to revise or construct creeds. But whenever the Divine Spirit is present with his illumination, and the Scriptures are plainly preached, they come into the foreground. If they shall be revised out of the Confession, it is certain that they will be taught less and less, and will finally disappear from the religious experience.

The acknowledgment that God might justly pass him by, and leave him in his resistance of common grace, is a necessary element in genuine repentance. Whoever denies this, lacks the broken and contrite heart. Such was the sorrow of the penitent thief: "We are in this condemnation justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds." Such was the penitence of the prodigal son: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Such was the temper of the leper: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." No one of these penitents took the ground that God owed him pardon and regeneration, and that to pass him by and ordain

him to the eternal death which sin deserves would be an act dishonorable to God. To deny God's sovereignty in His exercise of mercy, is to set up a claim for salvation, and whoever does this evinces that he has no true view of sin as ill desert, and no true sorrow for it as such. There is need of this doctrine in all ages, owing to the pride of the human heart, and its unwillingness to bend the knee and renounce all merit, and confess all demerit before God. And there is special need of it in our age, when the Christian experience is defective at this point, and redemption is looked upon as something which God owes to mankind, and is bound to provide for them. Unless this important truth is repristinated, and restored to its proper place in the consciousness of the Church, the current of Restorationism will set stronger and stronger, and the result will be a great apostasy in Christendom. This is no time to eradicate it from the Calvinistic creeds, but on the contrary to reaffirm it with confidence, and defend it out of Scripture.

Some say that preterition is liable to be understood as *preventing* a sinner's salvation, and would have an explanation added to the doctrine, to the effect that this is not its meaning or intent. We would respect the opinion of any Christian believer who sincerely thinks that the language of the Standards is unguarded, and who does not desire to change their doctrines but only to make sure that they are understood. This is not revision, but explanation; and a declarative statement like that of the United Presbyterians, which leaves the Confession untouched, is the least objectionable of all the plans before the Presbyterian Churches. But if it be borne in mind that preterition is by the *permissive*, not efficacious decree, what call is there for such a guarding clause? How does or can God's decision to leave a sinner to do just what he likes, *hinder* the sinner from faith and repentance? How does or can God's purpose to save another sinner, prevent this sinner from smiting on his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner?" "It is not the fault of the gospel," say the Dort Canons (I, iii, iv, 9), "nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God who calls men by the gospel and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the Word refuse to come and be converted. The fault lies in themselves." There is nothing *causative* in the decree of preterition. John Bunyan's statement of the matter is plain common sense. "Eternal reprobation *makes* no man a sinner. The foreknowledge of God that the reprobate will perish, *makes* no man a sinner. God's infallible determining upon the damnation of him that perisheth, *makes* no man a sinner. God's patience and forbearance until the reprobate fits himself for eternal destruction, *makes* no man a sinner." Whatever God does by a permissive decree,

excludes causation on His part. God is not the author of the sin in which He *leaves* the sinner ; or of the impenitence to which He *gives him over*. His action in preterition is inaction, rather than action. He decides to do nothing to prevent the free will of the sinner from its own action. With what color of reason can it be said that God *forces* a man into perdition, when this is all He does to him ? that God *hinders* a man from faith and repentance, when He lets him entirely alone ? To put the proposed explanation and caveat into the Confessional doctrine of preterition, would be like writing under Landseer's lions, "These are not sheep," or under Paul Potter's bull, "This is not a horse."

The preterition of a sinner is not his *exclusion* from salvation. Exclusion is a positive act ; but preterition is a negative one. When God gives special regenerating grace to only one of two persons, he does not work upon the other to prevent him from believing and repenting under the operation of the common grace which he has bestowed upon both alike. He merely leaves the other to his own free will to decide the matter ; assuring him that if he repents he will forgive him ; that if he believes He will save him. The bestowment of common grace upon the non-elect shows that non-election does not exclude from the kingdom of heaven by Divine efficiency, because common grace is not only an *invitation* to believe and repent, but an actual *help* towards it ; and a help that is nullified solely by the resistance of the non-elect, and not by anything in the nature of common grace, or by any preventive action of God. The fault of the failure of common grace to save the sinner, is chargeable to the sinner alone ; and he has no right to plead a fault of his own as the reason why he is entitled to special grace. It is absurd for him to contend that God has no right to refuse him regenerating grace, because he has defeated the Divine mercy in common grace. The true way out of the difficulty for the sinner is, not to demand regenerating grace as a debt, by denying that God has the right to withhold it, but to confess the sinful abuse and frustration of common grace, and to cry with the leper : "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean."

Having thus demonstrated the Scriptural and self-consistent character of the doctrine of decrees as contained in the Westminster Standards, we turn now to consider two erroneous conclusions that are drawn from it, which are urged as reasons for their revision : First, that it shuts out the entire heathen world from Christ's redemption ; and, second, that it implies the damnation of a part of those who die in infancy.

Some advocates of revision seem, unintentionally perhaps, to load down the Confession with faults not belonging to it. They put the

worst interpretation upon its terms and phraseology; insist that its defenders have no right to its necessary implications and natural inferences, in determining what it really means; and that an analytic and positive affirmation of every particular point must be found in it. Interpreting in this prejudiced manner, they assert that the Standards do not declare the universal love and compassion of God; that they teach that God creates some men in order to damn them; that their doctrine of election discourages ministers from making the universal offer of Christ's salvation, and hinders sinners from accepting it; and that he who adopts them as they read cannot consistently believe that any of the heathen are saved, and that no dying infants are lost. They carry a wrong idea of election and reprobation into their exegesis of the Standards. They suppose that these necessarily imply that only a very few are elected, and that very many are reprobated. But there is nothing in the nature of either election or preterition, that determines the *number* of each; nothing that implies that the elect must be the minority, and the non-elect the majority, or the converse. The size of each circle depends upon the will of Him who draws it. God, conceivably, might have elected the whole human family without an exception, as Schleiermacher says he did. Or, conceivably, He might have reprobated the whole human family, because He was not in justice obliged to save it. There is nothing in the nature of election that makes it inapplicable to the heathen, or of preterition. God may elect and regenerate a heathen if He please, or He may leave him in the sin which he loves. And the same is true of the ideas of election and preterition as related to dying infants. Since everything in this matter depends wholly upon the *sovereign will* of God, He may regulate His choice as He pleases. He may choose dying infants as individuals, as He does adults; or He may choose them as a class. And He might reject dying infants as individuals, as He does adults; or He might reject them as a class. For since infants like adults have a sinful nature, and, in the phrase of the Auburn Declaration, "in order to be saved, need redemption by the blood of Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Ghost," they require the exercise of *unmerited* mercy, which on grounds of justice might be withheld.

We cannot, therefore, determine from the mere idea of election how many are elected, or from that of preterition how many are passed by. This question can be answered only by God Himself, and this answer, so far as He has vouchsafed to give it, is contained in His Word. That the Scriptures plainly teach that the total result of Christ's redemption will be a triumphant victory over the kingdom of Satan, and that the number of the redeemed will be vastly greater than that of the lost, we shall assume. It is also plainly

taught in Scripture, that God's *ordinary* method is to gather His elect from the evangelized part of mankind. Does Scripture also furnish ground for the belief, that God also gathers some of His elect by an *extraordinary* method from among the unevangelized, and without the written Word saves some of the adult heathen "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost?" We contend that the Confession so understands the Word of God, in its declaration that there are some "elect persons [other than infants] who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word." To refer the "incapacity" here spoken of to that of idiots and insane persons, is an example of the unnatural exegesis of the Standards to which we have alluded. This explanation is objectionable for two reasons. First, idiots and maniacs are not moral agents, and therefore as such are neither damnable nor salvable. They would be required to be made rational and sane, before they could be classed with the rest of mankind. It is utterly improbable that the Assembly took into account this very small number of individuals respecting whose destiny so little is known. It would be like taking into account abortions and untimely births. Secondly, these "elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word," are contrasted in the immediate context with "others not elected," who "although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, never truly come to Christ;" that is to say, they are contrasted with rational and sane adults in evangelized regions. But idiots and maniacs could not be put into such a contrast. The "incapacity" therefore must be that of circumstances, not of mental faculty. A man in the heart of unevangelized Africa is incapable of hearing the written Word, in the sense that a man in New York is incapable of hearing the roar of London.

Consequently, the Confession, in this section, intends to teach that there are some unevangelized men who are "regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit," without "the ministry of the written Word," and who differ in this respect from evangelized men who are regenerated in connection with it. There are these two classes of regenerated persons among God's elect. They are both alike in being born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." They are both alike in respect to faith and repentance, because these are the natural and necessary effects of regeneration. Both alike feel and confess sin; and both alike hope in the Divine mercy, though the regenerate heathen has not yet had Christ presented to him. As this is the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit, little is said bearing upon it in Scripture. But something is said. God's promise to Abraham was, that in him should "all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xii, 3). St.

Paul teaches that "they are not all Israel which are of Israel" (Rom. ix, 6); and that "they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. iii, 7). Our Lord affirms that "many shall come from the east and west, the north and the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. viii, 11). Christ saw both penitence and faith in the unevangelized centurion, respecting whom He said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt. viii, 5-10). The faith of the "woman of Canaan," an alien and stranger to the Jewish people and covenant, was tested more severely than that of any person who came to Him in the days of His flesh, and of it the gracious Redeemer exclaimed, "O, woman, great is thy faith!" These two classes of the regenerate have their typical heads in Scripture. Says Kurtz, "Of those who are blessed in the seed of Abraham, Naomi represents the people of God who are to proceed from the ancient people of the covenant, and Ruth represents those proceeding from the heathen world." That the Church is not to expect and rely upon this extraordinary work of the Spirit, it is needless to say. That this work is extensive, and the number of saved unevangelized adults is great, cannot be affirmed. But that all the adult heathen are lost, is not the teaching of the Bible or of the Westminster Standards.

The declaration in Confession x, 4, and Larger Catechism, 60, does not refer at all to the heathen as such, but only to a certain class of persons to be found both in Christendom and heathendom, and probably more frequently in the latter than in the former. The "men not professing the Christian religion" are those who *reject* it, either in spirit, or formally and actually; that is to say, *legalists* of every age and nation, evangelized or unevangelized, who expect future happiness by following "the light of nature" and reason, and the ethical "religion they do profess," instead of by confessing sin and hoping in the Divine mercy. The Jewish Pharisee, the Roman Julian and Antoninus, the self-satisfied Buddhist sage following the "light of Asia," the Mohammedan saint despising Christianity, the English Hume and Mill, all of every race and clime who pride themselves on personal character and morality, and lack the humility and penitence that welcome the gospel, are the class spoken of in these declarations. They press no more, and probably less, upon the heathen than upon the Christian world. They do not shut out of the kingdom of heaven any heathen who has the spirit of the publican, but do shut out every heathen and every nominal Christian who is destitute of it. The object of this section of the Confession, which is the same as the eighteenth of the Thirty-nine Articles, is to teach that no human creature, evangelized or unevangelized, can be

saved on any but *evangelical* principles—namely, by unmerited grace, not by personal merit. It is only another way of proclaiming St. Paul's doctrine, that "by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified."

That this is the correct understanding of the Westminster Standards is corroborated by the fact that the Calvinism of the time held that God has His elect among the heathen. The Second Helvetic Confession (i, 7), teaches it. Zanchius, whose treatise on "Predestination" is of the strictest type, asserts it. Witsius and others suggest that the grace of God in election is wide and far reaching. The elder Calvinists held with the strictest rigor that no man is saved outside of the circle of election and regeneration, but they did not make that circle to be the small, narrow, insignificant circumference which their opponents charge upon them. And there is no reason to believe that the Westminster Assembly differed from the Calvinism of the time.

And this brings us to the subject of "elect infants." There is no dispute that the Confession teaches that there are "elect dying infants." Does it also teach that there are "non-elect dying infants?" In other words, does the phrase "elect infants" imply that there are "non-elect infants," as the phrase "elect adults" does that there are "non-elect adults?" This depends upon whether the cases are alike in all particulars. The argument is from analogy, and analogical reasoning requires a resemblance and similarity upon which to rest. But the Confession directs attention to a *great and marked diversity* between infant and adult regeneration, which sets off the two classes from one another, making some things true of one that are not of the other. The Confession points at and signalizes the striking difference in *the manner in which the Holy Ghost operates*, in each instance. Infants are incapable of the outward call and common grace; adults are capable of both. Consequently an elect infant dying in infancy is "regenerated by Christ, through the Spirit," without the outward call and common grace; but an elect adult is "regenerated by Christ through the Spirit," in connection with the external call and common grace, and after both have been frustrated by Him. Election and non-election in the case of adults, is the selection of some and omission of others who are alike guilty of resisting the ordinary antecedents of regeneration. Election in the case of dying infants, is wholly apart from this. There being this great *dissimilarity* between the two classes, it does not follow that every particular that is true of one must be of the other; that because election is individual in the instance of adults it must necessarily be so in that of infants; that because adults are not elected as a *class* infants cannot be. The state

of things in which the regeneration of an adult occurs, namely after conviction of sin and more or less opposition to the truth, is entirely diverse from that in which the regeneration of a dying infant occurs; namely, in unconsciousness and without conviction of sin. The only form of grace that is possible to the dying infant, is regenerating grace, and the only call possible is the effectual call. If therefore God manifests any grace at all to the dying infant, it must be special and saving; and if He call him at all, He must call him effectually.

Now, since the authors of the Confession have themselves distinctly specified such a peculiar feature in the regeneration of the dying infant, it is plain that they regarded it as differing in some respects from that of adults, and intended to disconnect it from that of adults and consider it by itself. For why should they take pains, when speaking of elect infants, to call attention to the fact that the "Holy Ghost worketh when, and where, and *how* He pleaseth," if they did not mean to signalize the *extraordinariness* of the Divine action in infant regeneration? And if infant regeneration is extraordinary in not having been preceded by the usual antecedents of common grace and the outward call, why may it not be extraordinary in being universal and not particular? that of a class and not of individuals? Does not the singularity that distinguishes the infant in regard to regeneration without conviction of sin, suggest that of electing the whole class? And what is yet more conclusive, does not the fact that the Assembly *does not limit* infant election by infant preterition, as it limits adult election by adult preterition, prove that there is this great diversity in the two cases? Does not the fact that the Assembly, while explicitly, and with a carefulness that is irritating to many persons, balancing and guarding the election of adults by preterition, *does not do so* with the election of infants, show beyond doubt that they believed their election to be unlimited, and that no dying infants are "passed by" in the bestowment of regenerating grace? We have already seen that the *proposed* omission of preterition, so as to leave only election in the case of adults, would make their election universal, and save the whole class without exception. The *actual* omission of it by the Assembly in the case of dying infants has the same effect. It is morally certain that if the Assembly had intended to discriminate between elect and non-elect infants, as they do between elect and non-elect adults, they would have taken pains to do so, and would have inserted a corresponding clause concerning infant preterition to indicate it. Whoever contends that they believed that preterition applies to infants, is bound to explain their silence upon this point. Had infant election been explicitly limited by preterition in the Confession, it would have been impossible for any candid expounder

of it to hold that it permits subscribers to it to believe in the salvation of all dying infants. But Calvinistic divines for the last century or more have put this interpretation upon this section of the Confession, namely, that infant election is not individual but classical, and we think they are justified in so doing by the remarkable omission in this case. *

On the face of it, the thing looks probable. The case of the adult, in which there is both the outward call and the effectual, both common grace and regenerating, may be governed by the principle of individuality; while that of the infant, in which there is only the effectual call and regenerating grace, may be governed by the principle of community. Of those who have had the outward call and have rejected it, some may be taken and others left; while of those who have not had the outward call and have not rejected it, all may be taken. It is *election* in both instances; that is, the decision of God according to the counsel of His own will. In one case, God sovereignly decides to elect some; in the other, to elect all. And it is *unmerited mercy*, in both instances; because God is not bound and obliged by justice to pardon and eradicate the sin of an infant any more than that of an adult. And there is nothing in the fact that an infant has not resisted common grace, that *entitles* it to the exercise of special grace. In the transaction, God is moved wholly by His spontaneous and infinite mercy. He does an act to which He is not compelled by the sense of duty, or of justice, either to Himself or to sinners, but which He loves to do, and longs to do, because of His infinite pity and compassion. †

* Respecting the necessity of construing the Confession as teaching that there are non-elect infants, Dr. Schaff remarks as follows: "The Confession nowhere speaks of reprobate infants, and the existence of such is not *necessarily* implied by way of distinction, although it *probably* was in the minds of the framers, as their private opinion, which they wisely withheld from the Confession" ("Creeds of Christendom," i, 795).

† That many of the elder Calvinists believed that there are non-elect infants is undeniable. But the rigor of their theology is exaggerated. They took a wide view of the extent of election. Owen is a fair example of them. Arguing against the Arminians, in support of the guilt of original sin, he says: "Observe that in this inquiry of the desert of original sin, the question is not, *What shall be the certain lot of those who depart this life under the guilt of this sin only?* but what this hereditary and native corruption doth *deserve*, in all those in whom it is? For as St. Paul saith, 'We judge not them that are without' (especially infants) (I Cor. v, 13). But for the *demerit* of it in the justice of God, our Saviour expressly affirmeth that 'unless a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' There are *two* ways whereby God saveth infants. First, by interesting them in the covenant, if their immediate or remote parents have been believers. He is a God of them, and of their seed, extending His mercy unto a thousand generations, of them that fear Him. Secondly, by His grace of election, which is most free and not tied to any conditions; by which

Such is the Westminster doctrine of the Divine decree. It is the common Augustino-Calvinistic doctrine. No part of it can be spared, and retain the integrity of the system. Whatever may have been the intention of the few first proposers of revision; or whatever may be the intention of the many various advocates of it who have joined them; the grave question before all parties now is, Whether the Presbyterian Church shall adhere to the historical Calvinism with which all its past usefulness and honor are inseparably associated, or whether it shall renounce it as an antiquated system which did good service in its day, but can do so no longer. The votes of the Presbyteries within the coming six months will answer this question.

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I make no doubt but God taketh many unto Him in Christ *whose parents never knew, or had been despisers of, the gospel*. And this is the doctrine of our Church, agreeable to the Scriptures affirming the desert of original sin to be God's wrath and damnation" (Owen : "Arminianism," Works v, 137).