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CHILD CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

The child of believing parents, members of the visible church themselves, is by birthright a member of the church. There is nothing in this that need startle any one. It is not a statement that children do not need to be regenerated in order to come into the personally saved life. It is not a claim that church membership, of itself, is sufficient to salvation. It is not a statement that these children are communicants, or entitled to come to the Lord's Table without any preliminary experience. It is simply the expression of the fact that they are members of the church.

The child is a member of the family into which it is born. It does not have to be adopted in order to become a member of it. It is born so. This does not mean that it is an adult member, or a self-supporting member, or a contributing or controlling member of the family. It is an infant. It is to be cared for, nurtured, supported, instructed and gradually inducted into the doing of life's duties. And it is through this conception of the family and the relation of the child to it that the family has been, and is, maintained.

The child is a member of the nation into which it is born. It does not have to be naturalized, nor even to declare its intention to become a citizen. It is born so. This does not mean that it is expected, in its infancy or childhood, to bear arms, pay taxes or vote. It does mean that it is a component part of the nation's life. It is helpless and irresponsible in its early life, as is any man in public life, and its abduction by any foreign power would be resented, if necessary, by the whole armament of the nation. And it is through this conception of the nation, and the relation of the child to it, that patriotic citizenship has been developed and fostered.

We hold that the whole trend of Bible teaching, as well as the analogies of practical life, emphasizes the fact that the child born to parents who are the professed followers of Christ are, themselves, members of the church. Our Presbyterian Discipline states this very plainly and forcefully when it says:

All children born within the pale of the visible church are members of the church, are to be baptized, are under the care of the church, and subject to its government and discipline; and when they have arrived at years of discretion, they are bound to perform all the duties of church members.

There are some bodies of Christian people who object to this, saying that they believe only in "believers' membership." They might as well demand that there shall be only adult membership for the family or the nation. God has put the children in the state, the family in the church. If they are properly cared for and nurtured

they will, in adult life, be found filling their places well in the home, in the nation, and in the Church of Jesus Christ.

There are some who are exceedingly afraid that this view may lead to a mere formalistic or sacramentarian view of church membership and its privileges. We will grant that they are conscientious, but we are free to insist that it does not work in that way. The children who are carefully and tenderly nurtured by parents who regard them as members of the church from infancy, as well as members of the family, and who use all efforts to train them for Christ, will, in most cases, come to have reverent regard for the things of religion, a habitual use of the means of grace and a personal love for and faith in Christ. This is regeneration. He who loves and believes in Christ is regenerated. The proper instruction at the right time in their early childhood will lead them to make profession of their faith and of their readiness and desire to come to the Lord's Table.

The dedication of the children to God in their infancy in baptism, by parents who regard this as the sign of a sacred covenant, is to be followed by their careful training in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This we regard as being far more apt to result in good to the children than the theory and practice of leaving them entirely outside the pale of the visible church in their infancy and childhood. We hold the view, however, that children are members of the church, not simply because we think it beautiful, or touching, or logical, or even because it works well, but because we believe it to be, in addition to all this, agreeable to and taught in the Word of God.

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

There is confusion in some minds as to what is or is not essential to Christianity, and there are some who do all in their power to promote that confusion. Those who are the loyal followers of Jesus Christ need to have clearly defined ideas and convictions, and then be prepared to stand to and defend their faith.

Christianity is not simply a system of ethics, although it includes within itself the highest and purest rules for human conduct ever devised. It is not simply a form of worship, although it does open up the way for the most spiritual and most elevating system of worship in which human hearts ever engaged. It is not simply one of a great number of religions any one of which is sufficiently good if only it be properly employed. It is not something of man's devising which has been developed as he has seen the need for it, and which may be still further improved by addition or elimination, as may seem proper.

Christianity is not simply the hand of

these is essential to the continued greatness of our nation and the permanence of its institutions. That is, the Christian religion. And he added, with deliberate and impressive emphasis: "Strike out the element of Christianity, and our nation is doomed." The career and destiny of Rome, he proceeded to say, indicate what ours would be.

While such men as Justice Brewer and Justice Harlan occupy seats in the highest judicial tribunal of our land, we may confidently hope that the fundamental principles of law, order and liberty on which our government is founded, will be expounded and maintained in their integrity.

NEW LIGHT ON "THE BRIEF STATEMENT."*

BY REV. W. S. PLUMER BRYAN, D. D.

This volume is one of a series, designed to "instruct the average church member in the origin, development and history of the various denominations," which, it is hoped, "will prove interesting to members of other denominations, as well who wish to learn something of their fellow-workers." Every one will admit the need of such a series. The volume is written in the clear and graceful literary style for which the author is so well known. The first ten chapters exhibit also a fine discrimination in the selection of the salient points in the history of the Church, although we can not but think that the history given would have been more luminous had the author allowed himself to discuss even briefly some of the outstanding questions of "polity and doctrine" which he thinks were beyond the limitations of space and his purpose. Every one will see the salient points in our church history differently, but to us it is singular that the organization of the General Assembly, in 1789, is passed by without mention, save in connection with the adoption of the national constitution. Dr. Thompson devotes his twelfth chapter to "Heresy Trials," which he thinks have peculiarly marked the period since the reunion. He tells us that the trial of Professor Swing took place because "Dr. Patton thought he detected in certain of Professor Swing's sermons doctrines inconsistent with the Confession of Faith," which, in our judgment, gives a merely personal aspect to a grave doctrinal issue in which the Presbyterian Church was abundantly vindicated by the after history of Professor Swing. Dr. Thompson's allusion to "the unhappy effects of the trial" is a mere reflection of the local sentiment engendered at the time, and shows a bias which in a historian is unfortunate. Our author traces the trials of Drs. Briggs, Smith and McGiffert to the Higher Criticism, which term is used "to designate the literary criticism of the Bible." In passing, we wonder what place Dr. Thompson finds for historical criticism, which, in our judgment, is of vastly more significance than literary criticism, and which was certainly involved in the trials of Professors Smith and McGiffert. The chapter gives no account of the grave issues which aroused the Church in these trials, nor does it find place for any statement of the general repudiation by the Church of the views advanced by these professors. So far as the general reader can tell, the Church might have been evenly divided on the questions at issue.

The most significant chapters, however, are the last two, dealing with "Confessional Changes" and "The Presbyterian Church To-day." The first of these chapters recites the various steps since 1839, which have led up to the overtures now before the Church for adoption. These overtures are dismissed in half a dozen lines without mention of the fact that final action has not yet been taken, and then we have the following remarkable statement:

* The Story of the Churches; the Presbyterians. By Charles Lemuel Thompson, D.D., Secretary of the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. New York, The Baker & Taylor Company, Small 12mo. Pp. 312.

"But the most important work of the committee, and that which was hailed with special satisfaction by the Assembly, was the 'Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith.' It had been prepared with a view to its being employed to give information and a better understanding of Presbyterian doctrine, and not with a view of its becoming a substitute for, or an alternative, of the Confession of Faith. It was not to be merely a condensation of catechisms and confessions, but a compendium which should bring out more plainly the evangelical aspects of the faith and be imbued with a devotional spirit. It was hoped that this 'Brief Statement' would find general acceptance when presented to the Assembly, but no one was prepared for the practical unanimity and devout enthusiasm with which it was adopted. Conservatives and liberals vied with each other in praise of its form and spirit, and in desire to adopt it as a worthy, and for all practical purposes, sufficient, expression of the truth, as held by the Presbyterian Church." (Pp. 250, 251.)

Then follows the Brief Statement, covering ten pages, almost as much space as is given to the chapter on "The Opening of a Century," and more than to any other Presbyterian document.

We can not at all concur with Dr. Thompson in these opinions, nor do we believe that he will be sustained in them by the sober judgment of the Church. He dismisses the eleven overtures on which our Presbyteries are now acting with a word, in order that he may exalt the Brief Statement, which is merely a deliverance of the Assembly, and calls for no constitutional action. He introduces statements which are not warranted either by the action of the General Assembly or by the report of the Revision Committee, when he says that this "compendium" was to "bring out more plainly the evangelical aspect of the faith, and be imbued with a devotional spirit," and he fails, in our judgment, to give the real causes of the unanimous action of the last Assembly in adopting the Brief Statement. In view of the action of the Assembly, and of the criticisms to which that Statement has been subjected since its adoption, it is scarcely historical to say it was adopted as "a worthy and for practical purposes, sufficient expression of the truth as held by the Presbyterian Church."

Dr. Thompson's closing chapter deals largely with the work of the Boards of the Church and its attitude of "Comity" towards other bodies. The most striking sentence, however, is one which must be read in the light of the preceding chapter. In showing that the Church is "conservative," he says:

"While, therefore, for the present the Church contents itself with a moderate revision and a brief creed, expressed in general terms, it is likely that the spirit of inquiry which has resulted in present changes will require further progress and additional statements" (p. 264.)

This is new light indeed, and we are indebted to our author for it. Perhaps it explains why a Secretary, representing another Board, closed his address at the centennial meeting of one of the Synods last autumn with a panegyric upon the Brief Statement and an extended quotation from it, and also why Dr. Francis Brown, of New York, and Dr. Herrick Johnson, of Chicago, have recently endeavored to lead their Presbyteries to endorse this deliverance and send it down to their churches. We think that this avowal of the need of "further progress and additional statements" is timely, and will prepare the Church to act upon the proposals which are foreshadowed; but we venture to add that some recent history which Dr. Thompson does not record is of such significance as seriously to impair the value of his prediction as to the future course of the Church.

We welcome this volume as a frank statement in good form of the personal views of Dr. Thompson as a minister of our Church, occupying a high position which he fills with success; yet we can not withhold an

expression of our regret that a volume dealing with history so recent, so incomplete as yet, and so calculated to engender differences of opinion, should be sent forth as from the Secretary of our Board of Home Missions. The author would of course, disclaim any official authority for his volume, but we are not sure that such a disclaimer would reach all of those who read the volume. So great a work as that of home missions should not be complicated by the intrusion of current controversies, and we are very respectfully, but very clearly, of the opinion that Dr. Thompson's best service, while in his present office, will be rendered by his concentrating his resources on the development of Presbyterian churches throughout the broad extent of our national domain.

Chicago.

ON THE DICTION OF THE REVISION OVERTURES.

BY PROF. BENJ. B. WARFIELD, D. D., LL. D.

The dealing of the Presbyteries with the overtures sent down by the last Assembly, proposing revisions of the Confession of Faith, has hitherto presented a remarkable spectacle of substantial unanimity. The future historian will, I am persuaded, be sadly puzzled to account for this unanimity. I have not myself been able to look upon it with satisfaction. The overtures themselves have not seemed to me, either in matter or in form, such as a Church, the heir of great traditions, should be willing to make its own, and much less to incorporate into the fabric of a nobly conceived and prudently expressed document like the Westminster Confession. There has seemed something hurried, hasty, almost impatient, in the way in which, in Presbytery after Presbytery, they have been rapidly disposed of. It has sometimes looked as if the Presbyteries were being driven by some extraneous impulse to get quickly through with a distasteful duty when the overtures came up for discussion. Sometimes, it appears, any discussion of them at all has been deprecated. An almost nervous desire "to be rid of them" (as I have heard it expressed) has seemed to be widespread through the Church.

I do not wonder, of course, that the Church should wish "to be rid" of these overtures, if I may, without offense, adopt this scarcely suitable phraseology to express my own point of view. But I deprecate very greatly the method it seems to be taking to accomplish this desirable result—reminding us of the woman who said she married her persistent suitor "to get rid of him." This is a poor way, however, to rid oneself of an undesirable applicant for our acceptance—as, indeed, we are advised by the proverb that tells us that to marry in haste is to repent at leisure. That appears to me the fate the Presbyteries are surely laying up for the Church in what seems to be the—shall I say inconsiderate?—well, certainly, the insufficiently considered, adoption of these overtures. Is it too late to plead for sober second thought before the knot is actually tied?

I can not persuade myself that the Church really likes these overtures; or, at least, I can not persuade myself that the Church can possibly like them when once it takes time to look them calmly in the face and to note their real features. Vagueness, or, perhaps, even some confusion in doctrinal conception, perplexity of logical statement, hesitancy of touch, an uncertain rhetoric, even a doubtful grammar—surely these are not features which in the haphazard combination given them here, form an engaging countenance.

Let us look for a moment at the unfortunate diction of the overtures. In the very first sentence we are bidden to pause by an ambiguous "only." Will any one tell us authoritatively what this word qualifies in this sentence? "The ordination vow requires the reception and adoption of the Confession of Faith only as containing the system of doctrine." Are we to read "the Confession of Faith only," i. e., to the exclusion of all else, for example, the catechisms? Or are we to read "only

as containing," i. e., "in no other sense but?"

We proceed to the second paragraph, and are at once smitten in the face by a false contrast. We are invited to declare "that, concerning those who are saved in Christ, the doctrine of God's eternal decree is held in harmony with" certain doctrines; while we at the same time declare "that, concerning those who perish, the doctrine of God's eternal decree is held in harmony with" certain other doctrines. According to all rule, and according to all natural instinct, these two contrasted clauses will be read as mutually exclusive, so that we are actually invited to say that it is only concerning the saved that the doctrine of the decree is held in harmony with God's love to all mankind, and it is only concerning the lost that the doctrine of the decree is held in harmony with the doctrine that God desires not the death of any sinner; and the like. This is surely a very bungling piece of sentence construction.

This, and many similar pieces of sentence-construction, may be regarded as only petty matters; they argue nothing but bad English; and they may be very easily corrected. But why should bad English be put into the Confession of Faith?

Or why should we put into the Confession such a "vain repetition" as this? Chapter on the Holy Spirit, Section 2: "The dispensation of the Gospel is especially committed to him." Section 3: He "is the only efficient agent in the application of redemption." Section 4: "He gives efficacy to the Word, and to the ordinances of the Gospel." Or why should any human being wish to put into any document which he wishes to be read without "a weary smile," such a piece of confusion worse confounded as this? Chapter on the Holy Spirit, Section 3: "The Holy Spirit gives to them the Spirit of adoption and prayer"; that is to say, the Holy Spirit gives himself. Or this? Chapter on the Holy Spirit, Section 3: The Holy Spirit "convicts men of sin, moves them to repentance, regenerates them by his grace, and persuades and enables them to embrace Jesus Christ by faith. He unites all believers to Christ," etc.

Here certainly is "logical progress" for you! One would like to know what distinction the reader is to make between the act of the Holy Ghost in "regenerating" the soul and his subsequent act in "enabling" the soul to embrace Christ, and his still subsequent act in "uniting" it to Christ. The bewildered reader may be excused if he fancies that the words must have been scattered upon the page from a pepper box, and have stuck where they chanced to strike.

But we must not prosecute this line of remark lest we find ourselves wandering into the obscure field of the theology of these overtures. Our proposed business now is solely with their diction. We have given only samples of the loose, confused and misleading diction of these remarkable paragraphs. We can not undertake to catalogue all the instances. We should have to repeat the whole of the overtures for that. There are few perfectly accurately conceived or justly expressed sentences in them. Any one who will simply read them over can easily match the "horrors" we have adduced with others just as bad.

Why should a great Church adopt such a body of loosely expressed sentences as part of its profession of faith? Why, above all, should it intrude them into the calm, chaste, exactly conceived, precisely-phrased context of the Westminster Confession? Surely the saving sober second thought will come before it is too late. There are some of us, at any rate, who confess to the weakness of preferring confessional statements which express what we know instead of betraying what we do not know. If that seems too much to ask, may we not at least plead for confessional statements that will parse? Brethren of the spring voting Presbyteries, the decision has providentially fallen into your hands. It is for you to say whether the Church is henceforth to lisp in these very halting numbers indeed, or

whether a pause should be called until at least we correct our English.

PITTSBURG'S LETTER.

BY REV. S. J. FISHER, D.D.

A beginning has been made upon the rebuilding of the First Church by the removal of the bodies of those buried in the graveyard surrounding the edifice. As it is to face on Sixth Avenue, this removal is made necessary, and where the names are known the friends will remove the bodies to the cemetery, while those unknown will be placed temporarily in the cellar of the church, and finally in a crypt which is to be constructed beneath the northern tower. When the huge office building rises on the Wood Street front, hiding the side of the new church and its towers, we shall miss the stately and attractive front, and, perhaps, the reminder of things unseen and spiritual and eternal in the noisy and crowded street. "The world is too much with us—late and soon," and even brick and stone set apart for divine things are helpful to the mind and heart and imagination. The Sixth Avenue frontage should repeat some of this attraction, and combine with Trinity to catch the eye of those who look out from store and office, and the handsome clubhouse just opposite. The removal of the saloon upon the corner—placed on property long ago sold by the church, will be no grief. A year from next September it is hoped will see the new building ready for occupancy.

Meanwhile the congregation will use the Alvin Theater for Sabbaths, and, possibly, the old Third Church Chapel for other services.

The Homestead Church congregation have removed their old edifice, and are busy with the foundations for the new. The site is a good one, and the fine plans promise it shall be made the best use of. The venerable Rev. W. G. Taylor, D.D., of Beaver, one of our oldest ministers, is slowly recovering from a very severe illness. Dr. Taylor has been so long and so usefully associated with the matters concerning Church and Presbytery in this region that though in the ordinary course of events we can not hope for a much longer retention of him here, his counsel and happy countenance and helpful presence are part of our treasured possessions.

The Bellefield Church has been holding a week of services preparatory to communion, in which Rev. Mr. Cotton, of Coraopolis, has been most successfully assisting the pastor, Dr. McClelland. His earnest and thoughtful sermons can not fail of present and future good.

The week preceding Easter will be used by a number of our churches for religious services, especially by those whose communion services fall on the second Sabbath of the month. Passion Week should be very suggestive at such a time. It begins to be probable that a site for the Technical School, offered by Mr. Carnegie, will soon be purchased by the city, as the Legislature is considering a bill authorizing the city to make such a purchase with its park funds; otherwise the limits on the debt-making powers of the city should prevent it. For those desirous of learning a trade, or developing their mechanical ability, this school will afford a great opportunity. Its proximity to the Institute, which includes the Library, Art Gallery and Music Hall, will afford an attractive grouping—though it is not necessary.

CHICAGO LETTER.

BY REV. CLARENCE G. REYNOLDS.

Five hundred Presbyterians heard Dr. Van Dyke at the banquet of the Presbyterian Social Union, at the Auditorium, Friday evening, the 13th inst. Nearly every church in the city was represented both by the pastor and one or more laymen and their wives. Dr. Van Dyke was given an informal reception, and was very happy in his good word to each one who greeted him. The Moderator was evidently very much at home with Chicago Presbyterians, and was in fine feather for his address,

which was sparkingly optimistic and delightfully delightful.

E. A. Halsey, the President of the Social Union, introduced Dr. Van Dyke as the man who always did well, whether in the pulpit, out of doors or in the Moderator's chair, and paid a glowing tribute to the literary genius of the writer of "The Ruling Passion," "The Blue Flower," and other books. Dr. Van Dyke, in his introductory words, said that he was glad to have his vacation fishing, and his vocation fishing for men. He was glad for the very name of the company he was addressing. He was glad they were Presbyterians, social and in union; glad that they were not sour, separate and cynical; glad they had a religion that believed in good digestion, good temper, fellowship and work. The banqueters had a right to be happy for four special reasons, which were elaborated at length:

Presbyterian prospects are bright, first, because of the peaceful, satisfactory and sufficient revision of our Standards of Faith.

Secondly, the Presbyterian Church is to be felicitated upon the production of "the Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith approved by the General Assembly, and issued for the better understanding of our doctrinal belief."

Our Brief Statement of Belief begins with acknowledgment and closes with the call to duty. One who receives it must be a "sound, solid Presbyterian, believing that all men are sinners, himself included; but that the grace of God saves all who will receive it. The crowning feature of the Statement is that it gives supreme authority to the Holy Spirit."

The third point emphasized by Dr. Van Dyke was the disposition of the Presbyterian Church to have a better equipment for public worship. This meets a necessity. As it has been, the Presbyterian Church having some forms of worship here and others there, confuses the worshiper so that he turns to the Episcopal Church for the settlement of the problems. Some Presbyterian churches at present have sort of "Dolly Varden" services. There should be the proper use of the Psalter, the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Let a special committee of the General Assembly devise a series of services, but let not the form of worship be forced upon the churches."

The Moderator thanked God for the revival of the evangelistic spirit in the Presbyterian Church. This was his fourth and last point, and he made much of it in the very few minutes left for the close of the address.

With Dr. Van Dyke, at the speakers' table, were many representative men, including Dr. Frank Carson, Moderator of the Presbytery, and Cyrus McCormick.

Dr. Van Dyke had expected to preach at the University of Chicago for two Sundays, but was called home hurriedly because of the alarming illness of his daughter, Dorothy, suffering with pneumonia.

Pro and Con.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

We have recently had a meeting in Chicago of a body of people calling themselves by several different names and having for their object, "to perfect and spread an ideal, to advise—for better work, to guide all existing agencies and individuals," etc.

In the light of certain facts this seems a piece of brazen impudence. It was along just such lines that Popery was developed. Are we to have a modern popery of destructive criticism? According to its chief apostle, the recent "Council of Seventy" is an "organization which can stand above all existing agencies and institutions, to perfect and spread an ideal." When the Presbyterian Church was founded it was by wise men, men of profound scholarship and clear insight into the teaching of Scripture. They discovered room or requirement for three ranks of officers—the ruling elder, the teaching el-