

THE  
PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

---

NO. 18.—OCTOBER, 1891.

---

I. CALVINISM AND CONFSSIONAL REVISION.<sup>1</sup>

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

---

<sup>1</sup> From *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, by permission. Published by special request.

Kings, but is fully confirmed by the prophecy against Philistia in Isaiah xiv. 29, "Rejoice not, O Philistia, all of thee, because the rod that smote thee is broken," etc. This evidently refers to a shaking off of the dominion that Uzziah had imposed on the Philistines, and can be nothing else than the attack which Chronicles here records. Even Graf is constrained to admit that this item is historical.

The third difficulty between the two passages, that, according to Kings, Tiglath-pileser listened to Ahaz's entreaty and smote Damascus, while, according to Chronicles, he did not strengthen him or help him is easily solved. Chronicles does not say that the King of Assyria did not smite the Syrians, but only that the alliance with Assyria was no real gain to Ahaz. It was merely substituting one oppressor for another, and from this time on Judah groaned under the Assyrian yoke as is abundantly testified by Isaiah x. 24-27; xxxiii. 18.

*Berlin.*

LEWIS B. PATON.

### CLOSED QUESTIONS.

THE Swiss have an entertaining legend concerning the origin of their mountains. In the olden time—so the story runs—the land was an irrigated pasture-plain of great fertility and beauty. In those days a race of giants came from the sterile Himalayas, famishing, and begging for supplies and hospitality. These were generously and bountifully accorded by the natives. By and by, the giants grew in wealth and power, and oppressed the inhabitants of the land, despoiled their charming pastures, and blocked up their flowing streams. Then the cry of the herdsmen and their herds ascended to heaven, and the Almighty Power metamorphosed the tyrannical giants into huge mountains, and there they remain to this day as the bulwarks of civil and religious liberty.

This legend illustrates the treatment which Protestantism is receiving at the hands of that famishing principle which it received into its bosom—the principle of free thought, free inquiry and free utterance. With it Rationalism, both within and without the Church, seeks to unsettle the whole Protestant mind, to overturn its venerable institutions, to invade the hallowed sphere of its worship with æsthetic notions, and to turn its own batteries upon itself. The attempt is ungrateful and iniquitous. It is the unlicensed perversion of a sound and useful principle.

Recent events and discussions emphasize the imperative import-

ance of our Protestantism, reminding its adherents that some questions are closed, and removed from the arena of debate; that there are some limitations upon the principle of free thought and speech which it will insist shall be respected. Unless this course is pursued, we shall be like children, "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

1. Protestantism has definitely settled upon the Bible as its rule of faith. To open this question as an original one would be equal to digging down the foundations, and beginning the theological superstructure again from the ground; and ere it could be completed, the same iconoclastic spirit would again make the same demand; and so on indefinitely. The science of mathematics refuses to put its axioms into interminable debate. It would be unreasonable to make such a demand upon it, and if such a demand were made, it would be the quintessence of absurdity did it recognize the demand for one single instant. The mechanician could never do the work of invention and construction, if he were required to discuss endlessly the rules of measurement. These practical illustrations show the suicidal and paralyzing folly of Protestantism holding the "source of authority" an open and unsettled question. Modern "progressives" are bitterly alleging that our Protestant theology is "anchored to a cemetery," in which the ecclesiastical sexton delights to inter all freedom and manliness; but these parties are themselves the greatest "barriers" to true progress in theology and church extension, for there can be no movement forward until there has been a fixation of some starting-point, and as soon as that starting-point has been determined upon, the "progressives" straightway raise the question, What shall be the starting-point? What is the source of theology? There can be no going on unto "perfection" unless there can be a leaving of "first principles." Protestantism, therefore, is bound to say to free thought, pointing its eye to the Bible: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

All theism rests upon God as the ultimate ground of certitude in religion. But as soon as we ask after the *media* through which this voice of God utters itself to the world—as soon as we inquire for the proximate ground of religious certitude—differences of a serious nature instantly emerge. Rationalism predicates the individual reason as the final source of authority to be implicitly relied upon, and promptly installs the reason above the Bible with the amendatory and expurgato y

rights of an editor over the sacred page—a right which entitles him to reject the whole or any part of the “Testimony of Jesus,” and a right to the final interpretation of so much of the Scriptures as is permitted to remain. Romanism points to the church as the infallible organ of divine truth; but that ecclesiastical authority heads up itself in an infallible Pope, whose organ of utterance is his individual reason, which reduces the system of Popery to the vilest form of rationalism. A late writer appeals to the reason, not to the individual reason, but to the concrete and corporate reason—“the Divine reason done into the historical institution of the church,” “the communal Christian consciousness.” Our controversy, therefore, is with rationalism in its pure, dogmatic, papal, historical, and mystical forms, and their multitudinous combinations. Protestantism, while seeing in the church a divinely appointed witness to the truth, and in the reason, a divinely instituted organ for the reception of the truth, finds the Scriptures to be the truth divinely delivered. This is its synthesis of the relations to the truth of the church, the reason and the Scriptures. The Protestant, therefore, can raise the question, What is the rule of faith? only for the didactic purpose of expounding it, and for the apologetic purpose of defending it. To raise it as a question of fact is, *ipso facto*, to withdraw from Protestantism, which has already determined it in that character.

2. Protestantism has also determined some of the characteristics of its rule of faith, and removed them from the category of open questions. The genuineness, authenticity, verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures are, to the Protestant mind, closed questions. They can be handled only to be expounded and maintained against all gain-sayers. The moment they are opened and their verity challenged, the opener becomes a disturber of settled principles, and, unless he is checked, will draw the church into battle upon a field where it has already fought and won. It would be gratuitous in the church to accept a controversy through which it has already passed in success. Must it jeopardise its principles at the dictation of every rationalist and person of unbalanced faith? Must it review its judgments as often as an “advanced thinker” rises to shout in the tones of palpitating sarcasm, great swelling words about “intellectual cowardice,” which permits the church “in a live century and country” to be tied to old ideas that the world has outgrown? Is our Protestantism under any moral or intellectual obligation to permit a destructive criticism to unsettle the authorship, canonicity and inspiration of the

Scriptures, which doctrines it has with prayerfulness and patient labor formulated to its own satisfaction? If this demand should be acceded to and the destructionists be allowed all freedom to reconstruct, it would be but a question of time when another school of destructionists would arise, and in the name of the same freedom of thought demand the overthrow of the new construction. The demand upon our Protestant theology is that it shall tramp an endless circle under the lash of the world's religious restlessness. The higher criticism is traitorous to Protestantism. Our contention is that Protestant theology has a right to conserve and file away these results of its hard-fought and blood-won controversies.

3. As Protestantism has closed a certain set of questions for its adherents, so denominationalism has closed another set for its members. This latter set of closed questions is exactly equal to the contents of the denominational creed. While it is superlatively true that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only, the all-sufficient, the inspired, the inerrant rule of faith and practice, revealing all that man is to believe concerning God, and the entire duty that God requires of him, it is at the same time true that man must interpret each and every part of those Scriptures to the best of his ability, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and then combine all that the Scriptures teach upon every subject into a scientific whole. "Every student of the Bible must do this, and all make it obvious that they do it by the terms they use in their prayers and religious discourse, whether they admit or deny the propriety of human creeds and confessions. If they refuse the assistance afforded by the statements of doctrine slowly elaborated and defined by the church, they must make out their own creed by their own unaided wisdom. The real question is not, as often pretended, between the word of God and the creed of man, but between the tried and proved faith of the collective body of God's people and the private judgment and the unassisted wisdom of the repudiator of creeds." It would be spiritual presumption, intellectual vanity and wanton folly thus to discard the concurrent wisdom of the learned and pious of all ages, and erect in its stead the judgments of the individual reason. The egotism that would do it deserves popular rebuke instead of applause. Still each individual has the right to exercise this responsible presumption, provided he is outside of denominationalism and outside of Protestantism; for, while he is inside of either, he is inside certain lines which they have drawn, and behind which he voluntarily placed himself.



(1). These creedal statements are closed questions to the adherents of that denomination, because they are the results of its investigations into sacred truth. They mark the attainments already made in religious knowledge by that branch of the church. No man within that denomination has any intellectual or moral right to efface those marks in the name of his personal liberty—to demand of that denomination that it shall wipe out its constitutional principles, which are to it basic, to further progress, and instrumental to the great end of popular instruction. There is no greater mercy for which we are under obligations to thank our heavenly Father than this, that it is not our sad state to be in a plight, where nothing is settled, but where all is in a state of flux. If we cannot be bound by creeds, says some, and at the same time be free from creeds; let us be free. No man has the right to make any such demand for unsettlement. He has the right to withdraw, but not the right to undermine.

(2). Creeds are a covenant of fellowship voluntarily subscribed to, and covenant fidelity closes their contents against all destructive criticism within the fellowship. For purposes of self-protection, for the sake of internal peace and undivided coöperation, each denomination exacts of all its officers a solemn oath that they will in no point contravene that confessional bond of fellowship. The oath is a pledge of faith to one another. In entering into the doctrinal agreement, each member has the right to demand of every one of his associates a pledge of fidelity. Every other organization proceeds in a similar manner. It would be too silly to command the patronage of any, but that of the unwary, if it did not lay such an exaction of faith-keeping with one another. Denominational infidelity is perjury. For one to force into debate the points in the creedal covenant, which he swore at his ordination should always be regarded by him as settled, is the worst sort of faith-breaking. Bishop Seymour, of Illinois, has, in a late pastoral letter, very properly written, "It might reasonably be anticipated that no man, who was thus voluntarily bound by his own oft-repeated pledge and promise, and had in consequence of his reiterated declaration of fidelity obtained a position as a trusted minister of the church, could trifle with, much less deny the faith; and if by chance he was so unfortunate as to cease to believe any or all of the fundamental verities of the gospel as summed up in the creed, it might be expected that he would at once, as soon as he knew his own mind, renounce his orders and leave the ranks of the priesthood, in which he could no longer remain. Self-evident as this seems to be, it is not always the case;

nay, it is frequently otherwise. . . . Heresy seems to cast a blight upon the moral nature, and to deaden and paralyze the conscience. Its victims, though shut out from such a course by their own voluntary and oft-repeated pledge and promise to the contrary, seem to think that they are called to stay in a body whose faith and principles they repudiate, and reform it. They seem to fancy that to them all questions are open, as though they had not entered a system, the very essence of whose stability lies in the fact that within its bounds certain questions are finally and forever closed. When such men are called to account for their perfidy and dishonesty, they respond with the charge of persecution and bigotry, and the world echoes their cry." "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

(3). The principle of free inquiry, in dealing with creeds, is further limited by the amount of Biblical truth there may be in them. This is obvious.

Out of the "thinking shop of Europe" and America, infidelity is offering an appalling variety of manufactures: sentimental, philosophic, scientific, secularistic, and other forms of unbelief. With these as the fruits of free thought, it is a marvel how men in the church can so vociferously demand that it shall more largely patronize this "shop."

R. A. WEBB.

---

### ON THE CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR MOVEMENT.

As a few Sabbaths ago, I witnessed some score or more of persons, mostly young, standing up in one of our churches confessing publicly their faith, I could not but wonder how many among them would be found five years hence in the ranks of the faithful. All of our church members have, on being received into the church, given evidence of conversion, and yet we are unfortunately by no means justified in using the term church member and Christian synonymously. We are forced to admit the probability that a certain number of those who are received into the church will in time prove unfaithful to their vows, and will fall away from the faith. Now, if we look over the