

A FRIENDLY TALK ABOUT REVISION:

*BEING A DISCUSSION OF THE REPORT PRESENTED
TO THE LAST GENERAL ASSEMBLY.*

BY
EDWARD D. MORRIS.

*Without counsel Purposes are disappointed:
But in the multitude of counsellors they are established.*

SOLOMON.

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TO MY BRETHREN,

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE OF REVISION :

With whom it has been one of the rare privileges of life to be associated in a responsible and honorable task appointed for us by the Church we delight to serve :

With tender memories of him, recently translated from service to reward, who was easily first among us in doctrine and in power, strong in conviction, earnest and indefatigable in labors, and ever a brother among brethren :

THIS LITTLE TRACTATE,

The product of summer days on the shores of a great inland sea, and the outcome of an anxious desire to contribute something in whatsoever way to the better understanding and wider acceptance of the present issue of our endeavor, is

MOST CORDIALLY INSCRIBED :

With an humble Prayer that the final issue of the current movement may be a true and living Creed, full both of Scriptural truth and of quickening power, an added honor to the Church we love, and (if it may by the grace of God be so)

FIRST AMONG THE CREEDS OF CHRISTENDOM.

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A FRIENDLY TALK ABOUT REVISION.

PREFATORY.

ONE of the most striking evidences of the biblical and theological soundness of the creeds, which came into existence during the period of the Reformation, lies in the fact that now, after the lapse of three centuries, these creeds remain substantially unchanged. Some indeed of the minor confessions, such as those of certain Swiss cities, have practically faded from view, partly from their intrinsic deficiencies of statement, partly because for external reasons they have lost their comparative importance as representatives of the common Protestantism. But all of the main creeds stand to-day in essence and substance as they stood at the first, so many marble columns inscribed with the old, but still surviving beliefs of the Church—so many strong and enduring witnesses certifying to what evangelical Protestants still hold and affirm to be the teaching of the Word of God.

This fact cannot be explained by the suggestion that Protestantism has been intellectually torpid during this long period, no living growth enjoyed, no progress made in doctrine or in experience. The conflicts of the seventeenth century, the theologies and speculations of the eighteenth, the moral energies and missionary activities of the nineteenth century, abundantly show that the churches born of the Reformation have not been dying out meanwhile in either intelligence or spiritual capability. Neither

can it be said that Protestantism has in fact outgrown these old creeds, holding on to them only for historic reasons, but practically regarding them as dead or meaningless, in the presence of the more vital issues now commanding thought and interest. For is it not obvious that Lutheranism still clings intelligently as well as tenaciously to its Book of Concord; that the Reformed communions of Germany and Holland, and their representatives in America, still accept with practical loyalty the Catechism of Heidelberg and the Canons of Dort; that Episcopacy still holds on with a deliberate grasp to the Thirty-Nine Articles; that, in fact, every conspicuous branch of Protestantism affirms and believes in our time, with an assurance springing from prolonged study and from a widening experience, substantially what the primitive Protestantism maintained three hundred years ago?

And this intelligent persistence becomes the more striking if we call to mind certain tendencies, both within the churches and without, which would naturally tend to an opposite result. Within, the deep consciousness of an underlying unity, the multiplied forms of activity in territory common to all, the beautiful growth of mutual respect and courtesy, the steadily increasing desire for fellowship and even for organic union, and other like influences, are constantly inclining the several denominations, if not to ignore, still to emphasize less distinctly their peculiarities in teaching and creed. Without, the struggles of current types of unbelief and of error for the subversion of all evangelical faith, the prevalent indifference to the Scriptures and to doctrine, the emphasizing of external moralities as higher than all theological convictions, and a multitude of other like causes, tend in the same direction. Is it not remarkable that, in the presence of many such influences, both internal and external, the old historic con-

fessions should be adhered to so faithfully, and maintained with such practical and living interest? Nor is this happening, as some have said, because the churches fear that, if the historic creeds were swept aside, Christianity itself would be lost; but rather because the old Reformation doctrines are still found to be true, notwithstanding a thousand forms of criticism and opposition, and because the Christian heart as well as the Christian brain still cherishes them and clings to them as representative of much that is sweetest, dearest, most nutritious and satisfying in the religious life. Not only do the creeds of the Reformation stand unbroken in their reverend majesty: the churches born of the Reformation still stand by them, not with indifference or through mere torpor, but with an intelligent loyalty that shows no signs of flagging or decay.

MOVEMENT TOWARD REVISION.

On the other hand, it is true that the various branches of Protestantism, as the result of their broadening experience and enlarging life, are becoming more and more conscious that the old creeds do not adequately express all that these churches now believe, and also that some of the doctrinal statements maintained in them need to be recast in order to make them more satisfactory in themselves, and to bring them into closer harmony with other discovered truth, both in theology and in adjacent departments of knowledge. Such an experience was to be anticipated as an inevitable issue, in a group of religious organizations exhibiting so much of vitality in themselves, and so closely affiliated with the grand progressive movements of our time in science and philosophy, and in multiplied other directions. Signs of such consciousness and conviction are already apparent in many quarters, and it is by no means certain that, before the twentieth century closes, most of

these ancient symbols will not either have passed through some process of revision and reconstruction, or possibly have given way to new declarations of faith, springing from the developing life of the churches, or perchance originating in some new conflict waged around this or that cardinal element in our holy Faith. Two great creed periods have already transpired in Christian history; a third, more significant than either, may yet follow before the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Confession shall be cast into ultimate form.

Is it not one of the glories of our Presbyterianism, both British and American, that it should be the first among the Protestant churches to become conscious of this doctrinal and spiritual development, to recognize the presence of this confessional necessity, and actually to enter upon the reconstruction of its cherished creed? If such a movement had appeared in but one or two of the fifty organizations, national or provincial, which bear this common name, or if it were busying itself with the reshaping of some single dogma merely, the fact might hardly attract attention. But this movement evidently has a cosmic character—is representative of a generic need, and is destined therefore to manifest itself sooner or later wherever the Westminster symbols are now accepted and cherished. May it not be expected that the same dogmatic and spiritual issues which are now confronting many branches of Presbyterianism, will before another generation has passed be forcing themselves upon the notice of other branches, even the most conservative and reluctant? And is it not one special honor of those that are now engaged in this process, that they are working out these great problems of doctrine and duty in confessional statement, not for themselves alone, but for their Presbyterian brethren in every land and through coming time?

It cannot be said that this movement grows out of defects peculiar to our noble Confession; for is it not an admitted fact that no creed of Protestantism is more elaborate or complete in its structure, or exhibits greater capacity to withstand the tests of searching scrutiny, the shocks and assaults of unbelief? Is it not obvious also, that many of the things which are inciting us as Presbyterians to this process of reconstruction, are really imbedded more or less fully in the other leading creeds of Protestantism, so that the same incentive is in fact operating, though less distinctly, in these other Protestant bodies? So true is this that the faithful revision of its creed by any single Presbyterian body like our own, is a work not for Presbyterianism only, but for evangelical Protestantism the world over. Other churches, even those most remote from us doctrinally and ecclesiastically, are profoundly interested in the task we are undertaking, and in a deeper sense are interested intellectually and spiritually in the issue of our labors. Were we to fail in this effort, there is reason to believe that the progress of Christian theology along the safe lines indicated by its nature and its history as a sacred science, the development of spiritual experience around the sublime verities of our Faith, the growth and activity of the whole Church of God, might be injured or retarded for centuries to come.*

* Many evidences of such general interest are already apparent. An eminent Professor in a Baptist Seminary recently said to the writer: "By far the larger proportion of our ministers and membership are Calvinists substantially, and they are watching with the deepest concern the work in which your Church is engaged. Eliminate from your noble creed some of its offensive statements and its severities of aspect, and we will welcome it as our Confession no less than yours. The work you are engaged in is a work for us also."—Many of our most intelligent and cultivated Methodist brethren are cherishing like sympathy with our effort to formulate our creed more distinctly along those great primal lines of evangelical truth wherein we and they

Nor can it be alleged that this is in fact a reaction against the Calvinistic system, of which the Westminster symbols are confessed to be the most positive and commanding representative. Were the movement to reveal any such tendency, we have reason to believe that neither in England or Scotland nor among ourselves could it secure any extensive support. There are indeed some extreme conceptions of Calvinism, justified in part—it may be confessed—by the known teachings and beliefs of some of the men who framed these symbols, and also by certain forms of expression and emphasis in statement, which such revision will inevitably tend to throw into the background: not so much because they are intrinsically untrue, but because they present the divine truth in ways that are too unsymmetrical, too extreme, too exclusive of other cardinal elements in the common Christianity. It might even occur that in the just reaction against such extremes, some would be inclined to reject entirely that system of belief which bears for us the name of the historic sage of Geneva, but which we believe to be imbedded primarily and inextricably in the Pauline epistles. But the present effort in the interest of reconstruction has nowhere taken on this revolutionary form: it is rather an effort by intelligent and loyal Calvinists, in behalf of Calvinism, for the purpose of giving to that Calvinism greater breadth, greater coherence and symmetry, greater power for good over its adherents and over all who come within the range of its influence. No one need fancy that he here sees evidence that our Calvinism is dying out; what he sees is a living process such

move more or less consciously together. Lutheranism and even Anglicanism are in some degree appreciating the relations of our movement to themselves as well as to us. It is not too much to say that our revision, in a word, is—as the future will clearly show—a work for the common Protestantism, for the whole Church of God on earth.

as none but an intensely vital system could either originate or carry through. There is certainly no less of what we call Calvinism in the world now than there was a generation ago, but rather much more; our type of doctrine is more widely diffused in evangelical conviction, more extensively influential in all circles of religious thought, more thoroughly alive and jubilant than ever in its long and honorable history. And revision will do, can do nothing to mar the significance of this fact; rather is it true that in and through wise revision, and thus only, is our Calvinism to reach its completeness both as a theological system, and as a guide to men in their religious life.

SOME REASONS FOR REVISION.

Why should we attempt to restate in confessional terms a doctrinal system acknowledged to be so complete in itself, and so well expressed already in our Presbyterian symbols? Two or three reasons may briefly be given. At the outset, it cannot fail to be obvious to any careful reader that there are many words, phrases, forms of expression, in our symbols which have greatly changed their meaning, either in theology or in common life, since the seventeenth century. Such adjectives as *mere* and *utter* and *total*, such nouns as *pleasure* and *depravity*, are familiar instances of such verbal change. Examples of forms of statement or expression that have become obsolete, or have taken on some special significance in later times, are not infrequent. And while the existence of these verbal defects may not be in itself a sufficient reason for revision, it may properly be adduced to illustrate and enforce the deeper reasons by which revision is justified.—These deeper reasons lie partly in what may with propriety be described as the dogmatic partialness of our Confession—the marked and imperative emphasis which it places upon certain aspects of Christian

doctrine, to the relative retiring or ignoring of others. For example, we are familiar with the fact that our symbols were written but a short time after the great Arminian defection broke out, and while the theological battle which that defection brought on was still in progress, not in Holland alone or on the Continent only, but in England also. It was but natural, therefore, that the composers of these symbols, many of them among the leading minds in British theological circles, should have stated the Calvinism against which Arminius and his followers had gone into revolt, in its most positive and even belligerent and extreme form, so as to leave no room whatever for the supposition that they were in sympathy with such errorists. Surely it is not necessary to accentuate these aspects of doctrine so strongly in this age when Arminianism has shaken off so entirely its earlier tendencies toward dangerous aberration, and has—at least as represented in Methodism ever since the Wesleys—exhibited so much both of evangelical conviction and of genuine spiritual power.

Other illustrations of a defectiveness in form which grew out of the age and the circumstances in which the symbols were written, will readily occur to mind. The perpetuation of such defects is as needless as it would be to perpetuate in our day the theological controversies out of which such deficiency arose. But another and broader reason for revision is to be found in the actual advances which have been made during the last two centuries and a half, and especially in the latter half of our own century, in theological knowledge and in religious experience. Of the reality and vast moment of these advances there can be little question among those who are familiar with the history of doctrine and of church life since the Reformation. New truths, hardly apprehended by the divines of the seventeenth century, or at least not sufficiently appreciated

by them to be placed in their confessional declarations, have in these later times come into prominence, and claimed their place in our creeds as well as our hearts. Illustrations of this fact appear on every hand. The gracious workings of the Holy Spirit in the heart of humanity, the adaptedness of the Gospel to the moral needs of the race, the generic as well as particularistic relations of the atonement and the mediation of Christ, the breadth of the divine covenant with man, the love of God for the world and His desire that all men should learn of the Saviour and believe on Him, the full responsibility of every sinner as a subject under the moral government of God, the divine fatherhood in its relations providential and gracious to the race, the great commission given to the Church, with its correspondent duty to carry the Gospel in faith and hope to every creature, and the lost condition of the pagan nations excepting as they shall hear and embrace the gracious message, —all these truths, and others of like import, have come into prominence or have become dominating convictions in the heart of Presbyterians as of other evangelical believers, since the day when our symbols were so carefully framed in Westminster Abbey.

Unquestionably the chief reason for revision lies in the absolute necessity for the proper recognition of such broad and vital doctrines as these in our denominational creed, just as we have welcomed them into our religious life, social and individual. It is not essential to this process that the old and grand and solemn doctrines respecting the majesty and the sovereignty of God in nature and in grace should be set aside, or should in any way be put into the background. It is not necessary that our Calvinism should be any less obviously Calvinistic, though we admit into it elements of sacred doctrine which the great divine of Geneva never discerned in their transcendent beauty and

power to bless. What is needed is a proper recognition of these elements, not only as entitled to a place in conjunction with the class of doctrines just referred to, but as absolutely essential to the explanation and proper commending of these doctrines, and to the spiritual warmth and glow of the whole system, viewed as a human effort to express in formal language the whole truth of God.*

THE MOVEMENT IN OUR CHURCH.

The history of this movement in its several stages may be briefly stated: the petition of several presbyteries to the General Assembly of 1889, and the action of that body submitting the general question of revision to the judgment of the whole Church; the reports of 134 presbyteries to the Assembly of 1890, expressing their wish for revision and indicating the particular changes desired by them; the action of that body in favor of revision within the limits prescribed by the Reformed or Calvinistic system, and the appointment of a large representative Committee to pro-

* The writer is well aware that in these informal and cursory statements he has done but little toward setting forth the argument for revision as it might be, and in fact has been, presented over and over. But happily little need now exists among us for such argument. A great church, after mature deliberation throughout all its borders, has by its supreme judicatory declared that revision is desirable, and has actually entered with substantial unanimity upon the lofty task. And since this auspicious beginning the work has gone on amid steadily increasing signs of consent and approval, such as justify no doubt as to the final success of the novel undertaking. Whether the revision will be all that is desired by some, or will be acceptable to all when it assumes its final form, cannot be foretold. But it seems as certain as anything in the future can be, that in some form and to some extent our Confession, and ultimately our Catechisms, will be so revised as to bring them more fully into conformity with the existing convictions and sentiments of the Church.

pose such alterations and amendments to the Confession as in their judgment might be deemed desirable; the tentative report of that Committee to the General Assembly of this year, suggesting a series of amendments and alterations and requesting that these be submitted to the further consideration of the whole Church; and the consequent action of the Assembly, submitting this report to the inspection of the presbyteries, and instructing them to give answer to the Committee at a specified date, with a view to the preparation on their part of a final report, to be submitted to the General Assembly of 1892, and ultimately presented to the whole Church for final action. At each of these stages, some of them to human view exceedingly critical, a degree of unanimity has been reached which is inexplicable on any other theory than that a Divine Hand has been present in the guidance of this movement, and a Divine Spirit at work almost visibly in the thoughts and the hearts of men. What a few years ago would have been pronounced impossible is already realized; and the present mental attitude of the whole Church, an attitude not merely of acquiescence, but apparently of positive approval, justifies the hope that what is now unfinished and tentative only, will be brought in due time to a glorious completion.

In submitting this Report in its present form to the judgment of the Church, the General Assembly has not indeed expressed an opinion as to the merits of any particular alteration or amendment proposed by the Committee. Yet it is not improper to infer that, if anything radically offensive in itself or anything obviously in conflict with our doctrinal system had been found in the report, the Assembly would have exercised its constitutional right to eliminate at once such objectionable features. It is not to be supposed that, if that judicatory, acting for the whole Church, had discovered in the report a wide variety of

heterogeneous material, some things to be approved, some to be set aside as unimportant, some to be positively repudiated, it would have incurred the responsibility of sending down to the presbyteries such an indiscriminate medley of matter, to be by them analyzed, inspected or suspected, and finally arranged in separate parcels to be received or rejected, like the fish good and bad in the parable of our Lord. Such action would have been entirely inconsistent with that broad responsibility, and that superintending care, which according to our Form of Government (Chap. XII: v.) are vested immediately in our supreme judicatory. Of course, the most critical and thorough examination possible is desired by the Assembly on account both of the vast moment of the subject-matter itself, and of the immeasurable consequences, good or evil, that must flow from right or wrong action on the part of the presbyteries, upon whom the final responsibility in the case must rest. All that is claimed here is that there is a just presumption to be recognized in favor of a report framed by a process so deliberate, and so cordially accepted in its general cast by the Assembly itself, to the extent at least that its recommendations shall not be regarded with unfriendly suspicion at the outset, but shall be treated as worthy of acceptance, until after the fullest and fairest investigation they shall be cast out as unworthy of acceptance.*

*The writer of this little tractate by no means assumes to be the special champion of this report. He is simply a private member of the Committee of Revision, charged with no particular responsibility, and aspiring to no particular honor or control. His assumed function is one of explanation chiefly. His only justification for bringing himself into public view in this connection lies in his absorbing interest in the whole movement, and his prayerful hope and purpose that nothing shall come in to prevent the happiest possible outcome from the labors of the Committee. In those labors he has counted it among the greatest privileges of his life to share.

There are important reasons in favor of the course adopted by the last Assembly. The time and deliberation required are certainly not too great, if the vastness of the result be duly considered. It is said that hardly any State in the American Union can alter a single article in its Constitution within less than three years, and surely an equal delay is desirable in the amendment of a creed which has stood for a hundred years unaltered, and may stand for another hundred years without further change. The fear that prolonged discussion of the alterations here proposed would excite controversy and possibly lead on to division, seems entirely groundless in view of the fact that thus far such discussion has obviously tended strongly toward unity,—disputants discovering more and more that, while differing in forms of statement, they were one at heart in respect to the essential elements of the doctrine discussed. This result may be anticipated in the future in still larger degree; and there is reason for the belief that our beloved Church, while embracing in itself elements and parties more or less antithetic and even antagonistic, will find itself more than ever intelligently and cordially one, as the outcome of this movement. And is there not also an educational value in the submission of this report as the Assembly has done, and in the discussions that must follow, which cannot well be too highly estimated? Indeed, it is not too much to hope that our ministers and elders will better understand our doctrinal system; that there will be more of private and thorough study of our symbols; that the people will receive more of practical and intellectual indoctrination; that the Church will understand the revised Confession better than for a long time it has understood the old one; and finally, that the historic place and function of Presbyterianism as in a high sense the teaching and testifying Church in Christendom will be more efficiently filled.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE.

With these preliminary suggestions in hand, the writer ventures with great deference to submit to those who may read these pages a detailed résumé and examination of the Report as now commended by the General Assembly to the thoughtful study of the whole Church. His general object will be to explain, to commend, and so far as needful to protect the proposed revision from misapprehension and from unjust opposition. At the same time he feels at liberty to indicate here and there what he regards as imperfection or inadequacy in some of the statements presented, in the hope that he may thus aid in some small degree in bringing the revised Confession up to the highest practicable point of completeness. In this examination, each of the amended chapters and sections will be presented in confessional order, with such explanations in brief as the object in view may seem to require.

CHAPTER I.: OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURE.

This chapter has long been regarded as the most full and the most satisfactory statement, in confessional form, of the general Protestant doctrine on this fundamental matter. Stanley has pronounced it the most complete article on any subject to be found in the wide range of Protestant symbolism, and compares it not unfavorably with the astute and remarkable decree of the Council of Trent on the doctrine of justification by faith. It sets forth admirably the several topics discussed: the need of Revelation, its contents and their full inspiration; its evidences, authoritativeness, and adequacy as a rule of faith and life, and the true and only law of interpretation. No specific call for its revision came before the Committee from any presbytery, but private suggestions, some of them valuable, were brought to its notice:—suggestions bearing particularly on its terse statement of inspiration, and on the problem of the Christian consciousness as related to its proper interpretation. So far as the first point was concerned, it was evidently best that any further reference should find its legitimate place if anywhere in the proposed new chapter on the offices and functions of the Holy Spirit: and as to the second, the declarations of the existing chapter, simple and practical yet remarkably profound, seemed to be sufficient.

But one matter required attention. It is a fact familiar to all students of historical theology, that the general evidences for the Bible were not specially discussed during the struggles of the Reformation, doubtless for the reason that not only Protestants of all varieties, but also the Roman Catholic party were substantially agreed in accepting the Scriptures as given to men by inspiration of God: and particularly that the great argument for the Bible, drawn

from what are now called the external evidences, had not at that date received the elaborate development which has resulted from the thorough researches of the eighteenth century and of later times. As a consequence, the proofs adduced in section v. being altogether internal, and appealing as such chiefly to the believer, have been found to be inadequate to meet the needs of an age like our own in which the divineness of the Holy Word is at every possible point assailed. To meet these needs the grand arguments from prophecy and from miracle, and also the rapidly developing argument from the established trustworthiness of the biblical history, regarded not as inspired but simply as authentic and credible when subjected to the ordinary historic tests, have become indispensable as correlated proofs. Without some reference to these more external proofs the section would manifestly be inadequate as a statement of the grounds on which we, as a Church, now receive the Bible as an inspired book. In the belief that the introduction of such a reference would commend itself to all, as an important addition to the chapter, the Committee have introduced the italicised words into section v. as follows :

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverent esteem for the Holy Scripture. And *the truthfulness of the history, the faithful witness of prophecy and miracle, the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God,) the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God ; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word, in our hearts.*

CHAPTER III.: OF GOD'S ETERNAL DECREE (DECREES).

One of the chief reasons for revision has been found in certain forms of expression and in some of the doctrinal statements contained in this strong chapter. It was natural that the subject should find a conspicuous place in the Confession, since it had figured so largely in antecedent discussion, and in some form had been introduced as an essential feature into nearly all of the earlier Protestant creeds.* The special emphasis laid upon it in our symbols is more fully explained by its relation to the Arminian controversy already named. The place assigned to the doctrine in the order of topics has often been challenged, but it comes in most logically after the chapter concerning God as a Being, and before the exposition of the acts of God in Providence and in Redemption. No other place could well be given it without altering the arrangement of the Confession throughout: nor could it be eliminated as a whole, as some have suggested, without rendering nearly unintelligible much that follows, especially in the chapters which treat of mediation and of grace.

* It is a grave mistake to fancy that the doctrine of the divine decrees is peculiar to our symbols. It is set forth again and again in the creeds of the Reformation in reference on one side to the divine providence, and on the other side to the election of the redeemed unto everlasting life. See First Helvetic Conf. vi.: Second Helvetic, x.: French Conf. vii.: xii.; Belgic Conf. xvi.: and especially the First Scotch Conf. viii., the Thirty-Nine Articles, xvii., the Canons of Dort, *First Head*, and the Irish Articles (A.D. 1615) from which the very language of our Confession was largely derived. The main problem which the term, decrees, suggests is not the puzzle of Presbyterians only: all branches of Protestantism are alike concerned with it. Even the Roman Catholic Church has been forced to attempt its solution. What is peculiar, almost unique, in the Westminster symbols is the stress laid on the logical deduction respecting the eternal predestination of certain men and angels to everlasting death—the dogma of preterition.

That some changes are needful in this chapter is abundantly evidenced by the fact that sixty-seven presbyteries ask for a general modification and restatement, that twenty-two propose the introduction of new explanatory matter, and that forty others suggest amendments of this or that particular section. The whole number of presbyteries desiring some change, more or less extensive, is one hundred and six, a majority of the whole number enrolled in our *Minutes*. In respect to the first and second sections the Committee have deemed it wise to make no change, the first being regarded as a generic proposition essential to the explanation of the more specific statements following, and the second being mainly an abstract inference from the first, not indeed indispensable to the Scriptural doctrine, but at least harmless in itself and in some degree important in its relationship to what follows. Section iii. and section iv. have elicited a much wider variety of suggestions: over forty presbyteries having asked for the dropping out of one or both sections either wholly or in part, and many others desiring revision, modification, or additions such as in their judgment would free the confessional statement from objection, or would render it more intelligible or acceptable to the Church. After most strenuous effort to make such changes as would be likely to prove satisfactory, the Committee determined to omit these sections entirely, transferring the important words, *particularly and unchangeably*, to section v. and joining that section, which treats of the eternal election of believers, on immediately to sections i. and ii., which set forth the underlying doctrine in its more generic form.

That such omission and adjustment will be satisfactory to all minds is hardly to be expected. The elimination of section iv., except the words just quoted, will be the more readily acquiesced in when it is seen that the essence of the

statement is really imbedded in these words, and also that the idea expressed appears again with sufficient fullness in section v. The question whether the whole of section iii. or only the last clause of it should be omitted, is a more difficult one. As to this last clause, which has been the occasion of more perplexity than any other sentence in the Confession to its adherents, and of greater cavil and misrepresentation on the part of its opponents, the argument in favor of exclusion is certainly very strong. It might perhaps be retained with safety, if there were added to it the explanatory statement, *for their sin*, as found in section vii. and elsewhere in the symbols, or the broader statement, preferred by some, *as the just punishment of their sins*. The words, *to be for their sins inflicted*, would answer, if there did not lie in them some implication of a foreordination unto everlasting death, antecedent to and determining the sin as well as the condemnation of the sinner. This dreadful implication the Church repudiates, and will not consent to preserve in her symbols. A foreordination which is contemplated simply as a chronologic consequence upon the free act of the sinner, and as a just punishment inflicted for his sins, cannot be objected to on any biblical grounds. But a foreordination which lies back of all human action, and which appears to determine or ordain the sin as truly as the punishment, thus binding the sinner down in a fatalistic bondage first to transgression and then to an inevitable condemnation, is hardly a dogma which, however forcible the logic that deduces it from the fundamental doctrine of the decrees, has such fullness of warrant in the Scriptures as would require its affirmation as an essential article in any Christian creed. The simple language of the Augsburg Confession (Art. xix.) better conveys the general belief of Calvinistic as well as Lutheran minds: Although God doth create and preserve nature, yet the

cause of sin is the will of the wicked : to wit, of the devil and ungodly men : which will, God not aiding, turneth itself away from God.

If the last clause of section iii. be eliminated because of its too sweeping and unconditional affirmation, it is hardly desirable to retain the first as a separate section, since the substance of it is immediately affirmed in fuller, better form in section v. as amended. The clause would simply say that for the manifestation of his glory God has predestinated some men and angels to everlasting life, and this is said directly and positively in the subsequent section, and is therefore needless here so far as men, separate from angels, are concerned. The declaration respecting angels, whether good or bad, is hardly within the line of confessional statement, beyond what is implied in the general proposition that God ordains whatever comes to pass in all the realms of His sovereign dominion. On these grounds, which are merely suggested here, these two sections are omitted wholly from the chapter as amended :

III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death.

IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed ; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

Section v. is amended in two ways : first, by the omission at the beginning of the now needless words, *those of mankind that are predestinated unto life*, and their introduction at a later point in the sentence : and secondly, by the introduction of the words already mentioned, *particularly and unchangeably*, which affirm the Calvinistic doctrine of an individual rather than a class election, and of an election which is not conditioned by what man may do,

but has its source in the eternal purpose of God. The section is also joined on immediately to sections i. and ii., and becomes, as it stands, a clear and strong statement of the doctrine of our Church respecting the divine decree unto salvation. The changes and emendations appear in the following parallel :

V. [*Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, omitted*] God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto ; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

III. God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath *predestinated some of mankind unto life*, and hath *particularly and unchangeably* chosen them in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions or causes, moving Him thereunto ; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.

Sixteen presbyteries have asked for the omission of the last sentence in section vi., which affirms that none but the elect are redeemed by Christ, or are justified and adopted, sanctified and saved, through Him. This sentence, however, is simply a repetition in negative form of that which has been affirmed positively in the two sentences just preceding. In this light it would indeed seem to be needless, but inasmuch as it is already in the creed, and since the limitations suggested in it are fully counterbalanced by broader and freer statements elsewhere, the

Committee have concluded to suggest no change. The omission of section vii., which is designed to set forth the divine decree in its relations to the unredeemed, is desired by twenty-one presbyteries, and its modification by eight others: chiefly on account of the objectionable expressions, *to pass by* and *to ordain to dishonor and wrath*; and because the language throughout seems needlessly severe in itself, presenting the awful truth to our view without those antithetic and modifying considerations which lie in the fundamental fact that man, and not God, is responsible for the guilt and doom of the transgressor. While the section cannot fairly be interpreted as inculcating the philosophic rather than biblical dogma of an inevitable predestination to sin and punishment from all eternity, still the stern and awful phrase, *passing by*, as implying the existence of no sort of divine provision for the lost such as would make their salvation possible, and the kindred phrase, *ordaining them to dishonor and wrath for their sin*, certainly do give to it a forbidding tone and aspect which ought in some way to be removed.

A partial attempt to correct this impression is made by omitting the expression, *to pass by*, which seems to contain an implication inconsistent with right views of the nature of God and the possible scope of the Gospel: and introducing in its stead the milder statement that God, for reasons which lie in His own counsel and in the nature of the plan of salvation, has determined *not to elect to everlasting life* some definite proportion of mankind. That this statement is true, is obvious from the fact that there are some who enter the eternal state without having been saved through Christ. That the statement is biblical, cannot be denied. Why do these persons fail of salvation? Is the result traceable directly and only to the divine purpose, or to their sin as its true cause? Obviously the section

teaches that they are passed by, or are not elected, because they are and choose to be sinners, even in the presence of a plan of salvation graciously offered. It teaches that their sinfulness and their continuance in it are not chargeable to God, but to themselves. It teaches that nothing either in the divine offer or in the bondage of will induced by their unholy living, will justify them in throwing upon God the responsibility for their final doom.—In order to bring this fact out more distinctly than is done in the section as it stands, the Committee have also added two antithetic declarations: first, that the divine passing by, or not electing unto life, is not in any sense to be interpreted as a limitation of the cordial offers of grace; and secondly, that this divine act does not carry with it any impairment of that freedom, that natural liberty, which in some sense remains with the sinner under the curse of the fall, and by virtue of which, when wrought upon by the Holy Ghost, he embraces Christ and is saved through Him. To let the section go without any such explanatory and conditioning clauses is simply out of the question: the Church would never consent to the omitting of an amendment so important. It is not improper to add here that at first the Committee determined upon making these antithetic clauses much more extensive and formal, but were finally led to propose them as they stand, on consideration especially of the fuller enunciation of the matter in the chapters on the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. It is but just, therefore, that this amendment should be estimated in the light of what is set forth in these two chapters, and also in the light of the proposed amendment to Chap. IX. (X.), sec. iii.; affirming that the responsibility of the sinner as a free moral agent is not impaired by the fall. The section in its original and its amended form is here given:

VII. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, [*to pass by, omitted*] and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.

V. The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, *not to elect unto everlasting life, but to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice; yet so as thereby neither is any limitation put upon the offer of salvation to all, upon condition of faith in Christ; nor is restraint laid upon the freedom of any one to hinder his acceptance of this offer.*

Section viii. in this remarkable chapter hardly needs the additions proposed by one or two presbyteries: as a statement of the proper spiritual uses of the doctrine, it could not well be improved. It greatly needs, however, to be emphasized practically, not merely as a pious expression, but as an explaining and illuminating conclusion to the entire discussion.—That the chapter as amended will fully satisfy the Church cannot be expected. Yet probably all would admit that the changes proposed constitute a real improvement, rendering the whole chapter simpler, less speculative, more obviously biblical, and far less open to adverse criticism. There will still be some who would prefer to see the entire doctrine dislodged from its central place in the Confession: though it is difficult to see how this could be done without an open abandonment at this point of the Reformed or Calvinistic system, in which the sovereign purpose of God as to all things, His particular purpose as to the election of the redeemed, and His no

less definite purpose respecting such as are lost, are fundamental elements. Further emendations will, no doubt, be suggested by the presbyteries on further study of the chapter, and the final result may be something completer and more satisfying than that which is here given. One improvement obviously ought to be made. The comparison between the number of the saved and the lost, indicated in the first case by the words, *some of mankind*, and in the other by the larger phrase, *the rest of mankind*, is clearly unfortunate and misleading. It implies what no Presbyterian believes, that the saved are only a few, and that the lost are the great majority of the human race. Surely, some form of statement should be introduced here which would remove forever the stigma of so narrowing a comparison, and would bring out the glorious fact that finally, in accordance with the grand and benevolent purpose of God, a great multitude whom no man can number shall be redeemed through grace, while only some small proportion of mankind shall perish in and for their sin.

CHAPTER IV.: OF CREATION.

Several presbyteries having asked for a revision of section i. in this brief chapter, with reference especially to the debateable phrase, *in the space of six days*, the whole subject of creation came properly before the Committee. The Apostles' Creed affirms that God the Father Almighty was the maker of heaven and earth: and the Nicene Creed, evidently in opposition to heresy current at the time, adds the broad declaration, and of all things visible and invisible. This declaration is evidently inclusive, not only of all that is contained in the earlier phrase, heaven and earth, but of the entire universe of created things, whether these are material or spiritual in their

structure. And the value of such a comprehensive statement is specially apparent in such an age as ours, when false and pernicious theories of creation are widely current,—when for the creative energy of a personal God, bringing all things into existence by His own omnific counsel and will, there is substituted so much of unbiblical teaching as to the origin of nature through some primal energy in matter or by the action of impersonal force and law.

Does the present Confession teach and enforce this comprehensive doctrine of a creation of all things visible and invisible, by the agency of the Eternal God? In other words, does the phrase, the world and all things therein, as found in this section, include the whole universe, or only that part of it which seems to be particularly indicated in the words of the older creed, heaven and earth? In view of possible doubt on a point of so much practical importance in our day, it has been deemed desirable to substitute the term, *universe*, for the more limited term, *world*, and thus to affirm beyond question and in the broadest form that God, the Triune Deity, is the maker of all things, whether visible or invisible—whether material like the stars or spiritual like the angels. The words, *or make*, are omitted as adding nothing to, if not subtracting something from, the significance of the more decisive word, *create*.

But this needful change renders it more necessary than before, that there should be some explanation of the phrase, in the space of six days, since we have no evidence in Scripture that the entire universe, spiritual and material, came into existence within any such specified period. This necessity has been met by the introduction of a more specific declaration in a separate sentence, referring to the heavens and the earth as a part of the created universe:

these, with all that they contain, being declared to have come into existence within a period of six consecutive days. And in view of current discussion respecting the exact length of these days—a matter which the Bible in the judgment of many does not decisively determine—the descriptive word, *creative*, has been added, though in a sense and connection somewhat unusual. With these further emendations, the chapter may fairly be regarded as expressing the current belief of our Church, and indeed of evangelical Protestantism generally,* on the whole subject. For convenience of comparison the present and the amended section are here given in parallel columns :

I. It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, [*or make,*] of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.

I. It pleased God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create of nothing, *the universe*, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, and all very good. *The heavens and the earth, with all that they contain, were made by Him in six creative days.*

* This statement is in harmony with the Confession of Augsburg, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Thirty-Nine Articles, and the Protestant symbols generally. The first Scotch Confession (1560) declares concerning God : "Be whom we confesse & beleve all things in hevin & eirth, aswel Visible as Invisible, to have been created." In the Declaratory Act of the United Church of Scotland (1879) 't is said, in terms which we may well approve :

"In accordance with the practice hitherto observed in this Church, liberty of opinion is allowed on such points in the Standards, not entering into the substance of the Faith, as the interpretation of the 'six days' in the Mosaic account of the creation : the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace."

CHAPTER VI.: OF THE FALL OF MAN, OF SIN AND OF THE PUNISHMENT THEREOF.

The doctrine of the fall of our first parents, like the doctrine of their original holy constitution (Chap. IV.: ii.), is unchanged in the revision. So are the related truths in sections ii. and iii. of this chapter in regard to the immediate spiritual and temporal consequences of the fall upon themselves, and to the transmission of these consequences to their posterity.* The doctrine of imputation continues to stand as a cardinal element in the general system represented in the Confession, though the question whether this be natural or forensic, immediate or mediate and consequential, is one respecting which liberty of opinion is allowed. Nor is any change proposed in the affirmation, sect. v., that the corruption of nature thus ensuing abides even in the regenerate during the present life; or in the strong and solemn declaration of sect. vi. as to the guilt of all sin, and to its dreadful consequences both in this life and in the life to come. It is significant that as to these cardinal elements of the Gospel, humbling and overwhelming as they must seem to the sinner, there is in the Church no distinct call for change or for modification. Certainly there is no suggestion here of the recent notion that sin may be pardoned, and its consequences averted, after death.

The only amendment proposed is in section iv.: which relates to the effects of the spiritual corruption introduced

* It is a fair question whether the statement in sect. ii., that through the fall all men are "wholly defiled in all the faculties of soul and body," is not an extreme one, or at least one very liable to perversion. It was undoubtedly intended at first simply to affirm that man is a sinner through and through—not partly a sinner, partly a saint, as the earlier Arminianism was inclined to maintain. But the expression is unfortunate and might well be modified.

by the fall, upon the moral condition of the fallen sinner. Here the language is regarded by many as needlessly and even offensively strong: and the phrase, *made opposite to all good*, is often falsely interpreted as implying the absence of any and all traces of goodness even in a civil and social sense, and the presence of an innate and dominating depravity which in the case of any sinner cannot well be worse. The phrase is interpreted as affirming that every unregenerate person is as bad as he can be; and in this aspect is characterized as a severe and sweeping accusation against human nature which is not justified by fair observation of mankind. Nor can it be denied that some ardent Calvinists, in their use of this language, and especially of such terms as utter and total, appended to the noun, depravity (which in our time has come to have an intenser meaning than was current in theological circles in the seventeenth century), have given some measure of warrant to this charge against our Confession and against the Church. The call of a number of presbyteries (10) for some revision, in view especially of the phrases just named, is a sufficient reason for action in the case.

One corrective to this liability has been found in the introduction from Chap. IX. (X.): iii., and also from the Larger Catechism (Ans. 25) of the words, *that is spiritually*. These words indicate the proper limitation to be put upon the sweeping phrase of the section: *utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good*. The indisposition, the disablement, the opposition of the natural heart are thus made to relate to that which is spiritual, holy, due to God—that which is induced in regeneration and renewal, in humble and loving faith in Christ, in a truly godly life. This is the nature and issue of that corruption of soul in which men live as a state, until they are renewed by grace: and this state is one which so far in-

volves the whole man and controls his desires and his will that, if left to himself, he never will, and in a proper sense never can, rise from his present condition of indisposition, disablement, aversion, into a new state of grace and of holiness. Such is the aim of the amendment, not to weaken the doctrine in its essence, but to locate it more closely and describe it more accurately. There are many who, while adhering faithfully to the substance of the doctrine, would desire an entire reconstruction of its statements, and especially of its phraseology as here given. But any attempt at such radical reconstruction would seem to lie beyond the province of the Committee—the minimum of verbal change being its only judicious rule.

With the same intention the word, *all*, has been omitted from the declaration following: it being deemed sufficient to say, not that each sinner is wholly inclined to all forms of evil, but that every sinner is wholly inclined to spiritual evil rather than to spiritual good, in such sense and degree that of himself he will never turn away from his sins to holiness and to God. And to make this still more clear, there is added the declaration that through grace men who are not converted, do still abstain from much that is evil, and are inclined to do many things that, tested by the lower standards of outward morality, are contemplated by God, much as Christ looked upon the young ruler and loved him. Further explanation of this added statement will be found in the new chapter on the Holy Spirit (IX.: ii.) and in the chapter on Effectual Calling (X.: XII.: iv.) and that (XVI.: XVIII.: vii.) on Good Works. That no impairment of the fundamental doctrine of depravity has been permitted in this process of amendment will be apparent on a careful study of the whole matter as set forth in the chapters named and in the Larger Cate-

chism, and especially on a comparison of the present section with the revised, as follows :

IV. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to [all, omitted] evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

IV. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all *that is spiritually* good, and wholly inclined to evil, do proceed all actual transgressions. *Nevertheless, the Providence of God, and the common operations of His Spirit, restrain unregenerate men from much that is evil, and lead them to exercise many social and civil virtues.*

CHAPTER VII.: OF GOD'S COVENANT WITH MAN.

The general doctrine of the Covenants is in no way modified by the revision, excepting at a minor point or two. While there are those who question or even challenge the conception of the covenant of works, especially as set forth in its more elaborate and exhaustive form by some Calvinistic teachers, no evidence appeared to show that the Church desires any change in the more simple statement as given in section ii. In the following section (iii.) an addition of the phrase, *by His word and Spirit*, has been made in order to indicate more fully the manner in which the offer of salvation by Jesus Christ is made to sinners. Of course the Spirit is the only agent and the Word the main instrument, whereby God enters into gracious and saving covenant with man. Section iv. is omitted entirely, for the reason that the proposition it contains rests on insufficient biblical warrant. As a proper conse-

quence the clause in section v., *and is called the Old Testament*, and the corresponding clause in section vi., *and is called the New Testament*, are omitted also, and the sections are differently numbered. Otherwise, the chapter stands as heretofore. It may be added here that some presbyteries and individuals have desired to have the declaration of the love of God for the world, and of the fullness and freeness of the Gospel as provided for all mankind—which has been so extensively called for by the Church—appended as a new section to this chapter, and so correlated more closely to the underlying conception of the covenant of grace. It was feared, however, that such a statement would be regarded as an inadequate answer to this almost universal call: and the incorporation of these truths in a new chapter under other connections was finally preferred. The sections as revised are as follows, the added and subtracted phrases being in italics:

III. Man by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offereth *by His word and Spirit* unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give, unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.

IV. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come, which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; [*and is called the Old Testament, omitted*].

V. Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances, in which this covenant is dispensed, are the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper; which though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet in them it is held forth in more fulness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; [*and is called the New Testament*, stricken out]. There are not, therefore, two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.

CHAPTER VIII.: OF CHRIST THE MEDIATOR.

The noble chapter on Christ and His Mediation will fitly take its place by the side of the chapter, OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURE, as indicating in their finest form alike the intellectual ability, the theological acumen and comprehensiveness, and the elevated spiritual temper of the Westminster divines. It would be hard to find in Protestant symbolism any presentation of this central theme of the Gospel, which even closely approaches this in the skill of its statements, and the breadth and dignity and power of its exposition of the Redeemer and his gracious offices and relations. If any charge could be brought against the theologians of our Church in their elucidation of this great theme, it would be that, in the minuteness of their analysis and the very elaborateness of their discussions, they have failed to rise to the real grandeur of the chapter itself. In eight brief propositions, and but eleven sentences, it describes our Saviour in his präincarnate condition, in his incarnation and composite nature, in his three main offices, in his life and suffering and atoning sacrifice, in his triumph over death and the grave, and his ascension to the Father, and in the application of his redemptive work and the full realization of salvation to

all the redeemed through Him, in language which certainly has never been surpassed, and which almost defies criticism.

Two or three suggestions made by certain presbyteries in regard to phrases in this notable chapter have been set aside as not needed or as having been sufficiently provided for in other and more favorable connections. One only is proposed by the Committee,—the substitution in section v. of the more general phrase, *the divine justice*, for the present phrase, *the justice of his Father*. This has been adopted for the reason given by one presbytery, that the present language seems to sanction the error that justice is the peculiar attribute of the First Person in the Trinity, rather than a quality inherent in all the Persons of the Godhead. (The same change is proposed in Chapter XI.: iii., for the phrase, *His Father's justice*, where the proper, real and full satisfaction of Christ for human sin is set forth.) As altered, section v. will read as follows:

V. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied *Divine justice*, [of *His Father*, omitted] and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.

CHAPTER IX.: OF THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.*

It was early noted by careful observers that the comprehensive amendments proposed in various chapters by

* The term, *Spirit*, has been preferred to the term, *Ghost*, in the title and sections of this chapter. Several presbyteries have desired that this change be made throughout the Confession, but the Committee have shrunk from such a merely verbal alteration for reasons already suggested. Perhaps the use of both terms is as well as the exclusive use of either would be.

the presbyteries, and especially their general call for more explicit statements respecting the love of God for mankind, the sufficiency of the atonement, the free offer of salvation to all men, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the duty of the Church to evangelize the world, and the responsibility of every sinner for the rejection of this offered grace, could not well be met by any mere changes of expression in our creed, or by any casual additions to it here and there. Any such attempt would have affected the Confession injuriously at many points, impairing its coherency as a logical structure, throwing its parts and elements out of proportion, and resulting probably in an inadequate and unsatisfactory presentation of the great truths whose introduction was so widely desired. Yet the voice of so many presbyteries throughout the Church (in all, 95, or nearly one-half of the whole number enrolled) was not to be ignored. Hence arose the necessity for some more elaborate and formal setting forth of these truths, such as could well be secured only by the introduction of new chapters, presenting the doctrines named in their proper relationship and completeness. The serious objection that the Confession was already too elaborate and too long was not weighty enough to require the omission of this additional matter, nor were there any chapters now in the creed which could be omitted for the sake of making room without exciting adverse criticism.

Hence the Committee undertook, with much hesitation at first, the formulation of such additional chapters, in the hope that they might thus, in good degree at least, reach the earnest demand of the Church. It was at the outset proposed to embody all that was needful in a single chapter, setting forth the source, the nature, the range of the Gospel, and the duty of the Church and of all men with respect to it as the loving message of God to the

race. But further consideration made it apparent that a second chapter was needed as well, which should set forth more fully the personality of the Divine Spirit, and especially his work and influence in conjunction with the glorious gospel call. It has well been affirmed that the doctrine of the Holy Ghost has been thus far one of the undeveloped doctrines in our Faith: this was beyond question true in the seventeenth century, and is largely true even in our time. To the credit of the Westminster divines, it should be said, however, that, much more fully than any other Protestant symbol, their Confession sets forth in admirable form the work of the Spirit in the case of the believer, from the first moment of his effectual calling, onward through his adoption and sanctification, his experience of faith and repentance and good works, and his perseverance and assurance of final salvation. Little, if anything, needs to be added here, except for the purpose of emphasizing these gracious offices through a condensed repetition such as appears in section iv. of the chapter, as now presented for examination.

The other four sections justify themselves on broader grounds. It would at first view seem singular that the Confessions of the Reformation say so little, so much less than the creeds of the fourth century, respecting the personality of the Spirit and his claims as God upon our reverence, love, and devotion. This is explained by the fact that the Reformers planted themselves so openly and unhesitatingly upon the doctrine taught in these ancient creeds.* The language of the Nicene creed

* Illustrations of this loyalty to the doctrines of the old creeds, especially respecting the Trinity in God and the attributes of the several Persons in the Godhead, may be found in many of our Confessions. See Augsburg Conf., Art. I.; the Belgic Conf., Art. IX.; the French Conf. A.D. 1559, and others. The latter says expressly, Art. V.:

on these points is familiar : " I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and from the Son (Filioque) ; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified ; who spake by the prophets." Our Confession certainly falls below the level of this old creed, especially as to the duty of loving, obeying, and adoring the Spirit as a Person in the blessed Trinity. The slight reference to this duty in Chap. XXI. (XXIII.) : ii. is all that can be found, in addition to the very abstract exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity in Chap. II. : iii. To meet this deficiency the Committee have introduced their chapter with a declaration which is substantially that of Nicea, as to the divinity of the Spirit, his coëqual place as a Person with the first and second Persons, and his right to credence, love, and devotion by all men through all ages.

Section ii. is a commentary on the Nicene phrase : *who spake by the prophets*. It is singular that in Chap. I., which treats so admirably of the Scriptures, there is no reference to the Holy Ghost as the special inspirer of these Scriptures, though He is described as directly concerned with their exposition, and as enabling us to understand and appreciate them as being the infallible Word of God. In that chapter both revelation and inspiration are said to be the work of God in general, unless we interpret more specifically the phrase in section x., *the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture*, as equivalent to the Nicene expression just quoted—certainly a doubtful interpreta-

" We confess the three creeds, to wit: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, because they are in accordance with the Word of God." See, also, the Thirty-Nine Articles: " The Nicene Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly (*omnino*) to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture": Art. VIII.

tion. To remove all uncertainty, and refer the whole work of revelation and inspiration immediately to the Holy Ghost, as is done in the Bible, seemed an important improvement, and is here attempted. The authoritative-ness and entire sufficiency of the Scriptures in all matters pertaining to life and salvation, as being thus recorded by holy men moved and guided by Him, are also repeated here, chiefly for the sake of emphasis, and the infallibility of the Word so given is affirmed afresh. No new theory either of inspiration or of infallibleness is here introduced; only the two great facts are brought out with more distinctness, and in a somewhat more practical form.

In the section following, the Committee have endeavored to set forth the doctrine of common grace, or what is styled in Chap. X. (XI.): sect. iv., *the common operations of the Spirit*. The doctrine is presented, however, in much more comprehensive form and in far broader relations. The ministries of the Spirit are directly correlated to the light and teachings of nature, and the law of God as written on the human heart and conscience. These ministries are also regarded as extending throughout the world of humanity, as contributing powerfully to the peace and order of human society, as restraining men from what is evil and inciting them to what is good, and as going even before the Gospel as well as with it into pagan lands, inclining mankind universally to receive Jesus Christ whenever He shall be made known to them. The Spirit is described as thus present with men everywhere, and everywhere working continuously in the interest of grace and of redemption. It is not said that He is the executive of the Godhead in the sphere of nature, or in the divine constitution of things generally. His sphere as here defined is the spiritual sphere, and His mission is to give to our lost race the blessed experience of salvation

through Christ.—Wherever the Gospel is preached, He is said to be present in a higher sense: enlightening, convincing, quickening, working in mind and heart and conscience, so as to bring sinners in true repentance to the Saviour. And it is added that his work is of such type and temper that they who resist, are in the highest possible measure guilty before God. The subject is a very broad and vital one; and it may be that it has not been set forth here in sufficient fullness. Yet as it stands, it is something which can be found in like fullness in no other creed of Christendom, though it be something which Presbyterians, and with them evangelical Protestants generally, are coming more and more cordially to believe.

Without referring further to section iv., which treats of the work of the Spirit upon believers, we may note the contents of the fifth and last section in this chapter, which aims to set forth particularly the sphere and functions of the Spirit within the Church. Here He is said both to create the Church, and to endow it with officers and with whatever else is needful to the proper discharge of its grand commission. He makes its ordinances efficacious; He keeps it from apostasy, and revives it in times of declension; He preserves, strengthens, beautifies it, in order that it may finally become triumphant in the whole earth. These are statements which, though not found in our creed, are clearly indispensable to it as an exposition of the Gospel in its broadest relations to humanity. As a whole, the chapter so justifies itself as a complete exposition of the fourfold work of the Spirit, first in revelation and inspiration, then in the heart of an unbelieving world, then in the souls and lives of believers, and finally in the organization, agencies, experience, and career of that Church which Christ has purchased and redeemed with His own blood. As

such the chapter—except the proof-texts appended by the Committee—is here given in full :

I. The Holy Spirit, the third Person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, the same in substance with the Father and the Son, and equal in power and glory, is together with the Father and the Son to be believed in, loved, obeyed, and worshipped throughout all ages.

II. The Holy Spirit who of old revealed to men in various ways the mind and will of God, hath fully and authoritatively made known this mind and will in all things pertaining to life and salvation in the sacred Scriptures, holy men of God speaking therein as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; and these Scriptures, being so inspired, are the infallible Word of God, the supreme rule of faith and duty.

III. The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, is everywhere present among men, confirming the teachings of nature and the law of God written on the heart, restraining from evil and inciting to good; and is the source of all the wisdom, virtue, and reverence for God found in men, and of all the peace and good order in society; thus preparing the way for the Gospel wherever it is preached. He everywhere accompanies the Gospel with his persuasive energy, and urges its message upon the unregenerate, enlightening their minds concerning Divine things, quickening their consciences, and drawing them by his grace, so that they who reject the merciful offer of the Gospel are not only without excuse, but are also guilty of resisting the Holy Spirit.

IV. The Holy Spirit is the only efficient agent in applying and communicating redemption. He effectually calls sinners to new life in Christ Jesus, regenerating them by His almighty grace, freeing them from the bondage of sin and death, and persuading and enabling them to embrace Jesus Christ by faith. He dwells in all believers as their Comforter and Sanctifier, and as the Spirit of adoption and of supplication, leading them into all the truth, making the means of grace efficacious in their edification, strengthening them for all duty, sustaining them in all affliction, and performing all other gracious offices by

which they are sanctified, sealed, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

V. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit all believers are vitally united to Christ, who is the Head, and are thus united to one another in the Church, which is his body. He calls and anoints ministers for their holy office. He also calls and qualifies all other officers in the Church for their special work, and imparts various gifts and graces to its members. He gives efficacy to the word and to the ordinances of the Gospel; keeps the Church from apostasy, revives it in times of declension, and enables it to bear effectual testimony to the truth. By Him the Church has been and will be preserved, increased, and purified, until it shall cover the earth, and at last be presented to Christ a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

CHAPTER IX. (X.): OF FREE WILL.

This chapter in the four sections following the first introduces the fourfold view of the human will, accepted in general by the leaders of the Reformation (see *Formula of Concord*, Art. II.): the will before the fall, since the fall, after regeneration, and (in the case of the righteous) after death. But it prefaces this distributive account by the generic proposition that the will of man, by virtue of what it is as will, is endued with the peculiar property of liberty, so that it cannot be forced to good or evil, and is not by any necessity of its own nature determined in either direction. This generic proposition finds its proper explanation in the antecedent statement (Chap. III.: i.), that while God freely and unchangeably ordains whatever comes to pass, He does this in such ways as not to take away the liberty or contingency of secondary causes, or to do violence in any manner to the inherently free will of the moral creature. We may note also the statement in Chapter IV.: ii. respecting the power to fulfil the law origi-

nally given to man, and the possibility of his transgressing the law through the liberty of will thus vested in him constitutionally: and the additional statement in the chapter on Providence (V.: ii.), in which we are taught that God so conducts His sovereign administration that all things fall out according to the nature of secondary causes (among which the human will is to be classed) either necessarily, freely, or contingently. Obviously the fourfold analysis of the condition of the will just referred to should be interpreted in the full light of this introductory and more generic statement.

With regard to the state of the human will before the fall, after regeneration, and after death, no change of the confessional statement seems to be desired. The proposition in section iii. with regard to the condition of the fallen will before regeneration through the Spirit of God, has often excited discussion and misapprehension in the Church, and seems to call for some form of emendation. The chief difficulty lies apparently in the popular tendency to separate and divide the proposition, as if its clauses were independent. For example, to affirm that man by his fall into a state of sin hath wholly lost all ability of will in all directions, as some have done, would be to affirm that he had ceased to be a man as at his creation, and had become a merely passive agent or instrument like any other secondary cause, and as such really necessitated in all his activities. This is by no means the teaching or belief of our Church. This belief is that this loss of ability or liberty is a loss in a particular direction—a loss in the direction of spiritual good, and of spiritual good accompanying and culminating in salvation. We hold and teach that the sinner on account of his sinful estate is altogether averse from or disinclined to such spiritual good, and being in this sense and direction spiritually dead, will never convert himself or

prepare himself for conversion, and in fact cannot put himself by any independent volition into a condition of true holiness such as God can accept. We also hold and teach that this aversion, this fixed unwillingness, this spiritual deadness, is something for which in some true sense the sinner is personally responsible, and for which he ought instantly to repent, turning away at once to God for that deliverance from it which God alone by His grace can bestow.

The Committee have endeavored to relieve the difficulty which seems to be imbedded in the statement in its present form, first, by substituting the phrase, *indisposed to*, for the phrase, *averse from*, in order to indicate a little more clearly the moral rather than constitutional nature of the disability here affirmed. In the second place, they have introduced a positive affirmation of the fact that the sinner even in his spiritual deadness remains a free moral agent, and is therefore in an unimpaired sense accountable to God for his present condition. This is in harmony with the clauses introduced into Chapter III. : sect. v., in explanation of the divine purpose respecting those who for their sin, their voluntary wickedness, are ordained to dishonor and death. Further light is shed upon the matter by the strong statement in the new chapter, just preceding (section iii.) in regard to the ability bestowed through common grace upon every sinner, and to the consequent responsibility and guilt of all who reject the divine offer of mercy. Still further light appears in the declarations of the new chapter following, as to the nature and scope of the gospel invitations, the duty of all men to accept them, and the wickedness and danger of delay or neglect. Studied thus in its totality, the Confession here, as at some other points, is seen to present in the main a composite and finely balanced doctrine; and one which few

evangelical persons would be willing to set aside as unscriptural.* And yet it may be confessed that the amendments proposed by the Committee seem insufficient: that even the omission of the confusing word, *all*, would be a further improvement: and that the entire proposition might well be recast in such a way as, without impairing the real doctrine, would afford greater relief to perplexed minds and furnish a quick answer to much unfriendly criticism. As it now stands, the amended section is as follows:

III. Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether [*averse from*] that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.

III. Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether *indisposed to* that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto. *Yet is his responsibility as a free moral agent not thereby impaired.*

* The Augsburg Conf. states the doctrine in these words: "The will hath some liberty to work a civil righteousness, and to choose such things as reason can attain unto: but *hath no power to work the righteousness of God, or a spiritual righteousness, without the Spirit of God.*" The Thirty-Nine Articles say: "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he *cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith* and calling upon God," etc. This statement is repeated in the Methodist Articles (1784) and may be said to represent fairly the common evangelical belief.

CHAPTER XI.: OF THE UNIVERSAL OFFER OF THE GOSPEL.

Questions will undoubtedly be raised as to the title of this new chapter, and to its proper place in the order of topics in the Confession. A briefer title, *Of the Gospel*, is to be preferred in view of the fact that the chapter contains not merely the offer in its source and its conditions, but also the obligation of the Church and of believers to proclaim it, and the duty and privilege of sinners with respect to accepting it. The problem of order will be variously viewed by different minds, but is not of sufficient intrinsic importance to require consideration here. In some respects another order is preferable.

Nor is it needful to discuss in detail the vital and blessed truths here expressed. The love of God for the world is tersely set forth as the true and only source of the divine offer of redemption. The nature of the Gospel as founded in the atoning grace of Christ: its invitations, promises, conditions, warnings; its adaptation to all men as sinners, and its strong appeals and array of motives addressed alike to all, are well expressed. So also are the glorious design and mission of the Church, and of all its ordinances and instruments—to bring the whole world to Christ, and also the duty and privilege of all believers to contribute in all possible ways to this one sublime end. As a whole, the chapter will probably commend itself universally as a fair and just exposition of truths whose fuller recognition has been, it may be said, one of the chief objects sought through the revision movement. The chapter is here given in full, excepting the appended proof-texts:

I. God so loved the world that he provided in the covenant of grace, through the mediation and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, a way of life and salvation sufficient

for and adapted to the whole lost race of man; and he doth freely offer this salvation to all men in the Gospel.

II. The Gospel declares the love of God for the world, and his desire for the salvation of all men. It sets forth fully and clearly the only way of salvation, which is through Christ alone; promises that all who truly repent and believe in Him shall be saved; commands, exhorts, and invites all to embrace the offered mercy; and urges every motive to induce men to accept its gracious invitations. This free and universal offer of the Gospel is accompanied by the Holy Spirit, striving with and entreating men to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. It is the duty and privilege of every one who hears the Gospel immediately to accept its merciful provisions. Great guilt and danger are incurred by delay or neglect. And they who continue to disobey the Gospel perish by their own fault and are wholly without excuse, because they have resisted the Holy Spirit and rejected God's gracious offer of eternal life.

IV. As there is no other way of salvation than that revealed in the Gospel, and as in the divinely established and ordinary method of grace, faith cometh by hearing the word of God, Christ hath given to His church the written Word, the Sacraments, and the Ministry, endowed her with the Holy Spirit, and commissioned her to go with His Gospel into all the world and to make disciples of all nations. It is, therefore, the duty and privilege of all believers to sustain the means of grace where they are already established, and to contribute by their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts to the extension of the Kingdom of Christ throughout the whole earth.

CHAPTER X. (XII.): OF EFFECTUAL CALLING.

In the theological system adopted by the Westminster Assembly, this chapter follows logically after the two chapters on the redemptive mediation of Christ and the freedom and consequent responsibility of men in view of that mediation. The two new chapters simply introduce into the system at this point two great doctrines which

were not so fully apprehended by our Presbyterian forefathers. Yet the general fact is that the extended statement of these related doctrines, instead of disturbing that system, gives it not only a broader range but a finer coherency. It is especially to be noted here that, instead of impairing in any way, this addition greatly increases the significance, doctrinal and spiritual, of the chapter now to be considered, and indeed of all the chapters immediately following. The articles on Justification, Adoption, Sanctification, Saving Faith, Repentance unto Life, Good Works, Perseverance of the Saints, and the Assurance of Grace and Salvation, one and all, are made larger, fresher, more profoundly spiritual and nutritious, through such introduction. Particularly is this apparent in respect to the confessional exposition of Effectual Calling. By the insertion of these new chapters, its correlations to all that precedes it in the Confession are not loosened, but rather made more close: its propositions acquire new meaning or new emphasis: and its perplexities find, as they could find by no other process, a happy solution.

How imperative such a solution is, becomes obvious from the fact that twenty-six presbyteries ask for a general revision of the chapter: that six others desire elimination and amendment in section i., while six more desire similar improvements in section ii.; that seventy-nine propose either omission or emendation in section iii.; that sixty-two call for the revision or elimination of section iv.; and that two ask for the insertion of a new section, setting forth the harmony between the conception of an effectual or efficacious call of the elect, and the universal call of God addressed to all men in the Gospel. A very large proportion of the entire Church (in all, 107 presbyteries) is thus seen to desire some reconstruction of this important chapter. The only parallel to this is the general call

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already described for the revision of the chapter on the Eternal Decree. How difficult is the task of meeting adequately such complicated demands, can be fully known only to those who have been set to perform it.

The proposal to omit the words, *and those only*, in section i., seems to be sufficiently met by the statements found in the new chapters and elsewhere respecting the freeness and universality of the scheme of grace. In section ii. a valuable discrimination has been brought in which locates the passivity of man to the act or experience of regeneration, and at the same time excludes the delusive notion that the sinner may be passive in conversion also,—may, in other words, lie down in sinful indifference and neglect under the false impression that there is nothing for him to do in the matter of his own salvation. The statement as amended harmonizes more fully with the admirable definition of the Shorter Catechism (31), where the work of the Spirit in convincing, enlightening, renewing, persuading, and enabling is so well set forth in its proper conjunction with that embracing of Jesus Christ as He is offered in the Gospel, which is the first conscious and free act of the sinner consequent upon his conviction and regeneration. Seen in this light, the change will doubtless commend itself as an improvement that can be made without any peril to the underlying doctrine of the entire dependence of sinners on the gracious ministrations of the Holy Ghost in order to their salvation.

II. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is there-

II. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive *in the act of regeneration wherein* being quickened and renewed by

by enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

the Holy Spirit, he is enabled to answer *God's* call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

The proposition in section iii. respecting the spiritual estate and destiny of infants dying in infancy, and of other persons of imbecile mind who are properly viewed as infants in virtue of the fact that they are incapable of embracing Christ through personal, conscious, intelligent choice, is one which has excited more inquiry and debate, more of perplexity and controversy, than any other in the Confession, outside of Chapter III. In reference to the second class, described in the Confession in a separate sentence, the question has often been raised whether the description includes the heathen as well as such imbecile persons—whether the incapacity which is made the ground of the affirmation is mental only, or is conditional or contingent also, as in the case of the millions who have never heard of Christ and therefore are incapable of accepting Him in the scriptural sense. There can be no doubt that the pagan world was not at all in the thought of those who framed this statement; and though the words used by them with one specific intention, are as mere words capable of a much broader import and application, it certainly is doubtful whether we are at liberty not only to insert the broader meaning, but also to claim for it confessional warrant. The permission of such a rule of interpretation might become very dangerous. And it may be suggested further that, if the Church desires to affirm the salvability of the heathen on the basis of the mediation of a Saviour whom these heathen have never known historically, through the exercise of a genuine though narrow repentance and of true though it be an imperfect faith, an affirmation of so much importance ought

to be set in a more conspicuous place and relationship than that which would be given to it in this section. If brought into this chapter, it certainly should stand as a section by itself.—The explanatory clause, *from birth to death*, introduced in this connection, may have some value, yet its omission would do no harm.

Respecting the incomparably larger class referred to in this statement,—the infants dying in infancy, or before they have reached the age of moral responsibility, who constitute nearly or quite half of the human race,—the change proposed is a very significant one. That the Westminster divines contemplated chiefly if not entirely the dying infants of elect parents, is certain: and it is no less certain that they were unprepared to go farther than this, and affirm the salvability of all dying infants, whether the parents were saints or unbelievers—whether born in Christian or in pagan lands. The revision makes this broad affirmation in the most explicit form, by omitting the limiting term, *elect*, and inserting the comprehending term, *all*. For the first term it introduces the explanatory declaration that all such infants are redeemed by Christ and are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and therefore of course are among the elect. In answer to the objection that redemption and regeneration are experiences which imply intelligence and voluntary acceptance, it maintains the comprehensive proposition that the Spirit worketh when and where and how He pleaseth—a proposition which broadens greatly, at several points besides this one, our conception of the wondrous possibilities of grace. To a statement so full and elaborate as this, it hardly seems necessary to make any addition by introducing the debatable term, *elect*. The statement is better as it stands.

It is certainly to be hoped that the Church will accept this comprehensive declaration, and give it enduring place

in our noble creed. The proposition to omit all reference to infants certainly will not carry, because the great heart of the Church is too much concerned with this vast problem to consent that it should be thus set aside as insoluble. The question of words and form is a very difficult one, as the wide variety of suggested statements would indicate: on the whole, the one proposed by the Committee may stand until the Church proposes a better one. It is to be recognized, also, that diversities of opinion exist as to the degree of biblical warrant for so broad a doctrine: some regarding the evidence in Scripture as insufficient, and on this ground questioning the propriety of incorporating such a broad doctrine in the Confession: the large majority taking the opposite view of the scriptural testimonies, and therefore calling earnestly for such incorporation. All agree that it is of vast moment to shut out, if possible, by the most distinct enunciation of our current belief, the slanderous and mischievous criticisms to which the Church has for a century been exposed at this point. To leave the statement as it stands, or to substitute some limited or ambiguous phraseology or some less definite proposition for that offered for approval by the Committee, would prove unsatisfactory to many in our communion, would fail to meet cavilling objections, and might result in further agitation, if not in undesirable controversy. Practically, the choice of the Church is likely to lie between the section as it stands and the amendment proposed by the Committee, as follows:

III. [*Elect*, omitted] infants dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth. So also are all other

III. *All* infants dying in infancy, and all other persons, who, *from birth to death*, are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word, *are redeemed* by Christ, and

<p>[<i>elect</i>] persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word.</p>	<p><i>regenerated by the Spirit,</i> who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth.</p>
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The desire expressed by nearly one-third of the presbyteries for the omission or amendment of section iv. seems to be based on two obvious grounds: the severe and offensive form in which the proposition is expressed, especially in its closing clause; and the sweeping condemnation of all who never truly come to Christ, (apparently including the heathen who have never heard of Him,) although they be ever so earnest in living up to the light they possess. The omission of the final clause, and the transposition of one or two other phrases, will certainly go far to remove the first difficulty, as will be obvious on close inspection of the two forms of statement. In respect to the second, it needs to be said again that the condition and fate of the pagan world were not, so far as we can ascertain, in the minds of those who penned the sentence. The structure of the chapter and the phraseology employed in this section show clearly that they were thinking only of deists or other moralists who, while openly rejecting Christ, were hoping for salvation on the ground of their fidelity to the principles of natural religion. These persons are described as being called by the ministry of the Word, and as experiencing some common operations of the Spirit, yet never truly coming to the Christ whom they have known, for the redemption which He alone can give—never enjoying those regenerative ministries of the Spirit through which alone salvation is to be realized. In this light, the section cannot be regarded as making any affirmation against the heathen to whom the Word has never come,—by whom, in the ordinary sense of that phrase, the common operations of the Spirit have never

been experienced, as they are by multitudes in Gospel lands. No intelligent critic of the Confession can bring against it a charge of exclusiveness or of narrowness at this point, since the case of the pagan world was not at all under consideration. Nor can it be said with justice that the Confession here affirms too much with regard to men in Christian lands who, after hearing of Christ and His salvation, never truly come to Him in humble, biblical faith; for while we are not called upon to pronounce judgment upon the destiny of any individual, we must insist, and all Protestantism must insist with us, that there is salvation for no such class of men in any other way than that which we proclaim to the world in the Gospel. This is precisely what the section in both the original and the amended form maintains, and from this position we cannot safely swerve. In respect even to the heathen we could not here or elsewhere admit that any among them are saved otherwise than through Christ; we could only hope that there may through grace exist in some pagan minds such a measure of compliance with the human conditions of repentance on account of sin, humble faith in the mercy of God, and sincere submission to the divine will so far as known, as will through the grace and mediation of Christ avail for their salvation. But this hope is not under consideration here, as a comparison of the sections will plainly show:

IV. Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men, not professing the

IV. Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet *inasmuch as they never truly come to Christ, they cannot be saved: neither is there salvation in*

Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may is very pernicious, and to be detested.

any other way *than by Christ through the Spirit, however diligent men may be in framing* their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess.

The changes proposed in the chapters following that on Effectual Calling are not extensive, and may be briefly referred to, with some cursory explanation. In Chapter XI. (XIII.), on Justification, section i. is amended by omitting certain words which are not found in the proof-text quoted, Eph. ii. 8. Section iii. is amended, as has been stated already, by substituting *Divine* justice, in the place of *His Father's* justice—as in Chapter VIII.: sec. v. The amended sections are as follows:

I. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins; and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone: not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness: but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith [*they have not of themselves, it, omitted*] is the gift of God.

III. Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real and full satisfaction to *Divine* [*His Father's, stricken out*] justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for any thing in them, their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice, and

rich grace of God, might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

The chapters on Adoption and Sanctification, so admirable in their statement of the biblical truth on these subjects, remain unchanged. In Chapter XIV. (XVI.), of Saving Faith, the word, *sinners*, for reasons which will be obvious to all, is substituted in section i. for the words, *the elect*, so that the section will read as follows :

I. The grace of faith, whereby *sinners* are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts; and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the word; by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.

On the general principle that merely verbal changes should not be made unless the reason for them was found to be quite imperative, no other words were substituted, as was desired by certain presbyteries, for the old word, *damnation*, in Chapter XV. (XVII.): section iv., though such a term as *condemnation* would in itself be preferable, and is actually substituted in Chap. XXIX.: sect. viii. In Chap. XVI. (XVIII.), *Of Good Works*, twelve presbyteries desire the omission or amending of section vii., which treats particularly of good works done by unregenerate men. It will be remembered that the subject has already been brought to view in the addition made to Chap. VI.: section iv., affirming that unregenerate men, through the providence and grace of God, are not only restrained from much that is evil, but are led to exercise many social and civil virtues. A fuller statement of the same intent is made in the new chapter, *Of the Holy Spirit* (IX.: sect. iii.), where the wisdom, virtue, and reverence for God found in men generally, and also the peace and good order existing in human society, are recognized as gifts of God

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through the Spirit. In Chap. X. (XII.): sect. iv., the subject is again introduced in such relations as to give at least some measure of relief to those who are pained by the obvious severities of the proposition contained in this section. In view of these other references, it perhaps is needful only to show that these good works, however excellent in themselves or in their effects, and though they are in some sense pleasing to God, are not a ground of acceptance with Him. To this end their spiritual defects are distinctly pointed out, and their inadequacy shown, while, on the other hand, it is affirmed that the neglect of such works, as it indicates a nature still more completely averse to God, is more positively displeasing and hateful in His holy sight. This general doctrine remains unchanged, but certain infelicities in the statement of it have been corrected, it is believed, by verbal alteration and transposition, as will appear in comparing the old and the new :

VII. Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others, yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith ; nor are done in a right manner, according to the word ; nor to a right end, the glory of God ; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. And yet their neglect of them is more sinful, and displeasing unto God.

VII. Works done by unregenerate men, although there may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others ; *and while their neglect of such things is sinful, and displeasing unto God*, yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith ; nor are done in a right manner, according to the word ; nor to a right end, the glory of God ; they are therefore *not free from sin*, and cannot be *accepted of* God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God.

In the four chapters following, no change has been desired by the presbyteries, with the exception of one verbal alteration in Chap. XX. (XXII.): sect. i., and this has not been made by the Committee, for the general reason just given. In view of the acknowledged infelicity of expression in Chap. XXI. (XXIII.): sect. iv., with respect to those who have committed the sin unto death, an amendment is proposed in the interest of clearness, which will doubtless commend itself without further explanation: The change appears in the following parallel:

IV. Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death.

IV. Prayer is to be made for things lawful; *for the forgiveness of all sins, except the sin unto death*; and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead.

In the following Chapter, XXII. (XXIV.), which treats *Of Lawful Oaths and Vows*, question is raised by some presbyteries as to the accuracy of the statement in section iii. respecting the sinfulness of refusing to take an oath when required by the civil authority: but no change in the section is proposed. In section vii. the word, *popish*, is stricken out, partly because the adjective is obnoxious as a term of reproach, and is therefore out of place in a confessional statement, and partly because the monastical vows condemned in the section are not now peculiar to the Roman Catholic communion, and are as a rule to be condemned wherever they appear, on the ground that they are inconsistent with the most free and healthful development of religious life. The amended section is as follows:

VII. No man may vow to do anything forbidden in the word of God, or what would hinder any duty therein commanded, or which is not in his own power, and for

the performance whereof he hath no promise or ability from God. In which respects, [*popish*, omitted] monastical vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, are so far from being degrees of higher perfection, that they are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself.

It is a familiar fact that Chapter XXIII. (XXV.), which discusses the relations between the Church and the civil authorities, was extensively altered at the time of the adoption of the Confession of Faith, in connection with the organization of the General Assembly in America. The general object of these alterations was to eliminate from the Confession whatever might seem to give the civil government any measure of control over ecclesiastical affairs. A comparison of our Confession with the original, as still accepted in the Presbyterian Churches of Great Britain, will show how thoroughly the fathers repudiated every form or phrase of civil domination. One such expression with reference to civil rulers remains in section iii.: *as nursing fathers*. The Committee recommend that this expression, as being clearly inappropriate to our country and time, be stricken out. The amended section is as follows :

III. Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the word and sacraments ; or the power of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven ; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, [*as nursing fathers*, omitted] it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the Church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner, that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in His Church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere

with, let, or hinder the due exercise thereof among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretence of religion or infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever; and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance.

Twenty-one presbyteries have called for revision and amendment of the following Chapter (XXIV.: XXVI.), which treats of *Marriage and Divorce*. The changes suggested are in sections iii. and vi.: relating respectively to the persons who may lawfully enter the married state, and to the question whether willful desertion is a sufficient ground for scriptural divorcement. On the latter point, in view of the inherent difficulties of the question, and of the wide variety of opinion existing in the Church, no change is suggested. As to the former, it is proposed to omit the invidious expression which classes those who are called papists with infidels and with other idolaters, whom it is pronounced unlawful for the believer to marry. For this expression the general phrase, *nor with the adherents of false religions*, is substituted, and the descriptive word, *reformed*, is omitted as non-essential. Those changes appear in the following parallel:

III. It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry who are able with judgment to give their consent, yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. And, therefore, such as profess the true [reformed, omitted] religion should not marry with

III. It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry who are able with judgment to give their consent, yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. And, therefore, such as profess the true religion should not marry with Infidels, *nor with the ad-*

Infidels, [*Papists, or other idolaters, omitted*]; neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, [*or maintain damnable heresies, omitted*].

herents of false religions,
neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life.

While one presbytery has protested against any alteration of Chapter XXV. (XXVII.), *Of the Church*, sixty have indicated their desire for certain amendments, chiefly in section vi., which relates to the papal claim to supremacy in the Church of Christ on earth. The proposal of one presbytery that a new section on missions be inserted in this chapter, is sufficiently met by the declaration on that subject in the new Chapter (XI. : iv.), *Of the Gospel*. The suggestion of another that section ii. be abbreviated by omitting that clause which declares that, outside of the visible church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation, seems of doubtful value. The difficulty as to section vi. relates principally to the propriety of applying the apostolic expressions, man of sin and son of perdition, in 2 Thess. ii. 3, and the scriptural term, Antichrist, to the pope of Rome, with its natural consequence in the conclusion that the papal communion is not a church of Christ, but is (sect. v.) a synagogue of Satan. But while the use of such terms is protested against as being incongruous with the general language and temper of our Confession, there have appeared to the Committee no indications that the historic opposition of Protestantism, and especially of American Presbyterianism, to the pernicious assumptions of the papal hierarchy, has in any wise diminished. These assumptions have embodied themselves conspicuously in the latest Vatican decree; and the language of that decree, declaring that the pope of Rome is the

vicar of Christ and the head and infallible teacher of the Church universal, has therefore been incorporated into the amended section, with a solemn protest against it as an assumption without warrant in Scripture or in fact. It is believed that the new statement will be universally preferred to the old, as being both worthier on exegetical grounds and more in harmony with the confessional belief and declaration of a great Church like ours :

VI. There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ, and all that is called God.

VI. There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ, *and the claim of the Pope of Rome to be the vicar of Christ, and the head of the Church universal, is without warrant in Scripture or in fact; and is a usurpation dishonoring to the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Passing by the three intervening chapters in respect to which no practicable amendments have been proposed by the presbyteries, we may note that in the spirit of formal improvement just described a verbal change has been inserted in the following Chapter (XXIX. : XXXI.) which sets forth the doctrine of the Eucharist. In section ii. the infelicitous expression, *the popish sacrifice of the mass, as they call it*, is supplanted by the more dignified description, the Roman Catholic doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass. The briefer statement, for sin, is also substituted for the longer closing clause, *the alone propitiation for the sins of the elect*: so that the section if amended would read as follows :

II. In this sacrament, Christ is not offered up to His Father, nor any real sacrifice made at all, for remission of sins of the quick or dead; but only a commemoration of

that one offering up of himself by himself, upon the cross, once for all, and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same; so that the *Roman Catholic doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass* is most abominably injurious to Christ's one only sacrifice *for sin*.

In section viii. of this chapter the word, *condemnation*, is substituted for the word, *damnation*. And in section ii. of Chap. XXX. (XXXII.) the words, *ministerial and declarative*, are added to the statement respecting the power vested in church officers. It must be confessed that the language is still open to objection on the ground that it exalts unduly the old hierarchal dogma of the keys, as in contrast with the more truly Protestant conception of authority as vested immediately in the Church. The proposed new section is as follows, with the added words in italics :

II. To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have *ministerial and declarative* power respectively to retain and remit sins, to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the Gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.

These, stated as summarily as possible, and with the briefest possible explanation, are the changes in the Confession proposed by the Committee. In a review of the ground traversed, it will be seen that amendments have been suggested by the presbyteries in 23 of the 33 chapters, and in 51 of the 171 sections, and that alterations have been made, mainly in accordance with these suggestions, in 16 chapters and in 25 sections, including the three which have been stricken out altogether. In addition to these, the Committee have made changes in 3 sections lying in 3 other chapters, thus making the total

number of chapters changed, 19, and of sections, 28. The chapters unchanged are 14, and the unaltered sections, 143. The two added chapters, with their nine sections, will make the aggregate number of chapters in the Confession, as revised, thirty-five, and of sections, one hundred and seventy-eight. It will be noted that some of the changes suggested by the presbyteries, for what seemed to be sufficient reasons, have been set aside; that in some cases what was desired has been secured in other ways than those suggested; that amid the wide variety of language and form in the amendments proposed, it has sometimes become necessary to formulate substantially new statements; and that in the main the whole ground covered by the action of the presbyteries, or otherwise brought under review, has been faithfully traversed. It will also be apparent that a large part of the change incorporated in the Report lies in the two new chapters, framed—as has been already shown—in response to the almost universal call of the Church. And all may see that the adoption of these chapters, in conjunction with the specific emendations suggested at other points, will make of the Confession substantially a new creed, with no impairment of its doctrinal system, but with decided increase in practical adaptation and in spiritual power.

Is this revision to be regarded as sufficient? Will it be satisfactory to the Church? It certainly will not be pronounced excessive when compared with the demand embodied in the Answers of the presbyteries. It may be thought by some that the Committee have rather fallen short than gone beyond the expressed wish of the Church. Upon a just examination of their work, it will at least be clear that they have endeavored throughout to steer closely along that central line of emendation where the judgment of the largest portion of the Church is evi-

dently moving.* To have gone beyond this line,—to have sought to incorporate in their revision the dogmas of some school or section, or to gratify the wishes of those who desired revolutionizing changes, even to the casting out of essential elements in our historic and cherished system,—would have been a palpable violation of instructions which they were bound to regard as sacred. It would also have been a mistake disastrous, if not fatal, to revision itself. Such a course would not only have been wholly at variance with the brotherly temper in which the movement for revision was initiated: it would almost inevitably have divided the Church into parties and factions around issues which, however interesting in themselves, have little or nothing to do with those grand, generic doctrines in which the Church is cordially one. And the end of such a policy might have been denominational dissolution.

There are two extreme positions against which this effort at the improvement of our Confession ought to be protected. The first is the radical extreme which decries

* To the charge of meagreness and insufficiency urged against the Report in some quarters, as if it embodied only the smallest amount of change that would satisfy or appease the majority, rather than what is demanded by the Church as a whole, it is enough to say (1) that the Committee have incorporated in it, as best they could, at least the substance of whatever was called for, to any large extent, in the Answers of the presbyteries; (2) that they have accomplished all that they could have accomplished, with any degree of unanimity, *at the time*; (3) that, happily, the way is still open for any presbytery to express its desire for further revision, at whatever point; (4) that the Committee may be relied upon, to respond to any such desire, if any considerable proportion of the Church is agreed in it; and (5) that it would be useless, and might be dangerous, for the Committee to propose changes called for by only a few presbyteries here and there, but which would be morally certain to fail at last in receiving the decisive vote in their favor, demanded by our Constitution.

all revision as impracticable, superficial, certain to prove unsatisfactory. It is easy enough to criticise the competency of the Committee, to disparage their work at specific points, to pronounce it as a whole inadequate, and on these grounds to summon the adherents of the cause of progress with blast of bugle for its overthrow. It is easy in one breath to declare the three ancient creeds a sufficient basis of doctrine for all Protestant Christendom, regardless of the fact that these creeds contain no single trace of the cardinal truths which were battled for in the Reformation ; and in the next breath either to clamor for some brief creed in which only what is common to all evangelical churches should be incorporated, or even to propose the rejection of all creeds altogether as hindrances to the true development of the common Christianity. It is easy also to profess a special knowledge of our symbols and a high degree of loyalty to them at one moment, and in the next to explain away their plainest teachings, and to propose some speculative substitutes in their place,—easy, in a word, to claim the name of Calvinist, and at the same time disparage or reject what that name specially represents to the minds of common men.

A Church so intelligent as ours cannot be deluded in this way. Why should it surrender what this revision promises to give it, under the bad stimulus of a spirit which in reality promises nothing that is worth having? Its ministers and members know well that there is a wide difference between a sacred and tender catholicity and a loose latitudinarianism, which advocates mere union among Christians without one recognition of those terms and conditions which, as church history abundantly shows, are indispensable to all true union,—which speaks contemptuously of all confessions or beliefs that represent distinctive phases of religious thought or experience,—which pro-

poses crude novelties as substitutes for doctrines reverend with age,—and which, in its inconsiderate zeal for something new, seems at times to be willing to set the very Scriptures aside, and to make a variable religious consciousness the ultimate test of truth. To all such latitudinarianism, in whatever guise, our Church is unalterably opposed: and its opposition grows more intense as the temper of true catholicity, born of the Spirit of God, brightens and glows more ardently in its breast. Surely such a Church, always and intelligently Calvinistic in its faith, will not sacrifice a substantial good well-nigh in hand, for any specious benefits which a radicalism of this type may promise to bestow. Moreover, is it not clear that in following such rash counsels the Church would not only gain nothing whatever, and as to its creed be left substantially as it has been, but would expose itself to an internal conflict which could not be otherwise than destructive to its peace and possibly to its very existence?

There is also an extreme conservatism, which must not be permitted to stand in the way of an honest, faithful, adequate revision of our Church symbols. In this direction also, it is easy enough to cling with blind devotion to these symbols as being already perfect, or at least beyond the possibility of improvement by the living men of this age, and even to affirm that they ought neither now nor at any future time to be altered. It is easy to question the wisdom of revision in whatever way, to challenge here and there the way actually adopted, to summon to the front all ecclesiastical and other barriers to the movement, to criticise the motives and the ability of the men engaged in that movement, and by exciting the fears of some people and the sectarian temper of others, to call together a considerable party in opposition. It is easy to sound the clarion of Calvinism, as if that Calvinism were in some special

danger; easy to point to past differences and conflicts, and solemnly foretell their repetition, and invoke the spirit of union and of peace as if some terrible day of discord was at hand: easy to suspect mischief here and smell trouble yonder and stir up narrow antipathies wherever practicable, and so to fill the pathway of revision with difficulties, each small in itself, but all together constituting a serious, perhaps impassable, hindrance to the securing of what the large majority of the Church so much desire.

This tendency, though entitled to something of respect both for itself and for what it represents, should not be suffered to stand in the way of the consummation now contemplated. The Church has only to see and be assured that there is in this effort nothing that is contrary to its historic faith or traditions, and especially that not a single doctrine in its creed has been or will be essentially impaired. The Church has only to see and be satisfied that in the proposed revision there has been incorporated, and that without dislocating or impairing the old truths, very much that is now central in its belief, and inspiring and controlling in its practical life. The Church has only to see also that this revision has become necessary, not merely to make its creed conform more fully to its present experience, but also to render the Church itself broader, freer, more truly catholic as a Christian body, and so enable it to become in a higher sense than ever the doctrinal and indoctrinating Church of Christendom. That all this will be seen more and more as the discussion progresses, and will be more and more appreciated as constituting abundant reason for the revision proposed, cannot be questioned by any careful observer of the currents and the forces at work among us. Surely, surely, such a Church thus instructed will follow a frightened or an obdurate conservatism no sooner than it would spend its strength in chasing the *ignis fatuus* of a

volatile radicalism. It will choose rather, intelligently and heartily, that bright medial path between these two extremes, which Presbyterianism has followed with satisfaction in all the past, and in which—if we may judge from either its history or its principles and structure—its future progress and prosperity will ever be found.

On a fair survey of the field there is good ground to expect the cordial acceptance by the presbyteries of the substance of the present report, and for the general reasons which have already been given. At the same time, no one would claim that the revision as proposed is complete. Whatever further changes or emendations may be called for by the presbyteries ought to be faithfully incorporated in it by the Committee, so far as this can be done under the instructions imposed by the General Assembly. Examples of such desirable improvements will doubtless occur to many minds. There are some things whose introduction the writer would certainly desire, if the way were open. For illustration, if the fundamental proposition that God is a God of love as well as justice, and that His love extends to all His moral creatures, were wrought more distinctly into the grand chapter (II.) which treats of God and of the Holy Trinity, as it should be, one serious charge against our Calvinism would be disposed of forever. This might be done, and perhaps sufficiently, by lifting into prominence, as a separate sentence, with an explanatory word or two, the clause in the middle of section i. : which declares that the God described in the first clause as “immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory,” is also, as a Being, “most loving, gracious, merciful, long-

suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." In the same direction it would be an improvement to Chap. V., *Of Providence*, if at the very beginning the doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood—a doctrine nowhere brought out in the Confession or Catechisms, as it ought to be—were formally introduced and made conspicuous. Certainly such a statement would do much to relieve the severities of the chapter, and to set forth the divine providence in aspects and with a coloring that would more spontaneously command both intellectual acceptance and the response of the filial heart.*

It is a criticism often made upon our symbols that in setting forth so admirably the work that Christ does for the believer (*Christus pro nobis*), they do not sufficiently bring out the work done by Him (*Christus in nobis*) within the believer. The mind of the reader is fixed, it is said, too intently and constantly on the objective, to the comparative ignoring of that subjective side of our salvation which it has been the special privilege of other types of Protestantism to state and illustrate. The estate into which the soul is brought by grace, in other words, commands attention much more decidedly than the type of character wrought in man through grace. This defect appears in the chapter (XVI. : XVIII.) on Good Works, where a fuller statement of the true nature of Christianity

* Inasmuch as there is no recognition of miracle in the Confession, unless it be in the general statement in this chapter, that God is free to work in Providence "without, above, or against means at His pleasure," the writer has thought that, in view of the current tendency to doubt or to unbelief at this vital point, it would be well to append to section iii. as it stands, some such declaration as the following:

Miracles are not ordinary providences produced through the action of secondary causes, but are the immediate acts of God, within the sphere of Providence, wrought in attestation of His Truth.

as the religion of character, and of the Christian character itself, not merely as the source of good actions, but as a holy state of the soul inwrought by grace, revealing itself in the loving and loyal exemplification of Christ before men, would certainly be of great value.—Again, in Chap. XIX. (XXI.), which treats of the Law of God, there is no distinct recognition, as there should be, of the great underlying doctrine of Moral Government,—a doctrine which since the days of Bishop Butler has wrought itself intricably into the conviction of a multitude of evangelical minds, but which the Westminster divines set forth, if at all, only under the too abstract conception of sovereignty, and in conjunction mainly with the Decrees and with Providence. The incorporation into the creed of a truth so fundamental and so sublime and vital in its relations to the Gospel scheme, would almost seem to be imperative ; and there is probably no place where it could so well be brought in as at the beginning of this chapter on the Divine Law.*

Passing by the two chapters (XXII. : XXIV.) on Lawful Oaths and Vows, and (XXIII. : XXV.) on the Civil Magistrate, both of which are largely anachronistic and might

* One reason why no such statements as have been suggested appear in the chapters on Good Works and on the Law of God, is doubtless to be found in the fact that both Catechisms furnish so full an exposition of the moral law and of human duty, as contained in the Ten Commandments: see Shorter C. 40-88; and Larger C. 91-151. The exposition of human duty in the Larger Catechism, under the category of the Commandments, has no parallel in any creed of Christendom. It constitutes an admirable treatise on Christian Ethics. And if we add to this the appended and supplementary tract of the Westminster Assembly on the *Duties of a Christian Man*, we are assured that, though they may not have deemed it proper to incorporate into their symbols the underlying truths here named, they themselves clung tenaciously to these truths, as fundamental factors in a genuine Christian experience and life.

with propriety be abbreviated, the writer ventures to refer, in the way of query only, to the two eschatological chapters with which the Confession closes: the chapters which treat of the State of Man after Death, of the Resurrection of the Dead, and of the Last Judgment. It is a remarkable illustration of the wisdom and foresight of the divines of Westminster that at so many points in the symbols they seem to have anticipated the developments of modern unbelief, and so fully to have furnished the Christian reply to the skeptical notions and theories of later ages. Narrow though they appear to us to have been at certain points in their theology, at others their profundity, their breadth, their sagacity and prescience seem to the careful student of their system, weighing well their weighty words, truly wonderful. No set of men ever saw farther into the future of Christian thought, age on age. In respect, for example, to the nature of God and his relations to the universe material and moral, their words contain nearly all that we now have need to affirm by way of reply to current skepticism. So in regard to the person and mission of Christ as the mediator between God and man, they have said the last word for us, as well as for themselves. This is no less true, if the proper and full significance be given to their language, of what they affirm in these two eschatological chapters, especially as explained and illustrated in the two Catechisms. Still, in view of certain tendencies toward the minimizing, if not the perversion, of what they have written, it is becoming a serious question whether some interpretive clauses might not with advantage be added to their terse declarations on these vital topics.—Whether there is need in the Confession, as has been suggested of late, of some additional affirmations in view of the existing conflict between Christianity and certain popular and rampant forms of unbelief, is a question which need not here be discussed.

It has been urged with some plausibility, that the adoption of a Confession rather lengthened than shortened, and at certain points made more specific rather than more general, involves a closer theory of subscription, and therefore brings the mind and conscience of the Church under a new form of bondage. It is hard to see the justness of such a criticism. It is true that there will be less of what is called mental reservation, or an adoption with exceptions publicly or privately made, for the simple reason that the revision will take away very largely if not entirely the need of such reserved or exceptional allegiance. There certainly will be less in the Confession that cannot be believed, and more that can be cordially believed by the great body of our eldership and ministry. But beyond this, is it not manifest that the movement toward revision has not been in any perceptible degree excited by a desire to impose in this way a more rigid rule of subscription? Had revision been urged on this ground, it would have been utterly defeated before the Church. The effects of the movement of course will not be to make room for a loose latitudinarianism, or to foster indifference to doctrines which the Church regards as sacred. But on the other hand, the revision, by bringing the Church and her creed into more obvious concord, may be expected to develop both a more conscious unity and a stronger sentiment of loyalty to what is confessed. In a word, the substance of doctrine, as held among us and as embodied more fully in the revised creed, will be adhered to more rather than less firmly, yet at the same time with a more intelligent and a more affectionate interest. The Church will love her Confession all the more, and those who represent the Church officially, without coming under any new bondage or feeling their liberty of thought in any degree impaired, will also love it all the more.

The writer, speaking for himself alone, ventures upon one closing suggestion: The fate of this movement, which seems to carry with it so much that is vital in our life as a Church of Christ, depends almost wholly on the temper and purpose with which the matter in hand is now approached. If this Report is to be regarded with suspicion at the outset, and the presbyteries are counselled to scrutinize it very closely before accepting any of its propositions,—if its contents are to be distributed into good and indifferent and bad, and all parties are warned beforehand that the latter element is a large one, and that its rejection is essential to the preservation of Calvinism,—and if under the stimulus of such suggestions the presbyteries begin to deal with the Report in chemical fashion, separating its various parts and elements one from another, accepting this, rejecting that, and agreeing cordially upon very little, better would it have been for the whole Church, if the Report had never been framed. Such a process would be the surest way, as the case now stands, to defeat for the time the entire movement: and the surest way also to plunge the Church into serious, possibly interminable, dissensions. There might indeed be a temporary arrest in this way of the process here begun: the hope of the Church might for a time be stayed: but if any one should dream that by such methods he could make that arrest permanent, he certainly can have no adequate appreciation of the extent of the disappointment, the seriousness of the disaster that would follow. It would be, as one of our poets has sung:

“ As if a morning in June, with all its music and sunshine,
Had suddenly paused in the sky, and fading, slowly descended,
Back to the east again, from whence it late had arisen.”

Of course the Report is not necessarily to be either approved or rejected as a whole. It is freely admitted by the Committee that as a document it is capable of amend-

ment by addition and by subtraction also : every part of it is open to the closest inspection, and nothing in it should be retained excepting through the most considerate judgment of the Church. And yet it is proper to say that the document is so inwrought part to part, the old and the new so joined together, changes at different points so carefully balanced, the whole so thoroughly unified, that in the elimination of any one clause or proposition there would be danger of derangement and injury at many other points, and that the tearing out of any considerable portion might be ruinous to the entire structure. It is proper also to say again that a Report, which bears in a real sense the approbation of a General Assembly, and which is a response, so far as possible, to the deliberate call and voice of the Church through its presbyteries, has a right to be generously dealt with by those bodies, even to the extent of consenting to some things here and there which the individual presbytery may not be able, in substance or in form, wholly to approve. It is but just that the dominating purpose of these bodies now should be a purpose to approve, excepting where disapproval is found to be the stern but indispensable alternative : And further, that their temper toward it should be as generous as that of the Church in initiating the revision, and as brotherly as that of the Committee who have labored together in harmony throughout, not for the triumph of a school or party, but for the welfare of the whole Church now and for generations to come.*

* The writer cannot refrain from expressing here his earnest dissent from both the substance and the spirit of the criticisms made upon the Report in the July No. of our Review. The praise there bestowed is certainly faint enough, though praise from that quarter was hardly to be expected. But the severe reflection upon it as sadly marring at one point the document with which it deals, and confusing and ob-

Dealt with in this way and spirit, there is good reason to hope that the Report will be so far accepted by the presbyteries as to insure its final adoption, after that it shall have passed once more under the review of the Committee, and have met the approbation of another General Assembly. Should this happy hope be realized, we may expect that the result will be the quieting of many forms of internal dissension, the completer unifying of the Church in conviction and belief, the dawning of a long age of peace in doctrine and life, and the inspiring of the Church for a new career of evangelistic activity in our own land and throughout the earth. Nay more; we may look as a consequence for similar emendatory movements in other Presbyterian bodies in imitation of our example, or possibly for the adoption by them of our amended creed: we may look also for a closer affiliation between the Presbyterian and all other evangelical churches, as they shall discover how truly we are one with them in faith as in love: and finally, we may look more hopefully than ever for that gradual unification of Protestantism the world over, an unification in feeling and fellowship and service springing from a recognized unity in belief, which shall beautifully verify the doctrine taught so worthily in our honored Confession,

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scuring the sense at another,—the imputation that the most central doctrine in Calvinism has been reduced in expression to the lowest terms, and then hidden away in a corner,—the assertion that some of the amendments proposed are not only useless but misleading, and are destructive in their tendency,—the suggestion that the principle of amendment followed in it, if carried out, would expunge Calvinism altogether from our creed,—and the zealous summons of the presbyteries to a grave and pressing task of faithful criticism and of resolute restoration of things which the Committee have omitted,—all these seem to flow in a wrong direction, and to be as injurious as they are unjust. Surely such counsels, such admonitions, will not prevail in such a Church as ours.