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Art. I.—THE AUBURN DECLARATION.

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AMONG the treasures preserved in the Library of Lane Seminary, is the original draft of what is widely known as the AUBURN DECLARATION. More than thirty years after its preparation, just when the separated Presbyterian Churches were happily uniting, this interesting historical document was presented to the Institution by its author, the venerable BAXTER DICKINSON, D.D. It was also accompanied by valuable memoranda with respect to its authorship, and to the circumstances which occasioned its preparation. Its contents have at various times been made public through the press, and have recently been incorporated under another name in the Presbyterian Digest. Its doctrinal quality and its important historical relations to the Presbyterian Church, both as separate and as united, are such as justify its further introduction to public notice in the columns of our denominational REVIEW. What will be attempted in the present article, is a narrative of the origin of this declaration, an analysis of its contents, and a brief discussion of its doctrinal significance and value, as one among the interesting memorials of our beloved Zion.

It is hardly needful to say that this task is undertaken in no conscious mood of partisanship, and with no anticipation of awakening old animosities or arousing new oppositions, but

rather in the hope of contributing something alike to historical and theologic knowledge, and to that broad and generous temper of unity which now reigns so worthily in our united church. It is impossible for the writer to be so unfaithful to the true spirit of history, and to the irenical tendencies of the times, as intentionally to use the courtesies now granted him in these pages for the purpose of promoting the interests of a party, or of introducing discord or division into the Presbyterian household. He is inspired simply by the belief that the welfare of a great denomination, both in the present and in the future, may be essentially subserved in several important respects by such an inquiry, historical and doctrinal, as is now proposed.

I. A sufficient account of the manner in which the Auburn Declaration came into existence will hardly require any general survey of the exciting events which marked the history of the Presbyterian Church during the fourth decade of the present century. We need not enter into an examination of the *Act and Testimony* of 1834, considered as a statement of Calvinistic doctrine, or analyze the deliverance of the Assembly of 1835 against "such opinions as are not distinguishable from Pelagian or Arminian errors." We need not undertake an account of the various parties and tendencies which came into view during the following years, or of the fierce strifes which both saddened and embittered that critical period in our denominational life. The narrative may properly commence with the convention of 1837, held in Philadelphia just prior to the meeting of the General Assembly. That Convention consisted, according to its own record, of one hundred and twenty-four members, of whom one hundred and twelve were designated by fifty-four Presbyteries, and twelve by minorities in eight other Presbyteries, and all of whom were ministers or ruling elders in the Presbyterian Church. It was assembled in general for the purpose of consultation respecting the serious issues then pending, and in the expectation of influencing the action of the approaching Assembly. Its most decisive act was the preparation of a *Testimony and Memorial* to be presented to the Assembly, relating to certain errors, not merely in church order and discipline, but also in doctrinal teaching, which were supposed by the Convention to be widely prevalent within the church. The document thus prepared was brought in to the Assembly as a memorial,

together with a petition that that venerable body would take such action in the premises as, in the judgment of the memorialists, the gravity of the case required.

Concerning the general propriety or desirableness of such a method of influencing church judicatories, nothing need be said in this connection; neither is it essential to refer further to the irregularities in ecclesiastical order and discipline of which the Convention complained. Our attention must be limited to the series of doctrinal errors, sixteen in number, which the memorialists described as prevalent in certain sections of the church, and against which they felt constrained to enter an earnest protest. These errors are stated, as follows:

1. That God would have been glad to prevent the existence of sin in our world, but was not able, without destroying the moral agency of man; or, that for aught that appears in the Bible to the contrary, sin is incidental to any wise moral system.

2. That election to eternal life is founded on a foresight of faith and obedience.

3. That we have no more to do with the sin of Adam than with the sins of any other parent.

4. That infants come into the world as free from moral defilement as was Adam when he was created.

5. That infants sustain the same relation to the moral government of God in this world as brute animals, and that their sufferings and death are to be accounted for on the same principles as those of brutes, and not by any means to be considered as penal.

6. That there is no other original sin than the fact that all the posterity of Adam, though by nature innocent, or possessed of no moral character, will always begin to sin when they begin to exercise moral agency; that original sin does not include a sinful bias of the human mind and a just exposure to penal suffering; and that there is no evidence in Scripture that infants in order to salvation do need redemption by the blood of Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Ghost.

7. That the doctrine of imputation, whether of the guilt of Adam's sin, or of the righteousness of Christ, has no foundation in the word of God, and is both unjust and absurd.

8. That the sufferings and death of Christ were not truly vicarious and penal, but symbolical, governmental, and instructive only.

9. That the impenitent sinner is by nature, and independently of the renewing influence or almighty energy of the Holy Spirit, in full possession of all the ability necessary to a full compliance with all the commands of God.

10. That Christ never intercedes for any but those who are united to Him by faith, or that Christ does not intercede for the elect until after their regeneration.

11. That saving faith is a mere belief of the word of God, and not a grace of the Holy Spirit.

12. That regeneration is the act of the sinner himself, and that it consists in a change of his governing purpose, which he himself must produce, and which is the result, not of any direct influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart, but chiefly of a persuasive exhibition of the truth, analogous to the influence which one man exerts over the mind of another; or that regeneration is not an instantaneous act, but a progressive work

13. That God has done all that *He can do* for the salvation of all men, and that man himself must do the rest.

14. That God cannot exert such influence on the minds of men as shall make it certain that they will choose and act in a particular manner, without impairing their moral agency.

15. That the righteousness of Christ is not the sole ground of the sinner's acceptance with God, and that in no sense does the righteousness of Christ become ours.

16. That the reason why some differ from others in regard to their reception of the gospel is, that they make themselves to differ.

Studying these sixteen propositions in their connections, and in comparison with our doctrinal system, we at once perceive that they constitute in the aggregate a very wide, if not fatal, departure from the Westminster symbols. And if, indeed, these errors—as the Convention affirmed—were at the time held and taught by many persons professing to receive our standards, were accepted by almost entire presbyteries and synods, and were virtually sanctioned even by preceding General Assemblies, most persons will admit that it was not merely the privilege, but also the duty, of the memorialists to solicit to these errors the prompt attention of the assembly, and to invoke its aid in their repression. It was justly said, that to bear public and open testimony against such departures from the Gospel, and so far as possible to banish them from the household of faith, was a duty which the Presbyterian Church owed to her Master.

The presentation of the *Testimony and Memorial* to the General Assembly of 1837 became the occasion of the series of acts by which the Presbyterian Church was formally divided, and the New School body came into being. In this series of acts we need to note only so much as relates to the question of doctrine. On the recommendation of its committee on bills and overtures, the Assembly took up and considered this list of doctrinal errors, and bore solemn testimony against them,

“whenever, wherever, and by whomsoever taught.” It also enjoined the inferior judicatories to adopt all suitable measures to “keep their members pure from opinions so dangerous;” and counselled the presbyteries to visit with discipline any minister who should give currency to such opinions. The propositions of the Convention thus became the statements of the Assembly, and were incorporated in its Minutes, with a few verbal alterations, and with an explanatory expansion of the eleventh proposition, as follows: That saving faith is not an effect of the special operation of the Holy Spirit, but a mere rational belief of the truth, or assent to the Word of God.

“During the exciting scenes of that remarkable Assembly,” writes the author of the Auburn Declaration, “the New School members were in the practice of holding separate meetings in the evening for consultation. On one of these occasions,” he adds, “I stated that it seemed to me due to ourselves and to the New School body at large, to disavow the errors charged, and to say distinctly what views we held as opposed to them. The suggestion was at once approved; and by way of carrying it out, I was requested to prepare a paper to be laid before a future similar meeting. . . . The paper thus prepared, being the original of the Declaration, was presented by me, as my report, at a subsequent meeting. It was discussed at length, amended somewhat, and unanimously approved as a correct expression of the theological views held by the New School generally on the points of doctrine presented in the list of errors.”

After the Assembly had already taken the action recited, it became important in the judgment of those interested that the document thus prepared, and which was then styled *Errors and True Doctrines*, should in some way be brought formally before that body. This was done by incorporating it in a general protest, which was received by the Assembly, and without formal answer, placed in its minutes. This protest, while presenting other considerations against the course adopted by the Assembly on the whole subject, claimed especially that the errors named were not held by the New School party, and in the name of that party it explicitly disavowed and rejected them as unworthy of countenance in the Church. The paper presented in each case, first the error charged, and then

underneath, what was conceived to be the true view. Omitting here the series of errors, the True Doctrines, as found in the minutes of the Assembly, are as follows :

1. God permitted the introduction of sin, not because He was unable to prevent it consistently with the moral freedom of His creatures, but for wise and benevolent reasons which he has not revealed.

2. Election to eternal life is not founded on a foresight of faith and obedience, but is a sovereign act of God's mercy, whereby, according to the counsel of his own will, he has chosen some to salvation : ' yet so as thereby neither is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established ; ' nor does this gracious purpose ever take effect independently of faith and a holy life.

3. By a divine constitution Adam was so the head and representative of the race that, as a consequence of his transgression, all mankind became morally corrupt, and liable to death, temporal and eternal.

4. Adam was created in the image of God, endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. Infants come into the world not only destitute of these, but with a nature inclined to evil, and only evil.

5. Brute animals sustain no such relation to the moral government of God as does the human family. Infants are a part of the human family, and their sufferings and death are to be accounted for on the ground of their being involved in the general moral ruin of the race, induced by the apostasy.

6. Original sin is a natural bias to evil, resulting from the first apostasy, leading invariably and certainly to actual transgression. And all infants, as well as adults, in order to be saved, need redemption by the blood of Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Ghost.

7. The sin of Adam is not imputed to his posterity in the sense of a literal transfer of personal qualities, acts, and demerits ; but by reason of the sin of Adam, in its peculiar relation, the race are treated as if they had sinned. Nor is the righteousness of Christ imputed to his people in the sense of a literal transfer of personal qualities, acts, and merit ; but by reason of his peculiar relation, they are treated as if they were righteous.

8. The sufferings of Christ were not symbolical, governmental, and instructive only ; but were truly vicarious, *i. e.*, a substitute for the punishment due to transgressors. And while Christ did not suffer the literal penalty of the law, involving remorse of conscience and the pains of hell, he did offer a sacrifice which infinite wisdom saw to be a full equivalent. And by virtue of this atonement, overtures of mercy are sincerely made to the race, and salvation secured to all who believe.

9. While sinners have all the faculties necessary to a perfect moral agency and a just accountability, such is their love of sin and opposition to God and his law, that, independently of the renewing influence and almighty energy of the Holy Spirit, they never will comply with the commands of God.

10. The intercession of Christ for the elect is previous, as well as subsequent, to their regeneration, as appears from the following Scripture, *viz.* : ' I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they

are thine. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.'

11. Saving faith is an intelligent and cordial assent to the testimony of God concerning his Son, implying reliance on Christ alone for pardon and eternal life, and in all cases it is an effect of the special operation of the Holy Spirit.

12. Regeneration is a radical change of heart, produced by the special operations of the Holy Spirit, "determining the sinner to that which is good," and is in all cases instantaneous.

13. While repentance for sin and faith in Christ are indispensable to salvation, all who are saved are indebted, from first to last, to the grace and Spirit of God. And the reason that God does not save all, is not that he wants the *power* to do it, but that in his wisdom he does not see fit to exert that power further than he actually does.

14. While the liberty of the will is not impaired, nor the established connection betwixt means and ends broken, by any action of God on the mind, he can influence it according to his pleasure, and does effectually determine it to good in all cases of true conversion.

15. All believers are justified, not on the ground of personal merit, but solely on the ground of the obedience and death, or, in other words, the righteousness of Christ; and while that righteousness does not become theirs, in the sense of a literal transfer of personal qualities and merits, yet from respect to it God can and does treat them as if they were righteous.

16. While all such as reject the Gospel of Christ do it, not by coercion, but freely, and all who embrace it, do it not by coercion, but freely, the reason why some differ from others is, that *God* has made them to differ.

After the Assembly had closed its sessions, and the rupture of the church had become inevitable, it was resolved by the signers of this protest, and other representatives of the New School party, to call a convention of delegates from the separated portions of the church, to consider the existing state of affairs, and to determine upon the course of duty in the future. This Convention assembled at Auburn, N.Y., during the month of August, in the same year, and was composed of one hundred and eighty persons. Nine synods and thirty-three presbyteries were represented by ninety-eight ministers and fifty-eight laymen; and twenty-four other ministers, not commissioned, were admitted as corresponding members. Of this truly representative body the venerable Dr. Richards, who, after an honored pastorate in New Jersey, had served the denomination for fourteen years as teacher of theology in the seminary at Auburn, and who was now, in his seventieth year, an acknowledged and revered father in the church, was by acclamation

made president. While the Convention was primarily called to consider certain practical questions of policy arising out of the peculiar exigency of the time, it was felt to be a matter of great importance to protect the New School body against the somewhat general impression, that it cherished, or at least allowed, the errors which had been so forcibly condemned by the Assembly. Although the members were generally averse to the interpretations put by the opposite party upon certain doctrines of the Confession, and preferred modes of statement as to these doctrines which, in their judgment, were less liable to be misunderstood, and less likely to become injurious, they were not conscious of any departure, on their part, from the essential principles of the Calvinistic system. They believed that both themselves and the body they were representing, were thoroughly loyal to the Westminster symbols; but in order to prevent misunderstanding as to their position, they deemed it wise to make some definite and adequate declaration of their common faith. In this spirit they took up the paper entitled *Errors and True Doctrines*, and after full deliberation adopted it as expressing their matured views, and those of the churches they represented, on the several topics involved. They also declared that they cordially disapproved and condemned the list of errors to which the True Doctrines stand opposed; and further affirmed their cordial acceptance of the Confession of Faith as the best formula of Christian doctrine in existence.

Whatever position may be taken on the question, whether the statements of their Declaration do, in fact, harmonize generally and essentially with the teaching of our standards, the opinion that the Convention sincerely believed in such harmony will hardly be questioned. In the heat of exciting controversy it was indeed alleged, not merely that these statements constituted a series of strange, if not fatal, departures from sound doctrine, but also that the members of the Convention must be aware of such serious incongruity. It was even suspected that this Declaration was made, not as the actual and full belief of the New School party, but rather as a screen to hide still more heretical and disastrous deviations from the truth. But at this day there are none who suppose that this Convention was consciously covering up cherished Arminian errors with Calvinistic wrappings, or that its avowal of loyalty to our symbols was

otherwise than sincere and cordial. All will unite in according to these men Christian sincerity and Christian frankness, as well as boldness, in their utterance of what they regarded as revealed truth and as sound Presbyterianism.

One interesting confirmation on this point may be introduced here. In the autumn of the following year (1838) the venerable president of the Auburn Convention wrote an open letter, designed to quiet misapprehensions and to certify to the essential loyalty of the New School body to the accepted standards. His testimony must be regarded as intelligent, honest, conclusive. In respect to the ministers, he declares that they have all solemnly professed to believe the Confession of Faith as containing that system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures; not, indeed, accepting every proposition contained in it, but such truths as are "vital to the system, and which distinguish it from Arminianism and Semipelagianism." They believe, he says, in the doctrine of total depravity by nature; in regeneration by the sovereign and efficacious influence of the Holy Spirit; in justification by the righteousness of Christ as the only true and meritorious cause; and in the perseverance of the saints and the interminable punishment of the wicked. As to the churches, he testifies, after an examination of twenty-six formulas of admission to membership, which he had gathered by application to as many presbyteries: "If I have any judgment as to what belongs to orthodoxy, they are as sound as a roach, with the exception of the article on atonement. They favor the idea of general atonement, as John Calvin and the early Reformers did."

II. With this brief review of the origin and history of the Auburn Declaration in mind, we may pass, in the next place, to an examination of its doctrinal contents, in comparison, especially, with the teaching of our standards. In such an examination the first step is a just recognition of the general characteristics of the document, regarded as a theological symbol. Here it will be observed at the outset, that, like the canons of the Synod of Dort, it does not profess to be a complete summary of Christian doctrine, but is simply a condensed statement of opinion on the specific topics named in the *Act and Testimony*. Drafted for a particular exigency, and, in fact, to answer certain specified charges, it is more directly concerned with the disa-

vowal of imputed error than with the exposition of revealed truth. In its structure it is consequently negative rather than positive, and fails more by conciseness than by redundancy. Avowedly abstaining from direct affirmation upon some of the more metaphysical and difficult questions suggested in the list of *Errors*, it sometimes says less than is said in our Confession—pausing carefully where our standards would have justified further advance. In its terms and phrases it carries us back not merely to the specific controversies in which it arose, but also to those prolonged struggles around anthropological and soteriological issues in which the religious thought of the country had, ever since the revival period of the preceding century, been so largely engaged. It especially reveals, at several points, the presence of that remarkable influence which had flowed down upon the Presbyterian Church, as indeed upon all evangelical communions, from the imperial mind and heart of Jonathan Edwards. It could have originated as a symbol in no other land than ours, and under no other set of conditions than that in which the author and his associates were historically placed. Its contents, its form, its method are alike American. In respect to the spirit it reveals, it must be regarded as decidedly irenic rather than polemic; and in its aim and tendency, it is much more practical than speculative or abstract.

In attempting an analysis of this Declaration, we do not propose to enter upon any defense of the doctrines presented, or to name the considerations by which these doctrines were justified in the eyes of their advocates. Still less shall we undertake to criticise the propositions of the Declaration, or to show, by any line of argument, their falsity or their inadequacy. We desire simply to place the reader, for the time, out of connection with ecclesiastical parties or schools of thought, and to bring him to the study of the document, as if it belonged to another land and age—as if it had just come to light as some new creed of the Reformation, or some recovered symbol of the medieval church. Though the language may frequently carry him back in memory to controversies raging only a generation ago, he should, as a student of theological opinion, be able to rise above the influence of those controversies, and weigh these propositions with a firm and generous impartiality. In order

to conduct such an examination successfully, the teachings of the Declaration should be grouped under three main divisions :

1. The first of these includes *the introduction and transmission of sin*, and *the condition of mankind as fallen*. All theories respecting the relations of God to the introduction or permission of human sin, represent him either as constrained to admit it wherever free agency exists or a moral system is established, or as allowing it in order that he may overrule it for the benefit of our race, especially through the compensations and blessings of the Gospel. In man as a moral being, in the nature of a probationary system, in the higher economy of providence, or in the consummating plan of redemption, taken separately or in some form of conjunction, the effort is made to find the key and explication of the solemn fact that under a divine constitution and arrangement sin exists. It is not strange that many minds turn away from every such explanation, and prefer to rest simply in the belief that, however inscrutable the mystery may now appear, God has some method in which the existence of sin is not merely permitted, but made subservient to his own holy purposes and to his eternal glory. This is the attitude of the Auburn Declaration. While, in answer to the error charged, it rejects the notion that God cannot prevent sin without destroying the moral agency of man, it does not attempt to account theoretically for the actual permission of sin, but simply remands the problem to the realm of divine sovereignty, maintaining only that the fact, however perplexing, is not one which should be suffered to shake our faith in the ability or wisdom, the equity or the love of Deity.

Recognizing sin as something which for wise and good reasons God has permitted, the Declaration proceeds to affirm, in opposition to all individualistic theories, the fact of its transmission from our first parents through all succeeding generations of mankind. In relation to this fact, as maintained and taught in the various Calvinistic Confessions, three theories or explanations have extensively prevailed. The first conceives of Adam as so far including and incorporating in himself the human race, that his primal transgression becomes, in effect, the generic offense of his entire posterity, and his fall naturally and of necessity involves every human being, as

sprung from him, and acting in him, in a common culpability and ruin. The second regards the connection, so far as the transmission of sin is concerned, as rather federal than natural, and Adam as representing and acting for the race by divine appointment, in such a sense and degree that they fell through his fall, and must therefore share with him in the penal issues of his sin. The third simply asserts, without attempting to define its exact nature, the existence under the divine constitution of such an established connection between Adam and his posterity, that sin on his part involved consequent sinfulness and guilt in them as his posterity. The Declaration evidently aims primarily to bring out the essential fact in the case, that sin originated with our first parents, and has in some manner flowed down from them, both as a taint and as a shame, upon their entire posterity. But, theoretically, it prefers rather to refer this fact simply to this divine constitution of things, than to explain it upon either the realistic or the federal theory. It indeed rejects the conception of a direct imputation in any such sense as involves a literal transfer of personal qualities, acts, or demerit, and chooses rather simply to say that by reason of the sin of Adam, and in view of his natural relation as head and representative, the race are treated as if they had sinned. The imputation in the case is viewed as mediate rather than immediate, and the intermediate element is their possession of his corrupted and sinful nature. As possessing such a nature, all mankind are regarded not only as morally corrupt, but as liable to death, temporal and eternal—a liability which, to the divine mind, became certainty, and which invariably changes into fact in the case of every responsible soul.

In regard to the nature and reach of the moral corruption thus affirmed, the Declaration takes what may be characterized as a strong Calvinistic position. Though it declines to present any theory respecting the divine permission of sin, and speaks cautiously in regard to the method in which sin is transmitted, it affirms most clearly the fallen and lost estate of man without the Gospel. It presents a marked contrast between the original character of our first parents, as created in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, and the estate of their posterity as coming into the world, not only destitute of these

qualities, but in fact inclined to evil and evil only. It teaches that this bias to evil is so strong as to lead on, invariably and certainly, to actual transgression, and that consequently even infants, as possessing it, need redemption through atoning and regenerating grace. It further recognizes this moral corruption as accounting for the existence of human misery, for the fact of temporal death, and for the general moral ruin in which mankind appear to be involved. To the notion that there is nothing back of personal choice which involves exposure to penal consequences, that we have nothing whatever to do with the sin or guilt of Adam, that infants are born free from all transmitted defilement, and consequently need no salvation, if they die in infancy, the Declaration certainly gives no countenance.

In general, it will be seen that the anthropological teaching of this document is not merely Calvinistic, as tested by the consensus of the Reformed symbols, but is substantially in harmony with the Westminster standards. So far as the divine relations to sin are concerned, it pauses where the Confession pauses, at the central mystery of an absolute and holy and glorious sovereignty. So far as the Confession favors either the theory of natural or that of federal headship (and there are passages which would justify both affirmations) the Declaration would rather be classed with some other essentially Calvinistic symbols, which content themselves with asserting the simple fact of transmission under a divine constitution, without attempting any additional explanation. As to the fallen and corrupt estate of man, while it does not repeat the statement of the Confession, that mankind are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil—a statement regarded by some as unguarded in terms, and requiring careful explanation—the Declaration is still thoroughly Augustinian, alike in doctrine and in spirit.

2. The second general topic treated in the Auburn Declaration is *the Divine and the human in regeneration, and in the spiritual life*. Controversies around this topic had agitated the American Church, and especially the Calvinistic portion of it, even from the time of Edwards. In the Presbyterian body such controversies had become intensely earnest, practical, divisive; and it was within this field that the larger part of the errors

named by the Assembly of 1837 were grouped. It was, therefore, indispensable that the language of the Declaration, on the several points in question, should be distinct, positive, and unmistakable.

The first of these points relates to the kind and amount of ability possessed by the sinner in the direction of holiness. It had been affirmed that many in the church taught that, independently of the renewing influence and energy of the Holy Spirit, the sinner possesses all the ability necessary to a full compliance with every divine command. And it was justly inferred that such teaching was not only in great degree subversive of the gospel, regarded as a scheme of grace, but also likely to lull the souls of men into false confidence and imperil their prospect of salvation. In contrast with this error, the Declaration plants itself on the old and familiar distinction between an ability that is constitutional, and a disability that is moral: and teaches on one side that men have all the natural faculties necessary to a perfect moral agency and to a full accountability, and on the other side, that their moral disposition is so perverse—their love of sin and opposition to God and His law so strong—that they in fact never do exercise these faculties in the right direction. It further declares that this moral inability, which has its root in the natural bias to evil already recognized as resulting from the first apostasy, involves certain continuance in sin, and will never be changed except by a direct and mighty interposition of the Spirit of God; and further, that from such an interposition alone can true regeneration come as a sovereign, gracious, undeserved bestowment.

In conformity with this general position, the Declaration further defines regeneration, not as a product of the native faculties or independent activities of man, but as an immediate work of the Holy Spirit; a work involving nothing less than a radical and permanent change of heart, by which the soul, in the language of our symbols, is determined toward all good and away from all transgression. This change of heart is declared to be instantaneous rather than progressive, and to be instantaneously effected, not through the independent influence of the truth, nor by some voluntary reversal of our governing purpose, but through the special operation of the Spirit of God. As to the connection between such special operation of the Spirit

and the inherent liberty of man, as a moral agent, the Declaration teaches that here, as in the original purpose of election, there is no infringement upon human freedom; that man acts and acts freely in conversion, while at the same time the Spirit effectually works within him regeneratively, to will and to do according to the divine pleasure. Room is preserved for the established connection between means and ends, for the liberty or contingency of second causes, for the free play of every vital force remaining within the soul, while at the same time it is affirmed that all outward agencies, all means of grace, all human devices and energies, would be utterly fruitless, excepting as the Spirit of God should thus begin, carry forward, and complete in sovereign potency and grace the specific work of regeneration.

Respecting saving faith as the prime condition of regeneration and the new life, the Declaration is careful to distinguish between such faith and any mere rational belief of the truth, or simple assent to the gospel plan of redemption, and describes it rather as a spiritual consent, involving the heart and will as well as the intellect, to all that God has said respecting our salvation through Christ. As thus defined, saving faith is eminently a true, cordial reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ for pardon and eternal life; and such faith, instead of originating in man, or being developed through human influence, comes into being only through the Spirit, and is a supernatural witness to his presence within the soul. In like manner, true repentance, which is the unvarying concomitant of true faith, is described as different from all mere regret or remorse, or other natural feeling, and as developed in the breast only when the Holy Spirit has come in with illuminating and quickening power.

The Christian life, thus originating in regeneration and marked by the presence of saving faith and its concomitants, is ascribed in the Declaration, from first to last, to the grace of God, and is thus recognized as supernatural, alike in its beginning and in every subsequent development. It is true that the document emphasizes more frequently and fully than our symbols the element of conversion, or the human side of that process by which the soul passes from death unto life. It aims especially to protect the doctrine of freedom, and the consequent doctrine of responsibility, from all such inferences as might result from

excessive conceptions of the immobility, the stupor, the deadness of the natural man. But it nowhere admits any Pelagian misconceptions of what regeneration is, or of the essentially supernatural life that flows from regeneration. It does not rest in the notion of a general influence of the Spirit, or a merely secondary and temporary work wrought by him, or a holy life sustained and blooming apart from his aid. It points directly to his special operation as the true cause and source, and ascribes the result, from first to last, to his sovereign and gracious agency. Nothing in the Confession itself is more clear, more weighty, more convincing, on this cardinal doctrine.

3. *The nature, characteristics, and extent of the plan of redemption, through the atonement of Christ*, constitute the third main topic of the Auburn Declaration. That such a plan of redemption is, and, from the nature of the case, must be, elective and segregative in its application, that it involves a particular and personal setting apart unto life in the case of each one who enjoys its privileges, and that such election is based, not on any foresight of faith and obedience in them, but is simply an act of infinite mercy, of which the will of God is the sole and the absolute source, this document very clearly affirms. It is careful, however, to protect this doctrine against the inference that free choice in man is thereby rendered impossible, quoting the strong statement of the Confession on this point: "Yet so as thereby neither is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." It also guards against another natural and kindred objection, by further declaring that this divine election is invariably realized and made manifest to us only in and through conscious faith and true holiness of life. And to this there should be added its further teaching, that such election is neither an accidental or fortuitous result, controlled by no rational consideration, nor a merely arbitrary manifestation of sovereign will, irrespective of any claims of justice, but is rather an act of ineffable and holy love, brooding over our lost race, and tenderly drawing some proportion of that race upward into itself. On such an election, inspired by divine love, specific and personal in application, and verified through a holy life in the elect, the plan of redemption is thus directly and definitely based.

In respect to the nature of that atoning work of Christ by which salvation becomes possible, the Declaration teaches explicitly that his sacrifice was not instructive, nor symbolical, nor governmental merely, but was truly vicarious—an actual substitution for the punishment due to transgressors. It takes up literally the error described in the *Act and Testimony*, and in the very language of that document affirms the contrary. It does, indeed, reject the statement that the sacrifice of Christ was penal, in the sense that He endured the exact and literal penalty of the law, or Himself felt, in any form, remorse of conscience or the pains of hell, as those whom He redeems would have done. That sacrifice is viewed simply as an equivalent for such punishment—an expedient by which the same results are secured at the bar of justice and in the sphere of moral administration which would have resulted from the condemnation of a world of sinners—an expedient, therefore, which the infinite wisdom and infinite equity of God will permit Him to accept, and which His infinite mercy inclines Him to accept, in place of the punishment due to those whom Christ has redeemed. Thus defined, the death of our Lord becomes something infinitely higher than a method of revealing dramatically the divine love, or of teaching men the truth concerning God, or of sustaining the divine government simply—it becomes a real substitution, an actually vicarious sacrifice, through which God may be just and yet justify the sinner.

In accordance with this view, the Declaration further affirms that this atonement not only secures the salvation of all who believe, but also, in some real sense, provides a possibility of salvation for all mankind. The transaction is of such a nature, and of such value, that, on the basis provided in it, overtures of mercy may be made, and are sincerely made, to the entire human race. While the divine plan becomes efficient only in such as believe, it is held to be sufficient for all men, so that nothing more would be needed on the part of God, were all mankind to accept the gracious provision here made. The sovereignty of God is indeed recognized in the elective purpose, in the prescribing of faith and repentance as the generic conditions, and in the bringing of gracious instrumentalities to bear upon men, in order to their acceptance of the gospel. But, on the other hand, the freeness and fullness of the gospel

scheme, the general as well as the specific relations of the atonement and the possibility of redemption as a door opening into Heaven, through which whosoever will may enter and share freely in the feast of grace, are specifically and prominently presented. It is probably at this point that one observes the widest divergence between the Declaration and our standards—a divergence, however, which is, possibly, more apparent than real, and concerning which varieties of opinion have always existed, and still exist, harmoniously within the Presbyterian church.

Respecting the manner in which this atonement is applied the Declaration further teaches that the sinner is saved, not by any personal merit, nor through any independent compliance, on his part, with the prescribed conditions, but simply and solely on account of the righteousness of Christ, made manifest in His holy life, and especially in His obedience unto death. This righteousness, it is said, does not become the possession of believers through any direct transfer to them of his personal qualities, acts, or merits; it is, however, by reason of his righteousness, and in virtue of his peculiar relation to them and their responsive relation to him, that they are treated as if they were righteous. Their salvation is attributed exclusively to what He has done. His work for them is prior even to their faith in Him; and He intercedes as well as atones for them, it is specially said, before they become regenerate.

The fact that some do reject the gospel, and consequently persist in sin, is the only remaining point to be noted. It is directly denied in the Declaration, that God does not save such persons simply and only because He cannot save them, or that it is some constitutional disability in Him, or some malevolent and irresistible combination of circumstances about Him, which is compelling him to let such perish. It is affirmed, on the contrary, that, as in the election of grace, the issue here is referable simply to a sovereign and holy purpose, whose justifying reasons or foundations it is not given to man to comprehend. On the human side the difference between the saved and the lost is seen to be a difference, not in the degree of visible influence or coercion exerted upon them, but in the free and responsible choice on their part between God and sin. But on the divine side the problem is simply accepted as inscrutable,

and the sovereign choice which limits the application of redemptive grace to a portion of mankind, is humbly and trustfully acquiesced in as wise and good, because it is the choice of a wise, a holy, an omnipotent, and a gracious God.

III. This synopsis of the doctrinal contents of the Auburn Declaration, more brief than such an act and testimony deserves, will be sufficient to prepare the way for some consideration of its symbolic value and relations, especially within our united church. It is hoped that what may be said on this topic will be recognized as just, considerate, generous, and as such will command the approbation of thoughtful men of whatever previous ecclesiastical connection or doctrinal tendency. To this end the writer humbly invokes the guidance of the Spirit of God.

It is a suggestive fact, that at the organization of the New School Church in 1838, no attempt was made to give this Declaration a symbolic position, or even to indorse it as an authoritative comment on the revised standards. Adopted, as it had unanimously and cordially been, by the representative Convention of the preceding summer, it might have been anticipated that the Assembly, composed not only of delegates from the same presbyteries and synods, but largely of the same persons, would have taken occasion to reaffirm their position on the doctrinal issues involved. It would not have been strange if, at such a juncture, an effort had been made to give the Declaration some co-ordinate authority, or even to alter the Confession and Catechisms wherever the language of the Declaration was regarded as preferable. The fact that nothing of this sort was undertaken shows conclusively, not that the mind of the Assembly had changed on these points of doctrine, nor that a party had risen up in opposition to the Declaration, but simply that this document was regarded as in essential harmony with the standards, and that all preferred to have the new organization plant itself on those standards, pure and simple. Had any great want of doctrinal harmony existed between the Declaration and the Confession, it is incredible that the Assembly of 1838 would not have discovered it, or that, on discovering it, they would not have either adopted the former *ex animo*, or undertaken to revise the latter in its interest. The Assembly, in fact, left the Declaration exactly where it already

stood, as a clear and satisfactory exposition of their mature judgment on the points in question, and proceeded to adopt a resolution recommending all the presbyteries in their connection to take steps toward the more general circulation of the Confession and Catechisms among the churches under their care. They thus planted themselves on the standards as they were, while the Declaration became a revered but unauthoritative expositor of these standards. The Assembly went further in this direction, and in its *Pastoral Letter* declared its high regard for the Confession as containing more well-defined, fundamental truth, with less defect, than any other known formula, and as deserving of the continued acceptance and allegiance of the churches; closing its commendation with a solemn disavowal of all purpose to revise or change it.

At no subsequent period during its separate existence, did the New School Church ever undertake to move off from the strong position then assumed. Alterations were made from time to time in the ecclesiastical methods and structure of the body, and other similar alterations were, at various times, proposed. But the Auburn Declaration was never adopted, or even formally indorsed, so far as we have learned after careful inquiry; neither was any proposal ever submitted to alter a line or a letter of the Confession or Catechisms in its interest. From the beginning to the close of its history, that church preferred to adhere to the old standards as they were, not merely as incorporating the system of doctrine contained in the Scriptures, but also as a sufficient and satisfactory basis of church life and activity. These have been the corner-stones on which its numerous churches have been reared; by these, and these only, have its ministers been tested; around these have its forces been gathered, alike in the day of battle and in the glad hour of victory.

In essential harmony with this pregnant fact stands the equally historic fact, that, from the beginning, the New School Church felt itself at liberty, in the temper of perfect loyalty to the standards, to cast its doctrinal teaching very largely in the new mould thus providentially provided for it in the clear, terse, honest, thoughtful sentences of the Auburn Declaration. Accepting heartily, for example, the generic truth set forth in the Confession, that the utter fall and apostasy of man are trace-

able to the prime transgression and consequent fall of Adam as a source, it preferred to regard this, as developed under a divine constitution of things—under a certain structural arrangement of human society, divinely ordained for beneficent ends—rather than as occurring under either a realistic or a federal headship. It maintained fully the real headship and the peculiar relationship of Adam, but regarded these as involving, through our inheritance of his corrupted nature, rather a mediate or social than an immediate or forensic imputation of his guilt—the legal and the speculative thus giving way to a more distinctively natural conception of the fact.

In like manner the New School Church never consciously departed from the teaching of our standards respecting the human and the divine in regeneration and the new life, or consented to regard man as in any sense a co-ordinate factor with God in the matter of his own salvation. But originating, as it did, immediately after and partly in consequence of that remarkable revival of religion which, for the preceding twenty years, had swept with such tremendous force along the parallels of latitude where it was chiefly located, it was led naturally to lay much stress upon the freedom and the consequent responsibility of man, especially for his faithful use of all means providentially afforded him, and for that state or disposition of heart and choice which was seen to be vitally involved in the matter of his regeneration and conversion through grace. Of such convictions the language of the Declaration seemed, without involving serious controversy about liberty of will or the nature of regeneration, to furnish the happy practical expression; and that language, therefore, worked itself readily into common use, shaping the current phraseology of the pulpit, regulating the forms of public prayer, and in numberless other ways impressing itself deeply upon the popular thought.

The same general tendency led to the acceptance of the teachings of the Declaration respecting the sufficiency, as well as the efficiency, of the gospel plan of redemption. While the doctrine of a particular election continued to be held, and the complete and righteous sovereignty of God, in the bestowment of salvation, was reverently taught, yet an earnest desire to win all men to Christ, an enlarged and urgent missionary zeal, could best express itself in formulas which brought out

rather the generic than the particularistic aspects of the Christian scheme. It was supposed, perhaps needlessly and without adequate grounds, that the doctrine of election had been so held and taught in the church as to be an embarrassment to the preacher in inviting sinners to Christ, and a hindrance to the sinner on his way to the cross. And it might have happened that, in avoiding this, some, at least, would have fallen into the opposite error, and cast the doctrine out of the circle of evangelical truth, if the Declaration itself had not furnished the more mediate view, and thus determined successfully the theological teaching of the new-born church.

In each of these directions, and in others which might be named, the Auburn Declaration became a kind of schoolmaster, acting conjointly with the Westminster symbols in educating the church into a true, broad, generous, fruitful type of Calvinism. There are few, if any, instances in ecclesiastical history where a document, never endowed with any form of authority, has yet entered so extensively and vitally into the general convictions of a body of believers, and become so practically a doctrinal basis and foundation. Perhaps the *Symbolum Quicumque*, originating we hardly know where, never depending for currency on any conspicuous ecclesiastical indorsement, yet affecting almost as vitally the belief of the entire Western Church on matters of such moment as the real trinity in God and the true composite personality in Christ, furnishes the closest parallel on record. So penetrating and diffusive has the influence of this Declaration been, that it has passed almost bodily into the language and experience of the church, with whose origin it was so singularly associated; it has survived in its effect the age and the controversy that produced it; it has descended from one generation to another, and wrought itself into the faith and teaching of a race of preachers to whom the document itself is largely unknown; it has continued to affect the instruction of the Sabbath-school and the familiar language of the Christian conference, has furnished inspiration in seasons of revival, has enkindled and directed missionary zeal, and, by a thousand subtle processes, has stamped itself historically on the convictions and experience of the church. To the student of ecclesiastical history who examines such a phenomenon in the serene light of a catholic scholarship, apart from the influ-

ence of any partizan interest, this fact, anomalous as it is, cannot fail to be full of useful suggestion. To one who is practically interested in such an event as the historic growth and progress and fruitfulness of the New School Church, a proper appreciation of this fact becomes indispensable.

Coming down in our survey to a more recent period, we may, without offense, observe that no single step contributed so much to the happy reunion of our beloved church as the generous recognition of the Auburn Declaration by the General Assembly (O. S.) of 1868. For two years preceding, negotiations in the interest of reunion had been going forward without practical result. It had first been proposed that the common standards should be accepted in their "fair historical sense, in opposition to Antinomianism and Fatalism on the one hand, and to Arminianism and Pelagianism on the other;" but the consciousness of existing differences in interpretation and in acceptance had led even positive friends of union on both sides to hesitate in acting upon such a guarantee. It had then been proposed that it should be understood, by both parties, that "various methods of viewing, stating, explaining, and illustrating the doctrines of the Confession, which do not impair the integrity of the Reformed or Calvinistic system, are to be freely allowed in the United Church, as they have hitherto been allowed in the separate churches."* To this proposal sincere objection had been raised by friends of sound orthodoxy, lest it might be construed as allowing wide depar-

* In explanation of this important sentence, we quote the language of the Joint Committee on submitting their report to the two Assemblies of 1868:

"The same Confession is adopted by all. It is adopted in the same terms, as containing the same system. At the same time that we exchange these guarantees for orthodoxy, we mutually interchange guarantees for Christian liberty. Differences always have existed and been allowed in the Presbyterian Churches, in Europe and America, as to modes of explaining and theorizing within the metes and bounds of the one accepted system. To put into exact formulas what opinions should be allowed and what interdicted, would be to write a new Confession of Faith. . . . Your committee have assumed no such work of supererogation. Neither have they made compromises or concessions. They append no codicil to the old symbols. They have asserted, as being essential to all true unity, the necessity of adopting the same Confession and the same system, with the recognition of liberty, on either hand, for such differences as do not impair the integrity of the system itself: which is all the liberty that any branch of the great Calvinistic family of churches has ever claimed or desired."—*Reunion Memorial*, p. 279.

tures from the standards, or as granting too great a degree of liberty, without defining sufficiently the sphere within which such liberty might be exercised. For this, and for other kindred reasons, the efforts in the interest of union had thus far been futile ; and all minds were verging toward the conclusion, that the union, if ever formed, must rest doctrinally on the simple basis of the standards.

At this juncture occurred the significant ecclesiastical action to which we have referred. A strong protest against the union had been presented to the Assembly by some of its most eminent members, based chiefly on the ground that undue latitude in doctrine had been allowed by these explanatory clauses. In answer to this able protest the Assembly took occasion to say: " We regard the Auburn Declaration as an authoritative statement of the New School type of Calvinism, and as indicating how far they desire to go, and how much liberty they wish, in regard to what the terms of union call the various modes of explaining, illustrating, and stating the Calvinistic faith." The Assembly further declared its judgment, that the Declaration embraced " all the fundamentals of the Calvinistic Creed," and expressed its belief that the New School party claimed and desired only that degree of variation from the standards " which would be represented by the theology of Richards and the Auburn Declaration."

Among the many providential indications, showing peculiarly the hand of a gracious God in uniting two churches divided by a generation of alienation and rivalry, we know of none more purely accidental to human view, and yet more divinely effectual than this. For the first time during the thirty years of its existence, the Declaration had now received ecclesiastical recognition, and this indorsement had come, not from those who had so long known and loved it as a commentary on the received standards, but from those who clung to those standards, without note or commentary, as containing the pure faith of the church. From that hour the difficulties in the way of union were seen to diminish. Even the signers of the protest, whom all would recognize as profoundly versed in Calvinistic theology, and as animated by the purest desire to preserve both the orthodoxy and the peace of the church they loved, must have felt that, if no further departure than this were desired,

the purity of the faith would not be imperiled by the reunion. Many others in that church, who had hitherto been constrained for similar reasons to doubt and hesitate, were now led to see that the granting of this measure of privilege was but a just act, and one which it involved no compromise of principle or of position to render. And on the other side there were many who, while loyal to the essence of the Confession, had yet been trained in the language and method of the Declaration, and who, while in the main favoring union, yet felt that some degree of guaranteed liberty was indispensable to any union which should carry with it their heart and sympathy, as well as their formal allegiance, to whom this frank indorsement came as an adequate assurance, that all they had hitherto cherished in modes of theological statement would, in fact, if not in form, be guaranteed to them in the united church. They desired no further latitude in interpretation; they wished for no wider variation from the language of the standards; and when the Assembly, of its own accord, put such honor upon a doctrinal symbol so dear to them, their last occasion for hesitancy was taken away.

Was it not a singular ordering of Providence that the document, which had originated historically in the division of our church, and under which as a banner the separated party had gone out from the ancestral patrimony in sadness and in bitterness of heart, should have been made, by accident as it were, the instrument used of God in the restoration of mutual confidence, and in the actual union of the churches so separated? It was well said in the Assembly (O. S.) of the following year, by one who represented the New School Church before that body, "We recall the generous act of your last Assembly in amply vindicating our orthodoxy by that deliverance which, of your own accord, was entered upon your Minutes, and for which we render you, in the name of all truth and fairness, our sincere thanks." Such a deliverance could never have been made, had not the Declaration been essentially an irenic, rather than a polemical, document. One evidence of this fact should be mentioned here. It is well known that the framers of the Declaration endeavored to increase the list of errors condemned in the Assembly, by adding four others, with which they sup-

posed some of their opponents to be justly chargeable.* In this endeavor they were frustrated by the refusal of the Assembly, under the previous question, to consider their amendment. Yet, under these circumstances, they wisely threw away their counter-charges, abandoned all aggressive measures, and rested their case in the simple and calm and peaceable statement of their judgment, on the points urged against them. Time has proven the Christian wisdom of their course. Both in its terms and in its spirit their Declaration became not only a silent protest against the separation, but also a perpetual argument for reunion. Its tones were soft and brotherly, and its voice was the voice of a friend. So far as its influence went, it quieted asperities on both sides, reduced the theological differences to their minimum, brought into view the broad remaining points of agreement, and forever whispered peace. And it may be that, although this was hardly in the hope of those who drafted it, the Declaration has at last subserved one of its highest predestined uses in rendering so easy and so cordial the unification of our divided Presbyterian family.

While all this is true, it should be said, as a safeguard against misapprehension, that the Auburn Declaration constitutes no part of the standards of our church, and is invested ecclesiastically with no degree of symbolic authority. Our symbols furnish still a sufficient basis of church belief, and they need no authoritative commentary. What the Declaration does is simply to exemplify conspicuously those methods of viewing, stating, explaining, and illustrating the doctrines of our symbols which the friends of orthodoxy were and are and will continue to be, we believe, willing to grant to the friends of liberty in the temper of mutual confidence and love. It could not, indeed, be brought into court as a legal guarantee, or as a constitutional impediment to action; in such a possible case, for ex-

* The four errors to which allusion is here made, are found in the Minutes, pp. 481-82, of the General Assembly of 1837. It may be of interest to our readers to glance at them in passing:

1. That man has no ability *of any kind* to obey God's commands or do his duty.
2. That ability is not necessary to constitute obligation.
3. That God may justly command what man has no ability to perform, and justly condemn him for non-performance.
4. That the powers of man to perform the duty required of him have been destroyed by the Fall.

ample, as the trial for heresy of one who held to its view of mediate imputation in preference to the immediate imputation taught in the Confession. Still less could it be properly employed to screen an errorist who should be guilty of promulgating opinions of such a nature as would impair the integrity of the Calvinistic system. The true value of the document lies rather in the deep impression which its contents, its history, its interesting relations to the entire thought and life of the New School body, its providential significance and use in the process of reunion, are together making, and are likely for generations to make, on our united church. We do not believe that any man will ever be convicted of heresy in any presbytery in that church, who simply holds what the Declaration teaches, and who is clearly seen to have wandered no further from the letter and essence of our symbols than the Declaration has itself gone. Its moderate and conciliatory terms, its irenic and catholic temper, its silent testimony to essential truth amid diversities of theory, will be both his safeguard and shield, and the protection and support of the church. And we venture the prediction, that after the conflicts of the past forty years shall have passed wholly into history, and the church, in the strength and glory of her union, shall have gone on to do the grand work assigned to her on this continent and in the world, the Auburn Declaration will continue to speak, not by authority, but in love, as the witness and the guarantee of a unity, which is none the less loyal to the truth for being generous, and none the less generous for being loyal still to the only recognized standards of our faith.

IV. This estimate of the symbolic value and relations of the Auburn Declaration in the Presbyterian Church sheds some interesting light on the current inquiry, whether the standards of that church need any present revision. At the risk of wearying our readers beyond measure, we venture to prolong this article by presenting some suggestions on this point, springing specifically from what has already been expressed. No one will question the right of any company of believers to alter, expand, abridge, amend, or even to throw aside and trample under foot, a creed which they themselves have made. Done in accordance with constitutional rules and provisions, and with such general consent as due regard for the unity and harmony

of the body would demand, such a revision or abrogation might take place at any time, at the option of the church interested. Individual members aggrieved by such changes would have the simple alternative of withdrawing from a communion which had thus modified or abandoned some of its original principles. Other communions in the common Christendom might feel justified in withholding further fellowship with such a church, and the general interests of Christianity might be seen to have suffered seriously from such an act of apostasy. But the abstract right remains, of course, with the church itself, subject only to a solemn responsibility to its Divine Head. And this concession, which involves the cardinal principle of Protestantism, must, as Professor Rainy well observes, be more than a mere idle flourish. "It must exist in the church as a living, practical, powerful principle. Loyalty to the Supreme Word requires it; and where it is withdrawn or denied, the defense of creeds on Protestant principles becomes impossible."

Standing on this general ground, our own church has not only recognized the fact, that all synods and councils may err in their exposition of Divine Truth, and the further fact that, at the best, no human statements of doctrine are to be regarded as of co-ordinate authority with the Scriptures, but also made adequate provision for the re-statement of her doctrinal formularies, whenever such re-statement shall be constitutionally demanded by her membership. It is well known that alterations were made in the Confession when it first became, by the Adopting Act of 1729, the doctrinal basis of American Presbyterianism; that these alterations were further approved by the act explanatory of the Adopting Act, passed in 1736; and that these, together with some changes made in the Larger Catechism, became permanent in the Confession at the final organization of the church in 1788. One of the resolutions of 1788 declares, that "the Form of Government and Discipline, and the Confession of Faith, as now ratified, is to continue to be our Constitution and the Confession of our faith and practice, unalterably, unless two-thirds of the presbyteries under the care of the General Assembly shall propose alterations or amendments, and such alterations or amendments shall be agreed to and enacted by the General Assembly." In 1804, the Assembly, upon the recommendation of a committee appointed in the

previous year "to consider whether any, and if any, what, alterations ought to be made in the Confession of Faith," resolved, after full consideration, to undertake no such revision. And in 1843 a similar committee, appointed to consider "whether there is any prescribed mode of amending or altering the Confession," while reporting against a specific alteration proposed in the section on marriage, directed attention to the Act of 1788, as giving full warrant for any amendment desired. It is, therefore, competent for the Presbyterian Church, under such rules and precedents, to take up any part or section of her avowed belief, and to amend, alter, abridge, or even reject, as the requisite majority in each case shall determine.

Granting the abstract right and the constitutional power, we may turn to consider the conditions under which revision may wisely be proposed. The general proposition of Professor Rainy, that this should not be regarded by the church as a singular and revolutionary step, but rather as something belonging to her ordinary and recognized responsibilities,* is one which needs to be received with caution, for it is difficult to see how any extensive or radical alterations could be made in the established creed of any Christian church, without involving what might well be termed a revolution. Especially would we hesitate to accept his suggestion, that the church should make regular provision for such revision, if this were carried to the extent of appointing set periods when the whole matter of the church belief should pass stately under review.† Such provisions might, indeed, be of service in the way of forestalling those more violent processes, by which, in the heat of partisan contention, creeds are sometimes altered or cast aside. It

* *Development of Christian Doctrine*, p. 276-7.

† At the risk of trespassing upon the privacy of a most profitable interview with this distinguished author, we venture to express the opinion, that he has been somewhat misapprehended in America. It may be believed that he favors no present movement for revision of the Confession in Scotland—that no such movement is likely, in his judgment, to be undertaken—and that the serious proposal of it would probably be fatal to the reputation of any man in the Free Church; and it may be added, that his entire lecture on Creeds (*Develop. of Chris. Doct.*, Lect vi.), together with the notes appended to it, should be read and weighed as a totality by any one who would obtain a just view of his conservative, rather than radical, attitude on the whole subject.

might also tend to check an undue sentiment of reverence for creeds, arrest false conservatisms, pacify revolutionary tendencies, and in general keep the church and her symbols in their true relations. But, on the other side, it is to be remembered, as this eminent writer himself well observes, that not every generation of believers is qualified for the business of making or amending Confessions. It is only great epochs that throw out great creeds; and it might frequently happen, under any such plan, that a less cultured or competent generation, or a reactionary or recreant generation, if called to such a task of revision, would only mar and mutilate creeds which it were better for them, and for the church and the world, to preserve in the beauty and the grandeur of their primitive historic integrity.

It will at least be granted, that such revision, if not revolutionary, is a most serious and pregnant process, and one which should be undertaken only under the pressure of most urgent considerations. A doubtful adjective, an ambiguous phrase, an unsustained proposition, an incidental error, can hardly call for so expensive a remedy.* Extensive diversity in regard to

* The evils involved in frequent revisions, or revision on slight grounds, are so forcibly stated by the committee of the General Assembly of 1804, already referred to, that we quote the following extracts:

"It is by no means to be considered as a vulgar or unfounded prejudice, when alarm is excited by alterations or innovations in the creed of a church. There are many reasons, of the most weighty kind, that will dispose every person of sound judgment and accurate observation to regard a spirit of change in this particular as an evil pregnant with a host of mischiefs. It leads the infidel to say, and with apparent plausibility, that there can be no truth already revealed in Scripture, because not only its friends of various sects, but of the same sect, pretend to see truths in it at one time, which at another they discover and declare to be falsehoods. It hurts the minds of weak believers, by suggesting to them the same thought. It destroys the confidence of the people generally, in those who maintain a system which is liable to constant fluctuations. It violates settled and useful habits. It encourages those who are influenced by the vanity of attempting to improve what wise men have executed, or by mere love of novelty, to give constant disturbance to the church by their crude proposals of amendment; and it is actually found to open the door to lasting uneasiness, constant altercation, and, finally, to the adoption of errors a thousand fold more dangerous and hurtful than any that shall have been corrected. . . . If there are a few things which, it might be shown, could be expressed more correctly, and in a manner less liable to objections, it is not proper, with a view to obtain this, to expose ourselves to the great inconveniences and injuries which have been specified."

minor doctrines, or wide varieties of theory respecting more central truths, may rather be suffered to exist, so long as the essential elements of the system are preserved. And if among these essential elements grave defects or serious errors should be discovered; if, in the progress of scientific theology, propositions more comprehensive, more just, more spiritual and scriptural, should be obtained, it would then, as we conceive, be necessary first to secure substantial agreement in the church before actual revision in the interest of such improvements be undertaken. What it is proposed to substitute should first be clearly seen and generally accepted; under no other conditions could the church wisely consent to revision. By the nature of the case this must be, not the initial step of a theological inquiry after the truth, but the concluding step of an inquiry already made and answered—the consummation of a structural change in the common faith, which, having been accepted in the consciousness of the church, now claims for itself a place in her written creed.

Back of these recognizable conditions and difficulties there is one general objection to revision, which we venture, almost at the hazard of seeming to go astray from the essential principle of Protestantism, to present in the form of a query: whether an old historic creed, evolved, like our own Confession, at some grand epoch in the career of the church, and expressing alike the faith, the piety, and the holy courage of the men and the age that produced it, ought not to be suffered to stand forever in its original form as a monument to the divine movement and energy which first sent it forth into the world? As the Apostolic and the Nicene Creeds are thus preserved in their ancient simplicity, with no line or letter changed, even while many minds are perplexed by some phraseology in each, and by recognized deficiencies in both, would it not be well to let the Confession of Augsburg, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Symbols, stand perpetually in view as changeless expressions of church thought and church life during the germinant epoch of the Reformation? If for the moment we ignore the fact that these are now the authoritative doctrinal bases of existing churches, by which current teaching is regulated and living teachers are tested, would it not seem a sort of sacrilege to alter these from time

to time in order to prevent the growth of undue reverence for them, or to make them conform to every transient change in phraseology or in modes of doctrinal statement? And may it not be questioned, whether the fact that they are the basis of the living church, and the actual test and measure of personal belief, wholly absolves us from the obligation to preserve, even at some discomfort, the primitive form sanctified by centuries of use, and already inwrought into the memory and affection of millions of believing hearts? As we preserve the Declaration of Independence as it was in the beginning, though it be regarded by some as a glittering generality, and by others as exaggerated, or as too narrow to be the foundation of a broad and enduring national life, might not the church for historic reasons wisely cling to an old creed from age to age, jealously guarding it from change and innovation, even amid distinct admission of its defects, without being suspected of supposing that it existed by divine right, and was too celestial to be touched by hand of man?

Foregoing this consideration, and recurring to the main question, we venture to express the conviction, that the conditions demanding so serious a measure as revision, or making it desirable that revision should be undertaken, do not in fact exist. Our Confession is indeed not altogether perfect, void of defect, or free from error. There are those who seriously question some of its doctrinal statements, such as the affirmation that the Pope of Rome is the antichrist of Scripture—the man of sin and son of perdition. There are those who would desire to see such a phrase as *elect infants* exchanged for another, which would make the Confession conform clearly and indisputably to the current hope of Christendom respecting all who die in infancy. There are those who reject its ruling respecting the degrees of consanguinity which preclude marriage. And there are others who find themselves seriously embarrassed by its language on more vital points, such as the nature and scope of the divine election and fore-ordination, the real freedom of the will, the consequent responsibility of the sinner, and the free grace and world-wide reach of the gospel plan. But have we here the conditions which make present revision imperative? Are the evils that flow from the ambiguity concerning elect infants, or from the proposition that papacy is antichrist, or from the

injunction against marrying the sister of a deceased wife, so serious and urgent, as to require such a remedy? Are the more vital difficulties referred to so clearly defined, so extensively felt, so evidently remediable, so substantially solved and determined, that the way is open for revision in their interest? IS THE CHURCH READY? Has she reached such matured conceptions and such enlarged experience, touching these central verities, that she may now enter upon revision, not as an inquiry intended to find out what her views really are, or as a conflict in which opposing theories are to strive together for an ultimate victory, but rather as the final and perfect blossoming forth of her clarified insight and her expanded spiritual life?

The general argument on the negative of this question has already been adequately presented in the pages of this REVIEW. It has justly been urged that such revision is needless, inasmuch as those who officially subscribe to the standards, are required to accept, not every word or phrase, but simply the system as therein set forth—the living church being the judge whether any avowed departure from the standards is an essential departure from the system. It has been said, that if the attempt were made to satisfy all parties, the difficulties of revision would soon be found to be insuperable, the opposing tendencies still existing, and the triumph of either involving widespread agitation, if not the ultimate disintegration of the church. It has also been urged, that, at the present time, while the process of reunion is still going forward, and while this process is based distinctively on the standards as they are, a movement toward revision would be peculiarly inopportune, not only precipitating upon the church a series of internal strifes and discords, but also separating her disastrously from other Presbyterian churches holding the common symbols. And it has well been prophesied, that such an undertaking would absorb the thought and strength of the church, for the next generation, in interminable questions and problems about doctrine, when the providence and the grace of God appear to be calling her away to a far higher work of missionary aggression and conquest, both on this continent and throughout the Pagan world.

Agreeing substantially with these general objections, we

have but one consideration further to present—a consideration derived from the view we have given of the symbolic value and relations of the Auburn Declaration. It must be confessed, that the supposed necessity for revision has been found chiefly within the theological domain mapped out in this document, and that the call for revision has come largely from those who would prefer to see its words and phrases, on various points, substituted for those found in the Confession. So far as it is revision, and not mere abbreviation or condensation, that is sought, the main current of desire has flowed along this channel. We have no disposition to ignore the feeling, or lightly estimate the opinion, of those thoughtful and candid minds who experience serious difficulty in receiving our standards, in all minute details, as they are, and who believe that certain changes in this direction would give them substantial relief. But is it not better to leave every line and letter of the Confession untouched, and to go forward into the grand future opening before our church, with the old banners flying, so long as liberty is given to every such mind to express itself freely, on every perplexing point, in the language and method of the Auburn Declaration? Granting that the Declaration possesses no ecclesiastical authority, and has never been incorporated as a guarantee into our scheme of union, and is therefore binding upon no man or judicatory in the church, yet are not its terms and teachings so fully understood, and so thoroughly respected, that no one need ever fear lest his Christian liberty, exercised within these limits, should suffer infringement? Does not the Declaration, as it stands, thus secure, to those who adhere to it, all that would be secured by actual revision, even if revision, once undertaken, were to issue in the incorporation of the Declaration bodily into our standards? May not every minister and every elder feel assured, that, standing, in all honesty, under the protection of this irenic and generous document, and consciously resting in it, as a Christian freeman, while in the discharge of his official trust, no presbytery within our broad church would ever feel itself required to subject him to ecclesiastical censure? And, under such conditions, is it not better to abandon all thought of present revision, and to preserve, as it is, a Confession which, amid all defects, is recognized by Christian scholars as not only the last, but also the most

complete, in that illustrious series of creeds which sprang into being after the Reformation?

In this conclusion we rest; to this conclusion we desire to bring all minds, of whatever doctrinal tendency, within our beloved church. We have no fear of the result, and we believe that no one else will have occasion to fear, so long as the present generous temper of unity and peace, of activity and growth, survives in our communion. While such a measure of liberty is granted, and the united church plants itself, not on a loose latitudinarianism, which admits all notions not absolutely and immediately destructive, but on a catholic and generous Calvinism, tenacious of the system, but wisely tolerant of varieties in theory and expression, we may safely forego the desire for changes in our standards, either on such specific points as have been named, or in the general interest of that type of Calvinism which is specially represented in the "theology of Richards and the Auburn Declaration." So long as these modes of viewing, stating, explaining, and illustrating the common system are admissible, we see no reason why every genuine Calvinistic mind should not be substantially satisfied.

These suggestions may fitly close with the following extract from the *Pastoral Letter*, sent out in 1838 by the first General Assembly of the New School Church, and addressed to all the churches and people under its care. Of the Committee that adopted it, the venerable Lyman Beecher was chairman, and the style of the extract strongly resembles his, although a high authority regards it rather as from the pen of another member of the committee, the equally venerated James Richards. The words are full of present, as well as past, significance:

"We love and honor the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, as containing more well-defined, fundamental truth, with less defects, than appertains to any other human formula of doctrine, and as calculated to hold in intelligent concord a greater number of sanctified minds than any which could now be formed, AND WE DISCLAIM ALL DESIGN, PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE, TO CHANGE IT."

NOTE.—The writer of this article deems it due to himself to say, that he believes Christian Theology to be, in a true and important sense, a progressive science; that he does not regard the seventeenth century as having furnished a conclusive norm or limit of theological thought for the nineteenth; that he judges the

phraseology and teaching of the Auburn Declaration to be an improvement in several particulars upon those of the Westminster Symbols: that he humbly trusts and prays that the Presbyterian Church of the future may have yet clearer apprehension, larger knowledge, more inclusive faith respecting these great mysteries of grace; but that, so far as present creeds are concerned, he cordially, and after full examination, accepts the legal motto, *STARE DECISIS*. It should be added, that the responsibility of the editors of this REVIEW, for the present discussion, is limited entirely to their kind consent to its admission in these pages.

Art. II.—THE STUDY OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE.

By W. HENRY GREEN, D.D., Professor in Princeton Theological Seminary.

We propose, as we may be able in a brief article, to illustrate the importance of an accurate and thorough knowledge of the Hebrew in the interpretation of the Old Testament. We must get beyond the province of the beginner and the smatterer—beyond the mere work of making a translation as a linguistic exercise. We are to deal with language as the medium of thought and feeling. We are to hear what God the Lord will speak. We come to learn the truths which it was given to holy men to impart by divine inspiration, and to receive the impressions which they sought to make. Our aim is, or should be, to grasp these truths in the exact form and in the same clearness in which they lay before the minds of those to whom they were originally addressed, and to gather these impressions, as far as may be, without any loss of their original vividness and force. We wish these words to convey to us precisely what they were intended and adapted to convey to the contemporaries of the sacred writers themselves, neither less nor more.

In order to this it is essential that the thought should not be warped or distorted by the medium through which it is transmitted, but that it should be faithfully and accurately delivered to us in its own proper and genuine forms. This cannot be unless the language is to us what it was to those who