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THE CLERGY AND SOCIAL MORALS.

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“They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.”—ROMANS 10 : 2.

IN a recent issue of one of our city journals—a journal of the very highest character and most wholesome influence—there appeared a sermon ; though the deliverances of the pulpit very seldom find entrance into the columns of the paper I refer to. But the editor deemed this sermon of such consequence to the public weal that he not only gave it newspaper currency, but advised that it should be printed and disseminated widely in the community. What could have been the burden of the sermon ? This : The preacher had felt constrained to warn rich men that they could not buy their way into the kingdom of God, on earth or in heaven, by giving a few thousands of their financial substance to a church or a charity ; one of our notably wealthy men having just about that time given ten or twenty thousand dollars to Christian missionary work, I think ; the gift having furnished the occasion, it would seem, for the preacher's solemn warning, which the editor emphasized with equal solemnity.

Now, the circumstance—for it is little more—has suggested to my own mind several reflections pertinent to the subject I have in hand this morning.

The preacher in question being credited with a rare courage, as he was, in having so admonished our wealthy men, involves, as I look at the matter, a reflection upon the preaching fraternity generally ; which reflection, I venture to say, is almost wholly undeserved. I myself, at least, don't know a man of the order so wanting in moral courage, or so void of a just sense of what his office requires of him, as that he would shrink from declaring, if fit occasion should call, just what St. Peter once declared to one Simon : “ *Thy money perish with thee ; because thou hast thought that the gift of God might be purchased with money.* ” But

I am quite sure that few or none of our rich men to-day are seriously under the delusion Simon was under. Doubly sure am I that the man toward whom I directed a surmise just now as having been the benefactor in the case I am recalling, would harbor the notion for a moment that Almighty God would accept money, or that churches or charities would accept money, in substitution for personal righteousness, or as a cloak for unrighteousness. I, for one, would give the millionaire credit for common sense as to these things ; the money in the instance I am alluding to having been meant, I feel confident, simply to serve one of the ordinary uses of money and nothing more. I hold no brief to plead the cause of rich men ; but we may as well be rational and fair in our judgments of them, and even in our animadversions, whenever they may be called for.

Incidentally, while the missionary gift was being commented upon in the public prints, or, later, when the sermon came out, a singular moral proviso was hinted at as something which it might be well to adopt, to save vestries and trustees from becoming parties to dishonorable doings in receiving money from men who might be under suspicion of not having come at it worthily. *Investigation* should be made by churches and charities, it was suggested, or by those acting for them, as to whether offerings were wholly free from moral taint before turning them into their treasuries !—which is all impracticable nonsense, of course. If a man's antecedents and moral standing in society should be really subject to grave suspicion, it might be well to let such a man know that his offering would not be welcome ; but as to formal investigation—who should conduct it ? and how would you go about it ? Where, and how,

press revelation. Of course, if God specifically revealed to Christ that the Pentateuch was written by Moses, 'cedit quaestio,' let God be true, and every critic, if not a liar, at any rate mistaken."

But is not Christ himself, God? Is it true that we could not expect him to be a "critic," because criticism requires so much exercise of mind? Are we rushing down to the pit of a new and crasser Unitarianism? What Christ is this that Mr. Aitken pictures before us? Not the Christ of the Bible, who is our Prophet and our Guide; who is the Truth itself incarnated; who is dramatized before our eyes in the length and breadth of the Gospels, not as a child of his times, limited by the mental outlook of his day, but as a teacher to his and to all times, sent from God as not more the power of God than the wisdom of God; and whose own witness to himself was, "Verily, verily I say unto you, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you of earthly things and ye believed not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?" Is it to deny the right of Criticism, to declare that a criticism which, starting on a wrong path, rushes headlong into the very face of the Truth himself, is an intolerable wrong which no Christian heart can calmly bear?

IV.

THE CHURCH'S RIGHT TO CRITICISM.

It is not to impugn the right of Criticism to declare that those who adopt a misleading criticism as their guide to truth; and draw from it conclusions inconsistent with what is held as precious truth by the Church with which they are connected; and teach these conclusions in opposition to the public Confession of the Church; may not rightly continue to receive the endorsement of that Church as sound teachers of religion. The refusal of the Church to remain responsible before the world for their teaching is no blow at the right of Criticism in the abstract, or even at the freedom of these "critics" to teach their special form of criticism. It is, on the one hand, only the assertion by the Church of HER right to teach only what she believes, without infringing in the least upon the right of others to teach what they please on their own responsibility and in their own names; and on the other hand the liberation of the new thinkers from whatever trammels to their thought and speech they may recognize as growing out of the pledges they may

have taken to believe and teach the doctrines of the Church. Or is the Critic only to be free and the Church bound? Let him exercise freely his right to criticize; and let the Church also be free to test not only the truth of the Scriptures as he does, but also the truth of his theories of the Scriptures, and to act accordingly. What Democrat would feel that his liberty of thought and speech were infringed by the refusal of a Republican club to become or remain sponsor for his political teachings? But, you say, no Democrat would desire to become or remain a member of a Republican club. This is the strangeness of the situation. One wonders that a new Criticism involving, as we are told, a wholly reconstructed theology should find so much attraction in a "traditionalist" Church of an "outworn" creed; or should care to do business under its trademark.

Hear the parable of the Thistles. Thistles certainly have beauties of their own, and many virtues, which nobody would care to deny. But they do seem out of place in a garden designed for roses, even though they proclaim themselves more beautiful than any roses in the garden. And the husbandman seems to have a duty toward Thistles growing in the garden, which even their irritable "noli me tangere" ought not to deter him from executing, with all due kindness indeed, but with that firmness of touch which becomes one in dealing with Thistles. Otherwise, what will he say to the Lord of the garden, whom even the more luxuriant growth of the Thistles may not please, when they are tossing their bold heads in the bed intended for roses?

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH NORTH.

BY PROFESSOR E. D. MORRIS, D.D., LANE SEMINARY, CINCINNATI, O.

From *The Congregationalist*, Boston, April 21, 1892.

THE geographic term in this denominational title would mislead if it were understood to imply that the denomination itself is anything less than *continental*. The fact is that the Church so designated has planted itself substantially in every Territory and in all but two of the States of our Union. While its main field of development during the last twenty years has been the far West and Northwest and along the Pacific coast, its five synods, twenty presbyteries, 460 churches and 48,700 communicants in the older South, east of the Mississippi, show

sufficiently that there is no section of the continent from which it consents to be debarred by a geographic title. In this Southern field the work among the colored people, begun just after the Civil War, constitutes at present the most prominent feature.

The growth of our Church since the war in the farther West, from the Dakotas southward to Texas, in the Rocky Mountain States and along the Pacific has been remarkable. Somewhere in this half of the continent one new church has been organized every two days without intermission for the past twenty years. No less than 1,100 such churches have sprung into existence, mostly within this region, in the last five years—208 in 1890-91. Not far from a thousand missionaries are now employed in various ways in this mighty task of denominational development west of the Mississippi. In our Church schools, 118 in number, among the Indians, Mexicans and Mormons 340 teachers were employed last year, and this work is steadily increasing in magnitude and promise. The claims of our various exceptional populations, including the immigrant multitudes from both Europe and Asia, and the equally urgent claims of the illiterate mountain whites and of the submerged masses in our great cities, West and East, have also called forth an unusual degree of interest during the year. The contributions to the various departments of this great home mission work, including the planting of Sabbath schools and the erection of churches and other buildings, may be estimated at \$1,700,000. The kindred work of foreign missions has been prosecuted vigorously during the year at a cost of nearly \$1,000,000. The progress made in the establishing and endowment of our various institutions founded in the interest of higher education has been highly encouraging, and the several theological seminaries, which are so largely a crowning feature of our church life, have enjoyed, with no marked exception, a year of unusual growth and fruitfulness. The entire contributions of the Church for all purposes, including congregational expenses, is reported at \$14,000,000.

The narrative of the state of religion issued by the last General Assembly shows a fair but not remarkable advance in this regard. A net gain of only 27,000 in the membership is reported, though the accessions on profession of faith were more than twice that number. A distinct gain in the number of licentiates and of candidates for the ministry is reported and also a larger number of licensures and ordinations. The

present roll of ministers is 6,223 and of churches 7,070—a small yet encouraging advance upon the roll of the preceding year. Revivals have not been as general as in some previous periods, yet the general condition of the churches spiritually, as indicated by attendance upon religious services and especially by earnest labors among children and youth, and the increase of associations for religious culture among the young people of our congregations, is every way cheering.

The chief denominational movement of the year has been the revision of our Confession of Faith. In 1889 a number of the presbyteries petitioned the General Assembly in favor of such revision. The reference of the question by the Assembly to the presbyteries in general brought out, in 1890, the fact that a decided majority of these bodies desired some revision, and many of them indicated the particular points at which they wished to see the Confession revised. Accordingly, a committee of twenty-five was appointed by the Assembly of that year to undertake the task, and this committee presented to the following Assembly, in May, 1891, a tentative report, containing the changes and additions which it had agreed to propose, for consideration by the Church. The Assembly submitted this report to the scrutiny of the presbyteries, instructing them to consider anew the matters presented and to send their judgment on each point to the committee for its further guidance. About 175 of the presbyteries responded to these instructions, twenty-five or thirty declaring more or less fully against the tentative revision and the remainder—constituting two-thirds of the whole number of presbyteries—217, favoring it and making further suggestions in the same direction.

This committee met recently in New York and after a fortnight of deliberation completed a final report to be presented to the next General Assembly in May. This report has already been published in substance, and is now informally before the Church for inspection. If approved by the Assembly as a revision proper to be made, it will be again submitted to the presbyteries for their formal adjudication upon its merits. There is good reason to anticipate, first, the acceptance of the report by the Assembly, and then its authoritative indorsement, at least in the main elements of it, by the presbyteries, which alone have ultimate power in the case. Such indorsement, when properly certified to the Assembly of 1893 by two-thirds of all the presbyteries, will constitute the revised Confession henceforth

the authorized creed of the Church. The process is a long and complex one, but probably will seem to us none too long or too elaborate if we remember what is involved in such a reconstruction of a denominational symbol so comprehensive and elaborate as that of Westminster.

The movement toward such reconstruction is significant as being the first instance in which any Protestant body has seriously attempted to recast a venerable creed inherited from the period of the Reformation. It is the more significant because other Presbyterian bodies, as in England and Scotland, are now engaged in the same delicate and difficult task. But it is believed by the friends of the movement that the result will abundantly justify the toils and the perils involved in such an attempt. The revised creed, as now made public, does not abandon at any point the Calvinistic or reformed system of doctrine as embodied in the old Confession. But it seeks to present that system in milder, more conciliatory, more practical aspects and with better adjustment to the present convictions and teachings of the Church. It sweeps aside forever the old taunt about the damnation of infants and the eternal reprobation of a certain portion of mankind. The two new chapters contained in it are the first efforts of Protestantism to formulate its conception of the gospel and of the Holy Spirit, and the admission of these chapters will put to silence the kindred taunt that the Presbyterian Church holds only to a restricted atonement and puts unwarrantable restraints on the free and cordial offer of the gospel to every creature. It is hoped that these two chapters will receive universal indorsement among Evangelical people, and that they will do much to lower the dividing barriers between the Presbyterian Church and all other churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It should be mentioned as another item of doctrinal interest that for the past three years a committee of scholars has been engaged in revising the proof texts of the Confession and Longer Catechism with a view to the sifting out of all proofs that have been found since the Westminster age to be inappropriate as quoted and to the adding of other proofs wherever these are needed. Such a revision was undertaken just after the organization of the Assembly a century ago, but the necessity for another and more thorough review has long been obvious. This work has already been twice reported to the Assembly, but of course it cannot be completed until the question of revision has been settled. Among those

engaged in this work are several of the leading exegetes and theologians of the Church; two of the number, Drs. Crosby and Welch, have died since the work began.

The discussions on this subject have occasioned a considerable demand for a new and briefer creed. Such a creed is desired by some as a mere condensation of the old Confession, by others as an embodiment of the common doctrines for the benefit of private members in the Church, and by some as a substitute for the old, which is to be put thereafter upon the shelf as a venerable archæological relic. This demand is not likely to have much significance so long as it is in itself so indefinite and so inharmonious. A more promising movement is that on which the last two General Assemblies have acted in the direction of securing what is termed a consensus creed—a creed in which all bodies holding in general the Presbyterian faith and order may be agreed as containing the essentials of their common belief. The committee having this interest in charge is now endeavoring to secure the concurrence and aid of all such bodies, fifty or more in number, in the framing of such a generic creed. This new symbol is not designed to supersede the Westminster symbols, but rather to draw these Presbyterian churches into closer fellowship by such simpler, more practical declaration of their joint belief.

An effort of this sort was made ten years ago within the Presbyterian Alliance, but it was found, first, that the constitution of the Alliance would hardly permit such an undertaking under its sanction, and then that the pressing of the proposal might result in the withdrawal of certain important churches from that organization. It will require some years of correspondence to determine whether the present movement will be successful or will be fatally checked by similar obstructions, especially on the other side of the Atlantic. If the proposed creed should finally be framed as a distinctively Calvinistic document, it would probably be so broad and so irenic in its statements that Christian men of other types of belief would find in it little to oppose. Possibly it might prove to be a step toward the framing of that coming creed in which all branches of the true Church of Christ can be harmonized doctrinally into one household of faith.

The past year has witnessed fearless action by our Church in the direction of practical and federative union with other sections of Protestantism. The General Assembly has virtually rejected the proposition of the Episcopalian bishops to accept the

Nicene creed as a sufficient doctrinal basis. This would be impossible for a body of believers long trained in the symbols of Westminster. It also rejects the proposal to introduce the historic episcopate into its polity, on the ground that this episcopate has but doubtful warrant in Scripture and is not essential either to the being or the well-being of a church. But our Presbyterianism is becoming more and more catholic in its sympathies, more and more broad in its fellowship, and the action of the last Assembly in this matter shows that our communion will be ready always to join all other communions, on equal terms, in federative measures of every sort, waiting always hopefully for the ultimate federation and unification of Evangelical Protestantism.

One of the special phenomena of the past year has been what is termed the Briggs controversy. The details of this unhappy matter are already familiar. The whole Church became involved, directly or remotely, in the doctrinal issues raised by his inaugural address in two ways: first, through the formal disapproval of the last Assembly by the appointment of Dr. Briggs to his new professorship, and, secondly, by an effort to subject him to an ecclesiastical trial for alleged heresy before his presbytery. Neither of these matters can be regarded as settled as yet, but there is good ground for anticipating that a fair and just solution will be reached on both points at an early day. The Presbyterian Church has no appetite for ecclesiastical trials and will enter into one only as a last resort and for the defense of vital truth. On the other hand, the Presbyterian Church has no sympathy with serious error, particularly on such topics as were discussed in this unfortunate address. Least of all will it tolerate looseness of teaching on its cardinal doctrines and especially its doctrine of Scripture in its theological chairs. But even here it cannot afford to allow mere gusts of excitement to sweep it into unconstitutional or revolutionary action. It would rather bear patiently with error and trust to the curative power of better teachings and the purifying touch of time than to rob its humblest member of his personal rights.

The next General Assembly will be convened in May in Portland, Ore., and this fact is full of suggestiveness. In 1870 there was but one synod with five small presbyteries, having thirty-seven churches, forty-two ministers and a membership of 2,000, west of Kansas and Nebraska. One of these presbyteries, with nine churches and eight ministers and a membership of 308,

was located in the distant territory of Oregon. In 1891 there were reported three synods, fifteen presbyteries, 359 ministers, 400 churches and a membership of nearly 26,000 in the Pacific States alone. Within these twenty years four other synods in the Northwest—North and South Dakota, Colorado and Utah—with their hundreds of churches and ministers and their large membership, have also come into existence. How fitting is it that the parent Church should by its highest representative body visit these vast regions, where a quarter of a century ago there was little but wilderness but where now such large and happy spiritual growths are seen!

THE main purpose, the first duty, of the Apostolic ministry was to witness to the fact that Christ had risen. The Apostles did not teach the resurrection as a revealed truth, as they taught, for example, the doctrine of justification; they taught the resurrection as a fact of experience, a fact of which they themselves had had experience. And this is why the different evangelists do not report the same appearances of our risen Lord. Each one reports that which he himself witnessed, or that which was witnessed by the eye-witness on whose authority he writes. Put the various attestations together, and the evidence is irresistible. He left on a group of minds, most unlike each other, one profound, ineffaceable impression, that they had seen and lived with One who had died indeed, and had risen again, and that this fact was in itself, and in its import so precious, so pregnant with meaning, and with blessing to the human race, that it threw in their minds all other facts into relative insignificance; it was worth living for, it was worth dying for. "That which we have seen and heard, that which our hands have handled, that declare we unto you." "I might disbelieve the resurrection," said a shrewd man of our day—certainly with no very ecclesiastical, I fear with no, perhaps, very religious bias—"I might disbelieve the resurrection, if without it I could possibly explain the existence of the Christian Church." Yes, if Christ did not rise, the existence of the Christian Church is unaccountable. The hopeless discredit and failure attaching to the crucifixion, if the crucified One did indeed rot in His grave, would have made it impossible, I do not say to set about the conversion of the world, but to interest any sensible person in the streets of Jerusalem.—*Canon Liddon.*