

# The American Presbyterian.

John A Weir

18 July 67

New Series, Vol. IV, No. 13.

Genesee Evangelist, No. 1088.

PHILADELPHIA, THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 1867.

## American Presbyterian.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 1867.

### THE CONFESSION AS A BASIS OF RE-UNION.

LIMITATIONS AND CONDITIONS SUGGESTED.

While it must unquestionably be admitted that the Westminster Confession is the only basis on which the branches of the Presbyterian church are likely to re-unite, it need not and ought not to be forgotten that this is by no means the only Calvinistic symbol in existence, nor yet the only one recognized in this country. That very orthodox Calvinistic body, the Reformed Dutch Church, knows nothing as a church, of the Westminster confession, which is entirely British in its origin, but finds its Calvinism best represented in the Heidelberg Catechism and the decisions of the famous Synod of Dort. Another decidedly Calvinistic formula is the Thirty-nine Articles of the Protestant Episcopal church. Besides these, there is the Basle Confession, the first and the second Helvetic (Swiss); the *Formula Consensus Helveticus*; the Confession of the Reformed Church of France; the Canons of the Synod of Dort; all of which, with others not named originated in Europe. In this country we have had the Savoy Confession, the Cambridge Platform—both of which, however, defer to the Westminster in doctrine—the Boston Confession, and the Saybrook Platform.

It must not therefore be concluded that all Calvinism is comprised in the Westminster Confession, or that all phases of doctrinal opinion which are not plainly contained in any of its sections are on that account without the range of the Calvinistic system. If, for example, any one should deny that the doctrine of the Extent of the Atonement, as taught in Mr. Barnes' sermon, published in our columns last week, can be fairly deduced from the Westminster Confession, we have only to turn to the Heidelberg Catechism, which Professor Shedd, in his *History of Doctrine*, ii, 473, praises as one of the best of the many systems of Christian doctrine that were constructed in the Reformation, and which he tells us, was approved by the highly Calvinistic Synod of Dort, where we shall find it declared that Christ "sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind." Other diversities, for example, upon Supralapsarianism and Infralapsarianism may be traced in these different Confessions. And of one thing we may be certain, that not all of Calvinistic wisdom was embodied in the Westminster Assembly, nor did it all die with them.

We however freely concede the excellence of the Westminster Confession among compends of Calvinistic Doctrine. As the product of Anglo-Saxon and Scottish Theologians, it is better adapted to the wants of the American Presbyterian Church than any of the products of the Belgic, Teutonic or Latin mind. It has been the seed of by far the most vigorous and extensive growth that Presbyterianism has ever had. It has been the theological text book for the training of nearly one-seventh of the population of this country. There is perhaps, not a single minister in any branch of the Presbyterian Church of America, that believes any other production could be advantageously substituted for it. Certainly we do not. Undoubtedly it is the only basis on which it is worth while to speak of union between the two branches now agitating the matter. We cordially accept it as such.

And it is within the limits of this instrument, and not of any other, that our branch grants, and in return asks a reasonable amount of latitude. We do not now, as a church, and never have received this by any other human production *ipsissima verba*—word for word. We content now, as we always have done, for a fair measure of liberty in the interpretation of its terms; for exemption from a hard and Jewish bondage to the letter of a human composition; for a broader exegesis than that which makes a man an offender for a word; for the right of one half of the Church to its own honest and reasonable opinion of the meaning and relations of the parts of the Confession on doubtful and minor matters, equally with the other half; for the right, which also involves the duty, of discriminating between what is plain Biblical fact, and what is mere human theory of the fact in the Confession; and of

paying a proportionately diverse regard to each.

Further: any branch of the Presbyterian Church claiming to be historically connected with and succeeding to, the original American organization of 1729, must not only allow the ordinary laws of interpretation to be applied to its standards; but must concede a difference between essentials and non-essentials, in the very body and contents of the standards themselves. Those standards must be viewed as a system, the broad distinctive features of which, no fair-minded person need have any difficulty in making out, and in adopting which *ex animo* he becomes a Calvinist, as distinguished from Arminian, Pelagian, and Semi-Pelagian, even though he openly nonconforms in such parts as are not essential to the Calvinistic system. It is only necessary to repeat the language of the Adopting Act, already so often quoted in these columns, to justify this claim: language which our cotemporaries of the other branch rarely find occasion to show to their readers; in which our standards are recognized as being, "in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine." And Synods and Presbyteries are expressly allowed to judge whether the doctrinal scruples or even mistakes of candidates are "about articles not necessary in doctrine, worship and government." Such language, if it means anything, means that differences of opinion were expected to prevail, in cases where the meaning of the standards is perfectly plain; differences which all saw to be with the teachings of the Confession itself; "scruples," says the Act, "about articles, as not essential and necessary," not questions as to the meaning of the articles.

The first qualification, therefore, with which we accept the Confession of Faith as a basis of re-union is one which the simplest rules of common sense prescribe, viz: that liberty of interpretation which men, confiding in each other's Christian honor, allow of the less important parts of the written terms of the agreement between them. The second qualification, however, is one for which we are indebted to Providence himself, in his special direction and control of the Presbyterian Church, in its development in the new world. For while Calvinism has included different shades of thought and opinion, yet there has been a marvelous uniformity in its standards, and a steady and powerful pressure towards uniformity of opinion; until the rise of the American Church, when, for the first time in the whole history of the Presbyterian Church, the distinction between essentials and non-essentials in the Calvinistic creed was proclaimed upon the solemn occasion of the adoption of that creed, as the basis of a new Presbyterian organization. These two qualifications of the Westminster Confession we claim as the basis of Union; one the gift of common sense, and the other the gift of Providence in History; one, the ordinary liberty of interpretation, the other the distinction between essentials and non-essentials in the contents of the Confession itself. Our branch of the Church has always held the Confession with these qualifications, and we are very much mistaken if they are going to abandon them, or quietly suffer them to be ignored or discredited in any transactions looking to Reunion.

But is not all this very latitudinarian, very alarming? In an age when so many attempts are being made and so many influences are at work to dilute orthodoxy and to break down all creeds, is not this a giving way to the prevailing undermining current? Is not this admitting enemies of the faith into the very stronghold of sound doctrine in the Evangelical Church? Where is it to end? Is it not like making an opening at both ends of the bag and picking it up at the middle? How shall we maintain a pure faith and a sound church with such a qualified adoption of the standards as this? We might answer that extreme rigor in the construction of the standards is no infallible safeguard against grievous error. The *ipsissima verba* theory is not a cherub sword that will protect the Eden of ultra theologians from the desecration of unbelief. Where could such an Eden be found, if not in Geneva, the home of Calvin; if not in Holland, the seat of the famous Synod of Dort? And yet the witnesses for a pure faith in the Reformed Churches of those countries are so few that a child might write them, and the church organizations, once so stringent for orthodoxy,

are wholly given over to the loosest forms of rationalism. Especially is this the case in Holland, where there is scarcely a show of opposition to the rationalizing tendency; in Geneva some life remains. Justly; too, may we point to the phenomenon of Unitarianism in this country, as, in part, a reaction from the extreme rigor of the Calvinistic creed of the early Puritans.

A far sounder mode of preserving and perpetuating a living orthodox church is to allow verge and play to the speculative faculty within safe and well-defined limits, to give it all the sea-room that may be granted within the compass of Orthodoxy, and never to undertake to bind conscience and intellect to every word or proposition of a human formula, as if it were the only perfect, the only conceivable or admissible expression of Scripture truth. It is nailing a delicate organism to a hard, cruel, senseless, cross; it is trying to build a spiritual house by rough joiner-work; it is hacking and mangling to make every thing and every body fit a Procrustes bed. It is a system of salvation by repression, and sooner or later, it must fail. Human nature will revolt against it.

Nevertheless, there is such a thing as a latitudinarian and inadmissible mode of treating the standards of a Church, with which we have no sympathy, and from which our Church, as we shall hereafter show, is entirely clear.

### THE SUNDAY CAR BILL DEFEATED.

Again by the mercy of God, and in answer to the prayers of His people, we are delivered from the plots of the enemies of the Sabbath in our city. On Wednesday of last week, the State Senate, by the close vote of 14 to 12, rejected the bill submitting the question of the running of the Sunday cars to the vote of the citizens. The strength of the Sabbath-breaking party in the Senate has increased by five, as compared with the vote on similar questions a year ago; while of the score or more who could not be persuaded to come out and vote openly in favor of submitting a divine institution to the will of a city mob, six or eight must have absented themselves from the Senate chamber, and fourteen at their posts, saved the State from the everlasting disgrace of enacting such a measure. Prominent among them, was Senator Lowrie of Allegheny, whose speech against the bill was one of the most telling arguments, in its way, against the whole scheme of the Sabbath-breakers of our city, that has any where appeared. Every weapon of sarcasm or of ridicule in the armory of the American political speaker was unhesitatingly wielded by the Senator. The home truths which he in no mincing phrases told these enemies of public morals, and their professedly religious supporters, were a fair volley of hot shot in their ranks. Interesting extracts will be found on another page. The remarks of Speaker Hall went to the very heart of the subject. He took ground which only a few weeks ago was argued and defended in these columns, and which must have had great weight on the floor of the Senate Chamber, from the lips of the Speaker.

"Mr. Hall," says the Report, "asserted, as a lawyer, that the observance of the Sabbath was part of the common law of England and the United States. It was not local in its application, and could not be decided upon by citizens at a local election. The bill before the Senate was unconstitutional."

The speech of the Rev. Senator Audley Browne, of Lawrence Co., if at all properly reported, was, to say the least, quite inexplicable considering the source from which it came. Mr. Browne is understood to have complained that the Philadelphia city councils, themselves, did not legislate on such matters, without bringing them to Harrisburg, and constraining the country members to violate their consciences by voting for them; in which remarks a grave error and a grave charge were involved. The error was nothing less than the concession to the city of the right, in and by itself, to nullify the fundamental laws of the State to which it belongs, without even consulting the remaining portions of the Commonwealth. We were not prepared for this expression of willingness, on the part of the sounder members from the country, to abandon the Christian people and institutions of a city, to the arbitrary will of a majority composed, the Senator well knows, of what elements. To hear such a declaration from one of the

very pillars of good order in our Legislature pained us more than we can describe. And for a Covenanter, in whose veins may flow some of the same blood which was shed by Claverhouse and his dragoons in the person of John Brown—for such a man, to talk about himself or any one being compelled to violate his conscience in voting, or in any other conceivable way, is so extraordinary as to demand explanation either of the reporter or of Mr. Browne himself.

The following is the vote in detail: For the bill: Bigham (Allegheny), Burnett (Monroe), Connell, Donovan, McCandless, and Ridgway (Philadelphia), Davis (Berks), Jackson (Sullivan), James (Bucks), Randall (Schuylkill), Schall, (Lehigh) Searight (Fayette). The following voted against the bill:—Billingsfelt (Lancaster), Browne (Lawrence), Brown (Mercer), Graham (Allegheny), Haines (Perry), Landon (Bradford), Lowry (Erie), McConaughy (Adams), Royer (Montgomery), Stutzman (Somerset), Taylor (Beaver), Walls (Union), White (Indiana), and Speaker Hall (Blair).

Senator Worthington whose vote would have been given in the negative, was detained from his place by sickness. As for the representation from our own city, every Senator, and as we have already stated, every member of the House but one, voted for the bill. We shall have something to say of these precious guardians of the morals of our city in our next issue.

After this defeat, we know not what new device may be under consideration by the pertinacious enemies of the good order of our city; but we are inclined to believe that they are at the end of their resources. In any event, we think nothing less than a majority of two-thirds of both houses would ensure their triumph over all obstacles; and no two-thirds are they likely to get. We rejoice to believe that the glory of our city as the one great Sabbath-keeping city of the globe is destined to abide; that William Penn's sagacious, benevolent provisions for "the ease of creation" will be perpetuated in the city which he founded; and that the rule of corrupt legislators and unprincipled and infidel demagogues in the State, is shortened by the narrow escape we have made from their mischievous and irreligious schemes.

### MEETING FOR HOME MISSIONS.

As was announced last week, a meeting in behalf of Home Missions was held in the Lecture Room of Calvary Church on Monday evening. There was a fair attendance. The chair was occupied by Judge Strong. After prayer by Dr. Butler, a statement was made by the Secretary, Dr. Kendall, showing the great extent of the field and needs of the committee. Over four hundred missionaries were in commission, and the committee must have \$20,000 in the next forty days, if they would close the year, free of debt. Judge Strong followed in a very earnest and forcible appeal. After which remarks were made by Dr. Butler, Messrs. Adair, Robbins, Eva, and Mears, Gerald F. Dale, S. H. Perkins, and W. G. Warden, Esqs.

The following resolution, offered by Mr. Mears was unanimously adopted. After which the meeting was dismissed with the benediction by Rev. B. B. Hotchkiss.

Resolved, That the meeting is under obligation to the Secretary for his deeply interesting statement of the work of the Committee; that we declare our approval of the policy of the committee in going forward in faith in God, and looking to the churches for the means; and that we are determined to do our part in carrying on the work and in meeting the existing deficiencies in the treasury.

### DEATH OF DR. LIVINGSTONE.

At length this intrepid adventurer, who seemed hitherto to bear a charmed life, has fallen a victim to the murderous passions of the tribes whose elevation has been the object of his labors. Sad as is his death, and great as are the services he might yet have performed, there are few lives so glorious with achievements for science, for humanity, for Christian Missions, so ennobled with sublime purpose and timeless energy as that of Dr. David Livingstone. He perished about the 25th of last October, in an attempt thoroughly to elucidate the problem of the connection of the great lake system of Central Africa. The U. S. Consul at Zanzibar, Mr. E. D. Ropes, tells us all which can be known of the tragedy, which, he says, occurred somewhere to the west of Lake Nyassa. We shall give his letter next week.

REVOLUTIONARY MEASURES SUGGESTED.—The Philadelphia Press feels as might be expected, very sore over its defeat on the Sunday Car Bill, and makes a suggestion which

shows what a peaceable and law-abiding spirit animates the anti-Sabbath party. It says:—

"There are several clergymen in both bodies [the Senate and the House,] and we are glad to see them there; \* \* \* \* \* This clerical influence defeated this wise, salutary, and Christian [!] measure, but the remedy lies with the twenty-one city members. Let no bill pass until the Sunday car bill becomes a law." The people of Philadelphia expect this."

### OUR WASHINGTON LETTER.

The President now counts his vetoes by the dozen. He will have no chance to increase the number before the recess of Congress, unless his clear and unbiased mind detects some "injustice to white men" in Senator Wilson's bill regulating the municipal election of Washington, or Senator Harlan's bill providing a better school system for the District. Twelve times has he made issue with the representatives of the people in defense of his policy, and three times out of every four has he been defeated. The people themselves, in a popular election have morally impeached him, but these lessons of experience have made no perceptible impression upon him. This tough specimen of Tennessee whinstone so effectually resists the strokes of State and Congressional picks and ordinary blasting materials, that the Butler-Logan-Ashley party strongly advocate a charge of *impeachment nitro-glycerine*. They are confident this will hoist him from the Presidential chair and retire him to private life, *a la* Fitz John Porter, where his dogged persistency might be of some practical benefit to the country in reclaiming the Government's wild lands.

The Young Men's Christian Association of this city, have called a convention of the churches of the District of Columbia and adjoining counties, to meet at their rooms on Tuesday and Wednesday of the present week. There are ten subjects selected for consideration, embracing, "The importance of Lay Effort;" "Home Missions;" "The Sabbath School;" "The sphere of the Young Men's Christian Association;" "The best way to relieve the necessities of the Poor;" "The Christian's duty in connection with temperance," &c., &c. Any one of these questions is enough to employ the time of such a convention two days. If they can debate and decide them all in that short period they will furnish the world a model for despatch. The Association has never been so flourishing or so active as now. Major General O. O. Howard was chosen President at its annual meeting a few days ago. He never makes any office he holds a sinecure, but endeavors to fill all its requirements. It is surprising how many engagements he meets, and yet he never seems hurried. He accomplishes this by methodizing his labors and economizing his time. Not a sand in his hour-glass runs to waste. In this respect, at least, he is worthy of imitation. Sec. Browning, last week presented this Association with over three hundred volumes of Government documents, some of them very valuable.

The Howard University dedicated its buildings at the head of Seventh Street, on Saturday last. This University was incorporated by the last Congress. The act provides for seven departments:—English, Normal, Collegiate, Theological, Law, Medical and Agricultural. Dr. Boynton, Chaplain of the House of Representatives will be the President. The trustees, though not many of them known to fame, are all earnest workers and such men as a new enterprise needs to insure its success. A large number of applications for membership have already been received from colored men in various parts of the United States.

Collector Smythe of New York, is to be the subject of impeachment. The Presidential household seems to be unfortunately connected with the affair. This drama promises to find its heroine there. It is hoped the investigation will lead to the reorganization of the Customs service. The country loses by the present system, at least, forty per cent of its rightful revenue. The French system has often been urged for adoption, and is now growing in favor. It is as rigid as our military and entirely removed from politics. Men enter as privates, at small salaries, and rise by application and honesty. The Customs General of France was twenty-eight years in rising from the rank of private to his present position. Abuses will abound and investigations be ordered so long as our present imperfect system continues.