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THE WAR
AGAINST THE
WESTMINSTER STANDARDS.

REV. DAVID MACRAE'S
SPEECHES, &c.,
INCLUDING THE
SPEECH SUPPRESSED BY THE PRESBYTERY.

PUBLISHED WITH MR. MACRAE'S CONSENT,
AND EDITED
WITH NOTES AND CRITICISMS.

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EDITORIAL PREFACE.

Mr. Macrae's Speeches have been collected and published in this form in deference to a widespread desire on the part of the general public. His first onslaught on the Confession was condemned by many as fitted to produce alarm and disturbance in the Churches, and even to postpone the reform which Mr. Macrae was seeking. The result has shown, in our opinion, that his attack, sudden and fierce though it was, was just what the situation required. It aroused the attention of the country; it elicited an unexpected amount of sympathy and support from the Christian laity; and it soon brought other champions into the field, whose swords have flashed before now in the sacred cause of reform. It has led to the question being agitated in other Presbyteries; it has seen the cause espoused, and a battle won, by the party of reform in Glasgow; and it has been the means of bringing the question in a practical form before the Supreme Court of the Church.

What awaits it now, and what awaits the men who have headed the movement, remains to be seen. We are amongst those who take a hopeful view of the situation. The Church does not stand where she did when she cut off Dr. James Morison and Dr. John Guthrie—two of the most devout men, and two of the most scholarly minds she has ever had within her pale. There is, in our opinion, plenty of bigotry in the Church still; but it has less sway. The times are

changed ; a new spirit is arising ; and the present movement has, within four months of its initiation, developed with such rapidity and is already operating so powerfully within the Church and beyond it, that it seems not unlikely that Dr. Carpenter's prediction, may be verified, that Mr. Macrae's attack on the Confession will prove the beginning of a new era in the religious life of Scotland.

Meantime the reactionary party in the Church have been doing their best at every stage to burke the movement. Nothing could be more amusing, if it were less humiliating, than to observe how readily the divines who are against reform admit that reform is desirable, if it is only not attempted ! They concede its necessity in the abstract, but deny it in the concrete. They are agreed that it should be done, if only it is not done just now. In the discussion of Mr. Macrae's overture in the Paisley and Greenock Presbytery, the Rev. J. B. Smith of Greenock thought "the Confession might be improved, *but* from the present relation to each other of the churches holding it, he did not think this was the time for it." Rev. Mr. Inglis had thought the matter should be moved in, but that it had better wait, at least for another year. He "disliked excessively some things in the *Confession of Faith* regarding predestination." Some of the language "could not be justified." It "would have been greatly to our credit had we got rid of it a hundred years ago." "But"—of course there was a "but." Dr. Hutton said, they might all with perfect safety say of the Confession it "was susceptible of improvement." "There were many grounds on which the revision of the Confession might be argued for with safety and advantage ; but—" &c. Rev. James Brown of Paisley admitted the revisability of the standards, "but there was no certain period fixed for their revision," and "no time was more unfit than the present." He admitted the right of the Church to revise the Standards, *but* "he could not support the revision just now." It was the same in Glasgow. In the endeavour to strangle

as kindly as possible the important overture introduced by the Rev. Fergus Ferguson of Queen's Park, Dr. Young "recognized the right and duty of the Church to revise from time to time its subordinate standards, *but* did not see cause to open up the question meanwhile." Rev. Mr. Ramage thought the Confession "too long, too elaborate, too polemical, too metaphysical, too technical." He thought that something "more in accordance with the simplicity that is in Christ would be greatly preferable." But "a step like this had never been taken except under the force of circumstances that rendered it inevitable." Such circumstances did not at this moment exist, so he thought the matter should be let alone. In other words, he thought it would be a good thing to do, but it should never be done—at least till it could not be helped! It was the same in Edinburgh. In the discussion of Mr. Mill's overture, Dr. Peddie "approved of a revision of the Standards theoretically," BUT this was not the time for it. So it is everywhere. As Mr. Macrae himself has said, "it has been the same thing every time an attempt at reform has been made. Desirable, but not now. Our Standards fail to present the truth of the Gospel; but this is not the time to make them do it. They state things that are false; but this is not the time to bring them into harmony with the truth? Was ever mockery like this?"

It is made an excuse by some that the Church must wait till the right men appear. But the policy of shirking duty and doing nothing is not the way to produce the right men. It is also objected that the men who have headed this movement are young men. Who could be expected to head a reform movement but young men? The greatest reforms of the past ages have all been accomplished by young men. Christ Himself, the supreme example, finished His work on earth when He was thirty-three. It is strange to hear Calvinistic ministers condemning younger men for attempting reform, when Calvin himself had written

his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* while he was still ten years younger than any of the men who are heading this movement—had, indeed, before he was twenty-eight, built up that gloomy and gigantic system which has dominated the Church for centuries, and before which these Calvinistic divines are still bowing down as before the brazen image of Nebuchadnezzar. If men don't do their duty when they are young, they are not likely to begin when they are old. The leaders of the United Presbyterian Church to-day were young when earlier voices proclaimed the need of revision and reform; but they shrank from their duty, and now (with a few notable exceptions), grown old in indolence, and hardened into Conservatism, they seem to find no use for their experience but in depreciating and retarding the reform which they themselves should have accomplished long ago. That reform, and others, are evidently coming; and we trust these Speeches of Mr. Macrae's will help to hasten them.

THE WAR

AGAINST THE

WESTMINSTER STANDARDS.

I.—THE ALARM GUN.

ON Tuesday, December 5th, 1876, in the Paisley and Greenock Presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church, the Rev. David Macrae of Gourock gave notice that at the next meeting he would make a motion anent the Standards of the Church. He was aware of its issues, and was ready to meet any perils it might involve. It was designed as an overture to the Supreme Court of the Church, and would be in the following terms:—

“That the time has come when the Standards of our Church ought to be reconstructed or revised. That they are too long and too intricate, and defeat the very object of their length and minuteness by preventing the members of the Church from becoming acquainted with them. Further, that, with all their voluminousness, they probably omit more than one thing which they ought to contain, and certainly contain a great many things which they ought to omit—mixing up matters of opinion with matters of faith, separating Christian Churches from one another, multiplying difficulties in the way of a Catholic union, and hindering, in a variety of ways, the progress of Christ’s Kingdom. That even as regards the Church’s own relation to its creed, two hundred years of research and experience have developed differences between the professed and the actual faith of the Church;

and that the spectacle of a Church professing to hold all these articles as articles of faith, while holding many of them only as matters of opinion, and not holding some of them at all, is a bad example to the world, and demoralising to the Church herself. That the continued timidity of the Church in dealing with her Standards in view of these facts is becoming discreditable to her faith in the abiding presence of God's Spirit; is a policy of unfaithfulness to the truth; and a policy that would be by no party more condemned than by the men who framed these Standards according to the light they had, and by the Reformers, whose creed has been preserved, but whose fearless loyalty to truth has been to a large extent lost. That our own Church, from her history and also from her present position (as free on the one hand from entanglement with the State, and on the other hand from union negotiations) stands now in a peculiarly favourable position for undertaking the work of revision, which important work the Synod is respectfully overtured to commence, with the view of preparing, if possible, a brief and simple formula, containing only the articles of faith which we think every man, in order to belong to the Church of Christ, must hold, and relegating to a separate category all points which are merely distinctive, or may be regarded by the Church as a desirable safeguard or protest against the errors of the time."

II.—THE PRESBYTERIAN POPE.

Shortly after the foregoing notice was given in the Presbyterian, Mr. Macrae preached a sermon in his own church in Gourock, on "Popish and Protestant Superstitions," in which, according to the *Scotsman's* report on January 12th, he referred to the *Confession of Faith* in the following terms:—

He said the awe with which some of our churches regarded that document, and the terror with which they regarded any proposal to touch it, were essentially superstitious. The Westminster Confession deserved more study, but less idolatry. Instead of being taken for what it was—a system of doctrine

prepared by fallible men, and therefore requiring to be tested and revised in the light of subsequent research and experience—it had been erected into an oracle, a sort of Petrified Pope, blind to new light, deaf to new argument, settling everything, old or new, by the Westminster decision of two hundred and thirty years ago. Results of thought and science, if they confirmed the Confession, were always welcome; if against it, they were tabooed. Orthodoxy had come to mean acceptance of the Confession. Heresy had come to mean, not a denial of God's Word, but a denial of what the Westminster divines said was God's Word. The very Bible must be read in the light of the Confession, if not even tried at its bar. The truth of God could only get into the creed if stamped with the Westminster stamp. This might be regarded as a way of guarding against error, and especially as a safeguard against Popery. But it was only putting aside one Pope to make way for another—happily for a better and more Scriptural one, but not the less a Pope—a human authority credited with infallibility, and endowed with practical supremacy over the conscience.

III.—THE FIRST SPEECH ATTACKING THE STANDARDS.*

DELIVERED BEFORE THE PRESBYTERY, ON THE 16TH OF
JANUARY, 1877.

At the meeting of the Paisley and Greenock Presbytery in January, Mr. Macrae brought forward the subject of the

* Dr. Carpenter of London, writing about this speech to the *Glasgow Herald*, in the midst of the excitement and widespread discussion which it caused, says:—"The interest which I have continued to feel in all that relates to the national welfare of Scotland, ever since I studied in her metropolis forty years ago, is my apology for addressing you on

Westminster Standards. He read the motion of which he had given notice at the previous meeting, and made this speech in its support :—

When I gave notice of this motion, six weeks ago, I made it so long and so explicit for two reasons. First, I thought it due to the fathers and brethren of this Presbytery to make them acquainted beforehand with the ground I meant to take, that they might come prepared with a mature judgment upon it to-day. In the second place, I was anxious not so much to frame a motion that would win support, as a motion (whatever its fate) that would fully and explicitly speak the truth. For years I waited for others to take this step, till I felt ashamed. I read their reasons for not taking it till I felt more ashamed. At last I felt that I had no right to look to others for a decisive step which I was not prepared to take myself. That led to the framing of this motion, and I am here to-day determined to strike a blow, even if it should be my last, to liberate the Church I love from the tyranny of a narrow and unscriptural creed, and the hypocrisy of professed adherence to it. I am well aware of the difficulty of dealing with our Standards. I am aware that every proposition in that enormous compendium of Calvinistic theology has been, and can be, with more or less show of reason, defended. I thought myself, at one time, that I could see a way through casuistry to a plausible reconciliation of its doctrines with my position as a minister of the Gospel of salvation. But

the subject of the 'Revision of the Standards.' Having had considerable opportunity of observing the direction of that *under current* of intelligent thought which sooner or later manifests itself in *surface movement*, I entertain a strong conviction that the speech of the Rev. David Macrae, in moving for that revision, will prove the beginning of a new era in the religious life of Scotland. For I have long noticed a gradual but unmistakable preparation for the downfall of that narrow Calvinistic system which is embodied in the Standards of your three Presbyterian Churches. The educated common sense of your people has been coming to perceive that what is so *unmoral* cannot be religiously true."

more and more I feel that for every honest mind wishing to keep his profession square with his principles and practice, the entanglements of casuistry are every day getting more intolerable—worse for ourselves, worse for the Church, worse for the cause of truth;—that we cannot a moment too soon burst these entanglements asunder and step out into an honest and clear profession of our faith.* My conviction is, that if our people knew what these Standards of our Church contain—if these documents were not so long, so intricate, so full of theological subtleties as to repel inquirers and leave them in ignorance of their contents—our people would, from a sense of common honesty, have long since demanded, what our ministers should long since have secured, a revision, if not a new statement, of what is believed and preached in our Church.† I maintain that

* In the Edinburgh Presbytery it was stated by one of the speakers that, eight years ago, in the Divinity Hall, Mr. Macrae headed a movement amongst the students, for opposition to the Westminster standards. The result, he said, was a memorial to the Senatus, followed by a Conference; and this, as far as we can learn, satisfied the students that the standards were not held binding in the same sense as a commercial bond; that subscription did not at all imply any such adherence to the letter of the Confession; and that this was quite understood by the Church. It is not at all improbable that this was part of the system of “talking objectors over,” which Dr. Joseph Brown referred to in his able speech in the Glasgow Presbytery, as too common, and in the present state of things too necessary, and part of the very system to which Mr. Macrae takes such strong exception here.

† Ministers themselves are not always acquainted with the standards they profess. We know a case of one U.P. elder from the country, who, when he removed to Edinburgh, was elected to the eldership of the church he had joined there, but declined to accept on account of his objections to the Confession. The minister had an interview with him, and asked what points he objected to. The elder specified the teaching of infant damnation. The minister said surely that was not in the Confession, and fetched a copy, remarking that it was a document he had not looked at for many years. When the passages were found, the minister said he did not believe that doctrine himself. But, he said, let us look at the texts referred to. They sat down and examined these

our relationship to these so-called Standards is not an honest one; that the professed is not the actual creed of the Church; that our Church is professing one creed, while holding, and to a large extent preaching, another. What is our profession? What is the theology of the Confession which is declared to be an exhibition of what is believed and taught in our Scottish Churches?

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CONFESSION.

The Confession teaches that God, for His own glory, has predestinated some men to be saved, but that all the rest of mankind He has predestinated to damnation and everlasting torment in hell. It teaches that while there is no fear of the elect, there is no hope for the non-elect. It teaches that God has absolutely and unchangeably fixed the very number, so that not one of them can be brought over to the ranks of the saved, preach to them and pray for them as you will. It teaches that none are redeemed by Christ but the elect only. It teaches that the rest of mankind are not only unable to believe in Christ, and beyond His power to redeem, but are brought into the world by God utterly unable to help themselves. It teaches, indeed, that God hardens them, withholding the grace by which they might have been enlightened in their understanding and wrought upon in

carefully one by one; the result being that the minister declared that not one of them gave the slightest support to the teaching referred to, and that it was a shame that such doctrines should have been allowed so long to remain in the professed standards of the Church. After talking over other difficulties, the minister, perfectly satisfied with the elder's Scriptural orthodoxy, though Westminster heterodoxy, said, "We will just receive you on your own Confession." Which was done. The elder, however, told Mr. Macrae himself that he was never easy in conscience about it, feeling that, if he was right, the form of accepting the Confession was wrong. We have this on Mr. Macrae's own authority; but many others could be added, some of them from the very Presbytery which has so strongly condemned Mr. Macrae for his crusade in the interests of reform.

their hearts. It teaches that by reason of the sin of Adam, apart from any fault of their own, they come into the world wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body, utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil. It teaches that because of this sin, which they could not and cannot help, they are bound helplessly over to the wrath of God and the curse of the law, and so made subject to spiritual, temporal, and eternal death. It teaches that even in heathen lands, where they have never heard, and therefore have had no opportunity of accepting the Gospel, they cannot be saved, no matter how earnestly they may frame their lives according to the light of nature, or the laws of that religion which they profess. It teaches that if they do wrong it is sin, and they are damned for it; and if they do right it is still sin, and they are damned all the same. If they turn to the one hand it is bad; if they turn to the other it is worse. If they obey the law of God it is sin; if they disobey it, it is worse sin. This is the doctrine of the Confession. Repent and turn to God it is declared they cannot. They cannot even make an effort that way; they are unchangeably predestinated to be damned. And after death, according to our Standard, they are all cast into hell, there to endure for ever and ever unspeakable torments, both of soul and body, as long as God Himself shall exist. It teaches that of the countless myriads of babes who have died and are dying in infancy, only the elect are saved. For the non-elect, young or old, it has no fate but the unending and unspeakable torments of hell.

IS THIS THE CREED PREACHED OR BELIEVED?

I ask the fathers and brethren of this Presbytery to say honestly if this is the theology they preach? I ask members of the U.P. Church to say honestly if that is the theology they hear preached? If not, then the Church is professing one creed and preaching another. The moral of this is plain. If the

Church holds the theology of the Confession to be true, she should abide by it and preach it. If she holds it not to be true, she should not profess it. No doubt there is a great deal in the Confession that we all accept. The Confession contains some of the most admirable and concise statements of Scriptural truth that have ever been put into human language. But they are nuggets in the Westminster quartz; they are pebbles imbedded in the theology I have described. And in the form of accepting the Confession, no distinction is made between what is scriptural and what is unscriptural. Its truth and its error are equally professed as part of our faith.

THE OTHER CHURCHES FETTERED STILL MORE.

No doubt our Church (from a motive and with a courage that did her honour) not only put a brand on sections of the Confession that gave the civil magistrate authority in the domain of conscience, but relaxed for the whole Confession the terms of subscription. The Established and Free Churches require their office-bearers to declare that they believe the whole doctrine which the Confession contains, that they acknowledge the same as the confession of their faith, and that they will firmly and constantly adhere thereto. In our Church, office-bearers are only required to accept the Confession generally, as an exhibition of the sense in which they understand the Scriptures. But the courage of this modification was greater than its practical value, for, if we consider it, the general sense is worse than any of the individual propositions.

THE "GENERAL SENSE" ASSAILED.

The whole general sense of the Confession is deformed by the omission from its theological system of the true character of God as revealed in the Scriptures. The God of the Confession is not the God of the Bible; and God's character is the basis of

all theology and of all Gospel preaching. Read the Confession, and then read the Bible. Look on this picture, and on that. In the one, God bringing countless millions of human beings into the world utterly helpless, predestinated to everlasting torment by God's own free will. In the other, God having "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live;"—"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The Confession giving by its general sense the picture of men pleading with an inexorable God, struggling with an inexorable fate; the other giving us the picture of God pleading with man, sending forth His ministers as messengers of mercy, as though God did beseech men by us, we, in Christ's stead, praying men to be reconciled to God. The Confession teaching that Christ redeemed the elect only, that God effectually calls the elect only, that He loves only the elect. The Bible telling us that "God so loved the world (not the elect, but 'the world') that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Confession formally admitting, but practically, by the inexorable logic of its system, denying man's free will, representing him as utterly unable to turn to God or even make the effort. The Bible giving us the picture of the prodigal son saying, "I will arise and go unto my father;" elsewhere saying, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely;" and again, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." The general sense of the Confession is therefore the worst of it. It gives us a different God from the God of the Bible. No doubt it says in one place that God is most loving and merciful, but epithets mean nothing when they are belied by the thing described. It is vain to say that the Deluge was harmless if you proceed to state that it destroyed the whole human race except those who were in the ark. Much even of the truth that the Confession gives about the character of God it turns into misrepresentation, by separating it from the totality of God's being. It constructs almost its whole

theology upon God's sovereignty. But, by severing His sovereignty from the other attributes of His being, it converts the heavenly Father, the holy and merciful God, into an arbitrary and capricious despot.

ABUSE OF "TEXTS."

It is not enough that the Confession, in constructing the dogmas on which such a character is founded, should be able to appeal for authority to some isolated verse of Scripture. Unitarianism can do that, so can Romanism, so can Mormonism. So can, and so does, every "Ism" in Christendom. We must have the general sense, not of the Confession, but the general sense of the Bible. If we are to have everything the Bible supplies on the side of Calvinism, let us have along with it what the Bible supplies against Calvinism. The Confession, for some of its purposes, is too long already; but let us have it double the length if it will give us the whole truth, rather than have it leaving out half the truth, and in this way converting the other half into a lie. This would throw us back upon the Bible; and this is just what in the meantime is needed. We shall there find the truths of the Confession, but find them, at least, in their natural connection. We shall there, at least, escape the misrepresentation caused by divorcing expressions from the element of personality, and tearing texts away from the profound relativity of Scripture.

HOW CASUISTRY IS USED.

In saying all this, I am well aware that every doctrine in the Confession, even as it stands, has been, or can be, defended or explained away. But some of the casuistry employed for this purpose is as discreditable as the doctrine it is used to defend. For instance, the Confession says that "elect infants" are saved. The other side of the doctrine obviously is that non-

elect infants are cast into hell. This is not only a consistent part of the Calvinistic system ; it was not only in former days admitted and preached ; but within the memory of fathers and brethren in this Presbytery, one of the most eminent ministers of our Church was like to have been brought before the Church Courts for denying it. When the Christian conscience of the Church, educated and enlightened by fuller acquaintance with the spirit of the Gospel, could no longer brook this doctrine, it was first let alone and then practically repudiated. There, however, it remains in the Confession as a part of what we profess to believe, only it is considered legitimate to explain it away by saying that "elect infants" may mean "all infants." And so, by means of a quibble, all who die in infancy are smuggled into security. Is that a shift worthy of a Christian Church? If we hold the doctrine of infant salvation, let us avow it. If we think such a dogma would go beyond Scripture, let us have no dogma on the subject at all. In any case, let us be straightforward, and keep our creed in honest harmony with our convictions. Let us not allow the character of our Church for honesty to depend on the popular ignorance of our Standards. Let us have a formula containing what we really believe ; not a formula containing what we don't believe, and don't need to believe, in order to belong to the Church of Christ.

THE KIND OF REFORM REQUIRED.

This brings me to the practical part of the motion I am offering to the Presbytery. I am not advocating the revision of the Confession for the purpose merely of altering or re-stating certain points. I would let the Confession alone ; but I would have it put amongst historical documents, not retained as a Standard. What we need is a brief formula, containing what we regard as essential ; the doctrines which every man, if he is to be a member of a Christian Church, must believe. The Confession is full of dogmas which a Christian man may hold

or not hold without its affecting his character as a Christian. It contains articles which separate from us whole denominations which we yet recognize as Christian denominations, and fraternise with, preaching in their pulpits, and opening our pulpits to them. Let us have a formula as liberal at least as our practice, a formula from which everything is excluded that separates from us those whom we recognize as Christian brethren—a ground on which all Christian people could join us—a ground on which all Christian Churches could unite or confederate. And non-essential but distinctive principles let us put into a separate category, which might serve as a denominational testimony.

THIS IS ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED FOR ORDINARY MEMBERS.

This would simply be carrying out on a large scale the principle which we already act upon in congregations. There we have a common ground on which we unite, while (on other points not essential to Christian fellowship) we retain our individual and often conflicting opinions. How possible it would be to accomplish the proposed reform were we thinking less of the theology that sunders, and more of the religion that unites, is seen in the fact that we have already in use in our Church, as a kind of test creed for applicants to our communion, a brief formula that might still stand revision, but one already about two hundred times shorter than our present Standards, and as a doctrinal basis two hundred times better. On that basis I have admitted into my church at Gourrock not only United Presbyterians but Free Church people, Established Church people, Reformed Presbyterians, Baptists, Independents, Methodists, Evangelical Unionists, and Episcopalians. Most of these would have been excluded by the *Confession of Faith*; and yet we have found them true and worthy members of our Christian brotherhood; and the Church, instead of suffering, has gained in every way by their admission. If this be found a formula sufficient for Christian individuals, why

should we despair of framing a formula as short that shall be sufficient for Christian denominations. What, therefore, this motion pleads, is not a mere revision of the Westminster Confession, but the preparation of a brief formula, excluding as far as possible all mere matters of opinion, and points on which Christian people can be allowed to differ—containing only those points on which they may all be said to have agreed.

ADVANTAGEOUS POSITION OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FOR ACTION.

To the initiation of this important work, the United Presbyterian Church seems by her history and present position to be specially called. We, as a Church, can look back upon a series of courageous advances towards a wider and more Catholic union. We have already modified our relation to the Confession by the exclusion of certain sections, and by the terms in which we accept the rest. We are free now from those negotiations with another Church which so long embarrassed our discussions and impeded the freedom of our action. We are not entangled, as the Free Church is, with questions of Church property, and conservative traditions. We are also free from any such compact with the State as fetters the actions of the Established Church. We have a right to alter our Standards when we please—a right prescriptive as well as real. But the advantage this freedom gives us over a Church established by law depends very much on the use we make of it. Between a Church that will not abolish a dishonest profession for want of courage, and a Church that cannot do it for want of power, many will not see much to choose. Let us show that we have, and that we value, our liberty, by its exercise when duty calls for it. Let us show our faith in the truth by practising it. Let us seek no favour, let us value no alliance that depends on a false conception of what we are—a conception produced by our pointing to Standards that misrepresent our actual creed.

“HISTORICAL IDENTITY.”

It is said that though our present Standards no longer represent accurately the faith of the Church, yet, if we put them aside, we shall destroy our historical identity. If our historical identity depends upon a disingenuous profession, the sooner it is destroyed the better. The apostle Paul was a child once, but he did not consider it necessary for his historical identity to remain a child always; when he became a man he put away childish things. A growing boy does not lose his identity by putting aside the garments that have grown too small for him; the boy's identity is not in his habiliments, but in himself. The Church is a living thing, not a formula. Its identity is in itself, not in its confessions. And the true violation of historical identity is for a Church that has grown to pretend that she has not. Let us have a creed that fits us. Let us have a formula that expresses our actual faith. Let us not delude ourselves by supposing that we can serve the cause of truth by means of an untruthful profession.

CONCLUSION.

I have spoken thus, fathers and brethren, out of a deep conviction that the time has come when this question, difficult though it be, must be courageously faced. I believe this motion speaks the truth, and points out the best line for action; and I believe that this reform is coming, whether with us or over us, whether we are found on the chariot or under its wheels. At the same time, I make this motion now with little hope of its adoption, without the assurance that any one will so much as give it his support. I know the peril to which any one exposes himself here who, even to vindicate the word of God dares to impugn the Confession; and though I have made up my own mind to abide by the issue of this step, I have not felt

at liberty to ask any brother to share the peril with me. But Reform is coming, of that I feel assured ; and, in the meantime, trusting to the power and ultimate triumph of the truth, I offer this motion to the Presbytery.

IV.—MR. MACRAE'S SECOND SPEECH BEFORE THE PRESBYTERY.

Made on March 16th, in reply to the attack made upon his First Speech, apparently with the object, certainly with the effect, of evading the question raised by Mr. Macrae's Overture.

After speeches by Mr. Inglis (Presbytery Clerk) and other members of Presbytery, and a motion of censure moved and supported by Dr. Hutton, Mr. Macrae said,—

Moderator,—It seems to me an ominous sign for our Church that the important question raised at last meeting, and affecting so much the interests of truth, and the character and prospects of the Church, has not been more dealt with upon its own merits ; and that the motion urged upon the Presbytery at last meeting has led to an attack upon the mover, instead of leading (as many had hoped) to an attack upon the errors and the abuses to which it called attention. I trust, however, that even this discussion (personal to some extent though it must in this instance be) will by and bye be delivered from this element, and issue in a movement for the liberation of our Church from an unscriptural yoke, and the vindication of God's character from the misrepresentations to which our subordinate standards have subjected it. Much of what has been said I hope to have a future opportunity of answering. Much else that has been said of a personal character does not in a grave question like this deserve to be answered ;

and much more that has been said answers itself. There are, however, two points which need reply, and which this is the proper time for replying to. These relate (1.) To my own relation to the Standards; and (2.) To my alleged charge against the brethren.

“WHY NOT LEAVE THE CHURCH?”

Neither Dr. Hutton nor the Presbytery Clerk (Mr. Inglis) seem able to understand how I can hold the views I expressed at last meeting and yet remain in this Church. Perhaps I will be forgiven if I try to remove the difficulty by a reference to Mr. Inglis' own case. About twenty-seven years ago Mr. Inglis, in the usual way, publicly accepted the *Confession of Faith* as an exhibition of the sense in which he understood the Scriptures. Six weeks since he told us that he had intended next year moving to have the Confession altered. It appears, then, that between 1850 and 1877 Mr. Inglis has found that the Confession is not so true an exhibition of Scripture as at first he thought it. He should therefore be in a good position for understanding how, during one's ministry, increasing acquaintance with the Confession on the one hand, and the Bible on the other, reveal the fact that they are at variance, and should therefore awaken a desire to have the human standard set aside or altered. The principal difference is that Mr. Inglis seems to have taken twenty-five years to learn what others learn sooner: and that Mr. Inglis thought next year the best time for reform, while I thought the best time (and the only time we are sure of) is now. Another difference seems to be that Mr. Inglis, because I have found fault with the Confession, thinks I should leave the Church; but that he, although he has also found fault with the Confession, should stay where he is. The more excellent way, to my mind, would be for both of us to remain, if we may, and if we honestly can; and instead of abandoning the Church, as many have done, try to make it better.

DEGREE OF DIVERGENCE.

Mr. Inglis may, no doubt, say that there is a great difference in the degree of our divergence from the standards; that while he only takes exception to special points in the Confession, I have taken exception to its general sense. But how far this distinction indicates a difference depends on what special points Mr. Inglis takes exception to. If, for instance, the doctrine of the eternal reprobation and everlasting future torment of all but the elect is one of these points, it is one that affects to a vital extent the whole sense of the Confession, and is conspicuously the doctrine that distorts the character of God, and makes the God of the Confession different from the God of the Bible. The distinction in this case between Mr. Inglis' objection to special points, and my objection to the general sense, might prove more imaginary than real. For me to propose to kill a man, and Mr. Inglis to propose merely to remove his head and one or two other points, would, to the man at least, mean very much the same thing.

THE BIBLE THE SUPREME STANDARD.

Apart, however, from any justification of my position from the conduct of Mr. Inglis, or any other member of Presbytery, the ground on which I vindicate myself, and all in the Church who are seeking the same reform, is this—The supreme standard in our Church is not the Confession, but the word of God. The very first question in our formula declares that the Bible is the “only rule of faith and practice.” The Confession itself appeals in its first chapter to the same standard (chap. i, sec. 9, 10). It teaches in section 9th that Scripture is to be interpreted, not by Confessions or Catechisms, but by Scripture itself. It teaches in section 10th that all religious controversies are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, and doctrines of men, judged, not by Confessions or Catechisms, but by

the Bible. We, therefore, in this Church are not only entitled to place the Bible above the Confession, but required by the Confession itself, required by our own formula, so to do. If therefore, like Mr. Inglis himself, we find in our study of the Bible that the Confession is at variance with it, what are we to do? Some people say, "Leave the Church." By all means leave the Church if it be a church of the Confession. But, if it is a church of the Bible, as it declares itself to be, our duty is, whenever we find the subordinate standards wrong, to get them as soon as possible brought into harmony with the supreme standard. This is precisely what I have tried to do. This is what Mr. Inglis told us he also intended to do next year. And if I and those who think with me have come to believe that these subordinate standards belie the Scriptures and the scriptural character of God more seriously than Mr. Inglis thinks, the more are we justified, the more are we bound to urge their revision or their repudiation.

RECTIFY THE SUBORDINATE STANDARDS.

Had John Knox been alive to-day he would not, with his heroic loyalty to truth, have been afraid, like some of the brethren, to face this question and put these standards to the test. His words in reference to his own Confession might wisely be printed in the front of ours:—"If," he said, "any man will note in this our Confession any article or sentence repugnant to God's Holy Word, that it would please him of his gentleness and for Christian charity's sake, to admonish us of the same in writing; and we, of our honour and fidelity, do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God (that is, from His Holy Scriptures), or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss." Although this invitation, which has in it the ring of loyalty to, and confidence in, the truth, does not preface our Confession, it is implied in the distinction between supreme and subordinate standards, and is

practically given (as we have seen), in the words of our formula and the declaration of the Confession itself. I have therefore felt that duty did not require me, or those thinking with me, to leave the Church while holding its supreme standard, but rather imposed the duty upon us of endeavouring to get the subordinate standards revised. But (as a reason why views hostile to the Confession should not be tolerated in the Church) it is said, "Though the Bible is the supreme standard, yet, the Confession is accepted as an exhibition of the sense in which we understand the Bible." That is true; and but for that part of the formula of acceptance I should have had no motion of this kind to make, and no charge to bring against the Church of professing one thing and preaching another. But what I maintain is that the Confession no longer exhibits the sense in which this Church understands the Scriptures. This is so manifest that, to my knowledge, some of our ministers and office-bearers reconciled themselves to the acceptance of the Confession by saying that everybody knew that it was accepted with great latitude. One said it was like subscribing a letter, "Your obedient servant." That, he said, was no deception, because the person who got the letter understood that it was only a form. If the understanding had really got that length, nobody would object to this being explicitly stated, and I hope no one would even wish so empty a form to be retained.

THE CHURCH'S RELATIONSHIP TO HER SUBORDINATE STANDARDS NOT AN HONEST ONE.

But the understanding, though extending in that direction, has not got that length, and this painful dubiety as to what subscription really means or carries with it, is of itself imperative reason why the Church should deal with the question. It makes the Confession a stumbling-block, and keeps back from the ministry many of our best and most conscientious students. And it is well known that in all the Presbyterian churches it

is becoming more and more a difficulty to get Christian laymen to accept office as elders (1st), because they cannot honestly accept the Confession; and (2nd), because not being able to accept it honestly, they will not accept it at all. I have one case of an Established Church in Glasgow which has fourteen elders, and yet only one who can go to the Assembly, as the other thirteen refused to sign the *Confession of Faith*. All honour to the men who have consciences so true that they will not regard acceptance as a mere form so long as it is not declared authoritatively to be so. But what are we to think of the Church that excludes such men by insisting on an unscriptural test? I know of elders in our own churches who (unable to take office because they had no faith in certain doctrines of the Confession), were "talked over" by their ministers, who assured them that such faith was not necessary, and in some instances that they did not believe the doctrines specified themselves. Is this a state of things that ought for a single day to be winked at by a Christian Church? Does it not justify only too fully the charge I have made, that our Church's relationship to her standards is not an honest one? There are some defenders of the Confession (specially, I think, amongst the ministers) who seek to get over the sense of inconsistency by casuistical explanations and subtleties, which it is surely not creditable of the Church to tempt or force them to. I was speaking to one of our ministers lately about the doctrine of the Confession which implies the damnation of non-elect infants. "Oh, but," he said, "I am not shut up to accept that view of it. The doctrine

* At a recent meeting in Glasgow, in connection with the Free Tron Church, Dr. Walter C. Smith, the former pastor, came through from Edinburgh to do honour to one of the ablest and most useful members of that congregation (Mr. Morison), to whom a presentation was being made that night. Dr. Smith said that no man in the Church was more suited for the eldership by Christian character, experience, and ability, and more calculated to be of service in the Church Courts, but he had been kept out by the *Confession of Faith*. Mr. Morison is only one of thousands of whom the same thing could be said.

is so stated that I can take out of it the sense that *all* infants are elect, and, therefore, that all infants are saved." He admitted, however, that this was not the natural sense, nor the common one until recent years. Now, if that clause makes it legitimate for one man to understand by it that all infants are saved, and equally legitimate for another man to understand by it that most of them are damned, I say it is a mockery of language to call that "an exhibition" of the sense in which we understand the Bible. It is an exhibition of nothing but the hypocrisy or imbecility of the Church that calls it so.

IS THE CONFESSION "AN EXHIBITION OF THE SENSE"
IN WHICH WE UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE?

What I understand by an exhibition of the sense of anything is a bringing of it out into clearness and certainty. What sort of "exhibition" is it of the sense of Scripture to tabulate propositions out of which it is equally legitimate to extract the affirmative and the negative—the assertion of a doctrine and the denial of it. And when the Church begins to repudiate a doctrine that by her Confession she still professes to hold, what sort of "exhibition" of candour and honesty does she give for the imitation of the world when (charged with this inconsistency) she tries to get over it by showing that the Confession may not mean what it says, or that the proposition which is said to "exhibit" the sense in which we understand the Scriptures can be made to mean one thing just as well as another? If this be the way in which the Confession is to "exhibit" the sense in which we understand the Bible, we shall want something else next to give us the sense in which we are to understand the Confession.

THE ALLEGED "CHARGE AGAINST THE BRETHREN."

I now come to the second charge made against me by Mr. Inglis—viz., that I have brought an accusation against the

brethren, by alleging that the relationship of our Church to her subordinate standards is not an honest one. Properly speaking this is not a charge against brethren individually, though it is a grave charge against the Church as a corporate body.* Who in the Church or Presbytery accept, and who reject, the characteristic doctrines of the Confession, I cannot tell. But this I know, and this I think, is pretty generally known from books and articles written by our ministers and elders, from sermons preached, from addresses given at meetings, from admissions freely made in conversation, in newspaper correspondence, in articles in the U. P. Magazine, and speeches in the U. P. Church Courts, that the actual creed of the Church has outgrown and to some extent discarded its professed creed. One Gospel is preached, while another Gospel (if Gospel it can be called) embodied in the Confession, is professed. But as to the amount of individual responsibility for the continuance of this state of things it is not for me to judge. God alone knows who in this Church adhere still to the theology of the Confession; who (though now beyond it) have seen no way of bringing up the standards to the new position: who again have done their best; and who, on the other hand, with the power to mend matters, have been content to let things alone. It is not for me or any one else to fix individual responsibility. But a profession belied by practice is called dishonesty, disingenuousness, or hypocrisy. And when a Church as a corporate body is found to be preaching one Gospel, while voluntarily continuing to profess a different Gospel, the same terms are applicable to it. This

* The dominant party in the Paisley and Greenock Presbytery seemed unable (or unwilling) to understand this very plain distinction. Mr. Macrae, about the same time, said at a public meeting, that we would be disgraced as a nation if we were drawn into war to perpetuate the infamous misrule of Turkey. If we were, this would be corporate not personal disgrace; but personal disgrace would attach to those who might have prevented it, but did not. The nervousness of the Presbytery under Mr. Macrae's charge of corporate dishonesty suggests the suspicion that they feel themselves not individually blameless.

is not accusing the brethren individually. It is accusing the Church as we would accuse a nation or an army—speaking of it as a collective whole. But while I say this in my own defence, and in defence of brethren here and elsewhere, it must be remembered that every such effort as the one now being made adds to personal responsibility. It brings the individuals who resist reform into more of personal identification with the corporate or collective dishonesty which it is sought to remove. Such is the position in which I stand with reference to the charge of accusing the brethren.

THE REAL QUESTION TO BE ANSWERED IF THE CHARGE OF
DISHONESTY IS TO BE DISPROVED.

And this brings us back to the real question at issue, which I am sorry has not been kept more steadily in view, and answered more satisfactorily, namely, Whether this accusation against the Church is just or unjust. Is the actual creed of the Church identical with the professed creed, or is it not? Let us courageously and frankly face this question. It is with sorrow that I feel compelled to press it. And I submit, with all deference, that the question is not whether the dogmas assailed have not in them some elements of truth; or whether texts (some of them unrighteously divorced from the context) may not be quoted in support of them, as texts (so gathered) can be quoted in support of every religious system (true and false) in the country. The question is not what led to this or that dogma being put into the shape we find it in, or whether as it stands it cannot be understood in a sense different from its original and plain sense; or how many other holes there are in the Westminster warren by which an ingenious reasoner, with sufficient flexibility of conscience, can escape the consciousness of culpable inconsistency. What needs to be known is this, whether the dogmas of the Confession, specified in my former speech, are or are not believed and preached in our Churches? The Confes-

sion teaches as a fundamental doctrine the doctrine of Reprobation. Is that doctrine believed and preached by this Church, or is it not? The Confession requires us to hold that God has of His own free will predestinated some men to everlasting death—that this indeed is the unchangeable destiny of the whole human race outside of the elect—and the Confession requires us by everlasting death to understand eternal and unspeakable torments in hell. That is the doctrine which, according to your standards, you profess. I want to know if it is the doctrine you preach? This is not a dogma aside from the main propositions of our Confession. If Election is the warp, Reprobation is the woof of the Westminster theology. The doctrine of Reprobation is fundamental. It could not possibly be otherwise, affecting as it does the whole system of theology. It determines the character of God. It limits the work of Christ: it limits the operations of the Spirit; it limits the sense and the sincerity of the offers of the Gospel. It would consign countless millions of the human race in every age to everlasting torment. Yet this is the doctrine professed by our Church. I ask, is it the doctrine preached? I have been a member of the United Presbyterian Church for twenty years, and have attended its churches in all parts of the country; but I have never (as far as I can remember) heard any of our ministers preach this vital part of their professed creed, while I have often, and especially in recent years, heard them preach a Gospel which, as far as my power of perception goes is utterly (thank God) at variance with it. In the diviner truth which is preached, we all, I hope, rejoice. But if we no longer hold this doctrine of Reprobation, let us no longer profess to hold it. Let our profession be brought into harmony with our practice. This is what I mean by an honest relationship between a Church and its creed. We all know, of course, that the Bible has *its* difficulties and apparent discrepancies. For these, however, as far as they belong to God, we are not responsible. But when a formula is prepared to show the sense in which we understand the Scrip-

tures, for that we are responsible: and as often as our views of Scripture change, so often should our standards be changed to correspond. Why should we permit in theology a misrepresentation to which men in other departments of human knowledge would not consent? Scientific men, for instance, are divided in opinion as to whether certain geological changes were sudden or slow. They recognize the difficulty of settling the question, and they accept facts even though unexplained. But none of them on either side would accept as an "exhibition" of his views a set of propositions on the subject which science had outgrown, or propositions which could stand either for his own view or its opposite—either for what he believed or what he disbelieved. Yet that is the humiliating position into which superstitious reverence for the Westminster Standards has brought the Church to-day. It is surely time that this state of things should be brought to an end.

The difficulties attending a re-adjustment of our relationship to these so-called standards are admitted by all. But if they were ten times greater than they are, better to face them in a spirit of loyalty to truth and reliance on the promised aid of God's Spirit than remain longer in our present position, lying open to the imputation of either not knowing what we believe, or not having the courage to declare it.

A FAIR CHALLENGE.

I was warned, after what I said at last meeting, that a committee might be appointed to deal with me. Would it not be better to have a committee to examine first into the truth of my charge? There is the more call for this order of action that the charge against me is of small account compared with the charge which I have brought against the Church. The charge against me is that of denying the infallibility of the Westminster divines. The charge I have brought against the Church is that of denying, by professed ad-

herence to these subordinate standards, the true and scriptural character of Almighty God. This is surely a charge that ought to be met. I have been spoken of as an accuser of the brethren. Whether in being so I am right or wrong depends on whether I have accused them justly or unjustly. At last meeting I stated the fundamental dogmas of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. These dogmas are declared by our formula of acceptance to exhibit the sense in which we understand the Scriptures. If, therefore, the members of this Presbytery hold an honest relation to our standards, they believe these doctrines and preach them. Let the committee ascertain if they do. If they do not, then they are bound either to get these documents altered or our relationship to them re-adjusted, to remove the scandal of seeming to profess one faith while preaching another. An even simpler course is open to this Presbytery now. The dogmas in the Confession, which I believe to be no longer held and taught by our Church, are here before us. It is open to the Presbytery to declare that they do hold and do teach them. If this be done, the charge against these standards of traducing the character of God and misinterpreting His Word will yet remain, but the charge of disingenuous profession will fall to the ground.

The Presbytery showing no disposition to accept the challenge, Mr. Macrae said—Then I beg respectfully to move: “That a committee be appointed to ascertain whether the charge brought against the subordinate standards and against the Church’s relationship to them be or be not well founded.”

The motion was seconded, but received no further support, and Dr. Hutton’s motion of censure was carried.

V.—HOW ECCLESIASTICAL TORYISM WILL DEAL WITH THE REFORM.

Immediately after the Presbytery meeting in March, Mr. Macrae was lecturing in Perth. The chair was occupied by the Rev. Robert Lyon, who introduced Mr. Macrae as having just come "from the seat of war." Mr. Lyon said the Confession had done good work in the past, and we should respect it. But it should be altered to suit the truths of science. While holding to the old landmarks, let us ask for light. Give us light, as the old Greeks said, although it should slay us. He then referred to the personal abuse with which, in the Paisley and Greenock Presbytery, it had been attempted to stop the movement, while he believed the members really felt that the Confession ought to be amended.

Mr. Macrae, before beginning his lecture, said he had not expected to hear the *Confession of Faith* referred to, but he was glad Mr. Lyon had given him an opportunity of saying that, notwithstanding the adverse vote in the Greenock Presbytery, the Reformation now sought for would assuredly come. But like every reform, it must encounter opposition. The Church was full of tories and temporisers, who would try, first of all, to mock the men and the movement down. When they found it advancing in spite of mockery, they would assail it with all the strength they had. When they found it still advancing, they would search for a new standpoint to look at it from. Having found this new standpoint, and looked again at the reform proposed, they would welcome it with enthusiasm, and say it was just the thing they wanted all along. One victory had already been gained. It had been decided, even by that adverse vote in the Paisley and Greenock Presbytery, that men could believe in the Bible, even where it differed from the Confession, and yet remain in the Church. But mere tolerance was not enough. The whole doctrinal position of the Church required to be

rectified. The conflict for reform was only beginning. They had heard the blast of the trumpet; they would by and bye see the battle; and out of that battle he believed God's truth would emerge triumphant.

VI.—PUBLIC LECTURE AT GOUROCK.

In the end of March the following requisition was presented to Mr. Macrae, largely signed by members of his congregation and others:—

DEAR SIR,—Being interested in the important question which you have raised in the Church, and throughout the country, with regard to the *Confession of Faith*, we, the undersigned, believing that the interests of truth would be served by your giving a lecture on the subject, addressed more to the general Christian public, do hereby solicit that, if willing to undertake this task, you will please name a date when you could give such an address in Gourock, and arrangements will be made accordingly.

In response to this requisition, Mr. Macrae gave the following lecture on the subject, on Monday, April 2nd, to a large audience, in his own Church.

The chair was occupied by Commissioner Wallace; and Mr. Macrae was accompanied to the platform by Provost Miller and the other members of his Session. After a cordial introduction from the Chairman, who, amidst applause, expressed warm sympathy with the movement,—

Mr. MACRAE said:—

It gave me great pleasure to receive the requisition that has led to the holding of this meeting, especially as the hope of this Reform lies mainly with the Christian laity. The grand old Reformation in Scotland was carried by the people. To-day we stand upon the verge of another conflict, which with the help of the Christian laity, should become another Reformation.

THE QUESTION THAT UNDERLIES.

The question that in our Church stands in the front—the question of reforming the Standards—though a difficult, is not in itself a very large one. But the question that lies behind it, and with which it has a vital connection, is one of immense importance. It is the question whether the Church is a living or a dead thing—whether it is a Church of the living God, or only a Society for conserving Calvinism. It is the question of whether Christianity is a formula or a force; a dogma or a life; the shibboleth of a sect or a power for the regeneration of the world. Let us not forget this in dealing with the present question of our Standards.

THE VALUE OF THE CONFESSION.

I am glad that one effect of this movement has been to create a demand for copies of the *Confession of Faith*. We can all rejoice in that. People will now read the Confession for themselves, and will see with their own eyes how far the Christianity of to-day has extended beyond those narrow lines. They will be able to judge for themselves whether or not the assertion is true that the professed is not the actual creed of the Church, that the theology of the Confession is neither the theology of the pulpit nor the pew, that these so-called Standards are deceptive as indications of our position, and therefore should be set aside. In saying that they ought to be set aside, I am speaking of them only as standards—that is, as professed indications to other churches and to the world of what we believe and preach. I am not one of those who cry down the Confession as no longer worthy of study. Because a man has proved unfit to conduct a campaign, it does not follow that he is not fit to occupy some other post, or that his knowledge of military affairs may not be of great service to the army. The *Confession of Faith* is one of the most remarkable, and, in its proper place, one of the

most valuable documents which the Church has ever possessed. It was prepared by an Assembly, called together in 1643 by the famous Long Parliament, and including some of the most eminent divines of the time. Although that dark and stormful time (when men's ideas of justice, and mercy, and sovereignty were very different from what they are now), has left its impress upon the theology of the Confession and Catechisms, yet the time in many respects was singularly favourable for the formulating of such views as were held by these men at that time. It was an age of keen discussion and controversy; and we find the result of it in many of those delicate but important distinctions which controversy alone can bring out. The theology is, of course, Calvin's; but looked at in that light, simply as a statement of Calvinistic doctrine, the Confession and Catechisms of the Westminster divines remain unequalled. Moreover, their contents, for the most part, are clear and indisputable statements of Bible truth, though they are often taken away to glorify false positions, like the golden vessels of the Temple in the palace of Belshazzar. Even doctrines that exaggerate the truth, and become to that extent false, were built up in that form as bulwarks against the errors of the time, and can in this way be explained even when they cannot be justified. Altogether, the Confession and Catechisms, though they deserve less idolatry, deserve more study; and are likely for many generations to furnish help in Bible study, and in many departments of theological inquiry.

UNPROGRESSIVE STANDARDS NOT FOR A PROGRESSING CHURCH.

But all this is very different from saying that they are fitted to remain as the Standards of our faith, fitted to indicate either what we believe or what we ought to believe. It would be a very strange thing (it would be for the Church a most discreditable thing) IF SHE HAD LEARNED NOTHING OF GOD FOR

THE LAST TWO CENTURIES; if Christian people have been praying and preaching and working and searching the Scriptures, and living amidst the brightening light of science and Providence and Christian experience, and yet in two hundred and thirty years had learned nothing, had no acquisitions to point to, had not advanced a step since the days of Prolocutor Twisse and the Long Parliament. The supposition is as false in fact as it is preposterous in conception. God's Spirit has not been working in the world for these two centuries in vain. God's providence has not been unfolding itself before the Christian Church for two hundred years without teaching it something of His character and of His ways that it did not know before. The discoveries of science, the exploration of Bible lands, the critical study of the language and literature of the Bible, carried on with all the facilities that have been accumulating in recent years, all this has not left the Church just where she was. On the contrary, in churches open to its influence, it has been working a silent revolution. It has changed the aspect of theology. It has antiquated and to some extent discredited the Calvinism of our Standards. It has brought us to this, that the Westminster Confession is no longer a true picture of our actual faith, can no more be taken to represent our views of the Gospel than the government of Charles the First could be taken to represent the government of Queen Victoria,—can no more furnish a creed for the Christian Church of to-day than the cycles and epi-cycles of the Ptolemaic system furnish a creed for modern astronomy.

THE POSITION OF THE U.P. CHURCH.

It is a high honour to the United Presbyterian Church that alone, amongst the great denominations in Scotland, she has distinctly although imperfectly recognized this change. She has formally indicated that the Confession is unscriptural on the subject of the Civil Magistrate. She has recognized that the

Westminster divines did not understand as well as we do now the rights of Conscience. Accordingly, she has put the brand of repudiation on all the sections of the Confession that would give the Magistrate authority in sacred things, and by the very terms of her formula allows her ministers and office-bearers to throw overboard everything in the Confession that teaches, or may be supposed to teach, persecuting and intolerant principles in religion. Our Church, therefore, has already repudiated the dogma of Westminster Infallibility. She has not only admitted that we have a right to revise these standards; she has actually to an important extent revised them. She therefore stands in a peculiarly favourable position for going on with this work; and I wish to show you to-night that there is need for undertaking further and larger reform. Other churches are looking on with interest; and success with us would clear the way for them. Reform should, indeed, if possible, be carried on with their co-operation. If it were, it would soon convert the Pan-Presbyterian Council from a benevolent farce into a majestic machinery of reform and confederation. But if other churches will not act with us, we should act alone. We have done so already in the matter of the Civil Magistrate. We have scored out of the Confession its heresies on that point. We have done it independently of the other Presbyterian Churches in Scotland, and we have gained by it. Let us go on with the reform—with them if they are willing, without them if they are not. Some church must take the initiative; our Church, as we have seen, is specially fitted for the task both by her past history and her present position. To-night I am anxious to show reason why it should be done.

REASONS OF REFORM—THE STANDARDS TOO LONG.

First of all, unnecessary length in the test-creed of a Church is always a grave objection; and our Standards are not only too long, but absurdly long, for the purpose we wish them to serve.

It is not the mere number of pages and sections. Look into it and see how closely compacted the doctrines are, and remember that every doctrine limits the comprehensiveness of the Church. Almost every section is like one of those ivory balls that the Chinese carve with such marvellous ingenuity and skill. It looks like one ball, but when you examine it you find inside of it another, and inside of that another still, and so on till you find that instead of one ball it is a dozen. So is it with almost every proposition in the *Confession of Faith*. It is packed with doctrines, each one of which involves to some one a new difficulty to subscription. Now, what do we want with these standards at all? We do not want them to rehearse the Bible; for with all deference to the Westminster divines, the Bible can tell its own story much better than they. The purpose our standards now are expected to serve is that of a bond of union—a something to set forth the fundamental points on which we think it necessary that we should be at one. Manifestly, therefore, we should have in this bond of union as few points as possible—carefully excluding everything about which it is legitimate for Christian men and Christian ministers to differ—everything that might exclude those who, differing from us (or from one another) on this point or that, are yet loyal to Christ, and agreed with us on the points essential to Church organization. What then is to be thought of our retaining as a test-creed, such an enormous catalogue of seventeenth century dogmas as we have in the *Confession of Faith*? Let me try to illustrate the absurdity and mischief of it. Suppose Britain invaded by a powerful enemy, and volunteers needed to fight for Queen and country, as the Church needs volunteers to-day to fight for Christ and His kingdom. What would we think if a long creed were drawn up, containing five hundred disputed points, which every man must settle in the same way before he could be enrolled? Questions about which loyal and competent men differ, but which they must have one opinion about, or else be turned back? What would we think if loyal and competent men

were to be turned back, unless they were ready to declare upon oath that the British uniform is better than any other—that the kilt should never be worn except by real Highlanders—that Wellington was a better general than Soult—that every enemy killed in battle went to perdition? What would you say if men had to accept a hundred things like that, or be rejected? You would say—“This is preposterous. What we want is men loyal and fit for the work before them. These tests keep out many of the very men we need. Men may differ on these points and yet be equally fit for the service of the country.” Precisely the same thing holds against the Confession as a test for office in the Church. Amongst its hundreds of dogmas, there are scores that may be true or false, that men may believe or not believe, and yet be none the less loyal to Christ, none the less competent for the Church’s work. Every such proposition tends to repel from the Church those who cannot accept it. Why then have it needlessly there?

SOME OF THE THINGS THAT ARE OUT OF PLACE IN A CONFESSION.

Why have it down as an article of faith that it is a sin to refuse an oath imposed by lawful authority? A man may be a Christian man and yet object to an oath under any circumstances, on the ground that Christ said, “Swear not at all; let your communication be yea, yea, and nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” Why should it be laid down as an article of faith that war is lawful? It is a matter of opinion, not a matter of faith. If we believe it to be lawful, so be it. But why keep everybody else out of the Church, as our formula attempts to do, unless he holds the same opinion? Especially when Christianity is more against war than in favour of it. Or why require a man to believe as a necessary article of faith, that the Pope is the veritable anti-Christ and man of sin? People may believe that, and yet see the absurdity of

excluding from the Church a man who may be as much opposed to Popery as himself, but who thinks that some other form of anti-Christ is the one referred to in Scripture. Or why lay it down as an article of faith that the world was created out of nothing in six days? The Scriptures do not teach this: and science has shown it to be contrary to fact. Everybody can understand how the Westminster divines blundered at this point. Geology had raised no questions then to put them on their guard and prevent them confounding Creation with the work of the first "day." Yet there the absurd proposition stands, exactly as it did then, just as if it had never been shown to be unscriptural and false. There it stands undisturbed; and every Established and Free Church probationer is required by the formula, before he can enter the ministry, to declare this notorious untruth to be the truth of God; and every United Presbyterian to declare it (by his formula) to be an exhibition of the sense in which he understands the Scriptures. Why should men be asked, and asked by a Christian Church, to do a thing like this? Why should they be asked to enter the Ministry of Truth with a lie in their right hand, or compelled to save their conscience by supposing, when such things are in the creed, that subscription can mean nothing? When taught in this way, that subscription does not bind them to one doctrine, need we wonder that many see no reason why it should bind them to any doctrine. Apart, however, from this graver aspect of the question, why should points like these be kept in our standards? They are at the best mere matters of interpretation and opinion, about which Christians may differ, and which are therefore entirely out of place amongst articles of faith, and terms of admission to the Church. Instances might be multiplied, and while the Confession contains a single needless proposition (not to speak of a hundred), it is to that extent too long, and does mischief by increasing the number of Christian men who cannot honestly accept it. No doubt Dr. Hutton said he could read the Confession in fifty-two minutes. But a

great deal of objectionable matter, and a great deal of superfluous matter can be compassed in much less than fifty-two minutes. Dr. Hutton himself admitted that the Confession contained more than it should. So did Dr. Andrew Thompson, Dr. Peddie, and others, who spoke on the subject when the matter was before the Edinburgh Presbytery as far back as 1866. So has every minister I have spoken to on the subject. This, then, we may take to be a settled point—that the Confession is too long—in other words, that much of what it contains ought to be struck out.

TOO LONG, YET OMITTING THE MAIN POINT.

But if these Standards err by excess, they err still more by defect. They leave out the very thing that should have the foremost place—the Gospel. Many of you may not realise how true this is, because you have wisely been accustomed to read the Bible, not the Confession; and even when reading the Confession or the Catechism, to supplement it in your own mind, with the Gospel. But no one left to these Standards would ever have come to know the central truth of the Bible; and yet it is the truth of the Bible which they are supposed to exhibit. Everywhere in these Standards we see the King; but we look in vain for the Heavenly Father. They give us a telescope with which to survey the power and majesty, the justice and severity of God, and also His love for the elect. But when we want to see His love for the world, we find the wrong end of the telescope turned to the eye, and the foreground of the Scriptures receding into infinite space and invisibility. We are shown a terrific machinery for the rescue of the elect; but where is the revelation of the Father's love? Where are the precious offers of mercy to all? Where is the Father's heart yearning over His prodigal boy? Where is the love that melts the sinner's heart? the love that has drawn ten thousand to the Saviour, for every one who has been driven to

Him by the fear of hell? Where in these standards (voluminous though they be) are the free offers of the Gospel?—"Ho, EVERY ONE THAT THIRSTETH, come ye to the waters." "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and WHOSOEVER WILL let him take of the water of life freely." "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Come unto Me ALL ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Where, in the theology of the Confession, are these free and glorious promises, these glad tidings of great joy? Where is the revelation of a Father's love and a Saviour's pity that has touched the heart of nations, that has turned millions to God, that has kindled in the Church, within the present century, the flame of missionary enterprise, and sent the messengers of mercy into the slums of the city and away to every heathen land? Where is it in the Confession of our Faith? Echo answers where? Of other things we have enough and to spare, and yet the best of all is wanting. It is the Bible, with the heart cut out of it. It is the family, without its father. It is Christ dishonoured. It is God robbed of His highest glory. Yet this is called the Confession of our Faith, our exhibition of the sense in which we understand the Scriptures. Is it not astounding that our Churches have contented themselves with such a Confession so long?—that superstitious veneration for this Calvinistic idol should make them shrink from the idea of removing even its acknowledged defects?

THE STANDARDS DISTORT GOD'S CHARACTER.

This brings me to the gravest charge against these Standards, namely, that they deform the character of God, and instead of vindicating His ways to men, make them appear inconsistent, incredible, and, in some instances, revolting. I

have already spoken of this in public, and will therefore say little on this point now. But I would have you read Chaps. VI, X, and XVI, of the Confession, and ask yourselves if such doctrine can be reconciled with the character of God as revealed by Christ. The meaning is unmistakable. It teaches that God brings men into the world utterly disabled and made opposite to all good, and then, having made them so, punishes them as guilty for not being different. This is a doctrine utterly at variance with the divine character, revolting to the moral sense which God Himself has implanted in the human breast. It is established in morals that no man can justly be blamed for what he could not help. If a man puts out his eyes, he is to blame for not seeing; but if he is born blind, he is an object of pity, not of blame. The man who would take a blind child and beat her to death because she could not see, would be regarded as a monster unfit to live. And yet we are required by the 6th chapter of the Confession to believe that this is God's way with men,—bringing them into the world incapable of doing right, and then sending them to hell for not doing it! It may be said, "The man by nature is disabled, but God can give him strength." But the Confession teaches us, in Chapter V, that if the man be not one of the elect, God, instead of helping, or being willing to help, blinds and hardens him to make sure that he shall not be moved to come. To speak of God as just and merciful, and yet charge Him with this, is an insult to the human understanding. It is much the same, in view of such dogmas, to speak of a man having free will. For the elect have no choice but to be saved; and no act of theirs is allowed to have anything to do with their salvation. As for the rest of mankind, they are declared to be sent into torment for their sins; but as it appears from Chapter VI that they could not possibly do anything but sin, it is evident that (according to the Confession) the only freedom they have is freedom to go to perdition. To speak of free will in either case, is a mockery of language. Pres-

ident Finney, in his grotesque lines, put the case only too accurately :—

“ You shall and you shan’t,
 You will and you won’t ;
 You can but you can’t,
 And you’re damned if you don’t.”

INFANT DAMNATION.

Again, the Confession teaches that elect infants dying in infancy are saved. The other part of the doctrine necessarily is that non-elect infants are damned. There is no escape from this. If the meaning were that all infants are elect, why was it not so put? No men were ever abler than the Westminster divines to state precisely and clearly what they meant. But if we have any doubt about their holding the damnation of non-elect infants, it is dispelled by their own statements. Samuel Rutherford spoke of infants coming into the world as “fuel for hell,” and of children “sinking and swimming in the black lake.”* And Dr. Twisse, the Moderator of the Assembly, held that “thousands of infants are damned only for sin original.”† But, indeed, the same doctrine was held till recent years. To-day, I suppose, most ministers and Christian people would recoil not only from teaching it, but from being supposed to hold it. Yet there the clause stands untouched in the Confession which our ministers are required to accept as an exhibition of the sense in which we understand the Scriptures, and which Established and Free Church ministers have to subscribe to as the truth of God, and pledge themselves to assert and maintain!‡ Again, in Chapter X,

* *Trial and Triumph of Faith.* Sermon 10th.

† *Vessels of Mercy and Vessels of Wrath,* p. 135.

‡ The damnation of non-elect infants, though felt now to be unrepresentable to Christian congregations, is at the same time an essential part of the Calvinistic system. It and the other doctrines stand or fall together. Though some of our divines try now not to see this, Calvin saw

after speaking of the elect, the Confession teaches that for the rest of mankind there is no salvation—no ray of hope even for the heathen who have never heard of Christ, and therefore have had no chance of accepting Him—that there is no mercy even for those of them who did their very best to live up to such light as they have. And where is it that they and all the rest of mankind, non-elect, are going? According to the Confession, God is casting countless millions as fast as they die into hell, there to be tormented with unspeakable torments for ever and ever. And all this in accordance with His own free will and predestined plan! Can we wonder that many find it impossible to believe in God without first disbelieving this? I know it is repulsive to you to listen to these details. I know it is repulsive to me to utter them. But the fault is not mine. I am giving simply the doctrines of what is called the Confession of our Faith. If these doctrines are revolting

it, and Calvin had the honesty to declare it. Hear what he says in these same *Institutes* of his (Book 4, c. 15, sec. 10)—“Infants (he says) are, as it were, a seed of sin, and therefore cannot but be odious and abominable to God.” Again (in Book 3, c. 23, sec. 7), he says, “How is it that the fall of Adam involves so many nations, *with their infant children, in eternal death without remedy*, unless that so seemed meet to God.” This is the doctrine implied in what is said in the Confession about “Elect infants,” and the Westminster divines themselves have some of them removed all doubt about it. Dr. William Twisse, the moderator of that Assembly, in his work on the *Vessels of Mercy and Vessels of Wrath*, speaks of it (in p. 135) as consistent with the character of God that “thousands or even all the *infants* of Turks and Saracens dying in original sin, should be tormented by God in hell.” These are his own words; and again (in p. 195) he speaks of the fall of infants in Adam as “tending to the manifestation of God’s justice *in their damnation*.” And yet to keep up faith in an incredible system, the logic of Calvinism as applicable to infants, is covered up or denied. The Westminster divines knew their own system, and they saw that it involved necessarily the damnation of infants—of infants who never sin. Nor indeed can one see more injustice in inflicting the torments of hell upon infants who have never sinned, than upon adults who, though they have sinned, did so out of necessity, and could not have done otherwise.

to the moral sense that God Himself has given us, Why should we have them retained in our standards as what we are supposed to believe, and teach, and speak of as the Gospel? The retention of standards setting forth such doctrines as I have referred to, is not only unjustifiable when the Church has come to hold a higher and more Scriptural faith, but is doing great injury to the Church itself, and to the progress of true Christianity. It has, I believe, turned many away into infidelity. It proves increasingly a great stumbling-block in the way of the young. It prevents many of the best men in the Church from entering either the ministry or the eldership. It has retarded in a most serious degree the progress of Christian theology.

PROGRESS OF THEOLOGY RETARDED, OR ELSE CONSCIENCE
TAMPERED WITH.

Look at the progress made in the arts and sciences. Men there are free. They do not need to bind themselves to the ideas or rules that prevailed a hundred years ago. Where would medical and surgical science have been to-day, had our graduates, before entering the profession, been compelled to pledge themselves to conform to the practice of last century? What would the effect be if astronomers were compelled to sign their adherence to the system of Ptolemy to-day? Either they would have to sacrifice honesty to truth,—professing Ptolemy, and preaching and practising Copernicus; or they would have to sacrifice truth to honesty, and try to explain the phenomena of the planets and stars in accordance with an exploded system. This is very much the dilemma in which the Church, by maintaining her present standards, keeps her ministers. And when her ministers, by way of being faithful to the human standards, refuse to see anything outside of Calvinism, people say, “There is no progress—they are behind the age—they are allowing the power of the pulpit to decline.” If by way of being faithful

to the Divine standard they go out into the larger truth, they are then charged with dishonesty, and told that they should leave the Church! Need we wonder that our churches have been so infertile in theology, and that we have to depend so much for fresh thought and new light upon men outside of our own pale?

PUT THE CONFESSION ASIDE.

The practical question now arises:—If our Standards are so ill suited either to the creed or to the wants of the Church to-day—what is to be done? I am not in favour of mere revision of the Confession. I think we owe it to the Westminster divines to let it alone. It is valuable as a historical document. It represents their views; it cannot be made to represent ours. It has a unity of its own as it stands. To put the Gospel into it would be putting new wine into an old bottle. It would burst it. Revision would be the most difficult thing to do, and the most disappointing thing when done. It would spoil Calvinism without giving us Christianity. It would spoil the Confession for what it is, without making of it what the Church requires. No mere revision will convert a bow and arrow into a Henry-Martini; or an old donjon keep into a good church. These Westminster documents should be kept as they are, but simply as works of reference—not as standards. What we need is a brief and simple formula, containing essentials and points which might be made a basis of confederation or union with other churches. Dr. Guthrie used to declare, that everything indispensable for a Christian Church to hold could be written on a sheet of note-paper. If distinctive principles need to be exhibited, let them be put in the form of a separate testimony approved by the Synod, and presented to, but not necessarily subscribed by, our office-bearers. Far too much importance is attached to outward tests, and far too little to inward life. The living spirit of a denomination is a better

guarantee for unity than any mere outward creed. We see a proof in our own Church. Our Church has reprobation in her formula, but that has not kept it in her faith. Voluntaryism is not in her formula, but she has it in her life. As to the best substitute for our present standards, opinions will differ; but let us at least get the existing evil removed.

ECCLESIASTICAL TORYISM AND TIMIDITY.

People who cannot deny that reform is needed, but who shrink from attempting it, will say that the question should be let alone in the meantime—that opinion is not ripe for change. Then LET US RIPEN OPINION. “Not yet,” is the old cry of those who want nothing done at all. Eleven years ago, in the Edinburgh Presbytery, one of the leaders of our Church declared that the time had arrived when something should be done. But these eleven years have gone by and nothing has been done. Forty years ago, an elder spoke to the late Dr. Young of Perth about the Confession, complaining of the unscriptural character of some of its dogmas. The Doctor said it certainly ought to be revised, but the time had scarcely come. The same thing is said to-day: the same thing will continue to be said till the Church, awaking to her duty and her danger, takes reform into her own hand. Too long has our Church preached the Gospel under a kind of protest in the presence of her own standards. Too long has she permitted the Calvinism of the Confession to distort her views of God, and criminate instead of vindicate His ways with men. Too long has she allowed these Standards to present to other Churches and to the world a false view of her own faith and character. Too long has she allowed them to stand where they do; excluding some of her best and most devoted sons from the work for which they are needed, driving many from her pale altogether, hindering fellowship and union with other sections of Christ’s people, and retarding her own development and the progress of her mission-

ary work at home and abroad. Our formula seeks to protect us from the intolerance of the civil magistrate. But there is no intolerance so enslaving as false and degrading views of Almighty God. We must know the truth, for the truth alone can make us free. But how can we hope for higher light if we will not receive and openly acknowledge the light that has already been vouchsafed to us. It is time that Christian congregations should speak out and agitate for reform. We cannot have it without an earnest effort, perhaps a protracted struggle. Everywhere, those who take the first step must be prepared to face insult and abuse, antagonism and perhaps persecution. But the liberation even of our own Church for the great work to which God is calling her is worth the suffering and all the possible sacrifice. And though baffled this time, and perhaps again and yet again, success will be achieved if we are loyal to the truth.

“For freedom’s battle once begun,
Bequeathed from bleeding sire to son,
Tho’ baffled oft is ever won.”

VII.—LAST SPEECH BEFORE THE PRESBYTERY.

At a special meeting of Presbytery, held in the beginning of April, a letter from Mr. Macrae was read, giving notice that he would ask the Presbytery to transmit, in the form of a personal overture, the one anent the Standards, which the Presbytery had declined to accept as its own.

Notice was also given of an overture from his Kirk-Session, which Mr. Macrae was appointed, in the event of its being sent on, to support at the bar of the Synod.

When the Presbytery met, on April 17th, the Kirk-Session’s overture was considered first; and, notwithstanding an effort on the part of the Clerk to stop it, the Presbytery, after considerable discussion, agreed to its transmission.

Thereafter the personal overture came on, and Mr. Macrae began his argument in support of his application to have it transmitted. But he had not gone far when some members of Presbytery, perceiving that he was opening out for another attack, protested against his being allowed to proceed. The Presbytery sustained the objection, and Mr. Macrae's speech was accordingly suppressed. His notes, however, were obtained, along with his consent to their publication. We are accordingly enabled to append entire his Reasons for dissenting from the judgment of the Presbytery, and for wishing the matter carried to the Synod. They are reasons which not only vindicate his original position, but constitute a new argument for agitation and reform.

THE SPEECH.

MODERATOR,—I should like (if permission be given me) to state in detail my reasons for soliciting that this Overture, though not adopted by the Presbytery, should be transmitted now as a personal one. First of all, it seeks a reform for which there is an imperative call, and for which I believe our Church at large is prepared—namely, the Reconstruction or Revision of our Doctrinal Standards. In the second place, it gives adequate reason for this reform—namely, that our present Standards err notoriously, both by excess and by defect, failing to present the Gospel in its fulness, and, on the other hand, containing numberless propositions which are entirely out of place in a confession of faith—propositions which need not be believed by Christian people; and are, in point of fact, rejected (many of them) by multitudes of Christian people, and by whole Christian denominations. These articles are therefore schismatic, tending to perpetuate and to multiply sectarian differences. Even within our own denomination these articles are so many additional and gratuitous difficulties in the way of honest and thoughtful men accepting the Standards. And, in point of fact, they are keeping out of the eldership men who ought to be in it, and

whose services are urgently required. They are turning good men away from the ministry. They are repelling many from Christianity itself, by presenting it in a repulsive and unscriptural form. Moreover, as the overture indicates, these Standards do injustice to the Church's faith. The Church believes in man's responsibility. The Standards represent his condition as such, both by nature and predestination, that responsibility becomes a fiction, and the imputation of guilt an aspersion on the justice of God, and an outrage on the common sense of men. The Church believes that Christ came to be the Saviour of the world. The Standards teach that He came only to save a certain number called the elect. The Church believes that a *bona fide* offer of salvation can be made to all; while the Standards lay down dogmas of election and reprobation which, carried out to their logical issue, make the offer of salvation either a superfluity or a mockery—needless to the elect, who cannot possibly be lost; a mockery to the non-elect, who cannot possibly be saved. For, to suppose one of the elect lost, no matter how indifferent the Church might be; or to suppose a single one of the non-elect saved by any effort the Church might make, would be to suppose the decree of God with reference to that man overturned; whereas, the Confession declares that decree to be immutable, and the number of elect and non-elect so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished (chap. iii, 4). It seems to me sufficient reason for asking this overture to be transmitted, that it urges the Synod to put an end as soon as possible to these and other flagrant inconsistencies between the Creed we are required to profess, and the Creed we are permitted and expected to preach.

Another reason is, that the overture was never discussed upon its merits. The overture contains very damaging assertions, which the Presbytery did not attempt to disprove; and suggests and pleads for a reform which the Presbytery has not shown to be either needless or impracticable. If, therefore, there was

reason for bringing the overture to the Presbytery at all, there is the same reason now for asking its transmission to the Synod.

The reason has, to my mind, been strengthened instead of weakened by the way in which the whole matter was dealt with by most of those who spoke in the Presbytery. The great object seemed to be to get the movement suppressed. Those who thought abuse would do, tried abuse. Those who knew better, advanced as reasons for letting things alone, what should rather be reasons for action and reform—betraying, as they did, anxiety to evade the point at issue, a fear to look facts in the face, a desire to extenuate and conceal the evil rather than have it removed.

IS THE QUESTION ONE OF MERE WORDS?

Dr. Hutton, for instance, in dealing with the glaring inconsistencies shown to exist between the Church's professed creed on the one hand, and the Bible and her actual creed on the other, sneered at them as "metaphysical and microscopical." He spoke as if the whole thing amounted to this, that the Westminster divines had "failed sometimes in the choice of their expressions!" But the difference between a Saviour for the world and a Saviour for a few elect persons is not a microscopical difference. The difference between ability and inability is more than merely metaphysical. The difference between punishing men for wilful wrong-doing, and damning them to everlasting torment for doing what they could not help, is not a microscopical difference. The difference between a God who wants men to come to Him, and a God who, while entreating them to come, has all the time determined that they shall not come; between a God who willeth not that any should perish, and a God who decrees that all shall perish except a favoured few—this is not a difference that can be accounted for by mere "failure in the choice of expressions."

It is a difference between sincerity and hypocrisy; between justice and injustice; between the sovereignty of a capricious despot and the sovereignty of a Heavenly Father. And this, as far as it goes, is just the difference that distinguishes Christianity from Calvinism; that differentiates the God of the Bible from the God of the Westminster Confession. Dr. Hutton's way of explaining the difference is insulting to the framers of the Confession as well as contrary to the facts of the case. Failure in the choice of expressions is one of the last charges that can be brought against the Westminster divines. Whatever their other faults were, and they were not few, these divines were masters of expression, and expressed their meaning as clearly and accurately as the nature of the subject and their own knowledge and agreement about it permitted. The fault is not in the expression, but in the thing expressed.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PREDESTINATION AND FORE-ORDINATION A MERE FICTION.

But if these differences are neither metaphysical nor microscopical, Dr. Hutton brought forward something himself that may very accurately be so described. This is the distinction between fore-ordaining and predestinating—a distinction by means of which he hopes to deliver Calvinism from the dogma of reprobation. But Dr. Hutton cannot produce an effect without a cause, or accomplish much with a distinction where there is no difference. If God fore-ordains that a man shall be lost, nothing by any possibility can save him. The means of his perdition are equally fore-ordained and as unavoidable and irresistible as the end. Speaking of the man's fate as "predestinated" could not make it a whit more certain—could not involve it more deeply in divine causation—could not make it more impossible for the man (or for anything that can be done for him) to avert. It is moreover a distinction utterly repugnant to the Calvinistic conception of God's purpose. Let

us hear what Calvin himself says—and Calvin knew his system better than Dr. Hutton. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (book iii, c. 21, sec. 5) he says, “By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which He determined with Himself whatever He wished to happen.” [Observe here that, with reference to the sinner’s death, which is about to be spoken of, God is made to “wish” it.] Calvin proceeds:—“With regard to men, all are *not created on equal terms*; but some are fore-ordained to eternal life, others to eternal destruction. And, accordingly, as each man has been *created for one or other of these ends*, we say that he has been PREDESTINATED TO *life or DEATH*.” What then are we to think of Dr. Hutton declaring that Calvinistic predestination does not apply to the lost?

The Synod of Dort declared, in its deliverance on predestination, that God, by an absolute decree, has elected to salvation a *very small number* of men, and appointed *all the rest of mankind*, by the *same decree*, to *eternal damnation*, without any regard to their infidelity or impenitence. And the first Moderator of the very Assembly that framed our *Confession of Faith* said, that—“As for the *reprobates*, we should, if we knew them, no more pray for them than for the devils themselves.” And, in his Commentary on Romans 9th, that eminent expounder of Calvinism, John Piscator, speaks of the *predestination* of God as that “by which He elects some men to everlasting life, and *reprobates others to eternal death*.” And yet Dr. Hutton would have us believe that Calvinistic predestination has no reference to the lost!

IF REPROBATION DISBELIEVED, WHY PROFESSED?

One thing about Reprobation, I was glad to hear Dr. Hutton say. He said there was no such doctrine in Scripture. That admission it is important to have. But if reprobation is not in Scripture, why have it in our Creed? If Dr. Hutton says

it is not there, he knows at least, that the mass of people believe it to be there. Why, then, not make our position clear? If our Church rejects that dogma, let her at once declare it. Why wait before doing our duty till other Churches are willing to do theirs? Joshua said, whatever others do, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Our Church has done this in regard to one important point already. She has freed us from the suspicion of holding, as a Church, that the civil magistrate has authority in sacred things. There are plenty of people who say (just as Dr. Hutton said about reprobation) that the Confession, fairly interpreted, does not really grant the civil magistrate that authority. But our Church has not contented herself with the shelter of a doubtful interpretation. She has come out explicitly. Nor has she waited till other Churches were willing to act with her. She has acted independently; and by her honesty and independence has gained in influence, gained in self-respect, and gained in the esteem of other Churches. Why has she not dealt in the same way with reprobation? Are false views of God less mischievous—are they to be tolerated longer—than false views of the civil magistrate?

THE CONFESSION LOGICALLY MAKES GOD THE AUTHOR OF SIN.

Mr. Inglis, however, seems to think that on at least one vital point there is escape sufficient in the contradictions of the Confession itself. He was astonished that I quoted the Westminster dogma that God has "freely and unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass," without quoting the clause "yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence done to the will of the creature." This clause might be quoted to show that the Westminster divines recoiled from the conclusion of their own argument—that, like some divines amongst ourselves, they were better than their own creed. But a conclusion that follows logically from the premises cannot be invalidated by

a verbal protest.* If we say that God has established throughout the material universe the law of gravitation, it is vain to add "yet so as not to be responsible for the moon gravitating towards the earth, or the earth gravitating towards the sun." And if it be laid down as a dogma that God has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass, and has therefore fore-ordained every sin, and everything that leads to sin, it needs more than a *caveat* to keep us from the conclusion that God is responsible for sin. This becomes more manifest when we turn from the dogma of God's fore-ordination to the correlative dogma of man's inability. It is vain to say that no violence is done to the will of the creature when a dogma is laid down which practically denies to the creature any will at all. The Confession teaches that man "in consequence of the fall, has wholly *lost all ability of will* to any good accompanying salvation." If that be the case, why do we urge men to accept salvation, and warn them of the consequences if they don't? How can they accept salvation if they have lost all ability of will in that direction? There is no use crying to a drowned man to catch a rope. If man has no ability, he has no responsibility—no ability to respond to. The Confession declares that we are born in this state, "disabled and *made opposite* to all good and wholly inclined to all evil" (ch. vi, sec. 4). If so, man is guiltless. He is depraved, but not to blame for it; he was "made" so. He does wrong, but he cannot help it. If he does not repent—if he does not accept the offer of salvation, who can blame him, if he has "lost all ability of will to any good accompanying salvation?" Like the man lame from his

* Mr. Macrae had, in the very speech to which Mr. Inglis referred, anticipated and answered Mr. Inglis' criticism, though Mr. Inglis seems not to have noticed it. He said in that speech that epithets meant nothing when contradicted by the character of the thing described. "It is vain to say that the deluge was harmless, if you proceed to state that it destroyed the whole human race, except those who were in the ark" (p. 15.) The same argument is now applied to the special clause quoted by Mr. Inglis.

mother's womb, he is an object of pity, not of blame. On this theory, Adam's sin was the only sin. There has been no actual sin since. Adam was "made" able to do right but did wrong. All others do wrong, being utterly unable to do right. But even as regards Adam, if God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass—if He "determined with Himself," as Calvin says, "whatever He wished to happen with regard to every man," then He *determined* that Adam should eat the forbidden fruit, and it was impossible for Adam to do anything else. Dr. Hutton thought my objections to the Confession implied defective views of man's sinfulness. Misconception there would be perilous indeed. But if the view that man, though fallen, has not *so* fallen as to have lost all ability, and therefore all responsibility,—if this implies a defective conception of man's sinfulness, what are we to think of Dr. Hutton's view—the view of every consistent Calvinist—in logical accordance with which man, being utterly disabled and helpless, cannot be said to sin at all, and the whole responsibility of human conduct is thrown back upon the good pleasure and irresistible determination of God. This accords with the system of the Confession,* but is at variance with the Bible.

THE CONFESSION AND THE MARROW CONTROVERSY.

Another point urged in the Presbytery, in defence of the present anomalous state of things supplies, on the contrary, another argument against it. It was urged that ever since the

* Piscator says, "Man sins necessarily" (*Resp. ad Vorstii*, i, 220). Hodge says, "Sin is fore-ordained." "The reason why any event occurs is that God has so decreed" (*Syst. Theol.*, i, 544, 537). The President of the Westminster Divines, who framed the Confession, declares that "Everything done by men, be it good or bad," comes to pass "by the efficacious decree of God who doeth all in all" (*Doctr. of Synod, &c.*, p. 73). Calvin says that "God determined with Himself *whatever He wished* to happen in regard to every man."

Marrow Controversy no minister of our Church need hesitate to preach Christ as the Saviour of the world. But our formula makes no exception in favour of this great truth of the Gospel, and the *Confession of Faith* excludes it. In chapter viii, sec. 8, it is said that, "to all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, He doth certainly and effectually communicate the same."* If, therefore, Christ died for all, all must be saved. This doctrine of the Confession, if yoked with the Gospel, carries us to Universalism, to which the whole theology of the Confession is opposed. So hopeless does it seem to preach the Gospel without destroying Calvinism—to accept the Bible without discrediting the *Confession of Faith*. The very admission that we preach a salvation which the Confession denies, and which our formula makes no exception in favour of (and if no exception is needed, why have we the one about the civil magistrate?) is another proof that the relation of our Church to her creed is not an honest one, and demands immediate reform.

DISAVOW WHAT IS DISBELIEVED.

The Presbytery will thus see that the reasons for urging this reform on the attention of the Church remain in undiminished force. We have a creed of which nobody knows how much we believe and how much we disbelieve. We have a creed which is declared to exhibit the sense in which we understand the Scriptures, while everybody knows, and most of us confess, that to a greater or less extent we understand the Scriptures in a different sense. This state of things is surely not a reputable

* Dr. Cunningham, in his *Historical Theology* (ii, 329, &c.), says, "This statement contains, and was intended to contain, the true *status questionis* in the controversy about the extent of the atonement." It was intended to teach "that all for whom these blessings were ever designed or procured, do certainly receive them; or, conversely, that they were not designed or procured for any except those who ultimately partake of them."

one for a Christian Church? To be satisfied with it is dishonour; to desire a change, and yet be afraid to make it, is cowardice; and to say that the Church is not competent for the task is to confess incredible imbecility as well as disbelief in the presence of the Divine Spirit.

If the Church cannot on some points set down what she believes, it would surely not be difficult to set aside what she disbelieves. If she disbelieves what the Confession teaches, or is "supposed to teach," about infant damnation, and the doom of the heathen, she is surely not incompetent to say so. If she does not believe what the Confession teaches about man in his natural state, being not only fallen but made incapable of a single act that God can approve, made opposed not only to much but to everything that is good, and inclined not only to much but to everything that is evil: if she does not believe what the Confession teaches about Christ having died only for the elect; about the non-elect being all doomed irrevocably to eternal death; and about eternal death signifying unspeakable and everlasting torment in hell—she can surely put them aside; she is surely not so helpless and incompetent that she cannot even discard what she has come to discredit as inconsistent with the true teaching of Scripture, with common sense, and with her experience of the ways of God. Even if she has not come to disbelieve such dogmas, yet if she does not regard their belief as indispensable to Christian faith—if she recognizes as Christians many who reject them (which she does) she is surely called upon to remove them and is surely competent to remove them, from the category of essentials. Nor would it be a task transcending the ability of the Church to gather out from the Confession, and set aside along with these, all other articles which, whether true or false, believed or disbelieved, are out of place in a creed for the whole Church—a creed which is not meant to contain the truths about which Christians may differ, but only those upon which it is considered indispensable that Christians should be agreed. By the time this

process was complete, we should probably find the Westminster Confession no longer recognizable; and would see it better, if a Confession of this kind were necessary at all, to have a new one altogether.

WHAT IN PLACE OF THE CONFESSION?

This brings me now to the final reason for desiring that the overture, though not adopted by the Presbytery, should be transmitted to the Synod. It makes a practical suggestion to meet a practical difficulty. It does not propose a mere revision of the Confession, and an attempt to bring it article by article into harmony with the actual faith of the Church. This would raise countless, perhaps insuperable, certainly uncalled for, difficulties. The overture suggests a way in which this could be avoided, and a result attained that might meet the different views that are held with regard to the amount of doctrine that a church should officially endorse. Some are of opinion that what we want is the briefest and simplest creed possible, consistently with a presentation of the essentials of our faith—such a creed as would remove the needless difficulties which our present creed puts in the way—such a creed as might at the same time form a basis of union or confederation with all Christian Churches throughout the world. Others, again, feel that it is important for us to have our distinctive principles kept prominently in view, not only to educate and unite our own people, but to show others our denominational position, and let these principles have their proper influence upon the world. The overture suggests a way in which both ends might be gained. It suggests that the binding creed should contain only what are and may continue to be deemed the essentials. It suggests that, apart from this, there should be drawn up a list of subordinate and distinctive principles, in the form of a testimony, which might be periodically revised and approved by the Synod, and which

would show forth the general attitude of the denomination towards the various questions to which it might be thought desirable to refer. This would be doing with some degree of completeness what is actually done for isolated questions like Disestablishment by every Synodical vote.

In this way the essentials of Christian faith would be separated from what is merely denominational; and matters of private interpretation and individual opinion would be kept out of the Church's creed altogether.

BY ANY METHOD LET THE EVIL BE REMOVED.

It is of secondary importance, however, the mere method which the Synod might deem best for the rectification of her doctrinal position. The great point is to get the Church to look earnestly at this whole question, to ascertain if it be not the case that the antiquated creed which she continues to profess, mistakes in many important points the true teaching of Scripture, distorts the character of God, and misrepresents the actual faith of our Church. If so, the duty of the Church is plain and imperative.

I would be glad, under these circumstances, if the Presbytery could see its way to transmit my overture in the following form:—

“That the time has come when the Standards of our Church ought to be revised. That they are too long and too intricate, and defeat the very object of their length and minuteness by preventing the members of the Church from becoming acquainted with them. Further, that, with all their voluminousness, they probably omit more than one thing which they ought to contain, and certainly contain a great many things which they ought to omit—mixing up matters of opinion with matters of faith, separating Christian Churches from one another, multiplying difficulties in the way of a Catholic union, and hindering in a variety of ways the progress of Christ's kingdom. That even as regards the Church's own relation to its creed, two hundred years of research and experience have developed differences be-

tween the professed and the actual faith of the Church, and that the spectacle of a Church professing to hold all these articles as articles of faith, while holding many of them only as matters of opinion, and not holding some of them at all, is a bad example to the world and demoralising to the Church herself. That her continued timidity in dealing with these Standards in view of such facts is discreditable to her faith in the abiding presence of God's Spirit; is a policy of unfaithfulness to the truth; and a policy that would be by no party more condemned than by the men who framed these Standards according to the light they had, and by the Reformers whose creed has been preserved, but whose prompt and fearless loyalty to truth has been to a large extent lost. That our own Church, from her history and also from her present position (as free on the one hand from entanglement with the State, and on the other hand from union negotiations) stands now in a peculiarly favourable position for undertaking the work of revision, which important work the Synod is respectfully overtured to commence, with the view of either substituting for the present subordinate standards, a brief and simple formula, containing only those articles of faith which we think every man, in order to belong to the visible Church of Christ, must hold, and relegating to a separate category merely distinctive principles; or in such other way as the Synod may in its wisdom deem best, extricating the Church from her present unworthy position, and removing the mischievous arrest which her present Standards would place (and to some extent have placed) upon her inalienable right freely to advance in the knowledge of God, freely to speak the whole truth of the Bible, and freely to adapt herself to the wants of every nation and of every age, in order more effectually to accomplish the great work for which she exists."

VIII.—OVERTURE FROM MR. MACRAE'S KIRK-SESSION.

After considerable discussion in the Presbytery, Mr. Macrae withdrew his personal overture on account of the Presbytery consenting to transmit the overture from his session, which he had been appointed to support before the Synod. He said he

would have preferred supporting his own; but his Kirk-Session's, though less explicit, covered the ground sufficiently, and would allow him to say all he meant to say before the Supreme Court.

The following are the terms of the Kirk-Session's overture:—

“Whereas the main object of our subordinate standards is to show forth as accurately as possible the views of God's character and will as believed and preached in our Church; and, whereas our present subordinate standards fail in this object, and tend very much to misrepresent our views of the truth, the Synod is respectfully overtured either to set these standards aside, or to take such steps as in its wisdom it may deem best, in order to bring the Church's formula into harmony with the Church's faith, and to remove what has proved a stumbling-block to many in the way of accepting office in the Church, as well as a barrier in the way of union among Christian people.

DAVID MACRAE, *Moderator of Session.*

WM. COCHRAN, *Session-Clerk.*

APPENDIX.

IS MR. MACRAE'S PICTURE OF THE THEOLOGY
OF THE CONFESSION A "CARICATURE?"

As Mr. Macrae's summary of the Calvinistic system embodied in the standards was called again and again, "a caricature," and "a distorted picture of the Confession," by persons both in the Presbytery and out of it, who either did not know their own Confession, or did not wish its actual character to be known,—we append here the very words of the Confession, side by side with Mr. Macrae's.

REV. DAVID MACRAE.

The Confession teaches that God, for His own glory, has predestinated some men to be saved, but that all the rest of mankind He has predestinated to damnation and everlasting torment in hell.

It teaches that while there is no fear for the elect, there is no hope for the non-elect.

It teaches that God has absolutely and unchangeably fixed the very number, so that not one of them (the non-elect) can

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CONFESSION OF FAITH.

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and some foreordained to everlasting death.—Chap. iii, 3.

They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.—Chap. xvii, 1.

Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved.—Chap. x, 4.

These men and angels, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their

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be brought over to the ranks of the saved, preach to them and pray for them as you will.

It teaches that none are redeemed by Christ but the elect only.

It teaches that the rest of mankind are not only unable to believe in Christ, and beyond His power to redeem, but are brought into the world by God utterly unable to help themselves.

It teaches that God hardens them, withholding the grace by which they might have been enlightened in their understandings and wrought upon in their hearts.

It teaches that by reason of the sin of Adam, apart from any fault of their own, they come into the world wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body, utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.

number is so certain and definite that it cannot either be increased or diminished.—Chap. iii, 4.

Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved but the elect only.—Chap. iii, 6.

The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.—Chap. iii, 7.

Man by his fall into a state of sin hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse to that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself or to prepare himself thereunto.—Chap. ix, 3.

As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God as a righteous judge for former sins doth blind and harden, from them He not only withholdeth His grace whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings and wrought upon in their hearts; but sometimes, &c.—Chap. v, 6.

By this sin they (our first parents) fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.

They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.

From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed our actual transgressions.—Chap. vi, 2, 3, 4.

It teaches that because of this sin, which they could not and cannot help, they are bound helplessly over to the wrath of God and the curse of the law, and so made subject to spiritual, temporal, and eternal death.

It teaches that even in heathen lands, where they have never heard, and therefore never had an opportunity of accepting the Gospel, they cannot be saved, no matter how earnestly they may frame their lives according to the light of nature, or the laws of that religion which they profess.

It teaches that if they do wrong it is a sin and they are damned for it, and if they do right it is still sin and they are damned all the same. If they turn to one hand it is bad, if they turn to the other it is worse. If they obey the law of God it is sin, if they disobey it is worse sin.

Repent and return to God, it is declared they cannot. They cannot even make an effort that way; they are unchangeably predestinated to be damned.

And after death, according to our standard, they are all cast into hell, there to endure for ever and ever unspeakable torments of soul and body as long as God Himself shall exist.

It teaches that of the countless myriads of babes who have died and are dying in infancy, only the elect are saved.

Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries—spiritual, temporal, and eternal.—Chap. vi, 6.

Much less can men not professing the Christian religion be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they ever so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and to the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may is very pernicious and to be detested.—Chap. x, 4.

Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands and of good use both to themselves and others, yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner according to the Word, nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are, therefore, sinful and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. And yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing unto God.—Chap. xvi, 7.

Chap. iii, 3, 4, 7; chap. ix, 3, quoted above.

Chap. vi, 4; ix, 3; and iii, 3, also quoted above.

But the wicked who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal fire, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power (Chap. xxxiii, 2); or, as the Larger Catechism (another of the Standards) puts it—"Cast into hell and be punished with UNSPEAKABLE TORMENTS, both of BODY AND SOUL, with the devil and his angels, FOR EVER.

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated in Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and how, and where He pleaseth.

For the non-elect, young and old, it has no fate but the unending and unspeakable torments of hell.

Others not elected cannot be saved.—Chap. x, 4, quoted above, also chap. xxxiii, 2.

Whether Mr. Macrae's picture is or is not a caricature, the reader can judge for himself; and whether this is the theology believed and preached in our churches, Presbyterian readers will also be able to judge without much hesitation.

