

## Our Contributors.

### Presbyterian and Personal Character.

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Mr. Chairman: In my view Presbyterianism and Christian character are synonymous terms. Had it not been for their sterling character our fathers would never have given us our Presbyterianism; and if it were not for our Presbyterianism, most of us would have no character. Character is the diamond that scratches every stone. Character is the man, standing with his bare feet upon the ground, who cannot by taking thought add one cubit to his stature.

We are hearing a good deal, nowadays, about the decay of those old-fashioned doctrines which constitute Presbyterianism. It is popular for magazines and newspapers to dilate upon the decay of Calvinism. There is no morsel quite so appetizing to the average editorial palate as an essay which boldly asserts the decay of some good and established institution. If you want to get your article published write about the decay of something. It will suit the craving of the natural heart. If you should describe the good health of your next door neighbour you could hardly expect to see your production in print. But tell about your neighbour having the small-pox, and you will be an author widely read. It is so in moral matters. The man who goes astray is more eagerly read about than the man who pursues the even tenor of his righteous way. The Bible says there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety-and-nine just men who need no repentance. But on earth there is more joy over one good man gone wrong than over ninety-nine just men trying to go right.

A brilliant writer, in one of the recent reviews, spoke of Calvinism as a paralyzing error. That writer needs a good dose of bonceet in the shape of history. Calvinism may have been sharpened, edged, but paralyzing never. Ask the Huguenots to whom it came as the voltage of an electric battery, enabling them to face death rather than surrender faith. It put iron in the blood of William the Silent, and those peerless Hollanders who fought for eighty years against the legions of Spain, going into battle belted with the motto "Nisi Dominus frustra" and shouting "Better a Turk than Papist." It was the fibre in John Knox's arm, and Murray's, and Andrew Melville, the men who built a new Scotland out of old, which presents to the world to-day the stubborn fact of a nation having the most Calvinism and the least crime.

John Morley said (in criticism of a certain history which omitted the name of John Calvin), "To write your book and leave out John Calvin shows that you have read history with one eye blind. You have given a place to Hobbs and Cromwell, but compared with Calvin, Hobbs and Cromwell are hardly more than names written in water, for Calvinism saved Europe in the sixteenth century."

One American historian, Bancroft, says: "He who does not honor the memory and influence of Calvin, betrays his ignorance of the origin of American liberty."

The history of Puritanism is simply a chapter of Calvinism. The men of the "Mayflower" who crossed a wilderness of

water in order to subdue the wilderness of land, and who laid the foundations of the American Republic were the Spiritual children of John Calvin.

History is the mirror which reflects the influence of Presbyterianism upon character. It has nerved more men and women to die for Christ with joy in their souls and psalms on their lips than any other faith. In an address to this very Alliance, 1886, the Methodist Conference said: Your creed has furnished the inspiring spectacle not simply of a solitary and heroic soul here and there, but of generations of faithful souls, ready for the sake of Christ and His truth to go cheerfully to prison and to death. (This rare honor you rightly esteem as the most precious part of your priceless heritage.)

In those centuries when religious tyranny was numbering its victims by the hundreds of thousands; when in England, Scotland, Switzerland, Holland, France, men had to recant their faith or seal their testimony with their blood, nearly all the martyrs were Calvinists. Says a careful writer: "There is no other system of religion in the world which has such a glorious array of martyrs to the faith. Almost every man and woman who walked to the flames rather than deny the faith, or leave a stain on conscience, was the devout follower not only and first of all of the Son of God, but also of that minister of God who made Geneva the light of Europe, John Calvin."

I need not tell you that the heroic moral energy inspired by Calvinism has been the admiration of historians. I need not quote the familiar tributes of Morley, Thomas Carlyle, or James Anthony Froude, John Morley says, "Calvinism has inspired incomparable energy, concentration, resolution. It has exalted its votaries to a pitch of heroic moral energy that has never been surpassed. They have exhibited an active courage, a resolute endurance, a cheerful self-restraint, an exulting self-sacrifice, that men count among the highest glories of the human conscience."

Our greatest American historian did not speak too strongly when he said: "English Presbyterianism, with its open Bible, its spiritual and intellectual freedom, meant the Protestantism of the American colonies, and of that virile and multiplying race, which for three centuries has been carrying the Anglo-Saxon language and institutions into all the world." (Bancroft.)

The German historian Ranke says: "John Calvin was the virtual founder of America."

This statement is based upon the fact that of the three millions of population in America at the time of the Revolution, nine hundred thousand were of Scotch origin, six hundred Puritan English, and four hundred thousand Dutch and Huguenot. Those figures mean that two-thirds of the founders of the Republic were trained in the school of John Calvin. Thus, the system of truth, which we call Presbyterianism, put its definite stamp on the character of the American Republic. It fostered industry, commerce and navigation. It was the guardian angel of science; it sanctified home life and family ties, and promoted by its high moral standard, purity in our social circles. A tree is known by its fruits. But no tree can flourish without roots. The

roots of Presbyterianism are in the word of God. They were always there! We talk sometimes as if our Church was born with Martin Luther's Reformation. That Reformation simply digged and watered the earth and gave the tree a chance to flourish. But Martin Luther's Reformation needed the peculiar genius of John Calvin to put certain great features into practical, fruit-bearing shape. John Calvin was a boy of eight years when Luther was placarding that old Cathedral door at Wittenberg. When Luther died, the first glorious period of Reform movement came to an end, a moment largely, and of necessity, negative and destructive. Then God raised up a man who should inaugurate the positive and constructive period; and the center of gravity shifted from Wittenberg to Geneva. Do you think it was merely human coincidence that the years of Calvin's activity at Geneva correspond with the sittings of the famous Council of Trent? The very time when the constructive gems of John Calvin enabled Protestantism to prevent a united front to Rome, resting the reaction under Loyola and the Jesuites? Presbyterianism became a builder of character, because it did not stop with being a merely ecclesiastical or dogmatical formula, but became a life system fitting itself into the folds and crevices of human heart. The primary appeal of Presbyterianism is not to the emotions but to the intellect, not only defining truth but making personal application of it. It is philosophical, but if it were philosophical only, it would be as changeable as human philosophy ever is, but it has its roots in the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever.

Another direct effect of Presbyterianism on character; it makes no compromise with sin. There are hard sayings in its doctrines because there are hard sayings in the Bible. Many are offended at the so-called harshness of some of our points of belief. "This is a hard saying, who can hear it," they said in Christ's day of Christ teachings. The question now of Is Presbyterianism suited to the needs in personal character to-day? We are living in an age signalized by many new things. We have new chemistry, a new pedagogy a new psychology, a new astronomy. A new astronomy? But I notice that our steamer crossed the trackless ocean in safety because it was steered by the same old sun, and same old stars. As another has said, "We have a new psychology, but reason, memory and judgment are the same as when Aristotle taught an Isaiah caught his vision. We may boast of a new chemistry but when our Romeo courts the new Juliet, however much he may know how to classify the constituent elements of the human body, he forgets all about grouping that beautiful Juliet into small jars marked lime, phosphates and carbon, but just simply loves her in the same old-fashioned way."

But we are told that the community in general has been lifted to a much higher plane of moral thinking and living through the great and universal power of the printing press. The daily paper comes to every man's breakfast table. Knowledge once pent up in the minister's library, or the college class-room, has burst its dykes and flows in copious stream to every man's door. We are told that the printing press has displaced the preacher! Well, I take up my morning newspaper to read of the beautiful deeds of this new humanity, redeemed by the printing press, and to my astonishment I find nearly every column filled with records of lapses from all the Ten Commandments. It tells of poorhouses and prisons