

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE CONSENSUS.

The consensus which the Presbyterian Alliance are discussing is a somewhat different thing from the consensus of Christendom. But it would be well if our readers had an acquaintance generally with what is meant by the consensus of Christendom and how much it signifies.

The great principle expounded by Vincentius of Lerius was, that whatsoever was held by all Christians in all lands and at all times must be the infallible truth of God, the saving Catholic faith, every departure from which is soul-destroying heresy. His famous formula has been sounded ever since, and especially in the recent times of the "Catholic revival" in England, "*Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.*"

It must be conceded at once that there is a certain value attachable to the consensus or agreement of all Christians always and everywhere. A certain strength is believed to belong to such opinions and interpretations; a certain security is felt in holding such views; the mind shaken by doubt and perplexity, confused and saddened by conflicting sentiments finds a certain rest and reassurance in accepting the positions of the grand majority or totality of Christian men. Cardinal Newman tells us it was a single sentence of this sort which detached him from the Church of England and won him over to the Church of Rome; a sentence of St. Augustine: "*Securus judicis ortis terrarum*"—the opinion of the whole world is safe. That which so powerfully swayed a powerful intellect must have force, and that which is felt by every man as soon as he hears it to have weight with him deserves serious consideration. It can never be a comfortable thing to differ in religion from the world-wide sentiment of catholicity. It must always raise a suspicion of error or craze, if not of actual heresy, when we find ourselves out of sympathy with the body of Christ. On the other hand, when we see where a man is landed who gives himself up to Vincent's principle, when we see its outcome in John Henry Newman, we pause to think and venture to scrutinize it. We find when we do so that like any other law it is "good if a man use it lawfully."

Here are the limitations to the famous principle of consensus—limitations very clearly set forth by Dr. Charles Hodge.

1. The consent must be the consent of converted men, men having the Spirit. For it is plain that the whole society called the visible Church may sometimes include vast numbers of unspiritual men, mere nominal Christians. Simon Magus believed and was baptized. The opinions of ten thousand Simons would not be surely and certainly true!

2. The consent must be consent of spiritual men about essential doctrines, and not about mere ecclesiastical arrangements. There is a Divine guaranty that converted people who have the Spirit will think much alike on essentials, the nature of God, the person of Christ, the way of salvation. But there is not the same certainty that believers will think alike on the manner of worship or the details of Church government.

3. The consent must be consent upon doctrines contained in the Bible, not on things outside of that canon. All Christians at one time believed, and believed everywhere that the sun moved round the earth. They were wrong, and the consensus of Christendom was in error. And when the true doctrine of the earth's motion was propounded many resisted and rejected it because it contradicted the great Catholic principle: "*Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.*" The principle must be subject to limitations. The consent must be the consent of all spiritual persons about essential truths and truths taught in canonical Scripture.

With these, which may be called Protestant limitations, the principle is a good one. The Spirit has been promised to lead Christians into all truth, to throw light on all things Christ has commanded. Where, then, there is any doubt or difficulty it must be of immense value to know what the whole body of faithful men in every age of the Church and in every country have held and taught. The consensus will, when rightly balanced and limited, furnish a powerful plea for any great essential principle. It confronts Socialism, on one hand, as to the person of Christ; it

confronts and refutes Plymouthism, on the other hand, as to the way of salvation.

Let our young divines learn the use of this powerful principle, a weapon which is none the less powerful and useful because one or two clever men have misread it, and misapprehended its true scope and value.—*Be fast Witness.*

WHILE WE MAY.

The hands are such dear hands:
They are so full; they tuck at our demands
So often; they reach out,
With trifles scarcely thought about,
So many times; they do
So many things for me, for you—
If their fond wills mistake,
We may well bend, not break.

They are such fond, frail lips
That speak to us. Pray, if love strips
Them of discretion many times,
Or if they speak too slow or quick, such crimes
We may pass by; for we may see
Days not far off when those small words may be
Held not as slow, or quick, or out of place, but dear,
Because the lips are no more here.

They are such dear, familiar feet that go
Along the path with ours—feet fast or slow,
And trying to keep pace—if they mistake
Or tread upon some flower that we would take
Upon our break, or bruise some reed,
Or crush poor Hope until it bleed,
We may be mute,
Not turning quickly to impute
Grave fault; for they and we
Have such a little way to go—can be
Together such a little while along the way.
We will be patient while we may.

So many little faults we find.
We see them; for not blind
Is Love. We see them; but if you and I
Perhaps remember them some by and by,
They will not be
Faults then—grave faults—to you and me,
But just odd ways—mistakes, or even less—
Remembrances to bless.
Days change so many things—yes, hours.
We see so differently in suns and showers.
Mistaken words to-night
May be so cherished by to-morrow's light.
We may be patient; for we know
There's such a little way to go.

—Independent.

STANDING BY THE CHURCH.

Nothing is more clear than that those who adhere faithfully to the principles and usages that were carried into the United Presbyterian Church at her organization, and that have always entered essentially and distinctively into her character, have a right to a place unmolested in her fold. They have all the rights and privileges of the Church in opposition to those who are unlawfully making inroads upon her profession and her peace. The idea has been thrown out occasionally that those who are standing by the profession might eventually secede. The daily paper which most fully published the proceedings of the Assembly at St. Louis, intimated that a convention was to be called at Xenia, by the friends of the purity of worship, to consider the question of secession, and it has been hinted, both publicly and privately, that such a course would be acceptable to a great many of those who are on the other side of the question.

We may say for the information of all concerned that the idea of secession is not cherished by those who are loyal to the principles of the Church. They believe these principles. They are endeavouring to adhere to them and to hold them forth to the world as the true principles of the Reformation, sealed by the blood of many martyred saints, and which for ages have been such a blessing to the Church and to the world. In those dark days, described in our series of articles on the "Struggles for a pure religion in Scotland," the Presbyterians did not secede when those who were making inroads upon the great Reformation principles obtained the ascendancy. The loyal reformers only became more zealous for their principles and appealed the more fervently to God to sustain them. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland with her reformed professor embodied in the Westminster standards was the heritage which they refused to forsake. Even when the great body of the ministers were false or indifferent, the mass of the people stood their ground and God answered their faith by defeating the strong combination of human power that sought to overthrow their profession.

Let us learn a lesson from these struggles. It is

nothing new that friends of truth have to struggle in apparent weakness against the odds of human power. If, like the apostle, we feel that when we are weak then we are strong, the results will be as they were in his experience, and in due time we will be able to say with him: "Thanks be unto God who always causeth us to triumph in Christ." The friends of the purity of worship have a responsibility in reference to the whole trust, spiritual and material, of the United Presbyterian Church which they cannot safely throw off in the present circumstances.—*Christian Instructor.*

ONE MAN'S WORK IN ITALY.

The *American Messenger* says: The following encouraging letter has been received from Dr. McDougall, Florence:

"The Free Italian Church in Milan is remarkable in many ways. It is one of our largest churches in Italy. The spirit of liberality has been well developed, for last year \$580 were raised by the members, who are all poor workmen. Best of all, they are very zealous and enthusiastic in spreading the Gospel. They seize every opportunity, and sometimes provoke it, for testifying for Jesus. The women get into discussions with the Catholic women, and the men have controversies with bigots, infidels, and careless persons among their fellows, and they succeed oftentimes in bringing their antagonists to the Christian church to see and hear for themselves.

"There is one man, however, in whom you will be interested, who excels all others in active and untiring exertions for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. His name is Colombo. He was formerly a game-keeper, but has long since laid aside his gun. Here is how he works for the Master. Twice or three times a week he fills his game-bag with tracts, Testaments, and Bibles, and sells forth in all directions in the neighbourhood of Milan. He ranges to a distance of seven or eight miles at times. He is a regular colporteur. He has a fine eye for opportunities, and turns them to profit in a masterful fashion. When any religious festival is being observed, Colombo takes up his position in the public square, and as the people leave the church he invites them to come and listen to him as he reads the Bible aloud. Very animated discussions at times ensue, and a large sale of books is the consequence. At other times the priests step forward and rouse the passions of the people against our good brother, who, judging discretion to be the better part of valour, withdraws from the scene. Occasionally he runs great risk of a beating.

"Colombo is now an old man, but full of faith and earnestness. He wishes to see the Word of God and Christian literature in the hands of all men, and so he buys these Christian wares, and scatters the good seed in the whole district of Milan. Many a time he gives away his whole stock.

"You may imagine what a number of friends he has made for the Gospel, and how heartily he is hated by the clerical party. No man is better known all round Milan, and no man is doing a nobler missionary work."

BAD TEMPER.

The Christian whom nature gave a choleric temperament often finds his temper a mighty foe to conquer and difficult to hold in subjection. Plato fought this ever-active enemy in himself by sheer force of will, as when one day, his servant having given him offence, he raised his hand to strike him: "Thou art angry, Plato!" said his inward voice. In an instant Plato's imperial will asserted its right of control over his rising passion and restrained his hand from giving the threatened blow. Seeing him standing for a long time with his arm uplifted, a friend asked: "Why do you stand thus, Plato?" The philosopher replied: "I am punishing an angry man." This was wise action for a heathen philosopher; but a Christian has, in his faith, a far more effectual weapon for fighting against his temper. Let him but commit his choleric temperament with his whole nature to God to be cleansed of all its sinful activities, without doubting that He will make it all that it ought to be, and he will surely find himself, not merely a conqueror, but "more than conqueror" through the blood of Jesus and the might of the Comforter. Purity is serenity; but let no man persuade himself that he can keep both a good conscience and a bad temper.—*Zion's Herald.*