

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE PROTECTIVE VALUE OF CREEDS.

It has become fashionable to regard creeds as the symbols of theological tyranny. The man who has subscribed to a positive confession of faith is pitied as the victim of a more or less irksome churchly oppression. He is commiserated; he is consoled with; he is pointed forward to a time when he shall regain his surrendered freedom, and be loosed from the iron chains of dogmatic formulas, in the millennium of creedless and churchless Christianity. Young men are warned that in giving their assent to this or that ecclesiastical symbol they are forfeiting their intellectual liberty, endangering the symmetry of their development, shackling their literary and philosophical activity.

We do not propose to discuss the justice of this assumption here. It must be admitted that the adoption of a theological system involves the resignation of a certain sort of liberty. The same thing is true in philosophy and the sciences. A materialist has resigned his liberty of believing in the existence of the soul. A Darwinian is tied to the theory of evolution. Every positive belief shuts out the possibility of accepting that which contradicts it. Every *credo*, like every *cogito*, is a self-limitation, a restriction, a surrender of absolute freedom. But freedom without restriction is license: indeed, it cannot be said to exist in a universe of law. The only man who is free to think and believe what he pleases is the idiot; and even he possesses that freedom only in appearance.

But there is another side to the subject. Creeds have a protective value. A true creed is not the mere expression of the individual opinion of this or that party, or community of men. It is the best embodiment which could be given, under the circumstances and in the age in which it originated, to a certain system of doctrine. This system is voluntarily adopted, in the first instance, by a religious community, and subsequently accepted by all those who choose to connect themselves with it. The church so constituted is no longer a mere crowd of changing individuals, but an organic body, with a principle of unity which insures its permanent existence, while the atoms which compose it, come and go, appear and vanish, increase and decrease, with the passing years. The creed is the defence of every individual, and of the whole body against the sudden fluctuations of human opinion, the destructive influence of hostile circumstances, the absolutism of an uncertain ecclesiastical majority.

Imagine a church without a creed. Her only belief is the religious feeling, beautiful, free, vital, which ebbs and flows like the blood of life through the whole body. She will not formulate it: she will not bind it in the iron fetters of written words. She will be confessionless, Catechism-free, simply and purely a church of Christ. Very good: but two powers she must yet retain, if she is to have a real existence; namely, the essential powers of every organized body, admission and expulsion. How is a man to be admitted to this church of Christ? By the will, and according to the judgment of a fluctuating majority, which may draw the line of eligibility here to-day, and there to-morrow. Or perhaps by a select body of ecclesiastical rulers, whose personal opinions are endowed with absolute authority. How is a useless or injurious member to be expelled from this church of Christ? Again, by the will of the majority, or the appointed powers, bound to no fixed principles, but left free to be swayed, this way or that way, by personal prejudices, external influences, fallible judgments. They say unto this man, Come, and he cometh, and to another, Go, and he goeth. That is ecclesiastical absolutism.

But the moment you introduce a creed you have a safeguard, a check, a protection. No longer the arbitrary decree, the changeable opinion of a certain number of men, but a clear system of doctrine is supreme. Every man who chooses to adopt that system as his own is protected in believing it, teaching it, and carrying it out to its legitimate conclusions. If he cannot conscientiously and from conviction accept the system at the outset, he must forego the privilege of membership in that particular church. But once having arrived at the conclusion that the system is true, once having given his assent to its principles, and adopted it as his own, he is secure in his liberty to follow it with unbroken zeal, and to proclaim it with perfect freedom, as long as he finds himself in harmony with

it. No change in the composition or opinion of the church can deprive him of that liberty. If it should come to pass, in the next few months, that the majority of Presbyterian ministers should "drift away" from the doctrine of the sacrificial atonement of Christ, the minority could still proclaim from their pulpits the sin-bearing death of the Lamb of God.

Two consequences follow.

First. The sure and only appeal of a minister accused of heresy is to the creed. Right or wrong, he must be judged by it; he must be condemned or vindicated according to his position towards that system which he professes to accept; his relation to the church must be determined by his actual harmony or discord with her embodied faith. An honest, candid, submissive appeal to the Standards is always to be respected. Judgment must be pronounced upon it in the temper of perfect sincerity and faithfulness.

Second. Accusations of "unsafe tendency" and "dangerous views" are altogether out of place in a church with a creed. Every member of such a church has a right to protest against vague and dark impeachments of his orthodoxy; and the honor of the church is bound to respect and support this protest. Once admit that a man may be silenced, or suspended, or expelled for so misty and intangible a thing as a tendency, and you have destroyed the protective value of the creed, and carried us back under the sway of churchly despotism. It is very much to be regretted that in the trial of Professor Smith, in the Free Church of Scotland, this error has been made. The charge of teaching that which is not in harmony with the system of the Westminster Confession has been supplemented by an accusation of "dangerous tendency." That is not to the point. It can neither be proved nor disproved. It is a slippery, unfair accusation. The real question, and the only question, is, Has he ceased to hold and teach the doctrine of the Confession of Faith? By that he must stand or fall.

In every church the creed is the expression, the guarantee, the bulwark, of religious freedom.—*Philadelphia Presbyterian*.

GREAT THINGS HANG ON LITTLE HINGES.

A few years ago a little boy had a present from his grandmamma of a little text-book. It was bound in red leather and had his name written on it. One day, when he went to visit the lions at Lynn Mart, his little book fell out of his pocket. He was a very little boy, and much troubled at the loss of the book, for his name was written on it by his grandmother herself.

The matter was almost forgotten, when a year afterward the clergyman of a parish, about eight miles from Lynn, gave the following history of the lost book.

He said he had been sent for to see the wife of a man living on a wild common on the outskirts of his parish, a notoriously bad character. The message was brought to him by the medical man who attended her, and who, after describing her as being most strangely altered, added, "You will find the lion become a lamb;" and so it proved. She who had been wild and rough, whose language had been violent and her conduct untamed, lay on a bed of exceeding suffering, patient and resigned.

On arriving at the house the clergyman heard the following story from the woman herself, explaining the cause of the marvellous change: Her child had picked up the text-book and carried it home as a lawful spoil. Curiosity—or, rather, some feeling put into her heart by Him without whose leave a sparrow falleth not to the ground—had induced her to read it. The Word had been blessed to her, and the understanding opened to receive the gospel of truth. Sin in her sight had become hateful; blasphemy was no longer heard from her lips. She drew from under her pillow her "precious book," as she called it, which had taken away the fear of death.

She died soon afterward, filled with joy and hope in believing, having in those portions of Scripture found a Saviour to bear her burden of guilt, and present her, clad in His own spotless righteousness, before the throne of God. God's providence had brought to her that little book to lead her to Christ.

THE IRONY OF LIFE.

But after all, the irony of life is best known when we consider time with reference to eternity. It must seem almost inconceivable to celestial beings, if they have any consciousness of what takes place on earth,

that we, the little insects of an hour, who profess to believe in immortality and a future state, should live as if our existence on earth were our all in all. The disproportion between the interests at stake is so infinite, that comparison is impossible. And yet practically the great majority of Christian men do live as if this world were everything, and throw themselves with as much eagerness into the trifles of the present as if they were to last forever. What a tremendous irony there is in the parable of our Saviour:

The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought within himself, saying, what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?

This is the sum of the whole matter. If we live in the full consciousness that we are but shadows here, and pursue only shadows upon earth—that we are but children who await a glorious inheritance, and that nothing is of any real value which does not fit and prepare us for our future destiny there will be no irony in our lives as regards our aims and our employments, for we shall subordinate everything to the thought of the hereafter. We shall know how to proportion our interest, and avoid all extravagance, either of sorrow or of joy, thankfully making use of the blessings which the favor of the Almighty may bestow upon us, but always in our life-voyage keeping steadily in view the haven for which we are bound.—*Blackwood's Magazine*.

WHY I GIVE.

1st. I give, because it does me good to do so. I am conscious of the worldliness of my nature. But giving helps to soften and break down that worldliness, and quickens somewhat the latent sympathies and emotions of my being. And this I know is in the direction of a higher tone of this earthly life.

2nd. I give, because giving is the very genius and spirit of the world. The sun gives. The cloud gives. The air gives. The flower gives. The day gives. The night gives. All nature, indeed, is a ministry, ever serving, ever giving, and shall I withhold?

3rd. I give, because I am always receiving. God is giving to me every hour of every day in a thousand different ways and forms, and surely it is a small matter indeed that I should give back a little again to Him.

4th. I give, because in so doing I set a useful example to others. I feel that every Christian is bound to be a pattern to others around him. Liberality for Christ is a grace sadly lacking in the religious community. If, by my example, I can help to enlarge it, I am bound to do so. Therefore I give.

5th. I give, because giving brings a blessing. Even in this life it does so. The liberal soul shall be made fat. And in the life to come, who can tell the splendour of its reward.

6th. I give, because it is the injunction of the Bible. God enjoins it. Christ taught it. The Apostles commended it. Let two sentences suffice—"It is more blessed to give than to receive;" "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver."

Finally, I shall give systematically, because it is rational so to give; because it will help to secure a more intelligent estimate of the claims for which I give; and because were systematic giving the practice of the Church, its financial operations would be vastly more easily conducted.

FORBEARANCE is a domestic jewel, not to be worn for state or show, but for daily and unostentatious ornament.

THE best thing to be done to lighten municipal life of its plethora, its venous blood at the heart, is to form emigrant aid societies, to help the surplus away to the prairie, to the hillsides, and valleys, and make room for healthier life, for cooler, clearer blood. This will set the whole body aglow.—*Presbyterian*.

THE world abounds in ruins resulting from neglect; and perdition is reached as certainly by neglect as by any other means. A neglected child grows up for ruin; the neglected business fails; the neglectful engineer wrecks his train; the neglectful sailor strands his vessel; the negligent general is certain to be overthrown, and "how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"—*Methodist Recorder*.