

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

WHY ARE YOU A PRESBYTERIAN?

BY REV. JOHN FAIRBANKS.

MR. EDITOR,—This is a fair question, and one which every intelligent member of the Church should be able to answer. In many cases the honest answer, perhaps, would be, "I am a Presbyterian because my father and mother belonged to that Church, and I was brought up in it and taught its peculiar doctrines." Another would say, "I was brought to the knowledge of the truth in connection with the Presbyterian Church, and connected myself with it, and now I like it, and am so edified and comforted in waiting upon ordinances as conducted in that denomination that I have no wish to change." A third might say, "I attend the Presbyterian Church because it is most convenient, and I feel quite at home among the Christian people who worship there." Other reasons might be given of a less satisfactory character than these, but a very large proportion of those who are connected with the Church, if honest, would be found to give no better reason.

These three reasons are good so far as they go. No one should leave the Church in which he has been brought up—the Church of pious parents—without a good and sufficient reason. A man is justified in connecting himself with the Church in which he expects to receive spiritual nurture and comfort. Generally speaking, it is for edification that men worship with those closely connected by neighbourhood where no principle is sacrificed. Still as these reasons assume that all denominations are alike branches of the Church of Christ, and make nothing of their differences, they fail to shew why you are a Presbyterian rather than a member of any other denomination. Nor do they afford any justification for maintaining the Presbyterian Church as distinct from other Churches. Either there are *principles* involved of grave importance, or you are guilty of the sin of schism in maintaining an organization distinguished by doctrine, government and practice from other branches of the catholic Church of God.

In order that it may be clearly understood *why* you are a Presbyterian, you must clearly comprehend what a Presbyterian is. In the minds of some the name is of the same import as an unconverted fatalist and formalist. To others it suggests an enemy of the State, a rebel, and a man of vulgar habits. To a third, a very obstinate, strict man, zealous for the Sabbath, the Bible and orthodoxy, but hard, unsympathetic and without any refined tastes. Perhaps it is possible to find among Presbyterians a few specimens of humanity to whom the above descriptions may apply; and impugnors of election and predestination, advocates of the divine rights of kings, and devotees of fashion and æsthetics in religion, who have felt the obstinate and unyielding force of Presbyterian principles, exasperated by that opposition, may have thought that these things constitute Presbyterianism. They have struck against some excrescence on the outside of the gnarly oak, and have concluded that it is these that make oak wood harder than any other timber, and fancy that but for them, it would be as supple as willow or soft as pine. The truth is that under these excrescences the strong, healthy wood grows, and despite them it is a valuable and enduring material. The healthiest of plants will sometimes have unseemly growths upon its surface.

A Presbyterian, we may say, is an adherent of a particular form of Christianity which has much in common with all Christians, and has some distinguishing characteristics. To dwell on these differences may serve to answer the question why you are not an adherent of some other Church, but would fail to give the positive elements which constitute our faith. As a clear perception of the latter will prepare us better to understand the negative or distinctive features, we may very shortly state what is held in common with others who profess evangelical Christianity—the fundamentals of our religion.

A Presbyterian is a *Theist*. He believes in a personal God of infinite perfections. This is opposed to all atheistic, or pantheistic speculations. Belief in God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, the God in whom we live and move and have our being, is fundamental.

A Presbyterian also believes that God has revealed Himself, that in times past He spake to the fathers

by the prophets, and in these last days by His Son from heaven, that the book which is commonly called the Bible—a collection of Hebrew and Greek writings—is the inspired record of the revelation of Himself and of His will which God has been pleased to give to man. This excludes all Deistical negations. Further, it necessitates belief in miracles. We most assuredly believe that God can so work in accordance with, above, or without the laws of nature (as we are in the habit of calling His ordinary methods of providence) that He has made known Himself, and His will with certainty to the children of men by signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost according to His will. Hence all rationalizing speculation and denial of the supernatural is inconsistent with the convictions of a true Presbyterian.

A Presbyterian believes that the teachings of the Bible are authoritative. When once it has been shown that any particular doctrine is taught or duty is enjoined in the Bible, that doctrine or duty is no longer doubtful; the doctrine is to be received as God's truth, and the duty as obligatory, no matter if in its nature or reasons it transcends the comprehension of man—Scripture, not human reason, is the infallible standard of truth and duty.

In all matters of faith and practice every other authority is excluded. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and nothing of human institution or enactment is binding as a matter of faith or duty. Obedience to the civil magistrate in things temporal is a duty; but into the sacred sphere of faith and morality no ordinance of man may enter. To God alone belongs authority here.

A Presbyterian, further, believes that God has a Church on earth, called out and separate from the world. This Church is led by the Spirit of God which dwells in it. God in Christ alone is the King and Head of the Church, and in the spiritual sphere which belongs to the Church no authority belongs to any civil institution. This principle excludes all State interference or persecution for conscience' sake, as well as the idea that the Church is only a department of human government—a kind of moral police—or a great national society for promoting goodness.

It is undoubtedly true that there are some men claiming to be Christians who do not hold these principles, and even some so-called Churches; but they are not Presbyterian, even although they may claim the name. These fundamental doctrines, held with more or less fulness by all Christians, are indispensable when we tell what is meant by saying, "I am a Presbyterian."

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An ancient author informs us that he once saw a copy of the Iliad written on a piece of parchment so small that it could be enclosed in a nutshell. Some one remarks that the scribe must have been almost as blind as the bard by the time his self-imposed task was ended. It seems almost as arduous an undertaking to attempt, in the space that can reasonably be allowed in the PRESBYTERIAN, to give in a becoming manner an account of the life, character and work, of the truly distinguished man whose name heads this paper. The writer has just finished the perusal of his biography, written by his son, whose work is extremely well done, and who is enabled to shew us very clearly what manner of man his father was. Prefixed to the memoir is a finely executed portrait of the great theologian, taken when he had reached a very advanced age. As one looks on the grand, beautiful old face, he feels that it is the countenance of one who was noble by the highest patent both of nature and grace. The serene and expansive forehead seems at once the index and the abode of a large and noble intellect. Nor was the outward sign misleading in the case of Charles Hodge. It is true that the rare and supreme endowment of genius was not his, but he was nevertheless very richly dowered with many of nature's most precious gifts. The Church and the world now know how well he used them.

He was born at Philadelphia, on the 28th of December, 1797. His father died when the future professor was but six months old. The widow was left in very straitened circumstances, but she appears to have done her part admirably well. Her illustrious son writes thus gratefully of her: "To our mother,

my brother and myself, under God, owe absolutely everything. To us she devoted her life; for us she prayed, laboured and suffered." Great was her reward on earth as well as in heaven. Largely through her excellent management, he was enabled in 1812 to enter the Sophomore Class at Princeton, where he prosecuted his studies with uncommon energy and success, and where, in 1815, he underwent the great change of the new birth during a very remarkable revival of religion. A venerable minister says he "well remembers the Saturday when he was startled in the street by Edward Allen rushing to him with the announcement that Hodge had 'enlisted,' for the war with Britain had not yet closed, and a sergeant with a drummer was in the village endeavouring to obtain recruits. "Is it possible," he exclaimed, "that Hodge has enlisted?" "Yes, he has enlisted under the banner of King Jesus." He remained a faithful soldier to his life's end. He graduated in Arts in 1815, and in Theology in 1819. He was elected Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature in Princeton Theological Seminary in 1822. His salary was at first the very moderate one of \$1,000 a year. With the view of qualifying himself more thoroughly for his important work, he went to Europe in 1826, remaining abroad nearly two years. A great part of that period he resided in Halle and Berlin, prosecuting his studies with much diligence and making the acquaintance of a considerable number of very eminent men—among others, Neander and Tholuck. From the time of his return to America, his life is a record of work in many different departments in the service of his heavenly Master. The pages of the biography enable us to see clearly how simply and grandly that work was done. His humility was profound and genuine, as many incidents prove. His life-long friend, Dr. Henry Boardman, relates the following: "I was saying, 'you ought to be a very happy man. Consider what you have accomplished, and the universal feeling towards you.' 'Now, stop,' said he, with a wave of the hand. 'All that can be said is, that God has been pleased to take up a *poor little stick* and do something with it. What I have done is nothing compared with what is done by a man who goes to Africa and labours among a heathen tribe, and reduces their language to writing. I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose the shoes of such a man.'"

For upwards of fifty years, and in a very important and conspicuous position, the man who gave this very modest self-estimate had been holding high the banner of the truth. During most of those years multitudes knew him as the dauntless champion of great principles.

"A tower of strength that stood four-square to every wind that blew." He did noble and varied work in the professor's chair. In connection with the "Princeton Review" he rendered invaluable service to literature and theology. He gave to the world several learned and valuable commentaries. For the benefit of those yet unpledged to the Saviour, he wrote the "Way of Life," a small volume, full of great truths admirably enforced. He was rarely brilliant or epigrammatic, but his clearness of style, his affectionate warmth, and his weight of matter, all united in enabling him to bear into the reader's mind and heart a certain guiding and subduing power which is of great worth. Above all, in his "Systematic Theology" he has given us a work which possesses a monumental character. No one can study it without feeling that the author brought to its production high intellectual gifts combined with an intensely earnest purpose and transparent clearness of moral and spiritual perception. And this great worker, this thinker, this leader of men, wears in youth, in manhood, and in old age, a violet crown woven for him by his humility and modesty.

In other respects, too, one can see that his soul was of the best earthly mould. In his mental constitution pathos and humour were finely blended. In speaking on the highest themes he often unsealed the fountain of tears both in himself and others. This seems to have been especially the case at the Sabbath afternoon conferences with the students, when his addresses overflowed with love and tenderness. His humour was necessarily less conspicuous, but it too came out in a spontaneous, and sometimes in a very unexpected, way. Thus for example he one day asked a student what Paul meant by the expression, "Sold under sin." The young man, who must have been American to the very core, answered, that he had been "taken in or deceived by it." "O no," rejoined