

PRESBYTERIANISM RE-VIEWED.

Should it be supposed that the Presbyterianism set forth in the quotations from the "confession of faith" and the "longer catechism" is in any sense a thing of the past, surely the confirmatory attitude of the Pan-Presbyterian Council ought to be sufficient to refute such a conclusion. But lest any doubt should remain, it may be advisable to quote further from the formularies assented to, or subscribed, by students when licensed, and by ministers when ordained. Here are some of the questions to which these are required to give their assent:—

"Do you believe the Westminster Confession of Faith, as adopted by this Church, in the Basis of Union, to be founded on, and agreeable to, the Word of God, and in your teaching will you faithfully adhere thereto?"

"Do you believe the government of this Church by Sessions, Presbyteries, &c., to be founded on, and agreeable to, the Word of God, and do you engage as a minister of this Church to defend and maintain the same?"

"Do you own the purity of worship at present authorized by this Church, and will you conform thereto?"

"Do you promise to give a dutiful attendance in the Courts of this Church, &c., to be subject to them, &c., to follow no divisive course, but to maintain the unity and peace of the Church?"

"Do you promise to submit yourself in the Lord to the several judicatories of this Church?"

The following is the formula to be signed by all office-bearers, ministers inclusive:—

"I hereby declare that I believe the Westminster Confession of Faith, as adopted by this Church, in the Basis of Union, and the government of the Church by Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and General Assemblies, to be founded on, and agreeable to, the Word of God; that I own the purity of worship at present authorized by this Church; and that I engage to adhere faithfully to the doctrine of the said Confession, to maintain and defend the said government, to conform to the said worship and to submit to the discipline of this Church, and to follow no divisive course from the present order established therein."

Beyond this "confession of faith" no progress is permissible. There is no provision whatever for any advance or change. It is only fair, however, to state that the first question to which the assent of students and ministers is referred is: "Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and manners?" But this is wholly neutralized—at least as regards those who would still remain Presbyterians—by that other which insists that they hold "the Westminster Confession of Faith to be founded on, and agreeable to, the Word of God."

These are plain, hard, recorded, creed-bound facts of the position assumed by the Presbyterian Church, and sustained by its recent Pan-Presbyterian Council,—a Council authoritative surely as embodying and repressing "the mind of the Church."

It is not this writer's present purpose to enter into any detailed dispute as to the soundness or unsoundness, in a doctrinal point of view, of the extensive creed evidently so tenaciously held by Pan-Presbyterianism. But it may not be out of place to state in plain terms the standpoint from which a large and increasing section of "the world" will, and do, regard their attitude.

That vast mass of intelligent humanity in the present day, who believe in the expansion of the spiritual life within man (which is man) outward into all and every form of usefulness; who have found by experience that there seems practically no limit to the powers with which man is gifted by his Creator if he will but use them; who are Gnostics enough to feel sure that the faculties of the spirit (or, mind, if you like the term better) are far more real than the physical, because able to interpenetrate them with ever-increasing ability of use—cannot fail to recognize this attitude assumed, and rested in, by Pan-Presbyterianism as only a subtler form of "Agnosticism." Agnosticism in its old form of denial of the existence of aught but matter can hardly be said to exist in this age. Even the most advanced materialists have, by honest search and real experience, reached the conclusion that life—its origin or cause—is not to be found within, but must be sought apart from, matter. As proof, take the recent admissions of such men as Tyndall or Huxley and the constant references to the same truth by Herbert Spencer. To these it may, perhaps, be permitted to add, without offence, that socialistic thinker, Colonel Ingersoll, who, in his latest discourse, clearly indicates his growing conviction that intellect and affection (or will and its thought) are at least as real and lasting as matter, and transcend in usefulness the material forms in which they are manifested, and by which, and on which, they act. Thus the advancing life of the age, having so far conquered the more material form of agnosticism, finds itself confronted with precisely the same evil on a higher plane—in short, meets with the rarified agnosticism of Pan-Presbyterianism. This vast body of so-called orthodoxy seems to them to take up a position antagonistic to everything which does not come within the range of those formulated perceptions of truth called doctrine which are the external senses its inherent life has formed for itself, within which to live, as the soul lives within the body. Everything must be touched and tested by this body of sound belief, and whatever is beyond the grasp of its doctrinal senses must for ever remain to it as though non-existent. It does not want to know any more than these doctrinal senses tell it. So content is it to live in and by these—to limit itself and its life within their boundaries—that it denies as impossible the existence of anything not perceptible to these senses.

Should this seem somewhat extreme, one more quotation from the Confession of Faith will surely suffice to convince. It is to be found in the section regarding the Holy Scriptures:—

"The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing at any time is to be added whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men," &c.

This precludes even the possibility of "any new revelation of the Spirit," and is in direct contradiction to our Lord's own words: "When the Spirit of Truth is come He will guide you into all truth." Have those who are followers of the Lord yet been led into the all of truth? Whatever "the Church" may think, "the world" will take leave to doubt it. Nor will that "world" in which the practical religion of usefulness, the desire to avoid any course which may injure our fellow men, and to join itself thus to the current of life from above, which, in ever-increasing measure, seeks to advance whatever of good is possible in the present condition of humanity, readily admire, reverence, or find it possible to use, that denial of the possibility of increase of light which lives in self-chosen darkness as modern agnosticism.

The expansion of our Lord's life voluntarily received, fed upon, and assimilated into his being by man, necessitates and leads directly towards increase of light. For life is first, and ever forces its way outwards and upwards towards the light. In the inception and growth of vegetable, plant, tree or animal we see that truth exemplified. Nor is it otherwise with man; and if the natural realm be but the shadow, or effect, from a spiritual cause, as we modern Gnostics believe, what folly it is to deny the lesson taught alike by observation and experience; or by a blind agnosticism, deny the provision of wisdom clad in the light of knowledge with which our Lord has clothed Himself in the inner or spiritual sense of that Divine Word which is His very self. Can we by searching find out God? Can we find out the Almighty to perfection? Need we then fear to search? Need we fetter our growing life by denying it light, in fear that our Lord in His infinite providence has not provided for all our future needs as well as our present ones in the light which flows from and lives in His Divine Word? Leave men free and unfettered to live upward towards the Light; to grow by the warmth of Love—Love contained within the Divine Wisdom; for that Divine Wisdom, revealed to us in word and symbol in the Holy Scriptures, is but the reflection of Him whose life was and is the light of men. What man, or body of men, who share their Lord's love for all His creatures shall dare to fetter or limit with their self-made windows of doctrine the influx of His light into His chosen temple—man?

Spero.

HATS IN CHURCH.

To all wearers of silk hats, when once they get inside the church the hat becomes a serious difficulty. Of all the various expedients by which ingenious churchgoers have endeavoured to safely dispose of their hats, there is no one that has not proved to be fallacious. The extreme danger of placing a hat in the aisle immediately outside the pew is universally known. The first lady that sweeps up the aisle carries with her a confused mass of defenceless hats, which are deposited in the shape of a terminal moraine in the front of the pew which is her final goal. Of course the hats which have been subjected to this process are reduced by attrition to a rounded form and are covered with scratches, reminding one of the marks of glacial action on granite boulders. However interesting they may be to the geologist, they are of no further value as hats, and can rarely be bent into a shape that will allow their owners to wear them home. In the days when expensive crinolines were in fashion, the fate of the hat deposited in the aisle was still more appalling. When a well-dressed lady passed by in its vicinity it disappeared totally from human sight. There are cases on record where one fashionable woman has thus caused the disappearance of thirteen separate hats during her passage from the church door to the pew in the neighbourhood of the pulpit. What was the final fate of those hats was never ascertained. The hats simply vanished at the rustle of crinoline, and left no trace behind. Whether they were absorbed by contact with soft kid, or resolved into thin chemical elements by proximity to steel, is yet to be discovered. The boldest men shrank from making investigations as to their fate, and preferred to bear their loss in sad and dignified silence. As to putting one's hat on the floor underneath the seat, no man who follows this reckless course can expect anything but disaster. If there is a small boy in the pew he will infallibly discover that hat, and kick it to the further end of the pew within the first thirty minutes of the service. If there is a lady in the pew a surgical operation will be required to remove her boot from the interior of the hat, while in any event the hat is certain to absorb every particle of dust within a radius of eight feet, and to fasten itself to the floor with the aid of forgotten Sunday School gum-drops. Neither under the seat, on the seat, nor in the aisle can the worried hat find rest, and the plan of establishing a hat pound in the vestibule, where hats can be ticketed and kept during service, would simply result in converting a church into a hat exchange, where the sinners would secure all the good hats, and the saints would be compelled to content themselves with worn-out and worthless ones.—*Hatter's Gazette*