

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

THE CHURCH—CREEDS—PRINCIPAL GRANT.

MR. EDITOR,—It is a risky thing now-a-days to venture upon the sea of controversy. Had you any notion that you were liable to be impeached for heresy on account of your leading article in the issue of the 11th inst.? Yet such a charge might be fairly made. Strong exception must be taken to your description of the Church. You speak of it as "a copartnership." Ministers, you say, "for mutual help, comfort and co-operation made a bargain with certain other men." Most of us will be surprised to learn that this is the true constitution of the Church. It is generally supposed that man has nothing to do with contriving the Church, that it is Jesus who planted it on the earth, and imposed the conditions on which we are to enter it, and that we are not free to enter it or leave it as we choose. It is clear that the difference between you and the learned Principal of Queen's College, arises from the view which each holds as to what the Church is. You regard it as a voluntary association; he speaks of it as "the Church of Christ." Now which is orthodox on this radical point? I humbly submit that the Principal is. This is what the "Confession" says. "The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal, under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." It is evident from his speech that Principal Grant had this lofty definition of the Church in his mind; it is as evident that you were thinking of sects. He, in sooth, is a churchman, while you are a dissenter. And what is the logical conclusion to be drawn from the above definition? Exactly that which he has drawn: if out of it there "is no ordinary possibility of salvation," any man would be insane that would go out of it of his own accord. But he is at liberty to work for its reformation *within* it—in fact, he has no right to speak *except* within it. Of course, the Principal was only supposing a case. A man may be in doubt as to the teaching of his Church on any matter, and nevertheless count that Church to be the best of any that claim to represent Christ in the world. He has the "Confession of Faith" to back him: "The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error." Counting it Christ's Church, he *dare not* go out of it; and if the Church cannot tolerate his views it is for it to say so, and thrust him out. If Principal Grant errs on this point he errs in distinguished company. Precisely similar ground was taken by Luther before his excommunication, by the Nonconformists up to 1662, by Ralph Erskine and his colleagues, by Edward Irving, by Campbell of Row, and by Scott of Greenock. You claim that such a position is inconsistent with honour and a good conscience. You will admit that all those named were men distinguished for their conscientiousness, it was really their profound reverence for the Church as an institution of Christ that led them to the position.

The ground taken by Principal Grant is that on which the Westminster Assembly acted. Everyone who has read their debates knows that they frequently divided on questions embraced in the Confession. Did they thrust out those that were in the minority? They did not, so long as that minority remained on the whole faithful to the Church which they set up; but woe betide those who *renounced the authority* of the Church! They denounced such as *sectaries* with might and main.

You speak of ambiguity in the Principal's utterance. Well, would you be surprised to be accused of that offence yourself? What do you mean by the sentence, "Why is any man licensed and ordained to preach or teach in the Presbyterian Church of Canada?" Is it that his commission is to teach Presbyterianism, or that he is to be confined in his teaching within the limits of the Presbyterian Church in Canada? If that is your meaning, here again, I humbly submit that you are wrong. The formula runs: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of the Church, and by the authority of this Presbytery, I license you to preach." What? "The Confession of Faith?" No, but "the Gospel," "within its bounds," and only there? "or wherever

God in His providence may order your lot." Ministers are ordained, in the same august name, to the office of the holy ministry in general, as well as to a particular charge in a particular branch of the Church. It is clear that on this point there is also divergence of view between you and the Principal, but the authorities sustain him rather than you.

The Westminster divines sought to promote uniformity between the Churches of Great Britain and Ireland, but they certainly never contemplated the use which would be sought to be made of their handiwork in after ages. They set to work to construct a formula for the Church irrespective of any that existed; but they neither possessed nor claimed any divine call to formulate a creed which was to be beyond challenge, and imposed upon the Church in all time. Had they foreseen that there would be a disposition to regard it with a reverence equal almost to that given to the Scriptures, they would have been the first to raise their hands and shiver to pieces the idol of human fabrication. They never intended that men's consciences should be bound by the Confession, "all Synods or Councils since the apostles' time, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as an help in both." That is what the Confession is practically. It is a *guide* for the thought and teaching of the Church, but any attempt to bind it upon the conscience ought to be resisted. This is the way I understand Principal Grant's speech, and I conclude that he is more orthodox than his critics. He is on the only true Protestant ground—that taken by Luther at Worms, and by the Elector and the other princes at Spire—that the conscience is to be bound only by the Word of God. And if it be urged that this view is in the teeth of some of the regulations of the Church and of the present terms of subscription, the evident answer is that which Stephenson gave, "a' the worse for the coo"—all the worse for the terms. They should be *altered* if they interfere with a God-given right.

Creeds are *formulas* drawn up to express the Church's views of Bible teaching. The Church was *before* those formulas. The Church has an inherent right to alter those formulas, if it feels that change is necessary to speak out its *consensus* of Scripture truth. If the Church, as a whole, has this right, it must be the inherent right of every individual member of it to agitate for a change. This is evidently what Dr. Grant contends for, and he is right. And I should be glad to see the Church undertake the work of revision, if it were for no other reason than to assert its right, and to prevent any human document, like the Westminster Confession, however venerable and excellent, from gradually obtaining for itself the reverence that belongs to the inspired volume alone.

ECCLESIASTICUS.

THE MARRIAGE QUESTION.

MR. EDITOR,—In Mr. Laing's rejoinder, he says, "Mr. B. is justified in his strictures in paragraph 5th of his letter. He had not probably seen the correction which I sent you when he wrote or doubtless he would have modified his reply." In explanation, I may state that my letter was written on the 20th of December, and despatched before the PRESBYTERIAN of the 24th of December, in which the correction appeared, came to my hand. The correction certainly frees Mr. Laing from the charge of contradiction. It also nullifies the first sentence of paragraph 5th of my reply, as well as the last two sentences, beginning at the words, "Mr. Laing says, if an instance," etc. It leaves, however, the main point of the argument untouched.

1. In regard to Mr. Laing's communication, permit me to notice, in the first place, his quotation from paragraph 8th of my letter, "How are we to decide the question if the argument from analogy be disallowed?" He might have seen that these words referred to a man or woman's own relatives by blood, and were intended to prove, from cases specified as forbidden, that similar cases not mentioned are also forbidden, in which the degree of kindred is the same; for if a son is forbidden to marry his mother, by analogy a daughter is forbidden to marry her father, though not mentioned, the relation being the same, that of parent and child; again, if a nephew is forbidden to marry his aunt, analogically a niece is forbidden to marry her uncle, though this prohibition is not specified, for the relation is the same here also, viz., that of a person to a

brother's or sister's child. It was in reference to this point that I asked, "If the argument from analogy be disallowed how are we to decide the question?" Further on it is said, "if we must allow the argument from analogy in the one case, how are we to refuse it in the other? On what ground can we reject it?" This refers to extending the analogy to relationship by affinity, for if it holds good in the case of blood relations on what grounds can it be shewn to be inapplicable in the case of relations by affinity. Moses himself extends the analogy to the blood relations of a husband or wife; for a son-in-law is prohibited from marrying his wife's mother, and in analogy with this a daughter-in-law is forbidden to marry her husband's father; a step-son is forbidden to marry his father's wife, and analogically a step-daughter is prohibited from marrying her mother's husband. And as we believe that Moses gives only regulative specimens to illustrate the principle of the law, without exhausting the whole list of prohibited degrees, we are warranted by his own example in extending the analogy to the degrees of kindred by affinity which he does not specify, as well as to those cases of blood relationship not mentioned in the law. Therefore, we believe when a man is prohibited from marrying his uncle's wife that by analogy a woman is forbidden to marry her aunt's husband, because we hold that in Christ there is neither male nor female, and whatsoever is forbidden to the man is forbidden also to the woman. And Moses has taught us, by the cases of analogous relationship which he has specified, the principle on which we are to proceed in determining all the degrees of kindred to which the law refers.

2. Again, as the Scriptures sufficiently shew that there is no difference between blood relatives in the direct and collateral lines, and as Mr. Laing *positively* affirms that there is a difference, my demand was, not that he should prove a *negative*, but rather prove what he positively asserted. As to the *onus probandi* and where it properly lies, I may refer to his own words in the PRESBYTERIAN of the 8th of October last, "The *onus probandi* lies with the reformers, not with the majority who are to be regarded as satisfied with things as they are, and not given to change." They, who are not satisfied with the law as it is, are bound to prove that it is unscriptural and wrong, in order that it may be altered.

3. There must be some confusion of ideas in Mr. Laing's mind when he speaks of a limited prohibition, and the repeal of that prohibition when the limit is removed. As we live not under the Mosaic but under the Gospel Dispensation, every man is bound by the law while his wife lives; during *that time* every woman on earth is forbidden him; he is not allowed to marry any of them, unless he chooses to turn Mohammedan and go to live in Turkey. To talk, therefore, of the wife's sister being forbidden while the wife lives is irrelevant and beside the mark. To say that the blood relatives of the wife in the direct line are permanently forbidden, while those in the collateral line are forbidden only in her lifetime, proves nothing to those who believe that monogamy is the law of the New Testament. It is tantamount to saying that they are not forbidden at all, because during the wife's lifetime not only her blood relatives, but all other women are equally forbidden.

4. Towards the end of his letter Mr. Laing says, "Am I not justified in holding that Scripture forbids marriage with certain women who are near of kin? It also contains a series of particular cases shewing who are near of kin. Marriage with those thus specified is forbidden. A wife's sister is specified during the wife's life, and is therefore during *that time* forbidden. A wife's sister after the wife's death is not specified." What are we to make of this statement? Mr. Laing admits that a wife's sister is specified as being near of kin, and is therefore forbidden, that is forbidden on the ground that she is a near relation; but he seems to hold that death destroys the relationship, and that after the wife's death her sister ceases to be a near relative at all. In demanding the proof of this assertion I do not think that it is requiring him to prove a negative, for he distinctly affirms that a wife's sister after the wife's death is not specified, which according to his own interpretation of verse 6, means that she ceases to be a near relative, or to be near of kin to the husband, as she was during the life of his wife. But will not the same argument apply to the relationship of a woman to the brother of her deceased husband. Surely if death be so powerful in the one case to annihilate all relationship, it must be