

striving to destroy the foundations of Christian faith, and seem delighted with the prospect of a result which will throw men back for any solution of the mystery of this life or the hope of another, on the uncertain and unsatisfactory conclusions of human reason, instead of the positive declarations of a divine apostle. The time is perhaps nearer than we think of, when the vast multitudes of the careless and nominal professors of Christianity shall be scattered and disappear, when there shall be as sharp a distinction as in the primitive age, between those who reject and those who receive the Gospel, and the gulf of neutral and nominal Christianity being closed, there shall appear but two companies: the company of unbelievers who proudly reject the doctrine of Christ, and the company of believers who, having been honestly minded to do the will of God, have ascertained the Gospel to be from God, and have proved it, in their happy experience, to be the power of God and the wisdom of God, unto salvation. Meanwhile, let every true-hearted Christian rejoice in this; that what Christianity claims as necessary to the apprehension of its excellence and authority, and lying at the root of all true faith in it, is not the learning of the schools nor lofty powers of reason and understanding, nor the accumulation of knowledge; but what the conscience of all acknowledges should be in all, and acknowledges the excellence of in any—the upright mind, honestly disposed to do the will of God.

These extracts have been given at some length, because such teaching is needed at present among ourselves, almost more than any other, and none could be a better remedy for most of the ailments of our age, whether on the side of the unbeliever or the nominal Christian.

The space already occupied will not permit much further illustration of the contents of these admirable sermons. One, however, which must be specially noticed—that on “The Outer and Inner Creed in Men,”—which must appeal to the experience of all. How true, for instance, is this respecting the *real* inner creed which often flashes out in the hasty, unguarded speeches of men:

It is curiously different from that which the man avows as a Church member—curiously different from that which he hears and expects to hear, and would be disappointed, perhaps enraged, if he did not hear from the pulpit.

And this is no less true:

Usually the Atheism that really prevails is disclaimed—is hardly admitted by men even to themselves. There is an outer creed of sound Theism; an inner of real Atheism, at least of doubt and darkness as to the being and character of God. In such a case surely it will be admitted that the light within is darkness, and great is that darkness.

It is just this inner core of Atheism in the hearts of so many who “profess and call themselves Christians” that gives point and power to the attacks of open avowed Atheism. And here from another sermon, on “The Two Great Commandments,” is one of the tests whereby men can try themselves as to their real belief in God:

Men can delude, and have deluded, and do delude themselves about a love to God, whom they have not seen. Well, then try your love to your neighbour whom you have seen. Dost thou mourn, as over the ungodliness, so over the remaining selfishness of thy nature, and dost thou see in every outbreathing of such selfishness, the token of what, if unremoved, will make a hell for thee, even though no place of darkness were prepared for the sinner? Is this thy grief, that thou dost little for others? Art thou willing to help thy brother in his need? To have patience with him, and to be forbearing toward him? Art thou sorry thou hast not more time, more opportunity, more ability, to do good to others? Or dost thou grudge any time; dost thou neglect every opportunity, dost thou fail to employ such power as thou hast to do good? Art thou glad to escape an opportunity of helping on thy brother? And dost thou wrap thyself up in a mantle of selfishness, through which no interest which is not immediately thine own can reach thy heart, awaken thy sympathies, or call forth thy exertions? Then how shall it ever be said that thou lovest thy neighbour as thyself, that thou lovest thy brother, even as Christ loveth thee?

These quotations will suffice to show something of the value of these sermons, which it is to be hoped many will procure and read for themselves.

FIDELIS.

PRESBYTERY ACCORDING TO THE REVISED BOOK.

MR. EDITOR,—It is no doubt easier to criticise than amend, to pull down than reconstruct, to point out the faults of others than amend our own. Nevertheless, a searching and careful scrutiny should be exercised by all concerned in framing “the Constitution and Forms of Procedure” under which, as a Church, we are to live. The object of the General Assembly in submitting the present draft of “the Constitution and Procedure” of the Church to our Presbyteries and people is, that their diversified skill and wisdom may be employed in bringing them as near to perfection as possible. To secure this, all concerned should help. Hence your present correspondent, who is a Presbyter of a quarter of a century,

standing, wishes to contribute some thoughts and convictions which are in his mind concerning it.

The section of the book to which he wishes to call attention and on which to offer a few strictures is not, perhaps, more faulty than some others, but contains, in his opinion, obvious faults and errors which should be removed before becoming law. It is the section on p. 21, which defines the *Presbytery*, the court from which our ecclesiastical name is derived, and to which every inquirer naturally turns for an intelligible definition, or at least a comprehensive statement of “what a Presbytery is.” But as we look at the one before us, we ask, do we find either here? With the definitions given by half a dozen Presbyterian Churches, older and historically better known than ours, open before us, we are compelled to say, No. As a definition of the *Presbytery*, the language used is defective in matter, illogical in form, arbitrary in what it includes and lacking in literary elegance. The most obvious tests of a correct definition cannot be applied to it: the subject and predicate are in no measure convertible. Nor do we find one chief attribute running through and characterizing the whole statements of its contents. Even as a description of Presbytery, it ought to grasp and present the salient elements of the notion of Presbytery, so as to impress intelligent inquirers, as well as to guide ecclesiastical jurists. It abounds too greatly in analogies, includes too many classes, selecting them arbitrarily, and disregards that synthesis, which should unite the several parts in an organic whole.

At the top of p. 21, under the words, THE PRESBYTERY, properly written in large letters, we have this statement, or definition, of Presbytery.

The Presbytery consists of—

1. Ordained ministers within the bounds (a) who are pastors of congregations; (b), who are professors of theology in the Church, or professors in colleges connected with the Church; (c), who are employed by appointment of the General Assembly in some department of the work of the Church; (d), who by special enactment of the Assembly have their names placed on the roll; (e), who are engaged in mission fields for a lengthened term with the sanction of the Assembly's Home Mission Committee.
2. An elder from each pastoral charge.

It is obvious that primarily the Presbytery consisted of all the Presbyters in a given district united in one body, to take spiritual oversight and direct the spiritual affairs of its own district. Such was the Presbytery of Jerusalem, such that of Ephesus, Antioch and other centres of Christian Churches. All the Presbyters, or elders, of the many Churches met with the apostles or ministers of the Word to transact the business, or settle the questions which came before them. So teaches our Confession of Faith in its form of Church government, as approved by the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, in 1645. (See pp. 311 and 312, Edition of Edinburgh, 1871.) The essential constituents of a Presbytery are not doctors, professors in colleges, or agents of the Church, but simply Presbyters, whether lay or clerical. Like to this is the answer which one of the most able divines and most learned Presbyterian jurists, which this continent has hitherto produced (Dr P. H. Thornwell) to the question “What constitutes the essence of a Presbytery.” He answers, “Neither ministers nor elders as such, but simply Presbyters, irrespective of the classes to which they belong.” We do not mean, nor does this writer, that this defines more than the constituent elements of a Presbytery. Complete organization involves more. According to the definition proposed in our book, there are no less than five classes of ministers, designated respectively (a), (b), (c), (d), (e) included in the Presbytery. These letters, though resembling algebraic symbols and so suggesting unknown quantities, are not presumed to have such meaning; but indicate different classes, not ranks or grades of ordained ministers, who form the constituent or essential elements of our Presbytery. It is supposed and indeed held in theory that all ordained ministers of the Presbyterian Church are ecclesiastically equal. The parity of the ministry was in former times contended for and gloried in; though by the very constitution of this Church there is great variety of small dignities among them, and not a few are wholly excluded from any place. Whatever practical or theoretic motives may have prevailed with the framers of this definition to include so many classes and grades, we regard it as unauthorized, arbitrary and un-Presbyterian. We would ask, What principle of justice, or of regard for the rights of all ministers, or what element of Presbyterian polity governs such

choice and authorized such distinction? We answer, There is none. There is but one principle governing the rights and qualifying preachers of the Word for membership in Presbytery; i.e., that they are judged by Presbytery qualified for and have received ordination to the full work of the ministry. This is the *sine qua non* of membership in Presbytery. It is this which constitutes and clothes with full ministerial rights and powers. It is this which entitles a minister to exercise the functions, enjoy the privileges, and discharge the duties of his office. It is as much his right and duty to sit and deliberate with his brethren on the concerns of the household of faith, as to sit and do the like in the earthly household of which he is a responsible member. An apprehension of some sort of danger from the large number of retired or teaching ministers, and ministers without charge, in certain central Presbyteries led to the bringing the matter of excluding or limiting their power before the O. S. General Assembly in the United States in 1849. The question was proposed to the Assembly in these terms: “Are ministers without charges constituent members of our Church judicatories, and have they an equal voice with settled pastors and ruling elders of congregations in ecclesiastical government?” The Assembly decided in the affirmative, and referred to their “Form of Church Government” in support of this decision, quoting these words: “A Presbytery consists of all ministers and one ruling elder from each congregation within a certain district.”

It will not be argued that ministers without charge are not Presbyters, or incapable of Presbyterian functions. If that were so, many a Presbytery would have its proceedings and its power badly and suddenly demolished; e.g., The first Presbytery of the Secession Church* of Scotland, which was composed of Messrs. Erskine, Fisher, Moncrief and Wilson, had no elders, and none of these ministers had a pastoral charge for more than four years after the Presbytery was organized.

PARITY.

*See McKerrow's History of Secession Church, p. 224.

(To be concluded.)

THE REVISED BOOK OF FORMS.

MR. EDITOR,—May I ask permission to use your columns, in order to remind Presbyteries that their reports on the Revised Book of Forms should be in my hands by March 1? See resolution of last General Assembly. I have received three reports already; and if the rest prove to be of like character, the committee will have valuable material and assistance for preparing their final report.

Allow me also to call attention to what some writers and probably some speakers in Presbyteries seem to overlook, viz., that no material change has been proposed, or can be made by the committee in the form of procedure without approval of the General Assembly. Such approval has been already obtained for all material changes, before they were introduced into the book. Still, any of the changes made may be removed and the old procedure restored if Presbyteries so desire. On the other hand, no material changes should be made by next Assembly, without afterwards receiving the consent of Presbyteries. At least the committee have so far acted on this principle. Changes in the order of the sections and in forms of expression with a view to secure unity and uniformity have been made, and some clauses have been added to bring out what the committee think is the intention of existing regulations, or to remove doubts on certain points. These the committee will undoubtedly conform as far as possible, and as the criticism of the Presbyteries may indicate, to the desire of the majority. But no material change can be made, even if suggested by a majority of Presbyteries. Although in that case the matter would be reported to the General Assembly. As examples of what I mean, I may refer to the suggestions that elders may be the Moderators of Sessions and other Church Courts. A change so important cannot be made in revising the book. The proposal to make a change like that should come before the Assembly by overture. Again, to change the constitution of the roll of a Presbytery, as proposed by Rev. A. Wilson, is beyond the power of the committee. So, as seems to me, is a proposal made by a respected minister in a letter to prepare liturgical forms for the administration of the sacraments, burial, the solemnization of marriage. It may be proper to consider these matters and take action; but a committee on revision would not be justified in giving them a place in the Book of Forms.

Yours, etc.

JOHN LAING.

Dundas, February 11, 1888.