

THE SHORTER CATECHISM.

If making books there is no end, and there are more books written on the Bible and its teachings, than any other subject in the wide world; systems of theology, commentaries of all kinds, essay, sermon, story.

But peerless among them all, as a clear, complete summary of revealed truth, small in compass, but vast in the majestic sweep of its lofty thought, stands the modest little primer, over which so many of us have toiled in our childhood days, trying to grasp its words while its meaning hung far beyond our reach. In the hope that it may assist some to get hold of that meaning, and to see how simple and beautiful the grand truths that hide behind these long dry words, an outline of its contents is given on the preceding page, which we wish to follow with a few notes.

1. How naturally it opens. When one sees anything new, the first question is "What is it for?" The first question of the Catechism sounds like that of one just awakening to the fact of existence, and asking, What am I for? "What is the chief end of man?" The answer stands sublime. Just as naturally other questions follow. When told that he was made to glorify God, the most natural thing to ask is Q. 2, How am I to glorify Him? "What rule hath God given to direct, etc?" In like manner when told that the Scriptures are the only rule to direct, the most natural question to ask is, Q. 3, What is in that rule. "What do the scriptures teach?"

2. Upon the answer to the third question depends all the remainder of the book. That answer says that the two great themes of the Bible are doctrine and duty; truths, revealed for men to believe, commands given for men to obey. Under these two heads may be ranged the whole of Scripture, and accordingly the Catechism divides at this point, from the fourth question down to the 38th question, being a statement of the great truths to be believed, while those from the 39th to the end, are devoted to the duties which God's word commands.

3. Read the first column directly downward as follows: "What man is to believe about God, about His plan, and the carrying out of that plan; about the Covenant of works, about its breaking, and the result; about the Covenant of Grace, who purchased its benefits for us, who applies them to us, and what these benefits are.

4. Read the same, pausing at each question to read what that question teaches, *e.g.*, What man is to believe about God; Q. 4. What he is; Q. 5. How many there are; and, Q. 6. His Trinity; and, at the same time, read the answers in full as given in the Catechism, and see their marvellous fulness and wealth. Continue this down the column, weighing carefully each word.

5. Read the third column down the page the same way, *e.g.*, "What man is to do, under the Covenant of works, and, under the Covenant of

Grace,"—remembering that while we do not depend upon the Covenant of works as a ground of salvation, it is binding upon all as a rule of life, so that the right hand side of the page contains man's complete duty.

6. Read the whole carefully, and see how naturally each question arises from some preceding answer. For example we are told, Q. 12, about the agreement that God made with man, and the most natural question is, Q. 13, viz, was that agreement kept? "No," is the reply. "It was broken by sin." "What is sin?" cries the next question, and next, "What was the special sin of our first parents." And just as natural is Q. 16, How far that sin and fall extends. Then learning that all share in it, we ask, Q. 17, what kind of a state it is into which men have fallen and on being told that it is a state of sin and misery, we ask, Q. 18, What is its sinfulness, and Q. 19, What is misery?

Then follows a wondering question, viz, as to whether man was left in that state, bringing the joyous answer that God's love and mercy has provided a way of escape by a Redeemer. Glad at the news, we can scarcely think of any other question than Q. 21. Who is this Redeemer? Told that He is the Son of God and became man, the question that most naturally arises, is Q. 22, How He became man, and just as naturally, Q. 23, What work he does in saving men. The answer to this requires five more questions to satisfy curiosity; the whole giving a complete summary of the life and work of Christ.

When all this has been learned about Christ, how natural to ask, as does Q. 29. How we are made sharers in what He has done, then, Q. 30. How the Spirit does this.

How natural too on reaching this stage to ask as does, Q. 32. *Qui Bono?* "What the good of it all." What benefits do they that are called and come, partake of in this life, and, Q. 37, at death, and, Q. 38, at the resurrection. Read down the other column and the same feature runs through it all.

7. Doctrine, or what man is to believe, begins with the being of God, before creation, moves along to his plan, then to its execution, then to the creation of man, his fall and his redemption, and ends, Q. 38, in eternity, where it begins. God reaches down from eternity and lifts man up to Himself, making him, Q. 38, "perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all Eternity."

8. The sections of doctrine and duty correspond *i.e.* opposite the first section, Q. 4-11, there is no corresponding section of duty, because man does not exist. It deals with matters before his creation.

9. Then the *doctrine* of the section from Q. 12-19, on the covenant of works, has its counterpart in the *duty* of the section from Q. 39-84. In Q. 12 we are taught the doctrine that perfect obedience was a condition of that covenant, and in Q. 39,