

He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice..

Dr. Schaff says concerning the Westminster Confession :

"It would be impossible now-a-days to pass such an elaborate system through any Protestant ecclesiastical body with a view to impose it upon all teachers of religion."

Then it is not the living utterance of the day. The new creed, we believe, is of American Congregationalists. Let it by all means be criticised, improved if the consensus of the Churches require it, but there it stands, for weal or for woe, a fair representation of the consensus, not only of the Congregational, but of a much wider circle of the Evangelical churches, we verily believe. We do not believe that the Pan-Presbyterian council to meet this year in Belfast could agree to frame a more rigid confession even with the fear of the Westminster before its eyes.

THE new Congregational creed has received some severe handling at the hands of Rev. J. Cook in his Boston Monday lectures, who pronounces it "a fast and loose compromise. A tissue of latitudinarian loopholes." What creed is not, when ingenuity undertakes to evade it? We are, however, indebted to Mr. Cook for some side-light upon the matter. Three of the twenty-five commissioners refused to sign, two have now given public utterances as to their position, and Dr. Alden, in a letter to Mr. Cook has given the creed as *he* would have voted for it. As the matter is of some importance we purpose to devote a little space thereto; though Mr. Cook's criticisms and Dr. Alden's letters we cannot give *in extenso*.

In the light of the suggested amendments we will view Articles XIII. The objection is, that though it pronounces against Universalism in its ordinary form, it does not against semi-Universalism in the form of probation after death, and the insertion of the words "the issues of which are determined by the deeds done in the body" after "final judgment" was suggested. And yet a probationist might ingeniously (if not ingenuously) maintain that the deeds once done in the body are the determining causes of condemnation, only another chance may be given to lay hold upon that grace which overrules

the deeds done in the body, to the "loving much" of those to whom much had been forgiven; and if it should be objected that we do not make the deeds done in the body the final determining power, the answer is ready, nor do the deeds done in the body determine finally for those who "were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" (which words are by the critics desired in Article VII. after the word Redeemer). Nor do we see how the words "both of the just and of the unjust" after "the resurrection of dead" exclude the annihilationist, seeing they may (some do) consistently maintain the resurrection of the unjust "to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." The simple truth is, that no creed can be framed that will meet every ambiguity of language or critical device of learned ingenuity. The Westminster Confession is *facile princeps*, a giant among creeds, yet as a matter of fact its statements are made to embrace diversities, and it has not escaped the evasion of being signed or assented to as a confession of peace rather than a confession of faith, actually and wholly.

Historically, the Congregational churches, both of England and America, have inherited the theology of the old Westminster symbol. The Savoy declaration of 1658 in England, as the Cambridge platform of New England, ten years previously, virtually stood upon the Westminster Confession, and as late as 1865 at Boston,

"Standing by the rock where the Pilgrims set foot upon these shores," the elders and messengers of the Congregational churches of the United States in National Council assembled, like them acknowledging no rule of faith but the Word of God, declared adhesion to the faith and order of the Apostolic and Primitive churches held by the Pilgrim Fathers, and substantially embodied in the Confessions and platforms which the Synods of 1648 and 1680 set forth and re-affirmed.

The Synod of 1680 was the one which accepted and endorsed the declaration of the Savoy Conference.

The English Congregational Union was formed 1831. In 1833 a declaration was adopted with this avowal :

Disallowing the utility of creeds and articles of religion as a bond of union, and protesting against subscription to any human formularies as a test of communion, Congregationalists are yet willing to declare, for general information, what is commonly believed among them, reserving to every one the most perfect liberty of conscience.