

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

WHY ARE YOU A PRESBYTERIAN?—II.

BY REV. JOHN LAING, DUNDAS.

We have seen that "to be a Presbyterian" means to believe in a personal God, in a revelation of that God, in an inspired record of that revelation, in the authority of that record in matters of faith and duty, and in a Church separated by God from the world. We have seen also that in these fundamental tenets Presbyterians agree with other Christians. But there are also distinctive tenets which Presbyterians hold to be taught in Scripture either directly or by just inference, and in which they differ more or less widely from other Christians. In our day, and in this country, we have three distinct positions assumed by those who claim to be Christians.

1. The Romanist or High Church theory, according to which the Church is before and above the Bible, in such sense that the Church—that is, the clergy—defines what is Scripture, and authoritatively interprets it, denying to the individual Christian the right of private judgment. The extreme of this view is reached in the doctrine of Papal infallibility in matters of faith and morals, and it demands abject submission of reason to the authoritative decrees of a man, and unquestioning obedience to human commands. Thus God's authority in His Word is made void.

2. The Rationalistic or so-called Liberal theory, according to which the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, although authoritative and sufficient when just given to the Jews and early Christians, are no longer wholly or exclusively binding on men. It is asserted that the advance and progress of civilization have rendered these writings antiquated, and that, with the additional light which men now have, some things commanded in Scripture, are no longer binding; and that it is right and expedient to add to the institutions, ordinances and commands of Scripture, so that the Church may keep pace with the progress of the age. However plausibly such arguments may be set forth, they certainly end in superseding Scripture as the only rule of faith and practice, and in exposing the Church to the corrupting influences of man's fallen nature and of an ungodly world. Thus God's authority in His Word is again made void by the fancies and ordinances of man. Against both these theories a Presbyterian takes his stand, and stoutly maintains that "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. The infallible rule of interpretation is the Scripture itself . . . and the Supreme Judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but *the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.*" (Westminster Confession, ch. 1., secs. 6, 9, 10)

3. Besides the above there are other Christians who, professing like Presbyterians to hold to Scripture alone, differ from these in their interpretation of certain portions of Scripture, or as to the legitimacy of inferences to be drawn from such passages. To this class belong the Independents, Baptists, Brethren, and some others. The difference between these latter and Presbyterians is not so much one of principle as of interpretation. Nevertheless, the points of difference are far from being unimportant.

Presbyterians hold distinctive views on matters (1) of doctrine, (2) of Church government, (3) of worship. They hold that all the *doctrines* taught in Scripture are to be humbly received as God's truth, and no other; that the *government* of the Christian Church, as laid down in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, is to be established and maintained, and that no usage, officer, or order of the ministry not found in the New Testament is to have a place of authority in the government of the Church; that all the ordinances and rites of *worship* appointed by our Lord and His apostles are obligatory on Christians still, but that no ordinance or rite is to be introduced into worship, sanction for which is not to be found in the New Testament. Nevertheless "there are some circum-

stances concerning the worship of God and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word of God, which are always to be observed" (Westminster Confession, ch. 1., sec. 6).

Having thus endeavoured to lay down, it is to be hoped with sufficient clearness, the grand principle which is to guide us, we may hope to appreciate the peculiar tenets of Presbyterianism, and we shall endeavour to give them in further detail.

PRESBYTERY OF LINDSAY S. S. CONVENTION.

[At a Sabbath School Convention of the Presbytery of Lindsay, held at Uxbridge, on the 23rd Feb., the Rev. J. Elliot, of Cannington, delivered a preliminary address as retiring President, the substance of which was as follows, and it appears in THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN by request of the Convention.]

Whatever the defects and need of improvement of Sabbath school systems in our day, certainly one of the progressive characteristics of the age is growing interest in the Scriptural instruction of the young. Progressive as is the spirit of the age, it is not so progressive yet as the spirit of the Bible. The spirit of prophecy is progressive, and so is that of the calls and stirring admonitions of the Word of God. That part of the philosophy of the age which is philosophy falsely so called, which is the building up of systems on mere theories instead of solid foundations, is anything but truly progressive. Its leading spirits do not anticipate a *conscious* immortality. They think of their conscious existence as limited by this life which is but as a span, and that, if they exist subsequently, it will be as vapour, or something not much better, in infinite space!

Professor Tyndall said, in one of his published addresses: "Here, however, I must quit a theme too great for me to handle, but which will be handled by the loftiest minds after you and I, *like streaks of morning cloud, shall have melted into the infinite azure of the past!*"

They do not see any need or evidence of the influence or even existence of an intelligent first cause, and thinking that originally all existence was small material elements or atoms, they regard those original elements as having, in the course of long durations, become by some law or laws what the universe and its living inhabitants now are. What baseless fabrics! But they are not only mere theories; they are moreover very largely not progressive but most markedly *retrogressive*.

Democritus, who was born about 500 years B.C., and who was a cotemporary of Socrates, propounded the theory of atoms of matter existing from all eternity, and gradually by some fortuitous concurrence becoming all that then was! Epicurus, about a century after the times of Democritus, took up and eagerly sought to propagate essentially the same theory, thought there was no need of a Creator, that conscious living minds must have sprung somehow out of matter, the essence of mind being probably "round atoms of fire!" Lucretius, less than a century before the Christian era, ardently took up essentially the same theory, and in his book, "*De Rerum Natura*" (On the Nature of Things) set forth the same old theory of the formation of all things from uncreated atoms, and he coloured up the theory by poetic genius. But many great minds in those ancient times thought very differently. Cicero, for instance, a cotemporary of Lucretius, thought that above and around him were clear marks of divine design—proofs of the existence and controlling influence of an intelligent first cause. Part of his reasoning was thus: "My name is made up of six letters. Now, let those letters be cut out on six separate pieces, say of wood. Let those six pieces of wood be taken together in one hand and thrown up into the air. How often would they have to be so thrown up before, by some fortuitous concurrence, they fell into a straight line, and in proper order, and at equal distances from one another, making C I C E R O? Would they ever so fall? And am I to believe in the order and adaptations all about in the universe without believing in an intelligent first cause? If any can believe it, to my mind it seems an impossibility." I need hardly say, we are not attempting to give his very words, but part of his reasoning.

As to the modern anti-Scriptural theories, the true

state of the case seems to be this: *The cold fingers of scepticism and infidelity* have been stretched back through a long succession of centuries; they have laid hold of a number of dry branches of Roman, Grecian, and other ancient theoretic thought; they have shaken them up from amid the dust of ages; they have selected some of them, and therewith interwoven some intellectual slips of their own; they have brushed them up, and, through the medium of the press, they flourish them before their cotemporaries as worthy of all acceptance, as having possibly some virtue in them (as had the tree cast into the waters of Marah) or, at least, as having a tendency to sweeten the troubled sea of humanity, whose waters cast up mire and dirt! In view of such theories, we feel, if possible, more deeply than ever the need and value of Divine revelation, and whatever the abilities of the authors and propagators of such theories, thinking of them in relation to the disorders and great necessities of human nature, we say they are physicians of no value, they have "no healing medicines," and we turn from them with hearts growing warmer with gratitude for the divine diagnosis, the divine prescription, the divine remedy, of the divinely inspired *vade mecum*—the Holy Bible, due attention to which will be followed by being lifted up forever to the better land, where the inhabitants shall not say, I am sick, where the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity; the Gospel remedy, furnished and applied by Him who said, "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." To that will we cleave; to that will we invite the rising race.

A great deal has been said and written about "the survival of the fittest," and there may be, and probably is, some interesting scientific truth couched in that expression. In a high sense we believe in "the survival of the fittest." *Christianity is the fittest.* Neither scepticism, nor agnosticism, nor atheism, nor any other of the isms that originated not in the mind of the King of kings, but have sprung up from amid the disordered faculties of human minds, have ever proved, are proving, or will ever prove the fittest truly to elevate humanity for either world. Christianity is not only the fittest, but has far more than begun to ameliorate the nations, and her restoring influence will spread until the nations shall in spirit cluster around the cross of Him who is mighty to save, by whose stripes souls are healed, and who proclaimed, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

"Holy Bible, book divine;
Precious treasure! thou art mine!"

What Milton represents Adam in Eden as saying to an angel in heaven, may be fitly said of the Word of God:

"Great things, and full of wonder in our ears,
Far differing from this world, *Thou* hast reveal'd,
Divine Interpreter!"

Yes; the holy Scriptures, revealing God to man, and man to himself, and the Mediator of the new covenant, as the way to the Father and to glory everlasting, are able to make wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus; and doubtless the sentiments cherished and expressed in the course of the sessions of this Convention will be in living sympathy with the spirit of the psalmist as indicated by the grand and noble resolve, "We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength, and the wonderful works that He hath done; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Ps. lxxviii. 4, 7).

ST. PETER AND ST. PATRICK.

BY REV. JOHN DUNBAR, DUNBARTON.

In these days of saintly celebrations and papal processions it may be that some who fall in with the one and follow on with the other are under the impression that St. Peter and St. Patrick are but different names for the same person, while others professedly better posted in patrician lore may believe not only that they are names of different individuals but most devoutly hold that the former was the father and founder of the Romish Church, and that the latter was no less the father and founder of the Irish Church, and that both of course were devout Roman Catholics.

That the Church of Rome was founded by Peter,