

III.

DOES THE CONFESSION NEED REVISION?*

I HAVE read with great interest the criticisms upon the paper which was presented by me to the Presbytery of New Brunswick, with which Dr. Van Dyke has honored me in the *Herald and Presbyter* of July 31. If I correctly understand the drift of Dr. Van Dyke's remarks, he argues that revision of the Confession is necessary, and he is willing to rest this alleged necessity on three criticisms of the Confession, which he states. It does not seem proper for me to pass these suggestions by without remark, and the less so, that the three points which Dr. Van Dyke has singled out are those which have been most frequently dwelt upon by those who advocate revision. We may hope, then, that if these do not prove adequate reasons for undertaking the task, it may be admitted that there is little serious call for it in the churches.

Probably, however, before entering into a discussion of these test criticisms, I ought to say a word in general about the New Brunswick paper, which has furnished occasion for Dr. Van Dyke's article. Let this be as brief as possible. That paper was intended to bring together what is, in essence, a threefold argument against the necessity of revision—an argument which, if founded on facts, ought

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to prevail. It was intended to urge the following points, viz.: (1) Revision is not necessary in order to ease the consciences of our office-bearers in accepting the Confession; (2) it is not needed in order to correct any serious infelicities in expressing the doctrines we profess; and (3) it will throw difficulties in the way of the realization of hopes of church union, already being entertained by the Church. In all this there is certainly no claim to perfection and infallibility for the Confession; there is no arraignment of the right or power of the Church to undertake a revision of it. The question is a question of expediency. The point is, Does the Confession need revision in order to ease the consciences of our office-bearers in accepting it as a test of soundness, or in order to fit it to be our testimony to the truth of God as taught in His word, and our text-book of doctrine? And the propositions which are defended are (1) that as we accept it, as office-bearers, only for "system of doctrine," and it confessedly brings the system we profess to adequate expression, it does not need revision for the first of these reasons; and (2) that as its statements of the truths that enter into this system are exact, full, complete, moderate, catholic, inclusive, and devout, it does not need revision for the second reason. If I properly understand Dr. Van Dyke, he does not take issue with the first of these propositions. He criticizes my mode of stating it, indeed, as if it implied that advocates of revision desired change in the system of doctrine. This "for himself and as many as will adhere to him," he repudiates. The object of those for whom he speaks "is not to change the system of doctrine taught in the Confession, nor to repudiate or modify or dilute any one doctrine of that system." Surely, then, we may say that Dr. Van Dyke agrees that no change in the system of doctrine which the Confession teaches, or in "any one doctrine of that system," is needed. And that is just my first contention. His whole case, then, is apparently directed

against my second contention, and is hung, in the present paper, on three selected instances, which he thinks “fully demonstrate the necessity and practicability of revision.”

These three points concern the statement of the doctrine of reprobation, the clause about “elect infants,” and the alleged absence from the Confession of sufficient recognition of the universal provision and free offer of salvation in Christ. I cannot deny that Dr. Van Dyke has chosen his points well. The issue made by them is distinct; and it is probably on these three points that the decision of the general question will turn. But if this be true, I cannot but think that as the Church (to use an old rabbinical phrase) “sinks herself down in the book” during the coming months, she will, on this issue, feel constrained to vote for no revision. Certainly, speaking for myself, I do not desire revision at these points, and feel bound to affirm that the Confession stands in no need of revision in any one of them—that the opinion that it does rests on a misapprehension of its teaching—and that the alterations that have been proposed would certainly mar it and leave it a less satisfactory document than it now is. I owe to myself some words in justification of my venturing to differ so materially from so ripe a scholar and so thoughtful a theologian as Dr. Van Dyke.

I.

THE DOCTRINE OF REPROBATION.

The third chapter of the Confession, “Of God’s Eternal Decree,” as it was the occasion of the overture of the Presbytery of Nassau opening the present discussion, so it has borne, thus far, the brunt of objection to the Confession. To me it appears, however, a most admirable chapter—the most admirably clear, orderly, careful, and moder-

ate statement of the great mysteries of God's decree to be found in the whole body of the Reformed Confessions. How, then, shall we account for the offence which has been taken with it of late? I trust I shall be excused for saying it frankly. It seems to me to have arisen from a very strange confusion, involving both the doctrine of reprobation on the one side and the purport of the Westminster Confession on the other.

In order to explain what I mean, let me begin by reminding the reader that the Reformed doctrine has always distinguished (under various names) between what we may call preterition and condemnation, and has always taught that preterition is sovereign (as, indeed, it must be if election is sovereign), while condemnation, a consequent only of preterition, is for men's sins. The sentence which Dr. Van Dyke quotes from Dr. A.A. Hodge is perfectly accurately expressed: "It is no part of the Reformed faith that God's . . . *treatment* of the lost is to be referred to His sovereign will. He *condemns* men only 'for their sins, to the praise of His glorious justice.'" But it *is* a part of the Reformed faith that preterition is sovereign, as Dr. Whitaker, in the age before the Westminster Assembly, clearly tells us: "Of predestination and reprobation it is our part to speak advisedly. But that the only will of God is the cause of reprobation, *being taken as it is contrary to predestination*, not only St. Paul and St. Augustine, but the best and learnedest schoolmen, have largely and invincibly proved." I do not know where this necessary distinction between the sovereignty of preterition and the grounding of the consequent condemnation on sin, is better put, in late writing, than in the late Dr. Boyce's (of the Louisville Baptist Seminary) "Abstract of Systematic Theology," which I mention here chiefly to call attention to the fact that Dr. Boyce's treatment is precisely that, even

in its peculiarities, of the great Westminster divine, Dr. Thomas Goodwin. I prefer, however, to quote here another Westminster divine, who appears to me to be more representative of the thought of the Assembly—Dr. John Arrowsmith—whose statement will serve to illuminate for us not only the subject itself, but the treatment of it in the Westminster Confession, and thus to supply us with a starting-point for its study.

In his “Chain of Principles,” Arrowsmith explains: “Preterition, or negative reprobation, is an eternal decree of God, purposing within Himself to deny unto the non-elect that peculiar love of His wherewith election is accompanied, as, also, that special grace which infallibly bringeth to glory. . . . This description carries in the face of it a clear reason why the thing described goeth under the name of negative reprobation, because it standeth mainly on the denial of these free favors which it pleaseth God to bestow on His elect.” When speaking later of the “consequents of the forementioned denials,” he comes to “3, Condemnation for sin,” and says: “This last is that which, by divines, is usually styled *positive reprobation*, and is clearly distinguishable from the *negative* in that the one is an act of punitive justice respecting sin committed and continued in. But the other an absolute decree of God’s most free and sovereign will, without respect to any disposition in the creature. I call them consequents, not effects; because, though negative reprobation be *antecedent* to them all, it is not the proper *cause* of them. This difference between the decrees Aquinas long since took notice of. ‘Election,’ saith he, ‘is a proper cause both of that glory which the elect look for hereafter, and of that grace which they here enjoy. Whereas reprobation is not the cause of the present sins of the non-elect, though it be of God’s forsaking them; but their sin proceeds from the parties themselves

so passed by and forsaken.’ ” A clearer or more exact statement of the common Reformed doctrine on this subject could scarcely be found. Although the matter is capable of very copious illustration from the Westminster divines, we may content ourself with this typical statement. Enough has been already quoted to point out that the Westminster divines had in mind, as, indeed, they could not fail to have, the very obvious and necessary distinction between God’s sovereign decree of preterition—“negative reprobation,” as Arrowsmith calls it—which must be as free and sovereign as election itself, of which it is, indeed, but the negative statement; and his dealing with those thus passed by, which depends on their deserts. The fact that men are sinners does not affect the sovereignty of preterition; it only affects the treatment they are left to by preterition. If, for instance, out of the holy angels God chose sovereignly a certain number for some high service, involving special gifts of grace to them to fit them for it, the “leaving” of the rest would be just as truly “preterition” as in the case of fallen men; but the consequent treatment being but the “consequent,” and not the “effect,” of preterition, would be infinitely different in the two cases, seeing that it is the effect of the deserts, whatever they may be, in which those who are “passed by” are found to be left. Consequently, *sin* is not the cause of preterition; *election* is the cause of preterition; *i.e.*, the choosing of some is the cause that “the rest” are left. Sin is the cause, however, of how the preterited ones are treated. And to guard this, the Westminster men were accustomed to use a phrase they borrowed from Wollevius, which affirmed that sin is not the *causa reprobationis*, but the *causa reprobabilitatis*; that is, sin is not the cause of *reprobation* (otherwise the elect, who also are sinners, would be reprobates), but it is the cause of men being in a *reprobable state*.

These are not theological subtleties; they are broad, outstanding facts of God's dealing with men; and it is failure to note them that is causing much (not always wholly intelligent) criticism of the Confession in these last days.

Let us come back to the third chapter of the Confession now, and note its structure. It opens with what is the finest and most guarded and most beautiful statement of the doctrine of God's decrees in general that has ever been compressed into so small a space (Sections 1 and 2). Then, proceeding to the special decree dealing with His creatures' destiny, it *first* asserts the fact that this sovereign, particular, and unchangeable decree extends also over this sphere of the destiny of the creature (Sections 3 and 4), and *then* proceeds to outline God's consequent dealing with the diverse classes (Sections 5-7), closing with a caution against careless handling of such great mysteries (Section 8). Were this the proper occasion for it, it would be a pleasure to expound this marvelously concise, full, and careful statement of an essential doctrine, in detail. Now, however, we are concerned only to emphasize the obvious fact that the famous Section 3 is nothing more than the clear statement of one fact falling under Section 1, here particularly restated in order to supply a starting-point for the full discussion of God's special decree given in Sections 4-8. To accept the general doctrine of Section 1, and then be stumbled by the specific fact asserted under it by Section 3, is simply to deny *in specie* what has just been asserted *in genere*. If "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass" (III., i.), how can we be offended by the assertion that "by the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life and others foreordained

to everlasting death” (III., iii.), unless we are prepared to deny that “it comes to pass” that some go to eternal life and some to eternal death? Are we to be Calvinists only “in the vague,” and on the moment that we descend into details, be ready not only to stumble at our Calvinistic faith, but also to desert elementary logic? What need there is for amending this section we certainly fail to see.

It is a matter of interest, indeed, but of less importance, to ask what would be the effect of adopting the amendment to it proposed by Dr. Van Dyke, who desires that the words, “*for their sins*” should be inserted into Section 3. “Will any opponent of revision,” he asks, “maintain that the addition of these words would mar the integrity of our Confession?” I answer, unhesitatingly, yes; the insertion of these words into Section 3 would be an intolerable confusing of the logical order and exactitude of statement of this now beautifully ordered and carefully phrased chapter. It would prematurely introduce the statement of the *ground* of God’s actual dealings with *one* class into the statement of the *fact* that *two* classes are discriminated. It would confound the treatment of *preterition* (which is sovereign) with that of *condemnation* (which is based on sin). It would throw the whole chapter into such confusion

* Compare the admirable discussion of the late Principal Cunningham (Historical Theology, II., pp. 422-430). “It is manifest,” he says, “that if the Calvinistic doctrine upon this great *general* question be established” (*i.e.*, of the Decrees, as in III, 1, 2), “this settles all the questions bearing upon the subjects of election and reprobation, or the purposings and actings of God with respect to the character and fate of men individually. If God has unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, and if, in point of fact, some men are saved and the rest perish, then it must be true that He has predestinated some men to everlasting life and has foreordained others to everlasting death.” (pp. 424-7).

as to render Section 7 superfluous, while affording us but a sorry substitute for that richer section. In the effort to prevent careless readers from misapprehending a plain and admirably ordered document, it would compel all careful readers to be offended by a bad arrangement and an insufficient theological discrimination. Speaking for myself, then, I do not hesitate to say that the present form of the third chapter suits me precisely, and that the proposed change would be unacceptable and confusing, and appears to me to rest only on an unwillingness to take the trouble to follow the Confession in the logical ordering of its matter.

II.

INFANT SALVATION.

If the current misapprehensions of Chapter III. are remarkable, I think we may characterize the interpretation of Chapter X., Section 3, which finds a body of non-elect infants, dying in infancy, implied in its statement, as one of the most astonishing pieces of misinterpretation in literary history. It is so perfectly gratuitous as almost to reach the level of the sublime. And when Dr. Van Dyke adduces “the ambiguous phrase ‘*elect* infants dying in infancy,’ ” as sanctioning “the popular impression that we hold the abhorrent doctrine of the damnation of infants,” and as, therefore, one of the three cases in which the necessity for revision is obvious, he renders it easy for us to reply that the phrase is not, properly speaking, “ambiguous,” and that the Confession is certainly in no need of revision to guard it from a wholly unreasonable interpretation.

The assertion that the clause in question necessarily implies, as its opposite, a body of non-elect infants dying in infancy, has been so often and so dogmatically reiterated

of late years, however, that I shall need to ask the reader to go with me to the text of the Confession, before I can hope that he will credit my counter-assertion that such an implication is a total misunderstanding of it. Let us observe, then, that we are now dealing with effectual calling, not with election. All questions of election have been settled seven chapters back; and this logically arranged Confession—the careful strictness of the logical arrangement of which has been made a reproach to it—is not a document to rebroach that question at this late and inappropriate point. Let us observe, next, that in the apprehension of the framers of the Confession effectual calling is the first step in the application of redemption to God’s elect. To them, and them only, is given this grace. But how? “*By His word and Spirit*”—and then a rich statement is made as to how this call works in and on them, so as that, though effectually drawn to Jesus, they come most freely and willingly. God’s elect, then, are saved through the external call of the word and the internal call of the Spirit conjoined. But what if God’s elect die before they are capable of receiving this external call of the word? Are they then lost? No, says Section 3; God’s elect that die in infancy are regenerated and saved through the internal work of the Spirit, without the intermediation of the word; and so are all others of the elect who are incapable of receiving such an outward call. Now, observe: There is no such distinction in the minds of the framers of the Confession, at this point, as “elect infants dying in infancy,” and “non-elect infants dying in infancy.” The distinction in their minds is that between “elect infants that reach the adult state,” who are saved by the “word and Spirit,” and “elect infants dying in infancy” who are saved by the Spirit apart from the word. This is the antithesis that was in their minds when they wrote this phrase;

and they expected the reader to understand, as he read the words “elect infants dying in infancy,” that these were the opposites of those who, having reached adulthood, were saved by the intermediation of the word. In short, “elect infants dying in infancy” is equivalent to “such elect infants as die in infancy,” *and not at all* to “such infants dying in infancy as are elect.” This is absolutely necessary to the progress of the thought. And this being so, the phrase does not start the question as to whether there are non-elect infants dying in infancy at all. To raise that question here is perfectly gratuitous; and as it was not in the minds of the writers as they wrote this phrase, no proof that the majority of the Westminster divines believed that there were, or might be, non-elect infants dying in infancy, has any bearing on the interpretation of this passage. We deal with the Confession that they framed, and with what they teach in it—not with what outside of it they are known to have believed. What they would have said had they felt called upon to speak of the question whether there be non-elect infants dying in infancy, we may indeed learn from their private writings. But we are not concerned with what they teach elsewhere on subjects not here under discussion; but only with what they teach here. And what they teach here is that all of God’s elect that reach adult age are called by the “word and Spirit,” but such elect infants as die in infancy, and all others of the elect who are incapable of the outward call, are saved, apart from the outward call, by the Spirit’s regeneration. How many there are—whether all or some of such as die in infancy—is a question wholly out of mind. The antithesis is that unless these infants die in infancy, or these others are really incapable of receiving the outward call, they cannot be saved without a knowledge of the gospel—and *that* the fourth section goes on to assert. To raise any other antith-

esis here is to raise a false antithesis, which was not in the minds of the writers; and to make any inferences from this false antithesis is to read something of our own into the text. If we choose to raise such questions of our own, let us answer them; the Confession has not raised them, and does not answer them by statement or implication.

This interpretation of the bare text is powerfully supported by the history of the framing of this phrase in the Assembly. The chapter on effectual calling in the first form lacked Section 3, and therefore it was ordered (“Minutes,” p. 134) “that something be expressed in fit place *concerning infants’ regeneration in their infancy.*” Observe, this is the point in the minds of the Assembly—the *regeneration of infants in their infancy*. What they wished to do was to show that Sections 1 and 2 did not exclude those who die in infancy from salvation, by the assertion that the effectual call came through the word. It was the possibility and actuality of regeneration in infancy that they wished to assert, and this, and this only, they do assert,—without implying anything at all as to how many infants dying in infancy are so regenerated, which they would have adjudged a wholly inappropriate subject to broach at this place. We read in the “Minutes” of debates about this section, but absolutely nothing of the debate turning on anything else than the memorandum quoted above suggests. The phrase that occurs once, “Proceed in debate about elect of infants” (p. 162), furnishes no ground whatever for an opposite inference. In the complete uncertainty as to what is meant by the phrase, “elect of infants,” or indeed whether it represents anything more than one of the numerous verbal blunders of the not over-careful scribe, it only tells us that Section 3 was carefully considered before it was finally accepted. All we know is that it cannot mean anything inconsistent

with both the memorandum which opened the debate and the formulated section which closed it. Dr. Van Dyke has somewhere in his papers in the *Evangelist* said (if my memory serves me), that he is aware that this Section 3 was arrived at by a compromise. If he will be so good as to point out the evidence for this, he will confer a favor on scholars. I have searched the "Minutes" in vain for any signs of such a compromise. To show that Westminster divines differed as to whether all or only some of those who die in infancy are saved, is nothing to the purpose. There is no evidence that they had this matter in mind when this section was being debated. The only apposite thing would be to show that they differed as to whether infants that die in infancy are capable of regenerating grace. We know that their intention was to assert that death in infancy did not snatch the soul from the Saviour; we know this is what they did assert. We have no right to infer that this assertion was arrived at by any compromise, or that any debates were held on any other subject in this connection.

What has been said surely vindicates the Confession from the charge that revision is necessary at this point in order to prevent its seeming to teach that there are non-elect infants dying in infancy. Are the amendments offered in themselves acceptable? A thousand times no, I should say. First, to insert a statement that all those that die in infancy are elect, *here*, would be out of place and order. This is not the place to treat of who are elect and who not, but of *how God saves the elect*. Secondly, to insert such a statement anywhere would be an unnecessary burdening of the Confession with an explicit statement of what most Presbyterians believe, indeed, but not all feel justified in asserting to be revealed truth. For myself, I believe with all my heart that all dying in infancy are saved, and I be-

lieve that I can prove it from Scripture. But I think it far better to leave the Confession, asserting, as it does assert, that God saves all the elect, whether reaching adult age or dying in infancy, rather than to force into it a dogmatic definition of a doctrine which many among us still believe rests on a pious hope rather than on clear Scripture. To do this, as Dr. De Witt has unanswerably shown, is to move in the direction of narrowing our confessional basis, without necessity and without gain. The Confession already provides firm ground for all who believe that all those that die in infancy are elect, and it does this without dogmatism and without sacrificing its moderation and calm guardedness of statement. Why sacrifice this? No one can doubt that what the Confession asserts is exactly true: that “elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth.” Who denies that? And why should it be altered to a more doubtful form to save men from the possibility of misinterpreting it inconsistently with both the context and its own grammatical form?

III.

GOD’S LOVE TO MAN.

In the proceeding paper (pp. 25 *sq.* above) I have already said a few words regarding the general subject which lies at the base of the third test case which Dr. Van Dyke adduces to prove a necessity for revising the Confession—the Confession’s treatment of the love of God to man. Here the following few remarks, additional to what I have there said, may suffice. Dr. Van Dyke complains that “there is not, in all our Confession, one declaration which clearly comprehends or alludes to the teaching of the Scripture” on the sufficient provision and free proclamation of

salvation for all men, and their accountability for rejecting it. I do not understand Dr. Van Dyke to complain that all this is nowhere gathered up in a single statement, nor can he intend to complain that the Confession does teach (as it certainly does) the doctrine of “the limited” (or better, “the definite”) atonement. I understand him to mean that the Confession taken at large nowhere recognizes adequately the freedom of the great Gospel offer, and man’s consequent responsibility for rejecting it. But certainly this is somewhat rashly charged. It can hardly be said that the Confession nowhere teaches that “the eternal decree of God hinders no one from accepting the Gospel,” when the Confession explicitly teaches that God is not the author of sin (would it not be a sin to refuse the Gospel?), and that by the decree no “violence is offered to the will of the creature” (III., i.), nor is his liberty taken away (III., i.), and when it teaches that God freely offers the Gospel to all, as we shall immediately see. For to affirm that the Confession does not teach that the offer to all men is free, and that their acceptance of it would be saving, is to forget some of its most emphatic passages. The Confession vindicates the duty of translating the Bible “into the vulgar language of every nation,” on the ground that thereby, “the word of God dwelling in all plentifully, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope” (I., viii.). Here is clearly asserted the duty of the free proclamation, and the value of the truth as proclaimed to all—that all may through it be brought to “hope.” Again (VII., vi.) it is declared that the ordinances of the New Covenant differ from those of the Old, in that the Gospel is held forth in them “in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy to all nations”—certainly a broad enough basis for any preaching. But the Confession goes

further than this, declaring with the greatest explicitness (VII., iii.) that the Lord has “*freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved.*” It may be asserted, without fear of successful contradiction, that this Section 3 of the seventh chapter actually contains all that Dr. Van Dyke asks, *i.e.*, a full recognition of the universal, sufficient provision and the free offer of salvation to all, *along-side of* the statement of its special designation for the elect, and I do not see what need there is for a repetition of it elsewhere. Nay, it may even be maintained that we already have in the third chapter itself all the recognition of this freedom of proclamation which is appropriate in that place, it being not only declared in the opening of it that God’s decree does not supersede man’s liberty or responsibility, but also commended at the end that the doctrine of predestination be not so preached as to deter man from seeking salvation, but only so as to encourage the seekers with the assurance that though it be they who are working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, yet it is God who is working in them both the willing and the doing according to His won good pleasure. The Confession requires that predestination be so preached “that men attending the will of God revealed in his word [there is the free offer], and yielding obedience thereunto [there is the recognition of personal responsibility], may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation [there is the recognition of God’s hand in what is experienced only as their own work], be assured of their eternal election [there is the encouragement to further effort].” No wonder the splendid sentence follows: “So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, *diligence*, and *abundant consolation* to all that sincerely obey the Gospel.” The order here is, (1),

hear the Gospel, (2) obey it, (3) be encouraged and comforted because God's hand is certainly in it; and that is (1) free proclamation of the word; (2) responsibility in accepting it; (3) praise to and confidence in God for His blessed work in us.

I cannot, then, think the Confession in need of the third improvement which Dr. Van Dyke proposes. It has it already spread over its pages, and, especially in VI. iii., explicitly stated. If the attempt is made to set aside the Confession's clear declaration of God's love for men and His provision of a salvation adequate to all their needs, as insufficiently explicit, I cannot consider this a very reasonable procedure. No one doubts that the New Testament is written all over with the love of God to man; and yet it is the fact that there is but a single unique passage in it which brings the terms "God loved" and "the world" into immediate conjunction. This great doctrine can be not only "implied" but "declared" apart from this exact phraseology, and it is adequately "declared" both in the Scriptures and the Confession, apart from it. It is scarcely fair to apply different modes of estimation to the two documents. If the New Testament declares that "God is love," the Confession equally asserts, at its appropriate place, that He is "most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin" (II., i.). If the New Testament declares that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," the Confession traces the working of this mighty love from plan to act and from act to act, until it brings its own into the fruition of glory: and speaks continually of God's goodness which is over all, of His nature which is such that He can be described only as He who "is good and doeth good unto

all” (XXI., i.), of His condescension to covenant with man as man for his salvation (VII., i.), and of his unwearying determination that His gracious offers, freely made to all should not wholly fail (VII., iii.). As a matter of mere fact the whole essence and drift of the entire Confession is praise of the unspeakable and inexplicable love of God to man. As such it opens with God’s compassion in giving man a saving revelation of Himself (I., i.); places the God of Love, so grandly described, at the root of all its doctrinal statements (II., i.); bases His whole saving purpose on His “mere grace and love” (III., v.), and creation itself on His goodness (IV., i.)—a goodness which fails not in any dealing with His creatures (VII., i.), even in His dealings with sin (V., iv.). The Confession, in a word, accurately fulfills the demand which Dr. Schaff makes, for a Confession “that is inspired and controlled, not by the idea of divine justice, which is a consuming fire, but by the idea of divine love, which is life and peace”—“a Confession which is as broad and deep as God’s love, and as strict and severe as God’s justice.” This, this Confession is. And no Confession could be this which did not make, as this Confession does, its formative idea, not God’s general and indiscriminate love for His creatures, but His ineffable and peculiar love for His people—His *saving* love, as distinguished from His mere benevolence. God’s electing love is the highest manifestation of His love for man, not (as some seem to think) a limitation of it: it does not make His general love without effect—it gives it effect. That the Confession lays most stress on it, is to preserve the right proportion of faith and to glorify God’s general love, not to derogate from it. Doing so it makes everything of love, bases its whole fabric on it, and all the more glorifies it that it does not forget God’s justice. After the Bible, it is the most perfect charter of the divine love cur-

rent among men. Nor would it be bettered in this regard by making it speak twice as often about love and half as often of the black facts of human nature and destiny which furnish the occasion of the exhibition of God's love to men, and apart from a full realization of which we can have no appreciation of the depths of His love.

In closing, then, I reiterate that I cannot but feel that the Confession, if it is to be judged by these three well-chosen examples, must be adjudged to be in no need of revision. And I cannot help noting that all the objections seem to grow out of misapprehension of what the Confession does teach and how it teaches it. Why not so revise it as to make such misapprehension impossible, then? I can only reply, that no document can be framed which is incapable of being misapprehended by the careless reader, and I am bound to say that, in my judgment, the Confession cannot be misapprehended in these points when carefully read. Most of the presently urged objections have arisen primarily in the minds of enemies of Calvinism, whose misapprehension (or misrepresentation) was a foregone conclusion, and have, by dint of much proclamation, been conveyed from them to us—for the best of us are not proof against outside influences. We have tested assertions of this kind, not as we should, by grounded and consecutive study of the whole document, but by momentary adversion to the passages specially attacked, with our minds full of the attack. And so we have seen the sense in them which we were sent to look for. The remedy is not to revise the Confession in the hope of rendering misapprehension of it impossible, but to revise our study of the Confession, in the hope of correctly apprehending it. What the Confession needs is not revision, but study. And the present agitation will have been a boon to the Church, however it eventuates if it brings the Confession more into

the minds of our membership; if it applies its forms of sound words to our conceptions of doctrine, and lays its devout spirit alongside of our aspirations heavenward. For the Confession is not only the soundest, sweetest, most exact and moderate statement of doctrine ever framed. It is a revival document. It was framed by revivalists, in a revival age. And it bears a revival spirit in its bosom. He who feeds on it will find, not only his thought quickened and his intellectual apprehension clarified, but his heart warmed and his spirit turned toward God.