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A STEP TO AVOID

WHAT was the really decisive step in the long downward march of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. into its present condition of hopeless corruption? Was it the union between the Old and New Schools in 1869? Was it the union with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church so ruthlessly forced through in 1905-1906? Was it the decision of the General Assembly in 1910, refusing to sustain the complaint against licensure of certain Union Theological Seminary students? Was it the return of the Modernist-indifferentist forces to full power in 1925 after the brief interruption to their rule which had been caused by the moderatorship of Dr. Clarence E. Macartney? Was it the destruction of the orthodox Princeton Theological Seminary in 1929 and the substitution for it of the very different institution which now occupies the old buildings and bears the old name?

Well, any one of these events might perhaps lay claim to the unenviable distinction.

But we are inclined to think that another event may also conceivably lay such claim. The more we review the history of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the more we are inclined to think that perhaps the really decisive step in the downward path was the adoption of the amendments to the doctrinal Standards of the Church in 1903.

We hold that grave view of the amendments for two reasons.

In the first place, the amendments are bad in themselves. Mr. John Murray has shown that very clearly in the last number of *THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN*. Even in themselves, and quite without reference to the

purpose for which they were adopted or the results that came from them, they do tend to obscure the great central Reformed doctrine of the grace of God.

In the second place, these amendments are shown to be disastrous by their effects in the history of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Their evil effects have been manifest throughout the entire subsequent history of the church, and they became manifest with particular clearness just after the adoption of the amendments. The amendments were the decisive factor in the accomplishment of a very disastrous church union, the union between the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Just consider for a moment the situation which prevailed between 1903 and 1906, when the union was being accomplished. Here were two churches. One of them, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., had a distinctly Calvinistic creed; the other, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, had an equally distinctly anti-Calvinistic—namely, Arminian—creed.

Well, those two churches came together on the basis of the doctrinal standards of one of them—the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Did that mean that the Cumberland Presbyterians, formerly holding the Arminianism so plainly set forth in their creed, repudiated that Arminianism and returned to the Calvinistic fold? No, we are afraid it meant nothing of the kind. The Cumberland Presbyterians who came into the union were very careful not to say that their uniting with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. meant any such essential change in their doctrinal convictions. What they did say, in effect, was that the 1903 amendments to the Standards of the

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Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. brought those Standards into such essential harmony with the Cumberland creed that the obstacles to organic union were removed.

The truth is, the amendments were so worded as to catch in the church-union net two classes of persons. In the first place, they caught the orthodox party in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. That party interpreted the amendments as not modifying essentially the Calvinistic character of the Standards. In the second place, they caught the large indifferentist element in the Cumberland Church. They were held by that element to have tempered the supposed harshness of the Westminster Confession of Faith and so to have brought it into essential harmony with the Cumberland creed.

Was there ever a more wretched compromise, even in the history of modern indifferentist church-unionism?

But what shall we now do? Shall we, when we come to adopt the doctrinal Standards for The Presbyterian Church of America next month, have anything to do with such ambiguous excrescences upon a truly Biblical creed as those which are found in the 1903 amendments? God forbid! If we do that, we are planting the deadly seeds of indifferentism and decay in the very heart of our church's life. Instead, let us stand firmly, without compromise or ambiguity, on the basis of the great system of doctrine that the Bible contains—the great system of doctrine that is set forth in the Westminster Catechisms and Confession of Faith.

A HARD CHURCH TO GET OUT OF

THE gentlemen in control of the ecclesiastical machinery of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. seem to be rather difficult to please.

When we were in that church these gentlemen told us that if we did not agree with their policy we ought to get out. Certainly that was the general impression that was given as to their attitude. "If you do not like our Board of Foreign Missions," they said in effect, "you have a perfectly good remedy; you can simply withdraw from our church and be in a church whose agencies you can conscientiously support."

Well, we have now done as they desired. We have withdrawn from the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

One would think that they would rejoice in this solution. One would think that they would rejoice in getting rid of the "troublemakers" at last. They might conceivably state, in recording our departure, that we have departed under sentence or under charges; but surely the departure itself would have to be recorded,

and recorded with satisfaction on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities.

Very different is what has actually happened. We are put down in the recently published *Minutes* of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. with asterisks or other marks of distinction opposite our names to indicate the divers penalties of suspension from the ministry, temporary suspension, or deposition purported to have been inflicted upon us. Now the strange thing is that in many of these cases the dates of the purported infliction of the penalties, as shown in the *Minutes*, are not only subsequent to the time when we severed our connection with the church purporting to inflict them, but also subsequent to the time when we united with another religious body, The Presbyterian Church of America. Moreover, we continue to receive summonses to appear before these judicatories and notices of their meetings, exactly as though we were still members of them.

One may well wonder just exactly what the theory is on the basis of which these strange things are done. Is the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. some kind of penal institution in which people are kept against their will? We formerly had a different notion regarding it. We thought it was a purely voluntary organization in which a man remained just so long as he could conscientiously do so. But apparently we were wrong. Apparently there is written up above the doors of this church the words: "Leave liberty behind, you who enter here. You may enter or not as you please, but once having entered you remain forever."

But stop a minute. Is it really true that on this theory a man may choose even whether he will *enter* this church or not, to say nothing of getting out? That may well be doubted. On the contrary, the next step will logically be for the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to place people on its rolls entirely without any volition on their part. Any citizen may awake some fine morning to find himself enrolled as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.—perhaps because in accordance with some "religious trade agreement or monopoly with respect to the Protestant religion" (see the last issue of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN, p. 261) it may have been determined that he belongs in the "Presbyterian U.S.A." sphere of influence rather than in the church to which he innocently thought he belonged. Well, why not? Is there any really essential difference between putting a man on a church roll against his will and keeping him there against his will when he has definitely stated that his connection with that church is at an end? We confess that we can detect none. One of these two things seems to us to be just about as preposterous as the other.