

LECTURE XII.

THE ASSEMBLY'S CATECHISMS, LARGER AND SHORTER.

MY last Lecture was devoted to an account of the Confession of Faith which was prepared by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, and is still accepted by almost all orthodox Presbyterians of the Anglo-Saxon race as their confession or chief doctrinal symbol. I showed you how carefully it was framed on the lines already laid down by the best British divines, and especially by that prince of theologians, Ussher of Armagh,—to whom his fellow-churchmen of subsequent times have failed to render the homage he deserves for his great learning and his firm attachment to Augustinianism and our common Protestantism. It now only remains that before concluding these historical sketches I should give you some account of the Catechisms of the Assembly, and especially of the Shorter Catechism, which, with Baxter, I regard as, in several respects, the most remarkable of their symbolical books, the matured fruit of all their consultations and debates, the quintessence

of that system of truth in which they desired to train English-speaking youth, and faithful training in which, I believe, has done more to keep alive on both sides of the Atlantic reverence for the old theology than all other human instrumentalities whatever.

Attention is only now beginning to be given in somewhat like adequate measure to the structure and composition of these catechisms. The composition of the Confession of Faith has been minutely examined, and something like general agreement as to the sources from which it has been taken has been arrived at. But no similar service has yet been rendered in regard to the catechisms, and I do not see how I can more appropriately bring these Lectures to a close than by bringing a humble contribution to supply this *desideratum*.

It may fairly be said of the catechisms framed on the system of the doctrinal Puritans, and published in England between the years 1600 and 1645, that their name is legion. Perhaps no other so convincing proof can be cited of the great influence they were exercising throughout these years of trial and oppression, and also of the manner in which they came to acquire, retain, and increase it, as that which is furnished by the floods of different catechisms and different editions of the same catechism,—often five or six, in several

cases ten or twelve, and in some cases from twenty to thirty editions being poured forth from the London press in rapid succession. Among the members of the Assembly there were at least twelve or fourteen who had prepared and published catechisms of their own years before the Assembly met, as Twisse, White, Gataker, Gouge, Wilkinson, Wilson, Walker, Palmer, Cawdrey, Sedgewick, Byfield, and probably Newcomen, Lyford, Hodges, and Foxcroft, to say nothing of Cartwright, Perkins, Ussher, Rogers, and Ball, who somewhat earlier had prepared the way for them, and whom several of them can be shown to have more or less followed in their plan or in details.

The first step towards the preparation of a catechism may be said to have been taken in December 1643,¹ when Messrs. Marshall, Palmer, Goodwin, Young, and Herle, with the Scottish Commissioners, were appointed a committee to draw up a directory for public worship. That was intended to include a directory for catechising, if not a catechism, and the preparation of that paper was intrusted to Mr. Herbert Palmer.¹ Notwithstanding his great reputation as a catechist, his paper, as first presented, does not appear to have come up to the expectation of the Scottish Commissioners. Their chronicler tells us, 'Mr.

¹ *Baillie's Letters*, vol. ii. p. 118.

² *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 140.

Marshall's part anent preaching, and Mr. Palmer's about catechising, though the one be the best preacher, and the other the best catechist in England, yet we no ways like it; so their papers are passed in (*i.e.* into) our hands to frame them according to our mind.¹ This was written on 2d April 1644, and on 21st November of the same year it is briefly recorded that 'the catechise is drawn up, and I think shall not take up much time,' and again, on 26th December, that 'we have near[ly] also agreed in private on a draught of catechism, whereupon, when it comes into public, we expect little debate.' The natural inference from these notices seems to be that this catechism was either some one which had been drafted by themselves in terms of the remit made to them—the catechism published in 1644 for the benefit of both kingdoms, or that of Rutherford, still extant in MS.—and which they were prematurely counting on getting the committee and the Assembly to accept without much discussion, or else some modification of Mr. Palmer's directory or catechism, such as we shall find reason to believe they were willing, after consultation with their friends in the north, to accept, at least in its method and principles. Before this date the printed Minutes² of the Assembly show that

¹ *Baillie's Letters*, vol. ii. p. 148.

² Page 12, 2d December 1644.

Messrs. Marshall, Tuckney, Newcomen, and Hill had been added to Mr. Palmer 'for hastening the catechism,' and that on 7th February 1644-5 Messrs. Reynolds and Delmé were added,—of course in conjunction with the Scotch Commissioners, who claimed the right to be on all committees appointed to carry out any part of the uniformity covenanted for between the Churches.

Among the catechisms which I examined cursorily in 1866 in the British Museum and in Sion College Library was one bearing the title, *An Endeavour of making Christian Religion easie*, and published at Cambridge in 1640 without the author's name, but which, from Dr. Wallis' preface to his *Explanation of the Shorter Catechism*, I concluded was probably Palmer's. In it each of the principal answers is, by repetition of part of the question, made a complete and independent proposition, and these principal answers are broken down in a peculiar way in a series of subordinate questions, all capable of being answered by the monosyllables Aye or No. It did not then strike me as so similar to the Westminster Catechisms in their ultimate form as it does now, and not knowing then what we know (now that the Minutes have been transcribed from the almost illegible original) of the successive stages by which this ultimate form was reached, I had almost forgotten all about it, till five years ago, when, as I ruminated

over the notes of a very unintelligible debate in the *Minutes*, this fact came back to my remembrance as one which might enable me to cast light on it. It was not my good fortune, however, to get back to the British Museum till November 1879, and before that time my attention, as well as that of others, had been called by an Edinburgh bookseller to what is said by Dr. Belfrage on the history of the Shorter Catechism prefixed to the second edition of his *Practical Exposition of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism*. This history was not contained in the earlier edition of the book. Dr. Belfrage appears to have seen Palmer's Catechism, and to have compared it with the Assembly's, but his conclusion regarding it coincided rather with my first impressions. He states, however, that M'Crie, on the ground of the passage quoted above from Baillie, was disposed to come to the conclusion that 'Mr. Palmer was concerned in the first draft of the Catechism.' My friend Dr. Briggs, who also saw Palmer's treatise when in London in 1879, early in the following year gave an interesting account of its relations to the Shorter Catechism in the paper to which I referred in a former lecture.¹ I have preferred to wait till I had leisure to make a further study of all the contemporary Puritan catechisms, and might venture to speak of them with fuller knowledge.

¹ In *Presbyterian Review*, for January 1880.

I have little doubt that the paper which Palmer gave in to the Committee and to the Assembly in 1645, and which occasioned the debate to which I have referred, was substantially the same with the preface to his catechism. It details the method which he had himself made use of in his catechisings, and which many modern keys (as they are called) to the Shorter Catechism have borrowed from him or from Dr. John Wallis, who, without loss of time, applied the system of his revered master to the new catechism which the Assembly ultimately agreed on. The Scotch Commissioners, when they first heard this paper, were not satisfied with it ; and their impartiality therefore is the more highly to be commended in regard to it. They had themselves in the meantime brought out 'the New Catechism according to the form of the Kirk of Scotland, published for the benefit of both Kingdoms,' and perhaps in the hope that it might be adopted as the common catechism. Yet when they had had time to consider the subject more deliberately, and advise with their friends in Scotland regarding it, they proved in the debate to which I have referred, if not the only, certainly the most prominent advocates of Palmer's method and peculiar form of catechism. This debate occurred on the 13th of May 1645, probably just after the fifth edition of Palmer's little treatise had appeared. His efforts on that occasion were directed mainly

to securing the Assembly's approval of his *method* of catechising rather than of the detailed *contents* of his catechism. Yet, as I read the brief minutes of the debate, his efforts were not crowned with success. The Scotch Commissioners Rutherford and Gillespie spoke warmly in favour of his method of catechising, and of the practice he adopted of making each principal answer a distinct and complete proposition, and breaking down the principal answers by subordinate questions which could all be answered by Aye or No. His personal friend Delmé gave the plan a sort of general support, but all the other speakers, and among them Messrs. Marshall and Reynolds, two of the most prominent members of his committee, while frankly acknowledging his great skill and success as a catechist and the good that might come from ministers in their catechisings availing themselves of his method, resolutely objected to have these subordinate questions and answers reduced to rigid form and inserted in the public catechism.¹

¹ *Minutes of Westminster Assembly*, pp. 91-94—*Mr. Marshall*: 'I confess that the pains which that brother that brought in the Report [hath taken] is both accepted with God and hath been blessed by him. . . . But I crave leave to give a few dissenting thoughts to the method propounded.' These were in substance that people would come to get up the subordinate answers by rote as well as the principal ones, that good might come of the catechiser himself breaking up the principal answers in the method proposed, but not from their being inserted into the catechism and learned by rote. He approved, however, of commending all this in the preface to the catechism. *Mr. Reynolds*: 'We all

One can hardly contemplate without a shudder how near we were to missing the most concise, nervous, and severely logical catechism in our language had Mr. Palmer and the Scotch Commissioners at that time carried their point and got these subordinate questions and answers inserted in the catechism. I do not think that was further pressed on the Assembly after this date,¹ but Mr. Palmer continued to be so persuaded of its excellence and importance that he determined with himself that he would print upon his own method the catechism which the Assembly should ultimately adopt, and, departing to his rest ere that had been completed, he left his purpose, as a sacred legacy, to be executed by his young friend Wallis. He accordingly in 1648 published that explanation of the Shorter Catechism on the model of Palmer's

agree that way which is most for ingenerating knowledge is most to be used. But that this way before you is the best way I cannot discern. [If] you resolve it shall be but a directory, then how shall those Ayes or Noes be of use? . . . You will obtain your end as well by setting it down in the preface to the catechism.' Seaman says there were two questions before them, the one relating to a catechism, the other to the method of catechising, and that the two should be kept distinct, and the minister not too strictly tied up as to the latter. Palmer was somewhat dissatisfied with the result of the debate, and said that if he had not a peculiar interest in the matter he would have spoken more upon it.

¹ Baillie, however, says at a later date: 'We had passed a quarter of the catechise and thought to have made short work with the rest; but they are fallen into such mistakes and endless janglings about both the method and the matter that all think it will be longsome work.'—*Letters*, vol. ii. p. 416.

treatise, on which several so-called *keys* to it have in our own day been based.

It was on 1st August 1645 that a further report was presented by the committee to the Assembly. The interval may possibly have been employed in trying to put the materials of Palmer's Catechism into more acceptable shape, or to bring it nearer to the Scotch one (which, though more brief; is framed on the same plan), and to disencumber it of all the subordinate questions to the formal insertion of which objection had been taken. The only hints which the Minutes supply are that there was a debate as to whether the Creed should be expressed and probably made, as it was both in the Scotch and in Palmer's, and several contemporary catechisms, the basis of the exposition of the Articles of Faith, or whether these articles should be taken up in the systematic order more usually adopted in strictly Puritan catechisms. There was also a debate concerning God, which was one of the first articles in all the catechisms of the period, whether they were framed on the basis of the Apostles' Creed or of the commonly received system of theology. But I conclude that even yet the committee was not altogether of one mind,¹ and that it was on this account that, after debate on 20th August, it was reconstituted, and Mr. Palmer, Dr. Stanton, and

¹ *Minutes*, p. 124, 125.

Mr. Young were appointed to draw up the whole draft of the catechism with all convenient speed. Either, however, they did not proceed very speedily or they met with unexpected difficulties in their undertaking, and, on 22d July 1646, Mr. Ward was adjoined to them. It was not till 11th September 1646 that their report was called for, nor till the afternoon of Monday 14th September that it was presented; and from that date on to the 4th January 1646-7 it was from time to time taken up, and passed as far as the fourth commandment.¹ On 1st December, however, before much of it had passed, a large addition was again made to the committee, viz., Messrs. Whitaker, Nye, and Byfield, and 'the brethren who had been intrusted with the methodising of the Confession of Faith,' viz., Messrs. Reynolds, Herle, Newcomen, Arrowsmith, and Tuckney; and probably it was in consequence of these changes on the committee that on the 14th of January, on a motion by Mr. Vines, it was ordered 'that the committee for the catechism do prepare a draught of *two* catechisms, one more large and another more brief, in the preparation of which they are to have an eye to the Confession of Faith and the *matter* of the catechism already begun,'² or, as the Scotch Commissioners report it in a letter to the

¹ *Minutes*, pp. 281-318.

² *Minutes*, p. 321; also Baillie's *Letters*, vol. ii. p. 379.

Commission of their own Assembly, which bears unmistakeable evidence of being from the hand of Rutherford: 'The Assembly of Divines, after they had made some progress in the catechism which was brought in to them from their committee, and having found it very difficult to satisfy themselves or the world with one form of catechism or to dress up milk and meat both in one dish, have, after second thoughts, recommitted the work that two forms of catechism may be prepared, one more exact and comprehensive; another more easie and short for new beginners.'¹ The catechism which had already been so far passed was unquestionably still on the basis of Palmer's, but a large portion of the detailed historical explanations of the second part of the creed, relating to the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, was omitted, and in the exposition of the commandments another basis is already plainly discernible, while a more pronounced Calvinistic character is given to the doctrinal teaching. The variations from and additions to individual answers can in general be still traced to other contempor-

¹ MS. Minutes of Commission. To the same effect, Gillespie says to the Assembly in Edinburgh in August 1647, that the divines have found great difficulty how to make it full, such as might be expected from an Assembly, and, upon the other part, how to condescend to the capacity of the common and unlearned. Therefore they are a-making two distinct catechisms—a short and plain one for these, and a larger one for those of understanding.' Appendix to Baillie's *Letters*, vol. iii. p. 452.

ary catechisms, and the more important of them to those of Ussher, on whose catechetical manuals, as previously on his Articles of Religion, they seem to me to take pleasure in falling back, especially on all cardinal questions. Even this partially passed recension of a catechism follows his and more strictly Puritan treatises rather than Palmer's, in placing in the forefront the question and answer as to the rule of faith, and in inserting another as to the decrees of God ; and it is to the same source we have to trace the questions and answers as to the covenants of works and grace, the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices of the Redeemer, and the effectual calling, justification, adoption, and sanctification and perseverance of those who have been made partakers of redemption, and even the detailed and specific statements as to the sinfulness of the estate into which man fell. All these, which make the Westminster Catechisms what they ultimately became, are to be sought outside of Palmer's *Endeavour of making Christian Religion easie*, which the more they tried to adapt it to their purpose, the more they had to alter or supplement it ; and all these are to be found in the distinctively Calvinistic catechisms of Ezekiel Rogers, John Ball, William Gouge, M[atthew] N[ewcomen], and, to a considerable extent, in those of Henry Wilkinson and Adoniram Byfield, as well as of Archbishop Ussher,

Of this I deem myself entitled to speak with some confidence, having had the opportunity of carefully comparing the answers in their manuals as well as in Palmer's with the definitions ultimately inserted by the Assembly in one or other of its catechisms.

It was not till after the Scripture proofs for the Confession of Faith were completed that the result of the labours of the reconstituted committee in preparing a Larger Catechism were called for. But, on 15th April 1647, the first portion of them was presented to the Assembly and further portions were from time to time presented and discussed till, on 15th October of the same year, the Larger Catechism was finished, substantially in the shape in which we still have it. The doctrinal part of this manual, as every one who has carefully studied it knows, and as the resolution reconstituting the committee prepares us to expect, is taken to a large extent from the Confession of Faith. The explanation of the ten commandments, and of the duties required and the sins forbidden under each, is largely derived from Ussher's *Body of Divinity*, Newcomen's and Ball's catechisms, and perhaps also from Cartwright's *Body of Divinity* and some of the larger practical treatises of Perkins. The exposition of the Lord's Prayer has been got in part from the same sources, in part also from Attersoll's,

or some other catechism based on Perkins' treatise on the Lord's Prayer, and like it, supplying matter for confession of sin, as well as for prayer more strictly so called, under each of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. I can enter into particulars as to this derivation or correspondence only in the most cursory way.

The first question or interrogation, which does not seem to have appeared in the former draft of the committee, is taken from the old English translation of Calvin's Catechism, What is the principal and chief end of man's life? The answer to this question may be said to combine the answers to Question 3rd in the Catechisms of Calvin and Ames, 'To have his glory showed forth in us,' and 'in the enjoying of God,' and it may have been taken from them; or the first part may have been taken from Rogers, Ball, or Palmer, and the second from an Italian catechism of the sixteenth century.¹ The second question is one found in several contemporary catechisms, and the answer to it is substantially taken from the Confession of Faith. The third question, which in the former draft had stood apparently at the head,² is put here in a somewhat altered shape, and the clause which had there been principal, and again becomes so in the Shorter Catechism, is brought in as subsidiary and thrown to the end of the answer. The next

¹ 'Goder' eternamente Dio.'

² *Minutes*, p. 281.

question, relating to the proofs showing that the Scriptures are the word of God, is found in many Puritan catechisms, and the answer is abridged from the Confession of Faith. The question as to what the Scriptures principally or especially teach is found both in Paget's and in Ball's Catechism, and the answer in Ussher's *Principles of Christian Religion*. The next question, What do the Scriptures make known of God? and the answer, are found in analogous forms in Rutherford's and some other contemporary manuals. The answer to the question, What is God?¹ had in the former draft been taken from Palmer's work, with the exception that 'perfection,' in the singular, had been changed into 'perfections,' in the plural, as it had been in another catechism published anonymously in the previous year. Here the former description is exchanged for one abridged apparently from Ussher's *Body of Divinity*.² The next answer, respecting the properties or attributes of God, was at first distinct from the previous one. Dr. Briggs supposes it may have been got by crushing into one the answers to more than a score of questions in Palmer's treatise and Dr. Matthews' by a somewhat similar condensation of various answers in Ball's larger catechism. But it is simply an abridgment of a paragraph in Chapter II. of the

¹ 'God is a most glorious being, infinite in all perfections.'

² 'God is a spirit, infinite in being and perfection.'

Confession of Faith; and the ultimate answer of the Larger Catechism to the question, What is God? was got by joining these two answers into one. The answer to the same question in the Shorter Catechism is composed of the scriptural definition, 'God is a Spirit,' with the incommunicable attributes arranged in the same order as they were by Rogers, but in adjectival form, and the communicable in substantive form almost exactly as they had been given by Egerton.

But time will not admit of my prosecuting this minute comparison further. The doctrinal definitions in the Larger Catechism are, as I have said, in a great measure abridged from the Confession of Faith; and so far as they are not so they may generally be found in a shorter form in Ball's and Newcomen's catechisms, in more diffuse form in Ussher's *Body of Divinity*. The same may be said even more unreservedly of the exposition of the ten commandments and of the Lord's Prayer as concerns Newcomen and Ussher. But one of the most singular and unexpected disclosures brought to light in the recently published Minutes of the Assembly is that, while the first draft of a catechism in 1645 treated first of *credenda*, then of the ten commandments, and so left to the last the means of grace and the Lord's Prayer, and while the Larger Catechism as finally adjusted followed the same order, yet, as

first entered on the Minutes of the Assembly in 1647, it treats of the means of grace or the word, sacraments, and prayer, before it expounds the commandments, in this following the plan of Ball's and some other catechisms, and showing that, if not in details, yet in outline and method, the divines followed some previous manual on the same plan as his—possibly that small one of date 1542, attributed to Calvin,—which, after being long lost, has been brought to light recently by M. Douen, and printed as an appendix to the second volume of his Huguenot Psalter. At least they follow its plan more exactly than that of Ball; and the statement of Baillie, given on page 415, is sufficient to show that the question of *method* continued long to divide them. Their detailed and elaborate answers in the several parts of this catechism are, even when founded on previous treatises, carefully matured expansions of the given answers in these. I shall try to find room in the Appendix (O) for one specimen of this, furnished by the rules they have provided for the exposition of the commandments, on the principles set forth in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. These rules had been more and more elaborated in the larger Puritan catechisms from the days of Whitaker and Cartwright to those of Ball and Ussher, and were finally brought as near to perfection as they could well be by Dr. Gouge and Mr. Walker—the sub-

committee appointed to prepare them—probably with the help of Dr. Tuckney, who by that time was acting as chairman of the Committee on the Catechism, and is supposed to have taken a very special charge of the exposition of the ten commandments. The Larger Catechism was completed on 15th October 1647, read over in the Assembly on 20th by Dr. Burgess, and on the 22d was carried up to the two Houses¹ by the Prolocutor and the whole Assembly, when thanks were returned to them ‘for their great labour and pains in compiling this Long Catechism.’ It appears to have been presented in manuscript to the Scottish Assembly in July 1647, so far as it was then completed, and on the 17th September certain alterations desired by their Commission were made at Westminster. It was approved by the General Assembly on 20th July 1648.² It was presented with the proofs on 14th April 1648.

The Shorter Catechism was not composed till after the Larger one had been virtually completed, though it perhaps embodies somewhat more of the materials of the earlier manual, which had partially passed the Assembly in 1646. Drs. Belfrage, Hetherington, and the younger M’Crie, relying on Neal’s account, have stated that the shorter one was first completed and presented to

¹ Lords’ *Journals*, ix. p. 488 ; Commons’ *Journals*, v. p. 340.

² Peterkin’s *Records of Kirk*, p. 496.

Parliament. But Neal has fallen into the error of overlooking the fact, that the Larger Catechism, without proofs, was presented to Parliament on 22nd October 1647, as well as with proofs on 14th April 1648, while the Shorter Catechism, without proofs, was only sent up on 25th November 1647, and again with proofs on 14th April 1648.¹ The following are the brief notices respecting it found in the Minutes of the Assembly.

On 5th August 1647, it was resolved (p. 408) 'that the Shorter Catechism shall be gone in hand with presently, by a committee now to be chosen,' and ordered that 'the Prolocutor, Mr. Palmer, Dr. Temple, Mr. Lightfoot, Mr. Greene, Mr. Delmy, shall be this committee.' It was to meet the same afternoon, and Mr. Palmer to take care of it, or be its convener. On August 9th, 'a report of the Short Catechism was made by Mr. Palmer, and Mr. Calamy and Mr. Gower were added to the committee.'² This is the last occasion in which the Minutes notice the presence of Mr. Palmer in the Assembly, and shortly after this he fell into a serious illness and died. The exact date of his death has not been ascertained even by Dr. Grosart, who has so carefully investigated his history; but by 28th September a successor had been presented to one of the charges held by him. On August 10th 'Dr. Temple made

¹ *Minutes*, pp. 485, 492, 511.

² *Ibid.* pp. 408-410.

report of the Lesser Catechism.' On September 8th, Mr. Wilson was added to the committee for the catechism, and the same day Mr. Wilson made report of the catechism. On September 16th, a further order was given to proceed with the little catechism. It was not, however, till 19th October 1647, when the Larger Catechism was ready to be presented to the two Houses of Parliament, that orders were given to Messrs. Tuckney,¹ Marshall, and Ward finally to adjust the Shorter one; but no doubt preparation was being made for it during the interval by the committee previously appointed, probably along with Wallis, who ultimately attended the committee as its secretary, and who in all likelihood had been privately assisting his friend Palmer with it during the last weeks of his life.² On 21st October the first report from this new committee was brought in by Tuckney, and discussed. Some debate arose as to whether the word 'substance,' or rather the expression 'one in substance,' in the answer to the question, How many persons are there in the Godhead? should be left out. This, we know, was not done, but 'one in substance' was changed into 'the same in substance,' a closer rendering of the Nicene *ὁμοούσιος*, and the phrase

¹ *Minutes*, p. 485. Cambridge gave him leave of absence.

² He was evidently a *protégé* of Palmer and a fellow in the college of which Palmer was master.

'equal in substance, power and glory,' originally used in the Larger Catechism, was changed to the same form as in the Shorter. No further particulars of the debates on this catechism are given in the Minutes, but nothing save formal business was transacted in the Assembly till it had been finished. On 8th November, it is recorded that the commandments, Lord's Prayer, and creed were added to the catechism, and on the following day that Mr. Rutherford took his leave of the Assembly, receiving the thanks of the Assembly through the Prolocutor for the great assistance he had rendered to it in its labours and debates.¹ On the same day, Mr. Burgess and Mr. Cawdrey were added to the committee, along with Wallis, for the review of the catechism. All was again reviewed by the committee, and discussed by the Assembly before the 25th November. The brief statement originally prepared as a preface was appended as a postscript. Messrs. Nye and Reynor dissented from the insertion of the creed at the end of the catechism, but possibly the terms

¹ *Minutes*, pp. 487, 488. On 15th October, when the completion of the Larger Catechism was reported, Mr. Rutherford moved, and the Assembly ordered, 'that it be recorded in the scribes' books that the Assembly hath enjoyed the assistance of the honourable reverend and learned commissioners from the Church of Scotland, in the work of the Assembly during all the time of the debating and perfecting the four things mentioned in the Covenant, viz., the Directory for Worship, the Confession of Faith, Form of Church-Government, and Catechism.'—*Ibid.* p. 484.

of the postscript just referred to, and the explanation added some days later as to the sense in which the Article 'he descended into hell' was to be understood, may have satisfied their scruples.¹ Though in Scotland, as elsewhere, this catechism has been, and deservedly so, the most popular of all the productions of the Assembly, it was the one with the elaboration of which the Scotch Commissioners had least to do. Henderson had left and had died before the Confession was completed. Baillie left immediately after it was finished, and took down with him to Scotland the first copy of the Confession, without proofs. Gillespie, after repeated petitions to be allowed to return home, received permission to leave in May 1647, when the proofs for the Confession had been completed but while the debates on the Larger Catechism were still going on, and the answer to the question What is God?—with which his name has been traditionally associated—had not as yet been adjusted for that Catechism, much less for the Shorter one.²

¹ *Minutes*, pp. 490, 492.

² Even three months after he left London all that he was able to report to the Scottish Assembly respecting the catechisms was that the divines 'have had no time yet to do anything in the latter, but here is the copy of the greater, *which is almost complete.*' The only instance in which we can be very sure that he has left his mark on the Confession is that (in ch. xxi. *Miscellany Questions*) pointed out some years ago by Professor Candlish:

'The heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, The Scripture is known to be indeed the word of God by the

Even Rutherford had been seized with a fit of home-sickness, and wrote that he did not think the elaboration of this catechism of sufficient importance to detain him from his college and his flock at St. Andrews. At any rate, though persuaded to remain till it had passed, so to speak, the first reading, he does not seem to have left his distinctive mark on it. Not the faintest trace of that wealth of homely imagery, which enriches the MS. catechism attributed to him, is to be found in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism. From first to last, it appears to me in its clear, condensed, and at times almost frigidly logical definitions, to give unmistakable evidence of its having passed

the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomprehensible excellencies and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly manifest itself to be the word of God.—*Confession of Faith*, ch. i. § v.

beams of divine authority which it hath in itself, . . . such as the heavenliness of the matter, the majesty of the style, the irresistible power over the conscience, the general scope to abase man, and to exalt God; nothing driven at but God's glory and man's salvation, . . . the supernatural mysteries revealed therein, which could never have entered into the reason of man, the marvellous consent of all parts and passages (though written by divers and several penmen), even where there is some appearance of difference, . . . these and the like are characters and marks which evidence the Scriptures to be the word of God.

through the alembic of Dr. Wallis, the great mathematician, the friend of Palmer, the opponent of Hobbes and the Socinians, and probably the last survivor of those connected with the great Assembly who was not ashamed to speak of the benefit he had derived from its discussions during the preparation of its Confession and Catechisms, long after he had conformed to the Church of the Restoration.¹ The Shorter Catechism contains, as I have just told you, more of the materials of the catechism partially passed by the Assembly in 1646, but not in a shape which brings them nearer to the form of Palmer's original work. On the contrary, it is a thoroughly Calvinistic and Puritan catechism, the ripest fruit of the Assembly's thought and experience, maturing and finally fixing the definitions of theological terms to which Puritanism for half a century had been leading up and gradually coming closer and closer in its legion of catechisms.

It differs in one or two things even from the Larger Catechism, composed just before it. Its second question as to the rule of faith, in more concise form than the third question of the other, is more direct and emphatic. Its definition of

¹ Wodrow and both the M'Cries seem to look on his claim with a certain amount of favour. Dr Belfrage refers to a 'theologian of great research' who favours that of Arrowsmith, but he does not appear to have been a member of the committee or in attendance on the Assembly at that time.

God is more happy, and, as already mentioned, is from a different source. It does not insert its definitions of faith and repentance where the other has them, but holds them over till its third part, when it comes to treat of the way of salvation and the means of grace. And while, as I have said, it is a thoroughly Calvinistic catechism, it has nothing of church censures, church courts, or church officers, as many similar productions have. Nay, it does not even have a definition of the Church, whether visible or invisible, like the Larger Catechism and the Confession of Faith, but only an incidental reference to it in connection with the answer to the question, To whom is baptism to be administered? It would seem as if in this their simplest yet noblest symbol they wished, as far as Calvinists could do so, to eliminate from their statements all that was subordinate or unessential—all relating to the mere organisation of Christians as an external community—all in which they differed from sound Protestant Episcopalians on the one hand, and from the less unsound of the sectaries on the other, and to make a supreme effort to provide a worthy catechism in which all the Protestant youth in the country might be trained. So highly was the effort appreciated at the time that the king, no doubt with the sanction of Ussher and his fellow-chaplains, in some of his latest negotiations with the

Parliament, offered to license it, while still hesitating to accept the Directories for Public Worship and for Church-Government as they had been drawn up by the Assembly. It was no sooner passed by the Parliament and published than it became widely popular in England, and it maintained its popularity in a wonderful degree even after the sad reverses which befel its authors in 1662. For more than a century after that, it was the most widely recognised manual of instruction, not only among Presbyterians but also among the other orthodox Dissenters. The Independents used it both in England and America. The Baptists used it with a very few alterations, and in the 18th century that great evangelist John Wesley, who was ever ready to adapt to his own purposes good books prepared by others holding opinions considerably different from his own, allowed it to circulate among his societies in a modified form. It was early translated into Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and has been retranslated in our own day into Hebrew and Syriac, and into most modern languages both in the east and the west. When about twenty-five years ago I visited the Lebanon schools, in the neighbourhood of Beyrout, I was greatly interested to find that the American missionaries not only taught this old catechism to the Druse and Maronite children, but also taught it in the old Scottish form which has now

all but disappeared at home, making it the first reading-book, having the A B C at the beginning, and a syllabary corresponding to our a, b, ab ; e, b, eb, etc., but of course all in orthodox Arabic.

The guiding principle of the Assembly and its committee in its composition was that announced by Dr. Seaman in one of the earliest debates about it, viz., 'That the greatest care should be taken to frame the answer not according to the model of the knowledge the child hath, but according to that the child ought to have.' And if too little care was taken in former times to teach it intelligently to the young, and gradually to open up its full meaning to them, yet, as Dr. M'Crie has well observed, 'the objection was pushed too far when it was maintained that without a full scientific understanding of its doctrines it is useless to acquire familiarity with their phraseology and contents. The pupil must learn the rudiments of Greek and Latin long before he can comprehend the use of them, or apply them as a key to unlock the treasures of ancient learning [in fact, in all Churches he is first taught his Christian creed in this way], and experience has shown that few who have been carefully instructed in our Shorter Catechism have failed to discover the advantage of becoming acquainted in early life, even as a task, with that admirable form of sound words.' For three quarters of a century past, I do not believe that

intelligent teachers of the Catechism have been rare, either in the parochial or in the Sabbath schools of Scotland, and with the helps with which Gall and others, who have drawn on the older stores of Wallis and Palmer and Lye, have provided them, there is no excuse for any teacher making the study of it an irksome task, or failing in a good measure to bring it down to the capacities and home to the hearts of his pupils. I am but fulfilling a simple duty when I thus publicly express my deep gratitude to my teachers, both in the day-school and in the Sabbath-school for the uniform pains they took to make the study of it interesting and attractive. I can confidently affirm that I found their instructions of no small advantage when I proceeded to the more systematic study of theology, and I shall never lose hope of the living orthodoxy of the Presbyterian Churches while their rising ministry and church-members are intelligently and affectionately trained in the Shorter Catechism, and set themselves to train their flocks in it as good old Principal Hill used to recommend them to do.

In a paper I put in type towards the close of 1880, and hope soon to publish, I have endeavoured pretty fully to trace out the sources of the several answers in this Catechism, or at least to indicate the many points of contact and resemblance between them and those of the earlier Puritan

catechisms. The exercise has been interesting to myself, and I trust its results will not be uninteresting to many of my brethren. It shows how gradually in the stream of successive catechisms those definitions of theological terms which were ultimately to be perfected and crystallised, so to speak, at Westminster, were developed and matured, and more and more widely accepted. I cannot within the compass of this lecture enter into details, but I may say generally before closing, that so far as plan and the order of the questions or interrogatories is concerned, I regard the little catechism of Ezekiel Rogers, who was a minister first in Yorkshire, and latterly in New England, as most closely resembling the Assembly's Shorter Catechism. The answers in his little treatise are much more simple and elementary, the exposition of the ten commandments is in the briefest possible form, and the verbal coincidences in individual answers are few. But all is there in miniature, and almost all in the same order as in the later and fuller catechism. The plan of M. N.'s (or, as I suppose, Matthew Newcomen's) Catechism is very similar also, the execution is much more detailed, especially in the exposition of the commandments, and particular answers frequently coincide in expression as well as in general meaning with those of the Shorter Catechism. The chief deviation is, that it, like

that of the Church of England and several of the more moderate Puritan catechisms, begins by reminding the catechumen of his baptism, and of the privileges and responsibilities connected with it. Next perhaps in point of resemblance stand the catechisms of Gouge and Ball. The author of the former was, like Newcomen, an influential member of the Assembly, and his treatise has many verbal coincidences with that prepared by them, but it deviates so far from it in plan by placing the exposition of the commandments before the explanation of the doctrines of the Christian faith. A similar remark applies to Ball's treatise, entitled *A Short Catechism*. This has decidedly more verbal coincidences with the Assembly's Shorter Catechism in the answers to particular questions, but it deviates farther in plan, treating first of doctrine, then of the means of grace, preaching, prayer, exposition of the Lord's Prayer and of the sacraments, of the Church and Church censures, and finally expounding the commandments, and concluding with a few general questions. Palmer's Catechism, as already stated, is similar in general plan, with the exception that, like the Anglican Catechism, it treats of prayer and the Lord's Prayer before it treats of the sacraments, and that it moulds its exposition of doctrine closely on the Apostles' Creed. It was unquestionably on the basis of its first part the divines began to work

in 1645, but so many of its historical questions have been omitted in the course of their successive revisions, and so much that was needed to explain and define important doctrines of the Christian system has been added, that the similarity is not now so marked in that first part, much less in the others, as, from the fact mentioned, one might have expected. The only trace the Shorter Catechism perhaps now bears of having been moulded on one which had the Apostles' Creed for the basis of its first or doctrinal part is that, at the close of that part, it takes account only of the eternal state of believers. But, strange as the fact may seem, it deviates in this from Palmer's, and from almost every other catechism—Newcomen's, however, as in so many other things, coming nearest to it. The only way in which one, who knows how strongly its authors speak in other parts of the desert of sin and the endless misery in reserve for the impenitent, can account for no reference being made to these topics in this place is, that the divines were expounding the last article of the Apostles' Creed, and had in view only the case of those who could truly say, 'I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting,' and did not deem themselves bound even incidentally to advert to the future of those who had neither part nor lot in Christ and his great salvation.

The title sanctioned by the English Parliament for this catechism was not that originally fixed on by the Assembly itself, and by which it is now universally known, but the following expansion of it:—‘The Grounds and Principles of Religion contained in a Shorter Catechism (according to the advice of the Assembly of Divines sitting at Westminster), to be used throughout the kingdom of England and dominion of Wales.’¹ It seems to have had the approval of the divines, and at least ten or twelve editions of it with this title were published in England before 1720.

Between 21st October and 19th November the Catechism may be said to have passed the first and second reading in the Assembly, and, without proofs, it was presented to the House of Commons on the 25th, and to the House of Lords on the 26th November. It was presented with proofs on 14th April 1648, and by 25th September 1648 it had been passed by the Houses, with the above title. It was approved by the General Assembly of Scotland on 28th July 1648, and their Acts in regard to it and the Larger Catechism were ratified by the Estates of the Scottish Parliament on 7th February 1649. No express mention is made of it or the Larger Catechism in the Act re-establishing Presbytery after the Revolution, but it has always retained its place of honour in the Presby-

¹ For procedure of the Houses, see *Minutes of Assembly*, p. 511.

terian Churches in Scotland, as elsewhere, as the most widely known and most highly valued of our doctrinal symbols.

Richard Baxter's opinion of this Catechism was very high, and his testimony to its merits very emphatic: 'I do heartily approve,' he says, 'of the Shorter Catechism of the Assembly, and of all therein contained, and I take it for the best catechism that ever I yet saw, and the answers continued (that is, I suppose, read continuously) for a most excellent summary of the Christian faith and doctrine, and a fit test to try the orthodoxy of teachers themselves.' Nay, he adds that, 'for the innate worth of it, he prefers it to any of the writings of the Fathers, and that he takes the labours of the Assembly, and especially the Confession and Catechisms, as the best book next his bible in his study.' The sainted Leighton seems also to have had a high opinion of it, and admits that the thoughts we find in it on the awful subject of the divine decrees 'are few, sober, clear, and certain.' Principal Hill speaks with high commendation of the Catechism and the system of teaching it followed by the ministers of his day: 'Considered as a system of divinity,' he says, 'this catechism is entitled to much admiration. It has nothing superfluous; the words are chosen with uncommon skill, and the answer to almost every question is a text on which a person vers-

ant in such subjects can easily enlarge, . . . and in the hands of an experienced, attentive examiner, . . . the catechism may be made completely to answer the purpose of leading the people to the apprehension of Christian doctrine and of the extent of Christian duty.'

The opinion of Dr. Schaff in our own day, if, as becomes a German, somewhat more guarded than Baxter's, is hardly less remarkable. He says: 'The Shorter Catechism is one of the three typical catechisms of Protestantism which are likely to last to the end of time. It is fully equal to Luther's and to the Heidelberg Catechism in ability and influence; it far surpasses them in clearness and careful wording (or, as he elsewhere says, in brevity, terseness, and accuracy of definition), and is better adapted to the Scottish and Anglo-American mind; but it lacks their genial warmth, freshness, and child-like simplicity.' Perhaps quite as noteworthy are the words he quotes from Carlyle, who, when testifying against modern materialism, thus expressed himself:—'The older I grow—and I now stand upon the brink of eternity—the more comes back to me the first sentence in the catechism which I learned when a child, and the fuller and deeper its meaning becomes: What is the chief end of man?—To glorify God, and enjoy him for ever.'