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Item of the Day: The Cambridge and Saybrook Platforms of Church Discipline (1829)

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Full Title: The Cambridge and Saybrook Platforms of Church Discipline, With the Confession of Faith of the New England Churches, Adopted in 1680; and the Heads of Agreement Assented to by the Presbyterians and Congregationalists in England in 1690. Illustrated with Historical Prefaces and Notes. Boston: T.R. Marvin, Printer, 32 Congress Street. 1829.

HISTORICAL PREFACE.

. . . On the 15th of august, 1648, the synod again met according to adjournment. At the opening of the session, the Rev. Mr. Allen, first minister of Dedham, preached. "The synod now went on comfortably," and completed the work assigned them "in less than fourteen days." As to a confession of faith, instead of framing one themselves, "they wholly agreed with that which had then lately been set forth" by the assembly of divines at Westminster. The Platform of Discipline they drew, says Gov. Winthrop, "according to the *general practice of the churches.*" . . .

From writers who have flourished since the synod of 1680, numerous quotations might be given, expressing their high estimation of the Cambridge Platform. Near the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Rev. Mr. Wise of Ipswich, published a work, the professed object of which was to vindicate the Platform, and urge its observance. the Rev. Cotton Mather, speaking of the Platform, says, "the churches have cheerfully embraced it, practiced it, and been prospered in it, unto this very day."

The following quotation is from a joint letter of Rev. John Higginson and Rev. William Hubbard, written by them at a very advanced period of life, in which they tell us that the had seen "the persons who from four famous colonies assembled in the synod, that agreed on our Platform of church Discipline."

"We do earnestly testify," says they, "that if any who are given to change do rise up to unhinge the well established churches in this land, it will be the duty and interest of the churches to examine whether the men of this trespass are more prayerful, more watchful, more zealous, more patient, more heavenly, more universally conscientious, and harder students, and better scholars, and more willing to be informed and advised than those great and good men who left unto the churches what they now enjoy; if they be not so, it will be wisdom for the children to forbear pulling down with their own hands the houses of God, which were built by their wiser fathers, until they have better satisfaction.

"It is not yet forgot by some surviving ear-witnesses of it, that when the synod had finished the Platform of Church discipline, they did with an extraordinary elevation of soul and voice then sing together the

song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, in the fifteenth chapter of the Revelation: God forbid, that in the loss of that holy discipline, there should be hereafter occasion to sing about breaking down the carved work of the houses of God with axes and hammers; or take up the eightieth Psalm for our lamentations. . . .

It is too observable that the power of godliness is exceedingly decaying and expiring in this country; and one great point in the decay of the power of godliness, is men's growing weary of the congregational church discipline, which is evidently calculated to maintain it.

If that church discipline were more thoroughly and vigorously kept alive, even by those that make profession of it, it might be hoped, that the Lord would sanctify it, for the revival of all godliness in the land.

But if this church discipline come to be given up, we think it our duty to leave this warning with the churches, that probably the apostacy will not stop there; for the same spirit that will dispose the next generation to change their way in one point, will dispose them to more and more changes (even in doctrine and worship as well as in manners) until it may be feared, the candlestick will quickly be removed out of its place."

The Cambridge Platform never has been superseded or formally annulled in Massachusetts; though by the gradual introduction of laws and usages, in a period of almost two hundred years, several of its requisitions have come to be no longer observed. Still, in many of its parts, it is of distinguished excellence and of high authority; it is an instrument to which reference is often made; and as a monument of the ecclesiastical order of our venerated fathers, it is exceedingly valuable.

1 Comment

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