

THE
COVENANTER.

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[From the (Belfast) Covenanter.]

SERVICES AT THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD.*

There is an evident tendency in our day to render the rites of religious worship, in various sections of the Protestant Church, imposing and impressive to the outward senses, and to conduct them so as to please the superstitious views and humour the prejudices of the masses of the people, especially of those who are styled respectable. Hence, choirs are introduced in conducting the public singing of praise in Presbyterian congregations; hence, too, the employment of hymns instead of the inspired Psalms, and of light and unsuitable tunes in public worship; and hence the plea that has been of late strenuously urged by numbers in different parts of the Presbyterian Church, that *instrumental music* should be used, as an appropriate accompaniment of Zion's service of song. To some of these innovations, we may direct particular attention upon some future occasion. Mean while, we purpose to notice a practice, which, during the last twenty or thirty years, has become extensively prevalent in the larger sections of the Presbyterian Church in these countries, which we cannot but regard as fraught with several serious evils, and as contrary to the express enactments of the standards and ecclesiastical authorities of the Presbyterian Church, and opposed to the spirit of genuine Presbyterianism. This is the BURIAL SERVICE, as performed by Presbyterian ministers at the interment of their people—with the funeral sermons, that are frequently preached upon the same occasions. This practice has become so general of late, throughout the large Presbyterian body, that, in towns especially, and among the more respectable members of the church, it is constantly looked for, and it would be considered quite wrong to omit it in any instance. On the day of interment, not only is social worship conducted by the minister in the house of the deceased, but at the grave, or in the house of worship, portions of the Scripture are read, prayer offered, and an address is not unfrequently delivered. These services are generally conducted so as to flatter the relatives of the deceased—to make the impression that the person removed by death has certainly gone to heaven, and that the friends, whatever may be their moral character, may entertain the hope that they shall hereafter meet him in glory. The Scripture read—almost always a

* We are pleased to have the opportunity of laying this article before our readers. It demonstrates that in refusing to follow the fashion of funeral services, we are sustained by the churches of the Reformation, as well as by higher authority. We hope it will be read with care.—ED. COV.

A profound and almost death-like silence reigns over and around the dreary spot, where once stood Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain, producing an impression on the mind of the beholder that can never be erased, and with the exception of a traveller now and then, never visited but by the footsteps of the wild Arab, who only approaches it with feelings of the most superstitious awe and dread.

Our course from here was directed to the Jordan, over undulations of white clay soil, bleached by the burning sun—probably near to, if not a portion of, “the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah, where king Solomon cast the brazen vessels for the house of the Lord.” 2 Chron. iv. 17. The whole plain is a desolation, and the prediction that “the strangers that shall come from a far land shall say when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the Lord hath laid upon it, and that the whole land thereof is brimstone and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger and in his wrath;—wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land?” has been literally fulfilled. Nothing grows upon its surface, “except a few stunted thorns and shrubs, which wear the brown garb of the desert.” How changed since the time of Abraham! when the Jordan, overflowing all its banks, fertilized that wide and extensive plain, making it as productive as the garden of the Lord! What a scene to look down on from one of the lofty peaks of the mountains of Moab! It was probably with this picture spread out before his vision—the rich and fertile plain of the Jordan extending northward—the city of Jericho before him, and the Dead Sea stretching southward, with the waters of the Jordan flowing into it, that Moses got the idea which he so beautifully expresses afterwards to the Israelites before his death. “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.” We reached the Jordan hungry and thirsty, but were so annoyed with little flies, that we were obliged to shorten our stay, not only for our own sakes, but also for the comfort of our animals. The point we touched was the one usually visited by travellers, and is said to be the place where Jesus was baptized, and where Joshua led “the Israelites over on dry ground.” Whatever may be the truth of the former conjecture, the latter, if the modern village called Jericho is any where near the site of the ancient city, must be a mistake, as it is expressly said, “And the people passed over right against Jericho;” which would make the supposed place of crossing three hours to the south of Jericho—that being the time it took us to travel it. We reached the modern village near sunset, where we spent the night.

As ever, yours in the gospel,

JOSEPH BEATTIE.

(For the Covenanter.)

REV. DAVID STEELE.

As the name of this individual is occasionally seen in our monthlies in connexion with what is called the Reformed Presbytery, it may be well for some readers of these journals to be reminded of his history,

and to learn his present position. It will be remembered that Rev. Robert Lusk and Rev. David Steele were members of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, which met in the city of Allegheny in the year 1840; the latter a constituent, and the former a consultative member. Synod then met by delegation. Some suspicions had been entertained by different persons intimate with these men previous to the meeting of Synod, that they intended at that Synod to take a bold and decisive stand in favour of some favourite measure; and if they could not carry it, they would decline the authority of the church, and set up an independent party. They had said nothing publicly to produce such an impression; but their conduct was thought to be mysterious, and they had thrown out insinuations at times which excited suspicion. But as they sat in Synod till its final adjournment, and took part in all its proceedings, and manifested no peculiar opposition to its decisions, and received their share of the travelling fund, it was thought that all suspicions touching the faithfulness and the honourable conduct of these men had been groundless, and should be dismissed. For in every case in which faithful men had been aggrieved by the prevalence of evils in the church, they laboured long and hard for the removal of the evils complained of; and it was only when hope had utterly failed, that they formed the design of separation, and when this intention was formed it was publicly avowed, and the supreme court solemnly warned, its authority openly declined, and reasons given for the course taken. This was the way in which all the Reformers acted in coming out of the Church of Rome. This was the course of Rev. John M'Millan in leaving the Established Church of Scotland, and of all the Seceders and the Free Church in leaving that corrupt establishment. As these men had done nothing of all this, and as Synod had postponed, under the pressure of business, final adjudication on the subject of voluntary associations, which it had been suspected was the hobby on which they intended to ride out of the church, it was supposed if any such design had been indulged it had been abandoned, and that they intended henceforth to act as consistent and peaceable members of the church. But how great was the surprise and regret of their friends, when it happened to leak out that on the day after the adjournment of Synod they had, with an elder or two, in a private room, and in a clandestine manner, separated themselves from the church, violated their solemn ordination vows, and set up what they called the Reformed Presbyterian. Even if they had had reason for separating from the church, their conduct in this instance was so entirely unprecedented and disorderly, that faithful and orderly people in the church could show them no favour. Their separation from the church met, as might be expected, with almost universal condemnation; and they found few followers, except some who had been privately alienated from the church under party drill before the meeting of Synod; and since then those who have united with them have generally been somehow disorderly persons, some of them under the censures of the church for scandalous sins.

But these men could give no sensible reason for making another rent in the mystical body of Christ. The chief, if not the only reason assigned for this sinful separation from the church deserving any con-

sideration, was that some of the members of the church had joined with Christians of other denominations in anti-slavery and temperance societies. This subject had been discussed, to some extent, in Synod; and it was thought that with proper time for deliberation and comparing of views, a general agreement, if not entire harmony, might be arrived at in the deliverance of Synod on this matter. Hasty and rash legislation seldom does much good in the church. Moreover, the members of the church who had joined in anti-slavery societies manifested no desire or inclination to depart from Covenanting principles, but believed they were exemplifying and carrying out their principles in anti-slavery operations. In these circumstances "Synod postponed the paper on this subject till the next meeting, with a view to early attendance at said meeting." Messrs. Lusk and Steele did not leave the church because Synod refused to adopt their views, but simply because it did not adopt them at the time which they wished. Their conduct, in this instance, looks more like the pet of a spoiled child, than the deliberate judgment of a sober man. Every one must see that this act of ecclesiastical suicide was committed without a cause, and in circumstances of peculiar aggravation.

On the ensuing September 17, 1840, the conduct of these men came before the Ohio Presbytery at its semi-annual meeting at Brush Creek, O., when a libel was formed against them, charging them with a violation of their solemn ordination vows, following divisive courses, slandering the ministers and courts of the Lord's house, and fostering contention and strife among the members of the church; and they were then several times cited to attend and answer to the libel. They refused to attend, when the following resolution was passed by the court:—

"Resolved, That the Rev. Robert Lusk and the Rev. David Steele be, and hereby are, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, suspended from the exercise of their office, and from the privileges of the church, until, by confession of their sin, and satisfactory repentance, they return to duty."

At the next meeting of Synod in 1841, in Utica, O., the matter of voluntary associations was taken up, according to the resolution of the previous meeting, and was discussed and acted on with entire calmness and harmony among the members. In the mean time the anti-slavery movement assumed a political form; it had previously occupied only moral ground, and Covenanters throughout the country every where stood aloof from these political movements. Thus by the judicious action of the Synod, and the co-operating influence of Divine Providence in political movements, the church was entirely freed from agitation on this subject, and it ceased to be a practical question.

A person not acquainted with the men might have hoped that as the ground on which they left the church had failed them, they would confess their sin, return to the church, and ask to be again restored to the exercise of their office, and to their privileges. Pride and ambition, and a large measure of natural obstinacy, stood in the way of this humble and Christian course. But to keep up the party on the ground on which they had seceded from the church, was plainly impossible. Other ground must be taken, or their followers would leave them. Here was the dilemma. But necessity is the mother of inven-

tion. All at once new light burst upon their eyes; and they looked, and behold, the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States was erroneous and contradictory; and the old Scotch Testimony, adopted in 1761, at Ploughlandhead, was the only platform on which the new party could stand and be continued. The Testimony of the church, which these men had so long approved, and so often and solemnly sworn to maintain, was cast aside, and a Testimony not adapted to, and never designed for the church in this land, put in its place. The Testimony of the church in North America, intended, and well adapted to point out and warn her members of the prevalent errors and evils in this country in the present age, is abandoned; and a Testimony adapted to a former age and a foreign country, and of course silent on many popular sins in this age and land, is preferred before it. That Testimony is faithful in testifying against the Erastianism of the British government, but says nothing about the infidelity of the government of the United States, for this government did not exist when it was prepared.

This Testimony, with a change in the terms of communion, to correspond with the new light obtained, and a notion of Mr. Steele about history being a term of communion in the church, is the ground of the new party. But what this new doctrine of history being a term of communion is, we have not been able to learn. For although Mr. S. has often explained his new doctrine, and again explained his explanations, yet some of his followers have been as unable as ourselves to tell what he means. There is one thing, however, he intends. At the end of the old Scotch Testimony he has added a number of misrepresentations and caricatures of our church and Synod in this country, and he intends that this part of historical testimony shall be believed by his followers. He rejects the true history of the church, which she has herself prepared and approved, and asks people to believe the false history which he has written himself. He professes that he and those united with him are the only true Covenanters in the world occupying the whole ground of Covenanted Reformation; and yet he rejects the Second Book of Discipline, the complete symbol and embodiment of Scotland's Reformation, which is also approved in the old Scotch Testimony. Truly the legs of the lame are not equal.

Respecting Mr. Lusk, the leader in this schismatical movement, little need be said. He has gone to give an account of his stewardship; but whatever may have been his state or end, it would certainly have been good for the church if he never had had a place in it. The two congregations over which he was successively pastor—Conococheague and Walnut Ridge—were almost destroyed by him, and were only preserved by a dissolution of the pastoral relation. In the year 1825 he declined the authority of Synod, became independent, and took his congregation, confiding in his integrity, with him. The congregation, however, soon saw that they had been deceived by his misrepresentations, and most of them returned to the church. In the year 1835, being left almost alone, he returned also, confessed his sin, for which he had been suspended from the ministry and the privileges of the church, and it was hoped by some manifested true repentance. But the people generally had no confidence in him. He

was every where disliked. And finding he could not rise in the church as he expected, and having secured the confidence of Mr. Steele, and alienated him from the church, he hoped with his influence and co-operation to be more successful as the head of a new party. Mr. Steele was taken in his snare, and in 1840 they left the church.

Unjustifiable and silly as is the ground on which this party stands, it is nevertheless looked upon with some sympathy and favour by different classes of people. There is a class of honest, well-meaning, but weak-minded people in the church, who are pleased and taken with pretensions in favour of old things. The adoption of the old Scotch Testimony was doubtless intended to cater to this well known feeling. There are restless and ambitious spirits sometimes that feel they can never rise in a large and well governed congregation, but may become quite distinguished in a little faction. "Better be the first man of the village, than the second man in Rome." There are persons who have been laid under censures by the church for scandalous sins, but have not grace to confess them. There are others who are opposed to the strictness of the law of our church, forbidding the common use of intoxicating drinks. There are others who do not like the Covenanted Reformation in reference to deacons being permanent officers in the church. There are others—self-righteous and pharisaical characters—who imagine that the church is not pure enough for them. "Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou." There are others who believe that the wrath of man worketh the righteousness of God, and delight to hear awful denunciations of Divine wrath pronounced upon all other Christians, and to see them hanging by a hair over the bottomless pit, provided their own sins are not reproved. They think that all this malice, and wrath, and clamour, and evil-speaking, is faithfulness in the preacher. There are others who, having little or no piety, indulge in wrath, and malice, and envy, and evil-speaking against their brethren, and find the church an uncongenial place to foster and display these evil passions, will feel themselves quite at home in the new party. From the little success that this party has had, we trust there are few of the above characters in the church.

JOHN KNOX, JUN.

AMERICAN SLAVERY.

Rev. Dr. Van Rensselaer, in his late rejoinder to Dr. Armstrong, enumerates the following popular errors in regard to slavery. We are pleased to find so much even as this from the pen of an influential minister and editor of the Old School Presbyterian Church. It would have been far more acceptable had the Doctor gone on to advocate *immediate* emancipation. Slavery is a *sin*, to be denounced.

[Ed. Cov.]

"It is a mistake to suppose that *the slaves have not a natural desire for freedom*, however erroneous may be their views of freedom. There are certain natural impulses which belong to man by the constitution of his being. No slavery can quench the aspirings for liberty. It is allied to his hope of immortality—it is the ethereal part of his nature which oppression cannot rend. It is a torch lit up in his soul by the hand of the Deity, and never meant to be extinguished by the hand of man.