

4354 A

SERMON

ON

NATIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SIN.

DELIVERED IN THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
PITTSBURGH, APRIL 3, 1827, BEFORE A LARGE
ASSEMBLY, CONVENED FOR THE PURPOSE
OF ADOPTING RESOLUTIONS A-
GAINST DUELLING,

— — — — —

BY REV. JOHN BLACK, D. D.

Pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

— — — — —

Pittsburgh:

PRINTED AT THE PITTSBURGH RECORDER OFFICE.

.....

1827.

17

A SERMON

ON NATIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS & SIN, &c.

PROVERBS xiv. 34. *Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*

This book is entitled *The Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel*. The writer was Solomon, but the *author* was the Spirit of God. Solomon was the greatest man of his age, & perhaps the wisest mere man of any age. Yet he affords an awful example of the frailty of man; for, in his old age, he became, at least, a countenancer of idolatry, and built high places for his wives to worship idols.

Nevertheless, it would appear, that he became a sincere penitent before his death, and was a saved sinner.

This is evident, from the name given him by the Lord, JEDIDIAH, which signifies *well beloved, or beloved of the Lord*. Now God's love is like himself, unchangeable: whom he loves, he loves unto the end, or to all eternity.—From the commendations of him after his death—from his being an inspired writer, and they were all *holy men of God*—from his writing his Ecclesiastes after his fall, which contains a recantation of all his errors and expresses deep sorrow and contrition for them—and above all, from the promise of God made to his father David concerning him, that *he would not take his mercy from him*.

It is probable that a part of this book was written after his recovery and repentance.

The Proverbs of Solomon are short sententious expressions, that contain truths independent of one another. They may be called the axioms of religion. In the book of Proverbs we have rules for every period, state, and relation of human life, from the highest to the lowest.

We have selected one of these axiomatic truths, as the foundation of a few remarks.

Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

The following method of discussion is proposed,

I. State a few propositions illustrative of what the text recommends, *Righteousness exalteth a nation.*

II. Take notice of some of those sins that are a reproach to a nation; for verily *Sin is a reproach to any people.*

I. State some illustrative propositions.

1. A nation is a people existing under an organized government. For example, the federal constitution, and the government which it organizes, is that which gives to America a national existence. Whenever we speak of nations, kingdoms, or republics, we mean a people having an organized form of government.

2. Nations, as such, are subjects of Jehovah's government, and are accountable to him in their national, as well as their individual character.

Man is a rational, moral, and accountable being. In every relation which he can sustain, he is amenable to God's law, and is a subject of moral government. God's law is the rule of all relations among the human family.

Man may be viewed either as an individual, or as a social being. A person only is a subject of moral government. But persons are either *natural* or *moral*. A physical person is an individual, accountable to the law of God in his individual character. A moral person is a corporate body, or a number of persons united for some social purpose. Such are societies, great or small, as churches, nations, &c. Now a moral person has its foundation in the original social principle, established in human nature, by the Almighty Creator. Man was created a social being. "It is not good that the man be alone." Society is not a creature of human formation. God is its author, and it is a subject of his law. *Society*, namely, moral persons, or social bodies, are as much accountable to the divine law, as any individual or physical person can be. To suppose otherwise, would be to make society independent of the divine Lawgiver. It would present man in a relation, to which no accountability was attached. Not to be accountable, is to be independent. To be independent, is to be God.

3. Nations enjoying the light of divine revelation, are bound to receive it with thankfulness, and employ it to illuminate the path of civil government, and to direct them in all their national concerns. To refuse this, is to pour contempt upon divine revelation, and is an obstinate drawing back to heathenism.

That the revealed will of God in the holy Scriptures

ought to be taken as the law paramount to nations enjoying divine revelation, is evident from the fact that God claims to himself the title of *King of nations*, Jer. x. 7. Nations, then, are a part of his subjects, and ought to be governed by his law. If they refuse, they are guilty of high treason against the Sovereign of the universe.

Civil government is the *ordinance*, or institution of God. It is founded in the law of nature, and flows from God's universal dominion over all nations. But the law of nature is the moral law, the same law which is more clearly revealed in the Bible. The law of nature obliges all its subjects to receive any new communications which God may be pleased to make. And as soon as a new revelation is made by God, the original law of nature homologates it, and gives to it the solemn sanction of all its authority. The Bible, therefore, wherever it obtains a place on earth, is introduced as a rule, by the requisitions of the law of nature, to regulate all the concerns of civil government. Besides, the law of God revealed in the Bible, is in the hand of Jesus Christ, who is *the Prince of the kings of the earth*, Rev. 1. 5. And who *has a name written on his vesture and on his thigh, King of kings and Lord of lords*. Rev. xix. 16. and the command from the Almighty to the kings, & the judges of the earth, is to submit their power to Messiah, on pain of being considered, and treated as rebels against heaven, Ps. ii. 10—12. *Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth.—Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way.* And the matter of fact declared in the days of the millennium, Rev. xi 15. that *the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.* They are now become, what they never were before, *the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.* Not merely that the inhabitants are generally become converts, and are added to the kingdom of grace; for this is but one kingdom, and never is of *this world*.

Now if these kingdoms are become, in their organized capacity, voluntary subjects of the Prince of the kings of the earth, they must be governed by his law, and that law is the holy Bible.

4. We inquire a little about that righteousness which exalteth a nation.

The righteousness which exalteth a nation, or what

is properly national righteousness, is more of an *external*, than of an internal or spiritual nature.

God is, indeed, *King of saints*, Rev. xv. 3. And the righteousness of saints is the righteousness of Christ, which they possess, by union to his person, and which will make them all upright and holy men, and also make them loyal subjects of Him who is *King of saints*. But as this title of *King of nations* is formally distinct from the title of King of saints, so the righteousness is distinct also. It consists in the public acknowledgment of the divine authority and law, by a nation, in the formation of its constitution, Prov. iii. 6. *In all thy ways acknowledge him.* Isai. viii. 20. *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

This righteousness respects the public functionaries of a nation and their investiture with office. They must be the choice of the people, for civil government is *the ordinance of man*. They must have Scriptural qualifications, for it is also *the ordinance of God*. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. It belongs to this national righteousness, that the officers of every nation possessing the word of God, should be *able men, men of truth, fearing God and hating covetousness*, Exod. xviii. 21. This is adapted to every nation: its excellence cannot be questioned, and it is the law of God.

This national righteousness further requires, that in the whole system of government, legislation and administration, respect may be had, and public countenance be given, to religion.

That public justice shall be exercised, in all foreign and international concerns, and impartial equity between man and man, in all internal and domestic regulations.

National righteousness also requires the general practice of virtue, honesty, and good order and obedience to the laws of God and the Commonwealth.

And lastly, that the Church of God should have her existence recognised, and a protection extended to her, to which the votaries of Antichrist, and the delusions of Mahomet have no claim. Isa. xlix. 23, *Thus saith the Lord, Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers.*

It is true that the church and state are distinct commonwealths. They ought never to be mixed. But God is the Lawgiver to both, and his law should govern

each in its place. This was the case under the Old Testament economy. It ought still to be so. They are indeed *co-ordinate*, but not *collateral*. They subsist beautifully together, and may be exercised mutually for the advantage of each other; but they are, nevertheless, independent of each other, and may subsist apart.

5. This righteousness *exalteth* a nation. Vice and immorality render a nation despicable in the eyes of neighbouring nations. Even among heathenish nations, want of good faith in a nation, and the corruption of its morals render it infamous. The "*Punica fides*," was proverbial. But righteousness exalteth a nation in the favour, approbation and protection of the Most High, Deut. xxvi. 9, *And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour: and that thou mayest be a holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken.* Ps. xxxiii. 12, *Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he hath chosen for his inheritance.*

II. Notice some sins that are a reproach to any people.

1. Not recognising God and his law, by a nation in its national capacity, but resolving all power into the will of the people, whether right or wrong. The Christian's motto is, "the law of God our guide." But all who regard not the divine law, are willing to say, "the public will our guide," let that be what it may. A Mahometan, zealous for the honour which he thinks due to God, and his prophet, begins every instrument of importance, "In the name of Allah, and Mahomet is his prophet;" but national establishments may be found among those that are called Christian, that recognise neither the name, nor the providence, nor the law of God.

2. Public violation of the Sabbath is a national sin. To sanctify the Sabbath and keep it holy is a moral law. Its principle will last forever. Heaven itself will be an eternal Sabbatism.

What need is there for violating the Sabbath by law, by authorizing the mail to be carried on the Sabbath day in the time of peace?

3. We name, but do not dwell upon the public sins of slavery, gambling under the name of lotteries authorized by law, and the unnecessary multiplying of oaths.

Slavery is at war with the rights of God and man. — It claims a property in man. This right belongs to

God alone. The claim of liberty by an unoffending man, is declared by the voice of this nation to be an inalienable right. but alas! the negro slave may claim in vain.

A lot is a sacred ordinance instituted by God. It is an appeal, an immediate appeal to Heaven to decide, where human ingenuity fails. And never should it be resorted to in any other case, and then, only by prayer. How often is it prostituted—how often profaned by authority of law!

How are oaths multiplied by law! By frequency the solemnity wears off, and the holy reverence which should impress our minds for the name of God disappears.

4. The God-dishonouring practice of duelling is a national sin, because practised without national restraint, and without national degradation, and disfranchisement to the character who dares so foul a deed.

To the indelible disgrace of our nation, her public counsels have been violated by this degrading sin—her halls of legislation have been polluted—her sacred Senate has been outraged by this more than Gothic barbarity. *Tell it not in Gath*, this has been done by legislators themselves—the guardians of the laws that they had made,

I proceed, in a few instances, to point out the folly and criminality of this barbarous practice.

1. This crime is very foolish and absurd. It sinks the perpetrator beneath the level of rational beings, and proclaims to the world a more than ordinary degree of stupidity. A duel is fought, by the challenger, under the idea of inflicting punishment on a person, who is supposed to have done him an injury, or as a reparation, or satisfaction for that injury. But as it gives "an equal chance" to the offender, as to the offended, it is absurd, and even ridiculous, to call it either *punishment, reparation or satisfaction*. If the punishment is equal; it supposes the parties equally guilty, and as to reparation or satisfaction, it leaves the offended person, in relation to the injury, precisely as it found him; but in addition, it exposes him to the risk of being wounded, or of losing his life.

Suppose a man to have received, undeservedly, a blow on the head, and he gravely asks the person who inflicted it to permit him to give him another, not merely in return for that already received, but to meet another which he authorizes him to give him, if he

can. Change the thing to shooting one another, and you have exactly the same preposterous result. We would feel for the deranged intellects of such a man.

2. But duelling is worse than folly and absurdity, it is self-murder, and possesses all the attributes of deliberate suicide. Whether a man takes away his own life, by his own hand, or presents his bosom to another, whom he authorizes to take his life, in the nature of the case, there is no difference. But what individual has a right to deprive society of one of its members without its consent? and who has a right to desert his post, to leave undone the duties assigned him by his Creator, and rush unbidden into the presence of his Judge? Can there be more Heaven-daring presumption than this?

3. It is the wilful and premeditated murder of another. Whatever secret resolutions may be entertained, and sometimes acted upon, not to take away the life of the other party, this enters not into the system, and cannot be considered, in the view which we ought to take of duelling, as a crime against God and civil society. Such forbearance forms no part of the laws of duelling. We are fully authorized to consider the duellist as, in every case, designing, if he can, to take away the life of his adversary. If this were not the case, the whole would be a farce.

If the duellist have not "a right to take away the life of his opponent, he can have no right to attempt it." Suppose the man, with whom he fights, to fall in the contest, he has taken away a human life without a trial, without judge or jury, without condemnation, and without any part of the legal forms of cutting off a criminal, except the mere business of the executioner, to which he meanly submits, without being legally appointed.

4. Duelling is treason against the majesty of a nation. It attempts, in every case, to rob society of two of its members, without its consent, in violation of the social compact. It does more. It usurps the highest exercise of the sovereignty of a nation—the taking away of human life.

It requires the sovereignty of a nation to decree death to one of its members. This the duellist takes upon himself. The representatives of a nation must meet in convention to form a constitution, in which it must be declared what crimes are worthy of death. The whole machinery of judges, and courts, and trial, brings into operation the sovereignty of a nation, before a single

human life can legally be taken away. But the duellist declares he is equal to all these, and above them, for he can set them all aside. This is to usurp the sovereignty of the nation; and if there can be treason, it is this.

5. It is an outrage upon the sacred laws of honour, by pilfering her holy attributes to deck a meretricious counterfeit. We might ask, what is honour? Is it an empty name, or is it a reality? If there be such a thing as honour, is it reducible to any standard, or can it be known by any certain definition? If it can, will not the moral perfections of the Fountain of honour be that standard? Will not his holy law clearly define it? or shall we apply to custom and usage, and what its votaries will call honourable men? Who is to determine? Let them not beg the question. "The ancient Gauls pretended that every person had a just right to what he could force from his neighbour, especially if he were of another tribe. The Spartans held theft to be innocent, if it were but shrewdly committed." Here is honour, according to custom and usage. Let the whole tribe of bullies, debauchees, duellists, and men who laugh at religion, and despise eternal consequences, be the judges, and duelling, that cold-blooded murder, will be called an honourable thing, the tears of the widow, and the cries of the orphans to the contrary notwithstanding.

We turn with disgust from the revolting picture, and ask, with whom could a man of genuine honour fight a duel? According to their own laws, it must be with one of his peers. Where shall he find him? We shall suppose a case. An honourable man receives a challenge for a supposed insult. As he is an honourable man, he will be willing to leave the matter to the decision of disinterested and honourable men. If he is found to have acted improperly, if he be an honourable man, if he be a gentleman, he will most cheerfully make suitable acknowledgments. If the other be a gentleman, he will be satisfied. If he is not satisfied, he is no gentleman, and the other who is, upon their own ground, has no right to fight him, because he is not his equal.

It cannot be honourable to break the laws of God. *Thou shalt do no murder*, is one of these laws. If one of the laws of heaven may be violated, by a point of honour, all may—And if one man has a right to do so, another has this also, all have, and society would become a pandemonium, and every country a field of blood.

6. Fighting a duel by any man of moderate understanding, betrays a spirit of the most abject cowardice. Not that every man who fights a duel, is at other times, and on other occasions, a coward. The contrary has often been proved. But in this case, the conduct is mean, paltry, and cowardly.

The character of a truly brave and magnanimous man, is, that he dares to do his duty, in spite of consequences or sufferings.

Ask these men, and they will generally answer that duelling is wrong. But the apology is, "I must comply with the usage. My standing in society is such, that if I refuse, I shall be branded as a coward—I shall be looked down upon and treated with contempt, and I cannot bear it." What a pitiful spirit is here! A nobler and more magnanimous mind than yours, would do it. A pity indeed, that you had not more courage. You cannot, then, with an undaunted front, meet these your worst enemies. You have not the courage to face them. What if they should thus point the finger of scorn, if you would refuse to pick a pocket, or filch your neighbour's purse? Must you do it, or forfeit your honour? for this arbitrary unprincipled honour, which so easily disposes of murder, might turn in the direction of robbery, and array it with all its glory. Nor would the crime possess the thousandth part of the magnitude of the other. The good man, the brave man, the man who has not the dastardly heart of a coward, will gloriously charge upon the whole phalanx, and nobly dare to suffer, rather than sin.

7. The most awful criminality in duelling, is, that, by necessary consequence, the duellist claims an equality with the Lord Jesus Christ, and if he fall in the contest, he appears before the judgment seat of the Eternal, challenging for his own, the independence of Godhead.

I have power, said the Son of God, *to lay down my life*, John x. 18. and says the duellist, "So have I." The power to lay down his life, argues the independence and Godhead of Christ—that his life was his own, and he might dispose of it at his pleasure. He has the right and prerogative of *being*. This is the name Jehovah, the name of being by which God made himself known to Moses, I AM. Thus Christ is the Lord of life, because he is Jehovah.

When Pharaoh exalted Joseph to be governor of Egypt, he reserved to himself the throne, *only in the*

throne will I be greater than thou. But this exclusive right the duellist will not allow to his Maker, but claims an equality in Jehovah's throne. How dreadful must the appearance of such an one be before the bar of Omnipotence! "Let the potsherds of the earth strive with the potsherds of the earth, but wo unto him that striveth with his Maker."—"Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle?" saith the Lord, "I would go through them, I would burn them together." What would the flimsy arguments of the duellist avail, when the Judge of quick and dead should put the appalling question, "Why hast thou left thy post? why hast thou rushed uncalled into the august presence of the Majesty of the heavens? Would he dare to open his mouth? Would he venture then to call the violation of Jehovah's law by the sacred name of honour? "Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil."—The Lord will require it.

To conclude: Does righteousness exalt a nation, and is sin a reproach to any people? Then let us bewail the want of that righteousness in our own nation, and the existence of such enormous sins. Nations, as such, exist only in this world, and if there be national sins unrepented of, national judgments may be expected. Are all our national institutions founded on moral principles, and do they recognise the holy Bible as the law paramount? Alas! they do not. Are our rulers generally, "able men, men of truth, fearing God and hating covetousness?" O what a falling off is here! How unlike is the character of many!

But the subject exhorts us to examine ourselves, and to search every one for the plagues of his own heart. National righteousness, even if we had it, does not confer personal righteousness. In the righteousness of Christ alone can we be exalted.

Let us endeavour, as far as may be in our power, to put a stop to abounding iniquity, and testify against all who make a mock at sin.

The object for which we are assembled, is to discountenance the hateful and savage custom of duelling. May God direct us to the means which he will bless, and to his name be the praise.

Anti-Duelling **RESOLUTIONS,**

Adopted April 3, 1827.

PUBLIC MEETING.

A GENERAL MEETING of the friends of religion and good morals was held, agreeably to public notice, in the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, on Tuesday April 3, 1827, at half past six o'clock P. M. The object of the meeting was to consider, and, if thought advisable, to adopt a Preamble and Resolutions against Duelling which had been previously prepared and approved at a meeting of professed Christians of different denominations. An appropriate and interesting Sermon was delivered by Rev. Dr. JOHN BLACK, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, from Prov. xiv: 34: "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people." The audience was large and attentive. It consisted of reputable citizens, ministers of the gospel and professed disciples of Christ of five or six different denominations. Public worship having been concluded, the meeting was organized. Rev. Dr. FRANCIS HERRON, of the Presbyterian Church, was called to the Chair; and Rev. CHARLES AVERY, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was appointed Secretary. The object of the meeting having been stated by the Chairman, the above mentioned Preamble and Resolutions were read by Rev. JOSEPH STOCKTON, of the Presbyterian Church. Whereupon, it was moved and seconded that they should be adopted without alteration; and, after some remarks, the question was taken, and the motion carried by a most cordial, overwhelming, and almost unanimous vote.—A committee, consisting of the clergy of the city of Pittsburgh and its vicinity, was then appointed, to address the public on the subject of these resolutions—to correspond with their brethren in different sections of our country, soliciting their co-operation—and to carry into effect such other means as they may consider calculated to discountenance and stamp with merited infamy the barbarous and Heaven-daring practice of duelling.

THE RESOLUTIONS.

At a public meeting of the different denominations of professing Christians, in the city of Pittsburgh and its vicinity, convened for the purpose of taking into consideration the pernicious practice of *Duelling*, in our beloved country, and sanctioned by the example of some of our legislators, and men in office, to the manifest injury of the best interests of the community; the following Preamble and Resolutions were adopted, viz.

We, who are citizens of this Commonwealth and professing Christians, are fully convinced, from the united testimony of *reason* and *Divine Revelation*, that every man is accountable to God for all his actions—that the revealed will of God is the great law by which all men should be directed and governed—that this law has expressly forbidden the crime of *Duelling*—that no government can long exist, where, in violation of this law, the principles of religion and public virtue are neglected and trampled upon, by those who, from their office and station, take the lead in forming the morals and manners of the nation—that nations are punished for the sins of their rulers, when they do not oppose those sins, by the lawful and proper means which God has put into their power—that the practice of *Duelling*, which continues to *afflict* and *disgrace* our happy republic, is a species of *murder* and *suicide* of the most aggravated kind, alike an outrage upon the laws of God, the principles of true honour, and civilized life, originating among the barbarous and ferocious hordes of the middle ages, and continued by men who indulge the same cruel and vindictive passions, or cowardly submit to their destructive influence—that it, under every circumstance, is illegal, immoral, irrational and impious—that every duellist not only breaks the bonds which unite him to his fellow men; becomes a murderer, and risks the loss of his own life; but places the fearful stake of his eternal happiness upon the precarious issue of a duel, and thus braves all the horrors of the *second death*—and that, therefore, it is the solemn duty of our National Government to interpose its authority, and, by official penal statutes, prevent the perpetration of this crime; or punish the offenders with entire disfranchisement, and so wipe away the disgrace from our national character—and also, that every Christian in the nation should, in some public manner, bear his testimony against this alarming evil, and so bring the

force of public sentiment to aid the laws in putting it down.

Deeply impressed with these sentiments; and desirous of promoting peace and good will among our fellow citizens; and assist in banishing from our country a practice so offensive to God, and injurious to man; in itself so savage; and in its consequences so fatal; we have cordially united in passing the following Resolutions, and pledged ourselves to each other, and the Christian public, that we will adhere to them.

1st. *Resolved*, That we do most solemnly consider the practice of Duelling a direct violation of the sixth commandment; and every Duellist a *wilful and deliberate murderer*; actuated by the most malignant and revengeful passions.

2d. *Resolved*, That we deeply deplore the frequency of this crime in these United States; and also in seeing our public journals so often disgraced with the details of challenges given and received by members of Congress, public officers, and men whose example is calculated to mislead and ruin the youth of our country.

3d. *Resolved*, That we will consider such men as disqualified for, and unworthy of any public office; and that, as Christians, we neither *can* nor *will* give them our support, or suffrage.

4th. *Resolved*, That it be earnestly recommended to all our Christian brethren, of every denomination, throughout these United States, to unite in testifying against and opposing a practice which has already done so much mischief among us; and which, if suffered to continue, will bring sorrow and wretchedness into many families, sin upon the nation, and the judgments of God upon our country.

5th. *Resolved*, That all good citizens be requested to unite in petitioning our National Legislature, to enact such laws against Duelling as to them shall appear the most effectual, to arrest its progress, and entirely banish it from the nation.

6th. *Resolved*, That all editors of public papers, friendly to religion and good order, are requested to renew and continue the great moral force of the press against this barbarous and murderous practice, until it shall be stamped with its own proper intamy, and those who shall be guilty of this crime be considered and treated as the basest of murderers.

7th. *Resolved*, That those men who have had the

true courage to treat challenges with merited contempt
deserve the approbation of their fellow citizens.

8th. *Resolved*, That the editors of news papers,
opposed to Duelling, be requested to publish these Re-
solutions.



CAPTAIN —'S EXCUSE FOR NOT FIGHTING A DUEL.

WHAT! you're afraid then? Yes, I am; you're right,—
I am *afraid to sin*, but not to fight:
My Country claims my service—but no Law
Bids me in *folly's* cause my sword to draw.
I fear not man, nor devil, but, though odd,
I'm *not ashamed* to own, *I fear my God*.

10 08 07