

OUR BANNER.

Vol. XV.

APRIL, 1888.

No. 4.

ROMANISM AND THE NEGRO.*

BY THE REV. G. M. ELLIOTT, SELMA, ALA.

We clip the following from the *Chicago Advance*, of December 29, 1887:

"A band of Franciscan nuns have taken vows to devote their lives to missionary work among the negroes of the United States, particularly those of the South." The above indicates that the eye of the Church of Rome is on the South. This may be concluded not only from the above statement, but from other facts. Almost every Southern State has its adherents to the Roman Catholic religion among the colored people, and mission work among them is being done. Probably more is being done in Maryland and Louisiana than in any other States. In Alabama we have some of them. Here in Selma they have no mission, but within this few years they have established a large school for the whites. Doubtless this is a step toward work among the freedmen also. They have already been circulating their Catechisms among them. In Mobile they are doing something toward gathering in the children. They have seen what a fine field the South

* The Presbyterian Club of New York, at its meeting February 29th. discussed "The Relation of the Roman Catholic Church to our Common Work." Dr. Philip Schaff sketched the history of the Roman Catholic Church, drew a parallel between the position of the Apostles toward the Jewish Church and that of the Reformers toward the Catholic Church, and thought that, as the Catholic Church had survived the terrific shocks of the Reformation and stands to-day the largest visible Christian Church, God must have some great work for it to do. If immorality and infidelity are the great dangers of our time, the Catholic Church is the ally of the Protestant Church in the warfare against them.

The Rev. Dr. John Hall took a different view of the question. He thought there was no more reason to think that there was good in the Catholic Church, because it had lasted so long, than in some heathen religions, which have lasted much longer. The Catholic Church should be treated with Christian kindness, but not made the "mother Church," or be an ally."—ED.]

to hear the brother." I shall never forget his looks and the tone of his voice as he said this, both of which told in themselves that his heart was pained to the very core. One of the members told me afterward that she knew many were kept away on account of not having spring clothing. Now I do not say that I should have done any better; but I do say that if we would resolve as Christians to adopt a plain, simple form of dress, and to keep it, we would not so often need to pain the hearts of our pastors with having to preach to empty pews. No; nor would we so much grieve the Saviour who hung mangled and bleeding on the cross for our sins. We were indeed bought with a price; and will we crucify the Saviour afresh by giving up to pride? Oh let us gird on the sword of the Spirit, that we may be ever ready to slay this giant of sin. God grant that missionary societies may take up this question at once. May we all be enabled to go forward in the path of duty at all times, trusting the results with our Lord Jesus, the God and Saviour.

PRACTICAL DISSENT STILL OBLIGATORY.

BY THE REV. D. S. FARIS, SPARTA, ILL.

Is a consistent, practical testimony for Christ as the Head of the nations needed any longer in the United States?

God has ordained civil government as Creator. As Redeemer He requires it to be subject to the law of Christ, the Mediator. The law of God, both natural and revealed, makes government obligatory upon the people. Therefore the want of government is a sin, and an inefficient government is sinful. In free government the obligation to have good and just laws rests upon the citizens who have the privilege and duty of voting. It rests specially on the party that possesses the offices; such a party is responsible to the people under God. If they fail in their duty, the people ought to deprive them of power, and depute it to those that will make good laws. A free and righteous Constitution enables the people to make the change peaceably by the ballot; without such a Constitution the people are still bound to have a good government, and they may carry out their obligation by force when necessary. The people are responsible for the constitution of government, be it righteous or unrighteous, free or despotic. As individuals they give their consent by voluntarily exercising the rights of citizenship.

Now suppose the Constitution is wrong or radically defective, the voluntary citizen becomes directly responsible for the error; and if the error be the rejection of God from His place in His own ordinance, it certainly must be considered fundamental. In other words a secular Constitution does not discharge the obligations that Christian people are under to secure the establishment of civil government.

What should Christians do in such a case? Manifestly a majority cannot make wrong right for the minority; every citizen must keep his own conscience. There is the privilege and duty of dissent from the deeds of an erring majority. The obligation to elect officers binds only when no immoral conditions are found in the way; when such conditions occur, there can be no compulsion on the electors. Election is choice; the right to choose implies the right not to choose. Compulsion to make some choice would involve in the next step compulsion to make the choice of the party in power. Hence the citizen must always be left free to choose or not to choose, according to his own judgment of what will best serve the public interest and promote the glory of God. He is not under law to any party, nor to the people as a whole, but to his own conscience and to his God.

The obligation of dissenting citizens is not fully discharged simply by refusing to make a choice of officers. There being a natural and revealed obligation to set up and administer good government resting upon every one, the dissenter must be held guilty who does not publicly declare the reasons of his refusal to co-operate with his fellow-citizens. The root of the reason is that we may not endorse a bad principle in order to do good; we may not "do evil that good may come." We may not endorse a Constitution that comes short of the divine pattern in that which is most essential, viz., the authority and law of God, the foundation of all authority.

The importance of the matter will appear when we consider that secular government is next door to anarchy. Leave out or deny the authority of God, and there can possibly be no authority; "there is no power but of God." There is no authority in the individual; then not in many; then not in the majority; the majority cannot make right wrong; the difference between the two rests on an eternal and immutable principle. If there is no authority in the decree of a majority, there remains nothing but force; might makes right; all must bow to and worship the God of forces. The idea is abhorrent, and reacts in anarchy. There is no middle ground between pure secularism and anarchy.

A greater political mistake was never made by a Christian people than the adoption of a secular Constitution; and no doubt something dreadful will be the outcome. Therefore something very significant of opposition to such a principle ought to be done by Christian people. Nothing but refusal to have anything to do with the godless organization is at all adequate to express the degree of condemnation that such a crime deserves. The crime that leaves out the factor of divine authority in civil government, and refuses to be bound by the moral law of the Bible, is enough to call down the fearful judgments of God on the heads of the guilty perpetrators; and every Christian should haste to wash his hands clean of this guilt. This seems too plain to need argument; the simple statement ought to carry overwhelming

conviction. Christians ought to separate themselves from the political body that is guilty of this rebellion against the Lord God of hosts.

But what attitude should the Church stand in toward this crime? Is this political sin a thing to be left to the judgment of private members? Or, Is it to be considered under the head of public scandal? This is perhaps the practical question. Few will deny the nation's sinfulness in this matter; yet they will say it is not a sin relevant to church censure in the individual. Some, no doubt, think it a very bold thing to censure as scandalous what the great majority of Christian citizens practice. But stop and think. In New Testament times we censure polygamy as scandalous, though it was practised by some eminently good men under the Old Testament. We censure moderate drinking now, though less than one hundred years ago good, godly ministers set the example. Less than one hundred years from now Christians will be astonished, not that the endorsers of secular government were in some cases censured as guilty of scandal; but that among the churches generally such a crime against God and His Christ could be condoned by church authority.

Somebody must set the ball in motion and keep it growing till it grows large enough to overcome the greatest obstacle. We freely admit that all sin is not scandal. Sins of infirmity are not scandalous unless they break out in an aggravating way; there are also times of ignorance that God winks at. The light is now dawning around these political issues. More and more men will be held accountable for their political conduct. The New Testament gives us several catalogues of scandalous offences which exclude from the kingdom of heaven. These catalogues vary as given in different places, showing that they were not meant to be exhaustive, but for information and for example. The sins of a secular government might be enumerated in a similar list; for as the business of government is to suppress crime, it is directly chargeable with the guilt of these crimes it licenses and tolerates. The murders that are not punished by the death of the murderers, the adultery that is winked at, the prostitution that is regulated by law, the free love that is encouraged by unlawful divorces, Sabbath profanation by corporations created by the government and by the government itself, monopoly and extortion practised under the eye of the State and as a privilege granted by law, and such like things. The government is the chief partner in these crimes, as in its Constitution it has dethroned God who denounces them, and rejects the law of God with the penalties prescribed to suppress them. Yes, the secular government is responsible for the drunkenness, polygamy, free love, extortion, robbery, swindling, and defalcations, etc., so common in our land to-day; for by its example it has destroyed the authority of the law that denounces punishment of such crimes. Where such crimes abound and are not suitably punished, the government itself becomes the great criminal; for God has ordained government for this very

purpose. The voluntary citizen participates in the crimes by virtually giving his support and oath of allegiance to a Constitution that does not make provision for carrying out the law of God. The Church has to do with the individual, not with the State; she bears her testimony against the wrong by dealing with individuals that participate in it. The Church, therefore will be unfaithful to the royal claims of Christ if her members are left free to take part in a government run on the principle of atheism.

To me it is astonishing that the greatest number of those in our communion desiring liberty to vote in the State are not urgent to join the parties of "political" reform; but they wish to fall in line with one of the great parties that pander to crime and corruption. Be astonished, O ye heavens, and earth be thou dismayed at such a generation of Covenanters? They ought to be ashamed of their connection with a dissenting church. Well may they grow weary of the Scripture Psalms, and put all distinctive principles behind their backs. There is not an element of reform in one bone of their body; they are a dead weight on the back of a witnessing church, and the sooner they take their leave the better for themselves and for those left behind. I express myself strongly, because I feel strongly. In good faith I have lifted up my hand to God in this matter, and I supposed that others did the same. For one I cannot go back; I must refuse in any way to incorporate with a secular Constitution of civil government.

Our Larger Catechism also teaches us that what is sin or duty in ourselves, we must endeavor according to our places and callings to see that it be avoided or performed by others. The Church cannot innocently lay down her authority in such an important matter. This testimony has been lifted up and enforced in a practical way, till it has made the light to spread abroad in all directions. Now when the light begins to shine more and more unto the perfect day shall the Church come down from the mountain-top and hide her light in the dark vale? The time has not come for putting the light under a bushel. No great principle of reform has ever succeeded without suffering. No proper persecution of dissenters from political atheism has yet taken place. We must stand our ground till our blood has sealed our testimony. Those not possessing the spirit of martyrs and confessors had better go back to the rear like those that were separated at the waters from Gideon's three hundred. There may be too many of us to do God's lamp-bearing work; too many who love ease, popularity and filthy lucre to sacrifice all on the altar of their faith. Brethren, let us rally once again under the Old Blue Banner, and if necessary cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye that offends against our political dissent.