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I.—LITERARY.

THE TESTING SYSTEM FOR MINISTERIAL STUDENTS IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF IRELAND.

The testing system for ministerial students in the Southern Presbyterian Church is far from giving universal satisfaction. No proposed changes have met with a favorable reception at the hands of the majority of our rulers. But all parties are ready to admit that practically the examining of our candidates is very often most imperfect and unsatisfactory. Laxity is the common characteristic of most of the examinations conducted by the Presbyteries, while incompetence on the part of the examiners is not unheard of.

We are not concerned here to inquire whether the trouble springs from the requirements of the Book, or from the nature of the personnel of the Presbyteries—whether the standard set up in our Constitution is too high, or the material of our Presbyteries too low. We merely affirm as an acknowledged fact that there is dissatisfaction with the system by which we test the students' qualifications for the work of the ministry.

This being so, it may be fairly assumed that an account of the testing system in application in a sister church of noble repute will be received with interest. We do not think of advocating the adoption of the Irish scheme by our own church. We hope simply to stir up the minds of our brethren, by giving them a new plan to think on, to the bettering, in a way which shall seem good to them, our testing system.

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE PERJURER.

REV. A. J. McKELWAY.

Ezekiel 12:13. "I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there." See also Jeremiah 34, II Kings 25.

Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, reached the zenith of its greatness. It was not only the largest city of ancient times, but the capital of the most extensive empire and the centre of the civilization of the world. Nor are we able to decry that civilization, even from our own point of view, so far as material magnificence goes. Assyrian explorers have learned enough to show that the arts and sciences had reached an astonishing degree of perfection. Learning received royal recognition and encouragement, and invention had made familiar twenty-five centuries ago, what we are accustomed to call the comforts and conveniences of modern life. But in one respect that civilization was unworthy of the name. It knew nothing of the gentle and the humane. Of all the bloody monarchs whose deeds have stained the pages of human history these Assyrian kings were the bloodiest. Their boasted achievements as recorded on their monuments stand to their eternal shame. They seem to have made a scientific study of what would constitute the utmost measure of torture to the hapless victim of their laws or of their lawless rage. They delighted in human agony. So that Babylon came to be, to the Jewish and the Christian church, the symbol of worldly oppression and cruelty.

The fate of Zedekiah is an example of one of these refinements of cruelty. Zedekiah was the last king of Judah. A melancholy interest attaches to his fate. He had sworn allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, had broken his oath and dared rebellion. Egypt, Assyria's only rival, was unable to come to his help. Jerusalem was besieged and taken. The king with his sons and the princess of the blood royal—of the house and lineage of David—fled from the doomed city only to be overtaken and captured in the plain of Jericho. Zedekiah was brought to Riblah into the presence of the conqueror and there received the double sentence. The children were to be

slain before him and his eyes put out. That the torture of the body might have added to it agony of mind, it was decreed that the last scene upon which his eyes should rest should be the death of his sons. One moment to gaze upon their agony and then—darkness. While that dreadful vision burned itself into his mind and left its impress there for life, the flaming metal passed before his eyes.

Yet, their fate had been foretold by a prophet of Jehovah. With the colony of Jewish exiles on the banks of the Chebar lived Ezekiel. But his heart was with his people in Jerusalem, and during the seven years that preceded the destruction of the Holy City, the limitations of space and time were removed for him, and in prophetic vision he beheld the events of the siege and the assault and the vain retreat. Familiar as he was with the usages of the Assyrian tyrants, he knew the punishment that was meted out to conquered kings, and so he wrote Jehovah's message in the words of the text. "I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there." The Assyrian, with all his cruel power, was but the rod of God's anger. So, often, when men have suffered at the hands of fellow-men, their consciences have told them that they suffered also the judgments of a justly offended God.

What was the sin that was visited with so heavy a punishment? Briefly, it was perjury; it was the breaking of a solemn covenant; it was the violation of an official oath.

An Assyrian army was besieging Jerusalem when Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet saying, pray for us. And as the prophet came in and went out among the people he doubtless pointed out to them one great wrong of which they were guilty. The law of Moses with regard to the emancipation of Hebrew slaves had long been disregarded. So Zedekiah made a covenant with his people to proclaim liberty unto them, 'that none should serve himself of a Jew his brother,' and all the princes and all the people obeyed. Moreover, they made a covenant which was sanctioned by an oath. It was made before God and in the house that was called by his name. It was a blood-covenant, a covenant made "over the dead" (Heb. 9:17). A calf was cut in twain and the princes and the people passed between the pieces. And the slaves, their brethren, were free.

But now the besieging army is withdrawn. Egypt threatens

the supremacy of Babylon, and insignificant Judah is left alone for a time. If Egypt should conquer, Jerusalem would be free from the dread of Assyrian invasion. And so in the moment of fancied security, when the 'army of the king of Babylon was gone away,' Zedekiah and his princes and his people repented of the one good action which is put to their credit in these faithful records. The covenant is broken, the sacred house profaned, and the slaves, who had hardly tasted the sweets of liberty, are brought into subjection again. Then comes the Prophet with the word of the Lord, 'I will deliver Zedekiah into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall not spare, neither have pity, nor have mercy.'

And so the bereaved and blinded king is brought to Babylon. But its beauty and magnificence are unseen by him. And voices beloved, familiar, are unheard forever. For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

The story of the lesson is the lesson of the story. The moral needs no pointing out. But does this narrative of the days of long ago have any near application to our own age and our own people and our own lives?

In one sense there are no covenants made between man and man which are not made also to God. God is the witness of them all. A broken agreement, was made and broken in his sight. An unfulfilled promise was heard when it was given and known when it was violated, by Him. So that the man who lives with the consciousness of the ever-present God is the man who is careful how he gives and how he keeps his word.

But Zedekiah's oath was an official oath: The thing sworn to be done was right in itself, was already a duty; and the oath was made to God deliberately, and with all that could add to its sanctity from sacred scenes and sacred rites and the sacred name. But even defining perjury to be the violation of an oath of this character, it may be shown that Zedekiah's sin is a common sin.

1. The oath of office is taken by thousands of those who are elected to positions of trust by the people of this country. The President, Senators and Congressmen, Judges, Governors, Legislators, and all the host of lesser officials, bind themselves to a faithful performance of their duty, by the sanction of an oath. And yet when duty is unperformed, even when there is most flagrant dereliction, how few of us think of the most

heinous part of the sin, the violation of the official oath. We scarcely connect the thought of perjury with that of malfeasance in office.

2. The witness upon the stand is an officer of the government. He is put into a position of trust, whether willingly or unwillingly, in which he is bound to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And he binds himself to perform that duty by raising his hand to heaven, or by pressing his lips to the written word of God. It is a solemn calling upon the Omniscient One to witness the truth of the declaration. It conditions the reception of the salvation offered in the Bible upon the speaking the whole truth.

Yet, how often do witnesses swear to a lie, and how much more the state's punishment for perjury is dreaded than the wrath of God. And often the innocent suffer and the guilty escape their just reward, because the witnesses do not realize the curse pronounced upon those who perjure themselves, and thus invoke the threatened doom.

3. Every election official takes an oath of office. From his position, as the administrator of the law, he is bound to be just and impartial. But he doubly binds himself by an oath. It may be carelessly administered. There may be mental reservations. But in the sight of him who searcheth the heart a man takes an oath which he pretends to take.

We of the South are not concerned as to the share of the crime by other sections of the country. It is enough for us to know that perjury at the polls, the deliberate violation of the oath of office, is practiced well nigh throughout the South. Men have been chosen for the position because of their unscrupulousness—sometimes because of their sleight-of-hand ability. Laws have been passed in the name of reform that enabled the election officers to commit their frauds more safely. And the only care is that the matter shall be unproveable in a court of justice. The community or the state profits by the crime and condones it. "The end justifies the means." The party rewards those whose manipulation has been most successful, and only here and there a voice is raised in warning.

It is time that it should be recognized that lying and cheating at the polls are lying and cheating and nothing else. That the judge of election who denies the right of a lawful voter to have his vote cast and counted is as infamous as the judge on the bench who soils his ermine by injustice and op-

pression ; that the perjured poll-holder or registrar is as vile a perjurer as the perjured witness, and that the wrath of Almighty God rests upon him and all his kind. And if the voice of the pulpit is not raised for God and for his truth in this particular, to whom shall the people turn ?

For while Zedekiah suffered his children were slain. When the fathers eat sour grapes the children's teeth are set on edge. Better any state of society, better any condition of misgovernment, or tyranny if that must be, than for the youth of our land to be taught that the path of trickery is the path of preferment, and that the eternal principles of honor and justice and truth may be suspended in the world of politics.

And as Zedekiah was the representative of his people, his people suffered likewise. Is it not what we may call poetic justice, that those who had no mercy nor pity upon their brethren, but kept them in unlawful bondage, should themselves have been carried along into captivity and exile by a merciless, pitiless king ? God never resigns. He appointeth over the kingdom of men whomsoever he will, and he will follow with his punishments those who break his holy laws.

4. There is another oath of office, an oath made to God, made in his house and in his name. It is the minister's ordination vow, "to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity and peace of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account." If anything like the state of affairs here described exists within the congregation of any minister who may read these words, surely he will not be inconsistent with that vow to show to the people that they cannot obtain human power by refusing to acknowledge divine power, that they cannot uphold the laws of man by breaking the laws of God, to show the sin of perjury and the punishment of the perjurer.

Fayetteville, N. C., September, 1896.

