

THE

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"THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN,"*

MY YOUNG FRIENDS—On this occasion of assembling to resume our labors, a shade of sadness is cast over our meeting. A void has been made among us. It has pleased Him in whose hand are our times, to call away from his work in the church, your esteemed instructor, Rev. James M. Willson, D. D. The hope cherished at the close of last session, that the summer vacation would avail to restore his wasted strength, so that with renewed energy he might fill his place in the Seminary this session, has been disappointed. He is not, for God has taken him. His labors on earth are finished. No more will his presence cheer you, and his instructions aid you in your studies. To his family, to the seminary, and to the church, his removal is a loss. To himself, I doubt not, to die was gain.

He was well fitted for the place to which he was assigned by the church. Gifted with mental powers susceptible of high cultivation, he improved with diligence the favorable opportunities afforded him for that end. His literature was varied and substantial. He was a close and laborious student. He loved learning for its own sake. The exercise as well as the end of studying afforded him enjoyment. What came from his lips or from his pen, generally evinced earnest thought, sound judgment, and acquaintance with his subject. He possessed eminently the qualifications of a teacher. It was his delight to be among his students, and he was singularly successful in gaining their confidence and esteem. With you, my young friends, I sympathize in this visitation of Providence. Let us, however, remember that God has done it, and bow in resignation to his will, which though to us is mysterious, we are sure is wise. It gives me pleasure to state to you, that the Board of Superintendents have promptly made provision to fill for this session the vacant chair, by the appointment of the Rev. David Scott—a ripe scholar, a sound divine, and a tried and proved defender of the Covenanted Testimony.

*Introductory Lecture at the opening of the session of the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary, Allegheny, Nov. 6th, 1866, by Professor Sproull.

FACTS VERSUS MISSTATEMENTS.

In the *Banner of the Covenant*, of December 20th, we find the following in the editorial column:

"IS THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH TO BE CARRIED INTO THE PRO-RE-NATA CHURCH?—While we use the term *Pro-Re-Nata* Church in regard to our former brethren, we would not be considered as using a disrespectful appellation, since it is on the ground of the *Pro-Re-Nata* meeting of the Eastern Subordinate Synod of 1832–3, that they hold their distinctive position. As some of our readers may not be aware of the *history* of this event, we may briefly state that the Reformed Presbyterian Church had been agitated for some years in regard to the position which her members should occupy in regard to the United States Government, some standing on the ground that the Constitution should not be accepted, and that none should vote or hold office, while others advocated the opposite. Those who took the restricted view of the subject, having called a *Pro-Re-Nata* meeting of the Eastern Subordinate Synod, in November, 1832, at that meeting and its continuation, suspended from the exercise of the holy ministry and the privileges of the church, Revs. Dr. S. B. Wylie, G. M'Master, John Gibson, S. W. Crawford, John M'Master and William Wilson, with Rev. Jas. W. Stewart and Rev. J. N. M'Leod. By ecclesiastical law, any ministerial act which these venerable fathers and brethren performed after their suspension would be invalid; any ordinations in which they participated, any sacrament they administered, any marriage they performed, any ecclesiastical services they conducted, are the same as if performed by persons who were not ministers at all. It is scarcely necessary to say that neither those individuals who were subjected to this unholy perversion of discipline, nor the Christian community at large, paid any regard to this suspension, but the act still stands unrepealed, and until it be repudiated by our brethren, the idea of a reunion with them is an absurdity, unless at the sacrifice of ministerial standing on the part of a large number of the ministers of our church. In the mean time, if measures are to be taken toward such a course, it is well that the people *should know* it. Those whose sympathies and proclivities tend in that direction, will find it difficult to accomplish their design."

There are some things here that need a sifting:

1. Mention is made of the *pro-re-nata* of the subordinate synod of 1832–3. This is intended, evidently, to give the impression that there were two meetings of that synod, *pro-re-nata*. And this is more clearly stated where it is said that at the *pro-re-nata* meeting in November, 1832, and its continuation, certain ministers were suspended. The fact is there was but one meeting *pro-re-nata*. The meeting at which all the persons named, but one, were suspended, was the adjourned meeting of the synod in April, 1833. The person excepted above was suspended at the *pro-re-nata* meeting for contumacy.

2. It is intimated that previous to 1832 the position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in regard to the United States Government, was undetermined. Now if any thing could be determined by a Testimony solemnly adopted, by synodical acts, and by the exercise of discipline, it was determined that the R. P. Church stood aloof from incorporation with the government as constituted.

3. It is implied in the statement above, that the ministers named

were suspended for exercising their right to act according to their judgment on an unsettled question. The fact is that their trial and suspension grew out of the publication of certain paragraphs of a pastoral address, which were rejected by the E. S. Synod at its meeting in April, 1832, along with some very offensive notes. They are charged in the libel with "having published to the world the condemned parts of the Pastoral Address and notes appended thereunto." The following are the counts of the libel: "1. Following divisive courses. 2. Contempt of the authority of synod. 3. Error in doctrine. 4. Abandonment of the testimony of the church. 5. Slandering synod and its members." To prepare this libel the *pro-re-nata* meeting was called. The libel, as we have already stated, was tried at the adjourned meeting in the following April.

4. From the statement of what was done, it might readily be concluded that the ministers were deposed. It is assumed that if the acts of that court were valid, those members could have no official power. We could hardly have conceived that any Presbyterian was so ignorant as to confound suspension with deposition. We will endeavor to enlighten the editor of the one-fourth of the *Banner of the Covenant*. Suspension is a prohibition to exercise office; deposition is a deprivation of office. The effect of suspension, ecclesiastically, extends no further than the jurisdiction of the church by which the sentence is passed. The suspended man may disregard it, and if he finds an organization that will sustain him, so far as ecclesiastical law and usage go, he may exercise his office, and his acts will be held valid. We speak not now of its spiritual effect; that is a different question. Hence, all those results, which are so strongly portrayed, exist only in a fertile or disordered imagination. These ministers entered into an organization with others, and constituted themselves an ecclesiastical body. As members of that body we view them as no more disabled to act officially than those with whom they are associated.

5. It would seem that the inspiration of the article is the fear lest some of the brethren might return to the former fold. We think the writer may dismiss his fears. The footprints already made point in the opposite direction. It was scarcely worth while to set up a scarecrow to frighten the remnant of this organization from retracing their steps. And we are sure if any of them have a design of doing so, the attempt to deter them will be of no avail. If they have a desire to return, it must be from a conviction that they did wrong in going away. That conviction, frankly expressed, will make their restoration to the Reformed Presbyterian Church easy to us, and honorable to them.

6. The apology for using the designation, *pro-re-nata*, might have been omitted, especially as it lacks the element of truth. It is notorious that the design of that epithet from the first, was to stigmatize the church from which the separatists withdrew. They knew well that before other religious bodies they could not maintain, by facts and arguments, their claim to still occupy the position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Hence they resorted to the meanest of all modes of controversy, the *argumentum ad invidiam*. It was, however, a signal failure. Not a single denomination ever applied the epithet to us as a

distinctive designation. Its use was monopolized by its originators to adorn their speeches and beautify their writings. On the other hand, the religious public, with singular unanimity, fixed on their organization the distinctive designation of "New Light," a proof that their efforts to cover up their defection by false pretenses were utterly fruitless.

Under the same heading which we have placed above the preceding remarks, we have something to say to another party. On both the right and left there seems to be a sad defect of memory or something worse. In the October number of the *London Scottish Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, there is an article signed David Steele, which needs a little attention. Passing several things that might be noticed, we refer to some statements in the last paragraph. It is stated that "before the meeting of the synod of 1840, an elder was ordained in one of the presbyteries for the express purpose of getting a majority to keep a faithful minister out of synod, and with success." Now we call for the name of the presbytery, and the names of the elder and of the minister referred to. If they are not given, the above statement must be pronounced a slanderous untruth. It is added in the same connection, "A committee was raised in general synod, of which Rev. James Blackwood was chairman, and D. Steele was added by vote of synod, on the motion of said chairman, the object of which committee was to consider the expediency of abolishing the subordinate synods and the delegation form of general synod. The committee prepared a report, which the chairman never presented to synod, but in lieu thereof, moved the next morning that the delegation synod and the two subordinate synods be abolished."

Now the facts of the case, as they appear in the published minutes of the synod of 1840, are these: Mr. Blackwood was appointed the chairman of the standing committee on synodical reports—page 162, vol. 4, *Reformed Presbyterian*. On the next page we find the following: "Resolved, That the committee on synodical reports be instructed to take under consideration the propriety of abolishing the subordinate synods and the delegated form of general synod." In the same connection it is recorded that Rev. D. Steele was added to the committee. The report of the committee is on page 180. The record is, "the report was accepted and on motion adopted." We give the part of the report that relates to the special matters referred to the committee: "Whereas, The system of subordinate synods and a delegate synod is in the present circumstances of the church complex and unnecessary; therefore, Resolved, That the subordinate synods be directed to adjourn, *sine die*, at the close of their next session, and that the delegation system be abolished after the present session of general synod, and the synod be constituted as it was previously to the year 1825."

We have not written this to vindicate the character of Mr. Blackwood from a base attack on his uprightness; for to those who knew him he needs no vindication. Nor is it to defend our synod against attempts to weaken confidence in its faithfulness. It needs no defense. Neither have we any desire to expose the moral frailties of the writer of the article. But we have written it for the sake of some on whom his misstatements might have some influence to draw them away from the

synod and attach them to his organization. To such we would say, that truth respecting facts is just as important as truth in regard to principles, and if they expect to find the latter where the former is wanting, they manifest a lack of judgment, or what is worse, a perverted moral sense.

To what is said in the first part of the article in regard to early efforts to have some change in "Reformation Principles Exhibited," we reply by stating that in the deed of constitution of Mr. Steele's presbytery, dated Allegheny, June 27th, 1840, "Reformation Principles Exhibited" is mentioned in the list with the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, and Directory for Worship. There surely if the alleged defects of the Testimony had been then discovered, they would have been noticed. The *precious* document to which we have referred, will be found in the *London Scottish Reformed Presbyterian Magazine* for January, 1866, page 20.

GILEAD'S BALM AGAIN.

The following is the principal part of an article which we clipped from the *Christian Instructor* of November 10th. It presents some plain truths, to which it would be well for this nation to take heed. The grossly wicked character of many of our public men is attracting the attention of the true friends of the country. In this way God is bringing good out of evil. It is in the constitution that the wrong must be corrected. Vile men will be elected to office under the constitution until Christ is acknowledged and honored in it.

In a former paper remarks were made upon those having our institutions in their keeping. It is now proposed to direct attention to organic law.

In regard to this, it is proverbial that all civil governments have arisen and flourished in proportion to the simplicity of their forms of government, and that the most renowned civil powers have added amendment to amendment, by-laws to by-laws, statute to statute, until they have been crippled and have fallen under the accumulated weight of their own enactments; and this, too, augmenting as they have departed from the constitution of the "One Lawgiver." In verification of this, we have but to look abroad upon the nations of the earth as they now exist. Those in the gross darkness of heathenism are comparatively chaotic; and in exact ratio with the light of the gospel diffused, and its benign rays pervading and exerting its power upon the hearts of the people, do we find equity and stability and compactness in their forms of civil government.

In no nation of which we have any history are those principles so clearly demonstrated as in that of God's own chosen people, the Jews. So long as they were content with the "Thus saith the Lord," their prosperity was unparalleled, they were a happy people. Compact and invincible, no powers on earth could abjugate them, or even assail them