

THE

Reformed Presbyterian.

WHOLE NUMBER,
Vol. XXIII.—No. 2. }

FEBRUARY, 1859.

{ NEW SERIES,
Vol. V. — No. 2.

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS VERSUS THE BIBLE.*

Deuteronomy 11: 18, 22.

THE topic upon which I propose to speak this evening, is but one branch of a great subject, whose importance it is impossible to magnify or exaggerate: THE SUPREME AND UNIVERSAL AUTHORITY OF "THE WORD OF GOD," AS THE ONLY RULE OF BELIEF AND PRACTICE.

For two hundred years Reformed Presbyterians have maintained the right of the Bible to a place not only in the schools of learning but also in the halls of legislation, courts of justice, and wherever the highest interests of humanity are concerned or transacted. This fundamental principle of Christianity they have embodied in their standards, and vindicated, if not always successfully, at least faithfully, by separating from and boldly testifying against all systems and organizations, civil or ecclesiastical, which either theoretically or practically deny it. We have had much empty talk in this country within a few years, with respect to obedience to "the Higher Law," in certain matters of legislation. In my estimation, these professions are nothing but a contemptible *ruse* on the part of those who make them, to avoid the obligations of an oath which they know binds them to that which is unjust and immoral.

The principle which I have enunciated may have been sometimes perverted by fanatics and enthusiasts, who deny the right of all government by man, civil or ecclesiastical, and who are desirous to free themselves from the wholesome restraints which it imposes. Too often in the world's history have tyrants, both in the Church and in the commonwealth, invoked the authority of God, and miserably perverted his Word, by claiming its sanction for the infliction of wrongs and the introduction and perpetuation of usurpations diametrically opposed both to its spirit and its precept.

* A discourse delivered in the Third R. P. congregation, New York, by its pastor, Rev. J. R. W. Sloane, occasioned by attempts to exclude the Bible from some of the public schools in that city.

CAUSES OF INFIDELITY.

THE original cause of infidelity is doubtless inherent in the moral constitution of man—of man fallen by breach of covenant with God. The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. But there are occasions, furnished in holy and sovereign providence, where enmity to God is manifested by special hostility to his revealed will. Among such occasions, may be noticed the *obstinacy* with which ministers, and other professors of the Gospel, resist the evidence of God's word against *slavery*. The just God, who loveth righteousness, denounces judgment against all oppressors. Slavery is complicated oppression—in body, soul, substance, relation, reputation. The ingenuity of divines, in concert with politicians, has been exercised for a quarter of a century to defend the lawfulness of this inhuman system. By wresting the Scriptures, attempts have been made to prove that the God of justice and mercy ordained the relation between master and slave. The present degradation of the negro is inferred as lawful, from the mark set upon Cain—the intervention of the *Deluge* notwithstanding!—from the curse upon Canaan—from the domestic economy of Abraham—from the Mosaic code, regulating the relation of master and servant; and even professors of natural science are invoked to ascertain from their profound researches in physiology, and especially geology, that the negro is *naturally* inferior to the white man—in fact, to prove that the colored man is not a man at all!—thus evincing an irresistible conviction, that if the negro be a *man*, all the preceding grounds of argument for his enslavement are false. Is it to be thought strange that theatre-going, novel-reading, ignorant and licentious youth, should be hardened in sin and confirmed in infidelity? For the God of the Bible, as portrayed by the advocates of slavery, is not the same God revealed in the volume of creation. Those who thus handle the Word of God deceitfully, wresting the Scriptures to their own destruction, have undoubtedly “unchurched themselves.”

Another *occasion*, which ungodly men eagerly seize upon to confirm themselves in unbelief, is the *facility with which ministers of the Gospel change their ecclesiastical relations*. Unhappily, the visible body of Christ is rent asunder by manifold causes in our time. All these causes are doubtless resolvable into one—a departing from the faith, either in theory or in practice, or both. And the changes in fellowship, which in our day are so rapid and so frequent, whether by ministers or others, are seldom from a more corrupt to a more pure communion. Indeed, “going from a more pure to a more corrupt fellowship,” as has been well remarked, “is the rule, not the exception, in our time.” The Presbyterian passes into the fellowship of the Methodist Church, the Associate into that of the Presbyterian, the Reformed Presbyterian into that of the United Presbyterian—each “carrying all his principles

with him"—and congratulates himself on a great accession to his gospel liberty! "I speak that I do know, and testify that I have seen." Now the youth of our day, who have been in any good measure brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, cannot but see and hear such important facts. They, of course, will reason from them; and alas! their deductions are to be lamented. With them who are not rooted and grounded in the truth, it is perfectly natural to judge of religion by the conduct of its professors. Looking at the instability, especially of ministers, and not the immutability of the Word of God, such persons conclude, first, there is no sincerity in professors—then, there is no reality in the matter of their profession! All this may be illustrated by referring to a special case.

During the time of the "great awakening," as it was often termed, last winter, some doctor of divinity wished to learn from Edwin Forrest, the tragedian, whether he had experienced a gracious change, as had been rumored. The facetious and wily stage-player in substance replied in the negative: That, as heretofore, "he loved his friends and hated his enemies, for he could not be a hypocrite!" insinuating that all professing Christians are hypocrites, and in this, imitating their Master! (*Absit blasphemia.*) A word or two on this singular case of declared infidelity. The cunning tragedian did not know that in the very act of "reproaching the Lord," he was confirming his word; for if "every man walketh in a vain show," this is true, emphatically, of the scenic actor; and it is more emphatically true, inasmuch as the Lord has selected the very word used to designate a stage-actor to portray the character of the worst of men.*

What shall we say of those ministers who decline from a more "pointed testimony to a more loose and general one?" Why, that they are condemned of themselves, at least as to their intelligence or sincerity. When a minister publicly declares: "I *never* approved of that part of the Testimony which condemns errors, and testifies against all who maintain them," is it a breach of the law of charity to infer that such a one is defective in respect of intelligence, or sincerity, or faithfulness? Can such be supposed to possess a scriptural sense of the obligation of ordination and other vows? Can it be said that he has "kept his oath of office?" But further, What will be the natural process of reasoning in the minds of such as are of "stronger capacity," whose memory will furnish matter for such reflection—matter brought forward in public ministrations for twenty or thirty years past? Certainly, that the preacher did not believe his own doctrine! But does not the instability of the minister in his profession tend to urge to the further impious conclusion—that his doctrine was erroneous? Moreover, if a person shall call to mind that such unstable ministers would take occasion to urge the Master's alarming

* The learned are aware that the word *hypocrite* in Scripture, is borrowed from the (*dramatis personæ*,) actors on a stage.

declaration: "Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me"—pressing the same upon the consciences of *communicants at the Lord's Table*,* the facility with which they can relinquish the distinctive principles of the covenanted unity and the peculiar practice of covenanted uniformity, will have a tendency to stagger the faith of God's children—because with lies they make the heart of the righteous sad, whom the Lord has not made sad, and strengthen the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life. Thus, when covenanted witnesses make defection from reformation attainments, and become identified with ecclesiastical bodies whose members make common cause with infidel and slaveholding political parties, the direct tendency of such unions and confederacies is to generate and perpetuate infidelity. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? Just what they have always done—encourage themselves in the Lord their God. For what if some do not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid; yea, let God be true, but every man a liar. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself. O Lord God of Hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?

DAVID STEELE.

HILL PRAIRIE, ILL., December 15th, 1858.

THE PURITANS.

THE Puritans were men whose minds had derived a peculiar character from the daily contemplation of superior beings and eternal interests. Not content with acknowledging, in general terms, an overruling providence, they habitually ascribed every event to the will of the Great Being, for whose power nothing was too vast, for whose inspection nothing was too minute. To know him, to serve him, to enjoy him, was with them the great end of existence. They rejected with contempt the ceremonious homage which other sects substituted for the pure worship of the soul. Instead of catching occasional glimpses of the Deity through an obscuring veil, they aspired to gaze full on the intolerable brightness, and to commune with him face to face. Hence originated their contempt for terrestrial distinctions. The difference between the greatest and meanest of mankind seemed to vanish, when compared with the boundless interval which separated the whole race from him on whom their own eyes were constantly fixed. They recognized no title to superiority but his favor; and confident of that favor, they despised all the accomplishments and all the dignities of the world. If they were unacquainted with the works of philosophers and poets, they were deeply read in the Oracles of God. If their names were not found in the register of heralds, they felt assured that they were recorded in the Book of Life. If their steps were not accompanied by a splendid train of menials, legions of ministering angels had charge over them. Their

* It was a matter of serious thought with some at the time, whether the theme was appropriate in the circumstances.