

The Christian Statesman

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X

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Vol. XLI.

OCTOBER, 1907.

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The Outlook.

The late New York legislature passed a marriage license law which has been signed by Governor Hughes. It requires a license to be issued by a town or city clerk in the place where the bride lives, and facts as to previous divorces will be shown on the face of the license. This serves for the information and protection of clergymen when asked to officiate at the marriage of persons who have broken away from marriage obligations previously assumed. The penalty for performing marriage without a license is a severe one. Thus another step has been taken in the slow and difficult path along which we are moving toward a complete and consistent reformation of the marriage laws of the United States.

The Rev. Dr. Charles W. Tinsley, pastor of a Methodist Episcopal church in Youngstown, Ohio, will be met with the charge of heresy at the meeting this month in Cleveland of the Northern Ohio conference. Dr. Tinsley frankly avows his disbelief of doctrines which the Christian church in all ages has held to be fundamental, viz., the miraculous conception of Jesus, His resurrection from the dead, and the doctrine of the Trinity. He says the book of Genesis is not history. It was made up of

myths and legends which were known among men before Moses compiled them. Following the usual tactics of men under charges of heresy, he speaks contemptuously and bitterly of the men who have preferred the charges—"a preacher of a small church in this city, another in Girard and a third in Niles. They represent no one but themselves. It seems to me like a black hand society with stilettos in their boots." He declares, referring to the fundamental doctrines stated above: "The people generally don't want such teachings, so I eliminate them." He declares positively that his own church of fourteen hundred members will stand by him, that he will be glad to have the matter brought up at conference and that the effect of the trial will be to give him a certificate of orthodoxy from the conference—something which he does not now possess. As in all such cases, the conference as well as Dr. Tinsley will be on trial, and the Christian public will carefully observe the decision.

William Jennings Bryan has had a great opportunity. For eleven years he has held almost complete ascendancy over one of the great political parties of the United States. By his oratorical gifts he has commanded the attention of the nation. In a recent tour of

**Skepticism
Within the
Church.**

**Mr. Bryan in
Want of a
Policy.**

somewhere in her silent nature, for she said not one word of pressing needs; she only answered briefly:

"I 'low ye can do what ye like, Creshy."

A small, half-ruined cabin was secured; some rude benches put up by the unskilled hands of a half-grown boy, a few children of widely varying ages were gathered in, and so the little school began. But even with such primitive arrangements twelve dollars could not last always, and Miss Mary at the mission school was one day surprised by a letter—a letter pathetic in its very meagreness, that simply told what 'Cretia was trying to do, and the need all about her. Could Miss Mary spare a few books and some Bibles? There were only two Bibles—'Cretia's own and one other—in all the place.

The reply was a box of supplies, followed a little later by Miss Mary herself. The day of arrival was warm and pleasant, and the school, which had outgrown its narrow quarters, was holding its afternoon session out of doors. Children of all sizes were seated on the grass or on convenient stumps, while the young teacher, slow still, and unassuming in her simple earnestness, was patiently trying to teach what she herself had been taught. It seemed to Miss Mary, in the few minutes that she stood there unob-

served and unwilling to interrupt, that the hungry heart must have treasured all it had ever heard. Then 'Cretia turned and saw her, and caught both her hands with a glad cry:

"Oh, Miss Mary! Now my poor scholars will have somebody to tell 'em!"

The same thought was in her face a little later when, as the sun drew near its setting, the circle of hearers increased. Men and boys returning from the fields stopped to listen, and a few women came from the cabins and joined the group. That this was the usual custom the visitor soon learned from the comments of those newcomers on the Bible lesson she was teaching.

"Yes'm, we'uns heard 'Creshy say that."

"Reckon that's what 'Creshy was tellin' las' week; it's pow'rful true."

Miss Mary looked upon them with eyes that saw through a mist. The story of their hard, barren lives was written in the faces turned toward her; and as she turned from them to 'Cretia, so unconscious of self, of toil and privation—so anxious only that the light should fall on these—she seemed to hear a voice not of earth, saying:

"There are last that shall be first."—Woman's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church.

The National Reform Movement

STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

xi.

The Forgiveness of National Sins.

BY THE REV. T. P. STEVENSON, D.D., LL.D.

As we proceed in the study of the Christian principles of civil government, the subjects which present themselves become less abstract

and more concrete and practical. The topic now before us is of close practical interest. Moreover, though it takes hold on some of the profoundest religious truths, it is no harder to understand than the subject of our own sins and our personal forgiveness. Any child old enough to be convinced of sin and to ask God for pardon, can understand the forgiveness of the sins of a nation.

FORGIVENESS

NEEDED BY NATIONS.

In approaching this subject we must recall some principles already discussed. A nation is a moral being, capable of doing right and of doing wrong, and is bound, therefore, by the moral law. Nations, then, do sin, and their sins are stupendous moral acts because of the number of persons who take part in them and the numbers affected by them. God cannot be indifferent, therefore, to the moral actions of nations. In dealing with them, moreover, he must proceed on the same principles of justice on which he deals with individual men. He "will by no means clear the guilty." The sins of nations must be punished, unless some provision is made for their remission or forgiveness. Is there such provision? If a nation sins, is there hope concerning it? If there is pardon for nations, is it in all respects similar to, or identical with, the forgiveness of individual men?

For answer to these questions, we must go to the Bible. Natural law knows nothing of forgiveness. All the laws of the natural world are inexorable. Any breach of these laws is followed invariably by punishment. The mercy of God to sinful beings is a matter of divine revelation. The human reason, apart from the Bible, has never discovered it. What, then, do the Scriptures teach concerning the forgiveness of national sins?

FORGIVENESS

OFFERED TO NATIONS.

Pardon is expressly offered to nations in the Word of God. The following pas-

sages prove this truth:

Exodus 32:31, 32. "Moses returned unto the Lord and said, Oh! this people have sinned a great sin. . . . Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me I pray Thee out of Thy book which Thou hast written."

The nation of Israel, the people as a whole, had sinned, as well as individual persons and the Church. It was for the people as a whole that Moses especially prayed. We cannot suppose Moses praying for a blessing for which no provision was made in the moral government of God, and the subsequent history shows that Moses' prayer was heard and Israel was spared.

At another time, about two years afterward, Moses prayed for Israel when God was about

to destroy them (Numbers 14:1-18), and closed his prayer with these words (v. 19): "Pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Thy mercy, and as Thou hast forgiven Thy people from Egypt even until now." And the answer came immediately (v. 20): "I have pardoned according to thy word." No one can doubt the national reference here, for the sin was their turning back in unbelief and disobedience from the national task of subduing the Canaanites and taking possession of the land of promise.

Leviticus 4:13-20. "If the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance . . . and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord . . . and are guilty, when the sin which they have sinned is known the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin . . . and the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock . . . and the priest shall make an atonement for them and it shall be forgiven them."

Deuteronomy 30:1-10. "When all these things have come upon thee . . . and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God and shalt obey His voice . . . then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity and have compassion on thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee . . . for the Lord will rejoice over thy fathers . . . if thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God to keep His commandments and His statutes . . . and if thou turn unto the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul."

In 2d Chronicles 6:24-31, 34-39, Solomon praying at the dedication of the temple asked that, in the event of certain calamities falling upon the nation, such as defeat in battle, drought, famine, pestilence or captivity, if they should "return and confess Thy name and pray and make supplication before Thee in this house, then hear Thou from the heavens and forgive the sin of Thy people Israel." When Solomon had made an end of praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices on the altar, and the glory of the Lord filled the house, setting the seal of Jehovah's acceptance and approval on Solomon's

prayer for the forgiveness of national sins, as well as upon other petitions which he had offered.

In Jeremiah 18:7-8, the prophet declares as a rule of God's dealings with nations: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up and to pull down and to destroy it, if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." The sparing of Nineveh upon their repentance under the preaching of Jonah, was an exact illustration of this method of God's dealing with a nation. "God saw their works that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that He had said He would do unto them and He did it not" (Jonah 3:10). To every mind whose thoughts are moulded by the teachings of the Scriptures it must seem a truth unquestionable that there is with God forgiveness for the sins of nations. The identity of God's moral government over nations and over individual men is declared in Job 34:39. "When He giveth quietness who can make trouble? When He hideth His face who then can behold Him, whether it be done against a nation or against a man only?"

Because He died to save the world, the government of the world has been put into the hands of Jesus Christ. "The

Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father" (John 5:22, 23). The forgiveness of sin is an executive, or authoritative, or kingly act. It is from Christ as Supreme Ruler of men that every individual penitent receives the remission of his sins, and this must be true also of nations. Christ Himself says: "The Son of Man hath power (Gr. authority) on earth to forgive sins" (Matthew 9:6). When the Egyptian people cried to Pharaoh for bread he said, "Go to Joseph." When men, singly or in communities, cry to God for their lives, God says, "Go to Jesus." Jesus Himself says, "No man cometh to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). Prayer for forgiveness of either individual or national sins must, therefore, be offered to God through Jesus Christ, and that

forgiveness, when granted, is given authoritatively by Jesus Christ. No nation, therefore, can hope for forgiveness except through the hands once pierced but now holding the sceptre of mercy.

The general truths thus far presented, that nations sin and need forgiveness, and that forgiveness is granted to nations, but only through Christ, has been more than once recognized in state papers by the government of the United States. An example is found in the proclamation of a fast by President John Adams in 1799, in which he recommended the citizens of the nation to "call to mind our numerous offences against the Most High God, confess them before Him with the sincerest penitence, and implore His pardoning mercy through the great Mediator and Redeemer." Another example appears in the resolution of the Senate of the United States in 1863, requesting President Lincoln to issue a Proclamation for a national Fast. The Senate, "devoutly recognizing the supreme authority and just government of Almighty God in all the affairs of men and nations, and . . . deploring the national offences which have provoked His righteous judgment, yet encouraged by the assurances of His Word to seek Him for succor according to His appointed way by Jesus Christ," requested the President to appoint a day for prayer and humiliation, which he accordingly did. The latest national utterance of this satisfactory character was in the Thanksgiving Proclamation of President Cleveland in 1896, in which he said: "Let us, through the mediation of Him who taught us how to pray, implore the forgiveness of our sins and a continuation of heavenly favor." (For the full text of these papers see the National Reform Manual, by Dr. McAllister, published by the National Reform Association. pp. 12, 297, 298.)

FORGIVENESS ONCE
GRANTED MAY BE
FORFEITED AND LOST
BY DISOBEDIENCE.

God's dealings with different creatures necessarily differ according to the nature of the beings with which he deals. An individual man is a single, indivisible spirit throughout his endless existence, but there is continual fluctuation in the constituent elements of a nation. A nation may change its moral character, therefore, as generations

come and pass away. It follows, then, that forgiveness of national sin is never absolute and irrevocable. It holds good so long as the nation continues believing and obedient. The work of instruction and conviction necessary to bring a nation to repentance and obedience, must be done continuously, through all its generations. If at any time it fails, the nation lapses into disobedience and impenitence. A nation penitent and loyal under Hezekiah may become apostate under Manasseh. In case of such apostasy, the sins formerly remitted are recalled and visited upon the apostate nation. For this statement we have the express words of Jesus: "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachias whom ye slew between the temple and the altar; verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation" (Matthew 23:35, 36). So also it is said of Babylon the Great: "In her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all that were slain on the earth" (Revelation 18:24). Other organizations besides the nation are contemplated in these words. Apostate churches are here. The organic unity of the human family is not forgotten. But if the destruction of Jerusalem and the final dispersion of the Hebrew people were national calamities, then the nation cannot be shut out from the scope of these words. When God deals finally with a people which has once been penitent, forgiven and in covenant with Him but was turned away from Him, He has respect to the sins of its whole history, earlier as well as later. Sins which were once confessed and remitted, and which need never have come into judgment are now recalled, not by any arbitrary act or decision of the Judge, but by the act of the nation itself. If a nation which has known God's enlightening and converting power, has experienced His saving mercy and has rejoiced in the blessings of His love, turns away and becomes disobedient, impenitent and incorrigible, it renounces God's mercy, repudiates its former confessions, rejects God's covenant of peace and invokes upon itself God's judgments, as did the Jews when they cried: "His blood be upon us and on our children." Out of its own mouth God will judge such a nation. Its former righteousness shall not be remembered, but all its

former sins shall come into remembrance before God.

But some one may say: Forgiveness, then, in the case of nations, is nothing more than a condemned man's reprieve, or the suspension of sentence during good behavior. I reply: These judicial processes are wholly different. Reprieve is delay of execution, granted from motives of compassion, not in consideration of actual repentance, but to give time for repentance. All wicked men and wicked nations live under God's reprieve, extended to them through Jesus Christ. The end of the world is delayed because God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Suspension of sentence, frequent in our courts, does not relieve the criminal from condemnation. It does not change the attitude of the law or the government toward him. It merely puts him on probation, opening an opportunity to recover his lost standing by manifest repentance and reformation. But forgiveness is conditioned on repentance and reformation already in evidence. It is the expression of favor and love now existing in the mind of God, and it opens the way to the receiving of all the blessings which His love prompts Him to bestow on men when the claims of justice against them have been satisfied and they turn with contrition and in obedience to Him.

PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM THE FORGIVENESS OF NATIONAL SINS.

I. *The unforgiven sins of a nation are an impressive and af- fecting thought for every citizen.* It is

not enough for a man to feel that his personal sins have been forgiven. He is also a member of the nation. For the sins of the nation, if not forgiven, he is liable to judgment. When God visits the sins of a nation upon it, He does not discriminate between innocent and guilty individuals, and this liability of every individual for all the sins of the social body is maintained by God because it supplies His people with a powerful motive for seeking the repentance and reformation of the communities of which they are part.

The question comes before us, What are we to think of our own nation? Rather, how does God look upon this nation? Are we penitent, loyal and obedient, working out His purposes in the earth? Do we find the supreme motive of our national life in His authority

and His will? Or are we proud, boastful, self-reliant, selfish, filled mostly with thoughts of our own aggrandizement and our own enrichment, and careless or forgetful of our responsibility to Him? What is God's judgment of some features of our national character—our desecration of the Sabbath, our corruption of the family by immoral and demoralizing laws, our sanction and maintenance of the liquor traffic, our injustice toward weaker races, our notorious political corruption? We did surrender one great national sin, the sin of slavery, but was our abandonment of it accompanied with such forsaking also of other sins and such consistent and steadfast obedience to His other commands that it can fairly be called an act of national repentance toward God? Or if we did indeed repent at the time under the stroke of His hand, have we continued in the same mind? Is the attitude of our governments—municipal, state and national—toward vice and crime so consistently rebuking and repressive that these evils can be said to be the outbreaking of individual wickedness which the nation strives, but is not able wholly to prevent? And are not our movements of reform often urged for the sake of human welfare rather than from regard to the rights and the claims of God? These questions can hardly fail to waken profound anxiety in thoughtful minds.

2. *These truths supply the noblest motive to labor for the reformation of the nation.* The thought of our national accountability to God and the desire for pardon for our national sins must be made dominant in the mind and heart of the nation, if the nation is to live and prosper. For lack of this, the nations of the past have perished. If we follow in their steps we shall share their fate. All citizens who see these truths are God's appointed messengers to the nation. To all such He says: "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet; show my people their transgression and the house of Jacob their sins." "If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet and the people be not warned, if the sword come and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand" (Isaiah 58:1; Ezekiel 33:6). Here are weighty thoughts for Christian citizens, for the Church in her relation to the nation, and for Christian

ministers who are the ambassadors of Christ to proclaim His law and to offer His pardon to nations as well as to individual men. The Church and the minister who do not teach and preach the religion of Christ in its application to nations proclaim neither the whole law nor a full gospel.

3. *A principal duty of Christian citizens is to pray for the reformation and the forgiveness of the nation.* Twice, on occasions nearly two years apart, the sin of Israel was forgiven and the nation was spared, through the intercession of Moses. All those in the United States whose eyes have been opened to see these truths, and whose hearts have been touched to feel their importance, are set by God in a public relation similar to that of Moses to Israel. Their spirit should be that of Moses when his own personal salvation seemed to him of small moment compared with the preservation of Israel for the work which Israel was to do; of John Knox when he cried, "Lord, give me Scotland or I die"; of Samuel when he said to the elders: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23). Reformers are called not only to a ministry of witness-bearing, but to a ministry of intercession. They can prevail with men only as they first prevail with God. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." This way lies a greatly neglected duty, to which Christian citizens, churches, young people's societies, should earnestly address themselves.

4. *Christian citizens should never doubt their ultimate success in the Christian reformation of their nation.* The Word of life, the renewing and transforming Spirit, are theirs for this great task. Definite promises and glorious prophecies have been given to assure their faith and sustain their hopes. "All kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him." "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ" (Psalm 72:11; Revelation 11:15). Whatever controversies and conflicts we may pass through, whatever social revolutions or dissolutions we may experience, the nation will survive and will become in the true and fundamental sense of the terms, a Christian nation. And in the day of that glorious consummation it shall be found that not one word or prayer or gift uttered or given for this sacred

cause has failed to contribute something to the final result.

5. *The forgiveness of national sins is part of the message of peace which Christian missionaries bear to the heathen nations.* These nations, as well as the individual men of whom they are composed, are "dead in trespasses and sins." They lie under the accumulated guilt of centuries. What calamities would be witnessed if God were to require it all at their hands. Christian missionaries are the ambassadors of Christ, saying to these nations as well as to all their people: "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). These heralds of the cross are God's angels flying over the chaos of heathendom, and calling a new social order into being. Their first work must needs be for individuals, for it is of individual Christian citizens that the Christian state must be built. But the final outcome of their work will be Christian nations, as well as Christian churches and Christian men and women. The wise and farsighted will keep the whole issue of their work in view from the beginning. And it is for us in the home lands, where long since Christian citizens have been in ample numbers for the purpose, to establish the Christian state, as the model which later on, and perhaps in more glorious fashion, they shall reproduce abroad. How truly the work at home and abroad, work of evangelism and work of reform, is one work, the preaching of "the gospel of the kingdom," the bringing in of that city of God which is the goal of all history and of which it is written: "The nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and their honor into it."

Meeting of the Executive Committee

The committee met in the Assembly Room of the United Presbyterian Board of Publication, Pittsburg, on Thursday, Sept. 5, at 9:30 A. M. More than twenty members were in attendance. The proceedings were of such interest that even business men who are usually obliged to cut short their attendance remained to the close of the three hours' session.

A season was spent in prayer, the Rev. J.

A. Cosby, of Tarentum, Pa., the Rev. W. R. Smiley, D.D., of Canonsburg, and the Rev. William Parsons, of Beaver Falls, leading in succession. The minutes of the last meeting were read, and the report of the sub-executive committee was approved. This included the special action on the death of Dr. McAllister which appeared in the last issue of the Statesman.

The committee on the Winona meetings this year reported encouraging attendance and deep interest. The work of Dr. Scovel, Dr. Smiley and Dr. R. C. Wylie in the institute was warmly commended, and the same tribute was paid to the addresses of other speakers in the popular conference which closed the work of the week.

The Committee on the Building at Winona Lake reported that the auditorium erected a year ago for the New York Bible Training School in its work at Winona, and occupied by that school last year, had been purchased for the sum of \$1,200. Of this amount eleven hundred dollars had been paid in fulfillment of pledges made a year ago for this purpose, and the remainder had been advanced by the chairman of this committee, the Rev. J. S. Martin. The committee is authorized to secure additional subscriptions to cover this advance and to provide for the seating of the auditorium, in all about \$450. The building is 40x72 feet, with cement floor and sides about three feet high, above which are movable curtains to shut out wind and rain. It is located in the midst of a two-acre park, and but two blocks distant from the center of Winona assembly grounds. The cost of the building a little more than a year ago was \$1,540, exclusive of the architect's fee, and it is believed it could not be duplicated to-day for less than \$1,700. The entire park of two acres is leased to this association for a term of fifty years. The special committee was warmly commended by the full committee for the zeal and energy which had enabled them to reach so early the completion of their work.

It was also reported that the Winona management has signed a contract extending the same privileges as heretofore to an institute and conference covering ten days instead of six. This includes the free entertainment of instructors and speakers, and special rebates on price of boarding and admission to the