

THE

EVANGELICAL WITNESS,

VOL. I.

MARCH, 1823.

NO. VIII.

DIALOGUE ON MESSIAH'S HEADSHIP OVER THE
NATIONS.

A Senator of the United States and a member of Congress.

Senator.—I am glad to see you again, safe at the seat of government. I trust we shall have a pleasant winter.

Mem. Con.—I thank you sir, and to see you in so good health and spirits gives me great pleasure. For the pleasant manner in which we shall spend the winter, my wishes are as strong as yours. Long and many speeches we may expect to hear again, in the capitol, not much to our gratification or improvement. In our own lodgings, I do hope again to spend many pleasant evenings.

S.—Have you much activity in the political world in your state?

M. C.—None at all. Our new state constitution has, for the present at least, put an end to all that. We have an entire calm. Our most active, noisy, and experienced demagogues can hardly excite any interest in the towns and counties. Where any is *got up* on the eve of an election, it all evaporates on the last day of the polls, and the people hardly ask who is the successful candidate. The people know

that there is no great question at stake, involving the general interest; and so they do not trouble themselves.

S.—I hoped to have heard from you something to stir us up—the history of some logomachy, where many a battle had been lost and won, where victors exulted in the routing of armies, and the fall of leaders.

M. C.—No such matter. Public feeling is generally now turned into another channel—Bible societies, missionary societies, tract societies, Sabbath school associations, popular preachers, &c. Those newspapers, that were but the other day, the great theatre of political strifes, begin to bow before the new feeling that has been awakened, and, for their own interest, they must now copy much of the religious news.

S.—Something of this might have been expected from the north. But, in truth, the south too is moved, and as our warmer climate, produces warmer and more sanguine feelings, we, I suspect, begin to outstrip you. We must have very considerable results from this wonderful popular excitement. In our country where public sentiment regulates every thing, is there not reason to apprehend that our state and general governments, will be strongly acted upon, by so great a moving power?

M. C.—We of the north think the impulse given has already produced action perceptible. The cooperation of the general government, with the missionaries, in expending a portion of the public revenues to aid them, and the organization of the Columbian college, under the direction of one Christian denomination, already great and growing rapidly, are acts that cannot be misunderstood by the acute intelligence of the American people.

S.—True, true. I have observed all this, and augur no good from it, I assure you. One great question, you know, we settled in this room last winter

—the inspiration of the Bible. I believe, a wise man cannot deny that that good book is given by divine inspiration. I have now no doubt on the subject; but, after all, as to the contents of the book, I have not made them much an object of study; especially as we have no concern with them in discharging our public functions as legislators. Is not this the sense of the nation?

M. C.—It has been, perhaps. Just now, I dare not say. Ere long, or I mistake, the tone of public sentiment and effort, the sense of the nation, will be strong on the other side.

S.—You think so? This public fervour has not been long in kindling, and may soon cool. This mighty blaze may soon be extinguished. Will it not in your opinion?

M. C.—It has not kindled so rapidly. In the south it may not have been so long, since it attracted the notice of public men. But it has been on the increase over the whole United States for at least 16 years, and consequently must have laid hold strongly on the public mind. Many youth now entering upon manhood have been educated entirely under its influence; and it has pervaded our academies and colleges. What evidence have we of its speedy extinction?

S.—Well, suppose it should last, and go on increasing, what reason is there to suppose that Bible influence will effect politics? or that we as legislators, will be obliged by public sentiment, to regard its dictates, and be governed by its statutes?

M. C.—How often do we hear this topic urged in the addresses delivered at the anniversaries of Bible societies? how often alluded to in missionary reports? how often in conversation? There is too a denomination of Christians, not very large, I believe but growing rapidly, who are distinguished from all others, on this point. They stand on this ground, that the statutes of the Bible should govern legisla-

tutes as well as individuals. And, indeed, it cannot well be denied that the Bible claims all this. The more this inspired book is brought into notice, the more powerful this sentiment will become.

S.—A denomination of Christians, that, as a body, maintain that the Bible should govern legislatures! Some small, illiterate, ignorant, enthusiastic society, that can have no influence, I fancy.

M. C.—Small they may be, though I believe they are spread over a great part of the United States, but illiterate, ignorant and enthusiastic, I assure you, they are not. There is no denomination that requires more learning in the clergy than they do, and it is said, that on religious subjects, the body of their people are well informed, cool, deliberate, industrious, sober and persevering. Their preachers are didactic and argumentative. But were they even what you say, they must be felt on their grand point, in such a state of public feeling on religious subjects, as now exists. It accords so exactly with the great body of sentiment and effort, relative to the Bible.

S.—But who are they? for this is something new, at which I always prick up my ears, in the great dearth of news.

M. C.—I really do not know their history, though there are many of them in my neighbourhood, and though I have often heard their preachers.

S.—You have often heard their preachers. O then I must hear more of the matter. They are worth inquiring after. Under what general class do they come, under the Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or under no class?

M. C.—Presbyterians.

S.—Ah! a great and powerful body. Well. But is there more than one Presbyterian denomination?

M. C.—More than one? There are seven.

S.—Can it be? I am a novice in ecclesiastical matters. Really I must explore this new field that opens

upon me. And this body is a Presbyterian corps. Well; "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." You see I know some Bible, and then, who knows but they may indeed, in the present aspect of things, leaven the whole nation. But what is their history?

M. C.—They say they are descended from the Reformers in Scotland, who formed the National Covenant of that kingdom, and from those British Reformers, who formed the Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms, and who were so severely persecuted by the house of Stewart, and that they hold to all the doctrines of the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of those Reformers.

S.—Now I know where you are. I have read the Waverley novels—a firm, well informed, intrepid, and most persevering race of men. Some noble points about them. I did, and do admire them after all. The Waverley novels may say what they will, but these men were in deep and sober earnest, and they did good. Are these American Christians, like the Waverley martyrs?

M. C.—I do not know either well. But I think there is some resemblance.

S.—But the former criticised the British government. Their ministers spoke publicly and boldly against what they thought wrong in public deeds and public men.

M. C.—So do the preachers of whom I speak. and let me tell you, many other Presbyterian preachers, as well as they; and in this free country, they cannot, and they ought not to be disturbed in this spirit of free inquiry.

S.—Certainly not. But do they deal much on these subjects? Do they reason much on the point that the Bible should be the supreme law of the land?

M. C.—Do they? Undoubtedly they do, and publish too; for they publish many books for their numbers. But the high claims which they set up for

the Bible, are only the result of a more general principle, on which they lay very great emphasis.

S.—What more general principle, pray?

M. C.—That Messiah is the governor of the kingdoms—that Jesus Christ has under his controul, the government of all nations.

S.—In this, though, they are not distinguished from other professors, I apprehend. All agree on this subject. It is the same in their view, is it not, as that God Almighty governs the nations?

M. C.—So I thought at first. But I was mistaken. Even Deists you know, at least many of them, will admit this. They mean more, much more. They, and all other Presbyterian, that are orthodox, maintain that “there are three persons in the Godhead, and that these three are the same in substance, equal in power and glory,”—to use the words of their catechism. The second person, or the eternal son of God, assumed human nature, and in that nature, died for sinners. This God man is the Messiah, or Christ Jesus. They represent him as a prophet, to instruct the nations, as a priest who died for sinners, as a king who rules the church. All this, they say he does as Messiah, or Mediator. Now these descendants of the old British Reformers, maintain that as Messiah he governs the nations. All Christians agree that, as Messiah, he gave the Bible to instruct men in truth, and to contain a record of the commands that he authoritatively issues as a king. These people say that as he rules the nations, in his character of Messiah, the Bible must contain a record of his will as announced to the kingdoms, for their obedience, and so they are bound to obey it at their peril.

S.—My dear sir, this may all be good sense, and very profound, but really, I hardly comprehend any thing of what you have uttered. Is it not enough to admit that the Almighty governs the world?

M. C.—I had some difficulty at first to enter into it. But as I found that these people laid so much

stress on it, I resolved to understand the matter. I made much inquiry, and I think I now comprehend their meaning, I must also add, I approve it.

S.—Really, I cannot take the trouble you seem to have taken. I can submit to enquire into facts, as to the number of denominations in the United States—the population of each—the learning of the clergy—the information of the people—the influence they have on society, especially at elections, and their increase or decline. But these abtruse points, lie out of the path of my enquiries. I assure you I have no taste for all this. Too subtle, quite to subtle for me. What's the use? I—

M. C.—Hold. You have an acute and penetrating mind, I do not compliment you. Legal and constitutional questions that require the nicest discrimination, where the practical results are of the greatest moment, you weigh with much deliberation and research; and why not here? It may be, and I am nearly certain, it will be a practical question; for I assure you the nation will be filled with this doctrine, as soon as the Bible society shall have filled every part of it with Bibles.

S.—Well, come. But I have no personal interest in the matter. However, since I see that you are interested, I should be sorry to drop the subject.

M. C.—Interested I am. You too are. You will excuse me, should the subject become a little more serious.

S.—That cannot be. We are as sober and grave as monks already. But I ought not to say so. My playful disposition gets the better of me.

M. C.—If we cannot be more serious, we may come a little nearer home. Should it be true that God Almighty has given Messiah authority to govern the nations, that Messiah, in the exercise of this authority, has issued his laws, in the Bible, commanding all legislators to obey him; you and I ought to consider, how we who have been many years in

the national councils, will answer to Messiah for the neglect of those laws. He who dishonours an ambassador, dishonours the government that he represents. If we are bound by the highest of all possible obligations to be governed by the laws contained in the Bible, in our legislative proceedings—if Messiah has issued these laws, in the name of Almighty God—if this Almighty and most glorious being demands of us to render homage to Messiah, by legislating according to the statutes contained in the Bible, do we not dishonour our Creator, by neglecting to render the homage demanded?

S.—I do not mean to dishonour my Maker. Though to confess the truth, while I have been punctilious in demanding honour as an ambassador, for my country, and have honoured the government of my country, I do not know, honestly, that I ever did an act, with the design of honouring my Maker. This thought flashed through my mind like lightning whenever you touched the subject of honouring an ambassador. I would not dishonour Messiah Heaven's ambassador. But how do you prove that he rules the nations, as he is the Christ? Your reference to the ambassador has let into my mind a beam of light on this subject.

M. C.—Do not consider me fully decided on these points, as to their practical application. I cannot deny their truth.

S.—Then you should not hesitate as to their application. You are a professor of religion, I am not. How can you doubt. Convince me that—

M. C.—No more. I blush at my own indecision. I go on to illustrate, and I will, by the divine aid, practise too. All who believe the doctrine of the Trinity as you do—

S.—The Bible teaches it, and I believe the Bible.

M. C.—All those admit that the second person of the Trinity—the son of God, being God equal with

the Father, possesses essentially in himself dominion over the nations. But the Reformed Presbyterians, for by that name these people are called, say that as he is Heaven's ambassador, he possesses delegated authority to rule the kingdoms of the world.

S.—Establish this, and then I admit the consequence, that he should be acknowledged by the nations as king, and that they should recognise his word as the supreme law of the land. None but a quibbler would deny it.

M. C.—Very good. "All power is given unto one in heaven and earth,"* is his own declaration. As God he had it originally, and hence it could be given to him as Messiah only. To Jeremiah he says, "See I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms."† He commissioned the prophet as Messiah, and surely he did not give more extensive authority than he himself possessed. Again "God hath highly exalted him" (Jesus) "and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."‡ All this exaltation is because he humbled himself, which was in his character of Messiah. He is called "king of kings and lord of lords," and "prince of the kings of the earth." "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son." Can any truth be more clearly established from the Bible? "O ye kings, ye judges of the earth, kiss ye the son."|| This is he who is set upon the holy hill of Zion, who is undoubtedly the Mediator. Again—

S.—You need proceed no further. I must reject the Bible, or admit that Messiah does claim the ho-

* Mat. xxviii. 18. † Jer. i. 10. ‡ Phil. ii. 9—11. || Psal. ii. 10, 12.

mage of civil rulers, and that his law recorded in the Scriptures is the paramount law, whenever it is made known.

M. C.—But your mind will hesitate, I doubt not, as mine did some time after I admitted the force of the evidence. It slipped out of my mind. It is so foreign from all our own habits of thinking, speaking, and acting in all our legislative proceedings. Lately it has so fastened upon me, that I think of it every time I hear, the name of the Bible society mentioned, and whenever I enter the capitol.

S.—That the eyes of heaven are on us, is sometimes said in senate and on the floor of congress, but the matter is little thought of, and there is reason to apprehend that they are rather words of course. But what should be done?

M. C.—So I fear; but I must reply to your question as to what ought to be done. The Reformed Presbyterians would have the constitution altered.

S.—The constitution! Alter the constitution! In what? How?

M. C.—Why so surprised? What is more common than alterations in that instrument? They are proposed every year almost in some one or other of the state legislatures; and many of them are adopted. In truth, it is not the mere fact of an alteration that startles you. It is the magnitude of the subject and its being so foreign to all our common habits of political speculation.

S.—That must be it. Really it would be a great change. The name of God is not now in the federal constitution, though I see you have introduced it into the preamble to your new constitution in New-York. To effect at once, so great a change, as to have the name of Messiah mentioned, he acknowledged as the nation's Lord, and his Bible proclaimed the supreme law of the land; Yes, it was that at which I startled.

M. C.—But why should you startle? The Greeks in whose great struggle we all feel so deep an interest, have recognized the doctrine of the trinity in their constitution, and have limited the right of suffrage to those who believe the inspiration of the Scriptures. What possible evil could result from doing honour to the prince of the kings of the earth and his law?

S.—Would there not be great opposition? We would be mocked for the attempt.

M. C.—Some would mock, some would ponder, some would approve. The measure would be popular with the sober, grave, aged and good. All our best citizens would laud the measure. Look at the vast, overwhelming, and still growing power of Bible societies. Recollect the extent of population, the wealth, intelligence and zeal of the numerous religious bodies. Would they not all hail a measure, that will do national honour, and nationally ascribe glory to their Saviour?

S.—Religion possesses powers and resources of which I have had no just conception. Then we may well suppose that Messiah will assert his rights; for such rights he does appear to have. But I must not be too positive. The subject is new. Is there not danger, that ambitious men would attempt to make religion an engine to promote their own views of self-aggrandizement?

M. C.—Less perhaps than there is now. There never has been a nation, where politicians have not in some way, meddled with religion. Witness in our own government, in the affair of the missionaries and the Columbian college. Let the constitution recognize the great and salutary principles we have been discussing, and then the eyes of the nation will be fastened on the rulers. Now the people are off their guard.

S.—Would it in your opinion affect the principles now established in our representation, or alter the

frame of our great and well adjusted national civil policy?

M. C.—Not in the least. The Reformed Presbyterians, who seem to have studied these points thoroughly, are among the warmest advocates of our splendid system of representation, now in so happy, harmonious and extensive operation. They wish this great and salutary system to be consecrated to the glory of the God of heaven, through the Redeemer of men.

S.—That is a noble thought. It enkindles in the soul sublime sentiments, and awakens conceptions, truly grand and magnificent. Who knows but as we have set the whole world an example in placing the security of human liberty on the firm basis of equal representation, we may also have the high honour of taking the lead in dedicating this liberty and this security, to the son of God? Ah! I now perceive that the basis is not so firm as I thought, until we rest it in his hands. This question cannot slumber much longer in our republic.

M. C.—It cannot. All Christians are now looking for the milleneum, you know, for we talked of this last winter.

S.—True. Well. What then?

M. C.—They all expect, and earnestly wish, so far as I know, that, during the thousand years of holiness, peace and felicity, “all kingdoms shall bow down before Messiah, and all nations shall serve him.” That very expectation and desire, though they make slow progress for a little, will necessarily produce a vast, powerful, concentrated and irresistible action.

S.—No doubt of it. And we must lead the way in this career of glorious effort. We have already shaken off the yoke of tyranny. Other nations have that yet to do.

M. C.—I hope we shall be the first to go forward; and may the prince of the kings of the earth, lead us on to so glorious a consummation!