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THE
COVENANTER,



DEVOTED TO THE PRINCIPLES OF

THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

EDITED BY

JAMES M. WILLSON.

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"The Law of the Lord is perfect."—PSALM XIX. 7.

"Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."—PHIL. III. 16.  
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THE SECOND BOOK OF DISCIPLINE.

We hazard nothing in saying that the second Book of Discipline is the most remarkable, and, in many respects, the most valuable synopsis of the principles of church government, ever compiled by uninspired men. Whether we consider its doctrines, its history, or its influence upon the ecclesiastical order and polity of the churches in Britain, and among the churches descended from them, this document is worthy of the highest regard. It will never be forgotten while the memory of Scotland's Reformation lasts: for it not only embodies all the attainments of the First Reformation, but it shadows forth, and in no indistinct outlines, all that was attained during the Second Reformation, and even more. Collecting, as in a focus, all the lights of her earlier struggles, the Second Book of Discipline irradiated with its effulgence the field of the after conflicts of the Church of Scotland.

Before proceeding to the consideration of the work immediately before us, it may be well to look back a little further to its less distinguished, but worthy predecessor—the first Book of Discipline, which was, for nearly twenty years, an acknowledged standard of the Scottish Church. It was compiled in the year 1560, by a committee, consisting of John Knox, John Winram, John Spotiswood, John Douglas and John Row (or Rough,)* and, then adopted by the General Assembly, but it never received, as did its successor, a civil sanction.†

The first Book of Discipline is, for such a work, sufficiently voluminous. It occupies nearly forty closely printed octavo pages, and contains sixteen chapters, relating to church government, to education, to the finances of the church, to censures, worship, marriage and burial. And, as far as its *principles* are concerned, it cannot be said to be at variance in any essential particular with those documents, which have, to a considerable extent, superseded it.‡ It is, however, unquestionably charac-

* Knox's History, Glasgow Edition, 1832, p. 223. John Knox was, at least, the *chief* penman.

† The greater part of the nobility subscribed it, (Knox, p. 223,) but they were unwilling to give it the force of law, on account of its doctrines respecting the "ecclesiastical goods." They had seized upon them, and, had this book received a civil sanction, they would have been compelled to disgorge.

‡ The only instance—unless the temporary appointment of superintendents be an exception, which it is not—in which this book varied in principle from the Second, was in the annual election of the elders and deacons. In this, it resembled the Holland Church. The principle of popular election is fully recognised.

absolutely refused, though to their own commercial detriment, even to acknowledge its independent existence as a nation. To do so, would offend the slave tyrants of this country, by appearing to favour the efforts of the slave to cast off his chains by successful revolt.* The churches have been equally subservient, and, while missionaries have been sent to the most remote parts, this popish and degraded people have been overlooked. The only American missionary now in Hayti is the Rev. William M. Jones, a Baptist, who sailed, with his wife, for Port au Prince, in January, 1845.

But what prospect is there of doing good among the Haytiens? On this subject, our information, for manifest reasons, is very limited. The religion of the island is popery; but all others are tolerated. The late revolution was, we believe, in part directed against the tyranny of the priesthood. The people are ignorant, and vice, no doubt, abounds; while, like the inhabitants of all tropical countries, they are inclined to indolence and voluptuousness. But they are no worse than others of their class in similar circumstances, and are fully as tractable. Much will, probably, depend upon the impressions which may be made on the minds of some of their influential men, in favour of efforts to evangelize them. Our missionary will enter upon his work measureably free from the suspicions which naturally attach to the slave-holding denominations. The way, moreover, will be partially prepared by the visit of a committee of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, who are about to make a tour of exploration through the island.

In a word, we think, if a Foreign Mission be undertaken, Hayti is the place to begin. A more careful and personal survey may bring to light difficulties of which we are ignorant. But it is worth the trial whether we cannot do something for the spiritual welfare of this long oppressed and despised people, and at the same time, wipe off, in some measure, the reproach which rests upon the American church.

THE EVANGELICAL REPOSITORY.

The remarks of the Repository, (we do not say "Mr." Repository) respecting ruling elders, and the standing of the New Lights, and the use of "sharp rebukes," we do not intend to notice again. We have no ambition to have the last word, and are willing to leave these matters, with what we have already said upon them, to the judgment of our readers. We write for those who have "senses exercised to discern." As to the rest of the long article of our friend, instead of containing, as we think it should have done, a vindication, if such a thing be possible, of the Basis, it may be summed up in these four things:

* Petitions for the recognition of Haytien independence have often been presented to Congress. Of late, they are *laid on the table*. Formerly they called out the most atrocious sentiments from southern men. Mr. Hayne of South Carolina said, "We ought not to touch the independence of Hayti. . . . We find men of colour at the head of their armies, &c. . . . Our policy with regard to Hayti is plain, we can never acknowledge her independence. Let our government direct all our ministers in South America, and Mexico, to *protest* against the independence of Hayti." Mr. Benton, "The peace of eleven States of this Union will not permit the fruits of a successful negro insurrection among them." Mr. Berrien of Georgia, an evangelical Episcopalian! speaks of employing "*the strength of our armies*" against any attempt to make the Spanish West India islands free! and denounces every thing that looks towards acknowledging the independence of Hayti.

1. A very unsatisfactory apology for not noticing our main objections to that document. 2. A quotation with remarks of a merely personal bearing from the pages of the *Covenanter*. 3. An additional attack upon the Westminster divines, by way of apology for former ones. And, 4. A statement of George Gillespie's principles in regard to Messiah's Headship, introduced for the purpose of vindicating the *Seceders* from some charges on that head.

Now, what has all this to do with the merits of the Basis? with the propriety of the course pursued by the framers of that document in wrapping up a diversity of opinion by the use of obscure expressions, to which all might appear to assent, each understanding them in his own way? We can view the whole article as nothing more than an attempt to evade the true issue, to turn away the minds of the readers of the Repository from the errors and infirmities of the Basis, to other and less unpleasant topics. For, we repeat, our principal objections to the Basis and to the proceedings connected with its getting up, have never been touched in those articles. However, we pass this. The Basis has been riddled by so many shot, large and small, that it is really lost labour to waste any more upon it.

Still, we are, once more, willing to be dragged away from the subject, for the purpose of noticing some of the allegations of our friend respecting the collateral topics which he introduces; namely, the opinions of some of the Reformers regarding the magistrate's power, and the views of Gillespie on the dominion of Christ. As to the first of these, the editor quotes, with evident disapprobation, the following passage from the "*Divine Right of Church Government*."

And as he, (the magistrate) strengthens the laws and ordinances of God by his civil authority, so he ratifies and establishes within his dominions the just and necessary decrees of the Church in synods and councils (which are agreeable to God's word) by his civil sanction. Judges and determines definitely with a consequent political judgment, or judgment of political discretion, concerning the things judged and determined antecedently by the Church, in reference to his own act. Whether he will approve such ecclesiasticals or not; and in what manner he will so approve, or do otherwise by his public authority; for he is not a brutish agent, (as papists would have him,) to do whatsoever the Church enjoins him unto blind obedience, but is to act prudently and knowingly in all his office; and therefore the judgment of discerning (which belongs to every Christian, for the well-ordering of his own act) cannot be denied to the Christian magistrate, in respect of his office.

Now, we ask, with some astonishment that the inquiry is called for, does our friend deny these propositions? If so, he will find himself, we venture to assert, standing nearly alone among intelligent Christians. Observe, the very point of this statement is to maintain the independence of the civil authorities on the ecclesiastical, even in those matters that come under the jurisdiction of both, while, on the other hand, by giving the precedency in action to the ecclesiastical, it, as effectually, vindicates its independence. But it gives to the magistrate a "political judgment," in regard to religious and ecclesiastical matters! But, where, on earth, is the country which does not? Even in the United States, where the attempt has been made to put religion and politics, the poles, asunder, questions are constantly occurring before the tribunals demanding a "political judgment" in religious matters. And, if the judgment of Vice-chancellor Willard of the state of New York in the case of a congregation in Washington co. be based on sound principles, (and the Repository, at least, will hardly deny this,) then, even

here, the magistrate, before he render it civilly operative, must exercise a "political judgment" of discretion respecting acts of discipline.

But, it may be said, that this article relates, not to acts of discipline, but to the sanctioning of a system of religious principles. Very well. Then it is but another form of stating the doctrine that the nation should establish the Christian religion, and give it and its institutions the advantage of a legal sanction. Now, our friend differs from us as to the propriety of this—and we are sorry he does—yet he will acknowledge that, so understood, this quotation makes nothing for the purpose for which it was brought forward. And, we have already seen, that even applying it to cases of discipline, it does not bear him out in ranking the reformers with papists; for while they hold it to be the duty of the civil authorities, under certain circumstances, to give a civil sanction even to acts of discipline, and *all* nations, even our own have, less or more, done so, and must do so, yet they allow always, what papists deny, a judgment of discretion.

Our friend gives another quotation from the same source, to which he objects still more decidedly. It is as follows:

A compulsive, coactive, punitive, or corrective power, formally political, is also granted to the political magistrate in matters of religion, in reference to all sorts of persons and things under his jurisdiction. He may politically compel the outward man of all persons, church officers, or others under his dominions, unto external performance of their respective duties, and offices in matters of religion, punishing them, if either they neglect to do their duty at all, or do it corruptly, not only against equity and sobriety, contrary to the second table, but against truth and piety, contrary to the first table of the decalogue.

And here again we ask, Does our friend deny this? We are aware that a sense may be put upon these words, by which they may be *made* to teach error, and we are sorry to see the Repository in all cases taking the worst sense that can be put upon these and similar expressions—but fairly understood they are not liable to any such charge. Certainly, our friend does not deny the general principle that the laws of the land comprehend, and may, in given circumstances, be brought to bear upon "all persons," and even causes, including those in which religion and the doings of church courts may be concerned? As to the statement before us, in saying that the magistrate may "compel" all persons, even "church officers," to do their duty, they speak, of course, in reference either to such a state of things as exists where there is an establishment of religion, or in reference to a condition in church and state similar to that which existed, for example, at the beginning of the Reformation in Scotland. Now, as to the last, in a state of begun reformation, when Popish priests had possession of all the benefices, we presume even the Repository would not object to their being obliged to do better, or abandon their fat livings! There would, surely, be no interference with the rights of conscience by such an interposition! At all events, there is the example of the godly kings of Judah in this case, which is as safe to follow as the current declamations—for they are nothing better—in regard to the rights and limits of the civil power. And as to the former, would our friend object to the magistrate interfering in the case of some English fox-hunting rector, or *very* Moderate Scottish pastor, to "compel" him to do better, or to abandon a place he is so unfit to fill? And mark, this interference, in cases where the government of the church is in any thing like wholesome operation, is only to give the necessary effect to the

discipline of the church.* But, besides, even in the United States, where there is no establishment, a case might readily occur in which a civil sanction might be necessary to give full effect to church discipline. For example, a minister having a parsonage farm, or some other permanent source of revenue, belonging to a congregation, refusing to discharge his ministerial duties, the civil authorities might be called upon to eject him, provided he persisted in his refusal. Now that they meant any "compulsion" differing *in kind* from this, cannot be shown. Neither their principles nor their practices warrant the charge, even by implication, that they intended to put the discipline of the church into the hand of the magistrate, or to allow the civil government to interfere with the ordinary discipline of a church court.

But does not this quotation give authority to restrain "corrupt" teaching? Assuredly it does. But, (1.) This must be understood in consistency with their principle that the church is independent of the state, and is the judge, in the first instance, of controversies in religion. The magistrate's authority, to use their own term, is "cumulative," not "privative." (2.) This is expressly referred, in the passage itself, to such things as are "contrary to the first table of the *decalogue*." Now we are aware that our friend differs from us as to the duty of the civil authorities to punish idolaters, blasphemers, and such as teach doctrines subversive of the "known principles of Christianity." To such, the above language refers. We deny that they meant to teach that a man, for example, who refused to read the scriptures, to attend to family worship, or believe the doctrine of election, should be laid hold of by the civil power. (3.) It must be remembered, that while, as we admit, most of the reformers maintained the permanent obligation of the penalties annexed to the several precepts of the Mosaic code—and we do not expect to see better ones soon—still, the utmost extent to which they would have the magistrate go, in regard to all ordinary offences which we may suppose to be referred to above, is exclusion from places of power and trust.†

We now turn to the subject of Gillespie's opinions. And here we find the following incautious language employed by our friend, "such a sentiment (a denial of Christ's mediatorial authority over all things,) coming from one of the framers of the Westminster Assembly (?) is *sound and orthodox*, and even to call it in question, is slanderous; but when uttered by a Seceder, it becomes infidel and altogether intolerable." If this is aimed at us, it is aimed at the wrong target. There is no arrow here for us; we have not called this sentiment "infidel."

* It is not, perhaps, so easy to decide whether in case the incumbent of a benefice be wrongfully suspended, the authorities should continue with him the revenues, &c. This would involve injustice to the people, for whose advantage they are given. For in this case, they must either follow him out of the church, or be deprived of church accommodations.

† As to the Solemn League and Covenant being enforced by "a considerable penalty," we deny that, with the consent of the leading Covenanters, any other penalty was usually affixed to its refusal, than exclusion from political privileges. The "malignants" in Scotland were put out of office. In England, Baxter tells us he himself refused to take the Covenant, and through his influence, it was taken by but few in his neighbourhood. What was done to them? Montrose was greatly blamed for using force in Aberdeen. But we ought to add, that we should not wonder that those who refused to take the Covenant were sometimes treated with some severity, for they were known to be generally the violent enemies of liberty—the friends of Popery and absolute government.

We have said that it savours of deism—that it belongs more properly to that system which rejects a mediator between God and man, than to Christianity. And this, we can establish. As to Gillespie, we highly respect him. We would be no Covenanter—no Presbyterian, if we did not. He was in his day, *the* champion of Presbyterian church government. But we do not call *all* his sentiments “sound and orthodox.” We pin our faith to no man’s sleeve. On the subject of Christ’s headship, he was in error. Still there are some things that have to be kept in mind on this subject. And

(1.) In his controversy with the Erastians, he appears to have become somewhat confused in his apprehensions as to the true import of the phrases, “putting under his feet,” and “into his hands.” Hence, he argues the question throughout, as if it really were, “whether the rise, derivation and tenure of Christian magistracy be from Jesus Christ under this formal consideration, as he is mediator, and head of the church.”* We should judge of his views and arguments in the light of this fact. (2.) Gillespie did, after all, hold that all things are controlled and governed by the Godhead according to, and subordinate to the interests of Christ’s “special kingdom.” And, hence he admits, “that Christ, as mediator, doth exercise a supreme power and providence over all things for his own glory, and his church’s good.”† (3.) Gillespie was far from making the same use of his principle that is now made of it by some Seceders. He did not deny the universal headship of Christ for the purpose of freeing the nations from the imperative obligation to receive the scriptures as a paramount rule in civil things, or to vindicate the divorce of religion and state. On the other hand, he uses the phrase “Christian magistrate;” he advocates the duty of nations to cherish the church and to restrain wickedness. Hence, in his mind, this doctrine, so far as it was not a mere speculation, was held, as we have said, against the Erastians. In most respects, it was far from occupying, either in his mind, or in his system, the place in which we now find it. (4.) In this notion he stands alone among the Reformers, and nearly alone among intelligent Christians of all ages. Covenanters hold on this subject the common faith of the church of God. They differ from others in allowing this principle fair scope in regulating their civil relations, and in giving it *due* prominence as a part of their Christian profession.

We conclude, by wishing our friend better employment than picking holes in the coats of the Worthies of the Reformation.

NOTICES OF CONGREGATIONS.

THE PHILADELPHIA CONGREGATION.

In our account of the Coldenham congregation, we mentioned a family by the name of Boyd, as having emigrated to Philadelphia, about the year 1740. This is the earliest account we have of Covenanters residing in this city. It is probable, however, inasmuch as they were pretty numerous, before that time, in central Pennsylvania,‡ that some may have fixed themselves here, at least temporarily, at even an earlier period. Boyd soon died. And, excepting that she was the means of

* Aaron’s Rod Blossoming, Edin. 1844, p. 97.

† Same, p. 95.

‡ Act and Testimony, p. 118.