

THE COVENANTER.

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[For the Covenanter.]

LITERATURE.—CHRISTIAN OR PAGAN?

What literature is best adapted to train the minds of youth for the ministry? This question was always important to the Christian church; but in the present day it seems peculiarly so. All churches now seem to admit that the ministry should be educated, well educated, literary, very literary and scientific men, thoroughly educated in all branches of literature that may be subservient to the reputable and profitable execution of the high functions of their office. The question then is not, shall they be learned or not; but shall their mental discipline in early life be principally and chiefly in heathen or Christian books? shall the Bible, and books which breathe Bible principles, and scriptural purity, be text books of the schools of literature? or shall the old classical books of the heathen, reeking with blood and dipped in all pollution, be the volumes that our sons shall peruse while prosecuting study for the ministry?

The question needs only to be stated fairly, to secure a correct answer from every unprejudiced mind. The difficulty with Christians is, and perhaps with some ministers, that they conceive that we cannot have our sons educated unless they study Ovid and Virgil and Horace. The time was, too, when the learned world thought it necessary to teach Aristotle, otherwise we could know nothing about the art of thinking. Times have changed. We have a new organon of mental philosophy; why not of Christian literature? Till Bacon, and Locke, and Reid, and Stewart, &c., arose to shear the locks and expose the nakedness of the Stagyrite, he was considered as important to form the mind for reasoning as Virgil and Horace, and Pindar and Sappho are, to give pinions to the imagination, and refinement to the taste.

This question is peculiarly interesting at present to Covenanters, who are employed in erecting two literary institutions for training youth for the ministry. The Presbytery of the Lakes, some time ago, concerted the plan, with great unanimity, for teaching and erecting an initiatory school and college which they call Geneva Hall, within the bounds of Mr. Johnston's congregation, near Belle-Centre. The friends of Biblical and Christian literature have patronized this institution beyond the expectations of its friends, both by contributing to the erection of necessary buildings and by sending pupils to cultivate their minds by study.

The Pittsburgh Presbytery are now in progress towards having a school for the same laudable purpose at Wilkinsburgh. The wish, I suppose, of all the friends of literature and religion would be that both of these institutions might prosper in co-operating for the same ends. As

nothing can be more untrue. If our brethren believe that the deacon should be in their congregations, why are they not taking the necessary steps to have deacons? Why are they not teaching their congregations? Why are they not disabusing the minds of their people of prejudices carefully fostered for ten years against the office of the deacon? Why, in short, do they not come as far as they can to meet those who occupy what they believe to be extreme ground? Do they do these things? No, far otherwise—bugbears are raised and shown—deacon-men are held up as not only maintaining odious doctrines, but as personally deserving of odium: they are sedulously excluded from pulpits and congregations, lest wrong impressions should be removed—their writings are cried down—put under the ban. Is this the way to make peace? Is that the peace party? If these manifest peaceful dispositions, how could they show hostile?

COVENANT RENOVATION.

BY JAMES R. WILLSON, D. D.

“And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.”—2 Cor. viii. 5.

Macedonia is on the North-East of Greece. Philippi was the capital. In that city there lived a milliner of the name of Lydia, who with some other devout women, kept society, in the year 53. Paul, Silas and Luke, directed by the Spirit, preached the gospel to them that year. Acts xvi. 12, 15. A large congregation was soon organized in the city. Three years after Paul wrote his epistle to the church at Philippi. In his second letter to the Christians in Corinth, written four years before that to the Philippians, he commends the liberality of the Macedonians, and in our text says they had done better than was expected, in that they had given themselves to God in ecclesiastical covenant, and then gave themselves to Christ at the Lord's table.

It is the duty of the church now to follow this example, and renew her covenant with her redeeming Head. This is demanded by the condition of the church. The action of the church in America, in the duty of covenanting, may be briefly related. At Middle Octorara in Lancaster county, Pa., the National Covenant of Scotland and the Solemn League and Covenant were renewed, in 1743, by our Covenant Fathers, one hundred years before the Solemn League and Covenant had been sworn in London. One hundred years after, 1843, at Rochester, N. Y., an overture of a covenant was adopted by synod and sent down to the Presbyteries. A majority of the Presbyteries reported against its adoption. A commission was appointed to draught an overture and publish it. That, too, was rejected by the Presbyteries.* A committee reported a new bond, 1847, at the sessions of synod in Pittsburg.

* These overtures are semi-official. The synod expresses its approbation of the whole contents of an overture which it publishes. One overture on Covenanting passed unanimously. These documents are not sent down to the courts below for adoption or rejection, but for information and criticism. Presbyteries may not set aside a deed of synod, because, 1. They are subject to synod; the subject does not govern the ruler. 2. If they can do this, sessions may annul deeds of Presbyteries, and the people those of sessions. 3. A minority might govern. The small Presbyteries, with three or four ministers, would have as much power as those with ten or twelve. 4. The decrees of the synod of Jerusalem were not enacted by the votes of Presbyteries. 5. If the votes of Presbyteries may decide in one matter, they have the right in every thing. This would divest synod of all authority.

It was referred to a committee for publication. A majority of that committee kept back the publication until it was too late for the action of Presbyteries before the last sessions of synod at Philadelphia, the present year.

The following considerations show that covenant renovation is required by the present state of the church:

1. *We are far dispersed in this commonwealth.* "Israel is like dew among the nations." There are Covenanters in twenty of the thirty States of the United States. The church extends from Eastport, at the mouth of the river St. Croix, to California—a distance of 3000 miles; and from Pontiac, in Michigan, to Chester, South Carolina—not less than 1200. This does not include our six organized congregations in the British Provinces of North America, one in Nova Scotia, two in New Brunswick, and three in Canada. There are also many missionary stations. We need a common bond, "to strengthen the stakes" of these far-stretched out "curtains of our habitation." By uniting us more closely to our common Head, we shall be bound more firmly to one another in the ties of brotherly love.

2. *Our Covenant brethren are diversified by many shades of character.* We have members from Ireland, Scotland, England, Holland, Germany and Africa, and some Israelitish proselytes. While a large majority are natives of the United States, all retain most of the national peculiarities of their ancestors, in modes of thought, manners, customs, and diction. It is true, our forms of worship every where, in the old world and the new, are nearly the same. But these are considerably modified in practice. It is in this, as in the personal characters of the saints. All are "created anew in Christ Jesus," in the image of the one living and true God, while "there are diversities of gifts by the same Spirit." Were the people of God perfect, these distinctive features would only augment the strength, beauty and harmony of the body of Christ. But through the remaining power of in-dwelling sin, which turns them to bad account, painful discords are created, marring the church's beauty and impairing her vigour. We have abundant reason to be thankful, that with all these disturbing causes, there is so much harmonious co-operation among a great majority of our ministers, elders, deacons and people. But a feeble minority, availing itself of these diversities, and aided by the subtleties of Satan, has often given the church much trouble, and crippled her energies not a little.

The church's Head has instituted the ordinance of ecclesiastical covenanting as a remedy for this evil. The embodiment of the great and blessed system of covenant truth and duty, in a short document, and the presenting of it to the faith of the whole church together, and its being embraced and sworn to by all, is one great means of knitting together the members of Christ's body, by that which every joint supplieth. What is wrong in their diversified characteristics is corrected, what is good garnished, and what works perversely brought into holy, harmonious action.

3. *The spirit of the world comes into the church with a malignant power, which nothing but solemn renovation of covenant with God can expel.* The members of the church militant are continually exposed to the almost imperceptible, but powerful, influence of the world of the ungodly. For many ages "the god of this world" has embodied this malignant power in the civil governments of the nations.

“The whole world” has long “wondered after the beast.” The church, it is true, has renounced allegiance to these corrupt institutions, by which, to a great degree, she escapes the corruptions that are in the world, through the lust of unholy power. But yet the baneful influence of governmental pollution is continually working harm to the Lord’s heritage. The church has often marred her beauty, by conforming her government to the framework of immoral organizations of civil society, by administering her regimen and dispensing her ordinances in accordance with the irreligious laws and spirit of sinful nations. Of the governments of the world that lieth in wickedness, the prophet Zechariah says:—“These are the horns that have scattered Judah.” They do this not by persecution only. In the latter part of the Old Testament dispensation, and in the early ages of the New, Satan employed bad governments to divide the church by the sword of persecution. He adopted the same infernal policy at the time of the reformation of the 16th century and down to the revolutionary settlement in Great Britain, 1688. Since that event, he employs chiefly the arts of seduction. “He prevails by flatteries;” “and would seduce, if it were possible, the very elect.” In this way, have the horns scattered Judah. A large fragment of the church, 1833, abandoned the testimony of Jesus and went over to an immoral government. For eleven years the church has been disturbed by a party, which is generated by the government of the State. The commonwealth does not regard the authority of Christ. “We, the people, ordain,” as the ultimate fountain of all power, “this constitution.” This party say, We, the people, manage Christ’s property, *if he has any*, in our own way. The church of Christ possesses no property on earth. This is the spirit of the world, “coming in like a flood.” The Head of the church has promised to lift up the standard of covenanting against it. The standard or banner is unfurled that the nation may rally under it for the defence of the sovereignty. Under the national flag of old the soldier swore fealty to the commander. The Spirit is promised to lift up the flag of the covenant in just such a time as that in which we live.

Some object to enter on the duty of covenant renovation, because the whole church is not unanimous in relation to her whole regimen. Let us wait, say they, until we are agreed to have deacons, or until we all agree to discard them; we shall then be prepared to enter into covenant with God. It is a sufficient answer to this objection to say, that it is as absurd as for a patient to declare that he will take no medicine till he gets well.

It is evident that God has given the spirit of the world power to trouble us, as an appropriate chastisement for the long neglect of an imperative duty. The good Lord pardon our sin, and give us grace to display soon the banner of the covenant. Amen.

A WIDE INVITATION.

A series of essays has appeared in the Banner of the Covenant, on the subject of Covenanting. They are understood to be from the pen of one of the most able and most respectable members of the New Light Synod, a most decided and uniform opponent of the late exploded union project. The following reveals the cause of his opposition—it was too small a business: his views are directed to a more comprehensive union.