

THE
C O V E N A N T E R.

FEBRUARY, 1853.

PROTEST AGAINST THE USE OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN THE STATED WORSHIP OF GOD ON THE LORD'S DAY.*

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1. The question does not concern the use of instrumental music in private, nor its use on extraordinary public occasions—about which I have nothing to say here; but simply its use in the ordinary, public, and divinely instituted worship of God. It is against this use I protest. And this argument is not intended so much as a general one, upon the widest grounds, but rather as a special one, addressed to Presbyterian people, professing Presbyterian principles.

2. The Presbyterian people of America, and those from whom we are descended in the old countries, and most particularly those of England, Ireland, and Scotland, from whom, more especially, we have received our hereditary faith, have always, and under all circumstances, as a body, and as a grand department of Christ's Church in this world, abhorred and rejected every human addition to God's word, God's ordinances, and God's worship: they have considered this principle fundamental, not only in Presbyterianism, but also in Protestantism, and in Christianity: they have endured all manner of persecution, and death itself, in defence of this principle; and they have, in mind, in heart, in faith, and in life, as a body, considered this principle applicable to, and utterly preclusive of, the use of instrumental music in the instituted public worship of God; and upon this point their testimonies are clear and abundant—against Papists, Prelatists, Lutherans, and all errorists.

* This will be found a *very* readable and able article. We find it in the columns of the Preacher, but cannot say whether it made its first appearance in this paper or not. We judge not, however, from its date, Dec., 1851. *We* would not claim, or allow, for the Presbyterian Church (General Assembly) all that the writer claims; but this does not affect his argument. Nor are we prepared to assent to every view presented in reference to the use of instruments in the Jewish worship. In the main, however, we agree with his statements; and, again, our differences do not affect the force of the argument. It would be well if all Presbyterians were as orthodox and faithful in matters of worship as Dr. B. We hope soon to find him coming out as decidedly in favour of the sole use of the inspired Psalms. In this article he goes so far as to say that David composed "Divine songs for God's people in his own and all other ages:" evidently not agreeing with many of his brethren, or with *their* psalmist, Dr. Watts, in reference to the fitness of the *whole* Book of Psalms for the worship of God in New Testament times.—ED.

favour of a contrary practice, can enough be found to outweigh the very weakest of these arguments? Surely it is a pitiable folly, that wise and good men should allow themselves to connive at the defection which is spreading all around us, and which a firm and concerted opposition could, at present, so easily arrest. And surely it is a fearful responsibility which they take upon themselves, who foster and promote amongst us the spiritual leprosy, whose existence is at once indicated and strengthened by this form of opposition to God's ordinances, by God's professed followers.

For twenty-two years, during which I have been an office-bearer in the Presbyterian church, I have seen a gradual declension of sound doctrine in that church, on this subject. The declension increases in its rapidity and its power. It has been a sore vexation to me, that some of my nearest personal friends have countenanced and advanced this incoming desolation. For myself, I have never ceased to testify against it, and to increase the directness and force of my protest, in proportion as I have seen the evil increase; so that for many years I have refused even to be present, much less to preach in any Presbyterian church, where musical instruments were used—except they were silenced when I officiated. In most cases, my brethren in the ministry have respected my conscientious scruples: in many others, and some of them very painful cases, they have refused, and thus excluded me from their pulpits—and some of them, in addition, have reviled me bitterly. In all this, and for years together, no man has stood fully with me. Now in protracted confinement, and sore sickness, I am applied to by members of three or four of our most important Kentucky churches, in all three of which are many worshippers very dear to me,—to draw up the heads of my objections for their use, in examining what their duty may require; seeing that organs have been lately introduced into all three of the churches alluded to—; and I have in this paper,—with much suffering, and as my circumstances allowed, briefly complied with the request—and therein, substantially, with many similar requests heretofore made of me.—It may be my last public testimony for the Lord Christ—my last service for a church in whose behalf I have been sent. May He in whom is all my hope, not allow it to fall like water upon a rock.

Lexington, Kentucky, Dec. 30th, 1851.

THE STATE AND PROSPECTS OF THE CHURCH.

The times are not unfavourable to the diffusion of truth—whatever they may be in regard to its acknowledgment and reception. There is a very general letting go of old opinions—a pervading disposition to sift established doctrines—to dig around the foundations of vested institutions. No feature is more characteristic of the age. That it effects and tends to shake the hold of the true as well as of the false, is evident enough, but we place as an offset to this, so far as they may go, the facts: first, that the votaries of error are by far the most numerous; and second, that one great obstacle in the way of the truth, has ever been the power of error arising from the close combination of its adherents. When this array is once broken up, as it was at the Reformation, a few, faithful and able, may win great triumphs.

But now, what is our state? Are we—the Reformed Presbyterian Church—occupying such a position as our intelligence, our union, our concert of action, our zeal, as qualifies us to act well our part amid the earnest contendings, on the one side as on the other, of conflicting sects and

parties? We think not. Others may give a different answer, but we are sure that there are among us not a few who lament day and night what they, at least, conceive to be the debilitated and hampered condition of the church; perhaps we might use stronger language—its declining state. They would, probably, assign some grounds like the following for their grief and their fears:

1.—*Diversities of opinion and practice.*

We do not say that these diversities of sentiment are found in reference to the doctrines of grace, specifically so called, or in reference to the principles of our testimony. There are among us no Hopkinsians or Arminians,—none who sympathize at all with these or other corruptions of gospel truth. Nor do we lay to the charge of the church any want of fidelity in regard to the covenanting system of truth. If there be any, it does not, certainly, come to the light. But there are topics—and topics embraced in our standards—on which we do not all think alike. We are not agreed, as every body knows, in reference to what officers are necessary to a full organization of a church; nor about the functions of all church officers. There is not entire unity in regard to occasional hearing—the publication of bans of marriage—funeral services—the liquor traffic and the drinking of liquors—and we might give other specifications; but this is enough.

Now, we do not maintain—no intelligent Covenanter will—that “all men” will, in the present circumstances of the church, “think alike about every object of thought,” nor do we affirm that the matters which we have specified are equal in intrinsic importance to those topics respecting which there is no dispute among us; but they are all referred to in our acknowledged standards—they occupy a place in that system of faith, and among those rules of Christian duty, which we hold up to the world as our system of belief and code of laws. Surely, in reference to these, there should be unity of faith and harmony of application. And, moreover, that disagreement in these topics—and similar ones—is an evil, appears most distinctly in the fact that it becomes a fountain of discord and alienation. In short, if disagreement in these matters is not an evil to be mourned over—let them be blotted out of the standards—let there be no reference to them in the documents by which we *profess* to be bound. Let us be honest with one another and the world, and not keep among our avowed principles and rules any thing that we don't mean to be faithful in, one toward another. Or—and this is what we advocate—“whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule.”

2. *There are sad alienations among us.*

And here we do not mean those petty feuds that may always be expected—not justified, of course,—in the present condition of the church: we mean alienations, deep, wide-spread, affecting mutual religious fellowship, and existing not only among private members of the church, but among her ministry as well. We all know that while professing to be brethren—to be a people separated from the world, and strictly bound together in the adopting of one system of faith, and that a system hated in its peculiarities by our neighbours, we are far from exemplifying Christian union and fellowship among ourselves. Feuds exist in *many* congregations. New congregations have been formed, and others appear to be in process of formation, on what is called the “elective affinity” principle,—that is, notwithstanding their *vows* to maintain Christian and sacramental fellowship, some have concluded *not to do it*, and after a series of fights,

disgracing their profession, and often themselves, they succeed in erecting a new tabernacle—when the two divisions become completely separate; no more knowing each other as brethren than if they belonged to different denominations; perhaps not quite so much. And so of the ministry. Among them, the union should be of the closest kind. Instead, they are divided, and too often seem to pursue separate interests—not even meeting in the common and interesting ministerial and friendly courtesy attending the dispensation among us of the sacred institution of the Lord's Supper. Some pulpits are scarcely more open to some ministers than if they belonged to a different body. While, as a necessary result of this state of things, they do not cherish each other's reputation or usefulness. In a word, we present, in a sense, the appearance of two different denominations, although professedly constituting one Christian society.

Now we are aware that this unhappy state of things is, in part, traceable to that diversity of views already noticed. Doctrinal differences are, in general, at the bottom of existing ecclesiastical dissensions. But in our case there is more. Personal ill-will is at work. We have evidence of this; for, first, this state of alienation is not restricted to the case of those who differ. Instances are found where a professed coincidence of view on disputed topics is found in connexion with no little alienation, personal and ministerial—where those who agree with the doctrines of one side let out their sympathies and exert their influence in favour of the measures and influence of the other. And why do they do so? Clearly because of personal dislike to those with whom they accord in sentiment. This appears, second, from the painful fact that any, even the slightest diversity of opinion, is, in not a few cases, sufficient to sunder ties, friendly and religious. In short, a divisive spirit is largely at work, and is *spreading*. Every year adds to the evil, and to its bitter fruits.

It is not for us to assign, dogmatically, the causes—we mean the radical causes—of this mutual coldness, or, it may be, hostility. We may pretty safely, however, mention, selfishness; lukewarmness in reference to the truth, the testimony, the cause of Christ; narrowness of view, a failure to regard the interest, the welfare, the character, the influence of the whole body; pride, ambition, real or fancied personal injuries, and disappointments; with, of course, a sad lack of that purity and singleness of purpose, that devotedness of spirit, that consuming zeal for the good of souls and the honour of Christ, that meekness, humility, and self-renunciation, which ought to characterize Christ's disciples, witnesses and ambassadors.

But whatever the cause, the fact is as unquestionable as it is painful—almost crushing—to the thoughtful and earnest lover of our Zion.

3. *There is, among us, very little co-operation.* We are aware that our circumstances are not very favourable for joint and vigorous action in any one enterprise; our extremities are remote from each other, and, not knowing, minutely, each other's state, cannot be expected to sympathize quite so readily and profoundly in each other's necessities and trials. Still, in reference to the aspect in which we now view our case, this is not, after all, very important. There are not a few things, and those of the greatest moment and most imperative obligation, in which we could and should unite our counsels and our efforts. Church extension, missions, the issuing of tracts and volumes, especially such as relate to the peculiar doctrines of the Reformed Presbyterian church; and, finally, the education of young men who seek the ministry. In reference to

some of these we have heretofore done a little; in regard to domestic missions, we are still doing a little; as to the others, we are now doing nothing—we mean as a body. We have never done any thing, as a church, besides the publication of our testimony, in the way of issuing tracts or volumes, with a view to the dissemination of our doctrines, and our Theological Seminary has fallen.

We are aware that our lack is being supplied in part by individual effort, and by Presbyterian action; but scarcely any the less is our inactivity to be deplored; and, particularly, when we reflect that it arises, no little, from the evils which we have already noticed. If we were united in sentiment, and in brotherly-kindness and confidence; if a right spirit were at work in our judicatories, and, above all, in the supreme judicatory, much might and would be done in the way of combining the wisdom, the piety, the energy, and the means of the church, in prosecuting all the objects to which we have referred. There is, we hope and believe, life and zeal enough in the heart of the church to work efficiently in every proper department of united action, if it could be concentrated and have the lines drawn in which to move. We could do much more in extending our limits in both the old and the new regions of our country; we could keep up a regular series of tract issues; we could, perhaps, do something in a foreign field; we could, at all events, secure the preparation of our contemplated ministry under the eye of the whole church. To take the last of these, why can we not do it? It has been done; it can be done again. None can doubt the importance of attempting it. Upon the character and attainments of our ministry, nearly all, instrumentally, depends. And it is a matter of no small moment, that, at least, during a part of their course of study, they pursue it together. Improper rivalry, almost unavoidable in other circumstances, will be, as effectually as possible, precluded, while an honourable competition will be promoted. We have already begun to feel, in the diminution of the number of candidates for the ministry, the chilling effects of the extinguishing of a central source of light and heat. No physical causes are in the way. Locomotion is easy, rapid, and cheap. We need but a spirit of confidence and co-operation. And so of the rest.

4. *There is great reason to fear that personal piety is low, and declining among us.* Perhaps we might speak more peremptorily, and say that *it is* low and declining; for how can such a state of things as we have sketched—and every reader knows our sketch to be correct—how could such a state of things exist, unless grace were feebly operative? The language of Paul, addressed to the Corinthians, may be regarded as addressed to us, (1 Cor. iii. 3, 4 :) “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, (*margin*, factions,) are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”

Direct observation confirms our inferences and our fears. Great effort, as every minister who makes the effort knows, is required to maintain that measure of regularity, punctuality, and awakened interest in Christian duties—in gospel ordinances—in the things of God, which are among even the least conclusive evidences of the felt power of the divine life. If the minister of Christ succeed in keeping a regular and respectable face upon the movements of his charge, he labours for it. The least relaxation seems to open the gate for accumulated waters, while the instances are much rarer than they ought to be of eminent attainments in

the Christian life. Nor can we flatter ourselves that the ministry are exempt from the prevalent lukewarmness. In the course of our article, we have already asserted the contrary. Indeed, we have sometimes feared, when we see the inefficiency of the ministry, that we know little of the spirit of Paul who, "travailed in birth," until Christ should be formed again in the Galatians. But, however this may be, we have evidence, ample and afflictive, "that the ways of Zion mourn." Even the youth of the church, who have been marked with the signet of Christ, are slow to admit his claims, and not a few scorn them altogether. We may add, that a worldly temper—a money-gathering spirit—a spirit that seeks the applause of the world—a spirit that chafes against the restraints of law, and testimony, and the discipline of the church—are sadly every where visible among us: shall we not say, growing? This is, after all, one of the greatest lamentations. This is the root-sin; of all our defects, this is most offensive to that Eye of perfect transparency and holiness, under whose inspection we live, and think, and speak, and act.

Are these things so? If they are, (and, in the main, this must be admitted,) we would ask again, are we prepared for the work of the times? Is it likely that we shall meet the calls made upon us by our Master, to plead earnestly and vigorously for his glory? To these interrogatories, there is but one reply. We are not; our armour is not bur-nished; it is not well fitted on; nor can we, broken in judgment and sundered in affection and in spirit, plead and labour aright "in the name of the Lord and in the majesty of the name of our God."

True, we might have presented some lines of light; but we are not in the mood. Our picture gives, what we need to contemplate, the darker shades. We write in sorrow. The matter is too weighty; the issues are too fearful, to be regarded with any other emotions than those of sadness and penitence.

We may be regarded as presumptuous. We care not, provided what we have written have any effect in bringing about a better state of things; if it awaken any to serious, frequent, and prayerful reflection; if it rouse the negligent or the listless to attempt something for truth, for souls, for Christ.

SLAVERY AND LITERATURE.

The Southern Literary Messenger, in a review of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," thus lets out some precious facts:

"The potency of literature, in this age of the world, when it embraces all manifestations of public or individual thought and feeling, and permeates in streams, more or less diluted, all classes of society, can scarcely be misapprehended. But the illiberal, unjust, and unwise course of southern communities has deprived them of the aid of this potent protection, by excluding themselves and their views almost entirely from the domain of literature. The southern population have checked and chilled all manifestations of literary aptitudes at the South; they have discouraged, by blighting indifference, the efforts of such literary genius as they may have nurtured; they have underrated and disregarded all productions of southern intellect; and now, when all the batteries of the literary republic are turned against them, and the torrent of literary censure threatens to unite with other agencies to overwhelm them, it is in vain that they cry in their dire necessity, "Help me, Cassius, or I sink." The