

COVENANTER.

 OCTOBER, 1855.

[For the Covenanter.]

SOCIAL RELIGIOUS COVENANTING.

As the time approaches when the Reformed Presbyterian Church expects and hopes to enter upon the solemn work of covenant renovation, there seems to be a call to lay before our readers some thoughts upon the doctrine of social covenanting, in its various aspects. This we now propose to do, in a few articles, drawn up as concisely as the extent and importance of the subject admit. We consider, in the present article—I. The nature of covenanting with God, and shall then—II. Attempt to show how social covenanting should be engaged in.

We remark—1st. That a religious covenant always contains a *true acknowledgment of God as revealed in his word*. The formula of such a covenant, on God's part, often repeated in the Scriptures, is—"I will be thy God, and ye shall be my people." To this corresponds the claim, and the engagement of the covenanter—"Thou art our God, we are thy people." The Most High says—"I am thy God," and so makes over to his people an interest in His fulness, as a God of infinite wisdom, almighty power, unalterable truth, and infallible, unchanging mercy, and also makes an unquestionable claim to their allegiance, homage, and confidence as a rightful Sovereign and Lord. To all this the eye of the believing covenanter is directed: he recognises the singular privileges conferred, and takes upon himself the corresponding obligation. He surrenders himself in the whole man, and all that is his to God, Most High, and binds himself to His service in an intelligent and humble submission and obedience to His will.

2. *Such covenants are either personal or social*. Every man has his own individual wants and his own personal duties. Each one of us stands for himself before the throne of God, as each is dependent upon the favour, and help, and guidance of God. And no man has an interest in God but he who responds for himself to the formula of God's covenant. "I know," says Paul, "whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." 2 Tim. i. 12. "Into thy hands I commit my spirit," is the language of every believer. "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Ps. xxvii. 8. In all these, we have exemplifications of personal covenanting in the believer, in answer to the call and encouragement given him of God, intrusting and devoting himself to the care, favour, and service of the Most High.

The connexion, or the analogy, between personal and social covenanting, is very clear. No man can stand alone. He is a social being. He has ever himself relative duties to perform, and is largely interested always in the character and conduct of his fellow-men. Even the exile, like John in Patmos, though cut off from the opportunity of social converse with his kind, is not exempt from this universal law. He is still bound at least to think of, sympathize with, and pray for the friends, the world, and brethren he has left behind. Social covenants recognise all this. In this they have their origin. They are mutual engagements entered into by the covenanters with each other, accompanied by a joint engagement to be the Lord's. "And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people; between the king also and the people." 2 Kings xi. 17.

3. *Prominent among social covenants are covenants ecclesiastical and national.* All social bodies and communities may covenant. Families, cities, and other organized societies, may be called upon to avouch God in some form of social covenant. But eminently is this obligatory upon the church and the state. To each of these the Lord's people sustain very close, but easily distinguishable relations, involving special and distinct duties. The church of Christ is an organized society. She has her system of faith, her peculiar institutions, her appointed government, ends, and functions. She is recognised, as she has been instituted of God; and hence, in an eminent sense, is she required to own her Maker and Lord. The Old Testament covenants were, in part, ecclesiastical. Regard was had, in them, to the ordinances and acts of religious worship. Priests and Levites—the ecclesiastical functionaries—were active in them. And in some form or other, in every age, and even in our own times, her obligations to enter into solemn covenant have been owned and exemplified. Congregations now, in various departments of the visible church, have what they call their "church covenants." We would extend these, on the grand Presbyterian principle of the church's unity, to the whole community of the faithful. It is the whole church that the inspired psalmist addresses when he says, (Ps. xlv. 11,) "For he is thy Lord, and worship thou Him." In short, the Lord Jesus Christ is the church's Husband as well as King; and how natural is it that she engage herself to Him by solemn marriage vow, claiming, on her part, an interest in His love, care, and fulness!

Nations are moral persons. Their existence is recognised, and their organization is provided for, of God. They are under His authority. His law prescribes national duties. It defines the principles, and establishes the ends of national institutions. All this is made plain by several and express Scripture testimonies. "God reigneth over the nations." Ps. xlvii. 8. He "is the King of all the earth," (ver. 7.) Among the eminent titles of Christ, are these—"King of kings, and Lord of lords." Rev. xix. 16. He is "the Prince of the kings of the earth." Rev. i. 5. A wo is denounced (Isa. lx. 12) against the nation that will not serve Him: it shall "utterly perish." During the Millennium, "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." Rev. xi. 15.

If all this be so—if nations owe obedience to God—if His law, the

law of the Bible, is law to them—if they have Christ above them as King of their kings, and Lord of their lords—then, surely, it is competent to them, it is obligatory upon them, to own their relation to God and to Christ. Very plainly is all this enjoined in the language of Isaiah, (xlix. 1,) “I have given thee—as a covenant of the Gentiles.” And again, in Isaiah lxii. 4, where, among many promises eminently consolatory to the church, we have the assurance—“And thy land”—the land in which the church finds her place on earth—“thy land shall be married,” engaged in covenant with God.

The lawfulness of national covenants—and, as we shall see hereafter, the obligation to enter into them—is conclusively seen in the fact, clear and undeniable, that the ancient people of God were nationally, as well as ecclesiastically, engaged to God, as their God—as their God in covenant.

4. *These covenants must be entered into in Christ.* In regard to personal covenanting, this will be at once admitted. The individual believer “lays hold” of God’s covenant, by believing in Christ, and with an eye to His righteousness and grace, devoting himself to the service of God, engages to walk in all the ways of new obedience. The old covenant—the covenant of works—is no longer of any value as a means of securing the favour and blessing of God. It is a broken covenant. It denounces a curse. Its voice is a voice of terror only. The only way of access to God *now*, is through Christ, looking to Him as Mediator, to His righteousness for pardon and eternal life, to His mediatorial fulness for safe-keeping and ability to obey, for holiness and comfort; to His intercession for the acceptance of all personal religious services and acts of obedience. So in social covenanting, the church looks to Christ as the “Lord her righteousness.” As her Head, He secures her the favour of the Father, and becomes the medium of communication between the body of the faithful and the throne of God. As to the nations, they also must regard the law and government of God as in the hands of Jesus, the Mediator. “No man,” says our Saviour himself, “cometh unto the Father but by me.” John xiv. 6. The legislator in the hall of legislation, the judge upon the bench of justice, the magistrate in the executive chair, are each still individuals, and can no more approach God in any other way but through Christ, than can the citizen in his place in the commonwealth. True, they act as representatives of the body politic; their proceedings and acts, in affairs of government, are of an official character, but each bears his individual responsibility before God. And in no way can the nation act by them, so as to find acceptance with God, except as they give honour to Christ in their public acts. Of ungodly rulers it is said, (Ps. ii,) “They set themselves, and take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed.” Every reason that goes to show the necessity of personal covenanting in Christ, bears equally upon social covenanting through Him, as the Vicegerent of the Father. Do nations seek national prosperity? Would they escape national evils? In Christ alone can they enjoy the former, or get rid of the latter. “Happy is that nation whose God is the Lord” by covenant; deplorable the condition of that people, to whom the Most High sustains no other relation than that of Lawgiver and Judge. It is of infinite moment to understand well, that *none* can come to God but through Christ the Mediator.

5. *In social covenants with God, both the parties become mutually pledged.* Without this, the transaction would not be a covenant at all. The very meaning of the word is an agreement between two or more distinct parties. The formula of the covenant evidently imports a mutual engagement:—"I will be thy God, and ye shall be my people." The covenanter acknowledges God, as we have seen already, and binds himself to do the revealed will of God in Christ; and so, on the other hand, the Most High condescends to secure to the believer, by His own word and promise, all covenant blessings. This is most clearly exhibited in the Sinaitic covenant. Ex. xix. 6—8: "Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice, and keep my covenants, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." Here are two parties: God as a God of mercy in Christ engaging to sustain a "peculiar" relation to the other covenanting party, and such a relation as imports a special interest in his people, and singular concern for them. True, God is a Lawgiver. He has a right to *demand* the homage and obedience of men, of nations, and of the church. Just so, as Creator, He might have dealt with our first parents. Without any infringement of justice, or even of goodness, he could have treated them merely as subjects of His supreme and unquestionable dominion. Still, He made with them a covenant, and condescended to enter into terms and stipulations, binding them to himself by the strong bonds of an engagement and promise, on His part as well as upon theirs. Hence it has been well and truly said, that there was grace—unmerited favour—even in the old covenant; for eternal life, an infinite reward, was promised to Adam's, at best, but finite obedience. So, even among men, the child is imperatively bound by the laws of the parental and filial relation to obey the commands of the parent; but the parent may, and often finds it the dictate of wisdom to hold out the inducement of a promise to excite the prompt and full obedience of the child. There is, then, no difficulty here. While the covenanter says, "I am thy servant, thou art my God,"—the Most High says, "Thou art mine, I am thy God." In no aspect is the principle of covenanting more interesting—in none is it more calculated to awaken the highest emotions of gratitude, and confidence, and joy.

6. *Such covenants impose an additional obligation.* And here, it is admitted and maintained, that social religious covenanting should include nothing but what the law of God already requires. It is also admitted that there is already upon every covenanter, irrespective of any engagement of his own, an obligation properly infinite—for the authority of God cannot be limited—to study entire conformity to the law, to discharge every duty, to avoid every sin, to seek after God and new covenant mercies, and to do all these with the whole heart. Hence, it has been supposed that there is really no room for such engagements as we now advocate; or that, if made, they have no distinct obligation. But is this so? In the language of another—"Although nothing can increase the *authority* of God, may not the *obligation* of man, the obligation under which man lies to respect the authority of God, be increased? While the obligation arising from the naked authority of God cannot possibly be increased, may not something be done to bring the conscience under an additional obligation to do the will of God? The obligation arising from the authority of God's law

being infinite, does not admit of being either increased or diminished; but may not an obligation of another kind, and springing altogether from another source, be superadded to that arising from the divine authority?"

These inquiries admit of an easy and satisfactory reply. We have only to allude to the common use and design of the oath among men. All men are bound by the law of God to speak the truth; but there is, notwithstanding, an oath required of, and imposed upon the witness. And this, of course, not for the purpose of remedying any defect, or supplementing any weakness in the law of God, but as impressing the conscience with its additional solemnities. Hence, a sworn but false, witness, not only lies, but is perjured. He breaks, not the ninth precept of the decalogue only, but the third also; and so, in the common judgment of all men, and of God himself—for His word recognises the distinction—is a sinner of a higher grade of iniquity, of a blacker hue, than the ordinary liar. How so, we ask, unless he has disregarded and thrown aside an additional obligation to speak the truth, and the truth only?

If further argument be needed, we find it in a fact, frequently and explicitly recorded in the Scriptures—the punishment inflicted by God upon His chosen people for the very sin of covenant-breaking. And, in short, if the principle of this objection be admitted, we must cease to charge any aggravation upon the sins of professing Christians arising out of their solemn pledges and vows to be a people especially devoted to Christ. Does not every Christian conscience feel that these vows of God, which are "upon him," constitute a most serious and sacred call, in addition to all other sorts of obligation, "to be the Lord's?"

It is just so in social covenanting. The parallel is complete: or rather, the facts are the same precisely, in relation to these, as in covenants and vows merely personal. In both the act of covenanting brings with it an additional obligation.

7. *Social covenanting is an extraordinary duty.* We distinguish, in this respect, between this and such duties as are either of constant or frequent recurrence. Prayer, praise, the reading of the word of God, confession of sin, social worship, and other Christian ordinances and exercises, are termed "ordinary" duties, because they are to be observed habitually, or daily, or at certain and set times. Even the Lord's Supper is an institution of ordinary observance. Not so frequent, indeed, in its recurrence as those just mentioned, but to be observed with some measure of regularity, and without waiting upon the providence of God for special indications of a call to it. In contrast, then, with all these, covenanting is styled an "extraordinary" service. It has no fixed times. There is no stated call to engage in it. The times and seasons are to be observed, and from these the call is to be made out. But here we must interpose a caution. We are not to imagine that it can be a moral wrong, or even an unprofitable exercise to enter into or renew covenants without some marked and singular concurrence of circumstances. At no time will covenanting, sincerely and devoutly observed, be a service unacceptable to God. Generally, indeed, under the Old Testament dispensation, times of covenanting were, in some way, peculiar. But not always. In one

instance—that recorded in the twenty-fourth chapter of Joshua—we know of no other circumstance particularly demanding the renovation of the Sinaitic covenant, except the near approach of the death of Joshua: an important circumstance, but not of a character so imperative as some would now ask for. In this matter, the voice of the church, or of the nation generally, should be regarded by all the members and citizens of either respectively, as ample warrant to approach God even with the solemnities of formal covenanting.

But what are the circumstances which usually constitute a call in Providence to this duty? A full enumeration is impossible. The covenant at Horeb was entered into at a time when the church and the nation had received, or were about to receive, a more complete organization. As the church extends to new regions—where nations put on, as this nation did, some eighty years ago, a new form of national and independent existence—there is a call to this service. Israel renewed their covenant in the plains of Moab, (Deut. xxix.,) just before their entrance into the land of Canaan. Social covenants should be formed when great works are about to be undertaken, great conflicts seem to impend. The covenant was renewed (2 Chron. xv.) when the nation had greatly declined. Seasons of reviving from spiritual decays, are appropriate seasons of covenanting. Great deliverances call to this work. Israel covenanted after their return from Babylon. In a word, the prevalence of error and sin, past backslidings, present favours, existing distress, anticipated trials, *intestine divisions*, and *animosities*—all these, and other circumstances in the condition of the church and of the times, are indications to the people of God to review their ways, and bind their souls afresh to the throne of God and of His Christ. And to this, we would add, the lapse of time itself. At least every generation ought, in some way, to reiterate the vows of God, and take upon itself the covenants of a faithful ancestry.

This brings us to consider,

II. In what way social covenants are formed. And—

1. *There is requisite a formal act of covenanting.* As to the individual believer, it is certainly true, that in the very act of receiving Christ by faith, there is a laying hold of God's covenant. The essence of faith, as a saving grace, consists in taking Christ, in His person and in all His offices, to be, to the believer righteousness, light, strength, and salvation. Faith, moreover, includes in it the seminal principle of an evangelical obedience. The true believer subscribes to the law in Christ's hand, and purposes to make it the law and guide of his life. "With me," can the believer say, "the Lord hath made an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." The believer does not stop here. He *formally* covenants with God. He forms in his heart, and, in prayer, if by no more specific act, gives himself away to Christ, and binds his soul by the vow of allegiance and homage, to love, honour, and obey his Saviour as his Head, Husband, and Lord. The language of David is very express; and his example is, in this, approved and authoritative. "I have said, that I would keep thy words;" "I have sworn and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments," (Ps. cxix. 58, 106:) referring in the last of these passages to some personal engagement entered into with the Most High. Every sincere communicant at the Lord's table so-

lemnly covenants; and not a few, more zealous and devoted, have prepared, have sworn, and have subscribed, private covenants of devotion to the truth, person, and work of Christ.

If this be so in the case of the individual saint of God, much more is it demanded of the community of the faithful, either in the church or in the state. In no other way can the church, a visible, organized society, properly and explicitly avouch subjection to her Head, without some formal act. And much less a nation. But we have more to guide than mere argument and analogy. We have the example of the people of God in all ages. Formal covenants have, in some way, been framed and solemnly sanctioned. At Horeb, and repeatedly afterwards, but particularly after the return from Babylon, (Neh. ix. x.,) the ancient people of God gave themselves away to Him as their God and Redeemer in an explicit covenant. They even recognised their *social* subjection to Him who had made them, by a peculiar relation, His own. We may add, that by such formal acts alone can the members of the church and the citizens of the commonwealth bind themselves to each other, as to God, to be true and faithful in their various relations, and to promote the ends of their high calling. Without this, their profession, if not nugatory, which we will not assert, is at least deficient as to an element of her inferior nature and excellence.

2. *These covenants ought to be entered into with the solemnities of an oath.* We must distinguish here the various constituents of a covenant. There is a promise—there is a vow, which is a promise made with special deliberation and solemnity—each of them, in their widest extent, covering the range of covenant duties, and then there is the oath by which the promise and vow are solemnly confirmed and ratified. In every oath there is an appeal to God as Witness and Judge. It is the most solemn and awful form by which the soul can be bound to speak or to do the right; to eschew and shun the wrong. The oath is not the matter of the covenant—it merely spreads its sanctions over the contents of the covenant.

Now, social covenants are to be sworn. When Moses (Deut. xxix. 12) called together the tribes of Israel in the plains of Moab, it was that they might “enter into covenant with the Lord, and into his oath.” When Israel covenanted in the days of Asa, (2 Chron. xv. 14, 15,) “They swore unto the Lord with a loud voice—and all Israel rejoiced at the oath.” The returned captives (Neh. x. 29) “entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God’s law.” Isaiah foretells (Isa. xix. 18) that in New Testament times, “Five cities in the land of Egypt shall speak the language of Canaan, and shall swear to the Lord of hosts.” These examples, and this prophecy are, surely, a sufficient warrant for any people in their swearing to the Lord of hosts; and it is not worth while to inquire into the possibility—though it may be admitted, of forming a covenant, even without this formal ratification. “God swore by himself.” His promise to the believer—his covenant with the church (Isa. liv.) is confirmed by an oath; and, certainly, it is not too much, when his people, on their part, come under the most solemn sanctions that they will be His.

It is important, in this connexion, to distinguish between the oath of allegiance taken by a subject or a citizen to the constitution of his

country, or the oath of office taken by the magistrate when he enters upon the discharge of his official duties, and this oath of God. Some have strangely confounded them. *This* oath binds to God—to his law and service. Those other oaths merely invoke the name of God to an engagement to a certain instrument, or to do certain specified duties. In the one, the matter sworn to is itself allegiance to God; in the other, allegiance to some human government. Jehoiada understood this well when “he made (2 Kings xvi. 17) a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, *that they should be the Lord's people*; between the king also and the people.” Here are two distinct transactions. The last is the social compact between king and people; the first is the religious covenant of which we speak. Take an example in this land. What does the President of the United States swear to when he takes the oath of office? Certainly not to the law of God—the higher law. It is not mentioned or alluded to in his oath. He merely swears by the name of God, (or if he chooses, says nothing about God—barely affirms,) but to the constitution and laws of the land. The two things are utterly distinct. The *matter* of the two—we mean a religious covenant and a mere oath of office—is as diverse as any two things can be.

3. *Social covenants may be entered into jointly by church and state in the same land.* Some who admit, in part, the doctrine of social covenanting, are disposed to object to a covenant—such as the National Covenant of Scotland—in which all departments of the social body (the ecclesiastical and the civil) unite together in one bond. They regard it as an improper mingling, and even confounding, of things religious and civil. But, surely, “to unite, is not to confound; to connect is one thing, to blend is another thing.” In Israel there was a church and also a state, an ecclesiastical distinct from the national organization. There were priests with their assigned duties and functions, rulers with theirs. And yet, *in every instance*, all joined in one covenant. To the covenant recorded in Neh. x. we find the names of princes and nobles, with the names of priests and Levites. In an ecclesiastical covenant both the officers and the members unite. The minister, the elder, and the deacon, swear each not only to such things as are competent to them as members of the church, but in addition to such as are peculiar to them in their respective offices. The members—some of them are husbands, some wives, some parents, some children, some employers, some employed—all take the covenant, but each in view of his own relations, and the obligations arising out of them. Now, here, manifestly, there is no blending. Why should there be in a joint covenant of the church and of the state? Each engages to its own duties—to fulfil its own obligations, and so the different members or citizens of each, as these duties are regulated and obligations imposed by that divine law which claims an authority over both.

And besides, there are good reasons why just such covenants should be formed; for church and state cannot but exercise a mighty influence over one another. Though distinct, they cannot be entirely alienated. It is wise and scriptural to come to a proper understanding, and to enter into mutual engagements, as well as each to own the supremacy, and resolve to advance the kingdom of Christ.

4. *These covenants are formed by the concurrence of all classes and ranks in each church and state.* When the church covenants, her representatives first act. The Bond is prepared, sworn, and subscribed, in the supreme judicatory, and is then transmitted to the various parts of the church, to be then, in a manner, orderly and becoming the sacred character of the transaction, sworn and subscribed. We have said "subscribed"—for we have the example before us, (Neh. x.,) and we have also the prophecy, (Isa. xlv. 5,) "And another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord." This done, the work is complete, and the church is now a formally covenanted church.

Just so, the nation. She acts, first, by her representatives—in connexion with the church. The covenant is then transmitted with their sanction—the *same* covenant, if both church and state accord; as they ought, in the work—and subscribed by the people, when the nation becomes a covenanted nation. In all this the way is perfectly clear. Nations find little difficulty in binding their people to the national constitution. Vast societies—secret and public—become bound by their mutual vows. Why should any difficulty be imagined in vowing to God?

A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

That conscience alone is good which is much busied in self-examination, which speaks much with itself, and much with God. This is both the sign that it is good, and the means to make it better. That soul will doubtless be very wary in its walk, which takes daily account of itself, and renders up that account unto God. It will not live by guess, but naturally examine each step beforehand, because it is resolved to examine all after; will consider well what it should do, because it means to ask over again what it hath done, and not only to answer itself, but to make a faithful report of all unto God; to lay all before him continually, upon trial made; to tell him what is in any measure well done, as his own work, and bless him for that; and tell him, too, all the slips and miscarriages of the day, as our own; complaining of ourselves in his presence, and still entreating free pardon, and more wisdom to walk more holily and exactly, and gaining, even by our failings, more humility and more watchfulness. If you would have your consciences answer well, they must inquire and question much beforehand. Whether is this I purpose and go about, agreeable to my Lord's will? Will it please him? Ask that more, and regard that more, than this, which the most follow. Will it please or profit myself? Fits that my own humour? And examine not only the bulk and substance of thy ways and actions, but the manner of them, how thy heart is set. So, think it not enough to go to church, or to pray, but take heed how ye hear; for consider how pure He is, and how piercing his eye, whom thou servest.—*Leighton.*

BE CHEERFUL, CHRISTIAN.

An old Scottish divine, in commenting on Psalm c. 2, "Serve the Lord with gladness," says:—"Your serving him doth not glorify him, unless it be with gladness. A Christian's looks glorify God. We glorify

COVENANTER.

 NOVEMBER, 1855.

SOCIAL RELIGIOUS COVENANTING.

(Continued from page 73.)

The nature of the ordinance of covenanting has already been considered in its general aspects in the preceding pages. We have also shown how Church and State may engage in the work of covenanting, or of covenant renovation. We now propose, in the first place, to enter upon the proof of the duty of social covenanting as being obligatory, both upon the church and the nations, under this dispensation. To show, in other words, that it is not a work peculiar to the Old Testament economy. We shall then state, in outline, what are the proper contents of such covenants as we are now treating of. And—

I. That social covenants ought *now* to be formed and sworn, is evident—

1. *From the unquestionable claims of the Lord and of his Christ, both upon the church and the nation.* This argument has already been incidentally referred to in considering the nature of this ordinance. The church is a distinct, well-defined, and organic association of the professed servants of God and of Christ. She is a creature of God: deriving her being from God as a God of grace, receiving from Him all her laws and institutions, and owing all her privileges to His unbought and ineffable favour. Jesus Christ is her Head as really as He is the Head of every believer—her Head of power, for He has a right by gift and by purchase to enact her laws and control her administration—her Head of influence, for from Him are derived her life, her unity, her active energies, and her success. “From whom,” (from Christ,) says Paul, “the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” Eph. iv. 16. And again—“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.” Eph. v. 23. And hence, every consideration that goes to show the propriety and duty of explicit and formal personal covenanting, is equally available in reference to the church. Individuals should avouch Christ, openly and solemnly, as their Saviour and King, because He is, in fact, both. The church, for the same reason, should make the same acknowledgment, and, substantially, in the same form. Individuals owe Him allegiance, homage, and ser-

vice; and should, consequently, enter into a distinct engagement to render such allegiance, homage, and service. On the same grounds, the church, as a distinct moral person, should enter into a similar engagement. The argument is clear; and, admitting the church's unity, absolutely conclusive.

And equally so in the case of the state. Surely, the nations owe obedience to God. None but an atheist will deny this. Even a heathen could say—the moralist Epictetus—"To this God ye ought to swear an oath, such as the soldiers swear to Cæsar. They, indeed, by the inducement of their wages, swear that they will value the safety of Cæsar before all things; and will you, then, honoured with so many and so great benefits, not swear to God?—or, having sworn, will you not continue steadfast?"* The Scripture expressly calls upon magistrates (Ps. ii. 12) "to kiss the Son"—to acknowledge by some act their subjection to His authority. From all this we infer that social covenanting, just as much as personal, is an appropriate form of avouching God, which the church and the nations should, on all proper occasions, practise, and thus exemplify. The same thing is evident—

2. *From the necessities of church and state.* Both need the favour of God. On Him both depend for peace, safety, prosperity, and permanence. Neither church nor state can stand before God, in any other way, than as having an interest in His *covenant* favour. The church sins. In Christ alone, and in Him as the express object of the church's hope and homage, can she find forgiveness, and so escape ruin. The nation sins. Unless it can claim some interest in God's favour, other than that which arises from any excellence in itself, that nation must perish. In this way many and great nations have gone to utter ruin, nor will the nations now existing escape the same consummation. It may be, indeed, somewhat difficult to conceive how national blessings are made to depend upon the covenant relation of any people to God. But the fact is clear. The case of the Israelites is evidence enough. Their national existence and prosperity, as well as the hopes of individual Jews, were inseparably bound up in their interest in God's covenant. "He dealt not so with any other nation." And hence, then, though the then heathen have mostly perished ages ago, the Jews still continue.

This view of the subject is important in another aspect. Instead of fearing this doctrine and duty of social covenanting, both church and state should gladly embrace the one and perform the other. How unaccountable! Christian people opposing social covenanting in such a way as to manifest a sort of dread of the principle—as if that nation would not be "blessed whose God was Jehovah" in covenant—as if they were not a "happy people whom He chose for his heritage!" Social covenanting is proved—

3. By the fact, that *God's people under the Old Testament, were a covenanted people.* The fact is admitted, but the inference is denied. It is said that the covenants entered into by the Jews are to be reckoned among their peculiarities—that covenanting was a positive institution of that economy, and that, of course, it has fallen in the abolition of the Mosaic ritual and Jewish state. Now, on all these points we take issue;

* Lib. i., ch. 14, as quoted by Dr. W. Symington.

admitting, however, and maintaining that there were peculiarities about that people, in their ceremonies, and even in their laws, with which we have nothing now *directly* to do, at least in the way of conformity to them. But does it follow that every thing obligatory upon the Jews, or practised by them, was a mere Jewish affair? Certainly not. The ten commandments were incorporated in the Jewish code as the basis of all legislation. The law of marriage (Lev. xviii.) was first formally given to them. But, surely, neither of these has been set aside. No Christian community admits this. The Jews constituted a nation—there was a church also then, as well as now—the same church, moreover, then as now. They were “the good olive tree,” into which Gentile believers have been engrafted. “The blessing that has come upon the Gentiles,” is “the blessing of Abraham.” We are now, “by faith, the children of Abraham.” Gal. iii. It is a singular hallucination to suppose that because there were some things peculiar to the people of God before the advent of Christ, we ought not to regard them as in any way an ensample in these last days! They were men, as we are. With the same natural and moral attributes—the same essential relations to each other and to God—the same wants, temptations, and rights, that men have now. They were equally social with us—equally incorporated into communities, ecclesiastical and civil. They covenanted, acknowledging God, individually and socially, to be their God, and promising obedience to His authority and law, and claiming an interest in His help and favour. Why should not their successors as the people of God, do the same now? Covenanting was no peculiarity—it is a moral duty. It was exemplified in man’s primitive state in the covenant of works. After the fall, we find it again exemplified in the Noachic covenant in a manner consistent with man’s condition as a sinner; for it was, in this instance, accompanied by the offering of sacrifice. God covenanted with Abraham—and Abraham with God. How, then, can it be an institution peculiar to any one people? In the Noachic covenant, all mankind then existing were concerned. And what evidence is there that in dealing by covenant with Abraham, the Most High introduced any new principle or mode of procedure with such as were the objects of His special favour? Not the least. The evidence is all the other way. And, lastly—“Is it Jewish for a people to avouch the Lord to be their God?—to engage their hearts to draw near unto God?—to give expression to their sense of obligation to fulfil the commandments of the Most High?—to fortify themselves against temptations to sin by impressing their consciences with the authority of God’s law?—to stimulate themselves to greater activity in holy obedience?—to comfort their souls in distress and calamity by taking hold of the covenant, character, and promise of the Lord their God? Jewish, forsooth? Pray what, then, is Christian?”* The duty of social covenanting appears—

4. In the fact that *it is among the holy and approved practices of New Testament times, foretold in the prophecies of the Old.* The mere fact that any event is foretold does not, we are well aware, establish even its propriety, much less its character as a duty. If it be foretold, however, as an act “holy and approved,” we may and must regard it as both pro-

per and dutiful. In this way is social covenanting made the subject of prophecy. Isaiah says—"In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts." Isa. xix. 18. That this prophecy relates to the New Testament "day," scarcely admits of a doubt. The phrase, "in that day," is, of itself, pretty conclusive of the fact; for in nearly every instance it points to these times. But, in addition to this, we remark that the prophet proceeds, (verse 24)—"In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land." Surely, this—nor any thing like this—ever occurred previously to the advent of Christ. In fact, the full accomplishment of this prophecy is yet future. And what is its import? "Five cities"—communities, social bodies—"shall swear to the Lord of hosts"—not merely *by*, but *to* Jehovah: language evidently descriptive of an act of social covenanting. So Henry infers—"They shall by a solemn oath and vow devote themselves to his honour, and bind themselves to his service—they shall swear allegiance to him as their King, to Christ, to whom all judgment is committed."* We add, these "cities" are to be regarded as leading and important cities—capitals of surrounding districts or provinces. Of these there are "five," representing the entire land. Social covenanting could scarcely be foretold in clearer terms.

Another prophecy, equally instructive, we find in Jer. l. 4, 5—"In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." Now, we do not stay to prove that the ultimate accomplishment of this prophecy must be sought in New Testament "days." This is admitted by *all* judicious expositors. Nor is it of any consequence to our argument whether it refers to the Jews literally, or, as we suppose, to the people of God, whether Jew or Gentile. The fact is the same, according to either interpretation: they will come—these converts—and "together" join themselves to the Lord in a social, religious, and abiding covenant. If "the people of God" are meant, we have here a direct testimony in behalf of our principle; if "Jews" only are meant, we arrive by a very short process of reasoning at the same point: for none can imagine that there will be one code of law, or one set of institutions and observances for Jewish, and another for Gentile Christians, during any part of this dispensation.

We adduce, again, Isaiah lxii. 4—"Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy *land* (its people, of course) shall be married." Beyond all question, this is a prophecy relating to our "day," (see verses 1, 3, 10.) And as clearly the marriage of a "land" implies, or rather consists in a solemn avouching of the Lord to be its God. But this is not all. Far from it. The entire scope, and much of the phraseology of Old Testament prophecy, is to the same effect. The nations are to rally to Christ, (Isa. xi. 10, xlix. 8;) God will then be their God, (Hos. i. 10, 11;) God's name shall be great among the Gentiles, (Mal. i. 11;) and the nations shall "go up to

* So Calvin, Barnes, Alexander.

Jerusalem to the mountain of the Lord's house," (Isa. ii. 1, 2;) not literally, but spiritually—and yet with manifest allusion to the solemn assemblies, and acts of covenant renovation so often observed then under the Old Testament economy. In short, for they announce that the church and the nations shall be in these "last days" honoured and exalted, even more eminently than Israel was, in their covenant connexion with Jehovah of hosts. We urge the duty—

5. *From the recognition of it, more or less directly, in the New Testament.* We are aware that the notices of covenanting are neither so frequent nor so express in the New Testament as in the Old. This is not necessary. It is a moral duty. It arises out of the necessary and unchangeable relations in which man stands to God Most High. The Sabbath, for the same reason—we mean because it is a moral institution, and of course not requiring re-instituting—is only incidentally referred to in the New Testament. But is it the less obligatory? Certainly not. We say the same thing of family worship, and even of the right of infants to be recognised as birthright members of the church. These are matters long ascertained and settled, either by positive institution or a moral law, or by both, in part, and hence, we need expect no more than casual allusions to them. Just so, as to covenanting. Founded in the moral law, and holding a prominent place among the acknowledged duties of man, of the church, and of the nation, it required no new command to render it obligatory. We have at least one example, however, of ecclesiastical covenanting; as to national, it could not, of course, be looked for at a time when no nation existed that was not openly hostile to Christ. The instance referred to, is that of the Macedonian churches—the most generous and public-spirited, and we may fairly infer, the most advanced in consistency of Christian character, of all the early churches. The record is in 2 Cor. viii. 5. It is brief, but very complete. "And this they did," contributed to the church at Jerusalem, "not as we had hoped, but first gave their own selves unto the Lord." This cannot be the "giving" included in the act of faith, or in the Lord's Supper, for this would have been nothing unexpected. It must have been some social act, yielding themselves as a people, personally and socially, to the Lord. Again, when it is foretold, (Rev. xi. 15,) alluding to a future day, that "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ," we think it implies, on their part, an act of open, voluntary, national profession of homage and allegiance to God in Christ—in other words, an act of social covenanting. The same thing is also implied when it is said, (Rev. xxi. 3,) "And God himself shall be with them, and be their God." "Men" are spoken of in the context: *they* "shall be God's people," and "He will be their God"—the formula, it will be remembered, of the covenant made with the ancient "people" of God. We add—

6. *That God's blessing has attended acts of covenanting since the completion of the canon of divine revelation.* Christians have often entered into social covenants. The early fathers make mention of acts of covenanting, and even of subscriptions affixed to such covenants. The Waldenses covenanted. During the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such covenants—more or less perfect—were frequently sworn. We may specify the League of

Smalcald in 1536, in which the Reformed German princes and people bound themselves to the maintenance and defence of the true religion, the liberties of their respective states, and the peace of the empire: the covenant of the Waldensian churches and the German Protestants in 1571, to adhere to the Reformed religion: the oath taken in 1537 by the Senate and people of Geneva to the leading articles of the Christian religion and discipline as then reformed; this engagement being afterwards extended, as a league, so as to include Berne and Lausanne: the covenants of the Hungarian, Transylvanian, and Holland reformers: and, lastly, and chiefly, the covenants of our ancestors in the British islands. In fact, it has been truly said that "the history of the church's reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is written in her covenants."

Now, we do not argue, as we might fairly argue, from the fact that the faithful have thus so often, in seasons of reformation and of trial, resorted to covenanting as a help and a means of defence—we take an argument from the blessing of God upon such transactions. These covenants, and the leagues frequently associated with them, have been singularly instrumental in establishing, perfecting, and transmitting to other times, the profession of a scriptural faith and order, as also national and political liberties. And where these covenants assumed a form, and embraced contents the most scriptural and full—as in Geneva and in Britain—there they have proved the most efficacious and abiding. The most remarkable of these transactions were the British Covenants—National and Solemn League: the former sworn in 1580, directed against Popery, but including also an engagement to maintain the true religion and the national order and liberties; the latter entered into in 1643 by England and Scotland, and the Reformed Church in Ireland—having the same general design, but more particularly directed against the prelatic system of England, containing the same positive views, substantially, as those of the older covenant. How eminently these transactions have been blessed of God, the disciples of Christ well know. On the Continent, religion and liberty still live, and, in our day, are rapidly reviving among the descendants of those reforming Covenanters, and nowhere else. From the British Covenanters have emanated many a precious gift of religion and liberty. Surely, that was no "will-worship," no "mere" "commandment of men," from which there have been so copious issues of light, of truth, of moral order, of human freedom!

IV. We will now consider the *matter of religious social covenants*. To what things should the Lord's people engage themselves in this solemn form? And, in general, we remark, that the word of God is, of course, the standard to which they ought to be conformed. A lawful covenant is a scriptural covenant. As the duty, or ordinance, itself originates in the law of God, this same law must also regulate throughout the manner in which it is to be observed. We advocate and urge only such covenants as accord in their contents with that which the Bible exhibits as the duty of the church, and the nation, and the individual members and citizens of each. Our remarks must, however, be very general, furnishing but an instance of what *may* be embraced in a social covenant. And—

1. *A confession of all known divine truth, and an engagement to*

maintain it. Such an acknowledgment and pledge, was implied in every case of covenanting under the former dispensation. The covenanters had respect to *all* God's teachings, and not merely to commanded duties. Indeed, the engagement to "do and be obedient" had explicit reference, among others, to the command, so often given, that they should "*keep* God's statutes;" a precept that could only be met by a faithful adherence to the word of God as the rule of their faith. This is clearly brought out in the covenant (Neh. x. 29) of the returned captives, when they bind themselves "to walk in God's law, (including all revealed truth,) and to observe and do all the commandments," &c. And who does not know, that one reason of the separation of that people from the world of idolaters around, was that they might preserve alive the truth of God—the knowledge of His Being, perfections, law, and grace, until "Shiloh" came? They were God's "witnesses"—lights in the dense surrounding darkness of paganism. Just so now. The very fact that in a social covenant God is acknowledged, and His authority honoured, and that all this is through Christ, and according to His word, furnishes conclusive evidence, that not only the church but the covenanting nation, must confess the truth of God, and engage to maintain it according to its place and within the just limits of its jurisdiction. For God is known only in his truth revealed. To know and honour Christ, the truth, in which he is brought nigh, must be known and believed. In short, that the God of the Bible may be suitably and acceptably worshipped in this act of covenanting, the Bible itself must be acknowledged, and its teachings recognised as the only system of faith.

But to return to the Old Testament covenants. Is it not manifest that the entire people, including not merely the priesthood and other ecclesiastical functionaries, but the rulers also, of every grade, were as covenanted, bound to hold and to transmit pure to their posterity, every doctrine, as well as every precept of their law? We have proof clear and unquestionable in Psalm lxxviii. 5, 6—"For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should *make them known* to their children; that the generation to come *might know them.*" And hence, the express injunction (Deut. vi.) upon every Israelite to exercise the utmost diligence in household instruction, and the commands of Deut. xvii., addressed to the chief magistrate in regard to the writing out the words, and the observance of the law of God, that he "may learn to fear the Lord, and to keep all the words of this law and these statutes to do them." So, in substance, at least, it should be now. Not only should the church and her members engage to "keep"—to hold fast, and preserve—"the words of God's law," but the nation itself should, as a subject of the divine government in Christ, and with equal explicitness, avouch that truth with which the glory and honour of God, Lawgiver, and Redeemer, is inseparably bound up.

2. *There should also be an express renunciation of error and sin.* We can hardly say that this is essential to an act of covenanting under any circumstances in which a creature can be placed. But it is a fact worthy of notice, that even in the covenant of works there was something more than a positive engagement to obedience,—there was also an engagement to refrain from the sin of eating the forbidden

fruit. In fact, we may safely say, that something of the kind—some renunciation of the wrong—is, at least, implied in the covenanted acknowledgment of God and the right.

In the case of fallen man, there must be a direct renunciation of evil. In the act of faith, and in the exercise of evangelical repentance, the believer expressly turns from and renounces all other allegiance, and every form of sin, and subjects himself to the sole authority of God, his Saviour. "Other lords besides thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name." Isa. xxvi. 13. This principle was exemplified in the covenant at Horeb. It is first recorded Exodus xix. 18. The law was then pronounced from the summit of Sinai, (Ex. xx. 1;) and additions were made, as illustrative and explanatory. These we have recorded in Exodus xxi., xxii., xxiii. And, finally, Ex. xxiv. 3, the covenanter's engagement is intimated—"All that the Lord hath said, we will do." Now, in consulting these chapters, we find them largely made up of commandments forbidding conformity to the idolatries of the pagans about them, and other sins and wrongs. To these, as well as to the positive principles requiring the performance of duties, the vow of the covenanting Israelites had manifestly a reference. Again, in the days of Asa (2 Chron. xv.,) the same principle was regarded in renewing their covenant. The people engaged to put away idols; and the king himself removed his mother, Maachah, from being queen on account of her idolatry. So in Nehemiah's covenant, we find a law binding to put away their strange wives, and to refrain from the sin of Sabbath profanation.

This is enough. Every scriptural covenant embraces a renunciation of error and sin. How full and explicit this should be, depends, of course, upon the condition and "surroundings" of the church or nation at the time when the covenant is entered into.

3. *There should be an engagement to sustain each other, church and state, and by the people, in their place, while administering the ordinances of God.* In social covenants, the parties covenanting—the "men of the covenant"—become mutually bound. They engage to one another as jointly they covenant with God. Thus Jehoiada "made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people; and between the king and the people." 1 Kings xi. 17. "The people" here are not only the private citizens of the realm, but the inferior magistracy, and also the ecclesiastical officers—the whole commonwealth on the one side, and the king on the other. Here was an engagement on the king's part to preserve and respect the rights of all orders of the state, and also of the religious functionaries, and a corresponding one on their part to bear true allegiance to the chief magistrate of the kingdom. Moreover, the law of God controls the contents of a wise covenant. The fifth commandment of the decalogue prescribes the duties of all ranks in the social body—not only of parents and children, but of magistrates and citizens; and church officers and people; and, we may add, of the two great ordinances of the magistracy and the ministry, in church and state, towards each other. Hence, in a religious covenant, all these enter into bonds and engagement with each other. The church, to recognise and honour the state, the state to recognise and protect the church,

the members of the church to honour them that bear rule over them, and their rulers to seek their welfare, the citizens of the commonwealth to sustain the government, and the government to promote the common good of the state; and, finally, and most important, each of all these engages to the other, *as and so long as*, this act, in their respective according the laws, and institutes of God do whom they jointly serve. Nor is this any complication. Each covenanter, individual or community, has but to ascertain his or its own duties, and so learn the purport and extent of the vow in its personal bearings.

4. And, last, *there should be a pledge to prosecute the ends of vital religion*. This is implied in all that succeeds—in the acknowledgment of God, of Christ, of the truth, in the renunciation of error and of sin, in the pledge to observe all religious duties. Of course, this is all to be done evangelically: and as evangelically, sincerely and devoutly. This, however, will be a distinct topic hereafter.

FEAR AND TREMBLING.

—The very immensity of the grace of God in the gospel, while it fills the soul of a Christian with holy joy and triumph, will also inspire a salutary fear, lest mercy so unspeakable, promises so exceeding great and precious, privileges so unexampled and abundant, should, after all, have been bestowed in vain, and heap only aggravated condemnation on his head. Is it so, (he will say,) that there is an inheritance in light, a rest with God, reserved for the saints above? O then let me *fear*, lest, a promise being left me of entering into his rest, I should even *seem* to come short of it. Have I reason to hope that God the Father has had thoughts of love to me in Christ? Was God the Son incarnate for my salvation? Does God the Spirit condescend to come into this foolish heart, and there plead with me to accept his blessings? How shall I not tremble at the thought of slighting this immeasurable love, quenching his blessed influences? What holy jealousy becomes me, to *cultivate* this friendship of my God; to *improve* these privileges; to *answer* the expectations of him who has transplanted me out of the wilderness of this world; has brought me into his garden; grafted me into his Son Jesus Christ; and now watches over me, and nourishes me with these living waters of grace, that I may bring forth fruit to his praise. Bear with me, O my God and Saviour, that I have, as yet, yielded so few, so miserable returns, for all thy care and kindness! How immense thy love! How faint my gratitude! How gentle thy dealings with me! How perverse and froward my thoughts and dispositions toward thee! How often hast thou looked that I should bring forth grapes, and I have brought forth wild grapes! Glory be to thy grace, (for it is of grace alone,) that thou sparest me, yet a living branch of the living Vine. O let me fear and tremble, lest I weary thee with my ingratitude for thy mercies, my continued barrenness under thy fostering hand! How shall I escape, if I neglect so great salvation?—*Goode's Better Covenant*.

LIGHT AND POWER.

Men need the putting forth of a divine *power* upon their minds, that shall effectually influence them to *choose* that which, naturally, they

THE
COVENANTER.

JANUARY, 1856.

SOCIAL RELIGIOUS COVENANTING.

[Continued from page 105.]

In former articles we have considered the general nature of social covenanting, the mode in which such covenants are entered into, the proof of the doctrine, and the subjects which ought to be embraced in covenants, national and ecclesiastical. We now propose to treat—I. Of the spirit or disposition of mind requisite to the right performance of this duty; and—II. The descending obligation of such covenants as have respect to posterity, and embody duties of an abiding character.

I. As to the *first* of these—the state of mind—it will require less of detailed examination from the fact that the true spirit of covenanting does not essentially differ from that frame of mind which is demanded in all acts of religious worship. However, we may specify—1. *A due measure of intelligence.* The service of God is ever a “reasonable service.” He demands “the heart.” “They that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit.” “Praise” is to be expressed “with understanding.” Rom. xii. 1; Prov. xxiii. 26; John iv. 14; Ps. xlvii. 7. In entering into covenant, there should, of course, be a suitable knowledge of Him into whose presence the covenanter is—of the Mediator through whom he appears before God—of the system of truth to which he swears—of the errors that he renounces—of the duties to which he becomes bound—of the nature, ends, and benefits of the ordinance of covenanting itself—and that he may know all these; of the word of God as the sole foundation of divine and saving truth, and the proper standard and test of all doctrine and duty. The Bond of the Covenant is, of course, to be examined with care, and its true import and bearings understood. Without this the covenanter swears to what he knows not; and his act, instead of finding acceptance with the Most High and Omniscient, will be regarded as little, if any better, than a lifeless form.

2. *With sincerity.* It is a solemn thing to appear with words and vows before God. Even in ordinary devotional exercises, sincerity is a prime and indispensable requisite. Much more is it essential in the making of engagements so holy and binding as these. Hypocrisy is ever most offensive to God. It is like the “dead fly in the ointment of the apothecary, causing it to send forth a stinking savour.” Among

the high charges brought against Israel in the wilderness, and with reference immediately to their acknowledgment of God and promises of obedience, is this—"They did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues: for their heart was not right with him." Ps. lxxviii. 36, 37. God "desires truth in the inward parts," (Ps. li. 6;) and if we draw near, "Let us draw near"—above all things—"with a true heart." Heb. x. 22. No measure of intelligence will compensate for the want of sincerity. The greater the intelligence, the greater the sin of hypocrisy.

3. *With deep humility.* Besides the general principle that in every acceptable act of worship, on the part of a sinner, *must* proceed from a heart humble and contrite, it frequently occurs that the providential calls to the duty of covenanting are eminently calculated to excite unusual searchings of heart, and these to awaken a more than ordinarily profound humility. This was so in the wilderness when Israel covenanted: in the plains of Moab, (Deut. xxix.,) when the carcasses of the former generation, which had covenanted at Horeb, were scattered over the howling desert: in the days of Asa, (1 Kings xv.,) when Israel and their king had been brought to the brink of ruin by the hostile incursion of Zerah, the Ethiopian: after the captivity, (Neh. ix. x.,) when the returned exiles had before them and around them a wasted city and temple, and a depopulated country: for, in all these providences they could not but see the awful holiness of Him with whom they had to do. And still more, when God was about to descend upon Sinai and proclaim his covenant, the command was given—"Sanctify the people to-day and to-morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against that time; for on the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai," (Ex. xix. 10, 11;) and, following the spirit of this commandment, we find Nehemiah and all the people, previously to the act of covenanting, (Neh. ix.,) confessing minutely, their own sins, and those of their fathers—evidently as a suitable preparation for the solemn work in which they were about to engage. Covenanting—this we infer—should always be accompanied by a similar acknowledgment of sin, personal and social, ecclesiastical and civil—and this for the same purpose, to work in the hearts of the covenanters the deepest contrition and evangelical humiliation.

4. *With cheerfulness and joy.* To covenant with God, is an eminent privilege and honour. There can be none greater. Can any thing be better calculated to awaken the liveliest emotions of joy, than the entering into mutual pledges with God Most High? Very remarkable here is the language employed in reference to Asa's covenant (2 Chron. xv. 15:) "And all Israel rejoiced at the oath." And equally apposite is the example of David and the twelve tribes, who brought up the ark of God to its place (1 Chron. xv.,) with every demonstration of joy. So the prophet Isaiah: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, (individually, but collectively also,) and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads." Isa. xxxv. 10. And John (Rev. xix.) "heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, . . . saying, . . . Let us be glad and rejoice, . . . for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." With what joy did our covenanting forefathers in Scotland

renew, in 1638, the National Covenant—that grand charter of their ecclesiastical and civil duties and rights! In short, if God will be served “with gladness,” (Ps. c. 2) even in ordinary and less prominent acts of devotion, how much more becoming is such a spirit in a transaction of so conspicuous and singular a character as this!

5. *With unanimity and mutual affection.* With unanimity in all the matters comprehended in their covenant—in all the truths, the institutions and ordinances, and the moral duties. If all engage in the work intelligently and sincerely, of course there must be unanimity. And so of mutual affection. The covenanters become pledged one to another, as brethren in Christ, as members of one living body, of which Christ is Head; and still more, they take upon themselves the laws which regulate the Christian life, and among these the law of love. With what earnest and searching diligence, then, should *each* covenanter study the exercise of love to the brethren as he takes upon him the oath of God! How fearfully offensive to the Heart-searching and Omniscient, is all hatred, all malice, all jealousy, and even all indifference, at a time so solemn, and while invoking, in so awful a form, His presence and witness!

6. *With solemnity, and in faith.* These need no further illustration. Without faith—faith in Christ—the words of the covenant will be no more than a dead letter. Without faith, it is ever impossible to “please God.” Not one step can be taken in covenanting without faith. Without it sin cannot be renounced, nor the truth acknowledged, nor duties engaged in, nor vital religion professed, nor its promotion made the object of distinct engagement. Without faith in the atonement and intercession of Christ—the fulness and grace of Christ—what considerate man would dare to bind his soul with vows so high and holy? That this entire work should be gone about with solemnity, is equally manifest. “How dreadful,” says the patriarch Jacob, when God appeared and gave him promises at Luz, “How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” Gen. xxviii. 17. “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground,” (Ex. iii. 5,) is the command addressed to Moses when he was about to commune with God. Equally solemn is the work of covenanting, and demands like solemnity and reverence. Levity can have no place here. The soul is dealing, most directly, and formally, and intimately, with the God of Bethel, with the “I AM” of the bush that was burned, but was not consumed.

Such is an outline of the dispositions and exercises of mind with which the church and the nation should seek to go about this work—intelligently, sincerely, humbly, cheerfully, with one mind and heart, with solemnity and faith. None of these may be wanting. They constitute a chain of graces, or gracious actings, from which no link can be spared in the day of a covenant made or renewed. Covenanting with such a spirit as this, God’s blessing may be confidently anticipated. He will then accept “the meditations of the heart” and the “works of the hands,” and there will be joy on earth and in heaven while hands are lifted up in the oath of God. But, on the other hand, to come in any other way, is but to “rush upon the bosses of Jehovah’s buckler”—to provoke his indignation against a people or nation hypocritical and presumptuous.

We now come, *in the second place*, to the consideration of a peculiar, and as we shall show, essential feature of social covenants—their *descending* or *permanent obligation*. And merely premising that this descending obligation continues until the ends of the covenant are answered; and this may be very soon, or it may be never fully completed in this world, according as the nature of the object of such covenants, we remark—

1. *That this is no singular or strange fact.* We propose nothing new here. In fact, in some form or other, it is acknowledged by all men, that social contracts do not necessarily expire with the contracting parties. Leagues, treaties, debts, bind the posterity of the actual contracting parties. National good offices—for example, the aid given by France in securing the liberties of America—are regarded as laying *some* obligation upon following generations—at the very least, the obligation of national gratitude. This holds even between man and man. Children, grandchildren, and even more remote descendants, feel some obligation to repay benefits—signal ones, of course, particularly—conferred upon fathers or ancestors. All men would regard a wrong done to one whose father had been eminently kind and beneficent to the father of the wrong-doer, as no little aggravated by that very circumstance. But, if national contracts, if social obligations, if deeds of love, carry with them an obligation upon a subsequent generation—if this fact be recognised as between nation and nation, and man and man—if it be, as it is, a principle interwoven with the entire structure of human society—and if it be a principle, as it is, without which society could scarcely maintain a permanent and settled existence, why should it be thought singular when applied to covenant engagements contracted with God Most High? Surely, if any where, we might look for it here, when one of the parties is God, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

2. *This principle appears in the law and providence of God, and in Scripture ordinances.* It is upon the principle of children being, in a peculiar manner, concerned in the conduct and doings of their fathers, that we have in the second commandment the threatening of a visitation of the sins of the fathers upon their children to the third and fourth generations of those “that hate God.” We may go still farther back—to the fall itself: the entire race of man subjected to “condemnation,” (Rom. v.) on account of “the offence of one.” Redemption from this fall, and consequent misery and ruin, is accomplished, in Christ, upon the same great principle of one representing many. The infant children of believers become proper subjects of the ordinance of baptism on the same principle. In short, God, Creator, Lawgiver, and Redeemer, in all his dealings with man, both innocent and fallen, has ever dealt with him in such a way as to demonstrate the existence of moral ligaments binding together parents and their children in one.* Strange, if this same rule of procedure should fail to come into operation in God’s dealings with great communities—the church and the nations.

* Of course, we are not to be understood as holding that children are lost, necessarily, through the sin of their parents. It is enough even that in His administrations relative to outward privileges, God binds parents and children together. The children of even genuine covenanters are not necessarily saved. They may be impenitent.

This argument derives additional confirmation from the fact that succeeding generations are actually deeply influenced by the position, attainments, and conduct of such as have gone before them. If one generation, or a series of generations, either in church or state, be ignorant, comparatively erroneous, lawless, licentious—as in France during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries—the subsequent ones feel, necessarily, the deplorable effects of the hurtful influences to which they have been exposed during those years when the character is in process of formation. If, on the other hand, a people be, through God's blessing upon His own word and the covenant engagements of His people—as in Scotland during the same sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—intelligent, devout, orderly, and virtuous, their children reap the rich benefit of such a legacy of holy example and high attainment.

Place, then, these facts together, the introduction of the principle of descending responsibility in the moral—the immutable law of God—its exemplification in religious arrangements and institutions—and the illustrations of it every where apparent in the kingdom of Providence, can we question its existence, or doubt its truth in reference to these social covenants?

3. *This principle is exemplified in occasional providences recorded in the Scriptures.* And—(1.) In the conveying of the bones of Joseph from the land of Egypt to Canaan. The fact is stated in Ex. xiii. 19: "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you." This oath had been sworn by a preceding generation. Not one man was alive who had been personally sworn, and yet the oath was held to be binding, and is assigned as *the reason why* Moses performed the desire of Joseph: "*For he had straitly sworn the children of Israel.*" Clearly, the great leader of the twelve tribes would have regarded himself and his people as forsworn, had he left the bones of Joseph in Egypt. (2.) In the slaughter of the Gibeonites by Saul. This event is not recorded in the history of the chief actor. It first appears in the record of its punishment, as it was visited, first, upon the whole land, and, second, upon the posterity of Saul during the reign of David. "Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." 2 Sam. xxi. 1. But, perhaps, this was merely regarded of God as a "bloody" deed? No. For, it is added, (verse 2,) "And the children of Israel had sworn unto them," referring to the transaction recorded in Joshua ix., where we find that "the princes of the congregation (representation again) had sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel." Nor is this all. The same principle—children linked with their parents—is still more remarkably shown in the fact that the guilt of Saul's cruelty and breach of covenant was wiped out—as a national sin—by the public and official execution, at the command of David, of some of the posterity of the actual offender. (3.) In the virtual payment of tithes by Levi to Melchisedec. These tithes were paid by Abraham—Levi's progenitor; and yet Paul says, (Heb. vii. 9, 10,) "And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham; for he

was yet in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him." Nor is Levi here, merely the man Levi, the son of Jacob; he stands for his posterity in the priesthood; for Levi himself was not, in the peculiar sense of this epistle, a priest receiving tithes. The priesthood was not conferred upon his family until long after the death of Levi. How clearly this declaration shows that children may be, and are, regarded by God as acting in the persons of their fathers!

We are aware that these instances do not all furnish exemplifications of the principle we advocate, entirely parallel. It is not necessary for our purpose that they should. It is sufficient that they establish—as they clearly do—a moral connexion between one generation and another, of such sort that the act of one becomes the act of the other; or that one—the subsequent—is held bound by the deed of the other, the antecedent.

4. We have proof, direct and conclusive, in *the descending obligation of the covenants, civil and ecclesiastical, entered into by the Jews at Horeb, and subsequently often renewed*. The fact regarding these covenants is most distinctly expressed in Deut. v. 2, 3: "The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day." This was uttered by Moses, in the audience of Israel, in "the fortieth year, in the eleventh month," (Deut. i. 3,) after their departure from Egypt. At that time, the threatening of death pronounced against the generation which had left Egypt, had nearly completed its work. *All* over twenty years of age, of the original covenanters, had died in the wilderness. And hence, lest their posterity, who had been in the wilderness, many of whom were now in middle life, should imagine that they were not comprehended in that transaction, the fact is reiterated with a frequency and clearness ample to remove all danger of mistake. "Not with our fathers, (only,) but with *us*, even *us*, who are *all of us* here alive this day." Nor is this all. The covenant is spoken of, not merely as coming down with a descending obligation, but as, in fact, made "*with*" them. Equally explicit is the declaration of Moses on the occasion of the renovation of this covenant in the plains of Moab, (Deut. xxix. 14, 15): "Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath: but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day." The entire people was included, whether present or absent, and on the same grounds; and as in the covenant at Horeb, whether born or unborn. And to make the fact, if possible, even more undeniable, how often do we find the sin of covenant-breaking charged upon that people, with direct reference to the covenants of their fathers? In the very making of the covenant alluded to in the land of Moab, provision is made for this: for Moses adds, (Deut. xxix. 14, 25,)—"Even all nations shall say, . . . What meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers." Hence, the form of the indictment against that people, in a remote generation—"They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words: and they went after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant, *which I made with their fathers.*" Jer. xi. 17.

The pious in Judah recognised their covenant relation with their godly ancestors. A memorable and instructive example we have in Hosea xii. 4, 5, where the prophet, referring to the patriarch Jacob, adds—"He found him in Bethel, and there he spake *with us*, even the Lord God of hosts:" a very clear acknowledgment of a social identity with a remote predecessor. On what principle? Certainly on that of the intimate moral connexion with the covenanting patriarch.

That these covenants were among the ancient people of God, does not, as we think we have previously shown, at all invalidate the argument we derive from them. The Jews were men as we are—the church was the same church essentially—and their national organization did not differ, in so far as it constituted them a nation, from what the same thing is now. If their covenants were of permanent obligation, so are moral covenants now.

5. *This principle is based upon the permanent identity of church and state, and is proved by it.* An individual covenants with God: not in reference to some matter of a transient character—for in that case, the obligation ceases when the object is attained—but in something, as the maintenance of the truth, for example, which is moral, and, of course, requiring attention and effort to the very end. This covenant is obligatory while the parties remain. For the same reason, social covenants of a moral character, and which relate to matters of unceasing obligation, or requiring generations to accomplish, descend to posterity. The church contains the same persons, and so the nation while it retains a distinct national existence. The *church* and the *nation* form one party in the covenant: the Most High is the other. How, then, can the bond become invalid, so long as any of its objects remain unaccomplished?

But, more than this. Social covenants *must*, in the very nature of the case, embrace the newly entering members of the social body. A nation covenants to-day; to-morrow the constituent elements of the nation have clearly undergone a change. Some have been born; some have died. But the covenant still binds. If not, a social covenant must be the most fleeting of all transactions. Another day, a week, a month, a year, elapses. During all this time, fresh additions are making to the nation; and *all*, as they are born, become interested in, and bound by, the covenant; for, surely, it is still a *national* covenant: so short time has not annulled the solemn oath of God, but, at the end of the year, *all* are alike bound as when the covenant was formed. Carry this on, as far as you please, and you will find no break in the continuity of the obligation.

Perhaps, however, it may be said, that whenever the majority of actual covenanters are removed by death, that then the contract ceases. This cannot be, for the fact cannot be ascertained; and even if it could, what difference would it make? Until the last man of the number necessary to make up the majority dies, the *whole* are bound; for the engagement is *national*. How, we would like to know, can the decease of one man dissolve the obligations, not only of such as have been incorporated since the renewing of the covenant, but of the actual covenanters? The thing is absolutely impossible. We repeat, *all* are bound up to the time specified, and the death of one, or of any number, is simply their death; it can, possibly, have no effect upon the national

vow, to weaken its force. Now, we might have selected any other period, and the same reasoning would have been equally valid. The obligation is upon *all* at the end of a day, week, month, or year; and we have only to extend the process, and if there be a social covenant at all, we shall find that it is *necessarily* binding until its ends are accomplished. And, hence, the doctrine of social covenants, and of the descending obligation of such covenants, stand or fall together: the former implies, in the very necessity of the case, the other.

6. *The descending obligation of covenants is most desirable in itself, and most beneficial in its influence.* Surely, the pious father would at least wish that God would look with favour upon his child, and endow it with a fixed and *covenanted* interest in all gospel privileges; and gladly would such a father own, and, if possible, impress the obligations of duty upon the person and heart of his child. And so the church and the nation. What interest does it give to any great reform, or deliverance, that it reaches, in its effects, to the generations to come? We repeat here, what we have already said in reference to the act of covenanting itself—it is eminently desirable that our children be associated with us in the oath of God. It is not less beneficial to posterity. We now use the language of another:

“It strengthens that sense of gratitude to God by which men are stimulated to obedience, by leading the children to reflect on his goodness in having regard to their welfare in the covenant made with their fathers, and comprehending them in the same federal transaction. Thus Peter reminded the Jews—‘Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers.’ Acts iii. 25. It inspires confidence in the promised mercies of God, and affords ground to hope that he who has been gracious in times that are past to the fathers, will be gracious still to their children. Thus Moses encouraged the people of Israel—‘He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers, which he swore unto them.’ Deut. iv. 31. It furnishes a powerful argument in pleading with God at the throne of grace, as we find exemplified and confirmed in Jeremiah’s expostulation with God concerning the state of his nation—‘Do not abhor us for thy name’s sake; do not disgrace the throne of thy glory; remember, break not thy covenant with us.’ Jer. xiv. 21. It seems also, as it were, to throw a shield over a people, by which the wrath of Jehovah is averted—‘Yet for all that,’ says the Lord, ‘when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But I will, for their sakes, remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt.’ Lev. xxvi. 44, 45. It is not less fitted to keep up a remembrance of the wonderful things done by God on behalf of a people, by forming a record of them, and furnishing a medium for their transmission from generation to generation. Accordingly, we find the command—‘Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth,’ connected with the injunction, ‘Be ye mindful always of his covenant, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.’ 1 Chron. xvi. 12, 15. And then, above all, it is eminently fitted, by begetting a delightful mutual interest between fathers and children, to promote and display the unity of the church. The fathers by being required to transact for the children, and the children by being required to recognise the deeds of the fathers, must be inspired with a double and most salutary interest in one another. All selfish and exclusive feeling is in this way rebuked. The present generation are taught to look back to the past, as the past are supposed to have looked forward to the future. Distant periods are united, and the interests of different generations concentrated. No one age is left solitary or detached. The present learns at once to sympathize with the past, and to cherish an enlightened concern for the future. All are embraced in one intimate and endearing bond of common brotherhood. The church is felt to be indeed one; and every individual comes to regard himself, not as an isolated being, but as a member of a great common society, which extends through all ages, and unites in one holy tie the remotest extremes of time. The men of this generation look back to those who are already gathered to their fathers, fired with

the noble ambition of emulating them in their glorious career; and forward to those who are soon to follow them, prepared to welcome them with eagerness and joy to the scene which they themselves must speedily quit. As the stream of time flows onward, the identity or oneness of God's covenant society is thus preserved and recognised; a wider range is given to the exercises, and feelings, and prospects of the Christian's heart; more generous and enlarged emotions are awakened, and ground is laid for confidently anticipating the period when the men of successive generations shall all meet on the illimitable field of eternity, clustering around the same covenant God, partakers of the same covenant blessings, fellow-heirs of the same land of covenant rest, as the result of the high and efficient advocacy of the same covenant Mediator: 'Holy Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.' John xvii. 11."*

7. *There are no objections urged against this doctrine which are not equally valid against others acknowledged, in some form, by Christians at least.* Is it said to be unintelligible? Is it asked, how can this be? The same questions may be asked regarding baptism—circumcision—God's covenant with Adam—and even national treaties and debts. Is it said, that it is unjust? We might give the same reply. But we go farther, and remark—(1.) That this is the very objection urged against God's dealings with mankind in the persons of our first parents. (2.) That this objection is equally valid as against the descending obligation of the Jewish covenants; and yet, beyond all question, God so regarded them. The objector is setting himself against God. (3.) Instead of being unjust, this arrangement is most beneficent. And here, in addition to what we have already urged in reference to the beneficial results of this principle, we would recall the objector to the true state of the case. The obligation to serve God ever rests upon the rational creature—to serve Him, according to his word, upon every one favoured with divine revelation. Is it not great condescension and kindness, on God's part, to put this very obligation in a covenant form? Take the case of a child. It is under all moral obligations; but God has previously, by means of the connexion established between parent and child in the church, sealed as it is by baptism, secured to the child a religious training and all the benefits of a Christian example. The unbaptized child is bound to acknowledge God and Christ; the baptized child has been put in the most favourable position for being in possession of all the means through which these obligations may be met, and the consequent blessings realized. Hence, the pious bless God for Christian parents and Christian baptism. The same holds of all ecclesiastical privileges; and largely, of all national blessings. In short, take away the principle of representation—sever the ligaments which bind posterity to their fathers, and you cut the cords by which are secured to men and nations the greater part of all that is desirable, either for this life or the life to come. We should bless God for the lasting obligation of covenant privileges, though allied inseparably with the lasting obligation of covenant bonds.

[For the Covenanters.]

DELIVERANCE TO THE CAPTIVES.†

"To proclaim liberty to the captives." Isa. lxi. 1.

Man was created free. He was endowed with powers, feelings, and thoughts, only suited to a state of freedom. He was made indeed the

* Lecture on Nature and Obligation of Public Vows, by W. Symington, D. D., Glasgow.

† A Sermon by R. Z. Willson, in Coloured Church, Allegheny, May 27, 1855.

COVENANTER.

FEBRUARY, 1856.

[For the Covenanter.]

SOCIAL RELIGIOUS COVENANTING.

[Continued from page 169.]

Having considered the subject of covenanting in its more general and distinctive doctrinal aspects, we add some remarks—*First*, upon the principles that should direct the people of God in *covenant renovation*; *second*, upon the present urgency of the duty; *third*, upon the covenants themselves which it is proposed to renew; and, *fourth*, upon the Bond proposed to be used in this work.

I. *Covenant renovation*. This should be observed—1. *With reasonable frequency*. Covenanting is not an ordinary duty, of constant recurrence; but neither is it to be deferred for generations and centuries. The covenant entered into at Horeb was renewed by the subsequent generation before their entrance into the promised land, (Deut. xxix.) It was again renewed (Josh. xxiv.) before the death of Joshua, which took place some twenty-three or four years after the passage of the Jordan. And while there is no express mention of such deeds during the reigns of the Judges, we are not at liberty to infer that none took place. So far from this, it is probable that at least on some of the occasional solemn seasons—as “the year of release”—there was, in good times, when the law was read in the hearing of the people, a formal acknowledgment of its Author, his claims, and their duty to Him as his people. In the days of Samuel and of David such transactions did certainly take place. And, in after times, it may be safely affirmed that the covenant was renewed upon the accession of a new king. Not a few instances are recorded besides—as in Asa’s, and in the reigns of Joash, of Hezekiah, and of Josiah—in which, in the *most* formal manner, the whole people, with their rulers, avouched God, anew, to be their God.

Still more. We may argue from the duty of personal covenanting. What Christian would rest content with but one act of personal dedication to God? or with but very few during his whole life? Against any such neglect there is an express provision made in the institution of the Lord’s Supper, and even in the Psalms, prescribed by the Holy Ghost, for the church’s manual of praise. Now, if personal acts of covenanting may be so repeated with considerable frequency, and corresponding advantage, can it be possible that generations may—

some might say, should—pass without any open or general recognition and reiteration of national or ecclesiastical vows?

Our fathers did not so understand this matter. The National Covenant of Scotland was sworn in 1580, and renewed in 1596, and again in 1638. The Solemn League and Covenant was first sworn in 1643, and was renewed in 1649. Even at an earlier period—in the very outset of the Scottish Reformation, there were no less than *four* engagements—the first in 1557, the last in 1562. But, without insisting upon so great frequency as this, we hold to the principle of a “reasonable” frequency—as often as a call exists, and at farthest once within the limits of an ordinary generation.

2. *Every Scripture principle and duty already recognised should be embraced in every subsequent act of covenant renovation.* Certainly, no individual is at liberty to drop any principle or duty already known or confessed. To attempt this, would be to impugn the wisdom, to discredit the word, or to insult the majesty of the Most High. No more can the church slight any attainment, or drop any doctrine, institution, or law. To the church is “committed the oracles of God,” (Rom. iii. 2,)—a most sacred and precious trust; a trust to be kept, not surely in the Popish sense of a mere preservation of the written word, but by an intelligent, and sincere, and entire reception of the truths revealed, institutions ordained, and laws established there. So important is this, that it is made the subject of repeated injunction in the word itself. “For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, . . . who should arise, and declare them to their children,” (Ps. lxxviii. 5, 6.) “Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing,” (Phil. iii. 16.) “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown,” (Rev. iii. 11.) These are express commands. They are given to the church. They are obeyed, not by individual integrity alone, but by the resolute and perpetual adherence of the social body to all known truth. Both these, in fact, go together. The body cannot be faithless, unless by the faithlessness of individuals. If the individual members are faithful, the body will, necessarily, be also.

It may be objected that the constant and persevering retention of every attainment, would result in a vast accumulation of doctrinal statements and ecclesiastical rules. Not so. The Bible is the fountain of all. None of *it* can be left behind. And, in fact, the earlier attainments of the church of God are easily accessible, and can be readily known, performed, and maintained. Our answer is, then, that the objection assumes what is not true; and that even if it were, it could only avail as against a proper regard for the word of God itself.

3. *In acts of covenant renovation, there is to be an adaptation of the form and special bearing of the truth to the existing condition of things.* The nature of the case demands this. The same rules apply here as in testimony-bearing. Abstract truth is always the same. The law of God is immutable. The church’s organization is, in its divine institution, fixed and permanent. Social and national duties, regulated as they are by the law of God, are invariable. All these must be preserved and reiterated, and their obligation acknowledged in every

successive act of covenanting. But it must be remembered, that covenanting includes more than a bare avouching of God and of his truth. It is an eminent means of promoting Christian unity, of quickening Christian activity, of increasing Christian energy, of promoting Christian purity; it embraces a direct application of divine truth against error and sin, with an explicit renunciation of both. In this aspect, particularly, it requires an adaptation, in its form, and in the terms of the covenant, to the diversified condition of the church and the world. If any truth has been brought out in a clearer light; if any new error, or phase of error, has arisen; if social evils have put on new shapes; if there have been, even in the church, any instances of defection from a particular truth, or of compliance with any sin; these should receive, according to their importance and the amount of present danger, and the apprehended difficulty of the combat against evil, a very special notice in the act of covenant renovation.

There was something of this in every act of covenanting recorded in the Bible. The laws of Moses, (Ex. xx.—xxiv.,) all of which were included in the covenant at Horeb, were, many of them, directed against such sins as were common in Egypt. In subsequent acts of renovation, though not with equal clearness in all, the same adaptation is seen; but most of all in the covenant after the captivity. For a time, affairs had been loosely managed. Evils had crept in among the restored captives. These had infected the priesthood itself, and other influential classes, (Neh. ix., x.) Hence, they are explicitly mentioned in the bond prepared by Nehemiah. Finally, we have the wise example of our covenanting forefathers in Scotland, who in all their covenants, and acts of covenant renovation, without exception, sought so to frame the terms of the covenant, in their bond, as to meet the existing emergency. Hence, the National Covenant is, particularly, anti-Popish; the additional Bond of 1638, anti-Prelatic; and so is the Solemn League and Covenant; the latter containing also a clause designed to meet the acts by which the opponents of God's cause endeavour to mislead, divide, weaken, and destroy.

Whether the entire covenant should be re-written, or whether it should be re-sworn in its original terms, with a Bond appended, as in 1638, is a matter that must be left to the discretion of those who undertake the work. If the interval is long—the change of circumstances great, either by a very great alteration in the face of society, or by a change of location, as in the case of the church in this country—wisdom would say, Form a new document. If the renovation is at a shorter interval, and amid circumstances nearly identical, an additional one may be all that is required; and, perhaps, even this might be dispensed with, as was certainly the case in some of the Old Testament examples. The great and important consideration is, that the entire sum of Christian, ecclesiastical, and national obligations and duties, be exhibited in the clearest and most perspicuous manner; dropping no attainment, and giving the whole act a decided and intelligible bearing upon the true objects of the church's present efforts and testimony. We now propose—

II. *To show that covenant renovation is our present duty. And—*

1. *It is long since either we or our forefathers have covenanted. We would not infer from this, as some of our contemporaries have done,*

that we have ceased to exemplify at all this high duty, or have lost entirely our due sense of its obligation. We have all along held ourselves, far more distinctly than those who bring this charge against us, as bound by the permanent obligation of the covenants of our ancestors. This acknowledgment we make, as individuals and as congregations, frequently at the Lord's table. It is one of our standing and leading terms of ecclesiastical communion. But, after all, it has become a serious inquiry, whether we have not permitted too long a time to elapse since the church has held up the right hand, and formally sworn this oath of God. The last act of this kind, in Scotland, in which we have an interest, was in 1645, at Crawford John. Two years previously, a portion of the Covenanters in this country, met at Octarara, Pa., and there renewed the covenant. More than a hundred years have passed—some four generations—since these acts, without any very vigorous attempt even to imitate their example. Calls have not been wanting. Covenanting should have been attempted as soon as possible after this nation became free and independent; at any rate, after the formation of the Constitution of the United States. Another pressing opportunity occurred, when the Testimony was adopted in 1806; and yet another, in 1833, when so large and influential a part of the church made defection. Never were there calls more imperative than these. They were clear, loud, and definite. And even, the Testimony of the church in this land has never been incorporated among her *formal* covenanted engagements. And, hence, in part, at least, the New Light defection.

It cannot, then, be objected that there has been, in this long interval, no distinct call. Such calls have been repeated; and our argument remains intact, and, we believe, most weighty—generations have passed away, while there has been no proper effort towards covenant renovation: and with this additional circumstance that fit occasions have been overlooked—occasions, moreover, of such a nature as that they still, among other circumstances, demand the attention of the church.

2. *The condition of things, religious and civil, in this land.* The church is, here, greatly divided. All the denominations found in the British islands are found here, and others besides. The spirit of schism has never been more rampant than in this age and the last, particularly in this land. New forms of error—as Hopkinsianism—have arisen. Corruptions, the same in principle as those which affect the church in other countries, but differing, more or less, in the circumstances attending them, meet us on every hand. The churches, Presbyterian and “Reformed,” have not been unharmed by the ordeal through which religion has been made to pass in the new world. Hence, alterations, or explanations—explaining portions of these away—have invaded the integrity of the time-honoured standards of the Reformed faith. And this work has not ceased. It goes on. Union is sought for on terms which, to say the least, endanger still more the unity of the faith, and the zealous observance of past attainments.

In other directions, still greater departures have taken place—doctrinal and practical—from the faith and integrity of our fathers. New philosophical systems, new views of the work of creation, new modes of evangelization—some of them direct infringements upon Scripture

law and example—all exert a mighty influence, and threaten to sap many a foundation.

Civil government, in this country, has put on new features; good ones, not a few, if sanctified by a spirit of holiness, and directed to the glory of Christ; but exceedingly insnaring, when pervaded, as they are, by a spirit of practical, and even theoretical infidelity. The peculiar danger attending them arises from two things: their popular origin, and their professed vindication of popular rights. Besides, the life of the nation is full of energy; it puts forth efforts, most vigorous and persevering, challenging that admiration which we always accord to high enterprise and indomitable exertion. In all this—ecclesiastical and civil—we see ample reason why the Covenanting church should anew “bind up the testimony;” why she should throw around her the panoply of a solemn covenant, lest she also fall into the current and share the dangers which have shattered so many of her contemporaries.

But, still more. The age is dealing with questions, moral and religious. The entire divorce of morals—religious morals—and politics, has not been found quite so practicable as it was once supposed to be. Hence, within the last quarter of a century, moral discussions have largely entered into political contests. And, just now—we speak still of the United States—the most absorbing matters in the halls of legislation, and in the press of the country, are matters in which the laws of morals, and the controversies between religions, make up the leading elements—we refer to slavery, temperance, and anti-Popery. Such a time is not merely a favourable one for renewed effort in behalf of the true doctrine of civil government—which many seem to be feeling after—but furnishes a call to that open and public avouching of it which constitutes a part of covenant renovation.

3. *Our own condition as a church.* It is, certainly, allowable to refer to this, however painful may be the facts. Indeed, we do not know but the strongest argument in behalf of covenant renovation, at the present time, is this now before us. We are not a properly united people. As to doctrinal differences, they are comparatively few, and these not upon subjects of the highest importance. Still, there are some. What we chiefly allude to are personal alienations, and the tendency to form party combinations, and these directed against brethren.

We are a formal people; and yet we do not, in many cases, even observe the forms of religion with due and unwearied diligence and attention. We are sadly deficient in activity, personal and social, in the cause of Christ and of souls. We have no theological seminary, no foreign mission, little home missionary zeal. We do little in the way of *united* effort in behalf of any great and good cause. We have Bible principles, but manifest too much of a selfish and ease-taking spirit—satisfied to hold, without labouring to extend the knowledge of them, at home or abroad. The moral movements of the age have been less indebted to us than they ought to have been. We need concentrating, rousing, sanctifying. We need more love to Christ, more concern for sinners, more mutual interest, a livelier attachment to the peculiarities of our faith, greater faith and patience to work, and, if need be, suffer for Christ.

We are aware that some of these considerations are often supposed to militate against any attempt to covenant *now*. It is said that we are disunited, and how can we covenant? We answer—and the answer is sufficient—covenanting is a means of drawing together the people of God—a means of testing the faithless, if there be such—a means of securing the outpouring of the Spirit, without which discord and alienation will wax worse and worse. And, besides, we must remember that proper covenanting is not all summed up in the brief act of swearing the covenant. It is always preceded and attended by searchings of heart, confessions of sin, prayers for the divine blessing, and new resolutions, believing and sincere. If we are ever to be in heart, in mouth, in deed, one people, we must first set our faces to seek, in *this* appointed way, as well as others, the Lord God of our fathers.

III. We now turn to the covenant engagements which we propose to renew. These are the covenant styled the National Covenant of Scotland, and that known as the Solemn League and Covenant. And—

1. *Their history.* The Reformation in Scotland was, emphatically, a “covenanted reformation” from the beginning. As early as the year 1557, when the greater part of the kingdom were yet, in name, at least, adherents of the Papal system and powers, the “Lords of the Congregation,” as they were afterwards called, entered into a bond engaging, in the name of the faithful, to carry forward the great work of religious renovation. This bond was afterwards, three several times, renewed: each time carefully adapted to the various phases of the conflict at the time. The last of these was in 1562, when success had nearly crowned their former efforts, and when they could speak in the name of almost the whole kingdom. None of these, however, were, strictly and formally, national or ecclesiastical engagements. The first truly national bond was formed in the year 1580. At this time the kingdom was decidedly Protestant. The church was fully established, in her organization, throughout the nation. Her courts were in active and efficient operation. The great body of the people, particularly in the Lowlands, were sincerely attached to her interest. The king—James VI.—then a young man—was easily influenced. His principles were far from being fixed. The court was subject to sinister influences of various kinds. The church had suffered no little anxiety from the persevering and unprincipled efforts of some men of high rank to introduce a sort of Episcopacy. And at this particular juncture, the Papists, at home and abroad, were actively plotting to overthrow the Reformation, and restore the ancient order of things. To counteract these designs and consolidate the friends of truth, the National Covenant was framed and sworn. It was prepared by a single individual—John Craig—a chaplain of the king. It was approved and signed by the Assembly of 1581, and then solemnly sworn by the king, the nobles, the ministers, and the people: and so became a proper and formal covenant, ecclesiastical and civil. This covenant was renewed with an additional Bond, with great solemnity and zeal, in 1638, at the commencement of the second Reformation.

The Solemn League and Covenant was framed and sworn in the year 1643. Scotland had then thrown off the yoke of Episcopacy, which had been imposed upon her, for a season, by the false and ty-

rannical house of Stuart. The church there had been purged from the corruptions induced by two generations of arbitrary and ungodly prelatie and regal power. A similar movement, but, of course, not based upon any previous Presbyterian reformation, had begun in England in the year 1640. The Long Parliament had then met. It had been summoned by Charles I., acting under the counsel of Laud, the Romanizing Archbishop of Canterbury, and of the Earl of Strafford, a renegade from the cause of liberty, for the very purpose of procuring means for pursuing the war against the Scots. Providence ordered it otherwise. A majority of the Parliament were Puritans. They began a series of measures opposed to the arbitrary designs of the court. The issue was a civil war, commenced by the king in August, 1642. England sought the aid of their northern neighbours—called an Assembly of Divines at Westminster in 1643, and then proposed a League with Scotland. The Scots insisted upon the adoption of a League and Covenant. This was assented to, and commissioners were sent by Parliament to Scotland—some of them civilians, and some ministers. Alexander Henderson prepared the document; which was approved by the Assembly then in session, and also by the “Convention of Estates.” It was at once accepted and subscribed by the English Parliament and Assembly of Divines; and thus the friends of civil and religious liberty in the two kingdoms—afterwards joined by their friends in Ireland—were united in sworn league and covenant.

The crisis demanded such a measure. Scotland was indeed reformed; but a large and powerful party of recusants, including some of the leading nobles, were, in heart, with the king and the court. They had not a few partisans, especially in the Highland districts. England had long been trampled upon by the abettors of arbitrary power; civil liberty was perishing; and no means of seduction or of terror, were left untried to break up entirely the old Puritan party, which had, from the first, existed in England. At this very time, the king, having under his banner most of the nobles, a large proportion of the gentry, and the dregs of the people, was in arms for the subjection of the kingdom. The Puritans had suffered some severe defeats. Foreign aid was even looked for by the court. Not only religion, but liberty, was at stake. Surely, if ever the Lord’s people were called upon to unite in solemn covenant, it was then, when every thing dear to man, and every thing dear to Christ, was in danger of being swept into one common ruin. We consider—

2. *The tenor of these covenants.* They were not unlike. (1.) Both contain an engagement to maintain the true religion; or, as it is expressed in the Solemn League—

“That we shall sincerely, really, and constantly, through the grace of God, endeavour, in our several places and callings, the preservation of the Reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, against our common enemies.”

To this there was added in the same covenant, a clause binding themselves to

“Endeavour the reformation of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the word of God, and the example of the best Reformed churches.”

A just and noble object, certainly. Moreover, they gave this the first place—partly from the fact that in this quarter the assault was openly made; and chiefly, because no object was in their view so important, personally or socially, as the purity and preservation of the true religion.

(2.) The National Covenant has for its second article the renunciation, and with “abhorrence,” and in great detail, of the entire system of Popish error, superstition, and tyranny: an article to which no Protestant can take exception. In the Solemn League the 2d article is of the same tenor. The engagement in regard to Popery is, however, expressed in general terms: Prelacy was then the near and dangerous enemy, and hence *it* is renounced in greater detail. The article reads thus:

“That we shall in like manner, without respect of persons, endeavour the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, (that is, church-government by archbishops, bishops, their chancellors and commissaries, deans, deans and chapters, archdeacons, and all other ecclesiastical officers depending on that hierarchy,) superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine, and the power of godliness, lest we partake in other men’s sins, and thereby be in danger to receive of their plagues; and that the Lord may be one, and his name one, in the three kingdoms.”

To this article no Presbyterian can object: for if Prelacy be—as it is, unscriptural—if it has shown itself, as it ever has, to be a fit ally and instrument of despotism—if it has been found, as it has generally been found, in alliance with sentiments opposed to sound, evangelical doctrine; it must be not merely right, but eminently a duty, to use every lawful means for its complete “extirpation.” “Every lawful means,” for our forefathers bound themselves to none others. It is not persons, but systems, and errors, and evils, against which this article is directed. And it is framed in the true spirit of Christian fidelity, which aims to eradicate “every plant which the heavenly Father hath not planted.”

(3.) The support of *just* civil government occupies the third place in both. In the National Covenant it is stated:

“We protest and promise . . . to defend the king’s royal person and authority in defence of Christ’s gospel, the liberty of the subject, the administration of justice, and the punishment of iniquity.”

In the Solemn League it runs thus:

“We shall, with the same reality, sincerity, and constancy, in our several vocations, endeavour with our estates and lives, mutually to preserve the rights and privileges of the parliaments, and the liberties of the kingdoms, and to preserve and defend the king’s majesty’s person and authority, in the preservation and defence of the true religion and liberties of the kingdoms, that the world may bear witness with our consciences, of our royalty, and that we have no thoughts or intentions to diminish his majesty’s just power and greatness.”

It might be supposed, at first sight, that these engagements were too loyal. In fact, while, in their own day, these covenants were charged with being seditious, and subversive of all government, they have been, in more modern times, opposed as leaning too strongly to kingly government. Neither charge can be sustained. These covenanters did, indeed, acknowledge the validity of regal power; but they understood too well their own rights, and the claims of Christ, to sanction the principle of absolute or irresponsible power. Hence, in the National Covenant, the ends and obligations of civil authority are

clearly stated, and the engagement is taken to maintain that authority "in defence" of these ends—in carrying out these obligations. The Solemn League and Covenant is still more clear. The rights and privileges of parliament are put first in order, and then what relates to the king's majesty: and this they will "preserve and defend" only "in defence of true religion and the liberties of the kingdoms." The truth is, they regarded the king, not as a law-maker, but as the executive, and were determined to restrain the royal authority within the true limits of executive power. And well they might,—and this circumstance must be ever remembered in judging of their doings,—they were, at the very time, at war with the king as an assailant of religion and liberty. It is not strange, then, that an arbitrary king, who claimed to reign "by the grace of God," and not by the will of the people, should hold them as seditious; but it is strange, that they should be charged with sanctioning an authority inconsistent with popular rights.

It may be objected again, that they allow civil authority something to do "in defence of the true religion." But in this they were right, and modern times are wrong. The government cannot be neutral. As an "ordinance of God," it must endeavour, in *its own sphere*, to promote the cause of God, the kingdom of Christ, the moral and religious interests of the nation. Without this it is degraded from its proper position, and ceases to be "the ordinance of God" at all; for it abandons all regard for that which is the chief end of all God's works—his own glory.

(4.) The fourth article of the Solemn League and Covenant—to which there is nothing directly corresponding in the National Covenant—relates to the opponents of the cause of religion and liberty, and contains a promise to exercise due diligence in advancing the ends of justice upon all such persons.

(5.) The subsequent article—peculiar also to the Solemn League—relates to its permanency, and their efforts to promote this.

(6.) The remainder of these covenants contain engagements also of a personal character—to be faithful to each other and the oath of God, and to exercise constant diligence in all duties, and in matters of personal religion.

All these are noble ends. Each was suited to the times. The call of God was most evident, and as clearly, the direction of God was vouchsafed in modelling the engagements of his people to meet the emergencies of their day. In the language of Hetherington—speaking of the Solemn League and Covenant, "it was the noblest bond, in its essential nature and principles, of all that are recorded among the international transactions of the world." The same writer adds:

"Perhaps no great international transaction has ever been so much misrepresented and maligned as the Solemn League and Covenant. Even its defenders have often exposed it and its authors to severe censures by their unwise modes of defence. There can be no doubt in the mind of any intelligent and thoughtful man, that on it mainly rests, under Providence, the noble structure of the British constitution. But for it, so far as man may judge, these kingdoms would have been placed beneath the deadening bondage of absolute despotism; and in the fate of Britain, the liberty and civilization of the world would have sustained a fatal, paralyzing shock. This consideration alone might bid the statesman pause before he ventures to condemn the Solemn League and Covenant. But to the Christian we may suggest still

loftier thoughts. The great principles of that sacred bond are those of the Bible itself. It may be that Britain was not then, and is not yet, in a fit state to receive them, and to make them her principles and rules of national government and law; but they are not on that account untrue, nor even impracticable; and the glorious predictions of inspired Scripture foretell a time when they will be more than realized, and when all the kingdoms of this earth shall become the kingdoms of Jehovah and of his Anointed, and all shall be united in one solemn league and covenant under the King of kings and Lord of lords."

These are the covenants which we hope to renew. They have, indeed, been cherished all along in the heart of the Covenanting church. She has honoured the memory of the great and good men who framed them. But has she studied their doings with sufficient thoughtfulness and diligence? Is it not well to re-read and re-examine these noble documents, and so seek to imbibe a larger measure of the comprehensive, and devoted, and resolute spirit of our Covenanted ancestors?

IV. The Bond now before us claims some attention. It is so drawn as to embrace every principle of the document we have just considered. In some instances, their very language is retained. It is stripped, however, of all local allusions and phraseology. It brings to view and renounces systems of error, under their modern names. It applies the principles of the Covenant to the existing civil institutions of the country, and thus shows clearly the fact that we hold ourselves bound as the witnesses for Christ to occupy a position apart from any active co-operation in their support, and furnishes our leading reasons for so doing. It might, possibly, be abridged. Perhaps it would be enough to mention systems of error by their ordinary names—leaving the particular errors which constitute or characterize these systems, to be otherwise ascertained. Take it all in all, however, though susceptible of some modifications, we have no hope of seeing another document worthy to take its place.

We now close our consideration of the subject of social covenanting with the expression of an earnest hope that we may be favoured and honoured with the privilege of lifting up the hand in the oath of God, and of subscribing our names to a solemn and abiding covenant.

DELIVERANCE TO THE CAPTIVES.

(Concluded from page 177.)

III. Christ frees from the bondage inflicted by man. That deliverance which has now been described is a spiritual, a saving deliverance, wrought in and upon the souls of individuals; this, which I am now to unfold, is wrought upon communities, freeing them from the evils that injure society. It also affects single persons and households, but chiefly as to their outward condition, at least so far as their religious interests. These forms of bondage, which I am presently to consider, may—nay, they actually do render it difficult to attend properly to the outward services of religion, and they even interfere with the performance of those relative duties which religion not only enjoins, but also ennobles. They also hinder, and, in many cases, absolutely prevent, the education of men, and encourage—nay, even enforce ignorance; but still they consist with deliverance from Satan and sin, so that one who is in a spiritual sense delivered, may yet be enslaved by others of his race. This bondage, which men have often to endure, is one of the works of the devil which Christ came to de-