

THE

Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanters.

VOL. XIV.

FEBRUARY, 1876.

No. 2.

ORIGINAL.

THE BIBLE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

IN the last annual report of Professor Wickersham, Superintendent of Public Schools in Pennsylvania, occurs the following interesting and gratifying statement:

“In 14,500 of our 17,000 schools it (the Bible) is now read without giving serious offence to anybody.”

There are two things in the above deserving attention. The first is the fact that the present system of education gives general satisfaction. If any one has an opportunity of knowing with what degree of favor the reading of the Bible is regarded by teachers, parents and scholars, the State Superintendent has. It is his business to visit the different counties, attend the teachers' institutes, receive the reports, &c., &c. Any dissatisfaction that may exist he is likely to be the first to hear, and if it be great, it is his duty to refer to it in his annual report. It is not likely there would be any hesitation on the part of Professor Wickersham to refer to any dissatisfaction occasioned by the reading of the Bible, if such existed, as he states clearly his willingness to exclude it entirely from our schools if there be manifested much opposition to its use. It appears from his statement, that notwithstanding all that has been said about sectarianism and sectarian teaching, the Bible continues to be read in six-sevenths of our schools without giving “serious offence to anybody.”

There is really no general dissatisfaction with our present system of public education, not even among the Roman Catholics. The priesthood unquestionably is opposed to it, but not the great mass of the people. From them come no complaints. They express no wish for a change. So satisfied are they with the instruction received in the schools as at present conducted, and so unwilling are they to have their children go to the church schools, where are inculcated the dogmas of their creed, that in different places threats have been made to withhold the sacraments from those who

A TRIP SOUTH.

HAVING accepted the appointment of the Central Board to visit the Freedmen's Mission at Selma, Alabama, and also the district in South Carolina where Covenanting congregations formerly existed, I left Philadelphia November 22d, accompanied by Mr. Walter T. Miller, of New York, who was going South partly for pleasure and partly for business. Leaving by the 12.45 A. M. train, we entered Washington City at early dawn. It was a most unpleasant morning. Through a driving storm of rain and sleet, we were driven over the "magnificent distances" to the Potomac, where a fine steamer was awaiting the arrival of passengers from the North and East. Soon we were steaming down the river, and in an hour touched at Alexandria. Not long afterwards the ringing of the bell announced that Mt. Vernon was in sight, once the home, and now the burial place of General Washington. The tomb, which on a clear day is visible to passengers, was hidden by the mist and fog of the morning. Ten o'clock brought us to Quantico, where disembarking we entered the cars, and soon crossed the Rappahannock at the old town of Fredericksburg. It was here, on the heights of Fredericksburg, that General Burnside with his fine army was signally defeated in the closing week of 1862. A United States cemetery marks the field on which the bloody contest was waged, and almost innumerable white boards, visible from the cars, indicate the graves of those who fell in battle. A few miles up the river is Chancellorville, the field of another bloody struggle, resulting in the repulse of General Hooker, in May of the following spring. Passing through a forsaken and desolate looking tract of country we were soon in Richmond, the capital of Virginia, and chiefly famous now as having been the political and military centre of the late Southern Confederacy.

The afternoon and night were spent in Richmond. We were disappointed in the appearance of the place. Though handsomely situated on rising ground of various shapes, sloping in an eastward direction, the general appearance is that of an old dilapidated town. The indications betokened a stagnant condition of trade. Dullness, except perhaps in the millinery business, of which there was a somewhat brilliant display in the leading thoroughfare, seemed to be the presiding genius of the place. Sight-seeing was attended to as far as the disagreeable character of the day would permit. We looked into Libby prison, where Union soldiers were confined during the progress of the war; visited the house occupied by Jefferson Davis during his short-lived and dishonored presidency; the capitol; the State library, a very fine one, rich in historical materials; a grand group of statuary in the square, and other objects of less note. In the rotunda of the capitol stands a statue of General Washington by Houdon, and said to be the only one in existence of which the living man was the model. From the cupola of the state house can be seen in the distance the field of the first great struggle in the late war, in which General McClellan and the Union army were badly defeated by the Confederate forces. Gainesville, Chickahominy and Malvern Hill are historic places, and are names associated with humbling and sorrowful memories. A young man of light mulatto color, arrayed in the uniform of a letter carrier, was the first visible intimation of the political and social revolution which had humbled, deeper than that of Nebuchadnezzar, the pride of the Old Dominion. This looked as if a *new* dominion had been inaugurated.

Leaving Richmond early in the morning, sixteen hours by rail brought

us to Charlotte, not far from the southern boundary of North Carolina, and a distance of 268 miles. Charlotte is quite a stirring place, the capital of Mecklenburg county, from which that famous political document, the Mecklenburg Declaration, takes its name. This celebrated paper was the production of Presbyterians, who coming from Scotland and Ireland, imparted into it some of the grand ideas of the federal deeds of Britain in reforming times. I was told by one gentleman, who is accepted as an authority in the local history of the country, that there was good reason for believing that to Rev. Alexander Craighead, who is mentioned in our historical testimony, and under whose direction the covenants were renewed at Octorara in 1743, the county is indebted for the declaration, the authorship of which as many are disputing, as there were cities claiming the honor of the birth-place of Homer. The convention in which it originated was composed almost entirely of those to whom Mr. Craighead had ministered, and whom he had indoctrinated and leavened with his views. It appears from contemporary documents, that the renovation of the covenants in 1743 excited the suspicion of the Proprietary government, who charged the parties concerned in it with disloyalty to the British authority. The charge was earnestly and indignantly repelled, but the trouble consequent upon the transaction led numbers of the actors in it to remove from the colony. They went to North Carolina, and Mr. Craighead was among them. He removed into Virginia probably about 1749, and in 1755, in consequence of the trouble following Braddock's defeat, he passed into North Carolina and became pastor of Sugar Creek congregation, not far from Charlotte. He died here in 1766, and his grave, unmarked by stone or inscription, is still pointed out. The Mecklenburg Declaration antedates the Declaration of Independence by more than a year, and it is strongly surmised that Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the latter, was familiar with the former, and that it gave shape in his mind to the document which he framed. What if it should turn out that the immortal principles incorporated into the National and Solemn League and Covenants, vitalized and brought into existence the great American nation!

Leaving Charlotte, after spending some days in Chester District, S. C., by the Piedmont Air Line, the next objective point is Atlanta in northern Georgia. This is a well arranged city, handsome in its general appearance, and with more of the hum of business than we had heard since leaving home. A large cotton interest centres here, and the commercial pulsations of the place are quickened and strengthened from contact with the people of the hill country of Georgia, which has been known for years as the most active and enterprising portion of the State. The people of the northern counties were never ardent in their devotion to the slave power, and they were looked upon as hostile to secession and other measures of the disunionists, who were seeking for the dismemberment of the nation. Atlanta and its nearer and remoter neighborhoods, were scenes of bloody contests during the progress of the war. It was taken and retaken by the contending hosts, its position rendering it extremely eligible as a basis for military operations. After Richmond, Atlanta was the Esdraelon of the civil war. It was from this point that General Sherman set out on his march for the sea, with his immense army of ninety thousand men, plunging into the very heart of the Confederacy, and leaving a wide-spread desolation to mark his track. The accounts given by southern people of this celebrated raid, are probably somewhat tinged with exaggeration, but making every reasonable allowance it must have struck appalling terror into the hearts of the people. Even yet, some of them almost shiver when they speak of it. Educational

interests are fostered here, judging from the character of the buildings for public schools, and considerable is being done in the interests of the Freedmen at the expense of associations in the North.

Nine hours travel brought us to Montgomery, the capital of Alabama, and the first capital of the Confederacy. It was here that the constitution of the Confederate States was prepared and the Confederate government formally organized. Montgomery is one of the most important cities in the South. Situated on the Alabama river, which furnishes an outlet for its commerce to the Gulf of Mexico, and surrounded by a rich tract of country, it is the seat of a large trade, particularly in cotton. It is a sight to witness the producers of it driving into the city with one, two or half a dozen bales on their wagons, mostly drawn by oxen, and proceeding to the market place where it is exposed for sale. Parts of the country around are beautiful. At the beginning of December the flowers were blooming in the gardens, vegetables of different kinds were still green in their beds, and many fields were white with cotton still unpicked.

Fifty miles west of Montgomery is Selma, where we arrived on Wednesday night, December 1st, after a miserably unpleasant and tedious ride of about seven hours' duration. This was the chief objective point. It stands upon the western bank of the Alabama, which at this point is a deep and narrow stream, and its waters glide so gently by, that a visitor might leave the place without knowing that a river is there. Situated on a navigable river, and in the midst of a fertile region of a black, rich soil from three to four feet deep, Selma has an active trade, and supports a population of from seven to eight thousand. As in many other southern cities and towns, the Jews are already a considerable and growing class, and are true types of the traditional reputation of their race in money-making, and in the kind of measures and means by which they make it. The ignorant and too confiding Freedmen are in many cases the victims of their villany. We were told of a case like this, as an illustration of what is continually happening: A colored man entered the office of one of them to make a sale of a small quantity of cotton. "What have you been offered for it," inquired the Jew. "Thirteen cents," was the reply of the colored man. "That is too little," responded the merchant; "we will give you thirteen cents and a half," and turning to his clerk, he says: "Pay Mr. — sixty dollars," which was five dollars less than the amount would have been at thirteen cents. The poor colored man not being able to count, flattered himself that he had made a grand raise. The case on discovery went to law, but for want of evidence, the scoundrel escaped the penalty of his dishonesty and theft. In many cases, too, taking advantage of the weakness of the Freedmen, and by treating them to whiskey and tobacco, they inveigle them into bargains by which these poor people are wickedly defrauded. From what we were told, no class of people need to pray oftener or more fervently than the Freedmen for the speedy conversion of the Jew. The interests of education among the colored people are well looked after in Selma. Besides our own school with its mission appliances, there is a large school known as the Burrell Academy; the teachers in which—a principal, Mr. Silsby, with four or five lady assistants, all white—are supplied by the American Missionary Association, and their salaries paid by the city of Selma. There is also a colored Congregational church of about seventy members, under the supervision of the A. M. Association. The minister, Rev. Mr. Pope, feels much encouraged by the measure of success which has attended his labors, and speaks hopefully of the prospect. The Roman Catholics are endeavoring to gain a foothold in Selma, but not-

withstanding they have erected for them a very comfortable church building, their efforts thus far are almost entirely without success.

Returning from Selma to Montgomery we passed down to New Orleans, some three hundred miles, taking Mobile on the way. Prior to the war, the latter was one of the most active and stirring points in the South. But it has not yet recovered, nor is it likely soon to recover from the shock which its trade received. Business has been directed into other channels, and a general dullness prevails. Twenty-six miles down the bay is Fort Morgan, the scene of Admiral Farragut's naval exploits, resulting in the capture of the fort, and in opening the way to Mobile. New Orleans is by all odds the most business like place seen by us in the South. It has the appearance of a fine city. Steamboats of the largest build and finest finish crowd the wharf. These bring the cotton from the upper countries, and deposit it in immense quantities upon the levee, whence it is re-shipped and sent to other ports. The rushing to and fro of people, the rattling of drays and other vehicles of different kinds, the crowded thoroughfares, some of which, despite their French names, are narrow enough, the rustling of silks, and the gew-gaws of fashion, all tell of business and wealth. New Orleans is famed for its irreligion and general disregard of the Christian moralities, to which an outward respect, at least, is paid in most other parts of the country. In licentiousness and looseness of manners, and in devotion to sensual pleasures, it is the Paris of America. There is a large Roman Catholic element in the population, and as it happened to be the feast of the Immaculate Conception, we observed large numbers entering the cathedral and other places of worship, to pay their devotions to the Virgin begotten, as the Pope says, without taint of original sin. However it may be with Mary in regard to original sin, it is patent enough that in respect of actual sin, her most devoted worshippers are quite up with those who do not accord to her the honor of having had in her life an untainted nature.

Leaving New Orleans at 5 P. M. on Wednesday, soft as an early October evening in our latitude, a continuous ride by way of Nashville, Louisville and Cincinnati brought us into Pittsburgh at an early hour on Saturday morning. Delaying here to meet the Central Board on Monday, and another day to give testimony in a suit for the recovery of a legacy to the church, at the request of Mr. William Wills, acting for the Synod's Board of Trustees, we reached home on Thursday morning, after an absence of nearly a month, and having travelled during that time about 3,200 miles.

This paper is already too long. In another we may refer to some matters of a more general kind.

S. O. WYLIE.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO CHURCH MEMBERS.

THE charges delivered at an ordination are, for the most part, uninteresting and commonplace. They were originally designed for the instruction and benefit of the parties addressed. Now, however, the original design is very generally lost sight of. Young men entering the ministry think they need no instruction from those who have learned by experience, and as to congregations, they are thoroughly acquainted with the duties which they owe to their pastor. And, as a result, the charges to pastor and people are very generally regarded as a mere routine service of but little value, and are prepared with but little care. This is not always the case. Occasionally we meet with a charge of real value. Such a charge