

FIRST  
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

OF

Reformed Presbyterian Churches.

---

SCOTLAND, JUNE 27—JULY 3, 1896.

---

GLASGOW:

ALEX. MALCOLM & CO., 34 ANN STREET, CITY.

EDINBURGH:

R. W. HUNTER, 19 GEORGE IV. BRIDGE.

There is no effectual trammelling-up of consequences. "The Word of God is living and active." And though our witness is set at nought or opposed by many, the Churches about us, and the nations that speak our tongue, are nearer—far nearer—the Divine ideal to-day, even in their non-acceptance—in their rejection, if you will—of this testimony than they would or could have been had it never been borne. And that such is the case makes insensibly, perhaps, but still most powerfully for personal religion.

A great ideal is a precious possession. It blesses those who cherish it; and it works, under God, to its own realization.

"The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,  
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,  
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;  
Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by."

Our forefathers had a great ideal. It was not a dream of human ambition. It was a thought from God and for God. It is good for us, far beyond our knowing, to cherish it. "The vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie; though it tarry, wait for it."

---

#### FAMILY RELIGION AND THE SOCIAL PRAYER-MEETING IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.

By the Rev. Prof. R. J. GEORGE, D.D., Allegheny.

THE family is divine in its origin. Marriage is not an institution of men, it is an ordinance of God. God laid the foundation for family religion by creating the family a moral person, a subject of moral law, capable of leading a religious life, and of entering into covenant relations with Himself.

To this moral person God has given institutions of worship peculiar to itself. "The voice of rejoicing and Salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous, the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly." (Ps. cxviii. 15). God's pleasure "in the

dwelling of Jacob" is only second to His supreme delight in "the gates of Zion." It is to the perpetual honour of the Covenanter Church that in the very beginning of her history she recognized, with remarkable clearness, the moral personality of both the family and the State.

The family is founded in nature. It shared the ruin of the Fall. The family is also included in the plan of redemption. It is embraced in the bosom of the Church. To this purpose speaks the Psalmist: "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thy house; thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord. The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion, and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life; yea, thou shalt see thy children's children and peace upon Israel." (Ps. cxxviii. 3-6).

The children of believing parents are born within the Church, and are therefore entitled to the sacramental seal of baptism. The baptism of infants cannot on any other grounds be defended, on this ground it cannot be assailed. "Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy." (I Cor. vii. 14). "Lo! children are a heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward." (Ps. cxvii. 3). "And of Zion it shall be said, this man and that man was born in her; and the Highest Himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count when He writeth up the people that this man was born there." (Ps. lxxxvii. 5-6). The Covenanter Church in administering baptism to the children of believing parents imposes upon the parents the most solemn vows as to the maintenance of family religion, and the care of their children in body, mind, and soul. The Covenanter home is thus bound to the Church and to her glorious Head by sacred covenant engagements. But this is not all.

The Covenanter Church exercises a sessional care and supervision over her families as such. We have an old custom called "Pastoral Visitation," which is in a large measure peculiar to ourselves. To this Scriptural custom we owe very

much of our family religion. In 1639, the year immediately following the taking of the National Covenant of Scotland, the General Assembly passed the following decree, viz. : "That there shall be a weekly catechising in some part of every congregation; that the families shall be catechised at home by the heads of the families of which duty the ministers shall take account, assisted by an elder, and that family worship shall be performed in each house morning and evening."

Of the beneficial results of this official oversight there can be no doubt. If intimate acquaintance between the Shepherd and his flock is important, and it is important, then pastoral visitation promotes it. If personal dealing with individual souls for that salvation is essential, and it is essential, pastoral visitation prompts to it and affords the opportunity. If in order to the proper dispensation of the Word, familiarity with the spiritual state of the flock is necessary, and it is necessary, pastoral visitation most certainly tends to secure that result.

The special aim of the enactment of the Assembly was to make the homes of the people the centres of religious culture, which would constitute them the nurseries of the Church. To this end three things were regarded as essential elements in family religion.

(1) Careful instruction in the Scriptures. That familiarity with the Word of God, which has always characterized our people, is largely due to the home-training. The reading of the Bible in course, accompanied with parental or pastoral instruction, and in connection with this, thorough teaching in the system of doctrine, as formulated in the Catechisms, gave to the youth trained in Covenanter homes an intelligent apprehension of revealed truth and an appreciation of its priceless value, which prepared them to lay down their lives for its sake. Let us settle it in our minds once for all that no work of the Sabbath School or Young People's Societies can ever take the place of this home-training, the Word of God.

(2) The careful observance of the Sabbath as a holy day.

It is the work of the Christian home to implant in the heart of childhood, both reverence and love for God's Day, so that children shall "call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy of the Lord honourable." This is the true solution of the Sabbath question. If the Sabbath can have its proper place in the affection of Christ's friends, it will have nothing to fear from the assaults of His foes. The family training which secures to the Book of God and the Day of God their proper place will make the home the House of God and the gate of Heaven.

(3) Morning and evening observance of family worship in all its parts; singing praise, reading Scriptures, and prayer.

"It is for a lamentation and shall be for a lamentation," that there is a tendency in many so-called Christian homes to omit family worship; or to observe it once a day; or to curtail it in some of its parts. The home in which this tendency prevails has ceased to be a genuine Covenanter home. It is a most significant fact that the singing of praise as a part of the family worship is confined almost exclusively to Psalm-singing families. It is also a matter of experience that when people cease to sing in the family worship, congregational singing soon becomes a thing of the past.

Another feature of Covenanter family worship is the reading of the Scriptures in course—the Old Testament, with the New, usually participated in by all the members of the family. The prayer is frequently conducted in the same way. The service is appropriately called "Family Prayers," when it consists of prayer alone. It is "Family Worship" when all the parts of worship are included.

Oh! when I think of the family exalted as a moral person to the rank and dignity of Saints and Angels, taken into covenant with God, entrusted with sacred ordinances of Divine worship peculiar to itself, covered with the wings' shade of the Angel of the Covenant, its members sealed under the sacrament of baptism into the bosom of God's family, surrounded with the atmosphere of the Bible in the daily reading



of the Scriptures, breathing the atmosphere of Heaven in the observance of the solemn holy days, its inner sanctuary a very temple of God, from whose golden altar the incense of a pure worship ascends in the morning and evening sacrifice, I bless God for Covenanter homes; and if I could reach the ears of our youth to-day, I would declare to them my solemn conviction that there is no more exalted privilege given to men on earth, none that affords a more favourable opportunity for attaining unto the life eternal, than to be born and brought up amid the environments and under the heavenly influences of a genuine Covenanter home.

From the consideration of family religion, it is a short and easy step to turn one's thoughts to the social prayer-meeting which is but the larger family gathering of the people of God.

The fellowship-meeting is founded in the nature of man as a social being, and in the nature of religion as a social principle. It is necessary to the exercise of those gifts and graces with which the children of God are endowed, and to the discharge of duties which they owe to one another. Time would fail to tell what God has wrought for His Church through this institution. In the New Testament it is called, "The Church in the House." During the struggle with Pagan persecutions, when faithful Shepherds were cut off, assemblies for social worship were held, from which the worshippers came forth able to endure "as seeing Him who is invisible."

The Waldenses were the people chosen of God to preserve the truth during the dark ages. The secret of their wonderful history is found in the fact that never did they forsake the assembling of themselves together for prayer and Christian fellowship. It is related how one lonely society which met in a secluded valley in the Alps, deeply concerned that deliverance might arise from some quarter, after prayerful consideration, sent out four of their number with instructions to travel north, south, east, and west, to inquire if any Churches could be found untainted by the corruption of Rome;

and after a year they returned with the intelligence that they had found none. Thus they waited "as weary watchers for the morn."

It is said that in Germany, Switzerland, and many other Continental States, those who embraced the truth sought fellowship together, and in many cases the elements of a living Church were collected and arranged before they had a living ministry. When Rome rose in her fury to crush the Reformers, it was the faithfulness of praying societies that made the Protestant cause invincible. It is said that Luther on one occasion addressed a company of dispirited Reformers who were brooding over recent disasters, declaring that he would never despair of Christ's cause, for that lately in passing through a village he had found a number of women and young persons assembled, praying for the work of the Reformation.

There is no more thrilling chapter in the history of the Church than that which records the story of the "Society People." In that dark hour, when their ministers had been driven away from their parishes, and many of the most faithful had won the crown of martyrdom; and in that hour of still deeper darkness, when the less faithful of them were beguiled into an acceptance of the ensnaring indulgences; and, when after the death of that noble servant and martyr of Jesus Christ, James Renwick, under the Revolution Settlement, the remaining ministers made defection, yielding to the allurements of an Erastian State, and the strict Covenanters were left sixteen years without a living ministry, then it was that God's faithful servants organized the societies, refused "to hear the instruction that causeth to err," maintained a faithful testimony for all the attainments of the second reformation, and waited and prayed until God gave them pastors according to His own heart. And those who under the fires of persecution were driven to the New World and scattered in the wilderness as sheep without a shepherd, true to the example and teaching of their fathers, gathered into fellowship meetings, and maintained their position until

the mother Church could provide a ministry. And when they in turn were abandoned by their ministers, who entered the union with the Associate Church, they followed still in the footsteps of the flock that had gone before them, refused to hold communion in the hearing of the Word with those who had abandoned their sworn obligations, and clung to one another and to Christ in the Societies. To God's blessing on this ordinance our Church owes its very existence in both the Old World and the New.

"In the year of Cameron's martyrdom," says the historian, "the societies framed their general correspondence and formed a simple but effective organization for mutual fellowship and edification for preserving their precious Gospel liberties, and for taking advantage of any event in public affairs for re-establishing the covenanted order in Church and State which had violently been taken away by despotic power and prelatic intolerance." To the Society people we are indebted for an honourable distinction in the sisterhood of the churches.

I have intimated that the Covenanter home is a distinctive type among Christian homes. I affirm the same of the Covenanter prayer-meeting. It is the correlate of the Covenanter home. If I am asked to point out some prominent distinctive feature of the Covenanter prayer-meeting, I will name this: its independence of the ministry.

There are no people in the world that honour their ministers more than do the Covenanters, nor are there any people more independent of their ministers' services. In many Churches the prayer-meeting depends for its existence on the presence of the pastor. When he is absent it dies. It is not so among us. The prayer-meeting belongs to the people. The minister takes his place as one of the brethren. He presides when it is his turn. The meeting goes forward in his absence the same as when he is present. This characteristic is a noble one. It has been stamped upon the Covenanter prayer-meeting by its history. It testifies to the nobility of our people, who have this independence of the ministerial order because



they themselves have been made "kings and priests unto God." It is not to be supposed that the descendants of a people who, when they were deprived of their ministers by tyranny, or were abandoned by them through defection, kept up their distinctive organization and maintained unimpaired the doctrine and discipline of the Church for long years without a ministry, will permit their prayer-meeting to fail because the pastor is out of town for the evening.

In closing, let me call upon you to emulate the affection of the martyrs who so devotedly loved these praying assemblies. James Renwick declared that he had not fully known what the gracious presence of God with His people meant till he joined the fellowship of the persecuted remnant. From Holland he sent to the Societies this touching message: "My longings and earnest desires to be in that land and with the pleasant remnant are very great. I cannot tell what may be in it; but I hope that either the Lord has some great work to work, or else is minded to call for a testimony at my hand. If He give me frame and furniture I desire to welcome either of them."

Noble words! They recall that ancient seal which had for its symbol an ox standing between a plough and an altar, and underneath the legend: "Ready for either." So Renwick wrote: "I desire to welcome either of them." Work or martyrdom! God intended him for both—work first, then martyrdom. First the plough, then the altar. And when all earthly things were fading from his view, and the glories of eternity were opening to his enraptured vision, the remembrance of those hallowed assemblies rose before his mind, and he exclaimed: "Farewell, sweet Societies!"

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in the day when I make up My jewels: and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son

that serveth him. Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not." (Mal. iii. 16-18.)

Rev. R. J. Dodds, Missionary, Mersine, Turkey: The papers read have dealt with matters of the greatest moment to the spirituality of the whole Covenanting Church. Personal religion is necessary in order to any proper testimony to the truth. Only this can bear the trials to which Christians are exposed. If all her members be really religious—if they have the spirit of our Saviour—the Covenanter Church has nothing to fear. A genuine religion in the heart will impel to religion in the family. Christ in the hearts of the members of a family will soon issue in the "Church in the House."

Mr. John McDonald, Glasgow: Personal religion, personal union to Christ, is of the utmost importance. Those who had the advantage of godly parents, and a Scriptural education, had much to be thankful for. The value of such blessings could not be overestimated. But while this was so, we should bear in mind that, however excellent the education of the family, more was required. Nicodemus, we have reason to believe, was well brought up, yet he wanted one thing—a want of which he himself had no conception, but yet a want without which all else went for nothing. I have been connected with the Reformed Presbyterian Church for more than half-a-century, and in the course of that time I have seen many changes. I have known many who had been well brought up—ministers too, as well as others, men who had made a good confession before many witnesses—turn their backs on the Church of their fathers, and desert both the Church and her principles. It does not belong to me to pronounce on these men—to their own Master they stand or fall; but, while I make no pronouncement, I have the conviction that with greater consecration of self and personal godliness, they would not have adandoned so readily their own Covenant