

# OUR BANNER.

Vol. XI.

JANUARY, 1884.

No 1.

## *FIFTY YEARS OF COVENANTER HISTORY.*

AN HISTORICAL DISCOURSE ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RE-ORGANIZATION OF THE FIRST REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA, PA.\*

BY THE PASTOR, REV. T. P. STEVENSON.

TEXT: "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts."—Ps. cxlv. 4.

These words are not only a prediction, but a command. They declare God's will that each generation shall instruct the next concerning his being, his perfections and his works. This principle rules in many other departments of human life as well as in religion. About three times in a century the accumulated wealth of the world, its governments and all social institutions, its schools and literature, its stately edifices, its storied monuments, its cherished archives, are transferred to the care and possession of other hands. Every generation stands, therefore, as a mediator between the generation past and that which is to come, and its office is to receive, to improve, and to transmit to its successor, the accumulated results of all the past labors and achievements of the human race, like a well-tilled farm which descends from father to son, and increases in value and beauty through successive generations.

Among the treasures thus to be preserved and handed down, unspeakably the most important is the knowledge of the true religion. If no provision had been made for the transmission of this trust, the knowledge of God and of the way of life would die with those who possess it, and would require to be revealed anew to each generation. But God never repeats his revelations. Successive revelations, indeed, there have been, but each was the complement, not the repetition, of those which went before, and each one, once made, was to suffice forever. The law was given at Sinai for all humanity through all

\*The Second and Third congregations, Philadelphia, united with the First in the services of this occasion.

the slave all written, it would fill volumes rather than a brief essay for a portion of an evening. But the record is on high and eternity will reveal it. And "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," will be pronounced in the presence of an assembled world, from His great white throne, by the Judge of all.

---

*THE CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES OF CIVIL  
GOVERNMENT.\**

BY THE REV. DAVID M'ALLISTER, BEAVER FALLS, PA.

A common way of estimating the efficiency of a congregation or a church is by the increase of its members. This is by no means to be disregarded. But it is not the sole test, nor is it always, taken by itself, a true one. Numbers are not of themselves an element of strength. They may be an element of weakness. A better test of the efficiency of any body of the followers of Christ is their measure of steadfastness to the great principles of divine truth.

The church is a supernatural institution, given in God's grace to our fallen race, as a remedial agency to counteract and overcome the evils wrought by the fall. Its work is, therefore, not only to save the souls of individuals, but to deliver the natural institutions of the family and the state from the curse brought upon them by sin. When true to her mission in the world, the church brings God's truth to bear upon civil society, as well as upon individual consciences. The state, in its own sphere, and according to its own nature, needs enlightenment and salvation from the effects of the fall, and the church is God's agency for this remedial work.

It seems peculiarly fitting to call to mind this latter test of the efficiency of a church or congregation in connection with these commemorative services. Some of you who have grown old in the membership of this particular congregation may have been disposed to question the results of your life's work. You may possibly feel somewhat disappointed as you count the names on your roll after fifty years of self-sacrificing labor. And some of you who are younger, full of energy, and eager to accomplish much for the Master, may be tempted to doubt the efficiency of congregational and church life, where only two or three hundred are enrolled in a city like this, not a few of whose congregations count up a thousand or more. But let me just here remind you of the influence of this congregation on behalf of each of the great public movements to which your attention

---

\* Abstract of an Address by the Rev. D. McAllister, November 21, 1883, at the Semi-Centennial celebration of the First Reformed Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia.

has been called by preceding speakers. You have set forth these high aims of your congregational life in these appropriate floral decorations above the pulpit. And circling round the lines of effort for "Temperance," "Foreign Missions," and "Freedom for the Slave," and comprehending them all, is the motto, an inscription meant for the banner of the Lord, and an inspiration to his loyal followers—"Christ the King of Nations." The congregation that has caught the spirit of this testimony to the Lord Jesus, and that has kept this truth before the nation for fifty years, has done something worthy of commemoration.

It would be out of place in a service like the present, to enter upon a general discussion of the Christian principles of civil government, or even to attempt a full statement of them. Let me limit myself, in this retrospect of a half century, to a brief presentation of the progress of the cause of Christian civil government in our own land within that period.

*I. The Christian idea of the nation has become definite and clear.* Going back to the date of the re-organization of this congregation we meet with the denial of the true nationality and sovereignty of the United States. The division of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1833, which made necessary your re-organization, was to no small extent the result of want of clear thinking on this principle of civil government. It was held by men of high position and influence among those who broke off from the band of faithful witnesses for Christ as King of kings, that the individual states of the American Union were the civil beings specially concerned with God and his law, and that the want of moral and religious character in the Federal Constitution and government, did not give ground of separation from the conduct of governmental affairs. The same doctrine ripened in the nation itself into the political heresy of state sovereignty, and led to the war of the Rebellion. The clear, unwavering testimony of this congregation, and the denomination with which it is connected, has been and is, that the collective being, the United States, is the nation, the sovereign political body, a true moral person, clothed with authority and responsible to God. The conflicts of the last quarter century especially have cleared away the mists. The social compact theory of the origin of the nation has been exploded in our struggle with state rights. And though the nation has not yet been brought to acknowledge that the nation is the creature of God, owing duty to him and his Christ, and that civil government is God's ordinance, and the civil magistrate God's minister, yet we have made marked and encouraging progress toward that consummation.

*II. No inconsiderable attainment has been made in the presentation and inculcation of the principles of national religion.* The nation has duties in reference to the religion of the subjects of its government. It is bound to secure their religious liberty and rights.

But being a creature of God and in direct relations with him, it is no less a religious being than the individual man or woman. Hence it has its own duties to God to perform. It must not only enact laws for the maintenance of such public order as will give opportunity for citizens and subjects to attend unhindered to their religious duties, but it is under obligation to recognize its relations and perform its own duties to God and his Christ. It needs a Sabbath for itself. It needs forgiveness of sins. It needs the guidance of the divine law. It owes worship to the God of nations, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. These truths, though by no means as yet generally accepted, have made progress in our land, and this congregation has had a conspicuous part in the accomplishment of what has been done.

*III. The claims of God's Word as a standard of national morals have been more widely maintained and acknowledged.* We are learning that when men act in a collective capacity, and individual opinions and wills clash, there is imperative need of a final and authoritative standard of appeal. In our national life, moral questions have been coming to the front. The appeal was made to God's Word as law for nations in the Anti-Slavery conflict. The same is true to-day in the Temperance conflict, and in the struggle with polygamy and violations of the divine law of marriage and divorce. The nation is learning that its legitimate and necessary sphere transcends the range of mere economies, in which expediency may be the rule. It must give solemn decisions in the realm of immutable morals, and here it must for itself make the application of a standard which carries with it the sanctions of divine authority—the only authority that can reach the conscience.

*IV. The appropriate legal place for the nation's acknowledgment of its relations to God and his law is better understood than ever before.* The nature of the fundamental law of the land, as a compact between the nation and its agent, the government, has been a subject of peculiarly careful study. This organic law gives character to the government, and for this character the nation is responsible. This law lays down the principles in accordance with which the officers are to be chosen and the whole machinery of government put and kept in motion. Here, then, is the appropriate place for the nation's acknowledgment of its own relations to God, and for the explicit binding of the government to the moral principles of national life. In no department of the whole subject of civil government has greater progress been made, particularly during the last twenty years, than in this.

*V. The Christian principles of civil government, as applied to the members of the political society, have become better understood.* The political body that accepts the compact of government is to be distinguished both from the wider and more comprehensive body of citizens in our land that make the nation, on the one hand, and from

the narrower body, on the other hand, that form the government. In entering into the field of political action as a member of the governing society, the citizen is bound by the compact agreed upon. As an individual, therefore, he must inquire into the moral character of this compact. Here is where our fathers planted themselves when the Constitution of the United States was adopted. To this principle, you as a congregation, renewed your adherence fifty years ago. The immorality of human bondage was upheld by the compact of our fundamental law, and to this we could not become parties. As interpreted by the highest judicial authorities, both such as are favorable and such as are unfavorable to Christianity, the Constitution of the United States is an agreement to have no reference to the religion of Christ in national affairs. The duty of Christian men is clear. They cannot bind themselves by a compact that rules out an appeal to the authority of Christ the King of nations. The only consistent course that remains open is that of political dissent. The grounds and the practical power of this position were never so manifest as they are to-day. What surpassing folly would it be for any among your own youth or throughout the church to abandon that position which has given us our chief power for the promotion of the nation's highest welfare.

No words that may here be spoken can do full justice to the labors of the former and the present pastor of this congregation in the exposition, defence, and dissemination of these Christian principles of civil government. With rare power of clear, broad, and comprehensive statement, and with unanswerable argument, by voice from the pulpit and the platform, and by the press, they have unflinchingly pressed the claims of God, his Christ, and the Bible upon this land. And back of these pastors has been the congregation, whose self-sacrifice, cordial and generous support have upheld and strengthened these servants of Christ in their work. Members of a congregation may sometimes feel that in their quiet place, with no opportunity of addressing the public, and perhaps no training for such work, their influence is of no account. But who can estimate what this congregation, including the most humble and unknown of its members, has accomplished in the past half century? The work of pastors and of people has been one, and neither the public laborer nor the humblest lay member that gave sympathy and aid by attention to congregational duties, shall fail of the reward.

---