

THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW.

VOL. XII.—No. I.

APRIL, MDCCCLIX.

ARTICLE I.

THE DEACONSHIP.*

The life of the Church, like every other kind of life, is perpetuated and invigorated by its own activities. The mode in which these activities are exercised constitutes its organization. This, of course, takes its form from the nature of its life, just as the peculiar form of each species of plant and animal is fixed by the nature and functions of its life; and the perfection of that form consists in its giving the fullest and freest exercise to those functions. For though the form springs from the life, that life may not be healthy; or its early activities may be prevented by some external obstructions from working out their appropriate effects, in which case the form that results must necessarily be defective. So a tree or an animal may, in its growth, be so obstructed in its development as to produce serious deformity, which may afterwards greatly interfere with the vigorous working of its life. While,

* This article was transmitted to us by vote of the Synod of Virginia, and is published at their request. It was read before that body by the author, Rev. James B. Ramsay of Lynchburg.—Eds. S. P. R.

ARTICLE II.

NATIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Christianity prescribes for citizenship, as well as for domestic or industrial life, and its ethics should be taught in the former department as freely as in either of the latter. To convert the pulpit into an instrument of political agitation is most certainly to invade its sacredness; and they who do so, seldom fail to reap in disappointment the fruits of their indiscretion. But to make it the means of instructing Christians in the Christianity of their political relations, is simply to accomplish one of the ends for which it was intended. The same may be said of the religious press. The connection between true religion and sound politics is very intimate. The well-being of the one is the well-being of the other; the corruption of the one is the corruption of the other; the decay or the revival of the one is the decay or the revival of the other; and it is therefore proper that the public mind, in its political aspirations, should be brought under the influence of those principles which alone can rectify political opinion.

The word *politics* suggests the idea of a civil *community*; and a civil community suggests the idea of a civil *government*, without which, in one form or another, no civil community can possibly subsist. Let us then inquire, first, what is the *design* of civil government? It is very obvious that government, as it now exists among men, was never intended for innocent beings; for, if innocence, with the virtues which necessarily spring from it, were still unimpaired, what would be the use of prison-houses, with their bolts and bars, and all that array of coercive force, without which the governments of the earth are absolutely things of nought? Nay, what the use of locks and keys, and all the other apparatus of defence, by which we try to secure our dwellings from external violence? In a state of innocence, these things would be worse than superfluous. There can be no doubt, that even innocent men, living together in this world, would have required

organization; but their organization would have been suited to their innocence, and altogether a different thing from that which we now behold. These things must be taken into account if we are to form a just conception of civil government as we have it; and they go farther to modify our views of it than at first sight we are apt to suppose. They tell us that such a government is not essential to our social existence, but superinduced upon it to meet a contingency; that it was made, not for the orderly, but for the disorderly; not for the innocent, but for the guilty; not for the sinless, but for the depraved. And hence its symbol is the sword—the instrument of death—an instrument to be wielded, as the defence of the peaceable from the violence of the unruly may, in righteousness, require.

If this be the *nature* of civil government, it will aid us not a little in perceiving its *design*. That design is obviously to mitigate the social miseries of man; to lay restraints upon social outrage; to secure to the industrious and well disposed, the quiet possession of their life and property, and to afford, at least, some degree of peaceful opportunity for the diffusion of that restorative, by which alone the apostate children of men can be brought back to the God that made them. This is the Scriptural account of the matter; it is expressly written, “the powers that be are ordained of God.” The civil ruler “is the minister of God to thee for good;” and “whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.”

Now, although these passages do not teach that God has set his seal to any one *form* of government; yet they do teach, that civil government (whether in heathen or Christian lands, and whether they be good or bad, perfect or imperfect men by whom it is administered), is not a mere invention of man, but a Divine institution; and that, being so, it ought to be administered on the one hand, and obeyed on the other, in accordance with those laws of eternal righteousness which God has given to regulate our individual and social deportment.

These hints on the design of civil government may, in some measure, prepare us for looking at the question, what is required for the accomplishment of this design?

And here, prior to the question, what kind of government is in itself the best, there is another question, namely—what kind of government is best suited to this or that community? For the government which would prove a blessing to one community might prove no blessing to another; and this, not because it is bad in itself, but because by them it cannot be appreciated. Hence the reason why God has neither prescribed any one form of government, nor any one measure of stringency, or relaxation, to be uniformly adhered to. These are things which the purest patriotism is compelled to modify according to circumstances; and were it to refuse to be schooled by circumstances, it would soon find itself to be utterly helpless. Hence the manifest folly of setting up a claim of natural right to this or that form of government, or to this or that amount of influence and control over the measures of an existing government. That communities of men have rights in relation to these things is beyond all question, and rights, too, which are very sacred; but it is absurd to call them *natural*. For civil government itself, which, as we have seen, is just the government of the sword, that is, of law, sustained by inviolable penalties, has not its seat in the constitution of our nature. It belongs not to man as a *human being*, but is made for man as a *fallen being*, whose depravity is so aggressive, that he cannot live in groups or communities, except under a system of positive and penal authority. Man, in his original constitution, is essentially a moral agent. The moral principle lies deeply imbedded in his nature. You are sure, therefore, to find some form of this moral nature wherever human beings are to be found. It is *moral* obliquity, and not physical disability, therefore, that entails upon man his manifold social and political miseries. And hence without the moral sedative of a regenerated nature, man can never have rest, whether personal, domestic, civic or national, whatever may be the form of government under which he exists; while *with this* he may enjoy quietness, contentment and peace, under any form of government. As depravity is the bane of human happiness, the antidote, and the only antidote, is the power of true religion, working in the

hearts of individuals, and so leavening the population as to dispose them to recognize, *first*, the claims of the great Creator, and *then* the claims of their fellow creatures. There is no room for debating here, even among political men, who have patience to examine the interior of our nature. No, it is a settled point—a point established by all experience—that where there is no piety to God, there can be no abiding principle of justice or kindness to man. For although *individuals* may be found who, in the conventional sense, do justice and practice kindness, without being devout, yet *nations* of men have always been found to be just and kind only in so far as they were actuated by the fear of the Lord. But, in order to serve its purpose in politics, the disposition to social equity which piety generates and sustains, must be in the high as well as in the low, and in the low as well as in the high; for, where there is not a *moral* harmony between rulers and citizens, *political* harmony is out of the question. “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of the Lord;” but he that is *ruled* among men must also be just, obeying in the fear of the Lord. And the most plausible of all the pretexts a ruler can have for short-coming in his duty to those over whom he rules, is just the fact, when fact it is, that they are coming short in their duty to the laws as administered by him.

So much, then, for the pre-requisite; and let us now inquire where this pre-requisite is to be found? It is not to be found in fallen humanity, although human nature, as the creature of God, ought to be its native home. Nor is it to be found in the self-directed researches of moralists; for although they have generally hit upon sound principles, and wrought these principles into salutary precepts, yet their precepts are but form without substance, or body without soul. Nor is it to be found in the contrivances of statesmen, for their contrivances, with few exceptions, are but the produce of a shifting expediency; or, it may be, of nefarious design. In short, it is nowhere to be found but in the religion of the Bible—in the religion of Christ—in the Gospel, and in the religion of the Bible taken up, as God has been pleased to lay it down—not

merely as a system of dogmas, or of dry and rigid institutes, compacted into national statute, and thus turned into a tool of State-craft; but as an instrument of tuition, of sovereign tuition, of internal tuition, of efficacious tuition, coming from heaven, and wrought by heaven into the hearts and lives of men. This is the thing wanted, and the only thing wanted to give health to the political constitution, by first giving health to the moral constitution. This is the grand rectifier of man; first of man as an individual, and then of man in all the relations which bind him to his fellow-man; in his domestic relations, in his relation of neighborhood, in his business relations, in his civic relations, and in his relation to the country, large or small, to which, in providence, he happens to belong. Just let a man be a Christian, a genuine Christian, a man imbued with the spirit of Jesus Christ, and if he be a statesman, he will be a righteous statesman; if he be a judge, he will be a righteous judge; and if he be no more than a private citizen, he will fill his place as a righteous citizen.

But let it never be forgotten that if Christianity is the grand requisite in civil government,—its salt, its leaven, its cement, its police in the heart, and its best defence,—it must be pure, and it must be free.

1. It must be *pure*. The religion of Jesus Christ flows directly from heaven. It is a well of living water, which God has opened for dying men. And if it is to prove medicinal to men in their hearts, or in their families, in their cities, or in their nations, it must be drawn from its own fountain, and it must be drunk as it is drawn. This is a very obvious rule. It is a thing self-evident. If we wish a medicine to cure our bodies, we must take it as it is. And if we wish Christianity to cure our minds, individual or collective, we must take it as it is. There is, however, a fact which meets us here, and which in the view of certain thinkers goes far to negative the Christian remedy, although, in reality, it leaves the specific and incomparable efficacy of this remedy altogether unaffected. What is that fact? It is that, with few exceptions, civil government has wrought as ill, or nearly as ill, under Christianity as under heathenism. To some extent this is not

to be denied. History declares it. And how is this fact to be accounted for? On a very plain principle. The medicine is marred by poisonous admixture, or it is, to a very partial extent, administered at all. Its name remains, but its specific virtue has been extracted. The Christianity of European and other nominally Christian countries has been corrupted; corrupted in its doctrines, in its precepts, in its spirit, in its institutes and administrations; and in this way has it been made the palladium of the very evils, social and political, it was sent from heaven to mitigate or purge away. The way in which this has been brought about is easily described. The corrupting process, although varied in its workings, yet steadily converged towards one result—the interjecting, namely, of a human authority between the conscience and its only Lord; and this point being once secured, political bondage or political corruption followed by a smooth and easy course.

These are points which are well understood by the abettors of the great Oriental and Romish corruptions of Christianity, and the kings who are in league with them. They have corrupted “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God,” and they nurse its corruptions, because they know full well that it is not the thing itself, but these same corruptions hallowed by its name, which can at all be made to favor their designs, or to sustain their despotic tyranny. With them it is no secret that the religion of Jesus Christ, taken just as it lies in its own record, and infused into the hearts of the high and the low, is just as unmistakably and forever the foe of oppression on the one hand, as it is of anarchy and atheistic agrarianism on the other. The spirit of that religion is opposed alike to the licentiousness of rule and the licentiousness of liberty; and so we find that, in those countries where, in matters of religion, the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is most in the ascendant, the machinery of civil government is always found to work the most smoothly, the most equably, and the most effectively for the commonweal.

2. But this is not all: Christianity must be *free* as well as uncorrupted, in order to be the rectifier of national rule and the pillar and ground of civil and religious liberty; and by free, we

mean delivered from the pay and patronage of governments. It is to this pay and patronage chiefly, although not exclusively, that the corruption already referred to is to be traced, and a glance at its origin may help us to see this. At first men in power attempted to drive Christianity from the earth, because they saw that its progress would put an end to their misrule. But soon finding that the sword could not slay it, they altered their tactics, and took it into favor, luring its ministers into their counsels, and spreading for them the banquet of royal munificence. And why did they resort to so new an expedient? Not that they might modify their politics to suit the purity of the adopted faith; but that they might modify the adopted faith to suit the impurity of their politics. That such was the aim is but too evident, and that it was the result is absolutely certain. In this way Christians were taught to believe their religion has no intrinsic power either to sustain or diffuse itself, and that it must either submit to be the pensioner of princes, or sink into decay. But if their pensioner, then their servant—and a trusty servant the corrupted form of Christianity has been—winking at their vices, palliating their crimes, helping them over many a difficulty, and never failing to aid their devisings, whether in Popish or in partially Protestant countries, as wicked occasion happened to require.

But this servitude is not the place for the religion of the New Testament; and till it is entirely set free, you need never expect it to operate either as a liberator, an enlightener, or as a purifier of civil government. No! Christianity cannot be a servant or a vassal. Christianity is, and must be, a sovereign potentate, as far above the mandate of a prince as above the cavil of his meanest subject, who blasphemously takes its name into polluted lips. It is descended from heaven, and wherever you find it, the majesty of heaven is there. If it comes in heaven's own name, teaching the humble artizan to "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty," it comes speaking in the same tone, and propounding the same law to the Ruler who rules over him. This is its commission—its high commission. And that it may execute this commis-

sion without restraint or qualification—that the voice which it lifts up may be as equal as it is commanding, it must be left to traverse the earth without the leading-strings of secular law, power or patronage.

But, let these two things be found together—its purity and its freedom—and you have it as a moral certainty that, in proportion as Christianity makes its way—internal and hearty way, through any nation under heaven—there is an end to misrule, and there is the full development of civil and religious liberty. It must be so, because it is impossible for men to embrace Christianity, or to make it their own, in its spirit and in its power, and yet continue to trample upon one another in any of the relations of social life—whether those relations be the various, domestic and private relations which God has established in his providence amongst men, of husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant—or whether they be those public relations which God in his providence has likewise established amongst men, of magistrates and citizens, or of kings and subjects. Every one who has paid the slightest attention to the New Testament, must know that Christianity is, by the whole life and teachings of its Divine author, a religion of brotherly love, and that it not only enjoins this virtue, but selects it and sets it on high as the grand test of character among its disciples. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “Do ye unto others as ye would that they should do unto you.” “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: he that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” “If a man shall say I love God, and loveth not his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”

And what is brotherly love? It is, in redundancy, the very thing needed for the life and the liberty of any community. It is enough, and more than enough, to secure the rectitude of all political administration. It is social beneficence built upon social equity. And be it observed, that the Christian system not only gives the precept of brotherly love, but it gives the heart which embraces the precept. It is not a system of tuition

merely, but a system of infusion, giving vitality to its precepts, and working them out to their practical results in all who are under its power. Men may pervert the meaning of names—and no name was ever perverted so much as the name Christian—but they cannot change the nature of things; and it is in the nature of the wondrous thing, whose specific name is Christianity, that if you diffuse it through the earth, then “judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field, and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.”

It was amidst the influences of a pure and free Christianity, were born and cradled our Colonial Independence, and the institutions to which it led. Our patriot forefathers were inspired by high and lofty principles, such as a pure and free Christianity always nurtures. When the Declaration of Independence was adopted, there was such a depth of principle required among those who signed it, as made them ready to seal their attachment to it with their blood. John Hancock supposed that his conspicuous name might make him distinguished among those who should perish on the scaffold; and, in full view of such a possible result, he and they pledged to each other their “lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.” The sentiments of all those men are well known, and the language eloquently attributed to one of them, John Adams, will express their feelings of patriotism founded on principle. “I see, I see clearly through this day’s business. You and I, indeed, may rue it. We may not live to the time when this Declaration shall be made good. We may die; die, colonists; die, slaves; die it may be ignominiously on the scaffold. Be it so—be it so. If it be the pleasure of Heaven that my country shall require the poor offerings of my life, the victim shall be ready at the appointed hour of sacrifice, come when that hour may. But, whatever may be our fate, be assured, be assured, that this Declaration will stand. It may cost treasure, and it may cost blood, but it will stand, and it will richly compensate us for both. Through the thick gloom of the present, I see the brightness of the future, as the sun in heaven. My judgment approves of this

measure, and my whole heart is in it. All that I have, and all that I hope in this life, and all that I am, I am ready here to stake on it; and, live or die, survive or perish, I am for the Declaration."

But, as it was in the spirit of a pure and free Christianity our free institutions were born and cradled, so is it by this, and this alone, they can be preserved and perpetuated. Eternal vigilance in defence of all civil and constitutional rights, is the only price with which liberty can be bought; and that vigilance itself can only be generated and sustained by Christian principle generating Christian character, and sustaining Christian fortitude and devotion to the public good.

The Gospel has already *wrought a great change* in the condition of the world; and when its influence shall be universal, all nations will be made virtuous and blessed. The power of the Christian religion, it is well known, has changed many of the evil customs of the world. It has abolished many cruel superstitions, and banished many enormous crimes; it has cast down the idols from their pedestals, and purified the temple of worship; it has mitigated the ferocity of war; it has made provision for the poor, and established hospitals for the sick; it has promoted civilization, refinement, learning, charity, and every thing that tends to enlarge the mind and ennoble the character.

Nor is there any other hope for the world. God is wiser than man. Infinite benevolence and wisdom have devised and disclosed the way of human improvement. The rational offspring of God must be assimilated to their Creator. Intelligent and moral agents must be enlightened by the truth, and persuaded to choose the right and to practice holiness. The perfect laws of the universe must be obeyed, or happiness will take its flight from the earth. Other hopes will fail. The fine-woven theories of perfectibility, not associated with religion, will prove but webs of gossamer. Even in our own country, the boasted intelligence of the people, if unallied to goodness, will be found inadequate to the security of the public welfare. If we stand before God as his enemies, with the stain of national crimes unavenged and tolerated, he will punish us. We shall have, like other nations, our retribution upon the earth. Nor are

the instruments of punishment difficult to be found. The angel of the pestilence may breathe upon us. The tempests may spread desolation. Our fields may be reddened with blood. Should we be ripe for ruin, God cannot fail to find instruments for our destruction.

No; it is not by the wisdom of statesmen and legislators; it is not by civil institutions, by the checks and balances of the powers of government, by laws and courts, by armies and navies, that the peace, and order, and happiness of mankind can be secured, and crime and suffering banished from the world. By these the flame may be smothered for a while, but it will again burst out. These expedients have been tried, and what has been the result? The history of mankind is but the history of crime and misery. It is the history of cruel superstitions and debasing idolatries. It is the history of pride, envy, malignity, and ferocious ambition. It is the history of perpetual wars, by which fields have been ravaged, cities plundered and burnt, and countless millions of infuriated men swept from the earth. It is the history of crimes and iniquities of every hue; of inhuman oppressions and fiend-like tortures; of secret assassinations, and of more open and what are called honorable murders; of frauds, thefts and robberies; of secret slanders, bitter revilings, and savage contests; of headlong gaming, besotting intemperance, profligate indulgence, and heaven-daring blasphemy. Make a true survey of the past history and the present condition of mankind, including our own favored country, and then say, whether there is any remedy for the miseries of the world but in the pure gospel of the Son of God?

It may be inferred from these considerations, that we are bound by every principle of patriotism, as well as of piety, to assist, to the utmost of our power and ability, to spread a pure Gospel through the length and breadth of our land.

Secure this and we secure every thing. And failing to secure this, all other reliances are vain. This is the true and only panacea for all social and moral ills—the only palladium of all social and political blessings—and the only guarantee for honesty, industry and prosperity. So thought that eminent statesman and patriot, Patrick Henry, who left in his will the

following passage:—"I have now disposed of all my property to my family; there is one thing more I wish I could give them, and that is the Christian religion. If they had that, and I had not given them one shilling, they would be rich; and if they have not that, and I had given them all the world, they would be poor."

ARTICLE III.

A DISCUSSION OF SOME OF THE CHANGES PROPOSED
BY THE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN
THEIR REVISED BOOK OF DISCIPLINE.*

The General Assembly of 1857 appointed Drs. Thornwell, James Hoge, R. J. Breckinridge, E. P. Swift, A. T. McGill and Charles Hodge, with Judges Sharswood, Allen and Leavitt, a Committee to revise the Book of Discipline. This Committee met in Philadelphia in August, 1858, Messrs. Leavitt and Allen being absent, and performed their task, devoting to it *four or five days'* labor. The result has for some months been published to the churches in the newspapers; and the time is fast approaching when the Presbyteries will appoint the Commissioners to that Assembly which must pass upon the proposed changes. Meantime they have evoked little discussion, and that of a fragmentary character; with the exception of an article defending the most of the proposed amendments, in the October number of the Princeton Review. This essay seems purposely to reveal its author as

* Notwithstanding the relations of this Review to the Chairman of the Assembly's Committee, and also Draughtsman of their Report; and notwithstanding our entire concurrence in the amendments they have proposed, with perhaps a single exception, we have, with his hearty and cordial consent, cheerfully given place to this article: being moved thereto, both by our respect for the author, by our love for free discussion, and by our sense of the great importance of the subject discussed.—EDS. S. P. REVIEW.