

The Covenanter Witness



A JOURNAL DEVOTED TO EXALTING CHRIST, THE SAVIOUR KING

Published Weekly by the Reformed Presbyterian Church

Editorial Office: 922 Clay Street, Topeka, Kansas

VOLUME XII

WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 1934

NUMBER 19

A Thought for Each Day

Sabbath, May 20. I have trusted in thy mercy: my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation! Psalm 13:5.

O impatient ones, did the leaves say nothing to you as they murmured today? They were not fashioned this spring, but months ago, and the summer will fashion others for another year. At the bottom of every leaf stem is a cradle, and in it is an infant germ. The winds will rock it, and the birds will sing to it all summer long, and next season it will unfold. So God is working for you and carrying forward to the perfect development all the processes of your lives!—Henry Ward Beecher.

Monday, May 21. There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Proverbs 14:12.

Sin loses nothing of its virulence by losing its grossness. When truth and righteousness are cunningly blended with error we may be easily deceived.—W. L. Watkinson.



Street scene, wagon load of bandits on their way to execution.

EDITORIAL HIS WAY THE WORLD'S UNSUNG SONGS

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THE COVENANT OF 1871 AND THE PROPOSED NEW FORM

By Rev. W. J. Coleman, D. D.

17 E High St
New Concord Ohio

first part of the sermon.

"We have engaged to go forth by the footsteps of the flock in adhering to the covenants of our fathers, and following a noble cloud of witnesses in bearing testimony for all truth, and against all the evils that exist in the corrupt constitutions of churches and nations.

"The Church of Christ is a covenant society, founded in the covenant of grace, which is her constitution, and in which she is united to her glorious Head in an indissoluble bond of union. All the immunities and blessings with which she is endowed, are secured to her by the charter of this covenant. As every individual believer, by faith enters into covenant with God by a solemn recognition of the covenant of grace, in which she avouches the Lord to be her God, and promises in all things to be subject to him as her covenant Head. When compacts are formed between individuals, binding to the performances of mutual offices, and not limited in their provisions, they continue in force as long as the lives of the parties last. Christ, who is made after the power of an endless life, is one party; and the Church, whose existence is continued from her birth in the garden of Eden to the end of time, is the other party. As she binds herself to obey the laws of her Lord, and as these are perpetually obligatory on all her members, from generation to generation, the moral obligation of the covenant into which the Church enters, must always remain unimpaired.

"Our Fathers in the British Isles, to say nothing of many continental reformers, did, both ecclesiastically and nationally, lift up their hand and swear to the Lord of Hosts their oaths of allegiance. Scotland did so in her national covenant, in which the civil rulers and all ranks of citizens, the courts of Christ's house, the officers of the sanctuary, and the people bound themselves by the oath of God to adhere to all the attainments which had been made by the Church, in her progressive testimony, relative both to the doctrines of the Gospel and to the principles of ecclesiastical order. The three kingdoms did so in the Solemn League and Covenant, in which Scotland, England, and Ireland—Church and State—plighted the faith of a great and reformed empire, to serve the Lord God of Israel, as their own God, in the maintenance of the truth and in obedience to his laws.

"If the principles of covenanting, which we have exhibited in few words, are true, then the whole Church in Great Britain, and all the Churches descended from them—all the branches, which have sprung from the good olive tree—to use a Scriptural metaphor, are bound by those national deeds. They were transactions agreeable to the Word of God, they were performed under the influence of the

Holy Ghost, and are recorded in heaven.

"Again we promise to follow the flock of Christ in bearing witness for all those truths to which our fathers have attained that we will not recede from a more particular testimony, to one more general and indefinite."

The following is taken from the second part of the sermon.

"The adversary rarely attacks intelligent professors, who are supposed to have some devout sense of the nature and obligation of their vows; otherwise than under some fair and liberal and even holy pretext. It is as an angel of light that he assails them.

"The pretense of greater light; knowledge is progressive. These vows, or parts of them, were formed and taken when we were not well-informed, and when we did not understand the nature of the things respecting which we vowed. This is the language of temptation.

"When the National Covenant of Scotland and the Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms were abandoned by the civil government of Britain, and by a great part of the church, the pretext was greater light. The Covenan-

ters were branded as unenlightened bigots, having a zeal not according to knowledge. All these truce-breakers cried out, it was an error—a great ecclesiastical and civil error. We may disregard and even burn these vows, for we have discovered that it was quite erroneous to swear such oaths of allegiance to Almighty God; to pledge ourselves to maintain the doctrines of the Confession of Faith.

"The British Covenanters were great and holy men, but they were in error—the martyrs were distinguished saints, but they were in error—I have attained, says the proud sciolist and the vain smatterer, to more light than they all. Those who framed our terms of communion, and established those relations which we sustain to the civil governments were wise and excellent men, but they were in error. We vowed at every sacrament to maintain and adhere to these terms, but we were in error.

"Against these subtle attacks of our enemy, the Apostle admonishes us—'That we be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried to and fro, with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.' Ephesians 4:14."

THE SYNOD OF 1882

By Rev. J. K. Robb, D. D.

(Who was present but who did not receive sufficient votes to become moderator in that year. Dr. Robb was made Moderator in Chicago, in the year 1916, thirty-four years later. The Editors.)

The meeting of Synod at New Concord, Ohio, in 1882, was the most unusual one ever attended by at least one person present. He was present merely as a spectator, and a rather youthful one at that, and his recollections of that meeting are not based so much on what was done as upon the general impressions made upon his youthful mind at the time. It would seem that he was more impressed by men than by measures. The retiring moderator was Dr. T. P. Stevenson, whom the writer then saw for the first time, and as a comparatively young man. The opening services were begun by singing the 67th Psalm, to the tune "Gerar," and for which the writer confesses a great fondness ever since. Rev. T. C. Sproull was the precentor. The writer heard for the first time a large company made up almost entirely of men, singing together. He has not forgotten the profound impression the singing of that Psalm made on him. Dr. Stevenson sang fervently as he stood before the audience, and at once it became an ambition with this youthful spectator to sing basso as did the fine-looking and dignified man in the pulpit, an ambition that, along with some others, has not been realized. The text was "Redeeming the Time," but all the writer recalls of the sermon was that

the preacher stressed the fact that in the original the text reads "Buying up the opportunity."

After the sermon the Court was constituted. Dr. D. B. Willson was Clerk, and Dr. R. M. Sommerville Assistant Clerk. Dr. Willson's eyes, a sort of blueish-gray, seemed to see everything, and it looked to the writer as if the elders who went up to the front to present their credentials were undergoing a very minute inspection on the part of the Clerk. Dr. Sommerville was no less striking in appearance, perhaps the most arresting single feature, physically speaking, being a great shock of reddish hair. Dr. David Gregg was chosen Moderator, a youthful-looking, closely-shaven man, perhaps the only member of the Court who did not wear a beard of some style, and with hair hanging almost to his shoulders. Even at this distant time, as one thinks of them, they were three as remarkable looking men, each representing a distinct type, as could have been chosen out of that assembly.

One cannot but contrast that meeting of Synod with later ones in the matter of dress and other matters having to do with the general appearance of the assembly as a whole. With the exception of the Moderator, (the writer cannot speak with authority about this) the members of that Synod were bearded men. A clean-shaven man in those days was a rarity. Having no beard rendered one conspicuous. Furthermore, most of the

members of the Synod of '82 wore frock coats (Prince Alberts). Black seemed to be the only color visible so far as clothes were concerned. And even with temperatures rising well up into the eighties, never a coat was shed. How much discomfort was borne by those men, perhaps the few still with us who were present at that meeting, might be able to testify. It is not only in very marked contrast to see members of Synod in our day doffing their coats when the heat begins to grow oppressive, but a very sensible thing as well.

Among the many names of men in the Synod of 1882, names that were household words, two had a special interest for that youthful spectator, the name of Dr. J. R. W. Sloane and that of Dr. A. M. Milligan, and he was eager to get a sight of these two great and good men. They sat side by side on a front seat, taking occasional part in discussions as they came up. It was at this meeting that Synod first took action on the question of voting on amendments, the occasion for this action being the fact that a vote was at the time pending in Iowa, on a temperance amendment to the state Constitution. Dr. Milligan seemed to favor the granting of this privilege to Covenanters living in Iowa, but with the proviso that their vote should be accompanied by some kind of statement that would make clear their attitude towards voting in general. Dr. Sloane at once arose and said in his most sonorous tones, "I sincerely hope this Synod will do no such absurd thing," and sat down, gave Dr. Milligan a resounding slap between the shoulders with his big hand, and then both men laughed, at which the writer wondered greatly.

The only pastor known to this youthful spectator of the Synod of 1882 up to that time, was Dr. H. P. McClurkin, for whom he had a most profound regard, not unmingled at times with what amounted almost to fear. It is not forgotten how he would walk the length of the west aisle of the New Concord church, and take his place in the pulpit. And as one thinks of it now, that air of solemnity was not lost on the congregation, for there was nothing of frivolity in evidence in that assembly on a Sabbath morning. More than the writer can testify to the vivid recollection of Dr. McClurkin, with his air of reverence, going into the pulpit. So it came to the writer as something of a shock when, on the afternoon of Synod Sabbath in 1882, Dr. James Kennedy preached, and with something of a smile on his face most of the time while delivering his sermon. His text is remembered, "I am the True Vine." But the writer was so engaged with the preacher's manner that he failed to absorb anything of the sermon itself. An elderly man was the preacher, tall and spare, and with an expression of gentle-

ness on his face. But as he went on with his sermon, at least one person present could not but wonder whether a man could smile so constantly, and at times so broadly, while preaching, and be altogether orthodox. Mr. McClurkin probably had never been known to do such a thing, and hence the question mark.

Of that company of able and consecrated men, only a very few remain after these fifty-one years. An examination of the Minutes of that Synod reveals that at the present time, but five names are on the roll of ministers in our church that were on that roll in 1882. The names are T. C. Sproull, William McFarland, J. F. Crozier, W. J. Coleman, and F. M. Foster. Of the one hundred and six names on the roll of Synod in 1882, but five still remain on it. The personnel of Synod has changed almost entirely in a period of time but little longer than the ordinary span of human life. "One generation passeth away, and another generation com-

eth." But with this solemn truth in mind, we must not forget that the Head of the Church does not change, that the Church's work remains the same, and that her ultimate triumph is as certain as it is that God lives and reigns. We are today laboring at the same great task that engaged the energies and strength of these men who half a century ago were bearing "the burden and heat of the day." Most of them have passed on to higher service, but others have taken the places left vacant by them, and the work itself has not lagged for a single moment. "God's program never falls behind time." This is the hope and inspiration of His people in whatever age they may be giving their service, that in His own time and in His own way, and through the instrumentality of those who are laborers together with Him, He is bringing His own purposes to their fulfillment. And thus we are assured that our labors are not in vain in the Lord.

THE COVENANT OF 1871 AND THE PROPOSED NEW FORM

By Rev. W. J. Coleman, D. D.

The Covenant of 1871 has in it one thousand and nineteen words and the proposed new form eight hundred and seventy-six. The Covenant of 1871 has sixty-five and five tenths per cent and the proposed new form seventy per cent words of one syllable.

As we expect children from eleven to fourteen years of age to take on themselves the vows taken for them by their parents in baptism, we need a covenant so simple, direct and clear that children can understand it. Such a form is not weak or puerile. Clearness of thought always tends to simplicity of statement.

As we renew the covenant every time we come to the communion table, it is fitting that the covenant be read as a part of the service of immediate preparation. The new form is short enough to admit of such use.

It has been my thought for years that it would be very desirable to have the covenant as the condition of membership and communion in the Covenanter Church. The Covenant of 1871 was too long and cumbersome for that purpose, but the new form might do. That arrangement would keep the covenant always to the front, instead of making it a document of reference. It would help to keep Covenanters in remembrance of their vows.

In some four points the Covenant of 1871 gave prominence to subjects that are not mentioned in the new form. These are Infidelity, Romanism, Presbyterianism and Church Union. Infidelity is denounced under the forms of Atheism, Pantheism, Naturalism, Spiritualism, Indifferentism and Formalism. Romanism

is denounced as Popery, the holding of false doctrine, hostility to liberty and to the right of the state to educate in morality and religion. A paragraph is given to the praise of Presbyterianism. Section four of the Covenant is given to a fine statement of the desirableness, basis and means of securing Church Union. These are covered in the new form by a declaration of the re-affirmation of the Covenant of 1871 in which are embodied the principles of the Covenants of our fathers.

On the other hand the new form contains a declaration of our position of some ten subjects, which are pressing questions of our times, and are not mentioned in the Covenant of 1871. These are: 1. A confession of sin which was a preliminary part of the Covenant of 1871, not often printed with it and seldom read. 2. A declaration of opposition to the traffic in alcohol and tobacco. 3. The recognition of Jesus Christ as the Saviour as well as the King of nations. 4. A declaration of the needs of national repentance and of our effort to secure such repentance. 5. A recognition of social and economic sins as well as sins political and ecclesiastical. 6. A declaration against war. 7. A declaration in favor of the Psalms in worship. 8. A declaration in favor of singing God's praise without instrumental accompaniment. 9. A declaration against the union of church and state. 10. A declaration of our obligation as stewards of all that we have. 11. A declaration in favor of paying one tenth of our increase to the Lord.

As for the character and style of the new form, one may well remember that it is primarily addressed to the Lord and