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NATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, A DIVINE INSTITUTION.

THE ministers about Sparta, Illinois, having agreed to commemorate the establishment of Presbyterianism in Scotland, 17th August, 1560, the following sermon was preached, in Grand Cote, by Rev. W. Sloane, to prepare the people for the celebration.

“Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?”—Ezra 7:23.

This is a part of all scripture, which is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for instruction in righteousness; for though it is the dictation of a heathen, we are told that the Lord put it into his heart. v. 27. And it is especially to be noticed, that Darius made no laws respecting the house of the God of heaven; but commanded that the laws which God himself had made should be enforced. He assigns an important reason for his decree, viz. that if he had acted otherwise, it would have provoked the wrath of God against his family and his kingdom.

We think the words thus glanced at contain the following proposition: If civil rulers do not enforce the laws which God has made in favor of his church, they bring divine wrath on the nation. In discussing this proposition we propose the following order:

- I. Make some preliminary observations.
- II. Consider what laws God has made for the good of his church.
- III. In what way God's laws in favor of the church should be enforced.
- IV. Show that God has manifested his wrath against the nations which do not enforce his laws in favor of his church.
- V. Make some improvement of the subject.

I. Preliminary observations.

1. All power is of God. He has both the natural and moral right to govern; being the Creator of all things, and possessor of all moral excellency, he must surely have a right to govern the

creatures which he has made. "Hath not the potter power over the clay?" Rom. 9:21.

2. Next to God, the people are the fountain of political power. They have a right to choose their own rulers. "Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you." Deut. 1:13. Neither Saul nor David attempted to rule without the consent of the people.

3. When people, who have God's law among them, adopt a constitution and choose men to administer it, they are bound to take God's law for their rule, both in the constitution and administration of government. "The law of the Lord is perfect." Ps. 19:7.

4. Magistrates are God's vicegerents. Ps. 82; Rom. 13:4. The people have a right to say who shall rule over them, provided those elected have scriptural qualifications; but the ruler's authority is from God. "Ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment." 2 Chron. 19:6. "By me kings reign and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." Prov. 8:15, 16. Even the light of nature teaches this. The Romans, who were destitute of divine revelation, in order to persuade Numa to reign over them, told him, "a king is the minister of God."

5. It follows from this that rulers of every rank should use their power for the glory of God; which they do, especially, when they favor the church. God has constituted a church in the world, that it might glorify him, by promoting the eternal and temporal interests of mankind; and just in proportion as the church of Christ has flourished, peace and prosperity have been enjoyed by the nation.

6. As the subject of civil government is fully exhibited in the Old Testament, there is less said on it in the New. But a *prophecy of good* to the church, in one period, becomes a *command* in another. Isaiah foretold that Cyrus would give orders to lay the foundation of the temple and build Jerusalem. Isa. 44:28. And *he* calls this *charging* him. Ezra 1:2. In Is. 49:6, the Father says to the Son, "I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles;" in Acts 13:47, Paul calls this a "command." Now we have numerous promises that kings shall support the church. Ps. 72:10, 11; Is. 49:23, and 60th chapter throughout. So in Rev. 11:15 it is foretold that the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ. All these prophecies have now become so many commands to civil rulers, to honor the Redeemer, by protecting and supporting the church. But they have no command to force men into the church. To restrain men from evil, and to convert them, are two different things.

II. The second topic is to consider what laws God has made in favor of his church.

1. The law given to magistrates, concerning their subjects in general, must more especially apply in the case of God's people. "Rid them out of the hand of the wicked." Ps. 82:4. Paul exhorts that "prayers be made for kings, and for all that are in au-

thority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." This evidently implies, that if rulers do their duty, God's people will live in peace and quietness. We see, then, that it is a law of the God of heaven, that civil rulers should protect the church against annoyance either from open enemies or unruly members.

2. Civil rulers should see that Christ's ministers be supported. Under the Mosaic economy there was ample provision made for the support of all that ministered about holy things. Paul tells us the law is not repealed. "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the temple, and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." 1 Cor. 9:13, 14. That ministers should have a sufficient maintenance is a law of the God of heaven, which civil rulers should cause to be speedily done for the house of the God of heaven.

3. The civil magistrate should punish the church's enemies. We hold with the Reformers, that the civil magistrate is (*custos utriusque tabulæ*) keeper of both tables. He should punish those that apostatize to idolatry, or entice others to idolatry; but he has no power to punish for idolatry those who have been brought up in the practice. Deut. 13th and 17th. He has no authority to inquire into any man's private opinion; but he should punish blasphemy. Lev. 24:16. He should also punish those that teach damnable heresies. "He is a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Some quibble here, and tell us, that teaching heresy is talking and not doing: they might say the same about blasphemy; but God has commanded the blasphemer to be put to death. But teaching is work; we read of the work of the ministry. Eph. 4:12. The minister that teaches damnable heresy is an evil worker; he doeth evil. Besides, heresies are expressly called works. Gal. 5:19, 20.

III. The third thing to be considered is, in what way should the laws in favor of the church be enforced?

1. The constitution should provide that none but the friends of the church be eligible to office. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." Sam. 23:3. "When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule the people mourn." Prov. 29:2. All history attests the truth of this: and nothing can be more convincing proof of the incurable wickedness of the human heart than the fact that men have, in all ages and nations, with few exceptions, set up for rulers the basest of characters. And although they know the incalculable misery that wicked rulers have brought upon their subjects, yet, even now, they follow the same course of folly and wickedness. I acknowledge that ungodly nations may prosper for a time; but "the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." See Ezek. 30, 31 and 32 chapters. Punish the church's enemies, then, by not suffering them to hold office.

2. The laws of the God of heaven should be enforced by inflicting adequate punishment on all evil doers. Paul says, that the law is made for "any thing that is contrary to sound doctrine." 1 Tim. 1:9, 10. But it is objected, Would you punish every one who differs from you in religion? Certainly not. It is again asked, If you punish false teachers, where will you stop? We reply, This can never be a practical question till "the saints of the Most High take the kingdom." We only advocate the scriptural principle. To what extent the principle should be applied, will be better understood, when "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." Is. 30:26.

IV. The fourth thing proposed was, to show that God has manifested his wrath against the nations which do not favor his church.

1. This is shown by the prosperity with which God has blessed those kings who favored the church. Take for example David, and the other pious kings of Judah, who followed his example. Among the Persians, Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes. Constantine was a heathen when he came into Italy; but for his favoring the church, God made him ruler of the Roman empire. In our own time, the king of Sardinia patronizes God's ancient people, the Waldenses, and he is not only blessed with the affection and confidence of his own subjects, but the other Italians are eager to put themselves under his government. On the other hand, the French usurper, who patronizes the Jesuits, lives in continual fear of assassination.

2. God, speaking of his church, says, "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." Is. 60:12. This has been fulfilled on all those nations that persecuted the church; and it is evident that the prophecy is receiving its accomplishment in our own day.

3. The constitution of the United States binds the rulers from doing anything for the church; and God is manifesting his displeasure by giving the people up to the lusts of their own hearts. Pagan and Popish idolatry are protected by our rulers; so are robbery, murder, polygamy, and the most loathsome kinds of incest. Surely, these are sad evidences of divine wrath.

4. The internal divisions that agitate the inhabitants of this country are evidences of divine wrath. This is one of the nations that will not serve the church; and we know that its doom is written. Is. 60:12. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation." Matt. 12:25. The fact cannot be disguised that the Union is tottering to its fall. Its duration cannot be very long; it must share the fate of all other nations that have forgotten God.

5. But it is objected, that we want to unite church and state. We reply, can you separate church and state? Is not every church member a member of the state? We do wish to unite church and state; we wish to see them both acknowledge the

Lord Jesus Christ, as their judge, their lawgiver, and their king. We abhor the notion of a man taking his conscience with him when he goes to church, and leaving it behind him when he goes to the polls. We would exclude Satan from the government of the state, as well as from that of the church. We hold that in the state, as well as in the church, we should do all to the glory of God. But we are by no means for blending church and state. We neither want to have the church governed by statesmen, nor the state governed by churchmen. Under the Old Testament, when God's people ruled, both in church and state, the two departments were kept perfectly distinct. The elders that sat in the gate durst not intermeddle with the priests' business, on pain of death. And the priests had as little right to interfere with the elders.

V. The last thing proposed was to improve the subject.

1. From this text and its illustration we infer that the Scotch parliament, when it gave a legal establishment to Presbyterianism, in the 16th century, acted according to the letter and spirit of this text, when they carried forward the Reformation, in 1567, by—1. Abolishing the Pope's usurped authority. 2. Annulling all laws in favor of Popery. 3. Abolishing the mass. 4. Framing a coronation oath, which bound the king to support and defend the true religion. 5. Requiring every officer, appointed by the government, to swear to support the true religion. This, some will say, was an infringement on the *liberty of conscience*. To this we reply, the Scotch require the officers of government to support the *true* religion. The Americans require government officials to swear or affirm to support no religion. Which is the greatest imposition on conscience? The Scotch, in what they did, acted by divine authority. "And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people; between the king also and the people." 2 Kings 11:17.

2. Those who swear to support the U. S. constitution swear that they will never execute the command in our text, nor as far as in them lies, suffer it to be executed by others. I do not pretend that they all mean so, or think that they are doing so; but I say, this is a fair deduction from the U. S. constitution. Amendment, article 1st: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." Compare this with what God says to the church: "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." Is. 60:12. It is added, in this same article, "nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Thus we see that the constitution protects whatever a "heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," instigated by the father of lies, may please to call religion. Hence, popish idolatry in all the States, pagan idolatry in California, and polygamy and the most abominable incest in Utah, are protected and patronized by our rulers. By this every law of God is openly set at defiance. This is both our crime and our judgment.

3. "Be not of those who build the tombs of the prophets, and

garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and yet walk in the steps of those that killed them." In every period of the Reformation the church and state of Scotland required a *religious test* as a qualification for office. The U. S. constitution says: "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." Art. 6th, clause 3d. If, then, you commemorate the establishment of religion by the parliament of Scotland, you condemn the U. S. constitution, for those who gave religion a national establishment in Scotland required a religious test as a qualification for office. The Reformers made the word of God their rule. The framers of the constitution threw it behind their back. The one saw an altar at Damascus that pleased them; they copied after Greece and Rome and England. The others took their plan from "the lively oracles"—"the perfect law of liberty." No people could be more careful to keep church and state distinct than the Scotch Reformers. So we see that the covenanted reformation and the U. S. constitution are diametrically opposite. The one condemns one part of the community to hopeless bondage, and to the other grants infidel liberty. The other proclaims scriptural liberty to all the inhabitants of the land.

4. We have reason to thank God that public opinion is, in many instances, more correct than the constitution. One of the candidates for the Presidency is opposed on the ground of his being a Papist. People do not desire to be ruled by a man whose church consigns them to eternal damnation, and whose clergy are sworn to persecute and destroy them. The other candidate is supported on the ground that he is opposed to the extension of slavery. Now no man can be opposed to its extension without desiring its extinction. It is matter of thankfulness that so many manifest sympathy with the oppressed; that so many are lifting up their voice in defense of human rights.

5. Let us hold fast what we have received; let us abide by all the church's attainments. They were purchased for her by the blood of the Lamb. She has preserved them at a vast expense of blood and treasure; let us not give away the inheritance of our fathers; let us follow in the steps of Christ's flock that have gone before us.

The great aim of the true church of Scotland has always been to give to Christ that honor which is due to him, "as a son over his own house." Hence the persecutions which she has suffered from the hateful house of Stuart; hence, too, the refusal of Renwick's followers to join in the Revolution establishment; hence the secession in 1782, and hence the noble stand taken by the Free Church in 1823. The Scotch Reformers were anxious "that the generation to come might know God, even the children who should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children." They were the first to institute common schools. It is neither to the "Declaration of Independence," nor to our infidel constitution, that we owe what liberty and happiness we enjoy in America; but to the scriptural principles which the Covenanters of

Scotland and the Puritans of England instilled into the minds of their children.

Let us thank God that all the power and policy of hell has not been able to root up the Reformation vine in Scotland. It still flourishes, and the good, the great and the powerful delight in its shadow. "O, Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountains; O, Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up; be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God." Is. 40:9.

6. Finally, seeing the church is "the house of God," 1 Tim. 3:15; "the place of his throne, and the place of the soles of his feet," Ez. 43:7; "his rest forever," Ps. 132:7; "the perfection of beauty out of which he hath shone," Ps. 50:2; let us secure a place for ourselves in this house. "Yield yourselves unto the Lord and enter into his sanctuary" is a command which binds all men of every rank, of every age, and of every nation. Kings are commanded to "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and they perish from the way." Peter says, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you." Acts 2:38. There was no way into the holiest of all but through the sanctuary, and there is no way for gospel hearers into heaven but through the visible church. Those who have no pleasure in God's service on earth cannot suppose that it would be a privilege to serve him in heaven. They would say of his service, "Behold what a weariness is it." The supreme desire of the believer is to be "before the throne of God, and to serve him day and night in his temple," for he knows that "in his presence is fullness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore."

OUR SOCIAL PARTIES.

It seems difficult for men to maintain the golden mean. The Covenanters of old were accused of moroseness and austerity; now they are likely to be guilty of undue levity and frivolity. A spirit of reveling has gone forth over the land, threatening to involve all classes in one wild whirl of dissipation. It is time to sound the alarm. There is danger of our being swept down with the general current. Not that we quarrel with the spirit that summons acquaintances around the festive board, where generous viands feast the body, and the halls are lighted up with more than their wonted splendor, and the fires burn more brightly, and there pass around the merry song, sharp jest, and lively repartee. These are right in their place; and we like those seasons of social mirth where men forget the past in the absorbing enjoyment of the present. But there are things connected with our parties which cannot honestly be commended—practices which really are abuses—and abuses in which we ought not to follow a fashionable world, if we would rightly serve our Lord and Master, and set a good example to those around us.