

# OUR BANNER.

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## *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.

manifold ills, and is "full of mercy and good fruit," in every condition of life. In fact, the religion of Jesus is like Joseph, "a fruitful bough by a well whose branches run over the wall." It has no line fence, but drops its fruit on the world, and on every part of society, as well as on the precincts of the Church. And oh, that the world only knew this fact. What good in the world, in promoting the kingdom of Christ, and securing the true welfare of man would not a tithe of the money squandered on folly, or on war, accomplish. Oh, when shall men learn that nations need Christ, as much as individuals, "to save them from the consequences of sin, and that it only is when men shall be blessed in Him," in every relation, that they shall be blessed indeed, and "all nations shall call Him blessed."



### COVENANTERS AND THE ANTI-SLAVERY STRUGGLE.\*

BY THE REV. A. M. MILLIGAN, D.D., PITTSBURGH, PA.

Eighty years ago, a young Ayrshire Scotchman, seventeen years old, arrived in Western Pennsylvania. A companion of his, who was cook for his mess in the British army, had come one morning into the ranks with some meal on his coat, and, being sentenced to receive five hundred lashes, died under the infliction. This cruelty excited the spirit of liberty in the young Scotchman, and he vowed that he would never shoulder a musket for King George. Thus he came to America an ardent republican; but on his arrival in this land he found a class of people, who were kidnapped on the western coast of Africa, transported over the sea under the decks of slave-ships amid horrors indescribable, sold on the auction block, and driven on the plantations as brute beasts to unrequited toil for their cruel owners and masters, and every effort of theirs to secure their freedom met by the most cruel tortures. Shocked by such deeds of cruelty in a land of boasted liberty, he turned to the law which was the recognized authority, and to the Constitution which was acknowledged as supreme, and found that the slave-holder had therein four full guarantees for his accursed institution of human bondage: The first authorized him to import these persons from their native land, forbidding any law to the contrary. The second gave the slave-holder political power proportioned to the number of his slaves, five of whom being reckoned equal to three free men in apportioning representation. The third bound all the states to return the fugitive who might escape from his master. The

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\* Abstract of address delivered on the evening of November 21, 1883, at the Semi-Centennial celebration of the First Reformed Presbyterian congregation of Philadelphia.

fourth bound the nation to suppress any and every insurrection of the slaves. This Constitution, the bulwark of slavery, every foreigner must swear to support on becoming a citizen, and again at his inauguration in any office to which he might be elected; while every voter who casts his ballot for an official employs that officer to swear that oath as his representative, thus involving every voting citizen in a complicity with this "sum of all villainies." Our young friend found his older brother an elder in the Seceder Church, and a justice of the peace in the town where he lived. He had been naturalized as a citizen, and sworn into this office, and was still an elder in the church without question. Without denominational prejudice, for he was brought up in the established Church of Scotland, but with an earnest spirit and quickened Christian conscience, he examined these facts in the light of Scripture, and weighed the morality of the Constitution and of the church that sanctioned it in the light of the gospel. The more he studied and prayed for light the more determined he became, that he could not conscientiously take the naturalization oath himself, nor unite with a church that allowed its members so to do.

In this dilemma he heard of a Covenanter communion eighteen miles distant in the Forks of the Yough, the first Covenanter communion west of the Allegheny Mountains. Thither he went on foot, and heard Dr. John Black analyze the United States Constitution and show with a clearness that admitted of no dispute the complicity of the voter with the sin of slavery, a sin as contrary to the spirit of Christianity as of civil liberty, and that the Covenanter church for this reason did not allow her members to vote or hold office in the government. With that community he united in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, not only to enjoy fellowship with the Lord's people in the ordinances, but also that he might be associated with an organization bearing a consistent testimony against the sin of slavery, and in behalf of the supreme authority of Christ. I have given this piece of history to show you the attitude which the Covenanting church presented to the inquisitive mind of an intelligent stranger in search of the truth and the right.\*

In the year 1800, Dr. Alexander McLeod, a Covenanter minister, received a call from a congregation in Orange county, New York, which he refused to accept because the names of some who held slaves were appended thereto. He preached and published a sermon on the subject, "Negro Slavery Unjustifiable." In that sermon he took the highest ground, and presented the strongest arguments ever presented in the cause. The Reformed Presbytery, then the supreme court of the church, judicially condemned slavery and warned their membership of it. About the same time it was understood that some in communion with the church in South Carolina held slaves, and a commission of Presbytery was sent thither to require the emancipation of their slaves,

\*The young man referred to was the speaker's father, afterward the Rev. James Milligan, D.D.

or their separation from our communion. All such parties emancipated their slaves, and there was no necessity for resorting to discipline. In 1806, the Covenanter church adopted her testimony, in which she says: "There are moral evils essential to the Constitution of the United States which render it necessary to refuse allegiance to the whole system. . . It establishes that system of robbery by which men are held in slavery, despoiled of liberty, property and protection." The attitude of the church in regard to slavery and the Constitution and government of the United States on account of slavery, was uniform that Covenanters could take no part in the administration of the government, nor in any way identify with it; and its members were censured if they voted, accepted office, or sat on juries.

A quarter of a century later, such was the firm and consistent testimony of the Covenanters against slavery in South Carolina, that the hostility of their slave holding neighbors became so unpleasant and dangerous that many families moved from the state and settled in Indiana and Illinois; among these were some of the ancestors of your pastor's family. A regular hegira of whole congregations left their homes to enjoy a purer atmosphere and greater liberty.

About the year 1833, in this city, Philadelphia, a movement was inaugurated professing to have obtained "new light" in regard to the relation of the government to the system of slavery. The position recently taken by the Southern Confederacy was assumed: That this was not properly a *national government*, but a confederation of Sovereign states, and that consequently the states alone were responsible for their peculiar institutions. This movement culminated in the division of 1833, the date of the organization of this congregation, and the immediate cause of its existence. The question on which the church divided was whether the church could permit her members to take part in the government or not; and the ground of the objection was the pro-slavery and infidel character of the Constitution.

It is a singular coincidence that in the providence of God, at the very time when the church divided, and a large and influential minority of her ministers and people abandoned her testimony, God raised up William Lloyd Garrison and the Anti-Slavery Society, who took the same attitude towards the Constitution that the Old Light Covenanters held, to rally to the testimony and fill up the gap. The effect of the division was moreover to excite those who remained faithful to speak out with more zeal, and to contend with greater earnestness against that evil that was daily growing more potent, until pulpit and press were muzzled, and political parties were reduced to its subjection or yoked to its car. No sooner were Anti-Slavery societies organized than Covenanters joined them and became their steady and zealous supporters. Your former pastor was president of the society in this city; and indeed it was universally understood that wherever an Abolitionist or fugitive slave found a Covenanter, he found a

friend and helper. The fact that Covenanters put forth their anti-slavery effort through the Anti-Slavery societies, rather than through their church organization, has tended to deprive the church of credit that was justly her due. Also the meetings of her church courts being only semi annual in her Presbyteries, and biennial in her Synod, gave little opportunity to put forth much active help, while in the Anti-Slavery societies her members and ministers were among the most active workers.

Mr. Garrison, who must always be recognized as the master spirit of the Anti-Slavery Movement, early discerned and employed the power of the press, and by this means gave his work more power and himself more prominence. No sooner, however, did his paper issue from the press in the garret, than it was hailed with a welcome and liberally supported by Covenanter patrons. Covenanter churches were always open for Anti-Slavery meetings, and Covenanter ministers were ever ready to stand side by side with the most radical lecturers in the advocacy of immediate, unconditional Emancipation. And whoever may have been the first to apply the term "Covenant with death and league with hell," to the United States Constitution, the Anti-Slavery platform used it no more freely than the Covenanter pulpit.

When George Thompson came to this country at the invitation of Garrison to take part in the agitation of the question, and no hall or church in Philadelphia could be obtained in which to hold his meetings, the old Cherry Street church, the original home of this congregation, was opened for his use; and its young pastor, Rev. J. M. Willson, stood bravely by his side after threats were made that it would be burnt to the ground. My own father bought a chaise on purpose to escort the illustrious English philanthropist in a lecture tour over New England. But American pride joined to the slaveholding spirit would not permit a "foreign emissary" to interfere with our institutions, and he was forced to retire from the field and return to his home. Having mentioned in this connection the name of my venerated father, it may not be out of place for me to say that he was on the most intimate terms with Garrison and Phillips, co-operated with them at every opportunity, traversed New England over and over, lecturing and pleading from pulpit and platform for the slave. On one occasion, preaching in the pulpit of Rev. N. P. Rogers, the seventh generation in a direct line of ministers from John Rogers, burned at Smithfield, Mr. Rogers said: "I do not know what we will do for an Anti-Slavery hymn; I have looked the book through and cannot find one." "Oh," said my father, "I have a book that is full of them," and gave out the 12th Psalm: "For poor oppressed, and for the sighs of needy rise will I, saith God, and him in safety set from such as him defy." Many a time he came home covered with snow and icicles hanging to his brow, and not unfrequently with marks of

unsavory eggs on his clothes, weary in but not of his work. On one occasion in a New Hampshire town, he was interrupted and assailed in his address, and threatened with a coat of tar and feathers; but he silenced them by proposing that if they would give attention to his lecture to the end, he would help pay for the tar and feathers. The next day, leaving the place in the stage-coach, he met and conversed with Franklin Pierce, afterwards President of the United States, who had been one of his auditors, and who said he had no doubt he would have received the ornamental application, as he deserved it, but he appeared too willing.

Rev. William Sloane, the father of our Professor, was an earnest and able advocate of the cause of the slave. Hon. John A. Bingham said to me that he learned his Anti-Slavery from father Sloane. He, too, was honored with the *ultima ratio regum*, mob violence. Rev. J. B. Johnston was also an able and fearless Anti-Slavery lecturer, and was once dragged from his horse and had ribs broken by a mob. Rev. A. McFarland lectured extensively through the State of Ohio, and was often met with hostile demonstrations. Rev. James Wallace and Rev. Hugh Stevenson, your pastor's father, did yeoman service in the lecture field, and at least upon one occasion were set upon by a mob whose yells were heard three miles distant. Rev. N. R. Johnston, then pastor in Topsham, Vt., kept the flag of liberty flying in the field, and gave the trumpet a sound by no means uncertain in a report on this subject to Synod in 1857.

Dr. James R. Willson, the father of your first pastor, plead with all the eloquence for which he was so justly noted, the cause of the slave; the pages of the *Evangelical Witness*, edited by him, contained as radical utterances and as strong arguments as came from the pen of Garrison, or glowed in the columns of the *Liberator*; but the *Witness* was only issued monthly, and its circulation was confined to our own people, and on that account attracted less attention. He was burned in effigy, and his life was threatened in the city of Albany, after the publication of his "Prince Messiah." When asked by a lady if it were true that Covenanters did not admit slave-holders to the communion table, he answered, "Yes, madam, it is true; we do not even admit *horse* thieves."

It would be a work of supererogation to recount in this place, to you who knew him so well and enjoyed his ministrations so long, the service rendered to the cause of the slave by your late pastor, Rev. J. M. Willson, D. D.; suffice it to say that this pulpit was ever faithful to the cause of liberty, and its voice was constantly heard pleading with God and with men the cause of the slave. At every meeting of our supreme Judicatory an earnest testimony was lifted in behalf of the down-trodden millions, yet one of the ablest expressions of the testimony of the Church on this question was from his pen as Chairman

of the Committee on Slavery in the Synod of 1856, reference to which will show where both he and the Church stood on this question.

Professor J. R. W. Sloane, D.D., while pastor in the city of New York, constantly co-operated in the Anti-Slavery agitation in that city. Abstracts of sermons preached by him against slavery often appeared in the columns of the *New York Tribune*, and a verbatim report of a sermon delivered by him on this subject was published in the *New York Times*. When Dr. Van Dyke's pamphlet in defence of slavery appeared, Prof. Sloane challenged him to a public debate on the question; and when the challenge was declined, he preached and published a sermon in reply to the pamphlet, and also delivered it by request in Dr. Cheever's church. He often stood on the platform with Garrison and Phillips as one of their anniversary orators. On one of these occasions he was followed by Theodore D. Weld, who began by saying, "In the early days of the Anti-Slavery struggle in the State of Ohio, I remember a venerable Covenanter minister, who gave us valuable aid. He has passed to his reward; but when he ascended he let his mantle fall full and broad on the shoulders of this, his youngest son." Prof. Sloane made the closing speech at the famous John Brown meeting in Cooper Institute, New York, when fifty policemen were utterly unable to control the mob, and the Chief came with seventy-five more and stood by the speakers directing his men, who knocked down and dragged out the most turbulent, while the excited orator launched hot thunderbolts into the ranks of the pro-slavery conspirators against the freedom of speech and the press. The *New York Tribune* gave him credit for stilling the tumult, which neither Prof. Mattison, Dr. Cheever, nor Wendell Phillips had succeeded in doing; when he told them that "in his childhood he had received in baptism the name of a man who had been tried, condemned and hung for high treason," they listened to hear what such a traitor had to say.

It may not be egotistic to say that I, too, was honored to take part in the anniversary exercises of the Anti-Slavery Society, when it was a deep disgrace to be associated with Abolitionists. I was also associated with Garrison in his famous debate with Governor Lewis of Ohio, and the lawyers of Cincinnati; and although I could furnish but small aid to the mighty champion, yet he kindly recognized the advantage and encouragement of companionship, and the benefit to him, charged with infidelity, of being seconded by a minister of acknowledged orthodoxy. Twenty years of my life were spent in battling with the slave power in one of the most bitter centers of Southern sentiment in the Northern States, where I was surnamed the "Nigger Lover," "Abolition Preacher," pilloried in the newspapers and market houses in the most ridiculous pictures and caricatures; twice burnt in effigy; twice assailed by mobs; waylaid and pursued by night, when returning home from a lecture, for four miles, and only escaped

from five men in a wagon and three on horseback by the speed of my horse, while stones and clubs flew over my head. When John Brown was awaiting hanging at Charlestown, I wrote him a letter of encouragement, which he kindly answered the day before his death, in which he said: "No letter, of a great number I have got to cheer me, and encourage and advise, has given more heart warming satisfaction or better counsel than your own."

The answer of John Brown to my letter is published in the life of John Brown printed by Alfred Webb, Great Brunswick, St. Dublin, and in a footnote the editor says: "The Covenanters, a small religious body, holding highly Calvinistic tenets, are the only sect in the United States who maintain a thoroughly consistent testimony against slavery. They not only refuse to hold slaves, but decline all political action on the ground of the inherent Constitutional complicity of the Federal Government with the slave system." Oliver Johnston, in his life of Garrison, bears this testimony, page 250: "The Old School Covenanters also deserve mention for their firm and consistent opposition to slavery. Some of them heartily co-operated with the Garrisonians. The Rev. J. R. W. Sloane, then of New York, now of Allegheny, Penn., never hesitated to stand on our platform even when charges of infidelity were flying thickest about our heads." Horace Greeley, in the first volume of his *American Conflict*, bears testimony to their fidelity to the cause of the slave. The leading Anti-Slavery lecturers generally excepted Covenanters from their sweeping denunciations of the time-serving churches. Mr. Garrison declared in an anniversary address that he was "not a Garrisonian Abolitionist, but a Reformed Presbyterian Abolitionist. The Covenanters had analyzed the Constitution and pronounced its condemnation, and refused to act under or swear to it, before I knew anything about it. South Carolina missed the man when she offered \$5,000 for my head; she should have singled out an Old School Covenanter and put the price on his head." During the meeting of our Synod at Northwood, Ohio, a family of slaves were landed at the house of one of our elders, who kept a station on the Underground Railroad, as the most of us did. Four horses were harnessed in an omnibus, and six sturdy young Covenanters armed, started with them and carried them through to Sandusky, where they were put on a steamboat for the Canada shore and secreted by the colored steward; the fact was whispered among the members of Synod, and earnest prayer went up to heaven for their escape.

While I appreciate the honor conferred in calling me to occupy this hour of your anniversary, at the same time I feel how inadequate I am to the task, and how imperfect is my brief sketch. My memory is not good, and I have been able to present little except what has fallen under my own observation. Were the story of the efforts, the trials, and the dangers endured by our people for the emancipation of



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.

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*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

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