

REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, AND DEATHS.

About this season of the year, ministers are accustomed to receive a circular from the several Clerks of the Peace, respectfully requesting them to forward returns, according to blank forms that are enclosed, of "all persons whom they shall have baptized or married, or who shall have died within their cures, and belonging to their Congregations, during the twelve months next preceding each Return." They are told that "these Returns are required by the Government for STATISTICAL INFORMATION," and they are impressed with "the necessity of making a full and prompt Return."

Now, it is notorious, that this demand, or request, is very seldom complied with. Some, from carelessness, neglect it; others, from conscientious scruples, refuse to render an account to the Government of their performance of strictly religious ordinances, such as baptisms are. The Government on the other hand, take thankfully what returns they can get, but never enforce any penalty upon defaulters.

Were there any attempt made to punish non-compliance with this law, there would be an instant agitation for its repeal. On no point ought we to be more sensitive, than about any demand from Cæsar concerning the things which are God's. But as it is not enforced, we protest against the whole matter as a solemn farce, degrading to the Majesty of the Law.

We concede the right of the Government to insist upon the due registration of births, marriages, and deaths. Consequences so important are dependent upon the proof of such facts, as regards the connection of families, and the inheritance of property, that it becomes even a duty of the Civil Power to provide an easy and effectual mode of furnishing such evidence. As matters are ordered now, nothing can be more uncertain and irregular than the methods adopted in any contested case. The evidence of Family Bibles, common report, the recognition of parties by each other in certain relations, testimony of eye-witness, &c., are resorted to. It is easy to see how any or all of these may fail in numberless instances, and positive proof be impossible, even when the claim is best founded, and thereby immense injury be done to innocent persons.

It would be difficult to devise any plan more clumsy or ineffectual than the one now in vogue. 1. As to Births, the number of baptisms bears no proportion to these; what with conscientious objections, parental disqualifications, and indifference, probably not one-half of the children born in the country are baptized. And of those who are, not one-half are returned as such. Many ministers are ecclesiastically competent to baptize, though unrecognized by law. Some denominations do not consider consecration to the pastoral office essential in performing such acts. For such cases, the law makes no provision; nor can it. *Yet there is no legal provision but this, for registering the birth of any child.* 2. The case of marriages is the least unfavorable illustration of the working of the law. A marriage cannot legally take place, unless celebrated by a legally authorized minister: consequently, every case of marriage comes under the cognizance of such a party. But what guarantee is there, that a person who is not an officer of Government, and who is encouraged by their indifference to be negligent in this doubtful duty, will return the marriages he celebrates, without which proof must be found at hap-hazard? 3. In the case of Deaths, many persons are buried without any service; many more by a service conducted by one not a clergyman in the eye of the law; and again, there are few returns made of these also.

For every purpose, therefore,—for the proof of the specific facts concerned, and for statistical information, the law, as it stands, is "a mockery, a delusion, and a snare."

Let the Government establish a machinery of its own for registering the fact of the birth of every child, irrespective of its baptism; of every marriage, as a civil contract, by whatsoever religious rites consecrated, or even by none at all—they have nothing to do with that; and of every death, however the body may be buried. Let the giving of information as to these points be compulsory, and enforced by penalty, on the parties concerned in each case. And where ministers' services are required, let parties call in whom they will to consecrate the occasion, independently of the Civil Act, the authorities having no concern with this part of the proceedings. Such is the plan adopted in France, where it works admirably, and partially in England, as also in many of the American States. We must come to