

EXEMPTION FROM TAXATION.

Sometime ago a well-known contributor to the "Western Watchman" is dealing with the subject of exemption of Church property from taxation. He said:—

The exercise of the power of taxation is among the highest attributes of sovereignty, and should be indulged only upon considerations of public policy and necessity. The power rests chiefly upon necessity. The primary object of a government or sovereignty is to maintain its own existence. This end may be attained through various means, as (1) by taxation, and (2) by rendering the government aid to these factors which are most conducive to law and order. Governmental assistance may be most effectively rendered in two ways, viz., (1) directly, as by subsidizing and pensioning, and (2) indirectly, as by granting immunity from taxation.

Education is fostered both directly and indirectly, by taxation for its support, and by exempting from taxation property devoted to educational uses. It matters not that a man have no children of school age, or that he have no children at all; he is obliged to pay school taxes just the same; so that if a man possesses no children he is simply paying for the education of other people's children, and his only means of obtaining immediate and direct benefit from this tax is to get children, and avail himself of the fund provided for their education. And why is this so? It is answered, "Because education is necessary to the existence of a free government."

Religion, too, is necessary to the existence of a free government. It is an essential ingredient of our civil polity. What would be the condition of this government if all men were insensible to the obligations of an oath? What assurance would we have of orderly and legal administration, if our public officials, in taking their oath of office, had no fear of the God who avenges falsehood? What manner of dispensations would we receive from our courts of justice if there were no fear of Him who said, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor?"

The natural love of right and justice is not a strong in the breast of man, and the fear of penal statutes is not so great, that he will do right simply because it is right, and avoid wrong merely because it falls within the inhibitions of a statute. Men must look beyond this life to their ultimate rewards and punishments. Any other course would permit us to fall a prey to the seductive allurements of present advantage, and to admit too greatly the felicity which is liable to change. The compunctions of conscience are not always sufficiently powerful to overcome the sense of present interest, and repeated disregard of warnings of that faithful monitor of the soul will soon deprive it of its efficacy. There must be a moral force behind the law. There must be a love of law and spirit of obedience among the people, or the whole contents of our statute books will be "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." There is but one agency that can enforce perfect obedience to moral obligation: it is a deep sense of religion, which permeates us with the idea of accountability to God for all our thoughts and deeds. Human laws may be invaded by human ingenuity, but who can contravene the immutable providence of God?

Of all the forces which add stability to a government, education and religion are most powerful, and of those two I do not scruple to affirm that religion is the stronger; for although it is a maxim, tried and true, that the ballots of ignorant voters are more dangerous to a free State than the muskets of foreign soldiers, yet it is a fact that the ballots of wicked voters, wickedly inclined, constitute the most dangerous agency that can exist within the confines of a free government. An ignorant man who seeks truth and righteousness will eventually find a way of doing good; but a wicked man, fatally bent on evil-doing, can never be expected to perform, without compulsion, his functions as a social being. Men may be wise, but if they have not goodness their wisdom is of no avail. A man may be highly educated, and yet very wicked; and therefore dangerous to good government. But a truly religious man cannot be a bad man. Hence we may readily perceive the absolute indispensability of religion to the security of a State.

Few will question the expediency of rendering State aid to literary, scientific and other educational institutions; and yet, without religion and religious morals, there can be no true education, for the essence of wisdom is virtue, and virtue finds in religion its most vital strength and stay.

It is a cardinal beauty and pervading excellency of our theory of government, that Church and State shall be kept inviolably separate, and that the one shall not dominate the other. This is true because of the general tendency to confuse form with substance. If the State were allowed to control the Church, there would arise endless controversies as to the form of religion, resulting in sectarian warfare and ultimate serious detriment to the body politic. This is the chief reason why religion is not supported by the State.

The vast majority of statesmen have in all ages conceded the extreme difficulty of maintaining morality without religion; and it is an indisputable fact that the strength of a free government lies in the morality of its citizens.

These facts being true, the question must arise, How can religion be most effectually aided by the State, without a union between Church and State? Manifestly, it must be done indirectly; and the most feasible manner of accomplishing this result indirectly is by exempting church property from taxation. This gives religious enterprises a chance to develop, unfettered by the shackles of taxation, and allows to each church an opportunity of shifting for itself as best it may.

It is objected by the advocates of church taxation that an exemption of church property from taxation makes the burden of taxes less proportionately heavier upon the property not so exempted, and that this works an injustice upon the taxpayer who is not a member of any church. These taxpayers find themselves in a like position with the man who has no children, but is obliged to pay school taxes. The objection would apply with equal force in both instances. It is easily met. Every citizen must bear his proportionate part of the burden of maintaining the government. The government is of necessity obliged to use its money and means in perpetuating its own existence and promoting the general welfare of the people. Religion and education are indispensable supports to the government, and are absolutely necessary to the welfare of the people. By fostering these, the State is erecting a bulwark of security for itself and the people's rights. Thus it appears that when a man renders direct aid to a school, or indirect assistance to a church, he is only contributing, as every good citizen should, his quota towards the support of the government, by assisting in the maintenance of those institutions which are most conducive to its welfare, and without which it could not exist. Such a man can certainly have no reason to complain of injustice.

It is said that by placing all church property upon the taxable list, the rate of taxation would be lowered, and thus the burdens of taxation would rest more lightly upon all. Such reasoning is manifestly sophistical and fallacious. Churches are not separately existing entities in the body politic. They are merely associations of individual citizens, who pay all the expenses of church maintenance, and upon whom, consequently would fall the burden of such taxation. I must confess my utter inability to perceive how or where in a man can be benefited by a decrease in the rate of taxation when the list of his taxable property is proportionately increased; especially where, as in this case, the increase in his property is of such a character that he can derive from it no pecuniary benefit whatever. Churches are not money-making institutions. Church stocks are not interest-bearing securities. There are no money-changers in the temples of God.

It is difficult to escape the idea that a tax upon property dedicated in piecemeal in its unavoidable effect a tax upon religion; for if there were no church houses in which to worship, religious services would suffer from non-attendance; and if there were no attendance upon divine services, the religion of Jesus Christ would soon pass into irreclaimable insatiation. It may be true that "the groves were God's first temples, but that was in the olden time." The children of God no longer dwell in tents. The age of Druidical worship is past.

It is very plain that any increase in the necessary expense of church maintenance must of necessity result in a decrease in church affiliations, and a consequent deterioration and impairment of church progress and religious advancement. It would be a mistaken policy. The State cannot afford to discourage religion. It would be a false and dangerous economy.

But aside from this, the honor of the State is involved. Imagine the emissaries of our proud government, standing at the door of every church in this Christian land, exacting toll from the members of the congregations as they pass into the worship of Almighty God—exacting toll, I say, from rich and poor; from the just and from the unjust; as well from the contribution of the rich man who rolls up to the church door in his stately carriage, as from the mite of the lone widow who hobbles to the feet of the Master with crutch and cane. When in the darkest hour of the American Revolution, the great Washington, upon his bended knees at Valley Forge, appealed to the God of battles for aid and comfort in the time that tried men's souls, it is little likely he pictured that free government for which he gave his life's work, in the attitude of demanding a pecuniary tribute at the doors of the temples consecrated to the worship of Him who nerved the arm of liberty in the day of its peril.

Where there is one church in prosperous circumstances, there are hundreds struggling for existence. I have

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in mind a country hamlet (and there are many such) whose humble, righteous citizens, too poor to maintain a preacher, contribute of their mutual time, labor and materials sufficient to erect a small meeting-house, in which to hold prayer-meetings and other modest religious gatherings, and by which, perhaps, there may occasionally be a sermon by some straggling minister of the Gospel. This is the condition of many a little church. Let the building be taxed, and who will pay? Few are willing, and fewer still are able to assume the responsibility. The matter is neglected, perhaps, or forgotten for a few years, and lo! the building is sold for taxes. The village church has gone under the hammer of the executioner.

And yet, although its arrangements were sparse and simple, and its members few and poor, there may have been, for aught we know, more genuine religion in that humble country church than is often found in the best cathedral piles of our cities!

The amount taken from the churches would weaken them just that much. The wealthier churches could stand the expense; but the poorer ones, which are by far the most numerous, could not endure it. As usual, in most cases of taxation, the burden of the burden would press most heavily upon the shoulders of the poor man, who is the hewer of wood, the drawer of water; who builds the temples; who pays the taxes; and who is the bone and sinew of this commonwealth. The confronting assurances of religion are about the only pleasures a poor man can enjoy in this world of sorrow and oppression. For my part, in view of the fact that the people are now obliged to pay a tax on nearly everything but the air that they breathe, I say let them have religion free. Why make this burden more costly than it is?

INTERESTING CEREMONY AT THETFORD MIXES.

A very imposing ceremony took place here on Sunday last.

Mrs. Paquet, representing Archbishop Bégin, of the archdiocese of Quebec, blessed three large bells in the new church. Rev. L. A. Paquet, of the Seminary of Quebec, preached a very touching sermon. Those who know him well say it was one of his best efforts.

The Quebec Central Railroad placed a special car at the disposal of the Hon. Messrs. Marchand, Déchéne and Turgeon, each of whom made a very elo-

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quent speech. They were introduced by the popular local member for Megantic, Mr. G. R. Smith.

The zealous parish priest, Rev. M. D'Auteuil, also delivered an address, thanking the parishioners and visitors for their presence. The sponsors were: Mr. G. Turcot, M. P. for Mercantile, Dr. L. O. Noel, Mr. and Madam S. de Champlain, Mr. and Madam S. Billedeau of St. Ferdinand, Halifax, together with all the principal citizens of Thetford.

The village had quite a festive air. Flags floated everywhere, besides other very pretty decorations.

The beautiful new church which is being finished at a cost of over forty thousand dollars, was also decorated with flowers, flags and banners.

At seven o'clock, p.m., a fine concert was given by the ladies and gentlemen of Thetford. It was a great success. Madam Louis Roberge and the Misses Bennet contributed largely to it.

There were many regrets expressed at the absence of Mr. A. Johnston, ex-M. L. A., who was detained through important business, but he displayed his customary generosity in sending a cheque for fifty dollars.

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