

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

A CHRISTIAN'S DUTY TO THE STATE.

By Rev. W. D. Armstrong, D.D.
Moderator of the General Assembly.

We are so apt to think that the state exists for material ends—for tariffs, the production of wealth or the protection of rights, that we forget the great moral end which gives it dignity and worth.

The perfect form of society, which is the ideal towards which the state is working, can be reached only when Christian men take an earnest and honest interest in politics.

The Christian Church must make men good citizens of the state here, as well as prepare them for the heaven of the future.

The Christian citizen is to "obey the powers that be," but he is to do more than that. He is to do his best to see that the powers that be are making for righteousness. He may obey unjust laws, but he should also seek their removal. Is there unrighteousness in the land? He surely is not to remain acquiescent or indifferent. It is for him to do his utmost towards righting every wrong.

No man who has the Spirit of Christ in him can be morally indifferent to anything that touches the welfare of humanity. No man can truly pray "Thy kingdom come," and not be active, as he may find or make opportunity, in all lines of influence and efforts that tend to bring in that kingdom. No man with enlightened Christian consciousness can look on with indifference and see corruption eating out the heart of the national life, or fail in desire to see his country pervaded by that righteousness which exalteth a nation.

Further, the Christian man will not refuse offices of public trust when desired to undertake them by his fellow citizens, unless other responsibilities forbid him. He may shrink from the discomfort of political associations, but does not the law of self-denial come in here? Public life should be viewed from the ethical standpoint. The standpoint of the true statesman is always ethical. He looks for the moral meaning and moral outcome of every measure. Our present Governor-General shows this mark of true statesmanship. Read his addresses.

How different things would be, if our public men kept the moral bearings of questions they discuss before their eyes. If political contests were carried on under the great principle, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor," what a change would come over our elections! If the command, "Thou shalt not steal," were hung upon the walls of public offices, or rather were engraved on the consciences of men in public trust, how it would modify commercial and political life.

One could illustrate this subject by many particulars, but my point is sufficiently clear—the moral outcome of any political policy or of any commercial enterprise should be kept clearly in the forefront; and further, Christian men should accept responsibilities and bring influence to bear to secure, as far as possible this end.

We should do our best, not only to secure a God-fearing people, but also a God-knowing government.

Sir Donald Currie's offer of £20,000 to Queen's College, Belfast, provided a similar sum was raised locally, has led to a remarkable response, the president of the College announcing that conditions have been more than complied with, and adding a sum secured previously, the amount now stands at over £70,000.

PERSIAN WOMEN AND THE GOSPEL.

I have as one of my most precious possessions a Turkish Testament underlined and annotated on every page, showing what I have found interesting to Persian women. One realizes as never before the wonderful truth and universal adaptability of the gospel, when giving it to those who hear it for the first time, and "It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

Though it is the gospel for humanity, and in Christ there is neither male nor female, it is interesting to find its special message to Persian women and how it appeals to their hearts. That they should have any message or consideration at all is news to them. As we pass a mosque lighted for evening services during the month of fasting, we see rows of men inside seated on carpets, sipping tea or smoking water pipes, while the mollah preaches from the pulpit. Outside, huddled together and sitting in the dust of the street, are the women. When two of us, disguised in the dress of Moslem women, attended the Passion Play at the invitation of a lady of rank, we sat with her on the ground among a crowd of women, while on chairs and in the booths above were "the lords of creation." They wonder where, even in heaven, there will be room for women. The Koran promises a house of pearl to each Mohammedan man, with seventy celestial maidens to wait upon him. So used are Persian women to being hustled about that they are surprised at Christ's "Forbid them not." It is sometimes amusing to see a pompous Moslem push his way into Dr. Mary Bradford's dispensary, and when he is made to understand that only women are treated there, to see him retire crestfallen. The doctor says she is glad that women have the first place there, at least. They generally expect neither deference nor respect, and are not surprised at the Syro-Phoenician woman being called a "dog." They are used to such epithets and use them themselves. One often hears a woman berating a child as "You son of a dog." When driven to desperation by want, the Persian woman can become as shameless, defiant and persistent as the woman before the unjust judge. Several times has a mob of women led by a woman attacked the Judge's gate in Tabriz demanding bread.

Their often miserable and diseased condition of health makes the women feel how tender is Christ's compassion in His miracles of healing. They have suffered much from quack nostrums only to grow worse. In any crowd of village women one may see an old hag, bent more "bowed together," and there is no more pitiful sight than the old women of Persia. One who is a hundred years old always appeals to us for charity by saying she is "an orphan."

Their life and occupations are so identical with those of Bible times that Persian women feel familiar at once with the scenes described in the New Testament. Every morning a village woman must mix her leaven in her meal for the daily baking, must sweep her mud floor, and often two women sit at the mill grinding salt or wheat to be cooked as porridge. Every one of them wears a necklace of silver coins, if she can, and counts each one precious. The custom of covering the face, lest a man "look on a woman," is so wrought into their earliest training, that they are able to draw their veils instantly, whatever they are doing, if a man approaches. They

marvel as did Christ's disciples, that He talked with a woman, especially of a foreign race, and that He asked for a drink of water, for today the Persians think a cup defiled if a Christian drinks from it. The accompanying picture might illustrate the parable of the "ten virgins," though it is only a wedding procession in a Persian village, the musicians leading with fife and drum and "the virgins" following in all the finery they can muster. At times of mourning also they act just as the gospels describe. Friends gather to "weep and bewail." I have seen a room full of women swaying and sobbing while a mother wailed a plaintive refrain, "Alas! alas," repeating the beloved name of the dead, often tearing her hair and beating her breast. I have often met bleary-eyed women, who said they had become so by excessive weeping over the loss of a child. To such comes Jesus' message, "Weep not!"

Religious observances in Persia are such as give special significance to the gospel teaching. I had a visitor whose lips were continually mumbling as she fingered her beads. She told me she was repeating the thousand names of God, for merit. Often, when in their homes, our hosts will excuse herself because it is "the hour of prayer" and going to a corner of the same room in which we are, will go through the forms and gestures of Mohammedan prayers. "Vain repetitions" they seem, when we know the words are Arabic, a language she does not understand, and as she calls out directions to her servants in the midst of her prayers, one can see there is no devotion in them.

Fasting is a terrible burden, when for a month, from dawn to dark, not a morsel of food nor a drop of water nor a whiff of the kalkan, (pipe) can pass their lips. The people acknowledge that it is the cause of quarrelling and reviling, so irritable do they become under the strain, and yet they dare not "eat their fast" for fear of others.

All who can afford it make the long pilgrimage to Mecca and bear thereafter the holy name of Hadji, Pilgrim. To them that is a new thought which Christ gave to the woman of Sychar, that no special location is "the place where men ought to worship." Of all Christ's words none is received with more approval by Persian women than those on marriage and divorce. They know how polygamy curses their homes. One Moslem said: "I need not go to the other world to know what hell is. I have it in my house." The women often say to us, "How happy you Christian women are with no fear of divorce!" A Moslem Bluebeard can dispose of his wives, in legal form, more readily than that fierce husband.

Not only Christ's teaching but his character makes an impression on these Moslem women and his gentleness and purity especially attract them. A Mohammedan lady said to me: "I cannot read, but one woman in our harem can and she reads the Injil (New Testament) to us. We can never get enough of it." Another, making a call of condolence upon me, said: "There is only one book that can comfort you. You told me about it, now I tell you."

The late Rev. Dr. Smith earned fame as a writer, and among his best-known publications are: "Fellowship—the Fullness of Life in Christ," "The Permanent Message of the Exodus," "Christian Character as a Social Force," and "The Integrity of Scripture—Plain Reasons for Rejecting the Critical Hypothesis."