

Our Contributors

Calvinism and Civic Righteousness.

At the present day, says the Christian Observer, when the organic life of great nations has become so complex, it is important to learn how this life may be rightly guided and the nation be made truly and permanently prosperous. In our own country, with its free institutions and its vast commercial prosperity, this inquiry cannot be an idle one. And in view of the perplexing civic problems which face our people, especially in the sphere of municipal government, the subject of civic welfare and how it is to be secured, is one of the highest moment. Above all, if righteousness exalteth a nation, and makes it really and permanently great, to retain this feature of our civic life is of the last importance. It may be here assumed that religion is the only secure basis for morality in all spheres of life; for while morality is not the whole of religion, religion includes, and gives force to, morality. This is true of individual, domestic, and civic morality. Religion must be the authoritative basis in each sphere. If this be the case, then the type of religious teaching which prevails, and the extent to which it controls the civic life of the nation, will determine the type and the measure of civic righteousness which any community or nation exhibits. But there is no need to argue for this conclusion here. The question which we now seek to raise is—How does our Calvinistic doctrinal and ethical system stand related to the production and preservation of civic righteousness? Can it vindicate its claim to have practical excellencies in this wide and vital sphere? From one point of view it might seem as if Calvinism, especially as exhibited in the Presbyterian system, is a system not suited to bring religion into close touch with the civic and political life of the nation. That system, in its definite form, teaches the headship of Christ over His Church, the spirituality of that Church, and the separation of the Church and State, in a well defined way. This might seem to imply that the Church and its ministry should not come into any sort of relation with the public life of the nation. But generic Calvinism with equal clearness also teaches that Jesus Christ is head over all things for the sake of the Church which is His body, that the civil powers that be are ordained of God, and that there is to be a free Church in a free State. These teachings of Calvinism are also to be kept in mind.

Hence, care needs to be exercised in regard to the general attitude which we who hold the Calvinistic system should assume in regard to the civic well being of the nation. This system, in its broad outlines, teaches us not to descend into the arena of political affairs, nor to keep entirely aloof from the civic life of the community. To neglect or obscure the essential distinction between the spheres of the Church and State is to incur the serious danger of unholy alliances between the two. But to separate the two spheres so widely that there is no relation or inter-action between them may render it difficult to have civic life permeated with religious influences. The true doctrine lies between these extremes. The Christian man is a citizen of two kingdoms, and he has duties and responsibilities in both. He must neglect neither, yet must not confound the two. Many of the tenets of Calvinism make it reasonable to expect that its influence must tend towards civic righteousness. Only one or two of these can be noted, in the briefest way.

First, the importance it gives to the sovereignty of God tends to this result. Calvinism enthrones God everywhere. It makes Him supreme everywhere. In nature and in history He is on the throne and at the helm. He is also King of kings and Lord of lords. His authority is absolute. He does what He pleaseth in earth and heaven. The civil powers are ordained by Him, and all rulers rule under His hand. No system lays more stress upon this than Calvinism, and because it does it is fitted to secure the most potent influence upon the public life of a community. It teaches men in all their relations that God is supreme, and that He will take account of men. It reminds rulers that, under God, they are set over men, and will be called to answer before Him for the way they have kept their trust. In a word, Calvinism will bring the sense of God into civic life, and keep it regnant there. Only this will cause rulers to fear God and to rule in righteousness. And if the people have the same sense of God in their lives that Calvinism teaches, they will be better citizens, and exhibit righteousness in all the duties laid upon them.

Secondly, Calvinism gives a high place to the rights and liberties of the individual man. Religion, according to this system, must be, first of all, a matter of heart and life in the individual. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and by His regenerating grace God gives to the individual man the purpose and ability to fulfil this high destiny. The result is the production of men who fear God and fear to offend Him. No system, by its very genius, can do more than Calvinism to further noble citizenship, and to keep high ideals of patriotism before a people. If men were trained in, and were true to, this system of doctrine and life, they could be neither slaves nor tyrants. They would have too high an idea of the rights of the individual as a freeman in Christ, to be the former, and too much regard for the rights of others, to be the latter. And, in addition, Calvinism, in seeking the regeneration of the individual man by Divine grace, gives the true method for the regeneration of the social fabric, and the production of civic righteousness in a nation. It is idle to talk of setting men right in their civic and social relations till they are set right in themselves and in their relations to God. Calvinism very definitely insists on setting men right in their Divine relations, and in their own hearts. It naturally follows that men will then fall into right relations in the civic organism, and exhibit civic righteousness. Then there will grow up a civic conscience which will be potent for good.

Many other features of the Calvinistic system tend to the same result, but we can not even mention them now. We only add that history fully bears out all we say on the doctrinal side in favour of Calvinism as the source of a splendid civic righteousness. Geneva, Holland, and Scotland are undoubted witnesses to this conclusion. Where are to be found such heroes, such patriots, such martyrs, as in these lands, and in the countries influenced by the type of doctrine preached therein. Let us not fail to preach it.

Table Talk, Philadelphia, Pa., brings with it each month so many new and attractive ideas about preparing dainty and nourishing dishes that with its helpful suggestions the work of preparing the family meal becomes an easy matter. Recent numbers will be sent free on request, to our readers, or the May number for 10 cents.

When the Clock Strikes.

BY REV. W. S. M'AVISH B. D., PH. D.

In a school conducted by the Christian Brothers, in the province of Quebec, a child rises up just as the clock strikes the hour, and says:

"Let us remember we are here in the holy presence of God."

The child, of course, has received instructions to do this, and he may be appointed to attend to this duty, every school hour for a month. It is difficult to say what was originally designed by the act—whether to stimulate to higher endeavor, or to terrify, or cheer, or comfort; and it is even more difficult to tell what impression is actually produced upon the boy who utters the words, or upon those who hear them. It is quite probable that when the child makes the announcement for the first time, he speaks with the greatest reverence; but it is equally probable that when he has repeated it five times a day for almost a month, he pays but little more attention to the meaning than if he were repeating a part of the multiplication table. It is quite probable that when the children hear the words for the first time in the school, their minds are filled with deepest awe, but it is also possible that when they have become accustomed to them, they regard the repetition of them as a form, and nothing more.

But the words, when they are properly understood, are full of comfort and encouragement. There can scarcely be a more encouraging or uplifting thought than that we are in God's presence. The story of Brother Lawrence, the cook in the monastery in Paris, is very suggestive. Once in the depth of winter, he was in a forest, and there the thought came to him that God must be present, because those trees which were then apparently dead, would again show signs of life. After that thought there came another to the effect that, if God were there, he must be everywhere; and if everywhere, he must be in the kitchen where he, a poor monk, was doing such humble work. When he went back to that kitchen, the place seemed to him like the very gate of heaven.

To feel that we are in God's presence everywhere, will dignify even the most commonplace tasks and make them noble. This is a great truth, and even though we have neither a school clock, nor a school boy, to remind us of it, we do well to ponder it. If we realize that he is at our right hand, we shall not be moved; but if we forget it, we shall deprive ourselves of the stimulus of a truth at once comforting and inspiring.

Descronto, Canada.

Sabbath School Literature.

By resolution of the General Assembly a portion of the contributions to "Children's Day Fund" is used to assist new and needy schools in the matter of Sabbath School Literature. The General Assembly's S. S. Committee is desirous of seeing our own S. S. Helps and Papers in all schools attended by Presbyterian children. All applications are to be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, Rev. W. W. Peck, M. A., Napanee, Ont. Applications will receive immediate attention.

An unsaved, unconverted sinner stands before God just as he would if Christ had never died for him. He has refused the purchased pardon and must take the consequences.