

needed with the effectual cultivation of our home field will require to be seriously pondered. In the discussion of these and all the other matters which may come before the Synod, we trust there will be a free and full discussion, but at the same time the manifestation of much brotherly love, and Christian forbearance. When an opposite spirit prevails, when there appears not only difference of opinion, but bitterness of spirit, we both grieve the spirit of God, and prejudice our system of Presbyterian order in the eyes of Christians generally, and in the eyes of the world. May we enter on our business, and go through all the questions that may be before us in such a spirit, that those who witness our proceedings, may be led to acknowledge that God is with us, of a truth.

We affectionately entreat all who truly love God and his cause, to be earnest in pleading with God, in behalf of the Synod. We feel the need of divine guidance that we may be kept from pursuing wrong courses, and may be enabled to advance the glory of God and the real interests of the Church. We claim an interest in the prayers of our people generally. Let them hold up the hands of God's servants, and we humbly trust that the presence of the Head of the Church will be with us and that what we do may be owned and blessed by him.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF THE PULPIT ON PUBLIC QUESTIONS.

As to the duty of ministers with reference to public questions, very opposite opinions are entertained. Some would make the minister a political agitator, and zealous partizan; others would keep the minister entirely silent on all public questions, and matters which could at all be regarded as politics. One class will be offended if the pastor does not take up their peculiar views and advocate them from the pulpit; the other class will be horrified if the preacher ever goes beyond the trodden path of plain Gospel doctrine, and touches on any point not embraced in their favourite text book of systematic theology. Both opinions we regard as erroneous. The pastor must not be a political agitator, or partizan. He must give his great attention to considerations and matters affecting men's eternal interests, and must not allow himself to be engulfed in the sea of party politics, often affecting, as these do, objects of a paltry, local, or temporary character. But then on the other hand, ministers are watchmen on the towers of Zion. They must not merely look at the little circle of their own parish or congregation, but must look abroad and take a large and comprehensive view of events and of public affairs. They must identify themselves with mankind at large, and seek to be men of understanding, that they may know what Israel ought to do. Many of the great questions of the day which are discussed in Legislatures, have a most important and direct bearing on the progress and

influence of true religion, and it will not do for ministers to avoid these, under the plea that they lie beyond the limits of their peculiar province. Some of these questions we may specify, such as Education, Popery, Temperance, Slavery. There is no doubt that all these important questions have suffered greatly from this very cause, namely, from a tendency on the part of some ministers to shrink from the responsibility of assuming a distinct position, and giving from the pulpit a certain sound. For this, however, the people are at least as culpable as ministers. At this present moment, faithful testimony on the subject of slavery is not tolerated in the United States. We have heard of faithful ministers being deserted by their congregations, or compelled by starvation to remove, because they had the independence and fidelity to speak out on the evil and sin of slavery. While faithful and uncompromising ministers, who, taking their stand on the platform of the Bible, speak the words of truth and soberness, are branded as fanatics and even madmen.

There was a time when the pulpit stood forth more prominently, and was more regarded as a leader than a follower of public opinion. John Knox, Andrew Melville and others, believed that they were acting in accordance with duty and in accordance with the spirit of the Bible, when they boldly stood up and brought the Bible to bear on the public questions of the day. Even the apostles and prophets, at the risk of being accused of turning the world upside down, and of being charged as troublers of Israel, did not shrink from assuming the position of public instructors, and reprovers too, when reproof was needed. It is true, in these modern times, there are great changes. Things are not now, even as they were in the days of the Reformers. Then the pulpit was the great, indeed we may say the only means of information and influence; the only channel of communication with the public mind. Now books are circulated, and the newspaper press exercises an immense influence. But still, notwithstanding the change of circumstances, we cannot but regard it as one of the leading duties of ministers to take a more prominent place with reference to the great public questions of the day, few of which can possibly be separated from morality and religion. Far be it from us to seek to degrade ministers into mere politicians, or to lead them to overlook their position as ambassadors for Christ, whose great work it is to beseech men in Christ's name to be reconciled to God. But we would have them in understanding to bemen, and to acquit themselves like men. There is force and truth in the following extract from a late work by the Rev. G. Gilfillan, as we find it quoted in the *Bulwark* :—

"What a poor shrinking spot of ground the pulpit has become, when compared with the iron pavement which supported it in the days of our fathers! It was a pinnacle commanding a view of both worlds. On it the Knox or the Melville, the Owen or the Howe, stood up in majesty, like one of those composite creatures in the visions of Ezekiel, with four faces—one

uplifted to heaven in worship, another beseeching sinners to be reconciled to God, a third bowed in holy contrition, and a fourth looking around in righteous indignation at the wrongs and abuses of the Church and the world. The thunders they uttered against wickedness in high places were not mere hollow sounds—they shook it, if they did not shake it down, and this because they were the echoes of profound earnestness, of the voice of God in the souls of the preachers. In this high position they were sustained by the general opinion of the Christians of that day, who, if wrong in their notions of the financial and the legislative relations of the Church to the State, were right in their belief that the Church has a general supervising moral, intellectual, and spiritual authority over civil as well as sacred questions, and that religion, if really effectual on the public, as on a single individual, touches, tests, and rules it at every point. How different with Christianity in its present state! Our pulpits are generally silent on public questions—and silent, because, first, no one expects them to speak; because, secondly, many of their occupants are afraid to speak out; because, thirdly, others of them could not speak to the purpose; and because, once more, their word would not now have much weight, or exert much power. Even when, on special facts, they are compelled to give forth a sound about questions of politics, or of war and peace, it requires all the efforts of an interested portion of the press to echo it with any effect to the world; the sound, too, is uncertain and contradictory, and 'no one prepares for the battle,' while thousands are ready to cry, 'What have these ministers to do with politics, or with the Eastern War? Let them attend to their pastoral duties; enough that they dictate to our religious beliefs, instead of dogmatizing on subjects with which they have no business, and are but imperfectly acquainted.' \* \* \*

But are not politics fast becoming, so to speak, transcendental? Are not all political questions of moment merging into moral ones? Are not the clouds of political movement rapidly surcharging with spiritual electricity? Look at the questions relating to education, to the condition of the masses, to capital punishments, to the connection of the Church with the State, to our foreign policy, to our relations with despotic and slaveholding States. These and others are appealing for determination from the world to Christianity, from cabinets to churches. All of them involve elements which soar above the narrow limits of party politics, and render their discussion not only proper but necessary, in pulpits, synods, and general assemblies. Indeed the day of party politics seems nearly over, and their doom is already sealed. All the parties of the past shall soon be melted down into one vast 'country party,' a committee of the whole House of Britain, met in permanent session to deliberate on the general welfare. And from that committee no 'benefit of clergy' shall be allowed to exempt them. They must share in, and, if they are wise, they may, in some degree, direct and control its counsels. This, however, we fear they will not be. When forced out of the indifference, neutrality, or dignified contempt for politics, which at present mark the majority of their number, they may go to the other extreme, and try, by the fierce *ex cathedra* fulminations of bigoted zeal, to overgrow influences which have grown into gigantic power and stature while they slept, and which will refuse to obey their discipline, or to hearken to their word. It is absolutely incalculable how much the Church has lost by so long refusing to exert her lawful influence in politics, and by only interfering with them when her own worldly interests were at stake, and her own self was in peril; a loss which we greatly fear she shall never fully repair."