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A PASTORAL LETTER;

WRITTEN IN

PERILOUS TIMES,

AND SUITABLE TO THE

PRESENT TIMES.



MONTGOMERY, ALA.:

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1861.

At a recent Union Prayer-meeting of Christians in Montgomery, Ala., assembled to intercede with Almighty God in behalf of our country, the following extract of a Pastoral Letter, written in troublous times of the Revolution, was read by the minister presiding at the meeting. A patriotic Christian lady, who was present, being much impressed with the suitability of this letter to our own perilous times, and desiring that it might have a wider circulation, expressed a wish that it might be printed in the form of a tract, and provided means to defray the expense of its publication.

This letter bears date May 22, 1775; and was written by Drs. Witherspoon, Rodgers, and others, of a Synod of the Presbyterian Church, to the Congregations under their care.

P. 212
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PASTORAL LETTER.

Very Dear Brethren :—The Synod being met at a time when public affairs wear so threatening an aspect, and when (unless God in his sovereign providence speedily prevent it) all the horrors of a civil war throughout this great Continent are to be apprehended, were of opinion, that they could not discharge their duty to the numerous Congregations under their care, without addressing them at this important crisis. As the firm belief, and habitual recollection of the power and presence of the living God, ought at all times to possess the minds of real Christians, so in seasons of public calamity, when the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth, it would be an ignorance or indifference highly criminal not to look up to Him with reverence, to implore his mercy by humble and fervent prayer, and, if possible, to prevent his vengeance by unfeigned repentance.

We therefore, brethren, beseech you in the most earnest manner, to look beyond the immediate authors either of your sufferings or fears, and to acknowledge the holiness and justice of the Almighty in the present visitation. He is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. Affliction springeth not out of the dust. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; and, therefore, it becomes every person, family, city, and province, to humble themselves before his throne, to confess their sins, by which they have pro-

voked his indignation, and to beseech him to pour out upon all ranks a spirit of repentance and of prayer. Fly also for forgiveness to the atoning blood of the Redeemer—the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel. Remember and confess not only your sins in general, but those prevalent national offences, which may be justly considered as the procuring causes of public judgments; particularly profaneness and contempt of God, his name, Sabbaths, and sanctuary; pride, luxury, uncleanness, and neglect of family religion and government, with the deplorable ignorance and security which certainly ought to be imputed to this as their principal cause. All these are, among us, highly aggravated by the inestimable privileges which we have hitherto enjoyed without interruption since the first settlement of this country. If, in the present day of distress, we expect that God will hear our supplications, and interpose for our protection or deliverance, let us remember, what He himself requires of us is, that our prayers should be attended with a sincere purpose, and thorough endeavor after personal and family reformation. “If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thy hand towards him, if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles.” Job xi. 13, 14.

The Synod cannot help thinking that this is a proper time for pressing all of every rank, seriously to consider the things that belong to their eternal peace. Hostilities, long feared, have now taken place; the sword has been drawn in one province, and the whole continent, with hardly any exception, seem determined to defend their rights by force of arms. If, at the same time, the British ministry shall continue to enforce their claims by violence, a lasting and bloody contest must be expected. Surely, then, it becomes those who have taken up arms, and profess a willingness to hazard their lives in the cause of liberty, to be prepared for death, which to many must be certain, and to every one is a possible or probable event.

We have long seen with concern, the circumstances which occasioned and the gradual increase of, this unhappy difference. As Ministers of the gospel of peace, we have ardently wished that it could, and often hoped that it would have been more early accommodated. It is well known to you, (otherwise it would be imprudent indeed thus publicly to profess) that we have not been instrumental in inflaming the minds of the people, or urging them to acts of violence and disorder. Perhaps no instance can be given on so interesting a subject, in which political sentiments have been so long and so fully kept from the pulpit, and even malice itself has not charged us with labouring from the press : but as things are now come to such a state, that we do not wish to conceal our opinions as men and citizens, so the relation we stand in to you seemed to make the present improvement of it to your spiritual benefit, an indispensable duty.

Suffer us then to lay hold of your present temper of mind, and to exhort, especially the young and vigorous, by assuring them that there is no soldier so undaunted as the pious man, no army so formidable as those who are superior to the fear of death. There is nothing more awful to think of, than that those whose trade is war should be despisers of the name of the Lord of hosts, and that they should expose themselves to the imminent danger of being immediately sent from cursing and cruelty on the earth, to the blaspheming rage and desparing horrors of the infernal pit. Let, therefore, every one, who from generosity of spirit, or benevolence of heart, offers himself as a champion in his country's cause, be persuaded to reverence the name, and walk in the fear of the Prince of the kings of the earth, and then he may, with the most unshaken firmness, expect the issue either in victory or death.

Let it not be forgotten, that though for the wise ends of his providence it may please God, for a season to suffer his people to lie under unmerited oppression, yet in general, we may expect, that those who fear and serve Him in sincerity and

truth, will be favoured with his countenance and strength. It is both the character and the privilege of the children of God, that they call upon Him in the day of trouble, and He, who keepeth covenant and truth for ever, has said, that his ears are always open to their cry. We need not mention to you in how many instances the event in battles, and success in war, have turned upon circumstances which were inconsiderable in themselves, as well as out of the power of human prudence to foresee or direct, because we suppose you firmly believe that after all the counsels of men, and the most probable and promising means, the Lord will do that which seemeth him good ; nor hath his promise ever failed of its full accomplishment: "the Lord is with you while ye be with him, and if ye seek him he will be found of you ; but if ye forsake him he will forsake you." 2 Chron. xv. 2.

 The Union Prayer-meeting, at which this Pastoral Letter was read, is held on every Monday afternoon, between the hours of five and six, in the Lecture Room of the Methodist Episcopal Church.



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