

The Changing Scene and the Unchanging Word

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"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever."—Isa. 40:8.

INTRODUCTION



Dr. Machen

WE certainly have before us today a changing scene, and very ominous are the figures that stalk across it. Twenty years after a war which was supposed to have been fought to make the world

safe for democracy, Russia stands under the most soul-killing despotism, perhaps, that the world has ever seen; and despots rule also in Italy and in Germany. One of these despots, after the approved tradition of despotic rulers, is now engaged in plunging the world, so far as his actions can accomplish it, into another world war.

These have been kaleidoscopic changes indeed. Who would have thought a few years ago that all freedom of speech and of the press would have been destroyed in great sections of Europe and thus that the achievements of centuries would suddenly have been wiped out? Who would have thought that after a century-long struggle upwards to light and liberty, Europe would suddenly return to a worse than medieval darkness?

In our own country, a man has to be blind indeed not to see that the same forces are mightily at work. Religious liberty has not yet been destroyed among us, as in Mexico; religious edifices and schools have not yet all been taken over by government. But when teachers even in private schools and Church schools and other institutions of learning are, as in New York and elsewhere, required to take an oath of office, as though they were state officials, we have in principle the totalitarian state; and liberty, just at the most important point, is in principle being destroyed. Everywhere we find centralization of power under an arbitrary bureaucracy; the area of liberty is slowly but very surely being reduced. Solemn contracts public and private are being treated as scraps of paper; the solid foundations of lib-

erty and honesty are crumbling beneath our feet.

Yes, it is certainly true that we have before us today a changing scene.

In the midst of that changing scene, is there anything that is constant? Is there anything solid at all in the midst of the shifting sands? Can we find a safe refuge anywhere from the destructive forces that are so mightily at work? Is there anything at all that we can trust?

Certainly we cannot trust the Church. The same destructive forces that are at work in the State are also at work in the Church. It seems almost unbelievable, but still it is a fact that at this present moment, in the largest of the Presbyterian bodies in this country, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., a secret trial is actually being held in the city of Philadelphia. Two members of The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, against their earnest protest, are being deprived of that right to an open hearing which is accorded even to the most degraded criminal under our civil laws. The Church, bearing the sacred name of Christ, is standing on a lower ethical plane than that which prevails in the world outside—than that which prevails among people who make no profession of religion at all.

Unfortunately the tendency manifested in this secret trial is not isolated in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Everywhere open discussion is discouraged. If anything is wrong, we are told, we should present the matter to committees of the General Assembly; but the pulpit and the press should not be used to present it to the rank and file.

The truth is that the bureaucracy in the Church has not a bit more regard for the Constitution of the Church, than the bureaucracy in the State has for the Constitution of the State in so many countries of the world. We are today in the midst of a time when the landmarks are being destroyed. Solemn constitutional guarantees of

liberty are treated as though they meant nothing; and when people make solemn subscription to a system of doctrine that solemn pledge is treated as though it were a mere empty form of words.

No, we cannot find a haven of refuge from the confusion in the world by any mere appeal to the Church. In many places the visible Church has been swept away into the full current of the world's madness.

Well, then, if we cannot appeal to the Church, is there anything to which we can appeal? Is there anything that is constant amid the shifting scene? The answer to that question is given by the text that stands at the top of this page, the text that gives us the program for all the corresponding pages in future issues of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN.

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth," says the prophet; there are many things that change. But there is one thing that does not change. That one thing is the Word of God. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand for ever."

Where shall we today find the Word of God?

Our answer is very simple. We find it in the whole Bible. We do not say, in Modernist fashion, that the Bible *contains* the Word of God. No, we say, in Christian fashion, that the Bible *is* the Word of God.

There, at last, we find something that we can trust. We cannot trust the world; we cannot trust that elusive something known as "civilization." We cannot, alas, trust the visible Church. But when God speaks we can trust Him. He has spoken in the Bible. We can find our way through all the mists if we will make that blessed Book our guide.

In these pages in successive issues of this paper we are going to ask our readers to do just that; we are going to ask our readers to view the changing scene in the light of the unchanging Word.