

The Oaths of Secret Societies¹

Free Presbyterian Magazine – August 1927

1. THE oaths and obligations binding to the unknown, which Secret Societies require of entrants are unscriptural. The members are pledged "ever to conceal" and "never to reveal" things that they are about to learn, things of which they are ignorant at the time of swearing. The Bible condemns such a pledge or oath-"Or if a soul swear, pronouncing with his lips to do evil, or to do od, whatsoever it be that a man shall pronounce with an oath, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then shall he be guilty in one of these" (Lev. v. 11). When Christ's most trusted disciples, James and John, sought to pledge Him to the unknown in the words-"Master, we would that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire." He enquired, "What would ye that I should do for you?" (Mark x. 35-36). On this point [the Doctrinal and Practical Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church] says:-" All such societies, in requiring an oath. of secrecy before the matters to be kept secret are known, require the candidate for admission to yield up his own judgment and conscience to the keeping of the Lodge, and to swear to God that he will keep secrets which he might afterwards, in the exercise of an enlightened judgment and conscience, feel solemnly bound to reveal., No man can come under such an obligation without sinning against God and against his own soul" (Chap. xii., sec. i5). Moreover, it is degrading to one's manhood. Drunken Herod took his oath to perform that which he knew not, surrendered his manhood, and it made him the murderer of John the Baptist.

2. The Confession of Faith, chap. xxii., saY3 :-- " A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein, upon just occasion, the person swearing solemnly calleth God to witness what he asserteth or promiseth to swear, vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful name (of God), is sinful, and to be abhorred. Yet, as, in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God under the New Testament, as well as under the Old, so a

¹ The above extract is taken from the Rev. Samuel Kennedy's "Christ, Lord of All," a prize essay on some of the distinctive principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. As some of our readers may be aware, the Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Ireland, Scotland, and America, in their Doctrinal and Practical Testimony state plainly that "those who administer and those who take an oath unnecessarily, or on trifling occasions, or in connection with unscriptural associations, are guilty of profaning the name of God." President Adams, of D.S.A., said about the oaths of Secret Societies :-"Even a cannibal would be ashamed of them," and again - I am prepared to complete the demonstration before God and man, that the Masonic Oaths, obligations, and penalties, cannot by any possibility, be reconciled to the laws of morality, of Christianity, or of the land" - Editor.

lawful oath being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters, ought to be taken. Neither may any man bind himself by oath to anything but what is good and just. A vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath, and ought to be taken with the like religious care." The Doctrinal and Practical Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, chap. xiii., sec. 2, says:-" Oaths are to be sworn only for weighty reasons, and with due solemnity and reverence. Those who administer and those who take an oath unnecessarily, or on trifling occasions, or in connection with unscriptural associations, are guilty of profaning the name of God. Secret brotherhoods, being in themselves unscriptural associations, are sinful, and, having no right in any case to administer oaths, are, consequently, guilty of additional sin in assuming this right; and, in addition to its being sinful to join such associations, it is sinful to take an oath administered by them." "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain" (Exod. xx. i). Secret Societies have, therefore, no right to administer an oath to, or to require an oath of, their members; and their doing so is a profanation of God's ordinance of the oath and contrary to the Word of God. The officers of the State and the Courts of the Church of Christ, acting in the Name and by the authority of Him, who is the fountain of all power, alone have the right to administer oaths, and even they only when the object to be served is one of seriousness and importance.