

25.—[*Things which be Cæsar's ... things which be God's.*] Few principles contain more deep wisdom than the famous one in this verse. Few however have been found to admit of such difference as to practical application.

The grand difficulty in applying the principle arises from this, that men do not agree what are the “things of Cæsar,” and what are the “things of God,”—where the claims of Cæsar end, and where the claims of God begin. A meeting place there must be. A boundary to the respective claims of each party must be laid down. The definition of this boundary has been in every age a fertile cause of strifes, divisions, and controversies.

On the one hand the English government under the Stuarts used to push the claims of “Cæsar” to a fearful extreme. Men were persecuted, and punished, and fined, and imprisoned, like felons, because they would not worship God in a particular way. In this case “Cæsar,” beyond all doubt, was stepping out of his province

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church, in modern times, is continually interfering with the civil power of every nation where Roman Catholics live, and claiming for her members immunities and privileges which threaten to interfere with the existence of civil government altogether. In this case we have an extravagant and unreasonable assertion of the claim on behalf of “the things that are God’s.”

There are few subjects on which Christians have such need to pray for a sound mind and a clear judgment, and to ask for

deliverance from a morbidly scrupulous conscience, and especially on the question of the dues of “Cæsar.”

A conscience which is very tender and sensitive about a money payment which the state demands, but very careless in all matters of faith, and hope, and charity, and humility, and private holiness, is a conscience which, to say the least, is very suspicious.

So long as we have liberty to worship God in Christ, according to our conscience, and to serve Him in the way of His commandments, we may safely submit to many requirements of the state, which in our own private opinion we do not thoroughly approve.

It is evident to every reflecting person, that all government must be the result of compromise, and that every member of the commonwealth must be willing to give up something of his private opinions for the sake of the general good. If every subject is to be excused paying the tax to which he feels an objection, common sense tells us that all government must soon come to a stand-still. One will object to one tax, and another to another, until the whole state is thrown into confusion.

Gualter has a very useful note on this passage, in which he maintains the principle just laid down by the example of the Jews under the rule of their Babylonian conquerors, and also bears his protest against the excesses committed by Anabaptists in Germany, in the days of the Reformation, under the color of conscientious scruples.

Our Lord had probably in view two

parties among His hearers. One party was that of the Jewish zealots. To them He said “render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s.” The other was that of the worldly Herodians. To them He said, “Render to God the things that are God’s.”