**“A Little Comparison” American Sentinel 2, 5.**

E. J. Waggoner

The *Christian Statesman* of February 24 says:- {AMS July 1887, p. 52.1}

“The constant struggle for place and self and power in American politics, closely resembles the struggles for the throne in the last days of the Roman Empire, and every thoughtful student of history must be struck by the correspondence.” {AMS July 1887, p. 52.2}

Very true; and the thoughtful student of history will be struck by another correspondence which the *Statesman* forgot to mention. In the last days of the Roman Empire many professed Christians, whose zeal outran their piety, thought that politics would be vastly improved if only the church were placed under State patronage, and were allowed a controlling voice in public affairs. Accordingly Constantine did for the church just what the National Reform Association is trying to accomplish in these days. What he did, and its consequences, is thus told by Eugene Lawrence:- {AMS July 1887, p. 52.3}

“In the last great persecution under Diocletian the bishops of Rome probably fled once more to the catacombs. Their churches were torn down, their property confiscated, their sacred writings destroyed, and a vigorous effort was made to extirpate the powerful sect. But the effort was vain. Constantine soon afterward became emperor, and the bishop of Rome emerged from the catacombs to become one of the ruling powers of the world. This sudden change was followed by an almost total loss of the simplicity and purity of the days of persecution. Magnificent churches were erected by the emperor in Rome, adorned with images and pictures; where the bishop sat on a lofty throne, encircled by inferior priests, and performing rites borrowed from the splendid ceremonial of the pagan temple. The bishop of Rome became a prince of the empire, and lived in a style of luxury and pomp that awakened the envy or the just indignation of the heathen writer Marcellinus. The church was now enriched by the gifts and bequests of the pious and the timid; the bishop drew great revenues from his farms in the Campagna, and his rich plantations in Sicily; he rode through the streets of Rome in a stately chariot, and clothed in gorgeous attire; his table was supplied with a profusion more than imperial; the proudest women of Rome loaded him with lavish donations, and followed him with their flatteries and attentions; and his haughty bearing and profuse luxury were remarked upon by both pagans and Christians as strangely inconsistent with the humility and simplicity enjoined by the religion which he professed. {AMS July 1887, p. 52.4}

“The bishopric of Rome now became a splendid prize, for which the ambitious and unprincipled contended by force or fraud. The bishop was elected by the clergy and populace of the city, and this was the only elective office at Rome. Long deprived of all the rights of freemen, and obliged to accept the senators and consuls nominated by the emperors, the Romans seemed once more to have gained a new liberty in their privilege of choosing their bishop. They exercised their right with a violence and a factious spirit that showed them to be unworthy of possessing it. On the election day the streets of Rome were often filled with bloodshed and riot. The rival factions assailed each other with blows and weapons. Churches were garrisoned, stormed, sacked, and burned; and the opposing candidates, at the head of their respective parties, more than once asserted their spiritual claims by force of arms.” {AMS July 1887, p. 52.5}

Much more might be given to the same effect. The struggle for place and power is not yet so openly shameless as it was in the days of Rome’s decline; but once let the church, as a church, enter into politics, and the climax will be reached. The lesson which the thoughtful student of history will draw from this, is that men cannot be converted by the forms of religion, and that if the State is controlled by unprincipled men, a union of Church and State will simply result in the church’s being controlled by the same wicked men. The unregenerated human nature that is in any man will make itself manifest whether he is in the church or out of it. {AMS July 1887, p. 53.1}

E. J. W.