

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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WHOLE SERIES
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Poetry.

What is a Church?

BY JOSIAH CONDER.

WHAT constitutes a church?
Not Roman basilic or Gothic pile,
With fretted roof, tall spire, and long-drawn aisle;
These only mock thy search;
Fantastic sepulchres, when all is said,
Seek not the living church among the dead.

What is a church indeed?
Not triple hierarchy, or throned priest,
The stolen trappings of the Romish beast,
Altar, or well-sung creed;
Rites magical, to save, to sanctify,
Nor sought that lulls the ear, or lures the eye.

A band of faithful men
Met for God's worship in an upper room,
Or canopied by midnight's starry dome,
On hill-side, or lone glen,
To hear the counsels of His holy word,
Pledged to each other and their common Lord.

These, few as they may be,
Compose a church, such as, in pristine age,
Defied the tyrant's zeal, the bigot's rage,
For where but two or three,
Whatever place, in faith's communion meet,
There, with Christ's presence, is a church complete.

Baptist History.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER VIII.

The Obscure Period.

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

You seem surprised that I have as yet said nothing about the Manichæans, a sect which first came into notice about the latter part of the third century, and continued in existence, if historians are to be believed, a thousand years or more. They were charged, you observe, with denying Infant Baptism, and you ask why they have not been mentioned as forerunners of the Baptist denomination of these times, seeing that Baptist authors have so classified them. In reply, I wish you to understand that I consider those only as Baptists in the New Testament sense of that term, who hold baptism as an ordinance binding on all believers, and refuse it to all other persons. Now, Manichæism was a compound of oriental philosophy and Christianity. The fanciful and wild speculations in which Manes indulged were as ill-founded in reason as in Scripture, and justly entitled their author to the appellation "fanatic." He incorporated sundry portions of christianity into his incongruous system, and therefore the party has been ranked among the heretics, though, as I think, with little propriety. The heretics, as they are called, were seceders from the established or Catholic church. Manes originated an independent body, on entirely original principles, and ought to be placed on the same list as Muhammed and other founders of systems. It is said that he admitted baptism and the Lord's Supper among the services enjoined on his followers; but the supper was celebrated with water instead of wine, and baptism was optional; those only who wished it were baptized; those who did not desire it were not debarred from membership on that account, and infants were excluded from participation in the rite. After these explanations you will not wonder that I have refrained from classing the Manichæans with the revivers of primitive religion.

We are now entering on the period which I have denominated "obscure." It is so called because the information is generally scanty, and sometimes of very doubtful character. I may begin by remarking that the student of ecclesiastical history must beware lest he be led astray by the misrepresentations of bigoted historians. Manichæism was soon looked on as a concentration of all that was outrageous and bad in religious opinion, and it became the fashion to call all heretics "Manichæans." Hence many excellent men have been so stigmatised, whose views and practices accorded with the word of God. It is necessary to repair to the original sources of history,

and even then to scan very closely the statements handed down to us, that they may be disentangled, as far as possible, from mistake or misrepresentation.

Further: it is not safe or proper to report all opponents of infant baptism as Baptists, in our sense of the word. Throughout the middle ages there were many dissenters from the Catholic faith, as it was called, who rejected baptism altogether, holding sentiments respecting that ordinance which much resemble those of the Quakers in these times. Possibly they were driven to those extreme views by contemplating the absurd ceremonies connected with baptism, and the superstitious notions entertained by the majority. It seemed to them better to have no baptism at all than to countenance such follies. Doubtless they were wrong, although much might be offered in excuse for them. But when these parties are adduced as witnesses for infant baptism, an unfairness is sometimes committed. Their opposition was against all baptism, and not against infant baptism only. I am not disposed to regard any persons as primitive Baptists unless they practised the baptism of believers; their rejection of infant baptism will not warrant the imposition of that worthy name on them. Mr. Orchard's "History of Foreign Baptists," and other works of a similar kind, have now and then fallen into this error.

At the same time it must be confessed that there is the utmost difficulty in forming a satisfactory judgment in regard to the opinions held by the reformers of the middle ages. We know nothing of them but by the reports of their adversaries, who were predisposed against them; and who, for want of religious sympathy, were unable to appreciate or even to understand their peculiar views. The same words were sometimes used by opposing parties in different senses, and truths were seen in different aspects. Hence the confusion and contradictoriness which are too often apparent.

These observations apply to the case of the Paulicians. They first appeared about the middle of the seventh century, in Armenia, and soon spread wonderfully, till they were numbered by hundreds of thousands. Their enemies accused them of Manichæism, which accusation they indignantly repelled. I will not trouble you at present with the details of their history, which would occupy too much space, but will proceed at once to the matter in hand. The only ancient authorities whence we can derive a knowledge of their sentiments are Photius and Petrus Siculus, who wrote against them with great bitterness, and on that account can scarcely be considered as worthy of entire credence. Photius was Archbishop of Constantinople, and died A. D., 890; Petrus Siculus, a learned nobleman, died a few years later. On the question of baptism Photius writes to this effect; that though the Paulicians despise "saving baptism," they pretend that they have received it, inasmuch as they received the gospel, wherein Christ declares that he is the "living water"; and he adds, that they are willing that the priests should baptize their children, notwithstanding their disbelief in any saving benefit accompanying the rite. Admitting the correctness of this account, the Paulicians rejected water-baptism, teaching that the knowledge of Christ, which is spiritual baptism, is sufficient. If they allowed the priests to baptize their children, as Photius states, it was probably to save themselves from annoyance, perhaps from persecution; and as, in their opinion, the baptism did the children neither good nor harm, it was looked on as a matter of indifference. I do not justify or commend them. Whatever their views were, the priests judged that they had saved the children by baptizing them, and there should not have been any opportunity given for cherishing that anti-christian notion. Still it is to be remembered that we are by no means certain of the truth of the statement, as the writer was a virulent opposer of the Paulicians, and aimed to excite hatred against them. The same remark will apply to Petrus Siculus, who, as Gibbon very

properly says, wrote "with much prejudice and passion."

Perhaps, after all, the Paulicians did not reject either baptism or the Lord's Supper, (which also they are said to have held in a spiritual sense only,) but the unauthorised additions that had been made to the ordinances, and the current opinions respecting their design and efficacy. In other words they rejected baptismal regeneration, and transubstantiation. The progress of perversion had brought men to this point, that baptism was no longer regarded as a profession of Christ, nor the Lord's Supper as a memorial of his love; the former was held to be the instrument of regeneration, and in the latter there was said to be an actual reception of the Saviour's body and blood. Whoever refused to acquiesce in these representations was reproached as a denier of the ordinances, whereas his opposition was confined to corruptions and abuses. This is a very probable supposition, though we have not the means of verifying it, for want of historic materials.

It is further to be considered that the Paulicians were not altogether agreed among themselves. There were divisions and parties. It may be that Photius and Petrus Siculus designedly referred to those of them whose opinions were, in their judgment, the farthest removed from Catholic verity, and that while some wandered into errors and excesses, the remainder pursued a scriptural course. Photius himself states that some of them observed the Lord's Supper, though, as he affects to believe, they did it to "deceive the simple." This indicates the existence of two parties. Those who observed one ordinance were not likely to neglect the other. I am therefore willing to believe that there were among the Paulicians many who preserved the truths and worship of Christianity, as derived from the New Testament. The obscurity that hangs over the question of the sacraments may yet be dispelled by further researches among the documents and treatises of the times.

Here I must stop. I shall try to get to the end of the "obscure" period in the next letter, which will contain some curious things. There were considerable oddities in the middle ages.

From my Study,
Oct. 7, 1856.

Yours truly,
MENNO.

For the Christian Messenger.

A FRAGMENT.

The Fading Flower.

I WATCHED with interest the swelling of the tender buds until they had gradually and almost imperceptibly unfolded and presented to my admiring gaze a beautiful sisterhood of those "Smiling-featured daughters of the sun," which the renowned Scottish bard has so aptly pronounced to be "Fairer than queenly bride, by Jordan's bank."

But as I looked upon them day after day, they became less lovely than before: their bright eyes grew dim—their petals dropped off—their leaves withered—until at length only one bright blossom remained amid the general wreck, to show what once had been. Soon I went to gather it, as a memento, but—it was not there.

This seemed a matter of regret, to me, that "The vernal breeze, the balmy showers" should "first form, and then destroy the flowers"; yet the blighted stalks whereon they had flourished became my teachers. I called to mind the words of the inspired penmen who have ransacked nature to illustrate the transience of our present life. They have told us that "we all do fade as a leaf," and that as "the grass withereth and the flower thereof fadeth, so we must vanish away." They have told us likewise that not only these ephemeral declarations must be swept away but "the earth itself must be dissolved and the heavens shall depart like a scroll," before the presence of the Lord their Creator, but he shall remain unchanged amid the wreck of matter and the crash of worlds.

Oh how much do we see around us, in the daily walks of life, of which the fading

flower seems a touching emblem. Earth's joys seem fair, but they quickly fade—our friends on earth are beloved, but they, too, must droop and die, and we, ourselves, must soon depart and be no more. May we then be enabled by divine grace, to say in apostolic language, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," where our pensive eye will no longer rest upon forms of beauty and objects of delight transient as the dew of the morning, but where the amaranthine garlands of immortality shall flourish in celestial beauty to all eternity.

ALEX. WILFRED.

For the Christian Messenger.

LETTER FROM BURMAH.

HENTHADAH, BRITISH BURMAH,
July 7th, 1856.

My dear Mr. Editor,—A short time since I gave you an episode of Missionary life, which occurred during one of my boat-tours among the people. I have now to give you another, not at all dissimilar, bearing indeed a very unpleasant likeness to the former. Even in a Christian land it is by no means an agreeable thing to wake up in the darkest part of a pitchy night and have a sensation of thieves-in-the-house come over you. In heathen Burmah I have recently learned that such a sensation is one, heightened as it is by the recollection, that the Burman, like the pirate, believes with all his heart that "dead men tell no tales," whose repetition is by no means to be desired. But to my story. In the house, or as the English officers are fond of styling the mat-building, "the exaggerated hen-coop," which we occupy here, there is a window whose appearance always has been strongly suggestive of a premium on thieving. In a word, it is no better than no window at all. But we have always felt so secure from thieves, that the dilapidated window has been allowed to remain to this present, giving a knowing wink, as it were, like a bleared and evil eye to every rascal who might look upon it. Now let me here premise that the Burman rat has all the peculiarities, as a vermin, that the Burman himself has as a man. He is the noisiest, cowardliest, most wantonly destructive thing that you can conceive in rat-shape. It must be an undoubted fact that our house is the head-quarters of rathom in Henthadah. They often wake us up with a noise as if a dozen men were bustling, trampling, and racing about the house. Consequently, if we are waked up a dozen times a night by sounds which would assuredly make nervous people at home review that article of their creed which has respect to the non-existence of ghosts and goblins, we merely make a reflection rather condemnatory of the good breeding of poor rat, and drop to sleep again. The night before last I heard a slight noise in the direction of the window before mentioned, but thought nothing more of it than that it was the beginning of the rat route and revel, and was falling asleep again when something unusual in the sound decided me to strike a match and light my candle. I commenced a review of the house, and was just thinking how verdant I was to let a rat pull me out of bed, when a turn brought me to my bathing-room, and behold that treacherous window wide open and staring on me like an eye of night! By this time the mistress of the house was up, and, looking over my shoulder, read more plainly than I did the expression of that dark eye. It said to her where are your spoons? I need not say that echo answered with most mocking distinctness "where?" And instead of our silver, much of it the gift of kind friends at home, I found a small but very heavy club, which I have no doubt would have proved harder than my head had I been in time to interfere with the performer of this pleasant little scene. A reward of 50 rupees (£5) and a vigorous search and espionage established throughout the city has not yet brought our property to light. Besides our spoons we found other articles had gone, among them a bunch of keys, whose loss will put us to great inconvenience, besides being rather