

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.

For the Christian Messenger.

AUTUMN.

BY SUSAN A. SPINNEY.

[The following stanzas have been reserved for an appropriate season until we have nearly allowed it to pass.]

The leaves are falling to the ground,
From off the lovely poplar tree;
The wind that brings them has a sound
Of deep solemnity to me.

It tells that summer's past away,
Just like a lovely opening flower
That bloomed so lovely yesterday—
But, oh! it withered in an hour.

So summer with its beauties o'er,
It may not smile on me again;
I may be called away before
Its loveliness shall deck the plain.

And when I see the falling leaves
Thus driven by the Autumn wind,
I heard a whisper in the breeze,
That brings sweet comfort to my mind.

That whisper is of other lands,
Where sorrows cannot rend the breast;
Where Jesus in his beauty star'd,
To give the soul eternal rest.

Selected for the Messenger.

GOD IS LOVE.

[The following remarkable and sublime stanzas are said to have been scratched by a Lunatic upon the window of his cell.]

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade.

To tell the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor would the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER X.

The Obscure Period.

[Concluded.]

MY YOUNG FRIEND,
ACCORDING to promise I proceed now to give you a fuller account of the Paulicians. My chief authority is Petrus Siculus, a nobleman in the imperial service, who was sent by the Emperor Basil to Tribica, a Paulician town, in the year 870, to negotiate an exchange of prisoners. He remained there seven months, and availed himself of the opportunity to gain information respecting the opinions and practices of the Paulicians, both by disputing with them and by instituting inquiries among the Catholics in the neighbourhood. It is unfortunate that there is no better authority to consult, for Petrus Siculus was so bitterly prejudiced against the people that his statements cannot be received without doubt and distrust. The only safe course is to endeavour to disentangle facts from opinions, insinuations and invectives, and thus to ascertain the truth. Yet even then it is impossible to furnish a complete picture. Petrus Siculus deals chiefly in negatives. He tells you what the Paulicians denied, and rails at them for presuming to differ from the Catholic party, but he leaves you to guess what they really believed, in many important particulars. I mention these things, that you may perceive the difficulty that lies in the way of an impartial narrator.

About the year 653, during the reign of the emperor Constant 2. a young man named Constantine, resident at Mananalis, in Armenia, rendered hospitable attentions to a stranger whom misfortune had brought under his roof. The stranger proved to be a deacon of a Christian Church, and he had in his possession a precious treasure, which he gave to Constantine on his departure, in return for the kindness shewn him. It was a copy of the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul. Constantine read, believed, and

obeyed. Manichæism, by which he had been deluded, was immediately renounced. His Manichæan books were thrown aside and the sacred writings were exclusively studied. Shortly afterwards he removed to Cibossa, where he lived and laboured for twenty-seven years. He was a diligent and successful preacher. Great numbers received the truth. In what manner he proceeded to form them into societies or churches, and how they were governed, we have not the means of knowing. We may conjecture and infer, but inference is not history. If the report of Petrus Siculus be correct, they lay under considerable disadvantage in not having the book of the Acts in their hands, from which they would have gathered the practices of the apostolic churches, and perhaps this circumstance exerted an unfavourable influence on their arrangements. But we must not affirm positively on this subject.

Constantine died the death of a martyr. The emperor Constantine Pogonatus sent Simeon, one of his officers, to Cibossa, with a military detachment. He apprehended Constantine, compelled the congregation to present themselves before him, and ordered them to stone their minister. They stood in silence for a while, no one lifting up his hand in obedience to so cruel a command. At length a man named Justus stepped forward, and the murderous deed was done. Simeon then undertook the work of conversion. He disputed with the followers of Constantine, and laboured hard to restore them to the Catholic Church. But he labored in vain. Not only so, the arguments used on the other side were too powerful for him. He yielded to the force of truth, and returned to Constantinople a Paulician in heart. At first he did not avow the change that had taken place, but at length he found it impossible to conceal it, and consequently he left the imperial service, retired to Cibossa, joined the persecuted sect, and became the successor of the very man whom he had murdered by the hand of Justus. After several years of usefulness, Justus, who had professed repentance and had been restored to the church, quarrelled with him and betrayed him to a neighbouring bishop, by whose means all the members of the church then resident in Cibossa were seized and burned alive in one vast pile. Paulus only escaped. He fled to Episparris. His two sons, Genesis and Theodotus, became Paulician ministers. Genesis was on one occasion apprehended as a heretic and taken to Constantinople, where he underwent an examination before the Patriarch. It is thus reported by Petrus Siculus:—

Patriarch.—"Why hast thou derided the orthodox faith?"

Genesis.—"Anathema to him who denies the orthodox faith": (meaning thereby his own heresy, which he boasted of as the true "orthodox faith").

Patriarch.—"Wherefore dost thou not believe in and adore the venerable cross?"

Genesis.—"Anathema to him who does not adore and worship the venerable and life-giving cross": (meaning Christ himself, whose out-stretched arms present the figure of the cross).

Patriarch.—"Why dost thou not worship and adore the holy mother of God?"

Genesis.—"Anathema to him who does not adore the most holy mother of God, the common mother of us all, into whom our Lord Jesus Christ entered": (meaning the heavenly Jerusalem, into which Christ has entered, as our Forerunner).

Patriarch.—"Why dost thou not partake of the immaculate body and precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, but dost rather despise the same?"

Genesis.—"Anathema to him who despises the body and blood of Jesus Christ": (meaning thereby the words "body and blood"; and nothing more).

"In like manner," says Petrus Siculus, "he spake of baptism, saying that Jesus Christ himself is baptism, and that there is no other, because he said, 'I am the living water.' And thus, perverting everything by his own false interpretations, he was acquitted and honourably dismissed."

After this, Mananalis was again the

head-quarters of the Paulicians. Genesis lived there thirty years, and died in peace. Various troubles and disasters followed. Joseph, who seems to have succeeded Genesis, withdrew to Episparris, and afterwards to Antioch in Pisidia, where he laboured thirty years. He was succeeded by Bahanes. But there must have been many more engaged in the work besides these, for the imperfect notices that are left indicate an extensive series of operations, embracing a large number of churches and a powerful body of adherents.

About the year 810 the Paulicians were joined by Sergius, who became one of the most eminent men of their community. The account of his conversion is exceedingly interesting. He was an intelligent, well-educated young man, and much esteemed for his many excellent qualities; but he was profoundly ignorant of religion. One day a Christian woman (evidently a Paulician) met with him and entered into conversation. "Why," said she, "do you not read the Holy Gospels?" "Because," he replied, "it is not lawful for us laymen, but only for the priests." "You are altogether mistaken," she rejoined, "for there is no respect of persons with God; he will have all men to be saved." She then proceeded to expose the priestly tyranny of the age, and the gross superstitions by which the people were deluded, urging the young man to examine the matter for himself. He did so. He read, and thought, and prayed, and became a Christian "in deed and in truth." The genuineness of his conversion was proved by his eminently holy life and incessant zeal. He traversed a large part of Western Asia, preaching everywhere, and calling on the people to abandon the follies of a corrupted christianity and "worship God in the spirit." Thirty-four years were thus spent, and marvellous results accompanied his efforts. Multitudes were converted. So general was the defection from the established church that the Greek emperor was greatly alarmed, and adopted the severest measures for the suppression of the reformation. The Paulicians had endured persecution from the beginning, and had "increased and multiplied" under it. But the storm raged with such terrific fierceness during the first half of the ninth century that utter extermination seemed inevitable. It is affirmed that under the auspices of the empress Theodora, who held the regency during the minority of her son Michael, from A. D. 832 to A. D. 846, no fewer than one hundred thousand Paulicians were put to death, "by the sword, the gibbet, or the flames." Sergius was one of the victims. He and his brethren went to join those of whom it is said that they constantly cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on those that dwell on the earth?"

"Oppression maketh a wise man mad." There is a point at which resistance becomes venial, if not obligatory. Imperial cruelty provoked retaliation and revenge. The Paulicians took up arms in defence of their families and their homes. The transition from self-defence to active rebellion is easy, and the provinces of the East were convulsed with civil war, for all the miseries of which the persecutors were responsible. It continued many years. The co-operation of the Saracens was sought, and many provinces of the empire were desolated. But I will not pursue the history any further. It is difficult to trace the progress of religion when carnal weapons have been taken up. I will only observe, further, that the Paulician revival had early extended to Thrace, now the Turkish province of Roumelia; that in the tenth century a large number of Paulicians were removed to Philippopolis in that country, and also to Bulgaria, the adjoining province; and that in the following age they began to migrate into Italy, France, and other parts of Europe.

When Petrus Siculus sat down to write his history he was predetermined to blacken the Paulicians to the utmost. Consequently he maintained that they were Manichæans, notwithstanding the disclaimer of Constantine, their founder; and having taken that position he was resolved to hold

it. I shall not think it worth while to discuss the question. There may have been some among them who still retained a regard to the philosophic speculations with which they were familiar before conversion, and which had for many ages proved very injurious to spiritual christianity; and that unworthy persons sometimes crept in among them may be readily admitted. That is the fate of all parties. But here was their distinction;—they withdrew from the Greek church because that church had abandoned the high ground of gospel truth and spiritual worship. They asserted the right and duty of searching the Scriptures, and would admit no other rule. They abhorred saint-worship. They would not adore the cross, nor bow down before images. They abjured the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In a word, they appear to have been Protestants before the Reformation, and even before those who have been commonly reckoned as its precursors. The meagre accounts of them which remain, tinged as they are with obstinate prejudice, fail to give us satisfaction. Had we the letters of Sergius, which Petrus Siculus tells us his followers valued highly, we should be able to obtain full and accurate information. This, however, is certain, that a religious movement, springing from God's word, and so firmly maintained against opposition that two hundred years after its rise the astonishing number of one hundred thousand of its adherents were cut off, without destroying the body, must have possessed a mighty influence. I agree with Joseph Milner, the ecclesiastical historian, who observes that in this case we have "one of those extraordinary effusions of the Divine Spirit, by which the knowledge of Christ and the practice of godliness is kept alive in the world."

The "Revival period" will begin to occupy our attention in the next letter.

Yours truly,

From my Study,
November 15, 1856.

MENNO.

"Christ a Great way off."

Many awakened sinners imagine the Saviour to be far away from them and difficult of access, and they toil long and wearily in the search to find Him, while He is ever near them, knocking at the door of their hearts, and seeking admission. The *Independent* has the following illustration of the common saying, "I've a great way to go to get to Christ,"

"I'VE A GREAT WAY TO GO TO GET TO CHRIST."

So spoke a man about fifty years of age, apparently near death. I found him very sick, and not expecting to live. To my inquiry if he expected to get well, he said he thought he should never be any better.

"And do you think," I asked him, "that you are prepared for heaven?"

"No, I do not think that I am."

I told him he ought to be ready for his departure, as he did not know when God might call him.

"And what can I do?"

"You can go to Christ," I said, "and he will save you."

"Yes, but I have a great way to go."

I asked him if he meant to be understood as saying, that he had wandered in the ways of sin so far from God that the way back to him was so long. This he said was his meaning.

I intimated to him that, although he was a stranger to him, I had no doubt of his having gone far off from God in the ways of sin. "But remember, my friend," said I, "that there is no occasion for you to go back to God by all the crooked ways in which you have walked away from him." I taught him that the way back to Christ was short, and quickly traveled. Its course was straight. I reminded him of the Prodigal Son, and pointed out to him how this vain, foolish, wicked young man, with his portion in advance, went to a great distance from his father's house, and there, by a life of profligacy, soon squandered all his patrimony, and was left destitute, wretched, helpless. He was brought so low that he engaged in what was, with the Jews, accounted the meanest of all employments—