

The Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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Poetry.

PRAYER.

There is an eye that never sleeps
Beneath the wing of night,
There is an ear that never shuts,
When sink the beams of light.

There is an arm that never tires,
When human strength gives way;
There is a love that never fails,
When earthly loves decay.

That eye is fixed on seraph throngs,
That ear is filled with angels' songs;
That arm upholds the worlds on high;
That love is shown beyond the sky.

But there's a power which man can wield,
When mortal aid is vain;
That eye, that arm, that love to reach,
That listening ear to gain.

That power is "Prayer," which soars on high,
And feeds on bliss beyond the sky.

LIFE.

Like to the falling of a star,
Or as the flights of eagles are,
Or like the fresh spring's gaudy hue,
Or silver drops of morning dew,
Or like a wind that chafes the flood,
Or bubbles which on water stood—
E'en such is man, whose borrowed light
Is straight called in, and paid to-night,
The wind blows out; the bubble dies;
The spring entombed in autumn lies;
The dew dries up; the star is shot;
The flight is past—a man forgot.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER VI.

The Transition Period.

[Continued]

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

The period now under consideration was marked by one "transition" which can never be sufficiently deplored. Hitherto, Christians had endured afflictions for the Lord's sake, and had willingly suffered the loss of all things rather than renounce the faith. But a change had taken place, involving a temptation which proved too powerful for any of them. When Constantine the Great declared for Christianity he expected to stand in the same position towards that religion as he had before occupied with regard to paganism. The Emperors were the high priests of Paganism, and the civil government had from time immemorial directed and controlled the religion of the country. Was not the same policy to be observed? Had Constantine examined the New Testament the question would have been soon answered. But he was very imperfectly acquainted with that book; and besides, the exclusive authority of God's word in matters of religion had been long given up. The profession of christianity in those times was a very different thing from what it had been in the first and present ages. Scripture was smothered by tradition. The simplicity of apostolic form had given place to complicated ceremonies. Expediency had supplanted right. The enquiry was not, What has Christ commanded?—but rather, how may influence, and power, and patronage, and wealth be obtained? How may the gospel become popular? Such being the views of the leaders, it is not surprising that the people grovelled in worldliness, or that rulers determined to use christianity as a state-machine, as they had

used paganism. Constantine led the way, and his successors naturally trod in his steps. He began by enjoining external compliance with christian institutions. The observance of the Lord's day was enforced by imperial law. Intemperance in christian controversies followed. The bishops were too ready to invoke the exercise of his authority, and there was not religious intelligence enough among the people to discern and resist the usurpation. The State set up the idol, uniformity, and they bowed down and worshipped it. The views entertained by the majority were called "Catholic," because they were said to be held by all, and "Orthodox," because they were assured to be right. Those who differed from the majority were termed heretics. The words "orthodoxy" and "heresy" were not always employed, however, in the same acceptations. As each man deemed himself right and his opponent wrong, every man was orthodox in his own eyes; and as successive emperors patronized one or another form of belief, he who was orthodox in one reign was liable to be stigmatised as a heretic in the next. Patronage, power, and persecution are closely allied. When imperial intervention was called for, to settle christian disputes or to suppress a rising sect, there was no way of exercising it but by means of penalties, for law must of necessity be powerless unless offences against it are punished. Hence arose the monstrous anomaly of christian persecution. If orthodox was in the ascendant, the catholic emperor pulled down Arian churches, and fined the people for attending Arian worship; the same measure was meted out to other sects. If an Arian sat on the throne, the Catholics were subject to the same indignities. It was unchristian on both sides. Pagans and Jews were hardened in their unbelief. When christianity was forced into an alliance with the State, the form (though even that was disguised,) remained, but the spirit had departed.

Were I writing to you on ecclesiastical history in general. I should enlarge here. I should expatiate on the sin of legislation in the church, whose duty it is to obey Christ's laws, not to make new ones,—on the pomp and pride of bishops,—the tyranny of kings,—the arrogance of councils,—and especially on the evils which have resulted from the worldly admixture connected with the introduction of infant baptism. Perhaps the last-mentioned item will receive separate consideration some time hence. But just now I must confine myself to the influence of the State on religion, and particularly in relation to the subject before us.

The Emperor Justinian (who reigned from A. D. 527 to A. D. 565) was a thorough despot. He would acknowledge no will but his own. The rights of conscience were altogether ignored by him. He claimed absolute mastery over his subjects, and required them to renounce paganism and embrace christianity, because he willed it, without reference to other considerations. A notable edict of his illustrates these remarks. It enacted, "that such parents as were yet unbaptized should present themselves, with their wives and children, and all that appertained to them, in the church; and there they should cause their little ones immediately to be baptized, and the rest as soon as they were taught the scriptures according to the canons. But if any persons, for the sake of a public office or dignity, or to get an estate, received a fallacious baptism themselves, but in the mean time left their wives, or children, or servants, or any that were retainers or near relations to them, in their ancient error, their goods in that case are ordered to be confiscated, and their persons punished by a competent

judge, and excluded from bearing any office in the commonwealth."—(Bingham's Antiquities of the Church, Book xi, ch. 4.)

Thus the fabric of infant baptism rested on two pillars—delusion and force:—delusion inasmuch as the ceremony was supposed to be invested with regenerating and saving power,—force as employed by the State, in the interest of the church. It is true, they called it an "apostolic institution"; but that was an afterthought. Exorcism, unction, the sign of the cross, holy water, infant communion, and many other childishnesses, were also called, "apostolic institutions"—not at first, but long after they were invented, to conceal their real origin, and prevent men from discovering their trickery.

Unquestionably the progress of religion in the community which was emphatically designated "the church" was altogether downward during the "transition period." It is an interesting inquiry. How far the spirit of the gospel was preserved, and its essential truths maintained by those whom ecclesiastical historians have denominated "heretics," and "schismatics." I shall pursue this enquiry in succeeding letters. In order to find the true church we must look out of the "church" commonly so called.

I shall begin with the Novatians and Donatists. But as the enquiry will occupy considerable space, I shall close this letter by adducing a few testimonies relative to the manner in which the ordinance of baptism was administered between the years 254 and 604.

With the sole exception of the clinics, already referred to, baptism still consisted in the immersion of the candidate, who was ordinarily divested of clothing. The same method was adopted for children as for adults. And the immersion was still commonly performed thrice.

The following passages are taken from Bingham's "Antiquities," Book xi, ch. 11. "Cyril of Jerusalem" (died, A. D. 386) "makes it an emblem of the Holy Ghost's effusion upon the Apostles; for as he that goes down into the water and is baptized, is surrounded on all sides by the water, so the apostles were baptized all over by the Spirit; the water surrounds the body externally, but the Spirit incomprehensibly baptizes the interior soul."

"So St. Ambrose" (died A. D. 396) "explains it. 'Thou wast asked, Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty? And thou didst answer, I believe; and then thou wast immersed in water, that is, buried.'"

"St. Chrysostom" (died, A. D. 407) "proves the resurrection from this practice; 'for,' says he, our being baptized and immersed into the water, and our rising again out of it, is a symbol of our descending into hell or the grave, and of our returning from thence.'"

"St. Jerome" (died A. D. 420) "makes this ceremony to be a symbol of the Unity as well as the Trinity. 'For,' says he, 'we are thrice dipped in the water, that the mystery of the Trinity may appear to be but one; we are not baptized in the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but in one name, which is God.'"

"St. Augustine" (died A. D. 430) "tells us there was a twofold mystery signified in this way of baptizing. The trine immersion was both a symbol of the Holy Trinity, in whose name we are baptized, and also a type of the Lord's burial, and of his resurrection on the third day from the dead. For we are buried with Christ by baptism, and rise again with him by faith."

Leo the Great (died A. D. 461) says, "The trine immersion is an imitation of the three days burial; and the rising again out

of the water is an image of Christ rising from the grave."

Gregory the Great (died, A. D. 604) wrote thus to Leander, bishop of Seville;—"Concerning the three immersions in baptism, you have judged very truly already, that different rites and customs do not prejudice the holy church, whilst the unity of faith remains entire. The reason why we use three immersions at Rome is to signify the mystery of Christ's three days' burial, that whilst an infant is thrice lifted up out of the water the resurrection on the third day may be expressed thereby. But if any one thinks this is rather done in regard to the Holy Trinity, a single immersion in baptism does no way prejudice that; for so long as the unity of substance is preserved in three persons, it is no harm whether a child be baptized with one immersion or three; because three immersions may represent the Trinity of persons, and one immersion the Unity of the Godhead."

At first, baptism was administered in rivers, pools, baths, wherever a sufficient quantity of water could be conveniently obtained. In the fourth century, baptisteries began to be erected. These were large buildings, contiguous to the churches. There was usually but one in a city, attached to the bishop's or cathedral church. The baptistery proper, or font, was in the centre of the building, and at the sides were numerous apartments for the accommodation of the candidates. Several of these baptisteries yet remain, and have been frequently described by travellers. The baptisteries at Rome (in the church of St. John Lateran), Ravenna, Florence, Pisa, and Parma may be particularly mentioned. The fonts in these baptisteries are from three to four feet deep, and of proportionate size. Of course they were intended for immersion.

Yours very truly,

From my Study,
August 2, 1856.

MENNO.

For the Christian Messenger.

AN APPEAL.

Beloved brethren in Christ Jesus, Our dear Redeemer. I as one who feels an interest in his blood to save my unworthy soul, and feel also a desire that all may feel thus as well as myself, would call on you who have felt his love to fulfil his commands by giving some of your gold and silver to impart the word of his grace to those who have it not, you say you love Christ, then show your love by your obedience to Him. He has commanded you to feed the poor, therefore give your money to send his word to the poor heathen and them that know not God. He has commanded you to clothe the naked. Who is so naked as the poor sinner, or the heathen who has not the righteousness of Jesus Christ to cover his sinful soul from the wrath of God? We know faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God, so we ought to strive to give them the Word that they may hear and have faith in it, and by faith may be saved from the wrath to come; and should it not save their souls it will raise them to earthly happiness. But he who has put it in our hearts to give it to the heathen sends it not to raise them to earthly happiness, but heavenly, for he has said "I came not to condemn the world but to save the world." Therefore as we profess to be followers of him who went about doing good, let us work while it is day for the night cometh when no man can work. Time is short and opportunities for doing good shall soon be taken from us, for death will soon cut us off and all our earthly work must cease. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord for as