

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.

The Year that Dies.

Close his eyes—they look so cold
Out across the snowy wold:
Draw the curtains close around,
That the bells with joyous sound
His dull hearing may not wound.

Clasp his hands—so long and thin;
They were full (when he came in
Just twelve months ago) with grain—
Seed of happiness and pain.
That he scattered round like rain!

Hush!—he's gone—down the wind
Died that last vague undefined
Word "Farewell"—'twas more a sigh
Than a word; I heard it die
On the breeze, that moaneth by.

Smooth the wrinkles on his brow—
He'll not feel the pressure now.
Hark! the rain sobs at the door,
Thinking how it saw of yore
Old Years die—and shall see more!

Lay him out ere he grow cold,
Clothe him for the church-yard mould.
Who is this among us here,
Standing by the Old Man's bier?
'Tis his heir—'tis the New Year!

Hail to thee! thou last of Years,
With thy young eyes wet with tears;
But the woe of youth is brief,
Thou wilt soon forget thy grief:
Thy new power will bring relief!

Leave us—grey old men, New Year!
To the earth his corpse to bear.
Go! the world with mirth and glee,
Waits impatiently for thee.
Leave the dead, so cold and grim!
Some day thou shalt be like him!

—From Pen and Pencil Pictures, by Thomas Hood
(son of the Hood).

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER XXXIV.

The Troublesome Period.

From A. D. 1567 to A. D. 1688.

Continued.

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

Shortly after the publication of the Confession, Mr. Helwisse, accompanied by most of the members of the Church, returned to England. They feared that if they remained longer abroad in a foreign country it would be regarded as cowardice. They considered, too, the circumstances of the brethren who had continued in their own land, and who were "as sheep without a shepherd." So they went back to their native shores, and established themselves in London, meeting for worship as often as they were able, but always in strict privacy. They had encountered a great risk in returning at such a time. The fires of persecution had been lighted again, and men burned to ashes for heresy. On the 18th of March, 1612, Bartholomew Legate, an Arian, suffered at the stake in Smithfield; on the 11th of April in the same year, Edward Wightman was put to death at Litchfield, in the same manner. This man, if the warrant for his execution may be believed, was a wholesale heretic, for he was charged with "the wicked heresies of Ebion, Cerinthus, Valentinus, Arius, Macedonius, Simon Magus, of Manes, Photinus, and of the Anabaptists and other arch-heretics; and moreover, of other cursed opinions, belched by the instinct of Satan excogitated, and heretofore unheard of." He maintained "that the baptism of infants is an abominable custom," and "that Christianity is not wholly professed and preached in the Church of England, but in part." There was his real delinquency. But the public, even in those days, would have protested against burning a man merely for his Baptist and anti-Church of England principles. It was found necessary, therefore, to blacken the victim to such an extent that he might appear perfectly hideous and fit only for the fire. But Bishop Neile of Litchfield and his coadjutors, who acted

as Royal Commissioners on the occasion, were manifestly "forgers of lies." No sane man could possibly hold the multifarious opinions imputed to Wightman. Crosby appropriately remarks that "many of the heresies they charge upon him are so foolish and inconsistent, that it very much discredits what they say; and that 'if he really held such opinions he must either be an idiot or a madman, and ought rather to have had their prayers and assistance than be put to such a cruel death.'" (History i. 108: Appendix, p. 1-7).

Another person, said to be a "Spanish Arian," was also condemned to die; but so much sympathy had been expressed by the people at the other executions, that "he was suffered to linger out his life in Newgate, where he ended the same"; for "King James politely preferred," says Thomas Fuller, "That heretics hereafter, though condemned, should silently and privately waste themselves away in the prison, rather than to grace them, and amuse others, with the solemnity of a public execution, which in popular judgement, usurped the honor of a persecution." Fuller had before observed that "such burning of heretics much startled common people," and that "the purblind eyes of common judgements looked only on what was next to them, (the suffering itself,) which they beheld with compassion, not minding the demerits of the guilt, which deserved the same." (Church History, iii. 256—Nichol's edition.) Thus wrote a Protestant clergyman of the seventeenth century; but murder is murder, however perpetrated, whether by the pistol, the dagger, the fire, or the slower process of the dungeon.

Though the Baptists were debarred the use of the pulpit, the press did them good service. Two tracts published by them soon after the events just recorded were honorable alike to their good sense and pious feeling. The first appeared in 1614. It was entitled, "Religious Peace, or, a Plea for Liberty of Conscience," and is the earliest published work on the subject, in the English language. Of the author, Leonard Busher, no account has been preserved. It may be gathered from the Tract itself that he had formerly belonged to the Brownists. He was acquainted with the Greek original of the New Testament, and was a diligent student of the sacred volume. Two other Tracts were written by him which poverty prevented him from printing. One was entitled, "A Scourge of small cords, wherewith Antichrist and his ministers might be driven out of the temple of God";—the other, "A Declaration of certain False Translations, in the New Testament." Our authorised version had been published but three years, and here was revision already threatened!

"Religious Peace" contains an address to the King and Parliament, earnestly pleading for pardon, and "certain reasons against persecution." Among these reasons are the following:—1. Christ has not commanded it. 2. He has commanded his bishops and ministers "to persuade prince and people to hear and believe the gospel, by his word and spirit—and not, as tyrants, to force and constrain them by persecution." 3. It is a heinous crime to "burn, banish, and hang the ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ." 4. The word and spirit of God destroy the errors of men, not their persons. 5. Christ has rebuked and forbidden persecution. 6. Such a course would offend and repel the Jews and other foreigners, and prevent them from settling among us. 7. It would drive out those already settled, and thus impoverish the country. 8. It would fill public offices with hypocrites and dissemblers. 9. "Persecution is a notable mark of the false church, and her bishops and ministers." 10. It is a great hindrance to the liberty of the gospel. "For thereby are the Jews, Turks and Pagans occasioned and encouraged to persecute likewise all such as preach and teach Christ in their dominions." 11. To force conscience is to "play the Antichrist." 12. Persecution by Protestants excuses and justifies persecution by Papists and others. 13. "His majesty and parliament would not willingly themselves be forced against their consciences."

I will copy a few passages, that you may see how a Baptist thought and wrote, and was bold enough to publish, in the early part of the seventeenth century, on this important question.

"Christ's Kingdom is not of this world, therefore it may not be purchased nor defended with the weapons of this world, but by his word and spirit. No other weapons hath he given to his church, which is his spiritual kingdom. Therefore Christ saith, 'He that will not hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen and a publican.' He saith not, 'burn, banish, or imprison him'; that is Antichrist's ordinance."

"It is not only unmerciful, but unnatural and abominable, yea monstrous, for one Christian to vex and destroy another for difference and questions of religion. And though tares have overgrown the wheat, yet Christ will have them let alone till harvest, lest while you go about to pluck up the tares, you pluck up also the wheat with them," as your predecessors have done, who thought they had gathered up the tares and burned them, but you see now that they have burned the wheat instead of tares. Wherefore, in all humility and christian modesty, 'I do affirm, that through the unlawful weed-work of persecution, which your predecessors have used, and by your majesty and parliament is still continued, there is such a quantity of wheat plucked up, and such a multitude of tares left behind, that the wheat which remains cannot yet appear in any right visible congregation."

"Persecution for difference in religion is a monstrous and cruel beast, that destroyeth both prince and people, hindereth the gospel of Christ, and scattereth his disciples that witness and profess his name. But permission of conscience in difference of religion saveth both prince and people; for it is a meek and gentle lamb, which not only furthereth and advanceth the gospel, but also fostereth and cherisheth those that profess it."

"It is not the gallows, nor the prisons, nor burning, nor banishing, that can defend the apostolic faith. Indeed, the king and state may defend religious peace [that is, protect all parties in the exercise of religion] by their sword and civil power, but not the faith, otherwise than by the word and spirit of God."

"They cannot be Christ's bishops and preachers that persuade princes and people to such anti-christian tyranny and cruelty; and it is very evident that those bishops and ministers which give over men and women to the magistrate to be persuaded by persecution, do show clearly that their doctrine is not good, and that they want the word and spirit of God, and therefore flee to the magistrate's sword for the forcing of them to their faith and discipline."

"I do verily believe that if free liberty of conscience be granted, that the spiritual kingdom of these idol-bishops will in time fall to the ground of itself as the idol Dagon fell before the ark. For through the knowledge of God's word, all godly people will withdraw themselves, in all peaceable and godly wise from the spiritual obedience of these spiritual lords and idol-bishops, and quietly betake themselves unto the obedience of the only spiritual lord, Jesus Messiah."—(Tracts on Liberty of Conscience. —Hanserd Knollys Society; pp. 18, 24, 54, 60, 66).

You will agree with me, I am sure, in regretting that we have no knowledge of the life and labours of the good man who penned these plain and pithy sentences.

The other treatise was somewhat larger. It was issued in 1615. The original title was, "Objections answered by way of Dialogue; wherein is proved by the law of God, by the law of our land, and by his Majesty's many testimonies, That no man ought to be persecuted for his religion, so he testify his allegiance by the oath, appointed by law." In an edition published in 1662 it was entitled, "Persecution for Religion judged and condemned." The author was a member of Mr. Helwisse's church. The work is constructed in the form of a dialogue, in which "Antichristian" defends the interference of the magistrate

in the affairs of religion, and his power to prescribe and punish—"Christian" replies to his arguments—and "Indifferent person" listens to the discussion. That question being settled, "Indifferent person" is represented as inquiring into the grounds of Baptist tenets and practices, which are so clearly explained that he declares himself convinced, and intimates his intention to join the persecuted sect.

The argument against persecution is handled in a masterly manner. And it is observable that the author takes the most liberal position. He avows his abhorrence of all persecution, and would grant religious freedom even to the Papists, in which respect he is far in advance of all the religionists of his time. "For the Baptists," he observes, "may it not be justly suspected that one chief cause of all their treasons hath been because of all the compulsions that have been used against their consciences, in compelling them to the worship practised in public, according to the law of this land? which being taken away, there is no doubt but that they would be much more peaceable, as we see it verified in divers other nations, where no such compulsion is used; for if they might have freedom in their religion unto their faithful allegiance to the king, the fear of the king's laws, and their own prosperity and peace, would make them live more inoffensively in that respect."—(Tracts, as above, p. 114). In the discussion on Baptist Sentiments an interesting inquiry is started. Thus the dialogue proceeds:—

"Indifferent person. May none be admitted to the church to partake in the ordinances, except they be baptized?"

"Christian. If any teach otherwise, he presumeth 'above that which is written,' and therefore ought to be held 'accused.' For there never was a true church since Christ's manifesting in the flesh, joined together of unbaptized persons, though some have vainly published the contrary.

"I. True, I think that cannot be denied, where the persons were never baptized; but now the members of the church of Rome, from whence the baptism of the church of England cometh, are baptized; therefore why need they again be baptized?"

"C. If they be baptized with Christ's baptism, I will acknowledge they need not again be baptized; but that the baptism of the church of Rome is Christ's baptism, can never be proved; for Christ requireth that only his disciple should baptize his disciple, and into his body; none of which is Rome's baptism. For Christ's adversaries wash with water those that are not Christ's disciples, into the body, not of Christ, but of antichrist."

Having proved that the Romish and English churches are altogether corrupt, neither of them administering true baptism, and both being founded on anti-biblical principles, "Christian" is asked, "Who then shall baptize after Antichrist's exaltation?" That is, how shall baptism be recovered, where it has been lost through the long prevalence of antichristian rule? The answer is thus given:—"We and others affirm, that any disciple of Christ, in what part of the world soever, coming to the Lord's way, he by the word and spirit of God preaching that way unto others, and converting—he may and ought also to baptize them." Again: having referred to the command given to every Israelite to go and build the temple after the captivity (Ezra i. 3, 5,) he adds—"So now, every spiritual Israelite with whom the Lord is, and whose spirit the Lord stirreth up, are commanded to go and build, and the Lord will prosper them in rising up and building, though some be more excellent in the business than others; the beginning of which spiritual building, is first to beget men anew by the immortal seed of God's word, so making them living stones, and thereupon to couple them together a spiritual house unto God, upon the confession of their faith by baptism, as the scriptures of the New Testament everywhere teach." (Tracts, p. 158, 166.)

These extracts will serve to show you that our Baptist forefathers were distinguished for mental vigour and independence. They had shot a-head of their re-