

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 Redeemer's Sacrifice.

BY GEORGE HERBERT.

"For thirty pence he did my death devise,
Who at three hundred did the ointment prize,
Not half so sweet as my sweet sacrifice.

Was ever grief like mine?

Therefore my soul melts, and my heart's dear treasure,
Drops blood (the only beads) my words to measure;
O let this cup pass, if it be Thy pleasure.

Was ever grief like mine?

Arise, arise, they come! Look how they run!
Alas! what haste they make to be undone!
How with their lanterns do they seek the sun!

Was ever grief like mine?

Judas dost thou betray me with a kiss?
Canst thou find hell about my lips? and miss
Of life, just at the gates of life and bliss?

Was ever grief like mine?"

The Pastor's Difficulty Solved.

Love cannot reach him, arrows of Despair,
And Hope, and Fear, fall from him, hedged in scale
Of wild obduracy, like iron mail!
But, Pastor, hast thou left no weapon there,
In thy heaven-furnished quiver? It is Prayer
Winged by Faith's pure resolves—Prayer shall prevail;
If hath the promise. Into life's dim vale
Prayer doth the golden gates of hell unbar;
To good of noblest aim that rugged brow
May turn; love o'er the rock his tendrils throw;
As when upon the world's first wakening morn
The Spirit came descending, on the thorn,
Woke by that sacred touch, the flower was born,
And bird new made sang on the new made bough.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER XXIX.

The Troublous Period.

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

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

I call this "The troublous period," because, while the Baptists were fast increasing in those parts of Europe in which they had already appeared, their history presents one continued scene of disturbance and suffering, inflicted, not only by the Papists, from whom nothing else could have been expected, but by their fellow-Protestants. The Episcopalians and Presbyterians of England, the Lutherans of Germany, and the Reformed in Switzerland, differing from one another, and refusing intercommunion, agreed in persecuting the Baptists. They were the "sect everywhere spoken against." It would have been well if the opposition had vented itself in hard words only; our forefathers would have borne it with christian meekness, "not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing." But their co-religionists persecuted them with relentless malice, even to the spoiling of their goods, imprisonment, and death. These things must not be concealed. I hold it to be the special duty of the historian to record with impartial and scrupulous accuracy the atrocities perpetrated by those who professed the principles of the Reformation. When a Papist persecutes, he acts in accordance with the well-known assumptions of the great apostacy, and however we may deplore it we do not wonder, for it is not in the nature of Popery to practice the charity of the gospel. But Protestant persecution deserves to be branded with double infamy. It is an outrage on Protestant principles, and should be held up to universal indignation.

The fires of martyrdom were frequently lighted in Holland during the early part of this period. But the establishment of the Dutch republic quenched them. The Prince of Orange understood religious freedom, and availed himself of the opportunity which his position gave him to assert the natural rights of his countrymen and the claims of conscience. The Baptists had aided him in the struggle with Spanish tyranny. Their integrity and peaceableness could be trusted. He steadfastly and

successfully resisted the endeavours of those who sought to exclude them from the general toleration.

In 1572 a considerable sum of money had been carried to the Prince, who was then at Dillenberg, by J. Cortenbosch and Peter Bogaert, Baptists, (the latter was a minister,) as the offering of the brethren. They performed this service at the risk of their lives. When he asked them what he could do in return, they replied that all they wanted was a due share of his favour should he be established in the government. He assured them that all men should be regarded by him as equals, and that they had no cause for fear (*Ottii Annales*, ad Ann. 1572.)

William, Prince of Orange, was a man of right noble spirit. He resolutely stood out against all meddling with men's consciences, or inquiring into their thoughts. While smiting the Spanish Inquisition into the dust, he would have no Calvinist Inquisition set up in its place. Earnestly a convert to the Reformed religion, but hating and denouncing only what was corrupt in the ancient church, he would not force men, with fire and sword, to travel to heaven upon his own road. Thought should be toll-free. Neither monk nor minister should burn, drown, or hang his fellow creatures, when argument or exhortation failed to redeem them from error. It was no small virtue, in that age, to rise to such a height. We know what Calvinists, Zwinglians, Lutherans, have done in the Netherlands, in Germany, in Switzerland, and almost a century later in New England. It is, therefore, with increased veneration that we regard this large and truly Catholic mind." But it was "impossible for the Prince thoroughly to infuse his own ideas on the subject of toleration into the hearts of his nearest associates. He could not hope to inspire his deadly enemies with a deeper sympathy. Was he not himself the mark of obloquy among the Reformers, because of his leniency to Catholics? Nay more, was not his intimate councillor, the accomplished Saint Aldegonde, in despair because the Prince refused to exclude the Anabaptists of Holland from the rights of citizenship? At the very moment when William was straining every nerve to unite warring sects, and to persuade men's hearts into a system by which their consciences were to be laid open to God alone—at the moment when it was most necessary for the very existence of the fatherland that Catholic and Protestant should mingle their social and political relations, it was indeed a bitter disappointment for him to see wise statesmen of his own creed unable to rise to the idea of toleration. 'The affair of the anabaptists,' wrote Saint Aldegonde, 'has been renewed. The Prince objects to exclude them from citizenship. He answered me sharply, that their yea was equal to our oath, and that we should not press this matter, unless we were willing to confess that it was just for the Baptists to compel us to a divine service which was against our conscience.' It seems hardly credible that this sentence, containing so sublime a tribute to the character of the Prince, should have been indited as a bitter censure, and that, too, by an enlightened and accomplished Protestant." (*Motley's "Rise of the Dutch Republic,"* iii. 62, 206.)

Notwithstanding the ignorance and bigotry of those with whom he was associated, William held on his way. When the "Union of Utrecht," the foundation of the Dutch Commonwealth, was formed, it was expressly provided that "every individual should remain free in his religion, and that no man should be molested or questioned on the subject of divine worship," (*Motley*, p. 412.)

That auspicious event took place in the year 1579. Then "the churches had rest." From that time the Dutch Baptists, or Mennonites, as they have been commonly called, enjoyed a good measure of prosperity. Their numbers greatly increased. In those very cities where their predecessors were so cruelly butchered they were held in high respect, and often discharged with credit the duties connected with the civic affairs to which they were appointed.

Their scruples against oath-taking were met by substituting, in their case, a solemn affirmation, as is the practice now in England with regard to the Quakers and some other religious bodies. In lieu of personal service in the army they paid an annual tax.

During their troubles it was impossible to carry into effect any educational plans. When peace was restored, the desirability of securing an educated ministry became a matter of earnest consideration. Sound views were entertained, and a College was established at Amsterdam, which has proved a great blessing to the denomination.

Certain divergencies of opinion among them occasioned bitterness of feeling and estranged brethren from one another. These manifestations of human weakness were to be lamented. Their injurious effects were felt by all parties, and at length they agreed to bear with one another, and to cease to regard their differences as hindrances to mutual fellowship. Those differences related chiefly to the manner in which the human nature of the Saviour was produced, and to the effects of exclusion from the Church. As to the former, a resolution was passed at a Synod held in 1615, declaring that harmony on that subject was not essential. The harshness which characterised the discipline of the churches, in the early period of their history gradually gave way to a more christian policy, and exclusion was not held, by the Mennonites in general, as involving the severance of domestic and social relations. There was another point in which they differed—the washing of one another's feet—which some of them regarded as an apostolic ordinance, of perpetual obligation. This, too, was placed among things indifferent. But some of the Mennonites hold it to this day.

The progress of the Baptists in the central countries of Europe is indicated by the number of publications on the baptismal controversy which issued from the press in the seventeenth century. There would have been no need of those works if Pædo-baptism had not been in danger. The concurrent testimony of the authors of that age proves that in the German States, in Prussia, and in Poland, Baptist principles were spreading among the people, in spite of continual efforts to suppress them.

In a former letter I gave you an account of the persecution of the Baptists in Moravia. They had re-entered that country, and lived without molestation for a number of years. Their industrious habits, their honesty and integrity commanded general respect. But the Jesuits, who had obtained complete control over the Emperor Ferdinand 2., persuaded him that it would be for the glory of God and for his own welfare to expel them. They had done no wrong, they owed no arrears of taxes; they were loyal and peaceable, and the district in which they lived was improving fast under their good management. But they were heretics. They would not wear the yoke of Rome, for they were the Lord's freemen. That was enough. The crime of thinking for one's self in matters of religion is unpardonable; it must be visited with the "great curse," and its perpetrators must be put out of the way. In this case extermination, which would have been preferred, was impossible; it was not politic and might not be safe, to attempt the destruction of from twenty to forty thousand of the best subjects of the kingdom. The milder measure of expulsion was resolved on, and the craft and cruelty of the Jesuits were strikingly displayed in carrying it into effect. It was summer, harvest time was near, and the vintage would follow shortly afterwards. Humanity would have dictated that if justice required the banishment of those men, they should have the opportunity of gathering in the produce of their labours, and so be provided with the means of sustenance for themselves and their families during the coming winter. But Jesuitism knows nothing of humanity. Goaded on by his spiritual advisers Ferdinand issued an edict in the year 1621, declaring that his conscience would not permit him to allow

the continuance of the heretics any longer in his dominions, and ordering them all to depart, within three weeks and three days, on pain of death if they were found even on the borders of the country after the expiration of the allotted time.

"Heaven had smiled on their harvest labours," says Robinson; "their fields stood thick with corn, and the sun and the dew were improving every moment to give them their last polish. The yellow ears waved an homage to their owners, and the wind whistled through the stems and the russet herbage softly said, 'Put in the sickle, the harvest is come.' Their luxuriant vine-leaves, too, hung aloft by tendrils mantling over the clustering grapes like watchful parents over their tender offspring; but all were fenced by an imperial edict, and it was instant death to approach. Without leaving one murmur upon record, in solemn silent submission to the power that governs the universe and causes 'all things to work together for good' to his creatures, they packed up and departed. In several hundred carriages they conveyed their sick, their innocent infants sucking at the breasts of their mothers who had newly lain in, and their decrepid parents whose work was done, and whose silvery locks told every beholder that they wanted only the favour of a grave. At the borders they filed off, some to Hungary, others to Transylvania, some to Wallachia, others to Poland; greater, far greater for their virtue than Ferdinand for all his titles and for all his glory," (*Robinson's Ecclesiastical Researches*, p. 526).

Robinson adds, that "the Jesuit, who executed this business, says, ten thousand staid in Moravia, and became Catholics." That may be set down as a glaring falsehood, for Baptists and the Church of Rome are the spiritual antipodes to each other. The truth was, that though the greater part obeyed the edict, some ventured to remain. They had to endure tremendous persecution for the first seven years, after which the activity of the bloodhounds slackened, and the Baptists were enabled to live in comparative peace. But freedom to worship was denied them. They met as they could, in small companies, in woods and caves and unfrequented places. God was with them.

Protestant Switzerland was disgraced by unremitting opposition to the truth. The history of the Baptists in that country is a sad tale of woe. Swiss Presbyterians had won freedom for themselves, but they were determined not to grant it to others. It seemed as if the ghost of Zwingli haunted them, urging them on in their antichristian career. Notwithstanding all the efforts that had been made, the Baptists had multiplied among them, and it was impossible to drive them out. Many emigrated to Moravia, but the majority preferred to remain in their own homesteads; and they could not be silent and quiet. They felt that they had as much right as others to worship God according to their consciences, and they acted accordingly. When edicts were issued against them they said, "We ought to obey God rather than men," and refused to acknowledge the authority of the magistrate in things spiritual. If they were sent to prison, they broke out whenever they could get opportunity; if they were put in irons in order to prevent escape, they made good use of the files with which their friends supplied them, and so extricated themselves, to the astonishment of their jailors; and on one occasion they contrived to throw a quantity of opium into their keepers' wine, and took leave of them while they slept. It was a most perplexing case. Both magistrates and clergy were altogether at fault. The magistrates said to the clergy—"Answer these men's arguments—preach better—live better—make it impossible for our Swiss to become Baptists." The clergy replied—"All we can do and say is in vain. Our people will listen to the heretics. You must inflict sharper punishments."

They tried it. Some were sent to the galleys. John Landis, a Baptist minister, was put to death. All Baptists were required to leave the country. On their refusal, their property was confiscated, and