

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.

Evening Hours.

THE human heart has hidden treasures
In secret kept, in silence sealed;
The thoughts, the hopes, the dreams, the pleasures,
Whose charms were broken if revealed.
And days may pass in dull confusion,
And nights in noisy routs may fly,
While, lost in fame's or wealth's illusion,
The memory of the past may die.

But there are hours of lonely musing,
Such as in evening silence come,
When soft as birds their pinions closing,
The heart's best feelings gather home.
Then, in our souls there seems to languish
A tender grief that is not woe;
And thoughts that once wrung groans of anguish,
Now cause some milder tears to flow.

And feelings once as strong as passions,
Float softly back—a faded dream;
Our own sharp griefs and wild sensations,
The taste of others' sufferings seem;
Oh! when the heart is freshly bleeding,
How it longs for that time to be,
When through the mist of years receding,
Its woes but live in reverie.

And it can dwell on moonlight glimmer,
On evening shades and loneliness,
And while the sky grows dim and dimmer,
Heed no untold woe's sad distress—
Only a deeper impress given
By lonely hour and darkened room,
To solemn thoughts that soar to heaven,
Seeking a life and world to come.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER XXXI.

The Troublous Period.

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

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

There were many Baptists among the sufferers in Queen Mary's reign. Some endured painful imprisonments; some passed to heaven through the fire. Humphrey Middleton, one of the ministers mentioned in my last letter, was burned at Canterbury, July 12, 1555. We should have known more about these good men, had the historians of the times been more faithful. Even the venerable John Foxe allowed his prejudices so far to influence him that he kept back information respecting Baptist martyrs. But "their record is on high."

Bishop Bonner bestirred himself diligently. In his "Articles of Visitation," issued in the year 1554, he directed inquiry to be made—"whether there be any that is a Sacramentary or Anabaptist, or Libertine, either in reiterating baptism again, or in holding any of the opinions of the Anabaptists, especially a Christian man or woman ought not to swear before a judge, nor one to sue another in the law for his right, and that all things should be common."—(Documentary Annals, i. 156). The last item, I need not inform you, was a calumny—or rather, perhaps, a misapprehension of the brotherly hospitality that prevailed among the Baptists.—In a "Declaration to be published to the lay people of his diocese concerning their reconciliation," he affirmed that England had been "previously vexed" and "sore infested" with "sundry sorts of sects of heresies," among which he expressly mentions "Anabaptists."—(Ibid. p. 170.) Next year he published a book of homilies, in one of which he warned the people against the Baptists. "Certain heresies," said he "have risen up and sprung in our days, against the christening of infants,"—a practice which "the most wholesome authority of the church doth command."—Underhill's "Historical Introduction" to "Tracts on Liberty of Conscience," p. cxxv.)

Bishop Gardiner was Chancellor of the University of Cambridge. In 1555 he published fifteen Articles, which were to be signed by all persons desirous of enjoying the privileges of the University. The fourth was to this effect:—that "baptism is necessary to salvation, even for infants; that all

sin, actual as well as original, is taken away and entirely destroyed, in baptism; and that the said baptism is never to be repeated."—(Documentary Annals, i. 195). This language betrays the existence of Baptists in Cambridge, and the bishop's fear lest persons holding their opinions should repair thither for education from other parts of the Kingdom.

Henry Hart, one of Humphrey Middleton's colleagues, was committed to the King's Bench Prison, London, with other Baptists. The prisons of the metropolis were crowded with Protestants at that time, many of whom, such as Bradford, Philpot, and others, glorified God in the flames. But the spirit of disputation was so powerful in them that there was hot controversy in the very jails. Mr. Hart and his friends, as I have before observed, differed from other Reformers on what is called the Arminian question. Those differences led to fierce disputes, and occasioned considerable loss of temper. Ridley, Bradford, and Philpot were men eminent for piety; we venerate them to this day; their names will be fragrant in all time coming. But in their zeal for truth they sometimes forgot the claims of charity, and in reference to baptism they held and inculcated tenets of a truly unprotestant character. Philpot must surely have felt the weakness of his cause when he pleaded thus:—"Since all truth was taught and revealed to the primitive church, which is our mother, let us all that be obedient children of God, submit ourselves to the judgment of the church for the better understanding of the articles of our faith and of the doubtful sentences of the scripture. Let us not go about to shew in us, by following any private man's interpretation upon the word, another spirit than they of the primitive church had, lest we deceive ourselves; for their is but one faith and one spirit, which is not contrary to himself, neither otherwise now teacheth us than he did them. Therefore let us believe as they have taught us of the Scriptures, and be at peace with them, according as the true catholic church is at this day."—(Examinations and writings of Archdeacon Philpot, p. 273. Parker Society's Edition).

And here I may go back a year or two. In Edward the Sixth's time Hooper was appointed Bishop of Gloucester. His consecration was delayed for some months on account of his scruples against the episcopal habits, which he justly regarded as popish. He had learned the truth, which is now known as elementary principles, but was then little understood, except by Baptists, that in the service of the church nothing should be admitted for which we cannot adduce apostolic precept or precedent, or which is contrary to any apostolic teaching. He was unwilling to defer to church authority or long-continued custom. Ridley was astonished at his brother's difficulties. In writing on the subject he affected to be very logical, and he was not sparing in rhetorical flourishes; but you will admit, I think, when one specimen is placed before you, that there was more sophistical declamation than either logic or rhetoric. Thus the bishop writes:—"If this reason should take place, 'The apostles used it not, ergo it is not lawful for us to use it'—or this either, 'They did it, ergo we must needs do it'—then all Christians must have no place abiding, all must, under pain of damnation, depart with [part from] their possessions, as Peter said they did [Behold, we have left all things, &c.]; we may have no ministration of Christ's sacraments in churches, for they had no churches, but were fain to do all in their own houses; we must baptize abroad in the fields, as the apostles did; we may not receive the holy communion but at supper, and with the table furnished with other meats, as the Anabaptists do now stiffly and obstinately affirm that it should be; our naming of the child in baptism, our prayer upon him, our crossing, and our threefold ab-renunciation, and our white chrisom [or vesture], all must be left, for these we cannot prove by God's word, that the apostles did use them. And, if to do anything which we cannot prove they did be sin, then a greatest part is sin that we do daily

in baptism. What followeth then other things, than to receive the Anabaptists' opinion, and to be baptized anew? O wicked folly and blind ignorancy!"—(Reply to Bishop Hooper, in Bradford's Letters, Treatises, &c., p. 383. Parker Society's Edition).

Ridley's argument was—"If you take such ground, you had better become an Anabaptist at once. But that would be a shocking thing. Therefore you must admit, in these things, the authority of the church, and yield submission to it." So, in utter contradiction to true Protestantism, did the bishop reason. The other alternative, viz., that the Baptists were right, which ought to have been granted, he either had not eyes to see or honesty to admit.

One point adverted to by Ridley may require explanation. The Baptists, according to him, taught that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated at the close of a meal. Their practice, it is to be supposed, agreed with the theory. They observed that the ordinance was instituted while our Lord and his apostles were still at the passover supper-table; and they inferred that the Lord's Supper should be preceded by a meal, taken in common by the assembled disciples. Whatever opinion may be formed on that subject, this is clear, that the Baptists evinced therein their scrupulous regard to the directions, express or implied, of the word of God. Positive institutions should be observed, in their judgment, (and were they not right?) as nearly as possible in the exact manner in which they were enjoined. The original precept should be literally obeyed, the original precedents followed. This is the characteristic distinction of the Baptist body. Can it be controverted?

Notwithstanding the vigilant ferocity of Bonner and his associates, the Baptists held their ground in Kent and Essex, and it was found impossible to root them out. Commissioners were sent to Colchester in 1558, with full power to proceed against heretics, and they had entered on their duties with activity and ardour, hoping to make a thorough clearance, when, for some unexplained reason, a letter of recall was despatched. Dr. Chedsey, one of the Commissioners, expressed his feelings on the occasion in the language of an inquisitor's regret. He was vexed at the loss of his prey. "We be now," he said, writing to the privy council, "in the midst of our examination and articulation. And if we should give it off in the midst, we should set the country in such a roar, that my estimation, and the residue of the Commissioners, shall be for ever lost. * * * Would to God the honourable council saw the face of Essex as we do see. We have such obstinate heretics, Anabaptists, and other unruly persons here, as never was heard of."—(Strippe's Memorials, v. 265.)

Bradford, as I have said, was one of those who disputed, while in prison, with his fellow-sufferers. He was ingenuous enough to acknowledge, that though he regarded them as heterodox in their opinions, they were men of unquestionable and even signal piety: "he was persuaded of them, that they feared the Lord, and therefore he loved them."

No sooner had Elizabeth ascended the throne than she began to display the despotic tendencies by which her reign was distinguished. In that respect she closely resembled her father. She would reform to a certain extent, but not so far as to allow her subjects to think and act for themselves. She would prescribe to them what they should believe, and how they should worship, under penalty of her high displeasure if they dared to go beyond the allotted bounds. The nation generally submitted in meekness. Some few chafed under the yoke, yet continued to wear it. Others remonstrated against ecclesiastical impositions, and asked for freedom in things indifferent. It seemed to them a monstrous thing, especially at a time when there were so few able and faithful ministers, to demand rigorous uniformity, not only in theological opinions, but also in the cut and wear of caps and gowns, and in liturgical services. But Elizabeth was not to be diverted from her purpose. She had made

up her mind to go so far and no farther. And she was determined, as far as lay in her power, to check the progress of her subjects. The "Act of uniformity," passed in the year 1559, declared her will, and defined their duty. The puritan clergy grumbled, but the queen said, "Silence!" And so it was. They must be silent or withdraw; and if, having withdrawn, they reduced their reforming principles to practice, they incurred all the terrors of the High Commission Court.

It was not to be expected that Baptists would find any favour with Elizabeth. Many had fled from foreign countries to England, hoping to enjoy there the peace and freedom elsewhere denied them. They had settled chiefly in London and "other maritime towns." But the queen would not suffer them to remain. A proclamation was issued, Sept. 2, 1560, declaring that her majesty, "willeth and chargeth all manner of persons, born either in foreign parts or in her majesty's dominions, that have conceived any manner of such heretical opinion as the Anabaptists do hold, and mean not by charitable teaching to be reconciled, to depart out of this realm within twenty days after this proclamation, upon pain of forfeiture of all their goods and chattels, and to be imprisoned and further punished as by the laws either ecclesiastical or temporal in such case is provided."—(Documentary Annals, i. 298). This was a severe and cruel measure. In those days of slow travelling the proclamation would not reach some of the outposts till the twenty days had nearly expired; and the poor people would have little time to dispose of their immovable property, and of such goods as they could not conveniently take away with them. In all cases there was doubtless a great sacrifice.

Bishop Jewel supposed that the hated sectarians were effectually got rid of. Writing to Peter Martyr, under date of Nov. 6, 1560, he said:—"We found at the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth a large and inauspicious corps of Arians, Anabaptists, and other pests, which I know not how, but as mushrooms spring up in the night and in darkness, so these sprung up in that darkness and unhappy night of the Marian times. These, I am informed, and I hope it is the fact, have retreated before the light of purer doctrine, like owls at the sight of the sun, and are now nowhere to be found; or, at least, if anywhere, they are no longer troublesome to our churches."—(Zurich letters, i. 92. Parker Society's Ed.). But he was mistaken. Many Baptists contrived to elude the proclamation. Next year, Parkhurst, bishop of Norwich, was complained of by Secretary Cecil for "winking at schismatics and Anabaptists."—(Documentary Annals, i. 338). Six years after, 1567, "articles of visitation" were issued by archbishop Parker, in which it was directed that inquiry should be made whether any persons did "say, teach, or maintain, that children being infants should not be baptized."—(Ibid. p. 340). It is evident, therefore, that persons holding those views were still in the realm. And they continued to seek shelter in England from persecution, while the queen and her minions were indefatigable in attempts to ferret them out and drive them away. Another proclamation appeared in 1568, in which it is stated that "great numbers of strangers from the parts beyond the seas," some of whom were supposed to be "Anabaptists," did "daily repair to her majesty's dominions, but that she did "in no wise mean to permit any refuge" to them.—(Ibid. p. 343). Permitted or not, however, they were there, and they were neither idle nor unsuccessful. Collier the ecclesiastical historian says that "the Dutch Anabaptists held private conventicles in London, and perverted a great many."—(History vi. 462).

Yours truly,

MENNO.

From my Study,
Nov. 7th, 1857.

—A pious house carpenter of Boston has recently completed a metrical version of the entire Holy Bible, the idea of which was suggested to him by a vision, in which a portion of this version was made known to him.