

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

NEW SERIES.
Vol. II. No. 14.

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 1857.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XXI. No. 14.

Poetry.

Heaven.

It does not take us long to reach
Heaven's holy, blessed land;
A few short moments, and the soul,
Upon the shores may stand.

One minute 'midst the things of time,
Amongst our kindred clay;
The next may give us angels' wings,
To rise to endless day.

The morning sun beholds us here;
Noon comes, and we are fled,
Through the dim portals of the tomb,
And numbered with the dead.

Our eyes may close in dewy sleep,
Earth hear our last good night!
We wake, and what a radiant scene
Bursts on our dazzled sight!

The soul at once can find its rest,
And rise from Jordan's wave,
To see the Saviour face to face,
Triumphant o'er the grave.

We are but travellers below;
Death holds the wondrous key,—
One turn; and lo! the unseen world,
Reveals its mystery.

My Saviour! let thy wedding robe
Be round my spirit cast;
Give me a hold upon thy cross,
That will through changes last.

Then I can calmly trust my all,
And fear death's quick surprise;
But joy to think that one short hour
May find me in the skies.

Baptist History.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER XVII.

The Revival Period.

From A. D. 1073 to A. D. 1516.

Continued.

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

The reformers of whom I have given you a brief account in the preceding letters, although they differed from one another on some minor points, agreed in these three things;—the sole authority of Scripture in matters of religion, in opposition to the burdens of tradition which had been laid upon men's shoulders—the spiritual nature of Christianity, and the consequent necessity of personal faith and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, in opposition to dead forms and reliance on the priesthood—and the right of every one to think and act for himself in these all-important affairs, in opposition to the tyrannical assumptions of the Romish clergy, sustained by the secular power. They sought bible truth, spiritual life, soul freedom. This threefold cord will guide us in the labyrinthine darkness of the middle ages. Whenever we can lay our hands on it we find the grace and power of God.

I come now again to the consideration of baptism. On this subject there were differences of opinion. Some retained the doctrine and practice of the dominant church, others rejected both baptism and the Lord's supper; for the former they substituted a ceremony which they called "consolamentum," or the "baptism by fire," in allusion to the words of John the Baptist. "They assembled in a room dark and closed in on all sides, but illuminated by a large number of lights affixed to the walls. Then the new candidate was placed in the centre, where the presiding officer of the sect laid a book (probably the Gospel of John) on his head, and gave him the imposition of hands, at the same time reciting the Lord's prayer." [Eckher' cont. Cat. aros, in Biblioth. Maxima, Tom. xxiii. p. 105.] In arguing against infant baptism they adopted the same course of reasoning as has been employed by the Baptists in all ages. They uniformly exposed the absurdity of baptizing those who could not believe. A third party propounded scriptural truth; but evidence is wanting as to how far their views were developed. It may be inferred that they abstained from bap-

tizing children as in all consistency they were bound to do. The fourth class consisted of those who not only taught but openly practiced Baptist sentiments. I will place before you such information as I have gathered respecting them, derived from the original sources. There will be no hazarding of conjectures or surmises.

Before I proceed to mention individuals I will observe that many of the Councils of this period refer in general terms to the heretics of the times, condemning them in the lump, without enumerating the various sects, and sometimes without any specification of their opinions. In some instances, however, there is such reference. Those who rejected "baptism of children" were condemned by the following Councils, viz.: Toulouse, A. D. 1119; Lateran 2., A. D. 1139; Lateran 3., A. D. 1179; London, A. D. 1381. I do not affirm that all the parties condemned were Baptists, because probably some of them rejected both baptism and the Lord's supper; but I wish to direct your particular attention to the fact that their denial of infant baptism was uniformly justified by them on the ground of the non-existence of faith in the child. They saw clearly that in the New Testament faith was always represented as the pre-requisite to baptism, and hence they naturally enough said, "These children cannot believe—why do you baptize them?"

Berengar of Tours was an excellent man. He was Principal of the Cathedral school in that city, and afterwards archdeacon of Angers. His fame as a teacher induced young men in different parts of France to repair to him for instruction. Neander says, "He was constantly deviating from the beaten track—striking out his own path, in matters both of secular and ecclesiastical science—a proof of the independence and freedom of judgment with which he pursued all his inquiries. Thus, for example, he studied to make improvements in grammar, and endeavoured to introduce a new pronunciation of Latin." [History of the Church, iii. 533.] This freedom and independence eminently characterized his theological researches. The controversy on transubstantiation attracted his attention, and he was quickly repelled by the absurdities propounded on that subject. He saw that christian ordinances required faith in those who observed them, without which the observance was altogether useless; and in regard to the Lord's supper in particular he abjured the commonly received opinion, and taught the spiritual presence of the Saviour, in connection with the believing apprehension, on the part of the communicant, of the truths embodied in the institution. For this he was severely persecuted, condemned, and compelled, through fear of death, to renounce his alleged heresies. But he re-asserted them, and they were embraced by great numbers of his former pupils, and by many other persons, in France and Germany.

In the following extract from one of Berengar's writings, for which I am indebted to Neander, you may see in what light he viewed baptism and the Lord's supper. "Our Lord Christ requires of thee no more than this. Thou believest that out of his great compassion for the human race he poured out his blood for them; and that thou, by virtue of this faith, wilt be cleansed by his blood from all sin. He requires of thee, that constantly mindful of this blood of Christ, thou shouldst use it to sustain the life of thy inner man in this earthly pilgrimage, as thou sustainest the life of thy outward man by meat and drink. He also requires of thee that in the faith that God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son as a propitiation for our sins, thou shouldst submit to outward baptism, to represent how those oughtest to follow Christ in his death and in his resurrection. The bodily eating and drinking of bread and wine—says he—should remind thee of the spiritual eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ, that whilst thou art represented in the inner man, by the contemplation of his incarnation and of his passion, thou mayest follow him in humility and patience." [History of the Church,

iii. 525.] A person who held such sentiments as these could not with propriety practise infant baptism. Consequently, we find that he is charged by writers of those times with attempting to overthrow that rite. Deoduin, bishop of Liege (died A. D. 1075) says of Berengar, and of Bruno, bishop of Angers, who had been one of his pupils,—"as far as is in their power they overturn the baptism of little children." Guitmund, a Benedictine monk, and afterwards archbishop of Aversa (died A. D. 1080), uses similar language, and expresses his horror at the "depth of all evil" into which such persons would be likely to fall, whom the devil should persuade, through Berengar, to renounce their baptism in infancy, since, as he supposed, they would hold themselves at liberty to plunge into every vice, in the assurance that whenever they might be baptized all would be cleansed away [Biblioth. Max. xviii. 441, 531.] You will not sympathize with Guitmund in that matter. You will pity his ignorance. Berengar's teaching did not produce such effects.

Berengar died A. D. 1088. Later writers have stated that his followers were very numerous. It is even said that in the next century as many as 800,000 persons professed his sentiments. It is obvious, however, that any exact enumeration is impossible. As Berengarians, the party was not of long continuance. But the principles remained, though the name was disused, and were spread over a large part of Europe.

In less than twenty years after Berengar's death Peter of Bruis was preaching in the south of France, with great power and blessing. I wish we had the materials for the history of this movement, and Peter's own account of his doctrine. We know not by what means he was led to those thoughts and conclusions which issued in his assuming the bold position of a reformer. Certainly he must have had a profound conviction of the utter worthlessness and injurious tendency of the religion of the age. He saw that people were "mad upon their idols," substituting the outward for the inward, the name for the reality. It seemed to him that nothing but a radical change would meet the necessity of the case. Seeing that the churches were held in so great reverence, as consecrated buildings, the only places where worship should be celebrated, he taught that God's blessing was not limited, and that prayer to him, if sincere, was as acceptable in a shop or in the market place as in a church, in a stable as before an altar. Reproving the pomp and splendour and the constant appeals to the senses by which the public services were characterised, especially the chants and the music, he instructed the people that "pious affections" were far more pleasing to God than loud vociferations. Instead of conniving at the adoration of the cross or allowing any respect to be paid to it, he said that it should only be regarded as the representation of an instrument of cruelty, and therefore worthy of all detestation and fit to be destroyed. There was a practical demonstration of the effects of his instructions. The people assembled in great numbers on Good Friday, collected all the crosses they could lay their hands on, made a bonfire of them, roasted meat at the fire, and ate it publicly, as if in contempt of the fast which was everywhere observed on that day. Once more, Peter dissuaded his hearers from attempting to benefit the dead by prayers or by payment for priest's masses. No advantage, he told them, could accrue to the departed from any thing of the kind.

Baptism and the church were contemplated by Peter in the pure light of Scripture. The church should be composed, he constantly affirmed, of true believers, good and just persons; no others had any claim to membership. Baptism was a nullity unless connected with personal faith, but all who believed were under solemn obligation to be baptized, according to the Saviour's command.

Peter was not merely what is now called a "Baptist in principle." When the truths he inculcated were received, and men and

women were raised to 'newness of life,' they were directed to the path of duty. Baptism followed faith. Enemies said that this was *Ana-baptism*, but Peter and his friends indignantly repelled the imputation. The rite performed in infancy, they maintained, was no baptism at all, since it wanted the essential ingredient, faith in Christ. Then, and then only, when that faith was professed, were the converts really baptized [Magdeburg, Centuriatores, Cent. xii. 331.]

Great success attended Peter's labours. At first he preached in thinly populated places and villages. But like his divine Master he "could not be hid." Multitudes flocked to hear him, and the towns and cities of Narbonne and Languedoc were enlightened by his ministry. This continued for twenty years. What an interesting chapter would it form in the history of the church, if the record of the facts could be recovered! What striking conversions! What penetrating, powerful sermons! What revival meetings! What lovely manifestations of christian fellowship! Doubtless such scenes were witnessed—and ministering angels rejoiced—and the news reached the saints in heaven, causing a fresh outburst of joyful acclaim. And again they sang, "Thou art worthy—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth."

Instead of recitals which would have gladdened our hearts we have but the meagre and melancholy jottings of a foe, written with the pen of prejudice. Peter the Venerable Abbot of Clugny, whose treatise against the Petrosians in our only authority on this subject, sums up all in these words: "the people are rebaptized, the churches profaned, the altars dug up, the crosses burned, flesh eaten in public on the very day of the Lord's passion, the priests scourged, the monks imprisoned, and compelled by threatenings and torments to marry wives." [Biblioth. Max. xxij. 1035.] When we bear in mind that in the first ebullitions of zeal during the Reformation in the 16th century, the instruments and objects of superstition, as well as its abettors, sometimes received rather rough usage, the people thus evincing their indignation at the trickery which had been practised upon them, we may wonder the less at any uproarious proceedings taking place four hundred years before. We are under no necessity, however, of believing, that the "rebaptized" people committed the outrages spoken of. At such times there are always many to be found who are willing to attach themselves outwardly to an enterprise for the sake of some worldly advantage, and when they run into excesses the blame is laid on the cause with which they are connected. Yet, partial and unsatisfactory as Peter the Venerable's statements is, it indicates the extent and effect of the Reformer's efforts. Labbe the Jesuit also (one of the editors of the "Concilia") evidently regarded Peter of Bruis as a man by whose labours great injury was indicted on Romanism. These are his words:—"Almost all the heretics who came after Peter of Bruis trod in the steps of his heresy; hence he may be deservedly called the parent of heretics." [Concil. x. 1001.]

Martyrdom awaited him. Having preached with his accustomed fervour at St. Gilles in Languedoc, the infuriated populace seized him and hurried him to the stake. It was like the murder of Stephen,—the act of a lawless mob. Nor can we doubt that the Lord whose presence cheered the first martyr, comforted Peter of Bruis, and enabled him to meet death, even in that terrible form, with the composure of faith.

Such was the end of a Baptist minister in the twelfth Century. Peter's martyrdom is supposed to have occurred about the year 1124. But the bereaved flocks were not forsaken. Another shepherd was ready to take charge of them. I shall tell you of him in my next.

Yours truly,
MEXCO.

From my Study,
April 4, 1857.