

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

NEW SERIES,
Vol. II. No. 28.

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, WEDNESDAY, JULY 22, 1857.

WHOLE SERIES,
Vol. XXI. No. 28.

Poetry.

An Ancient Gem.

Written early in the seventeenth century, by Dr. Peter Heylin. Given with a Bible.

Could this outside beholden bee
To cost and cunning equally;
Or were it such as might surprise
The luxurie of curious eyes;
Yea would I have my Dearest looke—
Not on the Cover, but the Booke!

If thou art merie, here are aires,
If Melancholie, here are prayers;
If studious, here are those things writt,
Which may deserve thy ablest wit;
If Hungry, here is food Divine;
If Thirsty, Nectar, Heavenly Wine.

Read then, but first thyself prepare
To read with zeal and mark with care;
And when thou readest what there is writt—
Let thy best practice second it;
So twice each precept read shall bee—
First in the Booke, and next in thee!

Much reading may thy spirits wrong,
Refresh them, therefore, with a song;
And that thy music praise may merit,
Sing David's Psalms with David's spirit;
That as thy voice doth pierce men's ears—
So shall thy Prayers and Vows the Spheres.

Thus reade, thus sing, and then to thee—
The very earth a heaven shall be;
If thus thou readest, thou shalt finde
A private heaven within thy mind;
And singing thus, before thou die,
Thou sing'st at thy part to those on High.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER XXIII.

The Reformation Period.

From A. D. 1516 to A. D. 1567.

Continued.

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

I pass over, for the present, the disturbances at Munster and other places, about which so much has been said, reserving the consideration of those matters till we come to the close of the period, when we shall be in a better position to form a correct judgment respecting them.

The Baptists continued to spread in Germany notwithstanding the odium that was attached to them in consequence of the Munster business. They were plundered, thrust into dungeons, banished, numbers of them beheaded or burned alive, yet still they made head against all opposition and multiplied everywhere. It is stated that "between the Eifel mountains on the Rhine (in Westphalia) and Moravia, not less than fifty churches are said to have been existing at this period, [about the year 1557.] some of them having from five to six hundred members. Fifty elders and ministers gathered at one time at Strasburg, from a district of about a hundred miles in circumference, to consult together on the interests of Christ's Kingdom, (Martyrology, ii. 125.)

It is distressing to observe how completely the Reformers of those days were imbued with the persecuting spirit. At a Diet held at Hombourg, in Hesse Cassel, in 1538, the opinions of many divines were adduced, sanctioning the punishment of the Baptists by the magistrates. Some would have them scourged; some, branded; some, banished; but most of them held that death should be the infliction, and Luther, Melancthon, and Bucer were of the number. See how sophistically the last mentioned Reformer reasoned. A three day's discussion was held with the Baptists of Marburg. George Schnabet, one of their ministers, disputed with Bucer. "The Hessian church is not the church of Christ," said Schnabet, "because it persecutes the poor, and banishes them from their possessions. The Kingdom of God is joy and righteousness; but this church with great zeal commits injustice—it persecutes the innocent." &c. To this Bucer replied;—"The church does not persecute;

it is the magistrates, and they only certain mischievous anabaptists. The church wishes to remain in peace, but these men despise the church." * * * "It is nowhere written," said Schnabet, that unbelievers should be put to death." "Blasphemy must be punished," Bucer replied. "The disturbance of religion ought to be forbidden much more than any temporal mischief." "Unbelievers," Schnabet argued, "ought not to be punished; our enemies should be loved." "When the magistrate punishes an enemy," said Bucer, "he loves him. It is a father punishing his child." (*Ibid*, i. 169, 170.)

The Emperor Charles 5. continued to evince his malignity by procuring cruel edicts at German Diets. In 1544, at the Diet of Spiros, when other Protestants were treated with leniency, severe measures were adopted against the Baptists. At Augsburg, in 1551, extermination was denounced against them. Nor was it a vain threat. Priests and people united to put it into execution, and tremendous sufferings followed. The Emperor's brother, Ferdinand, King of Hungary, was still more ferocious. As I have before stated, he was induced to suspend the execution of the edict which the expulsion of the Baptists from Moravia had been decreed in 1535, and for twelve years they enjoyed comparative tranquillity. But in 1547, having ascertained that they had greatly increased and were still increasing, he issued another edict, ordering them to be driven out of all the countries under his sway, their property to be confiscated, and no mercy to be shewn to age, sex, or condition. The decrees were rigorously executed. There was no refuge or home for the persecuted Baptists. They might have endeavoured to find shelter in the Austrian dominions, but the Augsburg edict, just attended to, prevented them. If they withdrew into the forests or mountain fastnesses, starvation awaited them; if they showed themselves in inhabited districts they were at the mercy of informers, and the officers of mis-called justice stood ready to seize their victims. Jacob Hutter strove to comfort them by letters, which were conveyed from place to place and read in their assemblies; but this relief soon failed, for their faithful leader fell into the hands of the enemy, and suffered death at In-pruck, in 1551.

In several instances brethren who had been commissioned to visit other churches were discovered as they passed through the German territories, betrayed to the authorities, and died in prison or were publicly executed. It was a dangerous thing in these days to be a member of a deputation.

Torture was frequently employed, in order to wring from the sufferers the names and places of abode of their associates, or to force them, under the pressure of anguish, to renounce the faith.

In the year 1539 the Vienna police, aided by a detachment of cavalry, surprised a congregation at Steinborn, and captured nearly all of them. They were lodged in the castle of Falkenstein. After remaining in confinement about five weeks, during which time strenuous efforts were made by the priests to persuade them to abjure, it was notified to them that the women and children would be released, but that the able-bodied men would be sent to sea. The youths, and some that were weak or sickly were reduced to bondage, and given to Austrian noblemen. Ninety men were sent away under a strong guard, bound two and two, to proceed on foot to Trieste, a journey of more than two hundred miles. "Man and wife were separated from each other, and children of tender years left behind; which flesh and blood could not have borne, but by the power of God and for his sake. So deplorable was the separation that the King's marshal and others like him could not refrain from tears." * * * They were led about by his majesty's messengers through towns, villages, and the open country, from one jurisdiction to another. In their journeys they were constrained to suffer much and various kinds of adversity and great affliction, but God always afforded them his gracious

help, and in particular, that every morning and evening, without hindrance, they could make and present their prayer to God, and durst, beside, without impediment, speak each one to the comfort of his brethren. This they received with great gratitude as a special favor and gift of God. By this means the people in many places were convinced of their innocence and piety; so that they who, at their first coming, regarded them as evil doers, felt great compassion for them. To this, the king's servants who conducted them bare repeated testimony, and told them that they should not pass through the towns and country places in silence, but might make known their faith by singing or in some other way. * * * God was thus pleased to reveal his word and truth in all places and lands, to make them known to the people who knew them not, and to cause their sound to be heard. As at all times, in a like manner, he graciously appoints means to draw men away from unrighteousness; so, by these witnesses of the faith and divine truth, who were led about into a great number and variety of places, amidst unknown and foreign tongues, where the truth was not heard, being unknown and hidden from the people, were some from Carniola and Italy led to inquire after the truth. Some were brought to the acknowledgment of the truth, who, to this very day, serve God with an upright heart. But how these captive brethren, during their journeys, and in many places were treated, how they were driven and beaten, and with cords and chains were bound together, and what in consequence they suffered, were too long to be narrated. Yet, how great soever the oppression they endured, their hearts were always comforted by God, (*Ibid*, p. 189-193.)

When they had been in Trieste nearly a fortnight they contrived to escape from the prison in which they were lodged. Fifteen of them were re-taken, but the others eluded search, and arrived among their brethren in safety. They were "received with joy and thanksgiving, as a gift sent by God." The fifteen were never heard of any more.

Leonhard Bernkop was burned at Salzburg in 1542. "He was led to the place of execution, and a fire made on one side of him, so that he was, as it were, roasted; but he cleaved fast to the Lord. He said to the bloodhounds and the servants of the executioner, "This side is roasted enough, turn me round; through the power of God, the suffering I feel is but little, and it is light compared with everlasting glory." (*Ibid*, p. 239.)

Two young females who had been recently baptized at Bamberg were apprehended, imprisoned, and severely tortured. But they did not swerve from the truth. When they were led out to die, wreaths of straw were placed on their heads, "by way of contempt and mockery." "Since Christ," said one of them to the other, "wore a crown of thorns for us, why should we not, in return, and for his honour, wear this crown of straw? Our faithful God will, instead of this, set a beautiful crown of gold and a glorious garland upon our heads." So they went cheerfully to the fire (*Ibid*, p. 363.)

Johannes Bair had been in prison nearly twenty years when he wrote the following letter:—

"Dear brethren, I have received the writing-desk, the account of our worship, faith and teaching, and six lights, or candles, and pens; but the bible, in particular, I have not received, though standing first in the list. Now, this is my prayer, that, if you have it, you will forward it me; for this above all things I wish to have, if it be according to the will of God. I suffer much for want of it, and have endured great hunger and thirst for the word of the Lord during many long years. Of this I make my complaint to God and his church, for it is full twenty years, save eight weeks, since the day of my miserable imprisonment.

"I, Johannes Bair of Lichtenfels, of all men the most miserable and the most forsaken, the prisoner of Jesus Christ our

Lord, make again this my complaint before God and his angels, and also his servants, churches, and congregations. Now, my brethren and sisters, the best beloved of my heart in the Lord, beseech God for me, that he would deliver me out of this peril and great distress—a distress that is unspeakable. This God knows, and my poor self, and you likewise know it with me. Herewith be it commended to God. Written at Bamberg in a dark hole, in the year 1548."

Three years afterwards he slept in the Lord in the prison, and obtained the martyr's crown" (*Ibid*, p. 372.)

Here is a specimen of diabolical atrocity. Hans Pichner was "put to the rack, but all their tortures were unavailing. Very vexatious it was to them that they could extort nothing from him. Several times they stripped him, and let him hang in torture for hours on the ropes. So strained did he become, that he could not set a step, nor stand upon his feet, nor bring his hand to his mouth to eat. Nevertheless he could not be turned aside, but remained steadfast in the Lord. Afterwards, they bound him hand and foot, and kept him confined in a dark prison or dungeon more than half a year. * * * After this they condemned him to death, and led him out to the place of execution, where he exhorted the people, who were numerous collected together, to repentance. He was then placed with his back against a stake, and so beheaded; for they had so dreadfully tortured and stretched him that he was unable to kneel." (*Ibid*, ii. 59.)

Take another case. Hans Breal was apprehended in the Tyrol, in the year 1557. Having been repeatedly tortured, in the vain hope of compelling him to betray his brethren, he was at length placed in "a deep, dark, filthy tower, where he could neither see sun, moon, nor day-light. So that he could not tell whether it was night or day; sometimes he could tell that it was night by its being colder than before. The dungeon was moist and damp, so that his clothes became foul and rotted on his body, and for some time he was obliged to sit naked. He had nothing but a coarse blanket that had been given him; this he threw round his body, and sat in misery and darkness. His shirt was so much rotted as not to leave a single slip of it, except the collar of the neck, which he hung on the wall. When these children of Pilate had him brought out to see if he would recant, the brightness of the light was so painful, that he was glad when they let him go down again into the dark tower. * * * Thus he lay in this foul dungeon, where worms and vermin were his companions for a long time; he protected his head with an old hat, that from pity had been thrown to him. No one had been confined in this tower for some years, so that the vermin had greatly increased, and caused him much terror until he had got used to it. The worms frequently ate his food. * * * Thus he lay in this foul tower the whole summer, until nearly Michaelmas day in the harvest. When they saw that the frost began to set in, they brought him out from thence, and led him into another prison, which could not possibly be worse. There he was obliged to stay for thirty-seven weeks, with one hand and one foot in the stocks, so that he was unable to lie down or sit, and could only stand. He also suffered much mocking and ridicule from the ungodly. * * * At length an order was issued by the council at Inspruck, which the magistrates brought to read to him. The contents were as follows:—That since he was so obdurate, and would receive no instruction, he should be sent to sea, to which he must go the following morning; there he would find how the obstinate were stripped and flogged. But Hans answered that he would confide in the Lord his God, who was on the sea as well as on land, to help him and give him patience. He was then released from prison, and suffered to go about the castle for two days that he might learn again to walk. This he could not easily do, so very infirm had he become through lying in prison and in the stocks, fastened