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"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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## Poetry.

[ORIGINAL.]

### Thoughts among the Graves.

Here sleep the dead,  
Where the worms are fed  
On mortal forms once beautiful and brave;  
How changed their state!  
Though once with life elate,  
Unheeded death, nor ponder'd o'er the grave.

Proud man attend;  
Here let the haughty bend,  
Folly, repress the smile of thoughtless mirth;  
See, here, the final close;  
The end of joys and woes,  
Known alike to all the sons of earth.

Mute those cold white stones,  
No voice from mouldering bones,  
Coming from the abodes of death below;  
Yet sure a warning comes,  
E'en from the silent tombs,  
How frail all earthly things they shew.

List to the voice of death,  
List, while life's fleeting breath,  
Urges the vital fluid through your veins,  
Think not with death to cope,  
While life holds out there's hope  
Flee from the curse of sin and all its pains.

Speak they not of years gone by?  
When they, like you and I,  
Flutter'd the giddy round of folly to and fro;  
Now endless ages roll,  
Unchanged th' immortal soul  
Hope no more relieves the eye of woe.

Hark! death speaks again,  
Lo, another funeral train,  
Bringing another tribute to the tomb;  
Bearing another mortal wreck,  
To earth's cold bosom back,  
Dust to dust—so let it forward come.

Hush! now gather round  
Death's undisputed ground:  
Now let the solemn prayer ascend  
To thy victor, O greedy grave,  
The Almighty One strong to save,  
And the feeble dying Christian's friend.

Here, the great Saviour lay  
Till that third glorious day,  
Whose light dawned on a ransom'd earth;  
Then Mercy's reign began,  
Finished the eternal plan,  
Which gives the long imprisoned soul new birth.

Come weary sinner now  
Low at Death's portal bow;  
Look to the bleeding sacrifice on high  
Look! only look and live,  
Father, he cries forgive,  
Believing sinner you shall never die.

H. Mc. E.

## Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

### A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER XXVI.

#### The Reformation Period.

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

Continued

#### MY YOUNG FRIEND,

I propose now to give you some account of Menno Simon, to whose labours the Baptists of Holland were so deeply indebted.

This great man was born at Witmarsum, in Friesland, in the year 1505. Very little is known of his early life. I am not able to tell you where he studied; but it is evident, both from his writings, and from the admissions of his opponents, that he was a first-rate scholar. Mosheim says that he had acquired "learning enough to be regarded by many as an oracle." Though he was educated for the priesthood he was entirely ignorant of the scriptures, excepting such portions as are contained in the Missal and the Breviary. Nay more, he was not only ignorant but hostile "speaking evil of things which he knew not," after the manner of the Romish priesthood of that age, who were irritated by the Reformers' constant appeal to the word of God, and refused to admit it, maintaining that the authority of the church was su-

preme. The fact that Luther and his coadjutors proposed to derive their religious views from the bible led these sapient priests to identify the holy book with heresy, and therefore to abstain from perusing it. So Menno Simon afterwards confessed.

But he was a thinking man. Having been ordained in 1528, he became vicar of Pingium, a village in Friesland. The celebration of the mass was of course a frequent duty. He had been taught to believe that when the priest uttered the words, "*Hoc est corpus meum*" ["This is my body"], the wafer was changed into the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. His reason was shocked and disgusted. Could these things be true? Did Christianity teach them? Such questions could not be answered unless he examined the original record. He determined to do so, and in the year 1530 he read the New Testament. The perusal opened his eyes. He renounced transubstantiation. Continuing to read, more enlightenment followed. As he learned, he taught. He preached so differently that he began to be regarded as an evangelical minister. But as yet it was only light; spiritual life was wanting.

I mentioned in a former letter the martyrdom of Syke Snyder, at Leewarden. Menno heard of it, and then for the first time was informed of the existence of the people called "Anabaptists." The effects produced on his mind, and the ultimate results were thus stated by himself some years afterwards:—

"It sounded very strange in my ears to speak of a person being re-baptized. I examined the Scriptures with diligence, and meditated on them earnestly; but could find in them no authority for infant baptism. As I remarked this, I spoke of it to my pastor; and after several conversations he acknowledged that infant baptism had no ground in the scriptures. Yet I dared not trust so much to my understanding. I consulted some ancient authors who taught me that children must be baptized by immersion, and that they must be washed from their original sin. This I compared with the Scriptures, and perceived that it set at naught the blood of Christ. Afterwards I went to Luther, and would gladly have known from him the ground; and he taught me that we must baptize children on their own faith, because they are holy. This also I saw was not according to God's word. In the third place I went to Bucer, who taught me that we should baptize children in order to be able the more diligently to take care of them, and bring them up in the ways of the Lord. But this, too, I saw was a groundless representation. In the fourth place, I had recourse to Bullinger, who pointed me to the covenant of circumcision; but I found as before, that according to Scripture the practice could not stand. As I now on every side observed that the writers stood on grounds so very different, and each followed his own reason, I saw clearly that we were deceived with infant baptism."

In 1530 Menno returned to Witmarsum, his native village, where he remained five years, discharging his duties as a Romish priest. "There," said he, "I preached and said much from the word of God, but without any influence from the Spirit, or any proper affection for the souls of men; and I made, by these my sermons, many young persons, like myself, vain boasters, and empty talkers; but they had very little concern for spiritual things. \* \* I entered with ardour into the indulgence of youthful lusts; and like the generality of persons of similar pursuits, sought exclusively after gain, worldly appearance, the favour of men, and the glory of a name." Nevertheless, he continued to inquire after truth, and the Lord graciously guided and blessed him. As his views became clearer, his heart was affected, and at length all the marks of genuine conversion appeared. Then came a time of trial. Should he retain his position as a priest, or forsake all and follow Christ? "If I continue in this state," he exclaimed, "and do not to the utmost of my ability expose the hypocrisy of false teachers, and the impotent

and careless lives of men, their depraved baptism and supper, with their other superstitions, what will become of me?" True to his convictions, he faithfully and fearlessly proclaimed the gospel.

"I began," he said, "in the name of the Lord, to teach publicly from the pulpit the doctrine of true repentance; to guide the people in the narrow path; to testify concerning sins and unchristian behaviour, and all idolatry and false worship; as also concerning baptism and the supper, according to the sense and fundamental principles of Christ, as far as I at the time received grace from my God. Also, I warned every man against the Munster abominations in regard to a king, to polygamy, to a worldly kingdom, to the sword, &c., most faithfully. Until the great and gracious Lord, perhaps after the course of nine months, extended to me his fatherly spirit, help and mighty hand, so that I freely abandoned at once my character, and fame among men, as also my Antichristian abominations, mass, infant baptism, loose and careless life, and all; and put myself willingly in all trouble and poverty, under the pressing cross of Christ the Lord. In my weakness I feared God. I sought pious people, and of these I found some, though few, in good zeal and doctrine. I disputed with the perverted; and some I gained through God's help and power, but the stiff-necked and obdurate I commended to the Lord. \* \* \* Thus has the gracious Lord drawn me through the free favor of his great grace. He first stirred in my heart. He has given me a new mind. He has humbled me in his fear. He has led me from the way of death, and through mere mercy has called me upon the narrow path of life into the company of his saints. To him be praise for ever. Amen."

This reference to the "Munster abominations" serves to point out the peculiarity of his circumstances. He was fully a baptist in principle, but the outrageous conduct of the men of Munster (about whom I shall have to speak at large in a subsequent letter,) had exposed all persons bearing the Baptist name to unmerited opprobrium; in fact, no man's life was safe who attached himself to that body. Menno distinguished, however, between the precious and the vile. Repudiating the monstrous dogmas and pretensions which characterized the Munster mania, against which he always earnestly protested, he embraced the sentiments held by the genuine Baptists, and joined one of their churches. This was in the year 1535.

During the first year after his baptism, Menno lived in retirement, meeting with the church from time to time, and diligently employing all the means in his power for the increase of knowledge and piety. But he could not be hid. The church recognized his talents for usefulness, and wisely determined to call him out to labor. I will again cite his own words.

"He who bought me with the blood of his love, and called me to his service, unworthy as I am, searches me, and knows that I seek neither gold, nor goods, nor luxury, nor ease on earth; but only my Lord's glory, my salvation, and the souls of many immortals. Wherefore I have had now the eighteenth year, to endure such excessive anxiety, oppression, trouble, sorrow, and persecution, with my poor feeble wife and little offspring, that I have stood in jeopardy of my life, and in many a fear. Yes, while the priests lie on soft beds and cushions, we must hide ourselves commonly in secret corners. While they are at all nuptials and christenings, and other times make themselves merry in public with fifes, drums, and various kinds of music, we must look out for every dog, lest he be employed to catch us. Instead of being greeted by all as doctors and masters, we must be called Anabaptists, clandestine holders-forth, deceivers, and heretics. In short, while for their services they are rewarded in princely style, with great emoluments and good days, our reward and portion must be fire, sword and death.

"What now I, and my true coadjutors in this very difficult and hazardous service, have sought, or could have sought, all the well-disposed may easily estimate from the

work itself and its fruit. \* \* \* And through our feeble service, teaching, and simple writing, with the careful deportment, labour, and help of our faithful brethren, the great and mighty God has made so known and public in many cities and lands the word of true repentance, the word of his grace and power, together with the wholesome use of his holy sacraments; and has given such growth to his churches, and endowed them with such invincible strength that not only have many proud hearts become humble, the impure chaste, the drunken temperate, the covetous liberal, the cruel kind, the godless godly; but also for the testimony which they bear, they faithfully give up their property to confiscation, and their bodies to torture and to death—as has occurred again and again to the present hour. These are no marks or fruits of false doctrine (with that God does not cooperate); nor under such oppression and misery could anything have stood so long, were it not the power and the word of the Almighty. Whether all the prophets, apostles, and true servants of God, did not through their service, produce the like fruits, we would gladly let all the pious judge."

The issue was that Menno became a Baptist minister. The last twenty-five years of his life were spent in toilsome and perilous efforts for the spread of the truth. Repeatedly compelled to change his abode, and living for the most part in a state of wandering and exile, his life was no doubt greatly embittered. Having married, too, at an early period of his ministry, his sufferings were increased by the exposure of his wife and children to the same distress as he himself endured. But he laboured on without fainting, and God abundantly blessed him. Let us listen to him once more.

"Perhaps a year afterwards, as I was silently employing myself upon the word of the Lord, in reading and writing, there came to me a great trial; in the heart of one heart and soul with me; in their faith and life (so far as man can judge) irreproachable; separated from the world, according to the direction of the Scriptures; subjected to the cross of Christ; and bearing a hearty abhorrence, not only of the Munster, but also of all worldly sects, anathematizings and corruptions. With much kind entreaty they urged me in the name of the pious who were agreed with them and me in one spirit and sentiment, that I would yet lay a little to heart the severe distress and great necessities of the poor oppressed souls, (for the hunger was great, and very few were the faithful stewards,) and employ the talent, which, unworthy as I am, I had received from the Lord.

"As I heard this I was very much troubled; anguish and fearfulness surrounded me. For on the one hand, I saw my small gift; my want of erudition; my weak and bashful nature; the extremely great wickedness, willfulness, perverse conduct, and tyranny of the world; the powerful large sects; the craftiness of many spirits; and the heavy cross, which, should I begin, would not a little press me. On the other side, I saw the pitiable extreme hunger, want and necessity of the devout pious children; for I perceived clearly enough that they wandered, as the simple, forsaken sheep when they have no shepherd.

"At length, after much prayer, I resigned myself to the Lord and his people with this condition. They were to unite with me in praying to him fervently, that should it be his holy pleasure to employ me in his service to his praise, his fatherly kindness would then give me such a heart and mind as would testify to me with Paul, *Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!* but should his will be otherwise, that he would order such means as to permit the matter to rest where it was. *For if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" (Matt. xviii. 19, 20.)"

Before his time the Baptists of Holland