

# Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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## Poetry.

### Flowers.

OH! they look upward in every place  
Through this beautiful world of ours,  
And dear as a smile on an old friend's face,  
Is the smile of the bright, bright flowers!  
They tell us of wanderings by wood and stream  
They tell us of lanes and trees;  
But the children of showers and sunny beams  
Have lovelier tales than these.

They tell of a season when men were not,  
When earth was by angels trod,  
And leaves and flowers in every spot  
Burst forth at the call of God;  
When spirits singing their hymns at even,  
Wandered by wood and glade,  
And the Lord looked down from the highest  
heaven,  
And blessed what he had made.

The blessing remaineth upon them still,  
Though often the storm-cloud lowers,  
And frequent tempests may soil and chill  
With their breath, the bright, bright flowers.  
When Sin and Death, with their sister Grief,  
Made a home in the hearts of men,  
The blessing of God on each tender leaf  
Preserved their beauty then.

The lily is lovely as when it slept  
On the waters of Eden's lake;  
The woodbine breathes sweetly as when it crept  
In Eden from brake to brake;  
They were left as a proof of the loveliness  
Of Adam and Eve's first home;  
They are here as types of the joys that bless  
The just in the world to come.

## Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

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

LETTER XXVIII.

#### The Reformation Period.

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

#### MY YOUNG FRIEND,

You have often heard of the black deeds of Munster, in the year 1534, and of some transactions of a similar kind in Holland, about the same time. Perhaps you have been taught to consider those events as deeply disgraceful to the Baptist cause.

I have no wish to throw a veil over that part of the history. Let the facts be set forth in all their horrid enormity, as Pædobaptist historians have portrayed them. Then let them be fairly contemplated, in the light of impartial truth.

The facts must first be stated. There had been fierce contests in Westphalia between the Roman Catholic authorities and the Protestants. The former would have exterminated the latter, but their numbers and their power prevented it. Their superiority over their opponents was shewn in the terms of the agreement which had been recently entered into between them and the bishop of Munster, who was also its prince. The Protestants secured for their worship the six parish churches, leaving to the bishop and his co-religionists only the cathedral and a monastery. The bishop, however, had left the city, not choosing to reside there under such circumstances. It could not be surprising that Munster became the resort of many religious fugitives whom persecution had driven from their homes, and who hoped to find a peaceful and safe refuge in that city. Nor could it be wondered at, in that age of excitement, that among the fugitives were found men of discordant and even outrageous opinions. Some of them were Baptists. Rothman, one of the Reformed preachers, and a man of high repute and great influence, embraced their views, and their numbers were daily increased, both by immigration and conversion. Just at that time, in January, 1534, Jan Matthys and Jan Bockelson arrived at Munster. They were fiery fanatics, strong in the belief that the restoration of all things was at hand, that the Lord's kingdom was to be established by the sword, that the saints were to take possession of the earth, and that they and their associates were the saints. Bernhard Knipperdolling, a weal-

thy burgher, invited them to his house, and entered into all their schemes. The fruits of their activity were soon manifest.

Proselytes multiplied on every hand. At length, they had secured the adhesion of the majority of the inhabitants. Tumults and conflicts followed, and the result was the expulsion of all who would not favour the designs of Matthys and Bockelson. The remainder of the narrative shall be given substantially in the words of Ranke, the well-known modern historian.

"The anabaptists were thus not only the masters of the city, but its sole occupants. What their adversaries had scrupled to do to them, they inflicted with fanatical eagerness. They divided the city among themselves; and communities from different parts of the country took possession of the religious houses. The movable property of the exiles was collected together, and seven deacons were appointed by Matthys to distribute it gradually to the faithful, according to their several necessities."

All the pictures and statues in the cathedral, works of art generally, and even musical instruments, were destroyed. "The rule which had been laid down as to the property of the exiles was very soon applied to the possessions of the faithful. They were ordered, under pain of death, to deliver up their gold and silver, their jewels and effects, to the chancery, for the common consumption. \* \* \* While the idea of property was abolished, each man was to continue to exercise his craft. Regulations are extant, in which journeymen shoemakers and tailors are specially mentioned; the latter being enjoined to take heed that no new garment or fashion be introduced. \* \* \* Meat and drink were provided at the common cost; the two sexes, 'brethren and sisters,' sat apart from each other at meals; they ate in silence, while one read aloud a chapter of the Bible."

Matthys being killed in a tumult, Bockelson took upon himself the management of affairs. He soon showed symptoms of the wildest fanaticism. At first he assumed the name and office of the prophet. He was a second Moses:—the people were the "new Israel":—twelve elders were appointed to judge them. "Six were to sit to administer justice every morning and afternoon; the prophet Jan Bockelson was to proclaim their sentences to the whole people of Israel, and Knipperdolling to execute them with the sword." A table of laws was prepared, drawn chiefly from the books of Moses. Unconditional submission was required. If any refused it they were denounced as the "wicked," who were to be "rooted out of the earth," and Knipperdolling was authorised to put them to death at once, without trial. "Preceded by four heralds, with a drawn sword in his hand, he traversed the streets, carrying terror wherever he went."

Bockelson's next step was to introduce polygamy. He married Matthys's widow, and many more women. The contagion spread. Rothman the preacher took four wives. All the females in the city were soon appropriated.

The climax was reached when Bockelson procured himself to be appointed king. The millennium, it was said, was just at hand. Christ would then reign with his saints over the whole earth for a thousand years. "The kingdom of Munster would endure until the commencement of that millennium, and ought therefore to foreshadow it, and be an image of it." Bockelson declared "that in him the kingdom announced by Christ was incontestably come; that he sat upon the throne of David. He wore round his neck a chain of gold, to which hung the symbol of his dominion,—a golden globe transfixed with two swords, the one of gold, the other of silver, above the handles of which was a cross." Thrice a week he appeared in the market place, thus attired, and administered justice. As he rode through the city, all persons were required to fall on their knees at his approach.

On one occasion, when the Lord's Supper was celebrated by the whole population, Bockelson fancied that one of the per-

sons present "had not on a wedding garment." He ordered him out, followed him, cut off his head, and then "returned cheerful and delighted to the feast." At another time, one of his wives having determined to leave him, he led her into the market-place, beheaded her with his own hands, and induced his other wives to dance round the corpse, exclaiming, "To God alone in the highest be honour."

It did not last long. The bishop of Munster, aided by some of the German princes, besieged the city. Tremendous sufferings were endured by the inhabitants, and great numbers died of starvation. At length the city was taken by assault. A fearful carnage took place. Rothman and other leaders were killed. Bockelson, Knipperdolling and another were taken prisoners, and torn to death by red-hot pincers. The Baptists who remained alive were banished; not one was allowed, not even a woman, to live in Munster.

While these things were taking place at Munster, similar outrages were attempted in Holland, particularly at Leyden and Amsterdam, in which cities certain anabaptists (so called) endeavoured to effect revolutions, and to set up the new kingdom. Extravagance and immoralities marked their proceedings, as at Munster, but they were fortunately unsuccessful.

The question now arises, how far were the Baptists, as a religious body, responsible for these transactions? To this I reply:—

1. That not only among the Baptists, but also among other Reformers of that age, there were persons who were led away by wild notions and unaccountable delusions. It was a time of universal excitement—of new thoughts and new feelings. In the sudden transition from gross darkness to the blaze of noon-day it is not surprising that Menno's vision should prove feeble, imperfect, or even deceptive. Poverty had chained down the mind: when the fetters were broken it ought not to have been wondered at if a period of erratic and wayward movement followed. For my own part I think that, under all the circumstances, the conduct of the Reform leaders was marvellously sober.

2. That although certain Baptists embraced millenarianism and other absurd theories, the whole body cannot be held responsible for such things, since they were discountenanced by the majority. The fair representation would be, that some persons professing Baptist sentiments fell into these evils, but that the Denomination as a whole was entirely free from them. They are properly enough ascribed by Brandt to "a new sect of enthusiastical anabaptists" which arose at that time, widely differing from the "well meaning" people who bore the same name, (History of the Reformation, i. 38).

3. That the men of Munster should have been treated as maniacs. Motley says of some who suffered at Amsterdam that they were "furious lunatics, who certainly deserved the madhouse rather than the scaffold" (History of the Dutch Republic, i. 80). The remark is as applicable to the Germans as to the Dutch. It was insanity produced by intense feeling, a phenomenon not unusual in times of excitement, from whatever cause that excitement might spring. Taught to abandon the old formalism, and to regard Christianity as essentially identified with life and power, and as requiring personal choice and action, the Baptists were conscious of an engagedness of heart in religion which was peculiar to such sentiments. The opposition they met with caused them to cling more closely to the truth, and to study it with greater earnestness. Firmly believing the promises of scripture they looked forward to the triumph of New Testament principles, and that triumph, they foresaw, would occasion a complete revolution in society, and particularly a dissolution of the union between church and state, since, in proportion as their views prevailed, the right of the civil magistrate to interfere in religious matters would be denied, and such interference abolished. Then, persecution would cease, and the peaceful dominion of the Saviour would prevail. The majority of the Bap-

tists were content to labour and suffer in the propagation of these truths, confidently expecting their ultimate prevalence. They employed spiritual means for the accomplishment of a spiritual end. So far from allowing the use of carnal weapons in the cause of religion, they held all war to be unlawful. But some few, men of warm imagination and weak judgment, were overpowered by their visionary hopes, and thought themselves authorised to establish a new government, on the ruins of the existing order of things. It was first the fire of enthusiasm—then, frenzy—at last, stark madness. But it was a temporary mania, and soon subsided. The disorders and outrages which attended it, and the disturbances which ensued in various parts of Europe, must be ascribed solely to the individuals who were implicated in them. The Baptists in general were wholly free from participation in riot or rebellion.

4. That only at Munster, but in many other places, there was a deadly struggle going on between despotism, civil and religious, on the one hand, and freedom on the other. Numbers of the Germans were prepared to follow any leader who would show them the path of deliverance from their hateful bondage; nor were they very scrupulous as to the means that might be employed. Their efforts failed. As it happened in some instances that Baptists had taken the lead or acquired pre-eminence, they were made to bear all the discredit, and patriotic risings were stigmatised as Baptist insurrections, whereas, in fact, the majority of those who were termed rebels had no connection with the Baptists, in a religious point of view.

It is observable, also, that the Baptist martyrs of this period frequently and indignantly rebutted the calumny cast upon them, and maintained that they were not answerable for the disgraceful doings at Munster and other places.

"They also asked him (Brother Dryzinger, A. D. 1538), if it were true, that if we should become numerous, we would rise up against them and strangle them, if they would not join us? He told them, 'If we did so, we should be no Christians, but only such in name.'" (Martyrology, i. 180).

Speaking of the word of God, Hans of Ovordam (martyred, A. D. 1550), said, "That is our sword; it is sharp and two-edged. But we are daily belied by those who say that we would defend our faith with the sword, as they of Munster did. The Almighty God defend us from such abominations!" (Ibid, p. 335).

"Were they not your people," said the lady of the Governor of Friesland to Jaques Dosie, "that disgracefully and shamefully took up the sword against the magistrates at Amsterdam and Munster?" "Oh no, madam," Jaques replied; "those persons greatly erred. But we consider it a devilish doctrine to resist the magistrates by the outward sword and violence. We would much rather suffer persecution and death at their hands, and whatever is appointed us to suffer." (Ibid, p. 357).

5. I will only remark in conclusion, that the history of these transactions has been written by enemies. We live in an age of impartial historical criticism. It is not improbable, therefore, that discoveries will yet be made which will enable future historians to tell the tale of the so-called anabaptists of Munster much more clearly and fully than their predecessors.

At any rate this is certain, that the atrocities and impurities perpetrated at Munster were not more justly traceable to Baptist sentiments than the massacres of the Waldenses and the enormities of the Inquisition would be to Pædobaptism.

In my next I shall commence a new period.

Yours truly,

From my Study,  
Sept. 28th, 1857.

MENNO.

John Jacob Astor once observed that a man with \$500,000 might begin to feel comfortable. The son of that millionaire has now an income of \$3,000 a day, or \$1,095,000 a year; but is not comfortable by any means, for he has the gout so bad, it is said, that he has to diet himself on Graham bread.