

# Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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## Poetry.

### Nearing Home.

ONE sweet solemn thought,  
Comes to me, o'er and o'er;  
I am nearer home to-day  
Than I ever have been before.

Nearer my Father's house,  
Where the many mansions be;  
Nearer the great white throne;  
Nearer the crystal sea;

Nearer the bound of life,  
Where we lay our burdens down;  
Nearer leaving the cross;  
Nearer gaining the crown.

But lying darkly between,  
Winding down through the night,  
Is the deep and unknown stream  
That leads at last to the light.

Jesus, perfect my trust  
Strengthen the hand of my faith;  
Let me feel thee near when I stand  
On the edge of the shore of death.

Feel thee near when my feet  
Are slipping over the brink;  
For it may be I am nearer home—  
Nearer now than I think.

CAREY.

## Ecclesiastical.

[In this province we may well rejoice in the religious liberty we possess. The evils of a state, or compulsory religion are so many and dangerous, that no effort should be neglected to cherish and guard it from every encroachment of what may tend to its injury.

The great error that the civil magistrate has jurisdiction over the religion of the subject, may be seen in the two following articles.

In one case it was in a former age, but with what is sometimes believed a more evangelical system; but in the latter case in England at the present time, and not so much a persecution as the preventing by law, of the preaching of the gospel to thousands in the city of London.

We copy the article from *The London Freeman*. Our correspondent also refers to the same circumstance, but the feature which appears in the sequel—that the Baptist ministers are prepared to engage the Hall if the Episcopal clergymen and bishops are prevented—shows the value of gospel liberty in favourable contrast with a church as "by law established."

### Calvin and Servetus.

Men have justified, palliated, or condemned the execution of Servetus, according as they were Calvinists or Arminians. Their judgment of the affair has been dictated by their theology.

A few lines will suffice to narrate the history of Servetus up to the time of his quarrel with Calvin—a quarrel which was to be so disastrous to them both. He was by birth a Spaniard, was born the same year with Calvin, and, like him, fluctuated between the study of law and theology. Leaving his native country, he entered as a law student at Toulouse, and in the year 1532 studied physic at Paris. By this time he had not only abjured Catholicism, but had rejected infant baptism, denied the Trinity, at least as ordinarily held, and gone far towards Pantheism. He seems to have been characterised by arrogance and instability, but to have been ready to make any sacrifices and brave any perils in the advocacy of what he at the time held to be truth. In the year 1534, he challenged Calvin to a disputation on some controverted points of theology. Calvin went to Paris to meet him, but for some unknown reason, Servetus did not keep his appointment. For some years after this time, he devoted himself assiduously and successfully to the study of medicine. He delivered lectures with great applause in Paris; he visited among the Italian universities, and everywhere distinguished himself as a man of ability; but his arrogance

and his morbid love of change and innovation constantly involved him in quarrels with his associates. The life of incessant turmoil in which his medical and theological heresies had involved him, made him glad to purchase temporary repose by silence; but he could not resist the impulse to write, even though he did not publish. Some of his manuscripts he submitted to Calvin through a friend of both, Jean Frelon, who formed the medium of communication. Neither of them could conduct controversy with calmness or forbearance, and the correspondence soon became embittered and personal. At length Calvin broke off all communication with his opponent in a letter to Frelon. It seems that Servetus had desired an interview; for on the same day Calvin wrote to Farel, saying "Servetus undertakes to come here, if it is agreeable to me. But I am unwilling to give my word for his safety; for if he come, I will not suffer him to depart alive, if my authority can at all avail."

This dreadful threat was written on February 13, 1546. For some years subsequently all intercourse between them was suspended. Servetus the while living quietly at Vienne. In the year 1552, the work, which seven years before he had submitted to Calvin's judgment, was privately printed, and a few copies put into circulation at Frankfurt and elsewhere. Shortly after this, a Protestant refugee, from the neighbourhood of Vienne, who was living at Geneva, in friendship with Calvin, wrote to a relative at Lyons, condemning the French government for banishing Protestants, whilst it allowed blasphemy to be vented with impunity. In confirmation of this statement, he forwarded the first sheet of the heretical book just printed, pointed out the archbishop's guest, M. Villeneuve, as its author, and revealed the fact that he was no other than the notorious Servetus. We fear that there can be no doubt as to this information having emanated from Calvin. The inquisitor of the district being informed of these facts, at once ordered the arrest of the so-called Villeneuve, and directed his informant to procure further evidence from his relative at Geneva. This, we regret to say, was supplied by Calvin, who "somewhat reluctantly and to save himself from the reproach of levity in making the charge," gave up some of the manuscripts of Servetus which remained in his hands. These sufficed for his conviction, and sentence of death was about to be pronounced, when he contrived to escape from the dungeons of the Inquisition. This was early in April; he wandered about in various disguises till July, when he set out for Naples, where he resolved to settle as a physician. On his way he had to pass through Geneva. He was travelling on foot, and took up his abode at a small inn. Being recognised, he was arrested and thrown into prison. Modern apologists for Calvin have described him as having been simply passive in the matter. In his letters, however, he takes upon himself all the responsibility of his arrest. Writing to Farel a few days after, he says, "We have new business on hand with Servetus. He intended perhaps passing through this city. But after he had been recognised, I thought that he should be detained." And a week or two later, he writes to Sulzer:—"Though he [Servetus] had not permitted any of his poison to go abroad since that time, he has lately brought out a large volume, printed secretly at Vienne. As soon as the thing became known, he was cast into prison. He escaped from it, and wandered about for nearly four months. He at length, in an evil hour, came to this place, when, at my instigation, one of the syndics ordered him to be conducted to prison. For I do not disguise it, that I considered it my duty to put a check upon this most obstinate and ungovernable man."

A paper was drawn up against him by Calvin, containing thirty-eight articles of accusation. He was charged with various heresies, with maintaining his abominable doctrines in an offensive manner, and with defaming Calvin. Servetus in his reply admitted some of the charges against him; as, for instance, his rejection of infant bap-

tism; being accused of denying the Trinity, he professed to hold the doctrine, though in a sense different to that generally received; his conduct towards Calvin he justified; he rejected with horror the accusation of denying the immortality of the soul; he admitted, however, that his conception of the Deity was Pantheistic. This examination lasted five days, at the close of which he was again consigned to prison, where he complained much of the severity of his treatment, saying that he was being devoured alive with vermin. After remaining in this loathsome cell for some days, he was handed over to the authorities of the city for trial. Against this he protested, on the very sufficient grounds that a criminal prosecution for doctrine was unknown to the primitive church; that he had committed no offence within the canton of Geneva; and that he owed no allegiance to the Genevese, being a foreigner merely passing through their territory. His protest was overruled, and his request for the assistance of an advocacy was refused.

The unhappy man seems from this period to have been worked up to such a pitch of excitement as to have become all but insane. His passionate outbreaks damaged the prisoner's cause, and the trial went on in spite of them.

The council resolved to take the opinion of the other Swiss churches upon the case, and in some measure to be guided by them. The replies seem to have been unanimous in their condemnation of the doctrines of Servetus.

This decided the fate of the unhappy heretic, and on the 26th October, he was sentenced to be burned alive the next morning. When the intelligence of his impending fate was announced to him he appeared stunned for a few moments, and then broke out in wild cries for mercy. He sought an interview with Calvin in order to ask his forgiveness, and probably to implore his intercession. Calvin replied that he had not acted from private malice—that he had tried in vain to reclaim him from his errors; and advising him to seek pardon from God, left the prison. The sentence was then carried into effect. The prisoner was led forth, bound to the stake, the fire was slowly kindled round him, his agonies were frightfully protracted; at last with a cry to the Saviour for mercy, expressed in terms which shewed that he still held to his heresy, death released him from his sufferings, and he expired.

Attempts have been sedulously made to clear Calvin from the charge of being a party to his death. A careful examination of his correspondence before us compels one to come to a different conclusion. The only interpretation that we can put upon his language, is that he desired his execution, but would have preferred some less cruel mode than that of the stake. He wrote to Farel, "I hope that sentence of death will be passed upon him, but desire that the severity of the punishment may be mitigated." To Sulzer, one of the ministers of Zurich, he wrote, whilst the case submitted by the Council of Geneva was under consideration:—"It was he of whom that faithful minister of Christ, Master Bucer, of holy memory, declared from the pulpit that he deserved to have his bowels pulled out and to be torn to pieces. . . . We see how impitiously he is making progress everywhere, and how very inactive those are whom God has armed with the sword for the vindication of the glory of his holy name. Seeing that the defenders of the Papacy are so bitter and bold in behalf of their superstitions, that in their atrocious fury they shed the blood of the innocent, it ought to shame Christian magistrates that in the protection of certain truths they are so shamefully destitute of spirit." He then proceeds to assign reasons why the severest judgment ought to be pronounced on Servetus, and adds that the treasurer of the city, who bears the letter to Sulzer, "takes a correct view of the case, and does not avoid the issue which we desire." This language can only mean that he is prepared for a capital sentence. Again, writing to Farel a week or two later, he says, "I am anxious to have you here soon; namely, on the occa-

sion of the final sentence on Servetus, which will take place, I hope, before the end of next week." This request is explained by the fact that the Genevese pastors, being the accusers of Servetus, had determined not to attend him to the stake, but had appointed Farel as their substitute. Shortly afterwards he wrote to Farel and Bullinger, thanking them for the very decisive condemnation they had pronounced on Servetus, and says to the former, "He was condemned without hesitation. He will be led forth to punishment to-morrow. We endeavoured to alter the mode of his death, but in vain."

In the year 1551, Jerome Bolsec, a Dominican monk converted to Protestantism, settled in Geneva. He called in question the doctrines of election and reprobation as taught by Calvin. The latter accused him before the council, who banished him, threatening him with a severe sentence if he returned. It was believed that Calvin desired a much heavier punishment at the time. This he denied. Considerable countenance is given to the report, notwithstanding, by a letter to Madame de Cany, in which, evidently referring to Bolsec, he says "Knowing partly the man he was, I could have wished that he were rotting in some ditch; and his arrival gave me as much pleasure as the piercing my heart with a pincard would have done." To complete the evidence against Calvin, we only need to adduce his letter to the Protector Somerset, dated 22nd October, 1548, in which he urges him to exercise his power as regent for the suppression of abuses in the realm of England, and specially points out the Anabaptists and the Roman Catholics, as "alike deserving to be repressed by the sword which is committed to you." To these exhortations were probably due the martyrdoms of the English Baptists, Joan Boucher and George von Paré, which followed speedily.

We cannot, then, acquit Calvin of the charge of persecution; we however do most entirely acquit him of the charge of wilful and conscious cruelty. He was the slave and victim of an unrelenting, unflinching logic. No suggestions of tenderness, no pleadings of mercy, could for a moment be listened to if they stood in the way of a theory or a conviction. He was ready at any moment to suffer himself all that he inflicted on others. In his nature, intellect and conscience reigned not merely supreme, but alone; the heart seemed wanting.

A man of this stern, self-possessed nature would shrink from no consequences which were deducible from his arguments. He had accepted the belief that it was the duty of the civil ruler to protect truth and to punish heresy by the sword. He carried that belief out into all its results and consequences. Hence he condemned the Roman Catholic rulers, not because they persecuted, but because they persecuted on the wrong side. Hence too, with perfect consistency, he blamed Protestant rulers, because they hesitated to persecute on the right side. We take the case of Calvin then as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory, that it is the duty of the state to interfere with religion. The premises assumed by Calvin being conceded, see their logical result in the case of Servetus. If the state has to do with the religion of its subjects, it must secure for them healthful doctrines and suppress "damnable heresies." If it be felony to maim or to poison and murder to kill, the body, a *fortiori* it is so to maim or to poison the soul; and if the state has to do with both parts of man's nature, the penalties attached to the former class of crimes are all too slight as punishments for the latter. Thus Calvin argued—thus Servetus died. The logic we take to be irresistible. The consequences flow inevitably from the premises. In the lurid glare of the death pile of Servetus, and in the deep reprobation which we attach to those acts of Calvin, let us learn how false are the principles from which they result—no less false in the case of those who hesitate to carry them out to their legitimate issues, than as held by him whose inflexible hardness shrank from no extremes to which they conducted him.