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"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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WHOLE SERIES.
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Poetry.

The Careless Word.

A word is ringing through my brain,
It was not meant to give me pain:
It had no tone to bid it stay,
When other things had passed away;
It had no meaning more than all
Which in an idle hour fall:
It was when first the sound I heard
A lightly uttered, careless word.

That word—O! it doth haunt me now,
In scenes of joy, in scenes of woe,
By night, by day, in sun or shade,
With the half smile that gently played
Reproachfully, and gave the sound
Eternal power through life to wound.
There is no voice I ever heard,
So deeply fixed as that one word.

When in the laughing crowd some tone,
Like those whose joyous sound is gone,
Strikes on my ear, I shrink—for then
The careless word comes back again.
When all alone I sit and gaze
Upon the cheerful home-fire blaze,
So freshly, as when first 'twas heard,
Returns that lightly uttered word.

When dreams bring back the days of old,
With all that wishes could not hold,
And from the feverish couch I start
To press a shadow to my heart,
Amid its beating echoes, clear,
That little word I seem to hear;
In vain I say, while it is heard,
Why weep!—'twas but a foolish word.

It comes, and with it comes the tears—
The hopes—the joys of former years;
Forgotten smiles—forgotten looks,
Thick as dead leaves on autumn brooks,
And all is joyless; though they were
The brightest things life's spring could share,
O! would to God, I ne'er had heard
That lightly uttered, careless word!

It was the first, the only one,
Of those, which lips for ever gone
Breathed in their love—which had for me
Rebuke of harshness at my glee;
And if those lips were here to say,
"Beloved, let it pass away."
Ah! then, perchance—but I have heard
The last dear tone, the careless word!

O! ye who, meeting, sigh to part,
Whose words are treasured to some heart,
Deal gently, ere the dark days come,
When earth hath but for one a home;
Lest, musing o'er the past, like me,
They feel their hearts wrung bitterly,
And, heeding not what else they heard,
Dwell weeping on a careless word!

Hon. Mrs. Norton.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER XXXVI.

The Troublous Period.

From A. D. 1567 to A. D. 1688.

Continued.

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

I have said that Presbyterianism was in the ascendant. But the Presbyterians of the seventeenth century held toleration in abhorrence. It was in their eyes the quintessence of all heresy.

The great Richard Baxter says:—"My judgment in that much disputed point of liberty of religion, I have always freely made known. I abhor unlimited liberty and toleration of all, and think myself easily able to prove the wickedness of it."

The President of the Scotch Parliament writes thus to the Parliament of England. (Feb. 3, 1645.):—"It was expected the Honourable Houses would add their civil sanction to what the pious and learned Assembly have advised; and I am commanded by the Parliament of this Kingdom to demand it, and I do in their names demand it. And the Parliament of this Kingdom is persuaded, that the piety and wisdom of the Honourable Houses will never admit

toleration of any sects or schisms contrary to our solemn League and Covenant."—(Neal, iii. 310.)

The London Presbyterian clergy bear their testimony against "the error of toleration, patronising and promoting all other errors, heresies, and blasphemies whatsoever, under the grossly abused notion of liberty of conscience;" and they consider it a great grievance, "that men should have liberty to worship God in that way and manner as shall appear to them most agreeable to the word of God, and no man be punished or discountenanced by authority for the same. We, the ministers of Jesus Christ," say they, "do hereby testify to our flocks, to all the Kingdom, and to the reformed world, our great dislike of Prelacy, Erastianism, Brownism, and Independency; and our utter abhorrence of Anti-Scripturism, Popery, Arianism, Socinianism, Arminianism, Antinomianism, Anabaptism, Libertinism, and Familism; and that we detest the forementioned toleration, so much pursued and endeavoured in this Kingdom, accounting it unlawful and pernicious."—(Ibid, p. 390.)

The Lancashire Ministers declare their "harmonious consent" with their brethren in London, in the following words:—"A toleration would be putting a sword into a midman's hand; a cup of poison into the hand of a child; a letting loose madmen with firebrands in their hands, and appointing a city of refuge in men's consciences for the devil to fly to; a laying a stumbling-block before the blind; a proclaiming liberty to the wolves to come into Christ's fold to prey upon the lambs: neither would it be to provide for tender consciences, but to take away all conscience."—(Crosby, i. 190.)

These sentiments were reduced to practice as far as possible. In 1645 an Ordinance of Parliament was published, enacting "that no person be permitted to preach, who is not ordained a minister, either in this or in some other reformed church, except such as, intending the ministry, shall be allowed for the trial of their gifts, by those who shall be appointed thereunto by both Houses of Parliament." The Ordinance was to be sent to Sir Thomas Fairfax, with the "earnest desire and recommendation" of the Houses, that it should be "duly observed in the Army."—(Crosby, i. 192.) The Baptists were particularly aimed at: because there were great numbers of preachers among them, and they were of course destitute of ordination, in the presbyterian sense of the word. Next year the Corporation of the City of London interfered in the matter, by presenting a memorial to Parliament, called "The City Remonstrance," in which they prayed "that some strict and speedy course might be taken for the suppressing all separate and private congregations; that all Anabaptists, Brownists, Heretics, Schismatics, Blasphemers, and all other sectaries, who conform not to the public discipline established, or to be established by parliament, may be fully declared against, and some effectual course settled for proceeding against such persons; and that no person disaffected to the Presbyterial government, set forth or to be set forth by Parliament, may be employed in any place of public trust."—(Crosby, i. 184.) But the Baptists and others in the army procured a counter-petition, which was very numerous signed, "applauding the labours and successes of the parliament in the cause of liberty, and praying them to go on with managing the affairs of the kingdom according to their wisdom, and not to suffer the free-born people of England to be enslaved on any pretence whatever, nor to suffer any set of people to prescribe to them in matters of government or conscience."—(Neal, iii. 328.) Nevertheless, the intolerent principle prevailed, and in December, 1646, a second parliamentary Ordinance appeared, forbidding all unordained persons to "preach or expound the Scriptures in any church, or chapel, or any other public place," and directing that all ministers, or others, who should "publish or maintain, by preaching, writing, printing, or any other way, any thing against, or in derogation of the church government which is now established by

authority of both houses of parliament," should be apprehended, and "due punishment" inflicted on them.—(Crosby, i. 194.) Many Baptists suffered under this ordinance, by imprisonment and otherwise. Had it been rigidly executed, there would have been extensive disturbances of the public peace, for the intolerance of the Presbyterian party excited general disgust and loathing. Milton's thoughts and feelings on the subject were expressed with more force than elegance. There is stinging truth in his lines entitled, "On the new Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament":—

"Because you have thrown off your Prelate lord,
And with stiff vows renounced his Liturgy,
To seize the widowed whore Pluralty
From them whose sin you envied, not abhorred;
Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword
To force our consciences that Christ set free,
And ride us with a classic hierarchy
Taught ye by mere A. S. and Rotherford?
Men, whose life, learning, faith, and pure intent,
Would have been held in high esteem with Paul,
Must now be named and printed Heretics
By shallow Edwards and Scotch what d'ye call:
But we do hope to find out all your tricks,
Your plots and packings worse than those of Trent,
That so the Parliament
May with their wholesome and preventive shears
Clip your phylacteries, though bank your ears,
And succour our just fears,
When they shall read this clearly in your charge,
New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large."

These Presbyterian outrages were also exposed by Samuel Richardson, one of the Pastors of the Calvinistic or Particular Baptist church, the formation of which was mentioned in my last letter. Mr. Richardson's pamphlet was entitled, "The necessity of Toleration in matters of religion; or, certain questions propounded to the Synod, tending to prove, that corporal punishments ought not to be inflicted upon such as hold errors in religion and that in matters of religion men ought not to be compelled, but have liberty and freedom." The "questions" are such as no persecutor, Roman Catholic or Protestant, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, could satisfactorily answer; and the observations interspersed are so pithy and pungent that the good cause must have derived great benefit from the publication. "Sit still quietly," the author says, "and be humbled, for your folly in calling persecution discipline and just deserved censure; and in calling your priesthood and presbytery a holy order, and yet are but the pope's priesthood. And we had as good be under the pope, as under your presbyterian check. . . . What are you worthy the name of Christians, of ministers of the gospel, and yet seek only your own things? You would all be tolerated, and would have none tolerated but yourselves; you would suffer none to live quietly and comfortable, but those of your way. Is this to do as you would be done by?"

The Assembly of Divines, as you are doubtless aware, sat from 1643 till 1649. Their Confession of Faith, and Catechisms, will live as long as theological literature lasts. With the exception of those portions in which religious liberty, church government and christian baptism are treated, they are invaluable. The Assembly not only sustained infant baptism, but also enjoined sprinkling as the mode of administering the ceremony. It was a close division: twenty-five were for the injunction of sprinkling, twenty-four against it. That majority of one was obtained by Dr. Lightfoot's influence, to whose authority as an oriental scholar and biblical critic great deference was paid. The minority were not willing to legislate on the subject, and would have left it to the option of ministers. But it seems that there was a dread of possible consequences; for if any infants should be immersed a suspicion might get abroad that sprinkling was insufficient. This might lead to the conclusion that those who had been only sprinkled ought to be baptized. The inquiry might then be extended to adults, and so the interests of the Baptists might be furthered. It was judged prudent to prevent all this by positive enactment.

There was a wonderful outcry against immersion. Even Baxter allowed himself to use expressions, which might be laughed at were it not for the melancholy fact that in his case (for he could not be ignorant on

the subject) prejudice and passion prevailed over christian charity, and impelled him to adopt a course which in his sober moments he must have condemned. Take a specimen or two:—"That which is a plain breach of the sixth commandment. *Thou shalt not kill*, is no ordinance of God, but a most heinous sin. But the ordinary practice of baptizing over head, and in cold water, as necessary, is a plain breach of the sixth commandment; therefore it is no ordinance of God, but a heinous sin, and, as Mr. Cradock shows in his book of gospel liberty, the magistrate ought to restrain it, to save the lives of his subjects." * * *

"In a word, it is good for nothing but to despatch men out of the world that are burdensome, and to ranken churchyards. I conclude, if murder be a sin, then dipping ordinarily over head in England is a sin; and if those who make it men's religion to murder themselves, and urge it upon their consciences as their duty, are not to be suffered in a commonwealth, any more than highway murderers; then judge how these Anabaptists, that teach the necessity of such dipping, are to be suffered." Poor Baxter! Had he never read the ninth commandment?—(Ivimey's History, i. 193).

Samuel Oates's case is another illustration of the intense hatred against everything Baptist which was at that time indulged in. This excellent minister, who was for some time pastor of one of the London churches, was much blessed in his labours. While engaged in a home missionary tour in the County of Essex, in the year 1646, his preaching was attended with such success, that hundreds were converted and baptized. One of the converts having died a few weeks after, Mr. Oates was actually committed to prison, put in irons, and indicted for murder! It would seem hardly credible that this charge could be seriously entertained; but malice and bigotry stick at nothing. Mr. Oates's persecutors were disappointed, as it clearly appeared on the trial that the young woman baptized was in good health for some time after her baptism. The jury returned a verdict of "not guilty;" but the attempt to destroy a christian minister by such means was an ugly symptom.—(Crosby, i. 236.)

Verily the times were odd and strange! The same Parliament which denounced preachers who had not been regularly ordained, and ordered the magistrates to seize them, issued, in the following year, a declaration in favour of the Baptists! How it came to pass, I know not. Whether some thought that they had gone too far, and honestly desired to retrace their steps; or whether the growing numbers and influence of the denomination inspired a salutary fear, especially as it was known that there were many Baptists in the army; or whether any other consideration, not now discoverable, operated on their minds, cannot be decided. These words were found in the "Declaration," issued March 4, 1647:—"The name of Anabaptism hath indeed contracted much odium, by reason of the extravagant opinions and practices we abhor and detest:—But for their opinion against the baptism of infants, it is only a difference about a circumstance of time in the administration of an ordinance, wherein in former ages, as well as this, learned men have differed both in opinion and practice. And though we could wish that all men would satisfy themselves, and join with us in our judgment, and practice in this point, yet herein we hold it fit that men should be convinced by the word of God, with great gentleness and reason, and not beaten out of it with force and violence."—(Crosby, i. 196.)

It was but a momentary glance of light. As if terrified at what they had said—

"they back recoll'd"
"E'en at the sound themselves had made"—
and in May 1648 passed a law more fearfully barbarous than any which had for a long time found a place in the statute-book. I refer to the "Ordinance of the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, for punishing blasphemies and heresies." By this law it was enacted that all persons found guilty of Atheism, Deism, or Socinianism, and refusing to abjure, should suffer