

# Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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## Poetry.

### God help the Poor.

DARKLY the winter day  
Dawns on the moor;  
How can the heart be gay?  
Who can endure?  
See the sad, weary wight,  
Wanders from noon to night,  
Shelterless! Homeless quite!  
God help the poor!

Now the red robin here  
Sits on the sill,  
Not e'en a grain comes near  
To touch its bill.  
So with the houseless poor,  
Wandering from door to door,  
Seeking a morsel more—  
Lord, is't thy will?

White is the virgin snow,  
Bitter the morn;  
See those starved children go,  
Wretched, forlorn!  
Feet without shoes or hose,  
Backs without warmth of clothes,  
Strangers to all repose,  
Why were they born?

See that lone, aged man,  
Snow-white his hair;  
Mark his sad visage wan,  
Deep his despair;  
Craving the rich man's food,  
Owner of many a rood;  
Lord, thou art always good,  
Hear his heart-prayer.

Yonder a woman goes,  
Ragged and old;  
Barefooted, o'er the snow,  
Famished and cold:  
How her poor children cling  
To her side shivering,  
Like chickens 'neath her wing  
Doth she enfold!

Fast falls the sleet and rain,  
Slowly they go,  
By forest-side, sheltered plain,  
Wailing their woe:  
City street now they see,  
Here they roam wild and free,  
Are they not flesh as we?  
Can'st thou say "No?"

Night spreads her sable wing,  
Where can they lie?  
Sorrrows like theirs must bring  
Tears to the eye;  
Full the cloud-torrent falls,  
They find no sheltering halls,  
Each to his Maker calls,  
"Lord! let me die!"

Ye whom the heavens bless,  
Give from your store;  
'Twill ne'er make your treasures less,  
Must make them more;  
For he that gives cheerfully,  
God loves so tenderly;  
Give to them! pray with me,  
God help the poor!

## Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

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

LETTER XXXIX.

#### The Troublesome Period.

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

Continued.

#### MY YOUNG FRIEND,

In 1664 the *Conventicle Act* was passed. The principal clause was to this effect:—"That if any person, above the age of sixteen, shall be present at any meeting, under colour or pretence of any exercise of religion, in any other manner than is allowed by the liturgy or practice of the Church of England, where shall be five or more persons than the household, he shall for the first offence suffer three months imprisonment, upon record made upon oath under the hand and seal of a justice of peace, or pay a sum not exceeding five pounds; and for the third offence the offender to be banished to some of the American plantations for seven years, or pay one hundred pounds, excepting New England or Virginia; and in case they return, or make their escape, such persons are to be adjudged felons, and suffer death without benefit of clergy."

You will observe that the proceedings under this Act were summary. There was no trial by jury. A single justice of the peace was empowered to levy the fines, or commit the offender to jail, or even banish them for seven years, and there was no appeal from his decision. Under the operation of this law vast numbers suffered in every part of the kingdom. Those who were banished were sent to the West Indies, where they endured very hard treatment.

Next year the *Five Mile Act* was passed. It was entitled, "An Act to restrain Nonconformists from inhabiting Corporations." All Nonconformist ministers were required to take the following oath:—"I, A. B., do swear, that it is not lawful upon any pretence whatsoever to take arms against the king; and that I do abhor that traitorous position of taking arms by his authority against his person, or against those that are commissioned by him, in pursuance of such commissions; and that I will not at any time endeavour any alteration of government, either in church or state." The Earl of Southampton justly observed, that this was an oath which "no honest man could take." But those ministers who refused to take it were forbidden to go within five miles of any city or town that sent members to parliament, or within five miles of any place where they had formerly exercised their ministry, before their ejection. The fine for every offence was forty pounds. They were also declared "incapable of teaching any public or private schools;" fine, forty pounds. And in addition to the fines, any two justices of the peace might "commit the offender to prison for six months."

The object of this inhuman act was to silence the ministers, or compel them to conform for fear of starvation. "But the body of nonconformist ministers refused the oath, choosing rather to leave their habitations, their relations and friends, and all visible support, than destroy the peace of their consciences. Those ministers who had some little estate or substance of their own retired to some remote and obscure villages, or such little market towns as were not corporations, and more than five miles from the places where they had preached; but in many counties it was difficult to find such places of retirement, or they were annexed to farms which the ministers were not capable of using, or the people were afraid to admit the ministers into their houses, lest they should be suspected as favourers of nonconformity. Some took advantage of the ministers' necessities, and raised their rents beyond what they were able to give. Great numbers were thus buried in obscurity; but others, who had neither money nor friends, went on preaching as they could, till they were sent to prison, thinking it more eligible to perish in a jail than to starve out of one, especially when by this means they had some occasional relief from their hearers, and hopes that their wives and children might be supported after their death. Many who lay concealed in distant places from their flocks in the day-time, rode thirty or forty miles to preach to them in the night, and retired again before daylight. These hardships tempted some few to conform (says Mr. Baxter), contrary to their former judgments; but the body of dissenters remained steadfast to their principles, and the church gained neither reputation nor numbers." (Neal's *Puritans*, iv. 402).

The *Conventicle Act* having failed to accomplish its purpose, and the time specified for its operation having expired, a severer law was passed in the spring of 1670. All persons attending conventicles were to be fined five shillings for the first offence, ten shillings for the second; the preachers were to be fined twenty pounds for the first offence, forty pounds for the second; the owners of the houses, barns, buildings, or yards in which the meetings were held, were to be fined twenty pounds each time; the fines were to be "levied by distress and sale of the offender's goods and chattels;" the money was to be divided into three parts—one-third for the king, one-third for the poor, and "the other third to the in-

former or his assistants, regard being had to their diligence and industry in discovering, dispersing, and punishing the said conventicles;" and in case of the poverty of the ministers, the fines imposed on them were to be levied "on the goods and chattels of any other present." Any justice of the peace refusing to carry the Act into execution was to be fined five pounds, and it was expressly declared, "That all clauses in the Act should be construed most largely and beneficially for the suppressing of conventicles, and for the justification and encouragement of all persons to be employed in the execution thereof."

If the first act scourged the dissenters with whips, the second was a scorpion plague. They were plundered and imprisoned without remorse. To their disgrace be it spoken, Archbishop Sheldon and many of the bishops exerted themselves in every possible way to enforce the Act. They sent circulars to the clergy, directing them to stimulate and aid the civil authorities; and some of the bishops went in person to the places where meetings were supposed to be held, in order to encourage the constables, or ensure the rigorous discharge of their duty.

The activity of the informers was excited by the promised share of the penalties. Their infamous trade became lucrative, and many of them amassed large sums, mercilessly fished from the servants of God. A more degrading and detestable occupation cannot well be imagined. They spent their time in prowling about the retired streets and by-lanes of towns, or in exploring the recesses of woods, and wild, desolate places, if haply they might hear the voice of singing or prayer, or watch the movements of some straggler, hastening to join his brethren. With savage glee they darted upon the secret assembly, gloating over their confusion and distress, and specially rejoicing when they seized the preacher, because of the heavier fine. They accompanied the constables when they executed warrants of distress on property; and they attended the sales of the goods seized, taking care to get bargains for themselves. They scrupled not to take the bed from under the sick; they robbed children of their bread, whose fathers were languishing in prison. The law created their calling, and encouraged them in diligently pursuing it. Magistrates urged them on. Clergymen and country squires applauded their cleverness, and judges on the bench commended them for their zeal. There was an unholy alliance against truth and righteousness, in which the titled and the learned were willing to associate themselves with the meanest, the wickedest, and the most brutal of men.

The prisons were crowded. Families were ruined. Houses were desolated. Estates were impoverished or abandoned. Numbers fled their native shores, and sought in Holland or in the American wilderness for "freedom to worship God."

I will give you the details of one case. On Lord's-day the 29th of May, 1670, the Baptists of Lewes in Sussex met for worship in a house about a mile from the town. Two persons watched them and became informers. The minister was fined twenty pounds, and forty of the hearers five shillings each; but as the minister was poor, his fine was imposed on five members of the congregation. All the fines were recovered by levying distresses on property, which was done forthwith.

Walter Brett was a grocer; his fine, six pounds five shillings. The constables took from him two barrels of sugar which cost him more than fifteen pounds.

Thomas Barnard was fined six pounds five shillings, and his brother five pounds five shillings. Six cows were taken from them, worth twenty-seven pounds.

Richard White, brazier, was fined three pounds fifteen shillings; for which, brass kettles and other articles were seized, the value of which was upwards of ten pounds. John Tabret's fine was two pounds fifteen shillings; a cow was taken for it.

John Price and wife were fined ten shillings, to pay which sum four cheeses were taken. Price told the constables that "he

never sold anything to so great an advantage, for this would bring him an hundred fold." (See Matt. xix. 29).

The same system of excessive and heartless restraint was pursued in levying the fines of five shillings each upon the other hearers. Five pairs of shoes from one shoemaker; three pairs from another; three hats from a haberdasher; a horse from a butcher; the sheets from a poor mason's bed, and his wife's under apparel—and so on.

Shortly after this a meeting was held in a house about three miles from Lewes. The owner was fined twenty pounds, and to meet it they took from him the whole of his stock, being six cows, two young bullocks, and a horse.—(Ivimey, i. 366-377.)

Perhaps you will obtain a clearer view of the actual condition of the Baptists in the reign of Charles II. from the history of one church than from any other source. We are fortunately furnished with such a history. The records of the church at Broadmead, Bristol, have been published by the Hanserd Knolly's Society. I will give you an abstract of the narrative.

This church was founded in 1640. The members met regularly for worship, whether they could obtain the services of a minister or not, the gifted brethren helping by prayer and exhortation. In 1651, Mr. Ewins, who had been a minister in the Episcopal church, became their pastor. Under his ministry the church prospered. In addition to the Lord's-day exercises they met on Thursday evenings in private houses for free-conference of the Scriptures and mutual exhortation. Those meetings were found very profitable.

But in 1661 their troubles began. On the 27th of July in that year Mr. Ewins was apprehended while preaching. He was released on the 25th of September following, and immediately recommenced his work. Next year he endured another short imprisonment. A heavier trial came upon them in 1663. Mr. Ewins and several others were arrested on the fourth of October, and indicted at the Quarter Sessions for a riot. Various fines were imposed, (Mr. Ewins was fined £50), and the parties were adjudged to lie in prison till the fines were paid. So the prison became the parsonage till the following September, when a compromise was effected, and on payment of part of the money the prisoners were released. Mr. Ewins had not been idle, however. The people were accustomed to gather around the prison, and their pastor preached to them from the window of the room which he occupied, on the fourth story. "The word of the Lord was precious in those days."

Hitherto they had met in a "chapel called the Friars," but now they were compelled for a time to worship in private houses. The constables frequently disturbed them, and many were imprisoned and fined. Sometimes, when they learned that the officers were coming, they evaded them by taking refuge in a cellar, and sometimes by climbing into a garret. Still they resolutely kept up their assemblies. "In the year 1665," they say, "we had many disturbances, and divers imprisoned, but the Lord helped us through it." Their firmness was remarkably shown by a resolution passed to the effect that those who absented themselves from worship through fear should be dealt with as disorderly members. The names of all the members were engrossed on parchment, and the roll was called once a month, when they met for the Lord's Supper, "to see who doth omit their duty." Not many were willing to expose themselves to church censure; but now and then a case occurred, and the delinquents were excluded, "for neglecting their duty of assembling, through fear."

When the plague broke out in Bristol, in 1666, a stop was put to the persecution. There was peace for four years. In 1667 the church obtained another "public meeting place." It was "a large warehouse, up one pair of stairs."

Mr. Ewins died April 26th, 1670. In the following month the police made their appearance again, and took some members