

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS; FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

NEW SERIES,
Vol. IV. No. 29.

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, WEDNESDAY, JULY 20, 1859.

WHOLE SERIES,
Vol. XXIII. No. 29.

Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Succession of Martyrs.

A sermon, preached before the Central Baptist Association of Nova Scotia, at its Ninth Annual Session, held with the Church in Granville Street, Halifax, June 20, 1859. By J. M. CRAMER, D. D.

Published by request of the Association.

"And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be published."—Rev. vi. 11.

(Concluded.)

In England, men who were themselves afterwards martyrs to Protestantism, united in persecuting Baptists, even unto death. Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer were guilty in this matter. Even good old John Fox, the martyrologist, when petitioning Queen Elizabeth, in behalf of condemned Baptists, did not ask that they might be set free, but only that the mode of punishment might be changed—that they might not be committed to the flames.

We pass on to the seventeenth century. It was a time of perplexity, contempt, and oppression. The Stuarts were bent on establishing despotism, and, as a means to that end, on extinguishing religious dissent. Nor were they the only foes to freedom. During the ascendancy of the Presbyterians in the Long Parliament an act was passed, decreeing the punishment of death to Atheists, Deists, Arians, and Socinians, and of imprisonment till they should renounce their alleged errors (which was tantamount to imprisonment for life) to the deniers of infant baptism. Then came the restoration of Charles II. which involved all the dissidents in one common trouble. Baptists shared with their brethren of other denominations in the distresses of that period. They were cruelly plundered. Many of their best men lived long in prison: some died there. Bunyan spent twelve years in Bedford jail. Henry Forty the same time at Exeter. Francis Bamfield, Vavasor Powell, "the apostle of Wales," and Thomas Delanne, author of the "Plea for Nonconformity," an unanswerable production, died in prison. And here, on this continent, our predecessors "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment," inflicted by men who had left their native land in search of "freedom to worship God," and then refused to others the rights which they claimed for themselves.

This nineteenth century is comparatively free from the stain, but not wholly so. Our beloved brother Oucken and his associates have endured great vexation and annoyance in the prosecution of their labours in Germany; and to this day some of the petty governments of that country throw every obstacle in the way of Baptist effort. Our ministers are fined and imprisoned—our religious assemblies broken up—and the children of our brethren snatched from their parents and taken to the clergy to be sprinkled. Lutherans persecute us in Denmark and Sweden; and Spanish Jesuits, authorized by their government, have suppressed our mission on the Island of Fernando Po.

But we have not imitated the policy of our enemies. Genuine Baptists cannot persecute. We point to Rhode Island and Roger Williams, and maintain, with that great man, "that the government of the civil magistrate extendeth no further than over the bodies and goods of the subject, and therefore hath no civil power over the soul." We cannot consent to the enforcement of any creed or mode of worship; nor to the endorsement or performance of any sect; nor to the imposition of religious tests. We protest against proscription—against pandering to party—against ascendancy;—whether it be Papal—Protestant—Episcopalian—or Presbyterian ascendancy. We demand equal justice for all, and equal right to privileges, honours, and offices. We plead for putting "the right man in the right place," on the ground of fitness only, irrespective of religious profession—as in India, at the present time, Hindus, Mussulmans, and Parsees are on the same footing as Christians. And much as we love the Bible, and heartily as we desire that the youth of our land may be thoroughly instructed in it, we ask for no legislative enactment. It is altogether contrary to Baptist principles to enjoin the use of the Bible by human law, or to make it compulsory by penalty, direct or indirect. We fear the entering wedge of the state-church system, knowing that system to be inconsistent with scripture and hostile to freedom and piety.

III. The facts which have been now adduced are instructive, consoling, and admonitory.

1. They are instructive.

The history of martyrdom affords striking illustration of the teachings of scripture respecting human depravity. It is the most melancholy chapter in the annals of our race. We are prepared to hear of the ravages of war; the passion for mutual destruction has raged in all lands, from time immemorial. But who could have expected that professing christians would vex and murder one another on account of religious differences—or that for shades of opinion and varieties of worship men would be despoiled of their freedom? Surely this is a mournful commentary on the inspired announcement. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

Again; we learn the folly and iniquity of the state-church system. Uniformity is the aim; compulsion, the means; defeat and disgrace the result. The system cannot be sustained without the adoption of measures which are at variance with the spirit of Christianity. Free thought is crushed by the iron hand of power. God's people are deprived of their liberties. A nation of formalists may be trained by this system, but spiritual religion withers under it.

Once more: We are reminded of the necessity of adherence to the laws of Christ. The history of martyrdom is a continual protest against deviation from them. Those witnesses for the truth died in defence of the original faith and practice. But to what lengths of departure men had gone before they could venture on deeds of persecution! It might seem a small thing to superadd a significant ceremony to the simple ritual of the gospel; but when men had begun to invent and improve, (as they vainly imagined), love of pomp and power urged them on, and so one abuse led to another till the aspect of outward Christianity was altogether changed. Then opposition excited violence. The word of God was supplanted by human creeds, and, as Robert Robinson quaintly but truly remarked, "the last article of the creed was the establishment of the inquisition." If men had been content to abide by the New Testament we should never have heard of baptismal regeneration,—of civil establishments of Christianity,—of the gradations of church hierarchies,—or of the multifarious superstitions which have been palmed on the world as developments of the gospel. Developments? Why, it is already developed. The system came from the Lord, by the hands of his Apostles, and is embodied in the Book, in a complete and perfect state:—we be to him who undertakes to improve the work of God! Alteration or addition cannot be admitted without concessions which involve the principles and the spirit of Popery. In fact, as we believe, there is no just medium between that system and ours; for when power to change or add is assumed, a principle is conceded which leads straight to Rome.

2. These facts are consoling.

See the cause of Christ, surviving all pressure, rising above all opposition. The bush burns with fire, but it is not consumed. "What shall I do," said the Burggraf of Alzey. Some he had beheaded—some he had drowned—others he had branded or maimed. "What shall I do? The more I condemn, the more they increase." How is this? The Lord himself explains it. "Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Mat. xvi. 18.

See the grace and faithfulness of the Saviour, in supporting his persecuted servants. The narratives of the sufferers are sometimes tedious—their letters are long,—and their modes of expression may seem quaint, uncouth or strange;—but it is manifest that the Lord was with them, fulfilling his ancient promises, and sustaining them when "heart and flesh failed? Then—they calmly bade farewell to beloved ones who met them on the way to the scaffold or the stake, and endured with unflinching firmness the most excruciating tortures. "You have struck me with roses," exclaimed Obadiah Holmes, as he was unloosed from the whipping-post, where we had received thirty strokes "with a three-corded whip, the man striking with all his strength." "Having joyfulness in my heart and cheerfulness in my countenance, as the spectators observed, I said to the magistrates, 'You have struck me with roses.' The Lord 'made it easy' to him. "This side is sufficiently roasted," said Leonard Baernkoff, who was burned at Salzburg in 1542; "turn me round, for by the grace of God this suffering is light and important in comparison to eternal glory." The grace of Christ was "sufficient" for them; his strength was "made perfect in weakness."

See the honour that has been put upon us: "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake," Phil. i. 20. We have been the butt of anti-christian malice from the beginning. It is a badge of distinction; may we always be found worthy to wear it!

3. These facts are admonitory.

The admonition relates to fidelity—watchfulness—union—and perseverance. Fidelity. We spring from a martyr stock. Our principles must be firmly and faithfully maintained. Those who have gone before us "suffered the loss of all things" for them, and great numbers "loved not their lives unto the death." Let us take heed lest our distinguishing tenets be in any degree neglected, or their importance overlooked. Believing as we do that they comprise vital truths, which cannot be disregarded without incurring injury to the cause of the Redeemer, let us place them in the fore-front, and "teach them diligently to

our children," and be especially careful that the members of our churches be well indoctrinated. It is peculiarly desirable that they should clearly understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Christ. This is the key to the most important controversies of the times; if they are sound here, they are prepared for any encounter with the adversaries of truth. And there is the more need of watchful care at the present crisis, since it is manifest, however the thing may be disguised, that a crusade against the Baptists has commenced in this Province. Stand to your arms brethren! and prepare for the conflict. "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above, all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance," Ephes. vi. 14-18. Your distinctive principles are identified with the existence and prosperity of Christ's church. Scatter them abroad in every direction,—by the pulpit,—by the press,—by the bible class,—by the Sunday School. It is not bigotry; it is not sectarianism; it is "fighting the good fight of faith;" it is the exercise of allegiance to the "King of Kings."

Watchfulness. We profess great regard for purity. We hold that none are qualified for membership in the church of Christ who have not been "born again," and that the maintenance of godly discipline is essential to safety and success. How needful that there should be a strict correspondence between our principles and our practice,—that the greatest care should be exercised in the admission of members,—and that all moral delinquency should be dealt with promptly and impartially! In some religious communities, laxity is unavoidable, and the pious mourn hopefully over it;—in Baptist churches it is suicide—it is ruin.

Union. Our enemies know our power, and that their best policy is to divide us. This is their cherished purpose. If they can set us against one another and induce us to spend our strength in bickering and strife, their object will be gained. This diversion of our energies will be well-pleasing to them. As long as they can keep us engaged in "biting and devouring one another," or withdraw our attention, by any means, from our mission as Baptists, their wishes are accomplished. Errors can then creep on undisturbed, and effect some lodgment in our neighbourhoods. Let us be warned in time. Let us disappoint our foes. What though we differ from one another on some points affecting our political or social interests? Such differences will ever exist in a free country, and among free men; but Baptists ought to be the last to regard them as grounds of disunion, or to allow them to interfere with the claims of the good cause. We are bound to manifest mutual forbearance, and while granting to each other the utmost latitude of thought and action in reference to the affairs of this world, to rally round the standard of truth and righteousness, and press on, shoulder to shoulder, against the common foe.

Perseverance. Much is yet to be done; a great work is before us. Many districts in this Province are still destitute of evangelical instruction. Our missions, Home (including also the French and Gaelic missions,) and Foreign, demand liberal support. Our educational enterprises require to be carried on with increasing vigour. If we determine to be true to our acknowledged principles, the blessing of God will be still more largely enjoyed, and the encouraging progress we have made during the last year will be perpetuated.

We rejoice in the success of all christian labourers, for we love all who "love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." But we hold that primitive Christianity is fully developed in Baptist views and practice only, and therefore we adhere to them, and seek to spread them over the land. We are inspired with the hope expressed in Krummachers' words—"There is a future for the Baptists." We adopt the language of the martyr Balthazar Hubmeyer, (burned at Vienna in 1828—his wife was put to death by drowning) "I believe and know that Christendom shall not receive its rising aught, unless baptism and the Lord's Supper are brought to their original purity." With these convictions, we feel bound to labour with all our might for denominational advancement. The world is to be regenerated; but that result, can only be brought about by God's blessing on the dissemination of New Testament truth and the establishment of New Testament policy. Let us give ourselves to the diffusion of truth—let us live according to the truth;—and let us seek the Lord in earnest prayer for the continual outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Truth and prayer will conquer the world.

Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises," Heb. vi. 12. "The noble army of martyrs"—says the grand old hymn—"praise thee." Oh what a glorious meeting there will be when the "fellow-servants and brethren" of those who are now "under the altar" shall be fulfilled!—"What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?" These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," Rev. vii. 13-17. May we form part of that blessed company!