

Christian Messenger.

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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

NOTES ON CHURCH HISTORY.

No. III.

Dear Brother,—

The Apostle Paul mentions "deceivableness of unrighteousness" as one of the symptoms of the "falling away" which he foresaw. The prediction has been remarkably fulfilled through all the succeeding ages. Hypocrisies and impostures have abounded. Those who desired to make a gain of godliness have been fruitful in inventions, and then have sought to get credit for their inventions by pretending to supernatural sources. They have sometimes descended to downright forgery. Of this, the Papal decretals, as they are called furnish singular illustrations.

FORGERIES.

I noticed in my last "the buddings of priestcraft." The progress of corruption may be distinctly traced in the advances of the Church of Rome to supremacy. Planted in the metropolis of the Empire, that church possessed advantages over all other churches, because the metropolis is always the centre of attraction to persons of every grade, and of all varieties of talent. The votaries of ambition, the literary and scientific, and those who are in pursuit of wealth besides many more, whose characters, motives and aims are very questionable, will be sure to flock to the great city. And there, too, philosophical and religious communities will be able to secure gifted men for presidents and other officers, whose advice and aid will be sought by visitors from the provinces, when business or pleasure may have drawn them to the metropolis.

The pastor of the church at Rome would therefore naturally possess a large amount of influence. As it would be reasonably supposed that the eminent men in all branches of knowledge and of affairs would be found in the city, other pastors and other churches would resort to the Roman bishop in their difficulties. Now, a point of doctrine would call for explanation or defence;—now, a case of discipline would present complications of a perplexing kind, which it might be hoped the metropolitan pastor would unravel;—now, a dispute between members, or with some neighbouring church, would be submitted to brotherly arbitration. In short, opportunities for interference would continually occur.

The first pastors of the church at Rome appear to have been God-fearing men, several of whom suffered martyrdom for the faith. But the heads of their successors seem to have been turned by the deference that was paid to them. When they were asked for advice they gave it in terms of authority, and a pastoral letter assumed the form of an episcopal decree, which it would be impious to disobey. This came on gradually. If a meek, modest man held the reins, things went on smoothly; but if his successor proved to be cunning and ambitious, great trouble ensued. An itch for uniformity early prevailed among those men, they wished the Roman Church to be a model church, and to constrain other churches to conform to its usages. This was not easy of accomplishment. Other pastors refused to be subjected to their brother of Rome; for if the church in that city venerated the Apostle Peter and Paul as its founders (though they were not) apostolic origin was equally claimed, and on better grounds, by many churches in Europe and Asia,—and why should not their customs be also entitled to respect? The opposition of the North African churches to Roman authority was peculiarly stern and inflexible. They would not submit to the usurpations of the church "beyond the sea;" the bishop of Rome was only one among others; they were as good as he, for all bishops were brothers and equals.

Still, aggression continued to be the order of the day. When an opinion was asked, it was deemed an appeal, and judgment was given in the style of law and

government. At length, the Council of Sardica, in the year 347, passed a resolution to the effect that a bishop who was dissatisfied with the unfriendly decision of his brother bishops might appeal to Rome. This was taking a great stride towards supremacy.

Rome's influence was originally founded as I have said, on the metropolitan position of the city. Pope Leo III. (died A. D. 441) promulgated another theory. He maintained that the Lord Jesus Christ had constituted Peter the prince of the apostles and head of the church on earth,—and that as he was bishop of Rome, all his powers and prerogatives descended to his successors. This was demanding a divine institution for the spiritual chiefdom. It was an utterly baseless assumption, for Peter's distinction, whatever it was, was only personal, and it died with him. But in those days power was leagued with pride, and freedom was sacrificed on the altar of aggrandisement.

A further step was taken in the ninth century. Certain letters were produced and published, purporting to be letters written by the early bishops of Rome. The writers are represented in them as demanding obedience to their decrees in virtue of their spiritual descent from Peter, and the Christians of the ninth century were required to believe in the authenticity of those documents. But they were miserably cheated. There are one hundred and nine "Epistles" ascribed to the bishops of Rome of the first four centuries. It is now acknowledged, even by Roman Catholic divines that eighty-four of them are forgeries, and it is precisely in those forged letters that the monstrous claims of Roman bishops to supremacy over all other churches are found. There were many other forgeries, relating to gifts of territory to the Popes, among which may be particularly mentioned the famous "Donation of Constantine," by which Italy was said to have been granted to them. In fact, the entire fabric of Romish domination, ecclesiastical and secular, is built on falsities. They are now confessed to be such, by the truly learned and impartial; but in the times of ignorance, from the ninth to the sixteenth century, they were accepted as genuine, and constantly cited and depended on in the courts. Yet, while the forgery is notorious, the documents themselves are still retained in the Decretals, or Canon Law of Rome, and so the deception is continued.

INTERPOLATIONS.

There is another form of forgery. It is difficult in many instances to interpret the writings of the early Christian Fathers so as to bring them into harmony with modern Romanism. Some of their statements, as might be expected, are directly contradictory to Romish dogma, especially as expounded at Trent. But there is an easy method of escape. One illustration will suffice. Cyprian (died A. D. 258) had said that all the Apostles "had received from Christ equal power and authority with Peter." This being contrary to Popish doctrine, the only way to meet it was the insertion of a paragraph of a totally opposite kind. So the following words were interpolated. "The primacy was given to Peter to show the unity of the Church and of the chair. How can he believe himself to be in the Church, who forsakes the chair of Peter, on which the church is built?" ("Janus," p. 127). True this interpolation makes the good Father contradict himself; but what care the rogues for that? Many other instances of singular roguery might be adduced.

PROHIBITIONS.

I believe that the history of true Christianity before the Reformation would be found in the records of the so-called heretics, and in their own published treatises were they now in existence. But as it is easier to burn books than to read them or to refute the arguments they may contain, that policy was adopted as soon as the pretended church acquired power and kings and emperors pandered to her. Thus, when the first General Council, held at Nice, A. D. 325, condemned Arius, it was ordered that his books should be

delivered up and burned on pain of death. A similar practice was observed in succeeding centuries. Heaps upon heaps of volumes, written by the Reformers of those times, were destroyed. The consequence is that we are dependent on the writings of their opponents for the knowledge we have of their opinions and practices, and scarcely know how far we may venture to believe them. Those who can forge can also falsify. It is not by "living wonders" only but also by lying books that mankind have been gulled and betrayed.

The introduction of printing and the growth of sound criticism have greatly interfered with the effort of the forgers, and lessened their influence and their profit. Another plan has been devised, by the operation of which the irruption of heresy is to be prevented, or the people guarded against its dangers. Lists are published from time to time, giving the titles of books which the obedient Catholic must not read nor even possess, on pain of incurring Church censure. When a book is condemned at Rome, it is placed in the "Index." That "Index" is now a large volume. An excellent library might be formed out of its lists. They contain such works as Milton's Paradise Lost, Robertson's History of Charles V., Young's Night Thoughts, the writings of all the Reformers, together with those of Addison, Lord Bacon, Locke Lavater, Mosheim, Jeremy Taylor, &c., &c. Those works, and hundreds more, valuable and useful to seekers after knowledge, truth, and piety, are forbidden to Roman Catholics. Even authors of their own Church are liable to this interdiction if their writings are not considered satisfactory by the Roman Court. Dr. Dollinger of Munich, for instance, is a celebrated Roman Catholic divine, and a man of great learning. The book entitled "Janus, or the Pope and the Council," is attributed to him. It was judged so damaging to Romish interests that it was placed in the "Index" forthwith. The obedient son of the Church must be careful not to read "The Pope and the Council."

Yours truly,

MENNO.

March 21, 1870.

For the Christian Messenger.

LETTER FROM PASTOR J. G. ONCKEN.

CHARLOTTETOWN, P. E. I.,
March 19, 1870.

Dear Brother,—

Last fall, in connection with our Thanksgiving services, my people, both in the city, and at St. Peter's Road, made their thank-offerings. These took the shape of a contribution to a Loan Fund now about being raised by brother Oncken to aid in building Baptist Meeting houses in Germany. The plan is, if I remember aright, to raise £5,000 sterling as a capital, to be lent out without interest. The Baptists have a Fund of this kind in London, which has been found highly useful. So it will doubtless be with brother Oncken's Fund. A legacy of £2000 sterling lately fell to our brother. He is now in his seventy-first year; and so he might very properly have set this money aside for his own support in his advanced years. But instead of this he has given it all to the above Fund. The object of that Fund, and our brother's noble self-denial in regard to it conspired to interest my people; and so they were induced to contribute the small sum acknowledged as below. This acknowledgment was forwarded to me by that good and great man,—for he is both—on my remittance of this sum. And I now forward you his letter, together with my explanation, for insertion in your columns.

I just add, that if any of your readers find themselves stirred up to aid our brother in his work, not for Hamburg alone, but for Northern and Eastern Europe, Russia and Turkey both included, my present contribution to your columns will have answered an excellent purpose. Our brother, our father in Christ, J. G. Oncken, is leading in a Second Reforma-

tion in Europe. He wants all the aid he can get. Who will encourage him? Any so disposed might forward their monies to yourself, brother Seldap,* and I am sure you would find great pleasure in transmitting them to Hamburg.

Your fellow-labourer,
J. DAVIS.

*We should be glad to serve the cause in any way.

PASTOR ONCKEN'S LETTER.

HAMBURG, Feb. 4th, 1870.

Dear Brother Davis,—

May grace and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, be multiplied to you, and all the saints with you!

Your welcome and interesting epistle, inclosing cheque for £5 11s. 8d. [sterling], dated Jan. 6, 1870, came duly to hand. Accept of my cordial thanks for both; and present the same for the contribution to the brethren for the aid given to our Mission.

I send you by the same mail which carries these my Quarterly Reporter in English; from which you will see that a wide door is opened to us in Russia. In Courland we have already 1500 members, and in Poland we have had an addition of 300 converts in 1869. With the exception of Saxony, and the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg, the whole of Germany is now open to us for Missionary efforts. All we need now is a greater staff of devoted Missionaries. And we contemplate to gather here, in the coming autumn, after our Triennial Conferences of Delegates from all our Mission Churches, a number of brethren, recommended to us from the Churches, about twenty in number, for a course of instruction preparatory for Mission-labour, if our English and American brethren will aid us in defraying the expenses.

The infidelity of the Continent surpasses all description; and yet the number of real converts is greater than in any previous period of this country. National churchism is hastening to a dissolution; but on its ruins the Lord is raising his Church of living stones. Thus far the Lord has in great mercy preserved us from divisions, so that all our Churches have "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism."

Here, in Hamburg, and in the adjoining States of Hanover, Holstein, and Schleswig, we have a powerful machinery in operation:—itinerant preaching, visiting from house to house on the Lord's Day, Sunday Schools, Tract distribution, and the circulation of the Holy Scriptures. One of our Missions, supported by brother Spurgeon's Church, visits on an average between five and six hundred ships of all nations. May the Spirit of the Lord infuse his life-giving power into all these efforts, to the saving conversion of thousands. I am lost in wonder, love, and praise at what God has wrought. To his adorable name be the undivided honour and glory.

I have just entered on my seventy-first year, (Jan. 26th.) and enjoy good health; and though oft tired from the large amount of work, my soul still delights in it; and I could wish to live, if only here, as long as Methuselah. There is nothing worth living for but our adorable Redeemer; to carry out his last command, "Go, . . . and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Now farewell, beloved brother. Remember us at a throne of grace; and if your people have anything to spare for Christ's cause, remember the millions in Europe perishing for lack of knowledge.

I am, dear brother,

Yours in the best of bonds,

J. G. ONCKEN.

PASTOR JOHN DAVIS.

THE NEW U. S. SENATOR.

The following account of the introduction of the colored senator Mr. Revels into the United States Senate, is from the talented authoress known as Grace Greenwood:—

Before proceeding to administer the oath Mr. Colfax warned the spectators against any expression of applause or disatis-