

The Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.

WINTER.

BY WM. H.

The wintry blast again we hear,
'Tis howling wildly round,
Again an aspect sad and drear
Has overspread the ground,
Where verdant beauties lately reigned
And gladdened all below,
A dreary waste there lies unstained,
A shroud of spotless snow.

The forest late in beauty gay
So proudly was arrayed,
Amid its bowers we loved to stray,
Or, loiter 'neath its shade,
Alas! deciduous was its bloom,
Its hey-day soon was past;
In nakedness 'tis left to stand,
The passing season's guest.

And where the plump warblers sing
In accents sweet and clear,
The wailing winds and crackling boughs
Are all the sounds we hear,
The flowers are scattered to the wind
Which flourished in the way,
Its leafless calix left behind
Of all that was so gay.

High in the azure vault of night,
In an ethereal clime,
The stars shine forth in clusters bright
With brilliancy sublime,
The moon sheds o'er the spotless waste
Her pale effulgent beams,
And pallid fields of fleecy white,
With dazzling lustre gleams.

With life the same, our summer joys
Too soon will fade away,
And quickly autumn gloom alloys
Our gala, summer's day,
E'er wintry sorrows we endure
With all their care and gloom,
Let us a place in heaven secure,
Where flowers perennial bloom.

Miscellany.

From the London Times.

Lord Russell at Exeter Hall.

[Concluded]

The learned and able of St. Paul's, agreeing in this regard, places the first edict of the punishment of heretics in the reign of Theodosius the Great, in the 4th century. I do not propose, however, to follow the history of the various persecutions of heretics in Christian times. I wish to make a transition at once to the persecution of the Protestants in the Low Countries, and to call your attention to a remarkable passage of Grotius on this subject. Speaking of the intolerant laws promulgated in that country, he says:

"These laws, dictated by a disposition not usually cruel, had their origin in a religion impatient of dissent. For religion, which ought to be the means of softening and uniting the minds of men, has become, through human infirmity, a most bitter source of hatred. For it was at that time the conviction of many princes that the body of the commonwealth should be animated by one religion as by a soul, and that the best way to constitute laws for spiritual as well as for temporal matters was to give no choice to the multitude. Hence, the Emperor was the more easily persuaded, after the example of Germany, that if the reverence for priests was destroyed, his own authority would no longer be obeyed, and that a poison which drew its vigour from license might in a short time be subdued by

punishment. But the event was contrary to his expectation, for though many perished, more succeeded in their places. For these things that we do to please the body are subject to fine and to authority from the fear of death and of torture; but the soul, as it is by its nature free and immortal, if it has embraced eagerly an opinion, it cannot be subdued by fire or by sword; for dangers themselves invite to resistance, and it is accounted blessed and glorious to suffer cruel and abhorred punishments with a conscience void of sin. Proofs of this fact are to be found in the early history of the Christians, and in these times. For, after the capital execution of not less than 100,000 persons in order to try whether this fire would be extinguished in a deluge of blood, such multitudes rose in Belgium that public punishments were interrupted by riot and sedition as often as a famous criminal was to be executed, or a torture more painful than usual was to be inflicted."

Such is the observation of the Protestant Grotius. Let us now hear the sentiment of an enlightened Roman Catholic. De Thou, President of the Parliament of France, speaking of his own country and his own time, says:—

"We have been sufficiently taught by experience that fire and sword, banishments and prescriptions, have irritated rather than cured a disease inherent in the mind. Religion alone is not commanded, but is infused into minds well prepared by an opinion of its truth, with the assistance of Divine grace. Punishments are of no efficacy in producing this conviction; they rather harden and confirm than break or persuade the mind. What the Stoics said so proudly of their philosophy, we may much more truly say of religion. For when a man is acted upon by religion trouble and pain are of no moment to him; and any other kind of grief is cast at his feet by the virtue which is derived from that opinion which he has imbibed. Nothing he can have to bear disturbs him. He complains not of being subject to anything that may befall a human being. He knows his own force, and, while he thinks himself trusting in the grace of God, he believes that he shall be equal to the burden that is cast upon him. The executioner may stand before him; the minister of torture may prepare his instruments and his fire, he will still persevere; nor will he consider what he is to suffer, but what it behoves him to do. For his happiness is in his own breast; and if anything touches him from without, it appears to him light and to reach no further than his outer skin. It is worth our while to listen to what one of these men said and did. When he was tied to the stake, in order to be burnt by fire, he went down on his knees and began to sing a hymn which the smoke and fire scarcely interrupted; and when the executioner began to light the fire behind his back, that he might not be seen, the sufferer cried out, 'Come here and light the fire before my eyes, had I feared it I never should have come to this place, which I might have avoided.' Thus, the zeal of those who labour to introduce novelties in religion is not to be repressed by punishment; but, on the contrary, minds become more obstinate, whether to suffer or to dare. For when, from the ashes of some, others are raised, and the number has increased, patience is converted into fury; nor have we to deal as before with suppliants, but with remonstrants and opposers, and those who before fled from punishment now appeared in arms. We have seen this course of events for 40 whole years in France—for somewhat less time in the Low Countries; and the matter has reached that point, that not by the punishment of this or that

person, as it might have been at the beginning, can this be restrained, lest it should spread further; but when it has pervaded entire communities and whole nations, and thus reached the greatest part of Europe, we have need, not of the sword of the magistrate, but of the weapon of the Lord. For those who cannot be forced ought to be taught, and ought to be invited to meetings and to friendly assemblies."

I come to the fourth and last instance of persecutions, which, like the former, regards France. After a long period of so-called religious war, Henry IV., in concert with his wise Minister, Sully, by the Edict of Nantes, established concord between the two religions by leaving Roman Catholics and Protestants in possession of all that they held. Peace for a long time prevailed. But Louis XIV., tormented by his confessor for the notorious profligacy of his life, resolved to atone for his sins by punishing the innocent and loyal Protestants of his dominions. Two schemes were proposed for his adoption; the one, recommended by the Jesuit La Chaise, aimed at nominal conversions, with a view to make good Roman Catholics of the children; the other, favoured by the Jansenists, looked to real and effectual turning of the heart and mind to the Roman Catholic faith. Between the two, however, interposed Louvois, Minister of War. Jealous of the influence which might be acquired during peace by other Ministers, he undertook the conversion of the Protestants as a business of his own department. The steps he took, consigned as they are to everlasting infamy, under the name of the "dragonnades," were of this nature:—Troops of Dragoons, sometimes accompanied by infantry and artillery, were sent into the provinces in which the Protestants abounded; they were quartered in the houses of the Protestants, especially of the rich of that communion, till they abandoned their faith; the troops were then removed to another district. If the Protestants attempted to assemble for public worship, they were charged, dispersed, and killed by the Dragoons. The consequences were what might have been expected. Many nominal conversions were made; in one district more than 100,000 in a fortnight, but nearly all relapsed. They then remained excluded from the rites of marriage, their children declared illegitimate, and they themselves, a million of subjects, placed out of the pale of the law. The discontent, the confusion, and the misery were beyond expression. So far, then, is it from being true that restrictions placed upon religious freedom have preserved the peace and order of society, the facts are all the other way. The persecutions of the early Christians, the massacre of the early Reformers, the violence committed against the Huguenots of France, have rent society to its foundations, and peace has only been established when the persecutor refrained from his unholy task and liberty of conscience was proclaimed. I might illustrate these facts by the persecutions which took place in Holland, at the peace which succeeded, when religious liberty was proclaimed in that country, which Sir W. Temple tells us was the first of all the countries of Europe. I might allude to what took place in our own country—to the persecutions which took place in the days of Charles II.—the Act of Toleration, the attempt to revive persecution towards the latter end of the reign of Queen Anne, and the peace which has prevailed since the accession of the House of Hanover, when religious liberty has been made a part not only of the law but of the established practice of this country. Nor should I forget that in the United States of America, where religious persecution has for many years been un-

known, where indeed it only took place for a short time after the Pilgrim Fathers arrived in America, we have the authority of Lord Carlisle for saying that it is a happy and pleasant thing to witness the peace and harmony that prevail. I am very far from having exhausted the subject of the obstacles placed by Governments to moral and political progress. But, having given this example of the evil done by authority, I will pass to another part of this great question, and consider how far, at the present day, the people themselves obstruct improvement. We have now arrived at that freedom of discussion, that religious liberty, which good men sighed for, which Milton eloquently demanded and Locke established by argument. In certain countries in Great Britain, in France, in the United States of America, the human conscience is no longer shackled by Governments or by laws. Have we, then, removed all obstacles to moral and political progress? 1. In 1850, the sums expended yearly in spirits, beer, and tobacco, amounted to upwards of 57,400,000*l.* It is stated, that among those labourers and workmen, heads of families, who earn 10*s.* to 15*s.* a week, at least one-half is spent by the men upon objects in which the other members of the family have no share. Apart from all statistical results, observation must lead us to the conclusion that among labourers and workmen the vice of intemperance is one of the most common and the most hurtful. 2. The want of education, as proved by the returns, is such that a great portion of our people are ignorant of the simplest elements of religion and the most common rudiments of learning. 3. While such are the prominent vices and defects of the poor, vices and defects of a different kind, but no less offensive to morality, are found among the rich. Sensuality and excess, selfishness, evil speaking, want of charity and kindness to those about them abound. All these are obstacles to moral and political progress. Upon what can we rely to counteract them? Upon the force of civilization? Twice have its powers been tried, and been found wanting. In the days of Augustus Caesar, when order had been established and prosperity revived, when Virgil and Horace flourished at Rome, and the vast provinces were blest with peace and tranquillity, everything seemed to promise a long duration of happiness. But the Christian apostle and the Pagan satirist alike prove all was hollow and delusive. Vice increased, knowledge decayed, power vanished, and soon everything portended the decline and fall of the Roman empire. Again, in the 18th century of our era, civilization had reached a very high point; that century, enlightened above all its predecessors, which enjoyed the literature of the age of Louis XIV. in France, and of Queen Anne in England, when Racine, Moliere, Boileau, La Fontaine, Dryden, Pope, Addison, and Swift were read and admired, when Newton's philosophy was established, when Lavoisier and Black and Cavendish had advanced chemistry to a science, and Watt had, by his improvement of the steam-engine, rivalled the invention of the printing press, seemed in its course tending to the happiness of nations. But before that century ended, revolutions tearing up the foundations of society, wars desolating all the nations of Europe, bore sad testimony to the mistake that had been made. What was that mistake? The nature of man is so prone to evil that strong restraint is required to keep down his bad passions and subdue his vicious inclinations. He requires likewise some special incentive to good. The legislators of antiquity sought that restraint upon evil and that incentive to good in powerful institutions, guarded by sanctity of manners. It was thus that