

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.

LINES

ON VISITING A GRAVE-YARD.

I stood upon that hallowed spot,
Where sleep the many dead,
And thought how soon we are forgot,
When life's short course hath sped.
We drop the tear at sorrows knell;
Our souls are bowed with grief;
And in the heart a saddened spell
Refuses all relief.

A few months pass: the eyes no more
Are wet with loving tears;
The mournful moments all are o'er,
And brightness re-appears.
Well is it thus! we should not be
Forever wrapt in gloom:
For, through the darkness, we can see
A light beyond the tomb.

SOPHIA LOUISA.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER II.

The Troublous Period.

From A. D. 1607 to A. D. 1688.

Continued.

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

I now proceed to give you some information respecting the introduction of Baptist principles into America.

There were Baptists among the first emigrants to New England; but their number must have been small, as no effort was made for some time to set up separate worship. "Some few of these people," says Cotton Mather, "have been among the planters of New England from the beginning, and have been welcome to the communion of our churches, which they enjoyed, reserving their particular opinions unto themselves."—(Magnalia, Book 7, Chap. 2.)

Roger Williams's preaching at Salem, prior to his banishment, was distasteful to some of his hearers, because he continually testified against the assumption of power in things religious by the magistrate, and they said that he inculcated principles "tending to Anabaptism." This, probably, meant nothing more than that he taught the individuality of religion, and laid such stress on personal piety, as seemed inconsistent with the Pædobaptist theory of membership. It is certain that he had not then professed Baptist sentiments.

But shortly after his settlement at Providence the whole subject of baptism came under consideration and discussion. How it originated, and in what way the inquiry was carried on, we know not. The result was, however, that twelve men declared themselves Baptists in principle. Then the question arose, how they were to be baptized, since they had no minister? They might have sent to England for one; but the application might not have been successful, and it would have involved an expense which they were ill prepared to meet; besides which, a long delay would have occurred. In this dilemma they adopted the only expedient that seemed to meet the case. One of their number, Thomas Holliman, was chosen to baptize Mr. Williams, who then baptized the others. A church was immediately formed, of which Mr. Williams became pastor. But he soon vacated the office; some think after the lapse of only a few months, while others are of opinion that he resigned when he embarked for England to procure a charter for the colony, and that it was on that occasion Mr. Chad Brown was chosen his successor. On his return from England he refrained from fellowship with the church, and lived in an isolated religious condition, preaching the gospel to the Indians, as he found opportunity, but refusing to participate in the ordinances. He had embraced a singular notion, which is thus stated by one of his biographers:—"He denied that any ministry now exists,

which is authorised to preach the gospel to the impenitent, or to administer the ordinances. He believed that these functions belonged to the apostolic race of ministers, which was interrupted and discontinued when the reign of Antichrist commenced, and which will not as he thought, be restored, till the witnesses shall have been slain and raised again,—(Rev. xi. 11.)

* * * He says, in his 'Hireling ministry none of Christ's' published in 1652;—'In the poor small span of my life, I desired to have been a diligent and constant observer, and have been myself many ways engaged, in city, in country, in courts, in schools, in universities, in church, in Old and New England, and yet cannot, in the holy presence of God, bring in the result of a satisfactory discovery, that either the begetting ministry of the apostles or messengers to the nations, or the feeding and nourishing ministry of teachers, according to the first institution of the Lord Jesus, are yet restored and extant.' The only ministry which, in his opinion, now exists, is that of prophets, i. e. ministers, who explain religious truths, and bear witness against error."—(Knowlton's Memoir of Roger Williams, p. 171.)

Year after year more Baptists emigrated from England to Massachusetts, and as a matter of course openly avowed their sentiments. "The Anabaptists," says Winthrop, "increased and spread in Massachusetts." Various methods were adopted to annoy them, which so far produced the desired effect that many of them left the country, and took refuge among the Dutch in the State of New York. But others remained, who, it would seem, took no pains to conceal their views, naturally concluding that those who had fled from England to gain religious freedom would concede to their fellow Christians what they sought for themselves. But the New Englanders were very imperfectly instructed in this matter. They still held the establishment principle, and dreamed that the Jewish theocracy was to be perpetuated in Christian States. An Act was passed for the banishment of Baptists. It was easier to banish than to convince them. Here it is:—

"Forasmuch as experience hath plentifully and often proved, that since the first rising of the Anabaptists, about one hundred years since, they have been the incendiaries of commonwealths, and the infectors of persons in main matters of religion, and the troublers of churches in all places where they have been, and that they have held the baptizing of infants unlawful, have usually held other errors or heresies therewith, though they have (as other heretics use to do) concealed the same, till they spied out a fit advantage and opportunity to vent them, by way of question or scruple; and whereas divers of this kind have, since our coming into New England, appeared amongst ourselves, some whereof (as others before them) denied the ordinance of magistracy, and the lawfulness of making war, and others the lawfulness of magistracy, and their inspection into any breach of the first table [that is, the first four of the ten commandments]; which opinions, if they should be connived at by us, are likely to be increased amongst us, and so must necessarily bring guilt upon us, infection and trouble to the churches, and hazard to the whole commonwealth; it is ordered and agreed, that if any person or persons, within this jurisdiction, shall either openly condemn or oppose the baptizing of infants, or go about secretly to seduce others from the approbation or use thereof, or shall purposely depart the congregation at the ministrations of the ordinance, or shall deny the ordinance of magistracy, or the lawful right and authority to make war, or to punish the outward breaches of the first table, and shall appear to the court wilfully and obstinately to continue therein after due time and means of conviction; every such person or persons shall be sentenced to banishment."

This Act was passed Nov. 13, 1644. That same year Roger Williams had published his immortal book, "The bloody Tenet of persecution for cause of conscience discussed." It was a bitter pill to

John Cotton, the minister, and to the magistrates who were so ready to do his bidding. They gnashed their teeth at Williams, as he passed through Boston on his way from England to Rhode Island, but they durst not bite. They could not even scratch him. Their claws were pared. They stood in awe of the men at home. So Williams got safe to his free colony. But "a poor man by the name of Painter" was "tied up and whipt" because he would not have his child sprinkled. Mean-souled creatures!

There was a pressure on the Baptists in Massachusetts. They were few and fearful. Can we wonder at it? It was no small trial to be driven beyond the bounds of civilization in those days. We hear but little of them for seven years, and then it is whipping again! William Witter, an aged Baptist, lived at Lynn. The distance, coupled with his infirmities, prevented him from enjoying Christian fellowship with his brethren of the church at Newport, to which he belonged. There were other brethren in the same neighbourhood. A pastoral visit was resolved on. Dr. John Clark, pastor of the church, accompanied by Obadiah Holmes, a ministering brother, and—Crandal, repaired to Lynn for that purpose, and proposed to hold a meeting with the brethren on the Lord's day. They were assembled, and Dr. Clark had commenced his discourse, when the constables made their appearance, charged to apprehend the intruders, and keep them safely till the next day. They obeyed their orders, and the meeting was broken up. Next day the puritan magistrates committed them to prison, and about a fortnight after the court of assistants adjudged Dr. Clark to pay a fine of twenty pounds, Mr. Holmes a fine of thirty pounds, and Mr. Crandal five pounds. Some friends paid Dr. Clark's fine. Mr. Crandal was released, on promise to appear the next court-day. There was some talk about a disputation on baptism between Dr. Clark and the clergy of Boston, who had intimated a willingness to meet him, but it came to nothing.

Mr. Holmes's fine was the heaviest, most probably on account of the circumstances mentioned in the sentence, presently to be quoted. He would not allow the fine to be paid for him, nor would he pay it himself. But he must either pay or be "well whipt." So ran the sentence. It is a curiosity, and should be preserved.

"The sentence of Obadiah Holmes, of Seacomb, the 31st of the fifth month, 1651.

"Forasmuch as you, Obadiah Holmes, being come into this jurisdiction about the 21st of the fifth month, did meet at one William Witter's house, at Lynn, and did here privately (and at other times), being an excommunicate person, did take upon you to preach and baptize upon the Lord's day or other days, and being taken then by the constable, and coming afterward to the assembly at Lynn, did, in disrespect to the ordinance of God and his worship, keep on your hat, the pastor being in prayer, inasmuch that you would not give reverence in vailing your hat, till it was forced off your head, to the disturbance of the congregation, and professing against the institution of the church, as not being according to the gospel of Jesus Christ; and that you, the said Obadiah Holmes, did, upon the day following, meet again at the said William Witter's, in contempt to authority, you being then in the custody of the law, and did there receive the sacrament, being excommunicate, and that you did baptize such as were baptized before, and thereby did necessarily deny the baptism that was before administered to be baptism, the churches no churches, and also other ordinances and ministers, as if all were a nullity; and did also deny the lawfulness of baptizing of infants; and all this tends to the dishonour of God, the despising the ordinances of God among us, the peace of the churches, and seducing the subjects of this commonwealth from the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and perverting the straight ways of the Lord; the Court doth fine you thirty pounds, to be paid, or sufficient sureties that the said sum shall be paid by the first day of the next Court of Assistants, or else to be well whipt; and

that you shall remain in prison till it be paid, or security given in for it.

By the Court,

Increase Norvel."

The sentence was passed in July. Mr. Holmes was kept in prison till September, when he was publicly whipped, and so barbarously "that in many days, if not some weeks, he could take no rest but as he lay upon his knees and elbows, not being able to suffer any part of his body to touch the bed whereon he lay." His own account of the affair, in a letter addressed to Messrs. Spilsbury, Kiffin, and other Baptists in London, is deeply affecting, but too long for transcription here. He tells the brethren how he declined the proffered kindness of his friends, who "came to visit him, desiring him to take the refreshment of wine and other comforts," having resolved "not to drink wine nor strong drink that day, until his punishment was over," lest the world should say "that the strength and comfort of the creature had carried him through;"—how he withdrew to his chamber, to seek strength from the Lord, and "prayed earnestly that he would be pleased to give him a spirit of courage and boldness, a tongue to speak for him, and strength of body to suffer for his sake, and not to shrink or yield to the strokes, or shed tears, lest the adversaries of the truth should thereupon blaspheme and be hardened, and the weak and feeble-hearted discouraged;"—how he attempted at the place of suffering to address the people, but was prevented by the magistrate in attendance; and how graciously he was strengthened to endure the pain. "As the man began to lay the strokes upon my back, I said to the people, 'though my flesh should fail, and my spirit should fail, yet my God would not fail.' So it pleased the Lord to come in, and so fill my heart and tongue as a vessel full, and with an audible voice I broke forth, praying unto the Lord not to lay this sin to their charge, and telling the people that now I found he did not fail me, and therefore now I should trust him for ever, who failed me not; for in truth, as the strokes fell upon me, I had such a spiritual manifestation of God's presence, as the like thereof I never had nor felt, nor can with fleshy tongue express; and the outward pain was so removed from me that indeed I am not able to declare it to you; it was so easy to me that I could well bear it, yea, and in a manner felt it not, although it was grievous, as the spectators said, the man striking with all his strength (yea, spitting in his hands three times, as many affirmed) with a three-corded whip, giving me therewith thirty strokes. When he had loosed me from the post, having joyfulness in my heart and cheerfulness in my countenance, as the spectators observed, I told the magistrates, 'you have struck me as with roses,' and said moreover, 'although the Lord hath made it easy to me, yet I pray God it may not be laid to your charge.'" Mr. Holmes then proceeds to state that John Hazel and John Spur, who expressed their sympathy by shaking hands with him after it was over, were sentenced "to pay forty shillings or be whipt;" and that a surgeon who dressed his wounds was inquired after as if he had committed some crime. But "it hath pleased the Father of mercies," he adds, "to dispose of the matter, that my bonds and imprisonment have been no hindrance to the gospel, for before my return some submitted to the Lord and were baptized, and divers were put upon the way of inquiry. And now, being advised to make my escape by night, because it was reported there were warrants forth for me, I departed; and the next day after, while I was on my journey, the constable came to search at the house where I had lodged; so I escaped their hands, and was, by the good hand of my heavenly Father, brought home again to my near relations, my wife and eight children, the brethren of our town and Providence having taken pains to meet me four miles in the woods, where we rejoiced together in the Lord."

Yours truly,

MENNO.

From my Study,

Aug. 28, 1858.