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Poetry.

Baptismal Scene.*

BY REV. C. W. DENISON.

The house of God was thronged. In every part
A swaying multitude had met. The hosts
Of Israel had come to Zebulon. The tower
Hung out on high the Bethel flag; the winds
Flapped free and full its blue and wavy folds;
While, higher still, the winter moon-lit sky
Poured down its silver light in glittering streams
On staff and flag, on spire and battlement,
And shed its glorious radiance all around.

The masts of ship, the steamers flitting by,
The crowds of passers to and fro, the lights
Along the walks and in the upper rooms,
The tall, dark stores, the quiet carts, the piles
Of out-door merchandise, the chat, the laugh,
The half-heard carnivals within, all told
The city's tale, and of its Sabbath night,

How different was the scene that temple saw!
Brighter than all the brilliance of the throng,
Brighter than sun, and moon, and stars, combined,
Shone there the glory of the face of God!
Ah! who can paint the radiance it shed?
Who shall portray what cannot be portrayed,
The light of God within the soul of man?

'Twas the baptismal hour. That throng had come
To witness it. Some came to honor, some
To mock. The Holy Spirit came to bless.
The sons of ocean crowded to the front; the young,
The old, the gay, the grave, pressed through the aisles,
And waited eagerly. So stood the throng
On Jordan's banks, when Jesus, in the hands
Of John the Baptist, bowed beneath the flood,
And "thus fulfilling all His righteousness,"
Gave to the world and to all coming time
This matchless emblem of His burial,
And of His resurrection from the dead.

'Twas beautiful! 'Twas wondrous beautiful!
The hardy tar long used to roam the sea,
The gentle wife, the tender child, the gray
Old sire, clad in their simple robes of faith,
And hope, and truth, marched to the ready tide,
And followed Jesus in the way He led.
Oh! if the Heavens ever smile on earth,
As erst they smiled when Jesus was baptized;
If, though there be no opening sky, no dove,
No voice made audible, there is beyond
The stars new joy among the angel-hosts,
Then is there many a smile around our globe
When Christians follow Christ in Jordan's wave.

Such was the joy that night. It shed its ray
On all the house; glistened in every eye;
Trembled on every lip; swelled every breast;
And even the listening silence seemed to say—
"This is well pleasing in the sight of God."
But Oh! how sweetest, best of all, it was
To see one tender lamb, eight summers old,
With calm obedience walking in the flood!
'Twas like the angel at gate Beautiful
Opening the healing waters to the throng.
How patiently she trod the stream! How still
She bowed her youthful head, as Jesus His!
What Heavenly lustre glistened in her eyes!
What joy angelic tuned her childish tongue!
And when the aged pastor bent his head,
As if to cheer her in the path to Christ,
She threw her little arms around his neck,
And drawing closer still his cheek to hers,
Pressed on it warm the kiss of holy love!

The multitude was thrilled. Not faster rained
The drops from off baptismal robes than tears
From pew to pew, till mingling notes of praise
Swelled from the choir, and closed the sacred scene.

* In the Mariner's Baptist Church, New York.

—New York Chronicle.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER XL.

The Troublous Period.

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

Continued.

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

I resume the history of the Broadmead church.

Mr. Hardcastle was released from prison at the end of six months; but on the second Lord's day after his release he was apprehended while preaching, and sent to jail again. During this second term of imprisonment he wrote a weekly letter to the church, which was read at the Lord's day meetings. These letters have been preserv-

ed. They are admirably adapted to the instruction and comfort of a people under such trying circumstances. And they were much needed. Towards the end of the year the meetings were "grown very poor and lean, through fines, imprisonments, and constant worrying of us every day." On one occasion the bishop himself was among the constables!

I will transcribe a few passages from Mr. Hardcastle's letters, which I think you will read with pleasure.

"It has been our great error that we have not trusted in the power of God. We have reasoned about the worst that men can do, but have not believed the best that God can do. Sense and carnal reason must be left behind in the things of God."

"The preaching of the gospel is the ordinance of Christ, and so is the imprisonment of the preachers of the gospel: but I never knew that forbearing to preach, for fear of a prison, did ever convince or establish any one."

"Keep your consciences, keep your confidences, keep your communions, and all is well enough."

"Wicked men, and ungodly men, are prevented of doing that mischief they design against the people of God, when they trust in his power. And godly men are disappointed of that good which they expect from other men, when, by such expectings, their faith in the omnipotence of God is weakened and divided."

"Precious faith makes sin rare to a believer; and to see sin most vile, makes faith most precious, because it keeps a due distance between the precious and the vile. Now common and counterfeit faith makes no such distinction, no such separation; knows no such awe and tenderness; admits of the prevalence of corruptness with the eminency of privileges, the power of ungodliness with the form of godliness; sees no such unhandsoneness, nor uncomeliness, to have the money-changers in the temple; does not think that there is such need of that strictness, niceness, and circumspection amongst believers. This creed-faith, baptism-faith, supper-faith—in a word, this tradition, profession, conviction-faith, that is a stranger to this preciousness and power, will in case make no great matter of handling and taking up a sin, or letting alone or letting fall a duty, if men see not or say nothing, outward profession and performances are its paint; natural conscience, credit, interest, custom, or company are its pulleys."

"The Lord will save his people with a 'notwithstanding.' How is this?"

"1. Notwithstanding their own unworthiness, imperfections, backslidings, and unfitness for mercies.

"2. Notwithstanding their fears, faintings, despondencies, unbelief, and positive conclusions against themselves, their hopes, and the returns of mercy."

"3. Notwithstanding all the improbabilities, and growing oppositions and obstructions that seem to lie in the way of their peace and deliverance.

"4. Notwithstanding the power, prevalence, expectations, interests, and insultings of their enemies.

"5. Notwithstanding many tokens and testimonies of his own displeasure and indignation against them, and a kind of resolution not to show mercy to them any more. See Hosea ii. 4-7, 14, 15, 23; Judges x. 11-17. I must conclude with this:—Peter was afraid, and he began to sink; our fears are the great cause of our sinkings. But when he began to sink, Christ came to his relief, and saved him; he will make you to cry out, but he will not suffer you to perish. The Lord increase your faith."

"The Kingdom of God is that which is primarily promised, and principally to be sought after. Other things are consequential and cautionary; secondary helps, made use of as lesser means; baits, not business. A little of them helps a traveller on his journey more comfortably; but a great deal proves his burden and his hindrance. Heaven is the great deed of settlement; the earth is but the loose money to bear the charges,—the staff to walk to the kingdom."

From the beginning of 1676 to the middle of 1680 there was a lull in the storm. Mr. Hardcastle died in 1678, and was succeeded by Mr. George Fownes in September, 1679.

Interruption of their worship was resumed in July, 1680, and continued at times through that year and the next. In December, 1681, Mr. Fownes and a large number of the brethren were seized and sent to prison. He preached to them there. Twenty four of them were brought up at the quarter sessions, and obliged to give bail for their appearance when called on to answer an indictment for a breach of the peace, with which they were, most untighteously threatened. Mr. Fownes was detained, but the brethren were determined to test the legality of his imprisonment, and procured a writ of *habeas corpus*, by which means his cause was taken to the Court of King's Bench at London, and he was ultimately discharged, although he was still prevented from preaching in public, by the operation of the Five Mile Act.

The years 1682 and 1683 were the darkest times to them. They held their meetings in private houses, in the fields, or in the woods, wherever they could best escape the vigilance of the authorities. Mayor, aldermen, and constables could hardly have gone to church at all in those years, for all their time was spent in hunting after dissenters' meetings. A few brief extracts from the records will show how our ancestors fared.

1682. Jan. 29.—The church met at four different places. Many of them "went in the afternoon on Durdham Down, and got into a cave of a rock towards Clifton, where brother Thomas Whinnell preached to them."

March 12.—"Met in the fields by Barton Hundred, and Mr. Samuel Butall of Plymouth preached in the fore-part of the day, and brother Whinnell in the evening. It was thought there were near a thousand persons in the morning."

March 19.—"Met in the lanes, beyond Baptist Mills."

April 13.—"Met in the rain in a lane."

April 20.—"A day of prayer, from nine to five in the evening, at Mr. Jackson's, over the Down, in peace."

May 4.—"Information was brought to a petty session for Gloucestershire, against brother Jennings, for preaching in the lanes, and a warrant granted for levying five pounds, or else goods, or person."

June 11.—"Brother Fownes being come from London, but not daring to come into the city because of the Corporation Act, met with us, and preached in Kingswood, near Scruze Hole, under a tree, and endured the rain."

July 2.—"Our pastor preached in another place in the wood. Our friends took much pains in the rain, because many informers were ordered out to search; and we were in peace, though there were near twenty men and boys in search."

July 16.—"Brother Fownes first, and brother Whinnell after, preached under a tree, it being very rainy."

Aug. 20.—"Met above Scruze Hole, in our old place, and heard brother Fownes preach twice in peace. Brother Terrill had caused a workman to make banks on the side of the hill to sit down on, several of them like a gallery; and there we met also on the 27th, in peace. On both days we sang a psalm in the open woods." Brave men!

"On the 7th of December we met for our Lecture at Mr. Shuter's on Redcliffe Hill in peace, taking a great deal of care in going and coming, the women wearing neither white aprons nor patters."

1683. Jan. 21.—"We met at eight in the morning, and though there were seven on horse-back and twenty on foot to seek after us, we escaped, having broken up at ten."

March.—"This week about 150 dissenters were convicted by our recorder, on the statute of 23rd Eliz., for £20 a month, for not coming to church."

March 25.—Mr. Fownes, though "very ill," went to the meetings in the wood; but after three quarters of an hour we were surrounded by horse and foot, the former in ambush." Mr. Fownes was arrested,

and sent to Gloucester Jail for six months.

April 22.—"We went out at four in the morning, and were in peace."

November 14.—"A day of prayer, having some hours together in the wood, between London and Sodbury Road: the enemy came upon us unawares, and seized about eight persons; but the brethren escaped to admiration. The bushes were of great service to us." A number of the sisters were taken: "they got Justice Fitz-Herbert to come, and upon examination he could get little out of them, and could not learn who was the preacher; so they were let go." Those good women could keep a secret.

Dec. 20.—"Watkins the marshal, and others, went with warrants from Justice Herbert to brother John Morgan, in Temple Street, and took his yarn and what goods they could find, for seven pounds ten shillings. And the day before took away Margaret Seymour's trunk and clothes, with about thirty pounds, for seven pounds odd money, for being at our meeting in the fields."

Dec. 30.—"Being a hard frost, and snow on the ground, we met in the wood, and though we stood in the snow, the sun shone upon us, and we were in peace."

1684. March 4.—"We took our sad state into consideration; and brother Terrill signified, that our duty lay in three things:—1st. To watch over one another, that none draw back to the world's worship. 2nd. That every one sanctify the Lord's day. 3rd. That we endeavour to edify one another as members, and also do what we can for others' souls. And considering what is above, and that writs are daily expected to levy £20 a month, £240 per annum a man, upon us, for not coming to church, or imprison us if it be not paid, there being thirteen brethren present, we agreed to have circular meetings at five places, where the brethren were to exercise their gifts, and twice in a day, at nine in the morning, and at one in the afternoon. These five places were,—first, brother Dickson or Davis; 2nd, brother Clark or Robert Lewis; 3rd, brother Whinnell; 4th, brother Ellis or J. Ciornhs; 5th, brother Terrill. And also three places for prayer and repetition; viz., brother Gwilliam's, brother Bodenham's, brother Reeve's. And because some might be sick or otherwise detained, we appointed six or seven to a place, and the first four were to be taken in, and those that were shut out were to go to the places of repetition. And none were to go to a place but once a day, and not to the same place every Lord's day; but round, so they came to the same once in five weeks. And by this means near one hundred might hear every Lord's day, and in a few weeks have the benefit of all the church's gifts. And besides, brother Whinnell would repeat again at some house in the evening, and on week days at other places. Thus we kept within the law, which allowed four besides the family. And on the ninth of March we began this circular meeting."

April 10.—"Brother Warren was fined £10 for a riot, being at a meeting near Roe Gate, and fees 47s., which he paid in the hall at Gloucester. But Lugg was forsworn in it, for he swore it was on the 27th, and it was on the 29th day that the meeting was. Old brother Cornish was bound to appear again next sessions, and several others. Some were fined 40s. and their fees, and released. Sister Fowles was put in prison at Gloucester. Some were fined five marks, as Mr. Jos. Wey; some £5, as the justices pleased, and to lie in prison till paid. About this time Pug-Read died miserably, being an informer about twenty years old; had his skull broke, as said, by one of his companions; he was one that broke into Mr. Terrill's house."

Sept. 16.—"Several of our brethren, brother Hunt, William Dickason, &c., and many more, were summoned by the apparitor to the bishop's court, for not receiving the Lord's supper."

Oct. 7.—"Nearly twenty more friends were indicted for eleven months' not coming to church." . . . "And brother Fownes being brought into Court, was by Powell the chairman, called a ringleader, turbulent,