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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.

"The Body's loss with the Soul's gain." —Tupper.

Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.—2 Cor. iv. 16.

Yes the poor worn and weary body may decay,
And feel how fast it nears the grave each passing day,—

May daily find its feeble powers more feeble grow,
And the once bounding life pulse-throb more faint and slow;

The failing footsteps once elastic, bold, and free,
Uncertain as an infant's first attempt may be;
The memory treacherous and confused, the vision dim,
Palsied and shrunk the once well-fashioned, vigorous limb.

But if the undying soul by grace divine renewed,
Feel in its daily life the power of sin subdued,—
Know that its aspirations high and higher rise,
As day by day it nears its home beyond the skies.

If dying daily to the things of time and sense,
It wait the joyful summons that shall call it hence;
Look back on life as on a toil-spent weary day,
And plume its wings in readiness to soar away.

Though nature may at times assert her mighty power,
And view with dread the inevitable parting hour;
May shrink from sundering ties that nought could rend before,
And trembling hear the waves on Jordan's stormy shore.

Yet faith, all conquering faith shall still triumphant be,
Stronger and brighter as it nears eternity,—
Raising the soul above all thought of care or pain,
Thus is the body's loss the soul's most glorious gain.
Lower Stovoe. J. B.

Religious.

The Three Centuries.

Religious liberty is an inheritance we too often undervalue. We do not consider sufficiently what it has cost. By an occasional glance at the past, we are reminded of the gloom which formerly surrounded the exercise of what are now regarded, at least on this side the Atlantic, inalienable and undisputed rights—to worship God according to the dictates of His word and our consciences.

The Baptists and other Nonconformists of England, intend this year to celebrate the bicentenary of the ejection, from the Church-established-by-law, of two thousand of her best ministers, because they refused to subscribe the test applied for the purpose of bringing them into submission to the civil power.

The Baptist Magazine for January contains, in a very graphic and succinct form, under the above title, outlines of history, or pictures as they might be called, which will help its readers to estimate their privileges, and with becoming feelings to enter upon this celebration.

Whilst we rejoice in the freedom we possess, let us not think lightly of the price at which it has been purchased, and although we may not think it necessary to join publicly in this celebration, yet we cannot be insensible to the subject which is occupying the attention of our brethren in the mother country.

1662.

On the 29th of May, 1660, Charles II. entered London, surrounded by the most profuse manifestations of public joy. His famous declaration made at Breda had preceded him—"We do also declare a liberty to tender consciences, and that no man shall be disquieted or called in question for differences of opinion on matters of religion which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom. And we shall be ready to consent to such an Act of Parliament, upon mature deliberation, shall be offered to us for the full granting that indulgence." Amongst the acclamations of the

people were heard the voices of their ministers, who, by the hands of old Mr. Arthur Jackson, presented the King with a richly adorned Bible, which he received, telling them, "it should be the rule of his government and of his life." Mr. Case, who had been placed in an ante-chamber to overhear the king's prayer, in which "he hoped the Lord would give him a humble, meek, forgiving spirit; that he might have forbearance from offended heaven," reported to his brethren that they had got an angel of a king. "The sugar'd words" concealed the poison in his heart.

"Ah, ha, my lord, th's prince is not an Edward! He is not lolling on a lewd day-bed, But on his knees at meditation; Not dallying with a brace of courtizans, But meditating with two deep divines; Not sleeping to engross his idle body, But praying to enrich his watchful soul; Happy were England, would this virtuous prince Take on himself the sovereignty thereof!"

So England thought, and in an evil hour welcomed to her throne the most dissolute, most tyrannical, most selfish king she ever had. The day-dream was speedily dispelled, and for fourteen years this lord of misrule rioted over the relics of the nation's honour, humbled her flag, exhausted her finances, and oppressed the wisest and the holiest of her sons. The first overt act in this reign for the destruction of religious liberty was the Corporation Act, which imposed the test of the Lord's Supper according to the rites of the Church of England; the oath of allegiance; the disclaimer of the League and Covenant; and a declaration of the illegality of taking up arms against the king or his authority upon all persons holding municipal offices. Thus the Nonconformists were shot off from all participation even in the meanest civil services. Next came the xiii. Car. II. cap. 1.—the Act against the Quakers,—by which all persons refusing to take an oath, or maintaining the unlawfulness of oaths, were cast into prison. More than four thousand members of the Society of Friends suffered captivity under this tyrannical imposition. At length the profligate Government felt itself strong enough to attack the Puritans in the Church; and in the commencement of 1662 the Act of Uniformity passed the House of Commons by the bare majority of 186 to 180. By this enactment every parson, vicar, or other minister whatsoever, was required, before the Feast of St. Bartholomew, the 24th of August in the same year, openly and publicly in the presence of the congregation assembled for religious worship, to utter the following words:—

"I, A. B., do here declare my unfeigned assent to all and everything contained and prescribed in and by the Book, entitled the Book of Common Prayer and Administration of Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England, together with the Psalms of David, appointed as they are to be sung or said in churches; and the form and manner of making, ordaining, and consecrating of bishops, priests, and deacons."

"The penalty for neglecting or refusing to make this declaration is deprivation, ipso facto, of all his spiritual promotions."

Another clause of this Procrustean piece of tyranny required "every schoolmaster keeping any public or private school, and any person instructing youth in any private family, to subscribe before the bishop of the diocese a declaration of conformity to the Liturgy of the Church of England." A further enactment condemned to a penalty of one hundred pounds for every offence, any person administering "the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper before he be ordained a priest by Episcopal ordination."

St. Bartholomew's Day, the centenary of the butchery of thousands of Protestants in France, was aptly chosen for the inauguration of this English reign of terror. The numbers of the ejected ministers are variously stated, but at least two thousand of them refused the test, and suffered the loss of all things rather than sacrifice a good conscience. Their integrity, their fortitude, their faith, their patient sufferings,—the Nonconformists of Britain propose to commemorate in the present year. From much which they hold we differ, but in this all right-minded men must be agreed: *No man of God can assent or consent to human ordinances in opposition to the dictates of conscience, though loss of*

life and liberty be the penalty of non-compliance. No torturing of reason can justify subscription to that which he believes to be untrue.

1762.

George III. has recently succeeded his Hanoverian grandfather, whose only liking for anything English was for English gold. The Seven years' war are exchanged for peace. The American colonies have not repudiated the mother country, and established their own independence. It is scarcely possible to identify the England of Queen Victoria with the England of a hundred years ago; and, certainly, a review of the manners and customs of society, and the general condition of the country, justifies the verdict of the wise man "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this."

The commerce of Britain had not yet burst its shell; our great grandfathers had little to offer in the world's markets, and small means of access to them. Coffee-houses, clubs, and theatres were at their height, and a galaxy of great names of the period will serve to illustrate the flourishing condition of literature: Johnson, Goldsmith, Gibbon, Burke, Gray, and many lesser stars, shone down on this age of active pamphletting, majestic discussion, and polished writing. There was a duel every day, and gambling every night—Sunday especially. *Hospitality* was the boast of that day; rendered in the language of the present, it meant unmitigated drunkenness. A dinner party was expected to terminate with a considerable portion of the guests under the table, and the remainder considerably too far gone to assist in removing them. The gentleman of the road, as highwaymen were termed, levied black mail almost without let or hindrance, though the little-widened sheets called newspapers were full of accounts of public executions. The laws of the period were Draconic in their severity—not a ray of mercy shines in any portion of the penal code. The prisons were literally hells on earth, in which pestilence, famine, and filth held the devil's carnival with crimes and criminals of every hue. It was the darkness that precedes the dawn. Howard was beginning his godlike exertions in the jails. Raikes, the projector of Sabbath schools, was brooding over his plan for promoting the quiet of Gloucester streets, little heeding whereunto the thing would grow. Though a chilling blight had settled on all sections of the Christian Church, so that it becomes a matter of astonishment how such a race of men could have been begotten by the giants of the previous century, Whitfield and Wesley were at their work of rousing the professors of the age from their lethargic slumbers, calling myriads to the knowledge of Christ, and bearing swift witness against the rampant immorality. Undaunted by rough treatment and blasphemous caricaturing (the former till he was sixty-six, the latter till he was eighty-eight) they ceased not in England and America to work for the revival of religion. To their apostolic zeal is traceable the vitality of Christian life in our own times. In 1762 William Carey was an infant only a few weeks old, nurtured by a special providence in a secluded Northampton village, and kept for the receptacle of the mighty project that should hereafter evangelise the world.

"The extension of the rule of Britain over far-off, widely separated lands, was just commencing. The current was for the first time setting strongly towards extended empire. The severance of the connection between the parent state and the American colonies, so soon to take place, was about to direct all the energies of our country towards eastern lands. Prior to 1760—the year before Carey's birth—our foreign possessions, with the exception of those we were so soon to lose, were small indeed. In the east we had next to none. That very year Canada, and all the vast regions to the north and west, became ours. Five years after that, the lordship of Bengal, Behar, and Orissa, was conferred on the East India Company. From this beginning, their sway ultimately extended over all India—a rule now transferred to the British Crown. Subsequently all our African possessions, the vast continent of Australia, the important Island of Tasmania and New Zealand, and other territories, were added to the empire. Thus, during the last hundred years, the population of Great Britain and her dependencies has increased from little more than 20 millions to 220, oc-

cupying 5,000,000 square miles in all quarters of the globe. This marvellous extension, while the progress of the nation in other directions—on every continent, by every sea—has not been checked, has brought us into close contact, into responsible association with the most populous nations of the world, and the most wide-spread forms of idolatry, thus preparing us for concentrated effort where most needed, and for extended operations in the proportion demanded."

1862.

Other pens have in these pages given expression to our share in the nation's grief at the loss of the virtuous and amiable consort of our afflicted Queen; and have also directed our readers to the claims of the coming Exhibition season on the prayers and exertions of Christians for the advancement of the Saviour's kingdom.

While we write there is yet another source of intense solicitude agitating the heart of the country. It is the question of peace or war with America. We are waiting in a suspense full of awe for the swift ship that is bearing over the waters of the Atlantic a word, that is more to us than the richest cargo that ever crossed the main. The alternative, as yet unknown, is one that, when these lines reach the reader, will have either plunged us into deeper grief, or will have exchanged our suspense for gratitude and praise. In either case may the prayers of God's people avail for a blessing to attend the issue! If war, may it be attended by the humiliation and mourning of the Churches before God!—if peace, may it witness our thankful acclamations and votive thank-offerings! One fact is certain, that thousands of our countrymen are already exposed to bitter privations in consequence of the civil war in America. All honour to the patience in suffering hitherto displayed by the unemployed and half-employed factory hands. It cannot be long before the cry of their need is heard throughout the land. At the first sign, before famine stares them face to face, let us assure our brethren who minister in the cotton districts that the poor of their churches shall share our comforts. By reason of this variety of woe, the year opens gloomily, but it may break forth even yet into brightness and prosperity. THE LORD REIGNETH.

The large outpouring of the spirit of prayer which the Churches of Britain have of late enjoyed, and the consequent increase of conversions, inspire the hope that we may in 1862 see greater things yet. If our Churches do but maintain earnest importunity with God, we shall through all the commotions of earth witness the progress of the truth as it is in Jesus. It is in the nature of spiritual blessings to quicken and enlarge the souls they replenish, so that, drawn by the mercies of the past, and driven by the anxieties of the present, we anticipate a year of fervent prayer.

We heartily urge on our readers the invitation issued by the Committee of the Evangelical Alliance to unite in dedicating the week commencing January the 5th, and terminating with the 12th, to special prayer, and trust that this sacred concert of believers of all denominations will bring down copious blessings on the Church and the world. But while in our congregational centres we thus labour and faint not, it is to be hoped that our denominational extension will be the object of combined action. The populace is willing to hear the Gospel, but the supply is mournfully inadequate. Our own tenets are gaining ground in the public mind, but in our pitiful isolation we stand all too weak for the opportunity.

To some who read these lines the decree has gone forth, "Thus saith the Lord: This year thou shalt die." Nothing can avert the blow; no buckler is impervious to the shafts of the last enemy; no citadel inaccessible to his assaults. Hide were thou wilt—under the purple of monarchs, or the rags of paupers—the insatiable King of Terrors will search out his prey and demand the tribute payable by every child of Adam. May the imperishable life conferred by the Second Adam gladden thine heart, my reader, and give thee the victory in that last conflict. And till that inevitable hour, be it soon or late, may each revolving day witness in thee renewed devotedness to Christ, and growing fitness for "the inheritance of the saints in light."

*Rev. F. Esworth's "England and Missions."