

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL & GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

NEW SERIES.
Vol. X. No. 32.

HALIFAX, N. S., WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 9, 1865.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XXIX. No. 32.

Religious.

Lord Macaulay on John Bunyan.

Before he left his prison he had begun the book which has made his name immortal. The history of that book is remarkable. The author was, as he tells us, writing a treatise, in which he had occasion to speak of the stages of the Christian progress. He compared that progress, as many others had compared it, to a pilgrimage. Soon his quick wit discovered innumerable points of similarity which had escaped his predecessors. Images came crowding on his mind faster than he could put them into words: quagmires and pits, steep hills, dark and horrible glens, soft vales, sunny pastures, a gloomy castle, of which the courtyard was strewn with the skulls and bones of murdered prisoners; a town all bustle and splendour, like London on the Lord Mayor's day; and the narrow path, straight as a rule could make it, running on up hill and down hill, through city and through wilderness, to the Black River and the Shining Gate. He had found out—as most people would have said, by accident—as he would doubtless have said, by the guidance of Providence—where his powers lay. He had no suspicion, indeed, that he was producing a masterpiece. He could not guess what place his allegory would occupy in the English literature, for of English literature he knew nothing. Those who suppose him to have studied the Fairy Queen might easily be confuted, if this were the proper place for a detailed examination of the passages in which the two allegories have been thought to resemble each other. The only work of fiction, in all probability, with which he could compare his pilgrim, was his old favourite, the legend of Sir Bevis of Southampton. He would have thought it a sin to borrow any time from the serious business of his life, from his expositions, his controversies, and his lace tags, for the purpose of amusing himself with what he considered merely as a trifle. It was only, he assures us, at spare moments that he returned to the house Beautiful, the Delightable Mountains, and the Enchanted Ground. He had no assistance. Nobody but himself saw a line till the whole was complete. He then consulted his pious friends. Some were pleased. Others were much scandalized. It was a vain story, a mere romance about giants, and lions, and goblins, and warriors, sometimes fighting with monsters, and sometimes regaled by fair ladies in stately palaces. The loose atheistical wit at Will's might write such stuff to divert the painted Jezebels of the court; but did it become a minister of the Gospel to copy the evil fashions of the world? There had been a time when the cant of such fools would have made Bunyan miserable. But that time was past; and his mind was now in a firm and healthy state. He saw that, in employing fiction to make truth clear and goodness attractive, he was only following the example which every Christian ought to propose to himself; and he determined to print.

The Pilgrim's Progress stole silently into the world. Not a single copy of the first edition is known to be in existence. The year of publication has not been ascertained. It is probable that, during some months, the little volume circulated only among poor and obscure sectaries. But soon the irresistible charm of a book which gratified the imagination of the reader with all the action and scenery of a fairy tale, which exercised his ingenuity by setting him to discover a multitude of curious analogies, which interested his feelings for human beings, frail like himself, and struggling with temptations from within and from without, which every moment drew a smile from him by some stroke of quaint yet simple pleasantry, and nevertheless left on his mind a sentiment of reverence for God and of sympathy for man, began to produce its effect. In Puritanical circles, from which plays and novels are strictly excluded, that effect was such as no work of genius, though it were superior to the *Iliad*, to Don Quixote, or to *Othello*, can ever produce on a mind accustomed to indulge in literary luxury. In 1688 came forth a second edition with additions; and then the demand became immense. In the four following years the book was reprinted six times. The eighth edition, which

contains the last improvements made by the author, was published in 1682, the ninth in 1684, the tenth in 1685. The help of the engraver had early been called in, and tens of thousands of children looked with terror and delight on execrable copper-plates, which represented Christian thrusting his sword into Apollyon, or writhing in the grasp of Giant Despair. In Scotland, and in some of the colonies, the *Pilgrim* was even more popular than in his native country. Bunyan has told us, with a very pardonable vanity, that in New England his dream was the daily subject of the conversation of thousands, and was thought worthy to appear in the most superb binding. He had numerous admirers in Holland, and among the Huguenots of France. With the pleasure, however, he experienced some of the pains of eminence. Knaveish booksellers put forth volumes of trash under his name, and envious scribblers maintained it to be impossible that the poor ignorant tinker should really be the author of the book which was called his.

He took the best way to confound both those who counterfeited him and those who slandered him. He continued to work the gold field which he had discovered, and to draw from it new treasures, not indeed with quite such ease and in quite such abundance as when the precious soil was still virgin, but yet with success which left all competition far behind. In 1684 appeared the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It was soon followed by *The Holy War*, which, if *The Pilgrim's Progress* did not exist, would be the best allegory that ever was written.

Bunyan's place in society was now very different from what it had been. There had been a time when many Dissenting ministers, who could talk Latin and read Greek, had affected to treat him with scorn. But his fame and influence now far exceeded theirs. He had so great an authority among the Baptists that he was popularly called Bishop Bunyan. His episcopal visitations were annual. From Bedford he rode every year to London, and preached there to large and attentive congregations. From London he went his circuit through the country, animating the zeal of his brethren, collecting and distributing alms, and making up quarrels. The magistrates seem in general to have given him little trouble. But there is reason to believe that, in the year 1685, he was in some danger of again occupying his old quarters in Bedford Gaol. In that year the rash and wicked enterprise of Monmouth gave the Government a pretext for prosecuting the Nonconformists; and scarcely one eminent divine of the Presbyterian, Independent, or Baptist persuasion remained unmolested. Baxter was in prison; Howe was driven into exile; Henry was arrested. Two eminent Baptists, with whom Bunyan had been engaged in controversy, were in great peril and distress. Danvers was in danger of being hanged; and Kiffin's grandsons were actually hanged. The tradition is that, during those evil days, Bunyan was forced to disguise himself as a waggoner, and that he preached to his congregation at Bedford in a smock-frock, with a cart-whip in his hand. But soon a great change took place. James the Second was at open war with the Church, and found it necessary to court the Dissenters. Some of the creatures of the Government tried to secure the aid of Bunyan. They probably knew that he had written in praise of the indulgence of 1672, and therefore hoped that he might be equally pleased with the indulgence of 1687. But fifteen years of thought, observation, and commerce with the world had made him wiser. Nor were the cases exactly parallel. Charles was a professed Protestant; James was a professed Papist. The object of Charles's indulgence was disguised; the object of James's indulgence was patent. Bunyan was not deceived. He exhorted his hearers to prepare themselves by fasting and prayer for the danger which menaced their civil and religious liberties, and refused even to speak to the courtier who came down to remodel the corporation of Bedford, and who, as was supposed, had it in charge to offer some municipal dignity to the Bishop of the Baptists.

Bunyan did not live to see the Revolution. In the summer of 1688 he undertook to plead the cause of a son with an angry father, and

inherited the young one. This good work cost the benevolent intercessor his life. He had to ride through heavy rain. He came drenched to his lodgings on Snow hill, was seized with a violent fever, and died in a few days. He was buried in Bunhill Fields; and the spot where he lies is still regarded by the Nonconformists with a feeling which seems scarcely in harmony with the stern spirit of their theology. Many Puritans, to whom the respect paid by Roman Catholics to the relics and tombs of saints seemed childish or sinful, are said to have begged, with their dying breath, that their coffin might be placed as near as possible to the coffin of the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The fame of Bunyan during his life, and during the century which followed his death, was indeed great, but was almost entirely confined to religious families of the middle and lower classes. Very seldom was he, during that time, mentioned with respect by any writer of great literary eminence. Young coupled his prose with the poetry of the wretched D'Urfey. In the *Spiritual Quixote*, the adventures of Christian are ranked with those of Jack the Giant-Killer and John Riekathrift. Cowper ventured to praise the great allegorist, but he did not venture to name him. It is a significant circumstance that, till a recent period, all the numerous editions of *The Pilgrim's Progress* were evidently meant for the cottage and servant's hall. The paper, the printing, the plates, were all of the meanest description. In general, when the educated minority and the common people differ about the merit of a book, the opinion of the educated minority finally prevails. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is, perhaps, the only book about which after the lapse of a hundred years, the educated minority has come over to the opinion of the common people.

The attempts which had been made to improve and to imitate this book are not to be numbered. It has been done into verse; it has been done into modern English. *The Pilgrimage of Tender Conscience*, *The Pilgrimage of Good Intent*, *The Pilgrimage of Seek Truth*, *The Pilgrimage of Theophilus*, *The Infant Pilgrim*, *The Hindoo Pilgrim*, are among the many feeble copies of the great original. But the peculiar glory of Bunyan is that those who most hated his doctrines have tried to borrow the help of his genius. A Catholic version of his parable may be seen with the head of the Virgin in the title-page. On the other hand, those Antinomians for whom his Calvinism is not strong enough, may study *The Pilgrimage of Hephzibah*, in which nothing will be found which can be construed into an admission of free agency and universal redemption. But the most extraordinary of all the acts of Vandalism by which a fine work of art was ever defaced was committed so late as the year 1853. It was determined to transform *The Pilgrim's Progress* into a Tractarian book. The task was not easy; for it was necessary to make the two sacraments the most prominent objects in the allegory; and of all Christian theologians, avowed Quakers excepted, Bunyan was the one in whose system the sacraments held the least prominent place. However, the Wicket Gate became a type of baptism, and the House Beautiful of the Eucharist. The effect of this change is such as assuredly the ingenious person who made it never contemplated; for, as not a single pilgrim passed through the Wicket Gate in infancy, and as Faithful carries past the House Beautiful without stopping, the lesson which the fable, in its altered shape, teaches, is that none but adults ought to be baptized, and that the Eucharist may safely be neglected. Nobody would have discovered, from the original *Pilgrim's Progress*, that the author was not a Paedobaptist. To turn this book into a book against Paedobaptism was an achievement reserved for an Anglo-Catholic divine. Such blunders must necessarily be committed by every man who mutilates parts of great works, without taking a comprehensive view of the whole.

Concerning Giving.

The following by J. Milner, of Stratford, in the *Canada Christian Journal*, copied by the Witness, is quite complimentary to Baptists. It would be well if Baptists generally

acted in a similar manner towards the cause of Christ. Their institutions would then soon attain a position of extensive usefulness and vast power in the work of evangelizing the world.

Certain circumstances throw me into the company of a Baptist Minister, of whose charge I had heard the most favorable report, but the half had not been told me. After many matters had been talked over, I thought it would be well to send you the following gleanings, which may be fully relied upon, as it was taken almost verbatim from the *Journal*. The following questions were asked and answers given.

MYSELF.—You say the people pay so much per family; how many families, or parts of families belong to your church?

BAPTIST.—Nine, well you may say ten families.

MYSELF.—What is their occupation?

BAPTIST.—All farmers.

MYSELF.—What amount of finances do they raise yearly?

BAPTIST.—This year for all purposes about \$500.00; about \$100.00 of this sum was raised by Sabbath collections and hearers.

MYSELF.—Are your people rich; for this is wonderful?

BAPTIST.—They own their farms, which may be nearly 1,200 acres altogether; but their farms are new, and they live in log-houses yet.

MYSELF.—Can they pay their other liabilities while giving so much?

BAPTIST.—Pay their debts! yes sir; they are doing as well as most farmers; they have got the notion that they prosper by giving to God.

MYSELF.—Do you think it right to give so much? You say that some of them give \$50.00 a year.

BAPTIST.—They do as well as I do, lay up as much in store as I can, and more too; they can provide for their children as well as I can do for mine, and do you think, in the presence of a just God, that my people have any right to claim in these matters more than I have? No, sir, we believe in sound doctrine of course they are not saving much money, nor yet am I doing so; minister and people are alike, as it should be.

MYSELF.—How often do you preach to them?

BAPTIST.—Twice every Sabbath; our people believe in having plenty of Gospel as well as giving liberally.

Many other matters were talked over; all the information sought for was very kindly given. I send it without note or comment; the congregation and the minister reside about 12½ miles from this town.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

OBITUARY NOTICES.

Mrs. ELIZABETH LOCKE.

Wife of Mr. Ebenezer Locke, died at Jordan Bay, July 8th, 1865, aged 79 years. Sister Locke was one of the first who joined the Baptist Church in that place, and the first removed by death to the church triumphant. We have every reason to believe she has joined that blessed company. She has been for many years the subject of severe affliction, which prevented her from attending the means of grace. Yet her faith was strong, and she could say with Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," through the blood of Christ she was enabled to "Read her title clear, To mansions in the skies," and in the last conflict was more than conqueror. She has left a husband and six children, and a large circle of friends to mourn their loss. May the Lord comfort their hearts and make their affliction a blessing. The occasion was improved by the writer to a large assembly, from 1 Cor. xv. 55, 56, 57. — Com. by Rev. John F. McKenne.

East Ragged Island, July 16th, 1865.

ALEXANDER McVANE.

Died at Bethwell, P. E. I., on the 26th of June last, in the 61st year of his age. He