

THE
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Miscellaneous Communications.

SKETCHES OF ITALIAN REFORMERS—PETER MARTYR.—PART I.*

THE beginning of the sixteenth century presented a dark and troubled prospect to the friends of reform in Italy. Divine truth was almost universally trodden down in the streets, and civil liberty was crushed under the tyranny of the priesthood and a few powerful families in the states. The house of the Medici at Florence, though the patrons of learning and the fine arts, were the foes of true freedom among the people, and, by their ambition for power, they forced multitudes of noble spirits to sigh for better days. In the midst of their splendid city, the fervent Savonarola had sounded the first notes of reformed truth in Italy, and, dragged to the stake under their eye, he had nobly fallen a martyr for Christ. When the witness of the truth was silenced, the Romish priesthood may have thought that the word of his testimony would be no more heard, but they were sadly mistaken. Though the faithful die the truth still lives, and the spirit of the martyrs re-appears in others, "who are chosen, and called, and faithful." "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus

and for the word of God, and they lived and reigned with Christ." In the year 1498 Savonarola died at the stake at Florence, and it was only two years after, when a successor appeared in the same city to take up the martyr's testimony, and to bear it forward to the generation to come. To this witness of Christ we now direct attention.

PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI was born at Florence in the year 1500. He was descended of an honourable family. There is reason to believe that his father, Stefano Vermigli, had heard the truth of Christ, as it was earnestly preached by Savonarola, and that convictions were thus lodged in his mind which exercised no inconsiderable influence on his illustrious son. Martyr, when a boy, was taught the Latin language by his amiable and accomplished mother, and at a very early period showed that remarkable aptness for acquiring knowledge, which afterwards raised him to such eminence as a scholar and divine. In his boyhood he evinced a singular mildness and amiability of disposition, which, with his untiring diligence and rapid progress in learning, endeared him to his parents and all around him. Being attracted, like many youths of his day, by the outward honours of

* SIMLERI, *Oratio de Vita et Obitu Petri Martyris Vernillii*; PETRI MARTYRIS VERMIGLI, *Locis Communes et Epistolæ*; GERDISII, *Italia Reformata*.

as some other more common and public services. It may have more self-denial in it than some other more fashionable duties; but it gives evidence of greater love to God and godliness, for their own sakes. Indeed, if it is not the hypocrite's mouth which we have assumed—if our ejaculations are not similar to the careless and profane language of too many, even in the church of God, when the irreverent exclaim, on all occasions,—“The Lord bless us—Lord have mercy on us!” then we cannot but be in love with this duty, and regard it also as a sweet privilege. Thus attached to it we cannot, however, be, unless we have love to the Redeemer in our hearts. It is emphatically the fruit of love, and is more like a free-will offering than some other services. Let all examine themselves as to the *bent* of their minds in regard to this matter; and, if we may be allowed the expression, the heaven-bestowed naturalness of their forthgoing to Him, whose they are, and whom they are bound to serve. In order to prove the genuineness of our feelings in this case, we should consider, that, although we may be sometimes *driven* to it by *circumstances*, we will perhaps still more frequently be *drawn* to it by *affection*. Let none, however, put ejaculatory prayer in the place of the other kinds of prayer. To be plain, let none content themselves with a wish and a word when they have composed themselves to rest, to the neglect of that command of the Saviour,—“Enter into thy closet,

and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” “These things,” said the same Jesus, “ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone.” It should not be forgotten, that there are solemn, stated supplications, to which ejaculations are good handmaidens; and that it is of the hypocrite that the question is asked,—“Will he *always* call upon God?” To be seldom *trafficking* with heaven by secret and ejaculatory prayer, shows that the individual is either dead or in a drowsy frame. The one is an extremely dangerous state, and the other very unbecoming the Christian's character and prospects. To live in the frequent observance of ejaculatory prayer, is to breathe the pure atmosphere of heaven, and to be ready for a sudden call into the immediate presence of the Lord our God. We should, then, be frequent in our supplications in private and in public,—in the closet, in the family, and in the sanctuary,—in the lonely walk, when the very silence of nature calls us to hold fellowship with the Creator; and amongst the busy throng, when all are panting after earthly portions;—then let the soul breathe forth its longings after a higher heritage, a perfect world, where even prayer itself will be no longer needed, but where every heaven-born wish shall be fully anticipated, and fully realized.

C. M.

SLAVERY IN THE ASSOCIATE REFORMED CHURCHES OF THE UNITED STATES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR,—In the April Number of your valuable Magazine, I have met with an article which, I fear, is calculated to give a wrong impression to

our sister churches in Great Britain. It professes to describe the “anti-slavery churches in America,” and to be “written by the Rev. J. P. Miller,

South Argyle, New York, in a letter to a friend." After alluding to the disposition of the United Presbyterian Church to engage in a correspondence with the Associate Reformed Church, and expressing a supposition that "the churches in Great Britain kept themselves accurately advised of the facts connected with the churches in this country on the subject of slavery," the writer proceeds to give an account of the manner in which the different Synods of the Associate Reformed Church were constituted, and the position which they sustain toward each other. Then he says, "not one of these have ever, in a judicial way, testified against slavery as a sin."

This is the statement which I regret, inasmuch as it is directly contrary to the facts in the case. Since the year 1820-21, the Associate Reformed Church has been divided into the Synods of New York, the West, and the South. That of the South is entirely in the slaveholding region of our country, and has never taken any action on the subject of slavery. Like each of the others, it is distinct and independent of itself, and has, therefore, never suffered any interference on this question; but it is one of the smallest divisions of the Associate Reformed Church, and ought not, therefore, to give character in any sense to the whole body.

With the Synod of the West, however, it is different. This Synod numbers nearly one hundred and fifty ministers, two theological schools, and over two hundred churches in its bounds, and is usefully engaged in the home and the foreign field. At a full meeting, in 1829, the Synod declared that it was "unanimous in the opinion, that slavery, as it exists in these United States, is a great political and moral evil, and that the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ calls for all Christians to remove it as soon as it can be done, without worse consequences to society and to the States

themselves." In the following year a series of resolutions were adopted; "in framing which," says the Synod in a pastoral letter, "two objects were kept in view. The *first* was the condemnation of slavery, and of every person who wilfully persevered in the practice of it. The *second* was to spare those persons who were convinced of the immorality of slavery, and desirous to free themselves from all connexion with it; but who were, by the force of circumstances which they could not control, prevented from liberating their slaves, and instead of excluding them from the church immediately, and on the simple ground of their having slaves, to give them time to effect their emancipation." In 1832, the Synod addressed a pastoral letter to the churches, in which, after condemning slavery as a moral evil, and pledging itself to effect its removal, the Synod say:—

"Against slavery, as a flagrant moral evil, the Synod does now testify. 1st, Because it deprives men of their inalienable rights. 2d, Because of its attendant cruelties. 3d, Because of its immoral tendencies. 4th, Because of the connexion of slavery with the slave-trade." This letter concludes with a solemn call upon presbyteries and sessions not to allow the resolutions of Synod, upon this subject, to lie as a dead letter, but to see them carried out throughout their bounds.

In 1838, these resolutions were re-issued; and in the narrative on the state of religion, sent forth in 1842, the Synod say, that, as "there is a growing sympathy in some quarters both for the master and the slave, we would remember them that are in bonds as bound with them, and we tremble for the oppressor; for the time is drawing near when God will break in pieces the oppressor, and Africa and her sons shall go free."

Such has been the action of the Synod of the West on slavery.

Under the operation of these enactments, all the slaveholding congregations and members in the bounds of Synod, have freed themselves from slavery or from the Synod. There were numerous churches in Kentucky, but these have all left. There are now churches in Wheeling Va., and St Louis Mo., under the care of Synod, but not one of their members is known to have any connexion with slavery.

The Synod of New York, with forty ministers, and upwards of forty churches, and about 5000 communicants, has virtually pursued the same course. This is seen in her not sanctioning the dissent of her delegates for the condemnation of slavery by the Convention of Reformed Churches, in 1842—to which Mr Miller refers—and by her continuing negotiations from year to year for a union, in which it is distinctly understood that a positive testimony shall be held against slavery in all of its forms.

So well is this understood, that the only slaveholding congregation in our bounds has sought another ecclesiastical connexion, assigning the anti-slavery sentiment of Synod as one of the grounds of their departure from us.

Such are the facts in this matter, and I will be thankful indeed if you will allow the *United Presbyterian Magazine* to lay before its readers this statement, of the faithful and effectual manner in which the Associate Reformed Church, so far as she could, has given her testimony on this subject. We are, in great part, your ecclesiastical descendants, and there is rejoicing among us, that, with you and us alike, there is a "heart's desire and prayer unto God," that his truth may be established—oppression be universally put down—and man every where be made physically and spiritually free. Yours in the ministry of the gospel,

JOHN B. DALES, Philadelphia.

THE TIMES OF RESTITUTION.

TO THE EDITORS.

SIRS,—I beg to offer a few thoughts on the remarks of W. P., in your January Number, on Acts iii. 19, 21, in which, he says, "are some things hard to be understood." The difficulties and obscurities complained of are, we believe, entirely of his own seeking; a result of his unwillingness to understand the passage in its plain unstrained meaning, lest it should confirm the millenarian theory. He therefore proposes a new translation of the passage,—not, be it observed, because any error can be found in the authorized version; but simply because the one proposed is more in accordance with what he regards "the truth of the passage." We hope, however, to show, that he has not only misapprehended the spirit of the text as a whole, but also given an unwarrantable interpretation of its several parts.

1st. We cannot admit that "the promised times of refreshing," just mean "the season of spiritual revival and tranquillity enjoyed by every believer." It is true, that we do enjoy rest and inward peace in believing; but it is equally true that the pre-

sent world is not our rest, for it is polluted, and that there remaineth a rest for the people of God. The form of expression used by the apostle shows, that it is to this future rest he refers, and not to the effusion of the Spirit, whose blessed influence had already begun to be experienced on the day of Pentecost. It is not said; "Repent, &c., seeing that times of refreshing are come; but repent, that your sins may be blotted out, when times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." "Divine refreshment," says Doddridge, "would no doubt immediately mingle itself with a sense of pardon, and eternal happiness would certainly at length succeed; but the following clause seems to intimate, that Peter apprehended the conversion of the Jews, as a people, would be attended with some extraordinary scene of prosperity and joy, and open a speedy way to Christ's descent from heaven, in order to the restitution of all things." "I have the pleasure," he adds, "since I wrote this, to find that the learned Vitringa agrees with me in this interpretation." Scott also de-