

POETRY.

THE LAST PLAGUE OF EGYPT.

BY H. ROGERS.

'Tis midnight, 'tis midnight, o'er Egypt's dark sky,
And in whirlwind and storm the sirocco sweeps by;
All arid and hot is its death-breathing blast,—
Each sleeper breathes thick, and each bosom beats fast.

And the young mother wakes, and arouses from rest,
And presses more closely her babe to her breast;
But the heart that she presses is death-like and still,
And the lips that she kisses are breathless and chill.

And the young brother clings to the elder in tear,
As the gust falls so dirge-like and sad on his ear;
But that brother returns not the trembling embrace,
He speaks not—he breathes not—death lies in his place.

And the first-born of Egypt are dying around;
'Tis a sigh—'tis a moan—and then slumber more sound;
They but wake from their sleep, and their spirits have fled—
They but wake into life, to repose with the dead.

And there lay the infant still smiling in death,
That scarce heaved its breast as it yielded its breath;
And there lay the boy, yet in youth's budding bloom,
With the calmness of sleep—but the hue of the tomb.

And there fell the youth in the pride of his prime,
In the morning of life—in the spring-tide of crime:
And unnerved is that arm, and fast closed is that eye,
And cold is that bosom which once beat so high.

And the fond mother's hope, and the fond father's trust,
And the widow's sole stay, are returning to dust;
Egypt has not a place where there is not one dead,
From the proud monarch's palace to penury's shed.

And the hearts of that country are desolate now,
And the crown of her glory is thrust from her brow;
But while proud Egypt trembles, all Israel is free—
Unfettered—unbound as the waves of the sea.

Ecclesiastical Intelligence.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH.

[Extracted from a pamphlet recently published by Dr. Steven lately one of the Ministers of the Scottish National Church at Rotterdam, now Governor of George Heriot's Hospital.]

The Dutch clergy are an uncommonly well educated body of men. It behoves every one destined for the Church to take, whilst at the university, two distinct degrees known by the titles of candidate in literature and candidate in theology. The former rank is only obtained, after he has been examined in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Oriental Antiquities; and given proof of having benefited by attendance on the classes of Logic, General History, and Dutch style. Again, before being advanced to the rank of candidate in divinity, he is examined in Natural Theology, Church History, and on the general doctrines of Christianity and likewise he must show that he has profited by the lectures on Moral and Natural Philosophy, Oriental Literature, and Hebrew. The student must attend the Divinity Lectures for three sessions. He enjoys much intercourse with his teachers and occasionally gives in written exercises; but he seldom delivers more than two discourses in the public classes in the presence of (*sub præsidente*) one of the theological professors. He may then preach before a congregation; but he can only be called to a charge after he has become a *proponent*, or be licensed by the competent ecclesiastical court. The Church of Scotland, like that of Holland, is at present devising plans for the employment, at home and abroad, of her numerous unbeneficed licentiates. This deserving and important class of men, (the hope of every Christian Church,) is unquestionably entitled to the warmest countenance and support of every friend of both establishments. The Dutch Reformed Church is taking a deep interest in the lot of other probationers who now amount to two hundred and forty-two, of whom several receive a government salary as assistant-ministers. They are not licensed till they have completed their twenty-second year. Being then regarded as "ecclesiastical persons," a watchful eye is constantly kept upon their conduct; care is shown in making the people acquainted with their pulpit abilities, and that their talents are otherwise rendered available to society. An official roll of their names is not only forwarded once a year to the General Synod, but is published likewise by authority every six months, in a widely circulated periodical. It is there stated if they be professionally employed as assistant-ministers, and as public teachers, or if they have within the preceding half year, been presented to a living. Similar intelligence is communicated in

a biennial clerical almanac, where their names are regularly printed immediately after those of the stated clergymen in each province, whose court granted them license. Each probationer is obliged to send his address to the classical ecclesiastical court within whose bounds he resides. The Dutch clergy manifest a kindly feeling towards candidates for the ministry, and, like the community, have a tolerably accurate knowledge of the peculiar gifts and graces of almost every licentiate of their Church.

A probationer, on receiving a call from a congregation, must be guided by the subjoined particular and recent regulations of the General Synod.

Ordination to the Pastoral Office is conferred by the provincial ecclesiastical courts by whom also all candidates for ordination are examined. The applicant two months before the time of examination, must deliver to the secretary of the provincial ecclesiastical court, 1. A certificate of his having attained the degree of candidate in literature, and also that of candidate in theology; 2. A certificate of his having for two years attended, with benefit, exegetical lectures on the Old and New Testaments, and lectures on Dogmatics, Christian Ethics, and National Economy; 3. A church-certificate [signed as usual by a minister and an elder] of his having been more than two years a member of the Reformed Church; 4. Certificates from the professors in Divinity of the university where he studied, testifying that he has for three full years diligently and profitably attended the foresaid lectures at the respective universities,—that he has preached twice at least *sub præsidente*, and that his moral character is good.

No one who has obtained ordination in any Reformed Church abroad, unless he has also occupied a pastoral charge, is allowed to officiate as a minister in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, till he has been examined by one of the provincial ecclesiastical courts. Before being admitted to examination, he must produce suitable testimonials, and especially attestations in favour of his moral character, from the professors in theology of the Reformed Church in the university where he studied: and an evidence of his church-membership.

The candidate having, on examination, been found qualified, declares, on solemn oath, that no gift is given, or shall be given by him, to procure any appointment in the Church; and that consistently with his knowledge, no gift has been, or ever shall be given by any other person, on his behalf. He shall then make the following declaration and promise:—

"I, the undersigned, having been admitted by the provincial ecclesiastical court of——to the ministerial office in the Netherlands' Reformed Church, sincerely declare that I shall carefully encourage, by life and doctrine, the interests of Christianity in general, and of the Netherlands' Reformed Church in particular; that I do in good faith receive, and cordially believe, the doctrine which, according to God's Holy Word, is contained in the existing formularies of unity of the Netherlands' Reformed Church; that I shall diligently inculcate and uphold the same, and zealously apply myself to the promotion of religious knowledge, Christian morality, order, and concord; binding myself, by this my signature, to all the aforesaid; and also, in the event of being found to have acted contrary to any part of this declaration and promise to submit, on that account, to the sentence of the competent Church authorities."

In the communities served by more than four ministers, no vacancy is allowed to be supplied by any clergyman under twenty-five years of age, nor by one, who has not been at least three years in the ministry. No clergyman can leave his charge till the expiration of two years after his induction, unless he or the calling church be disposed to disburse all the expenses attendant upon his last settlement. In Holland, a minister (*predikant*) is familiarly, but as a term of respect called *Domine*. He is easily recognized by his court-looking dress, and cocked hat. In the pulpit, instead of the full Geneva gown, which is still used in Scotland, the Dutch clergy wear a long *mantel*, which consists of black cloth, about six inches broad, edged with silk, and fastened by a hook to the collar of the coat. This mantle, from the numerous plaits of which it is composed, must originally have been sufficient to envelope the person, but probably has gradually been reduced to give more liberty to the speaker.

The Dutch preachers and hearers, immediately on taking, as well as before leaving, their places in church, pause for a short while, mentally to invoke the divine blessing. Few of the clergy preach from memory. In general, they are exemplary and zealous in the discharge of their sacred functions, and they are distinguished for loyalty and strong attachment to their fatherland. They are held in great estimation by all classes of the community; and they not unfrequently are signalized by special marks of royal favour.

Ministers of towns have districts allotted to them, but they have no particular church in which they

statedly preach. Each section has its own clergyman and elder. Rotterdam, where I now write, has a population of nearly eighty thousand, about the half of which number appertain to the Reformed Church. Belonging to the latter there are twelve ministers, of whom the two oldest in point of ordination have but half duty to perform. For the information of the inhabitants, a printed list, called a *Domine's briefje*, is on sale every Saturday, announcing the diets of the several preachers in the four Reformed churches for the subsequent Sunday, and likewise the week-day services.

If rendered incapable by bodily or mental infirmity, a minister, or his relatives, may present a statement of his case, vouched by the certificate of a physician, praying that he may be made *Emeritus*; when a pension is granted by Government proportioned to his public service. If he has been forty years in the Church, he is entitled to retire, *salvo honore et stipendio*. Every such application must be concurred in by the kirk-session, and addressed directly to his Majesty; but in many cases the applicant employs the agent for the Church to prepare the deed and bring it under the notice of the Director-General. This last functionary corresponds with the governor of the province, to ascertain from him whether there be any obstacle in the way. When found satisfactory, the King decrees that the petitioner shall become *Emeritus* on the subsequent 1st of January or 1st July, as it may happen,—*Emeriti* ministers being nominated only twice a-year. The official intimation is made some time before the clergyman retires from active duty, that his consistory may previously obtain permission to call a successor. This requisite permission (hand-opening) is granted by the Director-General, but after the new clergyman is called, he must be approved of by his Majesty. If the Crown presents to a living, the royal approval is of course presupposed.

Church-membership,—and mode of dispensing the Lord's Supper in the Dutch Reformed Church.—All candidates for membership receive, for a series of years, a regular course of religious instruction from their pastors. They are instructed in Christian doctrine and morality, according to the Confession of Faith, and to the Heidelberg Catechism; and they are also carefully taught Bible history, and the origin and progress of the Reformation from Popery. Upon such subjects they are examined, usually in the presence of an elder; and when found qualified, they are solemnly and publicly admitted or confirmed. Very few adults are to be found who were not enrolled as members ere they had attained the age of twenty.—The Sacrament of the Supper is administered once a quarter. The clergy, accompanied by an elder, professionally visit their members twice a-year immediately before the season of communion. The celebration of the ordinance is announced a fortnight before; and on the Saturday evening preceding the Sabbath on which it is dispensed, there is a preparation service, at the conclusion of which the new members are admitted in the presence of the congregation; and when they, as well as all who intend to communicate, stand up, and answer in the affirmative a few questions put from the pulpit. These questions comprehend a declaration, that they believe with all their heart the doctrine which they have confessed; that they resolve, through divine grace, to adhere to that doctrine, and to lead a Christian life; and that they will submit to the superintendence and the discipline of the Church. Before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, a meeting of the consistory of each church is held, in direct reference to the moral and religious character of the communicants. Members of other Protestant congregations in the Netherlands are admissible to communion with the Reformed Church, provided that their moral character is unobjectionable. Members of the Dutch communion are careful to supply themselves with a certificate before going to reside in a different part of the country; and kirk-sessions are specially enjoined not to give such certificates, except at a regular meeting. The practice is unknown in Holland, which is universal among Scotch Presbyterians, of distributing *tokens*, or small pieces of lead, having on one side an appropriate passage of Scripture, and on the reverse the name of the particular congregation or church. These tokens, given to intending communicants only, are collected by the elders as soon as the members have taken their seats at the table.

When the apostolic benediction, after the ordinary service in the morning of the sacramental Sabbath, is pronounced, the officiating minister directs the attention of the members to the prescribed and printed Form for the Communion Service. That Form commences with a plain statement of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, and of the character of those who ought to abstain from it, and of those who worthily partake of it. Then follows an appropriate prayer, with the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles Creed. A psalm or hymn is next sung, and the minister takes then, if not before, his station at the com-