

THE GOOD NEWS.

A SEMI-MONTHLY PERIODICAL:

DEVOTED to the RELIGIOUS EDUCATION of the OLD AND YOUNG.

REFUGE! REFUGE!! REFUGE!!!

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan; then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you."—NUM. xxxv. 9-11.

In ancient times there were places of refuge where under the cover of religion the guilty and unfortunate found shelter and protection. This right of shelter and impunity was enjoyed by certain places reputed sacred, such as groves, temples, altars, and the protective power commonly spread itself over a considerable district round the holy spot, being walled and preserved by great penalties. Among the Greeks and Romans the number of these places of asylum became in time, very great, and led by abuse to a fresh increase of criminals.

This pagan custom passed into Christianity as early as the time of Constantine the Great, when Christian Churches were asylums for the unfortunate persons whom an outraged law or powerful enemies pursued. This privilege prevailed in the whole of Catholic Christendom, and was preserved undiminished, at least in Italy, so long as the papal independence remained, and it must be acknowledged that this right acted beneficially in ages when violence and revenge predominated, and fixed habitations were less common than now, but its tendency to transfer power from the magistrate to the priesthood was injurious to the inviolability of law and the steady administration of justice, so that the privilege has been abrogated by most governments.

Among the Jews the six cities of Refuge bore some resemblance to the asylum of the classic nations, and were established with a

view to abate the evils which ensued from the old established rights of the blood-avenger, and thereby to further the prevalence of a mild, gentle, and forgiving spirit. To any of these six cities a person who had unawares and unintentionally slain any one might flee, and if he reached it before he was overtaken by the avenger of blood, he was safe within its shelter, provided he did not remove more than a thousand yards from its circuit, nor quit the refuge till the decease of the high priest under whom the homicide had taken place. If he had transgressed these provisions, the avenger might lawfully put him to death. Before, however, the fugitive could avail himself of the shelter conceded by the laws, he was to undergo a solemn trial and make it appear to the satisfaction of the magistrates of the place where the homicide was committed, that it was purely accidental. Should he, however, be found to have been guilty of murder, he was delivered into the hands of the avenger of blood that he might die.—And the Israelites were strictly forbidden to spare him, either from consideration of pity, or in consequence of any pecuniary ransom.

Passing from Scripture to the authority of the Rabbins, we are informed that in order to give the fugitive all possible advantage in his flight, it was the business of the Sanhedrim to make the roads that led to the cities of refuge convenient by en-