

Gleanings.

THE TOLERATION ACT.

This approaches very near to the idea of a great English law. To the jurist, versed in the theory of legislation, but not intimately acquainted with the temper of the sects and parties into which the nation was divided at the time of the Revolution, the act would seem to be a mere chaos of absurdities and contradictions. It will not bear to be tried by sound general principles. Nay, it will not bear to be tried by any principle, sound or unsound. The sound principle undoubtedly is, that mere theological error ought not to be punished by the civil magistrate. This principle, the Toleration Act not only does not recognize, but positively disclaims. Not a single one of the cruel laws enacted against Nonconformists by the Tudors or the Stuarts is repealed. Persecution continues to be the general rule. Toleration is the exception. Nor is this all. The freedom which is given to conscience is given in the most capricious manner. A Quaker, by making a declaration of faith in general terms, obtains the full benefit of the act without signing one of the thirty-nine articles. An Independent minister, who is perfectly willing to make the declaration required from the Quaker, but who has doubts about six or seven of the articles, remains still subject to the penal laws. Howe is liable to punishment if he preaches before he has solemnly declared his assent to the Anglican doctrine touching the Eucharist. Penn, who altogether rejects the Eucharist, is at perfect liberty to preach without making any declaration whatever on the subject.

These are some of the obvious faults, which must strike every person who examines the Toleration Act by that standard of just reason which is the same in all countries and in all ages. But these very faults may perhaps appear to be merits, when we take into consideration the passions and prejudices of those for whom the Toleration Act was framed. This law, abounding with contradictions which every smatterer in political philosophy can detect, did what a law framed by the utmost skill of the greatest masters of political philosophy might have failed to do. That the provisions which have been recapitulated are cumbrous, puerile, inconsistent with each other, inconsistent with the true theory of religious liberty, must be acknowledged. All that can be said in their defence is this: that they removed a vast mass of evil without shocking a vast mass of prejudice; that they put an end, at once and for ever, without one division in either House of Parliament, without one riot in the streets, with scarcely one audible murmur even from the classes most deeply tainted with bigotry, to a persecution which had raged during four generations, which had broken innumerable hearts, which had made innumerable firesides desolate, which had filled the prisons with men of whom the world was not worthy, which had driven thousands of those honest, diligent, and God-fearing yeomen and artizans, who are the true strength of a nation, to seek a refuge beyond the ocean among the wigwams of red Indians and the lairs of panthers. Such a defence, however weak it may appear to some shallow speculators, will probably be thought complete by statesmen.—*Macaulay's History.*

HOME REFORMATION AND CHRISTIAN UNION.

The work of the various Societies aiming at Home Reformation, is one that must be done in some way, either by individuals, or the churches, or the State. We trust that individuals and churches will still vindicate to our country its noble characteristic, of doing always, by the free benevolence of its citizens, what in other countries is effected by enforced taxation, and that instead of waiting for Government support, free private efforts will give to all these institutions the expansion which they require and deserve. Had only those vast sums that have been squandered in all that is ostentatious in religion—empty imitations of the dead work of past ages which can never live again, tawdry memorial windows, hideous monu-