

RELIGIOUS CENSUS OF IRELAND.—By the recent census, it appears that the population of Ireland has fallen off 787,842 since 1861, the population now being 5,784,543. The Roman Catholic population is 4,500,000, while all other persuasions number 1274,960, the Roman Catholics being about 3½ to 1. In Ulster the proportions are, Established Church, 390,130; Presbyterians, 311,371; Roman Catholics, 968,68. It may be stated that some doubts have been expressed as to the accuracy of the returns.

THE MEMORY OF DR. ISAAC WATTS.—A statue has been lately inaugurated in honor of Dr. Watts. The Earl of Shaftesbury, on the occasion of the inauguration, pronounced an eloquent eulogium on Dr. Watts.

MEETING OF EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE IN GENEVA.—There is to be a meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in Geneva in the course of the present month. Preparations have been actively making for the conference.

THE 'ESSAYS AND REVIEWS.'—The Upper House of Convocation has declined to take up the 'Essays and Reviews,' on the ground that legal proceedings have been commenced against one of the writers, in regard to which some of the Bishops might have to sit in judgment.

CAVOUR'S SUCCESSOR.—Baron Ricasoli, the successor of Cavour, is spoken of in the most favourable terms. He is said, in some respects, to be in advance of his illustrious predecessor. Although not a Protestant, he has frequently visited Protestant places of worship, and used the Protestant Bible at family worship. He is even less likely to make concessions to Popery than was Cavour.

SCOTTISH EDUCATION BILL.—The Scottish Education Bill has passed the Legislature, receiving some slight amendments in the House of Lords. It has been proposed by the Presbytery of Edinburgh (Established Church) to memorialize the Queen to refuse her sanction to the Bill.

THE IRISH GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE UNION IN CANADA.—At the late meeting of the General Assembly, it was agreed to express their satisfaction with the union of the various branches of the Presbyterian Churches in Australia, and Canada.

SUCCESSOR TO LATE DR. FLETCHER.—Means are being taken to obtain the Rev. A. Wallace of Glasgow as successor to late Dr. Fletcher, in Finsbury Square.

NEW MISSIONARY FOR CAFFRARIA.—The Rev. J. Chalmers has lately left, accompanied by his wife, for Algoa Bay, with the view of proceeding to Caffraria as a missionary in connexion with the United Presbyterian Church.

NEW CHURCH OPENED IN CORK.—A new church, erected for Rev. Mr. McGill, was lately opened in Cork. Dr. Guthrie of Edinburgh and Professor Gibson officiated on the occasion. The sum of £5300 has been raised by the congregation.

GAVAZZI IN EDINBURGH.—Gavazzi has been delivering eloquent addresses in Edinburgh on the present state of Italy, and the need of means of spiritual improvement.

DEATH OF BISHOP OF DURHAM.—The Bishop of Durham, Dr. Villiers, has recently died. He has not long occupied the important position to which he was appointed.

CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE EXPOSITION AND ILLUSTRATION OF A DIFFICULT TEXT.

"The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one Shepherd."—Ecc. xii., 11.

After the first clause, "The words of the wise are as goads," which is plain enough, the rest of the verse, as rendered in our version of the Bible is, in any connected, homogeneous sense, literally unintelligible. The expositor may put any construction he please upon it, if the signification he gives to the principal terms only accords with their meaning in other places, and the interpretation, as a whole, with the general tenor of Scripture; and this has been done very much by commentators in their treatment of the passage.

When figurative language is employed in the Bible to illustrate moral or spiritual truth, the unity of the figure, if there be but one, or the harmony of the figures if there be more than one, is maintained throughout the specific illustration; otherwise perplexing confusion would be unavoidable. Thus—"the words of the wise," the words of the All-wise preeminently, "are as goads" by which men are driven to pursue a God-determined course. The Word of God is "a hammer." It is "the sword of the Spirit." It is also written, "How sweet are thy words to my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" and "thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." These different similes, by which various qualities and characteristics of the Word of God are presented in an impressive light, are all truthful and expressive in the circumstances to which they are severally applicable; but it would never do to blend them all, or any two of them, in one proposition; and this is never done. We do not read, "Thy word is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword to me"—"it is my delight—sweet to my taste"; for however necessary and good for us the piercing of the Spirit's sword may be, that brings to us the sense of pain and fear, precluding at the moment calm, sweet enjoyment in the truth that has wounded and laid us low in trembling apprehension. And when we think of the Word of the Lord as "pure," "holy," or as "sincere milk," or as "bread of life," we do not at the same instant think of it as "a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces." Nor does the Bible lead us to such dislocated and discordant conceptions in its presentations of truth: there is no confounding or confused intermixture of imagery in Scripture, or in any accurate writing.

This may be regarded as a safe principle of interpretation in regard to partially obscure figurative language, viz., the unity of the figure, or the harmony and coherence

of the various emblems in one figurative representation—its consistency with the truth it illustrates, and with itself throughout. And this principle furnishes us with a key for opening to our understanding the whole passage under consideration.

"The words of the wise are as goads." As the rods employed by herdsmen in old times to drive their cattle, so wise words—God's word of power above all—drive men in a right course, which, but for this impulsion, they would not have taken.

"As nails fastened." The preposition "by" is not in the original, and is misleading. "Goad" suggests to us the idea of a herdsman and his herd. This word "nails" seems at first sight to be an entirely different and incongruous emblem, upon which, by itself, might be put a useful construction, (vide Matthew Henry,) but not in harmony with what goes before. But the ancient "goad" had a sharp spike, like a large nail, inserted in the end of it, for pricking the unruly cattle, which may have been in many cases a "nail" taken and adapted for the purpose. Influenced probably by other passages of Scripture—"to give us a nail in His holy place"—"I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place"—our translators mistakenly thinking of "nails" here, have rendered the attached verb "fastened." Before a nail can be fastened, it must penetrate the substance into which it is driven; and penetrating, not fastening, is the meaning of the word in this place—the spike of the goad piercing, pricking the animal driven.

Take next the word "assemblies." That, in our language now signifies invariably companies of men. But in more primitive times when language had not so many synonymous terms, such a word as is rendered "assemblies" included collections of various kinds—the bringing together, and the being together of materials, or of animals, as well as men. Nay, the primary signification of all words of this kind is, the herding together of the gregarious animals; as our English words, congregation, aggregation, derived from the Latin *grex*, a flock or herd. Here the primary sense of the word "assemblies" should be expressed; and then we have the herds which are driven and controlled by the herdsmen with their goads.

"Masters of assemblies." By "master" we mean a proprietor, a leader, one that has authority and power over his fellows. The "master" of a herd of cattle may be the owner or the herdsman in charge, or the most powerful or courageous animal in the herd, which masters the rest and is followed by them. In every flock and herd of the gregarious animals there is one that masters all the herd, whose superiority once recognized is instinctively submitted to, and it becomes the leader whom the whole drove follows. In the backwoods, where they send out the kine to browse in the forest, they put the bell on this master of the herd, and going out in the evening to bring the cattle to the milking, they know where they are, when the bell is heard, and that they have only to find and start homeward the bell-wearer in order to the gathering of all in the kine-yard. We may be sure that this is the sense in which "masters" is to be taken here, as the herdsman is spoken of in the following clause; and then we