

Religious Intelligence.

(From Evangelical Christendom for August.) Present State of Religious Matters in Tuscany. Florence, July 13, 1850.

My dear Dr. Steane,—I wish to send you a short notice of the state of religious matters in this part of Italy. You know that for some time there has been a great desire in Tuscany for the reading of the Word of God, and, notwithstanding all the means taken of late to prevent the circulation of the Scriptures, this desire is still increasing. In 1847 and 1848, a number of religious tracts and books were printed in Florence, and, as greater liberty was enjoyed at that time, they were sold openly in the shops and in the streets. They were not directly controversial, and so were permitted to pass the Censorship; but they were all evangelical in their spirit, and greatly superior, as might be expected, to the usual wretched productions of the Romish press. They made their way also into Rome, in the beginning of 1848. I have seen the Discorsi Religiosi, a volume of discourses translated from Monod, and Vinet, and Chalmers, exposed for sale in the book-shop windows at Rome, and a large bill advertising the same work pasted on the pillars of the Pantheon. This kind of liberty did not continue long. You know the fate of the Bibles which were printed here about eighteen months ago. But such measures failed, as they generally do, to destroy the cause of evangelism, or the interest that had been excited in the Scriptures of truth. Indeed, since that time the desire of the people to "search the Scriptures" has been greatly on the increase. The bishops and priests have placarded the walls with addresses to their people, warning them against the reading of those pestiferous and heretical books which they say have been so widely circulated in Tuscany. During the Lent preachings this year, the Protestant propaganda was the great subject of attack in the discourses of the priests.

A controversy had also been excited on the subject of confession. An able little treatise, by Dr. Desanctis, entitled La Confessione, had been circulated in great numbers in Florence, and eagerly read. The priests were compelled to attempt an answer, and a reply was published. The preachers also made confession the subject of several of their discourses, attacking the arguments of "the apostate priest." This was a pretty sure mode of increasing the interest already excited on the subject, and La Confessione is indebted to the priests to the extent of, perhaps, two editions. The reply of Belli to the treatise on Confession drew forth another treatise on the subject of Tradition, from Dr. Desanctis, which has also gone through two or three editions. Of course, great efforts have been made to discover the vendors of such treatises, and the searching of book shops by the police and the priests has now become very common. Files of old newspapers, and a pamphlet or two of Mazzini's are occasionally discovered as the result of such a search. An intimation of the discovery is published in the journals—a printer is fined or imprisoned, and so the thing goes on.

The Bible of course—that dreaded book—is always under ban, and Diodati's version is always contraband. Even the version of Martini, one of their own archbishops, they cannot trust in his own city of Florence, without their own notes and comments. It is not good, they say, when put on their defence for prohibiting the Word of Life, it is not good to give the Bible to the people—"there must be some one to point out the acorn to the pig." The words are their own, and such is the elegant simile by which they illustrate the wisdom of keeping the people in ignorance of the Word of God. It is well, however, that they have been drawn out to give any explanation of their system, and such degradation of things sacred is not likely to serve their own cause much, among those who have any reverence at all for the authority of sacred truth.

Greater efforts have been made of late to counteract the influence of Protestant notions in Tuscany. As it seems all the efforts that have been made by pastorals and Lent-preachings, and by what they rely on

much more, by fines and imprisonments, and the police, have been in vain, the bishops have formed a committee for the circulation of good books, and Florence has been already favoured with specimens of two of these emphatically "good books."—One of them is a flippant dialogue, entitled Don Francesco, and another is a translation of "The Travels of an Irish Gentleman in search of Religion," by the thoroughly orthodox Thomas Moore. There would be something extremely ridiculous in the selection of this old and flippant work of the author of the "Irish Melodies," were it not so melancholy to think of immortal souls under the care of spiritual directors, who prohibit the Bible as if it were a volume of blasphemy, and stamp with their ecclesiastical authority the ribaldry of Moore. The poet, perhaps, scarcely expected that his not very grave treatise, after being thoroughly forgotten at home, should be selected for translation into Italian by Tuscan bishops, and sent forth anew into the world by a committee for the distribution of good books.

In addition to such literary labours, the Tuscan bishops met lately in synod, at Florence, in the church of San Miniato, and issued a pastoral letter to their dioceses, from their "holy solitude," as they call it. They bewail the new spirit which has changed the face of Tuscany, the inroads made by false prophets, and the ready reception of their doctrine in the classic land washed by the Arno and the Tiber. They speak of the printing and circulating of pernicious books, by enemies of the Catholic faith, and bewail the loose hold of the church on the youth of the land. The empire of the beast, on whose front is written "blasphemy," must surely be at hand, when men can be found in Tuscany who have the diabolical hardihood to speak "against that lily of Paradise, the immaculate Mary." As there can be no salvation out of that church, of which the Roman pontiff is the head, they promise to pray for their strayed sheep "before the altars on which the host is immolated," and earnestly entreat all their people to beware of the blasphemous writings which have been so widely spread through Tuscany. The letter has the names of the archbishop of Florence and of six bishops appended to it.

Provincial synods have also been held at Pisa and Sienna, to follow up the same work. In the latter place, the synod was opened with invoking the protection of the most holy, immaculate Mary, and of the holy apostles Peter and Paul. The bishops meet in synod, issue pastoral letters, and try to allure their people, by the bribe of plenary indulgence, to attend the church, and to offer up the prayer for the extirpation of heresy. In addition to this they have addressed a letter to the Minister of the Interior, praying him to use all efforts for preventing the circulation of anti-catholic books. All these movements show that the Roman Catholic clergy in this country feel the necessity of making strong efforts to uphold the cause of the great apostasy.

Again, some of the more talented and liberal journals in Florence have been charged by the priests with strong Protestant tendencies. The Nazionale is especially obnoxious, and sundry efforts have been made to secure its suppression. It had been suspended at one time, and the responsible editor fined and imprisoned at another; and again it has been prohibited in some parts of Tuscany; but still it has continued its course, reviewing boldly the acts of the Government, and the encyclical letters of the Pope, and defending before the law courts the liberty of the press, according to the Constitution of 1848. Any plea for liberty to speak or write is charged with protestantism. The Eco, a little journal under the management of the priests, is so entirely devoid of talent, and so filled with the grossest absurdities, that it is not likely to do much harm to the more enlightened part of the population, whatever influence it may have among the ignorant and credulous.

An Italian translation of M. Adolphe Monod's Lucille, ou la Lecture de la Bible, has been in circulation in Florence for some weeks. As it is a masterly work, and has been well translated, it has made a considerable impression. I heard to-day of a

priest who had seen it. He said it was an awful book, and he did not know how it was to be answered. I believe, if there were more liberty of thinking and acting in Tuscany, some of the priests might be brought: at least to inquire after the truth: as it is, they are blind leaders of the blind, having little knowledge of any kind, and decidedly opposed to the enlightened education of others.

The Eco is at present full of marvellous stories of the Madonna of Rimini. In the church of St. Augustine, at Rimini, a picture of Mary, "Mater Misericordie," painted about fifty years ago, by a certain obscure painter of that neighbourhood, has opened its eyes and moved them. One would have thought that this was too absurd for these days; but while the liquifying of the blood of St. Januarius takes place annually, and while the church professes her belief in that rather stale miracle, and in all the legends of the Breviary, it would be difficult to say that any absurdity was too great to be received. The priestly editors of the Eco publish pages of letters on the subject of the Madonna, and defend the genuineness of the miracle in elaborate articles. Miracles, they say, are even to be expected in such times of danger to the church as the present; and they refer to the Breviary and its authority for belief in such miracles. The Civiltà Cattolica a Neapolitan periodical, superior, perhaps, to any in Italy under the management of the priests, and one of whose writers, I believe, is brother to one of the most enlightened and liberal-minded of Italian statesmen, defends at length this opening of the eyes of the Madonna, showing that nothing can account for it but a miracle. Bishops and priests from other places have hastened to the scene, to witness the miracle for themselves. The bishop of Cesena visited the place, knelt at the feet of the Mother of Mercy, and after a short time the Madonna opened her eyes, and fixed them upon him, and "for five minutes he was able to contemplate, the seven beauties of Paradise; at last he was obliged to turn away his eyes, not being able to support what he saw."

While the picture at Rimini has been thus drawing wondering multitudes to the shrine of the Madonna, other images, seized with a natural desire to see what is going on, have opened their eyes also. It is truly melancholy to see crowds of ignorant people, from whom the Word of Life has been kept, running to kneel down before a picture, and offering money, rings, jewels, &c., to the priests, who have already made well by the fraud. Others, of course, smite at the delusion. Pius IX., thoroughly superstitious in these things, is said to have given special directions concerning the picture. The devotees make great use of this with the incredulous, "When the Pope confirms the accounts, what will you say? Will you refuse to believe the Pope?"

In Rome, a medal has been struck for the return of the solemnity of the Prince of the Apostles. Pius IX., occupies the usual place; on the reverse, Daniel pointed to the dragon worshipped by the Babylonians, with the words of the exequie, Disruptus est Draco quem colubatis. The passage of course, is from the Apocrypha, and the dragon is interpreted as meaning Mazzini. The parti pretre at Paris have also struck a medal in honour of Montalbert, with the famous passage of his speech on the French expedition on the reverse,—"The church was more than a woman; she was a mother."

Amid all these things, it is cheering to see the progress made by Piedmont, and to know that in more than one quarter of Italy there is a thirst for the water of life. God may yet open a door, wide and effectual, for the preaching of the truth, though there are so many adversaries. The bread cast even on these troubled waters may be found after many days. God's word will not return unto Him void, but will accomplish that for which He has sent it forth.

Methodist Protestants. A letter from Mississippi, says: "Methodist Protestants have never had greater cause for rejoicing than at present. Our circuits and missions are well supplied with ministerial laborers, and both ministers and members seem to be in fine spirits."

Family Circle.

The Wife's Influence on her Husband's Fortune. A woman has her husband's fortunes in her power, because she may, or she may not, as she pleases, conform to his circumstances. This is her first duty, and ought to be her pride. No passion for luxury or display ought for a moment tempt her to deviate in the least degree from this line of conduct. Any other course is wretchedness itself, and inevitably leads to ruin. Nothing can be more miserable than the struggle to keep up appearance. If it would succeed it would cost more than it is worth; as it never can, its failure involves the deepest mortification. Some of the sublimest exhibitions of human virtue have been made by women, who have been precipitated suddenly from wealth and splendor to absolute want. Then a man's fortunes are in a manner in the hands of his wife, inasmuch as his own power of exertion depends on her. His moral strength is inconceivably increased by her sympathy, her counsel, her aid. She can aid him immensely by her relieving him of every care which she is capable of taking upon herself. If she be prompted by true affection and good sense, she will perceive when his spirit is borne down and overwhelmed. She, of all human beings, can best minister to its needs. If it be weary, in her assiduity it finds repose and refreshment. If it be harassed and worn to a morbid irritability, her gentle tones steal over it with a soothing more potent than the most exquisite music. If every enterprise be dead, and hope itself almost extinguished her patience and fortitude have the power to rekindle them in the heart, and he again goes forth to renew the encounter with the toils and troubles of life.

The Victorious Little Boy.

I had the following anecdote from a gentleman of veracity. A little boy in Connecticut, of remarkably serious mind and habits, was ordinarily employed about a mechanic's shop, where nearly all the hands were addicted to the common use of intoxicating liquors. The lad had imbibed temperance principles, and though often invited could never be induced to partake with any of the shop's crew. At length, his teacher in the Sunday school, in conversation on certain non-resistant texts of Scripture, had awakened his mind to that subject, and he very conscientiously strove his determination to try to live in accordance with this great Christian doctrine. Three or four of the harder drinkers in the shop, somewhat piqued at such precious piety and scrupulousness of conscience, resolved to humble the lad, or at least put his new notions to the test. They resolved to force a dram of rum down his throat by some means. Seizing an opportunity when he was left alone in the shop with themselves, they invited him to drink. He refused. They then told him they should compel him. He remained calm and unmoved. They threatened him with violence. Still he neither seemed angry nor attempted to escape, nor evinced the least disposition to yield; but insisted that it was wicked, and he could not do it. They then laid hold of him, a man at each arm, while the third held the bottle ready to force it into his mouth. Still their victim, remained meek and firm, declaring that he had never injured them, and never should, but that God would be his friend and protector, however they might abuse him. The man who held the fatal bottle, up to that moment resolute in his evil purpose, was so struck by the non-resisting dignity and innocence of the lad, that, as he afterwards confessed almost with tears, he actually felt unable to raise his hand.—Twice he assayed to lift the bottle, as he placed the nose of it in the child's mouth, but his arm refused to serve him. Not the least resistance was made in this stage of the proceeding otherwise than by a meek protesting look; yet the ringleader himself was overcome in his feelings, and gave over the attempt, declaring that he could not, and would not, injure such an innocent, conscientious, good-hearted boy. Such is moral power.—Such is the strength by which evil may, sometimes at least, be overcome with good.—American Paper.