

THE
MERCERSBURG REVIEW.

OCTOBER, 1858.

ART. I.—REFORMED SYNODS.

THE restoration of the Reformed, or—as it is commonly called—Presbyterian Church polity, is by many attributed to Calvin. This is correct only in part. The honor of having materially aided in its development belongs, no doubt, to him, but the first movement in that direction, and the first partial success in its restoration, belongs to Zwingli. Dr. Paul Henry, in his extensive and learned *Life of Calvin*, admits, that “the direction which Calvin took as a reformer, in matters of discipline, was that pointed out by Zwingli, and the opposite of that pursued by Luther.”*

Our present inquiry has reference to the rise and history of Synods and other ecclesiastical judicatories in the Reformed Church.

The first Synod in the Reformed sense, growing out of the new order developed by the Reformation, was, beyond doubt, the one held at Berne, Feb. 13th, 1528, six days after the close of the Disputation of Berne, when the ten Theses were signed. It was called with a view “to ascertain the sentiments of the congregations, through their delegates, with regard to the Reformation.” Whether this was designed to be the first of a series of permanent and regular Synods does not appear, but this is most likely. On account of disturbances which broke out in the Highlands, 1528, and also the religious wars of 1529 and 1531, what is usually called the first Synod of Berne did not meet till the 9th of January, 1532, continuing till the 14th.

* Vol. I, p. 367.

ART. VII.—THE INFLUENCE OF THE EARLY CHURCH ON THE INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY.

HEATHENISM, even under its most enlightened form, has no idea whatever of the general and natural rights of men. The ancient republics of Greece and Rome consisted in the exclusive dominion of a minority over a hopelessly oppressed majority. Both the Greeks and Romans regarded only the free, i. e., the free-born rich and independent citizens as men in the full sense of the term, and denied this privilege to the foreigners, the laborers, the poor, and the slaves. They claimed the natural right to make war upon all foreign nations, without distinction of race, in order to subject them to their iron rule. Even with Cicero the foreigner and the enemy are synonymous terms. The barbarians were taken in thousands by the chance of war (above 100,000 in the Jewish war alone) and sold as cheap as horses. Besides, an active slave-trade was carried on, particularly in the Euxine, the eastern provinces, the coast of Africa, and Britain. It may be safely asserted that the greater part of mankind in the old Roman empire was reduced to a hopeless state of slavery, and to a half brutish level.

Attica numbered, according to Ctesicles, under the governorship of Demetrius the Phalerian (309 B. C.) 400,000 slaves, 10,000 foreigners, and only 21,000 free citizens. In Sparta the disproportion was still greater. As to the Roman empire, Gibbon estimates the number of slaves, under the reign of Claudius, at no less than one half of the entire population, i. e., about sixty millions.* But according to Robertson there were twice as many slaves as free citizens, and Blair† estimates over three slaves to one freeman, between the conquest of Greece (146 B. C.) and the reign of Alexander Severus (A. D. 222–235). The proportion was of course very different in the cities and in the rural districts.

* I. 52 ed. Milman, N. Y., 1850.

† In his work on Roman slavery, Edinb., 1833. p. 15.

Athænaeus, as quoted by Gibbon, (p. 51) boldly asserts that he knew very many (*παμπολλοι*) Romans who possessed, not for use, but ostentation, ten and even twenty thousand slaves. In a single palace at Rome four hundred slaves were maintained, and were all executed for not preventing their master's murder.† The legal condition of the slaves is thus described by Taylor on *Civil Law* :|| “Slaves were held *pro nullis, pro mortuis, pro quadrupedibus* ; nay, were in a much worse state than any cattle whatsoever. They had no head in the state, no name, no title, or register; they were not capable of being injured ; nor could they take by purchase or descent ; they had no heirs, and therefore could make no will ; they were not entitled to the rights and considerations of matrimony; and therefore had no relief in case of adultery ; nor were they proper objects of cognation or affinity, but of quasi-cognation only; they could be sold, transferred, or pawned, as goods or personal estate, for goods they were, and as such they were esteemed ; they might be tortured for evidence, punished at the discretion of their lord, and even put to death by his authority; together with many other civil incapacities which I have no room to enumerate.” Gibbon (p. 48) thinks that “against such internal enemies, whose desperate insurrections had more than once reduced the republic to the brink of destruction, the most severe regulations and the most cruel treatment seemed almost justifiable by the great law of self-preservation.” It is but just to remark, that the philosophers of the first and second century, Seneca, Pliny, and Plutarch, entertain much milder views on this subject than the older writers, and commend a humane treatment of the slaves; also that the Antonines improved their condition to some extent, and took the oft abused jurisdiction of life and death over the slaves out of private hands into those of the magistrates. But at that time Christian principles and sentiments already freely circulated throughout the empire, and exerted a silent influence even over the educated heathens. This unconscious atmospheric influ-

† Tacit. Annal. XIV. 43.

|| As quoted in Cooper's *Justinian*, p. 411.

ence, so to speak, is continually exerted by Christianity over the surrounding world, which without this would be far worse than it actually is.

This evil of slavery was so thoroughly interwoven with the entire domestic and public life of the heathen world, and so deliberately regarded, even by the greatest philosophers, Aristotle, for instance, as natural and indispensable, that the abolition of it seemed to belong among the impossible things.

Yet from the outset Christianity has labored for this end; not by impairing the right of property, not by outward violence, nor sudden revolution; this, under the circumstances, would only have made the evil worse; but by its moral power, by preaching the divine character and original unity of all men, their common redemption through Christ, the duty of brotherly love, and the true freedom of the spirit. It placed slaves and masters on the same footing of dependence on God and of freedom in God, the Father, Redeemer, and Judge of both. It conferred inward freedom even under outward bondage, and taught obedience to God and for the sake of God, even in the enjoyment of outward freedom. This moral and religious freedom must lead at last to the personal and civil liberty of the individual; since Christianity redeems not only the soul but the body also, and the process of regeneration ends in the resurrection and glorification of the entire natural world.

In the early Church, however, the abolition of slavery, save in isolated cases of manumission, was utterly out of question, considering only the enormous number of the slaves. The question was not agitated at all, and hardly referred to by the fathers. From this an abolitionist of the modern stamp would at once be disposed to infer that the early Church silently acquiesced in and sanctioned an institution which he honestly abhors as a fruitful source of innumerable evils. But such a conclusion and charge would be manifestly unfair and unjust. It must be remembered that it takes time to cure any evil of society, and that a gradual and silent cure is always the most safe and radical in the end. The world, at that time, was far from

ripe for such a step, as a general emancipation. The Church, in her persecuted condition, had as yet no influence at all over the machinery of the State and the civil legislation. And she was at that time so absorbed in the transcendent importance of the higher world and in her longing for the speedy return of the Lord, that she cared very little for any earthly freedom or temporal happiness. Hence Ignatius, in his epistle to Polycarp, counsels servants to serve only the more zealously to the glory of the Lord, that they may receive from God the higher freedom; and not to attempt to be redeemed at the expense of their Christian brethren, lest they be found slaves to their own caprice. From this we see that slaves, in whom faith awoke the sense of manly dignity and the desire of freedom, were accustomed to demand their redemption at the expense of the Church, as a right, and were thus liable to value the earthly freedom more than the spiritual. Hence the apostolic father's admonition, which seems to be rather inconsistent with the advice of St. Paul: "If thou mayest be free, use it rather; for he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman."* Tertullian declares the outward freedom worthless without the inward, without the ransom of the soul from the bondage of sin. "How can the world," says he, "make a servant free? All is mere show in the world, nothing truth. For the slave is already free, as a purchase of Christ; and the freedman is a servant of Christ. If thou takes the freedom which the world can give for true, thou hast thereby become again the servant of man, and hast lost the freedom of Christ, in that thou thinkest it bondage." Chrysostom, in the fourth century, was the first of the fathers to discuss the question of slavery at large in the spirit of the apostle Paul, and to recommend, though cautiously, a gradual emancipation.

But the church before Constantine labored already with great success to improve the intellectual and moral condition of the slaves, to adjust inwardly the inequality be-

* 1 Cor. vii. 21, 22.

tween slaves and masters, as the first and efficient step towards the final outward abolition of the evil, and to influence the public opinion even of the heathens, as may be seen in the milder view of a Seneca, Pliny, Plutarch, and the latter legislation concerning the treatment of this unfortunate class of men.

It is here to be considered, first of all, that Christianity spread freely among the slaves, except where they were so extremely rude as to be insensible to all higher impressions; and that they were not rarely the instruments of the conversion of their masters, especially of the women and children, whose training was frequently intrusted to them. Not a few slaves died martyrs, and were enrolled among the saints; Onesimus, for example, Eutychus, Victorinus, Maro, Nereus, Achilleus, Potamiaena, and others. An ancient tradition makes Onesimus, the slave of Philemon, bishop of Beroea, in Macedonia.* According to the account of the author of the "Philosophoumena" even a Roman bishop, Calixtus I., in the early part of the third century, was originally a slave. Celsus cast it up as a reproach to Christianity, that it let itself down so readily to slaves, fools, women, and children. But Origen justly saw an excellence of the new religion in this very fact, that it could raise this despised and, in the prevailing view, irreclaimable class of men to the level of moral purity and worth. If, then, converted slaves, with the full sense of their intellectual and religious superiority, still remained obedient to their heathen masters, and even served them more faithfully than before, resisting decidedly only their immoral demands (like Potamiaena, and other chaste women and virgins in the service of voluptuous masters),—they showed, in this very self-control, the best proof of their ripeness for civil freedom, and at the same time furnished the fairest memorial of that Christian faith, which raised the soul, in the enjoyment of sonship, with God and in the hope of the blessedness of heaven, above the suffer-

* According to the *Apost. Constitutions* VII. 46, St. Paul himself ordained and installed him as bishop over that congregation. But the *Roman Martyrologium* makes him successor of Timothy at Ephesus.

ings and the conflicts of earth. Euelpistes, a slave of the imperial household, who was carried with Justin Martyr to the tribunal of Rusticus, on being questioned concerning his condition, replied: "I am a slave of the emperor, but I am also a Christian, and have received liberty from Jesus Christ; by his grace I have the same hope as my brethren." Where the owners of the slaves themselves became Christians, the old relation virtually ceased: both came together to the table of the Lord, and felt themselves brethren of one family, in striking contrast with the condition of things among their heathen neighbors as expressed in the current proverb: "As many enemies as slaves."* That there actually were such cases of fraternal fellowship, like that which St. Paul recommended to Philemon, we have the testimony of Lactantius, at the end of our period, who writes in his *Institutes*, † no doubt from life: "Should any say: Are there not also among you poor and rich, servants and masters, distinctions among individuals? No; we call ourselves brethren for no other reason, than that we hold ourselves all equal. For since we measure everything human not by its outward appearance, but by its intrinsic value, we have, notwithstanding the difference of outward relations, no slaves, but we call them and consider them brethren in the Spirit and fellow-servants in religion." The same writer says: "God would have all men equal. ‡ . . . With him there is neither servant nor master. If he is the same Father to all, they are all with the same right free. So no one is poor before God, but he who is destitute of righteousness; no one rich, but he who is full of virtues."

Such views must lead us to presume, that even in this early period instances of actual manumission among Christian slave-owners were not rare. And we read, in fact, in

* Totidem esse hostes, quot servos.—Seneca, Ep. 47.

† Lib. v. c. 15 (ed. Fritzsche. Lips. 1842, p. 257).

‡ Inst. v. 14 (p. 257): Deus enim, qui homines generat et inspirat, omnes aequos, id est pares esse voluit; eandem conditionem vivendi omnibus posuit; omnes ad sapientiam genuit; omnibus immortalitatem spondit, nemo a beneficiis coelestibus segregatur. . . Nemo apud eum servus est, nemo dominus; si enim cunctis idem Pater est, aequo jure omnes liberi sumus.

the Acts of the martyrdom of the Roman bishop Alexander, that a Roman prefect, Hermas, converted by that bishop, in the reign of Trajan, received baptism at an Easter festival with his wife and children and twelve hundred and fifty slaves, and on this occasion gave all his slaves their freedom and munificent gifts besides.|| So in the martyrology of St. Sebastian, it is related that a wealthy Roman prefect, Chromatius, under Diocletian, on embracing Christianity,, emancipated fourteen hundred slaves, after having them baptized with himself, because their sonship with God put an end to their servitude to man.* In the beginning of the fourth century St. Cantius, Cadtianus, and Cantianilla, of an old Roman family, set all their slaves, seventy-three in number, at liberty, after they had received baptism.† These traditions may indeed be doubted as to the exact facts in the case; but they are nevertheless conclusive for our purpose as the exponents of the spirit which animated the Church at that time concerning the duty of Christian masters. It was felt that in a thoroughly Christianized society there can be no room for despotism on the one hand and slavery on the other. Since the third century the manumission became a solemn act, which took place in the presence of the clergy and the congregation. The master led the slave to the altar; there the document of emancipation was read, the minister pronounced the blessing, and the congregation received him as a free brother with equal rights and privileges. Constantine found his custom already established, and African councils of the fourth century requested the emperor to give it general force.

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* Acta Sanct. Ian. tom. ii. p. 275. † Acta Sanct. Maj. tom. vi. p. 777.

|| Acta Sanct. Boll. Maj. tom. i. p. 871.