

Domestic Religious Intelligence.

REMARKS ON THE STATES OF ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI.

Extracts of a Letter from Rev. E. HOLLISTER, published in the Christian Spectator.

The States of Illinois and Missouri lie between lat. 36° and 44° north, and lon. 87° and 94° west, being separated by the Mississippi River. The population of Illinois, according to the census of 1820, is 52,000, and of Missouri 66,607.

The first settlement in either of these States was made at Kaskaskia by French people from Canada, more than one hundred years ago. When the North-Western Territory came into the hands of the British Government in the year 1783, most of the wealthy people removed, the town greatly degenerated, and many elegant houses went to decay. Since it has been under the American Government it has greatly improved.

The next settlement worthy of notice was made at St. Louis in 1764, by Mr. Peter De Laclede Liguest. He made his establishment for the purposes of trade, having obtained of the French Authorities at New-Orleans the exclusive privilege of the Indian trade on the Missouri river. According to the census of 1820, St. Louis contains 4,123 inhabitants. It has three printing establishments, each issuing a weekly newspaper, 13 physicians, 27 attorneys and counsellors at law, and 46 mercantile establishments.

The population of these States is for the most part, American. The French population is confined principally to the villages. About one third of the inhabitants are French; of Kaskaskia, one half; and of some other villages, nearly all. Collected from different quarters, and bringing with them different opinions, feelings, and habits, the people have as yet no general character. The state of morals is generally better in the country than in the towns. The charge of profligacy and vice, which has been so often and so liberally made against them, does not belong to them as a people.

The French inhabitants are Catholics. They have churches in St. Louis, St. Charles, Portage, Des Sioux, Florissant, Carondelet, Des Moines, St. Genevieve, The Barrens, and New-Madrid, in Missouri; and Kaskaskia, Prairie Du Rocher, and Cahokia, in Illinois. There is a nunnery at Florissant, (which is, however, nothing more than a boarding school,) an ecclesiastical seminary at the Barrens, and a seminary in St. Louis, called the St. Louis College. This last is, under the direction of Bishop Du Bourg, and has 65 students. The Bishop has a very valuable library, containing about 8,000 volumes.

The most numerous denomination of Christians is that of the Methodists. There is also a considerable number of Baptists, and Cumberland Presbyterians. However we may regard the preachers of these sects on other accounts, they deserve much credit for their zeal and activity; for it must be acknowledged that they have penetrated, and preached the gospel, and disseminated vital piety and christian morality in regions where, but for them, little more would be known of christianity than the name. And although there is reason to lament their doctrinal errors, and often their extravagant proceedings, yet by their means Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

The Presbytery of Missouri, embracing within its limits the two States of which I am speaking, consists of 16 churches and 4 ministers. The Ministers are Rev. J. Mathews at the village of Louisiana, Rev. S. Giddings at St. Louis, Rev. C. S. Robinson at St. Charles, and Rev. Thomas Donnell at Bellevue. The latter is the only one who sustains the pastoral relation. Beside these, there are, not yet connected with the Presbytery, Mr. Lacy, a licentiate, residing in St. Louis county; Rev. J. Townsend at Edwardsville, and Rev. A. Williamson at Shoal Creek. Some of the churches are small. One has 54, and the largest has 90 members. To supply these churches, at least six more ministers are this moment needed; and then some of them would be supplied, as some are now, only for one half of the time. There are also certain districts in which churches are not yet established, where Presbyterian preachers are immediately wanted. To furnish any thing like a tolerable supply for the country, there must be ten more ministers at least.

A preacher is uniformly received with cordiality, and welcomed with many expressions of regard. His preaching is listened to with seriousness and solemnity, and the kindness of missionary societies acknowledged with gratitude. In several places I met with little companies of Christians, shut out from their once high and precious privileges, and doomed to a long and painful 'famine of the word of God'; they manifested the high value they set upon the preaching of the gospel, by going for the purpose of hearing it, ten and even 15 miles, in cold and unpleasant weather.

The German settlement in the county of Cape Girardeau, is worthy of notice. The settlement was commenced more than 20 years since by emigrants from North-Carolina. Leaving behind them their meeting-houses, and preachers, and schools, the consequences are such as might have been expected. I cannot describe them better than in the language of one of their members, "When we came here we had no preaching, no schools, and we almost forgot what we had learned; the deer were so plenty that we thought of little beside hunting them; and now we are all running wild, these wild woods about."

On one occasion, soon after I arrived in the settlement, I received six applications to preach in different neighborhoods around; one was in writing, signed by 34 of the inhabitants. The communication is as follows:—

"State of Missouri, Cape Girardeau Co. Aug. 5, 1821."

"To the Rev. the moderator and other members of the Presbytery of Missouri."

"We, your humble petitioners, living near the waters of Crooked Creek, being destitute of the Gospel preached amongst us in a way which we in our consciences think agreeable to the word of God, would humbly supplicate your reverend body for such supplies of preaching as God in his providence may put it in your power to give, as a number of us have been living in this country 8 or 10 years, and have not had the opportunity of hearing a gospel sermon preached without going 15 or 20 miles. And now, sir, your compliance will lay us under lasting obligations to pray that the pleasure of the Lord may prosper in your hands. And as we have not as yet any stated place of preaching, we would desire you to appoint the first sermon at Mr. John Hahn's on the main leading road near Crooked Creek; and we would conclude by wishing all grace."

Such was the petition, or, in the expressive language of the person who penned it, the supplication of these people, and it speaks volumes on the necessity of education and missionary societies. I need not say that I preached to them as much as

my arrangements would admit, and that the tendancy and conduct evinced that such a place for preaching was sincere. To other remote places still more remote, I was under the necessity of replying in the negative.

The population of these States and others, is annually increasing, the settlements extending, and the field for ministerial labor, of course, constantly widening. Society here may be said to be in its infancy; its character is not yet formed. But it is important to a member that it is forming. The object of the west is not like that of the pilots of Plymouth, the enjoyment of their religious principles. They carry along with them the wardrobe, their furniture and utensils—but in the ordinances of the Gospel; in many instances, not even the Bible. The settlement of ministers properly qualified, would have an important influence upon the character and condition of the community with respect to knowledge, morals, and religion for ages and centuries to come. And on the other hand, let those regions be neglected for a few years only, and if efforts to reclaim them do not become hopeless, they will at least require labor augmented a hundred fold. Neglect your garden but for a few weeks in the month of June and the rain and the sunshine will nourish luxuriant weeds. Neglect your children in their infancy and youth, and they will grow up around you ignorant and vicious. So neglect the western settlements of our country—they will extend widely, will become flourishing like our own beloved New-England, will increase perhaps beyond our expectations, in wealth and importance; but ignorance and infidelity and vice, will extend as widely, and grow with equal rapidity, and to a towering height. The village which now consists of a few log cabins will become a city with its thousands of people, its mansions and balls, its billiard rooms and its theatre; but no spire will be even pointing to the skies, and no "church going bell" sound its summons to the worship of God. The prairie, clothed with verdure and adorned with flowers, will be transformed by the hand of industry to still lovelier scenery; but the moral condition of the people will present, in striking contrast, a scene of barrenness and desolation. Darkness, more terrible than that which God sent as a judgment upon Egypt, will brood over these wide-spreading regions, and the dark king of hell triumphantly wave the sceptre of his dominion over the reprobate population.

Is such to be the fate of a country as lovely in nature as was ever warmed by the sun? I can not believe it.

But what is to be done? How are the western settlements to be supplied with preachers? I answer, some can receive a support from the congregations. There are many wealthy people, especially in the villages, and they are not only able but disposed to contribute liberally for preaching. In St. Louis, a few years since, when an unsuccessful attempt was made to obtain a minister, fifteen hundred dollars were subscribed for his support. In one village in Illinois, and when the pressure of the times was most severely felt, four hundred dollars were subscribed, and in another eight hundred, for the support of a minister. These facts completely refute the insinuation which has been made, that the desires and the efforts of the people do not correspond with their means. A minister of suitable qualifications, preaching to two or three congregations, would receive a competent support. There are also some few places in the country, where a minister might easily be supported, chiefly by contributions from the people, of the various productions of the soil.

There are other places where a minister might support himself by teaching a school. Some who have good health and active habits may adopt this plan; and by instructing youth as well as preaching, may be greatly useful. It seems desirable, however, that where there is such a demand for the labors of ministers, they should devote themselves wholly to their peculiar work.

And there are other places in which, at present, little can be expected to be done for the support of ministers. In some, half a support would be needed from some Missionary Society; and in others, nearly a full support.

In behalf of the destitute, I would appeal then, to Christians, & to ministers—in behalf of those who have begged with tears that I would endeavor to obtain ministers for them. Ministers can go, they can encounter difficulties, can sacrifice the feelings of human nature on the altar of duty; and the Christian community at large can do something—can do more than they yet have done to aid the destitute. My brethren, will you leave the little churches just planted, to wither and die, the hours of worship to go to decay, the children and youth to grow up in all the wildness of their native forests, ignorant and profligate? Will you bid the children of God hang their harps upon the willows, and down by the rivers in the solitude and gloom of their banishment, and weep when they remember Zion? Ah! What do I seem to hear wafted by the western breeze from afar? Is it the song of gratitude and joy, is it the sweet harmony of the people of God in the far distant regions of the West? Hark! The accents swell upon the ear. I can distinguish the sounds as they flow, plaintive and mournful,—they come from the soul; "For shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Once we enjoyed the ordinances of the Gospel in the land of our fathers; the words of peace and life flowed sweetly from the lips of the messenger of God; our devotions ascended in union to the throne of mercy, and the Redeemer was in the midst of us to bless us. Happy days!—but they are gone—never to return." Brethren, shall it be so?