

The Persecuted Learned

THOSE who have laboured most zealously to instruct mankind have been those who have suffered most from ignorance; and the discoverers of new arts and sciences, have hardly ever lived to see them accepted by the world. With a noble perception of his own genius, Lord Bacon, in his prophetic will, thus expresses himself: "For my name and memory, I leave it to men's charitable speeches, and to foreign nations, and the next ages." Before the times of Galileo and Harvey the world believed in the stagnation of the blood, and the diurnal immoveability of the earth; and for denying these the one was persecuted and the other ridiculed.

The intelligence and the virtue of Socrates were punished with death. Anaxagoras, when he attempted to propagate a just notion of the Supreme Being, was dragged to prison. Aristotle, after a long series of persecution, swallowed poison. Heraclitus, tormented by his countrymen, broke off all intercourse with men. The great geometricians and chymists, as Gerbert, Roger Bacon, and others, were abhorred as magicians. Pope Gerbert, as Bishop Otho gravely relates, obtained the pontificate by having given himself up entirely to the devil: others suspected him too of holding an in-

tercourse with demons; but this was indeed a devilish age!

Virgilius, Bishop of Saltzburg, having asserted that there existed antipodes, the archbishop of Mentz declared him a heretic, and consigned him to the flames; and the Abbot Trithemius, who was fond of improving steganography, or the art of secret writing, having published several curious works on this subject, they were condemned, as works full of diabolical mysteries; and Frederick II., Elector Palatine, ordered Trithemius's original work, which was in his library, to be publicly burnt.

Galileo was condemned at Rome publicly to disavow sentiments, the truth of which must have been to him abundantly manifest. "Are these then my judges?" he exclaimed in retiring from the inquisitors, whose ignorance astonished him. He was imprisoned, and visited by Milton, who tells us he was then *poor* and *old*. The confessor of his widow, taking advantage of her piety, perused the mss. of this great philosopher, and destroyed such as in his *judgement* were not fit to be known to the world.

Gabriel Naudé, in his apology for those great men

who have been accused of magic, has recorded a melancholy number of the most eminent scholars, who have found, that to have been successful in their studies was a success which harassed them with continued persecution, a prison, or a grave!

Cornelius Agrippa was compelled to fly his country, and the enjoyment of a large income, merely for having displayed a few philosophical experiments, which now every schoolboy can perform; but more particularly having attacked the then prevailing opinion, that St. Anne had three husbands, he was so violently persecuted, that he was obliged to fly from place to place. The people beheld him as an object of horror, and not unfrequently, when he walked, he found the streets empty at his approach. He died in an hospital.

In those times, it was a common opinion to suspect every great man of an intercourse with some familiar spirit. The favourite black dog of Agrippa was supposed to be a demon. When Urban Grandier, another victim to the age, was led to the stake, a large fly settled on his head: a monk, who had heard that Beelzebub signifies in Hebrew the God of Flies, reported that he saw this spirit come to take possession of him. Mr. De Langear, a French minister, who employed many spies, was frequently accused of diabolical communication.

Sixtus the Fifth, Marechal Faber, Roger Bacon, Cæsar Borgia, his son Alexander VI. and others, like Socrates, had their diabolical attendant.

Cardan was believed to be a magician. The fact is, that he was for his time a very able naturalist; and he who happened to know something of the arcana of nature was immediately suspected of magic. Even the learned themselves, who had not applied to natural philosophy, seem to have acted with the same feelings as the most ignorant; for when Albert, usually, called the Great, an epithet he owed to his name *De Groot*, constructed a curious piece of mechanism, which sent forth distinct vocal sounds, Thomas Aquinas was so much terrified at it, that he struck it with his staff, and, to the mortification of Albert, annihilated the curious labour of thirty years.

Petrarch was less desirous of the laurel for the honour, than for the hope of being sheltered by it from the thunder of the priests, by whom both he and his brother poets were continually threatened. They could not imagine a poet, without supposing him to hold an intercourse with some demon. This was, as Abbé Resnel observes, having a most exalted idea of poetry, though a very bad one of poets. An anti-poetic Dominican was notorious for persecuting all verse-makers; whose

power he attributed to the effects of *heresy*, and *magic*. The lights of philosophy have dispersed all these accusations of magic, and have shown a dreadful chain of perjuries and conspiracies.

Descartes was horribly persecuted in Holland, when he first published his opinions. Voetius, a bigot of great influence at Utrecht, accused him of atheism, and had even projected in his mind to have this philosopher burnt at Utrecht in an extraordinary fire, which, kindled on an eminence, might be observed by the seven provinces, Mr. Hallam has observed, that “the ordeal of fire was the great purifier of books and men.” This persecution of science and genius lasted till the close of the seventeenth century.

“If the metaphysician stood a chance of being burnt as a heretic, the natural philosopher was not in less jeopardy as a magician,” is an observation of the same writer, which sums up the whole.