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INFANT SALVATION

IN ITS RELATION TO

Infant Depravity, Infant Regeneration

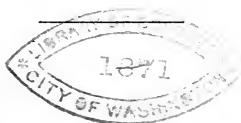
AND

INFANT BAPTISM.

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INFANT SALVATION

IN ITS RELATION TO

INFANT BAPTISM.

THE question of the relation which infants and young children sustain to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to His work of redemption, is not a question of merely abstract or speculative interest. It has important practical bearings. Infants and young children form a large portion of the membership of Christian families. They have natural claims to attention. Their claims to consideration upon spiritual grounds, however, are vastly stronger than those based upon their merely natural relations. If it be not only allowable, but right, that parents, and especially

W. E. H. 19 N. 40

The subject a practical one.

Christian parents, should feel due concern for the future bodily and temporal welfare of their children, how much more so that they should feel concerned for the spiritual and eternal welfare of those children. If it be reasonable and proper that Christian parents should inquire, with some anxiety, after encouraging grounds of hope, that their children, if spared to reach maturer years, will have a happy and peaceful pilgrimage through this life, how much more reasonable and proper, that they should earnestly ask after some satisfactory basis of faith, that the highest interests of those children are secured for the life to come.

Little children are most frail and tender plants in the family nursery. The fearful law of death, to which they seem peculiarly liable, makes sad havoc among

Children are frail treasures.

them. How many of these tender plants are annually blighted in the blade! But very few Christian families are permitted to escape this blight. There are few parents who have not wept bitter tears over some confined treasure; few who have not bent in the anguish of unutterable grief over some precious little grave.

And can these bereaved Jacobs, and these disconsolate Rachels be unconcerned about the destiny of their beloved children beyond the grave? During the first days of their deep affliction, they may indeed not be able to do anything but mourn, and cry out: "Oh! my child, my child, would God I had died for thee." But the bitterness of this sorrow will gradually yield to calmer grief. Smitten nature will revive somewhat from the stunning effect of the stroke which has laid a beloved

child low in the dust. Chastened reflections will succeed to their passionate distress. They will begin more and more to remember that the infant of which the Lord bereaved them, had an immortal as well as mortal part; that it was not merely the "frail fleeting comfort of an hour," but possessed a spirit on which the icy, palsying hand of death could not be laid. And they will ask: whither has that spirit fled? Where does it now abide?

Now it is certain that *nature* and *reason* shed no more light upon the sepulchres of departed children, than upon those of departed adults. Some stronger ground of consolation is needed, therefore, with regard to the fate of departed infants, than mere natural hopes, and rational probabilities afford. Reflecting

What becomes of those who die?

Christians cannot be satisfied with *taking it for granted*, merely, that “all is well” with the little ones whom the “Lord hath taken away.” Especially void of comfort will such an assumption be, when it is seen to come in conflict with some plain and universally admitted doctrines of the Holy Scriptures and of Evangelical Christianity.

Are little children, who die in their infancy, saved in heaven? If we hope and believe that they are thus saved, upon what foundation do this hope and faith rest? How are they saved? And if we have good reasons for hoping and believing that salvation has been provided for them also, are they not entitled to the divinely appointed sign and seal of such salvation, that is Baptism? Is it not the privilege and the duty, therefore, of

Certain grounds of hope needed.

Christian parents to have their children baptized?

Assuredly these questions do not involve merely speculative and unprofitable abstractions! What should enlist the deepest anxieties of believers, whom God has given to feel the sweet solitudes of parental hearts, if not such inquiries as these? If, therefore, any of us have hitherto been contented with vague opinions, and general hopes having no certain Scriptural foundation, let us dismiss this unnatural indifference, and ascertain the answers given by the Word of God, to the above and kindred questions.

The proper consideration of this subject will require us to ascertain what the Sacred Scriptures teach upon the following points: 1. *Infant Depravity.* 2. *The*

necessity of Infant Regeneration. 3. *Infant Salvation by Christ.* 4. *Infant Baptism.*

§ 1.—*Infant Depravity.*

The first point demanding attention relates to the moral character and spiritual state of children by nature. If they are morally free from guilt, and spiritually pure, they of course do not need the intervention of Divine grace. The grace and the mercy of God, in Christ, are for such only as are under condemnation through the defilement of sin. If our young children are not tainted with this defilement, they are fit for heaven without the application of that mercy and grace. There would then be no room for regeneration in their case. For of what advantage would regeneration be to those who were already spotless and pure?

If not depraved they need no grace.

There would be no reason for bringing them to Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;" but on the above supposition children are not, as infants, implicated in the sin of the world.

In this case, likewise, there would be no propriety in baptizing them. For Baptism is a Gospel sacrament. But a sacrament is a sign and a seal of the blessings provided for our lost and condemned race, in the covenant of redemption. If, therefore, our children are not lost and condemned with the race out of which they have sprung, and to which by birth they belong, there would be no propriety in applying to them this sacramental sign and seal. If they have not the plague-spot on them, why wash them in the laver of regeneration,

If pure by nature, they need not our prayers.

the significant symbol of efficacious cleansing by the blood of Christ? Their Baptism, under such circumstances, would be no better than a sacrilegious farce.

Nay, we would then be compelled to go still further than this. If infants do not share the penalties of sin incurred by our apostate race, they cannot be proper subjects for any spiritual concern. They are then placed not only above the need of our sacraments, but above the need of our supplications, excepting as we might pray the Lord to bestow desirable temporal blessings upon them, or entreat Him to save them from prospective guilt and future spiritual death. What else could He do for them? They would not need His grace; for grace is for the guilty and the lost, neither of which they would be, on the present assumption. For what-

Infant depravity practically ignored,

ever other purpose, therefore, parents might present their infant children before the Lord, they could not consistently hold them up to His promised compassion in Jesus Christ.

We may be told, however, that statements like these are wholly superfluous: that all evangelical Christians hold the doctrine that children are by nature in a sinful and lost condition. To this I reply that although this doctrine may be professedly held by all evangelical Christian parents, there are many who seem to have no deep convictions of its solemn truth. The doctrine may stand in the letter of their creed, but it does not live in the actual faith of their hearts. It has become practically obsolete, and seems to be gradually passing away with some other antiquated truths, for which the en-

Although confessed in hymns.

lightened reason of the present age is losing all taste and patience. True the doctrine is still permitted to retain its place in our Hymn books; and out of respect for the departed fathers who put it there, some old-fashioned congregations may like, occasionally to sing :

“ Conceived in sin ? O wretched state !
Before we draw our breath,
The first young pulse begins to beat
Depravity and death.

But how many, think you, reflect upon the fearful import of the sentiment thus strongly expressed? We all know how easy it becomes, alas ! both to sing and to pray what, nevertheless, is not really believed or truly felt. Especially do we know that religious poetry, and Church psalmody, are supposed to exercise the common license of all poetry, and express

The language of hymns and creeds often a dead letter.

Scripture facts and truths in strong figurative language, which requires to be considerably softened down, when converted into simple prose. The high tone still maintained in our good old orthodox hymns, therefore, cannot be taken as a fair index of the belief, in regard to this doctrine, now actually prevalent among many evangelical Christians. In spite of creeds, and of hymns, infants are considered as being by nature, dear, innocent, and pure as the fresh blown violet of the meadow, or the unsullied snow upon the mountain top.

A painful proof of this is certainly afforded by the growing indifference of Christian parents, such I mean as belong to Churches which maintain Infant Baptism, to the baptism of their children. Statistics have been published recently, which

The neglect of Baptism proves this.

exhibit a state of things well calculated to grieve and alarm those who have any zeal for one of the plainest doctrines of the Bible, and that a doctrine upon the maintenance of which depends in a great measure, our appreciation of the atonement by Jesus Christ.

In itself, the neglect of so explicitly enjoined an institution as Baptism is bad enough. But the evil assumes an aggravated form, when it becomes apparent that the sealing sacrament is neglected, because the truth and fact it symbolizes and seals are ignored. It is because infants are thought to be somehow released from innate sin, sure of salvation, even independently of the Gospel plan of salvation, that it is held to be practically unimportant, or at least unessential, whether they be baptized or not. And *the real*

Deep convictions upon the subject needed.

ground of this persuasion, that they are sure of being saved, even independently of the Gospel plan of salvation, is *the virtual repudiation of the doctrine of the total depravity of little children, by nature.* For if Christian parents were deeply convinced that their children have by nature a moral character which disqualifies them for the presence of God, and the fellowship of angels and saints in heaven, and renders them liable to the penalty of eternal death, they would be equally convinced that those children must be brought into actual participation in the redemption of Jesus Christ, in order to secure the one and to escape the other. And if they were fully convinced of this, they would not esteem it so indifferent a matter, whether those children received, or whether they did not receive, the sign and seal of that redemption.

If now we turn to the Word of God to have our practical errors upon this subject corrected, and any existing doubts in reference to it removed, we shall find that it teaches the doctrine of Infant Depravity, and the consequent liability of all infants by nature, to the extreme penalties of sin, in the strongest and most explicit terms. It teaches the doctrine by direct statements of it, and by obvious and unavoidable implications.

It is taught by positive declarations to this effect. Mankind are said to be "shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin." In view of this prevailing native depravity, Job asks: "What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" (Job xv. 14.) We are furthermore told, that "The wicked

More direct proofs.

are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born." And as a corroborative reason for this, our Lord declares, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Hence all are represented as being abominable; all as having gone aside and become filthy in the sight of God. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

With such declarations before their eyes, all evangelical Churches agree in laying down the doctrine of native depravity in their respective creeds or confessions of faith, and thus nominally assenting to its truth. Even those denominations which virtually neutralize the doctrine, by rejecting the ordinance which primarily holds in connection with man's total depravity by nature, and involves the symbolical confession of it,

The doctrine taught by implication.

still strive to keep so far within the limits of orthodoxy, as to avow belief in that depravity.

In addition to these direct and positive teachings of the Sacred Scriptures upon this subject, we find them abounding in passages which teach the doctrine by necessary implication. All men are said to die in Adam: "Death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." The doctrine is a necessary consequence of the fall of our first parents. If the root is unholy, the branches must be so too. Adam beget Seth in his own likeness. This, however, was now the likeness of fallen Adam, not of man as made originally in the image of God.

Those Scriptures, also, which teach that mankind are *universally* sinful, prove the natural corruptness and sinfulness of

Proven by their liability to bodily ills.

children. The human heart is declared, without any exception, to be "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." All men are represented as being, by nature, possessed of that "carnal mind which is enmity against God." All, alike, therefore, are called "children of wrath." Wherefore, judged by divine law, "every mouth is stopped, and all the world is become guilty before God."

In further evidence of this doctrine, we have the sad fact of the constant liability of little children to the bodily sufferings and temporal evils entailed upon the human race through sin. None are subject to these evils but those who, in some way, participate in the occasion or the cause of them. If children had no corrupt natures; if they were not in any way implicated in the guilt and penal-

By their subjection to sore diseases.

ties of the apostacy of the race, they would not be involved in the physical and the temporal miseries with which that apostacy has flooded the world. It is because the moral character of sinful parents is inherited by their children, that they also fall heirs to the temporal penalties of sin. Whatever cheering prospects the Gospel may open up to our view, regarding the destiny of these children in the world to come, here in this life we actually see them constantly subjected to all the woes incident to our present state, in consequence of the prevalence of sin. Diseases in their most painful and distressing forms rack and emaciate their feeble frames. Burning fevers, loathsome sores, devouring plagues consume them. Many bring diseases and wretched deformities with them into the

Physical sufferings the penalty of sin.

world, as it were only to wail and groan under them for a brief period, and then to pass down to the place of the dead. Their *bodies*, even like those of the beloved followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, are not put beyond the reach of such physical woes, by any gracious provision which may be otherwise made for them.

The inference is obvious. Such physical evils only follow in the track of moral evil. If the soul is by nature pure and uncorrupt, the body it inhabits will also be pure and uncorrupt. And such a body would be beyond the reach of disease so long as its indwelling spirit would retain its purity. Where there is no moral depravity, there will be no physical disorders or sufferings. It is only through moral corruption that men become liable to bodily corruption.

Their death proves their native depravity.

“Death,” physical or bodily death, as well as spiritual death, “is the wages of sin.” Death, therefore, and of course all those diseases and sufferings which lead to death, come upon us, upon all of us, whether we be infants or adults, because of sin. There would be nothing in the body on which disease and death could fasten their grasp, but for its union with a depraved soul, a corrupt nature.

Arguing, therefore, from the effect to the cause, as we certainly may and must in this case, we must feel compelled to adopt the conclusion, that our children are by nature morally depraved. The seed of all iniquity is born with them. They bring with them into the world hearts in which the germs of all bad appetites and passions lie latently imbedded. And, alas! how soon this seed

Another proof.

sprouts out and shows itself in the various tempers which even very young children are found to display!

One more proof of this mournful truth may be named. It is furnished by the fact, that all young children who live to reach maturity, grow up to be actual transgressors. No mere man ever lived, who always did what was perfectly just, and never sinned. No mere man ever lived, who did not, in his natural state, show a constant and predominant bias to evil, and disinclination to good. The carnal mind has uniformly shown itself to be inimical to holiness. Even the children of the most pious and exemplary parents do not form exceptions to this rule. Whatever modifying and restraining influences the gracious character of godly ancestors may exert upon their

All who reach maturity betray depraved natures.

posterity, those influences have never been found a sufficient antidote to the inherited poison of sin. Now, there is but one rational explanation of this indisputable fact. If all men, everywhere, and at all times, have become actual sinners, there must be something radically wrong in their very natures; they must all be naturally corrupt. The fruits are bad because the trees are bad. The waters are bitter because the fountains are bitter. They all sin because they are all sinful. For it is certainly just to conclude, that if all who grow up to maturity betray such natural corruptness, this evil must be so inherent in human nature itself, that all the descendants of Adam must be defiled by it. It would be absurd to suppose that only little children who may be cut off

Why the doctrine has been proven.

in their early days, form an exception to the rule. In this view of the case, therefore, we find another corroboration of the doctrine of infant depravity.

It will hardly be necessary to add, that I have not dwelt at such length upon this painful theme, merely for the purpose of demonstrating a doctrine. As already intimated, a more practical consideration has prompted me to adopt this course. It is because clear and strong convictions of this truth are necessary, before it can be duly realized, that all children must be saved by grace, if saved at all, that the direct and implied arguments of Scripture and experience have been so minutely detailed. Certainly, if the Word of God teaches the doctrine, we should be willing to

study and receive it; and if the clear perception and belief of the doctrine are requisite to prepare our minds and hearts to receive other essential doctrines, and especially to enable us to appropriate the precious consolations which the Gospel furnishes to Christian parents who may be bereft of their children, we should be glad to attain to such a perception and belief.

§ 2.—*Infant Regeneration.*

There may be those, even among professedly evangelical Christians, who will startle at the very expression: "*Infant Regeneration.*" And, indeed, all who reject Infant Baptism, or cherish doubts in reference to its importance, will be predisposed to doubt or deny the neces-

Its necessity often doubted.

sity of Infant Regeneration. The two doctrines seem to belong together, and so belong together as to be inseparable. One of the main popular objections to the baptism of little children is, that little children are not susceptible of faith, or of any spiritual operations, and therefore cannot be fit subjects of such an ordinance. What does a babe know of God, of Jesus Christ, of sin, of salvation, of the Church, of the Sacraments? Why then baptize such a babe into Jesus Christ?

All this, of course, sounds very plausible. It seems so evident and reasonable, that it may be thought wholly unanswerable. But how easy to glide over from such views of Infant Baptism, to similar views and feelings in regard to Infant Regeneration! Why should a little babe

“How can a babe be regenerated?”

need to be born again? How can it be born again? To be regenerated requires that human nature be renewed; that what is born of the flesh be re-born of the Spirit; that the soul which, by its first birth in Adam, is under condemnation, be set free from that condemnation by a second birth in Jesus Christ. But the objectors and the doubting ask: How can an unconscious babe undergo any such radical change as this? What does it know of its sinfulness and condemnation in the first Adam? What can it do towards securing the renewal of its nature in the second Adam? And why, then, should such a renewal be thought necessary in its case?

No doubt many who have hitherto been rejecting Infant Baptism would be prepared to say,—If it be proven to us that

Hence their Baptism is thought superfluous.

little children can and must be born again, our chief difficulty in the way of their Baptism will be removed. If we can be persuaded that they need the substance we shall no longer object to their receiving the sign and the seal of that substance. Let such persons calmly and candidly follow us in the statements which shall presently follow, and we feel confident that they will be convinced of the truth of the doctrine now under consideration.

I affirm, and shall prove, the necessity of Infant Regeneration, in order to infant salvation.

Let it be distinctly noticed, however, that it is of their *regeneration*, not of their *conversion* that this necessity is affirmed. These two terms are often confounded, as though they meant precisely

Regeneration not conversion.

the same thing. And yet there is a very essential difference between them. Regeneration is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit on the soul of man. In it man is passive. Whatever an adult sinner may do, through the grace of God, in the way of praying for the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit, and of using means favorable to his regeneration, the act itself must be performed by God, as really as that of a man's first creation.

This fact is clearly indicated by the Sacred Scriptures. They nowhere intimate that a man can in any way regenerate himself, but always speak of his regeneration as being divinely wrought in him. It is called a "being born of water and of the Spirit;" a "being created in Christ Jesus unto good works." The new man is "created after God in righteous-

Regeneration God's work alone.

ness and true holiness." The washing of regeneration is "by the renewing of the Holy Ghost." It is therefore only God who can "circumcise our hearts and the hearts of our seed, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, that we may live." Only the power of Almighty grace can "create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit" within man. Wherefore it is said of the true children of God: "Of His own will begat He us, with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures."

In regard to man's *conversion*, on the other hand, it is different. *Conversion* is that free and voluntary act of the penitent sinner by which, with the help of divine grace, he renounces and turns from sin and unrighteousness, as being offen-

Conversion explained.

sive to God, and engages to lead a holy life. In conversion the awakened and penitent sinner, reflects for himself upon his past course and present state, grieves for himself over his sins, prays for himself for the pardon of his iniquities, resolves for himself truly to forsake those iniquities and to lead a new life, and strives for himself to do all this. For all these exercises of his mind and heart, he is of course indebted to the Spirit of God, whose warnings, entreaties, and invitations, have graciously and powerfully constrained him to feel, and pray, and resolve, and strive as he does. But still these several acts are his own, self-conscious, personal acts. As in regeneration he is passive, so in conversion he is active.

Should any question this distinction between regeneration and conversion, let

This distinction not new.

them compare those passages of Scripture which speak of the former with those which speak of the latter, and they will have their doubts dissipated. (See Isaiah lv. 1—7. Ezekiel xiv. 6. Ezekiel xviii. 30—32. Matthew iii. 2. Matthew iv. 17. Acts iii. 19. Acts viii. 22. Acts xxvi. 20. Revelation ii. 5.)

This distinction is carefully observed in all the evangelical confessions of faith. Thus in *Luther's* "Order of Salvation," it is said (under Questions 88 and 92,) that the Holy Spirit makes new creatures of men at their Baptism, referring especially to Baptism in infancy; whereas repentance and conversion are urged (Questions 2 and 107,) as the personal act of the convicted sinner.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* is still more

It is made in all evangelical creeds.

explicit in declaring that regeneration is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit. (Questions 8, 53 and 70,) whilst conversion is defined to consist on the one hand in a “sincere sorrow of heart, that we have provoked God by our sins, and more and more to hate and flee from them;” and on the other hand in “a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.”

In the Westminster Confession, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Presbyterian Churches, the same distinction is assumed and maintained. In “Effectual Calling,” as involving regeneration, man is represented as the “*passive*” subject of the enlightening and renewing grace of the Holy Ghost; whilst in “Repentance unto Life,” as compre-

Westminster Confession quoted.

hending conversion, “a sinner, out of the sight and sense, not only of his danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with Him, in all the ways of His commandments.” (Confession of Faith, Chapter X. Sections 1 and 2. Chapter XV. Section 2.)

These extracts are given without comment. They clearly show that in pressing a distinction between these two acts, nothing new has been advocated. Keeping this important distinction, therefore, in view, I maintain *the necessity of infant regeneration*, upon the following grounds:

Infant Regeneration necessary in consequence of total depravity.

In the *first* place it follows from the doctrine of the universal depravity of human nature. The same arguments which prove the reality of the one, impliedly demonstrate the necessity of the other. Assuredly no evangelical Christian will admit that a soul so corrupt as is the soul of every man by nature, is fit for heaven in spite of its corruptness. There must be an antecedent change in the moral character of such a soul in order to qualify it for the presence of a holy God, or for the enjoyment of a holy state. An unholy nature would no more bloom into holiness in the pure light of heaven, than a bad tree would yield good fruit simply by being subjected to a bright sun, a pure atmosphere and refreshing showers. The pride of Lucifer grew into rebellion under the holiest influ-

Unrenewed souls unfit for heaven.

ences of the celestial world. And if spirits by nature depraved, could by any means be translated to the holy habitations of the Lamb and His ransomed saints, the sacred influences of the place, alone, could not change their nature, or annul their depravity. It does not alter a leopard's spots to put it among lambs, much less would its ferocity be changed by such companionship.

If, consequently, we believe the doctrine of man's total depravity, as the Sacred Scriptures teach it; if we hold that it involves a corruption of the inner sources of man's feelings, and thoughts, and volitions, of his inmost life,—then we must also hold to the necessity of infant regeneration, in order to an infant's fitness for Heavenly services and enjoyments.

Another proof of this doctrine.

A *second* reason for maintaining this doctrine is furnished by the fact, that the only way of salvation for any of our race, is through a real and living union with the the Lord Jesus Christ. As it is only by being, naturally *in* the first Adam that we die, so it is only by being supernaturally *in* the second Adam that we can be made alive. In both cases, equally, there must be a living, actual union, in order to a real effect. But in order to such a real union with Jesus Christ, we must be "created in Christ Jesus unto good works." In other words we must be regenerated. Only they who have Christ for their life, will, when He appears, appear with Him in glory.

Or do we know of some other method of surmounting the difficulty? Are there two ways by which the sinful descendants

But one way of salvation.

of Adam can be delivered from the consequences of the fall, and restored to forfeited felicity? Is there one method adapted to the case of adults, and another method adapted to the case of infants and young children? If there were, then there would be two distinct classes of saved men in heaven. One class would consist of those redeemed through the atonement and life of the Lord Jesus Christ. The other class would be composed of such as stood under no special obligations to the Saviour for their inheritance of joy. And this class would include the multitudes of children that had died in their infancy. Whoever else in heaven would have crowns to cast at the Redeemer's feet, these little ones, saved in some other way than by that Redeemer's strong arm, would have no such offerings to bring be-

If Infants are not renewed in Christ they owe Him no praise.

fore Him. Whilst the one hundred and forty-four thousand, and thousands of thousands, would break forth into the harmonious chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and that redeemed us to God by His blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation," these infants in heaven might listen to the song with admiration, and wonder what all those high hallelujahs meant, but they could not join in the heavenly hymn, or swell the saintly anthem. *They* would not be arrayed in robes washed white in the blood of that Lamb, but would stand there decked in the garments of their own innocency, and adorned with their own inherent moral beauty.

It will not do to evade this point, as some have tried to evade it, by saying that we cannot tell how God may save

The doctrine not to be evaded.

little children. This is casting a shadow upon a portion of the Scriptures which the Lord has made most plain and intelligible to all. No truth could be more explicitly taught than this, that "there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," but the name of Christ. "I am the way," saith Jesus, "and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

We do know, therefore, for it has been most explicitly declared, that there is no way for little children to be saved but through Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of our lost race. We do know, likewise, that in order to be saved by Jesus Christ, they must be found in Christ, be quickened in their souls by Him, and have His atonement really applied to them. Of

The manner of their regeneration unknown.

the divine method of operation in effecting this, we may indeed be ignorant. But we are most certainly taught that the method graciously employed, is one in full harmony with all the other parts of the plan of redemption. So that in this view of the case again, we are brought to the same result as before, and are constrained to adopt the doctrine of the necessity of Infant Regeneration.

Can we need further proof? Then let us hear our Lord's declaration to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man (any one) be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." No one will question that this solemn truth was designed for universal application. This is set beyond dispute by the statement which follows in the sixth verse: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

Inference from John iii. 3.

Because all men are by nature carnal, being born of the flesh, all must be born again in order to their saving admission into the kingdom of heaven. And as children form no exception, in the one case, they can form none in the other. Unless, therefore, children also are regenerated, they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

That which is born of flesh is flesh,
And flesh it will remain;
Then marvel not that Jesus saith:
“Ye must be born again.”

This section of our subject may be appropriately closed with the following words of Scott: “Infants are as capable of regeneration, as grown persons; and there is ground to conclude, that all those who have not lived to commit actual transgressions, though they share in the

effects of the first Adam's offence, will also share in the blessing of the second Adam's gracious covenant, without their personal faith and obedience, but not without the regenerating influence of the Spirit of Christ."

Two points have been thus far settled : (1) The total depravity of children by nature ; (2) The necessity of their regeneration in order to their admission into heaven. We are now prepared to proceed to the third point in the outline.

§ 3.—*Infant Salvation.*

If what has already been advanced has received due consideration, we will be ready to take up this point, not merely as an onward step in the argument, but for the purpose of finding some grounds of hope against the mournful state, in

Sure grounds of hope desirable.

which the Holy Scriptures teach us our children lie by nature. Only let us take care not to rest here upon the false and deceptive grounds which mere reason or sentimentalism may hold out. A simple foothold upon the rock of divine grace in Jesus Christ, is infinitely more desirable than broad fields of such rubbish and quicksands, as carnal reason and depraved sentimental conceits may furnish.

No question can be raised in which Christian parents should feel more deeply concerned than in that regarding the provisions made under the Gospel, for the deliverance of their children from the misery in which they lie by nature, and for their obtaining an interest in the renewing grace of Jesus Christ. Who could be happy in personal covenant relation with God, whilst devoid of all comforting assurance that their children also

Infants cannot repent or believe.

had been admitted or might be received into such covenant relationship? As long as the children of a Christian family would be left lying in their natural state, we would have before us the sad spectacle of the infant portion of the household being helplessly, under God's displeasure against sin, whilst their believing parents would be enjoying God's favor. And if no other way were provided for our deliverance from the law of sin and death, than by personal repentance and personal faith,—as is maintained by some,—these children would have to continue in this wretched condition of exclusion from covenanted mercies, until they were old enough to repent of their sins, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ;—that is, ordinarily, until they reached their tenth or fifteenth year.

A mournful case.

This were, indeed, a most appalling spectacle. And just those parents would be most deeply distressed by it, who most cordially embraced those doctrines of the Word of God which have been already demonstrated, and who most sincerely and ardently feared and loved the Lord. Apply this view of the sad plight in which these young children would be placed, in some of its obvious details. Remember we are speaking of the case of truly Christian parents and their infant children. Look in upon them then, through the glasses which the opinion we are exposing puts before your eyes, and contemplate the scene. Those parents have learned to love and adore God in Christ as their chief good. Their purest joys and their holiest hopes are derived from their covenant relationship with the Redeemer. And for

them there could be no higher earthly happiness, than to know that their children also had a real and living share in that covenant. But they are told that they must dismiss all present hope of this; that their children, "conceived and born in sin," as they admit them to be, must remain in that condition for many years to come. That until they reach the age of sufficient discretion to know the nature of sin, to come under personal convictions of sin, to repent of and confess their sins, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they can have no personal part or lot in His redemption. They might be told, that if those children should perchance die in infancy, they would in all probability go to Heaven. But if spared in life, their natural corruptness would cleave to them like a leprosy, and be beyond the

Can Christian parents endure such thoughts?

possibility of eradication or cure during their moral and intellectual minority.

Must not thoughts like these fall like a milldew blight upon all the other joys of those parents? Can any affliction be conceived of, sorer than such an affliction would be? A Christian mother nursing an outcast infant alien, by nature a "child of wrath, even as others!" A Christian father cherishing and toiling for his own offspring, and yet compelled to regard that babe as being in all moral and spiritual respects an undeveloped heathen! Well might the constant and agonizing cry of these wretched parents be—"Oh! that our children might even now live before Thee!"

And yet Christian parents may become so entangled in a false theory of Christianity, and so prejudiced against what

Influence of prejudices.

they conceive to be false tendencies, that rather than embrace such cheering Gospel views of this whole case as are warranted by the Bible, they will persist in clinging to the dreary persuasion, that their children continue "in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity," until they give evidence of personal repentance and personal faith in Jesus Christ. This assertion is not made at random; neither have I drawn upon imagination for a strong case. I know that a persuasion like this is entertained, and have heard it freely expressed. And it is held and expressed, also, by those who, in other respects, may scout the doctrine of a limited application of the atonement. They believe that the grace of Christ Jesus is available in this life for all classes and characters of men,

Strange inconsistencies.

excepting only little children. There is no foul blot which the blood of Jesus may not wash out but the blot of original sin clinging to infants, so long as they remain in this present state of being. There is no vile and loathsome moral disease, which the Good Physician is not willing to cure, excepting the deeply-seated depravity with which all our children are born into the world. For the cure of this they and their parents must wait until the child is old enough to repent and believe for itself. Publicans and harlots, Mary Magdalens, and murderers may at once enter into the kingdom of heaven in this life, but even the infants of God's own redeemed people must be, for the time, shut out. There is no present grace for the children.

How such views can be entertained,

Natural reason against supernatural grace.

with the letter of the Gospel in their hands, and the free grace of the Gospel in their hearts, it is indeed difficult to conceive. It is true, the advocates of these views contend for them, *because they profess to be unable to understand by what method the grace of the Gospel can be made available for unconscious little children.* This objection might stand, if that divine grace did not, from first to last, transcend the comprehension of finite minds. Grace is supernatural and miraculous in all its arrangements and in all its operations. The "love of Christ passeth knowledge," in its original conception, in its scheme of mercy, and in the entire execution of that scheme. If no sinner would be saved until that sinner, or that sinner's friends could fully understand how God can be just, and

All grace incomprehensible in its operations.

yet justify the ungodly; how the eternal Son of God could enter into true and complete union with flesh and blood; how He could "become sin for us who knew no sin;" how the

"Spirit, like some heavenly wind,
Breathes on the sons of flesh,
New models all the carnal mind,
And forms the man afresh,"

we would all be hopelessly lost.

Grace, in its saving application to adult sinners, is not expected to be within the compass and grasp of the natural understanding of men. We are glad to believe that such sinners can be saved, and are saved, however unable we may be to fathom "the mystery of godliness," or explain the wonderful arrangements of the scheme which accomplishes their salvation.

Infants are as easily renewed as adults.

Why then press a special difficulty, upon this ground, in the case of young children? Is it harder, even to human conception, for Almighty love to apply the blood of the better covenant, with cleansing efficacy, to the soul of an infant, than to the soul of an adult? Can human reason descry any more insuperable hinderances in the way of the regeneration of a little child, than of the regeneration of a man?

Most gladly may we escape from these dreary mists of reason, into the cheering light which "the Revelation of Jesus Christ" sheds upon this important subject. It does not allow believers to grope in the dark, in regard to a question which, until it has been satisfactorily settled, must be uppermost in their thoughts. If, after receiving some sweet assurances of their

The Gospel scatters our doubts.

own pardon and reconciliation with God, through the atoning blood of the cross, they anxiously ask: and what shall become of these? it does not dismiss them with vague words, or rebuke them for prying curiosity. "Our Father in heaven," who deigns to employ an earthly parent's pity in illustration of His own diviner compassion, does not chide that parent's pity, when its object is the spiritual wretchedness, by nature, of beloved offspring. Our merciful Lord and Saviour, who derives from the strong natural affection and concern of sinful fathers and mothers for their children, an argument to prove our Heavenly Father's still greater readiness to "bestow the Holy Spirit on them that ask him," does not rebuke those parents when they exhibit affectionate concern to know

Methods and processes left unexplained.

what provisions have been made by the grace of God, to deliver their children from the bondage of sin, in which they were born, and to admit them to a saving participation in the covenant of redemption.

His Gospel may not fully display and explain the process by which those children are qualified for admission into that covenant, any more than it exhibits the process by which the dead son of the widow of Nain was brought to life again, or that by which the daughter of Jairus was restored to her parent's arms. But what matters it, if we are left in the dark in regard to Divine modes of operation. It is not the process, but the result which properly concerns us. Most probably, if the details of the process in such cases were laid out before us, we should not comprehend them. But should this keep

First proof.

us from rejoicing in the blessed result? The "man born blind" could not tell the captious and inquisitive Pharisees, by what divine means the Lord had restored him to sight. But "one thing he knew, that whereas he was blind, he then saw." This was enough to constrain him to believe in the Lord, and to worship Him. This was enough to fill his heart with thanksgiving, and his mouth with praise for the rest of his life.

What clear and comforting evidence then do the Holy Scriptures furnish us, that provision is made for the salvation of our children?

The first proof of this is found in the fact, that *in all God's covenant transactions with men, CHILDREN are included in the covenant with their parents.* This gracious peculiarity of God's dealings

In every Divine covenant, children are included.

with man, characterizes each dispensation. "That this was the case with regard to the first covenant made with Adam, in Paradise, is granted by all. And indeed the consequences of the violation of that covenant to all his posterity, furnish a standing and mournful testimony that it embraced them all. The covenant made with Noah, after the deluge, was, as to this point, of the same character. Its language was: "Behold, I establish my covenant with thee and *with thy seed.*" The covenant with Abraham was equally comprehensive, "Behold," says Jehovah, "my covenant is with thee. Behold, I establish my covenant with thee, and with thy seed after thee." The covenants of Sinai and of Moab, it is evident, also comprehended the children of the imme-

Hence the ancient sacrament of circumcision.

diate actors in the passing scenes, and attached to them, as well as to their fathers, an interest in the blessings or the curses, the promises or the threatenings, which those covenants respectively included. Accordingly, when Moses was about to take leave of the people, he addressed them as “standing before the Lord, their God, *with their little ones*, and their wives, to enter into covenant with the Lord, their God.” (Deut. xxix. 10—12.)*

And to preclude all doubt as to the reality and the efficacious workings of this covenant, in its application to the “little ones,” the representative (the male) children in every Israelitish family were to receive a sacramental confirmation of its verity, by their circumcision. Of the spiritual significancy of this Israel-

* Dr. Samuel Miller on Infant Baptism.

Even Gentile infants not shut out.

itish sacrament, we are expressly assured by the Apostle Paul, who designates it as a "sign and seal of faith."

Even Gentile strangers were not excluded from the blessing of this covenant of mercy. They too might be circumcised and allowed to eat of the passover. Nay, the adult stranger might not only be admitted to this great privilege himself, but was encouraged, and even obliged thereby, to have his children also circumcised, and thus introduced into covenant relationship with the God of Israel. So that if one of the surrounding heathen came to dwell among the Israelites, bringing his wife and children with him, and then avowed a desire to become an Israelite indeed, he was not only admitted himself, by the appointed sacramental rite, but *his minor sons* came in with him

This order not annulled under the Gospel.

by the same sacrament. (Exodus xii. 44-48.) In this respect there was one law for the home-born, and for the stranger.

That a provision like this would not be annulled, or even narrowed down in its application, but rather made more ample and comprehensive, under the dispensation of the New and Better Covenant, might be concluded, already, from the avowed universality of that covenant. Under the Gospel, all the national limitations and restrictions of the Mosaic economy were to be abrogated. The ancient ritual, and various ceremonial ordinances, which had so long stood as a wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles, were to be abolished, to be restored no more forever. The Gentiles, also, were now to be afforded an opportunity of reconciliation with God, every way as full and free

Earlier restrictions abolished.

as that which was offered to the Jews. Both, equally, were to "be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ, by the Gospel." There should no longer be any such differences as had, for wise and holy purposes, been previously made, between the Jew and the Greek. "The same Lord over all, would be rich (in mercy) unto all that would call upon Him."

All this must apply of course, to the *children* of Gentiles also. If the previous restrictions availed to the special advantage of the offspring of the Israelites, why should not the offspring of the Gentiles be supposed to share in the advantages guaranteed by the abolition of those restrictions? The whole tenor of the passages of Scripture just quoted forbids a contrary view. As under the former dis-

Free grace for all children.

penetration Gentile children were excluded with their parents, so under the Gospel they should be admitted together.

Such, we say, are the expectations awakened by the general character of the New Dispensation; and such are the convictions wrought upon our minds by the teachings of the Apostles concerning the fullness and freeness of the salvation by Jesus Christ. Are these expectations confirmed by any direct declarations, or special acts of our Lord or His Apostles? Do they, by word or by deed, strengthen our convictions, that under the Gospel, even more certainly and efficaciously than under the law, provision is made for the admission of children with their parents to covenant blessings? And do they warrant the belief that in all circumstances children dying in infancy are saved?

There can be no difficulty in answering these questions. The New Testament anticipates them with the most cheering and explicit statements. It teaches the doctrine of Infant Salvation through Jesus Christ by direct assertion. In other cases it simply assumes the truth of the doctrine, as it does that of many others, which are considered so obvious as to need no authoritative revelation of them. Then there are passages involving the doctrine by necessary implication or inference. Indeed there is hardly another doctrine to be named, which seems to me to be more plainly and unequivocally set forth than this doctrine.

It may be objected, it is true: Why then have not all Christians discovered it? Why are so many earnest and intelligent minds in difficulty or in doubt concerning

Causes of doubts on the subject.

it? I think all this may be readily explained.

These difficulties or doubts are, almost invariably, of a logical or a theological character. They may be traced, not to any ambiguity of the Sacred Scriptures upon the subject, or to any lack of clear revelations with reference to it, *but to the supposed impossibility of reconciling this doctrine with some other parts of a system of faith, held by those who are in doubt regarding Infant Salvation.* To some, the doctrine seems irreconcilable with the dogma of election or predestination. Others conceive that it comes in conflict with their views of baptismal grace or regeneration. Still others imagine, that the frequent implication of children in the temporal judgments visited upon their ungodly parents, affords

Difficulties stated.

analogical proof that those children must be involved, with their parents, in the future and eternal consequences of their sins. In each of these cases, the holding of the particular views named, unfits the mind for examining impartially anything that may be said in the Bible in favor of the certain salvation of infants. Those who believe in the doctrine of election may feel so fully persuaded of its truth, that they at once set aside every doctrine which does not appear to harmonize with it. In their opinion the doctrine of general Infant Salvation, is at variance with that of election, and therefore they conclude that it cannot be true. Any Scriptures adduced in support of it are viewed, and tested, unconsciously to themselves, perhaps, but really are tested, in the light of the other doctrine, and interpreted

False reasoning.

accordingly. They reason thus within themselves: "The Scriptures teach in plain and strong terms the doctrine of God's election of a certain number out of the human race to eternal life. This must apply to infants as well as to adults. Some infants, therefore, are elected, and saved; others are not elected, and lost. Consequently, as Scripture never contradicts itself, it cannot teach that *all* children who die in infancy are saved; it cannot teach the doctrine of general Infant Salvation."

This is the natural operation of such rigidly fixed and settled systems of doctrine, as attempt in a minute and mathematical way, to define every point so as allow of no room for the amendment or modification of the terms in which the doctrines are set forth in their creed.

Logical consistency a hard master.

But now suppose that those who may find themselves sorely embarrassed in this way, had no such systematic or theoretical difficulties to overcome. Suppose those who hold high Calvinistic views in regard to Divine predestination and election could see some way of reconciling general Infant Salvation with those views. Would it not be a new joy to their hearts to discover such a method of reconciliation? Would it not solve for them, what has long been one of the deepest and darkest mysteries of what they have hitherto been considering a part of the Divine economy?

And yet such a solution of the seeming mystery appears to be very near at hand. There is nothing in the doctrine of election itself, as we presume some may hold it, to forbid the belief that children dying

in infancy are, precisely, among the Lord's chosen ones. In the most emphatic sense He may thus set upon them the unmistakeable sign of their election. Their early, and as we often hear it said, their premature death, is God's way, in their case, of making their salvation sure. Satan, "the god of this world," seizes upon them as soon as they are born, and binds them as the born subjects of his dominion. He afflicts and torments them with manifold and grievous diseases and bodily sufferings. Already he seems to exult in his triumph over them, and to suppose that nothing shall be able to loosen his grasp upon them. But their Redeemer is mighty. He has otherwise ordained it. As the natural heirs of the inherent depravity and guiltiness of the race, He permits them to lie, for a little season, in

May not children dying young, be of the elect?

the anguish of physical sufferings. They too must "glorify God in the fires." But "their light affliction, which is but for a moment," shall result in "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." They may be required to illustrate how God can, "out of the mouth of babes and of sucklings, ordain strength." But having accomplished this Divine purpose, the Lord "will still the enemy and the avenger," foil his cruel designs, and gather the Lambs to their own Good Shepherd's bosom.

Now what is there in this view of the case, which at all conflicts with what may be believed to be the Bible doctrine of election? And even though that doctrine may be constructed according to the most exact logical principles, it may nevertheless, consistently allow all infants

Predestination and infants.

to be included in the sovereign scheme of redemption. Nay, it may not only allow it, but even require this view of the case. For election always involves, I suppose, a predestination to be conformed to the image of Christ. Now our Lord, speaking of little children, says, "of such are the kingdom of heaven," of which declaration more hereafter. But to be "of the the kingdom of heaven" necessarily involves some corresponding conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. According to the doctrine of election, therefore, even as the most rigid may hold it, little children dying in infancy belong to the number of the elect.

But let us lay aside all such contingent difficulties, and search the Scriptures for their explicit teaching of the doctrine of Infant Salvation, without permitting our-

Abide by the Scriptures.

selves to be hampered by fears that we we may run foul of other doctrines. If the Bible teaches Predestination, that doctrine is true, and must be embraced by us, whether it seem to be in conflict with other doctrines or not. If the Bible teaches Election, conditional or unconditional, that doctrine again is true, and commands our assent, whether we be able to harmonize it with other doctrines, or not. And if Infant Salvation be taught in the Sacred Scriptures, it is true, however much it may now seem to us to conflict with Predestination, Election, Baptismal Regeneration, the necessity of personal Repentance and Faith, or any other doctrine we may have learned from the Master's lips, or include in our creed. It may be very pleasant indeed to be able to put together a system of divinity,

Incongruities often more imaginary than real.

which shall have no seeming incongruities, or logical flaws. But it is every way better to believe what Jesus Christ teaches, even though we should be compelled, in our rationalizing perplexities, to ask: "how can these things be?" In all these cases of an apparent collision of doctrines, we may rest assured the real difficulty is in our own minds, or in our faulty apprehension of the truth, not in the doctrines themselves.

Among the many Scriptures bearing directly upon this subject, the first place must undoubtedly be assigned to the incident recorded in the Gospel of St. Matthew, xix. 13—15, and in the parallel passages of the Gospels of St. Mark, x. 13—16, and of St. Luke, xviii. 15—17. "*Then were there brought unto Him little children,*" (St. Mark calls them "young

children," St. Luke calls them "infants,") "*that he should put His hands upon them*" (St. Mark and St. Luke say "touch them,") "*and pray: and the disciples rebuked them,*" (St. Mark adds, "that brought them.") "*But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands upon them, and departed thence.*" St. Mark in his more graphic style, informs us, that when Jesus saw that His disciples rebuked those who carried or led the children, He was much displeas'd at it. And in full harmony with the other two Gospels, St. Luke completes the account by adding what is most natural in the circumstances: "But Jesus *called* them unto Him." How strongly the disciples' *rebuke*, and the Redeemer's *call*, are thus contrasted with each other!

The law of the Kingdom for children.

Familiar as this Gospel for little children is, and frequently as it may be quoted and dwelt upon, there is certainly reason for fearing that very many persons fail to apprehend the length and breadth of the love and grace which it guarantees to infants. Here, evidently, the law of the kingdom, in regard to children, is laid down in the most explicit terms, and confirmed by a most significant act. In one brief, comprehensive sentence, our Lord issues a commandment binding upon His Church for all subsequent ages, and extends an invitation of mercy to infants and young children of all future generations. He does not say, "Suffer *these* children to come unto Me;" but, in the most general terms which language affords: "Suffer children." There can be

The invitation general.

no serious dispute that the command was designed to have universal force.

Some persons may, indeed, say, that these infants were the children of Jewish parents, and, therefore, included already in the covenant of mercy, by circumcision. Hence it may be argued that our Lord's declaration applies only to children of this class. But this is a gratuitous assumption. It is not only unnecessary, but unwarranted by the circumstances, to suppose this. If the place where this incident occurred is considered, it will seem altogether more probable that the Saviour was then surrounded by a promiscuous multitude, composed of Jews and others. He was spending the winter months preceding the time of His crucifixion in the region of the Jordan, beyond Jericho. And it was in the midst of His last pub-

Circumstances under which it was given.

lic instructions, delivered to the crowds which there gathered around Him in daily increasing numbers, that these children were brought to Him, and an opportunity was had, by His own divine ordering of events, for proclaiming this law, and performing the symbolical act by which he sealed its perpetually binding force.

Why, then, should we intrude an unnatural supposition here, in order to limit that which the Master was pleased to make general? He has opened wide the gates of the kingdom for the free admission of little children; by what right do any close those gates against all but such as may bear, what they may regard as an indispensable mark of qualification? He extended His gracious arms to take up all that were brought to Him, and blessed them all, without exception.

The gospel gates opened wide to children.

How can we justify ourselves for attempting to lay hold upon those arms, and exclude from their redeeming embrace, such as to our bigoted phariseism, may seem unworthy of that mercy? Assuredly if we err, we had better err on the side of charity, than advocate such unlovely exclusiveness as this. And any uncertainty which may hang over the actual parentage, or social position of the children involved in the present instance, may safely be plead in favor of a doctrine, otherwise so consonant with the Lord's gracious words concerning them, and His divine benediction pronounced upon them.

As to the real import of those words, and the significancy of the imposition of the Redeemer's hands, accompanied with the solemn benediction, I confess myself

The true import of the incident.

constrained to go with those who attach to His words their widest and strongest sense, and to His act some real spiritual efficacy. If the declaration: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me," means anything consistent with the sound and sense of the words employed, it must teach that the salvation which Jesus Christ came to accomplish, was designed to be available for children as well as for adults. The law He here lays down must be allowed to operate as freely as the invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And the phrase "Come unto me," employed in both cases, means substantially the same thing. The little children were not merely to be permitted to get externally nigh unto the Saviour's person, or corpo-

The children were called to Christ spiritually.

really into His arms. Their outward drawing near to Him was indeed a great privilege; and His embracing of them and placing His hands in benediction on their heads, was an unspeakably great blessing. But what was visible and corporeal, was but the symbol and the pledge of deeper and invisible spiritual operations.

It was not simply because our Lord “had a *tender love* for children, and well knew that a *proper notice of these might turn to some valuable account*,” that He said to His disciples: “Let the little children alone, and do not now, or at any other *convenient* time, hinder them from coming to me.” It was not merely, or mainly, because “He would no longer be detained from showing His affectionate regard unto these little children,” that He

The sense of this Scripture often perverted.

called them unto Him. Such paraphrases of Holy Writ, even though issuing from the pen of commentators as pious and devout as Doddridge, or as orthodox and learned as some who have succeeded to his labors without improving upon his views, must sound most flat when compared with the celestial tone of the Saviour's words, and seem most insipid beside the invigorating wine of the original. One can hardly forbear pronouncing them perversions rather than paraphrases. They put our Redeemer upon the low level of a merely human sentimentalist. Prompted, indeed, by the consideration that a "proper notice of these children might turn to some valuable account!" Moved, indeed, by "a tender love" for children! Such conceits might hardly be excused, had He not expressly told

Miserable conceits.

us what prompted Him, and plainly declared why He took them up in His divine arms. But with His own words and acts to guide us in the interpretation of what was said and done, attenuating and enervating paraphrases like these are not to be endured.

Nor does the explanation frequently given, of the Saviour's taking up of these children into His arms, and laying His hands upon them, rise above the level of the paraphrase just animadverted upon. Substantially the act is described as amounting simply to "a tender embracing of these infants with a holy complacency and love." They say that, "as a further token of the overflowing kindness and benevolence of His heart towards them," He laid his hands upon them and blessed them, "recommending

them in a solemn manner to the Divine blessing and favor; which, accordingly descended upon them, to strengthen their constitutions and to sanctify their hearts." Now, however dimly or indefinitely any of us may apprehend the true import and force of the Saviour's treatment of these children, this solution of its meaning must seem utterly unsatisfactory. It leaves something unexplained, unnoticed even, which every believing heart is convinced must have been involved in the transaction, and is of essential moment. We cannot rest content with regarding our Saviour as acting, in this case, in His human capacity alone, or suppose that He did nothing more than any other godly, kind-hearted man, having a tender regard for children, and knowing, moreover, how well it is sometimes to

The Redeemer displayed more than mere tenderness.

please parents by noticing them, would have done, under the circumstances. Nay, our common Christian sense actually revolts from so low and superficial a view of the case. That embrace and benediction cannot be thus paraphrased for us, into an act and utterance of mere human tenderness and love.

Rightly apprehended, then, the invitation of our Lord, calling the infants to Him, involved a true spiritual approach to Him, in His mediatorial character. In the invitation to the weary and the heavy laden, this sense of the phrase, "Come unto me," is admitted without dispute. So in the declaration, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Whatever, therefore, might have been the thought or expectation of the parents or friends who brought the

He took them mediatorially to Himself.

children to Jesus Christ, however little they might have hoped for any thing beyond what was merely temporal and natural, we may feel assured that our Lord himself contemplated much more than this. His words of invitation reveal Him as standing with an open heart, ready to receive them into His inmost and saving love. They assure us that there is nothing in the natural constitution of infants, which stands as an insurmountable obstacle to His saving grace; that they are clogged with no such intellectual incapacity; with no such disabilities of affection; with no such impotency to perform moral acts supposed to be the indispensable conditions to personal salvation, as effectually and hopelessly shut them out of His redeeming mercy, for the time being. Infants though they be,

Infants can come to Christ.

requiring parental arms to bear them, they can as effectually and savingly come to Christ as adults, and by an easier approach. Infants though they be, their souls, with all their living powers, may be as truly and livingly united to the Lord Jesus Christ as the souls of their parents who repented and believed on Him. Therefore, He says: "Suffer them," these infant immortals, soul and body, (not with their bodies only,) these that, like yourselves, are lost sheep, and therefore equally need the help of Him who "came to seek and to save that which was lost,"—suffer them to come to me, the Redeemer of their souls; I am willing to receive them. They are every way as really qualified to be subjects of my renewing and saving grace, as any of

Their infancy no hinderance.

you. Their inability to know my doctrine, is no bar to my mercy. Their inability now to confess me with their lips, need not defer their salvation. Their inability to lay hold of me with their personal love and faith, need be no hinderance to the power of my grace. By my providence, they have, through their natural birth, become the involuntary and unconscious subjects of the law of sin and death. By my grace, they are made the involuntary participants of the blessings of redemption, which I came to accomplish. Where sin abounded, grace shall much more abound. I have power to save them. They need my salvation. I do save them. Suffer them to come to Me, forbid them not. I lay my hands upon them. Their sin is pardoned. Their

The Saviour's benediction a reality.

nature is renewed in mine image. My blood blots out their guilt. Let them receive my Spirit and depart in peace.

Such, though but feebly and coldly set forth, I take to be something like the import of this part of the incident now under consideration. Does any one ask, whether I suppose that some special efficacy was connected with the imposition of the Redeemer's hands upon those infants? I answer unhesitatingly, that I do. And the efficacy connected therewith, I believe, was not merely of a moral or prospective sort. That is, the imposition of Jesus' hands upon their heads, benefited them, not only by the influence which the act might have upon their parents, not only by the subsequent moral effect it would have on these children themselves, when they should be

The imposition of his hands conveyed specific grace.

old enough to be told, and appreciate the mark of distinction bestowed upon them. Before, and above all this, the case requires us to believe that grace, confirming, sealing, sanctifying grace, streamed from the divine hands of Jesus into the souls of these little children, as really as the life of the vine transfuses itself through the smallest and tenderest shoots, or as the light of the sun illumines the eye of the youngest infant; or as the quickening breath of God pervades and animates every frail limb and delicate nerve of that infant's physical frame.

What our Saviour did, in this case, was no vain or empty ceremony. We cannot suppose that He would encourage, on such an occasion, what must have been a pernicious error, or foster a stu-

The parents expected as much.

pid and hurtful superstition on the part of the multitude, had the laying on of His hands been a mere matter of inefficacious formality. The parents brought the children to Christ that he might touch them. They believed that there was some supernatural virtue in that touch. Had they not seen dreadful bodily and mental diseases cured by it? Why then should not that root of all maladies, inherited sin, be thus removed? Now, either this thought of their's was based in truth, or it was a sheer superstition. Its truth is corroborated by the Lord's compliance with their request. He is willing to confirm their belief in the efficacy of the laying on of His hands. They are not rebuked for cherishing a superstition, but commended, rather, for their tender parental anxiety, to secure

Salvation was thus sealed to those children.

for their little ones every attainable blessing. The conclusion, therefore, is unavoidable, that some real grace was imparted to these children by the Saviour's act. But what else should be the nature and operation of this grace, than that above suggested? By the imposition of hands, therefore, the Redeemer solemnly sealed and confirmed to those children, the blessings of salvation, which He had mercifully provided for them. It made their salvation a part of their life. It completed their living union as branches, with Him as the living vine. And spiritual energies, corresponding with this sense of the transaction, passed over from Him as their Redeemer, to them as His redeemed ones.

That is a natural and altogether sufferable curiosity, which has sometimes sought

What became of those children?

to trace out the probable future history, of such of these children, whom Jesus blessed, as may have attained to maturity. Did they grow up to be worthy of the grace bestowed upon them? Did their future piety and zeal adorn the Church of the Redeemer whose hands of mercy were thus laid on their heads? The inquiry was started and circulated already in the earliest ages of the Church. It would of course not be easy, even then, to ascertain facts in the case. For us the difficulty must be immeasurably greater. And yet a tradition, entitled to some confidence, does report that the celebrated Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who sealed his profession of faith in Christ, with his triumphant martyrdom at Rome, was one of these infants. And why should we not

Ignatius was one of them.

hope to see them all in heaven, if by divine grace imparted to us from the atoning hands of this same Redeemer, we reach that blissful abode ourselves? Why not expect to hear from their own lips their testimony to the efficacy of the act of saving love, by which the atoning Lamb of these perishing lambs, sealed their title to the inheritance above? They received such an ordination to life, as even the Apostles did not receive to their sacred office. For we do not read that when the Lord called them to the Apostleship, He laid His hands upon them, as He did upon the heads of these favored infants.

One clause in the narrative still remains to be considered. It is that in which our Lord declares: "*for of such is the kingdom*

Of such is the kingdom of heaven.

of heaven.” When we remember how rarely we are furnished with *reasons* for what God does, and how, on the contrary, He most commonly requires us simply to believe that what He does is right, because He does it, this declaration must be invested for us, with peculiar importance. Did our Lord utter these words, and cause them to be recorded so explicitly by all three Evangelists, in order to anticipate, and in advance rebuke objections, which reason and formalism would always be sure to raise, against the admission of little children, to present fellowship with His Church ?

“ *Of such is the kingdom of heaven.*” Strange explanations of these apparently plain and simple words may often be met with—explanations which lose sight altogether of the true and avowed

Strange explanations of the phrase.

purpose of our Lord in uttering them, and which use them for an entirely different end. We are frequently told that these words are mainly designed to furnish a criterion by which to test our own qualifications for the kingdom of heaven, and to decide upon the fitness of others for membership in it. And this being assumed as the key to the right sense of the phrase, it is interpreted and applied accordingly. Supposed points of resemblance are raised between the temper and character of little children, and that disposition and frame of mind and heart, which are held to be essential to worthy membership in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus one of the Commentaries before me says: "His meaning is, that all those, like these children, of humble, docile,

A mistake corrected.

obedient dispositions, shall be received into His kingdom of grace and truth. Persons of such a character are the true subjects of His kingdom.”

Now it is a serious mistake of those who thus explain the passage before us, that they unwarrantably confound it with a similar, but by no means fully parallel passage, in the preceding chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel (xviii. 1—5.) An essential difference between these two incidents is, that in the earlier case, the children were old enough to walk, whilst in the instance with which we are at present chiefly concerned, they were infants carried, and such as the Saviour himself took up in His arms.

But wholly apart from this mistake there are two great objections to the above interpretation of the Saviour's

Objections to these explanations.

words. The *first* is that it rests upon such a misapprehension of the true point or points of comparison, if a comparison is at all intended, as involves acknowledged heresies. It holds up for our commendation the *natural* temper and moral characteristics of children, as being in themselves most innocent and pure, most faultless and lovely. And thus it fosters the error which it is the aim of the first section of this treatise to correct; namely, that, notwithstanding the solemn and explicit assertions of the Holy Scriptures to the contrary, children are not born in iniquity and conceived in sin, so as to bring totally depraved natures with them into the world. Assuredly these two things cannot be true. Children cannot have by nature, corrupt tempers and affections, and moral characters, and yet be models

Children by nature no models of goodness.

of fitness for admission into the kingdom of heaven, on account of these very affections and tempers. And if people are taught to understand the Saviour's words, in the case before us, to mean that the natural humility, docility, and obedience of children, are worthy of all imitation, they will very soon, and consistently, conclude that the doctrine of total native depravity must be modified.

Another error countenanced by this interpretation, is, that merely natural qualifications are sufficient to entitle men to admission into the kingdom of heaven. No atonement is needed, no blood of sprinkling "that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel," no fleeing for refuge to Christ, the only hope set up before us, no investiture with His righteousness, as the only garment wherewith

Another error exposed.

to have our moral nakedness covered, no regeneration, no pardon of past iniquities, no propitiatory reconciliation with the Father through the Son. All these, the interpretation obviously implies, might be dispensed with, if only we had the meek, the docile, the obedient temper of little children. I know, of course, that those who put this interpretation upon the passage, do not intend, by any means, to teach such errors as those just enumerated. None may hold the doctrines commonly laid down in our evangelical creed, as taught in the Bible, more firmly or cordially than they do. But this does not render their interpretation of our Saviour's words any the less offensive and pernicious. We know, that whatever else our Lord designed to teach by a declaration like this before us, He did not

Second objection stated.

intend thereby to pronounce His redeeming mission superfluous, or His renewing grace unnecessary.

A *second* leading objection to this explanation of the words "of such is the kingdom of heaven," is that it seems to ignore the main fact announced and to substitute an assumed comparison in its stead. It puts abstract moral qualities, or natural affections, in the place of actual living persons. The passage, accordingly, is supposed to be elliptical. To get at its true sense, it is thought some additional expressions must be supplied. That it should read somewhat as follows: *The kingdom of heaven is composed of persons having dispositions, affectionate confidence and meekness, resembling what is often seen in little children.* But there does not seem to me to be a word or intimation, to

True sense of the declaration.

justify such a paraphrase of this clause. There is nothing said or implied, which leads us to think that the Saviour intended to hold up these children, as He did those in St. Matthew, xviii. 1—5, as specimens of moral fitness for His kingdom. We must, therefore, adopt another sense of these words as the only correct one.

And that sense is the one most obviously lying in the declaration as it stands, without amplification or paraphrase, "Of such (little children) is the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of heaven consists mainly and emphatically of little children. All who have died in infancy, a countless, happy host, "early lost to be early saved," all these are safely housed in that kingdom above. All little children, living, belong to the

The words to be taken literally.

kingdom of heaven on earth. The kingdom of heaven consists of so large a proportion of *children* saved by the blood of the Lamb, that it may be said with truth, of such emphatically, is the kingdom of heaven. Not because they have docile and obedient tempers, by nature, not because they are meek and confiding, *but because they are little children*, are they of the kingdom of heaven. And now because, as children, they are graciously included in the kingdom, because provision has been made for the implanting in their natures of a holy and heavenly principle to counteract and destroy that evil and corrupt principle which is naturally inherent in them, because they have been joined to Christ in regeneration, because of this do they exhibit whatever good moral dispositions and tempers

Infancy lovely only through Christ.

may from time to time be discovered in them.

This I believe to be the true order of cause and effect in this most interesting case. Little children are most lovely in whatever moral attractions they display, because they belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. He has fixed His redeeming eye and loving heart upon them from their conception. Though doomed, by nature, to be born in sin, and sinful, they are destined by His grace to be received into His arms as soon as they are born. The emissaries of the great red dragon may be waiting to seize them, when the anxious hour of their parent's painful travail shall have come. But brighter and holier spirits shall be there to catch them up and to present them unto God, in the name of the Holy Child whom that

Langé's rendering of the words.

dragon himself tried to devour at His birth.

Instead of the common translation of this phrase, one of the best recent commentators (Langé) proposes that it be rendered: "because *for* such is the kingdom of heaven." This rendering, it will readily be seen, would be more favorable than the common version to the sense which I have been giving to these words of our Lord. They would then contain not merely the assertion of a fact, but the revelation of a divine purpose agreeable to that fact. The doctrine of the passage would accordingly be: God in His mercy designed the kingdom of heaven for little children, and has adapted all its provisions and arrangements to their natural character, and their moral and spiritual wants. Instead, therefore, of excluding

Further confirmation of the sense adopted.

them from outward communion with Me or with My Church, they are to be considered as having a most unquestionable title, through grace, to such privileges. Because the kingdom is for them, hinder them not from admission to the royal household or the person of the King.

The view of this passage which has now been taken is further confirmed by what St. Mark and St. Luke add: "Verily, I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein." How does a little child receive the kingdom of God? Certainly through regeneration. It must be born again before it can enter into that kingdom. And how does a little child receive regeneration? I answer *passively*; by being as clay in the hands of the pot-

How children receive the kingdom.

ter. It puts forth no meritorious acts of its own. Its heart is turned to the impressions of divine grace, as the softened wax to the seal. It receives the kingdom of heaven, solely through grace, not in any sense through works. *It* is in no danger of substituting contrition for conversion, or of vainly trying to wash out that native stain of guilt in penitential tears, which only the atoning blood of Christ can take away. The kingdom of heaven is put into its heart, is made a central power in its nature, and enters into the very life and substance of its moral being, through Christ. And so must every one receive that kingdom who would indeed share in its blessings. Not as the thinking and reflecting man receives a system of doctrines, or a body of divinity, not as a reformed moralist

All must receive it as infants do.

adopts new rules of life, and begins to cultivate better affections, must the kingdom of heaven be received, in order to our securing salvation. But as an infant unresistingly allows a new principle of life to be combined with its being, so must they that would be saved, receive the heavenly kingdom. It is thus, and thus most prominently, that Jesus holds up these, and, through them as types, all infants, as model members of His spiritual kingdom. He does not say, that the kingdom of heaven must be received by all men, just as it is received by those little ones who are admitted into it, or who may be pervaded by it. The words involve no such qualifying limitation and scarcely admit of it. They seem plainly to teach that every little child receives the kingdom of heaven; and, now, in the

The inference.

same manner, substantially, as it is received by children, must it be received by adults. "Whosoever does not receive the kingdom of heaven *as (every) little child receives it*, shall in no wise enter therein."

The conclusion, therefore, to which a candid consideration of this incident, and the various phrases which occur in the Gospel report of it, leads us, is undoubtedly this: that our Lord teaches the salvation of all little children. He has not left them lying to our view, under the dismal mists of uncertainty concerning their relation to His person, or concerning their eternal doom, if they should be snatched away, before they can "repent with the heart unto righteousness, or make confession with the mouth unto salvation." Unable,

The doctrine comforting.

themselves, in their infant muteness, to comfort the sorrowing hearts of parents as they sit watching and weeping over their dying bodies, the heavenly Consoler becomes their spokesman, and assuages parental anguish by the assurance, "of such is the kingdom of heaven." And the better to confirm our feeble faith, He conveys this assurance, not even through the inspired medium of an Apostle's mind and mouth, but pronounces it with His own divine lips. Why then should we hesitate to believe what He so authoritatively proclaims to be true? Suppose the doctrine should be, or seem to be, embarrassed with some perplexing difficulties? The same must be admitted in the case of some far less cheering doctrines than this. If Luther could justify himself for persistently adhering to the

Sustained by Matthew xviii. 10, 11, 14.

simple literal sense of the words of the institution of the Holy Supper, certainly we may be allowed to repel all objections to our interpretation of the passage we have been considering, by simply reiterating the Saviour's own words: "for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And this all the more readily, when we remember what our Lord declares in the 10th and 11th verses of the preceding chapter: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." And again in the 14th verse of the same chapter: "Even so it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones should perish."

Jesus the true friend of children.

In the sentiment of Langé, to whom we have already referred, we add yet: "Thus are children and the kingdom of heaven designed for each other; the former qualified through grace for the latter, the latter adapted in its nature and provisions for the former. Jesus Christ himself is the true Patron of little children; not the Archangel Michael, not St. Nicholas, not St. Martin, although the Lord commands all the angels and saints to take charge of them. Therefore He who was besought only to touch the little ones, took them up into His arms, laid His hands upon them and blessed them."

But let us notice some other Scripture proofs of this same cheering doctrine. And in turning from the teachings of Christ to those of His Apostles on this subject, we are not surprised to hear St. Peter

The declaration of St. Peter, Acts ii. 39.

proclaiming on the day of Pentecost: "*for the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*" (Acts, ii. 39.) To what promise does the Apostle here refer? The verse immediately preceding that which contains this declaration plainly tells us; it was the promise of the remission of sins, for the sake of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the bestowal of the renewing and sanctifying gift of the Holy Ghost. The design of the entire discourse delivered by St. Peter upon this occasion, was to awaken in the minds and hearts of those addressed, a deep conviction of their need of salvation by Jesus Christ, and of the influences of the Spirit of God. Nor was the Word preached without effect. It was "mixed with

The whole multitude to be baptized.

such faith in them that heard it," that "they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They were told that they must repent and be baptized, "*every one of you*, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Mark, it is expressly said, "*every one of you*." The entire multitude, even as they then stood before the Apostles, and hearkened to their words. No exception was to be made on account of age or sex. As all stood together under the same condemnation, all needed the same grace. And as all needed the same grace, all were to receive the same sign and seal of that grace.

Some of that convicted multitude might doubt, however, whether, having

Their desperate sense of sin.

sinned as they had sinned, such mercy could be bestowed upon them. But a little while before they had participated in the condemnation and crucifixion of the Redeemer. Having then "despised and rejected" Him, would he not now spurn and abandon them? They had joined in saying: "His blood be on us and on our children." How could they now hope to escape the penalty of that dreadful imprecation under which they had so madly placed, not only themselves, but their children? They richly deserved that God should take them at their word. And their conviction of the aggravated character of their sins, especially as those sins had reached their climax in the cruel death of Jesus Christ, was so deep and so condemning, that they were in danger of yielding to despair.

Awakened conscience condemns them.

At the feast of the Passover, which symbolized to them, through the slain Paschal Lamb, the great mercy of God to the house of Israel, it seemed so easy and sure a thing for an Israelite to be saved, that even though he should pollute his hands with blood-guiltiness, he would have no need for alarm. *Now*, at the feast of Pentecost, which was also the anniversary of the giving of the law, their presumptuous confidence forsakes them. Their consciences, startled from profound slumbers by the loud reverberations of the violated law, cry out for merited vengeance, more vehemently than they had previously cried out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." Their guilt assumes a magnitude too immense for its pardon. The only prospect before them, for themselves, and their children,

Their earnest inquiry.

is hopeless death. No wonder they send up this earnest cry: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Not, what shall we do *to be saved*? No ray of possible salvation then shone in upon their alarmed spirits. It was rather the indefinite shriek of men verging on the boiling abyss of despair.

This despairing cry, moreover, was prompted not by concern for themselves, alone, but for their children also. The shattered vessel on which they found themselves miserably wrecking, held their households, likewise. And all these seemed to be threatened with a general destruction; all seemed to be sinking into the same yawning gulf. This was more than even their hard hearts could endure. Before the storm was upon them, they mocked at its menaces, and supposed it

Their fears for their children.

would be easy for them to escape its violence, and outride in safety the tempestuous waves. Now when it burst over them in its fury, and they looked down into the dark depths, in which through their guilt and madness, not only they, but their helpless children too, seemed about to sink and perish, their stout hearts quailed, and they cried out in anguish. If only a life-boat had been at hand to rescue their little ones! But they saw no hope, even for these.

It is by considering that this was the state of mind of the multitude addressed by St. Peter, that we can more readily perceive the force and import of his encouraging reply. This explains his apparently incidental reference to "*children.*" He knew well, as a Jew, that his kinsmen were accustomed to look upon

Hence St. Peter's reference to children.

the interests of their children, as being most intimately bound up in their own interests. From the days of their earliest forefathers, it had always marked God's dealings with them, to include the children, and entire household (unless in cases of individual perverseness and obstinacy,) in every covenant and in every covenant promise. They would consequently, expect, as a matter of course, that the same great principle would be retained, in any new dispensation granted unto them. And now they are assured that this should be the case. "The promise *is* unto you and to your *children*." For them, also, the blood of atonement shall avail. They *are* included in the rich provisions of redeeming love in Jesus Christ, and *shall share* in the blessings purchased by the death of the Son of God.

The promise to the children sure.

And we are led to conclude from the Apostles' words, that the fulfillment of this promise to the children, was not allowed to depend entirely upon mere human contingencies, or upon an uncertain compliance with purely external conditions. Their share in these rich Gospel blessings should not be forfeited, for instance, by their early death—a death which would snatch them away before they had reached the years of self-consciousness or personal accountability. Neither should interests so solemn and far-reaching as the eternal welfare of these children involved, be allowed to be jeopardized, by the negligent failure on the part of their parents, or representatives, to have their children subjected to certain stipulated conditions, demanded of those who had reach-

Not left to human hazards.

ed riper years. Adults were required to repent and to be baptized, as the condition of their receiving the benefits of the promise. If they refused, or neglected, to do this, they should have no claim to covenant blessings. The children, also, were to be brought under these conditions, so far as they could be complied with by children. They could not yet repent; but as this did not exclude them from the benefits of the promise, they were to receive the same sign and seal of their participation in those benefits, that adults, who actually repented, received. They were entitled to the rite of Baptism. Nevertheless, if their parents or proper representatives neglected to present them for this rite, the effect of the promise to them, should not be thereby rendered void. It should not be put

Not lost through parental negligence.

in the power of unbelieving or careless parents, to frustrate God's purpose and promise of mercy and salvation to children, for whom His Son had paid a precious ransom. They might render the grace of God of none effect for themselves, by such unbelieving rejection or contempt of it. But their children's names were in the deed of promise, and could be blotted out of that deed only by their own hands, when once they came to act for themselves. A mother may forget her sucking child,—and neglect the higher spiritual duties which she owes to that child. But the Saviour of these little ones will not on this account suffer them to be forever cast out and eternally to perish.

All this, however, may be said to apply only to the children of Jews. That

This promise includes Gentiles.

others, accordingly, would have no part in the cheering promise. That whatever grounds for hope the holy Scriptures furnish, concerning the salvation of those born within the limits of the outward covenant, they afford none for the offspring of such as have no part in that covenant, as are "aliens to the Commonwealth of Israel."

It is well for us that the declaration of the apostle seems to have anticipated this plausible objection. He meets it in the same verse in which the cheering assurance I have just now been commenting upon, is contained. Turn once more to the passage, and you will find that he affirms not only that the promise is to those Israelites then before him, and to their children, but also "TO ALL THAT ARE AFAR OFF, *even as many as the Lord our*

The children of Gentiles also included.

God shall call." There can be no question that by "all that are afar off," the heathen are meant. Even then, already, Peter was enabled to see by the Holy Ghost, that salvation by Jesus Christ was designed for outcast Gentiles, as well as for the more highly favored Jews. This fact he fully apprehended, though it was long before he could accommodate himself to the method by which the Gentiles were to be brought to Christ.

But must not this extension of the grace of God to the Gentiles be as general as its application to the Jews? If in the one case children were included in the promise, they must be equally embraced in the other case. Under the "all that are afar off," therefore, we must include Gentiles and their children. And we must regard them as being included

The terms of its fulfillment.

upon the same, or similar conditions, as those stipulated in the case of the Israelites. The promise to adult Gentiles should be fulfilled upon their repenting and being baptized. The promise to infant Gentiles should avail for them upon their compliance with such conditions as it might become possible for them to comply with. But until they should become capable of rendering such compliance themselves, or until their proper representatives should become Christians, so as to be qualified to act for these children, the promise should hold unconditionally good, so far as external forms of ratification were concerned. The efficacy of the salvation, which formed the essence of the promise, could not be neutralized by the lack of the application of an outward sign or seal of that efficacy.

The promise in harmony with Christ's invitation.

For if Gentiles were not condemned under the Old Covenant, in case of their perishing, for not obeying a law of which they were ignorant, including that of circumcision, (Rom. ii. 14, 26, 27,) much less shall Gentile infants perish, under the New Covenant, for non-conformity with a law (as that of Baptism,) of which they are not only ignorant, but which is entirely beyond their reach.

The doctrine of this passage, consequently, is in full harmony with that of our Saviour's declaration. Little children are, in their infant state, included in the merciful provisions of the kingdom of heaven. The "*promise*" is for them, in all its fullness. They may not for themselves apprehend the grace of God here, but they "are apprehended" by it. They may, in this life, not learn to know

God loves them before they can know Him.

the Father who loves them, nor the Son who redeems them, nor the Spirit who regenerates them. But should they be gathered to the multitude of the dead in their infant days, they shall find "a place prepared for them," where they "shall (soon) see as they are seen, and (soon) know as they are known." It will not take their redeemed spirits long, in that abode, to learn the high object of their creation, and the glorious end of their existence. Speedily will be solved for them the mystery of their short and sudden passage through the flesh; of their having been born in time only, as it were, that they may die, and then bloom in eternity. And their brief sojourn in this vale of tears, will make it all the easier for them to chime in with the sweet harmonies of the celestial choir.

Though they only weep on earth they shall sing in heaven.

So that although denied the privilege of chanting their Redeemer's praises with His saints below, they shall not be excluded from the blood-bought throng which is continually rehearsing those praises in the courts above.

“For hark! amid the sacred songs
Those heavenly voices raise,
Ten thousand, thousand infant tongues
Unite in perfect praise.”

Another special Scripture proof of this cheering doctrine is found in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans v. 18, 19. “*Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*”

Another proof.

These verses, with the two which immediately follow, form the conclusion of the preceding train of argument. But whilst they set forth the result of that argument, they also serve as a key to its import. What did the Apostle wish to prove? Evidently this, that the atonement of Christ fully covered the sin entailed by Adam on his posterity. Indeed he asserts in verse 16, that the atonement reached far beyond the dire effects of Adam's sin, and availed for the pardon of penitent believers, who had added to that one transgression of Adam, by which they were naturally placed under condemnation, the guilt of "many offences" of their own perpetration. At first Paul draws a *parallel* between Adam and Christ: Adam, by his sin, brought condemnation, death, upon the race—Jesus

A comparison and a contrast.

Christ, by his atonement, canceled the penalty of spiritual death, and in its stead procured life for the condemned.

But at this point the parallel dissolves into a striking contrast. Great as is the condemnation brought upon mankind by Adam's sin, it is far exceeded by the grace provided for the condemned in Christ. He, the great antitype of the first man, in this, as in every other case, more than fulfilled the demands of the typical Adam. Not only does He make atonement for the guilt entailed upon the race by its natural descent from a corrupted stock; but He also provides means of deliverance from the penalty of tens of thousands of offences, which individual sinners add to their original guilt. "The judgment was by one (offence) to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification."

The import of the analogy.

From the analogy which is drawn here between the effect of Adam's sin, and the operation of the atonement of Jesus Christ, we also learn how the parties concerned come to participate in both the one and the other. By virtue of our natural relationship to Adam, we become liable to the condemnation of inherited sinfulness. But this happens without our personal act, or moral assent. So by virtue of the position in which grace places us, as members of Adam's sinful race, to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of that race, from the curse of the first transgression, we become partakers of the blessings purchased by the atonement. In the language of a departed master in Israel, whose opinions have still great weight in the evangelical Churches, "We are sinners in virtue of one man's diso-

As came the condemnation, so grace comes.

bedience, independently of our own personal sins; and we are righteous in virtue of another's obedience, independently of our own personal qualifications."

"As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, *even so* by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Let not the force of the little word with which this blessed declaration begins be overlooked. It comprehends a vast fund of comfort for those "little ones" whom loving parents have had torn from their embrace, and have seen hurried into what would be for such bereaved mourners a land of shadows and gloomy darkness, but for the bright light which He, who "gathers the lambs into His arms, and carries them in His bosom" has caused to shine in upon that region

How the condemnation came.

of the infant dead. "As by the offence." And how does the judgment or penalty of the offence come upon little children? In a way over which they have not the least control, and for which they are not, as infants, held responsible. The guile of the old serpent so far succeeded, that the first parents of the race fell under condemnation, and that all the natural offspring of that race partake of this condemnation. But the promised seed of the woman so far counteracts and remedies this sore evil, that none perish eternally because of that entailed condemnation. The inherited penalty is annulled. By being born sinners of a sinful race, infants are naturally depraved and condemned. "*Even so,*" by being sinners by birth, do they come under the provisions of grace, for delivering such from the

The spiritual penalty inherited from Adam annulled by Christ.

penalty of their inherited sinfulness. The temporal part of the penalty does indeed remain, in the case of these redeemed infants, just as in the case of those who, as adult saints, "through faith and patience inherit the promises." These little ones must endure bodily sufferings, and yield their frail tenements of clay to the corruptions of the grave. But their souls shall not perish. "As" the judgment came upon them to their condemnation, so shall the free gift come upon them unto salvation. They suffer the temporal evil effects of Adam's sin, without knowing how or why. So shall they be the objects of the Redeemer's atoning grace, even before they lisp His name, or feel the preciousness of His love,

"Who came to make His blessings flow,
Far as the curse is found."

The blood of Christ avails for children.

We have abundant reason to conclude, therefore, that the atonement of Christ has affected in an essential way, the general state of humanity; and, whether we can explain the mode or not, that it is fully commensurate with the spiritual wants of all who die in infancy. Where Adam's sin abounds, the grace of Christ much more abounds. "His blood cleanseth from all sin," to which men do not wilfully cleave by their own free, personal act. As many as were made sinners without their moral assent, "by one man's disobedience," and who die before they reach the age in which men become personally responsible, and by their own act endorse that one man's disobedience, and aggravate the guilt, by adding to its magnitude, so many, *at least*, shall, "by the obedience of one be made righteous."

Infants all die in Adam.

And that St. Paul really meant to affirm this very doctrine becomes still clearer, if possible, by his strong and terse reiteration of it in his Epistle to the Corinthians, xv. 22: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Who, according to these words, "*die*," that is, primarily, a bodily death? All that are in Adam. Infants are consequently included. And why do all, including infants, die in Adam? Because this was the penalty of the transgression. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." This is the death which has passed upon all men, through their relationship to Adam. Now all little children dying in infancy suffer this penalty. In their death this part of the curse of inherited sin exhausts itself. It cannot follow

The temporal curse exhausted in their bodily death.

them beyond the grave. Were there no additional revelation, it would indeed let them lie in that grave, to wake no more forever. But such an additional revelation has been granted to us. "In Christ all shall be made alive." He who proclaimed Himself "the resurrection and the life," will also revive the bodies of these little slumberers in their narrow tombs. They will be found among "all that in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

Do you ask: But to which of these two great classes, do departed infants belong, seeing that they were called away before they did either good or evil? Were they, indeed? Let me beg you to

Will infants share in the resurrection?

recall that saying. For even to do no evil in a sinful world like this, were to do some good. But waiving this, let me ask you, is it not by such babes as these that God often accomplishes more good than reputed heroes in Israel effect? *Is that babe's life a blank, which though the comfort of only a fleeting hour, bore mute but eloquent testimony to the wisdom, the power, and goodness of God? Is no good accomplished instrumentally, by an infant which after tarrying but a few months in the household, is suddenly snatched away, that it may teach the mourning inmates such lessons, as they are only too slow to learn in other ways, of the uncertainty of life, of the evanescent nature of all earthly joys, and of the sovereignty of the God who gives and takes away at His pleasure? Has*

An infant's life is a moral force.

that babe, so prematurely shrouded and prepared for burial, and lying there in the beauty of that death-sleep, so like a cherub that an angel might mistake it for a brother—has that babe lived in vain, seeing that its early and deplored removal, sanctified to the hearts of the bereaved survivors, will make its mourning parents think more frequently and earnestly of heaven, their beloved child's home, and of the Lamb upon the throne, that loved one's Saviour, than ever they did before? Oh! has that infant lived and died so soon, to no good purpose, whose brief life and early death, have still left a testimony behind, by which, it, "being dead, yet speaketh?" The day of that departed infant's birth is never forgotten. The memory of the hour of its last agony, and death, never perishes. After

They make lasting impressions.

many years shall have passed away, you shall go and inquire of those parents regarding the sad event, and they will recite to you all the details of that gloomy day and hour with mournful minuteness. The monuments of such things remain in the minds and hearts of many affectionate parents, longer than some marble tombstones stand in the grave-yards. And a hand more careful than Old Mortality's, may be seen re-chiseling the inscriptions recorded upon those monuments of the heart's cemetery, on every returning anniversary of the events to which they refer. Why, therefore, shall not these incidents of God's own ordering, be so many potent means in His hands, for accomplishing some hidden purpose of mercy towards the intractable and wayward sons of men.

They serve God better than many adults.

Then let it not be said that those infants dead, who shall come forth with the multitudes that shall issue from their graves upon the morning of the resurrection, have done neither good nor evil, and therefore can receive no reward. They did not live in vain. During their short sojourn in our habitations of sin, they did what they could. Would heaven, that tens of thousands of those who are permitted to remain on earth, and ripen into adult age, were ever found bearing as good fruit, as is yielded by these tender shoots, so early blasted. Would heaven, that all nominal Christians were "glorifying God in their bodies and spirits," as truly, and as effectually as such infants glorify Him. Indeed there are few such preachers of righteousness

They "shall be made alive in Christ."

in the great congregation, as I have sometimes known babes and sucklings to be, when dying in infancy, in the midst of a spiritually dead household.

These infants, therefore, "shall be made alive in Christ." They shall be made *spiritually* alive. For their only spiritual death, is that inherited from Adam. This Christ annuls in all, who have not, by their additional personal sins, become subject to the law of the second death. In Christ Jesus these infant souls stand arrayed before God in a new life, more beautiful and vigorous, than that which they lost by our first father's sin. Then, in due time, their *bodies* also shall be redeemed from the power of the grave. They shall be made corporeally alive.

Christ will ransom them from the grave.

Arrayed in glorious grace
Shall their vile bodies shine,
And every form, and every face
Look heavenly and divine.

Satan shall not reap any advantage from that seemingly mysterious providence which so soon recalled these infants from their earthly state. The Lord did not permit the scythe of death to cut down these tender flowers of the field in their early budding, only that the enemy might gather them into his everlasting fire. His gracious purpose in giving them a place for a short season among fallen men on earth, was that He might gather them, as the earliest fruits of the vintage, into the abodes of ransomed humanity in heaven. He permitted them to be born into the death of Adam, that they might be speedily reborn into the eternal life pro-

Last proof, from the nature of the judgment.

cured by Jesus Christ. "As in Adam all (these) die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."

The last Scripture proof of the doctrine of general Infant Salvation which I shall adduce, is furnished by *the revealed object of the final judgment*. This is most explicitly declared to be to render, by a final decision, "to every man according to his deeds." Who shall, in that dread day, be doomed to suffer the bitter pangs of eternal death? The Word of God answers this question upon almost every page. And the plain import of every one of its answers is, that the only ground of everlasting condemnation in the judgment day, will be personal sins freely committed by the sentenced transgressor. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," and die for its own sins voluntarily

Only personal sin freely committed will be punished.

perpetrated. None of those wretched culprits shall have opportunity to say: "Our fathers ate sour grapes, and their children's teeth are set on edge." "Behold, all souls are the Lord's; as the soul of the father so also the soul of the son is His: the soul that sinneth, it shall die." The only condemnation which will fall upon any of the vast multitude gathered before that great white throne, will be the condemnation meted out to those who "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Read the Saviour's description of the character of those who shall then go away into everlasting punishment, and tell me, can departed infants be included in that class? When did they deny Him before men, that it should be supposed He would deny them before His Father in

Infants never denied Christ.

heaven? How can they be supposed to answer to the character of barren fig trees, or unprofitable servants, or guests that spurned the wedding garment, that they should be involved in their doom? When saw they Christ “an hungered, and gave Him no meat; or thirsty, and gave Him no drink; or a stranger and took Him not in; or naked and clothed Him not; or sick and in prison, and visited Him not?” If, therefore, when all are called to “appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad,” nothing can be found in these infant dead, upon which, according to the established principle of the judgment of that day, a sentence of condemnation could

They will not be cast out.

rest, we may feel assured that those infants will not be “cast out into outer darkness,” but admitted with the redeemed to the joys of their Lord. Accordingly in St. John’s Apocalyptic visions, “the small” are always ranked with those “great” who are reckoned the true servants of God, and promised an everlasting reward. (Revelation, xi. 18; xix. 5.)

Wherefore, taking all these things together,—remembering how much richer are the provisions of the Better Covenant than those of the former dispensation,—keeping in view the Saviour’s treatment of little children, and His declaration concerning them,—adding to this the import of the promise announced by Peter on the day of Pentecost,—the argument of Paul in Romans, v. 18—19, and in Corinthians,

The proofs summed up.

xv. 22,—and the plainly revealed purpose of the day of judgment, and, in a word, considering the general tenor of the entire Gospel of Jesus Christ—tell me, “if Christianity does not throw a pleasant radiance around an infant’s tomb? And should any parent who reads these lines feel softened by the touching remembrance of a light that twinkled a few short months under his roof, and at the end of its little period, expired, we cannot think that we venture too far when we say that he has only to persevere in the faith and in the following of the Gospel, and that very light will again shine upon him in heaven. The blossom which withered here upon its stalk has been transplanted there to a place of endurance, and it will then gladden that eye which now weeps out the

Opinion of Chalmers.

agony of an affection that has been sorely wounded ; and in the name of Him, who if on earth would have wept along with them, do we bid all believers to sorrow not even as others having no hope, but to take comfort in the thought of that country where there is no sorrow and no separation.

Oh, when a mother meets on high
The babe she lost in infancy,
Hath she not then, for pain and fears—
The day of wo, the watchful night—
For all her sorrows, all her tears—
An overpayment of delight?"

With these eloquent words of Chalmers, I close this section of my treatise. Its length will be found considerably out of proportion with the sections which preceded it, and with that which is still to follow. My simple excuse is, it was

The comfort afforded by this doctrine.

so pleasant for me to linger upon it, and that upon searching the Scriptures with reference to this doctrine, I found its revelations so much fuller, and their light so much clearer than I had been led, by what are the more prevalent theological opinions upon it, to suppose I should find them to be. Shall I add more? May I say that the Lord has laid this theme so near my heart, that I could not help but tarry awhile in looking upon the bright scenes it opens, displaying the blissful portion of the infant dead? Reader, if any of your lambs were grazing in those far off

Sweet fields arrayed in living green,
By rivers of delight,

it would be a joy to your heart to stop occasionally, as you reached the high

ground of some mount of vision, in your weary pilgrimage, and gaze upon the pure pleasures of those lambs, gathered to their rest before you, and see that their Good Shepherd had provided for them a far better portion in heaven than you could have laid up for them upon earth.

§ 4.—*Infant Baptism.*

By nature children are depraved and under condemnation. The only way of their deliverance from this sad natural state is through regeneration. This is provided for them, and guarantied to them through the atonement of Jesus Christ, which extends to their salvation from the curse of Adam's sin. Therefore they should receive the appointed sign and seal of that salvation, *they should*

The right of infants to Baptism.

be "*baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*"

This must be allowed to follow, as an unavoidable conclusion from the entire preceding argument. If children are depraved and need the renewal of their nature to qualify them for heaven; if children are susceptible of such renewing grace by the operation of the Holy Ghost making them new creatures in Christ Jesus; if the blessed Saviour himself receives them as His; by what consideration can we refuse them the sacrament of the formal confession of their spiritual need, and of the formal confirmation of these blessings, here on earth? If we think we have sufficient ground to believe that in case of their early death they would be admitted to fellowship with the saints, in the Church above, which is

If fit for the church above, why not for that below?

without blemish, with what show of reason or religion can we justify any present exclusion of them, from formal fellowship in the Church below, whose beauty is marred with so many spots? The Bridegroom does not disown them! Will a vain and haughty bride affect such sanctity as to let them lie, on account of their natural uncleanness, unrecognized and spurned at her door? Pharaoh's daughter showed a kinder heart than this!

But why, if children dying in infancy will certainly be saved, whether baptized or not, why have them baptized at all? This question I know will be asked. And it can be answered, too, most satisfactorily answered for all who are willing to give the replies a candid consideration. Before giving these answers, however, let me show the reader how utterly unfair

A false issue exposed.

such an inquiry would be, if belief in a doctrine were made conditional upon its being satisfactorily answered.

You acknowledge *prayer* to be a solemn and important duty, binding upon all men; that they should humbly ask God for whatsoever they need and desire to receive. But you meet with a worldly and irreligious man who asks you: Is it not altogether probable that my life will be spared until to-morrow, that the sun will shed its genial light upon me, that my table will be furnished with needful food, and that my usual temporal blessings will be supplied, whether I pray to God for these things, or do not humbly ask Him to bestow them? You reply, Certainly, it is quite as probable that you will be as fully provided for as others; for God causes His sun to shine

God's free goodness no excuse for impiety.

upon the just and the unjust. Upon this he asks you: Where then is the need of my praying for them? What is your reply? Do you not tell that prayerless man, that he has no right to plead the great goodness of God, as an excuse for such contempt of Him; that one of the strongest motives to prayer, is derived from that very consideration which he urges in extenuation of his neglect of the duty? You might press other *direct* arguments in favor of the duty, and *direct* Scripture proofs of its being obligatory upon all men. But your Christian feelings are so pained by the man's ungenerous plea, that your first, and proper, impulse is, to fling back his plea into his own face, as the poorest and vilest apology which he could have offered for his ungodliness.

Inability to see results no measure of duty.

Now in this case, you feel that *a man's inability to see an immediate connection between a duty and its effects, or between a religious service and its beneficial influence, is no measure of his duty in any particular instance.* Men should pray *because* God so uniformly blesses them with all needful good. We should say, "Our Father who art in heaven," because God is "*our Father*" before we say it. We should pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," even when the larder is already supplied with food, and because it is supplied. If God's goodness anticipates our wants, our grateful acknowledgments of that goodness, should go before the actual enjoyment of the blessings it confers. It is felt to be obviously indecent in such instances, to say, or think: Why all this ceremony of asking and thanksgiving,

The case illustrated.

seeing that our mercies are already in our laps, or that the tide of goodness which is bearing them, is rapidly on its way to our doors?

Suppose you had a child lying dangerously ill, and likely to die. Nature and piety both prompt you to pray to the Lord to save its soul, if it should die, and take it to His home in heaven. You ask your friends around you to join in the prayer. But some of them object and say: "Why where is the use in praying for the child? It is sure to go to heaven at any rate. Do not trouble yourself, or God, with your idle supplications." Would you heed their objection? Would you not, in spite of their impious suggestions, fall down upon your knees, and put up your fervent petition to the Lord, for your dying child's eternal welfare?

Why are adults baptized?

Even if it were difficult, therefore, or impossible for us to show any positive advantage in the Baptism of children who die in infancy, this would be no reason for refusing to baptize them. Our inability to see any use in it, would by no means render the sacrament superfluous in their case. Why are adults baptized? Not in order that they *may be* saved, but because they give us good ground for hoping that they *are* among those who are now justified, and who will finally be among the redeemed in heaven. They are required to give evidence of repentance and of faith before they are admitted to Baptism. Now suppose that a man who gives such evidence of repentance towards God, and of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, should neglect or reject Baptism. Would he be saved? You

Baptism confers benefits though we may not see how.

hesitate to answer. And well you may. The Lord who has said: "Believe," also said: "Be baptized." But you cannot, perhaps, see any necessary connection between the external sacrament, in this case, and the apprehended consequences of its neglect. Do you allow this inability on your part, or on his part, to justify a neglect of the ordinance?

No. You still hold that there must be some important connection between the sacrament, and the man's piety; or between the sacrament and subsequent salvation, on account of which the sacrament should by no means be neglected. You do not think that a sinner repenting and believing, and willing to be baptized, would perish, if circumstances beyond his control prevented his being baptized. And still you think the ordinance should

It is thought essential for adults.

not be neglected by such penitent and believing adults, when they might obtain it. So I do not believe that little children who are denied the sacrament by the negligence or unbelief of parents or pastors—that is, therefore, by circumstances beyond the control of those children—would perish in consequence of such neglect. God forbid, that it should be thus in the power of a careless or skeptical father or mother, or minister of the Gospel, to pluck one such little one out of the Saviour's arms, and dash it against the rock of eternal ruin. These guardians of the child's body, may cruelly neglect or hurt it bodily and temporally. "Their Father who is in heaven," will overrule all that for good. But no cruelty of those guardians can inflict the wound of eternal death upon that child's soul.

Why then not baptize infants?

And yet, why, if the penitent believer, who has thus become Christ's, should be baptized, even though he might not perish without it,—why should not these children, whom Christ claims as His, be also baptized? Why should not Baptism be as beneficial, and as important, in the one case, as in the other? I repeat, then, that those very arguments which prove that infants are by nature depraved, and need a Saviour,—which prove that they are born, naturally, of the flesh, and require regeneration—and which prove that full provision has been made for their eternal salvation, by the same method by which all others are saved, who attain to heaven at last—these same arguments all demonstrate their right to be baptized, and the duty of parents and the Church to admit them to such Bap-

If their's is the grace, then also the sign and seal.

tism. If we believe that children are proper subjects of saving grace, why deny that they are proper subjects of the visible sign and seal of that invisible grace? If they can and must be regenerated in Christ, by the Holy Ghost, why refuse them the washing of the outward laver of regeneration? If they can and must eat of the tree of life, why chase them away from reposing under the shadow of the tree? You are willing to give a starving man food, and surely a dish to eat it from. You are willing to give a thirsty man water, and doubtless a vessel to drink it from.

In this vindication of Baptism, however, only the case of children dying in infancy has been contemplated. If, therefore, the considerations just presented, satisfy you, as I think they must,

Scripture proofs.

that even such children are entitled to the sacrament, and may derive benefits from its administration, this must seem still more obvious in the case of children who may live to mature age. Now we do not know which of our infants may be taken away from us, or which of them may be spared. Consequently all should be baptized.

But the right of infants to baptism, and our duty, accordingly, to confer the privilege upon them, when they are properly presented for it; and, on the other hand, the utter inexcusableness of their exclusion from the Church on earth, can be demonstrated by explicit Scripture proofs. I will simply enumerate these proofs, adding a few remarks under each, by way of explaining and enforcing them.

1. *It is the revealed will of God, and*

First proof.

His express command, that all who share the blessings of His covenant of mercy, shall receive a sacramental sign and seal of such participation in those blessings. This was indisputably the case under the Abrahamic covenant. Then the sacramental sign and seal was circumcision. Abraham “received the *sign* of circumcision, a *seal* of the righteousness of faith.” Any who now yet contend that the circumcision of the Old Testament dispensation, was merely a sign and seal of national or temporal benefits, are struggling to maintain, at all hazards, a theory concerning this subject, of which the foundations are felt to be weak and unsound. Its popularity and plausibility upon merely rational grounds, are more and more felt to be a poor compensation for its conflict with the positive teachings of

The Abrahamic covenant spiritual.

the Bible. Whatever temporal ingredients entered into the substance of the Abrahamic covenant, and that same covenant as afterwards renewed to his natural descendants, the principal item in it is expressly stated in the words: "And I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee," (Genesis, xvii. 7) taken in connection with the subsequent promise, (Genesis, xxii. 18) "and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." The circumcision of this seed, accordingly, was chiefly spiritual in its import. It symbolized that renewal of the heart in righteousness (so frequently called "the circumcision of the heart,") which was to distinguish the posterity of Abraham far more manifestly than any temporal prosperity which might be granted to them.

Circumcision strictly enjoined.

Now God attached so much importance to this outward, sacramental setting apart of His ancient people, by the rite named, that the strict observance of it was most solemnly enjoined upon them. Indeed if they neglected it, they should be condignly punished, (I say they, the negligent parents, not the unoffending children,) by being at once deprived of those children, of whom they thus proved themselves so unworthy. God would not entrust the rearing of children to parents who betrayed so irreligious a spirit, as willfully and presumptuously to neglect the early consecration of them to God, by the divinely appointed ordinance.

And not only were the natural descendants of Abraham to have the blessings of the covenant thus sealed to them. All Gentile proselytes, *adults and children,*

Even Gentiles had to be thus sealed.

(Exodus xii. 43—49,) were in a like manner to be circumcised. This was made the invariable condition of their being admitted to that great typical feast of the Jews, which so pre-eminently foreshadowed the spiritual blessings of the Better Covenant. None might mock at "*baby circumcision,*" under the former dispensation, as some endeavor under the Christian dispensation, to turn Infant Baptism into irreverent ridicule. Though Israelitish babes were not more precocious than the infants of Christians, though they could not understand the nature of the covenant for themselves, nor believe in it, nor assent to it for themselves, they were still to be circumcised. God had commanded that infant partakers of covenant blessings, as well as adults, should be thus formally introduced into those

The law of the Old Testament retained in spirit.

blessings. And anti-infant circumcisers were threatened with a sore penalty, even the death of their children, if they despised or ridiculed the commandment of God. It was God's will that invisible covenant blessings should be ratified by a visible covenant sign and seal.

This law of the Old dispensation, was transferred to the New dispensation. The outward *form* of the sacrament was changed. Baptism was substituted in the place of circumcision. Reasons for this change of the form might be given, but this is not the place for them. The fact itself is undeniable. St. Paul affirms it in Colossians, ii. 11—12. It is clear from the place which Baptism occupies in the Christian Church, by our Lord's command. Under the Gospel, therefore, as under the law, *all* who have part in the

All who share gospel mercy to have the seal.

blessings of the covenant, are to receive the sign and seal of those blessings, all are to be baptized. And if we have good reason to hope and believe, that children, and especially the children of believing parents, do partake in the salvation by Christ, we have equally good reason to know, and feel persuaded that they should be baptized. We may not be able to see why this law exists for the Christian Church, any more than the ancient Israelite might understand why his child had to be circumcised, as a member of the covenant. But what then? Does the divine Lawgiver limit His enactments by our ability to understand the reason or principles on which they are founded? It should be enough for us to know that He requires it. Faith must take the precedence of obedience, even as "obedience is better than sacrifice."

The command in Matthew xxviii. 19,

All that we have to do, therefore, to convince ourselves of duty and right, in this case, is to ascertain what is the will of God. This we have ascertained to be that children, as partakers in His covenant mercies, should receive the sign and seal of the covenant. Children, consequently, are to be baptized, unless we can prove that they are excluded from those blessings, and abandoned to eternal death. Are those who reject Infant Baptism willing to take this dilemma?

2. This right is, furthermore, guaranteed to children by the Saviour's express command to the Disciples, and through them to the entire Christian Church. "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The word "*teach*" in this verse means *to disciple*, or *to make disciples*. It is a

Includes infants.

different word in the original from that used in the next verse, also translated *teach*.

“All nations” means those in all parts of the world where the Gospel should be preached, who would receive the tidings of salvation in faith. Among these there would be parents with children. How now would the Apostles act with regard to these children of the new converts to Christianity? Would they baptize them also, as well as their parents?

Remember these Apostles, like our Redeemer according to the flesh, were Jews. As Jews they had been reared in a Church in which children were admitted, as well as adults. They had always been taught to believe that children were to come into the Church with their parents, *and by the same sacramental rite*. Sup-

So the Apostles would understand it.

pose that instead of substituting a new sacramental form, the old one, circumcision, had been retained. Suppose their Lord's command had then been—"Go and circumcise all nations." Would the Apostles have taken it for granted that children were included? Most unquestionably they would. Assuredly then, when the command was *to baptize*, they would understand it in an equally general sense, and baptize children as well as their parents, unless the Lord had given them explicit instructions to the contrary. Accordingly we find that they actually baptized parents and children, promiscuously, on the day of Pentecost. Afterwards they baptized entire households, upon the repentance and faith of the parents and adult members. In this respect there was one law for parents and children.

Baptism, as a ceremony, was nothing new.

It is well known that Baptism, like the sacrament of the Holy Supper, was, as to its form, not a new thing. Both were customs previously existing among the Jews, but incorporated by Jesus Christ, into His Church, for sacramental purposes. In the days of our Saviour and His Apostles, it was the prevailing practice of the Jews to baptize the infant children of all proselytes, upon their parents becoming Israelites. This is a fact abundantly attested by Jewish writers themselves. One of them (Maimonides,) says: "*An Israelite that took a little heathen child, or found a heathen infant, and baptized him for a proselyte, behold he became a proselyte.*" This again shows that the Apostles would naturally understand the Saviour's command to include little children, unless, again, He had explicitly enjoined them not to baptize such.

Early Christians so understood it.

And so the matter was understood by the early Christian Church. They uniformly baptized the children of converts and believers. Tertullian, who lived from about A. D. 160 to 230, is the first Christian writer known to have raised objections to Infant Baptism. But he objected to it, not on account of the early age of infants, but because he held that if any one sinned after his baptism he would be lost. Besides this, Tertullian had other very strange notions. He contended that young women and widows, also, should not be baptized, because he thought them peculiarly liable to fall into the snares of the devil, and thus be past all hope, if they had been baptized. Indeed the fact and manner of Tertullian's objection to Infant Baptism, prove beyond controversy, that it was generally practised in his day.

A synodical decision of A. D. 250.

Whilst Cyprian was Bishop of Carthage, (about A. D. 250,) a synod of sixty-six Bishops was held in that city. Among other things which claimed their attention was a request from a country pastor by the name of Fidus, who desired their opinion upon this point: "Whether the Baptism of an infant must not always be on the eighth day after his birth, because circumcision was so?" They answered him by letter as follows: "That his scruple was vain; that the child might (and must if there be danger of death,) be baptized even sooner than the eighth day; and the refusal to baptize it would be dangerous to the salvation of the child's soul." The truth is that so far from having any doubts upon the subject of Infant Baptism, the chief danger of the early Christians was to make too much of it in a superstitious way.

The main difficulty with opposers.

To these two plain Scripture proofs of Infant Baptism, I will add no more. Whoever will permit the objections of mere nature, and natural reason, to overrule these two clearly revealed commands and facts, would let the same nature and reason over-ride a hundred. Infant Baptism is not denounced by those who oppose it, because it is unscriptural, but because they cannot understand what good it can do to little children; they cannot see the use of it. This, however, has been already shown to be a miserable excuse for doubting or rejecting any truth or any religious ordinance.

For the confirmation of those who believe the doctrine as taught in the Word of God, I will now briefly state some of the benefits which are secured by the

blessing of God upon Infant Baptism to the parties concerned.

1. *In Baptism the child receives, through the promised mercy of God in Jesus Christ, immediate release from the penalty of original sin, by a formal covenant transaction.* This release as shown under the preceding section, has been *provided* for all the children of Adam, by the atonement of Jesus Christ. Its formal ratification to each individual, however, is made conditional upon the application of the sign and seal of the covenant of mercy. To the infant baptized, therefore, the present deliverance from the penalty of native depravity, is formally guaranteed. Baptism is "the sign and seal of the remission of its sins."

2. The second benefit secured, is *the official removal, from the child properly bap-*

Stain of original sin removed.

tized, of the stain or pollution of native depravity. Hence Baptism is called in the Bible, “the washing of regeneration.” Of course it is not the water used outwardly in the sacrament that does this. A sacrament does not consist mainly in the outward elements which are used in it. It is the grace of God operating, according to His appointment and promise, through these elements, which makes the ordinance efficacious in each particular case. It was not the water of Jordan that cleansed Naaman of his leprosy. For such a cure, the waters of Jordan *were* no better than those of Pharpar and Abana. But God could, and did, choose to work through Jordan’s waters, a remedy which He did not choose to perform in any other way. It was not the clay, nor the washing, externally, in Siloam,

God uses the sacrament as a channel of grace.

that restored the blind man to sight ; but the power of Jesus Christ operating through these elements as channels. So in the Sacrament. The Lord chooses to connect with the Sacrament of Baptism, properly administered, the formal, official washing away of the stain of original sin, from the infant's heart. "By this divine pledge and sign He assures us that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins, as really as we are externally washed with water."

3. The third benefit formally secured by Baptism, *is the present renewal of the nature of the child, in Christ Jesus, by the Holy Ghost.* The germ of a new life is thus implanted in the soul of the child. Its Baptism is the visible "sign and seal of its being engrafted in Christ." His hand of redeeming grace takes the child,

Last direct benefits.

which by nature is spiritually dead in Adam, and imparts to it the beginning of spiritual life in Himself. Thus the souls of infants are solemnly laid into the lap of the Saviour. He loved them before this was done, and declares them to be, through His grace, of the kingdom of heaven. But now in Baptism, He gives a formal sanction and seal to all this. "He takes them up into His arms and blesses them."

4. The last direct benefit of Infant Baptism which I shall name is, that *God graciously receives such children into special covenant relationship with Himself through Jesus Christ, makes them the objects of His peculiar care, and, if the engagement entered into by the parents, or representatives of the children, are faithfully performed, mercifully promises to bestow upon them such spiritual blessings as*

Special grace bestowed.

will promote the growth of the grace granted them at their baptism. There may be a thousand ways in which God can influence a child's heart, and mould its inner life. We know that such influences often manifest themselves. It is not true that baptized children grow up no better than others, any more than it is true that men and women who profess to have first been regenerated and converted in adult age, are generally no better than others. Baptized children, like baptized adults, may despise and reject the grace bestowed upon them. Their parents and friends may be unfaithful, may even be hindrances and hurts to their moral improvement. But the history of Churches in which infants are baptized will abundantly prove the faithfulness of God to His covenant promises, and the practical

Evidences of grace in baptized children.

benefit flowing from the sacrament. Nine-tenths of all I have ever received into full Church fellowship, were baptized in infancy. I have watched with concern, yet with faith, the operation of the ordinance. And my unhesitating testimony is, that, as a rule, all the baptized children I have ever met with and observed, have given evidence of being under gracious influences, such influences as proved that the child was not entirely in a state of corrupt nature, not utterly "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity." They have, in however childish a way, shown such fear of God, such love to Him, and such interest in religious duties as could not have sprung from a soul "dead in trespasses and in sins." By far the greater number of pious children, of whom biographies are published

Indirect benefits not dwelt upon.

by the American Sunday School Union, and sketches are given in the Child's Paper of the American Tract Society, were baptized in infancy. For some reasons, however, which I deem insufficient, this fact is rarely, if ever, stated.

Other advantages, which are commonly enumerated under the head of benefits of Infant Baptism, I have not named, because they are not immediately connected with the Sacrament, and are rather incidental and prospective. Among these may be included (1) the solemn obligation of parents and the Church, to care for the spiritual welfare of baptized children; (2) the fact that children are thus admitted into recognized fellowship with the visible Church; and, (3) the great moral influence, which it must subsequently exert on children who live to

The grievous sin of neglecting the duty.

years of maturity, to be told how mercifully they were cared for in their infancy, and how solemnly they were consecrated to the Lord who "loved them and gave Himself for them."

But certainly the direct advantages named, are sufficiently great to convince all, that their children should not be deprived on slight grounds, of such formal covenant participation in the inestimable blessings of the Gospel. Above all, in view of the plainly revealed will of God, upon this subject, and of these obvious advantages, parents who neglect this duty toward their children, will have a grievous sin to answer for to Him who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Inferences.

§ 5.—*Conclusion.*

The truths and arguments set forth in the preceding pages, have been designedly treated in so simple and practical a manner, as to render any special application of them almost superfluous. I shall, therefore, limit these concluding sentences to the mere statement of a few inferences, suggested by the entire subject.

1. The doctrines exhibited, considered in their necessary connection with each other, “show forth the exceeding riches of the grace of God,” in the complete availability of the Gospel plan of salvation for infants. How precious to think of this when standing beside infants’ graves? With what unutterable sentiments of gratitude must not these lively hopes fill the hearts of believing parents, who have been bereaved of children! What are we, that God our Redeemer

The gratitude which the doctrine excites.

should so distinguish us, as to translate our offspring from these abodes of sin, to the glorious and blissful immortality of saints of light—that He should make the sinful children of poor sinners on earth, kings and priests unto the exalted Saviour in heaven? Surely this must add immeasurably to all our other obligations to love and serve him faithfully so long as we tarry in the flesh. Such parents should feel incited by these assurances and hopes, to redouble their zeal, so as, if it were possible, to supply the services of which the Church on earth has been deprived, by the early removal of their children to the Jerusalem above. What an incentive, also, is thus furnished to these parents, and their surviving children, so to live, that the family bonds broken on earth, may, in due time, be reunited, never more to be sundered in heaven!

How absurd to refuse Baptism to infants.

2. In view of the facts and truths presented under the leading sections of the foregoing treatise, how absurd as well as unscriptural; how irrational, as well as wrong, to refuse Baptism to infants presented by Christian parents, or other suitable persons willing to assume the responsibility! Is it not strange that any parents, holding to Infant Baptism, should let their minds be for a moment disturbed by the unchristian, as well as stolid ridicule with which the Baptism of infants is sometimes assailed? What is it these opponents to our faith would have? Look at the case in a figure.

Here are brought hundreds of babes, the children of sincere and humble believers, borne in their parents' arms, to the gates of the earthly Zion. It is confessed that they need salvation. It is also

An Illustration.

admitted that they have part, through the free provisions of grace, in Jesus Christ. It is, furthermore, conceded that they must, in some way, be susceptible of regeneration, to qualify them for heaven, should they die in infancy. Under these circumstances, application is made for their formal admission into the kingdom of heaven, the Church, on earth. Shall they be baptized and so admitted? This is the question raised at the outer gates. Now we may see two keepers at those gates, one standing on either side. On the right hand stands "the Angel of the Covenant;" on the left is Reason. When the Angel of the Covenant sees the little ones approaching on their parents' arms, his countenance becomes unwontedly radiant with joy, and he welcomes them with cheering words, and

says, "Let them come, let them enter, give them the sacramental sign, they are the Lord's heritage." But Reason quickly interposes; "Hold, hold," he cries, "whom have you here, babies! what shall these do in the kingdom? Have they repented? Can they believe? Do they confess Christ? Nay, such unconscious mutes as these can never be admitted."

To all this the Angel gently replies: "Why hinder these little ones? Hath not the Master said, 'Suffer them to come to Me, and forbid them not?' These infants may enter. Open wide the gates for them."—But Reason, persistently reiterates, "They must first repent and believe. Until they do this they are but cumberers of the ground, and would prove a grievous burden to the Church. Let them wait for years of discretion. Away with these babbling babes; the Master

A controversy.

has more important work than to be annoyed by them.”—But the Angel of the Covenant again repeats the King’s command, and pleads the Lord’s gracious example, and with authority declares—they shall enter in, for it is not the Father’s will “that one of these little ones shall perish.” Reason, daunted and displeased, finally responds: “If, then, you will have it so, have it;—but as for me, I will go and build me another Zion, and surround with a ditch so deep, and full of water, that these young babes shall never be able to cross and get within its sacred precincts.”

Think you, dear Christian reader, that Reason did well, even though acting under the cloak of pious zeal?

3. There is one class of persons for whom the doctrines of this book must wear a peculiarly solemn aspect. I mean unbelieving and impenitent parents of

A word to unbelieving parents.

departed infants. Such parents have indeed good reason to think that their children are safely housed in heaven. But how mournful, how terrible the thought, that the doctrine which assures them of this comfort, is proportionally full of threatening for themselves. The more certain you may feel that your child is safe, the greater the certainty of your never, never seeing that child in peace, if you go on and die in your impenitency and unbelief. You often think of that babe in bliss, through the Saviour's grace. Do you never feel drawn to love Him, who so loved your child as to die for it; who so loved it that He hath taken it to himself? Do you never feel any yearnings of parental affection after that departed one?

Remember, the gulf which divides you from your child is growing wider every

Will they ever see their children again?

day. A little longer and it will have become impassable for ever! Can you endure this thought—impassable forever;—your child singing eternally in heaven, and you sighing eternally in hell!

And how bitter will that portion of woe be for parents whom Jesus Christ has vainly sought to draw unto Himself, by saving and glorifying their child! Oh! let His abounding grace rescue you, at once, from such a doom! Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Kiss the rod which has smitten you. Hasten to that Saviour, who is as able as He is willing, to heal the breach made in your household, and reunite you forever, a redeemed family in heaven.

THE END.

22 Jan 1860.

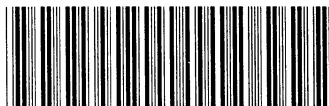


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