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THE  
SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM:

ITS  
NATURE, DESIGN, AND OBLIGATIONS.

BY  
REV. WILLIAM K. TWEEDIE,  
EDINBURGH.

*Second Edition.*

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P R E F A C E.

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THE chief design of the following short treatise is to draw attention to the Sacrament of Baptism, as a means of edification to the people of God. It is painful to observe how low a place it has long held in the minds of many. In some districts of the country, no provision is made for the public dispensation of the ordinance—whole generations have passed away without ever witnessing the rite in the assemblies of God's professing people. In other words, such portions of the Church have had only one sacrament—one holy ordinance of Christ has been superseded, and his body thereby defrauded of a portion of its appointed food.

And as in the natural body, a wound cannot be inflicted without pain ensuing, so in the spiritual body—the Church—the deprivation now referred to has led to injurious results. Even

when the Sacrament of Baptism is dispensed, it is often observed only as a decent formality demanded by the usages of our country—not as an ordinance of God for good to his people. It frequently serves only as a prelude to festivity, and is thus the means of increasing man's guilt, not of promoting his holiness. Experience renders it difficult to decide, whether superstitious additions to Christ's ordinances by Popery and the kindred heresies, or Neologian curtailments of them by Rationalism and the unconverted heart, have been most injurious to his Church.

It is in the hope that these evils may, in some degree, be counteracted, by the blessing of the Spirit, that the following pages are published. Among the tokens for spiritual good which appear in our day of conflict and agitation, the increased attention that begins to be paid to the ordinance in question is one. In some communities where it was recently of rare occurrence, a standing place is now secured for it among the public services of the sanctuary. As an important part of religion, it begins to be viewed in a religious light; and the author's object will be gained, for God our Saviour will be glorified, if this change for the better be promoted—if men learn, in greater numbers, to “ask for the old



paths, where is the good way, that they may walk therein, and find rest for their souls."

It will be seen that controversy has been here avoided as much as the subject allowed. Though strongly convinced of the necessity of "earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints," and of "withstanding even a brother to the face," when he has swerved from the simple truth as it is in Jesus, the author yet feels that, for purposes of edification and comfort, the direct or declarative, rather than the controversial method of presenting the truth, is to be preferred. It was the Saviour's method; and the more holy men become, the more will they imitate their Lord. Without adverting, therefore, at least at length, to controverted points, the truth, as an antidote to error, is stated with all attainable plainness, and is now committed to the blessing of Him who alone can teach the heart—the Spirit of the eternal God.

This little work is very specially commended to the study of the flock among whom it is the author's privilege to labour.

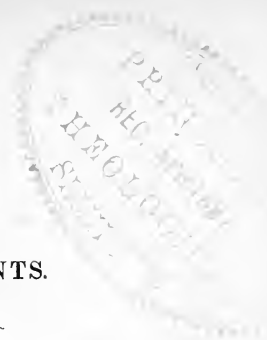
EDINBURGH, *January*, 1844.

## NOTE.

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IN issuing a Second Edition of this little volume, the author would express the satisfaction which he has felt at the discovery, that many who had not previously attended to the importance of Baptism, as *an ordinance of the Church*, and not merely of the family, have reconsidered their views, and, in consequence, altered their practice. He feels more and more assured, that wherever the whole religion of Jesus is embraced, the Sacrament of Baptism will be regarded with ever-increasing importance by parents, and by all. The Spirit of God is unquestionably grieved when a sacrament is lowered from its rank, as well as when it is desecrated in the observance.

EDINBURGH, *July*, 1845.



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# THE HISTORY OF THE

## REIGN OF

The reign of King Henry the Fourth, who reigned from the year 1399 to 1413, was a period of great civil war and political turbulence. The king's reign was marked by the struggle for the throne between the Lancastrian and Yorkist families, culminating in the Battle of Tewkesbury in 1471. The reign of Henry the Fourth was also characterized by the king's efforts to reform the government and the church, and by his military campaigns in France and Ireland. The reign of Henry the Fourth was a period of great change and development in England, and it laid the foundation for the reign of his son, King Henry the Fifth.

THE  
SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM.

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CHAPTER I.

Adaptation of Christian Religion to Man's whole Nature—  
The Sacraments an instance—Neglect of Baptism—Con-  
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It is not merely what the Bible unfolds, increas-  
ingly marvellous as it appears to the man of spiri-  
tual discernment, that commends it to the Chris-  
tian's heart and understanding—it is, moreover,

the exquisite adaptation of what is said to all the varieties of human character and condition—to the joys and griefs, the vicissitudes, bereavements, and disasters of humanity. While the Scriptures are, in one sense, unquestionably the Book of Omniscience, they are, in another, as certainly the Book of human nature; insomuch that, were it possible to bring together the nine hundred millions that live and move on our globe, and subject them all to the teaching of the Spirit, in that Book would they find all their histories written—all their sins detected—all their trials at once foretold and provided for. Under the influence of its self-evidencing power, each one might feel as if it had been written expressly for him; for it is the property of the written, as it was of the incarnate Word, to impress on the conscience the conviction that it can show us “all things that ever we did.” (John iv. 29.)

Now, in order thus to adapt the religion of Christ to the necessities of men, it is so wisely planned that the Gospel is preached not merely to the understanding but to the senses—it is not merely represented in statements, but also embodied in acts. Christ and the benefits of his redemption—the glories of the well ordered covenant, its blessed liberty, its righteousness, its peace and joy

in the Holy Ghost—are described in the words of the Bible, in every form that can render them clear to the understanding, or affecting to the heart; but the Gospel is, in addition, displayed in certain ordinances of the Church—it is set forth in a form which can be tasted, touched, and handled, and is thus pressed upon the heart and the conscience through the medium of the bodily senses. Man's whole nature, in soul and body, is to be restored to moral harmony, or brought into unison again with the mind of God, by means of the truth as it is in Jesus; and that truth, if the phrase be legitimate, is accordingly addressed to the whole man—the body and the soul. In one point of view, to promote our salvation, and in another, to deepen our responsibility to the Judge of all, the eye as well as the conscience is appealed to by the only wise God our Saviour in the Gospel.

It will at once be perceived that we here refer to the Sacraments of the Church; for by their instrumentality, the Searcher of hearts would at once address the understanding, and appeal, through the senses, to the soul. In paradise, no sacrament, in our sense of it, was needed—man was capable there of holding immediate commu-

nion with God without such aids, while the soul was fresh and untainted by sin. And in heaven above, no sacrament, we think, will be required; because the effects of sin will be over, and man for ever restored to the direct enjoyment of his God. The exclusive medium of communion with him there will be the glorified Redeemer—the meeting-place between Jehovah and the soul. But on earth, where we are laden with iniquity, where the very spirit cleaves to the dust, and where God is so habitually forgotten, we need every help to comprehend and keep hold of the things of the Spirit. They must be embodied in material things, to enable us to enjoy them; and in mercy to the souls of men, this has been done by the Author and Finisher of our faith. The Sacraments present invisible grace in a visible form—so that spiritual men may taste and handle it.

Now, opportunities are frequently embraced for explaining the nature of the sacrament of the Supper. Owing to the results which Scripture connects with engaging in that ordinance unworthily and unprepared, men's consciences are sometimes quick and sensitive regarding it; and whether to remove difficulties, to dispel superstition, or gladden the believer's soul, this Sacrament is often explained—preparation for this



high solemnity is pressed on men's attention by line upon line and precept upon precept; and so much is this the case, that the religion of not a few has come to consist solely in an annual observance—but also an annual desecration—of that holy institution.

It may have occurred to some, however, to think that far less attention is paid to the other sacrament—the ordinance of baptism. It is similar in its nature, essence, and design, to the former. It claims the same Author—it implies similar privileges, for “the spiritual part of both sacraments is Christ and his benefits”\*—it points to the same atoning blood—it proclaims the same mercy—and in general it promotes the same spiritual purposes; yet is it seldom fully explained as a means of edification and growth in grace. There may be some who cannot remember ever to have heard the sacrament of baptism largely opened up amid the other topics of Christian instruction, standing as it is in the Word of God, as the last appointment made by Jesus before he left this world to appear in the presence of God for us. In short, we fear we must confess that this Sacrament is not sufficiently explained by the teachers of religion, and is conse-

\* Larger Catechism.

quently undervalued by not a few; it is lowered, by too common consent, to the rank of a ceremony divested of spiritual benefit, or at least the benefits are unknown.

May we not hope, then, that by the blessing of God's free Spirit, the souls of some may be enabled to derive spiritual nourishment from this, as from the other Sacrament, if we endeavour to unfold its nature and design? As it represents to faith the same redeeming love and cleansing blood—as it speaks of purity and peace, and restoration to God's favour, just as the other sacrament does—as it exhibits to the Spirit-taught mind one of the most precious truths of the whole plan of redemption—the believer's union to Christ, his being made "one spirit with the Lord," a "member of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones"—may not the hope be cherished that that believer's faith will be strengthened, his views of the Gospel enlarged, his soul baptized with the Holy Spirit as with purifying fire, while this last institution of Christ, this mode of presenting the Gospel to the eye, is explained? Believers can testify from experience, that it is calculated to promote their growth in grace, and their comfort in the faith. How profitably, therefore, could that benefit be increased and extended!

Turning, with this design, to the Scriptures of truth as the origin and fountain of all saving knowledge, you find the authority of Christ, to whom "all power in heaven and on earth is given," for a certain simple ordinance. The object of Christ's mission to our world—his death, resurrection, and ascension—was to purify to himself a peculiar people. In regard to man, everything that the Saviour did was designed to restore and advance him to moral perfection, and render him fit for dwelling with the pure and perfect God. Whether you consider the doctrines which the Redeemer taught, or the example which he left us, or the few and simple ceremonies which he appointed, you will discover this to be the aim of them all—to make man pure, or restore to his nature the image of his God. So completely is this the case, that the man who has not discovered that personal purity is the grand result—the terminating point of Christ's religion regarding sinners—has yet to discover the real excellence and glory of the Christian scheme. In this point of view, "to bring a clean thing out of an unclean," may be regarded as the chief glory of the Gospel plan. It is not merely pardon and acceptance which that plan provides for, momentous as these are to our race. So prone are we, by nature, to

selfishness, that it is largely mixed up even with the religion which we hold. If men are *safe*, they seek for nothing more; and hence, the aims and desires of many point only to justification—or the pardon of their sins, and the acceptance of their persons—as the grand and the final result of their faith. But the Christian, who has risen, by the grace of God, above the dominion of selfishness, knows that “holiness to the Lord” is the terminating point of true religion. “This is all the fruit to take away sin;” for we are to be “changed into Christ’s image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.” It is nothing to me to be saved, if I am not made fit to enjoy salvation; nay, salvation is but a name, and that a delusive one, unless it include deliverance from the power, the pollution, and the love of sin, as well as from its punishment; in brief, *holiness of heart and soul* is the ultimate object of our faith. The “peculiar people” are to be “zealous of good works.” While the glory of God is to be the result that shall stretch through eternity, that glory is promoted by the sanctification of man, or *restoring to his soul the image of his God*. The cleansing efficacy of Christ’s blood, as well as its peace-speaking—the work of the Holy Spirit in re-moulding and perfecting

the soul, as well as Christ's work in dying for it—should never be overlooked by the man who would receive the whole counsel of God, and be thoroughly restored to the rank of which sin bereft him.

Following out that design, then, the Redeemer appointed the sacrament of baptism in the words: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Taking water as the universal emblem of purity, or the means of promoting it, he commanded men to be baptized therewith, in token of their inward purifying by the Spirit of God. And whether you view the word "baptize"\* as meaning to sprinkle or to dip or immerse, the design of the ordinance is the same; *it points to the necessity of being cleansed from sin ere God can make us truly blessed—of union to Christ before we can stand with acceptance in the presence of Jehovah—or of personal purity ere we can enjoy the Holy One.* It is the effect, or the significancy, not the mode, of the ordinance, that is to be considered; and it tells that the baptized, being purified by the Spirit's power

\* According to Scapula and Stephanus, the word means *to wash, or wash away.* Suidas translates βαπτίζω by *made-facio, lavo, abluo, purgo, mundo.*

and blessing (Heb. ix. 14), should follow after "whatsoever things are pure, and lovely, and of good report." By this sacrament men should be placed in the ranks of Christ's peculiar people. Their peculiarity, we repeat, consists in their holiness; so that, without further explanation, it may appear to the reflective reader, that when the Redeemer said: "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," he just indirectly said: "Go, promote purity among them. Go, see that the men who take up their cross to follow me, who come out from the world, and set their faces Zionward, be cleansed from dead works. While clean water is sprinkled upon them, according to one part of the prophecy, see that the Spirit of God be within them, to cause them to walk in his statutes, to keep his judgments and do them, according to the other. (Ezek. xxxvi. 25-27.) Thus make sure that men perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord, and prepare for that abode into which nothing that defileth can enter." As light hath no communion with darkness, nor Christ with Belial, God can hold no communion with unholy man; and therefore, as a means of promoting holiness in the Church of Christ, as well as of admitting within its pale, the sacrament

of baptism was appointed. It is one of the steps in the way which reconducts us to our God, and at the very entrance, or on the very threshold, of the Church a rite is thus placed, which proclaims the purity, and the holiness, and the likeness to Christ, which should ever reign within. In this sense, the Church below should contain the patterns of things in the heavens.

Now, aiming at the promoting of that end, we would endeavour, in this and the following sections, to answer in detail the following questions:—

I. What is meant by baptism?

II. What are the benefits that flow from it?

III. To whom is baptism to be administered, or who may claim it?

IV. What is the proper manner of administering it? And,

V. What are the responsibilities that follow it?

I. As to our first inquiry, What is meant by the sacrament of baptism? the words of institution may enable us plainly to reply. In that sacrament, the name of God the Father is pronounced over us; so that we profess to fear, and love, and reverence, and obey him as our Father. Looking to Jehovah's character as revealed in

Scripture, as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and our God and Father in him, we profess at baptism to believe in him accordingly. It is not merely the Deist’s God—the God of nature—that we there believe in, but the God of grace, who hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. It is not merely the God of providence, whom nature, in one sense, may teach us to adore; it is the God of redemption, as the Scriptures make him known, that we vow to serve. It is not merely the God of our own fancies—such a God as every unconverted man forms for himself, with such a character for justice or for mercy as suits the sinner’s liking; but the true and very Jehovah, whose character the Scriptures unfold when they say: “I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters.” We declare that we would cease to be his enemies, and become his children—we would cast out the spirit of bondage, and act in the spirit of adoption—we would become “the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” At the first moment of our entering the visible Church, we avow that we belong to the great Christian family, which is named in heaven and on earth after Jesus Christ. We are no longer strangers and foreigners to each other—we begin



to love as brethren; for we have the God who is LOVE for our Father, and Christ who loved us to the death as the first-born of many brethren. And remembering the complaint of old: "If I be a Father, where is mine honour?" we vow, in the ordinance of baptism, that we design to serve God, as children delight to serve the parent whom they love. In short, all the obligations that are involved in the filial relation are superadded in baptism to those which already bind the creature to obey the Creator. We pass from the condition in which God is to us only an incensed judge or a dreaded power, to that in which we can rejoice in him as our Father who is in heaven, and feel assured that as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him. We love to be near him—we mourn his absence—we cannot endure his frown; "his favour is life, and his loving-kindness better than life." "My Father, thou art the guide of my youth," becomes the language of the baptized believer's soul.

Then, the name of God our Saviour is pronounced over us at baptism; and by that we declare that we take him for our prophet to instruct us, our priest to atone for, and our king to rule

us. We disclaim and renounce all Saviours but him, and all righteousness but his. We “avouch the Lord to be our God.” We resolve to “glory only in the Lord,” or “in the cross of Christ”—to rest only on the foundation which he lays, and build on it in the strength which he supplies. Whatever spiritual blessing we need, whether it be deliverance from the power, or cleansing from the pollution, or escape from the punishment, of sin—whether it be a Spirit to sanctify, or a law to guide—the name of the Saviour pronounced over us declares that he is our strong tower, to which we flee for safety and defence. We “honour the Son even as we honour the Father.” Understanding that the Father and the Son are one, we act in the spirit of the Saviour’s merciful lesson: “Ye believe in God, believe also in me;” so that the obligations that lie on us, as the *creatures* and the *children* of God, are here reinforced by the obligations that bind the redeemed to the Redeemer. We are now transferred from that condition in which the condemnation of God’s law was pressing on us, and are accepted in the Beloved. The Saviour has become our righteousness—our hope—our all; and in as far as we have come in faith to the ordinance, we have become heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

*In him* we are infested in all that is contained in the eternal covenant. It is the true or very religion of the Bible that we hold—a religion which provides for sinners a divine righteousness, a divine peace, and a divine nature, in virtue of our ingrafting into a divine Saviour. (Compare Jer. xxiii. 6; 2 Cor. v. 21; Phil. iv. 7; 2 Pet. i. 4; with Rom. ix. 5.)

And next, the name of God the Spirit is pronounced over us at baptism; by which is meant, that we receive him to sanctify our natures, as we receive Christ and his righteousness to justify our persons. We open our hearts to receive him to dwell in us, as in his temple. We undertake, in his own strength, to live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit—whether it be power to grow in holiness, or to bear the ills of life—whether it be grace to say that Jesus is the Lord, or to copy the example which he set—whether it be love, or joy, or peace, or hope, or any other grace—we profess that all is to be sought by the Spirit, or it can never be obtained. The Eternal Spirit alone is able to sprinkle us from dead works, by the blood of which the water in baptism is an emblem; he alone can teach us to say that Jesus is the Lord, or make us truly his. (Rom. viii. 9.)

And all this, according to the Word of God, is meant by our baptism into the Spirit's name—we thereby profess, that for all this, the Spirit is to be honoured—sought—adored. Admitted, as we are, into Christ's visible Church by this rite, we profess and declare that we mean to live like Christ's people; and they "*walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit,*" enjoying "*the comfort of the Holy Ghost.*" It is this that completes the religion of Christ, as it is planted in the soul, or realized in the life of a believer. Had there been no Saviour sent, there could have been no hope toward God; for "without shedding of blood there is no pardon;"—and had there been no Spirit sent, the Saviour provided would not have profited the soul; for none could, in that case, have believed with the heart unto salvation. But when in baptism we take the Spirit of God to renew, to quicken, and to sanctify, the Christian system is then all believed—the plan of redemption is then all understood—the very mind of God concerning God himself is ours.

As God's *children*, then, we in baptism vow to obey him—as his *redeemed*, we vow to trust and to love him—as *renewed or led by his Spirit*, we vow not to vex or grieve him; and such is plainly the meaning of the rite, according to the

formula employed in the ordinance. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—Jehovah—the God of the Bible and of Christians, is here taken for our God, our Saviour, and Sanctifier—the author of all our blessings—the God of all grace, and all consolation in the soul.

But, further to facilitate the comprehension of this subject, we may present it in various other lights, and remark, that in the ordinance of baptism, we see a representation of Christ's blood sprinkled on his people to cleanse, and of Christ's Spirit shed abroad in their hearts to sanctify; and these two appear to exhaust the meaning of baptism, as embodying the vital truths of the Christian religion. As man is polluted by nature, and therefore wretched, he can never be restored to happiness, except by restoration to purity. It is the sure decree of God, that there is no peace to the wicked; and to purify the soul, the blood of sprinkling is applied to the conscience. Of that, the water in the ordinance is an emblem, and it thus declares by a figure what is so solemnly announced in the Word: "Without holiness no man can see the Lord." The righteousness of Christ procures for the believer the favour of God, and all that is implied in it; but as light is

the medium in which the eye perceives, so holiness or purity is the medium in which God's favour is enjoyed; and of that purity the blood of Christ is the cause.

But, even though men have once been purified, they would speedily sink back into pollution, if left to themselves; and, therefore, the Spirit is shed abroad in the heart—believers are led and guided by the Spirit of God. Without Christ's blood, there could be no pardon; and without Christ's Spirit, we could not enjoy a pardon, although it were bestowed. Both of these are, accordingly, represented in the ordinance appointed by Christ for introducing his people into his Church; and they who thus understand it, may walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. At the very threshold of the Church, its most important doctrines are avowed. The Trinity is the Christian's God—the Atonement his hope. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin—the Spirit sanctifies the soul; and then, in sorrow he will soothe—in ignorance he will teach—in weakness he will strengthen—under conviction of sin, he will lead to the Fountain opened for it; so that men may learn from their own experience, re-echoing the word of their God, that, just as Jehovah creates, the Redeemer's blood purifies, and the Holy

Ghost enlightens and upholds. All this is represented in baptism; and, by the blessing of God upon it, the believer is gradually ripened for glory.

Or, you may regard baptism, further, as a *Sign* of the pardon of sin, according to the text: "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sin." The act of sprinkling the common symbol of cleansing upon the body, represents the results secured by the death of Him "who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Without shedding of blood there could be no remission; but the blood of the covenant is sprinkled by the Spirit on the soul, and the believer is "washed, and sanctified, and justified." Not that the external act can produce that result, or benefit the soul in any sense, for baptism is "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God;" but even in the impenitent and unbelieving, the purpose of God standeth sure; the ordinance is a *sign* of spiritual blessings; it is a *sign* of God's willingness to blot out iniquity—of freedom from guilt by Christ's atoning death, from pollution by his blood, and from the dominion of indwelling sin by his grace. It proclaims to the eye of faith this cheering truth, that a sponge of extinction may pass over

the catalogue of our offences—the condemning hand-writing for ever be blotted out (Col. ii. 14); and the baptismal act thus *represents* or *signifies* the actual imparting of the fruits of Christ's death to the soul. Wherever there is faith in the heart, these benefits are imparted; and to be thus baptized, is to be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

Or, in still another point of view, you may regard baptism as a sign or an emblem of our *Regeneration*. In the case of believers, "the heart is" not merely "sprinkled from an evil conscience"—"the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost," are, moreover, the terms in which the spiritual nature of the ordinance is indicated, and its benefits described; and though we shall forthwith discover that baptism and regeneration are not merely different from each other, but are often entirely separated by man's ungodliness, yet is the outward act a *sign* of the inward grace—of our being born of the Spirit, and brought out of our condition of enmity and estrangement, into one in which we are the children of God and joint heirs with Christ. When the baptized believer enters the Church of Christ by the appointed ordinance, he is supposed to leave the world, in as far as it is



sinful, behind him—"the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life," are understood to be abjured. *If he be honest*, or if he be not self-deceived, in the profession which he makes, or the vows under which he comes, "old things have passed away, and all things become new." The energies of his mind have taken a new direction, and the affections of his heart have found objects of new and ever-growing engrossment. He lives for God and eternity—not for self and time; and scarcely differs more from the ungodly world around him, than from his former unconverted self. In short, in baptism a believer avows, in act, his conviction or hope that he is born of God. The rite is the transaction by which he enters on the life of a child of God—a joint heir with Christ.

But, while baptism is thus an emblem of the blessings guaranteed to believers by the new covenant—the pardon of sin, the purifying of conscience, the renewing of the soul—in a word, the restoring of man to the rank of which sin deprived him—it is also a *seal* of that covenant, a proof or pledge that all its benefits will be assuredly conveyed to believers. As men ratify and confirm their deeds by affixing their signature and seal, our covenant God has given to

sinner the guarantee of a similar procedure. God's word had been enough—on that our eternal all might have been ventured; for “blessed are they who have *not seen*, and yet have believed.” But, to embolden the timid, and uphold the weak, the covenant of grace is completed, as other covenants are, by affixing the seals—the sacraments—to the deed. (Rom. iv. 11.) Spiritual blessings are thereby made sure, and the believer's soul made a partaker of the benefits which Christ is exalted to bestow. Men, as in the act of infestment, can thus firmly take hold of what the Gospel freely offers, and walk in newness of life with Him who is at once the origin and substance of all their joy. If the blood of sprinkling be applied to my conscience, shall I count it an unholy thing? If I am ingrafted into Christ, shall I use the strength which he supplies in committing the sins which nailed him to a tree? If I am now enrolled among God's peculiar people, am I free to be the friend of the world, and smile connivance on its ungodly maxims? If, in virtue of Heaven's own appointed seal, affixed to its appointed deed, I have entered on the heritage which Christ died to secure for me, shall I at once deface the seal and mutilate the deed, by testifying, in my life and conduct,

that I am still an alien from the spiritual Israel? It is thus that the believer realizes the hallowing effect of the ordinance in question. On the one hand, a seal is affixed to the covenant on God's part, to confirm his truth; on the other, the benefits are sealed and applied to the believer's soul; and, taught by the Spirit of God, he experimentally knows, that while men may be exposed to judgment for desecrating this sacrament, as well as for unworthily engaging in the other, the souls of the people of God may here be made glad with the abundance of their Father's house. They are, in this ordinance, affianced to their God, and may live anticipating the blessedness of his home—a blessedness which consists in holiness, and which shall be proportioned hereafter to our attainments here.

The ordinance of baptism, it will now be perceived, is not what many seem to think it—a mere ceremony for bestowing on their children a name. It has been degraded to that rank, we fear, by not a few who hold but the letter of religion. Many among us are “weak and sickly,” because they have not yet been taught spiritually to understand the ordinance of the supper; and are not the same results produced when the other

sacrament is so utterly perverted, as to be regarded only as a decent form of attaching to our children or others the name which they shall wear through life? What can result from such a perversion of the holiest ordinance, but deadening to the conscience and dishonour to our God? Neither is it what superstition supposes—a ceremony that will operate like a charm on our little ones when they die; for this also is the opinion of many who are not taught by the Spirit of God. They attach importance to it, but what is the ground for their opinions regarding it they do not comprehend. It is a mysterious something, but how it benefits the soul is unknown and unheeded by many. They are tremulously alive to its importance, when their children are sick unto death; and yet they cannot tell how it can benefit, or promote their blessedness. When the rite is withheld, because there is too much reason to fear that it is superstition, not faith, that asks it, the parents' anguish is increased, because the solemnity is viewed as a passport to blessedness. But regarded as the Christian should ever do, it represents spiritual things under material emblems, and is meant to serve as a vehicle for making us partakers of them, when blessed by the Spirit of God. It reminds us, we have seen, of the blood

of sprinkling—it at once asserts that man is morally polluted, and proclaims the necessity of being made morally pure—it tells that God will not pardon without also purifying, and that the sprinkling of Christ's blood alone can cleanse—it admits us into Christ's visible Church, where all should purify themselves according to the standard which the Saviour set up—it repeats to us the Saviour's words: "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven;" and all this the rite of baptism confirms, by considerations the most cogent that earth can ever know. The solemnity of an oath (an oath of allegiance to God), of which the ordinance partakes, gives additional weight to the transaction; and if our own pollution, Christ's cleansing blood, and the Spirit's sanctifying power, be the truths embodied in it, or pressed on our attention, all may see that it is, in fact, a compend of the Gospel—a means of grace of unutterable importance, as bearing on the soul and its eternal portion.

II. But this brings us to reply to the *second* question, suggested to us by the words of institution, or, What are THE BENEFITS that are actually derived from baptism?

1. Let it be scrupulously observed that no benefits can be enjoyed by any but believers. God may be found of those that seek him not; for, as the sovereign Lord of all, he refuses to be limited even by the sinfulness of man. But without faith it is impossible to please him; and the ordinance in question is but a solemn mockery, unless that parent grace be regulating the heart and soul. Could ministers of religion judge the heart, which God alone can do, and did they discover that faith does not there exist, then they would be faithless to their Lord, and cruel to the souls of men, did they consent to dispense this sacrament to one that is an unbeliever.

With this in view, then, we remark, that as this ordinance is the doorway of entrance into the visible Church, it makes us, externally, fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. The benefits of baptism may, therefore, be easily summed up in this point of view; for *it may admit to all the blessings bestowed on man, through means of the Church on earth.* Through that Church does God communicate all the spiritual blessings he will ever vouchsafe to man. We do not mean by this, any single section of the Church, as if salvation were

attached to it, while all the others are excluded ; that is an opinion which only intense spiritual darkness could originate, or, once originated, maintain ; but we mean that God is pleased, in all ordinary cases, to impart spiritual blessings only through means of the Church of his Son, the Holy Catholic Church—" His body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." It is there that the manifold wisdom of God is displayed—the mystery of godliness, in one point of view, made plain—the Spirit of Jehovah appointed to dwell in his people—and grace nurtured till all be lost in love. Now, baptism constitutes our admission into the visible Church, and it thus instrumentally leads to all the benefits connected therewith. We become interested there in the prayers of all its people. The lessons and admonitions of the Church are brought to bear on the conscience and on the heart. We may be admitted to share all the blessings made sure in the new covenant. The heart may be purified, the life made holy, and the soul brought under those influences which God will bless to fit and ripen it for a higher state of being, where communion with God in Christ will constitute the life of the soul. When you place your little ones at school, you expect them to make progress

in things pertaining to this life—to advance from attainment to attainment, till they have made the acquisitions which their path through this world demands; and by a similar law, when brought by baptism into the Church of Christ, we are there made partakers of its benefits—the Church on earth becomes a nursery or school for the Church in heaven. The children of God, so often wayward prodigals, are guided back to their Father's house—they are “builted together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

2. But what effects or benefits are connected with the act of baptism itself? We have spoken of those that follow it, when men are admitted as believers to the visible Church; and the blessings bestowed through it, when they stand outwardly in a new relation to the world, and inwardly, as believers, to God; but are there any benefits or blessings *immediately and directly* connected with baptism itself?

We reply, that *in the case of believers*, baptism is not merely a sign—it is the means of imparting spiritual blessings to the soul; it not merely represents them to the eye—it is the means or the channel of conveying them into the heart. You read, for example, that Paul baptized the house-



hold of Stephanas ; and supposing that faith was in exercise when that act was performed, then not merely was the party admitted to a place in the visible Church, or to the enjoyment of the sign — the thing signified was, moreover, imparted.\* In consequence of true and living faith, the soul was ingrafted into Christ—it was made a partaker of his spiritual benefits, and taught to enjoy a portion of the liberty which he bestows. At the same time, faith was confirmed and increased by the ordinance, and from that hour the baptized believer was signalized from all the men around him, except his fellow-believers. The seeds of corruption began to be extirpated. The principle of spiritual vitality was planted, and thenceforth began to germinate in the soul. Eternal life had begun ; for, being ingrafted into one that cannot die, the soul of the believer, at baptism, in effect, takes possession of immortality—he is sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise unto the day of redemption. We thus

\* “ The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time when it is administered ; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but *really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost* to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in his own appointed time.”—*Confession of Faith*, chap. xxviii., § 6.

become members of Christ's body, of his flesh, and of his bones. We are made one spirit with the Lord, and partakers of all the benefits which he purchased by his death. As the blood in the human body circulates from the heart through all the frame, so from Christ, the Christian's living Head, do vigour and vitality flow to all the living members, through the ordinances of his house.

But let it be carefully noticed, these effects are not produced on all the baptized. Far from producing benefits, baptism may be perverted to deepen guilt. The name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, according to the words of institution, may be pronounced over some whose condemnation is all the more certain and all the more just. Vows may be broken, and apostacy committed. As in the ordinance of the supper, so in that of baptism, the heart may be withheld from God, the external ceremony may be all that is regarded, and guilt of the deepest degree may thus be contracted. It has been tersely said, and the saying is true, that many by neglecting the great end and design of their baptism, at once "falsify a trust, and bury a talent, and abuse a privilege, and contradict a profession, and break an oath, and violate a vow."

Yet though many may thus render the sacrament of baptism worse than useless, because it possesses no intrinsic power apart from the faith of the receiver and the blessing of God, the benefits which belong to it by Christ's appointment are still represented and applied to believers in the ordinance. Pardon through Christ's blood, an interest in his righteousness, regeneration through his Spirit, are sealed on their souls by the ordinance, as an instrument. In one sentence, we have seen that baptism is one of the seals of the covenant of grace, and all that the new covenant provides for the believer is made sure to him when he comes in faith to the initial rite, appointed by Christ for his people. That rite is to him what a deed of infestment is to the owner of an estate—it puts him in sure possession. To the man that is devoid of faith, baptism is only what the map of that estate would be—representing it to all—conveying it to none.\*

Connected with the benefits of baptism, many questions are started by inquisitive minds, some of which it might be profitable to discuss. For example, some classes of nominal Christians deny

\* Matthew Henry.

the necessity of baptism, and baptize neither infants nor adults.\* They deny the depravity of man, the doctrines of the Trinity, and atonement; and as the ordinance presupposes all these, as it proves, or proceeds upon their truth, some suppress the rite of Christ's appointment, which demonstrates them all divine. Hence arises the question, Is it necessary as a Christian rite? and the words of institution furnish a reply: "Go, teach and baptize all nations." Just as surely as men are to be taught the Christian religion, are they to be baptized into Christ's name. A command from Him to whom all power in heaven and on earth is given, it cannot be safe to set aside. We are Christ's disciples only if we do whatsoever he commands; and to oppose his authority is, in fact, to disown him as Lord, or dethrone him as King in Zion.†

But another class of professing Christians,

\* "Mr Emlyn, and several of the Socinians, have maintained that baptism was and is only to be used by those who are converted to Christianity from a different profession, the pollutions of which are considered washed away by it."—*Doddridge, Lectures on Pneumatology, &c.*, ii. 297.

† "The Quakers assert that *water* baptism was never intended to continue in the Church of Christ any longer than while Jewish prejudices made such an external ceremony necessary."—*Dodd.*, *ubi supra*, 296.

rushing into another extreme, hold that baptism is absolutely necessary to salvation, and that all who die unbaptized die unsaved.\* In consequence of this superstition, the heart of many a bereaved parent has been doubly wounded, and many more confirmed in the delusive imagination, that to be baptized is necessarily to be saved. Hence Popery baptizes the dying savage, and fondly dreams that the soul is safe, because the body has been sprinkled by the hands of a priest. So gross is the Popish perversion of this sacrament, that its missionaries actually glory in their shame. One of them has recorded, that he baptized two thousand idolaters in a year, and had administered the initiatory sacrament to three hundred in a single day, so that his arms fell down from weakness and fatigue—the natural result of that superstition, which prompts the thought that baptism acts like a charm.† On this point, however, the words of Scripture appear carefully explicit; for it is written: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned;” that is,

\* The Council of Trent pronounced an anathema on all who denied the absolute necessity of baptism to salvation.

† See “The Jesuits in India,” by Rev. W. S. Mackay of Calcutta.

condemnation does not follow the want of baptism—else how had the crucified malefactor gone with Christ to paradise?—but the want of faith. To neglect this ordinance is, no doubt, to sin; because Christ commanded it to be observed, and wherever it is wilfully contemned, guilt is contracted;\* nay, by wilfully neglecting it, we show that we are not his disciples (John xv. 14); but to make salvation depend on the ceremony, or to aver that salvation *necessarily* follows it in any sense, is to attach that consequence to the sign which belongs only to the thing signified—to the work of man, which flows only from the power of the Spirit of God.

Or, again, others hold that baptism is always accompanied by regeneration; that is, they assert that every baptized person is regenerated, or born again.† Now, waving all theoretical or abstract

\* “Although it be a great sin to contemn and neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.”—*Confession of Faith*, chap. xxviii., § 5.

† “We yield thee most hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church,” &c.—*Directory for Baptism in Church of England*.

speculations regarding this doctrine, does it appear from experience and fact, that all who are baptized have the heart changed? Is conformity to Christ, and love to God, produced in the soul of every baptized person? The regenerated *can* see the kingdom of heaven; is that true of all the baptized? Can it be believed that men who live in grossest sin, and too often die without any token of repentance, to which even affection or Christian hope might cling, are indeed and in truth the children of God, born of the Spirit, and renewed in the spirit of their mind? Are they adopted into God's family, and made joint heirs with Christ? On the contrary, is it not declared that such men are the children of the wicked one? Is it not made plain that they are without God, and without hope in the world? Nay, has not the God of truth, in his Word, declared of one that was baptized: "Thou hast neither part nor lot in these things?" Far, therefore, from concluding that they were regenerated in baptism, it were wiser to conclude that that holy ordinance, perverted by them, will immeasurably deepen their guilt. If, by regeneration, men mean what the Scriptures mean, namely, *a thorough change of nature, produced by the power of the Holy Ghost*, the event proves

that their theory of baptismal regeneration is baseless. If they mean by that word something else than the Scripture means, it is needless to dispute against their perversions. If outward acts may stand for inward grace, and if the hand of man can perform the functions of the Spirit of God, all the baptized may be reckoned regenerated; but the Christian, at least, whom the Holy Ghost makes wise, will feel that his new nature is outraged, when men speak of Infidels, and the profane of every name, as all regenerated, or "made the children of God," by baptism—as "regenerated by the Holy Ghost," and adopted into God's family.

Or, further, connected with this subject there is one question of a touching and tender nature, to which we would briefly refer, although in doing so we anticipate: What is the portion of the souls of those children who die in infancy? There is no topic on which a bereaved parent's heart yearns more earnestly for clear information than this; and yet there are few topics on which the Bible is more silent, than as regards the portion of departed infancy. It does seem strange, it baffles human solution, when we see the little ones of a few months, or days, or hours' duration, sometimes expiring amid agony worse



than is the lot of the wicked, who "have no bands in their death." And yet more baffling is the fact, that God, who could have told us all, has told us wellnigh nothing of the portion of infancy beyond the grave. That death makes fearful havoc among them is certain; for a large proportion seem to be born only to suffer and to die—and yet the mystery is not cleared up by Him who doeth all things well. A few hints, or a few glimpses into the Godhead's purpose, we may gather from the Scriptures, but there is no precise information in so many words. And why? Why did He who "loved little children, and commanded us to bring them to Him," tell us so little regarding their hereafter? "God is love." "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him." May we, therefore, without seeking to be wise beyond what is written, reverently inquire: Why are we left in doubt, when certainty could have been so easily imparted? We think the answer is plain, though trying. God would have us to intrust our best-loved treasures implicitly to him. He would have us to repose on the assurance, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" It is a measure adopted by the All-wise *to make parents doubly watchful unto prayer for the wellbeing*

*of their children.* In a matter so signally touching, God would have us to be still, and know that he is Sovereign. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen; and the Holy One would call that faith into active and confiding operation regarding all that is precious and dear. Meanwhile we have enough to foster hope; and when this world, and all its deaths and mysteries are over, it will be seen that "He hath done all things well"—not one heir of glory, or of "all that are given to Christ," will come short of the purchased possession. We have enough, I say, to foster hope. God has taken to himself the character of a *Father*. The Saviour appeared on earth in the character of God's *dear Son*, in whom all *the families* of the earth are to be blessed. His love flowed forth with signal tenderness toward the young, inasmuch that he chose childhood as an emblem of the character of his redeemed (Matt. xviii. 3); and on these may bereaved parents find a hope for their children's eternity. Let faith exist in the mind of the father or the mother, as the little one is rendered back to the God that gave it, and at last it will be seen that "of such is the kingdom of God." Be it ours, I repeat, to dedicate our little ones in faith to God, to remember that

his vows are on us, and on them through us, and in the use of the appointed means, the promised blessing will be ours. *To come without faith*, is to do all that we can to ruin, not to save, our offspring; for whatever may be the meaning attached to the words, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me," this much is certain, that the parent who seeks the baptism of his little one in an unbelieving state, can obtain no blessing, as he comes not to the Father through the Son, apart from whom he refuses to be approached. While you seek the sign, then, believe, and pray for the thing signified. Let the grace of God be thus the legacy which you bequeath to your little ones; and by this process, when the fathers are silent in the grave, or rejoicing before the throne, there may be a seed prepared for the service of Him who said: "The promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

And is it not true, that as often as a child is presented to God to be baptized into his name, the little one, through that act, is cast upon the prayers of the people of God? Should not the

death of every infant, and the mystery that hangs over an infant's portion beyond the grave, prompt the earnest petition, that baptism and regeneration may, in *this* case, be indeed the same? How far are we innocent if the prayer of faith be withheld? Or what title has *that* parent to expect the salvation of his little one, who neglects the means of God's appointment, or regards them only in the letter? The sovereignty of God in his mercy may prevent despair—*the covenant* holds out no hope, for faith is the condition of our partaking of its benefits.\* On the other hand, let the little one be believingly dedicated to God; he becomes God's property, not ours: and should the heart of father and of mother have to bleed when they see that mystery—inexplicable but for the Bible—their little infant die, such words as these may be blessed to sustain and soothe them: "The promise is to you and to your children:" "Of such is the kingdom of heaven:" "I will be a God to you, and to your seed after you."

But let it never be forgotten that here, as in every ordinance, the Spirit of God must work, or vain alike are the lessons and the ceremonies of man. It is not more certain that the Son of God

\* See Larger Catechism, Quest. 32.

is the only and exclusive Saviour, than it is that the Spirit alone can teach us to profit by the ordinances of God's house. His power must be put forth, or all is but water spilt on the ground; and this explains why there are so many of the baptized who trample on their vows—the Spirit is not honoured—he is grieved, and he is quenched. And the same blessed truth explains why the people of God are built up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation—why they go on their way rejoicing—because the Spirit whom they honour guides to the Redeemer whom they love. Though one were to rise from the dead, man would not be thereby persuaded to believe. He might be startled or awe-struck—he would not be converted; and it is deeply instructive to notice, that, again and again, when miracles were performed by the Saviour, men's enmity was only increased—his most wonderful works on the *body* often produced only more determined resolutions to accomplish his destruction. It is only when the Spirit of Jehovah blesses the ordinance that spiritual life is imparted, the freedom of God's people enjoyed, and their holiness of heart, speech, and behaviour displayed.

## CHAPTER II.

The Figures employed in Scripture regarding Baptism—To whom is the Rite to be administered?—To Believers and their Infant Offspring—Difficulties of the Question—Mode of arguing for Infant Baptism not always conclusive—Presumptive Arguments—Positive—The Right of Infants rests on Nature of Ordinance itself—It is a Seal of Covenant of *Grace*—Infants may be *Subjects* of Grace, and may therefore have the *Seal*—Analogy between Baptism and Circumcision—The Argument derived from it—Other Arguments—The Obligations laid on Parents—Errors originating in Unscriptural Views of the Ordinance—Want of Preparation—Encouragements held out to Parents—Position of those who, in an Unconverted State, engaged in the Ordinance, but are now Converted—Their Obligations.

THOSE who have made baptism a matter of attention and of careful thought, may have noticed the strong and peculiar language in which it is sometimes referred to in the Bible. For example, a baptized person is said to be *buried* with Christ in baptism, and to rise with him to newness of life: “ Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his

death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. vi. 3-5.) Baptism thus involves in it something like a burial and a resurrection. It is the act by which we declare our purpose to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness—to be crucified to the world, and have the world crucified to us—to have our lives hid with Christ in God, so that while we live, we live not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for our sins, and rose for our justification.

In another passage it is written, that "by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. xii. 13); that is, all of us who have been baptized, not merely by man, but by the Holy Ghost, are made one spirit with the Lord, and members of his true Church on earth. We are united to a common Lord by the bond of a common spirit, "whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free." We become members of the great family in heaven and on earth, which is named after Jesus Christ.

In yet another passage it is written: "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27); that is, if we be indeed

and in truth believers in him—baptized not merely by man, but by the Holy Spirit—then Christ's righteousness is the robe that covers the soul. Through union to him we are complete in him—we stand before God as the Redeemer doth. To us to live is Christ. He becomes to the soul what the soul is to the body—the source of activity, and vigour, and enjoyment.

Or, yet further to exhibit the benefits of baptism, I remark, that the words of the prophet exactly describe them: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. . . . . A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." (Ezek. xxxvi. 25-27.) These are the benefits represented by baptism, and which accompany the ordinance when the Spirit of God blesses the dispensation, and prepares us for it. Without the inward grace, the outward act is worthless, or tends only to increase our guilt—for "grace is figured, not enclosed in baptism;" but let the Spirit of God accompany the outward act, and then the blessings of the new covenant



are sealed and applied to believers—they are ingrafted into Christ—they derive strength and nourishment from him; and the result is, that they, and they alone of all the sons of men, bear fruit unto holiness, the end of which is everlasting life.

Now, in the previous section we have endeavoured to show—*first*, What is meant by baptism?—Our solemn dedication to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—our being set apart for his service and glory in a life of holiness—our admission into his Church on earth, to be prepared for the Church of the first-born on high. *Secondly*, We have tried to enumerate and explain some of the benefits or blessings to which baptism may lead. We enter thereby into the Church of Christ, and become partakers of the benefits which flow through the Church to the soul. According to a phrase current among the Jews, we are gathered under the Almighty's wings, and placed within reach of all the benefits which can ever be bestowed upon sinners. Pardon of sin, through the blood of Christ—peace with God through the atonement—holiness of heart and life, through the Spirit—these are some of the advantages to which baptism, when blessed by the Spirit, introduces the people of God. By means of

these, they are both fitted for heaven, and may enjoy a foretaste of it.

But now an important question is raised, and must be considered: To whom is baptism to be administered? or, Who may claim it? And we can give a general answer by saying, that baptism is to be administered to all that hold and profess the faith of Christ—that believe in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When the Saviour appointed the ordinance, his injunction was, first to make disciples of all men, and then to baptize them. As soon, therefore, as any man becomes a disciple of Christ, he is to be baptized. Whether he has abjured Heathenism in Heathen lands, or turned from Judaism to the religion of Christ, or abandoned Infidelity in lands called Christian, that man is to be admitted among the followers of the Saviour, by the initiating ordinance of his appointment. Man cannot look upon the heart—God alone can judge it; and, therefore, as soon as any one understands the Gospel, professes to believe in Christ, and his purpose, through grace, to walk as a follower of the Redeemer should do, that man is to be baptized. Sin is committed, and the soul endangered, if he enter the Church by the initiatory

rite without faith in the heart; but as the Judge of all has not constituted man the judge of his brother, an intelligent profession of faith, and a consistent life, warrant admission into the Church.

Up to this point, then, it is easy to answer the question, To whom is baptism to be administered? No right-thinking Christian will doubt the propriety of admitting into the number of Christ's people those who possess right knowledge of him and the Gospel; profess their faith in him; and walk, as far as man can judge, as that profession binds them to do—"purifying themselves as Christ is pure," and living like his peculiar people.

But it becomes more difficult to explain the grounds on which *infants* are to be baptized. We have no command, in so many words, for baptizing little children; and hence, many conclude that they should not be baptized at all. It is alleged, that as they cannot be made disciples, or as they cannot believe on Christ, neither should they be admitted by baptism into his visible Church; and Christian Churches have for centuries been divided on the topic.

Now there are some reasons why we should be specially guided by the meekness of wisdom in stirring this controversy at all. Some of the

men who object to infant baptism are second to none, they are superior to nearly all, in promoting the cause and glory of the Redeemer. Their zeal in the missionary work has long been unquenchable, and the God whom they serve has honoured them therein. With brethren so devoted, therefore, we would hold no willing controversy—we would not “fall out by the way.” Yet do we hold that the baptism of infants beautifully illustrates the Gospel of Christ, as a system of free grace, or salvation by another’s righteousness; and we cannot, therefore, without compromising some portions of *the truth*, abstain from defending the rights of infants. Indeed, we know not a single point at which the primary idea of the Gospel, the origin of all our hopes—“*by grace are ye saved*”—comes more prominently into view; and for that reason, we are now to explain the grounds on which our portion of the Church has taught that “baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible Church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; *but the infants of such as are members are to be baptized.*”

First of all, then, we confess our conviction, that some of the friends of infant baptism have taken up some positions regarding it which we

think not easily defended. It is written, for example, that on a certain occasion a woman was baptized by an apostle, "*with her household.*" On another occasion, it is recorded that a man "*with all his* were baptized straightway" after his conversion. Those who plead for infant baptism, infer from this, that as the household must have contained children, they were baptized with the others; and this is reckoned a foundation on which to rest their title to the ordinance. Others, however, deny this inference, because no mention is made of children; so that, at the very most, the argument amounts, they allege, only to a probability. Whole houses are sometimes said to *believe*, and as *infants* could not do so, some suppose that this is sufficient to show that neither were infants meant to be admitted to the baptismal rite.

Others, again, infer the propriety of infant baptism from the words of the Redeemer: "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." But this text plainly establishes nothing, in the way of proof, either for infant baptism or against it. That Jesus loved little children is certain—he "carries the lambs in his bosom;"—that they are capable of be-

ing spiritually blessed is no less so; for Christ blessed them when they were brought;—that a child-like disposition is essential to a Christian state is also certain; for the Saviour said: “Who-soever shall not receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, he shall not enter there;”—that the Scripture quoted may well gladden the hearts of believing parents, and help them to dry their tears without a murmur, when their little ones are carried from their bosom to the grave, is not merely a truth, but a truth eminently worthy the religion of Him who is LOVE;—but with all this, the text referred to in reality *proves* nothing about infant baptism; it has no necessary reference to that ordinance. No doubt these, and the other texts which have been quoted, form a strong presumption in favour of an infant’s right; and when it is remembered that we have no express injunction to admit women to the Lord’s table, or no command in the New Testament, *in so many words*, for observing the Lord’s-day, or in the whole Scriptures for the ordinance of family worship, the presumptive argument acquires a force which some are slow to concede. But, on the other hand, as that argument is circumstantial rather than direct, as it does not necessarily shut up the mind to the

belief of the alleged truth, it is well to regard the texts in question rather as auxiliary, than as supplying a solid foundation for the doctrine referred to. By themselves, they may be insufficient—in connection with others, they may tend to make the truth invincible.

Acting, then, on this principle, we hold it better to pass from these texts, and rest the baptism of our little ones on a firmer, though less extended foundation. And what *is* that foundation? Upon what are Christian fathers and Christian mothers to rest the right of their little ones to admission into Christ's visible Church?

We reply, *You are to rest it on the nature of the ordinance itself, taken in connection with the Gospel as a system of free grace.* There is no express command, in so many words, for baptizing children; but the very nature of baptism, in the blessings which it figures and holds out, is such, that children may be made partakers of all its benefits, as well as the hoary-headed. It is so framed by its Author, as to be the medium of conveying grace into the soul, whatever be the age of the baptized. In explanation of this, I need scarcely remark again, that in the ordinance, unless God worketh, man worketh in vain; without the blessing of the Spirit, all that

we can do is but a ceremony and a form. But let the Spirit of God bless the ordinance—let the unction of the Holy One accompany the outward act—let the blood of sprinkling be applied by Him, while man applies the symbol—water; then, as an all-wise Agent influences the soul, the infant of a day's existence, and the man that has touched the verge of his fourscore years, may be equally fit recipients of new covenant blessings. Regeneration of heart, cleansing from the pollution of sin, and freedom from its guilt in Christ, may all be imparted to our little ones, as well as to ourselves. “We are born again, not of the will of man, but of God;” and surely an infant is capable of being born again from the moment of its first birth; nay, the Word of God assures us that some infants have been so; for John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb.” The power that creates can surely make us new creatures—the hand that formed the body, or the power that breathed into it a soul, can surely quicken that soul as it quickened the body; and to reason as if this might not be, appears to us to be limiting the Holy One of Israel. The *object* of grace may surely be its *subject*; and being both, who will deny to a child the sign of covenant love?



But is it said that our little ones should not be baptized, because they cannot act faith—they cannot, in their own persons, believe upon the Son of God? Then mark how far this objection would carry us. It is manifest that our infant children can be no parties to our prayers on their behalf, any more than they can be intelligent parties in the ordinance of baptism. They cannot act faith—they cannot confess sin—they cannot implore forgiveness—they are equally passive as regards both God and man. Are we, therefore, to restrain prayer on their behalf? Because they cannot unite with us in heart and understanding, are our supplications to be hindered—are they to be left without a blessing implored from our common Father? Affection and religion alike revolt at the thought; and we apprehend that children are as fit recipients of the benefits involved in baptism as of the blessings vouchsafed in answer to believing prayer; nay, that prayer may draw down in baptism, the blessings connected with the ordinance, just as it would draw down similar blessings at any other period of life.\*

\* The *Directory for Public Worship* contains the following sentences regarding baptism:—

“ The minister is to demand the name of the child, which,

It is true that infants are not capable of being affected by the truths of the Word—it is not, therefore, the *medium* of their renovation; but, *in accordance with it*, may the souls of our little ones be blessed by the new-creating Spirit. The germ of immortal blessedness—of the purity that fits for heaven—the principle that expands the powers of man into full-blown perfection—may be deposited in the soul. The letter and the spirit of Scripture (Luke xviii. 15) unite in support of that opinion; so that natural affection and the truth of God are here, in effect, at one; they both sanction the notion that little children may be partakers of the benefits of Christ's redemp-

being told him, he is to say (naming the child by his name), *I baptize thee in (into) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*"

Now, we have heard an objection taken to this formula akin to the objection mentioned in the text. It is said the child is not a party—not an intelligent party—and should not be directly or personally addressed—it should be spoken of, not spoken to. But this, we hold, proceeds on an error regarding the nature of the rite, or the child's title to be admitted to it. If the child have no title, it should not be there—if it have a title, it is a party, and may be addressed. Now, its title is in the parents' faith, to which the promise is made (Acts ii. 39); and to deny the child's title to be addressed, appears to us to invalidate the title to be admitted to the rite at all. It is a party there, in virtue of its father's profession of faith in Jesus. See notes, p. 55 and p. 62.

tion. They are exposed to many dangers by their parents' sinfulness, or neglect of duty—their souls may be placed in utmost jeopardy by their parents' ungodliness; and surely it is not beyond the verge of soberness to infer, that they may be admitted to many blessings in consequence of their parents' faith. (1 Cor. vii. 14.) The child is represented by the parent, and is in one sense holy, if the parent be a believer.\*

But an illustration, or an analogy commonly employed for that purpose, will make this matter more simple than a mere description. The sacrament of baptism, then, among Christians, has been likened to the rite of circumcision among the Jews. At the age of eight days, their children were formally dedicated to God, in terms of the covenant made with Abraham; and Peter assured the Jews that the promises of that covenant were made "to them and to their children, and to all that were afar off, even as many as the Lord our God might call;" so that the blessings are promised to all—parents and children alike. Infancy did not unfit the young Jew from

\* "It is the parents' profession of faith in Christ, and obedience to him, that entitles the child to baptism, according to the tenor of the new covenant."—*Matthew Henry*.

occupying a place in the visible Church, or coming within the pale of the covenant. He had a soul to be saved—he had original sin to be washed away—he needed an interest in the Holy One of Israel; this, therefore, was all the qualification that he required, and the God of mercy placed him within the sweep of that covenant, which guaranteed to all his people the spiritual blessings which flow freely to old and young through Christ the friend of sinners—the purifying of the heart—the pardon of sin—in one word, the mercy of a covenant God.

In virtue of that ordinance, then, the infant Jew became a partaker, as far as an outward act or the faith of his parents could make him, of the blessings promised to Abraham, the father of the faithful. The Messiah was the great subject, as he was the substance, of that promise, and incontrovertibly the children of the Jews were admitted to share the benefits implied in the assurance: “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” When, therefore, the apostle addressed to *Jews* the words: “The promise is to you and to your children,” he knew that the men to whom he spoke would at once understand him as extending to them and theirs, in their Christian condition, the same privileges as

they enjoyed under Judaism; and yet he gave no warning, he recorded no limitation, and no restriction.\* If any change had been made, this was the precise point at which to announce it. If the children of the Christians were to be debarred from what the children of the Jews had enjoyed, it was right that that should be made known—that *the truth* might be understood. A spiritual privilege once conferred by God, is not to be annulled by any but its Author, and we must have his *command*, or at least his *sanction*, ere we can strip the offspring of Christians of a privilege enjoyed by the Jews. Yet is there no repeal, no abrogation, no hint to indicate that the blessings were, in spirit, either altered or curtailed.

Let us judge here, then, as dispassionately as we can—let us put away, if possible, the thought that we ourselves were baptized when we were little children—let us lay aside the character of controversialists, and think or act only as Christians. In that character, say, is it conceivable that the God who, in mercy, placed the Hebrew child within the pale of the covenant, would exclude the Christian child? Does the stream of mercy contract, instead of widening and deepening, as it flows? If this *be* the case, then the Christian

\* Bostwick's Vindication of the Right of Infants, &c.

dispensation falls short of the Jewish, at least in this respect. If every child in Jewry was formally dedicated to God when only eight days old, while children in Christendom may not partake of that privilege, the Saviour has limited, not enlarged, our blessings—the Christian Church has one privilege less than the Jewish, and it was dangerous phraseology to speak as Paul does (Col. ii. 11), of “the circumcision of Christ.” Believing parents now are deprived of a rite by which they might solemnly place their little ones, who hold existence here by so precarious a tenure, under the guardianship of Him who is “the life;” while yet he visited our world, that in Him all the families of the earth might be blessed.

But ought we not rather to conclude that He who brought in a better hope—He who established the covenant with better promises—He in whom all the promises of God are “yea and amen”—secured to believers, and, in them, to their children, the benefits which flow through his Church? It is true, that the little one whose existence has just begun, is unconscious of the hope full of immortality that may await him in Christ—he can act no faith, and manifest no repentance; but it is equally true, that the infant of the Jew was as unconscious of the blessings

promised to him, and as devoid of faith; so that we conclude again, if our children may not be dedicated to God according to the Christian rite, they are less favoured than were the offspring of the Jews. In that case the Saviour would in effect have, to some extent, repealed, not augmented, our blessings; and whatever leads to that conclusion, appears to be utterly opposed at once to the benevolence of the Redeemer and the spirit of his religion. Baptism, in short, is the appointed sign of mercy; and to interpose between children and it, is to withhold from them one of Christ's institutions symbolical of all the benefits which he bestows on man.

Or, further still, those who oppose the baptism of infants, in general concede at once, as Christians, that infants may be *saved*. They grant that little children, dying ere they become responsible agents, or capable of either moral good or evil as regards their own conduct, may be admitted to the blessings of Christ's purchase, according to the well-ordered covenant between the Father and the Son. Now, is it not strange, to confess that children may have the thing signified, and yet may *not* have the sign? They may have all that the deed conveys to them, but may not have the seal affixed to the deed!—their names may

be written among those “ of whom is the kingdom of heaven”—they may not be enrolled among the members of the Church on earth!—the reality of glory may be theirs, but the sign of grace may not! Do the benefits of baptism depend on the existence of faith?—So does the heavenly inheritance. Is it the personal state, or the personal act that must decide the portion of the person baptized?—The same is true regarding his entrance on the glory, the honour, and immortality that are hereafter to be revealed—so that the very argument which would debar a child from baptism would debar it from heaven. *It has not*, and as far as we know, it cannot have, *faith in act in its own soul*. But here again, ought we not rather to conclude that the God whose mercy is as deep as floods, has admitted our little ones, as well as ourselves, into the pale of the covenant that is well ordered in all things and sure? Since they may have the thing signified—salvation and eternal life—why should they be debarred from the sign? Since they may be members of the Church of the first-born on high, why exclude them in any sense from the Church planted upon earth? Since parents are permitted the hope that their little ones, interested in Christ, have an abode in the home which he has



gone to prepare, how strange to withhold them from the medium of conducting them thither—the Church on earth, the nursery of the Church in heaven!

Or even further still. It is confessed that children inherit from their parents a sinful and polluted nature. They are exposed to suffering, and misery, and death, through their parents; and may they not, through their parents also, have a title to admission into the visible Church, and the blessings involved therein, designed as they are to counteract evil, and medicate the soul—a title, we mean, not natural, but gracious—not of earthly origin, but bestowed by the Father of lights? If children be included in the covenant with their parents—if the promise be unto fathers and children alike—who can forbid water that they should not be baptized, seeing that they are capable of enjoying the benefits purchased by the blood of the covenant, and applied by the Spirit of God? He said unto the Jews of old: “Stand all of you up this day before the Lord your God, . . . . your little ones and your wives, . . . . that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God” (Deut. xxix. 10–12); and the same may surely be said of every professing follower of Christ. We are urged, therefore, to the conclu-

sion that our little ones, as well as ourselves, may partake of the benefits of the well-ordered covenant. They, as well as we, may be heirs of glory—they, as well as we, are immortal, and yet sinful—they, as well as we, may be interested in the love of Christ, and made partakers of his blessings. *Inasmuch as the plan of our redemption is one of free and sovereign grace; as salvation is not the result of works going before, to merit or prepare for God's favour, but solely of mercy on God's part; as we are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God; and as the Spirit's power is inexplicable as the motions of the wind—we are forced to conclude that children may be the objects of his transforming power and saving efficacy, as well as the man that has reached maturity and manhood. Had the notion of self-derived merit or personal right entered at all into the terms of man's salvation, then we think infant baptism would have been indefensible; but as all is of grace, that is the foundation on which the hopes which we cherish and the rite which we perform over children are based. Resting there, we feel that we are rooted and grounded in the truth of God.\**

\* Dr Owen, in his *Greater Catechism*, thus settles the

We have been reconciled to what some perhaps deem a useless task—contending against brethren in Christ—by the thought, that while doing so we are, in fact, unfolding the true nature of baptism. To understand it aright, we have to remember that it is a seal of the covenant of *grace*—that it is a spiritual ordinance, and represents spiritual things. Unless the Holy Spirit bless us, nothing that is truly profitable can result from the ordinance; but if the Spirit *do* bless it, both old and young are equally fit to receive his sanctifying influence. Many, we grant, many are not benefited by the ordinance at all; nay, but they live as if it were their joy and rejoicing in practice to abjure their vows. To see baptized men living in a state of practical ungodliness, which tends to corrupt the very heathen—as we read is sometimes the case with our countrymen in foreign lands—to witness this does furnish a practical objection against the baptism of infants; and when this objection is urged, we own that the conduct of many unholy parents gives it much appearance of truth. But let not man's error overlay or mar

controversy: “To whom does baptism belong?”—“Unto all to whom the promise of the covenant is made; that is, to believers, and to their seed. (Acts ii. 39; Gen. xvii. 11, 12; Acts xvi. 15; Rom iv. 10, 11; 1 Cor. vii. 14.)”

the truth of God. Let us, on the contrary, keep the closer by that truth, that others seeing our good works may glorify our God. Let us make sure that it is not the outward act alone, but the blessing of God's Spirit along with it, that we aim at and pray for; and when the ordinance of baptism is thus raised to its proper rank as a spiritual ordinance—when men learn to speak not merely of *the* sacrament, but of *the sacraments*—advancing them to that position of co-ordinate importance in which God has placed them—the blessing of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, may oftener accompany it in rich abundance. The blood of Christ may cleanse the young from original sin, as it cleanses the conscience of God's people from day to day from the pollution of actual transgression. Our children may be separated from the world, and set apart for God, as the children of Judah were. Being his, and not ours, nor their own, they may be reared for him. He may “give us our wages” in the blessedness of godly families—our children's souls and ours may eternally rejoice together in salvation through Him who washed us from our sins in his own blood.

These remarks admit of many applications that

may be profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness.

Since it is only through us that our little ones are admissible to baptism—as it is only *in consequence of our faith* that any blessing or benefit can be expected to infants when baptized—how solemn is the obligation under which this places parents to come *as believers* to the ordinance in question! If we are not believers with the heart upon the Son of God, we have seen that no blessing can be obtained—on the contrary, we do all that *we* can to prevent God's mercy in Christ from reaching our offspring. It may reach them in spite of us—for God may exercise his sovereign prerogative, and heap coals of fire upon our heads; but I say that we do all we can to prevent the privileges of the new covenant from being extended to our children. Surely, then, if parents love their offspring, and would do them good in the highest sense of all, they should seek to come to the ordinance of baptism in the way that God appoints; that is, in the exercise of faith in Christ, the Saviour and the friend of man. How groundless would be the expectation of benefit from the other sacrament, if the communicant were not a believer—if he came only to perform a decent ceremony, or to acquire a name; and surely not

less vain the hope of God's blessing in the sacrament of baptism, unless faith in Christ, the only mediator between God and man, be at that hour in exercise. As often, then, as a parent dedicates a child to God, he should see to it that he is guided and led by a true and living faith; for the welfare of two souls, his own and his child's, depends upon him. If it were proper to draw a contrast between the sacraments, or place those institutions in opposition which God has made co-ordinate and essentially the same, we should say that baptism is the more momentous of the two. In it the spiritual welfare of two immortal beings are concerned—in the other sacrament, the welfare only of one.

And here it may not be improper to advert to an error which largely prevails regarding preparation for the ordinance of baptism, and which, we fear, mars or prevents the benefits that might otherwise accrue. There are many who would scruple, or utterly refuse to approach the Lord's table, who yet have no compunction in reference to the ordinance of baptism. They decline to comply with Christ's command regarding the one sacrament—they cannot understand why there should be any hindrance to their observing the other. Some will proudly resent it, when an ob-

stacle is laid in their way. Regarding it, at heart, as only a ceremony, they do not see what preparation, what spiritual fitness is needed, ere they can approach Jehovah with acceptance.

Now, all who understand the nature of baptism will perceive, that this error originates in the low and degrading views of that ordinance which have so long prevailed among many. It is not contemplated as bodying forth the same truths and blessings as the other sacrament. It is not understood, that as the one exhibits the atonement offered for the guilty, the other speaks of blood sprinkled on the impure. On the contrary, baptism is by hundreds viewed as only a ceremony and a form, devoid of spiritual meaning, and not involving any responsibility, such as need disturb the conscience, for it cannot increase our guilt. It is not remembered that God is a party in the solemn transaction—that to sin here is to sin in the very presence of the Trinity, with the name of Him who is “Holy, Holy, Holy,” sounding in our ears. And surely if this were kept in view, there would be more of self-scrutiny, more of prayer, more of looking unto Jesus, more of honouring the Spirit in baptism, than often appears to be the case. Men would not rush to this sacrament in a worldly frame, ready, like

David, to perpetrate a double sin in one. It is not right to argue as if man's abuse of the ordinances of God rendered them invalid; but if there be an argument possessed of any strength against infant baptism, it is found in the unprepared state in which many parents seek to engage in the ordinance—the absence of prayer, repentance, and preparation, before the holy Jehovah is approached. If parents loved their children's souls as they love their bodies—that is, if grace were as constant in its operation as nature—O how pains-taking and circumspect would they be in dedicating their children to God!—what searching of soul would there be for genuine faith, that, through the parent, the child might live before his God! There are parents who would feel that their affection was outraged by the mere suspicion that they would injure their little one's body, who, yet, without being conscious of it, are putting the soul in jeopardy; and all this is the result of a sacrament deposed from the rank in which the Saviour placed it, and treated as a ceremony which, in many cases, never touches the conscience, nor warns the parent to offer up a single prayer. Because of this, and similar things, “the land mourneth.”

But we turn from this to another class, to offer



another suggestion. Let the believing parent hope in God regarding those that are dear to him. We may have brought them to the sacrament of baptism in a careless, unbelieving frame of mind, and there is no promise made to those who do so. But let the child be dedicated in faith, and then, I say, let the believing parent hope in his covenant God regarding his little one; for the promise of that God is his rock. Let him go, in fancy, to the Lake of Gennesareth, and see a little skiff there, just leaving the harbour, and about to encounter a storm. The storm arises, and as the frail bark struggles with the waves, a speck among the waters, you may think that it is in danger; and so it would be, were human help its only refuge. But there is One in it—omnipotent, though perhaps asleep. When the peril is the greatest he awakes—he speaks—and there is a great calm. So with the little child that has just commenced the weary voyage of life. All seems rough and tempestuous before him—every chance is against that child's salvation in a world so unholy as this; but the Holy One, who sets chance at defiance, is guiding the young soul. All its springs are in him. If we have come, as believing parents should do, to the ordinance of baptism, and if there be meaning in the promises of God, hope

may be cherished—the head may be laid even on a death-bed pillow, cheered by the consolation that the Holy One will smooth away difficulties, and guide our little ones after us to heaven as their home. “How sweet is it to godly minds, to be certified not only by word, but also by something to be seen with the eyes, that they obtain so much favour with the heavenly Father that he hath care even of their posterity.”\*

But there may be some parents now converted, who have gone, perhaps, in former times, to the baptism of their offspring with as little consciousness of its deep importance as if God were no party, and the soul not concerned, nor eternity affected. It sometimes happens that the intensest sorrow is occasioned when conscience is quickened by the Spirit of God to discover the sin that was committed, and the danger that was incurred by approaching unworthily, and without a warrant, to the table of the Lord. The deepest contrition has been felt, death-beds have been disturbed, and hope for eternity has been clouded, at the remembrance of such a presumptuous sin. And, in like manner, parents, long dead alike to the value of their own and their infants' souls, may have gone unprepared, unbelieving, unthink-

\* Calvin.

ing, to the ordinance of baptism, exposing at once themselves and their offspring to the anger of a pure, and holy, and jealous God. No realizing of his presence—no believing with the heart upon his Son—no honouring his Spirit—no prayer for his blessing—all was formality; all was, therefore, unblest, nay, all was sinful; and of all this, some such parents may now be convinced by the power and demonstration of the very Spirit whom they once dishonoured. They professed that God was their Father, whereas he was only their Judge; that Christ was their Saviour, whereas at heart they did not believe on him; and that the Spirit was their Sanctifier, whereas they were grieving and quenching him. But all the danger is now discovered, and they are ready with the cry: “Behold, we are vile, what shall we render unto thee, O thou Preserver of men?” “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed!” And O how deeply should such parents be abased!—how instant, and pressing, and constant, should be their flight to the Fountain opened for sin! If they have sinned at once against their own and their offspring’s soul, and if they have “lied unto God,” by vowing without designing to pay, should not the dust be their bed, and sackcloth their covering? And since God has in mercy opened

their eyes, and turned them from darkness to light, should not their assiduity be double, if, peradventure, their children may be reclaimed from the paths into which their parents' errors or prayerless lives may have been the means of leading them? Think of the meeting that must take place before the great white throne, between ungodly parents and the children whom they helped to ruin, and, by all that is precious in the soul or blessed in the favour of God, be induced to undo, as far as prayers and example can, the effects that may have followed neglect, tending to misery here, and "the worm that never dieth" hereafter. Could the heresy that "the sacraments justify and give grace" be proved, such repentance and contrition might be needless; but according to the truth of God, the parent, now convinced of his danger, will flee to the Fountain opened for sin.

## CHAPTER III.

Prevalent Opinions indicative of Erroneous Views—The *Manner* of performing the Rite of Baptism—Sprinkling—Immersion—The Controversy useless—*Where* should the Ordinance be Dispensed? In the Assemblies of God's People—Reasons—It belongs to the Church, not the Family—Practice in Early Ages—In the Reformed Churches—France—Geneva—Holland—England—Scotland—Acts of Assembly—Opinions of Individual Reformers—Calvin and others—Injury to the Body of Christ by Private Baptism—Need of every Auxiliary to strengthen Religion—The Error of supposing that none interested but the Parent or Child—Every Believer present may, in a sense, be a Party, and blessed—Baptism should spread its Influence over the whole Life—The Motives to Holiness implied in it—the Use to be made of it, in Temptation, and otherwise—In Training the Young—Instance—In Promoting Brotherly Love—Questions to Parents regarding the Sacrament—and its Consequences.

THERE are many opinions which pass current for solid truth among men, which yet, when examined, are found to be superficial or untrue. The prevalent opinion regarding the cause of winter, namely, the supposed greater distance of the sun, is an instance. The truth is, he is then nearer

than in summer. In like manner, there are some opinions in religion sanctioned by very common consent, which, nevertheless, evince that it is not in a vigorous state in the soul; and just as a skilful physician can detect the condition of the body by the pulse, may we detect the condition of the mind and soul by the religious opinions which men profess. For example, the ordinance to which we are referring, the Sacrament of baptism, is supposed by many to be one in which no person is concerned except the parent and the child. There are some who view it merely as a ceremony; and when it is dispensed, there is in their minds no feeling that any spiritual benefit can be enjoyed by them, or that any responsibility is incurred. It is not understood that every member of Christ's Church is interested in every ordinance of his appointment, nor is it remembered that the Saviour aimed at the edification of the whole body by every lesson that he taught, and every commandment that he gave, and every rite that he appointed. What he was pleased to institute, we should carefully study, and carefully use as he designed; and our profiting would more manifestly appear, did we thus seek spiritual nourishment from every ordinance, and aim at growth in grace, in the enjoyment of every privilege. There can be no

doubt in any reflective mind, that our religion would have a healthier character, it would rest on a firmer basis, and be more productive of fruit unto holiness and peace, if we thought more soundly, and understood more clearly than many do, the nature of the ordinance which admits us to engage in the practices, and, when blessed by the Spirit of God, to share in the blessings of our faith.

As to the *manner* of performing the rite of baptism—the next point that comes before us—little need be said, in addition to what has already been advanced. The application of water to the body is the divinely appointed sign of spiritual benefit. It points to the cleansing of the soul by the blood of sprinkling; and if that spiritual benefit be significantly represented, we need not contend regarding the manner of doing so. Whether we immerse the whole body, as some contend that we should do, or sprinkle only a part of it with water, according to the practice of others, the purifying of the soul is equally the end or object that is aimed at; it is equally the end or object represented in the sacramental act—it is *the application of water to the body* that constitutes the true *symbol* of the rite. It was predicted that God would *sprinkle* clean water upon us, in token of our spiritual cleansing.

The blood which that water betokens is called "*the blood of sprinkling*;" and by such language the believer is taught that sprinkling with water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is a significant emblem of that purity of which the apostle speaks, when he says, that "baptism doth also now save us;" and explains himself by adding, "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God." Instead, therefore, of contending about the *mode*, let the effect, the essential, spiritual benefit, be sought, and all secondary considerations will find a secondary place. If a word be employed in Scripture which is confessedly ambiguous—meaning, as some allege, to immerse—as others argue, only to sprinkle—let all sectarianism, on such a point, be entirely put away. And when we regard this matter, not in the light of controversy, but of Scripture, it may appear that it supplies but another instance of the wisdom, not announced, but involved in the plan of redemption. Its rites as well as its truths are designed for all climes, as well as all ages. The Saviour of sinners first propounded to mankind, in a palpable form, the divine conception of *one Church for the world*. He legislated for that Church, and not for any



detached or fragmentary section; and in doing so, while the principles which he unfolded are immutable as Jehovah's truth, the exterior framework which he set up may be regarded as plastic, or capable of adaptation to the circumstances, the climate, and the habits of his worshippers. It seems as necessary that what is secondary should admit of varied adaptations, as that what is primary should be unalterably determined for the guidance and the binding of all; and keeping this in view, it may perhaps appear, that the contest occasioned by the partisans of immersion, on the one hand, and of sprinkling, on the other, is one of the logomachies which Scripture repeatedly condemns. The words of our Confession of Faith are as judicious as they are temperate. "Dipping of the person," it says, "into the water, is not necessary, but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person." \*

But another question here occurs: Where should the ordinance be dispensed? We have spoken of its nature, design, and subjects, and would consider next, Where may its design be best promoted?

\* Chap. xxviii., § 3.

Now, the reply is very plain. Baptism should be dispensed, in all ordinary cases, in the house of God, or, if that may not be, at least, in the assemblies of God's people — the places where prayer is wont to be made. It is true that the Saviour has given no specific command to that effect. He foresaw that his people would often be without a church in which to worship, and would be forced, by the world's hostility to God's pure truth, to serve him with no covering but the canopy of heaven, and no shelter but the Rock that is higher than we. For that reason, the Saviour has not tied us down to any locality, as if there were sacredness in any spot. He was giving, we have seen, a religion for the world, and has, accordingly, so framed all his institutions, as to render them fit to expand and become commensurate with the extent of the globe on which we dwell. In carrying this purpose into effect, he has left us free to determine various points which must be differently determined in different countries. For example, there are places in our world where baptizing in the church might be attended with danger to health or life ; and, for that reason, there is no positive command upon the subject. But still, when we look at the design of the ordinance—

when we remember that not merely the parent or merely the child is concerned, but that it may become a means of conveying spiritual instruction, or warning, or comfort to many, it appears that the house of God, in the assemblies of his people, is the proper place for administering the rite. If we would not deprive the body of Christ—his Church—of the nourishment provided for it—if we would not reduce it to that condition in which it has only ONE sacrament, while Christ meant it to have two, our little ones should be dedicated to God in the place where he has chosen to set up his name. The sacrament of baptism should thus be lifted from the low position which it occupies in the minds of many, as if it implied little else than the naming of a child. It should be viewed as a means of growing in grace. It should be fenced and guarded as the other sacrament is; and, by the blessing of God upon his own ordinance, parents would be warned, believers would be edified, and the general design of Christ's Church more abundantly promoted in the land. We have seen that all the leading doctrines of our faith—man's inborn corruption, his need of a Redeemer and a Sanctifier, of blood to atone for and to cleanse, as well as of a new heart and a right spirit—are presented to

our attention in the sacrament of baptism, in a way more emphatic and impressive than words. Unless these be constantly pressed on men's notice, religion is not likely to prosper; and it was that they might be pressed on our notice from Sabbath to Sabbath that our wise forefathers made baptism an ordinance of the Church, and not merely of the family or the house.

But as this is a point regarding which no little misconception and consequent error in practice exists, it may be profitable, for doctrine on the one hand, and correction on the other, to consider the subject of public baptism more in detail.

And, in the first place, it is manifest, from the very nature of the ordinance, that it is not meant merely *for the family*, but, as we have seen, *for the Church*. The birth of our little ones constitutes them members of our own household; and baptism is meant to render them members of the household of faith, as far as devoting them to God on our part can accomplish that end. And if the ordinance be designed for the purpose now indicated, why perform it in private, as if our children were to be surreptitiously introduced to the enjoyment of the benefits implied in baptism, or as if the Church itself were no party in the transaction?

But whatever may be our opinions or practices on the subject, certain it is, that in the early ages, and wherever religion has been in vigorous operation, the initial rite of the Christian Church has been in the midst and presence of the assembled people; and of this abundant evidence has often been produced. While the Church of Christ was a persecuted or scarcely tolerated institution, baptism might be dispensed wherever convenience permitted, or necessity required—in dens and caves of the earth, on mountain sides, or in the homes of private Christians; but when the Church was properly organized, and the worship of God in Christ fairly established in the world, the rite became the property of the Church, and was performed in its presence, for edification and comfort *to all*, as well as for blessings to the baptized. “The congregation, with great fervency, poured out their souls in common and united prayers, both for themselves and for the person baptized, and for all others, all the world over.”\* And if we regard the practice of the Reformed Churches as of any authority in

\* Justin Martyr, quoted in Presbyterian Review for July 1841. The two articles which appeared in that journal, entitled, “Practical Reforms in the Church,” deserve to be reprinted in a separate form.

such a case, it will be found that their testimony is uniform in favour of public baptism. Those of France declare, that “no baptism shall be administered but in Church assemblies, or where there is a formed public Church.”\* In Geneva, it was enacted that “no baptism should be celebrated but in the ecclesiastical assemblies, immediately after the sermon.” In Holland, it was resolved, that “private baptism should not be used, except in cases of persecution.” The Church of England at the Reformation, according to Bishop Burnet, thought it expedient “to have all baptisms done in the church,” and “permitted the other only in cases of necessity.”† The Westminster Assembly, in its Directory for Public Worship, adopted by the General Assembly in 1645, declares, that “baptism is not to be administered in private places, or privately, but in the place of public worship, and in the face of the congregation, where the people may most conveniently see and hear;” and in unison with the spirit of this direction are both the Acts and the practice of the Church of Scotland, during its best and purest periods. In the days of Knox (1556), it was appointed, that as the sacraments

\* Canon VI., *Of Baptism*, in Quick's Synodicon.

† Presbyterian Review.

are “not ordained of God to be used in private corners, as charms, but left to the congregation, therefore, the infant to be baptized shall be brought to church.” The First Book of Discipline (prepared in 1562), declares, that “baptism may be administered wheresoever the Word is preached, but it is more expedient that it be ministered upon a Sabbath, or upon the days of prayer, . . . . . to make the people have a greater reverence to the administration of the sacraments than they have.” The Assembly of 1580 censured a minister “for baptizing privately;” and in 1581, another minister was suspended for this irregularity—the Assembly at the same time ordaining, that “the sacrament should not be administered in private houses.” In 1618, the Five Articles of Perth, passed in a packed Assembly, forced the practice of private baptism, along with private communion, and various superstitions, on the Church of Scotland—a measure which at once overthrew its constitution and outraged its religion. But in the memorable Assembly of Glasgow (1638), where so many corruptions were swept away, that of private baptism was abolished with the rest, and from time to time thereafter, Acts similar in spirit were passed. In the year 1690, the Assembly

again “discharged the administration of baptism in private; that is, in any place or at any time where the congregation is not orderly called together to wait on the dispensing of the Word;” \* and the reasons assigned for this stringent but salutary act, are deserving of serious attention. The parties who “receive the sacraments,” it says, “are solemnly devoted to God before angels and men—they are solemnly received as members of the Church, and do enter into communion with her;” and it adds: “By the private use of the sacraments, the superstitious opinion is nourished that they are necessary to salvation, not only as commanded duties, but as means without which salvation cannot be attained.” Our forefathers thus sought at once to promote the edification of the people, and repress the superstition which they daily witnessed; hence their close and resolute adherence to the simplicity of Scripture truth; and wherever religion is so vigorous as to command the mind, and subordinate all to itself, these maxims, in their spirit, will be restored to their former ascendancy, harmonizing as they do with the Word of God, and the incontrovertible design of the ordinance.

\* Acts of Assembly, 1690.



The opinions of individual Reformers and Protestant divines are in strict accordance with these acts and canons of the Churches. Calvin has declared, that the sacrament which introduces us within the Church, and is the sign of our adoption, cannot validly be dispensed except in the public assembly of believers; and asserts, that private baptism agrees neither with the ordinance of God nor the practice of the apostles. Another author asserts, that except in times of persecution baptism should be public; because it is annexed, not to private exhortation, but to public teaching —“ go, *teach* and baptize,” are the words used by the Author of the ordinance. Another — that unless there be some pressing necessity, baptism should not be administered except in the assembly of the whole Church.\* Another — that it is rather tolerated as a corruption, than countenanced as a part of the Church’s constitution. In short, whether we regard the authority of different portions of the Church of Christ, or of individual members, we find their testimony uniform and concurrent. Nothing but pressing necessity, such as occurs in times of persecution, and the disorders which accompany them, could justify, in their opinion, a practice

\* See the authorities quoted in Presbyterian Review.

which tends to lower a sacrament from its rank as a spiritual ordinance, to that of a decent ceremonial, or a superstitious observance—a charm—a passport to heaven—worthless, yet confided in.

Nor is it difficult to find reasons for this harmony of different Churches and different men on the subject. They all saw that, according to the Word of God, the ordinance of baptism is designed, not for the family, but for the Church—that it is a means of warning, of instruction, and edification, to the assembled members—that it reminds them of their condition by nature, of their need of cleansing from pollution, and pardon from guilt—that it presses the Gospel on their notice and acceptance—that it tells of the vows that are on them, so often broken, and, therefore, to be anew repented of. Moreover, they saw that, as often as baptism is dispensed in private, the Church is robbed of one of its sacraments, and the body of Christ deprived of a portion of that spiritual nourishment, which he knew to be needful to preserve it in vigour. Not merely is superstition fostered in some—religion is, at the same time, weakened or repressed in all; and though many are incapable of connecting these things with baptism, that is itself a proof that the ordinance, in its nature and effects, when

blessed by the Spirit of God, is not understood. The parent that can forego the benefit of the prayers of a congregation on his own and his little one's behalf, has yet to learn, in this respect, the efficacy of prayer. The professing Christian who does not shrink from robbing any member of Christ's body, or any portion of his Church, of its appointed nourishment, except at the bidding of providential necessity, is not, in doing so, acting in harmony with the mind of Christ. If this ordinance, in short, be a means of "feeding Christ's sheep," or "feeding Christ's lambs"—who will incur the responsibility of depriving them of their appointed food? He may have given no positive command on the subject, and that is a proof of his forethought for his people. He foreknew that they would often be doomed, in a world which crucified him, and hates and persecutes them (John xv. 20), to wander about without a shelter or a home—with no protection but that of a covenant God, and no place of worship but that which he had built; and he, therefore, recorded no enactment regarding the place of baptism. But, by making it an ordinance, a sacrament *of his Church*—by placing it at the very threshold of his house, as a token of our having entered there, he has plainly indicated

his mind regarding it—he has made provision at once for arresting the thoughts of the careless, and promoting the growth in grace of the godly. In a word, from Sabbath to Sabbath, this ordinance calls on God's people to *keep* out, as they profess to have come out from the world, and not do despite to the holy name by which they are called.

And if we reflect, further, on what is implied in the Sacrament, the reasons for its publicity will become yet more cogent. Of all the transactions which are dictated by religion, none appears surrounded by more considerations that should awe and solemnize than the rite of baptism. God is a party—he is either mocked or honoured. Two souls are concerned—the parent's and the child's. A young immortal is about to be dedicated to God in a way that will either give intensity to his guilt, or enhance his blessedness for ever. At the same time, he is entering on a life where spiritual dangers assail him on every side, amid which nothing but combined omniscience and omnipotence could conduct him in safety. He has just been born in sin—he is entering on a sinful world, where the dormant seeds of iniquity will soon be warmed and fostered into strength; and in circumstances like these, who that understands the nature of fallen man, or

feels the need of grace to rectify it, would not employ every agency to counteract the evil, and fortify the good? Now this can be done by enlisting the prayers of the people of God on behalf of the child—by drawing down the blessing which alone can correct man's wayward nature, or fit him for the inheritance of the saints in light; and wherever this is not done, the least that can be said is, that men are not sufficiently alive to spiritual danger on the one hand, or to spiritual blessings on the other. God has bestowed privileges on us and our offspring, which we unconsciously consent to forego.

And here we would address some warning remarks to those who think that they have no interest in this matter, as being only spectators when the rite is performed. You HAVE an interest in every baptism, as surely as you have an interest in the preaching of the Gospel. The Saviour so constructed this sacrament, as to make it promote the growth in grace of all believers; and the child of God may find peace, and comfort, and spiritual benefit in it, as well as the other ordinances of the Church. The blood shed to redeem and to cleanse, may here be sprinkled again on the conscience. We are solemnly told of our own in-

grafting into Christ. We are reminded of the vows which we have all broken, and for which we are all responsible. This sacrament tells at once whose we are, and what we ought to be. It presses on our notice the words of a holy man in another portion of the Church. "Sit down," he says, "and think with yourselves what you stand obliged to, and either renounce your wicked life, or renounce your baptism. Deal ingenuously: rescind the deed, and profess to all the world that you look not on yourselves as listed under Christ's banner, nor engaged to be his servants and soldiers; or else live as becometh Christians. Will you carry Christ's ensign in your forehead, and yet fight against him in his own camp? This is not only hostility, but treason; and as rebels and traitors are more severely dealt with than enemies, so shall you be; and believe it, the flames of hell burn the more furiously for being sprinkled with baptismal water."\* These solemn truths, I say, are pressed on our notice, as often as we are present when the ordinance is dispensed; and though many do not think of these things, that is their error and their sin. By faith they might make the benefits of baptism their own as often as it is dispensed in their presence.

\* Bishop Hopkins—Works, ii. 428.

Prayer for the child, the parents, and ourselves, might enable us largely to profit by it; and, instead of that indifference which indicates that the ordinance is not understood, men would display such interest in it, as would teach them to feel like him who exclaimed: "It is good for us to be here." The Lord Jesus has not instituted one ordinance too many; and if we have not learned to find benefit and refreshment to our souls from the ordinance of baptism, we are still unacquainted with *one* Christian privilege—we deprive ourselves of *one* means of being blessed by God in Christ. You know that there was a period in Jehovah's existence when this world did not exist; when the sun and the stars, the ocean and the earth, sprang into being at the bidding of their God. He spoke, and all creation stood fast. But, in the *new* creation, far more than a word was needed. God did not merely say: "Let there be redemption," and there *was* redemption—"Let there be pardon," and there *was* pardon; but the Son of God had to travel in the greatness of his strength, and the depth of his sorrows, and bear the burden of his people's sins, ere redemption could be accomplished or pardon vouchsafed. Now, the sufferings of Christ, in accomplishing our deliverance, are brought be-

fore us in the sacrament of baptism; and what Christian will say that he has no interest in these? The dowry of blessings which he purchased for his people, beginning in pardon and terminating in glory, are here presented or spread out before us; and who will say that he has no interest in these? Away, then, for ever, with all such notions of the ordinance as we are now opposing—rather train yourselves to think of it as designed for you, as well as for the parent and child; and thus honouring God in his ordinance, you will be honoured by him. Let your baptismal vows be renewed in spirit, let communion with a covenant God be sought, as often as ye witness, nay, assist by your prayers at the rite, and your souls will prosper and be in health.

Nor should the benefits and moral influence of the ordinance be limited to the time of its dispensation. It is the glory of the religion of Christ that it brings to bear upon sinners a multitude of motives unknown to any other system. It is plain that all that God can heap on man in providence will not constrain him to holy obedience; nay, the more that the Author of every good and perfect gift imparts in his *providential* bounty, the more signally is man oftentimes a sinner. “The prosperity of the fool destroys



him." Where is man more deeply degraded as a moral being—more forgetful, nay, more ignorant of God—than where the year is one perpetual autumn, constantly pouring into man's lap the exuberance with which the teeming earth is charged? Where is God more conspicuously dishonoured than where he has lavished his mercies on men who enjoy more than they can squander, yet employ it all against him? It is not in *nature*, it is not in *providence*, to make man obedient to his God; ere that be accomplished, new motives must be brought to bear on him, and these motives—unfolded only in the Gospel—must be pressed home on the conscience by the Spirit of God. "The love of Christ" is one such motive. (2 Cor. v. 14.) The fact that the Holy Ghost dwells in the believer's heart should be another. (1 Cor. iii. 16.) "The power of the world to come" should be a third; and *the fact that we are baptized*, should be yet another. Like her of old who repelled the tempter by the cry: "I am baptized," we should ever plant our baptism between us and sin. It should thus be employed to reinforce the principle of grace, and promote our holiness of heart, speech, and behaviour. Inasmuch as we have vowed, we are resolutely to pay our vow. We are to re-

member that our baptism, like the Gospel, will prove a savour, either of life unto life, or of death unto death. Whether we realize or neglect its binding force, it remains, as a deed to which God is a party, in all its force, and all its high authority. God "remembers his covenant for ever," and we should do likewise. When temptation assails, it should be repelled by the remembrance that we are God's. When faith is feeble, it should be fortified by the reflection that we are not our own, but dedicated to God. When indwelling sin struggles for the mastery, that should urge us afresh to the Fountain opened for sin. In one sentence, "holiness to the Lord," purity like that of Christ (1 John iii. 3), nay, perfection like that of God (Matt. v. 48), should be cultivated and advanced by the constant remembrance of the fact, that the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, has been pronounced over us. We are buried with Christ by baptism, and should be as completely cut off from the love of sin as the dead are cut off from the doings of earth; and did we thus, in spirit and in truth, improve our baptism, an affirmative answer might be given through all our families, to the questions: "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?"

And while all who can reflect should thus find a motive to constantly increasing holiness in the sacrament of baptism, parents should employ it as a high moral incentive in the training of their children. It is recorded by one godly man,\* that he could not but confess his gratitude to God for baptism in infancy, not merely because he was thereby introduced into the visible Church, but because it furnished his parents with an argument for an early dedication of himself to God; and it might be the same with all godly parents. Their children should be trained to understand their baptism, and the solemn obligations under which they are laid by it. The holy and constraining nature of the sacrament should be pressed on the young child; and were it thus employed as furnishing a sanctifying motive, more of the rising race might be prepared to exclaim: "Thou art my trust from my youth; by thee I have been holden up from the womb." The Jews were commanded diligently to explain their rites to their children (Deut. vi. 6-9, 20-25). The same reasons for explanation exist in the case of Christians; and from this no parent is free till means be employed to induce the young to remove the responsibility from their parents to

\* Matthew Henry.

themselves, by their own proper act, in due season performed.

Nor let it be forgotten, amid all the jarrings that too often turn the Church on earth into an arena of keen contention, that baptism is a bond of holy union among the people of God. BY ONE SPIRIT, WE ARE ALL BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY; and among the countless reasons which the religion of love suggests for unity, this is not the least. Let the ordinance continue but a ceremony, let it be still used only as a charm, let ignorance continue to ask the rite, and ministerial unfaithfulness to perform it, and then no such benefits can result. But let baptism by the Spirit of God, be prayed for, as well as the external rite observed, and then, while the Spirit of adoption takes possession of the heart, we shall learn to "love as brethren, to be pitiful and courteous." The children of a common Father, redeemed by a common Saviour, and born of the one Spirit, should surely be "knit together in love."

And now to ascertain how far the spirit of these remarks has been imbibed and acted on, we would suggest some questions to parents, to guide them to a sound judgment regarding their position in re-

ference to baptism and their children. You have sought the outward ordinance—have you prayed and watched for THE INWARD BLESSINGS? You have sought THE SEAL—have you also sought and prayed for THE THINGS SEALED? You have obtained THE SIGN—has the thing signified been as anxiously longed for? You would have felt yourselves aggrieved had you been denied the outward rite for your little ones—have you been as resolutely bent on obtaining the renewing grace and the cleansing blood of the Saviour to be applied by the Spirit to the soul? You have dedicated your children to God—to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—have you reared, and are you rearing, them for him? He is, by profession, their heavenly Father—do you teach them to love and honour him in that character? He is, by profession, their Saviour—do you train them to receive and rest upon him exclusively and alone? He is their Sanctifier—do you teach them, that unless they be renewed and made holy by the Spirit, as Christ was holy, they can never see God? You have vowed to set before your children a Christian example—have they reason to take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus? You have vowed to maintain the worship of God in your family—do the morning and the

evening sacrifice ascend from the family altar, as in the temple of old? You have declared, with all the solemnity of an oath, before God and man, that you design to bring up your little ones in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—is his Word, then, your guide, your counsellor, and light? Are the maxims of the world discarded? Are those of Scripture a rule at once to you and to your child? If these things be neglected, while yet there are vows upon us to be guided by them, is not the ostrich the emblem of our condition, “which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them?” (Job xxxix. 14, 15.) But if these things be attended to in the spirit of prayer, and dependence upon God, then, in the use of his appointed means, we may expect his promised blessing. No doubt, our children may go astray in spite of all our painstaking and prayers; and it has happened that the grey hairs even of godly parents have been brought in sorrow to the grave, by the waywardness of unconverted youth. Jehovah is sovereign; and the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. None so exceedingly guilty as they who live in sin under the preaching of the Gos-

pel, and the enjoyment of spiritual privileges; and none so hardened in sin, so “desperately wicked,” as the child of many prayers, when he tramples on his father’s warnings, or despises his mother’s tears. But still, amid all that is mysterious or sorely trying in this, be it ours to discharge duty—to use means, to wait in faith, and cherish hope; and if our bread be cast upon the waters, we shall find it after many days—it may be given to us to see, if not here, at least from our home in glory, the fulfilment of the promise: “There shall be a seed to serve Him while sun and moon endure.”\* What parent would mock his offspring, by pretending to leave him an inheritance on earth, to which that parent had himself no title, and which he could not, therefore, bequeath? Who that is wise would trifle with his child, and rear him for great things, while beggary was certain to be his portion? And will any parent deceive him who is bone of his bone, by neglecting first to bring him to God in faith, and then to train him for God in hope?

\* The admirable helps provided, in the form of Catechisms on baptism, should encourage Christian parents to discharge with zeal the duties now explained. We would particularize those of the Rev. Henry Grey of Edinburgh; Rev. Alexander Beith of Stirling; and Rev. Robert Forbes of Woodside, Aberdeen.

## CHAPTER IV.

Indifference regarding the Soul the result of Unbelief—Importance of all Men, especially Parents, forming a Right Estimate of it—The Influence of Mothers in the Training of the Young—Instance from Scripture, 2 Tim. i. 4, 5—Remarks addressed to Mothers founded thereon—The Strength of a Mother's Affection, the Secret of her Influence for Good or for Ill—Hence a Mother's Responsibility—A Mother's Dangers—A Mother's Trials—Encouragements—Examples—Augustine—John Newton—Conclusion.

SOME holy men have been so much surprised at the neglect wherewith the human soul is treated, that they could account for it only by alleging that the immortality of the soul is not believed by men. Looking at the sayings of God's Word on the one hand, and the doings of man upon the other, the only explanation that could be suggested was, that a large proportion of mankind, even while they profess the religion of Christ, do not practically believe that life and immortality have been brought to light in the Gospel. They have heard of them as they have



heard of events remote in distance or in time; but they exercise no permanent or practical influence on the conscience and the life.

To make this matter plain, language nearly like the following has been used: A child is born into the world, but who thinks or says: Here is the commencement of an existence which shall never end—here is a nature that will suffer no decay for ever—here is a being which will outlive the sun, witness the death of time, and retain its consciousness, its moral connection with the Supreme Spirit, through untold and unimaginable duration? The birth of such a being is rarely contemplated in reference to its eternity of existence, its immensity of suffering or of joy; it is thought of only, or chiefly, as a child of time, and to its interests for this life, which nature makes our earliest care, we are prone to devote our exclusive attention. The death of such a being, moreover, in the vast majority of cases, is spoken of only as the loss of human life, the departure of one of the human animals from amidst a teeming population. But the immortal spirit—where is it? In wretchedness, or joy—for ever! How rarely are its worth, its capabilities, and its eternal destiny made the topics of prayerful and heartfelt reflection! In short,

the idea of immortality is often buried out of sight amid the griefs or the engrossments which earthly things occasion.

But whether men think of it or not, the child that was born but an hour ago is an immortal being. The spirit which God has breathed into it, is undying as the Godhead—at least nothing can destroy the immortal creature but the fiat of Jehovah. In his Word, however, he most plainly tells that the immortal principle, the soul, shall never die. Unending misery, or unending joy, will be the doom of every child of the family of man.

This being the case, as unchangeably settled by the God of heaven and of earth, you will at once perceive how important it is for every Christian to entertain right views on this subject—not merely those transient feelings about immortality which satisfy so many, and which would suffice were sentiment religion—but deep, permanent, and influential convictions of this unquestionable truth, that every child of Adam will exist, and exist for ever, either in agony or joy. Right convictions on this subject would drive a nominal religion away from the mind, just as sunrise dissipates darkness.

Now, we need not hesitate to say, that no man

has right views of the soul's immortality, until God's Spirit has taught him to believe God's Word. It is the religion of Jesus Christ alone that enables man to realize eternity, as that religion alone brings immortality to light, or can prepare him for it. And till religion does that, men may not overtly deny the immortality of the soul; but they habitually act as if they did not believe it. They put the body in the soul's place, and treat the body like an immortal. It is the constant tendency of man to reverse the order of God's appointments—to prefer man's approbation to God's—the interests of time to those of eternity—the righteousness of self to that of the Saviour; and never is this tendency more apparent than as regards the treatment of the soul. Now, while it is much to be desired that all men could hold Christian views on this subject, it is doubly important that parents should be clear concerning the destiny of souls hereafter. Every child committed to a parent's keeping will live, and move, and be for ever either in anguish or in joy; and till this be so felt as to influence the very heart and soul, no parent can even be supposed to do his duty to his child.

And when we thus look at the destiny of young immortals in the light of eternity, little reflection

is needed to convince us further, that the character of their immortality will be decided by their character on earth, as this, again, is mainly formed *by the character and the habits of mothers*. For this reason, and following up the previous sections, we would now offer some suggestions to mothers, in the hope that some may be taught, by the power of the Spirit of God, to care more intensely at once for their own immortality, and that of their offspring.

And there is a passage in the Word of God which will introduce us directly to this subject. In 2 Tim. i. 4, 5, it is written: " I greatly desire to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy ; when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice ; and I am persuaded that in thee also." Though grace or godliness is certainly not hereditary, though " that which is born of the flesh is flesh," and the children of the holy are often abandoned or profligate, we yet find in this passage that the grace of God produced unfeigned faith in three successive generations. The grandmother Lois, the mother Eunice, and the son Timothy, were all alike the children of

a heavenly Father; in other words, unfeigned faith in Christ united them all to him, and he is the first-born of many brethren. Moreover, it will be noticed that it was through the *mothers* that this faith descended. Lois taught her daughter Eunice, and Eunice taught her son Timothy, to believe upon the Son of God; that is, in each case it was the mother whom God's sovereign Spirit employed to be the instrument of bringing the child to Jesus Christ, and salvation through his blood. "From a child," we read, "Timothy knew the Holy Scriptures." Means were early employed by his mother to imbue his mind with the knowledge of God, of Christ, and of man, as the Scriptures describe them; and the result, by the blessing of God's Spirit, was "unfeigned faith" in the Redeemer.

From this historical fact, then, we may infer the general truth—that *the character of children here, and their consequent portion hereafter, essentially depend on the mother*; and this is the truth to which we now invite attention.

It is not our design to enter on any detail of maternal duties. What we mean is simply to draw attention to the great importance of the mother's part in the training of children. She is not formally recognised in the ordinance of

baptism, except as represented by the father; but it were well, perhaps, were she, with all the solemnity of a sacramental deed, allowed to come under a direct personal responsibility, in the open view of the Church, regarding the soul of her child. Nature is not enough—it is as nothing; grace should be superadded, that mothers may be warned to watch for souls like those that must render an account.

I. Now, nearly all who advert to this subject have dwelt largely on the depth, and strength, and warmth of a mother's affection. The most unquenchable of all earthly love is that of a mother to her child, insomuch that God has singled out this passion as the emblem of his own affection to his covenant-people in Christ, saying: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." (Isa. lxiv. 13.) And this principle of attachment is as much a part of a mother's nature, as the heart and the blood are parts of the human frame. A child may be wayward, and the cause of much disquietude to a mother's mind; but let that child become sick or diseased, instantly all is forgotten, and sleepless nights are spent without a grudge in the sufferer's chamber; or let that child grow

up to manhood—let him even become reckless and a prodigal, still a mother's affection clings to him—her half-broken heart feels whole again, even at the hope of his being reclaimed to virtue and to God.

On the other hand, this love is in general reciprocated by the child. That affection which many waters cannot quench in a mother's heart, is responded to by her offspring often with equal warmth. Even a long course of sin cannot extirpate that attachment; for, in some cases, guilty youth have been known to confess, that amid all their wanderings, they never could trample on, they never could even forget, the affection or the spell-like charm of their mother. It haunted them in all their ways, and from time to time, it loudly protested and reclaimed against their sins. It was the one influence for good that kept them from sinking into hopeless profligacy. God could be forgotten, the Saviour denied, heaven disregarded, and hell made a topic for mirth; but the remembrance of a holy mother clung to the soul, as the skin adheres to the body.

Now, this reciprocal affection, so wisely ordained by God, is the great secret of a mother's influence in training. It arms her with tremen-

dous power to ruin her offspring, if she be herself unconverted; but it may render her also another Lois, or another Eunice, if her heart be influenced by what the verses we have quoted call "unfeigned faith." Let mothers ponder this subject well. In consequence of the strong tie that binds them to their children, and their children to them, such is their influence, that, under God, they may abundantly promote their offspring's happiness, or as surely promote their misery. So great is this maternal power, that of all the millions of immortal beings swarming at this moment on our globe, there is not so much as one who has not been largely influenced for good or for ill by her who bore him, if she also reared him. Insensibly she moulded his character—strengthening the good, and weakening the vicious, or the reverse, according to her own; so that in the hands of mothers are placed by Providence the destinies of the coming generation; nay, not merely of that, but the destinies of many throughout all generations—even for ever. Long after you have said to the worm, "Thou art my mother and my sister," your example will be operating for good or for ill; because, possessing a mother's tenderness, you wield a mother's power. You may therefore do what nothing besides, ex-



cept Omnipotence, can accomplish—you can do everything short of converting your child; and even his conversion may be largely promoted, or as largely hindered, by you. And since God has made you the stewards of so much power, see that you use it all for him. Lavish not your love and influence on your offspring's bodies alone, for the mother who does that, has formed a plot against her children's soul; but by a pure example, by a Christian character, by faith unfeigned, and the fruits of it in a holy life; in short, under the Bible's directions, bring your children up for God; that is, be like Lois—be like Eunice—be like Hannah, who “gave her child to the Lord all the days of his life;” and if this be neglected, mothers need not weep for their children's waywardness or wickedness. For, is it wonderful at all that God should repay us with stripes and anguish, when even a mother can be so lost to true affection, as to seduce the heart of her child from God, and fix it upon vanity? One of the strongest moral powers possessed by a creature is, we repeat, a mother's love; and if that moral power be perverted to evil, need we marvel though moral misery be fomented, and moral disaster be the result? Were we free to proclaim our experience as a minister of the Gospel, we

might tell of innumerable cases where men now walking with God, dated their first impressions of God's holiness and love from a Christian mother's warning, or rebuke, or lesson; while the annals of crime, in this and every land, make it all too plain how deplorable is the havoc wrought by godless, worldly mothers.

II. It is most true, then, that a child, in a mother's hand, is very much what clay is in the potter's. By the plastic power of affection, she may mould the child according to her pleasure—ere he has left her knee, his character for life may be formed. She cannot give him a new heart—that is, she cannot convert him; but by adopting right means, and setting a right example, Christian mothers may do everything short of conversion.

At the same time, nothing will be done to purpose, until *responsibility to God* be felt. As long as a mother thinks she may rear her children in her own way, and for her own purposes, no good need be expected. Children then are trained for ruin—the friendship of the world is the object for which they live, and that friendship is “enmity with God.” It is only when a mother begins to feel her responsibility to Al-

mighty God—when she remembers that her child is but lent to her by him, and that he expects his own again without usury—and when she understands the nature of that deposit intrusted to her keeping, that she begins to act like Lois, or Eunice—to train her children to unfeigned faith. Many a mother never once asked the question: “Is it well with my child’s soul?” “Am I training him for a happy immortality, or for one of anguish?” The accomplishments of earth may be heaped on such a child; but what if such mothers be all the while leading their offspring on the road to ruin—smoothing the already gentle slope that leads to wretchedness—or making the second death more sure—because the blow is inflicted by the hand of apparent affection?

How desirable, then, that all were alive to a sense of a mother’s responsibility! You and your little ones have to meet before your common God, and are you training them here as you shall wish you had done when you meet them before the throne? When you press your children to your hearts so tenderly, are you sure you have brought them to Him who loved little children yet more intensely than you do, and surrendered them to him in soul, body, and spirit?

Before the Judge of the quick and the dead, you have yet to account for every thought, and word, and deed, regarding your children. Realize this accountability. Pray God's Spirit to bless it to you, that you may escape from the misery of meeting your children ruined at the bar of God—ruined by a mother's example, or a mother's neglect. We mourn when we read of savage mothers, who are taught by fiendish superstition to dip their hands in the blood of their offspring, and reckon it a service well-pleasing to their gods. But which will be thought most cruel, at the grand assize?—the savage mother, sunk in Pagan darkness, ruining the *body*; or mothers in Christian lands, with the Word of God to warn and instruct them, systematically endangering their children's *souls*?

It is true, no worldly-minded mother ever thinks of such responsibility. She is the unconscious betrayer of that immortal creature that is bone of her bone. She is leading her unsuspecting, because loving victim, along the path to ruin. The body and the soul—both are exposed to danger by an unpraying, unconverted parent. Such a mother's very kiss and smile may lodge that venom deeper in the young soul, which, when it has festered there a while, may end in

death eternal. On this point, the truth should not be disguised—for the sake of a rising race, the fact should be proclaimed—that the unconverted mother can only mislead the soul, and endanger the immortality of her child. Had Lois or Eunice been one of the thoughtless daughters of Zion, who lived only for the frivolous pleasures of the passing day, and whom the prophet describes (Isa. iii. 16–26) as the causes of woe and tribulation to their land, then, instead of training Timothy as they did, he too would have been inured to frivolity—an heir, perhaps, of the world's smile, but also of Jehovah's condemnation. It was because the faith of God's people reigned in their souls, and made eternal or spiritual things realities, that they cared either for their own souls or for that of their youthful relative; and where the faith of God's people does not operate, as well expect the tide to ebb or flow at man's command, as the soul to be regarded.

And to you who cannot but fear that you are unconverted mothers, let me say, that we know some who go sorrowing from day to day, and will go down in sorrow to the grave, because, in the days of their worldliness, they misled, and have, peradventure, eternally ruined, the souls of

children who have gone to the judgment before them. We have seen poignant grief in dying men's chambers, when a wife was trembling on the verge of widowhood—and was first made aware of her coming condition, by the obviously approaching dissolution of him who was her staff and her stay. We have witnessed heart-rending scenes, when children were just about to be deprived of a parent—perhaps the sole surviving one—and cast upon a cold, uncharitable world, with scarcely a friend but the orphan's God to lean on. We have seen scenes of bitter misery, when parents discovered the precocious depravity of their favourite boy, and found that he, whom they had often caressed and all too fondly loved, had forfeited his liberty to his country's outraged laws. We have beheld intensest sorrow, when the tidings were conveyed to an unconscious widow, that he whom she still hoped to meet alive had long been drowned in the deep. And we have seen misery more than all, when a soul was first convinced of sin, and righteousness, and judgment to come, by the resistless energy of Jehovah's Spirit. But none of these has equalled the agony we have beheld in the case of mothers, once unconverted, but now given to the Lord, who could look back on the days of their god-

lessness, and remember how they stood between their little ones and Christ—little ones now gone to the bar of a just and holy God. O! could the thoughtless mothers, who are fast treading in the footsteps of those whom we now describe, and leading their children down a path, all strewn with flowers, to the chambers of death, know for an hour the poignant grief of some of their sisters now convinced of sin and converted from it, the feeling might yet be blessed by the Spirit of God to save some young soul alive—a soul in the act of being ruined by the mother who thinks that she loves it. Infidels protest against the fancied cruelty of Abraham in offering to sacrifice Isaac—why have they no protest against unconverted mothers, who do what they can to sacrifice the souls of their children?

III. But connected with a mother's responsibility, we may mention *a mother's dangers*.

The sources of such dangers are very numerous. We need refer only to a few; and, among the first, we would mention *the tendency to act on mere feeling or affection, apart from Christian principle*. It is so easy to indulge a mere emotion, so difficult to take and to keep hold of a right principle, and so irksome to be constantly

applying it so as to correct the objects of our love, that every hour of every day witnesses the injury wrought on the young from this source. Without consulting conscience, principle, or the Word of God, many regulate their conduct by the mere impulse of affection; and may we not fear that the very tender mercies of such mothers are cruel? To uphold principle, the Son of God must suffer. Rather than let it be outraged with impunity, the whole race of man must be condemned to die. "God is love," and yet that very Being will by no means clear the guilty—He *scourges* every child whom he receives. Correction is, therefore, only a modification of love; and "he that spareth his rod hateth his son." (Prov. xiii. 24.) No doubt, parents should correct through tears—it should pain them yet more than the child; but so explicit is the Word of God on this subject, that only fond partiality can make us either blind or indifferent to its meaning. *Wherever affection interferes with principle, a primary law is outraged, and misery must be the result;* and the history of the world is full of illustrations of the sad results of such tender mercy, which the Scriptures describe as cruel. We may hazard the remark, that a case was never known in which a child loved, with true filial



affection, the mother that had spoiled him by indulgence. They may become partners in sorrow, but never, till "old things pass away," can they reciprocate real affection.

Nor should we omit to mention the dangers to which mothers are exposed from *erroneous views of human nature*. It is difficult to persuade them that the little ones, whom they cherish so fondly, were born in sin. (Ps. li. 5.) The innocent and untainted in man's esteem are reckoned innocent and untainted in God's; and not till the Spirit of Jehovah, whose work it is to convince of sin, has shown to mothers what manner of spirit they are of by nature, will they credit or realize the announcements of God regarding their offspring. No truth is more unwelcome to unconverted, and therefore unchristian mothers, or more resented by them, than the unquestionable fact, that their children are by nature spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. But, as in the acorn there is contained the germ or embryo of an oak, however majestic; so in the infant, that has just begun to be, there lie folded up all the elements of evil, awaiting the time or the circumstances which shall occasion their development. He who, as a child, indulged his cruelty by torturing flies, became, as a Roman

emperor, the willing butcher of his race. And though natural affection, so often on the side of unbelief, reclaims against it, the Word of God has declared that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," or polluted; only "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," or holy; and the history of the world, without one solitary exception, but those which converting grace has occasioned, furnishes a melancholy corroboration or comment on the truth.

Now, it often happens that mothers do not study their infants' nature in the light of Scripture; and hence the danger to both. The spiritual disease, if acknowledged at all, is regarded as slight and superficial. It is, therefore, slightly and superficially treated. No attempt to extirpate the malady—no strong crying and tears for regenerating grace—no sustained efforts to counteract the evil. The wound inflicted by sin is neglected, and the disease is allowed to gather strength, and grow malignant, because affection renders the mother blind to her offspring's true spiritual condition. But let the nature even of loveliest childhood be studied in the light of God's Word—let it be remembered that it is not wise, and cannot be safe, to continue ignorant where God has been pleased to instruct us—let

it be borne in mind, that an error here may be fatal, and must be dangerous; and then, being taught by God to understand the true condition of the human heart, even when it gives its very first beat, we shall be led to honour the new-creating Spirit—that the germ of immortal life may be planted in the soul when natural life first animates the body. From the moment of their birth, the *new* birth will thus hold a place in our prayers for our little ones; and their first acts of intelligence will be to listen to their mother's petition on their behalf: "Create in them a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within them." It would be interesting to know how many parents are thus watching unto prayer for their children's conversion; in other words, how many *practically* believe that conversion is requisite ere they can be safe.

But another and a fertile source of danger lies in *the pains which mothers take to train the body, and render it accomplished, irrespective of the immortal principle—the soul.* We are careful, and even sleepless, in cultivating a child's mind, or watching a child's body, and every means is adopted that can fit the young for usefulness or honour in society. The ornamental is added to the useful, and perhaps

neither pains, nor warnings, nor punishments, spread over years, are spared, that the end in view may be accomplished. But contrast with this the feeble exertions which some nominally Christian mothers make in training their children to "faith unfeigned." Something may be done on the Lord's-day, though often even that is neglected, and left to be performed by others. The men who have been the scourges of their age, have been possessed of capacious intellect, but seared in conscience—capable, perhaps, of grasping the whole concerns of an empire, and swaying the destinies of half the world, yet dead to their accountability to God—owning no supreme but their own despotic will, and sacrificing the lives of thousands to aggrandize or gratify self. And yet, untaught by this historical fact, *conscience* is not trained—its sensibilities are not awakened, as they should be, by habitual reference to God, as the Witness now and the Judge hereafter—the peculiar motives of the Bible are not pressed upon the soul—the love of Christ, especially to the young, is not made habitually prominent—the understanding, not the heart, or talent, not goodness, is the object of solicitude; in short, the energies of the young, and the ingenuity of the aged, are wasted in

training the body, so that the immortal is superseded by the mortal—eternity is supplanted by time. There *are* many parents, wise unto salvation by the teaching of God's Spirit, who give their days and their nights to the work of watching for their little ones' souls; but, on the other hand, O how many a mother has reason to mourn yet more bitterly than Rachel in Ramah, and refuse to be comforted, because of her children's spiritual condition—their unconverted, and yet uncared for souls!

Now, these, and such as these, are the dangers to which mothers are exposed. No doubt, a truly Christian mother—a Lois or Eunice—would watch and pray against such things; but all mothers have not faith unfeigned, and hence the danger, lest a child's ruin be traced up to a mother's neglect. The day is coming, we repeat, when you must meet your children before your God and theirs; and I would ask, in the name of all that is lovely in a mother's affection, or momentous in a child's eternity, Is any one prepared to sacrifice the soul of her offspring on the altar of worldliness or frivolity? "It is not our heavenly Father's good pleasure that one of these little ones should perish"—can it be yours? Every mother's heart is ready with the exclamation,

“God forbid!” and by the feeling which dictates that cry, be warned to watch and pray for your children’s souls, that the Spirit of grace may guide you safely through a mother’s dangers. Be not like the worldly-minded, the staple of whose anxieties are not for holy, heavenly things, but for earthly advancement and affluence, as if earth were heaven. Maternal affection may, indeed, suggest some instinctive cravings for a child’s felicity, even in reference to eternity, on the part of parents who know not the path that leads to blessedness there. That affection has, in some cases, dictated such desires even in the profligate and the abandoned—insomuch that one of the most reckless though gifted of our countrymen, whose writings abound with ridicule of the Word of God (which God himself hath magnified above all his name), yet recorded the desire that his offspring might be trained in Christian truth. The bold sinner had a feeling or presentiment that that was the path of safety; but still no efforts were made—no example set—no prayers offered, that the soul of the child might live, and not die; *the father did not walk before the child in the way*; and it is ever thus with unconverted parents. It is not the mere craving of maternal instinct, it is the vigorous and healthy influence of Christian

principle, planted and preserved in the soul by the Spirit of God, that alone makes mothers wise regarding the souls of their offspring.

IV. But on this topic we leave many things unsaid, and now advert to a *mother's trials*.

We have already spoken of the strength of a mother's affection, and by that we may gage a mother's afflictions; for, how often is that affection torn and lacerated when the child is snatched from her embrace and carried in haste to the tomb—the most signal and instructive of all the trophies of Satan and of Death! To see a hoary-headed man stretched upon a bier and carried to his grave, is no great marvel—to see a child of days rifled of life, and lifted from the cradle to a coffin, tears the heart as a ploughshare tears the soil. But we would speak rather of the moral trials of mothers; for the young may be taken away from the evil to come, and that is a blessing. We would speak rather of the moral trials of a mother, and how sore may we often see them! In early youth, the child of the most godly frequently shows no love of godliness, but just the reverse. And as soon as that child can do so, he breaks free from a mother's restraint, casts religion away, and seems to hasten on-

wards with joy to the twofold crime of breaking her heart and ruining his own soul. Unchecked by the warnings of God (Eccles. xi. 9), and untaught by the experience of all the past, he rushes on iniquity as the horse rushes to the battle. It is not the agony of the body—that might be painful, but it would not be crushing—it is the ruin of the soul, the dreaded eternal death of the still immortal spirit, that occasions the acutest pang, and forms the crisis and the acme of a Christian mother's trials. It is then that the heart, while the lip is perhaps mute with anguish, can sympathize with the cry of the man according to God's own heart: "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" No doubt the soul of the widow of Nain was sorely disconsolate when she followed the bier of her only son and only earthly hope to the grave; but deep as her sorrow might be, let the Christian mother say: What was it to the death, the dreaded, all but hopeless, endless ruin of the soul?

— And what is it that can sustain under a calamity so sore? The grace of God is all-sufficient. He who hath wounded can heal. He who hath broken can bind up. But one thing should be



specially mentioned as calculated to support under trials like this—the consciousness that the wayward one had been dedicated, in spirit and in truth, with the heart and the soul, to God in baptism—that means had been used, and prayers offered, and warnings given, to hedge up the sinner's path. In that case, the misery may still be intense, but it is not overwhelming. The believer may say with meek resignation: "I was silent, Lord, for thou didst it;" \* and the pang is alleviated by submission. That widow of Nain had no hope, when the mournful procession left her house, that the son of her love would be speedily restored to her affections; and yet it was so. Jesus was there, and "had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began

\* "Think of dear Lady —; her eldest son executed as a murderer—a hardened wretch till the last hour: the only hope this, that, in his rage in casting himself off, the rope broke, and he lived till another was fetched, perhaps ten minutes, and seemed during that space softened, and earnestly crying for mercy;—*yet I never heard from her lips one murmuring word.*"—*Rev. Thomas Scott.* [At the earnest request of the criminal, the providential respite was extended for an hour.]

to speak. And he delivered him to his mother." In reference to the soul, it may be even thus when unfeigned faith prompts the prayer which honours God as the Almighty One, with whom all things are possible.

After this, I need not refer to any minor sources of trial—for example, the difficulty of training a family where every child may have a different disposition, and require a different treatment—or the necessity of crossing and punishing those whom a mother so fondly loves. These *are* trials; but they deserve not the name, compared with that which has been stated. It is true, the mother who has never felt the value of her own soul, cares not—in the nature of things, she cannot care aright—about her child's. But we speak of Christian mothers—of mothers taught by God's Holy Spirit, and convinced of the value of every soul, by the price at which sinners are redeemed; and to such we would say, the heaviest load, the sorest trial of all, is to see the bone of her bone, the child of her heart and her prayers, hastening onwards in the way which God declares goeth down to the chambers of death. Yet the wisdom that cometh from above, and is profitable to direct, if asked in faith, will be vouchsafed by the Hearer of prayer, to counsel and

sustain. He will give strength for the work which he assigns to us to do.

But, lastly, we would advert to a mother's *encouragements*. It may be true, that a mother's sorrows are often multiplied; but it is also true, that in as far as any mother is a Christian in spirit and in truth, her encouragements may abound.

For example, how great is the privilege of training up the heirs of glory for immortality! To be thus employed constitutes a Christian mother a fellow-worker with God. And when prayer for the heavenly Father's blessing is resorted to, this suggests another encouragement; for if right means be employed in a proper spirit, we may hope that God will bless them. It is the opinion of some, that no child that had been properly trained ever went finally astray. They suppose, that the promise implied in the words, "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and *when he is old* he will not depart from it," is always fulfilled to the letter; so that wherever the precept is obeyed, the promise is kept—no child that had been properly reared ever went astray so as eternally to perish. Affection would prompt us to lean to this opinion, though we would not speak

with authority on the subject. But how encouraging is this view, and how strong the obligation that it lays on every Christian mother to spend and be spent in the work of rightly training! She wields a power, we repeat, which no creature but she possesses; and if that power be employed according to God's mind, it may be blessed according to his promises. It is the recorded experience of David, toward the close of his life, that he had not seen the offspring of the righteous deserted by God: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." (Ps. xxxvii. 25.)

But we are not left to the light of mere speculation on a point so vital. In history, we have instance upon instance of the blessed effects of such training, long after something akin to despair had settled down on the parent's heart. The case of Augustine in ancient times, and of John Newton in our own, will at once occur. Each of these, in spite of prayers, entreaties, and tears, had sunk into grossest sin, and with the strange, but most instructive, "Confessions" of the one, and the "Life" of the other, before us, written by their own hands, it would be difficult to name the crime of which they had not been guilty. But their mothers had been animated

by the spirit of prayer. Though often tempted to despair, they continued to pray and to hope, and, at length, the set time arrived. The grace of God reclaimed the wayward sinners from all their iniquities—they became as much signalized by their godliness as they had formerly been by their crimes; and we are not merely warranted, but bound to connect that result with the prayers and the pains of their mothers.

Here, therefore, is encouragement for all—all who have faith unfeigned. There may be much that seems frowning, and that threatens to be disastrous, in the conduct of the wayward; but the prayer of faith is never unanswered, though it may seem unheeded, and the cry of the prodigal's father may anon be re-echoed when the wanderer is reclaimed: My son "was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found."\*

Further, for encouragement, consider how blessed is the portion of that mother who, by God's blessing on her efforts, and his answer to her prayers, is privileged to see a work of conversion going on in the young soul, to notice the proofs of

\* To the cases now mentioned might be added those of hundreds remarkable for their godliness, and ascribing its origin, under God, to their mothers—Luther, Henry Martyn, Legh Richmond, John Williams, and a cloud besides.

the Holy Spirit's power operating there, and witness, with something more than earthly rapture, her child's heart warmed by that love to Jesus Christ which, we think, is the invariable characteristic of juvenile religion. Amid all the trials of her lot, and all the dangers that surround her, she may be cheered, while she remembers that there is a holy sovereign Spirit given in answer to believing prayer, to change and renew the heart. By that hope she may be upheld, even while nothing appears in the conduct of her children to warrant the belief that they are converted; but when hope becomes fruition—when promise gives place to performance, her heart may leap for joy. Man cannot convert even his own child, but God's Holy Spirit is sent to create anew; and when mothers pray in faith for that all-decisive change, they are sometimes privileged to know, from experience, that that Spirit hears, and in his own time answers.

And neither are we left to mere speculation here. There are cases not a few in which the result we mention has been realized so as to gladden the hearts of parents to the full. Sin has deflowered the soul of its beauty, and even in earliest youth has iniquity sometimes appeared in all the vigour of precocious manhood. But,

on the other hand, there have been cases of as precocious godliness, in which God all but literally perfected praise out of the mouth of babes. As if to show what man would have been had sin never defiled him, or how blessed our world had guilt never found a lodgment here, a few rare examples have been granted to our race, in which religion sprang up into maturity, even in the minds of children—the aged and confirmed believer has been constrained to come and wonder, and sit down a humble disciple, to learn spiritual wisdom from the lips of such youthful converts. Now, this also may encourage mothers amid their trials and their efforts. The sovereign Spirit may permit them to see their offspring early ripe for glory, and early transplanted to the dwelling of their God.

Or, to bring this matter even to the test of statistics and arithmetic, we remark, that it is on record that out of one hundred and twenty young men who formed a certain Christian society, above a *hundred* traced their first religious impressions up to a mother's prayers and influence. It might be, that some of those mothers did not live to know the blessed results of their own prayers and pains; but yet "their works did follow them." The seed which they had been the instruments

of planting in the minds or hearts of their children, though choked for a while by youthful passion, grew up at last, and bore fruit unto holiness, and the end was everlasting life—they have now met their natural and spiritual descendants, in the same person, in the presence of their God on high. Here again, therefore, is encouragement for as many as believe; and, cheered by it, cast your bread upon the waters, and you shall find it after many days. In heaven, if not here, you may meet your spiritual offspring, and rejoice over them with a joy that is unspeakable. “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not which shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.” (Eccles. xi. 6.) A Christian mother’s highest, purest joy, consists in seeing her child savingly brought to God; and would Christian mothers seek to be wise to win souls to Christ, there is much to encourage the brightest hope, both in God’s providence and his Word.

We speak, then, as unto Christian mothers—to mothers who know what the value of a soul is—what joy and misery eternal are, as God in his Word describes them; and to them we finally say: *Speaking humanly, all depends on you.*



You hold in your hands both your own happiness and your children's, and in caring religiously for them, you in fact are caring for yourselves. Seek, therefore, by the blessing of God's Spirit, to be what you wish your child to be. Like Lois with her daughter Eunice—like Eunice with her son Timothy, let faith unfeigned be the guide of your exertions; and often think, that without that faith you are rushing on rocks yourselves, and, what is worse, you may be dragging your children along with you. But seek rather to make some compensation to our race for the ruin first wrought by a woman, who "gave to her husband, and he did eat," the fruit which soon sprang up a heavy harvest of woe and tribulation. Be it your aim and prayer to reclaim your children from their birth in sin to a new birth in holiness. Let Christian Love—not mere natural affection, beautiful as it is, but Christian love—be the dictatress of your actions as mothers; and then, through grace, a mother's influence may be used for God—a mother's responsibility may be discharged—a mother's dangers avoided—a mother's trials lessened—and a mother's encouragement felt. You may, through faith unfeigned, say at last: "Behold me, and the children whom thou hast given me."

Such are the suggestions we have to offer in connection with the Sacrament of baptism.

As a means appointed by God, let the ordinance be employed in the spirit which he approves, and then there is hope—hope that Christ will gather the lambs into his bosom, and guard them there from the lion that seeks to destroy. Children are by nature under condemnation, because they are born in sin; but if we bring them, in faith, to Him who became a curse for his people, they and we then stand on covenant ground, and can use a covenant plea that the blessing may be bestowed. Children are, by nature, destitute of love to God; but if they are given, in a solemn sacramental deed, to him who sends the Spirit to renew, that Spirit may in God's time be sent; and the parent who acted thus in the sacrament, if called to such a trial, may close his dying infant's eyes, strongly hoping that he will meet him, thus dedicated to Christ, at God's right hand. Where parents are Christian parents, and have given their child in spirit and in truth to God in Christ, they may hopefully say, smiling through their tears, at his departure: "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

And now, to put our conduct in regard to the sacrament which has occupied our attention to a

final test, imagine that you see the funeral of some little child—fancy it one of your own. The coffin is lowered into the narrow house. The parent's tear has fallen on it. The sigh of sympathy has been heaved by the bystanders. The heart has glanced at the mother as she sits in her chamber childless and weeping. "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes," is the dirge, and the mourners return to their homes. Now, this child belonged either to a Christian father, or to an unconverted man. *The Christian*, led by God's Spirit, sought to give his child in spirit to Christ. When the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost was pronounced over him, it was not a mere ceremony, but a sacrament. He has, therefore, humble hope, not in his own act, but in God's covenant mercy. He can rest on promises. He can trust the God of grace and truth. With the Bible before him, he can dry his tears, and be comforted.

But what hope can *the unconverted man cherish*? Not one heartfelt prayer ever was offered by him. The baptism of his child was but a superstitious ceremony, and what spiritual benefit can accrue? This man presumes that his child is happy, and it may be so. Of that we know nothing; it is one of the secret things that

belong to the Lord our God. But we may ask, What right has such a parent to expect such a result *to follow his neglect*—his desecration of a sacrament? The child may be safe in the bosom of its heavenly Father, but it is so in spite of its earthly parent; and when he and his little one meet in the presence of God, if his child appear among the ransomed of the Lord, he will implore no blessing on the head of his father. “I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore have I sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.” (1 Sam. iii. 13, 14.) These are the words in which God would warn and startle parents that are remiss. “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages,” may be regarded as words of encouragement to parents who would train their offspring for God; and when these words are in spirit obeyed, “the voice of rejoicing and salvation may be heard in the tabernacles of the righteous.” (Ps. cxviii. 15.)

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