

dangerous an enemy? Should, however, the strange opinion still continue to gain ground, and in spite of all efforts to counteract its progress, spread itself over the whole of Christendom, and be adopted by all denominations of Christians, would not this extraordinary triumph be recorded in ecclesiastical history among the most wonderful of its events, and be referred to other causes than those which regulate the progress of human opinions? And yet such a change in church membership, and universal practice, is stated to have taken place at the end of the second century! At a period only a short distance from the time of the apostles, when their practice could not but be well known, and held in the highest veneration,—every Christian, in every Church and every nation, it should seem, was an advocate for the exclusive baptism of adults; and not a single example, up to that time, had occurred of the privilege being extended to infants: all, with one consent, and without a murmur, had excluded them from the pale of the Church, and shut them out from “the covenant of promise.” But at this time, we are taught to believe that this unanimity was disturbed, and this universal practice innovated upon. A new opinion was started; an opinion which aimed at the subversion of the universal practice, and of the very nature of the Christian Church; and that opinion gained ground, soon spread over all Christendom, and proselyted all Christians in every part of the world!

This is sufficiently surprising, and one wonders by what art and power of man such an event could be achieved. We feel anxious to know the name and nation of the individual who commenced and completed the enterprise; what were his arguments, who were his opponents, and by what magic he silenced objections, eradicated prejudices, counteracted party spirit, subdued passion, and bent the whole Christian world, as the heart of one man, to adopt his extraordinary opinion. We ask for the documents in which all this is recorded, a narrative of the means by which this change was effected; but we ask in vain. The page of history says not one word upon the subject. The nature of the Christian Church was changed, apostolic usage trampled upon, a most unscriptural practice introduced, and nobody knows by whom; nor have the records of those controversies which abounded at that particular time said a single word upon the subject, or given the most indirect intimation that any such change was effected, or even contemplated! To such absurdities are we brought by the assumption that only adult-baptism was practised till the end of the second century: that then a change took place, infants were baptized, and the practice soon became universal, and continued without interruption, down to the sixteenth century. The whole is a mere conjecture, and is as absurd as it is gratuitous.

Let us then proceed with our argument in support of the infant's privilege to Christian baptism. We have had every proof short of absolute demonstration, that infants were baptized in the apostolic era. That proof will be still further strengthened by referring to the earliest accounts that are recorded of what was the practice of the succeeding ages; and we shall thus obtain one unbroken chain of evidence, that children are entitled to this Christian privilege. Justin Martyr flourished about forty years after the apostles; and he informs us that there were many among them, of both sexes, who were then seventy or eighty years of age, who had been made disciples of Christ when they were infants; and this must have been by baptism, no other way of being made disciples, at that early age, being possible. But if this were the case, they must have been baptized in the days of the apostles.

Irenæus, who lived between thirty and forty years after Justin Martyr, and between sixty and seventy after the Apostles, makes use of the following remarkable and decisive expressions: “He (Jesus Christ) came to save all persons by himself; all, I say, who are regenerated by him unto God, infants, and little ones, and children, and young men, and old men.” This passage is too plain to need any comment. The particular specification of every stage of life from infancy to old age, renders it impossible not to see that, whatever may be intended by regeneration, infants are capable of partaking of it, and therefore are the proper subjects of baptism: and if regeneration here be only another word for baptism, as, indeed, I conceive it is, then we have the direct testimony of one of the earliest of the fathers, and one who lived soon after the apostles, that it was the custom of the Church to baptize infants.

Origen, who flourished about one hundred years after the apostles, says, “Infants are baptized for the remission of sins: and if it be asked what sins, or at what time they sinned, our answer is,—No one is free from pollution, though his life should be but of the length of one day upon the earth.” In this passage we have a plain declaration, that it was the practice of the primitive Church to baptize infants; and the very reason assigned for it applies to every child born into the world, and is co-extensive with the human race.

After these direct evidences of the primitive practice of baptizing infants, it might seem superfluous to adduce more authorities. But I cannot dismiss this line of evidence without citing the solemn decision of sixty-six bishops, who were convened for the very purpose of deliberating upon a scruple which had arisen in the mind of one individual as to the precise time at which an infant should be baptized. One Fidus, an African bishop, about 150 years after the apostolic era, had some doubts whether children ought to be baptized before the eighth day, in order that the administration of the Christian ordinance might more exactly correspond with that of circumcision. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, therefore held a convocation of bishops for the purpose of settling this question. At this synod sixty-six bishops attended; and they came to the unanimous conclusion, that children were eligible to baptism from the first day of their birth. Now it should be noticed, on this decisive historical fact, that there was no controversy at all, whether infants should be baptized—this was agreed on all hands—it was simply, whether the rite should be performed earlier than the eighth day; and this question was determined in the affirmative. If, therefore, the baptizing of infants were an error, it must have been of long standing—so long that it had found its way into the districts of at least sixty-six bishops, and was established not only without any controversy,

but beyond the reach of controversy; for no one doubted the fact. I might go on to adduce witnesses increasing as years advance, till I came to the time of St. Austin, who, after declaring that the baptism of infants rests on the authority of the universal Church, as handed down from our Lord and his apostles, says, “Let no man suggest to us other doctrines. This the church has always had; this it has received upon the credit of its predecessors: this it keeps perseveringly to the end.” But it is useless to proceed further with such testimonies, since Baptists themselves admit, as we have seen, the practice to have become nearly universal from the fourth century, down to the time of the Reformation. I have shewn, however, that it was equally prevalent and general from the very commencement of the Christian dispensation, and that there never was a Christian Church which did not practice it during the first four centuries; and therefore that it was never called in question by any Church or Christian nation till the time of the Reformation.

There is, however, one solitary instance of a primitive father questioning the expediency of infant baptism; and I advert to it, both for the purpose of rescuing the fact from an improper inference, and of turning it to the proof of the practice for which I am contending. Tertullian, who lived about one hundred years after the apostolic era, objected against infant baptism, and assigned his reason for it. The objection, however, itself proves the fact that the custom was prevalent in his days, and must have been of long standing; and the reasons he assigns for discontinuing it prove the still more important fact, that there never was a time, since the existence of Christianity, when it was not practised. This eminent man, in the latter part of his life, gave into some singular opinions. Among these, one was, that Montanus, a celebrated heretic, was the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, promised by our Lord; and another, that sins, after baptism, were unpardonable. He, therefore, advised that this ceremony should be deferred to the latest period of life, and prevailed with many to adopt his notion. Now, supposing that pædo-baptism had been an innovation, his first and unanswerable objection to the customary practice would have been, that it was unauthorized, unscriptural, and subversive of the constitution of the Christian Church; and at the time he lived, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to prove all this, if the fact had been so.—This would have been the method of our modern opponents; and they would have pressed home the argument in every variety of form, and force of appeal. But not so Tertullian. He never gives the slightest intimation that infant baptism was an innovation, unknown in the apostolic age, and of recent invention. He beats about in every quarter for reasons to shew its inexpediency; but he says not a word about its novelty. And why so? Because he knew that the practice was as old as christianity, and that every body could have contradicted him, if he had stated the contrary. His silence, therefore, on this topic amounts almost to a demonstration, that the usage was co-existent with the Christian dispensation. The baptism of infants was practised in his time; and there never was a time since the rite itself was commanded, when it was not practised.

I may just advert to another perverted passage of a primitive father. Justin Martyr, in his “Apology” for Christianity, addressed to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius, gives an account of the manner in which proselytes to the Christian faith from amongst the heathen were introduced into the Church, and states the particulars which preceded and accompanied baptism. And the advocates for adult baptism have claimed this as an evidence—of what? That adult converts to Christianity were baptized? Who denies this? No—not as an evidence that adults were baptized, but as a proof that infants were not,—of which it certainly is no proof, nor would ten thousand such instances afford the shadow of an evidence that infants were not partakers of the same privilege. Justin Martyr can never be justly quoted as an authority against pædo-baptism, so long as we have his testimony that himself and some others, “who were then seventy or eighty years of age” (a period of time which carried them back to the apostolic era), “were made disciples of Christ when they were infants.”—*Rev. C. Jerram.*

To the Editor of the Church.

Toronto, 18th November, 1837.

Rev. Sir:—My attention has been lately drawn by a friend to a pamphlet entitled “The correspondence of the Honble. William Morris with the Colonial office as the Delegate from the Presbyterian body in Canada,” which has been circulated in both Provinces, and obtained the notice of several respectable Journals.

Having been referred to by Lord Glenelg on the subject of the fifty-seven Rectories with which this correspondence is intimately connected, and delivered a report which will doubtless appear in due time, I felt disposed to let the matter rest in the hands of Government, for I have always been unwilling to discuss such questions in the Colony, as dangerous to the public peace. But the industrious dissemination of this pamphlet and the extraordinary nature of the letters which have passed between Mr. Morris and his constituents, since his return to the Province, has produced on the part of Churchmen a great desire to know how matters really stand. Many applications have been made to me for information, as the person supposed from my station in the Church best acquainted with the subject, and not a little censure interspersed on my seeming apathy where the interests of the Establishment are so deeply involved.

Under such circumstances, I do not feel myself any longer at liberty to withhold the information required, and have therefore to request the privilege of occupying a small portion of your excellent Journal, that I may insert the substance of my recent communications to Her Majesty's Government.

As these documents will, in all probability, be called for and published during the next session of the Provincial Legislature, I do not think it necessary, on this occasion, to follow them word for word; but shall add such particulars as have appeared since they were written, and such remarks as passing occurrences may suggest.

Being naturally averse to controversy, and convinced that no benefit can arise from violence or exaggeration, it is my earnest desire, as it is my duty, to abstain from personalities, or any

expressions that can by possibility give cause of just offence. I shall deal only with facts, and such reasonings and observations as these facts may fully warrant; nor shall even slanderous and false allegations on the part of the enemies of the Church produce any other retaliation than that clear and determined exposure which truth demands.

I remain, &c. &c.

JOHN STRACHAN.

LETTER I.

Toronto, 17th November, 1837.

TO THE HONBLE. WILLIAM MORRIS:

Honble. Sir:—I find, from a pamphlet entitled “The correspondence of the Honble. William Morris with the Colonial office as the Delegate from the Presbyterian body in Canada,” that you went to London in May last as the authorised Delegate or Agent of the Presbyterians in this Province in connexion with the Kirk of Scotland to complain of the Rectories which have been recently established, and to state various grievances under which that body suppose themselves to labour.

I am thankful that the documents which compose this pamphlet have been given to the public, as they not only present the spirit and motives which animate those whom you represent, in their hostility to the Church of England, but, at the same time, afford me a seasonable opportunity of examining the several matters of complaint. Should they be found, on such examination, in a great degree frivolous, deficient in Christian candour, and not, in all respects, consistent with truth and accuracy of statement, the blame must fall on you and your employers, who have presumed to bring them forward.

It is not one of the least of the evils arising from the representations which you have been employed to make, that they have had the unfortunate effect of inducing Lord Glenelg to believe that this Colony is distracted with religious dissensions,—a belief which seems to have been conveyed to the Royal ear, since Her most Gracious Majesty the Queen, in her maternal solicitude for the peace and happiness of her Upper Canadian subjects, commands His Lordship to inform them “That it is the earnest desire of the Queen that all the various communities of Christians existing in that part of her Majesty's dominions may unite together in the spirit of mutual toleration and good will, in the diffusion and knowledge of Christianity.”

On this subject I may, with confidence, appeal to the Inhabitants of the whole Province to testify to the peaceable demeanour of our people from the first agitation of the question of the Clergy Reserves till your return a few weeks ago with intelligence that the Rectories had been declared illegal.

Up to this time the Clergy and friends of the Established Church have been content with quietly urging the impropriety of debating the appropriation of the Clergy Reserves in the Colony, where it might produce much angry feeling, but could never be satisfactorily disposed of, and their readiness to submit to any measure which Her Majesty in Parliament might see fit to adopt, and which should be final and unequivocal, in making such appropriations as should appear to be most consistent with a due regard to religion, to the principles of the Constitution, and to the permanent welfare and tranquillity of the Province.

The contest respecting the Clergy Reserves was commenced by the members of the Kirk, and by them it has been continued. For a time you made a common cause with other denominations against the Established Church; but since your connexion with the National Church of Scotland has been indirectly acknowledged by the General Assembly, you have deemed it prudent to drop your former associates. You made use of them as long as they could be turned to your advantage, and now you cast them off as a tattered garment, and bring forward with equal violence and pertinacity a claim to an equality with the Church of England without any regard to the provisions of the 31 Geo. 3, chap. 31, or to the smallness of your numbers.

To you and your constituents must likewise be attributed the opposition made to the Rectories; for no other denominations have had any public meetings or proceedings on the subject. Your Synod took the lead in agitation, and enjoined on their congregations the propriety of sending petitions to the Legislature; many of which, as might have been expected when so authorized, were conceived in language of great bitterness, and hostility.

Yet it is refreshing to find, amidst the reckless violence which these petitions present, one so moderate in language and fair in principle as to meet the desire which our church has uniformly expressed and in which we are still ready to concur. The petition of the Minister, and Elders and members of the congregation of St. Andrew's church, Kingston, in connexion with the Kirk of Scotland, after expressing becoming confidence in the Legislative Council submit “Whether the Imperial Parliament by their entire removal from the conflicting interests and endless variety of opinions which have for so many years agitated the country and perplexed the Provincial Legislature in reference to the Clergy Reserves are not best qualified to explain their own Act and definitely settle what is doubtful in the existing statute without the danger of farther disturbing the tranquillity of the Province.” The petition proceeds to state, “That the Provincial Legislature can do nothing satisfactory however just and equitable; nor so stable as a declaratory enactment on that subject originated and passed by the Imperial Parliament, who, it may be trusted, in explaining the provisions of the Act will be careful to preserve our Constitution inviolate.”

This is the course proposed by the Clergy of the Established Church in their various statements and petitions since the first agitation of the question of the Clergy Reserves. They have always deprecated its discussion in the Colony, and prayed that it might be referred for settlement to the Imperial Parliament; and should the result be unfavourable, it would nevertheless be their duty to submit.

Disappointed, and, as it should seem, enraged because the House of Assembly thought proper to confirm the Rectories actually established, though it disapproved of the measure in the first instance, your constituents had again recourse to agitation. Public meetings were held in their different congregations at