

the bestowment of high spiritual benefits on all baptized persons is at variance with the notoriously unspiritual character and life of many who were once baptized, and seems to involve the Popish dogma of Baptismal Regeneration. Here then we introduce a third proposition.

III. *The Baptismal benefits are conferred not as by a mystic charm, but by the sovereign grace of God, as and when it pleaseth Him.* The error of the Romanists, and Tractarians, and high Lutherans is to confound Baptism and Regeneration together, to ascribe the spiritual efficacy to the sacrament as by a mechanical certainty—to use the celebrated phrase of the Council of Trent, “*ex opere operato.*” In their view, there is ordinarily no regeneration, but that which is in baptism. As a consequence, this sacrament is regarded as essential to salvation, and it is held that no unbaptized adult or infant can inherit the kingdom of heaven.

This dogma we reject as unscriptural and cruel. Baptism is an important means of grace and salvation, but we deny that it is so essential to salvation, that those who die unbaptized must perish. Our Lord said, “he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved,” but in the remainder of the sentence, dropped all mention of baptism—“but he that believeth not shall be damned.” The penitent robber on the cross was saved unbaptized, and taken to be with Christ that very day in Paradise. Hundreds of thousands of new born babes dying unbaptized have been saved—unbaptized, because their parents were doubtful of the warrant for infant baptism, or were careless of it, or were unworthy to ask and receive it—or because death came before the earliest period at which we have any indication from the scriptural analogy of circumcision, that this rite may be administered: viz, the eighth day. That infants, so dying, suffer eternally for want of a rite, however important, which they were unable to observe, is an idea so cruel, and even monstrous, that we can only compassionate the superstitious minds that are able to give it credence.

We have condemned the dogma that baptism certainly and invariably confers regenerating grace, as unsupported by scripture, and, in its practical inferences regarding the unbaptized, intolerably cruel. We now go a step farther, and affirm that it is directly at variance with some of the plainest statements of the Bible. Let one instance suffice. The Samaritans heard the preaching of Philip, professed faith, and were baptized, yet “the Holy Ghost was fallen upon none of them.” Nay, Simon the sorcerer was at that time baptized on his profession of faith, yet was so far from being regenerate, that he offered money to the Apostles Peter and John in order to obtain a spiritual power, and received the stern rebuke,—“Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee; for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity.”

While we thus protest against the Popish doctrine of sacramental efficacy, we are far from denying to baptism a spiritual value. It is, as already stated, the symbol of regeneration by the Spirit, and union to the Lord Jesus Christ; but those benefits are conferred by the grace of a Sovereign God at or after baptism as He pleaseth, and conferred in answer to believing prayers. Regeneration is not to be confounded with baptism—neither is it to be entirely separated from it:—what is required is, to distinguish between them, the latter a holy ordinance, the former an ineffable grace—the one to be observed with reverence, the other to be asked in faith.