

To rightly understand the mystery of the Circumcision to which our infant Saviour submitted, it is necessary to state to you its origin and its epoch. The first mention of it is in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis, when God revealed it to Abraham, and recorded it for us: "*And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an EVERLASTING COVENANT; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*"* As a token and seal of the covenant, God gave him this sacred rite, and commanded that on the eighth day, every male child should be circumcised; and the neglect of this outward sign was declared to be a violation of the covenant and a forfeiture of its blessings. "*And the uncircumcised man child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from the people; he hath broken my covenant.*"† So we learn that the origin of Circumcision was the sovereign will of God, and its effect was to bring the chosen people into covenant with Him. As such it was observed by all who valued their election, and exercised their faith in the promises of God—as such it was sanctioned and received, when "*the eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, and they called His name Jesus*"—as such it must still be considered by us; for although the sign is changed, the signification remains—although we no longer circumcise our children, our children enter into covenant with God. St. Paul, discoursing upon the subject, calls the sign of circumcision "*the seal of the righteousness which is by faith*";‡ and he points out, with wonderful precision, its nature as a sacrament: it was an entrance into covenant with God, "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given to them;" it was not merely a mark to distinguish them from the heathen—it was the mystical cutting off of sin—the mystical adoption into the family of God. "*The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*"§ So we see, it was not a mere ceremony, once to be performed and then to be forever forgotten—it was to remove sin—it was to sanctify the heart—to fill it with divine love and prepare it for eternal life.

But, the sacrament of Circumcision has ceased: it is an ordinance which Christ has cancelled, and it now availeth nothing.|| And have all its blessings failed? Are all its precious promises

* Gen. xvii. 7.
§ Deut. xxx. 6.

† Verse 14.
|| Gal. v. 6.

‡ Rom. iv. 11.

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