

the practice was more ancient than himself; and the principles on which he impugns it farther show that it was so. He regarded this sacrament superstitiously; he appended to it the *trine* immersion in the name of each of the persons of the trinity; he gives it gravely as a reason why infants should not be baptized, that Christ says, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," therefore they must stay till they are able to come, that is, till they are grown up; "and he would prohibit the unmarried, and all in a widowed state, from baptism, because of the temptations to which they may be liable." The whole of this is solved by adverting to that notion of the efficacy of this sacrament in taking away all *previous* sins, which then began to prevail, so that an inducement was held out for delaying baptism as long as possible, till at length, in many cases, it was postponed to the article of death, under the belief that the dying who received this sacrament were the more secure of salvation. Tertullian, accordingly, with all his zeal, allowed that infants ought to be baptized *if their lives be in danger*, and thus evidently shows that this opposition to the baptism of infants in ordinary rested upon a very different principle from that of the modern Antipædobaptists. Amid all his arguments against this practice, Tertullian, however, never ventures upon one which would have been most to his purpose, and which might most forcibly have been urged had not baptism been administered to infants by the Apostles and their immediate successors. That argument would have been the *novelty* of the practice, which he never asserts, and which, as he lived so early, he might have proved, had he any ground for it. On the contrary, Justin Martyr, and Irenæus, in the second century, and Origen in the beginning of the third, expressly mention infant baptism as the practice of their times, and, by the latter, this is assigned to apostolical injunction. Fidus, an African bishop, applied to Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, to know, not whether infants were to be baptized, but whether their baptism might take place before the eighth day after their birth, that being the day on which circumcision was performed by the law of Moses. This question was considered in an African synod, held A. D. 254, at which sixty-six bishops were present, and "it was unanimously decreed 'that it was not necessary to defer baptism to that day; and that the grace of God, or baptism, should be given to all, and especially to infants.'" This decision was communicated in a letter from Cyprian to Fidus. (*Cyp. Ep. 59.*) We trace the practice also downward. In the fourth century, Ambrose says that "infants who are baptized are reformed from wickedness to the primitive state of their nature;" (*Comment. in Lucam, c. x*;) and to the end of that century, the famous controversy took place between Augustine and Pelagius concerning original sin, in which the uniform practice of baptizing infants from the days of the Apostles, was admitted by both parties, although they assigned different reasons for it. So little indeed were Tertullian's absurdities regarded, that he appears to have been quite forgotten by this time; for Augustine says he never heard of any Christian, catholic, or sectary, who taught any other doctrine than that infants are to be baptized. (*De Pecc. Mor. cap. vi.*) Infant baptism is not mentioned in the canons of any council; nor is it insisted upon as an object of faith in any creed; and thence we infer that it was a point not controverted at any period of the ancient church, and we know that it was the practice in all established churches. Wall says that Peter Broussier, a Frenchman, who lived about the year 1030, whose followers were called Petrobrussians, was the first Antipædobaptist who had a regular congregation. (*Hist. part ii. c. vii.*) The Antipædobaptists of Germany took their rise in the beginning of the fifteenth century; but it does not appear that there was any congregation of Anabaptists in England,

till the year 1640. That a practice which can be traced up to the first periods of the Church, and has been, till within very modern times, its uncontradicted practice, should have a lower authority than Apostolical usage and appointment, may be pronounced impossible. It is not like one of those trifling, though somewhat superstitious additions, which, in very early times began to be made to the sacraments; on the contrary, it involves a principle so important as to alter the very nature of the sacrament itself. For if personal faith be an essential requisite of baptism in all cases; if baptism be a visible declaration of this, and is vicious without it; then infant baptism was an innovation of so serious a nature, that it must have attracted attention, and provoked controversy, which would have led, if not to the suppression of the error, yet to a diversity of practice in the ancient churches, which did not in point of fact exist, Tertullian himself allowing infant baptism in extreme cases.

The *BENEFITS* of this sacrament require to be briefly exhibited. Baptism introduces the adult believer into the covenant of grace and the church of Christ; and is the seal, and pledge to him on the part of God, of the fulfilment of all its provisions, in time and in eternity; while, on his part, he takes upon himself the obligations of steadfast faith and obedience.

To the infant child it is a visible reception into the same covenant and church,—a pledge of acceptance through Christ,—the bestowment of a title to all the grace of the covenant as circumstances may require, and of receiving it; and as it may be sought in future life by prayer, when the period of reason and moral choice shall arrive. It conveys also the present "blessing" of Christ, of which we are assured by his taking children in his arms, and blessing them; which blessing cannot be merely nominal, but must be substantial and efficacious. It secures, too, the gift of the Holy Spirit, in those secret spiritual influences by which the actual regeneration of those children who die in infancy is effected; and which are a seed of life in those who are spared, to prepare them for instruction in the word of God, as they are taught by parental care, to incline their will and affections to good, and to begin and maintain in them the war against inward and outward evil, so that they may be divinely assisted, as reason strengthens, to make their calling and election sure. In a word, it is both as to infants and to adults, the sign and pledge of that inward grace which, although modified by its operations by the difference of their circumstances, has respect to, and flows from, a covenant religion to each of the three persons in whose *one name* they are baptized,—acceptance by the FATHER,—union with Christ as the head of his mystical body, the church,—and "the communion of the HOLY GHOST." To these advantages must be added the respect which God leaves to the believing act of the parents, and to their solemn prayers on the occasion, in both which the child is interested; as well as in that solemn engagement of the parents, which the rite necessarily implies, to bring up their child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

To the parents it is a benefit also. It assures them that God will not only be their God; but "the God of their seed after them;" it thus gives them, as the Israelites of old, the right to covenant with God for their "little ones," and it is a consoling pledge that their dying, infant offspring should be saved; since He who says, "Suffer little children to come unto me," has added, "for of such is the kingdom of heaven." They are reminded by it also of the necessity of acquainting themselves with God's covenant, that they may diligently teach it to their children; and that, as they have covenanted with God for their children, they are bound thereby to enforce the covenant conditions upon them as they come to years—by example as well as by education; by prayer, as well as by the profession of the name of Christ.