

## The Canadian Independent.

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TORONTO, APRIL 7, 1881.

### NOTICE!

Mr. Wm. Revell has kindly undertaken the business management of the INDEPENDENT. In the future, therefore, all remittances and letters about the subscription, or complaints, should be addressed to him, Box 2618, P. O. Toronto, and all articles for insertion, news of churches, &c., to Managing Editor, same address.

Mr. A. Christie, 9 Wilson Avenue, will continue to attend to the business of the Congregational Publishing Company, including arrears for the INDEPENDENT and the Year Book.

We would call the attention of our readers to their labels. All whose subscriptions expired Jan., '81, or earlier, are now due another year. Will they please remit.

We want as many items of news of the churches as possible, but will our correspondents be brief, our space is limited and we dislike to cut down.

### BAPTISTS ON MODES OF BAPTISM.

A controversy is agitating our Baptist brethren in England, which if it does not produce immediate results, as we hardly suppose that it will, is at any rate indicative of the setting in of a tide of opinion which may ultimately overflow the old landmarks and change materially the position of the Baptist churches and their relation to ourselves.

The point is as to the mode of baptism, and the question is asked, practically, if it is not time to cease insisting on immersion, and admit the equal validity of sprinkling in the case of those who, from conscientious or physical reasons, prefer it? The opening of the controversy was by a letter from Mr. Samuel Watson, who appears to be a man of position, as he is undoubtedly of large views. He made the rather startling suggestion, coming from such a source, that the time had come when it would strengthen, not weaken, their position "to confess that the spirit and meaning of the ordinance is not dependent upon the form." And he goes on to state what, we confess, we should hardly have expected, that such is the growing reluctance among the young people of education and refinement to submit to the ordeal, that in some (Baptist) churches they actually admit young people to membership without baptism at all!

Of course, such an utterance as this was like the letting out of waters, and the Baptist papers have given insertion to a large number of letters, pro and con, most of them, as might be expected, opposed to such revolutionary sentiments. The conclusion set forth by these being that it was commanded by Christ, in the very mode that it was intended to exist to the end of the world, and that any avoidance of it would be treason to the truth. It is noticeable, however, that while there is feeling, prejudice, and, we would add, true piety, variously shown in the letters advocating the retention of the mode: the arguments for the modification are, to our minds, very strong, and the motives of the writers are as pure and loyal to the truth as their opponents'. We quote some extracts

from what is the longest letter in the *Nonconformist's* summary, and which very calmly, and yet very forcibly, puts the points for a modification in the cast-iron rule of immersion.

"Mr. James Harvey, of Mount Grove, Hampstead, (whom the *Freeman* refers to as one who 'has assuredly a right to a hearing on any matter pertaining to our denomination'), says: 'It may be that some of us will have to make the admission that our fathers in the Baptist denomination, and we their successors, have not been right in maintaining that immersion is the only mode of baptism authorized in Scripture. If truth should require this admission to be made, I hope we one and all shall be ready to make it, and rejoice in any further light which may be thrown on the sacred page. Our appeal, however, must be to the Scriptures, and not merely to our preferences. We ought not to beg the question by saying, 'This is settled, there is the command, the mode is one and unalterable, and you are inconsistent in not obeying it.' If the question has been settled twenty times over, or rather considered to have been so settled, it will not do to plead such supposed settlement when a new inquiry is instituted.' Comparing Acts ii. 1-4, 14-18, with Acts i. 4, 5, he remarks: 'In these Scriptures two things are clearly stated, the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel in pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and the analogy between the baptism of John and that of the Holy Ghost. It follows that if we have clearly stated the mode of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, we have an unquestionable clue to the mode of the baptism of John. . . . Whatever may have been the copiousness of the gift of the Spirit, the mode was a 'pouring out,' a 'coming upon,' the disciples.' Much argument may be fairly used to show the reasonableness of an alternative mode of baptism. For instance, Palestine is a country which is barely ten degrees from the Tropic of Cancer, and in which loose garments are worn and but few needed. To throw off the upper flowing robe and plunge into the stream of Jordan was a rite in harmony with the nature of the country, and fitted to symbolise at least one Scriptural meaning of the act on the part of the disciple as a profession of 'death unto sin and a new life unto righteousness.' So also in Asia Minor and in the southern countries of Europe. But is immersion equally suitable in England or still colder countries? For the administration of baptism, our ordinary clothes must be taken off and a special suit put on. After the rite has been gone through, the wet garments have to be removed and the body well rubbed from head to foot and dry clothes resumed. Was this required in apostolic days? Had John need of many dressing rooms, special suits of clothes and a large supply of dry towels on the banks of Jordan? Again, take the case of a convert in a critical or a permanently delicate state of health, whose medical attendant absolutely prohibits a sudden plunge into the water. Has our Lord, in His infinite wisdom and goodness, made no provision for such an one to obey His command to be baptized? And must such an one be deprived for life of church fellowship? *A priori* we should certainly conclude that an ordinance instituted for all people and all ages would be applicable to such a case. The Sabbath, notwithstanding its sacredness, and the stringent commands and severe penalties attached thereto under the Jewish economy, was, we are told by our Lord, made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.' May we not fairly apply this principle to baptism, and say, 'It was made for Christians, and not Christians for baptism.' Reason seems to indicate that the probability is on the side of a rite applicable to all ages, all climates, and all people. The words of our Lord and the practice of His apostles

appear to confirm the result of our reasoning, and to show that baptizing by immersion is not the only mode recognised in Scripture. John baptized with water, Jesus baptized with the Spirit. The mode of the baptism of the Spirit was by 'pouring out,' 'coming upon'—*ergo*, the mode of baptism by water may be, and probably was, carried out in the same manner."

As we said at the beginning, we do not anticipate any immediate results, but if such sentiments as we have quoted prevail to any large extent in the Baptist body, or even if it is only a small but a working leaven, the time will come when the whole lump will be leavened. On principle we welcome such a tendency, not because it would involve any weakening of the Baptists as a denomination, which it need not do, but because it would bring that denomination nearer, as we think, to the light and spirit of the Master's teachings.

### MADAGASCAR.

This island, as a mission field, has been called the crown of the London Missionary Society, which first planted, and for nearly two generations solely maintained, the Gospel there, until, in 1848, Christianity was made the religion of the State, and heathenism disowned. It was scarcely to be supposed that such a field should be allowed to remain solely in the hands of an undenominational Society, for denominationalism has a much stronger hold on many minds than simple Christianity, so the Propagation (High Church) Society established, 1874, a bishopric there to proselyte rather than Christianize. The Quakers have also established a mission, not, however, antagonistic, but specially directed towards the complete emancipation of the slaves.

Madagascar equals in extent Great Britain and Ireland, and has a population about equal with that of Canada. Unitedly the inhabitants are called the *Malagasy*, though there are at least four distinct classes:—the ruling race of the Hovas, who, of a light olive complexion, seem almost a Caucasian race; the Betanimena, who inhabit the lowlands, as the Hovas the highlands, and who somewhat resemble each other; the Betsileos, a copper-colored, heavy-featured race, peaceful, patriarchal and contented, seldom straying from their ancestral home; the Sakalavas, with the crisp hair and dark features of the negro, of fine presence, bold, firm, intelligent, said to be, though not the ruling, yet the finest race of Madagascar. In the forests, skirting the great mountain range which forms the backbone of the island, live the hewers of wood, the miners, charcoal-burners, and mechanics, whose occupations never change, being handed down from father to son continually. Though reckoned free their services are at the disposal of the king, and of him alone, for which services no pay is received; apart from this, every one for himself or by his *slaves* builds his own house and looks after his own affairs. Slaves—no spot on that island is free from the blight of slavery, which Christianity, as yet, has only lightened. The slaves are not a distinct race. Captives in war, criminals, debtors, become slaves; their children perpetuate the class. Then on the south-east coast there has been

for centuries a settlement chiefly of Arabs, who in charms, jugglery, fortune-telling, and such like superstitions, have established an intercourse and trade with the native tribes, who have become so thoroughly influenced thereby that every act, such as the setting out upon a journey, or the location of a dwelling, is regulated by these superstitions. Such in brief are the inhabitants of this island.

The general shape and geographical position of the island will be familiar by the map of Africa, to which it bears a relation similar to that which England bears to Europe. A mountain range, rising in its peaks from 6,000 to 10,000 and even 12,000 feet, runs through the centre of the island along its length, and on its high table-lands live the Hovas; there, too, is Antananarivo, "City of a Thousand Towns" (the capital). On the mountain sides, below these heights of table-lands and peaks, a circling forest of nearly forty miles in width runs riot over rock, and vale, and wilderness; huge tree ferns and bamboos and forest monarchs, that one can readily imagine began their race in patriarchal days. We have already indicated the class who hew out homes in this vast barricade, through which all travellers must pass from the sea coasts to the central province of Ankovy. Lower down there are continuous terraces, hills, and valleys, covered with the rank vegetation of the tropics; snake-like roots overground, huge flowers, trees that shoot as an arrow upward, and then spread out in an umbrella form of waving plumes; tangled vines twisting in inextricable confusion; the whole resounding with the chattering of innumerable monkeys, and the sharp chirping of the paroquet. Streams, hidden beneath the dense foliage, and cataracts, whose muffled roar you hear, but whose rush you see not until almost ready to take your leap with them into the wilderness below. Down and beyond all this the lowlands of the coast, broad or narrow according as they reach up to the side of the mountain range, or are narrowed by the projecting spurs of the mountains, in some places a hundred miles from the heights to the sea. Here grow the mango-tree, the cocoa-palm, and the gorgeous magnolia; there, too, lurk the deadly fevers from the swampy miasma of this tropical luxuriance.

Such is the island which within this century has caught the spirit of the world's progress under the gospel of the Nazarene, and has made rapid advancement towards a Christian civilization.

The representatives of the civilized world at Tamatave—the chief port of Madagascar, midway on the eastern coast—in 1808 were slave-traders, who did not scruple to steal as well as to buy the subjects of their infamous traffic. It may seem incredible, but it is nevertheless true, that in the days of our fathers, in the early part of this nineteenth century, men from our fatherland could traffic in human lives and human misery. The spirit is not dead, for even now money is made at the price of human virtue, and unsuspecting girls in our civilized cities led to infamy for gain. "Who stands guiltless forth?"

In 1818 the first missionary began the work of preparation upon the island. Radama, the first of that