

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

CONCERNING BAPTISM.

BY REV. W. L. McKAY, B.A., WOODSTOCK.

From the Christian Standard.

NO. I. INTRODUCTORY.

MR. EDITOR.—In the columns of your very interesting paper you have seen fit to notice my "tract" on Immersion. It is but fair, after the extended advertisement you have given me, that I should say a few words in reply—and I thank you for the privilege you have so generously extended to me of as many columns in reply as you have used in the review.

Allow me to express my satisfaction with the general tone of your criticism. True, you make a somewhat free use of the charges of "ignorance," "dishonesty," "falsehood," which are, alas! so frequently found in newspaper controversy on the subject of baptism, and which I cannot but regard as unseemly between those who, although differing in some things, are yet seeking to advance the same glorious end—the truth as it is in Jesus. However, these charges do not move me in the least. "Ignorant" I am, incorrect I may be, but "dishonest," or false, I trust, by the grace of God, I never will be. The cause of truth does not require such defence. With these exceptions, however, the review is characterized by a tone that is both scholarly and Christian.

In the "Standard" of February 25 you say that my tract is but "a rehash of the old pedobaptist and affusionist arguments, which have been so often met and disposed of; that only those unread in the baptismal controversy can be puzzled or troubled with McKay's book." And yet for two or three years immersionist professors have been denouncing, and immersionist writers have been "rehashing" that little work which is only "a rehash of the old pedobaptist and affusionist arguments, which have been so often met and disposed of"! And even the editor of the "Christian Standard"—confessedly the ablest journal in the denomination it represents—finds it necessary to use about thirty columns of his valuable space in reviewing *even a portion* of this little book, which is only a rehash, etc.!! Now, herein is a marvellous matter. But the excuse for the review of McKay's book is that "many of the present generation are unread in this discussion" about baptism! Surely the readers of the "Standard" are not "unread" on baptism; for a large part of every issue of that paper I have ever seen was devoted to that subject. The same is true of all the periodicals and books of the denomination represented by the "Standard." And it is notorious that baptism is the regular theme of all the preachers and exhorters among the "Disciples." There must then be something painfully deficient in the capacity of "many of the present generation" for retaining instruction, or an unfortunate lack of ability in those who give instruction from the pulpit and through the press. Of course, the "many unread" persons referred to by the editor of the "Standard" are in his own Church communities; for these are the only ones his paper usually reaches, and for them it is prepared. Is not then, Mr. Editor, the reason given for reviewing McKay's work on "Immersion" a cruel reflection on the capacity of your readers and hearers, and a tacit confession of inefficiency in the writers and oral teachers among the Disciples? I leave you to explain the charge of dullness against your readers and co-workers; suggesting, however, to you a way of escape by throwing the blame upon the *matter taught*, rather than upon the persons who teach, or their manner of teaching. It is notorious that some things, although "clearly proved," will yet not stay "proved," especially in the light of the present day.

If the editor of the "Standard" will compare the columns of his own paper with those of any of the leading papers of the Presbyterian Church in Canada or the United States, he will be convinced that my charge of lack of interest in the subject of baptism is not without foundation in fact. Take THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN, printed at Toronto, Ont., and the leading paper of the Church in Canada, as a specimen. I assure you that not once in a month is the subject of baptism referred to. Or take the "Interior," the leading Presbyterian paper of the Northwest. A careful reader of that paper informs me that it will not average *one column in twelve months* on

this subject. And it is not uncommon for years to pass by without a word on the *mode* or *subjects* of baptism in its columns. What is said of these two papers is true of the other Presbyterian papers of this country. And the average pulpit in the Presbyterian Church devotes even a smaller proportion of time to questions concerning the baptismal controversy. The reasons given for this reticence and apparent lack of interest in an important subject are various and sufficient for those who use them. Some are fearful of exalting the external rite beyond the place it occupies in the Word of God; and making it, as it is with Papists and Ritualists, a saving ordinance—i. e., indispensable to the salvation of the soul. Others say that it is only a tottering cause, that requires its advocates to be constantly propping it up. But by far the greater number say that the people do not want Presbyterian papers and Presbyterian sermons full of controversy about an external rite: that they are sated, filled *ad nauseam*—with discussions about baptism, as heard and seen in the pulpits and papers of Disciples and Baptists. Such persons say that the masses need and expect something better from Presbyterian pulpits and papers.

The editor of the "Standard" will not, perhaps, deny that in his own denomination among the people the doctrine of water baptism is "made too much of." To use the words of Robert T. Matthews, in the "Standard" of March 4, 1882, you have "drifted into sacerdotalism" and "made too much of" immersion.

I would occupy a middle ground between the extreme of almost entirely ignoring the rite of baptism, as is done in too many Presbyterian pulpits and papers, and the other extreme of making the rite of water baptism of so much importance and prominence as to eclipse almost everything else, as is done by the Papist, Ritualist and average pulpit and paper among the Disciples and too many of the Baptists. I am labouring, in my own humble way, to fix the attention of my fellow-Christians of all denominations, not upon the modal use of water in baptism, but upon the high and holy import of the sacred ordinance—upon the substance, not upon the shadow. Through your generosity, Mr. Editor, I trust to be able to show your readers that real baptism is not a pouring or a sprinkling or a dipping or an immersing, but something far better, even the "washing of regeneration" effected by the Holy Ghost upon the soul of man. This inward spiritual change is set forth, or made manifest, by the emblem of water, applied to the body just as the Spirit is applied to the soul—the sign conforming to the thing signified. This is water baptism (Matt. iii. 11).

I humbly ask your readers, however much they may differ from my views, to give what I say a calm, careful and prayerful consideration; and possibly before I am done, though I may not be able to persuade them that I am right and they are wrong, yet good, I think, will be done if I only succeed in convincing them that their fellow-Christians who conscientiously differ from them on baptism are not therefore necessarily either "ignorant" or "unreasonable," or "wilfully dishonest." But what I ask is, let me say, no easy matter for your readers to grant me. Persons, whose fondest church recollections, whose endearing associations of family, friendship and conversion to God, and whose pious toils, sacrifices and prayers have all been connected with immersion, will find it difficult, if not impossible, to give unbiased consideration to arguments pointing out a dangerous error and an unwarranted innovation in a rite which they have always confidently regarded as an ordinance of God. But no Christian could claim infallibility of judgment, or close his eyes against the light of truth. Our appeal will be to the "Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." The claims of God's truth are paramount: and when considering these claims, all pride and prejudice must be renounced.

To be continued if the Lord will.

DR. JOHN BROWN'S RELIGION.

Of the author of "Rab and his Friends" and other delightful books, a writer in "Good Words" says:

"A more beautiful soul never looked out from a more beautiful face, and saw God, and lived in the light of His countenance. Of course his piety was the reverse of sour—was as sweet, and gentle, and loving as a pure spirit could be. It was not exactly the old Scottish piety, but it was still less the English kind; and, indeed, I know not that it belonged to any age,

or to any Church, but just to John Brown; and to him it was perfectly natural and real. Always serious, he was often sad; and yet what an amount of playful, tricky, wayward nonsense he would perpetrate, and even carry on for whole weeks on end! Some odd fancy would strike him, and being with those he could trust, it was uttered with the utmost gravity, and the fun was kept up as long as they could toss the light shuttlecock back. Nor did it stop there. Little notes would come for days after—daily little notes, with illustrations of the joke, pen-and-ink illustrations of the quaint absurdity, enlarging and unfolding the original germ till it grew to be really a part of one's life, which one talked of at breakfast, wondering what its next development would be. The fancy seemed to take hold of him, and grow from day to day, with fresh outcomes of fun and fresh lights of humour, almost as if he studied it, and yet it was only the veriest play of a spirit that tried to make its world as merry-hearted as it could. For underneath that crisp froth of gaiety there lay a great deep of solemn thought, which he tried to sound, and often found no bottom to it; and in the midst of his 'quips and cranks' there were many wistful sighs to know the hidden mystery. And over all there still rose, and abided steadfast in his faith, laugh and jest as he might, the face of the Crucified, the ever-beloved, ever-trusted Image and Glory of the Father.

"He was an exquisite story-teller, quaint, simple, with a look in his face half-pawky, half-pathetic, which never failed to catch and keep the interest of the hearer. Consider, for instance, how much this implies. I forget now, for it is many years since I heard him tell it at Craigcrook, what exactly were the circumstances giving rise to it—peril of a boat in a storm, or danger of a gig whose horse had madly run off, and become unmanageable; but whatever the risk was, it was enough to make one of the parties suggest to his neighbour that if he had a prayer he could pray, it was high time to say it. And the answer was: 'I don't remember anything but the Lord's Prayer, and what is the good of that?' Was it that there was no express petition there suitable for their circumstances; or that he had been from childhood so accustomed to it that he had got to think of it as only a 'bairn's prayer,' of no use to grown men; or that our Scotch habits of thought have tended to evacuate that prayer of its meaning and power? You may ponder over it for a long while, and fail to get to the bottom of it; but rest assured there was strange, deep import to John Brown in that question, 'What's the good of that?'

"I remember, not many months ago now, and yet what has happened since makes it look to me like years, for I have to gaze across 'the valley of the shadow of death,' and its bleak silence feels ever so vast—I remember, as he paid me one of his frequent morning visits which broke with such a bright gleam of natural sunshine on the daily task of sermon-writing, that something led me to speak of the various motives which brought people to church, which were not always so noble as a desire to hear of the way of salvation, nor always so flattering to the preacher as he might fancy. And I adduced as an illustration a circumstance that had come under my notice long ago. One country clown was heard calling to his fellow on Sunday morning: 'Are ye gaun to ti o' kirk to day, Jock?' To which the reply was, 'Na, I dinna think it. I hae naething to tak' me. I hev tobacco.' He had been wont to get his weekly supply of that weed at 'the kirk town' on Sunday, and as he was now provided for, he saw no occasion to go up to the house of the Lord. Brown enjoyed the story very much, but seemed to be set a-musing by it on yet deeper matters, for after a little he said: 'There is no connection exactly between them, but yet it reminds me of a story my old friend, Coventry, used to tell me. The minister was catechising one day over in Kinross, and asked a raw ploughman lad, 'Who made you?' which he answered correctly enough. Then another question was put, 'How do you know that God made you?' to which, after some pause and head scratching, the reply was, 'Weel, sir, it's the common clash o' the country.' 'Ay,' Brown added, 'I am afraid that a deal of our belief is just founded on the good "common clash o' the country";' and therewith he wrung my hand and went his way, having thoughts clearly in his head that he could not then utter. Nearly all his stories—and you hardly ever met him at a street corner but one at least would quietly drop from him—had this pregnant character. They had a meaning