

he would winnow the nation, gathering the good around him, separating and rejecting the bad. We shall find occasion soon to speak of this more particularly; at present let us remark that it shows us what course the Baptist imagined that the movement he had commenced would take. He had renewed the old theocratic covenant with the nation. But not all the nation was fit to remain in such a covenant. A sifting was necessary; from the approaching downfall of the Jewish nationality, from the wrath to come, an election should be rescued who should perpetuate the covenant. It is superfluous to remark how just this anticipation was, and how precisely it describes Christ's work, which consisted in collecting all the better spirits of the nation, and bringing them under that revised covenant which we call Christianity, and which survived and diffused itself after the fall of the Temple.

Further, Christ was to baptise with a holy spirit and with fire. John felt his own baptism to have something cold and negative about it. It was a renouncing of definite bad practices. The soldier bound himself to refrain from violence, the tax-gatherer from extortion. But more than this was wanting. It was necessary that an enthusiasm should be kindled. The phrase "baptise with fire" seems at first sight to contain a mixture of metaphors. Baptism means cleansing, and fire means warmth. How can warmth cleanse? The answer is that *moral* warmth does cleanse. No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic. And such an enthusiastic virtue Christ was to introduce. The whole of the present volume will be a comment on this text.