

Those were solemn days at Jordan where there was being enacted this "baptism of repentance." Matthew calls it even the "baptism unto repentance," the baptism ordained to bring to its own that total change of mind and heart which alone could fit one to endure the eye of the Refiner at his coming. Hence its nearness from all previous or contemporary illustrations, immensely multiplied though they were. They, to be sure, implied purification; but here was registered, as Professor Bernard Weiss has said, a fact "decisive for life"; or, as he puts it more fully, "the complete conclusion of a new life up to that point, and the commencement of a new life of a totally different nature." It was upon this total and final life-reversal, to which scribes and Pharisees would not bend nor submit, that John the Baptist hinged the forgiveness of sins.

But the task of John was not alone the "making ready of a prepared people." He was to identify the Messiah also, and introduce him to "his own." "That he should be manifested to Israel, for this cause came I baptized in water," John appears to have emerged from retirement in full consciousness of his task of searching out the Stronger One and making him known when found. Plainly, if the Fourth Gospel is to be credited, John's Messiah was to be no suddenly appearing heavenly figure. He was to be "found in fashion as a man" (Phil. 2:8). But that he was also to be found in the baptismal waters,—this, truly, was far enough from the Baptist's thought.

We can hardly refuse a glance at our Lord's baptism if we are to understand fully baptism in John's ministry. And this is the point to attend to; the baptism of our Lord was no mere formal sanction of his Forerunner; it was, as Jesus said, part of God's expressed will and requirement for himself. "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." But this very obedience of Jesus in submitting to John's baptism proves that repentance did not exhaust the meaning of the rite. It implied identification with the new order as well. This is Paul's representation of the matter to the Ephesian converts. For if a man laid off the old life in the watery grave, did he not assume the new also? Was not his very renunciation of the past a dedication of himself to the order that was coming? And this is the assumption that saves our Lord's baptism from being a denial of his sinless nature. In it he also dedicates himself, with the brethren of whom he is not ashamed to be one, to the new order, and specifically to his part in it,—not of lordship, but of suffering and death. That the moment of his humiliation proved the moment of revelation and kingly anointing, is no accident, but the annunciation of the law which holds for all his followers: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Baptism in the Ministry of Jesus.

But the baptism is over and the temptation past, and our Lord's public ministry opens. What place does baptism occupy in this ministry? Here we come on scant notices and perplexing questions. As for the early Judean ministry, John only records it. It hints in briefest possible fashion at a ministry contemporaneous with the Baptist's, and in some respects assimilated to it. Jesus baptizes,—that is, through his disciples,—and gathers many disciples. But from that time on until after the resurrection all mention of baptism disappears. There is no reference to it in the directions to the Twelve and the Seventy. There is no allusion to it as a requirement of those who join the ranks of the Kingdom in this its most popular time.

Why was baptism dropped from our Lord's evangelizing program? Did the continuance of the rite tend to assimilate his work unwarrantably in the public eye with the past work of John? Did the accession of discipline in an era so popular, and hence so superficial and dangerous, need to be tempor-

arily checked? Did these, and perhaps other considerations, well, interpose to postpone baptism to a time when it should be enshrined in a body more organic, and accompanied with gifts which were impossible until the earthly ministry of Jesus was done?

Whatever answers may be given to these questions, we shall not go astray in thinking that the baptism which Jesus performed in his early ministry, through his disciples, symbolized with renewed emphasis the requirements of John. Men were severed from sin and linked to the Messiah by this symbolic act which engraved upon the memory and pictured before the world the momentous change.

The Christian church was, properly regarded, the creation of Pentecost. Then, for the first time, was manifested upon the earth in organic form as a new society the heavenly life which Jesus came to bestow upon men. And the realization of this Spirit-bestowed life was not adapted to minimize, but greatly to enhance, the vast change which separated the Christian from the World. We are not surprised, then, when we see the Apostles baptizing converts into the new order, to find them at the instance of our Lord applying the strongly symbolic rite of John. It was administered in the name of Jesus, and accompanied normally with the gift of the promised Spirit from on high. "John baptized with water"; but now he that baptized with the Spirit was on the throne.

We find little that could be regarded as a further development in the doctrine of baptism except in the thoughts of the Apostle Paul. Few direct allusions to its meaning meet us outside his writings, and these move within the circle of the ideas already laid down. With Paul, as with the richly-gifted John, we find contemplation dwelling on the nature and glory of him who had meditated to them salvation, on the necessity and significance of his sacrificial death, and especially on the almost palpable sense of participation in his present risen life. It is out of such experiences that Paul's high thoughts grew of a church which was Christ's body, receiving his life-impulses, manifesting his purposes, repeating, though in a faltering way, his sufferings, death, and victory upon the earth; and of a baptism which not only incorporated the believer into this body of Christ, but linked him by symbolic death, burial, and resurrection with those divine and atoning acts which are the price of his life and peace. Paul ranges baptism alongside the Lord's Supper as monuments of the central facts of Christianity.

Belief and Practice Concerning Baptism To-day.

Little need be devoted to the varying belief and practice concerning baptism to-day. These touch (1) the subjects of baptism—believers only, or believers with their households? (2) the mode,—by immersion only, or also by sprinkling or pouring? (3) the meaning. Questions of mode really resolve themselves into questions of reference and meaning.

Of these points of difference Baptists are apt, perhaps, to emphasize the first,—“believers’ baptism.” (“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”) Other Christians, while not denying the propriety of believers’ baptism, include with them as subjects of the rite believers’ children, basing the practice rather on inference from Scripture than on apostolic example or prescription (“To you is the promise, and to your children.” * * * “Suffer little children to come unto me”). The question of the subjects of baptism touches the conception of the nature of the church.

As for the meaning of the ordinance (questions of mode or form are at bottom questions of meaning) non-Baptist churches, though regarding Paul's language about baptism in the Romans and Colossians as venerable and significant imagery, fall back for the meaning of baptism on the more general idea

of purification which the practice of sprinkling or pouring is equally adapted to typify. Baptist churches find Paul's description of baptism as an emblem of Christ's death and burial and resurrection and the believer's union with Christ both commemorative and spiritually fruitful, and class these thoughts of the apostle with those other Spirit-led developments of truth to which the church at large owes so much.

Thus the differences of opinion concerning baptism in the Christian church to-day spring chiefly from a difference of attitude regarding the weight of New Testament precedent in matters of symbol and form. This difference of attitude is rooted perhaps chiefly in history, partly in temperament,—though temperament reflects history also in part.

Lodges of Christians exist which dispense with all ordinances. But I do not find it strange that Christ has willed to dominate the whole life of man, imaginative and symbolic as well as rational and believing, and to write across his life in the language of figures and emblem as well as in the language of daily speech the great realities in which man is called to believe.

HURTFUL DEFECTS.

By C. H. Wetnerbe.

Ministers, like all other people, are the subjects of moral defects in some forms and to some extent. But this general fact does not free any minister from the responsibility of his being so honorable in character and upright in his dealings with others, as to give good ground for full confidence in him. It is not too much to say that no man has a divine right to be in the ministry if he be so defective in morals that his promises cannot be relied upon by those to whom he makes them. It is absurd to suppose that God ever called to the ministry an untruthful and dishonest man.

The late Bishop Dickson, of the United Brethren denomination, in an article pertaining to ministers, referred to the fact that sometimes there was a "want of reliability on the part of ministers," and he further said: "This manifests itself in various ways. Making engagements, only to disregard them; promises to pay bills, and not paying them, and not giving any reason why. A minister promises to dine with a family; sometimes, as I have learned, with several families the same day. With some of our people it does not matter whether he comes or not; they are used to company of this kind. But when a family gets up a special meal for the preacher, as many do, and after waiting an hour or more he fails to come it is felt keenly, and must of necessity shake the confidence of the people in him. It has been found, too, that men who are careless about keeping promises in small affairs are apt to be loose in weightier matters. More than once have I received letters from business men with unpaid accounts, asking that the conference take action in the matter. I blush, and feel sad to think that any of our preachers should be open to such charges; they promise again and again to pay, but that is all there is of it."

But in a large sense there is a great deal more of it, for the minister who pursues such a course is exceedingly hurtful to the good cause. And especially is this so, if the man is allowed to remain in the ministry of his denomination. As soon as it is proved that he is dishonest and hence untruthful, he should be deposed from the ministry. To retain such a man is to be a partaker of his sins; it is to practically encourage him in his wickedness. Moreover, unconverted people are led by such examples to be greatly prejudiced, not only against other ministers, but also against the church which tolerates and supports a man of this kind. It is nothing strange that such churches are spiritually weak and uninfluential.