

Infant Baptism.

ABOUT A. D. 400, or 300 years after the times of the Apostles, a council was held at Carthage, in which a subject was introduced which shows plainly that Infant Baptism was the custom of the Church at that time. It was in reference to the case of persons who had been carried away captives in their infancy, and who had afterwards been ransomed. Being infants when taken away they knew nothing about their baptism, neither were there any witnesses who could certify that they were baptized. Their friends were very anxious that they should be partakers of the benefits of the Sacrament of Baptism, and yet they were afraid of desecrating that sacrament by re-baptizing. The matter was brought before the Council of Carthage, and after discussion it was decided as follows:

"It is resolved concerning *Infants*, when positive witnesses cannot be found who will testify that they have been baptized without doubt, and they, by reason of their age, are not able to answer as to the administration of the sacrament to them; that they be baptized without any scruple, lest that scruple do cause them to go without the benefit of the sacrament."

A few years earlier than this a council had been held at the same place, at which it was resolved concerning some who had been baptized by schismatics, and had afterwards been received into the Church, "That they who were baptized in their *infancy* among the Donatists, before they were old enough to understand the mischief of that error, ought to be promoted to Church offices, especially in time of so great need."

Next, we will take the writings of *John Chrysostom*, who lived about 280 years after the Apostles. He was a native of Antioch, and became Patriarch of Constantinople. On account of his great eloquence he is called the "golden mouthed," and many of his writings have come down to our day. In one of his homilies, on Genesis, he speaks in the following manner of the pain and suffering of circumcision, and the advantages which baptism has over it: "But our circumcision—I mean the grace of baptism—gives cure without pain, and procures for us a thousand benefits, and fills us with the grace of the Spirit. And it has no determinate time, as that had (*viz.*, the eighth day), but it is lawful to any one in the very *beginning of his age* (that is, on the day of his birth), or in the middle of it, or in old age, to receive this circumcision made without hands, in which there is no trouble to be undergone, but to throw off the load of sin and receive pardon for all foregoing offences."

Again, in another homily, when speaking of the benefit of baptism, he says: "You see how many are the benefits of baptism. And yet some think that the heavenly grace consists only in the forgiveness of sins; but I have reckoned up *ten* advantages of it. For this cause we *baptize Infants* also, though they are not defiled with sin (of their own), that there may be superadded to them saintship, righteousness, adoption, inheritance, a brotherhood with Christ, and to be made members of Him." These extracts show plainly the custom of the Church in the time of S. Chrysostom, and that is only 280 years after the time of the Apostles. With him Baptism is the Christian circumcision; but, unlike the circumcision of the Jew (which was to be performed on the eighth day after birth), Baptism can be administered *at any age*, even on the *day of birth*. This language is in perfect agreement with S. Paul, who calls Baptism the "circumcision made without hands" (see Col. ii. 11, 12). Again, S. Chrysostom would tell us that the benefits of Baptism are many, and that they are not to be kept back from *Infants*. "For this cause we *baptize Infants* also."

We have space in this paper for but one extract more. It shall be from S. Ambrose, the great Bishop of Milan, who lived about 274 years after the time of the Apostles. He is writing on the history of Abraham, and of course comes to the subject of circumcision, and refers to the fact of *Infants being circumcised*. The reason he gives for the circumcision of *Infants* is this: "As the disease is from *Infancy*, so is the remedy." And then, applying the same principle to *baptism*, he quotes the words of our Lord to Nicodemus, in S. John iii. 5, to enforce its necessity: "For unless any person be born again of the water, and of the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Then he adds, "You see He (Christ) excepts no person—not an *Infant*, not one that is hindered by an unavoidable accident,—and even if such (those hindered by unavoidable accident) have freedom from punishment, I know not that they shall have the honour of the Kingdom."

Verily no words of ours can be stronger than these of our Blessed Lord, or than this comment of S. Ambrose upon them: "Baptism is absolutely binding upon every one (*Infants* not even excepted) who enters the Kingdom of God."

An old lady in a backwoods settlement says: "*I look eagerly each month for the arrival of K.D.M.*" Thank you, madam, we do our best to be in time, but sometimes fail in the attempt.