

The Brevian.

THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.—Acts xvii. 11.

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[Vol. I.]

Poetry.

THE SAVIOUR'S ADDRESS.

Child of man! whose seed below
Must fulfil their race of woe,
Heir of want, and doubt, and pain,
Does thy panting heart complain?
Oh! in thought, one night recall,
The night of grief in Herod's hall,
When I bore the vengeance due,
Freely bore it all for you.

Child of Dust! corruption's son!
By pride deceived, by pride undone,
Willing captive, yet so free,
Take my yoke, and learn of me;
I, of Heaven and Earth the Lord,
God with God—Eternal Word,
I forsook my Father's side,
Toil'd, and wept, and bled, and died!

Child of Doubt! does fear surprise?
Vexing thoughts within thee rise?
Wand'ring, murmuring, dost thou gaze
On evil men and evil ways?
And if darkness round thee lower,
Darker far my dying hour,
Which bade that fearful cry awake—
"My God! my God! dost thou forsake?"

Child of Sin! by guilt oppress'd,
Heavens at last thy throbbing breast?
Hast thou felt the mourner's part?
Tear'st thou now thy falling heart?
Bear thee on, beloved of God!
Tread the path thy Saviour trod;
He the tempter's pow'r hath known,
He hath pour'd the garden-groan.

Child of Heaven! by me restor'd,
Love thy Saviour, serve thy Lord,
Seal'd with my mysterious name,
Bear the cross, and scorn the shame,
Then, like Me, the conflict o'er,
Thou shalt rise to sleep no more,
Partner of my purchas'd throne,
One in joy, in glory one.

BOWDLER.

REGENERATION.

BY THE REV. JOHN HAMBLETON, M. A. MINISTER OF THE CHAPEL OF EASE, ISLINGTON.

JOHN III. 3.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

This is a text which claims the most serious attention of every one who calls himself a Christian. It relates to what our Lord himself pronounced an essential requisite, an indispensable characteristic, a necessary passport for every one who would see or enter the kingdom of God. My brethren, would you see that kingdom? I know you would. I think I can read the wish of your hearts. Then consider, again and again, and ponder with yourselves in the secret chambers of the heart, that Christ has himself declared, "Verily, verily," and that strong asseveration marks the importance and the certainty of the truth that follows, "I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Now, if I were immediately to state my own views of the meaning of those remarkable words, I can readily imagine that some of you might neither understand me, nor agree with me. They may have a far different interpretation of their own, which they may consider equally correct, and we might separate as far asunder in spirit as we met, with a mutual sight over what we should consider each other's mistakes and misapprehensions of divine truth. I therefore do not tell you, at present, what I understand our Lord to mean by saying, a man must be born again; but we will endeavour, if you please, to discover our Lord's own meaning by his own words, and by their effects, so far as they are made known by the account of his interview with Nicodemus, and by the subsequent glimpses given us of the history of Nicodemus himself. You will remember these two points. We are to review our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus, and also the brief notices in Scripture of the personal history of Nicodemus, and to consider what light these two points will combine to throw upon the question, *What is meant by being born again?*

Allow me, my brethren, to make one very earnest request. Lay aside all prejudice against the subject. Keep your preconceived notions of the text in abeyance. Hear with candour. And only remember, that the question is one of vital importance; and also lift the heart in secret supplication for God, the Holy Spirit, to guide you and me into all truth. Is that your state of mind? If so, you are in a right attitude for studying our subject. Let us now therefore proceed in real earnest to the work before us, as important a work as can occupy the mind of man.

Our Lord spoke the declaration of our text to Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee, and a ruler of the Jews, that is, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, or Greater Council. "The same came to Jesus by night," during the time of our Lord's first ministerial visit to Jerusalem, at the annual paschal feast, and consequently in the first of the three years of his personal ministry. From the circumstance that Nicodemus was a Pharisee, we infer that he was a man of outwardly decent life, the Pharisees being, as you all know, the very strictest sect among the Jews. From his being a ruler of the Jews, and a minister of Israel, (ver. 10,) we may further infer, that he was a man of some rank and influence, probably also of education and learning. It is pleas-

ing to see here and there one of the wise, and rich, and mighty, come to Jesus Christ, since we know, on good authority, that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."

Another interesting and instructive circumstance in the conduct of Nicodemus, was his coming to Christ so early in our Lord's ministry. He had heard only a little of what we have heard of the works and doctrines of Christ. He had not been living, as we have all our days, among professed disciples of Christ. He had prejudices and obstacles to overcome, which we can scarcely understand. And yet he came to Jesus for instruction thus early. This marks a candour and an earnestness of spirit. Let his example say, Do not you be the last, truly to come to Jesus. Do not wait till all the rest of the Pharisees, and all the world, come to him; but come early, come now. He came then to Jesus:—but he came by night. And why by night? Why not come openly in the face of day, when Jesus taught publicly in the temple? Why wait, like a thief or an assassin, for the obscurity of night, as if to veil some deed of darkness? It is not difficult to understand his reasons for coming by night. He has not yet courage to confess Christ openly before men. He is afraid of the reproach of the other Pharisees and rulers, if he, a man of rank, authority, and Rabbinical learning, were seen conversing with the disciples of the despised Galilean. Then why come at all? He was anxious and uneasy in his mind. He had heard of the miracles, and probably also of the doctrine of Jesus. He is startled, aroused, made anxious, though not yet enlightened or converted. He resolved, therefore, to come to Jesus,—the resolution was good,—but he must come by night. Better to come by night than not to come at all. This same state of mind is, I believe, very common. The fear of man has, for a time, very great force in keeping back many from an open confession of Christ. This is perhaps very peculiarly the case with those who by education, rank, or worldly connexions, are much involved with persons who pour contempt on every thing like vital piety. The same difficulty is however found, more or less, in almost every condition of life. Still attention is aroused, anxiety is excited, such minds are far from easy. Sometimes by night they will come to Jesus and turn the pages which contain his doctrine with trembling anxiety, or offer a hurried prayer, fearful of being suspected by the world to care any thing about religion. Sometimes also they are so anxious as to come privately to some experienced Christian or minister for advice and guidance. What say we to such conduct? We would look on it with great consideration. If sincere, humble, teachable, they will soon gather strength, and advance in Christian holiness.

"Behold, then, Nicodemus sailling forth, amid the shades of night, in quest of Jesus. The streets of Jerusalem are still. The eye of impertinent curiosity is asleep. The tongue of the busy-body, so active all through the day, is hushed. He comes to the lowly place where the Saviour was lodging. Though the hour was unseasonable,—though the Saviour's human frame, fatigued with the labours of the day, (for his were no days of idleness,) required rest,—though his soul was, perhaps, in close communion with his heavenly Father,—and though He, who "knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man;" must have perceived how much ignorance, fear of man, and false shame influenced this his nocturnal visitor, yet He neither refuses to receive his visitor to enter into converse. Let the most timid here learn encouragement. If you are at present afraid to confess Christ before men, go to him in secret, by night, at any hour. "Him that cometh to me," he says, "I will in no wise cast out." Let the minister of Christ also learn to be like his master, accessible at any hour to every one who would seek spiritual instruction. Let us be content to labour, not merely in the great congregation, but with the single individual, who will come to us for instruction in the things of God. Perhaps we are not sufficiently aware, in the present day, of the benefit which persons in perplexity of mind might occasionally, with God's blessing, find by application to their ministers. In avoiding the confessional of the Church of Rome, with its monstrous abuses, we seem in some danger of running into an opposite extreme.

We now see Nicodemus in the Saviour's presence. He opens the conversation in a very respectful manner. "Rabbi," he said, (and this with the Jews was a title of great respect,) "we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." "If I know,"—this may seem to imply, that he spoke the sentiment of others, his friends or relatives. It may be, that after much private discussion, these had deputed Nicodemus to go as the representative of his and their common anxiety. But I urge not this supposition. He expresses, you observe, his belief in Christ, as a teacher come from God, and states a good reason for that belief by appealing to the miracles of Jesus. This then is no ordinary Pharisee. He has some knowledge of Christ. But it is only as a teacher come from God, proving his divine mission by miracles. The knowledge of some, who call themselves Christians, extends, it is to be feared, but little farther than that of this Pharisee. They look on Christ as a teacher of good morals; they allow that he had some special commission from God; and that his miracles are a divine sanction to his doctrine. Now all this is true and correct, as far as it goes; but if men imagine, that this is the sun, the substance, the extent of Christianity, they most lamentably err. Christ is a

teacher; but he is far more. His miracles do prove that he came from God; but, being wrought in his own name, and by his own power, they also prove that he was God, one with the Father. Man is not only ignorant, and requiring a teacher; he is guilty; and needs a Saviour; he is corrupt, and must have a purifier. It is very remarkable, that men, in general, have no great objection to hear of Christ as a teacher; but when we preach the cross of Christ, his atoning sacrifice, his meritorious righteousness, his new-creating Spirit, they perceive, with a glance of the mind, that so to believe in Christ is to confess their own deep guilt, depravity, condemned and helpless state. Hence the offence of the cross. Hence many of the corruptions of true religion.

Nicodemus had simply spoken his introductory sentence, when our Lord addressed him in the words of my text, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus was instantly struck with astonishment and perplexity. His reply shows it—"Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old?" This intimates that he was himself advanced in life,—can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" This question shows the darkness of his mind on this great and vital subject. His views were altogether gross, earthly, carnal. It illustrates 1 Cor. ii. 14, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Yet his question should, I think, be carefully distinguished from the spirit of some in these latter days, who, as ignorant as he of what is meant by being born again, dare to treat their Lord's solemn declaration with levity, and make it matter of jesting, as ill-timed as it is indecorous. No serious inquirer after truth will so act. The question of Nicodemus was not, I conceive, at all of a jesting character, but the honest language of his ignorance. You behold then, his state. He was a Pharisee, a man of outwardly decent character, a teacher of the law, an inquirer after truth, convinced of the divine mission of Christ as a teacher, respectful in his manners, and venerable, it should seem, for age, as well as station. *What can he wanting in such a man? EVERY THING MAY.* He must be born again. This great truth is propounded by our Lord. Nicodemus is utterly ignorant of its meaning. Yet since it is declared by Christ, whom he regards as a teacher come from God, to be essentially necessary, yea, fundamentally important, to every one who would see the kingdom of God, the perplexity of mind, which he had hoped to have had removed, is now infinitely increased. If any of you are as ignorant as he of what it is to be born again, you must surely be now sharing his perplexity. For Christ, you observe, proposes his truth as of individual, general, universal application. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again,"—not, except this man or that, except Nicodemus, or Peter, or John, but, except a man be born again, except thou, O man, whoever thou art, be born again, thou canst not see the kingdom of God! What then does it mean? I must not tell you yet. For I was not to give you the interpretation, so much as to help you to find it for yourself.

"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." A ray of light here begins to dawn upon his meaning. He evidently proposes the same great truth as before, but he now introduces an explanatory change into his expression, which may much assist us in discovering his meaning. In the former instance it was, "Except a man be born again," here, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit." To be born again, then, is the same with being born of water and of the Spirit. And what does this mean? We will consider. Add in, however, the Saviour's next observation, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." This directly meets the ignorant question just put by Nicodemus. It is not, the Saviour tells him, of a natural, carnal, fleshy birth, that he speaks. If that could be repeated, it would not change the carnal, fleshy nature. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." The natural birth cannot produce the spiritual child. The birth spoken of is "of the Spirit;" "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

We are now therefore advanced thus far in our interpretation. To be born again, so necessary to every human being, is something totally distinct from the natural birth. Its author is the Spirit. Its effect, product, or issue, is spirit, that is, spiritual. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." But I have omitted, you will tell me, the water, "Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit." How can a man be born of water spiritually, (for we have seen it must be a spiritual birth,) of water, I say, which is a thing material, visible, tangible, sensible, (I mean, subject to the outward senses,) except as an emblem, token, or sign? it may be a pledge, a channel, a means; it cannot be the thing itself, the inward, spiritual grace. No washing of the body with water, whether in Abana or Parpar, or Jordan, can cleanse a soul from its defilements. The thing is evident. Then the water must be emblematic and significative—every one sees of what—namely, of the cleansing and purification of the inner man, the heart, the soul, by the Holy Spirit. But our Lord told us that every man needs this. Then every man by nature has his inner man, his heart, his soul defiled, polluted, deeply stained, or it would not need this divine cleansing and purification. And yet, that we may not think of it as any thing slight, or partial, or superficial, like the Pharisees' rinsing of the outside of the cup, or like the outward reformation which satisfies the moralist, our Lord

each time speaks of it as a new birth, a new creation, a complete change, a transition from death unto life, the entering into a new world, the commencement of a new era of existence.

I think, my brethren, you must allow, that without straining a single expression of the sacred text, we have now several important propositions clearly educed. That the product of the natural birth is a fleshy nature. That this extends not only to the bodily appetites, but also to the whole bias and character of the soul; otherwise the regeneration of the soul or spirit could not be needed. That accordingly, every man's natural state is that of one in the flesh; and a scriptural consequence is, "That they that are in the flesh cannot please God." "To be carnally minded," to mind the things of the flesh, "is death." In other words, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And why? The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom. Flesh and spirit, since the fall of man, are naturally and essentially opposed. The flesh, consistently with its nature, desires or lusts after things sensual, earthly, perishable. The spirit desires things spiritual, heavenly, imperishable. Flesh and spirit cannot bear full sway in the same man. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit." "Because the carnal mind," (the minding of the "flesh," is enmity against God; for it is not "subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be;" "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.") You see, my brethren,—I think you must see,—the grand distinction which the word of God makes between the spiritual kingdom and the fleshy nature. Light and darkness, good and evil, are not more opposite. Every man also is in one or the other of these two states in the sight of God. How may we know, you tremblingly ask, in which state are we? "By their fruits ye shall know them." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." If your chief pleasures and enjoyments are in the things of the flesh, the things of time and sense, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life; if your affections are fixed on things below; if you allow yourselves in the habitual practice of any of "the works of the flesh," which are more comprehensive than some imagine, then how can I in faithfulness allow you, or how can you in kindness allow yourselves, to suppose that you are born of the Spirit, or entered into the spiritual kingdom of God? I give you an inspired catalogue of the works of the flesh; and I entreat you to consider, while I read it, whether any of them are still your works. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

But, on the other hand, if your chief delight is now in God, and in the things of God; if your affections are set on things above; if you allow yourselves in the habitual practice of no evil thing; if your inward deviations from the spiritual standard of true holiness, proposed in the law of God and the example of Jesus Christ, are your grief and shame; if you produce the fruits of the Spirit in your temper and life, and desire to produce them far more; then have you pleasing evidence that you have experienced this new birth and new creation of the soul unto righteousness and true holiness. "The fruit of the Spirit," which you are to inquire if you produce, "is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." (To be continued.)

THE DEATH OF INFANTS.

"Oh when a mother meets on high
The babe she lost in infancy,
Hath she not then for pains and fears—
The day of woe, the watchful night—
For all her sorrow, all her tears—
An over-payment of delight?"

Probably every one who expects to go to heaven, believes that those who die in infancy will certainly be there also. There have been Christians who had doubts on this subject; I think there are few now; perhaps none. There is enough in the one precious declaration of the Saviour to put at rest all anxiety; and when we look at other passages of the Bible, and at the provisions of the gospel, the subject is cleared of its difficulties, and the sweet truth is cherished without a fear.

Yet it has sometimes pained me to observe that Christian parents, bereaved of their infants, find their chief consolation in the thought that the loved and lost are now in a better and brighter world than this. In some degree, this remark may apply to Christians when mourning over the grave of any pious friend. It is a source of comfort that those whom we love, if not with us, are happier than if they were. We are reconciled to the removal of a friend to a distant land, if his own interest and happiness are to be secured by the removal. The prospect of wealth will induce even an anxious parent to trust a darling boy to the temptations of a crowded city or a foreign port. And

• Rom. viii. 8. † Rom. viii. 6.
‡ Rom. viii. 5. § Rom. viii. 7.
•• Rom. viii. 13. †† Matt. vii. 20.
•• Gal. v. 19-21. †† Gal. v. 22.

on the same principle, we may be reconciled to the death of an infant or a pious friend, while religion has no share in the emotions under which we submit to the removal. Nay, in the quiet resignation, the almost complacency, perhaps the gentle joy with which we yield an infant's spirit to Him who lent it to us, it may be that we are selfish, and submit to its departure because we know that our babe is now an angel. This is not the fruit of religion—Philosophy, believing the Bible, though it had no faith in the Bible's Saviour, would silence every murmur, when the assurance of such a change is brought home to the soul. I would therefore waive the thought of my child's increased happiness, and seek consolation elsewhere, when the stroke of death makes my hearth desolate and my heart sad.

It is my Father's will. When I first learned to say "Our Father," I was taught to add "thy will be done;" and my own children are taught to ask no other reason when their parent's will is known. Shall I have less confidence in the wisdom and love of Him whom I adore, than these little ones have in me? This is not blind submission; it is the acquiescence of love—the yielding of my way to one whose ways are better, though higher, than mine, and who is so dear to me, that if my own way seemed the best, I would still prefer to yield to his. So felt the aged and pious woman who was asked in her sickness whether she wished to live or to die. "Why," said she, "I have left it to the Lord; let him do what seemeth to him good." "Yes, but if the Lord should leave it to you, which would you choose?" "Well, if the Lord should leave it to me, I would just leave it back to him again." So, if the Lord should ask me to decide the question, whether my children shall be taken away while they nestle as infants in their mother's arms, or in the bloom of their childhood, or in the summer of youth, or be spared to the noontide or evening of life, I would desire to have grace to say, "Not my will, but thine be done."

Just now a child of six summers came to my side with his daily lesson, and repeated as part of it these words: "In the third petition (which is, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven,') we pray, that God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey and submit to his will in all things as the angels do in Heaven."

Think of it—as the angels do in Heaven. That is our prayer—a part of the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples—a prayer that we have offered every day since we could lip the words! "Thy will be done." That is enough. I do not ask for more: I had almost said, I will not have anything else, to reconcile me to aught that God does. It pleases Him. It must be wise, good, holy, kind. It must be just the thing for me, and for His high purposes; and it becomes me to be still, and know that it is the Lord.

But then we may go farther, and find comfort in the thought that God is love. Dwell upon that word. What balm the thought sheds over the bleeding heart. Is God's hand heavily on you now? God is love. Is the ground still unsettled over the babe that lately smiled at your breast? God is love. He cannot be unkind. It is assuredly in kindness that he has plucked the sweetest flower in your garden, and you shall see and say that it is kind, though you never confess it till you behold that flower again, radiant with immortal bloom. Love, the love of God, God who is love itself, has taken away what was dear to us, and we cannot find it in our hearts to complain of love. This disarms us. Nay, we will kiss the hand, we will kiss the rod that smites us, and believe that "it is well."

"Oh, blessed be the hand that gave;
Still blessed when it takes:
Blessed be who smites to save,
Who heals the heart he breaks:
Perfect and true are all his ways,
Whom heaven adores and death obeys."

This should the Christian parent find the cup of sorrow mingled with sweetness; joy breaking out of grief, like springs in the desert, and peace that passeth all understanding flowing as a river into his soul. What if thou canst not know why the Lord has thus dealt with thee? That is the very trial to which thou art called to bow. This is the test of thy faith. Dry up thy tears and sing,

"Oh, let my trembling soul be still,
While darkness veils this mortal eye,
And wait thy wise, thy holy will,
Wrapp'd yet in tears and mystery!
I cannot, Lord, thy purpose see,
Yet all is well since ruled by thee.
"Thus trusting in thy love, I tread
The narrow path of duty on;
What though some cherished joys are fled?
What though some fluttering dreams are gone?
Yet prar, brighter joys remain:
Why should my spirit then complain?"
Mother's Magazine.