

in the flesh," says Paul; "but circumcision is of the heart; in the spirit, and not in the letter." That is not baptism, says Peter, which merely puts away the filth of the flesh; but baptism is the answer of a good conscience unto God. If the baptism of infants offer any violence to the vital and essential principles of that ordinance, the principles of the ordinance of circumcision are altogether the same. Circumcision is the sign of an inward grace; and upon Abraham, in the previous possession of this grace, the sign was impressed. And, in the face of what might have been alleged, that it was wrong when the sign and the thing signified did not go together, this sign of circumcision was nevertheless perpetuated in the family of Abraham, by being impressed on the infancy of all his descendants. In like manner, when an adult stands before us for baptism, should we be satisfied that he has the washing of regeneration, then may we put the question, "Can any man forbid water, that he should not be baptized who hath received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" But should any man go further, and forbid water to the infants of his present or his future family, he appears to do so on a principle which God himself did not recognise; and, while he seems to exalt faith over forms, by waiting for the rise of this inward grace ere he will impose the outward ceremonial, he stamps a reflection on that very procedure that was instituted for him who is called the "father of the faithful."

But is it not wrong, when the sign and the thing signified do not go together? Yes, it is very wrong; and let us shortly consider who they generally are that are in the wrong when such a disjunction at any time occurs. In the case of an adult, the thing signified should precede the sign. When he offers himself for baptism, he asks to be invested with the sign that he is a disciple, and he makes a credible appearance and profession of his being so. Were it not a credible profession, then the administrator is in the fault for having put the outward stamp of Christianity on one whom he believed to be a counterfeiter. Were it a profession rendered credible by the arts of hypocrisy, then the Minister is free; and the whole guilt that arises from an unworthy subject, standing arrayed in the insignia of our faith, lies upon him who wears them. But in the case of an infant, the sign precedes the thing signified. The former has been impressed upon him by the will of his parent; and the latter remains to be wrought in him by the care of his parent. If he do not put forth this care, he is in the fault. Better that there had been no sign, if there was to be no substance; and he by whose application it was that the sign was imprinted, but by whose neglect it is that the substance is not infused, he is the author of this mockery upon ordinances. He it is who hath made the symbolical language of Christianity the vehicle of a falsehood. He is like the steward who is entrusted by his superior with the subscription of his name to a space of blank paper, on the understanding that it was to be filled up in a particular manner, agreeable to the will of his Lord; and, instead of doing so, has filled it up with matter of a different import altogether. The infant, with its mind unfilled and unfurnished, has been put by the God of providence into his hands; and after the baptism which he himself hath craved, it has been again made over to him with the signature of Christian discipleship, and, by his own consent, impressed upon it; and he, by failing to give the characters of discipleship upon it, hath unworthily betrayed the trust that was reposed in him; and, like the treacherous agent, who hath prostituted his master's name to a purpose different from his master's will, he hath so perverted the sign of Heaven's appointment, as to frustrate the end of Heaven's ordination. The worthies of the Old Testament, who, in obedience to the God whom they served, circumcised their children in infancy, never forget that they were the children of the circumcision; and the mark of separa-

tion they had been enjoined to impose upon them reminded them of the duty under which they lay, to rear them in all the virtues of a holy and separate generation; and many a Hebrew parent was solemnized by this observance into the devotedness of Joshua, who said that whatever others should do, he with all his house would fear the Lord: and this was the testimony of the Searcher of hearts in behalf of one who had laid the great initiatory rite of Judaism upon his offspring, "that He knew him, that he would bring up his children after him in all his ways, and statutes, and ordinances that he had himself been taught;" and it was the commandment of God to his servants of old, that they should teach their children diligently, and talk to them as they rose up and sat down, and walked by the way-side, of the loyalty and gratitude that should be rendered to the God of Israel. Thus was the matter ordered under the old dispensation. The sign was impressed upon the infant, and it served for a signal of duty and direction to the parent. It pointed out to him the moral destination of his child, and led him to guide it onward accordingly. There ought to be a correspondence between the sign and the thing signified. At the very outset of the child's life, did the parent fix upon its person the one term of this correspondence, as a mark of his determination to fix upon its character the other term of it. It was as good as his promissory declaration to that effect; and if this be enough to rationalize the infant circumcision of the Jews, it is equally enough to rationalize the infant baptism of Christians. The parent of our day, who feels as he ought, will feel himself in conscience to be solemnly charged, that the infant whom he has held up to the baptism of Christianity, he should bring up in the belief of Christianity; and if he fail to do this, it is he who has degraded this simple and impressive ceremonial into a thing of nought; it is he who has dissolved the alliance between the sign and the thing signified; it is he who brings scandal upon ordinances, by stripping them of all their respect, and all their significance. Should the child live and die unchristian, there will be a proper and essential guilt attached to him in consequence; but it will at least not be the guilt of having broken a vow which he was incapable of making. And yet the vow was made by some one. It was made by the parent; and in as far as the ruin of the child may be resolved into the negligence of him to whom he owes his birth, it is he who moved the baptism, and it is he who hath profaned it.

This ordinance lays a responsibility on parents; the sense of which has, we doubt not, given a mighty impulse to the cause of Christian education. It is well that there should be one sacrament in behalf of the grown-up disciple, for the solemn avowal of his Christianity before men; and the very participation of which binds more closely about his conscience all the duties and all the consistencies of the Gospel. But it is also well that there should be another sacrament, the place of which in his history is, not at the period of his youth or manhood, but at the period of his infancy; and the obligation of which is felt, not by his conscience still in embryo, but by the conscience of him whose business is to develope, and to guard, and to nurture its yet unawakened sensibilities. This is like removing baptism upward on a higher vantage ground. It is assigning for it a station of command and of custody at the very fountain head of moral influence; and we repeat it to be well that Christianity should have here fixed one of its sacraments; that it should have reared such a security around the birth of every immortal; that it should have so constituted baptism, as to render it a guide and a guardian, whose post is by the cradle of the infant spirit; and which, from coming into contact with the first elements of tuition, has, we doubt not, from this presiding eminence, done much to sustain and perpetuate the faith of the Gospel from generation to generation.

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This affords hious glimpse distracted mot her; when al world amount or a few openi felt enjoyment lisp of infanc wrestle throu and at length what an inter was so passin grave, what the few acqu too, baptism was never fal in its little bo truth; no lov light; nor ha tion which y unbelief, that know that G children of t for the infant ty. Should th as a sign has not be permit that the use o tireness; tha to a babe wil his ordinance known dispo that he manif fered them endearment Jerusalem, t company of gredient of t Christianity an infant's hears us feel of a light th roof, and at cannot think that he has following of again shine which with planted the then gladder ny of an a and in the n wept along to sorrow d