An Exegesis

OF JOHN 3: 3 AND 5.

BY J. H. HUGHES, PASTOR AT ARCADIA, YARMOUTH, N. S.

"Except a man be born of water, and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."—John iii: 3, 5.

There are two parts of this statement of our Lord upon which religious thought has been divided. The water, and the kingdom. Without meddling with the opinions of others, we shall attempt to show what seems to be the comparative Scripture teaching on these subjects or terms. It is necessary first to understand what is meant by the phrase, kingdom of God, or kingdom of heaven. That it is not a visible organic body, either political or ecclesiastical, is clearly seen from the following expressions found elsewhere in the New Testament. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." "Go thou and preach the kingdom of God." "The kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation." "The kingdom of heaven is within you." "The kingdom of God is not in eating and drinking; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." From these statements, as well as the many comparisons of the kingdom of heaven our Saviour made in His parables, it is evident that the phrase means nothing more than the gospel dispensation, the dispensation of the spirit, in distinction from the former dispensation of law.

The one was ministration of death; the other is a ministration of life. It is the dispensation, or kingdom of grace, the long promised reign of heaven upon earth—the outcome of the new covenant, which was to affect men, not with forms and ceremonials, but with the *word* and spirit of God, in order to bring them into relation with the unseen, intangible realm of the spirit, in which Jesus is supreme in all things pertaining to salvation. It is a kingdom of heavenly nature, laws and privileges, that men can neither see nor enter into without a change of heart, a birth from above. Being in the kingdom, has the same meaning as being in Christ. As believers are said to be in Christ Jesus as new creatures, and Christ is said to be in them, so they are in the kingdom, and the kingdom is in them. To be in the kingdom here as its subjects, is to be heirs of the kingdom above in the Father's house.

This kingdom of gracious rule was foreseen by kings, and prophets, and righteous men, under many aspects, in olden times, and was symbolized to Nebuchadnezzar in his dream of the great beast, and of the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which filled the whole land, as a kingdom which the God of heaven was to set up, which was never to be destroyed, nor to be left to another people; but was to stand forever. And afterwards it was seen by Daniel in his vision of the four beasts, and the ancient of days, as a kingdom that the saints of the most high were to possess, which was to have rule in all the earth under the whole heaven, and all peoples were to obey and serve their king. Observe that this kingdom was to be set up in the days of these kings; that is, it was to be in part contemporaneous with their reign, and by its righteous principles overthrow their cruel policy. But there is no intimation that it was in any wise to be a supplanter or a successor of any of their dynasties.

This is the kingdom that John the Baptist and Jesus both preached as then at hand, of which men were to become the subjects by repentance and faith, the development of regeneration, and short of which no man could see or enter into it. It seems to me it is the only kingdom of God that will ever be known in this world, (although there is to be a greater fulness of it throughout the earth); for his kingdom is not of this world, because it is of heaven. Our Lord likened it in his parables, in its working in the human soul, and insociety, to almost everything in nature except a kingdom, to teach them that it was not a temporal, earthly kingdom he came to establish, but one heavenly and spiritual in its nature, working, and results.

Now let us try and ascertain what the term water, in the text, means. Having seen that the kingdom of heaven is purely God's spirit, and truth, working within and among men in this world, it is therefore obvious that nothing affecting the body, such as water, can have anything to do with renewing the soul.

Therefore the term water in the text must have a figurative significance that must be found in the language of other statements where the same change of heart is spoken of. Now, as Jesus had preached repentance as a requisite to entrance into the kingdom of heaven then at hand, it is clear that moral defilement and spiritual death was to be removed by spiritual cleansing and quickening. This can only be accomplished by a belief in the Word of God, and by the operations of his Spirit. For the apostle Paul tells us that God purifies men's hearts by faith, and that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, and that that word is nigh thee even in thy mouth and in thine heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach. When the efficacy of the word is spoken of in cleansing or purifying the soul, or quenching its thirst, it is frequently expressed by the term water, both in the Old Testament and the New, and it is to be supposed that Nicodemus, a master in Israel, knew something of the figurative use of that term. He, doubtless, had not read such prophetic statements as these: "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing, for in the wilderness shall *waters* break out, and streams in the desert, and the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of *water*." "When the poor and needy seek water and there be none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of *water*, and the dry land springs of *water*." "He that hath mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of *water* shall he guide them." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the *waters*." "In that day, there shall be a fountain opened to the House of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." All of which sets forth in poetic beauty and figures of speech the words of gospel grace and their saving efficacy.

The New Testament also contains many *utterances* wherein the Word of God is figuratively represented by the term water in its uses in cleansing the soul and quenching its thirst. Our Lord said to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me; and he that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean *every* whit." He gives us the idea when he said to the disciples, "Now are ye clean through the word that I have spoken unto you." Paul says that, "according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." And again he says, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for it, that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water in the word." In this last statement, water is used for Spirit, in the word. There are other texts also where the word and spirit together are compared to water. Jesus says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I will give him, shall never thirst. The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." He also says that his words are spirit and life. So his word is like living and cleansing water when coupled with the Spirit. But the word, or letter alone, killeth, and is represented as an instrument of death or of separation. It is called a sword, a pruning knife, a hammer, a fire, all of which require a wise and gentle hand to use and control them; and this is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit. He makes use of the divine word to bring man to a knowledge of himself and of his Maker. It is the word being mixed with faith in them that hear it, that purifies their hearts; and the Spirit gives them life, which is the same as being born again. There is another figure also used in Scripture which shows that the divine word is the only instrument the Holy Spirit employs in the work of regeneration. The word is represented as the seed of truth. Our Saviour, in his parable of the sower, says that the seed is the *word* of the kingdom. And the apostle Peter, says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the *word* of God that liveth and abideth forever." And James says "Of his own will begat he us with the *word* of truth."

From all these statements of Scripture, showing that it is by his word and spirit God renews the human soul, we conclude that the term water in this text is expressive of the word, and that water and word when spoken of as instruments in the work of regeneration, are interchangeable and synonymous. The word of itself does not renew the soul and give it eternal life, any more than dead or stagnant water produces life without the light and heat of the sun. The word and spirit of God are required to new-create the moral agent dead in trespasses and in sins, in order to his entering into the kingdom of God. Analogous to this view, we are informed that man was at first created or formed by the word of God: but not until the Creator breathed into him the breath of life did he become a living soul. Ezekiel first prophesied to the dry bones, and said, "O, ye dry bones, hear ye the word of the Lord," and that caused a shaking, and brought many of them together, and a large number of bodies were formed; but he had to prophesy to the winds also, and say, "O, four winds, come and breathe upon these slain, that they may live," before they had life, and stood up, an exceeding great army. Paul says that "we are created in Christ Jesus, unto good works," and that if any man be in Christ he is a new creation. And this is only another way of describing the new birth. John says those who believe in Christ are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man, but of God.

So we see that God's word creates the soul anew, and the spirit gives it life. And nothing physical nor material, such as literal water, can have any part in effecting the new birth, only the word and spirit of God alone. Therefore the term water in the text must have a figurative meaning; and, as the holy spirit uses no other instrument than the divine word in the renewal of the soul, it is self-evident that being born of water and of the spirit means nothing more nor less than being renewed by the word and spirit of God.

It may be asked, why did not our Lord use the term word instead of the term water? We answer, he may have had reasons we know nothing about. It is reasonable, however, to suppose that Nicodemus had every chance to know the figurative use of that term in the Scriptures, and would thereby be better able to conceive the necessity of divine cleansing, as well as the need of divine quickening, if he would see the spiritual kingdom and enter into its privileges.

The word see in the third verse requires a passing notice. It may have the same meaning here as it does in other parts of Scripture—that of enjoyment; but it is true in another sense also, and must be so understood here—that of perception. The apostle Paul says "that 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." "The entrance of thy word giveth light," says the Psalmist.

The kingdom of God being spiritual and heavenly in its nature, principles, and privileges, requires a spiritual sight to see it, as well as a spiritual nature to enter into it. Therefore Nicodemus, although a good member of the Jewish Church—which did not require a change of heart to belong to it—could neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God until he was born anew, or from above; and what was true in his case is still true in the case of every one who is not made a new creature in Christ Jesus. It is the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus that sets us free from the law of sin and death, and brings us into relation with the Father in heaven, and introduces us into the kingdom of grace, of light, life, love, and peace.

If any should ask, has not the term water in the text any allusion to baptism? we answer, so far as the symbolism of baptism goes, it is a representation of the new birth in two respects, as given in the Scriptures: Being born of the flesh is a coming forth into this world, when we receive the breath of natural life; and as natural creatures we are the subjects of sin, condemnation, and death. Being born again is a coming forth of the soul from the natural state of sin, condemnation and death, into a state of grace, of pardon, justification, and eternal life; and as such we are the subjects of the kingdom of heaven. This change of standing and character before God is also represented as a resurrection from the dead, to a life of holiness and peace. As baptism is the burial and raising of a body from a watery grave, there is in it a semblance of being born again, or a coming forth to a new life. But the term born of water cannot have reference to the *necessity* of baptism in order to entering into the kingdom of God, but only to the *necessity* of being renewed by the word and spirit of God.

—Spain is thirsting for Christ. A lady missionary in Spain writes that many times women have thrown their arms about her neck, crying out, "I want to be saved! I want to be saved!"

Dorothy Ann's Sermon.

There was great rejoicing among the little ones at the farm, when it was understood that Cousin Hetty, who lived in the city, was coming to make a long visit. She was not very strong, so mamma said, and they must all be careful to be very kind and polite, and to see that she always had the best of everything.

The little lassie came, and they were delighted with everything about her, from her pretty fair curls and white face, so different from their own sun-browned ones, to her dainty dresses and french boots. There could be no doubt that her manners were quite equal to her appearance, so Jessie and Tom and Polly resolved to be upon their very best behavior all the time.

"Will you come out into the garden?" said Jessie. There are lots of currants and a few raspberries ripe. There will be plenty of raspberries next week, though."

Such a garden as that! None of your little seven-by-nine scraps, but a full acre of everything that could be found in a liberal, old-fashioned country garden.

A broad walk through the middle of it was bordered by beds of bright-colored flowers, with rows of hollyhocks and sun flowers, at the end. Honeysuckles and morning-glories climbed over the fences, and in a shady corner grew such pansies as the children believed only mamma knew how to raise.

Miss Hettie tried the fruit and said, "I don't like currants; they're sour. I like only raspberries."

It had been supposed that each one would eat a great many currants and a very few raspberries. But on hearing this, the others offered her all the raspberries they could find, and were rather surprised to see that she took them without seeming to think whether they liked them, too. She kept calling for more, and, when Tom scratched his face and Polly tore her sleeve pushing through the bushes in search of them, very quietly ate all they had without so much as thank you. Then she declared the berries were not half ripe, and not fit to eat.

"Mamma don't wish us to pick the pansies unless she is with us," ventured Jessie, as Hetty began gathering them freely, "because she has some choice ones she wants to keep for seed."

"I like choice pansies, too," said Hetty, with a scowl on her pretty face.

They went to the swing, where Hetty grumbled when the others wanted to take a turn. Then to the croquet-ground, where things went smoothly so long as Hetty was on the winning side; but if they went against her she grew sober, then sulky, and finally threw down her mallet and refused to finish the game.

Long before tea time, Jessie and Tom and Polly began to wonder if it was so very delightful a thing after all to have a cousin from the city to visit them; and before the first week was gone everybody on the place had fully decided that it was not.

Hetty could be very sweet and pleasant while things were exactly to her liking, but unless she could have her own way in everything her frowns and complaints were ready at a moment's notice. She had never been taught to take any thought for others, and her little cousins found it very hard to endure all her whims and ill humors. They were very dutifully anxious to heed all mamma's reminders that it was their place to give up to their guest, but she herself could not help seeing that Hetty made sore demands upon the patience.

One day there was a picnic, to which all the children looked forward for days, and for which great preparations were made. When all were ready to go, it was discovered that Hetty was wearing a pair of thin slippers.

"Oh, my dear," said mamma, "you must put on your thick shoes. There will be rough ground and perhaps damp places to go over to-day."

Hetty had made up her mind to wear those slippers, and was not inclined to change it, or them, but was still quite determined to go to the picnic. So she said, "Then I believe I won't go."

The other children were as wofully dismayed as she had expected them to be.

"O, Hetty!" cried Jessie, "you must not stay at home. It's lovely out there—wild flowers and vine swings"—

"And a creek where we fish and wade and sail boats," said Tom.

"And such good things in the basket," whispered Polly.

"Hurry, dear," said her aunt, coaxingly. "We are all waiting, you see."

"Don't wait," said Hetty; "I'd rather stay at home." She went to her room, much enjoying the emotion she was making. From the back of it she could look out of the window and see what was going on. The children got into the big wagon and sat looking up at her windows. Then her aunt came out and called cheerily up to her, "Come, Hetty we've got a good seat for you."

"And I'm to have the whip, and I'll let you have it half the time," shouted Tom.

Hetty came to the window and said, "Thank you, Aunt Emily, but I'd rather not go;" and then watched again from the back of the room, wondering what they would do next in the way of urging her.

Aunt Emily got in, and to Hetty's great astonishment the wagon was driven away. What could it mean? They surely would never, never think of such a thing as going without her. They must be going to turn back for her—perhaps they were doing an errand first. But there was a little misgiving at her heart, as she slowly walked down to the kitchen and asked Dorothy Ann, the maid, "Where are they all gone?"

"Why, to the picnic, of course! Seems to me I'd a gone, too, if I'd a been you."

"Gone *without me*?" Hetty stood in blank amazement for a few moments, then flung herself down on the floor and screamed.

At the first howl, Dorothy Ann quietly took a chair, folded her arms, and sat looking at Hetty as if she were some very interesting natural curiosity. And Hetty screamed louder, and kicked until her bronze slippers were as badly off as if they had gone through half a dozen picnics. And the louder she screamed and the harder she kicked, the straighter Dorothy Ann looked at her.

It was very perplexing for Hetty. She had never kicked and screamed before without everybody being frightened for fear she would injure herself, and coaxing and petting her, and offering her everything she wanted, including her own way, if she would only stop. But here was Dorothy Ann looking as if she would not mind if it lasted all day, and not a soul anywhere near to do any coaxing. Hetty did not know what to do next.

At last, when her throat ached and her face was red and her whole self very badly tumbled, she sat upon the floor and looked at Dorothy Ann. And then Dorothy Ann spoke.

"You're a nice child now, ain't you?"

It was not spoken sneeringly, nor in anger. Dorothy Ann was a pleasant-faced, hard-working woman, older than Aunt Emily and her words always had weight in the family. After a pause she went on in a slow, earnest way: "You're a nice child, I say! Don't you think it's nice to be a makin' yourself a trouble and a torment with your cross, crabbed, cantankerous ways? Don't you think it's nice to come where folks is all glad to see you, and their hearts just warm and runnin' over with kind feelin's to you, and little ones that's always a-givin' up to you, and you just for all the world like a buzzin wasp or a stingin' nettle or a prickly chestnut-burr that everybody is glad to get away from or drop out of their hands? Don't you think it's nice to keep them children all rasped up with your tantrums, and to keep your aunt in a fret all the time between her wish to do everything that's kind by you, tellin' her children to do the same likewise, and you a-goin' on like all possessed?"

Hetty stared up at Dorothy Ann, bewildered at words the like of which she had never heard before, and slowly through her mind came the idea that the next thing for to do was to feel very angry.

"How dare you talk so to me?" she cried. "Mamma won't let you." But Dorothy Ann noticed her anger as little as she had her screams.

"If you go on so to your mamma, don't she think it's nice to have a little girl to buy pretty things for and to take good care of, and then to have her a-snappin' and a-snarlin', and a-scowlin', and a-makin' people wherever she goes wish she was a thousand miles away? Don't you think she's proud of havin' such a child?"

"Don't you think its nice to see your pretty blue eyes all red, and your forehead all crumpled up so you might iron it out, and your mouth that was made to smile and laugh all puckered? Don't you know there's wolves a-looking out of your eyes when there ought to be lambs and doves? Don't you know the words you speak are like so many snakes and toads a-droppin' out of your mouth? And what do you s'pose?—Dorothy Ann's voice grew solemn—"the good Lord thinks when he looks at that little heart of yourn that he give you to keep full of sweetness and loving kindness, and to make you a comfort instead of a trial to folks—what does he think, do you s'pose, when he sees it blotted and stained up with all sorts of hateful thoughts?"

Hetty had never taken her eyes from Dorothy Ann's face, and now as she seemed to have said her say, and went back to her work as if nothing had happened, it came over her very strongly that the next thing for her to do was to feel very much ashamed. With a little sob or two she got off the floor and went out and lay down under a apple tree. There Dorothy Ann found her, an hour later, fast asleep.

"Poor little creature! She's tired herself clean out." Dorothy Ann had for some days been "bilin' over for a chance to speak her mind," and having now had it, felt very kindly disposed. She slipped a cushion under the poor little, rumpled head, and when dinner time came, Hetty found a dainty pudding, just big enough for her, baked on purpose. And during the long afternoon Dorothy Ann told funny old stories and let her make molasses candy to pass away the time.

"I do declare, I'm most afraid to see Hetty!" said Tom, as the picnic party drew near home. And the other members of it felt so too.

But Hetty was subdued, and as days went on every one was amazed at the change in her. And nobody could ever guess how it came about, for she never told of Dorothy Ann's sermon. I wish all spoiled children could hear such a one—dont you?—*Congregationalist.*

A Popular Ministry

BY THE REV. JOHN HALL, D. D.

A ministry that pleases everybody may well suspect itself. Look at the doctrines we preach—human depravity, our Lord's true Deity, the atonement on the cross, the personality and work of the Holy Ghost, the need of every man, the most amiable and cultivated, of being regenerated, the Bible the sole rule of faith, self-denial a part of true Christian living, retribution on the impenitent, the obligation of the Sabbath, and all this with a worship conspicuously plain and free from showy and meretricious decoration. Make all this palatable to "society," the "world," everybody? No, this whole message tramples on the pride of human intellect; it belittles the boasted culture of the time, and it is, if understood, in direct opposition to the "life" which we are being persuaded to impart and servilely copy from Paris.

"Then what am I to do?" one may say. Go on and preach these truths, only more cleverly, firmly, tenderly. "But what if people leave me?" Yes, some will leave you and go to churches they like better, assigning various reasons for the same. That is their matter. Yours is to preach for the saving of men, not for the keeping of them in pews. "But cultivated and well-to-do people will quit the church." Let them. It is so much the worse for them. Remember Paul's words, "Not many wise, mighty, noble are called." "But it is a pity they should not be saved." Certainly, but it is by the truth they are to be saved, and you are the teacher of the truth. "But I may set them against it." Yes, and if your spirit is bad you will be very guilty in so doing.

But if yours is a right spirit, then your ministry will be like Christ's, which irritated and drove off not a few, especially the ritualists and the intellectual kind. "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind."—*From Pulpit Treasury.*

A Japanese Priest Converted.

The Rev. J. B. Hall, writing from Osaka, Japan, to the *Missionary Record*, gives the following report of a testimony which was given publicly at Gobo by Wada San, formerly a Buddhist priest:

"I was given, at an early age, to the priest-hood (Buddhist). I was raised in a temple, and was diligently taught the doctrines and the ceremonies and ritual of the sect. I at last completed my course so far as to receive authority from my bishop to take charge of a temple. I received a call to the temple where I was raised, and had charge also of five others. I was clothed in silks and crapes. I prayed for the people and got lots of money for it. When any one died I read prayers for them, and wrote a new name for them, and got well paid for it. But some of my friends said I was taken money from foolish people and professing to have power by praying for them to deliver them from purgatory. The worst of it was my conscience told me they were right. Besides, I did in secret those things which I preached against openly, and my conscience accused me daily, until at last I resolved to quit the priesthood.

"The Kocho being a friend of mine, through him I received the permit to quit. But new, having thrown up my temple, and with it Buddhism, I was lonesome, and, as I had always been a worshipper, my heart was *hungry for God*. I must have something to worship. But what? I had no faith in Buddah, none in Shinto. I was without God and without hope. At that time I came to Tanabe on business and stopped at the 'Kiyohechi Hotel. That same night [providentially, as Peter went to Cornelius, Acts 10] the missionary came with Yamamoto San and put up at the same house. I heard the talking and came in and inquired about Christianity, and was told to read the New Testament. I finally got the same and read it, and *found the God I sought.* While a priest I could dress in silk and live on the fat of the land; now I am comparatively a poor man, but am happy with it all. Formerly I taught error and taught men to worship idols. Now I know the true God and rejoice to teach the truth."

Suffering and Service.

There is a side of our faith that is inexpressibly joyous and glorious. But that is *one* side—that is the sunny side. There is another, as inexpressibly sad and dark. Shall we dwell perpetually on the sunny side? Some say, yes! But did *he*? "It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord." Shall we have the Mount of Transfiguration only, and no Gethsemane—no Calvary? "Jesus rejoiced in spirit"; and, in an agony of tears, wept with compassion. Shall we only rejoice? If so, it is because we are incapable of seeing things as he saw them, and as they are, and are unwilling to enter into sympathy with him in his divine passion.

We have been so industriously exhorted against a "long-faced religion," that we are disposed to be impatient with a religion that has even an earnest face. We have been so solemnly warned against solemnity that we forget that the angels can do anything but laugh, or that so tolerable a Christian as Paul said: "I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart," or that the Chiefest among ten thousand was a "Man of Sorrows." There is something painfully superficial and inadequate in these fashionable representations of our Christian religion as a religion of unalloyed comfort and uninterrupted delight. Why, at the very foundation of this religion lies a blood-stained cross, and its birth-throe was borne out into the darkened sky on the agonized cry: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me!" It is a tremendous uprising of the powers of righteousness and rescue against the powers of sin and damnation. Its occasion is the awful imminence in man of eternal destruction from the presence of God, and its momentous issue the issue of life or death. Surely if anything could solemnize the spirit it is the presence of such an issue. If anything is fitted to unseal the fountains of perpetual tears, and give rise to groanings that cannot be uttered, it is the stress and suspense of this conflict, and "the garments rolled in blood," and the wail of the lost as it reverberates down the aisles of eternity. How can a religion of laughter and "good times" comport with the awful seriousness of this battlefield; how can the jovial spirit be the sole and presiding spirit amid the flame and rending and agony of this supreme valley of decision? Who would think of organizing a quadrille on the shore, while the crew of a life-boat were seeking to bring to land some shipwrecked mariners? Nero, we are told, fiddled while Rome was burning. But this is not so monstrous as that a *Christian* should have no solicitude but for happiness, and no feelings but feelings of careless exultation in the midst of a doomed world.

"Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," not always and only rejoicing, is the law of a Christian life.—*Standard.*

DEVICES OF ADVERTISERS.—So many devices are resorted to by advertisers, that the ordinary reader sometimes becomes shy of the tempting paragraph, fearing the advice that is concealed in it like a pill in jelly. Who, for instance, on beginning this item, would have supposed that its purpose was to make the truth that Dr. Sage's Catarrh Remedy is what it claims to be—a cure for a disease at once loathsome to friends, and annoying and even dangerous to the sufferer.

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