

Contributions.

The Commission vs. Denominationalism.

XIV.

T. B. KNOWLES.

That the commission was given for, and embraces only, such persons as are of sufficient age and intellect to receive its teaching, obey its commands, and enjoy its promises, is evident to every rational mind. The "teaching," making "disciples of all the nations," preaching "the gospel to every creature," the preaching of "repentance and remission of sins," "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," etc., was never intended for persons incapable of instruction, of faith, repentance, or of obeying the Gospel. The commission was never intended, therefore, for either infants or idiots.

(1) This fact is everywhere apparent in the preaching and carrying out of the commission by the apostles. Their discourses were not delivered to infants, nor were they infants who were so "pierced to the heart" that they asked of the apostles, "What shall we do?" and were commanded to "repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins," etc., and that "gladly received His word, were baptized," etc. But,

(2) There is not a command in the whole New Testament, given either by Christ or his apostles, authorizing infant baptism; nor is there a single example showing that the apostles practiced it.

(3) This has been admitted by pedobaptists, clearly so, as the following statements, made by scholars of that school, will show. But, first, let us hear what the late Archbishop Kenrick, who clearly voiced the whole Roman Catholic church on this question, has said. Commenting on the words of the commission, "Go teach all nations, baptizing them," the Bishop remarks: "Whether infants shall be baptized cannot be inferred with certainty from the words of the commission." Again, he says: "Without the aid of tradition, the practice of baptizing infants cannot be satisfactorily vindicated, the Scriptural proofs on this point not being thoroughly conclusive." And, as to household baptisms, so much relied upon by pedobaptists, the Bishop frankly says: "It cannot indeed be proved that infants were in those families." He also quite repudiates the argument, fondly advanced by pedobaptists, touching infant baptism taking the place of infant circumcision. The Church of Rome claims infant baptism as her own offspring—born of tradition. Notwithstanding this fact, denominationalism has shown a tender tone for it, and still fondly dandles it, as though it was her own. And the Church of Rome is not slow to remind Protestants of their inconsistencies in this respect. The late Elder George Garity reports the following example of this kind of Catholic pleasantry and retort, which occurred in a discussion some years ago between a Rev. Mr. Pope, of the Church of England, and a priest named McGuire. Mr. Pope charged the church of Rome with being "corrupt." McGuire replied, "If then the church of Rome is corrupt, why do you practice her precepts?" Mr. Pope denied the assertion. The priest then affirmed, "You sprinkle infants in your Protestant church: and you know, and I know, and God knows, that there is no such thing in the whole book of God." "We get our authority," added the priest, "from the power conferred upon us by God to change the institution as we saw fit. Hence, you take the practice from us." And the late Archbishop

Hughes, in his "doctrinal catechism," etc., has the following conversation between a Presbyterian and a Catholic: "Pres. Do you not believe that baptism was administered to infants in the days of Christ and the Apostles, and that they looked upon it as essential to true obedience?" "Cath. We do not believe it was taught, recognized, or admitted by Jesus Christ, his Apostles, or their immediate successors, or that in their days it was considered essential." "Pres. Where, then, do Catholics derive their authority?" "Cath. Not from Scripture, not from precept or example, but from the power and authority which Jesus Christ left with the Catholic church to adopt such rules and measures as she desired expedient to promote her best interests and diffuse a knowledge of her ways to all nations and kindreds of men." But, learned pedobaptists as clearly assert this practice to be anti-scriptural.

Here is the testimony given by some of these; a testimony that condemns the practice of their own churches: Neander says: "It is certain that Christ did not ordain infant baptism. . . . we cannot prove that the apostles ordained infant baptism; from those places where the baptism of whole families is mentioned, as in Acts xv. 33, 1 Cor. i. 16, we can draw no such conclusion, because the inquiry is still to be made whether there were any children in these families of such an age that they were not capable of any intelligent reception of Christianity; for this is the only point on which the case turns." (N. Hist. pg. 198.) And Dr. Wall says, that, "Among all the persons that are recorded as baptized by the apostles, there is no express mention of an infant." And Wesley says: "There is no express command or clear example." While Calvin declares that, "The last discourse of our Lord referred to adults, and to no others." Again, Wesley says (Doc. tracts): "We do not pretend to found the rite of infant baptism on any supposed precept or examples of Scriptures which expressly declare that infants were, or that they should be baptized." And Martin Luther says: "It cannot be proved by the Scriptures that infant baptism was instituted by Christ, or began by the first Christians after the apostles." Barnes, commenting upon the words "For the promise is unto you, and to your children," Acts ii. 39, says: "It does not refer to children as children, and should not be adduced to establish the propriety of infant baptism, or as applicable particularly to infants." And Coleridge, who was said to be "the most talented theologian in the English church of his day," says: "The texts appealed to, as commanding or authorizing infant baptism, are all, without exception, made to bear a sense neither designed nor deducible, and likewise (historically considered) there exists no sufficient positive evidence that the baptism of infants was instituted by the apostles in the practice of the apostolic age." And again he says, "Equally vain is the pretended analogy from circumcision, which was no sacrament at all, but the means and work of a national distinction."

Let us hear one more witness, Dr. A. T. Bledsoe, of the M. E. Church South. He says: "We have shown in this paper (*Southern Quarterly Review*) that the position assumed by us (viz., that there is no express authority in the New Testament for infant baptism) is corroborated and supported as clearly and fully as language can support anything, by such writers as Wesley, Watson, Clark, McClintock, Nast, Edwards, Calvin, Dr. John Dick, Schaff, Lightfoot, Dr. S. Miller, Baker, Hodge, Hoy, Blackerstheth, Scheffer, Hibbard, Livingstone, Burnet, Ryle and Wall.

Thus surrounded and supported by the pedobaptist world—Methodists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians—we just let the anathema of Mr. Miller pass on with the idle wind." Thus, according to pedobaptists themselves, infant baptism has no New Testament authority whatever. But, it is claimed that the practice has historical support; that it is mentioned by early Christian writers, etc., etc. Well, let us examine the historical evidence relied upon, and the first thing we meet with is a fact that cuts off the head of this historical argument in favor of infant baptism, and shows it to be nothing more than the old decapitated corpse, Romish tradition!

(4) "Infant baptism is not so much as named in any fragment of ancient tradition during the first and second centuries. No living man can find any allusion to it, or account of it, till in the third century. Not one of the five apostolic fathers—Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Hermas, Ignatius, or Polycarp—either name or allude to infant baptism, or say anything that would imply it." (Campbell.) "We deny that there is any express affirmation of the practice of infant baptism, before the time of Tertullian (A.D. 200), or that there is even any unequivocal allusion to it by any writer who preceded him." (Dr. Pendleton.)

I have quoted the language of these two men of acknowledged scholarship and highest Christian integrity, in stating this very important fact, because they give it in terms forcible and clear, and their testimony cannot be questioned. But there is abundant testimony from the pens of learned pedobaptists sustaining this fact. Curcellene, champion for infant baptism, says: "Pedobaptism was not known in the world the first two ages after Christ. In the third and fourth it was approved by few; in the fifth and sixth, began to obtain in divers places." "Therefore we" (pedobaptists) "observe this rite as an ancient custom, but not as an apostolic tradition." "The custom of infant baptism did not begin until the third century after Christ, and there appears not the least footsteps of it for the first and second centuries." (Stennett's Ans.) Jones' Ecc. Lex. says: "Not one natural infant appears to have been baptized in the Church of Rome during the first three centuries, and immersion was the only method of administering the ordinance." Neander (Ch. Hist., Vol. 1) says of Cyprian (A.D. 248-258): "He and his colleagues were the first who publicly sanctioned the baptism of infants." And Bonson says: "It was far from being uniformly recognized in practice."

It is certain, therefore, that the practice of infant baptism stands condemned as a mere human institution, and without any divine sanction whatever, its own supporters being judges! And, furthermore, it took its rise in an age, and at a time, when many corruptions had crept into the church. "The mystery of iniquity" that was "already" at "work" "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness": (2 Thess. a. ch.), when Paul wrote, continued without ceasing to multiply errors in the church, until, as Dr. Miller says, "before the close of the second century the scene began to change, and before the commencement of the fourth, a deplorable corruption of doctrine, discipline, and morals had crept into the church and disfigured the body of Christ. Hegeppus, an ecclesiastical historian, declares that the virgin purity of the church was confined to the days of the Apostles." "Taylor and others," says A. Campbell, "have shown that all the abominations of popery were hatched in the second century" (C. and R. Debate, p. 423). So infant baptism now cultivated in the garden of de-

nominalism was a plant reared in and transplanted from the hot-bed of popery!

A Plea for Sceptics.

PETER ANDERSON.

"Then Simon Peter answered him: Lord, to whom shall we go; Thou hast the words of eternal life."

I recently heard a sermon preached from this text. The preacher, a Methodist minister of more than ordinary ability, gave us what was regarded by the greater part of his hearers as a most excellent sermon. But his mode of dealing with his subject raised a feeling of antagonism in my mind which effectually destroyed all my enjoyment of the meeting, and perhaps prevented me from appreciating the good which the sermon might contain.

He began by assuring his hearers that he had a better opinion of them than to think that any of them doubted "the Word of God" or the truths of the Christian religion, and went on to denounce the man who is so desperately foolish and wicked as to entertain a doubt regarding these things, as one who has almost—if not altogether—placed himself beyond the utmost limits of hope or help.

He then proceeded to emphasize the thought that there is nowhere else to go: that it is Hobson's choice, this or nothing; and gave us the dying words of sceptics—such as "I am taking a leap in the dark," etc.—to prove what no one, themselves included, ever doubts or denies, viz., that these men have no certain hope or expectation of a future life, nor any well defined idea of what awaits them after death.

He then pictured in glowing colors the bright hopes and perfect confidence of the "believer," and invited us to choose between faith and doubt in the light of the visible results, remarking that the thoughtful man would pause before choosing to discredit the "Word of God," and refuse the only way which offered a means of escape from eternal ruin.

Now all this seems to me to be just about the worst conceivable way of helping an intelligent and honest man who has acquired sceptical habits of thought regarding religious matters; and I could only sincerely hope that none of the very class for whom the sermon seemed to be specially designed were present to hear it.

It would be well for preachers, as also for Christians generally, to recognize certain truths regarding the class generally termed "infidels," which they are very much inclined to ignore.

I have been held by some who seem well qualified to judge, incredible as it may appear, rather sceptically inclined myself, and I submit that, somewhat on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief, I may be competent to give some useful hints in reference to the treatment of this class to men who are very much my superiors in regard to all else. Of course a thief so employed may require watching lest old associations should prove too strong for him and he be found betraying his employer by doing something at that species of deception known as "barking with the hounds and running with the hare."

"A word to the wise is sufficient."

It is neither wise nor right for preachers to assume an attitude of irritation and personal antagonism to infidels, and to treat them as if their unbelief was something which they had freely and voluntarily chosen by reason of their own obstinacy and love of untruth. Do you not see that the inducements are all the other way? That it is really an incredible thing that hundreds, aye thousands, of sane men, many of whom are intelligent citizens of good moral

character, should, as a matter of choice, simply disbelieve a religion which warns them that "he who believeth not shall be damned," while unbelief offers nothing whatever to place in the opposite scale; or that they should feign an unbelief which they do not feel and which, if their infidelity is only feigned, they must inevitably know will end in irremediable disaster?

Give the sceptic the heaviest shot that you have in your arsenal in the way of fact or argument, and if he deserves help he will hear you gladly, but to base all that you offer him as a remedy on what he knows to be a false diagnosis of his case is to offer him the veriest "vacant chaff," no matter how well it may be meant, for grain. I have spoken freely and exchanged thoughts fully with many of the reputed "infidels," and I know that many of them are glad to hear religious truths, which after all it affords them no pleasure to disbelieve, so presented that they cannot help believing them.

It is not wise or just to charge sceptics with refusing to believe "the Word of God." There is no sceptic outside a lunatic asylum so infinitely foolish as to match himself against almighty God by refusing to credit that which he knows or believes that God has spoken. Their scepticism consists, so far as their intention is concerned, not in doubting what God has spoken, but in a doubt as to whether it is His voice that they hear. And, to be perfectly candid, when I pass in mental review some of the things which many of us have been insisting upon as a part of the message, the scepticism which finds it well nigh impossible to believe that it is the voice of God that delivers it, does not appear to me to be such a very incredulous or irreverent thing after all. To charge the sceptic at the outset with refusing to believe God, is an exhibition of weakness and injustice on our part which is nearly certain to result in arming him, *a priori*, against all the good and wise things which we will, of course, say later on.

To commend the Christian religion to the acceptance of the sceptic on the ground that nothing better offers as a means of meeting the needs of humanity or enlightening us as to the origin and destiny of the race, is neither helpful to him nor fair to the Christian religion.

The difficulty with the sceptic is that he has come to regard the facts of the gospel, the salvation which it offers, and the ruin from which it saves, as largely mythical and incredible; and to tell him that nothing better offers as an explanation of the mystery of human life, or God's purposes regarding the race, is merely to strengthen his conviction that He has never made an oral or written revelation to men at all. Then all such talk—argument I will not call it—proceeds upon the old unwarranted and exasperating assumption that he has voluntarily thrown his former religious faiths away, and could by a simple exercise of the will just as voluntarily resume them again, if he only would. That, in short, he has deliberately determined to go to perdition merely for the fun of the thing, or at the best, just to humor his own insane obstinacy.

Now the very reverse of all this is true, and he knows it. Probably at least nine sceptics out of every ten to be met with in Canada are men who were taught to believe the Bible to be a revelation from God, and who did believe it to be such in their younger days; as far as a man can be said to believe anything without having made any careful or personal examination of the evidence upon which it depends for acceptance as true. And when these men, from whatever cause, found their hold upon the religious faiths of their youth slowly but surely relaxing year