

DIOCESE OF FREDERICTON.

Extracts from a Charge delivered in the Cathedral of Christ Church, Fredericton, to the Clergy of the Diocese, assembled at the second Triennial Visitation of JOHN, BISHOP OF FREDERICTON.

SACRAMENTAL GRACE.

By Sacramental Grace I understand that portion of God's spiritual gifts which He has limited to two particular channels, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord. I say, *that portion* of His gifts; because I am far from affirming, that grace is not bestowed in answer to Prayer, and in hearing the word. Nor does it necessarily follow from the premises, that grace is never vouchsafed to persons who have never been Baptized, or who have not received the Lord's Supper. It is evident that both Cornelius and the Eunuch had grace before Baptism, though, as shewn by Bishop Taylor, the case of Cornelius is the exception, not the rule; and the repentance and faith which our Church requires of all adults as qualifications for receiving the grace of Baptism, are also grace, for they are the gift of God. This, therefore, removes the objection that we limit Grace to the Sacraments. Our Church, in her Catechism, Baptismal and Communion offices, and in the 27th and 28th Articles, defines the nature of Sacramental Grace, informing us that the Grace of Baptism is Regeneration, and that the Grace of the Lord's Supper is the spiritual communication of the Body and Blood of Christ. It is the great misfortune of the Romanist Church, and of the Lutherans (if indeed, as a body, they have any definite standard remaining), that they have, in respect to one Sacrament, attempted to define the manner of this communication. The Church of England advises us to lay all such curious questions aside, to receive the mystery (a word applied to both Sacraments in our offices) faithfully, to teach it plainly, but to leave the manner unexplained. As however the doctrine of our Church, which is founded on the Nicene Creed, and that on Scripture, is denied by many of her professed members, I should consider myself as an unfaithful witness to the truth of the Gospel, and as culpably indifferent to a trust committed to me, if I did not bear my testimony against this denial of the faith of Christ, which the Holy Ghost has recorded in the written word of God.

In what I have to deliver to you, I shall endeavour to abstain from the bitterness of a controversial spirit, to impute no motives to others, which I am unwilling to have imputed to myself, and I shall consider the question on the footing of Scripture.

1. The first question to be asked, is, what is the doctrine which our Church propounds in her Baptismal Service. In the offices of Infant and Adult Baptism, six passages of Scripture are quoted in proof of the necessity, and of the benefits of Baptism. 1. The command of our Lord that children should be brought unto Him to be blessed, and that of such children the Kingdom of God is composed, as our warrant, for considering infants capable of spiritual blessings in Baptism. 2. The conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus, in regard to the new birth by water and the Spirit, as shewing "the great necessity of this Sacrament, where it may be had." 3. The command of our Lord, on the eve of His Ascension, connecting Faith and Baptism with Salvation. 4. St. Peter's address to the Jews, exhorting them to repent and be Baptized, promising them remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and extending the promise to "their children," and to the whole Gentile world. 5. The testimony of St. Peter in 1 Epist. cap. iii. that Noah's Ark was a type of Baptism, and that "Baptism saves us." 6. The expression of Saint Paul, "the washing or laver of Regeneration," and our Church adds, "Baptism." There are also allusions to four other passages, viz. to 1 Cor. x., on the typical nature of the passage through the Red Sea: to Eph. v., "that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water;" to Rom. vi., "we are buried with Him by Baptism unto death," and to Gal. iii., "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." I shall not comment on all these passages, as I consider one of them amply sufficient for the resolution of my question.

When St. Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, was laying the foundation (as far as his ministerial acts could lay it) of the Christian Church, he used these words to the penitent Jews, who inquired the way of salvation, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." What our Church in imitation of St. Paul calls Regeneration, is here called "remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost;" a gift offered to these adult persons on condition of their repentance. Nothing is said of faith, because their repentance for having crucified Christ, implied their belief in him as the Messiah, as where our Lord says, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved;" repentance is not mentioned, because no man can repent of his sins, with a view to Christian Baptism, without a readiness to accept as his Saviour Him who died to save us from sin. The nature of Regeneration having been shewn, the Apostle next points out its extent. "The promise is to you," the crucifiers of the Lord, "and to your children;"

for it must be recollected that the children of all these penitents had been circumcised, and therefore they would naturally be anxious to know whether children were included in the Christian covenant, or no. Nothing is here said of limiting the word "children" to the posterity of these persons, though I do not deny that the word may include this sense also. "And to all that are afar off," the whole Gentile world, "even as many as the Lord our God shall call;" for the promise must be supposed to be co-extensive with the means of grace which are provided.

From this passage I draw the following conclusions:

1. That Regeneration is not a work in which man can be said to be a worker at all, except in respect of the penitence and faith which qualifies the adult to receive it. Consequently regeneration is not conversion. Still less is it salvation, unless we suppose every baptised person in the days of the Apostles to have been saved, a supposition which is not warranted by Scripture.

2. Regeneration is a blessing promised to all penitent and believing Jews and their children, and by parity of reason, to all penitent and believing Gentiles and their children. For unless some limit had been placed by St. Peter in the way of the regeneration of infants, some hint thrown out that the gift would be vouchsafed to some, and denied to others, I see no way of escape from the conclusion, that the grace of regeneration was bestowed on all the children of those penitent Jews who presented them for Baptism, and if on them, then on all others similarly presented. The only forcible objection to this view strikes at the root of all Baptism of Infants. It is said (though without I think fairly weighing the force of the passage just quoted), that Repentance and Faith are, in all cases, indispensable requisites to Baptism, and that, as Infants cannot perform these duties, they cannot be, by Baptism, Regenerated. Our Lord's words in St. Mark, xvi. 16, requiring Faith as an accompaniment of Baptism, are usually quoted in support of the objection.

To this objection I answer thus. If (as St. Paul has shewn) it be the gracious design of God to make the atonement of Christ more than an equivalent for the original sin: if consequently, we may hope that many are saved by Christ who have heard of His name, and who cannot have repented or believed in Him: then we may reasonably hope that Infants are saved by the merits of Christ, without faith or repentance. If then we hold that Infants may be saved without these qualifications, which are ordinarily necessary to salvation, a fortiori, they may be baptized without them. For if we suppose God to admit them to His presence in Heaven, we can never be so presumptuous as to deny them admission to His ordinances on earth. If Christ welcomed them to His arms, when Himself present in the body, we must not deny them a welcome to the Church, to which His presence is promised, as "His Body." But if Infants, without faith and repentance, be capable of admission into Heaven, if being capable of admission into Heaven they must be capable of Baptism, then they must also be capable of Regeneration in Baptism. For if they be incapable of such Regeneration, then they are incapable of admission into Heaven, because no man without Regeneration can see the Kingdom of God; and to that new birth faith and repentance are indispensably required, nor is there any exception positively stated in Scripture. But if the exclusion of Infants from that salvation, of which regeneration is the beginning, and Baptism a mean, be a detestable doctrine, condemned by the general tenor of Scripture, and the voice of almost all mankind; if the want of repentance and faith shut them not out of Paradise, because those blessed gates are barred against none but the impenitent, then we may justly conclude that the inability of Infants to repent and believe, does not exclude them from the benefit of Regeneration in Baptism; and if we exclude any Infants from the blessing, we must, by parity of reason, exclude all.

When our Church then quotes this passage of St. Peter as her warrant for the office of Baptism, it seems to me that it cannot be doubtful what she means by Regeneration in Baptism; and that where she directs every Minister to say of every child brought to be baptized, that it is after baptism, and "by baptism Regenerate," that she intends the words bona fide to apply to every child, and not bona fide to some, and not to others. The limitation of the blessing has been called the "judgment of charity;" surely a most infelicitous expression. "Charity hopeth all things, and believeth all things." Charity hopes the best of a deceased adult, because in no case can we absolutely anticipate the final judgment of God. Charity believes the best of a baptized adult, because the evidence of his sincerity is more open to our view: but we qualify our belief of his Regeneration with the condition, "truly repenting, and coming unto Him by faith." But Charity may more firmly believe of the unconscious Infant what it cannot know to be otherwise, that God has "prevented him with the blessings of his goodness," which is rendered the more probable, by an extensive promise of spiritual blessing to children, never yet repealed. To limit this blessing to certain elect infants, the subject of a prevenient grace, of which there is no special promise in the Word of God,

and deny it to other Infants, against whom no ground of separate exclusion can belong, and to call this unscriptural limitation the "judgment of charity," is, to say the least of it, a sad misnomer. To me it appears the judgment of unbelief.

The absolute and positive declaration of the Regeneration of every Infant in Baptism, by our formularies is, I think, a strong reason against a hypothetical Regeneration. Suppose the obvious meaning to be the true meaning. Could any other or stronger words be used? Is it not most delusive, most dangerous, most fatal to our simplicity of purpose, that the Church should put words into our mouths, to be used apparently in one sense, whilst she intends them to be used in another? That she should do this in all cases without caution or explanation of any kind, before persons unversed in theological disputes, and likely to mistake the literal sense for the true sense? Must not this incautious plainness lead us to be mistrustful of the Regeneration of all Infants, seeing we cannot tell to whom the words apply or whether to any? But is this like our Reformers? Were they men of subtilty and refinement in theological questions? Were they not men of singular honesty, and even roughness of character and speech, incapable of devising a clever ingenious hypothesis, and of making "an ecclesiastical fiction" a ground of solemn adoration and thanksgiving to the Most High God? To me it appears absolutely incredible (apart from their private declarations), that two such men as Ridley and Latimer, should have so tampered with vital doctrine, as to compile a service, agreeing in this particular with the Baptismal Service of the Church of Rome, and asserting the Regeneration of all Infants in Baptism, if they did not intend the words to be used in the literal sense. Nor is it credible that their successors, who listened to the objections of the Puritans at the Savoy conference, asserting, "We cannot in faith say, that every child that is baptised is regenerated by God's Holy Spirit, at least it is a disputable point, and we desire it may be otherwise expressed;" and who then answered "Seeing that God's Sacraments have their effects, where the receiver doth not 'ponere obicem,' which children cannot do, we may say in faith of every child that is baptized, that it is generated by God's Holy Spirit: and the denial of it tends to Anabaptism, and the contempt of this Holy Sacrament"—I say, it is incredible, that such men, who heard that objection and returned this answer, could have admitted the hypothetical view—and among these men were Pearson, Sanderson, Sheldon, Cosin, Heylin, Sparrow, Thorndike, whose opinions cannot reasonably be doubted. Yet when they gave this answer, to a view propounded by Baxter, and now adopted by others, the Prayer-book underwent its last review, and as far as the animus impenitent is concerned, we derive it from those Reviewers.

But it is said, that the Baptismal Service must be explained by the Burial Service; and that if the one is apparently absolute, but really conditional, so must be the other. There are however several reasons for not admitting this parallel. First, the cases are not parallel. We may venture to speak with much more confidence of the effect of God's grace, where we have a promise, and where the recipient puts no bar by actual transgression, than of the final estate of a person to whom there is not (except on the general terms of the Gospel) any promise of individual salvation. Of the final salvation of baptized infants our Church speaks undoubtedly, but only with hope of the salvation of baptized adults. Further, the doctrines are not wholly parallel. The burial service is conditional and not absolute, as is asserted. To me it is very surprising that grave and learned persons should reiterate the old Puritan objection made at the Savoy conference, when it is notorious that the words of the Burial Service were then altered to meet that objection, and expressed somewhat more generally, to shew that the Church did not intend by "resurrection to eternal life," his resurrection to eternal salvation, any more than the words "life everlasting" in the Apostles' creed imply eternal salvation only.* So our Church thanks God for his mercy in taking to himself another soul "out of the miseries of this sinful world," without pronouncing on the final estate of that soul. The act of dismission from the miseries of life and of sickness, is in itself an act of mercy, and there is mercy mixed with God's severest acts of justice. But when the question of our brother's final estate is considered, the Church only expresses a charitable hope. And where is the parallel to this in the baptismal service for Infants? So that a service which is used indiscriminately for deceased adults and infants, is not the true measure of that which is used for infants only; the parallel lies between the absolute and undoubting expressions of our Church concerning the Salvation of baptized infants, and the absolute and undoubting expressions concerning the Regeneration of baptized infants. Here the parallel holds. There is also a parallel, though less strict, between the charitable hope of the salvation of deceased adults, and the qualified assertion of Regeneration in the case of baptized adults, qualified, I mean, by the condition of "truly repenting, and coming to God by faith." But between the charitable hope of the salvation of deceased adults, and

the absolute assertion of the regeneration of baptized infants, no parallel can be fairly drawn. But even if the burial service did not seem totally with the literal sense of the baptismal office, what shall we say to the office for Confirmation? If all that is intended in the Baptism of Infants be a charitable hope, is it meet and right to lead all adults, about to be confirmed, to cherish the delusion of past Regeneration? Can it be safe, when the only hope, to teach all young persons to believe that "God has regenerated them by water and the Holy Ghost, and has granted to them forgiveness of all their sins," and to refer to this not in the language of hope, but as a fact, relating to all, if we are not authorized positively to believe it of any? Yet if Regeneration has not been granted, when are we to expect it? For the Church does not teach the young persons present to pray for it. Yet surely, if it had not been vouchsafed, then would be the time to ask it. For if we neither believe that it was once granted in Baptism, nor pray that it may be vouchsafed in answer to our petitions, why do we refer to it at all?

It is further stated (though I feel a considerable difficulty in seeing the force of the argument) that, "as the answer to the question, 'Why then are infants baptized, when by reason of their tender age they cannot perform them,' is not, that infants present no obex or hinderance to Regeneration, that therefore we must take the assertion of their membership in the Catechism, and of their Regeneration in the Baptismal Service, in a qualified sense;" which appears to me to be a very fallacious inference. The question in the Catechism is not concerning the certainty or uncertainty of Infant Regeneration, but concerning our right to Baptize Infants without the ordinary qualifications for Baptism. And the answer is, that though they cannot repent and believe, from mental inability to do so, they, by the instrumentality of others, promise to repent and believe, "which promise they are bound" hereafter "to perform." But there is no proof that the Church intended to intimate that, by reason of not repenting and believing (which are unavoidable), they are excluded from the remission of original sin, and from the gift of the Spirit, which are the present benefits of Baptism. On the contrary, all are taught to say, not that they may receive, but that they have received those benefits. But the future benefits of Baptism, the continuance of this state of Remission, and the presence and indwelling of the Holy Ghost, must, "when they come of age," depend on their fulfilment of the promise made for them by their sureties.

It is also objected, that, if the assertions in the Baptismal Service concerning the Regeneration of Infants be taken absolutely, they prove too much. "For," it is said, "the Church assumes not only the Regeneration, but the salvation of all baptized Infants. 'Doubt ye not, but earnestly believe that he will make them partakers of his everlasting kingdom.' But if all who are baptized are not saved, then all who are baptized are not Regenerated." This argument is more plausible than sound. The point assumed by the Church is not the certainty of the salvation of the infant, but the willingness of God on his part, and on his part only, to save it. The Church contemplates a covenant, which supposes two parties, God and man. On the part of God, she declares that nothing is wanting, neither the will, nor the promise to save. But she immediately explains her meaning, by adding, "We being thus persuaded to the good-will of our Heavenly Father towards this Infant;" His "good-will," and, "nothing doubting," not the certainty of his salvation, but God's "favourable allowance of this charitable work of ours in bringing this Infant to His holy Baptism." Nothing more is intended than that we should be satisfied we have a right to baptize, and may expect God's blessing on our work, of which, but for God's "good will" and design to save, we could not be assured. But the gracious designs of God towards mankind do not always finally take effect, because men "reject the counsel of God against themselves." So that to argue that, because the Church considers the gracious design of God towards the final salvation of the infant, a strong reason for its baptism, that therefore she cannot mean that God bestows absolutely a present blessing, which all infants need, but which, it is admitted on all hands, is only a means to the future salvation of the adult, and does not in any way insure it, is to confound the general "will" of our Heavenly Father, that "all men shall be saved," with the particular will or law, that there are certain terms of salvation with which, in order to salvation, we must comply. And it is especially to be observed, that, after Baptism, the Church speaks unhesitatingly of the Infant's Regeneration, but at the same time, teaches us to pray that the regenerate child may "crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin, and that as he is made partaker of the death of thy Son" (which St. Paul, in Rom. vi., tells us is by Baptism), so he "may also be partaker of His Resurrection," so that, "finally, he may be an inheritor of thine everlasting Kingdom;" expressions which fully prove, that the Church does not put present Regeneration and final Salvation on the same footing, leading us to consider both as absolute, or both conditional; but that she speaks of the one as a benefit absolutely bestowed, and of the other as a blessing expected,

* Acts ii. 38.

* See Bishop Pearson on this clause of the Creed.