

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

THREE RIVERS, FRIDAY 18th MARCH, 1831.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISMAL REGENERATION.—No. VII.

"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."

1. Our view of regeneration, so amply supported by Scripture and scriptural arguments according to the "analogy of faith," while it steers clear of all mysticism and forced interpretation, which numbers so much delight in; teaches men to pay a proper respect to the Church as a house of God's building, and to regard an authorized ministry as essential to their salvation. It teaches them to seek every spiritual blessing, regeneration; the adoption of children; the gift of the Holy Ghost for daily renewing assistance, and all necessary things, in and by the Church their mother in God;—and then they can no more think of being saved without the assistance of the Christian priesthood, than of living without food. To desert the ministry is to desert Christ.—"He that despiseth you despiseth me." But if men in general can, under the Gospel, be born again, and adopted of God, and pardoned and sanctified without the ministry, pray what was his object in giving it? The question is not, Can one or two be saved without the instrumentality of the ministry?—but, Is it lawful to desert God's method, and follow our own inventions?—Is it lawful for laymen to usurp the priest's office, and to seduce away followers from God's flock to their own? Yet such a practice is no uncommon thing, and such observation has taught us to believe, that the true cause of it is the corruption of the Scripture doctrine of regeneration, a corruption fruitful in mischief to the true interests of the Church of Christ.—The common parent of most of the religious quackery of the present day. We believe that Socinianism has received large accessions of strength from this quarter, because this error has ever been the substratum of the soil most productive of that unchristian and dangerous heresy. Look at this moment at the bodies were it abounds, including the followers of Elias Hicks. To a man they reject Baptismal Regeneration, and place the evidence of regeneration in indefinite and fanciful speculation or the effervescence of animal feelings: and with many of these people, the ordinances and ministry of God are more or less degraded from the rank they hold in the Bible.—The Quakers have quite laid them aside.

2. Regeneration is neither faith, nor conversion, nor repentance, nor renewal day by day, nor justification, nor sanctification. It is known by the name of none of them. None of them are capable of explanation by the fact and circumstances of the birth of a child, and no such explanation is given them in Scripture. They excite in our minds no relative ideas of parents and children, and need no such explanation. But if a sinner has repented, and is renewed by the Spirit, and is justified and sanctified, what is his condition? What birth does he need, except death and the resurrection, to take him safely into heaven? And what would he lose if he had never heard of regeneration at all? Does Scripture declare that one cannot be saved, or enter into heaven, without being "born of water and of the Spirit?" No: Does it say this of those who are impenitent, unjustified, and un sanctified? Yes, hundreds of times. Does it deny salvation to those who cannot partake of the ordinances of the Church? No; but it denies it to those who can and will not: the very existence of the Church is a royal proclamation to that effect. Regeneration being obtained by and in the Church only, by the ministry of God's servants, by which we become the covenant and adopted children of our heavenly Father, and are put to nurse in the arms of our spiritual mother the spouse of Christ to be fed with the sincere milk of the word and grow thereby, cannot be necessary to salvation where there is no ministry. If any truly desire to serve God regularly in the Church, and cannot for lack of opportunity, but serve him the best way they can, no doubt he will accept them. This is a great source of comfort to those willing ones who are deprived of the ordinances: but yet it

is no plea for their rejection when the means of access are at hand.

3. The contention on this subject has been in some part of it, more about words than things. Both parties have claimed the necessity of repentance, conversion, justification, and sanctification; but one party has confounded and entangled the doctrine of regeneration, in itself distinct, with some or all of them, and explained terms and expressions as originally applying to heaven, which properly belong to the Church on Earth; which involves in mystification and obscurity that which in itself is plain and easy. Certain it is that our office of Baptism and the Catechism decidedly teach the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration in its most offensive character, and it is in vain to deny it.

But they also teach other doctrines equally important. The baptismal office opens with a declaration of the corruption of human nature, and strictly enforces the necessity of a complete renovation. It directs parents to train up their tender offspring entirely for God, as his adopted children; to teach them his will as soon as they are able to learn, to direct their attention to the fact of their connection with his covenant people, and to prohibit the expectation of heaven hereafter, unless they walk in the same all the days of their life. The Catechism takes up the subject where the baptismal office left it, and gives instruction how to obtain the fulfilment of the promise made of God in the baptismal covenant; namely, by living wholly to God, in the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. If Children are not so taught, the object of their baptism is defeated, offered grace is thrown away, the Spirit is grieved, their precious souls left to go to ruin, and that which would have been a savor of life unto life becomes a savor of death unto death. The Bible should constantly be read under this view, and then it would be far more intelligible, instructive, and profitable. It would keep the attention fixed on God as our Covenant Father, on his word as our law, on his service as our meat and drink, on the Church as our Spiritual Mother, and on her ordinances as the gift of God to serve as stepping stones to the upper room, where there is provided a marriage feast, but to which we can be admitted but those who obtain of Christ the wedding garment. It would teach us to regard our baptized selves as members of the commonwealth of Israel, as citizens naturalized under the government of the Spiritual kingdom, as spiritual subjects of the eternal king, who, in the day of judgment, will demand an account of their allegiance.

This method would lead us gently along step by step from early life to old age, in a plain, simple, practical and efficient course of spiritual education in the ways of God without noise or tumult, and cut off occasion for those exhibitions of human folly which we so often witness as the effects of a hot and random zeal.

4. The corruption of the doctrine of regeneration has produced innumerable treatises, great and small, the reading of which has a pernicious effect on the mind very similar to novel reading. Nothing will please that is not in a degree extravagant. It brings ministers to something vitiated in the understanding and the taste—it may more or less deal in the marvellous or it is not esteemed *ecclesiastical*. The sublime simplicity of the book of Common Prayer cannot be heard, because it will not court popularity by harping upon the animal passions, and driving them headlong over the understanding and the judgment: and that divinity which imitates the gravity, the solidity, and the simple purity of the Church formularies, is banished the shelves of thousands to be supplanted by those frothy productions, which had far better be consigned to the flames.

FROM THE RECOLLECTIONS OF A LONDON CURATE.—No. I.—Concluded.

Is this a true portrait of what a country Curate ought to be? I believe it is; and also a description of what he may be in every instance of his character.—Is this the delineation of what thirty years back the majority of country curates were found to be?—Let me not answer this question. If it is not so, I fear that to the defect may be largely attributed that growth of dissent which about