

Contributions.

John III, 5th

MR. EDITOR.—In the last EVANGELIST some one asks the question: Does "water" in John 3rd chapter, 5th verse, refer to baptism? To which E. S. replies, "Some critics say no." "Let us rather understand," say they, "that the word 'water' is used figuratively to signify the cleansing influence of the Spirit of God."

I would suggest that those critics probably mean that water is used to signify the cleansing power of the Word when applied by the Spirit of God. Jesus says to His disciples, "Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you." And Paul says, "That He might sanctify and cleanse it (the church) with the washing of water by the Word." And again, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost."

Water is often used in the Old Testament as a type of the Gospel. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." Nicodemus had no doubt scrupulously attended to the various and oft repeated washings enjoined by the Jewish law; and it does not appear that he was at all in doubt as to his fitness for the coming kingdom; but one flash of Divine light reveals his foundation of sand. His heart as well as his body must be washed with water.

In his conversation with the woman of Samaria, Jesus also uses "water" to illustrate the same truth, but from a different standpoint. He wished this poor woman to understand that the blessing he would give her would be like living water, both satisfying and unending.

In speaking of the new birth the apostles make it to depend upon the united agency of the Word and Spirit. Peter says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever;" James says, "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth;" and Paul, "For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel." John uses the expressions, "Born of God," "Begotten of God," but they both mean precisely the same thing.

Nicodemus had an opportunity of knowing something about "these things," or Jesus would not have expressed surprise at his ignorance. There are many passages in the Old Testament that clearly point to the birth from above. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you; a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; and I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them."—Ezek. xxxvi, 25, 26, 27. The Lord declares also by another prophet, "That He would put His laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts," and David prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Baptism being a New Testament institution, Nicodemus, as a master of Israel, could have had no opportunity of knowing anything of its import. Indeed, of the inspired writers, Paul seems to be the first, if not the only one, to grasp its real significance, namely, the symbol of a burial and resurrection.

The fact that in the oldest Greek text we have, "So is every one that is born of water and the Spirit," should be sufficient in itself to settle the question, as when a person is baptised it is possible to ascertain, with absolute certainty, both whence he comes and whither he goes.

The above is a kindly criticism from a lady, on the brief explanation given of the meaning of "water" in the passage under consideration in the Critics Corner of No. 5 of THE CANADIAN EVANGELIST.

As the meaning of the Scripture is not only very important, that as it is,

at the present time, eliciting a good deal of discussion, we will give the further consideration of it, a larger space than is convenient for the Critics Corner.

In the first place, as the Saviour's language is metaphorical, it is essentially necessary, in order to understand his meaning, that we keep in view that the change necessary to fit a man for the Kingdom of God is compared to a natural birth, and to be cautious neither to mix this metaphor with others, nor "to consider the resemblance or analogy to extend further, i. e., to more particulars than it does."

This precaution would have saved our critic from the introduction of several portions of the Word of God in which the word "water" occurs, which are totally irrelevant to illustrate or explain the use of that word in connection with regeneration.

What a marked distinction there is between "water" as a metaphor in the quotations from Isaiah, and in the words addressed to the woman of Samaria and as used in speaking to Nicodemus! What has the drinking of water to do with birth? How much it has to do, in its figurative significance, with the free access to the refreshing and satisfying joys of the Holy Spirit, Divine truth and of eternal life!

Then we have a number of quotations from both the Old and the New Testament, where cleansing by water is figuratively used to indicate the necessity of man's heart and character being changed or cleansed by the Spirit of God through the agency of His Word and ordinances. The most of these are, in no way, any guide to the exegesis of our text unless we discard the figure of a birth.

Just here it will be well to show that baptism is analogically used by the inspired writers in the inculcation of different truths and to illustrate different facts.

In Romans and Colossians, the figure of a burial and a resurrection. In Romans and Galatians, the believer is said to be transferred into Christ by baptism.

It appears to be referred to in Ephesians, and Titus as a washing or cleansing, while, if our view is correct, in John iii. it is connected with regeneration.

Trench says of *Palingnesia*, the Greek word, translated regeneration in Titus, iii. 5, which he justly considers of the same import as the *another genuathanai* of John iii. 3, "This is one of the many words which the Gospel found, and so to speak, glorified; enlarged the borders of its meaning; lifted it up into a higher sphere; made it the expression of far deeper thoughts, of far greater truths, than any of which it had been the vehicle before." Yet, notwithstanding, its use before it was adopted by Divine wisdom gives the leading import of the trope.

"Among the Stoics the word set forth the periodical renovation of the earth when building and blossoming in the spring time.

"Cicero calls his restoration to his dignities and honors after his return from exile, '*hanc palingnesian nostram*.'"

The reader will thus be enabled to see that important and beneficial changes; revival from wintry death to the spring time of life and beauty; restoration from exile to liberty and enjoyment, were figuratively set forth in the new birth, while its use in the New Testament implies still greater and more wonderful changes—from darkness to light, from spiritual death to spiritual life, from the service of sin to the liberty and the affections of the children of God.

This great change is effected by God:

"Which were born, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

It is effected by God through the agency of the Holy Spirit setting us to a new life: "That which born of the Spirit is spirit."

The agency of the Holy Spirit in this great renovation is through the instrumentality of the Word. "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth." "Having been begotten again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible through the word of God, which liveth and abideth." (N.V.)

The influence of that Ark (which is quick and powerful) uppour spirits to effect the renewal is through our faith. "Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." (N.V.)

Our correspondent says, "In speaking of the new birth the Apostles make it to depend upon the united agency of the word and Spirit," and to prove the assertion, she quotes the scriptures we have just given to prove it is by the instrumentality of the word or gospel, in not one of which it said "by the word and Spirit."

Not to set aside or deny an influence that the Holy Spirit may exert in connection with the work, we only desire thus to show that the work if the Holy Spirit and the power of the truth he has made known, are not used as the complement of one another, but are used interchangeably by Christ and the Apostles.

This sets aside any probability that the Saviour meant as suggested in the above article, that "Water is used to signify the cleansing power of the Word, when applied by the Spirit of God," which would be equivalent to Born of the Word and Spirit. And it is birth and not cleansing that he is speaking about.

Another Scripture quoted by our objector, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it (the Church) with the washing of water by the Word." To apply her rule of exegesis it would have to mean with the washing of the word by the word.

To put it in plain words it is not birth that gives being and life to the child, but only a change of state; it is not baptism that imparts a spiritual life to the child of God, but the Holy Spirit and baptism is only a birth or change of state from the world to the Church of Christ, in order to develop and nourish unto eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

This view requires no straining or forced interpretation of the metaphor used by the Great Teacher, and compares with the other passages where the same figure is used.

If it be urged that this application of the Scripture attaches too much importance to baptism, we can easily show from the indisputable authority of inspiration that baptism is declared to be a resurrection to a new life which implies as great a change as a new birth. Peter, speaking as the Spirit gave him utterance, expressly stated that it was for the remission of sins. In all cases, however, whether as a birth, a resurrection or for the remission of sins, it is of no avail, only a mockery or an abortion, unless the subject of the holy ordinance be a true believer in Christ, and made willing to obey Him through love and confidence.

In regard to the observation upon the rendering of verse 8, "So is every one that is born of water and the Spirit," we only need observe that the water must have made it unthinkable, for she must know that no one for a moment ever could conceive that baptism was the whole process of regeneration, and thus apply the sub-

lime words of Jesus to it as being like the wind that bloweth where it listeth.

In conclusion we would ask, why should such repeated efforts be put forth to avoid obedience to a command the Saviour gave just before he ascended up on high, a command which the early Christians obeyed at once "gladly?" or, why should others who, themselves, have thus obeyed Christ, be seeking to extenuate the disobedience of others, and to excuse the folly of those who have changed this sacred institution of Heaven? Why not, rather in faithful allegiance to Him that loved us and gave Himself for us, show our reciprocating love by keeping and honoring all his commandments? Walkerton. E. SHERRARD.

That Last Word.

MR. EDITOR.—Your Hillsburg correspondent seems to be in an unsettled state of mind. He is not satisfied with "that last word" published some months ago, as he has twice returned to the attack under cover of his letters to the Editor. He seems to attach vastly more importance to knowing exactly how many Baptists and Disciples there are than the clear understanding of a principle. Had he met the union proposition in the spirit of union, he would have appeared to a better advantage in the EVANGELIST than he has. No doubt all the other readers of my letter, published originally in the *Globe*, saw clearly the point in question, that it was to show the growing greatness of the two people, and the moral force they would have by becoming one. Yet he persists in seeing only an intent to misrepresent numbers to the disparagement of the Baptists. In his last insinuation he makes me say the Baptists number only two and a-half millions and the Disciples one million. I refer him to my letter to see that this is not my statement. I said the Baptists number two millions and a-half (not only) and the Disciples about one million, giving, as I believed, the approximate numbers to illustrate my argument. It matters not to me in this connection how many there are of us all together, so that in the spirit of Christ we seek for a Scriptural ground of union. A dignified inquiry into differences and agreements might be profitable, if done in a spirit of fraternal confidence, but ungenerous suspicions and personalities are neither desirable nor profitable. The gentleman has not told us on what grounds he excludes other immersionists from the Table, whether they are not of the Church of Christ, or whether they are not Baptists; and why Disciples are considered regenerate when individually any of them are willing to join the Baptists, and not regenerate when they wish to consider Scriptural grounds of union.

J. R. GAFF.

Failure, after long perseverance, is much grander than never having a striving good enough to be called a failure.—George Eliot.

Christ did not spend His life in trying not to do wrong. He was too full of the earnest love and longing to do right; to do His Father's will.—Phillips Brooks.

Sunlight through a red glass becomes rose-colored light; through a blue one, indigo. God, manifested in a sweet, sympathizing, magnanimous disposition, becomes to those in contact with us a loving Father.

ONLY A SISTER.

"My sister and I each tried a bottle of Burdock Blood Bitters with great success for bilious headache. We recommend it to all as a specific for headache." Miss CARRIE SCHERER, Baden, Ont.

Selections.

Holy Land.

This is the earth He walked on; not alone
That Asian country keeps the sacred stain
'Tis not alone the far Judean plain,
Mountain, and river! Lo! the sun that shone
On Him shines now on us; when day is gone
The moon of Galilee comes forth again
And lights our path as His; an endless chain
Of years and sorrows make the round world one.
The air we breathe He breathed, the very air
That took the mold and music of His high
And godlike speech. Since then shall mortal dare
With bared thought front the ever-sacred sky,
Soil with foul feet the ground whereon He laid
In holy death His pale, immortal head?
—Richard Watson Gilder.

Free From Righteousness.

For when ye were the servants of sin ye were free from righteousness. Rom. vi. 20.
Perhaps there is not a strange anomaly in the Bible than the expression "free from righteousness." How can anyone be at liberty to do wrong and be free from right doing? An outlaw may engage in every crime within his reach, but he is not free but a fugitive from justice. We can scarcely meet a man who will affirm that he is free to injure others whenever he has the opportunity, but the apostle says, "Ye were free from righteousness."

The word of God often addresses men according to their own estimation of themselves, and reasons from what they assume as true to convince them of their errors by their own admission. When the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, at Jesus for eating with sinners and giving so little attention to them, who in their own opinion were so righteous, He met them on their own ground. He told them that when one of them lost a sheep he would leave all the rest and hunt for it, and would rejoice more when he found it than over all the rest that went not astray. "So," said Jesus, "there is more joy among the angels over one of these lost sinners when he is found than over ninety and nine of you righteous persons who went not astray." By this means He showed them their error and deep depravity in blaming Him for seeking lost sinners, and desiring a Messiah like themselves, who cared so much less for lost souls than they did for lost sheep (Luko xv.).

In this place the apostle describes the state of his brethren before their conversion to Christ. They were in sin and the servants of sin. They could not serve two masters. If bound to serve sin they were free from righteousness. At their conversion they changed masters. They gave up sin and became servants of God. Both in those days and now men who are servants of sin declare openly that they are free from righteousness. Not that they are at liberty to wrong their fellowmen, but they are at liberty to wrong the Son of God though He has given Himself to save them. Ask an unconverted man the following questions and he will give about the following answers:

"Do you go to hear the Gospel?"
"I go sometimes when convenient and sometimes I do not. I am free to go or not. I don't profess to be a Christian."
"Is it not right to go always when it is possible?"
"O yes; but I am free as I am not a Christian."
"Do you assist in paying the expenses of the Lord's cause?"