

BAPTISM.

An Essay, by Arthur Penryn Stanley, D. D., Dean of Westminster.

And lest any should plead different interpretations, the same St. Augustine avers this later opinion also, touching the necessary communicating of children, to have once been the common judgement of the Church of Rome. Such were the doctrines of the Fathers on Infant Baptism;—doctrines so deeply "athing our whole concepts of God and of man, that, in comparison, the gravest questions now in dispute shrink into utter insignificance; doctrines so wholly different from those professed by any English, we may almost add any European clergyman, of the present day, that had the Pope himself appeared before the Bishop of Hippo, he would have been rejected at once as an unbaptized heretic.

It is a more pleasing task to trace the struggle of Christian goodness and wisdom, by which the Church gradually was delivered from this iron yoke. Even in the Patristic age itself (in its earlier stage) the subjugation had not been complete. Tertullian and Chrysostom must have accepted with hesitation, if they accepted at all, the universal condemnation of unbaptized children. Salvian, who acknowledged so freely the virtues of the Vandal heretics, must surely have scrupled to repudiate the virtues of the unbaptized heathens. No general or provincial council, except the Fifth of Carthage, ventured to affirm any doctrine on the subject. The exceptions in behalf of martyrs left an opening, at least in principle, which would by logical consequence no less admit other exceptions, of which the Fathers never dreamed. The saints of the old Testament were rescued from their long prison-house by the hypothesis of a liberation effected for them in a descent into hell. But these were contradictions and exceptions to the prevailing doctrine; and the gloomy period which followed the death of Augustine, fraught as it was with imaginable horror of a falling empire, it was not likely to soften the harsh creed which he had bequeathed to it; and the chains which the "durus pater infantum" had thrown round the souls of children were riveted by Gregory the great. At last, however, with the new birth of the European nations, the humanity of Christendom revived. One by one the chief strongholds of the ancient belief yielded to the purer and loftier instincts (to use no higher name) which guided the Christian Church in its onward progress, dawning more and more into the perfect day. First disappeared the necessity of immersion. Then to the Master of Sentences we owe the decisive change of doctrine which delivered the souls of infants from the everlasting fire to which they had been handed over by Augustine and Fulgentius, and placed them, with the heroes of the heathen world in that mild limbo or Elysium which everybody knows in the pages of Dante. Next fell the practice of administering to them the Eucharistic elements. Last of all,

in the fourteenth century, the great though silent protest against the magical theory of Baptism itself was effected in the postponement of the rite of Confirmation, which down to that time, had been regarded as an essential part of Baptism, and, as such, was administered simultaneously with it. An ineffectual stand was made in behalf of the receding doctrine of Augustine by Gregory of Rimini, known among his "seraphic" and "angelic" colleagues by the unenviable title of "Tormentor Infantum;" and some of the severer reformers, both in England and Germany, for a few years clung to the sterner view. But the victory was really won; and the Council of Trent, no less than the Confession of Augsburg, and the thirty-nine articles, has virtually abandoned the position by which Popes and Fathers once maintained the absolute, unconditional, mystical efficacy of sacramental elements on the body and soul of the unconscious infant. The Eastern Church, indeed, with its usual tenacity of ancient forms, still immerses, still communicates, and still confines its infant members. But in the Western Church the Christian religion has taken its free and natural course; and in the boldness which substituted a few drops of water for the ancient bath which pronounced a charitable judgement on the innocent babe who died without the sacraments, which restored to the Eucharist its original intention, and gave to confirmation a meaning of its own, by deferring both these rites to years of discretion, we have once the best proof of the total and necessary divergence of modern from ancient doctrine, and the best guarantee that surely, though slowly, the true wisdom of Christianity will be justified of all her children.

The constant opinion of the ancients in favor of the unconditional efficacy and necessity of Baptism has been happily exchanged for a constant opinion of the moderns, which has almost, if not entirely, spread through the whole of Christendom. No doubt traces of the old opinion may occasionally be found. It is said that a Roman peasant, on being remonstrated with for spinning a cockchafer, replied, with a full assurance of conviction "There is no harm in doing it. Non e' cosa battezzata"—"It is not baptized stuff." "They are not baptized things" is the reply which many a scholastic divine would have made to the complaint that Socrates and Marcus Aurelius were excluded from Paradise. The French peasant, we are told, regard their children before baptism simply as animals. Even in the English church we sometimes hear a horror expressed by some excellent clergyman at using any religious words over the graves of unbaptized persons. The rubric which, in the disastrous epoch of 1662, was for the first time introduced into the Prayer-book, forbidding the performance of its burial service over the unbaptized, which till then had been permitted, still, through the influence of Convocation, maintains its place. But these are like the ghosts of former beliefs—lingering in

dens and caves of the church, visiting here and there their ancient haunts, but almost everywhere receding, if slowly yet inevitably, from the light of day.

Such changes on such a momentous subject are amongst the most engaging lessons of ecclesiastical history. They show how variable and contradictory, and therefore how capable of improvement, has been the theology of the Catholic as well as of the Protestant churches, and how great, therefore, are the hopes for the future of both.

2. We now pass to the change in the form itself. For the first thirteen centuries the almost universal practice of Baptism was that of which we read in the New Testament, and which is the very meaning of the word "baptize"—that those who were baptized were plunged, submerged, immersed into the water. That practice is still, as we have seen, continued in Eastern Churches. In the Western Church it still lingers amongst Roman Catholics in the solitary instance of the cathedral of Milan, among Protestants in the austere sect of the Baptists. It lasted long into the Middle Ages. Even the Icelanders, who at first shrank from the water of their freezing lakes, were reconciled when they found they could use the warm water of the Geysers. And the cold climate of Russia has not been found an obstacle to its continuance throughout that empire. Even in the Church of England it is still observed in theory.

Elizabeth and Edward the Sixth were both immersed. The Rubric in the Public Baptism of Infants enjoins that, unless for special cases, they are to be dipped, not sprinkled. But in practice it gave way since the beginning of the seventeenth century. With the few exceptions just mentioned: the whole of the Western Churches have now substituted for the ancient bath the ceremony of sprinkling a few drops of water on the face. The reason of the change is obvious. The practice of immersion, apostolic and primitive though it was, was peculiarly suitable to the Southern and Eastern countries for which it was designed, and peculiarly unsuitable to the tastes the convenience, and the feelings of the countries of the North and West. Not by any decree of Council and Parliament, but by the general sentiment of christian liberty, this great change was effected. Not beginning till the thirteenth century, it has gradually driven the ancient Catholic usage out of the whole of Europe. There is no one who would now wish to go back to the old practice. It had no doubt the sanction of the Apostles and of their Master. It had the sanction of the venerable Churches of the early ages, and of the sacred countries of the East. Baptism by sprinkling was rejected by the whole ancient Church (except in the rare case of deathbed or extreme necessity) as no baptism at all. Almost the first exception was the heretic Novatian. It still has the sanction of the powerful religious community which numbers amongst its members such noble characters as John Bunyan, Robert Hall, and Havelock. In a version of the Bible which the Baptist Church has compiled for its own use in America, where it excels in numbers, all but the Methodists, it is thought necessary, and on philo-

logical grounds it is quite correct, to translate John the Baptist by John the Immerser. It has been defended on dogmatic grounds. Sir John Floyer dates the prevalence of consumption in the discontinuance of baptism by immersion. But, speaking generally, the Christian Church would have declined, and it is a striking example of the triumph of common sense and common sense over the bondage of form and custom. Perhaps no greater change has ever taken place in the outward form of Christian ceremony with such general agreement. It is a greater change even than that which the Roman Catholic Church has made in administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the bread without the wine. For that was a change which did not effect the thing which was signified; whereas the change from immersion to sprinkling has set aside the larger part of apostolic language regarding Baptism and has altered the very meaning of the word.

To be Continued.

THE AMERICAN CONGRESS OF CHURCHES.

The skies kindly and sweetly smiled upon the quiet old city of Hartford, all the days of the first meeting of the American Congress of Churches. Its list of Vice-Presidents contained men of various evangelical churches and of non-evangelical churches as well.

A pleasant feature of the services was the simple and hearty congregational singing. "As for bugles and cornets they are an abomination in worship."

The first session was held on Monday evening, May 11, and after singing and prayer, a brief but felicitous address was made by the President, the Hon. Henry B. Harrison, Governor of the State of Connecticut. He said: "It was a happy accident which led to the choice of Hartford as the first meeting of this Congress. For it is the distinction of this commonwealth that here, she springs into existence with the declaration of her faith in God upon her lips."

Papers upon different themes were read and discussions followed, all being carried on in a friendly way.

One discussion opened by Father Grafton, of Boston, who announced himself as a high-church proselyte and Ritualist, followed by Dr. Broadman, who announced himself as a "low-church Baptist" which turned the laugh on Father Grafton.

At the fourth final session the hall was densely packed, and the interest reached a climax in the closing papers and addresses. Subject, "The Historical Christ Considered as the True Centre of Theology."

Its prophecy, if I may use the term, may be truthfully stated as this, that, around this divinely human person, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God and Son of man, Christians will one day unite. It was voted to hold the next annual meeting in the city of St. Louis.

S. M.
ABSTAIN FROM EVIL.

That intelligence is necessary to control our actions and guide us in all the duties and vicissitudes of life, must claim the assent of all intelligent minds. Intelligence and success are so intimately connected, that, to gain the latter we must possess the former. And different spheres of action, necessitate the possession of varied and comprehensive knowledge. The more important

the action is to be performed, the greater the need of a thorough acquaintance with all things connected with the undertaking, what, or for time or certainty. The Lord has arranged that all his servants be well supplied with instruction about all duties required of them, and has given his word of counsel with all the knowledge of his will, power, goodness and mercy, to guide us in all our duties to him, and toward all his creatures. The knowledge in the word of the Lord will not be gained without study. Merely reading the word will not suffice; it must be pondered and carefully investigated. The scriptures must be searched before anyone will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." The Psalmist asks: "whereof shall a young man cleanse his way?" and replies, "by taking heed thereto according to thy word." (Psalm 119.9.) He also says, "The statutes of the Lord maketh the simple wise."

Reading the scriptures as a duty or to gratify curiosity, will not profit much. The reading must be to discover the Lord's greatness, his will and mercy. We should read till our minds with divine truth, that our actions may be conformed to the divine pattern, and our desires purified and elevated. We are counselled to "look into the perfect law of liberty" and walk according to it; that we may be blessed. Now if anyone should tempt to evil, let us follow "the perfect law of liberty," and defeat the tempter. Solomon warns us not to "follow a multitude to do evil," nor let sinners entice us. Whoever thinks of reading his or her Bible, to learn how to behave in a theatre, or a ballroom. We are not told to behave in them, but how to keep away from them. We look in vain in the Lord's

Word for instruction how to act in those spots where gaiety and frivolity are the order of the place. The Lord's word will tell us how to abstain from all appearance of evil to be seen in those temples of mirth, where youthful piety is destroyed by the astounding unwholesome sport. Dear friends do not suppose that you require exercise, for you may have it without frequenting places where the Lord is forgotten. Thoughtful reader, should the Lord call you in the midst of sport and gaiety, how could you answer him? Could anyone ask the Lord to bless their conduct in these places, or give him thanks for the opportunity to spend precious time so foolishly? Think of the Master's name by which his people are called, and seek for opportunities to "walk worthy of his kingdom and glory."

Let both old and young if they are happy, cheerful, unwholesome one another in Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and keep their christian robes pure, that their hearts may not condemn them in the Lord's presence. We say to all our youthful readers, drink freely of the deep pure spring of divine truth, and thoughtfully survey the grandeur of the Lord coming in all the glory of the Father, and earthly trifling sports will lose their beauty, and you will enjoy a good conscience now, and a good hope for the future.

JOHN BUTCHART.

Those engaged in opposing error need employ no power save that of truth—a good cause needs no bad weapons.

The popular man is he who compliments the good and leaves the bad unmentioned; the true man is he who speaks of both as they deserve.

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