

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

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

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

1. Though we walk by faith, yet we are so much the creatures of sense that we must have some certain sensible marks to guide us even in matters of faith; something that we can in a manner see, hear, and handle, or we cannot proceed with certainty. This is the reason that God gave to Abraham and the Church after him the external and cognizable mark, sign, and seal of his eternal covenant. *Human nature* as much requires a cognizable mark now, as the sign and seal of God's covenant, as it did then. This seal we have in Baptism, and it is the sign manual of Church membership, the seal of the Holy Spirit to our adoption into the family of God, our engrafting into the Vine Christ Jesus, or his body the Church, and may be ascertained (as has been *contemptuously* said to us) by a reference to the Parish Register. 2 Cor. i. 21, 22. "Now he which stablishes us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." The promise of God begs confidence in the heart, and excites a rising hope, as is particularly expressed in Peter's Sermon on the day of Pentecost, in which the promise of the Holy Spirit is made to *baptized persons*, and made *dependent on baptism*. So also Eph. i. 13. "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." And again, at Eph. v. 30. "Grieve not that holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed [have been sealed, in the Greek] unto the day of redemption." This sealing is the assuring certificate of our adoption, as appears by a reference to Eph. i. 5. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will;" and verse 11, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance."—And Gal. iv. 5. "That we might receive the adoption of sons." Reflect that this strong language was addressed unconditionally to whole churches,—nay, to the whole Church. Then, either there was not at that time a single individual in all those Churches who was not "born again" in the *modern* sense of the words, if indeed we can affix to it any definite meaning, not even the incestuous Corinthian,—for Paul uses language which precludes all claim to exceptions; or the *modern* doctrine of regeneration and adoption is not taught by Saint Paul.

2. By separating the fact of regeneration from the fact of baptism, we make it a matter of uncertainty as to whether or not we are regenerate and adopted children of God. Hence multitudes have been exceedingly puzzled and perplexed in searching for imaginary internal marks and evidences, and some have even been driven to despair because they could not feel them, concluding that they were eternally predestinated to everlasting damnation. The learned and excellent and truly evangelical Dr. Warton, in his *Death-bed Scenes*, mentions the melancholy effect of this perversion of the doctrine in view in the instance of two poor women, within the range of his acquaintance, who committed suicide: see Vol. I. pp. 190, 226. Philadel. Ed. 1828. And in Vol. II. under the title "Religious Melancholy" he gives a most interesting and lengthy account of a poor young woman whom he saved from a like fate by preaching the Gospel to her. At p. 98, he says, "The whole appeared to me to be now disclosed; and at first I doubted how to proceed. But after a moment's consideration, being assured that, if I could not convince this methodistical aunt, I could at least reduce her to silence, and that it would be better for the sick woman herself to hear the discussion than to have the doctrine explained by me in private, I begged to be informed what was meant by this word "converted." "Oh Sir," she answered without hesitation, "it is the new birth. We must all be born again of the Spirit; and there is no salvation without it. All the elect go through it of course, in some period of their lives sooner or later." "Well,

I said, "supposing this to be true, may we know when we go through it?" "To be sure Sir," she replied; "it never takes place without some labor and difficulty, and sometimes it costs a great deal: so that it may certainly be known." "And when it is over, what comes afterwards?" I enquired. "Oh then, Sir," she said "all doubt and misgiving about our eternal state are at an end: the heart is all joy and love in the Lord; and we feel as they who are sealed for redemption, and can never fall."—The sick woman, it appears by the Doctor's account, had become partially mad by going to the *Zion Chapel* "where the *true Gospel* was preached;" and failing to find the new birth as she was taught to expect it, she was reduced to despair.

3. By directing men to seek for the evidences of regeneration in their internal feelings and faculties, instead of something cognizable by the outward senses, as must be the case when we divorce it from baptism, we open a wide door to all manner of extravagance and fanaticism. Even unbaptized persons have been known to invade the ministry and sacraments under pretence of being born of the Spirit and miraculously called. Here we refer again to Dr. Warton, Vol. i. p. 195. "Very well, I said, and did she tell you when this new birth took place, and whether you could be sensible of it at the moment by your feelings? Yes, Sir, she answered, the Lady told me that the change was so sudden, and so great when the new birth happened, that it would make itself known and felt, whether we would or not; and that it might take place at any period of our lives; and what is best of all, Sir, that, having passed through it, we shall be full of wonderful comfort and delight, and be for ever after assured of our salvation." Page 222, "Why, Sir, she said, this elect Lady felt the Spirit sensibly dwelling and working within her: and the old women informed her that nothing of the sort had ever happened to themselves. Therefore you know, Sir, they are yet in a lost state—dead and buried; and nothing but the extraordinary workings of the Spirit, producing a new birth, can raise them out of it." Page 224. "Very well, Sir, she replied, rather contemptuously, you may examine me as much as you think proper. I do it only for your own good, I said; so tell me, if you can, more precisely what it is that you feel; or what it is that you are urged by your feelings to think and do." She was silent for a moment, and then collecting her whole mind, and knitting her brow, and fixing her glaring eyes upon me, and protruding her lips with the air of one about to pour forth an oracular response, at length she burst out in the following words: "I feel as if I were all soul, and could escape from the body, and leave it behind! I feel as if I could take wings, and soar aloft into Paradise to hear unspeakable words, and to see my blessed Redeemer, face to face! I feel: I am assured, that I am a vessel made to honor; one of those for whom alone Christ died; one of those who are called according to God's eternal purpose; and predestinated to everlasting life."

The above extracts are very much in the style of the *retiral* phraseology of this Western world, in which we not unfrequently find that at a particular meeting, at a particular hour, there was a mighty outpouring of the Spirit; and twenty, or fifty, or two hundred obtained hope, or were adopted, or received evidence of adoption, or had dreadful wrestlings, or were born again, or were sealed with the Spirit, or were hopefully converted, or some such nauseating trash: all which are legitimately consequent on the corruption of the *Scripture* doctrine of regeneration. The extracts from Dr. Warton also conclusively demonstrate that this corruption is an offspring of Calvin's horrible doctrine of consigning the greater part of mankind to eternal and remediless ruin by mere arbitrary power. For it is very natural for one of this stamp to argue thus: "The regenerate are the elect; and none of these can be lost. But no reprobate can be born of God, because God has determined otherwise, though any of them may receive baptism: therefore baptism is not regeneration." Hence we find people telling of their adoption, and regeneration, and their covenants with God, and their evidences of acceptance, &c. independently of a single idea of reference to the ordinances of the Church of Christ as the means, instruments and medium of receiving such benefits, or to the Church as their mother in the Lord. The only true evidence of these things is, the faithful reception and use of outward ordinances, as assurances from God to us of his good will in Christ: for if he had not that good will,