

THE TRUE IDEAL OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE CLERICAL CONFERENCE IN ST. JOHN, BY THE REV. P. J. FILLUEL, B. A., RURAL DEAN, WEYMOUTH, N. S.

In the account which Inspiration gives us of the Creation we cannot fail to observe that man is described as far elevated above the rank of a mere animal creature into that of a son of God—"let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And although man's body was "formed of the dust of the ground," yet his soul was breathed into him by the Spirit of God. Hence Adam lived in the uninterrupted enjoyment of the presence of His Maker. But, alas! from the moment of his fall, this blessed consciousness of relationship to God was lost and destroyed; "by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation (Rom. v. 18.) "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." (v. 19.) Men may think, argue and cavil as they like, the fact of the whole race being involved in Adam's guilt is plainly stated in the Scriptures, and, indeed, no other doctrine will account for the suffering, the wretchedness, the death which everywhere abound. Even in ordinary life do we not continually see that a similar principle prevails? Are not children frequently involved in the moral consequences of their parent's conduct? Violation of God's command smothered the life of the Spirit which God had infused in man; the blessed connection was broken off, and distance and alienation came into the place of filial confidence. Most fearful would have been the consequences to the whole race had there not come upon them the hope of new life from above, a new infusion of that Spirit which our great progenitor had lost.

Now the restoration of His fallen creatures to the favour, to the image, and to the enjoyment of their Glorious Creator was the great and gracious design of God, in all His varied dispensations, as well as in the full light and enlarged grace of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And here we shall receive light from the Old Testament. When God resolved to make a covenant with Abraham He appointed circumcision to be a sign and a seal between Himself and the posterity of the Patriarch. It was to be the initiatory rite into the Church, for He was with Abraham's descendants "which were in the wilderness. Those who received circumcision were partakers of the promises God had made; but whenever it was neglected, "that soul was to be cut off from His people." And in no instance could neglect or omission fail to receive the stern reprobation of God; and we know the extreme peril in which the life of even Moses, that eminent servant of His, was brought, who, from some cause not revealed to us, had not complied with the ordinance.

Now, that infants belong to the Church or congregation, will appear from various incidents in the Old Testament, and from the fact, that when God commanded the Church to be "gathered into Him" He did not permit "the little ones," and even those that "sucked the breasts" to be absent. And we can assert, with confidence, that baptism is the *correlative* rite to circumcision, i. e., that baptism has come into the place of circumcision. This is shown, most conclusively, by St. Paul in Colos. ii., 11, 12, "In Whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands in putting off the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (Christian circumcision) buried with Him in baptism." The apostle here affirms then that the spiritual thing formerly signified and sealed by circumcision is now signed and sealed by Baptism; in other words, that *what circumcision was to the Old Testament Church, the same Baptism is now to the New*. But we have seen that circumcision was administered to infants, it follows, therefore, that baptism should be administered to them also. Indeed, if we had no single instance in the New Testament of the baptism of "households" (in which it were incredible there were no children); and were primitive antiquity entirely silent on this subject, yet so strong

is the presumptive evidence from the former dispensation, that the Church of God to Whom Christ has, as His Bride and Spouse, delegated full authority in gathering souls unto Him, until His coming again be fully warranted to initiate infants by baptism into His Church. And it does seem utterly incredible to our minds that the Saviour of Love, who folded mere babes into His Own Gracious Arms, and pronounced *such* fit subjects for His kingdom above, should close against them the door of entrance into the Church below; aye, should now leave countless millions of the most interesting portion of the human race to the uncovenanted mercies of God, and thus tacitly deprive them of the standing, the blessing, and the grace, which they enjoyed under a dispensation which, in comparison of His Own, was but as the faint, glimmering light of dawn to the full blaze of the meridian sun.—"I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." The question may here be asked—"What are the *qualifications* required; and what *spiritual benefits* does baptism confer? Of adults, it is required that they should come to that holy ordinance in the exercise of "*repentance* towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." The benefits are entrance into the Church, the birth of the Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins. In the case of children, by baptism they become "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven." The only sin which attaches to them is original, or birth sin; but this is done away in "the washing" or laver "of regeneration;" they are grafted into Christ as scions upon a vine, the germ of Divine Life is implanted in them, which, with prayer, training, and the adoption of all suitable means, may be fanned into a bright and glowing flame. The Baptismal Service of the Church is framed on the principle of grace and blessing asked and bestowed. For do we not in that service most earnestly pray God to "give His Holy Spirit to the infant," and after the administration of the holy rite, in the full belief that the prayer has been heard and granted, do we not "yield hearty thanks to our Merciful Father that it hath pleased Him to regenerate the infant with His Holy Spirit?" Now, as in the world of *nature* we can be born but *once*, so in the world of *grace* can we be born but *once*. And at what later time can this be assured to us than when we were pure and innocent infants? Unless, then, we are prepared to admit that Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, has done much more in the way of grace and blessing for the unconscious infant than the First Adam has accomplished in respect of the guilt, the condemnation, the suffering in which he has involved the child, how can we affirm with the apostle that "where *sin* abounded *grace* did much more abound?" The Church of God proceeds on the supposition that all men are "born in sin," and are "the children of wrath," with no capacity for good. But it regards the Holy Spirit as graciously implanting in the infant that possibility of sanctification, that "seed of holiness," which, by the occasion of subsequent instruction, earnest prayer and discipline, may grow up and expand "unto all things belonging to the Spirit." Does the Church anywhere even seem to imply that all that is required has been done the moment the child is baptized? On the contrary, in the service she regards the practical necessity of fostering and developing this implanted seed. Her solemn prayers are that "he may crucify the old man and utterly abolish the whole body of sin, and lead the rest of his life according to this beginning." Unmistakeably, then, does the Church recognize the impossibility of a child, growing up to adult years, of obtaining *ultimate* salvation *except* the grace which has been imparted be so nurtured and developed. We shall find that St. Paul in his Epistles ever presupposes grace to have been imparted in baptism—"As many of you as have been baptized have put on Christ?" "Know ye not that ye *are* the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

I think, then, that we are borne out in asserting that Baptism is not only (as some affirm) a change of *relation*, but that it also implies a measure of grace bestowed; that it is, in short, the *beginning*

of the *spiritual life*. Should the child, however, notwithstanding all pious efforts and care, prove rebellious, profligate, and wicked, if he should hereafter repent its regeneration will pass into conversion; it will then be *converted*, viz., brought back into the state it once was in. And we shall find that St. Paul never in his epistles calls upon baptized converts, whenever they "fall away," to be "born again," but exhorts them to "repent" to "awake from the sleep of indifference and sin," to be "renewed in the spirit of their minds," and phrases of similar imports.

(To be continued.)

IN MEMORIAM.

THE sad and sudden death of Mrs. Belfield, eldest daughter of the Bishop of Nova Scotia, has filled many hearts with grief outside the more immediate circle of her relatives and nearest friends. But ten short months ago we saw her at God's altar, a sweet and happy vision in her bridal dress, the summer sun shining down upon her as if in blessing, as she stood upon the threshold of the life that opened before her with such fair prospects and under such bright auspices, and on which she entered accompanied with numberless fond and true wishes for her prosperity and happiness.

How heartily did the many friends of his Lordship and Mrs. Binney sympathize then with their joy in the happiness of their beloved daughter and the husband of her choice; how profound is now the sympathy felt by all classes of the community in the sudden and terrible affliction which has befallen them.

That happy day seems but as yesterday, and now the brief wedded life is over, and the young wife and mother has been called hence. Very awful, very mysterious is such a summons. Why must this precious life be cut off in the midst of its promise? we are tempted to exclaim, a life the centre of so many warm affections, a life which leaves so terrible a void! Those who knew Mrs. Belfield must, one and all, bear loving testimony to her sweet and womanly disposition, to her tenderness of heart and gentle charity, combined with intellectual qualities which were equalled by her rare modesty. How large an influence for good might such a life have exerted, and that it should thus early be cut off is indeed to our poor feeble insight a mystery. Yet we know that God is a God of Love, and not the bitterness of death itself can make the Christian loose his hold of this greatest of all comforts. To her who has been called away from earthly love to the higher joy and peace of Paradise, this love of God was a principle of life, an object of living faith, which enabled her in perfect resignation to obey the call of her Heavenly Father.

And what a glorious, what a triumphant hope is that of the Christian! What sweet comfort must have been conveyed to the sorrowing hearts of the survivors by the sacred associations of the day in which their beloved one was laid to rest. What day more appropriate for the mortal body to be committed to the earth than that on which we commemorate the Ascension of Him who brake the bands of death, of Him who was the first-fruits of them that slept, and at Whose coming this mortal shall put on immortality.

Soothing and comforting too it must have been to the bereaved to see, evidenced by the large concourse of those who assembled to offer the last tribute of respect and affection to the departed, the profound and general sympathy felt by the people of Halifax. The coffin was literally heaped with the choicest and most lovely flowers, gifts of loving hearts and hands, and the grave, which now contains all that is mortal of her so much loved and mourned, is covered with the same beautiful offerings.

THERE would seem to be no doubt entertained by Bishops, clergy and laity in London as to the usefulness of what are technically called 'missions.' At the recent Diocesan Conference it was unanimously determined that one should be held in 1884, corresponding and in most respects similar to that of ten years ago.