

all; but he dwells on the mysteries connected with both Sacraments, and refers to their perpetual witness to Divine Truth in his first general epistle: "There are three that bear witness on earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."* In the third chapter of his Gospel he selects Nicodemus, one of the great council of the nation, as the person whose conversation with our Lord he deems it fittest to record; and he proves from that discourse "the great necessity of the Sacrament" of baptism, † of a new birth by water and the spirit. None are excluded from this necessity. All, learned or unlearned, rich or poor, venerated Rabbi or "simple folk," must stoop by this door; for none can enter into the kingdom of Jesus but such as are born of water and of the Spirit. Nicodemus avows himself astonished at the statement. He cannot understand the mystery. He asks in amazement, can the natural birth take place a second time? Our Lord does not condescend to explain his statement, but assists the clouded understanding of his disciple by the illustration in the text: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." It is important to have a distinct conception of the points of the comparison, and of its bearing on the whole conversation.

Our Lord had announced to the astonished Rabbi a new and spiritual life connected with his kingdom. He showed him that all who enter his kingdom partake of a new birth, and that in this new birth there are two parts, the visible and the invisible; the water which cleanses the body, and the Spirit which purifies the soul. Water, in the old dispensation, had been used as an outward means of bodily restoration; it should now be made use of in the "mystical washing away of sin." Our Lord connects the earthly element with the spiritual grace by a link, the subtlety of which altogether escapes us, so that what is perceptible to our observation, is inscrutable to our understanding. He leaves it to time, and to the gracious teaching of his Spirit to make known to Nicodemus the practical working of this truth. For we do not know that our Lord baptized Nicodemus, nor do we know at whose hands he received baptism. The mystery of the Sacrament is what St. John sets forth, and loves to dwell upon. In his view, it exalts the dignity of his Master to raise the Sacrament in the eyes of men. In our days, men speak of elevating Christ, when they depreciate his Sacraments; as if Christ could possibly be magnified by undervaluing what Christ instituted for the benefit of the whole world. Surely such Christians take a very different view of truth from the inspired Apostle. One would suppose the true way to raise one's Master in men's thoughts was not to idolize the servant, but to magnify the Master's

* 1 St. John v. 8. † Service for Baptism of Adults.