

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

THREE RIVERS, FRIDAY 11th FEBRUARY, 1831.

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

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

1. Let us first inquire into the meaning of the phrase "Kingdom of God." It appears to have three meanings: 1. *Heaven*; which men cannot enter till after death. 2. *The visible Church in this world*.—"The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and set down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away;" 3. *Sanctified affections through the instrumentality of the Gospel*.—"The kingdom of God is within you."—The use of it in the *second* sense is very common.

2. The phrase in our Lord's words to Nicodemus appears to require being understood in the *second* sense; namely, of the visible Church. 1. He does not say, that except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot be *saved*: but, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Understand this of the visible Church, and it amounts to the simple assertion that a man cannot enter into the Church, or be made a member of his [Christ's] body, of his flesh, and of his bones: or, he cannot have Church membership without regeneration. 2. The Jews were accustomed to regard introduction into their Church as being born out of the world into a state of citizenship with God's covenant people. "Art thou a Master in Israel, and knowest not these things?" His own religious rites ought to have interpreted the Lord's assertion. 3. "If I have told you of *earthly things*,"—literally, of things on or in the earth,—and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell of *heavenly things*?—namely, of things in heaven. The Church and the things of it are *in the world*, though neither of man nor for worldly purposes alone, but of God.

To this we may add, that the primitive Church held the same doctrine on this point with the Church of England. Justin Martyr, the famous apologist for Christianity, who flourished about fifty years after the death of St. John, writes thus to the Greeks in his first apology: "As many therefore as are persuaded and believe that the things taught and said by us are true, and moreover take upon them to live accordingly,"—"are taught to pray and ask of God, with fasting, the forgiveness of their former sins, we praying together and fasting for and with them. And then they are brought to a place of water, and there regenerated, after the same manner with ourselves. For they are washed in the name of God the Father and Lord of all, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ; for Christ has said—"unless you are born again you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." In the second apology he says: "This washing is called illumination." Irenæus, who, as Eusebius informs us, (Ecc. Hist. book v. chap. 5) had in his youth been the auditor, or hearer of Polycarp (one of the Disciples of St. John,) has these words: "When Christ gave his Disciples the commission of *regenerating unto God*, he said unto them, Goye," &c. (Then follows the commission recorded in Matthew.) Clement of Alexandria also affirms it to be the effect of the Divine agency, "to form man out of earth, to regenerate him by water, and to increase him by the Spirit:" which is the doctrine contained in our office of Baptism.

3. This view removes the stumbling block in regard to those who die unbaptized. Indeed, our Lord's words appear to make no allusion at all to the state after death. If they did, the words *born of water* would have a most terrific import; because they are as plain and positive in their assertion as those which mention the Spirit. They would cut off every unbaptized person from salvation: a thing too hard to be believed.

4. Our Lord, in speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God, as legislating for the Church, could not be expected to make provision for any *out of her pale*, except as they came within it. His scheme is to save men by the instrumentality of the

Church; and hence we have nothing to do with them that are without, but to bring them in, and teach them the way of life in their new state of alliance with God through Christ. He will finally judge all by such rules of exception, if need be, that we do not and need not know till the time come.

5. There is but one regeneration spoken of in the Gospel. Some however have said, that to be born of water is one thing, and born of the Spirit another. But the simple phrase *born of water* does not occur in Scripture: it is *born of water AND the Spirit*; which is equivalent to the phrase *born of the Spirit*. This is no stronger language than Paul uses to the Ephesians, v. 26. "Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." Here he attributes *sanctification* to the washing of water, which is quite as unreasonable as to attribute regeneration to it. But if one is born of water in a religious rite of our Lord's own institution, he is evidently and indisputably *born again*,—"not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."—For who made the institution, and commanded it to be done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, by certain authorized persons? Has he not said that when even two or three are gathered in his name, there he himself is? And since the command is to baptize every body, who will presume to exclude his authority, presence, and co-operation from any particular baptism performed by his authorized servant?

6. Is not regeneration a privilege of the Church of Christ? Is not water baptism the same?—Where are we to look for the privileges of God's covenant people but to his body the Church? How shall we receive them but in a faithful participation of the ordinances given her of God "for the perfecting of the Saints?" Shall we neglect the Church and expect to reap the fruits of the Spirit elsewhere? The Church is his vineyard, where he sends his servants to work out their salvation, and where they are to look for spiritual privileges and blessings. If they were to be had out of her, why did he make her "the pillar and ground of the truth," and command that all men be made her children?

7. But it is asked, How can Water Baptism be Spiritual Regeneration? As easily as for it to be spiritual sanctification. The wind bloweth where it listeth: so is every one born of the Spirit: and we have no Scripture rule for excluding the Spirit from the Office of Baptism. Even if done in hypocrisy he is there, else it could not be a profanation. Is not baptism a religious and spiritual rite? Does it not introduce us into a spiritual society—a spiritual kingdom of God's building—into a spiritual covenant with the Father of Spirits, that we may worship him in spirit and in truth, and serve him in a state of gracious adoption? Is not connection with the Church a spiritual connection? Is not Church membership into which baptism admits us the same thing? If baptism admits us into the family of God and the condition of covenant children, can regeneration do more? Or is it incorrect to say that the covenant children and members of God's family are *born of God*? How can they become children out of aliens and strangers and children of wrath but by spiritual regeneration? Is not the Christian Ministry a spiritual Ministry of God's appointment, expressly to teach a spiritual religion, administer spiritual sacraments, and endeavor to bring all the members of Christ's body into a state of Gospel obedience?

8. Regeneration is evidently a privilege of the Church. The Ministry is essential to the existence of the Church:—it is therefore essential to all the blessings under the Gospel; and hence the new birth comes through its instrumentality, by the will of man, if you please, but *under God's direction*, the same as all other good things. So testifies James, i. 18.—"Of his own will beget he us with the word of truth."—Also 1 Pet. i. 23:—"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God." The allusion here to the canonical formulary of baptism commanded to be used by our Lord is too manifest to need further comment. But we may observe, that either sacrament exerts its *sacramental force* in all cases, being—"a savor of death unto death, or of life unto life;" else they could not be profaned.

9. By the natural birth we are no more than "Children of wrath, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise." The Christian Church is the common-