

1 PETER IV. 8.—A STUDY.

SIR,—A peculiar circumstance having lately drawn my attention to the study of this text, I was greatly surprised to find that out of six commentaries I consulted, two—one of them being that of the learned Dr. Doddridge—interpreted the text to mean that charity covers a multitude of sins of any one who has it. I, of course, know that this is the meaning put on it in the Church of Rome and by some few Protestants, but I was greatly surprised to see that the eminent Evangelical Commentator, Dr. Doddridge, held the same view, and that some of my clerical brethren had also adopted it. I was therefore much interested in the study, and hope you will allow me to give the result of it.

The other and commonly accepted meaning of the text is that it refers to those differences among brethren which are a violation of Christian charity, and that when one person feels aggrieved by the language or the conduct of another, this charity will, as it were, cast a cloak over the offence, so that it will not be seen, but forgiven and forgotten, and as it were covered up.

Now if it be true that the charity of any individual will hide the sins that he has committed from the sight of God, it follows as a matter of course, that some sins may be forgiven to the sinner through the exercise of charity, and if this be so, that there are two modes of forgiveness of sin, one by the atonement made by our Saviour, the other, as I said, by the exercise of charity.

It is easy to understand how this view may be consistently held by a person who adopts the distinction which is drawn in the Church of Rome between mortal and venial sin, but it is not easy to understand how anyone who believes that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for the whole world, and that His blood cleanseth us from all sin, can look to any other source than to Him for the forgiveness of sin.

This however is only a negative view of the case, and only carries us to this point that this interpretation of the text is inconsistent with the teaching of St. John in his 1st general Epistle, and therefore having seen what the text does not mean, let us try to find out what it does mean. It is a quotation from Proverbs x. 12. "Hatred stirreth up strife, but love covereth all sins." Now, we all know that in the book of Proverbs the second clause of each verse is commonly exegetical of the first as in the book of Psalms, but with this difference that there often is in the book of Proverbs a kind of antithesis between the first half of a verse and the second, as if there lay between the two clauses the expression "on the other hand," it is, in fact, continued in the word, "but." Now the obvious meaning of the first half of this verse is, if hatred exists between two parties, it will, on occasions, lead to strife as every one still knows, and then comes the antithesis. If love exists between two parties, it will make all allowance for an offence, which without its existence would surely have stirred up strife; and this view is most strongly corroborated by the 17th chapter and 9th verse of this same book, where we read—"He that covereth a transgression seeketh love." It would be waste of time (and of your space, Sir) to dwell on the meaning of the word covereth in this text. It is hides or pardons, or overlooks, the transgression of a brother whom we love, and we have its counterpart in the language of our blessed Saviour, that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life,—it is the love of God which covers the multitude of our sins—and not the love which we have one towards another.

In my own experience I have, however, two striking illustrations of the two meanings attached to this sentence in St. Peter. The first was that of a lady, a relation of my own, who gave away a very large proportion of her income in charity, and being complimented on her benevolence by my grandmother, she said—"O Betty, my dear, I deserve no credit at all. Surely you know that charity covereth a multitude of sins." The good old lady fancied that this money she was giving away so lavishly was a very good investment which would be available in the day when she should give an account of herself to God.

The second illustration occurred to me when I was c. rate of a city in which there were 3,000 Church people. Among them, there were, as always happens in large towns, a considerable number of what are called bad characters. There was a gentleman and his wife living in the city who gave a great deal of money indiscriminately to anyone they thought was much in need of it; and almost every day in the week some of these bad characters might be seen at their door waiting for their dole. Thinking that the lady—who was almoner on these occasions—did not know about it, I called and told her; and with her accustomed wit, which was, on all occasions, very sparkling, she said—"Oh I know quite well about these unfortunate people. You are here to look after the wants of the saints, and, since there is no one else to do it, I shall look after the wants of the sinners."

I have mentioned that I consulted six Commentaries on the text at the head of this, and I do not think that anyone of them supplied so clear an idea of its meaning as she did. For the charity that she had "towards all men" covered and hid from her tender heart the multitude of sins that these wretched people had committed.—*Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette.*

THE FOUR BAPTISMS.

How few Christians are aware that there are four distinct baptisms mentioned in the New Testament. It is from not knowing what each one of these signifies and from not discriminating between them, that most of the mistakes about baptism arise. Let us try and make this clear.

The first baptism is that administered by S. John, Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord.

Now this was not Christian Baptism. It differed in several essentials from Christian Baptism. It was not baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. We know this because our Lord did not make the revelation of the Triune Name until just before the Ascension. Nor was it a baptism into Christ and His death, as Christian baptism is, for Christ had not died. Nor was it accompanied with the Gift of the Holy Ghost, as Christian baptism is.—"Be baptised" and "ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost," for the "Holy Ghost was not yet given as Christ was not yet glorified." John's Baptism was only a baptism of repentance. It was a profession only on the part of the recipient of a duty to repent and a sign he had done so. It was like an ordinance that belonged to the old dispensation. It was a sign only—not a sacrament. It was preparatory to something better, and had to be supplemented by its recipients with Christian baptism, as we read in the Nineteenth of Acts. And not being Christian baptism it is immaterial to Christians how he performed it, with much or little water. It has nothing to do with us.

The second baptism is that of Jesus Christ. This is unique. He was not a sinner, but he came to John's Baptism as having identified Himself with the fallen race, and in his representative character of its Deliverer. It was also the formal inauguration of his Messiahship.

He does not take the honor upon himself, but is called, as was Aaron, and formally set apart as our Prophet, Priest, and King.

The third baptism was that performed by Christ Himself. S. John had prophesied that Christ should baptize with the Holy Ghost and Fire. This Christ did on the day of Pentecost. He then baptized, with the Holy Spirit, the collective Church. He did not baptize before this. We read that in his public ministry Jesus baptized not. He baptized once and only once and that was on the day of Pentecost. During His public ministry He had gathered disciples and Apostles to Himself and gradually commanded the Apostles to preach, baptize, absolve, offer the Holy Sacrifice and rule in His Name. Then on the day of Pentecost he baptized His Church with the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost, and made his Church a life-giving organism through the Spirit that abides in it. It was never to be repeated any more than the act of the Incarnation. On the bringing in of the Gentiles the place is shaken, but the Holy Spirit never again is said to descend. He descended once for all and abides in the Holy Apostolic Catholic Church as its light and life, Sectarians are ever seeking for another Pentecost, which is as wise as if they should seek for another Nativity. They pray and agonize, sometimes with a physical excitement and fury like that of Baal's prophets, to get the Holy Spirit to come down. The Church never does this. For the Holy Ghost She knows dwells within Her and all Her ministerial acts and sacraments are wrought by His power and in the calmness of assured possession. She seals, anoints and by laying on of hands imparts the Spirit.

The fourth baptism is Christian Baptism; that is, baptism in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, by water and the Spirit. The first time it was administered was after St. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. The people asked what shall we do? and were told to repent and be baptized, for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Christian Baptism does three things for the believing penitent. First, he obtains remission for all his sins. We see this in Saul's case. Saul was converted, thoroughly converted, on the way to Damascus. But though a converted man his sins were not washed away. Christ ordained Baptism for that purpose. And so we read that Ananias comes to him some days after and says, "brother Saul arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins." His sins not being washed away by his change of heart, but by the Blood of Christ applied in Baptism. Secondly, in Baptism we are born again, or born from above. That is born by the action of the Holy Spirit. And by the Spirit we are born of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Just as Eve was taken from Adam, so is the Church and each individual, formed from Christ's side. We are born by the Spirit of Him and a seminal principle of his life is implanted in us. Thirdly, we are born into a new sphere of life, we are brought out of darkness into light. Out of the state of nature into that of grace. We are born into the Church, the new Kingdom, the spiritual organism, whose atmosphere is the Holy Ghost, and whose life-giving center, and light, is the God Man, Jesus Christ.

In all the Epistles, the Apostles ever address themselves to Christians as having passed into this new relation to God. God has cast their sins behind his back. The enlightenment of the Spirit is theirs. They are in Christ and Christ is in them. What we Churchmen need is to realize our relation to Christ and arouse the dormant power within us and work as never before for the extension of Christ's kingdom.—*Diocese Fond du Lac.*

The Church is not a voluntary association of individual believers, it is the creation of God, by the Incarnate Word in the power of the Holy Ghost.