

The Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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WHOLE SERIES.
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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Departed Ones.

Lines written on the death of Jane and Clara Munroe.

We oft have seen the bright rose-bud
Just opening into flower,
And watched its beauties pure and bright,
Unfolding every hour.

We gazed upon it with delight,
And admiration deep,
And hoped that lovely flower might long,
Its present station keep.

But soon, ah! soon, earth's sweeping winds
With chill and sickly breath,
Passed o'er the garden bower and bore
That rose away in death.

And thus earth's fair and lovely flowers
Are subject to decay;
They bloom awhile with life and love,
Then droop and fade away.

The young, the gay, the lovely forms
That once upon us smiled,
Have passed away and left a void
That never can be filled.

Two sisters fair, that round one hearth
In childhood used to meet,
Now dwell where they will part no more,
And there each other greet.

They both were called in life's gay morn,
When youthful ardour planned
Bright scenes and future prospects fair,
By health's fair breezes fanned.

The eldest first was called away
From her loved happy home,
By stern disease's sudden stroke;
And left her friends to mourn.

By dread consumption's withering breath
The second lost her bloom,
And, with deep rooted fangs, death pierced;
And bore her to the tomb.

And now their bodies sweetly rest
Beneath the bright green sod,
Till that blest morn when from the grave
They rise to meet their God.

Their happy spirits now in heaven,
With saints and angels join,
And sing in strains earth cannot reach
Redemption's joyful song.

Then mourning parents cease your tears,
Weep not, for they are blest,
But hope in heavenly mansions fair
At last with them to rest.

There on that peaceful happy shore,
Where christian friend meets friend,
May you and all your lost ones meet
In bliss that has no end.

Oswal.

ISABELLA.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER II.

The Primitive Period.

[Continued]

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

Christian baptism, as instituted by the Saviour, and practised by the Apostles, was the immersion of believers in water, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." It was the declaration of their adhesion to Christ, and the symbol of their renunciation of sin. It was in every case the act of a free agent, and thus it harmonised with the spiritual nature of Christianity. All this is now generally admitted.

The next inquiry is, Did the usages of

the period immediately succeeding the apostolic, accord with these views? Or did they indicate any change or any departure from them?

Here it is necessary to interpose a caution. Apostolic example has the force of authority. It is the inspired exposition of the law. Not so the example of the primitive churches, as they are called, that is, as they existed after the apostolic age. The plainness of the christian ceremonial offended those who were fond of pomp and show, and the equality of the christian brotherhood offended those who loved power. Hence corruptions crept in. They were anticipated and foretold by the apostles. And hence the necessity of distinguishing between divine law and human tradition. We have no power to change the law, or to make any addition to it. The assumption of such power in primitive times was a fatal error, the evil consequences of which are felt to this day. Instead of adhering strictly to the Scripture rule, men dealt with Christianity as they dealt with systems of philosophy. They treated it as if it were susceptible of improvement, and might be accommodated to circumstances. They took the liberty to engraft on it certain peculiarities of Judaism, and even of Paganism. They multiplied forms to the sore detriment of the spirit and the life.

It has been customary to appeal to the opinions and practices of the churches of the first three centuries after the apostles. In the controversy with the church of Rome it is an available argument to this extent, that it takes from that church the plea of antiquity, since it proves that Romanism, as such, did not exist in the above mentioned period. Yet it cannot be denied that the first steps towards Romanism were taken. Professing christians soon abandoned the high ground of scripture, and took pleasure in "vain deceit" and "will worship." In this they are not examples for our imitation. We must go further back—to the book itself—to the recorded enactments of the Divine Lawgiver; and our object will be to ascertain how far, and by whom, the Saviour's will has been regarded.

This can only be accomplished by consulting the writers of the times now under consideration. The "Apostolic Fathers" first claim attention. They are Barnabas, Hermas, Clement of Rome, Ignatius and Polycarp. To these some add Papias, a few fragments only of whose writings have been preserved by Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian. They contain no reference to the subject now before us.

The writings ascribed to Barnabas and Hermas were probably composed in the second century, by some weak-minded christians, who fathered their own poor effusions on the coadjutor of the Apostle Paul and the brother mentioned by him in his epistle to the Romans, (ch. xvi. 14). But though they are not genuine books, they may be regarded as witnesses to the religious views entertained by the christians of those times. In the work ascribed to Barnabas we find the following passage:—"We descend into the water laden with sins and corruption, and ascend bearing fruit, having in the heart the fear [towards God], and in the spirit the hope towards Jesus." There are several references to baptism in the writings bearing the name of Hermas, some of them exceedingly fanciful, but there is not the slightest allusion to infant baptism; he speaks repeatedly of descending into the water, and ascending out of it, evidently advertising to immersion.

Let us pass on to Clement of Rome. He was bishop or pastor of the church of Rome, and died about the year 100. His

epistle to the Corinthians is a precious gem. Baptism is not mentioned in it. A second epistle to the Corinthians is attributed to him, but without sufficient grounds. There is one sentence referring to baptism. It is as follows:—"If we do not keep the baptism pure and undefiled, with what confidence shall we enter the kingdom of God?"

Ignatius comes next. He was pastor at Antioch in Syria, and suffered martyrdom by exposure to wild beasts at Rome, A. D. 116. Several letters were written by him, which have come down to us in an interpolated state. There are a few allusions to baptism. He refers twice to the baptism of our Saviour by John. He tells the Smyrneans that the ordinance should not be administered without the bishop. In writing to Polycarp he uses this military phraseology—"Let your baptism continue as a shield, faith as a helmet, love as a spear." This is all.

Polycarp suffered martyrdom by fire at Smyrna, A. D. 167. An epistle to the Philippians is attributed to him. It does not allude either to baptism or the Lord's Supper.

Justin Martyr was a philosophic christian. He was put to death at Rome A. D. 166. In his "Apology," addressed to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, he gives the following account of baptism as practised in his days;—"As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach is true, and undertake to conform their lives to our doctrine, are instructed to fast and pray, and entreat from God the remission of their past sins, we fasting and praying together with them. They are then conducted by us to a place where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For they are then washed in the name of God the Father and Lord of the Universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit." You will observe the manner in which he speaks of baptism. The candidates are those who are "persuaded" and "believe," and the ordinance is administered, not by sprinkling, but by the washing of immersion. Semisch, the learned biographer of Justin, says, "Whenever Justin refers to baptism, adults appear as the objects to whom the sacred rite is administered. Of infant baptism he knows nothing."

The only other writer I can notice in this letter is Irenæus, who became bishop of Lyons in France, A. D. 177, and died A. D. 202. He mentions baptism several times, and seemingly connects it with regeneration, as Justin had done before him, in the passage just cited; but I am strongly inclined to think that neither Justin nor Irenæus thought that men were regenerated in or by baptism. Their object was to shew that as the convert came under new obligations and entered into new relationships, at his baptism, it was equivalent to the assumption of a new life: he was in this profession "born again unto God," and publicly entered into the spiritual family. I am confirmed in this view of the subject by another representation given of baptism by Justin in the course of his narrative. He says, "This washing is called 'Illumination,' because those who learn these things are enlightened in their minds." Baptism is not "illumination," but it is so called because it is connected with an enlightened state of mind: in like manner, baptism is called "Regeneration," not because it regenerates, but because it is connected with a regenerate state and a new life, profession of which is then made.

Two passages used to be quoted by Pædobaptist writers, as testimonies in favour of infant baptism. One is from Justin Martyr: he writes thus:—"Many men and

many women, sixty and seventy years old, who from children have been disciples of Christ, preserve their continence." The other is from Irenæus. These are his words:—"He came to save all persons by himself; all, I say, who are regenerated by him unto God—infants, and children, and boys, and young men, and old men." But baptism is not mentioned in either of these passages, and modern critics have confessed that they afford no support to the Pædobaptist cause. All that Justin means is, that he knew many persons who had been disciples of Christ from early life; and he expressly connects "choice" and "knowledge" with baptism, of which infants are incapable. The language used by Irenæus, "merely expresses," says Hagenbach (a German Pædobaptist), "the beautiful idea that Jesus was Redeemer in every stage of life, and for every stage of life;—but it does not say that he became Redeemer for children by water baptism."

We are now brought to the close of the second century. But few christian authors had as yet appeared. Is it not remarkable, however, that in none of their writings which have been preserved is there any mention of infant baptism? If it existed, it must have been a prominent thing in the church transactions of the period. But these christians knew nothing of it. Neither Clement of Rome, nor Ignatius, nor Justin, nor any other author wrote a word which would lead us to suppose that infants were baptized. There is a singular difference in this respect between the statements of these christian fathers and the correspondence of modern pædobaptist missionaries. Read the letters of missionaries in the Reports of Missionary Societies. How careful they are to give us full information respecting the number of children that have been baptized, and how numerous are the references to them! With what solicitude are arrangements framed, and their operation watched over, with a view to the religious instruction and training of baptized children! We search the christian writings of the first two centuries in vain for any thing of this kind. That the christians of those times gave their children the benefit of religious teaching and example is not to be doubted; but they did not baptize them till they could answer for themselves, and voluntarily assume the vows of the christian profession.

You will bear in mind, then, that we have now advanced two hundred years, and have not yet found infant baptism. It will come in sight next time, along with other corruptions and inventions.

Yours truly,
MENNO.

From my Study.
May 24, 1856.

For the Christian Messenger.

SPRING.

In the kind providence of God, we again behold the beauties of Spring. Let us attend to some of these reflections that may arise on this most delightful of all the seasons of the varied year.

He who can discern

"Books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

Can hear voices in the various seasons of the year that teach wisdom. Spring has lessons of wisdom peculiar to itself. Who can stand surrounded by bursting buds, and opening flowers, and sprouting roots, and look around upon the ten thousand hues of nature, and listen to its myriad of harmonious voices, and not feel disposed to say in his heart "God has been merciful and kind toward his creatures to create for them such an abode as this earth." What an uninviting world that would be, that should be