

# The Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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## Poetry.

### The Falls of Niagara.

SUGGESTED BY SEEING A PICTURE OF THE FALLS.

How awfully grand is thine image on paper;  
Oh! would I could stand on thy soul-thrilling shore.  
To witness thy bold and magnificent caper,  
To hear the dread sound of thy deafening roar.

Roll on, mighty River! so fearfully dashing—  
The mist is obscuring thy gambols below,  
Thy floods upon floods, everlastingly washing  
The rocks that were clean generations ago.

Some simple Hibernian thought thee no wonder,  
Astonish'd that any should show their surprise;  
He coolly observ'd, "there was nothing to hinder  
The water to fall or the vapour to rise."

But the man that could see thee without much emotion,  
Nor see the great power of thy Maker in thee,  
Might be said to possess a most pitiful notion  
Of all that is grand in the Earth or the Sea.

Goat Island has stood as a watchman for ages,  
So calm and majestic, astride on thy brow—  
But where are the Poets? and where are the Sages,  
Who speak of thy wonders, Niagara, now?

They are gone to the region where mortals assemble?  
Have recorded thy praises in prose and in rhyme;  
And crowds of new visitors see thee and tremble,  
While thou art unchanged in thy grandeur sublime.

O, murmur the date of thy first tumble over,  
Say, was it when *Tubal* was learning his trade?  
Or Noah was building his vessel of Gopher,  
Or the mighty foundations of Babel were laid?

Or, say, did thy Maker determine thy grandeur  
Before there was *Man* to behold or admire?  
Or when did the Indian first quail at thy thunder?  
Comparing thy wrath to the Great Spirit's ire.

In vain do we look for historical data  
On thy flood-smitten rocks, or thy volumes in air,  
Or could we discover thy deep-hidden strata,  
What mortal could read thy chronology there?

Rush on in thy glory, with motion defiant,  
Regardless of those who are quailing with fear;  
Thy "voice of great waters," like that of a giant,  
It thrills through the soul while it falls on the ear.

And just as thy torrent, that knows no controlling,  
Is sweeping incessantly into its foam,  
So the tide of humanity, constantly rolling,  
Is launching its myriads into the tomb.

The Scriptures assure us there is no abiding,  
And experience proves it is solemnly so;  
Alas! for the multitude carelessly gliding,  
Unsav'd and unwarn'd, to the vortex of woe.

But how much severer the terrible sentence,  
Of those who the message of mercy despise;  
Their doom shall be sealed, too late for repentance,  
"Where the fire is not quench'd and the worm never dies."

But those who, convinc'd of their sinful condition,  
Have turn'd to the Lord with their whole heart's desires,  
Unto whom is imputed no sin or transgression—  
These, these shall exult, when creation expires.

—Can. Egan.

## Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

### A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER IV.

#### The Primitive Period.

[Concluded.]

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

We have at length arrived at the origin of Infant Baptism. Its birth-place was a district of Northern Africa, one of the least enlightened portions of the earth in that age; the time, the middle of the third century; the occasion, certain unscriptural no-

tions which had gradually gained prevalence respecting the design and efficacy of the baptismal right. Having adverted to those extravagances in a former letter, it is unnecessary to adduce further proof. But you can easily trace the progress of error. When believers, newly baptized, rejoiced in the forgiveness of sin, and exhibited satisfactory evidence of a regenerated state, men soon began to regard pardon and regeneration as the effects of baptism. Hence sprung the opinion of its necessity to salvation. That being admitted, the question of time came next under consideration. Was it not desirable to obtain pardon and regeneration at the earliest possible period? And besides, were not infants circumcised under the Jewish Law? These questions were in the mind of Fidus, a bishop of some place in Northern Africa. You and I can have no doubt as to his duty under such circumstances. He ought to have searched the New Testament, if he had one, (we cannot be sure of it, for books were scarce and dear in those days,) and inquired into the differences between the old and the new dispensations, the carnal and the spiritual Israel. If he had carried on the inquiry fairly, his difficulties would have been removed without further reference. But he either did not or would not conduct the requisite investigation. Cyprian was at that time bishop of Carthage, and was revered as a great authority in all church affairs. Fidus wrote to Cyprian. Certain persons, he said, had advised the baptism of infants immediately after birth; but he could not agree with them, and particularly for this reason, that whereas it was customary to receive the baptized with the brotherly kiss, a newly born infant could not be so received, being treated as unclean for several days after its coming into the world. He thought it best, therefore, to wait till the eighth day, and to baptize the infant at the same time at which, under the law, it would have been circumcised. But he asked advice of Cyprian, who laid the case before a Council which had assembled at Carthage, in the year 252, for the settlement of various ecclesiastical matters. Sixty-six bishops met on that occasion. The answer is given in a letter written by Cyprian, from which the following extract is taken:—

"None of us could agree to your opinion. On the contrary, it is the opinion of us all, that the mercy and grace of God must be refused to no human being, so soon as he is born; for since our Lord says in his gospel, 'The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's souls, but to save them,' so every thing that lies in our power must be done that no soul may be lost. As God has no respect of persons, so too he has no respect of age, offering himself as a Father with equal freeness to all, that they may be enabled to obtain the heavenly grace. As to what you say, that the child in the first days of its birth is not *clean* to the touch, and that each of us would shrink from kissing such an object, even this, in our opinion, ought to present no obstacles to the bestowment of heavenly grace; for it is written, 'to the pure all things are pure;' and none of us ought to revolt at that which God has condescended to create. Although the child be but just born, yet it is no such object that any one ought to demur at kissing it to impart the divine grace and the salutation of peace, since each of us must be led, by his own religious sensibility, to think upon the creative hands of God, fresh from the completion of their work, which we kiss in the newly formed man when we take in our arms what God has made. As to the rest, if any thing could prove a hindrance to men in the attainment of grace, much rather might those be hindered whose maturer

years have involved them in heavy sins. But if even the chief of sinners, who have been exceedingly guilty before God, receive the forgiveness of sins on coming to the faith, and no one is precluded from baptism and from grace, how much less should the child be kept back, which, as it is but just born, cannot have sinned, but has only brought with it, by its descent from Adam, the infection of the old death; and which may the more easily obtain the remission of sins, because the sins which are forgiven it are not its own, but those of another."

This is very muddy theology. In fact, the religion of great numbers, in the third century, was a compound of Judaism and Paganism, with a slight seasoning of Christianity. Gaudy ceremonies were delighted in, and the strange power which had been ascribed to magical influences was transferred to the ordinances of the gospel. The immersion in water, the eating of the bread, and the drinking of the wine, were associated in their minds, as producing causes, with spiritual transformations and blessings. The bodily act was substituted for the mental, and "faith was made void." I do not affirm that every professing Christian was enveloped in this darkness; but it is too evident that the views of the majority were confused, and that under the leadership of such men as Cyprian the churches were fast drifting into dangerous notions.

Nevertheless, they were consistent in some things. They did not separate baptism from the Lord's Supper, as is done by all Pædobaptists in these times. They held that those who were entiled to the one had an equal right to the other. When the infant had been plunged in the baptismal water, it was considered a member of the church, and received the Lord's Supper. If it was too young to eat the bread, they poured the wine down its throat. This, too, originated in Northern Africa, and there only we find it, in the period now under notice.

Another innovation is traced to the third century. I allude to *clinic* baptism, that is, the baptism of sick persons, confined to their beds. It was not baptism, properly so called, as they were only sprinkled with water. The reason alleged for this departure from apostolic practice was the necessity of baptism to the salvation of the soul, and the consequent danger of deferring it, lest the sickness should terminate in death. Thus one error led to another. If those clinics recovered, they were not baptized afterwards; but they were not admitted to the ministry. Novatian, however, was an exception to this rule. He had been sprinkled on his bed, when his dissolution was hourly expected. After his recovery, his eminent qualifications for the ministry induced the churches to deviate from the established custom, and he was ordained. Subsequently, he took a high stand as a reformer. There may be occasion hereafter to take some notice of the party which bore his name.

We are now brought to the year 254, the date of Origen's death. The downward tendency is before us. Baptism, at first the voluntary act of a believer in Christ, has become, in numerous instances, the performance of a ceremony upon an unconscious infant. In all these cases the design of the christian professor is subverted. Members are introduced into the churches who are necessarily destitute of the spiritual qualifications enumerated in the New Testament. It does not require the gift of prophecy to foretel the disastrous consequences. Religious declension was both the cause and the effect of the introduction of infant baptism. The cause, inasmuch as so great a change could not have taken place if the christian mind had not previously lost a due

sense of the spiritual nature of religion—the effect, since the unholy mixture arising from the new arrangement could not but prove injurious to the interests of piety. "What communion hath light with darkness?" Yours truly,

From my Study.  
June 28, 1856.

MENNO.

For the Christian Messenger.

### LETTER FROM BURMAH.

HENTHADAH, BRITISH BURMAH,

March 25, 1856.

My Dear Mr. Editor.—What with jungle tours and river tours I fear I am in the way to forget, if I have not already forgotten, my promise to send you a monthly communication from Burmah.

My last letter dated, I think, from the much more romantic than agreeable encounter had with robbers. Soon after that event, I went into the jungles with Mr. Thomas—he, to visit several villages of Karen Christians, and I to see some Burmans who had heard a little from the Karens and wanted to know more.

At the first place we stopped, three Karens were baptized after having given most satisfactory answers to all the questions put to them. Here I noticed that children of ten and twelve years gave such evidence of true conversion as is seldom seen in such young persons at home. There is something peculiarly refreshing, as one travels through these tangled jungles, in meeting so often with these villages where frequently all are christians, and generally the majority. Sometimes before the houses can be seen, the soft sweet voices of the Karens are heard, singing in their rude chapels, the praises of Him who has saved them, with words set to their own native tunes of unmatched wildness and beauty, and the very same tunes they use now in every heathen village accustomed to use in the celebration of their festivals. As soon as we reach the village every one runs out to meet the teachers. Every face beams with happiness and every one joins in the cordial shake of the hand. At the village which I have in my mind, while I write, there were eighteen candidates for baptism. I needed not to be told whence issued that simple, beaming, unalloyed joy which each face expressed. It was the glad smile of the spirit born again, reconciled to God and filled with a sense of His goodness and love. On the day after our arrival these candidates were to be baptized, having all been first thoroughly examined. It was a glad and memorable day to me for I never before had had the privilege of baptizing so many at once. At the time appointed we all left the house together, singing as we descended to the work, a suitable baptismal hymn. Mr. Thomas and myself standing in the water, the candidates came down to us, and we baptized alternately until all had received the ordinance. No where, even in Christian lands, could the ordinance be received in a more solemn or dignified manner, or with a more evident appreciation of its meaning and beauty as a symbol. It is impossible to witness such scenes as these without being reminded of those beautiful words, "As springs break forth in the wilderness," &c., and "the wilderness shall be made glad, and shall blossom as the rose."

On our way home we stopped for a few hours at the city of Opo, where, as I think I mentioned before, there were two old Burmans waiting for baptism. One is eighty years of age, the other sixty. The other man, fearful of the persecution which would probably ensue if he were baptized in the place where he resided, decided to come here and receive it.