

# The Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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## Poetry.

Selected for the Christian Messenger.

### MY LAMB.

BY WM. DENTON.

I HAD a lamb from our father's fold,  
More dear to me than the finest gold.  
Its fleece was whiter than driven snow,  
And pure as streams from the mountain flow.  
Its eye was clear as the glistening dew,  
Where love looked out at those windows blue,  
And I was happy as man could be  
Whene'er those starry eyes beamed on me.

We roamed together at morning's dawn  
With gladdened steps o'er the dewy lawn  
We crossed the valleys and climbed the hills  
And drank with birds from the crystal rills.  
Earth was greener and more bright the sky,  
Fairer all things when that lamb was nigh.

At eve when wearied we sank to rest  
Its head was pillowed upon my breast:  
'Twas then I heard the celestial song:  
Of heaven my dreams were the blest night long.  
Angels watched over my lamb and me  
Rounding the night with their melody.

My golden dreams were all broken when  
Our Father sent for his lamb again.  
I strove to keep her, but death said, "No!"  
The shepherd calls, and the lamb must go.  
'But tho' I take her it is in love,"  
"She goes to feed with the flocks above."

"The pastures there are forever green,"  
"And streams that fail not, flow between."  
"There dwells a shepherd whose name is 'love,'"  
"Around him gather the blest above."  
"Then sorrow not for the dear one dead,"  
"Twas thus the 'Spirit deliverer' said,  
And hope with angel voice, whispered then,  
"Weep not, thou shalt find thy lamb again."

For the Christian Messenger.

### Anthem, by King Henry the Eighth.

O LORD, the Maker of all thing,  
We pray the nowe in this evening  
Us to defende, through thy mercy,  
From all deceite of our enemy—  
Let us neither deluded be,  
Goode Lordes, with dreame or phantasy.  
Oure hearte wakyng in the thou kepe,  
That we in sinne fal not on slepe.  
O Father, through thy blessed Sonne,  
Grant us this our petition:  
To whom, with the Holy Ghost alwaies,  
In heaven and yearth be laude and praise.  
Amen.

CANTOR IN CHORO.

London, July 1856.

## Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

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

LETTER V.

#### The Transition Period.

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

THE statements made in my former letters are abundantly confirmed by impartial divines and historians. One of the most learned men of the present day, the Chevalier Bunson, formerly Prussian ambassador in England, writes thus in his work entitled "Hippolytus and his Times":—

"The Apostolical Church made the school the connecting link between herself and the world. The object of this education was admission into the free society and brotherhood of the Christian community. The Church adhered rigidly to the principle as constituting the true purport of the baptism ordained by Christ, that no one can be a member of the communion of saints, but by his own free act and deed, his own solemn vow made in presence of the Church. It

was with this understanding that the candidate for baptism was immersed in water and admitted as a brother upon his confession of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. It understood, therefore, in the exact sense, 1 Peter iii. 21, not as being a mere bodily purification, but as a vow made to God with a good conscience through faith in Jesus Christ. This vow was preceded by a confession of Christian faith made in the face of the Church, in which the catechumen expressed that faith in Christ and in the sufficiency of the salvation offered by him. It was a vow to live for the time to come to God and for his neighbour, not to the world and for self; a vow of faith in his becoming a child of God, through the communion of his only-begotten Son, in the Holy Ghost; a vow of the most solemn kind, for life and for death. The keeping of this pledge was the condition of continuance in the Church; its infringement entailed repentance or excommunication. All Church discipline was based upon this voluntary pledge, and the responsibility thereby self-imposed. But how could such a vow be received without examination? How could such examination be passed without instruction and observation?

"As a general rule the ancient Church fixed three years for this preparation, supposing the candidate, whether Heathen or Jew, to be competent to receive it. With Christian children the condition was the same, except that the term of probation was curtailed according to circumstances. Pædobaptism in the more modern sense, meaning thereby the baptism of new-born infants with the vicarious promises of parents or other sponsors, was utterly unknown to the early church not only down to the end of the second, but indeed to the middle of the third century."

The catechumen institution may be traced back to an early period—as far as the second century. At first, as we gather from the New Testament, converts were baptized as soon as they acknowledged Christ. Afterwards, it was judged expedient to prepare them for baptism by a course of instruction, generally extending, as Chevalier Bunson states in the above cited passage, to three years. In the first ages they experienced Christianity, and then professed it. In after times they learned Christianity, and that, in too many instances, was all; conversion and experience were unknown. But this catechumenal system, you perceive, was adapted to those only who were able to learn, and therefore excluded infants. Its very existence was incompatible with infant baptism, and the consequence was that when the latter became general the former disappeared, or dwindled down to an unmeaning form. But in the period which is now before us the Catechumens were a distinct Order. Certain persons, called Catechists, were appointed to instruct them. They occupied a separate place in Christian assemblies, and were required to withdraw before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which they were not permitted to witness. From the Latin phrase used in dismissing the assembly the whole service was called "Missa," from which the English word "Mass" is derived. There was the *Missa Catechumenorum*, or service of the Catechumens, and the *Missa Fidelium*, or service of the Faithful; the former comprising the reading of the scriptures and the sermon; the latter the Lord's Supper and the devotional exercises which preceded and accompanied it, denoting the fellowship of believers, to which class the Catechumens did not belong till after their baptism.

I have called the period from A. D. 254 to A. D. 604 the "Transition Period," because, as far as baptism was concerned,

and indeed in many other particulars which might be adduced, if needful, the ecclesiastical system was in a formative state. It was neither one thing nor the other, but a mixture of incongruities. The catechumenical arrangement was founded on the theory of baptism on a personal profession of faith, and so far accorded with the New Testament. But infant baptism had sprung up in Northern Africa, and was gradually extending itself through the powerful influence of Augustine, bishop of Hippo, who wrote largely on the subject. His sheet-anchor in the argument was the supposed efficacy of baptism in removing the defilement of original sin. These two theories were in opposition to each other, for if all candidates for baptism were to become catechumens and receive preparatory instruction, infant baptism had no place. Yet there it was, daily gaining ground. Augustine's authority gave it the advantage in the West; but in the East, the baptism of children from three to ten years of age, who could in some sort answer for themselves, lingered much longer. And great numbers followed the example of the Emperor Constantine, who deferred his baptism to the latest possible period, that all his sins might be washed away at once, as he, poor man, vainly imagined they would be, by the administration of the ordinance. Thus we find a great diversity of practice. There was infant baptism spreading from North Africa—child-baptism prevalent in the East—catechumen-baptism, properly so called, the ordinary mode of admitting converts—and procrustated-baptism, including such cases as Constantine's. You see, then, that this period is rightly termed the "Transition Period."

Neander says,—"It was still very far from being the case, especially in the Greek Church, that infant baptism, although acknowledged to be necessary, was generally introduced into practice. Partly, the same mistaken notions which arose from confounding the thing represented by baptism with the outward rite, and which afterwards led to the overvaluation of infant baptism, and partly, the frivolous tone of thinking, the indifference to all higher concerns, which characterized so many who had only exchanged the pagan for a Christian outside,—all this together contributed to bring it about, that among Christians of the East, infant baptism, though acknowledged in theory to be necessary, yet entered so rarely and with so much difficulty into the church life during the first half of this period." (Church History, vol. ii. p. 319.)

Had infant baptism been universally regarded as a divine ordinance it would have been everywhere observed, and Christian parents would have been scrupulously heedful of their duty towards their children in this matter. But it was not so. Some of the best men of the time were children of pious parents, but were not baptized till they attained maturity. I say again, this could not have taken place if infant baptism had been from the beginning regarded as an apostolic institution. A few instances may be given.

Gregory Nazianzen, archbishop of Constantinople, who died in the year 389, and whose father was bishop of Nazianzum, was not baptized till he was nearly thirty years old. He expressly intimated his disapproval of infant baptism, in one of his public discourses, and advised that children should not be baptized till they were three years old or more, at which time they might be able to answer the questions proposed to candidates.

Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed preacher, also archbishop of Constantinople, and born of Christian parents, received baptism

at the age of twenty-eight. He died in the year 407.

Basil of Caesarea, though he could boast of Christian ancestry for several generations, was not baptized till he was twenty-seven years old. Addressing Catechumens, he says (A. D. 350), "Do you demur, and loiter, and put it off, when you have been from a child catechised in the word? Are you not acquainted with the truth? Having been always learning it, are you not yet come to the knowledge of it? A seeker all your life long, a considerer till you are old. When will you become one of us?" Observe—"from a child catechised"—but baptism still delayed.

Ephrem of Edessa, a learned writer of the Syriac church (died, A. D. 378), was born of parents who, as Alban Butler remarks, "were ennobled by the blood of martyrs in their family, and had themselves both confessed Christ before the persecutors, under Diocletian or his successors. They consecrated Ephrem to God from his cradle, like another Samuel, but he was eighteen years old when he was baptized." They would be called good Baptists in these times. They "consecrated" their child, that is prayed for him, and trained him "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"; but they did not think of his being baptized till he was a believer, which was not till he was "eighteen years old." Would they have acted thus, if infant baptism had been the universal and binding practice of the church?

Speaking of the Emperor Constantine, the infidel historian Gibbon says,—"The example and reputation of Constantine seemed to countenance the delay of baptism. Future tyrants were encouraged to believe, that the innocent blood which they might shed in a long reign would instantly be washed away in the waters of regeneration; and the abuse of religion dangerously undermined the foundation of moral virtue." ("Decline and Fall, chap. 20.) The truth of the last observation is undeniable. All ecclesiastical history illustrates it. And there is no more melancholy confirmation than that which is afforded by the records of baptism. The figment of baptismal regeneration, one of the earliest corruptions of Christianity, was an outrage on morals and religion. It encouraged men in sin, and bolstered them up with a false hope, substituting the outward form for repentance, faith, and a changed heart and life. Infant baptism, also, soon unfolded its injurious tendencies and effects. They will present themselves at every step of our future progress. It seems astonishing that so gross a perversion of Christianity should have acquired such a firm hold of men's minds. But it is among the things that are doomed, and the day is not far off.

Yours truly,  
MENNO.

From my Study,  
July, 1856.

For the Christian Messenger.

### A SKETCH: taken at Amherst

BY AN AMATEUR.

THE decorations of a room usually consist of various objects of nature and art. Some are necessarily of smaller value and less prominent than others, but are used to give variety. Amongst the many literary contributions of a more substantial and useful nature which the Christian Messenger displays from week to week, I have thought you might have no objection to a little variation by way of a pictorial contribution. As, however, the difficulties in the way of my representing it on canvass or of multiplying copies sufficiently to give one to each of your readers, or even of giving