

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.

JESUS.

O more to dwell with Jesus!
More of his heavenly mind;
More light, more peace, more joy, more bliss,
In his sweet life to find.

O more to speak of Jesus!
To tell of all his love;
That fairest of unfading flowers,
Enkindled from above.

O more to 'bide in Jesus!
The branch-breaks down alone;
But, when it centres in the vine,
Its fruit surrounds the throne.

O more to think of Jesus!
To glory in his cross;
To trust in him alone, and count
All earthly leaven dress.

O more to look for Jesus!
To bid him quickly come,
And bear us on his bosom to
His bright and heavenly home.

* John xv. 4.

LINES

BY MRS. FENDEREL LLEWELYN.

"For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed
them; and that Rock was Christ."
A Rock in solitary grandeur loared
Throughout the desert waste: alone it stood.
When smote by God's command, a flood
Of gushing waters for his people poured,
To bless their parched lips, their thirst allay,
As onward wending o'er their pilgrim way.
E'en so for us was Jesus smitten sore,
When on the painful cross his life he gave,
And streams of mercy from his goodness pour,
Thro' the world's wilderness to bless, and save.
In darkest hours the Rock of ages still
Pours forth a tide to cleanse from every ill.
Faith clings to Christ, and sees in him the way
To win, and guide us to eternal day.

Ch. of Eng. Mag.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER III.

The Primitive Period.

[Continued]

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

I showed you in my last letter that in the Christian writings of the first two centuries there have been found but two passages that are even supposed to refer to infant-baptism, and that neither of these passages contains any allusion to it.

We are now approaching the development of those corrupting influences which had been at work from the apostolic age, silently sapping the foundations of personal piety. In adverting to the language employed by Justin Martyr and Irenæus, I endeavoured to clear those authors from the imputation of unevangelical sentiments, and to interpret their expressions in a sound and safe sense. But though it may be possible to hold them guiltless, I fear that many of their cotemporaries were fairly open to the charge of holding unscriptural opinions. A notion had grown up, that baptism actually accomplished what was professed in it. As the miraculous gifts of the spirit were often bestowed upon believers immediately after their baptism, men began to think that it was then first that the spirit wrought on the soul. And as the act of obedience to the Saviour in the ordinance was commonly associated with spiritual enjoyments and manifestations, and happy converts, like the eunuch, "went on their way rejoicing,"

there were some who came to the conclusion that what was connected with baptism was produced by it. If the convictions that led the candidate to the baptismal water, and impelled him to the act of dedication to the Saviour's service, were greatly strengthened at his baptism, so that he then experienced a more intensely satisfying consciousness of pardon and union with Christ, results were confounded with causes, and the new believer was taught to ascribe to baptism the blessings which he had in fact enjoyed before, but which he realised more vividly when he obeyed the Lord.

This step taken, the transition to yet more perilous errors and evils was easy. When baptism was thus invested with a kind of supernatural power, the outward act was soon substituted for the spiritual qualification. Instead of directing inquirers to the atonement, and encouraging them to seek by prayer for the teaching and aid of the Holy Spirit, the religious instructions of that age expatiated on the vast powers of baptism. Tertullian, for instance, a christian writer who flourished at the close of the second and the commencement of the third century, "declares the following spiritual blessings to be consequent upon baptism:—remission from sins, deliverance from death, regeneration, and participation in the Holy Spirit. He calls it the 'sacrament of washing,' the 'blessed sacrament of water,' the 'laver of regeneration.'" When such opinions as these were entertained, is it not evident that the door was open to manifold abuses, and that those who had so far departed from christian truth would be likely enough to interfere with christian worship and obedience?

Tertullian was a native of Carthage in Africa, and spent most of his life in that city. It is supposed that he died about the year 220. His tract "De Baptismo" was probably written twenty years before his death. From that tract and from other writings of his we learn that at the beginning of the third century there were some strange additions to the ordinance of baptism. The new convert was placed among the catechumens, that he might be fully instructed in the faith. After a sufficient probation he was admitted to baptism. The following account of the manner in which it was administered is taken from the late Bishop of Bristol's "Ecclesiastical History of the second and third centuries, illustrated from the writings of Tertullian":—

"The candidate, having been prepared for its due reception by frequent prayers, fasts, and vigils, professed, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, that he renounced the devil, his pomp, and angels. He was then plunged into the water three times, in allusion to the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, making certain responses which, like the other forms here mentioned, were not prescribed in Scripture, but rested on custom and tradition. He then tasted a mixture of milk and honey—was anointed with oil, in allusion to the practice under the Mosaic dispensation, of anointing those who were appointed to the priesthood, since all christians are in a certain sense supposed to be priests—and was signed with the sign of the cross. Lastly followed the imposition of hands, the origin of which ceremony is referred by our author to the benediction pronounced by Jacob upon the sons of Joseph."

The administration of baptism, you see, was encumbered by ceremonies of merely human invention; in fact, Tertullian complains, in another work, that "various forms and observances had been introduced into the christian worship, of which some bore too close a resemblance to the customs and

practices of the Gentiles." The signing with the sign of the cross was a superstition early practised among the Christians. They crossed themselves perpetually. Whatever they undertook or engaged in—when they went out—when they returned home—when they dressed themselves, or put on their shoes, or sat down to a meal, or went to the bath or to bed—the sign of the cross was associated with everything. We need not wonder that the heathen suspected it to savour of magic.

I have mentioned these particulars for the purpose of shewing that at the beginning of the third century religious declension had considerably advanced. You will not now be surprised at hearing that an attempt was made to extend the administration of baptism in an unwarrantable manner. It is referred to by Tertullian in his Tract "De Baptismo," in terms of strong disapproval. Some persons had introduced children (not infants, you will observe,) to baptism, or advocated the administration of the ordinance to them. Tertullian indignantly reproves the practice. "Let them come," he says, "When they are taught to whom they may come; let them become Christians when they are able to know Christ. Why should this innocent age hasten to the remission of sins?" Now, is it not obvious that Tertullian was entirely unacquainted with infant-baptism, and that this children's baptism, which then first began to be talked of, was regarded by him as an unauthorised innovation? The sign of the cross, the giving of milk and honey, and similar ceremonies, were comparatively small matters, trifling circumstances; they were uncalculated for additions to the ordinance, and were so far mischievous, but they did not change it. It was still connected with knowledge, and repentance, and faith. "We are not baptized," as Tertullian once said, "in order that we may repent, but because we have repented." But the admission of children, if they were not old enough to repent and believe, would change the ordinance. It would sever it from those religious prerequisites with which it had been hitherto uniformly associated. The Gentile or Jewish rites which had been added to it tended to make it more imposing, and so attracted the notice of the weak-minded; but to allow children to be baptized, who were not subjects of repentance and faith, would be, in Tertullian's opinion, to revolutionise the institute altogether. We act more wisely, he remarked, in temporal matters; surely we ought not to admit to baptism those whom we consider unfit to manage temporal affairs. So he argued.

The case is quite clear. Children (not infants, but probably children from six to ten years old) are first mentioned in connection with the ordinance at the beginning of the third century, and then with disapprobation. "Tertullian's opposition," the learned Chevalier Bunsen remarks, "is to the baptism of young, growing children; he does not say a word about new-born infants."

Some writers have laboured hard to prove that Origen referred to infant-baptism in his writings, as a then existing fact, and that he assigned to it an apostolic origin. Origen was the most learned christian of that age. He flourished from A. D. 203 to A. D. 254, and attained high repute, both as a teacher in the catechetical school of Alexandria, and as an author. But his references are to child-baptism, not to infant-baptism, and the difference between him and Tertullian is that the latter decidedly objected to the practice, while Origen spoke of it with approbation. How far, however, did that approbation extend? Only to the baptism of such children, as

were capable of instruction, and gave indications of personal piety; for he uniformly taught that "the benefit of baptism depended on the deliberate purpose of the baptized." His reply to an objection of Celsus expresses his views. That heathen writer, having stated that "intelligent and respectable persons" were invited to initiation in the heathen mysteries, proceeds thus:—"And now let us hear what persons the christians invite. Whoever, they say, is a sinner, whoever is unintelligent, whoever is a mere child, and, in short, whoever is a miserable and contemptible creature, the Kingdom of God shall receive him." Origen answers him in the following manner:—"In reply to these accusations we say, it is one thing to invite those who are diseased in the soul to a healing, and it is another to invite the healthy to a knowledge and discernment of things more divine. And we, knowing the difference, first call men to be healed. We exhort sinners to come to the instruction that teaches them not to sin, and the unintelligent to come to that which produces in them understanding, and the little children to rise in elevation of thought to the man, and the miserable to come to a more fortunate state, or (what is more proper to say) a state of happiness. But when those of the exhorted that make progress show that they have been cleansed by the word, and, as much as possible, have lived a better life, THEN we invite them to be initiated among us." (Quoted from an article by Dr. Ira Chase, in the *Christian Review*, April, 1854.)

Such children as Origen here describes would be "initiated," that is, baptized, by any of us Baptists in these days. If they have been "cleansed by the word," what more can we require? Tertullian's objection seems to have arisen from the undue eagerness of some persons to hurry children to the baptismal water before they could fully understand and receive the truth. But neither of these fathers refers to infants. They ascribed influences to baptism which are nowhere mentioned in the New Testament. They used language implying that an outward ceremony produced an inward, spiritual effect. They taught the necessity of baptism in order to pardon and salvation. And yet they also maintained the necessity of repentance and faith; and therefore they demanded, that if young children were baptized they should not be admitted to the ordinance till they were "able to know Christ," and were "cleansed by the word." I said in my last that infant-baptism would come in sight this time. The length to which the present letter has extended prevents me from satisfying your expectation. I must ask you to wait a little longer.

Yours truly,

MENNO.

From my Study.

June 7, 1856.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Prayer Meeting.

The Pastor was absent, and there was only a prayer meeting!—no preaching—only a meeting for christians to unite in supplicating a Throne of Grace, to converse with the Great Jehovah, to make known our many wants to our Heavenly Father, to encourage each other by sympathy and exhortation to press onward; and to prove thus in our own souls the truth of that sweet promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I, &c." To bless us by filling our hearts with love to God and to each other, and is there nothing to ask? Are our hearts surfeited with the "Heavenly Manna." Are none near and dear to us out of the "Ark of Safety." Is