

Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, JUNE 5, 1861.

Baptism.

OUR Lord's commission to his disciples demands faith and obedience, and pronounces salvation as the result:—"He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." Mark xvi. 16.

The corruptions of Christianity surrounded with error its ordinances as well as its faith; and whilst they deprived the latter of power, invested the former with superstition, until ceremonies usurped the place of repentance, and the priest was made to stand before the Saviour. The gospel became so bedaubed with paganism, that there was but comparatively little to choose between the two systems,—although one was of heavenly origin, whilst the other emanated from the father of lies.

The Christian Church, instead of being composed of spiritual stones,—believers in, and professors of the holy doctrines of Christ, thus came to be but a company of those who had in infancy received a corruption of baptism, but had not, themselves, even assented to those glorious truths it represented, and made no pretension to spiritual union with Christ. The foundation being laid in error, of course the superstructure could but be imperfect and unsafe. With unconscious infants as the subjects of church membership, and sprinkling substituted for baptism, the significance of the ordinance is lost, and the church, becomes amalgamated with the world, and loses its character as "a congregation of faithful men"—a company of disciples or believers; or as the Apostle describes the church of God which was at Corinth,—them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints."

Taking in the infants and all who have received this form of initiatory rite, churches comprised in their membership those who were incapable of obeying christian precepts, and partaking of gospel ordinances. Some other provision, than that found in the Scriptures, must therefore be made for church government. Hence in Pedobaptist Churches the exercise of discipline, and other necessary duties, must be performed by courts, &c., and not by the church,—thus introducing an ecclesiastical hierarchy and a worldly policy, instead of the simplicity everywhere seen in the New Testament. The primitive practice of believer's baptism, being the true initiatory rite of the Christian Church, brings in those only who make a confession of faith, and who are therefore competent to perform all church duties.

The Reformation failed to purge away the corruptions which had gathered around baptism. Each body which came out from Rome retained infant baptism; and has often made use of it, both in Europe and America, and with both Protestants and Catholics, for purposes of persecution. Those, belonging to these bodies, who have embraced the gospel in its evangelical character, have continually charged others with regarding baptism as possessing more power than they deem consistent with personal faith in Christ.

The dogma of baptismal regeneration is so interwoven with the history and practice of infant baptism, that we rarely find a pedobaptist, with any pretensions to evangelical views, writing on the subject, without taking special pains to guard his readers from supposing that he holds such grave error. The inevitable tendency of infant baptism to teach that doctrine, shows them the necessity of surrounding it with such guards. While these writers commonly admit that baptism is the initiatory rite of the church, that it "signifies and seals our engraving into Christ;" yet they do not administer the other ordinance,—the Lord's Supper,—to all who have been so initiated, or allow that they are by that means made full members of the visible Church. They thus surround the subject with confusion and uncertainty.

The forms of error on this subject are so manifold, and upheld by such diverse courses of argument, that it is only necessary to bring one forward, and place it against another, to show their futility. Some pedobaptists defend the practice of infant baptism on the ground of the Abrahamic covenant, and make it take the place of circumcision; while others, perceiving the unsoundness of that foundation, put it aside, and rely on the connection of the infant with its believing parent. Others again, finding the inconvenient consequences of such a position, depend on the power of the church to decide who shall be brought into it,—whether infants are the proper subjects or not, without regard to what the Scriptures teach on the subject.

If we wanted to inform our readers what "we believe to be God's truth on this important subject," we might simply quote the texts of scripture which refer to it, and so leave the

matter with them. We advise a careful and unprejudiced examination of those texts, as about the best guide they can have.

Our object, in this article, is simply to call attention to the subject, and invite our readers to consider the means by which it has become surrounded with so much that is incongruous and inconsistent. We rejoice that a greater measure of light is spreading, that many who have hitherto yielded a blind submission to ecclesiastical dictation, in reference to it, are more disposed to examine it than formerly, and act on intelligent conviction. A large proportion of the theological discussion of the present day, in the form of "Essays and Reviews," and local religious newspaper articles, have more or less to do with this question. Even the Revivals in Europe and America bring out features in the personal profession of religion which have always been recognized as part and parcel of Baptist principles. Appeals are found necessary, and are frequently addressed to Pedobaptist parents, to bring their children to baptism; and attempts are made to shew that by their doing so, they will be fulfilling the injunction of our Saviour, "Suffer little children to come unto me," &c.

Those who use such arguments can have but little respect for the intelligence of parents. Any child even may perceive that infants being brought to the priest or minister is no equivalent to children themselves coming to the Saviour. Baptist parents far more effectually "Suffer their little children to come to Jesus," by praying for them and giving them instruction in Christian truth, than Pedobaptists do by bringing their babes to the font.

The idea of a dedication is sought by some to be engrafted on that of infant baptism, and the notion taught that a parent will be more likely to bring up his child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord after such baptism than he will before. The fallacy of such argument must be apparent to any who think of the relation existing between parents and children. No true christian could be indifferent to the everlasting welfare of his child. There are thousands on whom the fact of having received baptism in infancy, produces the reverse—indifference to religious influences,—the work, they think, has been already done, they are already members of the church, and "inheritors of the kingdom of heaven."

Infant baptism we believe is chargeable with a large portion of the religious formality which prevails throughout Christendom. Even Baptist Churches suffer from it. The influence left on the minds of many of their members, acts injuriously, notwithstanding that they have discovered the error and renounced it. The notion, too, entertained by some, on whom no such ceremonial has been performed, that they are therefore less under obligation to live up to the precepts of Christianity is, we believe, fostered by the same practice.

Were there no non-professing baptized church members, the preacher might address his congregation with far more effect; and shew the sinner that he is at enmity with God; and he might then with far more propriety call upon such persons to repent and believe the Gospel, make a personal confession of his name, and obey the commands of the Lord Jesus. The love of Christ and our obligations to him are we think far more powerful motives to influence the youthful heart, than any drawn from the fact that upon them a religious ceremonial, without their concurrence, has been performed. The free circulation and use of God's word, we doubt not, will remove from this important subject the remaining darkness, and bring about a brighter day, when there will be "One Lord, one faith and one baptism."

An Erratum.—One of our friends has called our attention to what he deems a mistake, in a small piece of poetry in our last issue, commencing,

"How happy are they,
Whom the editors pay!"

Those "whom the editors pay" must of course be those to whom he makes payments,—his compositors, paper-makers, printers, his grocer, butcher, baker, &c. &c. &c. Whether the writer intended this; or referred to the happiness arising in the minds of subscribers, from the consciousness of having discharged their obligations to the editor, we will not now determine. We are willing, however, to accept our friend's criticism, and believe that the poet intended the latter, and that therefore he should have written,

"How happy are they,
Who the editors pay!"

We presume that both couplets are correct; the happiness in the former case being only a little more remote than that in the latter, and dependant upon it,—for how can the editors pay, and thus cause happiness, until the subscribers have paid, and received the happiness which follows honorable and just actions?

We invite the attention of our readers, especially those of them who are Sons of Temperance, to an article on the fifth page of our present issue, having the modest title "Stray Leaves." We would take the liberty of recommending that it be read aloud in the DIVISION ROOM. Its touching appeals would awaken for it a welcome, and a hearty response in the breast of every brother. Our patrons will remember to have seen other pieces in our columns over the same signature. We hope to become (both in this and the future world,) still better acquainted with the writer, and many other kindred spirits, with whom we and our readers have, by these means only, been enabled to hold fellowship.

It is curious to observe the different views taken of the Secession question by denominational journals and religious men in different sections of the Union. The North Carolina Presbyterian says:

"Like our revolutionary fathers, the people of the South are battling for constitutional liberty, for the right of self-government, and for freedom from oppressed rule."

The writer of an editorial in the *Morning Chronicle* of Thursday last appears to have been very angry with us, for saying in our last, "We hope to hear a good account of the men of Kings—that they will not sell their birthright, &c." He puts a bad interpretation upon the few lines of good advice we gave them, which might have been taken by men of either party with benefit, and then very unjustly calls them "a sneer." After turning over our very harmless remarks and looking at them, through his colored spectacles, he warms up and indulges in his penchant for calling out proper names and using naughty expressions, in a style more suited to a Reign of Terror under a Robespierre, than to Nova Scotia in 1861.

We had no idea, before reading his remarks, that Protestantism would suffer from "the men of Kings" voting "honestly" and "fearlessly." Neither were we aware, before, that it was wrong to advise men "to judge for themselves and shew that they are worthy of having the interests of their country committed to them."

Mr. M. C.'s comments upon our text are a sad exhibition of the effects of party spirit, and must show, even his own readers, that his efforts to make us his enemy were perfectly suicidal.

Would our sensitive contemporary have us reverse the advice we gave, and say to the electors, when called upon to choose representatives, "Your votes are your own, dispose of them to the highest bidder; and, as patriotism is extinct, you had better disregard honesty, or the good of your country, so long as you are able to evade the Bribery Act, and make as much out of an election as possible. Your representatives have chances of reimbursing themselves, make good use of your opportunity?" Is this, we ask, what our neighbour would have us say to our readers, and what would receive commendation from him? If such be the principles he would have us inculcate either openly or otherwise, and thinks it possible for us to do so, we can assure him he has made a great mistake. We have no desire to win laurels in the field of party politics at such a price.

Our western contemporary the *Bridgetown Weekly Register* may, we suppose expect a rap over his knuckles, from our choleric tri-weekly, for, in his last issue, he says:—

"BREAD STUFFS FALLING.—We understand that flour—"fancy brands"—is selling at South Kings for five shillings per barrel."

Now Mr. *Chronicle* tell him to "take back his sneer" if you dare.

News Summary.

While the continent of North America, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Southern frontier of the British Provinces, is in a state of alarm hitherto unparalleled, these portions of the dominions of England are, by the divine blessing, enabled to witness the conflict in sad but undisturbed quiet. What is to be the issue of that conflict, or when it is going to terminate, is only known to the great Disposer of all events. One thing as yet only is certain—that war with all its multiplied horrors is already stalking with giant strides over some of the fairest regions of the earth, among a people of the same lineage, laws and language, in many cases brother against brother and father against son.

The reports which reach us from day to day, in quick succession, of what is going on at the immediate seat of war, are so contradictory, that little or no reliance can be placed in telegraphic communications. Legion after legion from the North is hurrying towards the border States, and each of the belligerent parties is marshalling its forces and taking up strategic positions, preparatory to more

decisive operations. The Union forces which are being concentrated at Washington and on the line of the Potomac, and probably number ere this, some fifty or sixty thousand men, have taken up strong positions on the Southern or Virginia side of the river, from the Capital to the sea coast, a strong force occupying Fort Monroe at the mouth of James' river, under General Butler. It is supposed also that the Federal troops will make a strong movement upon the great National Arsenal at Harper's Ferry, some distance above Washington, and which is a point of importance to both parties. The blockade of the Southern ports is daily becoming more strict, and there seems little doubt but that with their greatly superior force in shipping, the foreign trade of the South will soon be annihilated. Much less is known of the Secessionists' movements, but there is no doubt that the most active and determined preparations are going on to meet the great emergency.

The Southern armies are said to have the advantage of more skillful and scientific officers, and it is by no means improbable that at the first onset they may gain advantages from their more deliberate preparations. According to all probable calculations however, it would seem an inevitable result that the North with their overpowering resources must be the final conquerors—an unhappy, but under the circumstances an indispensable achievement.

We endeavour to select for our readers, from the constantly varying and conflicting statements, such items only as present themselves in the most reliable shape.

The telegram in our last, stating that a great battle was going on in Virginia between the rebel and Federal forces and that 385 of the rebels had been killed, turns out to be a pure fabrication. That statement was published in the Boston papers and considered reliable by the parties who forwarded it to Halifax.

The Cunard Steamer *America* from Liverpool and Queenstown arrived on Thursday morning with news from the latter place to the 20th ult. Nothing of special interest appears in European affairs. More quietness prevails.

The American question occupies a large portion of the attention of British politicians. The want of cotton for manufacturing purposes is creating some alarm in the northern counties of England. The Queen's proclamation, given on another page, concerning British subjects, who take part in the U. States quarrel, will afford matter for some debate on this side the Atlantic.

The position hitherto occupied by the United States government, with regard to the blockade of ports and letters of marque, is now found somewhat inconvenient. They are being shewn, that the laws of civilized European nations on the subject of privateering, are not to be despised. Had they consented to join in pronouncing privateering a barbarous practice and nothing better than piracy, they would now have the moral influence, if not material aid, of those countries against this course of their Southern rebellious subjects, as it is, they must take the consequences and deal with it in the best way they can.

The new American Minister had arrived in London, and Mr. Dallas has taken his leave.

The dispute about the occupation of Syria by the French is settled. The French ministers have consented to act according to the decision of the great European powers, and evacuate on the 5th inst. They intimate however, that if France had alone been concerned, she would have remained to protect the Christians around Lebanon!

INCREASE OF BAPTISTS IN GREAT BRITAIN.

The report of the annual meeting of the Baptist Union, given in our last, makes some allusion to this fact. The *Freemen* makes statements in connection with this gratifying circumstance. The following brief extract is encouraging.

During the past year the increase to the churches, so far as the statistics have been obtained, has been larger than in any year when facts have been ascertained. In response to the inquiries of the committee of the Union, 1,222 churches have made returns, and those returns show a clear average increase of sixteen members per church. To estimate this result aright, it is necessary to compare it with the results in previous years. During the four years from 1852 to 1855, the average increase was but one and a fraction; in 1856, it had increased to three; in 1857 and 1858, it was four and five; in 1859 and 1860, it was increased to ten and eleven; in 1861, as we have seen, it is sixteen. This result, it is fair to say, is owing, to some considerable extent, to the large additions which have been made to the churches in Wales. In those churches, so far as they have reported, the clear average increase has been twenty-five per church. If, however, the returns in England were taken separately, the clear increase would be reduced only to eleven—a far higher average than has ever before been recorded.