

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

THE BAPTISMAL QUESTION.

No. I.

BAPTISM NOT A SEAL.

PART I.

§ Prefatory.

Some time ago a pamphlet was published in this Island with the following title:—"Practical Reflections on Baptism: by Rev. Edward Williams, D. D. Extracted from his Larger Work on Baptism." I have already commented on this pamphlet, in a lecture delivered in the neighborhood of the Presbyterian minister supposed to have put it forth. But circumstances which need not here be stated seem to demand that I should deal with it in the columns of the Messenger. Hence the present series of articles. My remarks will be pretty much limited to one thought of the "Reflections," reaching out, of course, to the certain aspects and relations of that thought. In making these remarks I shall endeavour to avoid bitter personalities. Whatever I may say that seems severe will be directed against sentiments rather than individuals. I may expose error, which I am bound to take and condemn. Yet I would deal kindly with those who hold that error. I see among them brethren in Christ. Mistaken, indeed, but brethren still; and therefore falling within the range of the lovely apostolic wish, which I cheerfully adopt as my own—"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

§ Dr. Williams.

Before I proceed I ought to say a few words about Dr. Williams. He was a great and good man in his day, while his memory is yet deservedly held in high esteem. He was for many years President of a Congregational Ministerial College in the north of England. He was distinguished as a writer and editor. I have before me a catalogue of works prepared by him, embracing more than thirty articles on a great variety of subjects, and including an abridgement of Owen on the Hebrews, with editions of the voluminous works of Doddridge and Edwards. His treatise on the Equity and Sovereignty of God I am happy to possess. It is a work of marked ability and of great and permanent value, shewing him to have been, as an expounder of moderate Calvinism, a worthy fellow-laborer with Fuller, and forerunner of Howard Hinton. When Booth's great work entitled "Pædobaptism Examined, on the Principles, Concessions, and Reasoning of the Most Learned Pædobaptists," made its appearance, Dr. Williams came out with an answer to it. The title of his work was, in part, an imitation of the title of Booth's work. But alas! only in part; since he could say nothing about the concessions of Anti-pædobaptists. From the days of Dr. Williams until now indeed, Pædobaptist concessions have still grown upon us; so that it were no difficult task to collect large additions to those supplied to us by Booth's not forgetting the recent notable ones made by H. W. Beecher. But a writer of these days would find it quite as hard to collect Anti-pædobaptist concessions as Dr. Williams found it. Here is the title of his work against Booth:—"Anti-pædobaptism Examined; or, a Strict and Impartial Inquiry into the Nature and Design, Subjects and Mode of Baptism. Including also an Investigation of the Nature of Positive Institutions in General, and Occasional Strictures on Human Ceremonies in Matters of Religion." This work used to be published in two volumes 12 mo, and is the one from which the "Practical Reflections" have been extracted. These "Reflections" I have before me, as also Booth's reply to the work from which they are taken. The doctor's work bears the marks of its author's great intellectual power. Yet it shews, in common with the writings of Wardlaw and Dwight on the subject of baptism, together with those of many able men beside on the same theme, the insufficiency of mere human force to sustain itself against the decision of the Divine Word. An archangel must break down here, no less than an idiot. For "what is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord." And so I venture on my present engagement, not without hope that I may pierce the armour even of a champion like Williams.

§ "Practical Reflections."

Taking the doctor's pamphlet in hand, I find that it turns largely upon one thought,—THAT BAPTISM IS A SEAL. The thought is not peculiar to Dr. Williams. "That baptism and the Lord's Supper are seals of the covenant," says Dr. Carson, "is a doctrine so common, and a

phraseology so established, that it is received without question as a first principle." And what says the Westminster Confession, that great Presbyterian standard? "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his

growing up unto God through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life." Thus also reads the first sentence in the "Reflections":—"The Gospel contains good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people; and the legacy, the inestimable treasure, bequeathed to us by the last will and testament of our Divine Saviour. He seals, not only with His blood to satisfy justice, but also by His institutions, for our instruction and comfort.—And as this," adds the doctor, farther on, "is the character of gospel institutions in general, so it is particularly of baptism in an eminent degree." Upon this thought the doctor rings changes throughout the whole of his "Reflections." Now this I take to be a great fallacy; one, moreover, fraught with false and dangerous consequences, some of which appear in the citation taken, as above, from the Westminster Confession. They come out very strikingly, however, in Dr. Williams's pamphlet, as I propose to show hereafter. For the present, I must endeavour to explode the great primary fallacy that baptism is a seal, while I maintain the contrary position, that Baptism is not a seal.

§ What is a seal?

What, according to Eastern usages, is the idea attached to a seal? The importance of this inquiry will be manifest as I proceed. In Gen. xli. 42, we read thus:—"And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand." This no doubt, was a signet ring, containing a stamp or signet. Stamps, or signets are affixed to documents in the East, and answer the same purpose as signatures among us. Our own employment of seals, as well as signatures, as applied to legal documents illustrates this Eastern usage. With this difference, however,—that we require the signature with the seal; whereas in the East the seal alone has the effect which we give to both seal and signature. The statement here made is clearly illustrated in Esther viii. We read there, first that Ahasuerus "took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai." Next we find the same monarch giving instructions for the issuing of a decree, and adding a direction about the application of his ring to this decree:—"Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse." The leading idea here is that of a certificate, or security. Here is a royal decree, certified by the royal signet. It is under a royal seal. It proceeds from the king. A royal efficacy pertains to it. Such is the secular idea associated with the use of a seal in the word of God.

§ The Sacred Idea of Sealing.

I pass from the secular to the sacred. And here we have the idea of sealing elevated and sanctified. The heavenly seal is that in heavenly things which the earthly seal is in earthly things. Here are heavenly documents, certified and assured by a heavenly signet,—sealed by the hand of Jehovah. Thus Christ, the Word and Wisdom of God, God's great document, sent down from heaven to earth, speaks of himself:—"Him hath God the Father sealed." That is, the Father, by the miracles wrought by his Son, gave assurance to men that he was what he professed to be, and attached his own signet to the lofty claims of that Son. Which miracles, again were wrought by Christ through the agency of the Spirit. Thus Peter tells us, "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy Spirit and with power; who went about doing good," the apostle proceeds, "and healing all that were oppressed with the devil; for God was with him." Thus are we instructed, as now elsewhere, in the leading sense of the term, sealing as applied in Scripture to sacred uses.

§ Baptism does not correspond with this idea.

Here, too, should seem to be the thought in the mind of Dr. Williams, when he describes baptism as a seal. Thus he writes:—"The all-sufficient God, (how shall I express myself?) JEHOVAH gives Himself to me. Astonishing conveyance! 'I will be thy God' says He. He confirms it with his oath, and ratifies it with His seal. . . . If it be not a truth, that I as a baptized person, am privileged with this covenant grant, 'I will be thy God' then I may question whether the sun ever shone upon

Britain on a summer's day!" Just here exhibited in no equivocal terms, we have the grand fallacy which I now seek to explode. I think I have above correctly presented the Biblical idea of sealing as applied to sacred uses. I shall now endeavour to shew in opposition to the views put forth by Dr. Williams, that there is nothing in baptism which corresponds to that idea. But I must reserve my argument here to another week. J. DAVIS.

Charlottetown, P. E. I.

For the Christian Messenger.

Loiterings at Parrsboro.

No. 3.

I resumed my rambles in company with a loquacious, but intelligent companion. He had followed for many years the occupation of a pedlar, or travelling merchant, and in this capacity had visited every County in the Province; had traveled Parrsboro from Moose River to Advocate Harbor; was posted up as regards the peculiarities of the people; versed in all the legends and traditions of the country; in fine, was a sort of universal genius, at home on every subject:—

"He talk'd of politics, or prayers,
Of Ruskin's praise, or Shakespear's sonnets,
Of daggers, or of dancing bears,
Of battle, or of the last new bonnets,"

with equal familiarity. He was the very man to interest an inquisitive traveller; therefore, I thanked my stars, that I had made his acquaintance. We carried with us our rifles, and fishing apparatus. Thus equipped, we were equally ready, either for business, or a "lark." We sauntered carelessly along until we came to a part of the wood, called the Dug-way, when my companion suddenly exclaimed, "Do you know that this place has, or rather had, the reputation of being haunted?" No, replied I, but do tell me. "Well," said he, "this place was once the terror of school boys, while those of riper years, had awful stories to tell about the Dug-way ghost: but I will give you my own experience. About twenty-five years ago, I was travelling from Amherst to Parrsboro in order to take the Packet for Windsor; from thence to Halifax to buy my usual stock of goods. The night was rather hazy, scarcely a star blinking in the sky, and when I was about midway of this hill, I heard a trampling behind me as of horse's feet, I looked around and there saw a strange luminous appearance, and could hear the dull, heavy sound of feet striking the ground with great force. My first impulse was to run away as fast as possible; but then a strange fascination possessed me, to see more of the mysterious thing, and, if possible, to ascertain its character. I halted upon the side of the road, and with fear and trembling, awaited the result. My dog usually courageous enough, crouched at my feet, and whined piteously. As the Thing drew near. I could distinctly see the outline of a human figure on horseback; upon a closer inspection, it presented the appearance of a man, arrayed in military costume, his face swollen and convulsed, his eyes starting from their sockets, with a gash in his left cheek, from which the blood flowed copiously; he was minus the right arm, while with the left he guided his horse. My proximity to what I supposed to be, a supernatural being, completely unnerved me, my hair literally stood on end, the atmosphere grew colder and at last became positively icy; my blood seemed to congeal in my veins, and circulation was only restored, when the ghost got some yards in advance of me. Hitherto it had moved very slowly, but now quickened its pace, and rushed with great rapidity down the steep on the lower side of the road, and disappeared." Now, whether he had been imbibing from the inebriating cup, that fruitful source of spectral illusions; or whether, he really saw a veritable ghost, I am not prepared to say: but gentle reader, you have the story as I got it from him, you must therefore draw your own conclusions, I have been informed, that his ghostship has not made himself visible for some years, to the great relief of the timid and superstitious. An old Acadian has erected his house at the foot of the Dug-way, and cleared away the thick woods, that once made such an excellent lodging place for the ghost. The innovating hand of man, has compelled his ghostship to take his departure, to a more suitable locality, to the deserted grave yard; the dilapidated house; the lonely woods; for these are places most congenial to ghostly propensities. Thus it is, the march of improvement is driving all the ghosts and hobgoblins out of the land; and they will ere long be numbered among the things that were. Our route lay directly through a straggling place, which bore the euphonious title of Monkey Town. The country appeared to be

extremely rugged and broken; a mass of hills, made and deep gulches it seemed as if nature had a number of hills, in order to scatter them over a large area, but in some freak, had dropped them altogether in this place; where they tumbled about in the wildest confusion.

As we journeyed along, my friend's loquacity increased, for he rattled on with a volubility perfectly astonishing; now he talked about love and romance; then a dissertation on cooking; now some snatches of poetry; then a philippic against crinolins; and finally got highly excited about that old philosopher Pythagoras; and contended that mankind had never yet rendered him justice. What good did he ever do? I asked. "What good? vociferated my friend; "why it was Pythagoras, who discovered that famous theorem, viz, that the square of the hypothenuse of a right-angled triangle, is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides: and what would the mathematicians do without it. Copernicus and Newton whom all delight to honour, derived their theories from Pythagoras. Moreover, the temperance community are deeply indebted to him, for he was one of the earliest lecturers, a pioneer in the great work of temperance reform. He preached sobriety to the people of Crotona, more than five hundred years before Christ; and the sons of Temperance, would do themselves honour, by adopting him as the patron of their order. But Pythagoras was a heathen, I observed, and you know he was very heterodox in his religious opinions; and would you recommend a body of christian men to select a pagan as their patron? "Well then, continued my companion, "they might give him a christian appellation by christening him saint Pythagoras; for (bringing his hand down with emphasis,) less deserving men have been canonized, and occupy a place in the calendar." The droll remarks and conversation, of my volatile companion, although perhaps not always strictly accurate, yet always amusing, whilled away the time until we came to the Halfway River Lake, a beautiful sheet of water, with a beach covered with fine white sand. At some distance, we observed a lady, evidently enjoying a walk by the lake; she moved gracefully, but the distance prevented us from scanning her features; however, in imagination we painted her as some beautiful nymph; and my companion exclaimed, "O for the pen of a Walter Scott, that I might immortalize her, as another Lady of the Lake," and (he continued, addressing himself to me,)—"although our Lady of the Lake, might have to yield the palm to Sir Walter's more celebrated heroine,—our lake will lose nothing by comparison with Loch Katrine. If this really charming lake, were situated in some foreign country, Nova Scotians would be eager to pay it a visit, and wax eloquent in its praise; but because it belongs to their own Province, they cannot appreciate it. It is really wonderful, said he, "how many objects of interest lie in and about our daily paths, from which we might derive both instruction and amusement, yet we treat them with perfect indifference, and fly away to far distant scenes, forgetting that equally interesting scenes, and objects lie at our very doors." We soon put our fishing tackle into requisition, and hauled up a number of the finny tribe, and such trout! why they would have made dear old Isaac Walton go into raptures! We fished and played, and talked and sung, until the day was far advanced, and the inner man gave signs of uneasiness, not to be mistaken. We therefore lighted a fire in the woods, by the side of the lake, where we broiled our piscatorial trophies, and around a table formed from an old stump, without catsup or butter, or condiment of any kind, we acted out the adage, that "fingers were made before knives and forks." Thus ended our days amusement, and, just as the sun was sinking behind the western hills, we started for home.

SYLVANUS OBED SMITH.

Pugwash, Sept. 1864.

For the Christian Messenger.

AMERICAN BIBLE UNION.

American Bible Union Rooms,
New York, October 8, 1864.

DEAR BROTHER,—

Our Bible Union Anniversary takes place on the 26th and 27th of this month. We anticipate a meeting of extraordinary interest.—The entire New Testament, Revised, from the Final Committee, will be printed by that time. Thus a period is reached in the history of the Bible Union long wished for; and this gives assurance to our friends that the entire work is steadily advancing to completion.

Our mission in your provinces closed September 20th. A history of our travels in the pro-