

THE BAPTISTS AT ROME.

[BY ONE OF THE PILGRIMS.]

"HOLY WEEK" in Italy! It seems to promise a good deal, but the fulfilment scarcely justifies the expectation. Of all the great cities in Popish countries, Naples is reputed to be the most Popish; but the devoutness even of the Neapolitans is a strictly measured quantity. When Holy Thursday came they certainly went to church in multitudes, but the whole aspect of the city was festive, as if keeping holiday rather than mourning for sin. The churches were open early, and so were the shops; and the museums and galleries and markets were as lively as a fair. The Via di Toledo was thronged with people dressed in their best; the tradesman left his shop for an hour to his assistant or apprentice, and turned out with his wife or daughter to go to church. The pavements and corners of the streets were beset with stalls covered with small wares, trinkets, Easter eggs, confectionery, and above all piles of oranges and lemons. Most of these people are going, or have already been to confession; but do they look like it? Not a bit. Going and returning there is plenty of laughing and chatting, but not one tearful or melancholy face among them all. The priests are busy enough from morning to night. The confessionals are besieged, and while some penitents are occupied with the confessor, others are patiently waiting beside the box till their turn arrives. There is one priest whose duties are clearly too arduous for him. He is listening to a confession, while at the same time a comely lass kneels before him for his blessing. He cannot give it in words, but he is prepared for the exigency, and lifting a long wand resting at his side, he gently touches her head, and the mystic virtue is conveyed to her so that she departs well satisfied. The churches were darkened all the day; some indeed were so dark that it was impossible on entering them from the glare of the Neapolitan sunshine at first to distinguish any object. It was soon found, however, that they were full of worshippers, amongst whom there was a perpetual commotion, some going and some entering all day long. In the evening there was preaching, the preacher being aided in some instances by large transparencies representing the Redeemer in His final agonies, either in the garden or on the Cross. The commotion was as great during the sermon as it had been during prayers in the morning; but generally there was a group of hearers sitting near the pulpit, numbering, perhaps two or three hundred, who were either attentively listening or quietly sleeping. On Good Friday similar scenes were to be witnessed outside the churches; marketing, chaffering, swarms of saunterers in the streets, and inside the same business like despatch of a necessary but not much loved duty. In the afternoon and evening the shops were shut, and though there were no signs of merriment, the day was evidently observed as a holiday. At Rome this "holy week" is a time of unequalled concourse of strangers, as many as 50,000 being estimated to arrive and depart within that space of time. Perhaps the priests furnished a considerable proportion of this number, for their fewness in the streets of Naples led to the conclusion that most of them had gone to Rome.

EXHIBITION OF RELICS.

The Pope's personal share in the ceremonies of the Easter week is gone for the present; but Rome is the great emporium of relics, real or counterfeit, and the exhibition of these relics at Easter is a great attraction to the "faithful." At St. John Lateran, on Thursday, they showed the crowd of believers the heads of the apostles Peter and Paul, and table on which our Lord held His last supper with the disciples! On Easter Sunday, in S. Peter's, the officiating cardinal descended with great parade behind the statue of S. Veronica, and soon reappearing in a gallery, he over her head, exhibited to those who stood in the nave below first a crystal vase containing some precious unknown object; then, in a richly adorned cross a piece of the wood of the true "cross;" and, lastly, what looked like a large picture in a frame, but was declared to be S. Veronica's handkerchief on which was impressed the likeness of our Saviour's countenance. Faith in these relics is apparently not very strong even among Catholics. Of about 300 persons who were spectators of this exhibition not one-third were kneeling. The rest were, probably, all of them, certainly most of them, Protestant sight-seers, who irreverently stood gazing as they would have done

at Blondin's performing on the tight rope in the gardens at Sydenham; but a far larger number of people were strolling about the aisles and chapels of S. Peter's not paying the smallest attention to the important proceedings. Truly Pio Nono has fallen upon sceptical times, and had he the energy and zeal of Hildebrand himself, he would not be able to restore the waning confidence of his degenerate flock. To us, however, as the Rev. Edward White acutely remarked at Mr. Wall's meeting on Monday, the growing infidelity presents a hopeful side. It could not but be that doubt and denial should be the end of all the hypocrisy and double dealing of Popish priestcraft; but men cannot rest in utter unbelief, and the ringing out of the false is only preparing the way for ringing in the true.

HOPEFUL SIGNS.

And it is deeply interesting to note how readily the Italian mind opens for the reception of the true. On the Baptist party saving the city of Pompeii, one of the number, the Rev. T. Passingham, of Dover, offered one of the guides some remuneration, and finding that money must not be given, asked if he would receive and read a *Bible* if one were sent him. He said certainly he would, and be very much obliged. On hearing this, the party subscribed to supply all the guides, numbering about forty, with copies of the Scriptures, and they were presented and welcomed accordingly. And the progress already made by Protestantism in Italy offers striking confirmation of the view that Italians are fast becoming ready to shake off the Papal yoke.

THE TWO CENTRES.

These two points—Rome and Spezia—are the most conspicuous at present in the evangelising work of the Baptists; but both of these are already centres, from which missionary operations are carried into other places, and now at length there is good hope of Naples, the most benighted and depraved city of all Italy, being added to the number, as Mr. Wall is proceeding forthwith to that town for the purpose of baptizing a little company of converts who reside there. And although the whole mission is as yet in its infancy, the promise of its ultimate success may be judged of by the effect already produced on the minds of those who are either indifferent or avowedly hostile. The visit of a few Baptists to open a new chapel has been quite a sensation. The journals have chronicled their progress from day to day. In Rome, Naples, Pisa, and Turin, the local prints have discussed the character and object of these visitors, and never in disrespectful terms. The last article, indeed—a leader in the *Gazetta di Torino* of April 1st—is of a very remarkable description. The writer has carefully studied the history of English Non-conformists, and of Baptists in particular, from such sources of information as were within his reach; and whilst generally accurate in his statement of facts, shows a surprising acuteness in estimating their value. The religious sentiment, he says, has a wonderful vitality in England, ranging from the aristocratic and feudal Established Church to the liberal Methodists and the radical Baptists. He traces the history of baptism by immersion to John the Baptist, and follows that of its professors through all the centuries, declaring them to have been Catharists, Paulinians, Lollards, Meronites, Waldenses, according to their country and age. He distinguishes between the *General* and the *Particular* Baptists, which is more than we can do at home; and, having described the rite of baptism as administered at a church "in the vicinity of Park road"—probably meaning Regent's-park Chapel—he concludes by saying, "If I were a Christian, I would be a Baptist!"

May he and all free thinking Italians soon come to the knowledge of the truth, as it is in Jesus! The awakening of a spirit of inquiry on the subject of the true faith is patent to all, and fills us with the most sanguine and lively hopes.—*Christian World*.

A LONDON CONGREGATIONALIST MINISTER BAPTIZED.—The Rev. Spencer Pearsall, late of Eochston Chapel, Pimlico, was baptized by Dr. Landels at Regent's-park on the 3rd ult., and preached there a very interesting sermon on the following Sunday evening. Mr. Pearsall has been for many years a useful and honoured minister of the Congregational body; but having recently become convinced of the Scripturalness of our views of the ordinance of baptism, he has had the fidelity and the courage to carry out his conviction. We gladly hail such accessions to our denominational strength as testimonies to the power of conscience, and trust that Mr. Pearsall's usefulness will not be diminished, but increased by the step he has taken.—*Freeman*.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION, AND SOME OBJECTIONS OFFERED AGAINST IT.

A paper on a few of the reasons set forth by certain religious teachers of the present day, why the doctrine of free and sovereign election should not be preached. Reason 1st. "It is a damnable doctrine." The meaning of the term "damnable" according to Worcester is, 1st. "Deserving condemnation, highly censurable." 2d. (That), "procuring or worthy to procure damnation or eternal punishment." 3rd "odious, execrable." "O thou damnable fellow." This is strong language for men to use toward the purpose of Jehovah to save some of the sons and daughters of men. Not so did our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, nor his Apostles speak concerning it. See Mark xiii. 20—"but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days." Ephesians i. 4—"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." 1 Peter i. 2—"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Romans ix. 20—"Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

From the portions of the inspired record above cited, the profoundest reverence is intimated for this doctrine of free and sovereign grace by our Lord and his Apostles. To call election "damnable" therefore, formed no part of the work of the first minister. Nor did the persons to whom they preached and wrote regard it as such. Acts ii. 42—"But continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, and were commanded to," Jude iii. "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints."

It would be well for this class of the opposers of election to prayerfully ponder the solemn warning spoken by our Lord in Luke ix. 26—"For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels," as well as the awful charge given by Paul to Timothy, 2 Timothy iv. 1, 2—"I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his Kingdom, preach the word."

Reason 2nd, "It is a dangerous doctrine." If this be true it seems strange that it should have been pleaded in the Word of God, to become exposed to the view of all those to whom this heavenly boon is sent. Strange too that the great teacher should have required men, and unconverted men be it remembered, to "search the Scriptures in which this 'dangerous doctrine' is so clear. Wonderful that no caution nor command is to be found in the Scriptures to avoid or refrain from the examination of the doctrine of election. It is evident that the author of election did not consider it "dangerous" to the souls of men, for he would not have revealed it. Nor did the Lord Jesus Christ who is the head of the elect, treat it as a "dangerous doctrine" see John xv. 16—"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name he may give it you" John xv. 19—"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." "Believers are intrinsically no better than the world, they are only so by election."

Sinners are loved and call according to the eternal purpose of election. Proof, 2 Timothy i. 9—"Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. Titus iii. 5—"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Romans viii. 28—"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God to them who are the called according this purpose."

To preach the doctrine of election is not

dangerous but safe. All that have been saved, or ever will be, were chosen in Christ before the world began, consequently before they had done good or evil. Rom. ix. 11—"For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." Let the friends, therefore, of election, fearlessly and faithfully preach it, and in so doing they will imitate the holy examples set them by their divine Master and his inspired Apostles; and be able to say at their death as did the Lord's faithful servant Paul: Acts xx. 26, 27—"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am free from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

Reason 3rd, "It is an unprofitable doctrine, i. e. useless, serving no purpose." The election and predestination of some of the children of Adam is ascribed to the Father in the Scriptures. Romans viii. 33—"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Romans viii. 29—"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son."

He therefore who desires to become scripturally acquainted with the source of human redemption must of necessity examine those texts in which the terms *elect*, *election*, *predestinate* and *predestinated* are to be found. From those portions of the word of God, he will be able, as from holy heights to discover the rule and fountal cause of God's election of His people. Ephesians i. 5, which is, "According to the good pleasure of his will." That it was not for the sake of anything in the elect foreseen, but because it was His sovereign will and a thing highly pleasing to Him. That the so-called "unprofitable doctrine" of election, is, Ephesians i. 11, according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. That God powerfully accomplishes whatever concerns his elect. The doctrine of election is honoring to God and profitable to man. Honoring to God, because it discovers the last and great end and design of all, which is his own glory. Ephesians i. 6—"To the praise of the glory of his grace. Profitable to man, because it teaches him, Ephesians i. 12—"That we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ" That we should live and "behave ourselves in such a manner that his rich grace might be magnified and appear glorious, and worthy of the highest praise."

The holiness and blamelessness of the children of God are the results of this unprofitable doctrine. Ephesians i. 4—"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love." Observe here one great end and design of this choice. Chosen that we should be holy, not because he foresaw they would be holy, but because he determined to make them so. All who are chosen to happiness as the end, are chosen to holiness as the means. Election does not promise to do anything for man that they are disposed to do of their own free choice. But it does for men what they have no natural inclination to do for themselves. For example it is not their nature to come to Christ that they might have life. John v. 40—"And ye will not come to me that ye might have life." Psalms x. 4—"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts." Psalms lviii. 3—"The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." John vi. 44—"No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

Such is the nature of the human family. There are no honorable exceptions. But out of this rebellious family God has chosen his people. John xv. 19—"But I have chosen you out of the world." These elect ones were given to Christ that he might give eternal life to them. John xvii. 2—"As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." John xvii. 6—"I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were and thou gavest them me." All these elect persons are made willing to come to Christ. None are lost. John vi. 40—"And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." John vi. 45—"It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man

therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." John vi. 37. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Psalm cx. 3—"Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

It is this "unprofitable doctrine that saves a remnant of the Jewish nation, Romans xi. 5. "Even so then at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace. The Jewish nation sought for justification, and acceptance before God by the deeds of the law; but sought in vain. The election of grace obtained these inestimable blessings for a remnant of that nation. Romans xi. 7, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it."

The doctrine of election, as taught in the scriptures, is of a humbling and holy tendency. The whole difference between the saved and the lost being ascribed to sovereign grace, the pride of man is abased. Upon every other principle it is the sinner that makes himself to differ; and who must therefore find whereof to glory? We may allow ourselves to be unable to repent and believe without the aid of the Holy Spirit; but whilst we maintain that these aids are afforded to sinners in common, and that faith, instead of being "the gift of God," is the effect of one having improved the helps afforded, while others neglected it, we think we do not ascribe the very turning point of salvation to our own virtue, we greatly deceive ourselves. But election, while it places no bar in the way of any man which would not have been there without it, resolves the salvation of the saved into mere grace, "and if of grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace." Such a view of things tends to humble us in the dust. It is frequently the last point which a sinner yields to God; it is the giving up of every other claim and ground of hope from his own good endeavours and falling into the arms of sovereign mercy. And having here found rest to his soul, he will not be less, but more attentive to the means of salvation than he was before. His endeavours will be more ardent, and directed to a better end. Then he was trying to serve himself; now he will serve the Lord. But if election be viewed in certain connections, it will cease to be a doctrine according to godliness. If faith and works foreseen be connected with it as the procuring cause, grace is excluded, and self-righteous boasting admitted. If, on the other hand, they be not connected with it as effects, the interests of sobriety, righteousness and godliness are relinquished.

This "unprofitable" doctrine binds ministers of the gospel to give thanks always to God. 2 Thess. ii. 13, "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth;" "Whenever we give thanks to God for his grace, either to us or others, we should run up the streams to the fountain, and thank God for his electing love, by which we are made to differ."

Reason 4th, "It is an unpopular doctrine." "Not popular." Not having, or not fitted to gain public favor; disliked." Worcester. The doctrine of election is disliked by men of this world, and with such must ever be unpopular, Romans viii. 7, "because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." But such as have the Spirit of God dwelling in them, ardently love this doctrine. Our blessed Lord and Saviour loved this doctrine. His Heavenly Father was the author of it, yet he rejoiced in it, Luke x. 21. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." Let us then preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Amen.

J. C. MONROE.

Sandy Cove, 17th March, 1875.

For the Christian Messenger.

BOSTON CORRESPONDENCE.

Dear Editor,—

Some of your readers may be interested in the way things go about Boston. The long, cold Winter has not yet entirely taken its departure, and snow and ice are to be seen in all directions. An occasional snowdrop or crocus attempts to bloom in