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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.
Joseph of Arimathea.

Boldly, yet sorrowfully the few
Before the haughty Roman stood;
Each thought of Him who on the cross
That day had shed His precious blood;
And over Pilate's son; there swept
The memory of that awful scene,
And his cheek paled as Joseph craved,
The body of the Nazarene.

Back to the cross the Councillor came,
And claimed the form extended there,
Then loving hands the body wrapped
In linen fine and spices rare.
And Joseph placed it in the tomb,
His own new tomb where ne'er man laid
And thus fulfilled the prophet's words—
'His grave shall with the rich be made.'

Though centuries have rolled away
Since Joseph's feet Judea trod,
His name still lives—a good man who
In secret loved the Son God.
But who, when Christ was crucified
In shame, and His disciples fled,
Owned his dear Lord and fearless laid
In his own sepulchre the dead.
E. E. C.

Religious.

(From the Scottish Baptist Magazine.)
Baptism: its Significance.

Every religion has connected with it more or less ceremonial observance: in addition to its peculiar beliefs, there are certain rites which embody them. The reason of this may be found in the constitution of human nature. Man is composed of body and spirit, and is thus united to the outward and sensuous, as well as to the inward and spiritual. This double relation he retains as long as he is an inhabitant of earth: he cannot free himself from any part of it. Therefore whatever appeals to his spiritual, must at the same time have some reference to his sensuous nature. Hence all religion, although it has exclusive reference to the high part in man, seeks to gain certain ends by the employment of outward and sensible symbols; and though these have occupied a position of much too great prominence, though rites have been and are subject to abuse, there is no religion so spiritual as to exist without them. Christianity itself is no exception; for in this matter—as in all others, it recognises the needs of man's nature and provides for them. Christ knew well the value of bringing truth before the mind by figure and symbol. His parables bear testimony to this, as do also those rites which He Himself instituted, which, however, were few and simple. His was not a religion of form but of spirit; He, therefore, introduced only those who were essential to the carrying out of the great ends He had in view. These are the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

It is with the first of these that we are now concerned.

In one of the verses of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, we have the cardinal truth, symbolised in baptism clearly stated:—"As many of you as have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ." There are many incidental things connected with the rite of baptism;—but the entering into the sphere of Christ, is the essential representation of the ordinance. This is its primary symbolical import. Union with the person of Christ is the grand thought which is put in visible form when the believer enters the baptismal waters. This is clearly seen by comparison of Christian Baptism with that of John. John baptised into repentance. Now what does this mean, but that they who before were regarded as outside the region of repentance, were by this outward sign represented as transferred into it; and the pointing out of the transference was the essential idea of John's baptism. Thus when we turn to Christian baptism, and read that it is "into Christ," we are forced to the conclusion that here also is signified the coming out of one sphere and the entering into another. The person baptised passes over from the body of

sin and death, into the body of Christ. There is a complete change. Just as when one comes of age, he passes into the state of manhood, taking upon him its responsibilities and enjoying its privileges. So at baptism one passes consciously from his old position as an alien, and enters into that closest of all relationships, expressed in New Testament language, as being "in Christ."

That this is the main design of baptism, is also established by the united testimony of Scripture. The inspired writers speak of being baptised "into Christ," "into the name of Christ," "into His death." Paul says, for by one spirit are we all baptised into one body." Here baptism is regarded as signifying a passing into that one body of Christ. It is so also in the words which we have taken as the basis of these remarks:—"For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ." He is over and around you, and you are within Him. As a garment is put on, and marks out the person wearing it, so Christ is put on and becomes the distinguishing mark of the believer at baptism. This fact, it is the first and grand design of his baptism to shadow forth.

There are, however, some things of a secondary importance portrayed in this ordinance. These have, in many cases, been exalted to undue prominence. A single aspect of the truth has been put for the whole. For example, we frequently hear it urged that baptism is intended to signify only that the believer is buried with Christ, and that he rises with him again in newness of life. But there is here only a part of the truth expressed; a part very strongly accentuated by the peculiar form of the symbol, but not to be regarded as the whole. It could not have had this limited meaning to those to whom it was administered before Christ died. In the passages quoted in support of this view, Paul only makes use of the outward form, the submersion and the emersion of the believer, in representing, with emphasis, two grand ideas of Christianity—dying with Christ to sin, and rising with Him to a new and divine life. But in doing this he only brings into clearer vision a certain aspect of the one central thought prefigured in baptism, a personal union with Christ.

On the other hand we find some asserting that the ordinance only signifies the washing away of the filth of the flesh. This is certainly shown forth in the rite; but it is only of secondary importance. Its chief aim is to symbolize the entrance of the believer into union with Christ. But now we ask what is implied when it is said that Christians have been baptised into Christ? Is it that the act of being immersed in water into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, really puts them into Christ? Is there some magical efficacy in the act which changes men's hearts? No, certainly not; this would attribute to the mere outward, sensuous rite an inward spiritual effect. Just as John's baptism, though intrepentance, did not make a man repentant, so the mere baptism of a person will not bring him into fellowship with Christ. Men have indeed said, that if one has observed this sacred ordinance, he is truly of the fold of Christ. Such a position, however, can only be taken up when the spirituality of the church is at a very low ebb; when men have lost in mere symbols the things set forth. They take for a literal passing into Christ what is only symbolical of such an act. A man must be already in Christ before he can be truly baptised into Him. Just as those who came to John were regarded as having repented before they offered themselves for the baptism of repentance.

It is here that we strike upon the true meaning of the phrase, "baptised into Christ." The believer is united to Christ by faith inwardly, and outwardly this union is officially proclaimed in the ordinance of baptism. In it he is marked off in the eyes of the world as so united to Him. He has, in baptism, put on Christ as a garment is put on,

which he wears before all men. Faith distinguishes believers spiritually; it makes them sons of God and heirs of His grace. Baptism is intended to distinguish them visibly, viewed in this light. Just as faith marks off a man in the eyes of God as a participator in the benefits of His Son's death, so baptism in the eyes of the Church and the world is evidence of the same thing. It shows his full identification with Christ.

It points, moreover, to the fact that this is conscious and voluntary. The will of the individual is freely exercised in the matter. The act is essentially his own. This is very clearly taught by the use, in the original, of a particular part of the word, "On your baptism," the apostle says, "Ye clothed yourselves upon with Christ. No one did it for you. You, by your own deed did it." The administrator does not put Christ on the believer. He is simply an instrument guided by the will of him who is baptised. Just as in the Lord's Supper, each one for himself commemorates the dying love of his Lord, so in baptism, each believer, by his own act, fully and consciously puts on Christ. He proclaims that he enters into Him: he declares himself a participator in His life as well as in His death and resurrection.

Now, following upon this view, there are certain inferences which may be drawn regarding the nature and the place of baptism in the Christian system.

(a.) The first is, that Christian Baptism is an entirely new rite. The mere form is not so. The Jews were familiar with "divers washings," but in its essential point, the rite as instituted by Christ is altogether new. It has not come in the place of circumcision. It gives expression to an idea which only arose with the birth of Christianity, and therefore it cannot be traced to any of the Judaistic practices.

(b.) There must be the possession of faith in Christ on the part of those who are baptised. This strikes at the root of the whole controversy which is waged around the subject. The position of parties is determined by the answer which they give to the question—Is personal faith necessary to the rightful administration of baptism? A large section of the Church has answered it in the negative. They say that faith is needful, but not on the part of those baptised,—the belief of the parent being held as sufficient ground for the baptism of his child. This, however, is not only at variance with Scripture, but also with the very idea expressed in the ordinance of baptism. That idea we have seen is the union of the believer with Christ by faith; but where there is no faith, how can there be union? and where there is no union, why administer that rite, the grand design of which is to symbolise this oneness with Christ? Clearly the giving of baptism to the infants of Christian parents, involves the unscriptural idea that fellowship with Christ comes as a birth-right. But we know that a man must be born again before he can be a member of the kingdom of heaven. The passport is personal faith; the outward sign of admission is baptism. Thus faith and baptism are inseparably connected. Whoever seeks to disunite them, does violence to both. Baptism therefore can only be rightly administered when they meet together in one person. That this was the practice of the early Christians there can be no doubt. Indeed, this is fully conceded by the intelligent men on the opposite side. In a book recently published, written by a theological professor, edited by two leading ministers, and designed for the instruction of the young, we read the following: "What is expressly commanded by Christ in regard to baptism is that those who are made disciples by the preaching of the Gospel should be baptised," and he adds, "and in all the instances in which baptism is said to have been administered, it was to such persons." What is

*The Sacraments. By Professor Candlish, D. D., in the series of "Hand Books for Bible Classes." Edited by Revs. Marcus Dods, D.D., and Alex. White, M. A. Chap. iv., p. 64.

needed now is to show that the express command is still in force; and where, we ask, is the authority for altering it? Christ and His apostles looked upon personal faith as an indispensable condition, and so ought we. Baptism was regarded by them as a conscious putting on of Christ, and Christians should still look upon it in the same light.

(c.) Further, an inference may be drawn as to the place which baptism occupies. To all inquiring minds there comes up the question, Is baptism the initiatory rite of the Christian life, or of the visible Church? Does it stand at the beginning of the Christian career, or at the entrance to communion with fellow-believers in the church on earth? From the main design of baptism we are forced to infer, that logically, its place is not at the entrance to the visible Church. It stands rather at the commencement of the Christian life. It is there that the real union of Christ and the believer takes place, and it is at that time that Christ should be put on in baptism. Practically, indeed, it does stand at the threshold of his church life; for when a man puts on Christ, he seeks to associate with those who form the members of the visible body. But there is no necessary connection between the act of baptism and that of joining in fellowship with any community of Christians. There is no scripture testimony to bear out such a conclusion. It is true that the great majority of those who were baptised in apostolic days, joined some church; and on the other hand, that the most of those in communion with the churches, were baptised. In Paul's words, "As many of you as have been baptised," we have the possibility that some of those addressed had not at that time observed the ordinance. Certainly it is the duty of all those who love the name of the Lord Jesus, to obey His command in this matter. But we know that the path of duty does not appear equally plain to all. There are some who have not seen their way to this outward putting on of Christ, who yet have an inward living union with Him. Are we then to exclude these from the fellowship of the visible Church? It is a belief in Christ, not baptism into His name, that is the condition of membership. There is no rite which stands as the gate of admission for believers. These have, in virtue of their union with Christ, free access to the privileges and advantages of Christ's Church. The position which baptism ought to be regarded as occupying, is the conscious putting on of Christ before the eyes of men. It is only thus that its true significance will be fully realized, and that the rite itself will be kept free from all abuse.

D. R. K.

What an institution the finding of mares' nests has become! Here is perhaps the latest discovery in that line. We had supposed from the way our old Bible reads that there was not the shadow of a doubt as to the fact that John administered the ordinance of baptism in the Jordan. All Christian travellers in Palestine have conceded this, and, in reverent recognition of the sacredness of the river, its waters have been bottled and borne to the most distant parts of Christendom and used by our Paedobaptist friends to give effect to christening scenes. But it turns out that they have been labouring under a delusion. One E. Thompson writes to the *Herald and Presbyterian* that it was not in but beyond the Jordan that John baptised. In proof of which this text is quoted: "These things were done in Bethabara, beyond (peran) Jordan, where John was baptizing," and the conclusion reached is that Jesus was unquestionably baptised by John in Bethabara. All of which might bother a few in these stirring political times, when we need our wits about us, but for the fortunate fact that we find in the old Bible a little verse which tells us that John's disciples "were baptised of him in Jordan." Perhaps the gifted Thompson has a Bible of his own.

For the Christian Messenger.
Acier on Small Churches.

Granted, that in some places, small churches are a necessity. In all the surrounding districts there may be no others holding the same views. There is, then, no option in the matter. We must have a small church or none at all. May all such prosper, and speedily grow large, by absorbing all the sinners around—by permeating all the families with the Gospel of the Redeemer.

But there is an unnecessary multiplying of churches, which is anything but beneficial. Here, for example, is a hamlet of a dozen families. None of them is very strong in influence, or in means. None particularly noted for their religious characteristics. More than probable they have their local jealousies. There is a want of confidence in one another. In fact, they all know too much about one another. Under such circumstances, how is it possible to keep up a church? Why, I hear some good brother exclaim, is not the grace of God sufficient to enable any people to keep up a church? Yes, I believe it is. But what if they persistently neglect to seek supplies of that grace? The Spirit of God does not ordinarily manifest His influence where people are actuated by jealousy, or hatred, or where they indulge in evil speaking. The curse of small communities is want of confidence in each other. As a matter of history, churches are not prosperous where they have not a strong converging influence from different points. My idea of a church, after twenty years experience, is that of a carriage wheel—the spokes all converging to the hub. Varied interests, different families, should come to a common centre. There should be one conference where all can confer upon the things that tend to the prosperity of the cause. There should be but one Communion Table, where the many should partake of the symbol of union—"the one loaf." Thus all the elements of strength would be brought together. There would be a church with a back-bone. It would be easier for purposes of business. Views could be interchanged, and a general policy agreed upon as to engaging a minister, raising denominational funds, &c., &c.

One potent reason for the larger organization, is, that in the little isolated bodies, it is next to impossible to carry out discipline. It becomes a family affair. We must have independent members to sit upon the case—that is, those who come from another district. Men are allowed to live and die members of churches whose lives are notoriously sinful, because there is not sufficient strength to deal with them. Thus, the existence of the little church is only a question of time: No minister, no letter to the Association, by-and-by no meetings. Write Ichabod upon the unpainted door of the dilapidated meeting-house, church vanished.

If at any time, some warm-hearted evangelist comes along, holds meetings, and rights up the old ship, it is but the fire of brushwood—a great flame and soon over, the little brand cannot burn alone.

Now it seems to me the remedy for all this, is to have larger churches. Instead of dividing, and sub-dividing, as has been the tendency of late years, let us unite one, two, three, or even four of these scattered interests. Let them agree upon a common centre. Let them choose a strong man for pastor, and beware of breaking him down by asking him to attend too many meetings. Let the people go to him at conference times, and preaching times, and on anniversary occasions, and let him go to them when they are sick or in trouble of any sort. Let him hold meetings whenever he may be in a particular locality, such meetings as I imagine Paul held when he "taught them" . . . "from house to house," gathering a few neighbours together and speaking to them about the greatest of all interests. Thus the work would be simplified and the burdens equalized, the strong church would have the strong minister, discipline