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Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

Thoughts on Theology.

No. V.

THE PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION

Principles, (continued.)

My Dear Sir,—

The records of the Patriarchal Dispensation are so scanty, consisting almost entirely of plain and brief narratives of events, that it is scarcely possible to gather from them such statements of the opinions held by the servants of God as would serve to place before us the theology of the period. If that difficulty was felt when treating of the thoughts concerning God entertained by those holy men it will be much more felt on other subjects. The information to be derived will be mostly in the form of inference.

Of angelic beings, for instance, we have no means of deciding what amount of knowledge was at that time possessed. The matter of fact is clear enough; the belief is hardly discernible. That the patriarchs were frequently visited by angels is evident; and there is no intimation of surprise on those occasions; they were accustomed to such visits. It was God's method of communication while as yet there was no written word. Probably, too, it was by the intervention of an angel that the divine will was announced when "God spake" to his servants. At such times the human form was assumed, as we learn from the narrative of Abraham's reception of "three men" when that memorable interview took place which is recorded in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, and from the account of Lot's deliverance from Sodom:—"the angels hastened Lot—and while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand." Referring to those circumstances, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Chap. xiii. 2.) But the facts only are made known. Not a word is uttered respecting the nature, powers and qualities of the heavenly visitants.

It is maintained by some that the expression, "Angel of the Lord," or, as they choose to render it, "Angel Jehovah," employed in Gen. xvi. 7-13, xxii. 11-15., indicates the Son of God, and is intended to instruct us that the providential administration of the affairs of the church, in all the stages of its development, was committed to him from the first. The description given of "Wisdom," in the eighth chapter of the Proverbs, and especially the words, "My delights were with the sons of men," have been adduced as illustrating and confirming this representation. It is particularly noticed that "the Angel of the Lord" spoke as God—"I will multiply thy seed exceedingly"—"By myself have I sworn; saith the Lord" (Gen. xvi. 10, xxii. 16); and that Jacob, when dying, said, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads" (Gen. xlviii. 15, 16). Other passages have been cited, such as the appointment of an "Angel" to conduct the Israelitish host through the wilderness, of whom Jehovah said "Provoke him not—for my name is in him"; and the appearance of the "Angel of the Lord" to Manoah and his wife (Judges xiii. 2-23). Some have gone so far as to refer to Nebuchadnezzar's declaration that he saw a fourth person walking in the fire with the three Hebrew brethren, and that "the form of the fourth was like the Son of God" (Dan. iii. 25)—as if that heathen monarch, or indeed any one else in those days, could know any thing about "the Son of God"!

Whether our Saviour anticipated, so to speak, his incarnation, by assuming the human form, and interposing, on some extraordinary occasions, for the guidance, protection, or comfort of his people, as "the Angel of the covenant," I do not feel competent to determine. The evidence is not sufficiently clear. It is an interesting speculation, and may be a truth. But it seems to me that more satisfactory proof is required.

The only reference to Satan, the chief of the fallen angels, is contained in the history of Job. What extent of knowledge the patriarchs had respecting the rebel spirits, we are not in a position to decide.

Nor can we state, positively, what they thought, and how they felt, regarding the fall of man, and his depravity. As I said before the time was not yet come for nice distinctions. But the facts were fully before them. Wickedness of all sorts abounded, from proud defiance of God to the despicable meannesses by which men circumvented and defrauded one another. It was not difficult to trace the unholy streams to the impure source. The godly of those times could not define and distinguish as men do now; but they could declare their abhorrence of evil! they could acknowledge their own imperfections and unworthiness; and they could express their conviction of the desperate nature of the moral malady, and the utter unattainableness of a sinless state. They confessed, as Dr. Watt says, that "the leprosy lies deep within." Here are Job's words:—"How should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand."—"If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me; if I say I am perfect it shall also prove me perverse."—"If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me into the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me."—"Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth."—"I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job ix. 2, 3, 20, 30; xl. 4; xlii. 6. He was not alone in these utterances. Eliphaz the Temanite used similar language:—"What is man, that he should be clean? and he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous?—Behold he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water? Job xv. 14-16.

There can be no doubt that the men of God in the patriarchal days walked humbly with him, and that their humility was based on their consciousness of indwelling sin.—Witness the self-abasing spirit manifested by Abraham while he pleaded for Sodom; and the words of Jacob when he sought deliverance from Esau:—"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." (Gen. xxxii. 10). And it is equally clear that they regarded all men as under solemn responsibility to the Almighty Governor and Judge. Joseph spoke from the depths of a holy conscientiousness when he repelled temptation by exclaiming, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"—(Gen. xxxix. 9.)

If such were their thoughts about sin, what hope had they of salvation? Here, it must be confessed, there is great obscurity. It could not be otherwise. There were gracious promises, which we flatter ourselves that we understand, and we are too apt to conclude that they were as well understood by those to whom they were first given. It should not be forgotten, however, that we, who live "after the fulfilment of the promises, are in very different circumstances from those of the men of the olden time. We believe that the announcement made in Eden has been accomplished in the incarnation of the Redeemer, who was "manifested" that "he might destroy the works of the devil"; but it is not to be imagined that our first parents and their immediate descendants discerned the meaning of the original promise as clearly as ourselves. We may feel assured that Abel "offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain," because he knew that the bloody sacrifice typified the great atonement, and was therefore enjoined; but no one can prove that such were his views, or define the limits of his religious knowledge. We perceive the meaning of the promise made to Abraham, that in him should all families of the earth be blessed;—it has been receiving for ages what Lord Bacon calls "a springing and germinant accomplishment";—but it is very questionable how far the patriarch himself penetrated into it. Some suppose that dying Jacob's exclamation—"I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord"—was an unmistakable aspiration after the great spiritual deliverance, which he dimly saw in the distance, and which he had

hoped might have been accomplished in his own life-time: yet it is by no means certain that he had any such thoughts.

There is, indeed, one passage which, in the judgment of some, throws more light on the subject. I refer to our Lord's words, addressed to the Jews—John viii. 56.—"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day," rather, "that he should see my day."—and he saw it and was glad"; with which may be conjoined the Apostle Paul's statement—Gal. iii. 16. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ." Granting that Abraham so understood it, and that, expecting the future Deliverer to spring from himself, he greatly rejoiced in the prospect, however remote and indefinite—who can tell how much of the truth was revealed to him, or how clearly he saw it? And this question may be more reasonably be asked, because we know that many ages after Abraham's time the prophets "inquired and searched diligently"—searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." (1 Peter i. 10, 11.)

But it is said, that "he saw it and was glad." Doubtless he did. When and how? in Paradise, where he has been living, with God and angels, and with other saints; ever since his death on earth. The history of the Church is unrolled before those blessed spirits who "through faith and patience inherit the promises." When the Son of God left heaven on his errand of love, the tidings were conveyed to every part of Paradise, gladdening the hearts of its inhabitants. It was the day of Christ. Abraham "saw it, and was glad." The song of the heavenly host at the Redeemer's birth was heard in the third heavens, and awakened ineffable sympathy and joy.

"Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." Matt. xiii. 16, 17.

Yours truly,

J. M. CRAMP.

Acadia College, March 10, 1868.

For the Christian Messenger.

Baptist Principles and Practices.

DEAR BROTHER,—

The following quotation may be of some service just now. It is from a volume entitled "Madison Avenue Lectures," and from the discourse delivered by Rev. E. G. Robinson, D. D. Dr. Robinson is Professor of Theology in the Rochester University, and is one of the most powerful thinkers of the day. The subject of his discourse is "The relation of the church and the bible." Our quotation is from page 418.

In contrast with the sects just named, the Baptists have always persisted in a maintenance of the true use of creeds, and of the true relation of church prerogative to scripture authority. They have no one authoritative creed to whose wording all must bow, no ecclesiastical judicatories, no canons, no directory, no book of discipline, and yet not a sect in Christendom is more completely one in its faith, more uniform in its ecclesiastical usages, or more prompt and rigid and efficient in its discipline. Presbyterians may hesitate and waver amid the divergencies of "old school and new school," and before the perplexities of the question of "infant membership"; Methodists may pause and wrangle over the question of "lay representation"; and Episcopalians may falter and stammer over their "baptismal regeneration." But Baptists in their convocations, have no questions of polity or faith which they fear to confront and frankly to dispose of. Their churches, brooking no assumption of authority by Association, or convention, hold themselves amenable to Christ alone. Their ministers acknowledging the right of no association, or convention, or any other ecclesiastical body to introduce them into the christian ministry, or to eject them from it, recognize themselves as responsible to the churches alone of which they are

members, and each church, maintaining its independency, and aided by such counsel as, in courtesy to other churches it may choose to ask from them, judges of the worthiness of its own members and ministers. By all true Baptists the voice of the church universal is attentively heeded, but in every discussion, whether of doctrine or of practice, their final appeal is to the bible, and to the bible alone."

ENQUIRER.

Burial before death!

Those who believe that sprinkling is a scriptural way of baptism, are not a little embarrassed by those passages in which baptism is compared to a burial. There is no denying or evading the fact, that the Apostle Paul in Romans VI. and Colossians II., does teach that our baptism is a symbolical burial. But our Pedobaptist brethren, even if they could succeed to their own perfect satisfaction in explaining how the Apostle came to use so strange a figure of speech, as that of calling the sprinkling of a few drops of water upon a person a burying in baptism, would still have accomplished only half the task. They would still have to justify themselves against the charge of premature burial. It is the "old man," according to Romans vi: 6, that is first crucified with Christ, and then buried with him. Until this old man, this body of sin, is actually dead, it is not for burial.

Now, evangelical Pedobaptists do not hold that the old and depraved nature has died in the young children whom they sprinkle. So that even if it were possible to express by sprinkling the true sense of the word baptize—which it is not; and even if sprinkling had any resemblance to burial—which it has not, they would still be unable to justify themselves in giving burial to those who are confessedly not yet dead.

Sometimes we are told, that when those who are baptized in infancy are afterwards converted, and so come to have both the inward reality and the outward sign, it is of no consequence which they had first. But this illustration may help to convince those who use this plea, that the order of these two requirements is as imperative as the requirements themselves. Death and burial are appointed for all men; but it is not immaterial which comes first. Regeneration and baptism are both divine requirements; but it is not immaterial which comes first. We do not bury the living, in the pious hope that they will die afterwards; we ought not to baptize the unregenerate, in the pious hope that they will be Christians some time or other.

There is a time to die, and a time to be buried; and the time cannot be rightfully or safely interchanged. There is a time of regeneration, and a time for baptism; and the times cannot be rightfully or safely interchanged. The living know that they must die and be buried; but they have a right to insist that the burial shall not antedate the dying. And since the little ones cannot speak for themselves, we speak for them, and insist upon their right to die before they are buried—to be converted before they are baptized.—Exchange.

For the Trouble-makers.

The forest of Lebanon once held a consultation to choose a King, upon the death of the king, the Yew-tree. They agreed to offer the crown to the Cedar; and if the Cedar should refuse, to invite the Vine and Olive to office. They all refused the honors for the following reasons: the Cedar refused, "because," said he, "I am sufficiently high as I am." "I would rather," said the Vine, "yield wine to cheer others, than receive for myself." And in the same manner, the Olive preferred giving its oil to honor others rather than receive any honors to itself.

All these having refused the honors offered them, they next agreed to call the Thorn to the government; and if he should decline, to choose the Bramble. The White Thorn in its beautiful dress, received the honor, speaking thus to itself: "I have nothing to lose but the white coat, and some red berries; and I have prickles enough to hurt the whole forest." But the Bramble instigated a rebellion