

Christian Messenger.

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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.

"WHAT DO YE MORE THAN OTHERS!"

Matt. v. 47.

What have I done, Oh! Blessed Lord!
In vain I look to see
Some worthy gift, some work or deed
That shall my answer be!
To find some battle wisely fought,
And gained o'er earth and sin,—
Some onward progress to the gate
Where I would enter in.

What have I done, Beloved Lord?
Thou see'st the devious way,
Duties neglected, cherished sins,
My wandering and delay;
The laggard zeal that scarce would hear
The Spirit's gentle call;
My selfish will, and proud, cold heart,
Dear Lord, Thou see'st all.

There is the plain safe way, the path
That shineth more and more,
There are the footsteps where He trod,
And there the Cross He bore;
But I have left undone the things
Thou gavest me to do,
And shrunk beneath my cross, and failed,—
Ah me, I know it now!

Failed in the love I owe my Lord,
Failed in my little task,
Lacking the strength He freely gives
To all who freely ask.
I would have followed my dear Lord
Through flood, and flame, and storm,
Yet hath my cold heart almost failed
In fortune's treacherous calm.

Here at Thy feet, my Lord, my King,
Once more I render Thee
That which my full heart gladly gives—
An offering full and free.
Take Thou my heart, Beloved Lord,
Though weak and sin-defiled,
And grant the strength that Thou can'st give,
The grace to be Thy child.

Thou know'st how full of weary care
Is life, how far from Thee
Our hearts, e'en when we feel the glow
Of warmest ecstasy.
This would I crave, though others stray,
To do Thy perfect will;
In life and death to follow Thee,
And love and serve Thee still.

A. W. F.

July 18th, 1869

Historical.

ANCIENT BAPTISTERIES.

By R. G. HATFIELD, OF NEW-YORK.

Among the many objects of interest which the ecclesiastical structures of Italy present to the architect, the antiquarian, and the Christian, the edifices erected for the administration of the rite of baptism have not received the attention they deserve. It is the design of the following article merely to name some of the baptisteries, and to state some facts concerning them, ascertained by recent personal observation. It is greatly to be desired that extended surveys and photographs of these interesting works be prepared and made generally accessible.

Distinct buildings, erected as baptisteries, may now be found in at least sixteen cities of Italy, viz: Rome, Ravenna, Florence, Pisa, Parma, Brescia, Areoli, Cremona, Genoa, Novara, Padua, Verona, Lucca, Pistoja, Siena, Bologna. Of these, some are plain and unpretending edifices, indicative of the style of the age in which they were designed. Others are more elaborately decorated, while a few, such as those at Pisa and at Parma, are magnificent marble structures, of great diameter and height.

These monuments of the practice of immersion in Italy date back to the fourth century. Previous to this there may have been artificial baptisteries; if so, they were of a temporary character, and gave place to fabrics constructed of more durable materials. The first Christians would naturally and necessarily select natural baptisteries,

such as rivers, lakes, and the sea; and where these were not readily accessible, the fountains and open cisterns abounding in Oriental countries. In the countries where Christianity gained its first converts, great care was taken, and great expense incurred, in all the cities and towns of any size, to secure a copious supply of good water; a fact to which the noble aqueducts still remaining, and the ruins of many others, continue to testify. At the present day, in Rome, Naples, Florence, Genoa, and other places, there are large fountains in the public squares, where water is obtained in abundance by all who will; and, at many of them, there may now be seen, almost every day, women washing soiled garments. Beside these, in the court of every considerable house and public building, there is always found a depression at the centre, into which enters the water from the roofs, flowing over the pavement. This construction was more common in the days of our Saviour than now, as is evident from the uncovered ruins of Pompeii, where may be clearly seen the plan of building among the Romans. In every house, of any pretensions, the outer wall was made for strength; high, thick, and solid, with very few openings for light or air. To obtain these latter, it was necessary and customary to construct the rooms or apartments against the outer wall, leaving an unoccupied space at the middle, of more or less ample dimensions, according to the size of the house. Upon this open space, or court, the various rooms at the outer wall fronted with their windows and doors; the upper apartments having galleries all around the court, and the roof of the house extending over the galleries, as well as over the rooms. These galleries, with their columns, arches, and cornices, afforded large opportunity for architectural embellishment; and, while from the exterior, a house might appear unsightly, even hideous, in the massiveness and roughness of its unembellished walls, a view of the interior, from its court, would fill the beholder with surprise and delight. This is the type to which all Italian and Oriental houses were made, in a greater or less degree, to conform. The court, being open to the sky, received the sunshine and the rain in common with the roof of the house. The rain water from the roof descended to the pavement of the court, and, together with that which fell upon the pavement, found its way to the cistern, or depression, at the centre. The cistern, sometimes, in the better class of houses, contained a fountain, from which water, brought by pipes from some neighboring eminence, was thrown upward, moistening and cooling the atmosphere, nourishing the plants and flowers at the margin of the fountain, and giving health to the occupants of the house. The surplus water was carried off by a waste pipe. These fountains, or cisterns, are many of them of ample dimensions to serve as baptisteries, and not only is it probable that they were used for this purpose, but it cannot be doubted that these courts served as a type of the great baptisteries afterwards erected, and some of which, as they now appear, we shall more particularly describe.

In Rome, is a building known as "S. Giovanni in Fonte," and commonly called the "Baptistry of Constantine." It is located within a few yards of the great church of St. John Lateran, once the city Cathedral. It is built of brick, is octagonal in form, and about 75 feet in diameter. It was erected by Constantine, and is decorated with marbles, the remains of buildings still more ancient. The two columns at the eastern entrance, and the eight principal columns of the interior are of porphyry. These latter eight, said to have been the gift of Constantine, are so disposed in plan as to form an octagon having its sides parallel with those of the building. The columns are not all alike, some having capitals of the Ionic order, and others of the Composite order. They were not made for this building, but were doubtless taken from the ruins of some heathen temple. These columns carry an entablature by which they are connected, and upon which stands another series of eight columns, smaller than the former. Upon these latter rests the octagonal drum of the lantern or cupola. The whole interior has a very antique appearance. The mosaics, on a gold ground, with which the ceiling of one of the two small chapels connected with the building, is decorated, are of the fifth century, and are among the most ancient mosaics of Rome. The usual restorations and repairs have been effected upon the building, from time to time, and some additions and decorations have been made by various pontiffs; but the walls and general arrangements are doubtless substantially the same as at first constructed. In connection with the work of restoration, the names of Sixtus III., Hilary, Anastasius IV., Urban VIII., and Innocent X., are mentioned. These last two restored it as it now is. The building, as a whole, has a very plain and ordinary appearance, and, except for its antiquity, and historical associations, would awaken but little interest. The object for which the building was erected, attracts at once the attention of the visitor. At the centre, within the area bounded by the eight columns, there is a depression in the pavement of the floor. This depression, or well, is octagonal in plan, with sides equidistant from the parallel with the sides of the building, and guarded with a heavy railing and balusters of marble. The railings at the sides of this well, three feet seven inches high, measure eleven feet in length each, or together, eighty-eight feet, the well being about twenty-eight feet diameter. The well is paved with marble, and its depth is twenty-two inches below the pavement of the building, or thirty-two inches below the marble coping upon which the railings stand. That the well was deeper originally, is shown by the marble panelling of the sides, the lower rail or band of which, is now almost entirely buried. It was originally, no doubt, about three and a half feet deep.

At the centre of the well stands an urn of green basalt, of sufficient size to immerse a child in. This urn is elevated upon a pedestal surrounded by steps. Access to it is obtained by first descending into the well, through a gate in the marble railing, down the marble steps, and thence across the pavement of the well, to the steps surrounding the pedestal upon which the urn stands. This is so inconvenient and unnatural a contrivance, as to carry conviction to any candid mind that the urn was not a part of the original plan. It has been added since. The large quantity of water required to fill the well being out of all proportion to the size of the infants brought there for baptism, and the desire of the officiating priests for an arrangement which would secure the performance of the rite without necessarily wetting his own garments, were the reasons for introducing the urn. Before the urn was placed there, the ordinance was administered to adults in the well or baptistry in presence of the assembled congregation standing within the building, and the candidates for baptism used the two small rooms, now called chapels, for changing their garments. Here is a building, planned and constructed for the express purpose of administering the rite by immersion, built in the early part of the fourth century. This building is a history in brick and stone. Constructed originally for immersion,—the immersion of adults,—as is shown by its antique baptistry; the font of green basalt placed upon the floor of that baptistry, testifies, in enduring marble, to the fact that the baptism of infants has supplanted the baptism of adults. And the small bowl-sized fonts now used, not in baptisteries, but in churches, are so many more monuments of another fact, that sprinkling has supplanted immersion.

The baptistry of the city of Ravenna, on the easterly shore of Italy, is of equal antiquity with that of Rome. It was erected in the fourth century, and was restored, in 431, by Archbishop Neo. Like that of Rome, it is octagonal in form, and the large well at the centre, built of slabs of white marble and porphyry, with an ambo or recess for the officiating priest, testifies to the ancient practice of immersion.

The baptistry of Florence is an octagonal structure, larger and finer than that of Rome. It is 100 feet diameter, and is supposed to date from the sixth century. It

was a complete building in 725. Its floor is paved with marble, and one may walk freely across it without obstruction; there is no sunken baptistry with its guard railing around it, as at Rome; no, all is clear and plain now. But in the pavement there is seen the coping of the original baptistry that once occupied the centre of the floor. The coping forms an octagon, of about the same diameter as that at Rome, and bears an inscription which attests the fact of the former existence and size of the sunken well, and that in its place a font has been substituted. But the supplanting was not done as at Rome. Here the change was more thorough and complete, and suited more perfectly to the new practice of the rite. The depression was filled up, and floored over with marble tiling, to compare with the floor of the building, preserving only the coping to mark the location, the form, and the size of the original baptistry. The Romanists, having no need to obliterate the evidence that immersion was the original mode, carefully made this inscription, and to this day, speak freely of immersion as the original practice. Their apology for the change in mode, is the authority of the Church, an authority, in their minds, equal to that of the Bible.

At Brescia, in the north of Italy, a circular building of the ninth century is called the "Old Cathedral," but from its form, externally and internally, and the fact that the centre part of the floor, that included within the circular colonnade, is depressed below the other portion, the indications are that it was originally not the Cathedral but the Baptistry.

At Bologna, also, the church of St. Stephanus, erected in the eighth century, is supposed to have been the baptistry. It is now used as a chapel, as is the case with the baptistry of Florence, and many others. Many of the baptisteries of Italy now have, and, probably, they all had, baptismal fonts of ample dimensions for the immersion of children. Among those that now have them may be mentioned the baptisteries of Cremona, Parma, Verona, Pistoja, Amalfi, Ravenna, and Pisa. The fonts in these are each hewn from one immense block of marble, usually from 8 to 12 feet diameter. The one at Verona is 31 feet circumference, from one piece of Veronese marble. That of Parma is of yellowish red marble, in one piece, very large, and octagonal in plan, but it is not now used; a small font at one side being found quite sufficient for all present needs. In nearly all the cities of Italy, a smaller font, holding a few quarts of water, is now employed. These, generally, are not located in the baptisteries, but in the cathedrals, the baptisteries being turned from their original purpose, and now used as chapels.

Among the late baptisteries, one of the most splendid is that at Parma, 1186-1281, constructed entirely of red and gray Veronese marble. The baptistry of Pisa, commenced in 1152, is a circular building, 116 feet diameter outside, 99 feet within, built of solid marble, its walls being 8½ feet thick. The centre is sunk three steps below the surrounding pavement, from which the spectators witnessed the performance of the rite. The building is lofty, and is a fine specimen of Italian Gothic architecture.

Knight, in his Ecclesiastical Architecture of Italy, says: "In the early ages baptisteries were always separate buildings, and always either in a circular or octagonal form. The baptism of adults only took place at the three great festivals of Easter, Pentecost, and Epiphany, and, in consequence of the restriction, very large numbers of persons were baptized at the same time. Distinct and spacious baptisteries were, in consequence, erected, and, as plenary immersion was insisted upon, a circular bath was provided in the centre of the baptistry, into which the neophytes descended by steps. The inconvenience of increasing multitudes, as well as the progress of refinement, gradually led to a change of system. Plenary immersion was no longer insisted upon. The ceremony was transferred to the church, and the baptisteries were gradually deserted. Adult baptism now became the exception, and infant baptism the rule."—*Baptist Quarterly*, July.