

[From the Primitive Church Magazine.]

Essay on Christian Baptism, by BAPTIST W. NOEL, M. A. Pp. 321. London: James Nisbet and Co.

[CONCLUDED.]

"Having already proved that Christ has commanded his ministers to baptize believers I proceed to show that no one who does not make a consistent profession of faith ought to be baptized.

"*Meaning of the Commission.*—I. This follows directly from the commission given by Christ to disciples; for since he said to them, "Go and disciple all nations, baptizing them," thus directing them to make men disciples and then to baptize them, when can christian ministers' derive authority to reverse that order? Why did Christ say that they were to baptize believers if faith was not necessary to baptism? If all men indiscriminately might be baptized, then with respect to baptism faith was immaterial; and if faith is immaterial to baptism, why was it specified in the commission? When Oliver Cromwell, who saw that the forces of the parliament were beaten by the troops of Charles the First, because there were gentlemen in the ranks of the royal army and none but low men of worthless character in the other, sent out his recruiting sergeants to enlist godly and sober young men into his regiment, would they have been entitled to enlist drunkards and profligates because he had not expressly excluded them? His specification of the godly and the sober excluded all the rest. And when the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded his ministers to enlist believers under his banners by baptism, he has excluded all the rest. When God enjoined upon Abraham and on his children and servants circumcision, as the token of his covenant with that family, the mention of these classes excluded all others. And unless they had received express permission to admit proselytes into the privileges of the national covenant, they would have had no right to admit them. So when Christ has declared that believers shall be admitted to the token of the covenant of grace, no one else can be admitted to that token without express permission. To have circumcised a heathen stranger without command from God would have been presumptuous in the Israelites, and to baptize an unbeliever without command from Christ must be presumptuous in a christian minister now. From our Lord's naming believers as the proper subjects for baptism, it is plain that none others must be baptized unless christian ministers have his authority, expressed or implied, to baptize them. And as he has never given such permission, it follows that none but those who make a consistent profession of faith ought to be baptized.

"Our Lord has here forbidden any persons to apply for baptism who are not true believers and he has forbidden his ministers to baptize any who do not seem to be true believers.—But as no man can read another's heart, reason agrees with apostolic precedents to declare that no minister should refuse baptism to a candidate of sound creed and of christian habits because he does not feel sure of his conversion; otherwise baptism might be refused to many true believers. Real faith, therefore, warrants the candidate to apply for baptism, and a credible profession of faith warrants the minister to receive him.

"2. It appears, further, that no one but a believer should be baptized, from the nature of the profession made in baptism.

"Baptism being, as we have proved, a profession of repentance and of a new life, in which the baptized person is consecrated to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost no one but a believer can make this profession without falsehood.

"How can one who does not mean to renounce all sin be immersed, to signify his death unto sin, without hypocrisy? How can one whose heart is unchanged, profess, by rising from the water, that he means to live a new life of faith, of gratitude, of obedience, of spirituality, when he has no such intention? How can one who is still a votary of pleasure, a servant of the world, a slave of Satan, profess, without falsehood, to consecrate himself to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, by being immersed in water unto the name of God? And since there is manifest falsehood in the profession made in baptism by every unregenerate person, how can christian ministers have authority from Christ to sanction such falsehood by administering baptism to any persons who are manifestly unconverted? No one, therefore, who does not make a consistent profession of faith can be admitted to baptism without manifest disregard

of the nature of the ordinance, or without sanctioning sin in the person baptized."

In the third chapter infant baptism comes under view; wherein it is shown that, not only Jesus did not appoint it, but that in its nature it is improper and unlawful. We like the serious and decided tone in which the following is expressed:—

"We have seen that baptism is a solemn profession of repentance, faith, and devotedness, which no one but a believer can honestly make, and which therefore ought to be administered to no one without a credible profession of faith. As, then, infants are incapable of such profession, they ought not to be baptized without express authority from Christ, which cannot be adduced; or plain apostolic precedents, which are not to be found.

"Since Christ has made baptism to be a voluntary act, what right have his ministers to substitute for it what is perfectly involuntary? No baptized infant has been baptized by his own consent, no person baptized in infancy has ever in his own person honoured Christ's ordinance; but conformity was forced upon him when he was as unconscious as a stone. Can this be right? Since Christ has required baptism as a profession of faith in him, how can his ministers lawfully administer it to those who can make no profession, and thus, with respect to them, completely alter the whole character of his ordinance?—Since he has made repentance and faith necessary to baptism, what right can they have to set his commands aside by baptizing those who have neither repented nor believed?—And since he has ordained that saints and faithful brethren should be introduced to fellowship with saints and faithful brethren by this ordinance, how can it be proper that churches should by it receive into their society unregenerate and unconscious infants instead?

"Infant baptism differs essentially from the baptism of believers. The believer is active in his reception of baptism, but the infant is passive; the believer asks for it as a privilege, the infant receives it without his consent; the one by it professes his faith, the other professes nothing. The baptism of the believer, and the baptism of the infant, are therefore two different baptisms, with different significations and different consequences; and both, therefore, to be lawful must have a separate warrant from the Lord. Since they are quite different institutions, the precept which enjoins the one rather by inference forbids the other. Since Christ has commanded a baptismal profession, no man may, without his authority, hinder that baptismal profession by substituting a parental act for the act of the person himself. Since baptismal dedication in infancy sets aside, with reference to all such infants, baptismal profession in after life, the one must not be lightly substituted for the other, lest a human invention be found to subvert a divine ordinance. The commands of Christ to each penitent believer are plain.—"Repent, and be baptized;" "Arise, and wash away thy sins;" "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." But where is the authority for the baptismal dedication of the infant without profession? In vain do we look through the whole New Testament for a line, for a word, in its favour."

The fourth chapter is devoted to a consideration of the effects of baptism; wherein is contemplated, first, the influence which the baptism of a believer is likely to have upon himself, upon the church of which he becomes a member, and upon spectators. Under this head are some excellent and telling remarks; but which our space forbids us quoting. Contrasted with this our author considers, secondly, the effects of infant sprinkling. We give the following as a specimen of Mr. Noel's impressions and sentiments:—

"1. Its first effect is to abolish almost entirely in any church and in any nation the baptism of believers. It is not an addition to the baptism of believers, but supersedes it; because when a nation adopts the profession of christianity, almost all its children are baptized, and there remain no adults unbaptized. The consequence is, that all the effects of the baptism of believers vanish with it. A baptism of dedication, not sanctioned by Christ, and of which no instance is found in the New Testament, has abolished the baptism of profession instituted by Christ, and alone declared to be practised by apostles. The intense emotions with which converts might give themselves in baptism to the service of the Redeemer are precluded; and the church, the congregation, the world, lose the impressions which might be derived from witnessing the act by which believers, lately turned from

darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, surrender themselves to the service of the Redeemer. Christ's baptism, with all its blessings, is set aside to introduce another baptism derived from false analogies and forced inferences, of which neither Christ nor his apostles have said one word. Through the baptism of unconscious infants, the solemn, affecting, and salutary baptism of repentance, faith, and self-dedication to God, has nearly vanished from the churches.

"2. What have the churches gained by this substitution? I can find no benefit whatever derived from infant baptism by infants, or their parents, or the churches, or the world. Infants altogether unconscious are thus dedicated to God, falsely by unbelieving parents, and sincerely by parents who believe. In the former case, parents sin by an act of hypocrisy; in the second, they do what they would do without baptism, and no more? But what does the infant gain? Without baptism he might receive parental training, be placed under a pious master, listen to earnest preaching, join in the prayers of the congregation, associate with godly friends, be instructed at a good school, become a member of the pastor's bible-class, and attend the prayer-meetings of the congregation. From what means of instruction is the unbaptized child of christian parents excluded which would be open to the baptized child? Under the Mosaic economy, which was exclusive, circumcision admitted the child to the temple-worship, to the teaching of the rabbins or priests, to the passover, and other festivals, to association with the chosen people, to the use of all the means of instruction then in the world, from which the uncircumcised were excluded; but under the christian economy which is meant for the world, there is no such exclusion. The unbaptized child, has all the advantages which were possessed by the circumcised child, and many more; nay, further, he has all the advantages possessed by the baptized child. In no respect does the first differ from the second, except that he does not bear a name which by itself is delusive and worse than worthless.—The unauthorized baptism of infants cannot be shown to render to them any service whatever. It renders no advantage to their parents. By the complete subjection of a child to the will of his parents, by his imploring helplessness, by his docility and artlessness, by the sacred trust which God has put in the hands of his parents, by the parental love with which he has implored them, are they bound and urged to dedicate him from his infancy to God, to instruct and train him for God, and guide him by precept and example to the knowledge and love of his Maker. Can baptism add anything to these obligations? Does it, in fact? Even parents who have sprinkled their children feel the force of these natural motives, day by day, a thousand times more than they do the influence of that religious sprinkling. Pious parents do not need this new inducement to educate their children well; ungodly parents cannot feel its force.—On the other hand, the actual practice of paedobaptist churches too clearly proves that the churches themselves take very little interest in the ceremony. Baptism, except as far as superstition has invested it with imaginary spiritual power, seems to me to have dwindled into a formality."

At the close of the volume there are a few remarks advocating free communion. Here we shall have to break a lance with our brother. We purpose to take up the subject in our next number.

On a subject which has been controverted for centuries, and which on both sides of the question has occupied the pens of our most learned and able divines, it was not to be expected that any statement or argument should be put forth possessing the charm of novelty; nor does this work possess such claims. It is, however, a performance entitled to great respect, and must command it from all serious minds. Mr. Noel writes like a good man, rather than as a theological gladiator; evidently impressed with the importance of the subject discussed, and desirous of knowing and doing his Master's will. The spirit in which he has written is highly exemplary; he is always calm and dignified, and never sinks the courtesy of the gentleman, or sins against the meekness of the christian. Notwithstanding, he is very decided in his views, and exhibits them with remarkable perspicuity, and frequently with much force. Our Paedobaptist brethren will find him no contemptible opponent. They have in their ranks great talents and much learning. These will be in requisition, in order to get up even a plausible case in reply.

His frequent and solemn appeals to their consciences claim their devout consideration.—We commend the work to all good men, and the blessing of our glorious Redeemer, whose cause it so ably advocates.

Newton and Chalmers on Calvinism.

[The following testimonies of competent witnesses, is worthy to be pondered. This testimony pertains, in one case, to the biblical origin, and in the other, to the practical results of Calvinism.]

JOHN NEWTON.

When such men as the eminently pious and devoted Newton, some of whose devotional hymns are favourites with the pious of all denominations avow themselves believers in the distinctive doctrines of Calvinism, it should lead those who are in the habit of denouncing that system as the sum of all that is hateful and horrible, to suspect that they "neither know what they say, nor whereof they affirm." Especially is this the case, when the sentiments of Newton are re-echoed and confirmed by such giants in intellect as Chalmers, Candlish, &c., and by such characters as Dr. Tyng, Bishop Johns, &c. &c. Surely if Calvinism were that impious compound of blasphemy and licentiousness, which some persons would persuade the world to believe, these men, and such as these, were capable of making the discovery. Take, for example, the testimony of John Newton, himself one of the most remarkable and distinguished illustrations of the power of Free and Sovereign Grace, that the world ever saw. He avows himself, as will be seen, a "rigid Calvinist."

As to the doctrines which are stigmatized by the name of Calvinism, I cannot well avoid the epithet *rigid*, while I believe them, for there seems to be no medium between holding them, and not holding them; between ascribing salvation to the will of man, or the power of God;—between grace and works;—between being found in the righteousness of Christ, or my own. Did the hard consequences often charged upon the doctrine called Calvinism, really belong to it, I should have much to answer for, if I had invented it myself, or taken it upon trust from Calvin: but as I find it in Scripture, I cheerfully embrace it, and leave it to the Lord to vindicate his own truth, and his own ways, from all imputations which have been cast upon them.—*Presbyterian Advocate.*

DR. CHALMERS.

How comes it, that Scotland, which, of all the countries in Europe, is the most signalized by the moral glory that sits on the aspect of her general population? How, in the name of mystery, should it happen, that such a theology as ours is conjoined with perhaps the yet most unvitiated peasantry among the nations of Christendom? The allegation against our Churches is, that in the argumentation of our abstract and speculative controversies, the people are so little schooled to the performance of good works. And how is it, that in our courts of justice, when compared with the calendars of our sister kingdom, there should be so vastly less to do with their evil works? It is certainly a most important experience, that in that country where there is the most of Calvinism, there should be the least of crime, that what may be called the most doctrinal nation of Europe, should, at the same time, be the least depraved, and the land wherein people are most deeply imbued with the principles of salvation by grace, should be the least distempered either by their weekly profligacies, or their Sabbath profanations. When Knox came over from the school of Geneva, he brought its strict, and, at the same time, uncorrupted orthodoxy along with him; and not only did it flame abroad from all our pulpits, but through our schools and our catechisms, it was brought down to the boyhood of our land; and from one generation to another have our Scottish youth been familiarized to the sound of it from their very infancy; and unpromising as such a system of tuition might be in the eye of the mere academic moralist to the object of building up a virtuous and well-doing peasantry, certain it is, that, as the wholesale result there has palpably come forth of it the most moral peasantry in Europe, notwithstanding. We know of great and grievous declensions, partly owing to the extension of our crowded cities being most adequately followed up by such a multiplication of churches and parishes as might give scope to the energies of our ecclesiastical system; and principally, we fear to a declension from that very theology which has been denounced as the enemy of practical righteousness.