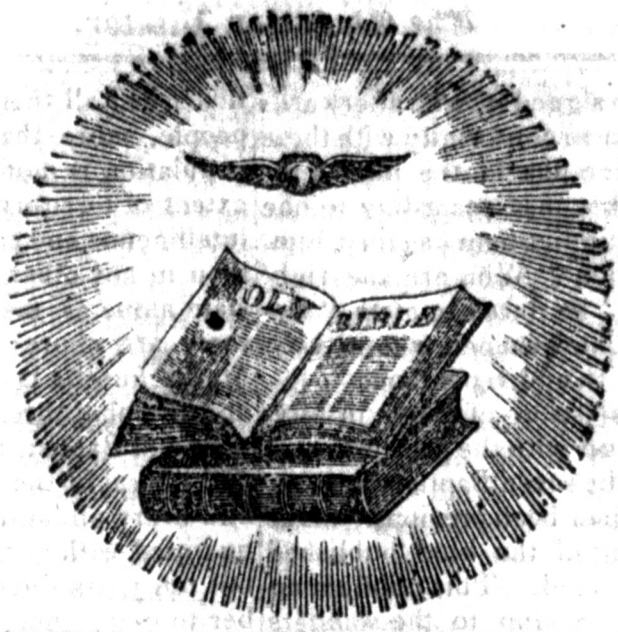


CHRISTIAN



VISITOR.

A Family Newspaper: devoted to

Religious & General Intelligence

REV. E. D. VERY,

"BY PURENESS, BY KNOWLEDGE—BY LOVE UNFEIGNED."—ST. PAUL.

EDITOR.

Volume V.

SAINT JOHN, NEW-BRUNSWICK, FRIDAY, MAY 14, 1852.

Number 17.

POETIC GEMS.

THE WISE MAN.

The wise man (says the Bible) walks with God;
Surveys, far on, the endless line of life;
Values his soul, thinks of eternity,
Both worlds considers, and provides for both;
With reason's eye his passions guards; ab-
stains
From evil; lives on hope,—on hope, the fruit
Of faith; looks upward, purifies his soul,
Expands his wings, and mounts into the sky;
Passes the sun, and gains his Father's house,
And drinks with angels at the fount of bliss!

Believing, in Thy glorious gospel day,
Types, emblems, shadows, all must pass away;
In such I dare not place my trust and stay.

Abba! on Thee with child-like trust I call;
In self-abasement at Thy footstool fall;
Asking to know but Thee, and find Thee all!

THE DOCTRINE OF THE SACRAMENTS.

We give the following, from an article of E. B. Underhill, Esquire, of London. The statement of the doctrines held by the various Reformed Churches and that of the Baptists, is so clear, so satisfactory, that we cannot refrain from giving them to our readers. The tendency towards sacramentalism has developed itself in almost every branch of the Christian Church. It is the question that underlies the Puseyite controversy among the English and American Episcopalians. The Baptists, if we except the movement of Mr. A. Campbell and his followers, have been preserved from its influence.

We now turn to the last topic on which we propose to engage the attention of our readers—that of the respective views held by Baptists and other Protestant Churches on the so-called sacraments.

The views of the great parties into which Protestants are divided, on the meaning and use of the two positive institutions of Christianity, have from the beginning differed fundamentally, and given rise to prolonged and bitter controversies. It is obvious, on a very cursory glance at the formularies and confessions of the different Churches, that the doctrines of Rome have on this subject exercised a strange influence; that the Protestant sects but very imperfectly freed themselves from notions of sacramental grace and efficacy, and the trammels of priestly power. The Lutheran churches, under Luther's guidance, maintained with much fulness the original error of Rome. According to them, God proffers in the sacraments, and communicates to the participant, invisible and heavenly blessings, thro' the external signs He has appointed. These external signs have secured to them, by the promises of God, an invisible divine thing; and, when rightly administered, effectually and really communicate the blessing to all believing communicants. Thus, in baptism, regeneration and remission of sins are infallibly given to the believing neophyte, while in the infant heart is planted the germ of faith. In the Lord's Supper, Christ, in his living bodily personality, as the God-man, is present. His body and blood, after the consecration of the elements of bread and wine, are actually existent on the altar, and received by the communicant, while in their reception the germ of the resurrection-life is imparted.

These views are opposed by the Calvinistic Churches as but little removed from the *opus operatum* of Rome. On the other hand, the sacraments are affirmed to be outward symbols, representing the Divine promise and mercy to men, which God's grace and Spirit have imparted to their souls. They are yet

more than this. Though symbolic of the Divine mercy, they also seal to every believer, to every one in the covenant of grace, (that is to say, to the elect,) the benefits of Christ's redemption, "so as to oblige them to obedience, to testify and cherish their love to one another, and to distinguish them from those that are without." Grace, however, is not absolutely and exclusively tied to the sacraments; to the non-elect and unbelieving they are valueless. In respect to baptism, it is God that freely purges us from our sins in his Son's blood, and Christ adopts us into his family, making with us a holy covenant, and enriching us with the gifts of grace. "All these things are sealed up unto us in baptism." Inwardly, these gifts and graces are wrought by the Holy Spirit, outwardly, they are sealed by water, and by it represented to the eye. The baptized become bound to fight in the Christian warfare, and to render all due obedience to the Lord's commands. Their covenant relation to God through their covenanted and elect parents, entitles infants to every privilege and blessing of the gospel, which are sealed unto them in the baptismal rite in virtue of their presumed election. In this view of baptism, the Calvinistic Churches substantially agree. A portion of the Congregational body in England, however, following Dr. Hally, deems the rite to be a mere symbol, a significant emblem of divine truth, a sacred sign of evangelical doctrine, illustrative of some important truths of the gospel, and to be administered indifferently to all, without respect to age, character, or condition. As to the holy Supper, the Calvinistic Churches believe only in a spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament. The enjoyment of blessing or grace is made dependent on the believer's faith; the body and blood of Christ are received only after a spiritual manner by the soul. Faith, co-working with the sign, raises the soul upward into a state of communion with the Redeemer; but this communion is by no means dependent on the sign. It only happens to be contemporaneous. It may, at all other times, be realized by a living faith, without the sign. Nevertheless, the rite seals the benefits of Christ's sacrifice to all believers, and is an assurance or pledge of their acceptance with God. In the practical carrying out of these views, Calvinistic Churches profess to baptize the children of believers only—that is, the children of professed Christians—and receive all the baptized to the table of the Lord, presuming their baptism a sufficient guaranty of genuine discipleship. The Congregational churches do not act on this broad principle. With the exception already alluded to, they, for the most part, admit to baptism the children of believers only, understanding thereby those who are sincere followers of Christ: but admission to the Lord's Table is barred against all, even the baptized, who do not evince unequivocal signs of a true conversion to God. Thus the purity of our church-fellowship is maintained at the cost of consistency; for it is self-evident, that if the baptized children of believers inherit all the blessings of the gospel covenant, it were inconsistent to exclude them from the enjoyment of any part of them. Either a sign is imparted which has no significance, or they are ejected from church privileges whom baptism has sealed as the covenant children of God.

The Church of England belongs to neither of these parties. The sacraments are not, in its view, on the one hand, mere barren signs of God's grace and goodness, but are effectual to work and to quicken, to strengthen and confirm faith in God: nor, on the other, do they become effectual to this end, unless worthily received and duly administered. Two parties, however, divide this Church as to the

mode in which the sacraments operate. Thus, one affirms that the "wholesome effect or operation" is inseparable from the rite, unless unworthiness intervene to prevent the gracious result; and especially with respect to the Eucharist, the Redeemer is really, though spiritually present, the believing recipient communicating in the precious body and blood of Christ after a mystical and supersensual manner. The other party affirms, that the gracious effect is separable from the rite, though it may be imparted at the same time the rite is performed, as it is *one*, though *but one*, of the several means and channels of grace appointed for the salvation of men. Regeneration, therefore, is not a special grace of baptism. It may be wrought either by the preaching of the Word, or by the gift of the Holy Spirit at some other time. And as it respects the second rite of the Church, the blessings of salvation are enjoyed through faith; yet may that faith be quickened and revived in the presence of the sacred signs by which, as it were, Christ is set forth crucified before the eyes of men.

It were beside our purpose to detain our readers with any remarks on the question, which of these views accords most nearly with the language of the Anglican formularies. It is, however, our opinion, and one shared in by large numbers of impartial men, that the first view most truly expresses the teaching of the Articles and Liturgy. The two views are fundamentally discordant; and it can be no matter of surprise that the conflict upon them now agitating the Anglican establishment, threatens its disruption.

With none of these opinions do the Baptists agree. Mere signs the sacraments cannot be, simply illustrative of important truth, since by baptism the convert is actually incorporated into the visible Church of God; while, by participation in the Holy Supper, he expresses his faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb, and his fellowship with the family of the redeemed. Still less are these rites the channels of grace, of regeneration and forgiveness, or seals and assurances of the believer's acceptance with God. We may express the Baptist views of baptism for instance, in the words of the ancient confession: "Sacred baptism is an outward, visible, and evangelical action, in which, following the precept of Christ, and the practice of the apostles, they who have heard the doctrine of the holy gospel, and have believed, and willingly received it with a penitent heart, are baptized in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Or, in a yet later confession, that of 1646: "Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ to be dispensed on persons professing, or that are made disciples, who upon profession of faith, ought to be baptized, and after to partake of the Lord's Supper. As the answer of a good conscience, as the solemn confession of faith in Christ, and of adherence to his kingdom, baptism is an act of practical importance and value. A line of distinction is drawn between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan. It is the boundary of the Church visible, and the badge of Christian discipleship. Yet baptism is not without an additional and symbolic meaning. Death to sin and to the world is imaged forth in the act of immersion, and a new and holy life entered upon, as the child of God emerges from the laver of regeneration. "It is a sign," says the latter confession just now quoted, "of the interest the saints have in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and that as certainly as the body is buried under water and risen again, so certainly shall the bodies of the saints be raised by the power of Christ in the day of resurrection, to reign with Christ."

But inasmuch as neither the initiatory rite nor the symbol can find their full meaning

and realization in any but the truly regenerate, in them that believe; since baptism is expressive of a real transfer from Satan's kingdom to God's, and a symbol of that final redemption in which faith rests, and which hope anticipates; the rite itself must be limited in its application to those in whom these things are realized. Hence infants, who possess neither the ability to confess Christ, nor the power to comprehend the blessings of salvation, cannot be fit subjects of baptism; and, in opposition to the whole of Christendom, the Baptist churches refuse to perform what must in all such cases be an unmeaning ceremony.

Here, as in former instances, Scripture is the guide of the Baptist churches. On the institutions of the new covenant, the instructions of Christ, by whose blood it was ratified, are held to be paramount and alone. What cannot be proved by the New Testament, they reject. They cleave to the simple and determinate language of holy writ. Sacramental grace and federal privileges appear to them to have no place in the rule of faith. And on the doctrine of the sacraments, as on other points, they are compelled to bear their testimony against various perversions still upheld by Protestant churches, as well as by the source of all these errors, the Church of Rome itself.

In every stage of the Reformation, this testimony was borne. Perspicacious men saw, that in the absolute and theological authority of Scripture lay the sacramental and ecclesiastical views the Baptists deduced from it.—But the principle covered too large a field for the Reformers, and they shrank back from pursuing the course to which God's Word and providence summoned them. They stopped short in its application to the interpretation of Scripture itself; they hesitated to employ it in the ecclesiastical arrangements necessitated by their abandonment of Rome; they feared for the ark of God, if it were not upheld by human might; and the counsels of earthly potentates were more regarded in the construction of the church fabric, its national extension and maintenance, than the might and wisdom of Him "who is the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords." And not only so; our sorrow at this departure from the principles the Reformers had themselves announced, is deepened as we remember that the secular arm, on which they leaned, was employed by them to repress every differing sentiment. It did not suffice to garb heavenly truth in ragged tatters of human device and construction. Everywhere the objector was met, in Protestant as well as in Romish countries, with reproach and torture. The streams and dykes of Holland, the market-places of broad Germany, the mountain lakes and dales of glorious Switzerland, together with the Smithfield of Old England, and the settlements of New-England, bear witness to the steadfast faith, the glowing and unwavering attachment to the truth as it is in Jesus, the ardent love for Christ, and devotion to his crown and covenant, of the myriad of martyred Baptists, who, for their testimony to the word of God, cheerfully, yea, joyously laid down their lives, "not accepting deliverance." But that testimony has borne rich fruit. Liberty, the free expression of thought and piety in their many forms, has been won. Numerous churches have arisen, are still rising, in which Christ is the only acknowledged head and lawgiver. Modern legislation breathes the spirit of charity, tolerance, and peace; and the agitations which now rock every church, bid fair to place in a broad and unmistakable light the evils which must ever follow, which have so plentifully followed, every departure from the pure words of the divine testimony.