

# CHRISTIAN



# VISITOR.

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## HYMN.

Zion, thou city of our peace,  
Thy walls are strength, thy gates are praise,  
With favour thou art compass'd round;  
To thee th' assembling nations throng,  
To sing with joy the Lord's new song,  
And triumph in the gospel's sound.

In Zion David's greater Son  
Is seated on his righteous throne,  
Justice and judgment to declare;  
'Tis there he lives his saints to bless,  
And they proclaim aloud his grace,  
Made joyful in his house of pray'r.

Then let our thankful tongues repeat,  
Peace be to Salem's glorious seat!  
Where Jesus reigns to endless days;  
Where brethren and companions dwell,  
United to maintain his will,  
A people form'd to shew his praise.

[FOR THE CHRISTIAN VISITOR.]

## THE BAPTISTERIES OF ITALY.

The day has gone by, when Baptists can be contemptuously injured, or their principles treated with open or silent contempt. They have had no inglorious history. Can others boast of the antiquity of their creed? We ask the historian to point to a period in church history when Baptists were unknown, or their principles untaught. Have other portions of the christian church known how to live a life of patience amidst dire afflictions, and to die a martyr's death with joy? To swell that sanguine flood which has so copiously watered the seed of the gospel, Baptists have poured out, with no stinted measure, their hearts best blood. The desolate Alpine peaks could not shelter them; the deepest forests of Germany afforded no hiding place from persecution, —and on that scroll of martyrs, whose holy lives and heroic deaths were for England, her liberty and religion, a Baptist name stands first, and a Baptist name stands last. He knew how to die, and he knew something more. Wherever the contest has raged most fiercely between the soldiers of the cross, and the powers of death and hell, there was the Baptist, with no hesitating step or nerveless arm. And when quivering beneath a brother's blow, when the Protestant, the Puritan, the refugee from persecution, stained the virgin soil of the New World with his blood, then he propounded, and illustrated that doctrine of religious liberty by which all protestantism is honored. There is something grand in this. While, too, their brother christians still debated whether it was worth while to pray for the conversion of the heathen, Baptist missionaries had already gone far beyond the hearing of the sarcasms and biting jeers of christians, which greeted their departure from their native land. Already were they upon the scorching plain of India, the pioneers in that sublime enterprise in which the christianity of the nineteenth century prides herself so highly.

If the Baptist has not always done his whole duty, who can cast the first stone at him? He draws his creed from the Bible; but where authorities are made of great names, he can produce them. When an opponent would lead him into the mazes of tradition, there he can go and safely tread that labyrinth, while others grope and feel their way. History is luminous to him, when to others nothing can be deciphered but dark, mysterious hieroglyphics. The tide of christianity, in its western course from Asia, through Europe to America, has left, deeply furrowed in the soil, marks which confirm his belief in his peculiar creed. The eastern church, including more than half the nominally christian world, prac-

tice baptism by immersion to this day. The western church still possesses monuments which show that for hundreds of years the rite was practised in this manner. The English church in its rubric, and the large fonts still to be seen in the old cathedrals, speak out most plainly her opinions on this point.

It is our intention to dwell briefly upon some of those monuments which prove, beyond the possibility of mistake, that at one time baptism by immersion was universally practised in Italy. We allude to the baptisteries still existing in that country in an almost perfect condition.

A Baptistry is an edifice, most commonly in the form of an octagon, with a domed covering. In some of the minor towns, these buildings are of brick, plain and neat in their appearance. In the larger cities, they are magnificent marble structures, whose ornaments and architecture traced the wealth and genius of the period when they were erected. In the centre of the Baptistry is a large font, sixteen to twenty feet in diameter; sometimes raised above the pavement, and sometimes sunk into it. These fonts are of marble or basalt, and about four feet in depth. As soon as the christians possessed sufficient power, they erected these costly edifices: previously to that period the rite was performed in ponds, lakes, or by the river side. These structures are not few. Almost every town in Italy of any importance possesses one, and but one. Of these we shall describe a few, which, from their antiquity or magnificence, seem to be most interesting.

Parma, Cremona, and Verona possess handsome Baptistries, with large fonts—that of Verona being thirty feet in diameter. Ravenna, which perhaps contains the most valuable and interesting christian antiquities of any city in Italy, boasts of one of the oldest Baptistries, that of St. Sioukni, in Fouto, built about the middle of the third century, and known to have been repaired in 451. The grand vase in the centre is composed of Greek marble and porphyry. The cupola is adorned with valuable mosaics of the fifth century, representing the baptism of Christ. The Baptistry of St. John Lateman, in Rome, was built by Constantine. It is not so large as some of the others, but on many accounts is the most interesting edifice of the kind in Italy. It is of brick, and in the form of an octagon. In the interior, around the centre, are eight noble columns of porphyry, the largest known. These columns sustain a cornice, over which are eight small ones of pure white marble. The font included in this circle, is sunk in the pavement to the depth of four feet, and occupies a large part of it. In this font, which has been held sacred from the earliest periods of christianity, Constantine was baptized; and here Rienzi bathed himself the night before he was crowned in the St. John Lateman. We think that no one can descend into this huge vase, and walk across it, without feeling a perfect conviction that it was not intended for the sprinkling of infants.

The Baptistries above mentioned are as old as the elevation of the church to temporal power. That of Pisa, which we are now about to mention, was not built until the power of the church of Rome was almost supreme. This Baptistry began to be erected in 1152, though it was not fully completed before the fourteenth century. It is in the same Piazza with the celebrated Duomo, Campo Santo, and leaning tower of Pisa, a collection of objects for curiosity, beauty, or magnificence, unequalled. In the centre of this square rises the Duomo, which until the completion of St. Peters, in the excellence of its architecture, and the gorgeousness of its ornaments, was unrivalled.

In front of the Duomo is the Campanile, of pure white marble, rising story above story to the height of 178 feet; interesting not only from its exquisite beauty and extraordinary inclination, but almost sanctified by its connection with the immortal Galileo. To the right of the Duomo is the Campo Santo, where lie entombed, in splendid mausoleums, the knighted dead of Pisa, around the sacred area formed of earth from Calvary. The walls of this cemetery are covered with frescos, by Giotto, almost the first works of the kind in Italy. Almost in front of this holy ground, and behind the cathedral, is the Baptistry, an edifice 115 feet in diameter, and 170 in height. Its exterior is beautiful and striking, being built of Canan marble of the purest white, encircled by noble pillars, and surmounted by a large cupola in the form of a hemisphere. Nor is the interior less pleasing. Two rows of piers and columns, one above the other, support the noble dome; graceful arches, groups of statuary, exquisite bas-reliefs, and rich mosaics, fill the eye, and testify to the former wealth and genius of the citizens of Pisa. But for our purpose there is something more valuable than these relics of the magnificence of a past age. Directly in the centre of the edifice, we notice a huge vase of white marble, about four feet in height, and richly ornamented. We scarcely need consult our guide-book to learn what this is; but were we to do so, we are informed that it is a font, originally intended for the immersion of adults.

The lover of the beautiful and grand may fairly revel amidst these structures; their exquisite proportions and almost matchless richness. The artist traces on the walls of the Campo Santo, the infancy of the art of fresco painting, which seems in perfection, as exhibited on the walls of the Vatican, constituted one of the glories of modern Italy. The Catholic may lament that the day has past, when the faithful would pour out their treasures to produce such temples of art and piety as here stand before him. And the follower of Christ, as he stands within that Baptistry, may perhaps see something to recall to his mind some of those descriptions of the interesting rite of his religion as they are given in the New Testament.

Some of these edifices were raised as early as 300, after Christ; others as late as the twelfth century. So soon as the christians possessed sufficient power, they reared these monuments of their faith. These solid marble fonts cannot be twisted to any meaning. Oh! the writings of some of the fathers, they are strong, stubborn facts. It might, perhaps, be imagined, that they furnished an argument in support of the baptism of adults by immersion rather difficult to answer. On the contrary, a little ingenuity resolves the whole into thin air. We propose to give the train of reasoning which destroys the face of these baptisteries as an argument.

1. Baptism takes the place of circumcision, hence it must be for infants: besides, Christ took children up in his arms and blessed them, therefore infants should receive the benefit of this institution.

2. Christ would not establish a rite which could not be conveniently performed everywhere and always. Baptism by immersion is very inconvenient and dangerous. Hence it cannot be supposed by any sensible man, that the founder of christianity instituted such an ordinance, and therefore to baptize and to sprinkle are synonymous.

Besides, believers are said to be baptised with the holy spirit, which must mean an outpouring. This strengthens the idea that baptism and sprinkling are the same. Also, it is said that whole families were baptised, as many as believed. Such families must of

course have included unconscious infants. Though this is very conclusive to our Pedobaptist brother, still he must admit that there are some slight difficulties. For instance, the Greek language requires some awkward parsing to make *Baptizo* even mean to sprinkle. At least half of the christian church have made it heresy to suppose that any mode but by immersion is baptism. The Baptistries of Italy prove that the Catholic church at one period held a similar opinion. The fathers of the church of England, Luther, Calvin, and numerous other Pædo-baptists, have admitted that immersion was the primitive method of performing the ordinance. There seems to be some weight in these facts, but they can easily be set aside. If the great leaders of Protestantism have made these admissions, it only proves that the human understanding is fallible; and what though it can be proved that baptism by immersion was practised by the church in Italy from the third century? The church became very corrupt about that period, and it is natural to suppose that this mode of performing baptism was then introduced. It is a little singular that no notice is taken of such corruption. It is a little strange that an ordinance so easy of performance, so gratifying to the parental heart, should have been changed for one so inconvenient, so opposed to the analogy of the Old Testament, as is the immersion of adults. Yet this must have been the case—because Christ could not have introduced an ordinance so very inconvenient and dangerous. The conclusion is that adult immersion is a corruption, introduced about the beginning of the third century.

The Baptist looks on one of those Baptistries. He has concluded from the Bible that believers should be immersed. He learns from tradition that this was the custom. He can find no period in early church history where immersion was spoken of as an innovation, but he can find strong denunciation against the sprinkling of infants. Now, as he measures with his eye these huge fonts, he feels the most perfect conviction in his peculiar creed. He feels no necessity for long, learned and injurious trains of argument. He sees a plain command, that command explained, history and tradition proving that this command was retained for a while in its integrity, and these Baptistries lasting monuments for the confusion of gainsayers; a commentary to the Bible, giving the lie to history when she speaks falsely, and making tradition speak a plain, unambiguous language.

## THAT ONE WORD.

A single remark of the Rev. Charles Simeon, on the blessings which had resulted from the labors of Dr. Carey in India, first arrested the attention of Henry Martyn to the cause of missions. His mind began to stir under the new thought, and a perusal of the life of Brainerd fixed him in his resolution to give himself to the missionary work among the heathen.

Harlan Page once went through his Sabbath school to get the spiritual census of the school. Coming to one of the teachers, he said, "Shall I put you down as having a hope in Christ?" The teacher replied, "No." "Then," said he very tenderly, "I will put you down as having no hope." He closed his little book and left him. That was enough. God gave that young man's soul no rest till he found hope through the cross.

Fellow-disciple, have you never yet spoken one word to an impenitent friend about the most momentous of all questions? Then I fear you will find no one in heaven whom you were the means, under God, of sending there.