

## Baptismal Regeneration.

IN Dr. Forsyth's book *The Church and the Sacraments*, a book which all ministers would do well to read and study, and which, contrary to the author's wont, is written in a delightfully clear style, there is a notable chapter by Dr. H. T. Andrews on "The Place of the Sacraments in the teaching of St. Paul." It is a chapter which calls for the careful attention of Baptists. He expresses the opinion that the best commentary on the phrase "Ye were washed" in 1 Cor. vi. 11, is to be found in Acts xxii. 16, "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins." "In both of these statements there seems to be a very definite nexus between baptism and the forgiveness of sins." Of 1 Cor. xv. 29—"Those who are baptized for the dead," he says, "There is no reasonable doubt that St. Paul is referring to the practice of vicarious baptism by living Christians on behalf of those who had died in an unbaptized condition. . . . Baptism was believed to confer some spiritual endowment which could not be obtained in any other way and it was hoped that vicarious baptism might remedy the defect for those who had died without it—a defect which otherwise seemed irremediable." With Ephesians v. 26 and Titus iii. 5 in mind, he says it is "Very hard to resist the conclusion that if the Epistles of St. Paul do not enunciate the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, they at any rate approximate very closely to it, with this difference, of course, that there is no shred of proof that baptism was ever administered to infants in the Apostolic age." As to John iii. 5, his opinion is that "there seems to be no way of avoiding the conclusion that what the words signify is this: Baptism is essential not merely to the bene esse but to the very esse of the Christian life." All this is really amazing as coming from a Congregationalist, and it goes far beyond such Anglicans as Whitgift and Hooker. For Whitgift said, "It is not true that whoso has external signs shall be saved but it is true that none can be saved that are willingly void of them. *Qui crediderit baptizatus.*" So he, at least, did not hold baptism as absolutely vital. Some might unwillingly lack it and be saved despite the defect. And Hooker, while maintaining that baptism is the ordinary gate into the Christian life, says that "it is to be gladly confessed that there may be in divers cases life by virtue of inward baptism where outward is not found." Certainly the unquestioned reality of spiritual life in Quakers and Salvationists who do not practise

baptism is a fact to be reckoned with here. If John iii. 5 really meant what Dr. Andrews says it does, it would contradict the facts of spiritual experience and that in itself is grave reason for mistrusting his interpretation. Moreover, everybody knows that there has often been very little sign of spiritual life amid populations where every individual has been baptized. John Calvin put it tersely, "He who is not a Christian before he comes to receive baptism cannot be made a Christian by baptism, which is only the seal of grace before received." But Dr. Andrews' passages should be re-examined. 1 Cor. xv. 29 is a well-known crux interpretum. But if the gross superstition of a vicarious baptism for the dead did really arise among the Corinthian Christians, it is simply inconceivable that the Apostle of justification by faith should have referred to it in any terms save those of passionate denial and stinging rebuke. In Ephesians v. 26, and Titus iii. 5, it is to be observed that *λουτρόν*, rendered in the Revised Version "the washing of water, Gr. laver," does not necessarily mean "place of bathing," or "the water for washing," but may mean the "washing" itself. Moulton and Milligan's Greek Testament Vocabulary and Robinson's "Ephesians" in loc., may be usefully consulted upon this point and will confirm the correctness of our statement. So there is no sound reason for the view that the two passages make any allusion to baptism. Certainly we cannot use them in any attempt to construct a Pauline doctrine on the subject. Why should we not take it that the much discussed *τὸ ῥήματι* (with the word) is an echo of another word which may have been current in Christian circles before the Fourth Gospel appeared, "Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you" The participle in Ephesians v. 26, rendered "having cleansed" in the Revised Version, is probably an aorist of coincident action for the cleansing and the sanctifying are one and the same act of grace. In the very moment when a man believes, he is forgiven and becomes a saint in the New Testament meaning of that sorely abused word. As for Acts xxii. 16, baptism was for Paul an essential part of his self-surrender to Christ. It followed inevitably upon his conversion. It would have been to him unthinkable that he should not be baptized. There *was* "a nexus between baptism and the forgiveness of sins" since faith in Christ meant obedience to His command. Yet the statement needs guarding. Baptism was not a thing which had so obtained for Paul the Divine forgiveness. His whole reiterated teaching makes it clear that the doctrine of baptismal regeneration would have been repudiated by him with a scornful indignation such as he felt and expressed when he fought the idea that circumcision was vital to salvation.

With reference to John iii. 5, it seemed to me at one time that the clue to its meaning was in that word *καὶ* (and) which could well be rendered "even." When a Romanist priest once challenged me on the subject, I asked him whether "God and the Father" meant "God even the Father," whether "He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire" might not mean "the Holy Spirit even fire," and whether similarly we might not read "Except a man be born of water even of the Spirit," taking water as a symbol of the Spirit in His cleansing power. He consulted his Greek New Testament and frankly allowed that the Lord's words were certainly patient of that interpretation, upon which I charged him never to quote John iii. 5 as proof of his doctrine, since his foundation would be very insecure. Recently I have discovered that Thomas Cartwright held the same view. Against baptism by women in cases of urgency, he says, "It came by a false interpretation of John iii. 5, which means not water but is a translation or borrowed speech for the Spirit of God as elsewhere fire is the same, purifying." A greater man than Cartwright—John Calvin—held the same view.

But there is a far more feasible interpretation. Proselyte baptism was practised among Jews in ancient times. We have no direct proof of this, but we know that they used it in Christian days and they certainly did not borrow it from the Church. But John the Baptist called Israelites to the baptism of repentance, and though Matthew says "He saw many of the Pharisees and the Sadducees coming to (or for) his baptism," Luke makes it clear that the Pharisees only came as spectators. "The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God being not baptized of him" (vii. 30). It was all very well to expect a heathen man to submit to such a humiliation, but it was preposterous to imagine for a moment that a Pharisee would bow his proud head beneath the waters. He was already one of God's people and a leader among them! I believe then, that our Lord was telling Nicodemus that he ought to have made that submission not because baptism was anything in itself, but that the realisation and confession of his sinfulness would have been the first step towards the new life. Besides that, Nicodemus needed the quickening grace of the Holy Spirit.

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