

## Judson on Baptism.

**A**DONIRAM JUDSON, the apostle of Burma, is one of the outstanding heroes of the Christian story, and certainly one of the greatest on our Baptist roll. It is a pity that he is so little known in this country.

As a theological student he was instrumental in causing the founding of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810. He was the author of a memorial sent to the General Association of the Congregational Ministers by a group of students, asking that they be supported as foreign missionaries. In 1812 he sailed for Calcutta hoping to start work in British India.

On the long voyage he devoted himself to a careful study of the subject of baptism. He hoped to meet the Serampore band and wanted to be armed to meet the arguments in which he might get involved. Much to his annoyance and with extreme reluctance he found himself being convinced that Carey and his friends were right; infant baptism was unscriptural and generally indefensible. It was a painful situation. Here he was on his way to start work as a pioneer Congregational missionary for a society he had largely called into existence. He wanted to go on being a missionary but he had no other means of support for himself and his wife. The latter was, if possible, even more reluctant than he to become a Baptist. Yet if he was to be honest he would have to sever his connection with his Congregational colleagues. Some further weeks of study after reaching Calcutta clinched matters for himself and his wife. He went to Serampore not to argue but to announce their conversion to Baptist views and to ask for baptism. This took place in Calcutta in September 1812, by Ward of the Serampore trio.

Judson's actions led to the founding in America of the Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in India and other Foreign Parts. But the British government ordered him out of India and he set sail for Burma to join Felix Carey. At the time of his death in 1850 the Burmese church had a membership of seven thousand, and Judson had the oversight of a staff of 163 missionaries, Burmese pastors and assistants. He had translated the Bible, published much other literature, prepared a grammar and nearly completed a great dictionary. But only an exceptionally strong constitution and a will of iron had prevented him in the early days from joining the noble army of martyrs,

under the strain of prolonged imprisonment under the most horrifying conditions, to say nothing of spells of deliberate torture.

In the present writer's possession is a slim, stained volume: *A Sermon on the nature and subjects of Christian Baptism, by Adoniram Judson, D.D., Burmah*.<sup>1</sup> It is the second edition and was published by Peter Sinclair in 1835. This is the sermon of which William Carey said, "Judson has since then (his baptism) preached the best sermon upon baptism that I ever heard upon the subject". The "Sermon" contains over twenty thousand words and has obviously been enlarged for publication. It has also been furnished with a whole battery of footnotes in Greek and English, and with many references to ancient and modern authorities. It was delivered probably in Calcutta or Serampore. Much of it naturally covers ground familiar to readers of the *Baptist Quarterly*, but an outline of the argument may be of interest.

The text is Matthew xxviii, 19, and Judson sets out to ask two questions: What is baptism? and To whom is baptism to be administered? Under the first head he establishes that the Greek word means immersion, with many quotations from Greek dictionaries and the support of eleven non-Baptist authors, including Beza and Luther. There are no instances in the New Testament which suggest that the word is to be interpreted in any other sense.

Further, "not only all the branches of the Greek church, but the whole Christian world, for the space of thirteen hundred years, practised immersion as the only valid baptism. Sprinkling, or pouring, was never tolerated except in case of dangerous sickness, or want of sufficient quantity of water—Never by an Christians in any age was sprinkling or pouring allowed in common cases, until the Council of Ravenna, assembled by the Pope in the year 1311, declared immersion or pouring to be indifferent." To substantiate this assertion he devotes eight pages to quotations from "Paedobaptist authors of acknowledged authority."

Judson now turns to his second question: to whom is baptism to be administered? The commission makes it clear that Jesus commanded the apostles to baptise "disciples" only. Why then does the greater part of the Christian world practise infant baptism? The New Testament never mentions it, and the baptism of households is shown to be no exception.

<sup>1</sup> The book has an added personal interest because it is inscribed on the fly-leaf, "Joseph Martin, 1839," the signature, I believe, of my great-grandfather, and because it bears unmistakable signs of having been in India in the possession of my grandfather during his long missionary career.

The next part of Judson's argument is learned, detailed and involved. It concerns the paedobaptist contention, evidently much emphasised at that time, that children are involved in God's covenant with their parents, that Christians are the inheritors of the covenant with Abraham, and that infant baptism seals the Christian covenant as circumcision did the older one. Judson has not much difficulty in showing that the covenant with Abraham cannot apply literally to Christians, though he devotes no less than twenty pages to the task. Christians, he concludes, are heirs of Abraham only in so far as they have faith. "Proper caution" is necessary in applying analogies from the Old Testament. "In the words of Dr. Scott . . . 'common sense is usually sufficient to preserve men from such absurdities, when there is no personal or party interest to serve by them'."

Judson quotes and demolishes four arguments advanced by Dr. Worcester, "a late distinguished writer", whose book he had been studying on the voyage, to prove that infant baptism is to replace circumcision. The argument that Jewish proselyte baptism, including the baptism of infants, was familiar in the time of Christ and would naturally be taken as a guide by Christians, is next handled. He holds that there is in fact no evidence that the Jews in the time of Christ admitted proselytes by baptism. The only Jewish baptism known was the baptism of John, a baptism of repentance and therefore of adults only.

Finally Judson turns to assault the last line of defence of the paedobaptists. He quotes Bossuet: "Experience has shown that all the attempts of the Reformed Church to confound the Anabaptists by the scripture, have been weak and, therefore, they are at least obliged to allege to them the practice of the Church."

But the Christian writers of the first and second centuries never mention infant baptism. The first reference is one of opposition by Tertullian in the beginning of the third century. The practice no doubt began in the late second century, on the spread of the belief that baptism was necessary to salvation, but there was much debate about it until the Council in A.D. 418. Judson quotes freely from paedobaptist historians in support of his case.

He sums up, "The reasons stated in both parts of this discourse, lead us to the conclusion, that *the immersion of a professing believer into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is the only Christian baptism.*"

His concluding appeal comes from one who had already paid a heavy price for loyalty to his convictions and reflects his own mental and spiritual struggle. "If when your mind adverts to this question, you fear the consequences of an examination, and dread those sacrifices, which a discovery that

you have been mistaken, may enforce on your conscience; or if you feel the influence of long-established sentiments, or imagine that the subject is too dark and intricate for your investigation, look to the Son of God, who hesitated not to make the greatest sacrifices and to endure the most painful sufferings for you; and look up to the Father of lights, to send the Holy Spirit, according to the promise of His Son, to guide you into all the truth."

HUGH MARTIN.

*The Living Christ in Modern China*, by G. A. Young. (Carey Press 7s. 6d.)

Here is a book which is a tonic to read, for the author's own passionate faith in Christ as the only but sufficient Saviour of mankind has communicated itself to what he has written. The story pulsates with the vivid spiritual experience of a man who is a blend of the mystic and the intrepid campaigner for Christ. The reader is grateful too for the honesty of the book. No one is likely to forget the graphic account of the remarkable growth of the Bible Study Fellowship in Sian which Mr. Young led, and of its dramatic and almost complete disintegration when the members realised that their leader was claiming a unique position for Christ and His religion. Recent events in China provide a poignant commentary upon Mr. Young's story. He devotes one of his chapters to Communism. In Europe we are tempted to think that the Communist is almost as difficult to convert as the Jew, but here is a story of Communists being brought to the foot of the Cross. In his discussion of the relation of Christianity to Communism Mr. Young is our teacher. In Britain and America the contemporary Christian attitude to Communism is far too negative and complacent. Mr. Young, on the other hand, boldly calls for "a rebirth of Apostolic Christianity with a flaming evangelism and a Kingdom of God social programme which will be more revolutionary than that of the Communists." Only at one point does the reviewer find his judgement parting company with the author. It is in the latter's too sympathetic account of the excesses of the Chinese revival-movements. But that is a small point. Here is a book to rejoice in and to commend enthusiastically to all one's friends.

JOHN O. BARRETT.