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THE
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—BAPTISM: ITS PLACE IN THE SYSTEM,
ITS PART IN THE LIFE.

II.

THE effects on personal life which Scripture ascribes to baptism are generally connected with its character of initiation. All commencements have their importance from their being commencements, and from their relation to the histories which they inaugurate. Thus the ordinance is presented in the apostolic writings, in which the *act* of baptism passes on to the *state* of the baptized. It is like entering a great building. There is but a step through the door, but that step makes the difference of being without and being within. The building in this case is the House of God, and the change is one of spiritual position. If the sacrament were a church ordinance, it would give entrance within the society; as it is an institution of Christ, it gives entrance within the covenant.

Hence great things are spoken of it, and comprehensive words are used, as if in a contributory sense it had a *saving* power. Thus our Lord saith, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"; and St. Peter affirms, "Baptism doth also now save us." Such words may require any amount of explanation, but they assert the part which baptism has in the whole result, whatever that part may be.

1. The first grace which we find associated with the ordinance is the forgiveness of sins. That was a fundamental idea in John's baptism, also in the Christian institution. It is indeed the first necessity, felt as such by man, recognised as such by God. It is the great cry of the awakened soul, "Oh that I knew if He forgiveth!" The answer was clear in the Gospel, "Through this man is proclaimed unto you the

remission of sins" (Acts xiii. 38). Of this baptism was the ordained assurance. "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins" was certainly no dubious promise. "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" are words which St. Paul recites as addressed to himself (Acts xxii. 16). This cleansing from sin by a definite act of forgiveness was aptly represented in baptism at the beginning of Christian life and as preliminary to all further grace, and the consciousness of it is kept ever present. After a reminder of former defilements, it is added: "But ye were washed, ye were sanctified, ye were justified, etc." (1 Cor. vi. 11); and as of separate persons, so of the whole Church, it is said: "Christ loved it, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word" (Eph. vi. 26). Moreover, the sense of this sacramental cleansing remained through life, and men were ever to "draw near to God, having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and their bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. x. 22); for the effect of that sacramental beginning of the new life continues through the course of it. The forgiveness of sins in baptism is not only a remission of sins past (in the case of an infant, what are they?) It is of the nature of an abiding grant for time to come, the grant of a right to be realized whenever, either in the hour of conversion or in habitual approach to God, the heart in repentance and faith seeks and proves the sprinkling of the precious blood. This abiding effect of baptism as the Divine pledge of forgiveness through the life of the baptized has two consequences:

(a) It anticipates and precludes the so-called sacrament of penance, invented to meet the case of "sins after baptism," on the supposition that it was a cleansing only for the time before it, and that its effect in after-life was to increase the sinfulness of sin, not to entail the promise of remission.

(b) The sacrament could never be repeated, the Divine authority being attached to the single act, in its nature one of initiation. It was the one entrance into a scheme of things marked by the note of unity. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Therefore in this larger and life-long sense of its purpose and effect we say, in the Nicene Creed: "I believe in one baptism for the remission of sins."

2. This grace is not detached and alone. It is a part and a consequence of a larger grace, union with Christ. That was what was sought in baptism, that was what was given. On the day when the Holy Ghost came, and Jesus was first preached as the Christ of God, the one desire and design of

those who received the Word was to join themselves to the Lord in whom they believed, and that was granted by being baptized in His name. Afterwards each, in his measure, would come to know how real, how intimate, and how practical in effect this personal and spiritual union is. St. Paul, pressing it on his converts as the essence of the Christian state, again and again connects it with their baptism in the past, setting it forth both as a general association with their Lord and as a special participation in His death, burial, and resurrection. "We who were baptized into Jesus Christ," he says to the Romans, "were baptized into His death. We were buried, therefore, with Him through baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life. For, if we have become united with Him by the likeness of His death, we shall be also by that of His resurrection" (vi. 2-11). And so he proceeds in language (accurately rendered in the R.V.), referring his readers to their baptism as the time when they "became united with Jesus Christ," so as to participate both in the power and in the likeness of "the death which He died unto sin once, and of the life which He liveth unto God." How prominent in this Apostle's teaching, and how exemplified in his own consciousness, is this living union with the Lord, which is concisely and aptly expressed by the great word, "a member of Christ"! That is not to be superficially explained as meaning only a member of His Church, the society which confesses His name. The relation is primarily not with the Church, but with Himself. It is one not inherited by birth nor to be acquired by effort, but bestowed by grant, as "a thing which by nature we cannot have," and baptism is by the Lord's institution the legal deed of conveyance of that grant, the consequences of which, however, can only be realized in fact under the power of the Word and the Spirit.

3. By virtue of union with the Son, the member of Christ is also "the child of God." That is a spiritual supernatural relationship, but can only be expressed in the terms of natural relationship, for we have no other terms to use. But as no such words are adequate to the case, different similitudes are employed to represent the truths intended, sometimes the similitude of adoption, sometimes of generation and birth. Of these one is more present to the mind of St. Paul, the other to that of St. John. The connection of baptism with the first idea is most obvious, since in the case of adoption a definite change of status was marked by a legal act, creating a relation which did not previously exist; one, too, which demanded, but did not ensure, responsive filial affections. In

like manner the sacrament of adoption needs to be followed by an inward spiritual gift, that of "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Then only "the Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

This word (*τέκνα*) children, not frequent with St. Paul, is characteristically St. John's. The term (*υἱός*) son, ever appropriate to Christ, he does not use of the Christian, save once at the final consummation (Rev. xxi. 7); it is said, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son." This discrimination of language is much lost in the A.V., notably in its rendering of 1 John iii. 1, 2; but it is a distinction of thought, which ought to be observed. It belongs to this Apostle's habit of representing the origination of spiritual life by the analogy of natural generation with the natural affections ensuing. The children of God are with him "begotten of God." It is an expression peculiar to him, occurring ten times in his Epistle, as it is first used in the prologue to his Gospel. The Word incarnate, he says, "came to His own, and His own received Him not; but as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them which believe on His name, which were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." This is measured, significant language. The persons receive Jesus, but they are not thereby actually children of God. The (*ἐξουσία*) right, title, or authority to become such is a gift from the Lord on whom they believe. It is precisely the gift of such a right which is expressed in baptism, but the right needs for its realization the breath of the Spirit of God.

4. St. John, who does not mention the institution of the two sacraments, records the words of Jesus, which by anticipation illuminate their meaning. Such is the effect of the great saying, which answered the unspoken inquiries of Nicodemus. Its application to baptism has in later days been disputed, but the situation is decisive for the plain sense of the words, as they are primarily addressed to the man and to the occasion. The public mind was deeply stirred, full of expectation and debate. What is this kingdom of God which is at hand? What means this baptism which prepares for it? Is it from heaven or of men? The Pharisees more especially were exercised in mind by the latter question. They felt called to deal with it, and had made public and official inquiry as to John's baptism and the character which he claimed for it and for himself (i. 19 to 28). But now another person has appeared, One who also baptizes through His disciples, and whose works declare Him a Teacher sent from

God. To Him comes "a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews," a serious, candid man, seeking information on the questions in his mind—in everybody's mind at that moment. The Lord's words go straight to the point, but with discoveries which transcend his thoughts. "Verily, verily I say unto thee (the first time these words are heard), Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God," and then more explicitly, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and spirit (ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος), he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." They are plain words, though profound, and the circumstances support the interpretation which was the only one known to antiquity, and which is given them in the opening of our Baptismal Office.

Baptism, according to this fundamental text, has a necessity and potency of its own as a factor in the new birth which qualifies for entering into the kingdom of God. That kingdom is not thought of as in a future state; it was at hand, it was coming, and it came. "When He had overcome the sharpness of death, He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers." There is no sentence of exclusion from the kingdom, but the statement of a fact. The natural man (οὐ δύναται) is not able to see it, still less to enter into it. He has not the capacity for doing so. Does the birth of water create that capacity? It is a spiritual capacity which spirit only can generate. That is in the nature of things, as the discourse proceeds to affirm. From the bare mention of the visible sign, it passes into the sphere of the invisible, as being the region of reality, and enlarges on birth of the Spirit, which now appears as a living, life-giving, spontaneous Power. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." The lessons of these profound, comprehensive words are beyond the present purpose, which is only to consider what part belongs to the water (*i.e.*, to the sacrament), as associated with the Spirit, in the regeneration of men. That it has a representative and symbolic part is plain, and that is itself an important aspect, since the symbolism is not of human invention, but of Divine institution; but the language of Scripture elsewhere, and notably in this word of Jesus, assigns to it, not a symbolical, but a real contribution to the result. We may venture to say that the Spirit does that which the water cannot do, but the water does that which the Spirit does not do. Action on the inner man, the mind and heart, is the work of the Spirit. That is no proper effect of an appointed act, an outward and

visible sign; but for investiture with rights, privileges, and powers, this is the proper means—as in all the kingdoms of the world, so also in the kingdom of God. Acts of investiture or induction in the order of the world are not only symbolic—they are effectual, as carrying the sovereign authority. They change the man's position, giving him powers, possessions, and relations with others which he had not before, and which are thenceforth his by right, whatever use he may afterwards make of them. The disposition to use them worthily, the sense of the obligations which they impose, the spirit and character which respond to them, are not created by the grant, though it demands and suggests them. These have their recondite sources in the history and mystery of the moral being. It is the same in the higher region. There the spiritual rights are conferred by ordinance; the spiritual mind is generated by the Spirit of God. Where these concur the man is born anew of water and the Spirit. By Divine will each factor has its own necessity. Even if the work of the Spirit were sensibly manifest, it could not supersede the office of the sacrament. "Can any man," said St. Peter, "forbid the water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."

A question follows as to the connection between these two constituents of regeneration. Is it simultaneous? Does the administration of the sacrament carry with it the action of the Spirit on the recipient in the way of inward change and renewal? It was a promise at the first baptism, "And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"—a promise which remains for evermore. And the reference to that gift in the same connection is frequent in the Epistles, and to "the laver of regeneration" is attached "the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus iii. 5). But the promises do not fulfil themselves automatically, made as they are to human beings capable of desiring and claiming them; neither is there any assurance of simultaneous or immediate fulfilment, and the Spirit is said to breathe where it lists, like the free wind of heaven; and in multitudes of the baptized no manifestation of it appears, or not till time has passed. Moreover, it acts by the word in its operation on the heart and mind; and, as St. Peter says, the regenerate man is "begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God living and abiding." We conclude, then, that the renewing Spirit is one of "the promises of God made in that sacrament," but not then and there fulfilled. In the case of the infant it could not be, unless by creation of a new nature—a notion as much at variance with Scripture as with reason and facts.

In reading the strong statements in the Epistles we think of them as exemplified in typical instances of the time. There is the convert from heathenism, whom the Word has reached and conquered, with all the darkness of his life behind him, coming to baptism in "the repentance whereby he forsakes sin, and faith whereby he steadfastly believes the promises of God made to him in that sacrament." Forgiveness of sin, membership in Christ, adoption as a child of God, the gift of the Spirit, are not his when he descends into the water; they are his by right when he emerges from it. The grace of the sacrament is discerned, not in impressive circumstances, or even in conscious experiences, but in the effectual grant which the Divine institution conveys. So Luther strenuously insists against depreciators of the ordinance in his time, "using," as he says, "such twaddle as this: How shall a handful of water help the soul? Wilt thou take away the costly part which God has attached to it, and in which He has set it? For the kernel in the water is God's word or commandment, and God's name. . . . From thence it derives its nature and is called a sacrament, as St. Augustine teaches: 'Accedat verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum.' . . . For through the Word it receives the power to become a washing of regeneration, as St. Paul calls it" ("The Greater Catechism: On Baptism").

That single word of St. Paul's (*παλιγγενεσία*) and another like word of St. Peter's (*αναγέννησις*), both intending the same metaphor, and fitly rendered by "regeneration," became in the Church familiar in their application to baptism as the sacrament of the new birth. So Justin Martyr, telling the Emperor how men were made Christians, after the mention of preceding confessions and devotions, concludes with the words: "Then are they led by us where there is water, and, in the manner of regeneration (*ἀναγεννήσεως*), in which also we ourselves were regenerated, are they regenerated. For in the name of the Lord God, Father of all, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, they then make the washing in the water" (Apol. i. 79).

But these general expressions take a more restricted meaning when we come to apply them to individual persons. Then the hypothetical element comes in—that which respects the spiritual state of the recipients. In regard to the earliest times the question scarcely occurs, on account of the securities which then existed. But even from the first there were doubtful characters, and later on, when manifold influences were at work, there was an ever-increasing number of cases in which baptism did not attest or create a regenerate condition of mind, as facts made manifest. Hence a sense of

the distinction between the grace proper to the sacrament and the spiritual condition of the recipient—the one a conveyance of the sure promises of God, the other inclusive of varieties and uncertainties in man. God judges the secrets of the heart; the Church only knows the man by his profession. The language of her offices is therefore in respect of the persons an assumption, in respect of the sacrament an assertion—on the one a judgment of charity, on the other a judgment of faith.

Of infant baptism, which practically concerns us, there is no need to speak particularly, since the view which has been taken of the whole subject allows an easy application to this branch of it. If the essential grace of the sacrament consists in the conferring of rights, powers, and relations, which by nature we cannot have, that is as possible for the child as for the man. It is so in the world—as in case of a legal adoption frequent in Eastern dynasties, infancy at the time is no bar to the validity of the Act. It is the same in the kingdom of God. If repentance and faith are required of those who come to be baptized, they are equally required of those who have been baptized; and if a defect of them in an adult at the time of baptism does not invalidate the sacrament for after-life, still less will incapacity for them in the child have that effect. In each case he inherits the promises when quickened into life by the baptism of the Spirit.

How or when it comes we know no law or prescription. The wind bloweth where it listeth in the mysterious world of mind and will. Its breath may be present from earliest consciousness, or break upon the soul in partial and interrupted gusts, or gradually make its way through reasoned convictions and felt necessities, or come at some critical hour with sudden distinctness and irrevocable determination. But, whenever or however it comes, the effect is still the same—a conscious contact with God in living relations with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and in the character which these create. This mind is not of man; it is begotten of God. Without it, notwithstanding the birth of water, there is no real entering into the kingdom. The right of entrance has been given, but the mind that enters is not there; and the Lord's word remains a witness and a warning—"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew."

Nothing has been said here of one important feature of the rite—the promise and vow of the person baptized. There was no need to speak of it, as, with all its fulness of meaning, it raises no doubtful questions. Only a caveat may be entered against a way of thinking which regards the promises of God and those of man in the aspect of "a reciprocal con-

tract between two parties." Teaching of that kind has not been uncommon, and has perhaps found a starting-point in the phrase, "the Baptismal Covenant." It does not occur in our formularies, and, though in some sense useful, is capable of misleading suggestions of the kind just mentioned. It will not be so if we take the word "covenant" in its higher Scriptural sense—that of a sovereign act of God, creating relations with Himself, with the signs, sanctions, and charges that attend it. The promises of men, in return, are acknowledgments of the duties and acceptance of the obligations which ensue. Our duties arise out of our relations, as Bishop Butler observes, referring to our revealed relations with God in the Persons of the Trinity. These relations are revealed in the Gospel, but they are made our own in baptism, as the ordained admission into the covenant of grace. That involves corresponding duties on our part, accepted by promise and vow, to be fulfilled in obedience of faith. If the covenant of grace under which we have come elevates the standard of our obligations, it supplies proportionate resources for their fulfilment, and from the "sacrament of regeneration" we pass on into life, not only as children of nature, but as "thereby made the children of grace."

In conclusion, all that has been said may be summed up in words which were used at first. The essential grace of baptism consists in its character of initiation. The virtue of the act is in its relation to the state which it inaugurates. It associates the personal life with that supernatural scheme of things which rests on the basis of the Incarnation. It is the admission of the individual into the dispensation of covenanted grace which is in Christ Jesus. That admission is by Divine institution, and, being such, cannot be dispensed with, or superseded or repeated, and is effectual in conferring a right and interest in all the promises of God, promises, however, made to man under the necessary conditions of his nature, his self-determining power, his liberty, his responsibility, with their contingent consequences in actual life and in eternal judgment.

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