

LECTURE VI.

SACRAMENTS.

THE question of the sacraments has been for centuries the battlefield of theologians: since the Reformation it has divided Churches, and was perhaps never more contested than at the present hour. The cleavage of opinion is wide, and creates lamentable schisms, not only between Churches that are separate from one another, but within Churches that still maintain corporate unity.

Among too large a proportion of Presbyterians the most inadequate views prevail as to the value and importance of the sacraments. These views are in marked contrast to the standards of the Church and to the faith of our forefathers. The Reformers condemned the cold Rationalism which reduces the sacraments to mere signs and badges of Christian profession, almost as much as they condemned the perversion of Scriptural truth in the sacramental doctrines of Romanism.

The word "sacrament" is not found in Scripture, nor in the sub-apostolic period. It originated in the Vulgate, wherein it was used to represent the

Greek word *μυστήριον*. Thus we find that where it is said, "We speak God's wisdom in a mystery," the rendering is "in a sacrament." Again, "Though I know all mysteries" becomes "all sacraments," and so on. In later times the mystery of the Trinity and of the incarnation was rendered by the Latin "sacramentum S. S. Trinitatis" or "Incarnationis."

This translation of the Greek term was unfortunate, because the word "mystery" in the New Testament does not signify a mystery in the modern sense, and as certain Churchmen so often use it in the ordinary sense of what cannot be understood. In the New Testament, it represents some truth or purpose or institution of God, the meaning of which had *at one time been concealed, but is now made known*, at least to the spiritually minded who are capable of receiving it. Mystery in the New Testament, therefore, usually signifies the very opposite of our ordinary usage. "To you it is given to *know* the mysteries of the kingdom"; "Though I *understand* all mysteries"; "That I may open my mouth boldly to *make known* the mystery of the Gospel." Mystery, accordingly, is something made known and understood, which can be explained to the Church. The use of *sacramentum* to represent mystery arose from the idea of a sacred meaning being involved in some outward sign or action. Thus the touching of the ears of catechumens with spittle or the use of salt, and even the sign of the cross, were sometimes termed sacraments, because they had a spiritual

significance. The term, accordingly, became of wide application. In the Reformed Churches, however, the name "sacraments" came to be restricted to those ordinances of the New Testament which alone bear the authority of express divine institution in the Christian Church. In the Reformed Churches the two Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are alone recognised, because these only were appointed by Christ; but in the Roman Church there are seven, so that five are sacraments because of ecclesiastical authority, and except we grant the claim of Rome to infallibility, are without divine warrant. The recognition of seven sacraments dates from at least twelve centuries after Christ.

The teaching of the Church of Scotland as to the nature of the sacraments is clear and distinct. The Confession of Faith defines their character both by negative and positive statements:—

"1. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and His benefits, and to confirm our interest in Him; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His Word.

"2. There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other."

The definition of a sacrament in the Larger Catechism is in some respects fuller: "A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace the benefits of His mediation"; and it also declares that "the parts of a sacrament are two—the one an outward and sensible sign used according to Christ's own appointment, the other an inward spiritual grace thereby signified." In the Shorter Catechism there is another form of expression that is similarly significant: "A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein by sensible signs Christ and the benefits of His new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers."

The position of the doctrine of the sacraments in the Catechisms is suggestively connected with other means of grace. They are properly declared to be means of grace in common with the Word of God and prayer.

The definitions of our Church are in absolute harmony with those given in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and generally with the other Reformed Confessions.

The meaning of the terms requires explanation. The phrase "sensible signs" refers to the character of the elements used: they are sensible—that is, physical things which appeal to the senses. In other words, they are material, and fitted to represent the spiritual facts they refer to. Thus water is a fitting symbol of cleansing and of the gift of the Holy Ghost; while bread and wine have

been appointed because they set forth how the body of the Lord was broken and His blood shed, and how these are given for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. As signs they plainly signify spiritual realities. They are also termed seals. The word is manifestly suggested by the saying of St Paul: "Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision, that he might be the father of all them that believe." The force of this is evident. The seal attached to any document is the visible mark of authority (1 Kings xxi. 8; Esther iii. 12). Its modern equivalent is very much what we mean by putting the signature to solemn documents—as the seal is still used in some Oriental countries instead of a signature—to give legal effect to their contents. We are familiar with what is meant by "signed, sealed, and delivered." It is in a similar sense that St Paul speaks of his converts being "the seals" of his ministry, for they were the visible evidences "known and read of all men" that God had owned His work. So it is written, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." The presence and witness of the Holy Ghost was Christ's visible token of the redemption of believers, provided they did not grieve that Spirit or banish these divine influences.

When applied to the sacraments the term "seal" implies that they are visible testimonies, divinely given, and of the most solemn character, to the fact that the spiritual benefits signified are actually

bestowed. They are not themselves the blessing, but the sign and seal that the spiritual grace they express is actually given by God. They are, as it were, God's visible signature to the promises that are set forth, so that we may know that what He promises outwardly He fulfils effectually. In the sacrament we have thus the signature of God. It is His seal as to His bestowal of spiritual blessing, just as circumcision was the visible testimony of His promise to Abraham.

Further, it is stated in the Larger Catechism that the sacraments "signify and exhibit the benefits of salvation"; and again, in the Shorter Catechism, that these benefits "are represented, sealed, and applied." "Exhibit" at the time of the Reformation bore the sense of "confer" or "apply," so that the two Catechisms are at one in making these testify to *an actual conveyance* of the spiritual benefits they signify. This goes beyond the coldness of the view that they are no more than pictures, badges, and memorials: they are set forth in our standards as means of grace. So is it said in the Confession of Faith in reference to baptism, "The grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost" (chap. xxviii. 6). The sprinkling of the water in baptism testifies the application to the individual of what baptism signifies. The water is not the grace, nor is it, as it were, the pipe or the envelope through which it comes, but it is the sacramental sign that the grace is conferred and applied to that person.

"Whence it comes to pass that the names and

effects of the one are attributed to the other." The significance of this may be thus stated. There can be no true sacrament without the use of the appointed elements, water being necessary to baptism, and bread and wine to the Eucharist; otherwise they would not be as instituted by the Lord. Yet it is not the elements alone which constitute the sacraments. The spiritual benefits they signify are not secured by anything in the earthly elements. The word of institution used in the celebration, the blessing of Christ, and the working of the Holy Spirit, all combine to make each sacrament really valid—that is, that it shall fulfil the purpose for which it was instituted. There is, accordingly, an evident spiritual relation or sacramental union between the material elements or signs and the spiritual thing signified. It thus comes to pass that "the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other," and accordingly, when treating of the Lord's Supper, it is stated in the Confession, "The outward elements in the sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to Him crucified as that truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the names of the things they represent—to wit, the body and blood of Christ, although in substance and nature they still remain truly and only bread and wine as they were before." So is it that when in the words of the institution "the cup" is made the equivalent of the blood of Christ,—“this cup is the new covenant in My blood,” even that which is poured forth for you,—only the grossest literal-

ism would misunderstand the expression. Similarly when St Paul said, "that rock was Christ," or when in Exodus the lamb was called the Passover, we at once perceive the relationship. In like manner the elements are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, such as when the bread is called "the body of Christ" and the wine is called His blood," or when the water in baptism is named the "washing" or "laver of regeneration."

The Church of Rome, while giving in some respects a similar definition of a sacrament, as when it says that a sacrament is a sign, "for it makes known to us by a certain appearance and resemblance that which God by His invisible power accomplishes in our soul," yet differs widely from the reformed doctrine by the assertion of its acting as an *opus operatum*, as when it is said of baptism that the "corporal ablution accomplishes in the soul that which it signifies."¹ The various elements of the ritual combine to make the sacraments effectual *ex opere operato*. The sacraments have, accordingly, in themselves an intrinsic power. It is true that there are certain saving clauses used, such as that there should be no mortal sin forming an obstacle; and it is also held that there must be faith either on the part of the recipient or, in case of infant baptism, on the part of the sponsors or of the Church itself.²

But the relation of sacraments to the life of the Church may be viewed in another light. They stand related to the ascended life of Christ and to His

¹ Cat. Council of Trent, ii. 1, 5.

² *Ibid.*, *sub voce* "Sacraments."

presence in the Church. Their very materialism suggests the abiding activity of the humanity of the incarnate and now glorified Lord. They are physical things appointed for spiritual purposes by Him who was incarnate and is now ascended in our humanity, and they link us in the most vivid manner to His life on earth and to His life glorified. The sensible signs thus acquire special significance. "If man," says Chrysostom, "were not clothed with a material body, these good things—viz., the graces signified—would have been presented naked and unveiled; but, as the soul is united to the body, it was altogether necessary towards understanding them that He should use the aid of sensible things" (Chrys., Hom. 83).

There are two extremes, practically illustrated although perhaps not dogmatically taught, which find their contradiction in just views of the sacraments. There are those who treat the Church as if it were an entity coming between us and Christ, so that the individual has to look to the Church and depend on it as the priestly system which mediates grace: it is, according to them, the depository from which believers have to look for every supply; they have to put themselves into the hands of the Church. There is an element of truth in this, because the Church, as we have seen, is a divine instrument for setting forth Christ and administering His sacraments; but we allude now to the tendency to stop at the Church as an end. Saving faith directed to the personal Saviour must ever create an immediate and personal relationship to God and Christ.

When the Church is represented as being almost supreme, there is a wrong relationship produced, making the believer dependent on the Church rather than on Christ, and assigning a false independence to the Church in relation to Christ. On the other hand, there is the error found in schools of Evangelicalism, which rest all on the subjective realisation of certain doctrines. More than this is required, even the recognition of the continual presence of the living Christ in His ordinances, witnessed to by the material signs He has instituted. His saving work and His ascended life ought not to be regarded in the abstract as an intellectual or spiritual truth for humanity in general, but also in their concrete force as for the individual, and as assured to him by Christ. It is in this way that the sacraments, being visible and graphic acts,—acts which embody, signify, and apply to the individual in a succinct and comprehensive form what Christ gives to him,—become helpful and important. “Christ,” says Dorner, “left behind permanent institutions which bring us into historic contact with Him, even by sensuous media. His Word, holy Baptism, and the holy Supper proclaim to us this historic connection of the Church of all ages with Him. These three in their impersonal form and manifestation are the means, established and preserved by Him, for bringing us into fellowship with the personally historic and now exalted Lord, and for keeping us therein till He comes again. Rightly used, they do not separate us from Him as false substitutes, such as human persons must be, but draw to His person

while He works through them. Their mediatory working is through no contradiction to the immediacy of the relation between Him and us. They rather mediate the immediacy, not merely of Christ's relation to us, but also of ours to Him. . . . The Church never has faith-creating regenerating power. Never and nowhere does the Holy Spirit withdraw into passivity behind the acting work of the Church. Never and nowhere do the Word and sacraments become His substitutes. They are means for bringing Christ and the individual into vital relationship."¹

Much has been written regarding the relation of the Word and sacraments. The reformers held that the grace that is in the Word and in the sacraments is the same, and that the difference is not to be found in the contents, but in the form in which they severally convey the same grace. The Word appeals to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and proclaims Christ in the fulness of His mediatorial work. Through the knowledge of Christ comes the influence on heart and will which convinces and converts. Nor can there be any true sacrament without the Word. If there was no Word, no intelligent knowledge or apprehension of Christ, the sacraments would be empty forms, mere magical incantations without spiritual benefit. Thus Augustine's rule, "Accedit verbum ad elementum, fit sacramentum," applies in another sense than he used it; for it holds true not merely as to the due institution but to the spiritual efficacy of

¹ *Sys. Chris. Doct.*, vol. iv. pp. 153-156.

sacraments, which must depend on some spiritual discernment of what they mean. But the Word and sacraments work in different methods. The preached Word is addressed to all, and its power is in several respects dependent on that of the preacher. It is, however, an appeal to men, as it were *en masse*. On the other hand, the sacrament applies the grace to the individual. Each recipient is separated from the crowd. It is no longer an appeal to many, but it is a vivid action, an action which embodies and expresses the grace which has been preached. That action is, as it were, the deed of Christ, Who through the mediation of visible signs seals to the believing soul the invisible grace signified, and the fact that He does actually confer it. The individual is brought into union with the glorified Lord, Who testifies that the grace which the sacrament signifies is bestowed. The sacraments thus meet us in a form which brings us personally to Christ, Who, through the Holy Ghost, bestows the spiritual benefits. "Their chiefest force and virtue," says Hooker, "is that they are heavenly ceremonies which God hath signified and ordained in His Church, first, as marks whereby we may know *when* God doth impart the vital and saving grace of Christ to all that are capable thereof; and secondly, as means conditional which God requireth in them unto whom He imparteth grace."¹

We must, however, always distinguish between the idea that sacraments have virtue in themselves to produce spiritual effects and the teaching that

¹ Eccles. Polity, v. 57. 3.

their efficacy comes from "the blessing of Christ and the working of God's Spirit in those who by faith receive them." The former partakes of the nature of a charm, and tends to priestcraft and superstition; the other has moral and spiritual power, and that, not from the sacraments *per se*, but from Christ through the instrumentality of His sacraments.¹

¹ "Seeing, therefore, that grace is a consequent of sacraments, a thing which accompanieth them as their end, a benefit which he that hath receiveth from God Himself, the author of sacraments, and not from any other natural or supernatural quality in them, it may be hereby both understood that sacraments are necessary, and that the manner of their necessity to life supernatural is not in all respects as food to natural life, because they contain *in themselves* no vital force or efficacy, they are not physical but *moral instruments* of salvation, duties of service and worship, which, unless we perform as the Author of grace requireth, they are unprofitable. For all receive not the grace of God who receive the sacraments of His grace. Neither is it *ordinarily* His will to bestow the grace of sacraments on any but by the sacraments; which grace also they that receive by sacraments, receive it from Him and not from them. For of sacraments the very same thing is true which Solomon's wisdom observeth in the brazen serpent, 'He that turned towards it was not saved by the thing he saw, but by Thee, O Saviour of all'" (Hooker's 'Eccles. Polity,' v. 57. 4). So Calvin warns against the error, "When not elevating our minds beyond the visible sign, we transfer to the sacraments the praise of those benefits which are only conferred upon us by Christ alone, and that by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who makes us partakers of Christ Himself, and by the instrumentality of the external signs which invite us to Christ, but which cannot be perverted to any other use without a shameful perversion of all their utility. . . . It is also necessary to guard against being drawn into an error from reading the extravagant language used by the Fathers, with a view to exalt the dignity of the sacraments, lest we should suppose that there is some secret power annexed and attached to the sacraments, so that they communicate the grace of the Holy Spirit just as wine is given in a cup." But he also asserts, "Whatever God promises and adumbrates in signs, He really performs. . . . The only question here is whether God works by a proper and intrinsic power, as it is expressed, or resigns His office to external symbols. 'God alone performs what we obtain by the sacraments, and that by

BAPTISM.

When our Lord commanded His apostles to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the

His sacred and, as it is called, intrinsic virtue'" (Ins., iv, 14, 16, 17). "It is Christ alone who bestoweth inwardly. He it is alone who makes us partakers of Himself in the Supper" (Augustine, Hom. v. vi. in Joann. Quest. vet. Test. iii. 84).

Much superstition has existed in the Church from comparatively early times as to the virtue that is in the material part of the sacraments to effect spiritual results. While there are phrases which may appear to attribute all to the direct work of God spiritually in the soul, yet, especially in the Oriental Church, the influence of certain Greek beliefs as to nature and materialism is felt, and the ritual both of the Oriental and Roman Church cannot fail sometimes to produce the impression that the sacramental elements become endued with spiritual power. The consecrating of the water of baptism, the marking with the sign of the cross in oil, the chrism, the exorcism, the spittle, all accentuate the idea that material symbols become efficacious in virtue of powers imparted to them. The apostolic Church showed no such tendency, but in Tertullian we have the commencement of the materialistic view, for he declares that "the water of baptism possesses the power of sanctifying the soul after it has been consecrated, by the action of the Holy Spirit." And Cyril of Jerusalem, in his Lectures on the Mysteries, teaches that "the physical sign carried an inward potency—the oil in exorcism possesses a charm for driving away evil influences, and the chrism in confirmation is made fit to impart the divine nature" (see Allan's 'Christian Institute,' p. 481). The doctrine of the *opus operatum* rests on the belief of a virtue imparted to the material elements wherein spiritual results *ex opere operato* are necessarily produced unless mortal sin prevents. It may be said in reply that, in the "Order of Worship of the Church of Scotland," the consecration of the elements both in baptism and the Lord's Supper is expressly ordered. The consecration is there employed in a different sense; it is but the setting apart of the earthly elements to sacred purposes through the use of the words of institution and prayer. Speaking of the elements, the second Helvetic Confession says, "Verbo Dei fiunt, quæ antea non fuerunt, sacramenta. Consecrantur enim Verbo, et sanctificata esse ostenduntur ab eo qui instituit. Et sanctificare vel consecrare est, rem aliquam Deo sacrisque usibus dedicare—h. e., a communi vel profano usu segregare et sacro usui destinare" (cap. xix. 8).

Holy Ghost," He was adopting a custom already familiar to the Jews. Not only did John the Baptist baptize those who accepted His teaching, but the disciples of our Lord during His ministry baptized those who wished to be His followers (John iv. 1, 2). And we have other evidence as to the previous existence of the rite. There is much to show that when a proselyte from the Gentile world was received into Judaism, not only was circumcision insisted on, but baptism also usually took place. This custom may have arisen from the washings which were commonly associated with cleansing from legal defilement. And there is another historical ground for believing that the use of baptism was familiar, for the sect of the Essenes, which was in its vigour in the days of Christ, made much use of immersion as part of their cultus. Accordingly the use of baptism as the visible sign and seal of the washing away of defilement, of the acceptance of a new faith, and of enrolment among the disciples of a religious teacher or prophet, must have been well understood in the days of Christ. This is brought out by the question of the rulers to John the Baptist, "Why then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither the prophet?" If he could make good his claims to be a prophet, they would not have objected to his baptizing, for it would have been the natural course to follow. Their difficulty was not baptism—the purpose of which they understood—but the claims of John as one sent of God. Accordingly we may believe that the disciples at

once understood what Christ meant by connecting baptism with the command to make disciples of all nations: it would signify, from their point of view, the visible reception into the faith of all those who repented and confessed the grace and truth implied in the great Name into which they were baptized. That Jesus, during the forty days after His resurrection, when He spoke "the things concerning the kingdom of God," instructed them as to the full significance of baptism is highly probable; but we can gather the nature of that teaching only from what has come down to us in the writings of those who actually heard Him, and must avoid trying to be wise above what is written by reading into that teaching opinions which grew up in the Church hundreds of years afterwards. All that is necessary for us here to remember is that baptism was a well-known and prevalent custom before it was adopted by our Lord. The washing externally with water, to signify cleansing from defilement, had even a wider influence, as the "lustrations," so common in paganism, were connected not only with the cleansing of persons, but of animals and land from uncleanness supposed to be displeasing to the gods.

The putting off of a former life with its sins, or the giving up of a former faith, the adoption of the doctrine of a religious teacher, and the commencement of a new life founded on that teaching, were what baptism meant among the Jews; and there is reason to believe that they called such a change "a new birth," "a new life." The baptism of repent-

ance which John proclaimed was thus the setting forth in visible form; through the plunge in the Jordan, the change which his preaching had produced in the convert. As each disciple confessed his sins, the plunge was the appropriate sign of the washing away of his past life. He came forth as one prepared for the kingdom of God and for the Messiah who was about to appear.

When we consider the circumstances of Christian baptism as at first celebrated, we shall see both the appropriateness of the ceremony and how the phraseology of the New Testament acquires freshness when viewed in the light of that early period. Because we must recollect that the Church was then missionary, and making its converts from Judaism and heathenism. The persons baptised were, accordingly, chiefly adults who had become enlightened, and to whom baptism meant the most solemn of all events, the critical moment when they abjured their former faiths and habits of life, and made "the good confession before many witnesses" of their turning to the living God from idols, or to Jesus Christ as the true Messiah. At first those who were baptised were markedly converts. Later on, and before infant baptism became the rule, the catechumens—such young people as had been born within the Church and had been instructed, as well as converts from without—were also made to feel the force of the holy ordinance, when, as was the custom of the time, they went, generally at Eastertide, in procession at night to the baptistery amid a blaze of torches; and turning to the west, the region

of darkness, they renounced the devil and all his works; and then turning to the east, repeated the Creed, expressing their faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and their renunciation of the devil, the world, and the flesh; and then going down into the water, were plunged,—immersed in it three times,—probably in reference to the Trinity, or to the three days when Christ lay in the grave; and coming forth, were anointed with oil and clothed in white raiment, and joining in hymns of joy, went to the church, where they took communion for the first time, and were received into the full fellowship of the body of Christ.¹ It is when we picture

¹ "Let us conceive ourselves present at those extraordinary scenes to which no existing ritual of any European Church offers any likeness. There was, as a general rule, but one baptistery in each city, and such baptisteries were apart from the churches. There was but one time of the year when the rite was administered—viz., between Easter and Pentecost. There was but one personage who could administer it, the presiding officer of the community, the bishop, as the chief presbyter was called in the first century. There was but one hour for the ceremony—it was midnight. The torches flare through the dark hall as the troops of converts flock in. The baptistery consisted of an inner and an outer chamber. In the outer chamber stood the candidates for baptism, stripped to their shirts; and turning to the west as the region of sunset, they stretched forth their hands through the dimly lit chamber as in a defiant attitude towards the evil spirit of darkness, and speaking to him by name, said, 'I renounce thee, Satan, and all thy works and all thy pomp and all thy services.' And then they turned like a regiment, facing right round to the east, and repeated in a form more or less long their belief in the Father, Son, and the Spirit, which has grown up into the so-called Apostles' Creed in the West, and the so-called Nicene Creed in the East. They then advance into the inner chamber. Before them yawns the deep pool or reservoir, and, standing by, the deacon or deaconess, as the case might be, to arrange that all might be done with decency. The whole troop undress completely as if for a bath, and stood up naked before the bishop. He put to each the

to ourselves such scenes that we understand the force of St Paul's words, "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 might walk in newness of life" (Rom. vi. 4, R.V.) "Having been buried with Him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Col. ii. 12). The plunge beneath the water was as the burial of a past life and of an abandoned faith, while the rising again was through faith in the risen Saviour, the rising into a new life, even the life that is in Christ. On the part of the baptized there was abjuration of the past and acceptance of the Redeemer. On the part of Christ it was the visible sign and seal that He conferred what was signified and sealed—viz., forgiveness and regeneration, and the power of the Holy Ghost to walk henceforth in newness of life. St Paul gives further emphasis to this idea of Christian baptism when he connects it with Israel passing through the Red Sea, which was the outward and visible sign that the tyranny under which they had suffered as slaves was for ever broken. For Pharaoh and his host and their own

questions, to which the answer was returned in a loud and distinct voice as of those who knew what they had undertaken. They then plunged into the water. But before and after the immersion, their bare limbs were rubbed with oil from head to foot; they were then clothed in white gowns, and received as token of the kindly feeling of their new brotherhood the kiss of peace and a taste of honey and milk, and they expressed their new faith by using for the first time the Lord's Prayer" (Stanley's 'Christian Institutions,' p. 4).

former life were left drowned in the depths; and when they came up from the waters, they began the new life of national freedom. They were "baptized into Moses," for they accepted his guidance as God's messenger, were under the law of which he was the mediator, and, in their corporate life, they became "the Church that was in the wilderness."

Though far from being so simple as in apostolic times, the comparative simplicity of this early rite stands in contrast to the increasing elaboration of ceremony which took place in subsequent ages, so that by the end of the second or beginning of the third century we find it gradually assuming the type which afterwards led to the superstitious importance attached to the influence of the water and to the utterance of the sacred names—symbols, indeed, and names of spiritual realities, but yet so treated as to be made elements in something analogous to heathen incantations. Much that had a living meaning when the baptized were adults, who accepted baptism in full consciousness of the spiritual significance of the rite, became a superstitious observance implying belief in the power of the ceremony as if it were a charm; so that when children at play threw water on their fellows, using thoughtlessly the Triune name, and, in mere imitation of what they had seen, played at being priests, this was held to be true baptism, and effectual for forgiveness and regeneration. The use of water and of the formula was similarly employed by Francis Xavier when he scattered the consecrated water over multitudes of

heathen,—many of whom knew as little of what was being done as the stones on which the drops also fell,—and called them converts because the magical liquid had reached them. Such developments afford a warning, and teach us the necessity of falling back on Scripture, and of being cautious as to the authority we attach to the *obiter dicta* of any of the Fathers respecting the power of the ceremonial, as a ceremonial, to effect a spiritual change.

But the symbolism in its early use was graphic and suggestive. It may not be so marked now, when conditions are so much changed, and when the Church is in most places no longer missionary, making converts among an adult and heathen population, and when, instead of the immersion in the rushing river or in the deep pool of the baptistery, there is infant baptism with the sprinkling of a few drops of water. In old times, and under the special circumstances of the Church, the words of the apostles had a force which we are likely to destroy when, through a prosaic literalism, we translate them into elaborate dogmas, and confound the sign with the thing signified. For the reality of baptism is not effected by the water, however employed. The use of water is but the sign and seal of what God spiritually confers. For that sign and seal “cannot be intended to delude us,” but is appointed to assure us that He does fulfil His promise, and does bestow the grace signified as certainly as the sacrament is celebrated according to His ordinance. The elaboration of ceremony, instead of emphasising this divine act, of which the

sacrament is the divinely appointed witness, is apt to divert the thoughts from Christ to the ritual as if it had in itself the potency; and then the faith passes from confidence in the power and faithfulness of Christ, to confidence in the power of a priesthood and of a ceremony to effectuate that which God alone confers. This finds sufficient illustration in the history of the Church.

Let us, then, see what our Church teaches as to the nature of baptism, and indicate some of the Scriptural facts on which its teaching rests.

This teaching is founded on a belief in the power of the resurrection life of our ascended Lord, and the union we have with the divine through His humanity. His manhood is the ground of faith, for by His incarnation He took part in our flesh; in His humanity He bore the sin of the world; in His humanity He burst the bonds of death and ascended to the right hand of God; and it is as the God-Man that He now reigns. Through His humanity we are brought into fellowship with Him and in Him with God; we are made sharers of what He is now; and the sacraments, as we have seen, in their very materialism are suggestive of the incarnation and of the glorified humanity.

The importance of baptism is fully taught and illustrated in Scripture. When Christ instituted it, saying, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," He linked the command to the fact that all authority was given to Him in heaven and earth, and

also to the promise that He is with His Church "always, even unto the end of the world." His exaltation and His presence are thus connected with what His disciples are commanded to do, and there is at least suggested that what they thus fulfil carries with it the authority of the ever-present Lord abiding in His Church.¹

The words of Jesus to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," were undoubtedly interpreted by the Fathers as relating to baptism, and were so held in the Church till the days of Calvin; and, thus understood, they lent a vital importance to the ordinance, for they seemed to indicate its necessity before any one could enter the kingdom of God. We are told that this consensus of the Fathers must be regarded as decisive. It would be strange, however, if the Church now was to be silenced on that account, for patristic exegesis is not always to be defended. Many reasons have been urged against the acceptance of this ancient view, which we do not stay to discuss.² At all

¹ We do not quote the strong sayings in St Mark's Gospel, because they are now generally recognised as without authority, and are omitted in the Revised Version.

² "That the whole passage," writes Dr Leishman, "is meant to convey a rebuke to Nicodemus for his offer of a private profession of faith is confirmed by the spirit of the words with which it ended. That which Jesus spoke to an adult, before the baptism of the Christian dispensation was instituted in the completeness of its form and significance, can hardly have been intended to reveal the general law of the force of baptism when it came to be administered most frequently to infants born within His Church. The theory that the work of regeneration is invariably accomplished in baptism is contradicted rather

events, the words themselves seem to indicate two things, “water” and “spirit.” They recall the words of the Baptist, “I baptize you with water unto repentance; but He that cometh after me shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” The baptism with water signified the cleansing from the sin, of which repentance was the confession, and it is distinguished from the baptism of fire, which was the gift of the Holy Ghost, and this distinction seems to be assumed in the words of Christ.

In the Acts of the Apostles baptism is invariably than asserted by the saying of Jesus, ‘The wind bloweth *where* it listeth.’ His words regarding the new birth do not necessarily mean that there is one spiritual regeneration—the result of two causes, one spiritual, the other material. They may with at least equal propriety be understood to mean that for Nicodemus and all others in like circumstances there must be a regeneration by water and a regeneration by the Holy Spirit. He was a Jew proud of being born into the visible covenant which God had made with the sons of Abraham. He must be born anew into a better covenant, that of Christ; and so long as he withheld this open homage, he was entitled to no part in the new kingdom. But besides this, he must be renewed in the spirit of his mind by the Holy Spirit of God. Such a distinction between a visible and an unseen regeneration seems to be indicated by the explanatory words which immediately follow: ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’ If our Lord’s purpose was, as the circumstances and the context seem to show, to tell Nicodemus that two conditions were necessary to honest discipleship, and that He could not have the one fulfilled and dispense with the other, there is nothing in the passage to prove that invariable coincidence of baptism and spiritual regeneration which the Church of Rome deduces from it. At the same time, it shows baptism to be necessary, according to the common distinction of the Reformers, *non ex necessitate medii*—not as a means through which alone spiritual regeneration could be given—*sed ex necessitate precepti*—as an ordinance commanded by God, to contemn or neglect which is a great sin” (Thesis on Baptism).

enforced, and that under most diverse circumstances. It was not enough at Pentecost that 3000 were pricked to the heart, and in repentance asked, "What shall we do?" Repentance must lead to baptism, and baptism was usually followed by the apostolic gift of the Holy Ghost. It was not enough that the Ethiopian eunuch should have come to believe in Jesus as the suffering Messiah. "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" is the instinctive cry of his heart. His faith was already strong, but it did not supersede the necessity for baptism. Cornelius had already received the gift of the Holy Ghost, but even that did not supersede the necessity for baptism in his case. The faith of the Samaritans, consequent on the preaching of Philip, led at once to baptism. St Paul had been converted, and was a believer in Jesus four days before Ananias said, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." The heart of Lydia was fully opened by the grace of Christ, yet baptism was at once administered to her and her household. The Philippian jailor believed with his whole house, yet conversion and faith were not sufficient, for they were all immediately baptized. Crispus, St Paul's convert at Corinth, "believed in the Lord with his whole house," and many others, hearing and believing, were also baptized.

Baptism is represented not as the cause of repentance, or of faith, or of spiritual life, but as invariably following these (Acts ii. 38-41; viii. 12, 13, 36-38; ix. 18; xi. 16; xvi. 14, 15, 31, 33; xviii. 8;

xix. 1-5). Baptism usually preceded the apostolic gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts viii. 15, 16; xix. 1-5), but not always (Acts x. 4-7). Yet in spite of the confession of his faith by Cornelius, and the manifestation in him of the gift of the Holy Ghost "as at the first," that his baptism should have been considered necessary is one of the strongest evidences of the importance attached to it by the apostle.¹

Nothing can be stronger than the witness which St Paul bears, and which is borne also by the other writers of the New Testament, to the place which baptism occupies. It is represented as marking the critical moment when the convert passes from death into life, and is a visible sign and seal of the changed

¹ The only passage in which an apparent non-recognition of the importance of baptism is discovered is in what St Paul says (1 Cor. i. 14-17): "I thank God I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in my own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." The tone of the whole passage is startling, and his reason, "Lest people should say I had baptized in my own name," must appear a weak one if he believed that baptism was the specific and only instrument whereby forgiveness, regeneration, and adoption were ordinarily communicated. The dread of being misunderstood could scarcely have excused him had he held such views of the ordinance, for we could not imagine him saying, "I thank God none of you received the washing away of sin, the gift of regeneration and adoption into life, through me." It is not enough to say that he had appointed others to baptize, for it cannot remove the conviction that he never could have written thus if he had regarded baptism as not merely the divinely appointed sign and seal of grace, but the only divinely appointed channel through which these specific graces were conveyed. But whatever the force of this passage may be, it cannot affect the teaching of St Paul elsewhere and the significance of the place that he assigns to baptism.

relationship in which baptism places the baptized. It assumes the condition of sin and death in which man lies by nature, as separated from God (Rom. v. 18-20, vi. 1-5; I Cor. vi. 11; Col. ii. 10-12). In these passages there is set, in contrast to the death in sin, the new life into which believers are raised in Christ, who is risen from the dead; and this change is associated with baptism: "In whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Even as circumcision had marked the moment when the Israelite was admitted into the new relationship created by the old covenant, so baptism marks the putting off of the life of the flesh, the burial of the past, and the rising again into the new life which is in the risen Lord, and bestowed because of the resurrection life of Him Who is now ascended.¹ As the

¹ There is one passage (I Peter iii. 21) where, after reference to the ark,—which, floating on the waters, was the means of saving Noah and them that were with him,—it is added, "Which also after a true likeness (or in the antitype) doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation (or inquiry) of a good conscience towards God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Much has been made of these words by those who lay emphasis on the water of baptism as that on which the Church, like the ark, rests. But the emphasis here is not on the water, or on its cleansing, but on the "interrogation of a good conscience," which is a difficult expression, but probably means the demand for a good conscience, or, in other words, for the spiritual cleansing of which the "washing of the filth of the flesh" by material water was the sign.

proselyte to Judaism, although spiritually convinced and enlightened, yet, until he was actually circumcised, was not within the covenant or a member of the ecclesia to which belonged the ancient promise, so conviction and conversion did not of themselves fulfil all that baptism involved. For even as circumcision bestowed membership in Israel and all the privileges of membership, in like manner may baptism be regarded as the act whereby the convert was ingrafted into Christ and made a member of His Body, which is the Church, and a partaker of the benefits which flow from union with its great Head.

One remark it is necessary to make here to prevent confusion. Many, recalling controversies on the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, stumble at regeneration being associated, as it is in our Standards, with baptism. They are repelled by the phrase, because it seems to imply a materialistic *ex opere operato* idea of a personal spiritual change being produced by an external rite. But they confound regeneration with conversion. Regeneration, as taught in relation to baptism, is rather that which is implied by the ingrafting into Christ. When a graft is inserted into a stock, that act is the pledge of the life that is to be. The ingrafting may not lead to a permanent life at all, for in the vine not all the branches are living branches. As baptism is an act whereby Christ signifies and seals and confers the grafting of the child or of the adult into His body, the Church, in which He lives by His Spirit, so regeneration in baptism

represents the pledge of the new life of which it is the sign and seal. In the early Church so prominent was the thought of regeneration that baptism was usually called by that name. Baptism was then "regeneration." Conversion is not an experience which belongs to the infant; while baptism is the pledge of a life, and the sacrament signifies and seals the gift of this life. It is in this sense that we must understand such phrases as the "laver of regeneration" (Titus iii. 4-8). The washing, the cleansing from sin, as the word "laver" signifies, is associated with the commencement of the new life which is by the "renewing of the Holy Ghost." They form one act, although the renewing, like sanctification, is continuous; and baptism is the sign and seal that Christ gives this washing, and also pledges the life which springs from the ingrafting into His body, the Church. And all this is grounded on the grace and mercy which appear in the life that was incarnate, and through the righteousness which justifies. In the case of adults there must ever be previous repentance and faith, or, in other words, conversion; and the baptism which follows their confession of Christ is the divinely appointed act in which the washing away of sin and their new relationship as ingrafted into Christ are signified and confirmed. In the case of infants there is necessarily an absence of conscious life, and so also of repentance and faith; but as in circumcision the infant, without apprehension of its meaning on his part, was made an heir of the covenant of promise, and a member of

the Church of God with all its privileges, so are the spiritual benefits of the new covenant by grace conferred on the baptized child. The act of baptism is the divinely appointed seal to the fact that the child is God's child and adopted into His family.¹

We propose now to give a brief *résumé* of the teaching of our Church, as expressed in her Standards, as to the nature of baptism, founded upon Scripture.

The Scots Confession, which was accepted as authoritative in 1560, was founded on the Genevan Confession, and on Calvin's Catechism. In treating of the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper are connected with circumcision and the Passover: "And thir Sacramentes, as weil of Auld as of New Testament, now instituted of God, not onelie to make ane visible difference betwixt His people and they that wes without His League; bot also to exercese the faith of His children, and, be participation of the same sacraments, to seill in their hearts the assurance of His promise, and of that most blessed conjunction, union, and societie quhilk the elect have with their head, Christ Jesus. And this we utterlie damne the vanitie of thay that affirme sacraments to be naething ellis bot naked and baire signes. No, wee assuredlie believe that be baptisme we are ingraphted in Christ Jesus, to

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be made partakers of His justice, be quihlk our sinnes ar covered and remitted.”¹

These statements clearly represent the great end of all sacraments to be union and communion with the Head, Christ Jesus, and assert that in baptism we are ingrafted into Him, to be made partakers of His righteousness, by which our sins are covered and remitted. The force of the statements in the Confession is made plain by reference to Calvin’s Catechism (1545), which forms the basis of the teaching of the Reformers in their Catechism.²

¹—Scots Confession of Faith, Art. 21.

²—“The significance of baptism standeth in two pointes: first, our Lord representeth unto us herein the remission of our sins; secondly, our regeneration. . . . The remission of sinnes is a manner of washing, whereby our souls are cleansed from their filthinesse even as the filth of the body is washed away by water.” Again: “Because the beginning of our regeneration standeth in the mortification of our nature, and the end that we become new creatures through the Spirit of God, therefore the water is poured upon the head to signify that we are dead or buried, and that in such sort that our rising again into a new life is therewithall figured, in that the pouring of water is hut a thing of a very short continuance, and not ordained that we should be drowned thereby.” Not that the water is the washing of our souls, “for that belongeth to the blood of our Saviour Christ alone, which was shed that all our filth might be wiped away, and that we might be counted pure and without spot before God; the which thing then taketh effect in us, what time our consciences are sprinkled therewith by God’s Holy Spirit, but the sacrament doth testify and declare it unto us.” “Yet it is such a figure as hath the virtue joined with it, for God keepeth His promise, and deceiveth no man; wherefore it is certain that remission of sins and newness of life is offered to us in baptism, and that we receive the same there.” Our regeneration, in like manner, is connected with the death and resurrection of Christ. In His death “our old Adam is crucified, and our sinful nature is, as it were, buried.” The newness of life and obedience we obtain by His resurrection, and “we obtain this grace in baptism because we are there clothed with

The dogmatic teaching is most instructive. The ingrafting into Christ is connected with the spiritual union of the members with Him in His resurrection and eternal life; their union and communion with Him are set forth; and baptism is the sign and seal of the conferring thereof. Besides this regeneration, or imparting of the new life by the ingrafting into Christ, there is remission of sins because of the righteousness of Christ, of which we are made partakers, sealed to us in baptism. The question put to parents in the 'Book of Common Order' for baptism, as it appears in Knox's Liturgy, is one which may reveal the distance by which the Church of the present day has departed from earlier times: "Do ye here present this child to be baptized, earnestly desiring that he may be grafted in the mystical body of Jesus Christ?" We fear that, if such a question were put now, it would excite some surprise.

Another Catechism which obtained great influence in the Church of the Reformation was that of Craig, who was at once a famous scholar and one who had seen much of the world. He became colleague to John Knox in St Giles', Edinburgh, in 1568, was translated to Aberdeen, where in

Christ, and indued with His Holy Spirit, if so be we make not ourselves unworthy of His promises, which be there given unto us."

Calvin, therefore, clearly asserts that the sacraments are not bare signs, but such as signify a divine operation, and that God does fulfil what the sacraments testify; and he makes the grace of baptism consist in the remission of sins and regeneration. These views were adopted by our Scottish Reformers, and find full expression in the first Confession.

1581 he published his Catechism, and subsequently became chaplain to King James. He describes the two sacraments as testifying our receiving and continual feeding in God's household, baptism being the receiving or entrance, and the Lord's Supper the feeding in the household of God.¹

These earlier symbols of the reformed faith lead us to the present standards of the Church—viz., the Westminster Confession, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

Confession of Faith.—The words of the West-

¹ The following are the questions bearing upon baptism:—

Q. What is the signification of baptism? *A.* Remission of our sins, and regeneration.

Q. What similitude hath baptism with the remission of sins? *A.* As washing cleanseth the body, so Christ's blood our souls.

Q. Wherein doth this cleansing stand? *A.* In abolishing of sin, and imputation of justice.

Q. Wherein standeth our regeneration? *A.* In mortification and newness of life.

Q. How are these things sealed up in baptism? *A.* By laying on and taking off the water.

Q. What meaneth the laying on of the water? *A.* Our death and burial to sin.

Q. What meaneth the taking off again? *A.* Our rising again to a new life.

Q. Doth the external washing work these things? *A.* No; it is the work of God's Spirit only.

Q. Then the sacrament is a bare figure? *A.* No, but it hath the verity joined with it.

Q. Do all men receive these graces with the sacrament? *A.* No, only the faithful.

Q. What is the ground of our regeneration? *A.* The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Q. When are we partakers of His death and resurrection? *A.* When we are made one with Him through His Spirit. (See the reprint edited by Thomas Graves Law, 1883.)

minster Confession are as follows: "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world" (chap. xxviii. sect. 1).

The statements here are clear. Baptism is more than the solemn admission of the baptized into the visible Church; it is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace,—not an instrument itself operating, but a seal of the operation of God (Col. ii. 12), a sign and seal that the person baptized is ingrafted into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. Whatever else it means, it shows the establishment of a new relation with the promise of the consequent graces and privileges.

"Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated" (chap. xxviii. sect. 5).

This section is an admirable protest against the harsh doctrine which makes baptism necessary to salvation. Augustine's revolting view, that unbaptized infants are infallibly damned, was the

outcome of the identification of saving grace with the ritual of the Church. Although in a measure accepted by the Romish Church, yet the instinct of a better spirit led to certain modifications, such as the liberty given even to women to baptize in extreme cases, and also to the prevalent semi-heathen, medieval belief in a region somewhere between heaven and hell, a *limbus infantum*, to which the souls of unbaptized children were consigned. The necessities of the theory also led to such horrible conceptions as that the penitent thief must have been baptized by the blood of Christ having been ejected upon him, because his salvation without baptism seemed to those old divines impossible. The shocking effects of this theory of baptism found, till recently, a barbarous illustration in the Anglican Church, when unbaptized infants were forbidden to be buried in consecrated ground. Verily the sacraments, which are revelations of grace, were converted into dogmas of repulsive cruelty when men could dare thus to treat infants, forgetting how He Who instituted baptism once took an unbaptized Jewish child in His arms and blessed it; and how He placed another child in the midst of His disciples and said, "Except ye be converted"—*i.e.*, the disciples, not the child—"and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." We may, therefore, be thankful for the unfaltering statement of the Confession that grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed to this ordinance as that no person can be regenerated or saved without

it, and also for the assertion, which found its first illustration in Simon Magus, that all who are baptized are not necessarily regenerated.¹

“The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered, yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in His appointed time” (chap. xxviii. sect. 6).

This section puts in a clear light what we are to understand by the words “really conferred by the Holy Ghost” as referring to the grace signified and sealed. It shows that the Reformers, true to their denial of the *ex opere operato* doctrine of Rome, and not less firmly holding that the grace signified is really conferred, recognised that the efficacy of the sacrament was not tied to the moment when the ordinance was administered, but that yet, in God’s appointed time, it is bestowed on such as “that grace belongeth unto.” The force of this is made clear by the phrase, “the right use of this ordinance,” which finds a certain exposition in the admirable answer given in the Larger Catechism to the question, “How is our baptism to be improved by us?” God does work His blessed work of grace

¹ We cannot accept the interpretation of this statement given in the treatise on baptism in the Scottish Church Society’s Conferences, Second Series, vol. i. It is only by a straining of words that any other meaning can be assigned except the plain one that persons may be regenerated or saved without baptism.

in those who do not resist that grace, who are willing to be workers together with Him in His good purpose towards them; and their baptism is a fact which may ever be used as a permanent and fixed ground, at once for confidence as to the grace of God, and of assured victory in the struggle against the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.

Larger Catechism.—The Larger Catechism exhibits even a richer conception of baptism than the Confession of Faith,—as we may see by comparing its fuller statement with that of the Confession. It is represented as “a sign and seal of ingrafting into Himself; of remission of sins by His blood, and regeneration by His Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible Church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord’s.”

These last words, when applied to infants, must be held as referring to their standing as represented by their parents or sponsors, who come under obligations to train them into the knowledge of what their baptism had signified.

Again, there is the valuable answer to Question 167: “The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration

of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavouring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body."

This statement stands almost alone among the symbols of the Churches of Christ as an exposition of the duties which baptism continually lays upon the baptized, and of the importance of recognising it as a basis on which practical life and character ought to be built. Dogmatically, also, it is of value, as affirming the connection between the life of the baptized and the resurrection life of the Lord. It would be well if the teaching here given was more enforced in the present day, and that baptism was kept before the minds of the members of the Church as a ground at once of responsibility and of assured grace.

The *Shorter Catechism* gives, in an abbreviated

form, the same teaching as the Larger Catechism, but calls for no further remark.¹

The definition of the nature of baptism contained in the 27th Article of the Church of England is practically identical with the standards of the Church of Scotland, although not so full or rich in its terms; but, as in the case of the Eucharist, a certain colour is given to its meaning in the Prayer Book which leaves more room for the conception of the *opus operatum* than the article, of itself, indicates. The prayers are capable of being regarded as expressing no more than what has been set forth above, or the views of those who take a "higher" ground. Regeneration, *e.g.*, may be viewed as actually tied to the administration, or the words may, with perhaps as much truth, be said to be but the solemn signing and sealing of God's grace,

¹ In the Palatine or Heidelberg Catechism, which bears on its title, "Translated into English, and printed anno 1591, by public Authority, for the Use of Scotland, . . . by Jeremias Bastingius, and sometimes printed with the Book of Common Order and Psalm Book,"* there are interesting illustrations of the belief of the Reformers, as accepted at that time in our Church and country:—

Q. Is this baptism the very washing away of sins? *A.* It is not, for only the blood of Christ and the Holy Ghost doth cleanse us from all sin.

Q. Why, then, doth the Holy Ghost call baptism the washing of regeneration, and the washing away of sins? *A.* God doth not, without great cause, so speak, to wit, not only to teach us that, as spots of the body are cleansed with water, so our sins are purged by the blood and Spirit of Christ, but much more that, by this heavenly Token and Pledge, He may assure us that we are as surely washed inwardly from our sins as we are washed with outward and visible water.

* In Dunlop's Collection, vol. ii.

although not necessarily tied to the moment of baptism. The diversity of view which is tolerated in the Anglican Church has its ground in the diversity of tone which often distinguishes the terms of the Articles of Religion from the words of the Liturgy.

INFANT BAPTISM.

From the nature of the case, as already shown, adult baptism comes chiefly before us in the New Testament and in the early Church, because it was then a missionary Church making converts from Judaism and paganism. They were usually grown-up people who had been converted, who, with full consciousness of the nature of the step, were baptized. But there are those who, perceiving the appropriateness of baptism in such cases, fail to see similar reasons for the baptism of unconscious infants, and who ask what it can possibly mean for them. Those who call themselves Baptists go further, and assert that there is no express command for infant baptism, and no clear instance of such in the New Testament, and that, up to a comparatively late date in the early Church, baptism seems not to have been administered to children born within the Church till they came to the age when, as catechumens, they were able to answer for themselves.

The grounds on which infant baptism is usually defended are cogent.

1. It rests on the fact of continuity between the

Old Dispensation and the New. In the former the covenant was one of promise; in the latter the promise is fulfilled. "The Scripture," St Paul says, "preached the Gospel beforehand unto Abraham" (Gal. iii. 8), and he connects the Church with Abraham thus, "Know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham." And again, "That upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus" (Gal. iii. 7, 14). The unity of the Church from the first is assumed throughout. Our Lord Himself declared that He had not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. Under the Old Covenant children were made members of the Jewish Church by circumcision. The conception that their infants had no part with them in the community of God never dawned on the Israelites, for the community or nation, which constituted the people of God, did not consist of mere individuals, but of families—as is the case, indeed, in all society. Infants cannot be regarded as separate and unconnected, because from the very commencement of life they are members of a family, and, being dependent on father and mother, they are necessarily identified with family life. And this was clearly set forth at the first: "This is My covenant which ye shall keep between Me and you and your seed for ever; every male among you shall be circumcised" (Gen. xvii. 9, 10). Circumcision was the sign and seal that the infant son of each Israelite was, in virtue of his parentage, a member of the covenanted nation. It did not make him a spiritual son of Abraham, for

“they are not all Israel who are of Israel.” The circumcision was not the circumcision of the heart, but it was the instrument which recognised the seed of the promise, and the seal whereby there was admission to the privileges of the chosen nation.

Accordingly, when the Church of the first covenant gave place to the Christian Church, the natural course taken by those accustomed to the former dispensation was to regard the children of believers as identified with their parents. We have to realise the associations which prevailed in the age of the apostles. From time immemorial the Jews had beheld infants admitted to the membership of the Jewish Church. They had seen the same sealing ordinance of circumcision employed, when not only proselytes were admitted, but also the families of these proselytes, with their infants, and even their slaves—all being treated as one with the parent or master—being circumcised and made proselytes with him. The idea that the children must be excluded until each had grown to years when it could for itself make an intelligent profession of faith, as the proselyte father had done, was quite foreign to the beliefs and the habits of the period. And there is no breach of continuity hinted in the New Testament. Had a new law come into force excluding children, we should expect its declaration in clear terms. The burden of proof does not, therefore, lie with those who regard children as fit subjects for baptism,—which took the place of ancient circumcision, even as the Lord’s Supper took the place of the Passover,—but it lies with

those who deny the principles which ruled throughout the former Dispensation, to show the evidence for such a change having been made by Divine appointment. Where is there such evidence?

It is not necessary to fall back on passages which show the prevalence of adult baptism, because the circumstances of the Church, as a missionary Church, necessitated the conversion of adult Jews and Gentiles. The point is whether the principle recognised from the days of Abraham was annulled, and the children of converts expressly excluded from admission by baptism into the Christian Church.

On the contrary, the evidence points in an opposite direction. We do not dwell on the great saying of Jesus, "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven," except to say how strange it would be if those so markedly described as typical of the kingdom of heaven should be excluded by Him from the Church on earth. Christ pronounced them fit for the kingdom of heaven: are we to treat them as heathen till they grow up and are "converted," forgetting the word to His disciples, "Except ye be converted" (not the children, but the disciples), "and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"? But we have positive indications to the contrary in the instances in which whole households belonging to converts are said to have been baptized along with the head of the house. The probability of children being among them seems almost a certainty when

we remember what an ancient household was; and this is strengthened by what took place, as we have seen, in the case of proselytes, where all—not only the children, but the slaves—were circumcised. The principle involved is illustrated and applied to baptism by St Paul when he says that “the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.” It cannot be that by “holy” he meant sanctified by the Holy Spirit, for that must ever be the result of a personal religious experience, impossible for an infant. They were “holy” only in the sense in which Israel was “a holy nation,” because they were within the covenant of promise.

Among the early Fathers, Irenæus, Justin Martyr, and Origen assert infant baptism; and the latter not only speaks of it as the custom in his days, but expressly says, “The Church received the tradition from the apostles that baptism ought to be administered even to little children.” For these and many other reasons, which need not be quoted here, we hold that infant baptism rests on broad principles which ruled from the first in Israel, and which were adopted and acted upon by the apostles, and have governed the action of the universal Church till the present day, except among the estimable Christians who have assumed, on conscientious but, we believe, mistaken grounds, a separatist position.¹

¹ See additional Note V., p. 242.

NOTE V.

As to the form of Baptism the Confession of Faith (chap. xxviii. 3) declares, "Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person." So, too, in the Directory for the Public Worship of God it is said that "for the manner of doing of it, is not only lawful but sufficient, and most expedient to us, by pouring or sprinkling of the water in the face of the child, without adding any other ceremony." The Rev. W. H. Macleod, B.D., furnishes me with the following interesting statement: "In 1617 the Scottish Parliament passed an Act enjoining parishes to have utensils for ministration of the Sacraments, and in that Act it is specially mentioned that the baptismal vessels were to consist of 'Basines and Lavoires'—an account of which may be found in Burns's 'Old Scottish Communion Plate,' pp. 512, 513. There are twenty-eight parishes in which the original vessels are preserved. The basins are too shallow to have admitted the raising of the water with the hand, but the 'lavers' or 'lavoires'—or, as they are elsewhere termed, 'ewers'—have very small holes through which the water was poured. It is needless to say that this custom has completely disappeared."