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I.

THE SACRAMENTS AND THE CHILDREN OF
THE CHURCH.

ALL Protestant creeds, notably the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, insist upon the distinction between the invisible and the visible Church, the one consisting of all true believers in Christ, and the other of all professed believers; and while all these creeds embrace the glorious anticipation that this distinction will be utterly abolished when the divine ideal is realized and the Church is presented to Christ "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing," they also recognize the fact so clearly set forth in our Lord's parables and illustrated even in the calling of the twelve apostles, that, in the Kingdom of Heaven, under the present dispensation, the Gospel net gathers of every kind, both good and bad, and the tares and the wheat grow together until the harvest. But notwithstanding this theoretical agreement there is a wide practical difference even among Protestants as to how far and by what means the visible Church is authorized and required to conform herself to the invisible.

That only regenerate persons have any divine right to visible Church membership, and that the Church ought to preach this doctrine, we are all agreed. But the open question is, how far she may undertake to apply and enforce the doctrine in the exercise of discipline and the administration of the Sacraments. For the solution of the problem there are two theories which may be designated as the Puritan and the Reformed. We use the word Puritan, of course, not as the historic name of any sect or body of Christians, but simply as the abstract and upon the whole the most expressive term for certain views as to the province and functions of the visible Church. With the ultimate design of Puritanism, which is to rid the

Church of everything scandalous and contrary to Scripture, we are in full sympathy. In this design Puritan and Presbyterian are one, and until the rise of Independency in England they were identified in the struggle to attain it. For much that Puritanism has done we are profoundly grateful. Even for its later excesses we have the utmost charity, when we remember the desperate diseases for which they were the desperate remedy. At the same time we reject the theory of the Church by which these excesses are justified.

John Owen, the prince of Puritan theologians of the Independent type, will be accepted as the best expounder of the theory we are discussing. He defends, against the Roman Catholics, the distinction between the invisible and the visible Church. He condemns, with irresistible array of Scripture arguments, the corruptions and scandals which were tolerated and protected by the Church of England in his day. He demonstrates that "regeneration is expressly required in the Gospel to give a right and privilege unto an entrance into the Church or kingdom of Christ"; that by this requirement the Church is "distinguished from all other kingdoms in and of the world"; that the right to Church membership "must of necessity be something better and more excellent and sublime than anything the laws and polities of men pretend unto or prescribe," and that "it cannot consist in any outward rite easy to be observed by the worst and vilest of men." *

Against the Erastianism dominant in the Church of England under the Stuarts, which made Church membership and citizenship in the State identical, and administered the Sacraments as the badges of both, to men of openly scandalous lives—the arguments of Owen are unanswerable, and in full accord with the doctrine of all the Reformed Creeds. So far Presbyterians always have been and still are Puritans. We are fully agreed in the negative position that the Sacraments ought not to be administered to persons who, by their own confession, or by the witness of a scandalous life, are proved to be unregenerate. But when Owen comes affirmatively to define the conditions upon which persons are to be admitted to sealing ordinances, he goes beyond the Westminster Standards, and beyond all the Reformed creeds, in claiming for the Church an authority for which there is no Scripture warrant. He insists that it is

"the duty of the Elders of the Church towards persons desiring to be admitted unto the fellowship of the Church, to discern and judge by the rule of truth applied in love between sincere professors and hypocritical pretenders, to influence, direct, comfort, and encourage in the way, such as they judge to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity ;

* "The Nature of the Gospel Church." Owen's works, vol. xvi., p. 12.

to propose and recommend them unto the whole Church with prayers and supplications to God for them ; to admit them, being approved, into the order and fellowship of the Gospel Church."—(Owen's Works, vol. xv., p. 525.)

Now this claim in behalf of the Church to be a discerner of the thoughts and intents of men's hearts marks the essential difference between the Puritan and the Reformed theory. We contend, in harmony with all the Reformed creeds, that God has not given to the office-bearers or to the members of the Church the right to "discern, judge, and approve" of men's spiritual condition. And the simple proof that he has not conferred the right is found in the patent truth that he has not given them the ability to do so. The attempt to exercise such prerogatives is a spiritual usurpation which must necessarily cause divisions and fanatical excesses. The whole history of Protestantism proves this. The puritan idea of the Church and its functions has not been and is not now confined to those who are called Puritans. Its presence and power are often felt in denominations whose doctrinal standards give it no sanction. It is the moving cause of all attempts to enforce tests and terms of communion beyond what Christ has enjoined and the Scriptures declare to be necessary to salvation. It is the fruitful mother of schism in the body of Christ. It underlies and is the main strength of all arguments against the right of infants, born of believing parents, to be recognized and treated as Church members. Because they cannot profess faith in Christ, nor give an account of their personal experience, by which *we* may judge of their spiritual state in the sight of God, therefore they are to be excluded from baptism, and from membership in the Church. And if the Puritan idea of the Church be admitted as a premise, we cannot see how this conclusion can be logically avoided. The difference between these two theories in their practical working is thus clearly defined by Dr. Hodge :

"According to the one view the Church is bound to be satisfied in its judgment that the applicant is truly regenerate; according to the other no such judgment is expressed or implied in receiving any one into the communion of the Church. Both parties require a *credible* profession of faith; but the one means by credible that which *constrains belief*, the other that which *may be believed*, *i.e.*, that against which no tangible evidence can be adduced."—"Theology," iii., p. 545).

The difference between these two positions is very profound, especially in its bearing on the relation of children to the Sacraments. The theory which imposes on the Church the obligation to judge of men's spiritual condition in order to admit them to membership, must necessarily lead either to the rejection of infant baptism, or to a change in the whole meaning of the ordinance as defined in the

doctrinal standards of the Reformation. In fact, it does work powerfully in both these directions, even in the Presbyterian Church. The increasing neglect of the ordinance is not more to be deprecated than the inadequate views with which it is often observed. "A holy ordinance instituted by Christ," unless it be kept to the intent for which it was appointed, is not kept at all. Its efficacy depends upon its meaning and not upon its outward form. There is a common, if not a prevalent notion that infant baptism differs in its significance from adult baptism, that it is simply the formal consecration of our children to God, the sign of a grace which exists only in the possibilities of the future, the seal of something to be prayed and hoped for in the mature experience of the child, but in the present reality of which it would be a dangerous superstition to believe. They who hold such views act more consistently in the neglect than in the observance of the ordinance. Is it not better to postpone the application of the seal till there is something to be sealed?

To justify these observations let us glance at the doctrine of the Sacraments as defined in our Standards. Our Shorter Catechism declares

"that the sacraments become effectual means of salvation not from any virtue in them or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ and the working of his spirit in them that by faith receive them."—(Ques. 91.)

Nevertheless they *do* become and are EFFECTUAL MEANS OF SALVATION. A true sacrament always consists of two parts, the one outward, visible, and formal, the other inward, spiritual, and effectual. Our Standards assert this quite as explicitly as the catechism of the Episcopal Church. The Larger Catechism, question 163, says: "The parts of a sacrament are two: the one an outward and sensible sign used according to Christ's own appointment, and the other an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified." Where either of these is wanting there is, in fact, no sacrament at all, no matter what ceremonies may be performed; a mere act of consecration or of worship, however sincere and devout, does not constitute a sacrament. Nor is the design for which these holy ordinances were instituted by Christ limited to the symbolic preaching of the Gospel, and to the opportunity they afford us to profess our faith in Christ, and our love for one another. The attainment of these objects, which are common to them and to the other means of grace, is not their distinctive and most important design. In them "by sensible signs Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers" (Shorter Catechism, 92). Both the Sacraments represent,

but they do infinitely more than this, they *seal* and *apply* Christ and his benefits. These words are not tautological. A seal is something more than a sign, to apply means more than to seal. They can mean nothing less than this, that the proper use of either of the Sacraments is not merely a profession of faith, an act of consecration, or an exercise of brotherly love on our part: it involves a covenant engagement on God's part that the things signified in the ordinance shall be and are ours in actual possession. The Confession of Faith (chap. 27-3) says, "the grace which is *exhibited* in or by the Sacraments, rightly used, is not *conferred* by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit, and the Word of institution which *contains together with a precept a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.*" The negative part of this statement should not be allowed to overshadow what it so explicitly affirms. It should be observed that our standards, in common with all the Reformed creeds, and all theological writers down to and after the time of the Westminster Assembly, use the words *exhibit* and *confer* as synonymous. The Confession of Faith, as above quoted, plainly asserts that *in or by the Sacraments grace is conferred upon worthy receivers.* Romanists and Romanizers maintain that the grace is conferred by the power of the consecrated elements, or by the intention or piety of the administrator, and that it is therefore conferred upon all who receive the outward elements. This our standards deny; and some are so concerned to overthrow the Romish doctrine as to the mode that they run to the opposite extreme, and insist that no grace whatever is conferred by the Sacraments. But our Standards teach that God, in fulfilment of the promise contained in the words of institution, bestows sacramental grace upon all "worthy receivers." And who are worthy receivers? Our catechisms give two definitions of this phrase: The Shorter Catechism (91-92) says they are "believers," or those "who by faith receive" the sacraments: The Larger Catechism (162) declares that the grace promised is exhibited and applied to all "those who are within the covenant of grace"; *i. e.*, to believers and their children. If the infant children of believers are not "worthy receivers" of the only sacrament they are capable of receiving in their infancy, then infant baptism has no place whatever in our system. For surely our Standards do not propose to administer either of the sacraments to those who are not presumed to be worthy to receive it. And on the other hand, if infants *are* "worthy receivers" of baptism, then our creed teaches that the grace or benefit signified in the ordinance and prom-

ised in the words of institution, is conferred upon them. The doctrine of the Sacraments, as thus simply, but profoundly defined in the Westminster Symbols is common to all the Reformed Creeds: "Calvin's doctrine of the Eucharist passed into all the leading Reformed Confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and must be regarded as the orthodox Reformed doctrine. Zwingli's theory, which is more simple and intelligible, has considerable popular currency, but no symbolic authority."* There is certainly no Zwinglianism in our Confession and Catechisms.†

* Schaff's "Creeds and Christendom," vol. i., p. 456.

† Nor is there any Zwinglianism upon the subject of the Sacraments in the sources from whence the Westminster Standards were composed. The views of the leading men in the Westminster Assembly can easily be ascertained from their other works. Dr. Briggs, of the Union Theological Seminary, who has done a good service to the Church by making a rare and valuable collection of these works, has shown me great kindness in exhibiting and explaining his treasures.

Thomas Cartwright, who was the father, and as Dr. Briggs calls him, the HERO of English Puritanism of the Presbyterian type, though he died forty years before the Westminster Assembly met, exerted a mighty influence in forming the opinions of its members. In his Catechism entitled "A Treatise of Christian Religion, or the whole body and substance of Divinity," he says of Baptism and the Lord's Supper: "These two Sacraments do sufficiently seal unto us the covenant of grace and all the benefits that God offereth therein, as our regeneration and engrafting into Christ, and of our growth and continuance therein" (p. 218). "Baptism is the first sacrament of the Gospel, wherein by the washing or sprinkling of our bodies with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, our regeneration or new birth, on our entrance and engrafting into Christ and into the body of Christ, which is his Church, is represented and sealed unto us" (p. 219.)

Herbert Palmer was chairman of the Assembly's Committee on the Catechisms, a position which indicates the estimation in which he was held. Doubtless one reason of his appointment to this responsible post was the fact that he had published a catechism of his own, which was in very general use in Presbyterian churches. In this catechism he says: "The inward grace sealed to the faithful in baptism is the virtue of Christ's blood and of his Spirit to the washing away of sin and new birth of the life of grace."

"Children born within the Church are to be baptized, because they were wont to be circumcised, and because they are within God's covenant, and so have right to the seal of it."

Principal Cunningham says ("Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation," p. 279): "Rutherford and Gillespie are, literally and without any exception, just the two very highest authorities that could be brought to bear upon a question of this kind, at once from their learning and ability as theologians, and from the place they held and the influence they exerted in the actual preparation of the documents under consideration"; viz, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

Gillespie in his "Aaron's Rod Blossoming," while combating the doctrine that the Sacraments are converting ordinances, declares that "the exhibition spoken of in our Standards and by Protestant writers is a *real, effectual, lively application* of Christ and all his benefits to every one that believeth, for the staying, strengthening, confirming, and comforting of their souls" (p. 496).

From Rutherford's "Due Right of Presbyteries," we extract the following explicit statements: "The seals are not to be conferred by the church upon persons because they believe, but because they *profess* their believing" (p. 185). "The sacraments are seals and not teaching and representing signs only" (p. 212). From using the sacraments in faith we receive increase of grace, and sacramental grace" (p. 214). "For if a sacrament make not a thing that was not before—if God give not and really produce, confer and exhibit grace and a stronger measure of faith and assurance of remission of sins at the due and right use of the sacraments, the sacrament is a naked sign and not an exhibitivè seal."

The views of these two eminent Scotch Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, accord not only with our Standards, but with the *Confessio Scottica*, drawn up by Knox and his associates in 1560, and held by the Church of Scotland until it was superseded in 1647 by the adoption of the Westminster Confession. A brief extract will suffice: "Wee utterlie damne the vanitie of thay that affirme sacramentes to be nathing ellis bot naked and baire signes. No, wee assuredlie beleeve that be Baptisme wee ar engrafted in Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his justice, bequihlk our sinnes

They are as Calvinistic in regard to the Sacraments as in regard to the doctrines of grace. They teach the real, though spiritual, presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. They reiterate and insist upon the doctrine that both the Sacraments are seals and applications of Christ and his benefits to all who rightly use them, in opposition to the theory which makes them simply signs and historic memorials, badges of our professed faith in Christ, and pledges of our love for him and for each other. As taught by Zwingli, this theory of simple commemoration was no doubt a natural reaction from the Romish error, to which, in a modified form, Luther adhered. But in order to avoid Scylla we are not obliged to fall into Charybdis. Many of the followers of Zwingli have gone much further than he did. The Quaker doctrine, which denies the present necessity of the outward form of the Sacraments, and resolves them entirely into the things signified, seems to be a legitimate conclusion from the commemorative theory. Certainly this conclusion cannot be successfully resisted by pleading merely "the preceptive necessity" of the Sacraments, for our interpretation of the precepts must be determined by our apprehension of their design. If that design was simply to commemorate Christ and express the union of Christians, there is great force in the opinion that it was temporary—that it was exhausted and done away by the coming of the Comforter, the writing of the New Testament Script-

are covered and remitted. And also, that in the Supper rightly used, Christ Jesus is so joined with us, that hee becummis very nurishment and fude of our saules."—(Schaff's "Creeds of Christendom," vol. iii., p. 468.)

Thomas Vincent published in 1673, "An Explicatory Catechism, or an Explanation of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism," from which we make the following extract: "The sensible signs in a sacrament . . . are not bare signifying or representing signs, but withal exhibiting, conveying, and applying signs; as a seal unto a bond or last will and testament doth both signify the will of him whose bond or testament it is, and doth also exhibit, convey, confirm and apply a right unto the things promised and engaged therein; when the minister doth give forth the signs or outward elements in a sacramental action the Lord doth give forth and convey the things signified unto the worthy receivers" (Question 92).

"Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible Church, because they being out of the covenant have no right unto the seals of the covenant. The infants of such as are visible Church members may and ought to be baptized, because they *are in the covenant*, and the promise of the covenant belonging unto them, this seal of the covenant doth belong unto them also" (Question 95).

Dr. Briggs has called my attention to a remarkable little book by Bishop Davenant, published in 1641, and entitled, "An Exhortation to Brotherly Communion." The author shows the essential points of agreement among Protestants, as a protest against the divisive tendencies of the extreme Puritans. In regard to the sacraments he bears this testimony: "No protestant Church can be named which professeth not with the Eucharist the true presence of the body and blood of Christ, although it acknowledgeth the very manner of the presence to be supernatural and plainly divine. . . . The agreement of all Protestants on this point is so well known we need take no pains to prove it. . . . All Protestant Churches are point-blank against all erroneous doctrines of the bare representation of the body and blood of Christ, parted from the true and real exhibiting of him" (p. 129).

From all which, and much more that might be quoted, it is evident that the prevalence of the theory that the sacraments are mere signs and remembrances, is of more modern date than the Westminster Assembly, and is a departure from our doctrinal standards and from the views of the men who made them.

ures, and the establishment of the great facts of Christianity in the knowledge and memory of the Church. Nor can the force of this argument be broken by quoting the saying, "Ye do show forth the Lord's death *till he come.*" For the advocates of the Quaker theory will insist, with all sincerity, that this expression is to be interpreted in a spiritual sense, and that Christ has long since come, according to his promise in John xiv. 18.*

But if the Sacraments are not merely commemorative rites, but "effectual means of salvation"—seals and conveyances of the benefits of the covenant of grace, then their design proves that their preceptive necessity is perpetual to the end of time, and confirms the declaration of our Standards, that "to neglect them is a great sin." †

Dr. Schaff says truly that "the Zwinglian is the simplest, clearest, and most intelligible theory. It removes the supernatural influence of the ordinance, and presents no obstacle to the understanding." And this is, doubtless, the secret of its prevalence. Rationalism, in the evil sense of the word, is by no means confined to Germany; nor does it win its only triumphs in the fields of Theology and Biblical Criticism. Many who denounce rationalizing in these directions, pursue the same method to extremes in their views of the Church and the Sacraments. They demand that the potency and the promise of these holy ordinances shall be brought down to their comprehension, and insist that the theory which takes them out of the category of divine mysteries is the true one, because it is so easily understood. That these views are current to a great extent, even in the Presbyterian Church, there is unfortunately little room for doubting. Their prevalence is both evidenced and fostered by the ecclesiastical phraseology so generally adopted. The first participation in the Lord's Supper has become not only contemporaneous, but, in the popular understanding, *identical* with professing Christ's name and joining the Church. And hence, in the apprehension of many, our participation in the Lord's Supper is chiefly, if not exclusively, a "badge of our profession," and its repeated use is but "the renewal of our covenant vows." Hence also the word sacrament is often explained at the communion-table, not out of our Standards, but out of the classical dictionary, to be an oath of allegiance, like that by which the Roman soldier bound himself to follow the standard of his legion.

And what is still more significant and pertinent to the subject in hand, when those who are "born within the pale of the visible Church," and recognized by our Standards as birthright members, come for the first time to the Lord's table, they are not only reported

* See Barclay's Catechism.

† Conf. of Faith, ch. 27, 5.

in the newspapers as new converts, but they are set down in the statistics of the General Assembly in the same column with converts from the world and from heathenism as "*added on examination.*"

Our danger in connection with the Sacraments does not lie in the direction of Popery and Ritualism, against which we are perhaps sufficiently warned, but it lies in the direction of indifference and unbelief. We take too much upon ourselves when we make these holy ordinances instituted by Christ any less necessary to salvation than the preaching of the Gospel with which he has inseparably connected them, or when we nullify their distinctive meaning and necessity by making them only another method of preaching. Low views of the Sacraments in general, and of the scriptural import of baptism in particular, are the real cause of the increasing neglect, not only of infant baptism, but of that Christian nurture of children which a consistent adherence to her own standards would make the grand characteristic of the Presbyterian Church.

The design of this article is not to advance anything original or new on this vitally important subject; but to state clearly what we believe to be the doctrine of our Church, and to defend the statement by authorities which all true Presbyterians will respect.

The views we advocate may be summed up in these four propositions:

I. The children of professing Christians are by their birth members of the visible Church.

II. In recognition of their birthright membership in the Church all children of professedly believing parents ought to be baptized for the same reason that adults professing faith in Christ ought to be baptized.

III. Every child lawfully baptized, until the contrary is made to appear, is presumed to be grafted into Christ, regenerated, and made a true member of the invisible Church.

IV. Baptized children ought to be treated and educated as young Christians, with a view to their being admitted at an early age to a participation in the Lord's Supper.

I.

"Baptism," says our Shorter Catechism (Question 95), "is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible Church, till they profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members of the visible Church are to be baptized." This statement has received two interpretations: (i) that which makes the latter

clause contradictory and exceptional to the first, as though it read "infants of church members are to be baptized notwithstanding these are out of the visible Church"; and (2) that which harmonizes the two clauses, as though it read "infants of professing Christians, being in the visible Church already, are not required to make a personal profession of faith as a condition of baptism." Their admission to this ordinance is therefore not an exception to the rule, but a confirmation of it. That this is the true interpretation seems evident from the construction of the statement itself. The other interpretation makes it awkward and confused, and attributes to the framers of our Standards an unskilfulness in the use of language which does not appear in any other part of their work. If they meant that the infants of professed believers are to be regarded as exceptions to the rule they lay down, it would have been easy to say so explicitly in a single sentence, like this :

"Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible Church, except to the infants of such as are already members of the same, till they profess their faith in Christ and their obedience to him."

Our interpretation is fully confirmed by the explicit language of other parts of the Standards. The Shorter Catechism is an epitome of the Larger and must be interpreted by it. Answer 166 of the Larger Catechism says :

"Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible Church, *and so strangers from the covenant of promise*, till they confess their faith in Christ and their obedience to him ; but infants descending from parents either but one or both of them professing faith in Christ and obedience to him, *are in that respect within the covenant and to be baptized.*"

If infants of believers are out of the visible Church, then are they strangers to the covenant of promise ; but they are within the covenant, therefore they are in the visible Church and so entitled to baptism. The declaration of the Confession of Faith (chap. 28, sec. 1) "that 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," does not invalidate our interpretation, because (1) this declaration refers to the baptism of adults, as the phrase "to be unto him" clearly shows, and because (2) the "solemn admission" does not constitute, but only recognizes his church membership as already existing. His membership is based, not upon his baptism, but upon his profession of faith and obedience, and is acknowledged by the vote of the session or by the minister *before* he is baptized. And this brings the passage just quoted into harmony with other

declarations of the Confession, which, under any other interpretation, it would contradict and confuse. Chap. xv. 2 says :

“The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion *together with their children.*”

It does not say together with their *baptized* children ; but simply their children, without qualification or condition, beyond the professed faith of their parents.

The visible Church *consists* of these two clauses. If that does not mean that the children of professed Christians are members of the Church, what does it mean? Our Directory for Worship, chap. ix. 1, declares that “Children born within the pale of the visible Church and dedicated to God in baptism, are under the inspection and government of the Church.” It does not say, children BROUGHT within the pale of the visible Church by baptism ; but children *born* within the pale. And if they are born within that sacred enclosure, they are not to be considered as *out* of it until they are baptized. The framers of our Directory were not afflicted with any such confusion of ideas; nor did they use language in any such bungling way as such an interpretation would attribute to them.

We shall not enter upon the familiar argument to show that the doctrine of our Standards on this point is consistent, *first* with the constitution and universal usage of human society, domestic and civil, according to which the child by its birth becomes a member of the family, and a citizen of the State ; and *secondly* with the organization of the Church of God under the old dispensation, which is one historically and essentially with the New Testament Church, and in which children were circumcised, not to make them members, but as a solemn recognition of their birthright membership. Our object now is not to defend the doctrine of our Standards, but simply to show what it is. We pass on to quote a few testimonies on the point before us, and we purposely select them from those who are still living, or so recently dead that their names are still familiar in our churches.

Dr. A. A. Hodge, in his “Commentary on the Confession of Faith,” p. 425, says : “The children of all professors of the true religion are *on that account* fellow-members with their parents of the visible Church.” The words “on that account” are italicized by the author ; and they mean that the Church membership of infants is not constituted, but only recognized by baptism : it rests upon their covenant relation to believing parents. The same idea is also presented in the following extracts :

"Infants were members of the Church under the Old Covenant from the beginning, being circumcised upon the faith of their parents. Now, as the Church is the same Church, as the conditions of membership were the same then as now—as circumcision signified and bound to precisely what baptism does—and since baptism has taken the place of circumcision, it follows that the church membership of the children of professors should be *recognized* now as it was then, and that they should be baptized" (*op. cit.*, p. 472).

"Although the New Testament does not contain any specific text which in so many words declares that the infant seed of believers *are members of the Church in virtue of their birth*, yet it abounds in passages which cannot reasonably be explained, but in harmony with this doctrine" (Miller on Infant Baptism, "Presbyterian Tracts," vol. i., p. 212).

"Infants born of believing parents are *in virtue of their birth* members of the Church of God, and entitled during infancy to baptism" (John M. Mason's "Essays on the Church," Works, vol. ii., p. 249).

"Children of believing parents, that is, of visible Christians, are members *in virtue of their birth*; so that the Catholic Church consists of all those who throughout the world profess the true religion and their children" (*Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 383.)

"The infant seed of professing Christians in virtue of their parents' faith and standing are *born members of the visible Church*, and are considered as partakers of those benefits of the covenant of grace which belong to the offspring of believers, *before they are baptized*. It has been justly remarked that baptism does not constitute a visible subject, but only recognizes one already existing; it does not introduce an individual into the covenant of grace, but it signifies that he is already there. It *seals* a covenant already formed, and which indeed would not admit of a seal if it were not previously made and prepared for sealing. Abraham had the righteousness of faith before he was circumcised. Cornelius "feared God and was accepted of Him" before he was baptized, and every adult candidate for baptism ought to give credible evidence of being born of God before he is admitted to the ordinance" (Dr. Ashbel Green, "Lectures on Shorter Catechism," vol. ii., p. 270).

"Infants of believers are to be baptized: (1) Because they are included in the covenant which God through Christ makes with His people. (2) Because they *are of right members of the Church* on earth. (3) Because the promises of the Gospel extend to them. (4) Because it is proper that they should be openly distinguished as the children of the covenanted Church from the children of unbelievers. (5) Because baptism having come in the place of circumcision, is the authorized method of making such distinction" (Bethune's "Lectures on Heidelberg Catechism," vol. ii., p. 250).

"The doctrine that parents represent their children, and that therefore children of professing parents are *born within the Church*, and on that ground are to be baptized, is the distinctive doctrine of the Reformed churches. In opposition to this view Romanists and Lutherans place the duty of infant baptism on the ground that all children are born outside of the Church, and by baptism are inwardly renewed and become members of Christ's body. They become members of the Church therefore by baptism" (Dr. Hodge in *Princeton Review*, 1858).

The doctrine that infants become members of the Church by baptism is not confined to Roman Catholics and Lutherans. It seems to be plainly affirmed in the standards of the Episcopal Church. The Twenty-sixth of the Thirty-nine Articles says: "As by an *instrument* they that rightly receive Baptism are *grafted* into the Church." The same idea underlies the Baptismal service. And this is the chief ground of our objection to that service. We are bound to accord to our Episcopal brethren the right to define their own terms. The great majority of their most esteemed expositors understand the word regeneration to mean not a moral, but an ecclesiastical change,

which secures indeed certain spiritual blessings, but does not involve either the renovation of the child's nature or the certainty of its salvation. In other words, they mean by regeneration what we mean by Church membership, coupled with the reception of what we call common, as distinguished from saving grace.*

Whether this is a right use of the word regeneration is a question not pertinent to this discussion. According to them the right to define their own terms, and admitting that this definition is a sufficient answer to the charge that their service teaches baptismal regeneration in the sense that is so offensive to Presbyterian ears, our objections to that service are based upon other and stronger grounds: (1) It makes baptism, in all cases, an initiatory rite, and the instrument by which church membership is constituted. (2) It puts the children of the Church, and the children of the world, in this respect, upon a common level. (3) It ignores the whole idea of the household covenant. (4) It substitutes the awkward and unscriptural device of sponsors in baptism, for the sacred relations and obligations of believing parents.

To prove that, according to the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church, baptism does not constitute, but only signifies and seals the Church membership of infants, we might quote many more testimonies; but we content ourselves with one from Fisher's Catechism, the most comprehensive and profound commentary on our doctrinal standards with which we are acquainted:

"Does baptism make or constitute persons church members? No! They are supposed to be church members before they are baptized, and if they are children of professing parents they are *born* members of the visible Church.—Why must they be church members before they are baptized? Because the seals of the covenant can never be applied to any but such as are supposed to be in the covenant, nor can the privileges of the Church be confirmed to any that are without the Church.—Why then do our Con-

* "The doctrine of baptismal regeneration is contrary to the declared opinions of the most pious, judicious, and venerable Protestant divines, including those of the very highest authority in the Church of England. In support of this assertion the most explicit quotations might be presented from the writings of those distinguished martyrs and prelates—Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, and Hooper; and after them, from the writings of the eminent bishops—Jewell, Davenant, Hall, Usher, Reynolds, Leighton, Hopkins, Tillotson, Beveridge, Burnet, Seeker, and a host of other divines of the English Church, of whose elevated character it would be little less than an insult to any intelligent reader to attempt to offer testimony. All these men declare in the most solemn manner against the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, *in the sense which we are now considering*" (Miller on "Infant Baptism," p. 105).

And yet all these men could consistently use the Baptismal Service of the Church of England, because they did not understand the word Regeneration to signify what we mean by it. And their views appear still to be dominant in the Episcopal Church in this country and in England.

Waterland, who was one of their ablest writers on the subject in the last century, maintains this (see Works, vol. iv., p. 424). Harold Browne, whose exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles is a text-book in Episcopal seminaries in this country, sustains the same position (see Browne on "Thirty-nine Articles," p. 633). Bishop Brownell, in his elaborate "Commentary on the Prayer-Book," sanctions the same opinion, and quotes many authorities to show that it is the accepted doctrine of the Episcopal Church (see "Commentary on Prayer-Book," p. 418).

fession and Larger Catechism say that the parties baptized are solemnly *admitted* into the visible Church? Because there is a vast difference between making a person a Church member who was none before, and the solemnity of the admission of one who is already a member. All that our Confession and Catechism affirm is, that by baptism we are solemnly admitted into the visible Church; that is, by baptism we are publicly declared to be Church members before, and thus have our membership solemnly sealed to us: 'For by one spirit we are all baptized into one body.'

II.

The right of an infant to baptism rests upon its Church membership. Its Church membership is based upon the professed faith and obedience of one or both of its parents. The superstructure can be no broader than its foundation. If the parents' profession is imperfect, insincere, or false in any way, the right of the child is so far impaired or destroyed. But of this God only is the absolute and infallible judge. Ministers and church officers cannot discern spirits. The case is precisely the same; whether the persons making the profession demand the baptism of a child, or the admission of themselves to the Lord's Supper. There must be a credible profession in either case. On this point we agree entirely with Dr. A. A. Hodge ("Commentary on Confession," p. 475):

That "it is manifestly absurd to suppose that every one who has been baptized in infancy has an indefeasible right to have his children baptized, whether he professes personal faith in Christ or not. (1) Because all members of the Church have not a right to all privileges of church membership. Baptized members have no right to come to the Communion until they make a profession of personal faith. Until they do this, they are like citizens under age, with their rights held in suspension. These suspended rights are those of communing and having their children baptized. (2) Because a person destitute of personal faith can only commit perjury and sacrilege by making the solemn profession and taking the obligations involved in the baptismal covenant. It is a sin for them to do it, and a sin for the minister to help them do it."

But still it is an open question whether the profession of faith on the part of the parent must have been formally pronounced credible by the Church, as a qualification for admission to the Lord's Supper, or whether the minister may be a judge of its credibility at the time the baptism is to be administered. Under our Form of Government, baptism is a ministerial act, as the admission of adults to the Lord's Table is the act of the Session. And we are inclined to think that in the case of those who were themselves baptized in infancy it is sufficient for the minister to demand, as a condition for admitting their children to baptism, such a confession of faith and obedience as would, in his judgment, be deemed credible and sufficient to admit them, upon application, to the Lord's Supper.

This is not a revival of the old theory of the "half-way covenant,"

which wrought such mischief in New England. For a long time, many of the New England churches, acting under the sanction and advice of the Synod of Boston in 1662, maintained the principle that persons baptized in infancy, and free from scandal, on making profession of faith and good intention (though such profession manifestly fell short of a profession of saving faith and repentance), were entitled to have their children baptized. And it soon came to be insisted and acted upon that such half-way covenanters were entitled to come to the Lord's Table. The evil results were manifold. Many who did not even profess to be believers, in the full sense of the word, were admitted to all the outward privileges of Church members. It was against this evil practice, and the theory on which it was grounded, that Jonathan Edwards wrote his Tractate on "QUALIFICATIONS FOR FULL COMMUNION." But we do not sanction the half-way covenant by saying that the minister may baptize the children of baptized persons when they make such a credible profession of faith as would entitle them to come to the Lord's Table, even though they have not yet actually become communicants. Of course, their reasons for not coming to the Lord's Table must be taken into account in judging of the credibility of their profession. Dr. Atwater, in his admirable article on Sealing Ordinances, in the *Princeton Review*, in 1857, well says:

"Those who, giving evidence of piety to others, distrust themselves, who dare not withhold the seal of the covenant from their children, and yet dare not come to the Lord's Table lest they eat and drink damnation to themselves, are in most communions occasionally allowed the former privilege, even before they feel warranted to accept the latter; not because different qualifications *in kind* are requisite for the two sacraments, but because the Lord's Supper requires not mere faith, but faith developing and proving itself in self-examination and discerning the Lord's body, according to 1 Cor. xi. 28."

It is in accordance with these views that many Presbyterian pastors earnestly desire an authorized form for the administration of Infant Baptism, which shall embody the doctrine of our Confession and Catechisms on the subject, and at the same time serve as a test and standard by which to judge of the qualification of those who demand baptism for their children. Every such form should include a credible profession of faith and obedience on the part of parents.

The outcry against prescribed forms is no answer to this demand. We ask for an *authorized* not a *prescribed* form. We have now forms many and various imposed upon our churches. It is as a protection from the evils of mongrel forms and the prescriptions of individual authority that we invoke the wisdom and authority of the whole Church.

Nor does it meet the case to say our Directory for Worship fur-

nishes all the Form we need. The general instructions there given, in regard to the administration of both sacraments and all our modes of worship, when regarded at all, are constantly improved upon and applied according to the taste and judgment of the minister, which are not always as great as they might be.

That these instructions are not sufficient is proved by the fact that new and unauthorized forms are constantly issued—even by our Board of Publication. Besides the advantages already referred to, as furnishing a test and a standard of profession, a well-prepared and authorized Form would have an unspeakable influence in educating the Church to right views of Infant Baptism. Probably not one in a thousand of our members ever reads or hears the statements of our Confession of Faith and our Directory for Worship on the subject. But a form of sound words, repeated at every infant baptism, would impress the truth upon young and old, just as the repetition of the Lord's Prayer and of some of our precious hymns has interwoven their beauty and their evangelical truth with the very life of the Church. And there would be no more formalism, in any bad sense, in the one case than there is in the other.

III.

Baptism as applied to infants signifies and seals just what it does in the case of adults. There are not two sacraments of Baptism, nor two definitions of the same. "It is the sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, *and that even to infants*" (Larger Cat., 177).

Principal Cunningham, in his essay on "Zwingli and the Doctrine of the Sacraments," contends that the definition of Baptism in the Shorter Catechism "applies fully and in all its extent only to those who are possessed of the necessary qualifications or preparation for baptism and who are *able to ascertain this*." He further declares that "the Sacraments were instituted and intended for believers, and produce their appropriate beneficial effects only through the faith which must have *previously existed*, and which is expressed and exercised in the act of partaking in them." In order to harmonize these statements with the doctrine and practice of the Reformers and with the Standards of the Presbyterian Church, he asserts that "the case of infant baptism is special and peculiar"; that it "really occupies a sort of subordinate and exceptional position." Wherein it is subordinate and exceptional he does not undertake to show, nor does he quote a word from the Presbyterian Standards or from any of the

Reformed creeds to prove that the views he advocates are consistent with the doctrines of the Reformers. He makes it plain, however, that in his opinion Baptism, as applied to infants, is not to be regarded as a seal, because in their case there is nothing whatever to seal. How such opinions could be held and openly advocated by a leader and a teacher in the Free Church of Scotland, and how far such advocacy accounts for the prevalence of low views of infant baptism in the Presbyterian Churches of this country, are questions which cannot now be discussed. It is sufficient for our present purpose to set over against such opinions the explicit and strong statement of our Standards that "*Baptism is the sign and seal of our regeneration and engrafting into Christ, and THAT EVEN TO INFANTS.*"

In the case of both infants and adults baptism signifies and seals "an engagement to be the Lord's." The parent represents and binds the child. Hence our Confession of Faith (chap. xxvii. 4) says: "Not only those who do *actually* profess faith in and obedience unto Christ; but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized." The infant does not profess faith and obedience *actually*, but he does so *representatively*. The doctrine that our engagements are all individual and voluntary cannot be defended in Church or State. If logically carried out it would dissolve human society. We are born under bonds. If a man when he comes to years of discretion is bound to obey the State in which he is a citizen by birthright, much more is a child born within the pale of the visible Church bound by the obligations which his parents have acknowledged in his behalf.

But baptism, whether applied to adults or to infants, includes much more than our engagements. It signifies and seals our "ingrafting into Christ." This expression as expounded in our Standards means much more than the recognition and confirmation of our membership in the visible Church; it means much more than "*regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's Church,*" as that phrase is explained by the great mass of the expounders of the Episcopal Liturgy; it includes those spiritual conditions and blessings upon the assumed existence of which Church membership is always based. To be "ingrafted into Christ" is to be a member of his mystical body, the invisible Church. And hence baptism, whether in adult or infant, signifies and seals not only our engagement to be the Lord's and our ingrafting into Christ, but our "partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace." The benefits specifically represented and sealed in baptism are the forgiveness of sins and the baptism of the Holy Ghost; or, as it is expressed in the Confession of Faith, chap. xxviii., "regeneration and remission of sins."

The teaching of our Standards on this subject is summed up and justified in the words of Peter at the day of Pentecost :

“ Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call ” (Acts ii. 38, 39).

If it be asked what sin is forgiven in the case of infants, we answer, *original* sin—the guilt of Adam’s first transgression—the sentence of condemnation which came upon all men by the offence of one—and in consequence of which we are all “ by nature children of wrath,” and inheritors of moral corruption. The controversy among the orthodox upon this question seems to us a dispute about words. If by original sin you mean only the corruption of our nature, and if by forgiveness you mean the removal of that corruption, the negative side of the question is easily maintained. It was under these limitations of the terms employed that Calvin so vehemently contended that baptism does not remove original sin. But our Standards do not confine the term original sin to the corruption of our nature ; it includes “ the guilt of Adam’s first transgression,” and that guilt or liability to punishment, whether it be mediately or immediately imputed, whether it follows or precedes the corruption of our nature, underlies that corruption, imparts to it a moral character, and makes it sin. Now forgiveness as signified and sealed in infant baptism, as in all other cases, is nothing more nor less than the removal of guilt. It does not include, though in the economy of grace it is inseparably connected with, the ultimate removal of moral corruption. The removal of corruption is the work of the Holy Spirit ; the gift of the Spirit is with forgiveness the twin benefit signified and sealed in baptism ; the first saving act of the Spirit is the regeneration of the soul ; and his subsequent work is the development of this seed of God to final and complete sanctification. Now why should it seem an incredible thing that the fulfilment of the twin promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit which is made “ to you and to your children ” in immediate connection with the command to be baptized, is both signified and sealed in infant baptism ? All Protestant—and especially, because most consistently, all Calvinistic—theologians believe that infants, dying in infancy, are elect and saved.* Salvation in their case, no less than in adults, must include regeneration and forgiveness. What all Christians believe in regard to those who die in infancy, baptism signifies and seals to the children of believers, whether they live or die. If we believe in the greater

* See Hodge’s “ Theology,” vol. i., p. 26.

exercise of sovereign grace, why hesitate on more explicit promises to believe the less?

If it be asked how we can know that this is true in regard to any baptized infant, the answer is that we know it in the same way and to the same extent that we know any adult who is baptized to be a child of God; that is to say, in both cases we assume it as credible, not upon demonstrative, but upon probable evidence. The whole Scripture argument for the divine authority and efficacy of baptism in general, and of infant baptism in particular, enters into and supports this probability.

If the Episcopal Liturgy, after praying that God would "mercifully look upon the child" and "wash him and sanctify him with the Holy Ghost, that he may receive remission of sins by spiritual regeneration," without attempting to pronounce authoritatively upon the question, simply expressed the faith of the participants that their prayer has been heard, and that the child has been regenerated according to the covenant promise, we would have no hesitation to join in the thanksgiving. Nor would we deem it necessary in order to justify such faith and thanksgiving to give any ancient, patristic, or modified sense to the word regenerate. The presumption is that every child lawfully baptized is regenerate in the fullest sense of the word. Our hesitation to believe this indicates not a high, but a low view, of regeneration as a work of God's sovereign grace. We limit the holy one of Israel in this mighty work, by confounding, or at least connecting it inseparably, with what we call conversion, and by judging of its existence by our tests of religious experience. The divine grace which abounds in Christ beyond the abounding of sin, and beyond our ability to define or even to conceive of its working, is stronger in every point of human existence than the fallen and corrupt nature we inherit from Adam. We all admit in theory that this divine grace *can* change the nature of a child, before its birth, or at its birth, or at the time of its baptism, as easily as at any subsequent period of life. We all see the evidence that, in consistency with, and working through, the law of heredity, God fulfils not only his threatening to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him, but also his promise to show mercy to thousands of generations of them that love him and keep his commandments. The proverb of Mathew Henry that "grace does not run in the blood, but deviltry does," is not altogether true. Hereditary gracious influences control and modify the nature of children born of Christian parents. The doctrine of total depravity is not the absurd notion that any one is as bad as he

can be, nor that all are equally bad at their birth. Some are born less depraved than others. The grace of God makes them to differ. Samuel and John the Baptist and Timothy are not exceptional cases, but specimens of those who are filled with the Holy Ghost even from their mother's womb. "Of such is the kingdom of God," does not mean merely that the kingdom is composed of adults who have been converted and become as little children; but that it is largely composed in heaven and on earth of little ones, whom the Saviour has taken into his arms and blessed. The typical little one whom he set in the midst was a "young Christian," and not merely an unsophisticated child who might one day become a Christian. Connecting the sovereignty and omnipotence of God's grace with his covenant promises to believers and their children, we maintain that every child lawfully baptized—not because of its baptism, but because of the relations and promises of which baptism is the sign and seal—is to be regarded and treated as a regenerate child of God, until the contrary is made to appear.

There is no real inconsistency between these views and the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures as it is set forth in the Standards of our Church. If there is a seeming difficulty in reconciling them with some of these doctrines, it is just the same difficulty which the finite mind finds at every point where the little wheel of man's moral agency plays into the great wheel of God's foreknowledge and sovereignty. In order to tide over this difficulty we make a distinction between common and saving grace—meaning by the first that which *may*, and by the second that which *certainly will* issue in salvation. This seems to be the underlying thought with those who insist that the word regeneration in the Episcopal service does not mean a moral and saving change, but only such a change as puts salvation within the reach of the subject of baptism and makes it sure, provided the grace received is not resisted and made of none effect. In other words, it is what we call common grace, which may either be resisted and nullified, or be so improved by its possessor, and so increased by God that it will become saving. But after all is not this distinction formal rather than real? Are there two kinds of grace? Is not all grace saving, unless it be resisted and received in vain? (See 1 Cor. vi. 1; Heb. vi. 4-6; Heb. xii. 15). We know from these Scriptures, and from observation, that the grace of God is often received in vain; that there are multitudes who would be saved, but for the fact that they resist the Holy Ghost, and set at naught the powers of the world to come, and "count the blood of the everlasting covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing." And it matters not, so

far as the consistency of this awful fact with the doctrines of grace is concerned, whether the resisted and nullified grace comes to the soul in infancy, either before or at the time of baptism, or whether it comes in mature life in connection with the preaching of the Gospel, and what is sometimes called "the ordinary influences of the Spirit." Aside from the time when it comes, and the means through which it comes, it is in its own nature divine grace, which would save the soul if unresisted. The guilt of such resistance belongs entirely to the sinner. But while we insist upon this, as the Scriptures and the guilty conscience do; we also devoutly believe, upon the testimony of Scripture and of the Christian conscience, that where grace received is not resisted, but cherished and yielded to, the difference is attributable only to God, who in his sovereignty "giveth more grace." Now our Confession of Faith (chap. xxviii. 6) says:

"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."

This is to say: (1) Baptism really signs and seals the conferring of Christ and his benefits only upon those who will be finally saved. (2) None will be finally saved but the elect. (3) Therefore, baptism is efficacious only to the elect. (4) The time when this efficacy will be revealed to the consciousness of its subject is foreknown only to God.

All Christians, Arminians as well as Calvinists, Sacramentarians as well as Evangelicals, will freely admit that God's people are called "the elect," and that only the elect will be saved; the point of difference between Calvinist and anti-Calvinist being not the *fact*, but simply the *ground* of election. Now it ought to be admitted, on the one hand, just as freely by the Sacramentarians as by their opponents, that the efficacy of any sacrament is not the same in them that perish as it is in them that are saved. And, on the other hand, it ought to be just as freely admitted by the Calvinist as by the Arminian that the counsel of God's own will, or the decree of election, upon whatever it may be founded, can never be a rule of duty nor a ground of personal faith for us; and therefore it can never be lawfully applied by us as a restriction upon the divine promises. The Sacraments, and the unlimited invitations of the Gospel, stand in this respect upon precisely the same footing. The Lord knoweth them that are his, but it is not for us to exercise divine prerogatives. Our office is simply ministerial and declarative.

In the face of Christ's command to preach the Gospel to *every* creature, the position, which some have assumed, that we have no right to offer salvation to any but the elect, is something worse than presumptuous: it is premeditated disobedience, and an implied censure upon God's administration of the economy of his grace. Knowing just who will be and who will not be saved, he commands that the offer of salvation shall be made indiscriminately to all. In the face of this divine example, it is arrogance for us to restrict that offer even hypothetically, to say, or to think, that if we knew who the elect are we would make the offer only to them. It is not setting up a high claim for the sacraments to say that our administration of them rests upon the same basis with our preaching of the Gospel. We have no right to restrict either their significance or their application where Christ has imposed no restriction, nor to require of those who would participate in them any condition which he has not required. Wherever these divinely appointed conditions are fulfilled we are bound to administer them, not as hypothetical, but as real sacraments, including both the outward sign and seal and the inward spiritual grace. To adults we say, as God's mouthpiece, "Repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The only condition we have a right to insist upon is a credible profession of repentance, and faith in Christ, and that condition being fulfilled, we are bound to administer the sacrament as a real and whole transaction, and to declare that it is to the recipient the sign not only, but the seal of his engrafting into Christ, and his partaking of all the benefits of the covenant of grace.

The only condition God has attached to infant baptism is that one or both parents shall be in covenant with him, and shall promise to bring up the child in his nurture; and that condition being credibly fulfilled, we are bound to administer the ordinance, as in the case of adults, in its entirety, without any restrictions as to its significance and efficacy, uttered or unexpressed.

As we have no right to take from the fulness of the Gospel, and say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and, *if thou art one of the elect*, thou shalt be saved"; neither have we any right to whittle away the meaning of the Sacraments by saying to believing parents, "Bring your children to be baptized, and bring them up in the nurture of the Lord; and *if the grace signified in baptism belongs to them, according to the counsel of God's own will*, it shall be sealed and applied to them." Both declarations, indeed, are true in themselves, but the truth they involve is to be "handled with special prudence

and care" ("Confession of Faith," chap. 3, sec. 8). And when presumptuously applied, to limit what God has left unlimited, "the doctrine of this high mystery" is perverted into a practical falsehood and a snare. We have no right either to restrict the freedom and efficacy of the Sacraments by suppositions about the divine decrees, nor to thrust those decrees between the Saviour's loving invitations and the trembling soul of a sinner, nor to allow our faith in that sublime doctrine to dampen our zeal, whether in the preaching of Christ's Gospel or the administration of his ordinances. "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children, that we may do all the words of this law."

The things that belong to our children in connection with their baptism are thus summed up by Dr. Hodge :

"The status, therefore, of baptized children is not a vague or uncertain one according to the doctrine of the reformed churches. They are members of the Church; they are professing Christians; they belong *presumptively* to the number of the elect. These propositions are true of them in *the same sense in which they are true of adult professing Christians*" (*Princeton Review*, 1858, p. 389).

While these words of our venerated teacher do not directly assert, we think they logically import the presumptive regeneration of baptized infants.

(1) As according to the teaching of our Confession of Faith, chap. iii. 8, "the *certainty* of eternal election" can be assured to us only by "the certainty of effectual vocation" (*i. e.*, regeneration); so the *presumption* of election must rest in our apprehension on the presumption of regeneration.

(2) Adult Church membership assumes regeneration just so far as it assumes faith. It must necessarily be so. "For whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ *is born of God*" (1 John v. 1). And, therefore, whosoever *professes* so to believe, professes to be born of God; and the acceptance of such a profession of faith as credible involves the acceptance of the professor's regeneration as equally credible.

These propositions are true of baptized children in the same sense that they are true of adult professing Christians.

"Baptism is a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants."

IV.

The two theories of the Church and of the Sacraments which we have endeavored to expound lie at the base of two entirely different

schemes of Christian education ; different not only in their positive precepts, but in their pervading spirit, and in the atmosphere they create in the homes where they prevail. The aims of the two schemes are radically distinct. According to the one, parents have a child of Satan, a fallen and unregenerate being, prone to all evil and incapable of all good, to restrain, to instruct, and to pray over, in the hope that it will one day be converted and made fit to join the Church.* According to the other scheme, the child is a fellow-member with its parents in the Church of Christ, a participant with them in the covenant of grace, a joint heir with them to the same covenant promises, a child of God, whom he has committed to them to be nursed for him. The reflex influence of the aim pursued will determine the whole educational process. The underlying expectation of the parent will inevitably impress itself upon the character of the child. Any attempt to treat our children inconsistently with our inmost views as to their moral state and their relation to God, will betray and defeat itself in a thousand unconscious ways. And the effect of such self-betrayal will be not only a failure to attain our specific ends, but an impression on the mind of the child that both we and our religion are a pretence and a sham. Dr. Bushnell, in his admirable book on "Christian Nurture," does not put the case a whit too strongly when he says : "It is the very character and mark of all *unchristian* education, to train up a child for future conversion." And he is no less correct when he adds, "The true idea of *Christian* education is that a child is to grow up a Christian, and never to know himself as being otherwise." These opposite aims will not only control the hopes of parents, and the instructions through which they seek to be realized, but they will make themselves felt with peculiar power in our treatment of children's faults. It must make a vast difference in our discipline whether we regard their shortcomings and

* Principal Cunningham, carrying out his views as to the subordinate and exceptional character of infant baptism, insists that "every child, whether baptized or not, should be treated and dealt with in all respects as if they were unregenerate and still needed to be born again of the Word of God *through the belief of the truth*" ("Reformers and Theology of the Reformation," p. 291). And yet, notwithstanding the intimation in the words we have italicised, that there is no other way to be born again except through the belief of the truth, he insists in the same passage that "believers are warranted to improve the baptism of their children in the way of *confirming their faith in the salvation of those of them who die in infancy*." How can these two positions be reconciled? Does death change the moral character and relations of its subjects, and make credible in regard to them that which was incredible before? Can even an infant enter heaven without being born again? Does baptism really add anything to the grounds of our faith in regard to the salvation of infants? If a child dies before its believing parents have an opportunity to have it baptized, must they have any less faith in its salvation than if it had been baptized?

To all which questions we answer, No. And for the same reason we utterly reject the dogma that the children of the covenant are to be judged and treated as unregenerate, unless, happily for them, death comes into the higher court of the believer's heart to plead against his head for a reversal of the cruel judgment.

misdoings as the lingering remains of sin in a young Christian, or as the living seeds of all evil in one who is still in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity. The assumption that they are already within the covenant, regenerate and holy, that grace is struggling in them for mastery over sin, will give a divine tenderness to our rebukes, and often substitute encouragements and entreaties for stern condemnation and scoldings which provoke to anger. It will make us pray with them in the assurance that they are partakers with us of the same grace, even as we share with them in the same passions and infirmities. It will bring us together to Christ in the faith of the Syrophenician woman, saying, "O Lord, have mercy upon *us*." Our sympathy will be to the child the sign and seal of divine mercy, and our kiss of reconciliation the sacrament of God's loving forgiveness. But if we assume that the faults we would correct are the evidences of their unregenerate state, the proofs of a proneness to all evil and an aversion to all good unrestrained by divine grace; if we constantly tell them that they are wicked, and drill into their tender souls the unevangelical falsehood that "God does not love naughty children"; if we warn them continually that they are in great danger of growing up reprobates and are in perishing need of a new heart, such religious training will discourage and harden their sensitive nature more effectually than the indiscriminate use of the rod. This kind of religious discipline found an extreme but logical illustration in a well-authenticated story told to me by one who was personally cognizant of the facts. In one of the great Revivals in Western New York, a woman who was thoroughly convinced by the preaching she had heard that all religion consists in voluntary submission to God, and that it is every one's immediate duty to make for himself a new heart, proceeded to apply these doctrines to her little daughter, by alternately whipping and praying with her, until she was willing to submit and professed herself converted. What the result was in the future experience of that child we do not know. But we are sure this is by no means the only case in which the tender mind of a child has been subjected to the rod of conversion. Even under the kindest personal treatment, multitudes of the children of the covenant are placed by the inexorable logic of the popular creed in the most anomalous and hopeless condition. They are taught to believe that the mark of the Lord Jesus is upon them, but that they are still excluded from his fold. They are bound by all the obligations of religion, but they are warned not to claim its privileges until they have undergone a change of whose nature they can form no clear conception, for which they can discover no necessity in their present simple and childlike relig-

ious experience, and the symptoms of which they are taught not to expect until that ill-defined period shall come when they will be "old enough to join the Church."

The telling of experiences, the fixing of the time, the discovery of the causes, and the description of the process of conversion, have become to a large extent synonymous in the mind of the Church with the tests of piety and the evidences of Christian character; while the value or even the possibility of a true Christian experience running back into springs that are hidden and divine, gradually developed, like a grain of mustard-seed, under the steady influence of Christian culture, and eluding by its very depth and pervading power all attempts to fix its times and seasons or describe the successive stages of its growth, is ignored, undervalued, and even condemned as unevangelical. Our children are afraid to claim their birthright privileges, because they have no experiences to tell, and can give no account of their conversion. Instead of being taught that they already belong to the Church, and that if they love the Saviour it is their privilege to come to his table as soon as they understand the meaning of the ordinance, they hear the changes rung about being converted and joining the Church; and getting their ideas of conversion from what they hear of the experience of adults brought into the Church from the world, they sadly number themselves with Christ's enemies even while their hearts ache to be recognized among his friends.

It is time to take down the bars with which the tables have been fenced to the exclusion of the children of the Church, and to substitute for them the plain and wise instructions of our Presbyterian Standards:

"Children born within the pale of the visible Church, and dedicated to God in baptism, are under the inspection and government of the Church, and are to be taught to read and repeat the catechism, the Apostles' creed and the Lord's prayer. And when they come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady, and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body, they ought to be informed that it is their privilege and duty to come to the Lord's Table" ("Directory for Worship," chap. ix., sec. 1.)

There is certainly a wide departure from the spirit and the letter of these instructions. For proof of this we need look no further than the Forms for a public profession of Faith, which in their freedom from a prescribed Liturgy, our ministers are compelled to invent for themselves. So far as the writer's observation goes these forms, with few exceptions, ignore the Church membership of the children of believers, and assume that they all grow up to years of discretion unbelieving and unregenerate. One of these Forms, which has been

in use in a prominent Presbyterian church for fifty years, is now before us, and may serve as a sample. It makes no distinction whatever between the children of the Church and the children of the world. It assumes that admission to membership, and coming for the first time to the communion, are contemporaneous if not identical. It demands the same "confession and covenant from all who are thus 'added on profession,'" and among other things it requires them all to adopt the following declaration: "In this public manner you do humbly confess and bewail the original and total depravity of your nature, the past enmity of your heart against God, the unbelief which has led you to reject a Saviour, and the manifold transgressions of your life; all which sins you do condemn and in your purpose renounce." Now, without stopping to inquire whether the acceptance of the doctrine of original and total depravity (which of course we thoroughly believe) is essential to salvation, and therefore a term of communion in the Church of Christ: it is sufficient for our purpose to observe that confessions like that above quoted, as applied to children born within the pale of the visible Church and trained in the nurture of the Lord, are without warrant of Scripture and contrary to experience. I have received scores of such children to the Lord's Table—many of them at an early age. There was not one of them, so far as I can now remember, who was conscious of having ever rejected the Saviour or of cherishing enmity against God. While they all confessed and bewailed their sins, most, if not all of them declared that they always believed in and loved the Saviour, and had never ceased from their earliest recollection to pray for his forgiving and sanctifying grace. My experience and observation in this matter cannot be peculiar. Surely it is not right to put such a confession between the Lord's Table and the tender souls of children whom Christ has taken into his arms and blessed, and concerning whom he has said, "of such is the kingdom of heaven." How can a child who has always, so far as memory goes, believed in and loved the Lord Jesus Christ, publicly confess, bewail, and renounce "enmity against God and the unbelief that rejects a Saviour," without contradicting his inmost consciousness, and denying the grace of God which is in him? If there is only *one* such child in the Church, is it right either to keep that child away from the Lord's Table, or to bring it there with a confession on the lips to which there is no response in the heart? But such forms of admission are not only an offence against their little ones who believe in Christ; they are a practical repudiation of what we profess to believe concerning the household covenant, the efficacy of the ordinance and the sovereignty of God in

the aboundings of his grace. They are manifestly based upon the assumption that total depravity is never counteracted by divine grace, in the case of those who live, till they come to years of discretion; that none of the children of the Church are born in infancy, except they die in infancy, and that their baptism does not in any case really signify and seal their actual ingrafting into Christ. These assumptions seem to me to be monstrous. They are far more inconsistent with the doctrines of grace and with the sovereignty of God, than any theory of baptismal regeneration.

The subject we have imperfectly discussed in its outlines is of unspeakable importance. It not only concerns the spiritual interests of our children; it touches the organic life and power of the Church at every point. The revival that is most needed, and without which all others will necessarily be superficial and short-lived, is a revival of household religion—a revival that shall recognize and put into full force, not the external and ephemeral incidents of the day of Pentecost, but its underlying and permanent principles—the coming of the Comforter to abide in the Church forever, the fulfilment of the promises which are “to believers and their children,” the unity of the Church founded upon the unity of the family as its germ, and the conversion of the world, not merely by additions from without, but largely and most effectively by development from within.

Who can estimate the fruits of such a revival? It would restore marriage to its original and holy design, “the seeking of a godly seed” (Mal. ii. 15). It would “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.” It would make every Christian home a little church. Instead of waiting and praying for them to “be brought in,” meanwhile treating them as “unclean,” parents would regard their children as “holy” (I Cor. vii. 14), being already in the Church, and better still, in the covenant and partakers with them of the same promises. By all the gentle yet mighty influences which under the promises of the covenant and the blessing of God, win the heart and mould the character of Christian children, godly men and women would repeat and perpetuate in the world enlarged copies of their own lives. And thus there would be a glorious fulfilment of the royal promise, “instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth”; the ranks of the ministry would be recruited with those who have imbibed the love of the Church and the knowledge of her ways with their mother’s milk; and the work and power of that kingdom which cometh not with observation, but is “*in the midst of you*” (Luke xvii. 20, R. V.), would be increased and multiplied as the dew and the light from the womb of the morning.

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