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"Why I Am a Christian."

THIRD SERIES.—No. VII.

MY DEAR FRIEND:—I will now ask you to look at two great monuments of the Christian Faith, and mark two perpetual witnesses, namely, the great Sacraments—Baptism and the Holy Communion or Supper of the Lord.

1. Baptism is a spiritual death and resurrection of man, corresponding to the death and resurrection of Christ. If Christ did not live, and die, and rise from the dead, baptism would be a mere folly; no christian would care for it. You can read the passages in our christian books which will show you that this is the meaning of baptism, and what it proclaims. Read the 6th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, from the 3d to 11th verse, and the 12th verse of the 2d chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians; there are other passages, but these will suffice.

2. The other chief sacrament, now commonly called the Lord's Supper, means: 1. A setting before God a memorial of Christ's death, bread representing His Body, wine representing His Blood; the first broken, to represent His bruised and wounded Body, the second poured out, to represent His blood shed—both separated from each other, as it was in death. 2. It is a feast in which those who eat and drink are taught to believe that they partake of their risen Lord, so that by union with Him they also shall hereafter arise. 3. Christians celebrate this Sacament until their Risen Lord shall appear again, with the eye of their mind on His coming. You can look at the passages in our books which show that such is the meaning of this sacrament, and that to these things it bears continual witness. Read St. Mark 14-22d, 23d and 24th verses. St. Luke 22-19th, 20th verses. 1 Cor. 11-23d to 27th verses St. John 6-53d to 58th verses.

Thus Baptism and the Lord's Supper are two perpetual witnesses, not only by their general support of a religion professedly based upon the Resurrection of Christ, but by their special meaning and effect, to the facts that Christ lived and died and rose again; and in this witnessing to the Resurrection of Christ, they proclaim a miracle—an amazing miracle—that miracle on which the first teachers based all their teaching, namely, the miracle of Christ's Resurrection. In fact, christianity is built upon this miracle. We are not afraid nor ashamed to say, "If Christ be not risen our faith is vain." I would like to say something here about miracles, but must pass on, and try later on to speak of them. I must say something more about Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

When God first made man he was pure and innocent, and nwithout sin, but by one act of disobedience he fell away from God, brought sin into the world and was cast out from the presence of the pure and holy God. It was not until *after* man's fall that children were born to him. Adam had no children until after he was cast out of Eden. His sin of disobedience brought to him a degenerate nature unfit for the enjoyment of God's presence in Heaven, and made him utterly unable to gain an entrance there. At the very moment that God pronounced the sentence of banishment, He gave promise of a Redeemer and Saviour, who should come by and by and make a way by which man might be restored to the place and position which he had lost by his sin; One who would open again the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Jesus Christ. the Word, the Son of God became flesh, that is man, that He might provide a *new spiritual origin*, which should make those derived from it capable of standing before God's throne. Hence Christ was called by St. Paul "the second Adam," because holiness is inherited from Christ by *spiritual* regeneration and new birth, as sin is inherited from the first Adam by *natural* generation and birth.

To make this new birth of our fallen nature possible, it was necessary for the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, to overcome, in a trial of obedience, that He might do what Adam had failed to do. And this trial of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, was made by suffering the evil one to array against Him the most powerful temptation, and by subjecting Him to the passion and death which fell upon Him at the time when He had reached the perfect maturity of manhood. Thus He carried out of the world a nature infinitely more perfect than had ever been carried out of the world by any other man. Having gained the victory over the tempter in the severest trial of temptation, and having submitted patiently to death in its most humilating and painful form, His human nature retained still that perfect holiness which had belonged to it when conceived by God the Holy Ghost and born of a pure virgin.

Thus, as the death of Christ is offered up by Him as a continual sacrifice before God, redeeming mankind from the slavery of Satan, so is it the fountain of new life to all who are willing to work out their own individual salvation by partaking of its saving stream. By co-operation of each soul with the work of the Redeemer, each soul may attain holiness in this world, and final salvation in the world to come.

The first step by which Christ's general work of Redemption is made available for the particular work of individual sanctification and salvation is Baptism, our Lord ordained this mysterious rite as the means by which persons were to be drawn one by one within the range of His work; bidding the founder of His kingdom to go and make disciples, "baptizing them:" and having already shown the absolute necessity of the rite when he said, "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." The object of baptism is thus to give to one born under the effects of his origin from the degenerated nature of fallen man, the benefits to be received by being "born again," and thus having a new spiritual origin from the "second Adam," the "new man," our Lord Jesus Christ. How this new birth, this change of nature, this regeneration, can be effected by the means used it is impossible to explain. God the Son knew when He ordained those means to be used with a view to the attainment of that end, but He did not reveal the steps of the process, leaving it to our faith to believe that the end is attained even though our understanding can not get an answer to the question. "How can these things be?" The effect of Baptism is, thus, to place those who are Baptized in an entirely new relation to God, and to bring them within the reach of salvation. It takes away the effect of a sinful origin, gives to the sinner a spiritual union with the all-holy man, and plants in his soul the seed of grace. It is administered to infants, because, although they have *done* nothing wrong (that is have no *actual* sin) they inherit all the disadvantages of fallen human nature, and can not have the benefits of Christ's redeaming work without being Baptized. If Baptized children die before they *commit* sin they are certainly saved, but what becomes of unbaptized children under the same circumstances God has not revealed to us.

As children grow up, the seed of God's grace planted within them grows with them, but may be hindered and stunted in its growth by the neglect of those into whose care God's providence has given them. The tendency of a christian child is towards good, even although there remains within it a tendency towards evil that is capable of being developed into sin. But with good Christian care the grace of God will be developed before the tendency of evil, and will prove stronger. All the training and education of Christian children should be subordinate, therefore, to this consideration, and the earnest endeavors of their parents and teachers should be used to *strengthen the hold of God's work upon them;* and to fence them off from the power of God's enemy and theirs—the devil.

Christ said emphatically "ye must be born again," these words may be more correctly rendered "born from above." There can be no doubt as to what we are to understand by them. Being born from above, does not mean going regularly to church, or being regareded as a member of the church, nor does it mean making so many good resolutions, being morally good and upright, though each of these things are absolutely necessary and right, you may, however, have all these, and yet not be "born from above" or "born of the Spirit." Holy Baptism does not mean that we give the baptised child or person a name. It means that, but it means much more. It means that God gives the baptised a new life, a spiritual life. "As many as have been baptised into Jesus Christ, have been baptised into his death," says the Apostle St. Paul, and even very young people understand that the chief idea in death means complete separation from the earlier life in which the dead once lived, Christian Baptism means the final close of one period, and the beginning of another—the complete putting off of "the old man," and the putting on of the new. The principle of regeneration in our hearts is nothing else than the Divine Nature, producing a death to sin and a life to righteouness.

When a child is born into the world we regard it as having and exercising the functions of life, life permeates its whole body, every member of the body pulsates with new and fresh life, imparted indeed by another, but the child is now a separate entity, a new life. Every child, therefore, *born* into the world has a *natural* life, and every child *baptised* has a spiritual life, but remember, it requires the same "glorious energy" to quicken to make live, in baptising the dead soul, as to raise from the grave the dead Christ, God gives the natural life through parents, He gives the spiritual life through Holy Baptism.

But God has a right to make His own conditions, and He lays it down, "Except a man be born by water and of the spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The new birth, however, may come at any stage of the human life, God alone is the author of that, as of all other life, and if you are born again, it will be, it must be, the work of the spirit of God directly operating upon your heart and life. Be sure to note well, then, if ever you are to have so much as a glimpse of the kingdom of God, "Ye must be born of water—and of the spirit." That is God's way, and we can scarcely expect Him to bestow His blessing if we say, "No I don't want to take it that way, I will have it in *my* own way." It is surely wiser to do what God tells as, for then we can ecunt on getting what He promises to give. Some people call this spiritual gift conversion, and then speak of the word "conversion," as "old-fashioned," "out-of-date" and offensive. But why should they do so? It is a bible word, and one which our Blessed Lord used again and again. What did he mean by, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," but exactly the same as when he said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God?" Nicodemus did not, could not, understand it, nor will you, unless like him you make your way to Jesus to be taught, and the Spirit of God Himself, teach you. I would like to say a few wards more about Baptism, before I go on to the other great monument of the Christian Faith—the Holy Communion—I will try and do so in my next letter.

Faithfully yours,
HENRY B. MARTIN.

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