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**Infant Baptism**  
and  
**Infant Regeneration.**

A FEW CONSIDERATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

BY

LAURENCE BOMFORD, M.A.,

*Author of*

*"Divine Ambassadors from Earth and Heaven."*

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## PREFACE.

SIXTY years ago the Privy Council decided, after hearing arguments, that the Church of England did *not* teach that every baptised infant was spiritually regenerate. The late Dr. James Mozley, a remarkably able High Church theologian, was very much distressed at this decision, and proceeded to show it was untenable. His researches, however, led him to the conclusion that the judgment was correct, and he thereupon modified his opinions. He wrote three works on the subject, first on the Augustinian doctrine of predestination, in which he shows that since—according to this doctrine—only the elect are ever regenerate, and only God knows who the elect are, it is quite impossible that Cranmer, Hooker, Usher, and other great English divines who held this doctrine, could have held that every baptised infant is regenerate; secondly, a work on the primitive doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, in which he shows that the early Christian fathers agreed with Scripture in holding that regeneration implied actual goodness, actual holiness; and thirdly, a work often read and quoted, on the baptismal controversy, in which he sums up and drives home the conclusions he has arrived at. These three works of Mozley's form a complete treatise on the subject of infant baptism and regeneration.

The late Dean Goode's work on the *Effects of Infant Baptism* covers much the same ground, and arrives at much the same conclusions, but to my mind is less terse and less complete.



# Infant Baptism and Infant Regeneration.

## CHAPTER I.

### ARE INFANTS ENTITLED TO BE BAPTISED ?

**W**HAT the infants of Christian parentage have a title to baptism may, I think, be gathered from the right of circumcision. Circumcision was a seal of faith (see Rom. iv.), and yet the children of Jewish parentage were circumcised on the eighth day long *before* they had faith. Augustine, whose writings and teaching lie at the base of our prayer-book, says, "What effect baptism has in the case of infants we may gather from the right of circumcision which Abraham received *after*, the people *before* justification. Abraham received circumcision as the sign of a righteousness which he already had. . . . . In Isaac, on the other hand, who was circumcised the eighth day of his birth, the sign of the righteousness preceded, and since he imitated the faith of his father, the righteousness itself followed when he grew up. In the same way in baptised infants, the sacrament of regeneration precedes, and if they hold to Christian piety, conversion of the heart will follow that of which the outward sign preceded."—(Mozley, on *Baptismal Regeneration*, p. 116).

To the same effect writes Peter Lombard, the first of the so-called schoolmen, about 1200 A.D. :

"Nor must you be surprised, that the thing sometimes precedes the sacrament, since sometimes it follows long after, as in the case of those who come hypocritically, to whom, when afterwards they shall have repented, baptism will begin to be of use."

The ancients spoke of a man who came forward for baptism without true repentance and faith as a "fictus," and decided that such a one, when afterwards he repented and believed, had no need to be re-baptised; in his case the sacrament of baptism had preceded the thing, regeneration, of which it was the seal. The same holds good of the baptised infant who afterwards repents and believes; he receives the seal in infancy, he receives the thing, regeneration, when he repents and believes.

To the same effect speak such divines as Hooker and Usher, only that perhaps they lay more stress on the doctrine of election, and speak of the original sin of *elect* babes being forgiven at baptism, and of the use of charitable language in assuming that every baptised infant is one of the elect till he shows himself otherwise by his future life and conduct.

"When then (says Mozley, *Baptismal Controversy*, p. 46) the divines of the Reformation held that infant baptism was an anticipatory rite which though *it was not beneficial at the time* on account of the want of qualification in the recipient, became beneficial afterwards upon his obtaining that qualification, they had a parallel case provided for them in antiquity. They were only applying to infants the same law and rule of baptism which the fathers had applied to unqualified adults."

The language of our Catechism becomes now clear and full of meaning; the adult's title to baptism is that he has repented and believed, but the infant's title to baptism is that he possesses a promise of repentance and faith, "which promise," as the Catechism says, the infant himself when he comes to age is "bound to perform." The twenty-seventh Article of our Church teaches us the same thing. It is they that receive baptism rightly—not ritely, as some have read foolishly enough—who are thereby grafted into the Church, and only those who repent and believe can receive baptism rightly. They may be rightly baptised—that is another question—but they cannot receive the baptism rightly till they possess repentance and faith.

Now note that the child who was circumcised on the eighth day had certain qualifications for that rite; he was the child, not of heathen, but of Jewish parents—or at all events of one Jewish parent; if he had not the faith of his father he had the promise of that faith—a promise which was strong or weak, according to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. So with the infant of Christian parents; he has not repentance and faith, but he has a certain qualification for baptism in that he has the promise of repentance and faith, a promise which resides not chiefly in the mere verbal promise of the sponsors, but in the fact that he is the child of Christian parents, and that he will grow up more or less surrounded by Christian influence—day school, Sunday school, Christian teachers, Christian literature, Christian sentiment—all will have their share in making it possible, or sometimes even probable, that the infant, as he grows up, will become a true believer. Of course the promise is often very weak, but on



the other hand it is sometimes very strong. I have known whole families baptised in infancy grow up to be whole-hearted believers ; they have been the families of earnest Christian parents. It is for such families that our prayer-book services are composed. They are designed for a high ideal of Christian life, and stimulate us who use them to endeavour to realise that ideal.

A lawyer informs me that covenants are sometimes entered into by grown-up people on behalf of infants. They promise that the infant shall fulfil certain conditions laid down in the covenant when he comes of age ; if he fail to do so the covenant is void. So was it with the covenant of circumcision, so is it with the covenant of baptism.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE STATEMENT PUT INTO THE CHILD'S MOUTH IN OUR CATECHISM.

MANY people object to the following words which are put in the mouth of the child in our Catechism : " My godfathers and godmothers in my baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven " ? Many children are careless, without apparently any religious feelings whatever, without any reverence for holy things, with no outward sign whatever in their daily lives that they can be honestly spoken of as children of God. Is it right, people ask—can it be right—to put such words in their mouths, to make them say what is not true ? My answer to this is very simple. I stood in a children's elementary school

the other day and heard the children sing the well-known hymn :—

Jesus is our shepherd, wiping every tear,  
Folded in His bosom, what have we to fear.

The second verse of that hymn runs—

Jesus is our shepherd, well we know his voice,  
How its gentlest whisper makes our hearts rejoice ;  
Even when He chideth, tender is His tone,  
None but He shall guide us ; we are His alone.

Now I do not suppose anyone, however much opposed to the Church of England, would ever think of objecting to children being taught to sing that hymn. The school was not a Church of England school, but a county council school ; the hymn was one of a number authorised by the council for the use of the schools under their charge. Probably many of the children whom I heard singing the hymn show no signs in their daily life of being the children of God—do not seem ever to hear or listen to the voice of our Saviour. The same objection might well be raised to the singing of that hymn by a mixed company of children as can be raised to the learning and repetition of the Catechism ; it makes the children say what may often be untrue.

You will answer, “ How can this be avoided in a hymn ? ” A hymn must be written on the assumption that those who use it mean what they say, and are actually what they profess to be. You cannot compose a hymn which can be truly sung by unbelievers, or cannot make the children sing, “ Jesus is our shepherd (at least we hope He is the shepherd of some of us), “ Well we know his voice,” (at least some of us do if others have never heard that voice). The very attempt is absurd :



in other words, no hymn can be written in praise of our Redeemer except on the assumption that those who use it are really desirous of praising Him. And what is true of a hymn is true of a service, or of a catechism. In both service and catechism we must put into the mouth of the worshipper, or the child instructed, the words he can honestly use if he be what he professes to be and ought to be. You cannot teach a child to sing, "Gentle Jesus meek and mild, look upon a little child, pity my simplicity, suffer me to come to Thee," without putting in his mouth words which he can only honestly use if he be really a child of God. With regard to the Catechism also, it must be taken as a whole if it is to be rightly judged. The same child who is made to say that in baptism he has been made a child of God, is asked presently whether he does not think that he is "bound to believe and to do" as his godparents have promised for him; and he is taught to answer, "Yes, verily, and by God's help so I will. And I heartily thank our heavenly Father that he hath called me to this state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And I pray unto God to give me His grace that I may continue in the same unto my life's end."

It is manifest that a child who could truly and honestly use these words would be a child of God, would be regenerate. Our services are composed for ideal Christian people, our Catechism is composed for an ideal child; the words are such as a Christian child ought to be able to use honestly, just as the words of our hymns are such as Christian people ought to be able to use honestly.

On the other hand, to argue from the words of the Catechism that the Church of England teaches that every child is made a child of God in baptism,

is to forget the necessary hypothetical nature of service, or hymn, or Catechism.

Take the case of hymns which are used in adult services. I take up the collection known as Sankey's hymns (Sacred Songs and Solos), and I open it almost at random and find hymns such as these :—No. 299 begins

Oh what a Saviour that He died for me,  
From condemnation he hath made me free.

or 298—

The blood has always precious been,  
'Tis precious now to me,  
Through it alone my soul has rest,  
From fear and doubt set free.

Now you go into some place of worship, denominational or undenominational ; it may be full of people who more or less object to the Church of England Catechism or the baptismal service, and yet at the bidding of the minister they will rise and join in singing such hymns as these. They will not accuse the minister of teaching or wishing to teach that the words of the hymn apply to every one present. They know well enough that the words of a hymn must be ideal words, must be words which Christian people ought to be able honestly to use, but they know also that it does not follow that all who use them have a real right to do so, or honestly mean what they say when they use them. What is true of hymns is true also of any other set form of service.

There is a class of language which is constantly used, not only in hymns and services, but in ordinary conversation—a class of language which may be called the hypothetical, or presumptive. You speak of some kind friend as a good man, though you know well enough that in the strict sense of the word none is good save one. You speak of the English as being a brave nation,

though you know well enough that there are cowards among them. You speak of the English as an honest people, though you know well enough that there are thieves among them. You speak of the bluntness of the English, though you know well enough that there are among them persons who are studiously polite and gentle. You are obliged to speak in this way; life would not be long enough if you had at every moment to mention all the exceptions to the general rule, or to explain in what sense you were using your words. There is a customary use of language which is convenient and harmless. So the apostle Paul speaks to all Christians as being saints, though he knows well enough, and often says so, that they are not all saints. So the Church of England may regard all baptised persons as being regenerate because they ought to be so, and may be held to be so till their conduct shows the contrary, and knows well enough, alas, that they are not all so—knows well enough that not every baptised child is regenerate; but its Catechism is composed in words which would be fitting for a regenerate child to use, and the very use of which may help a child to see what it ought to be, and to seek for that grace which alone can make it what it ought to be. So, also, with the baptismal service. It is composed for the use of a congregation, and of godparents who really are what they profess to be. It is Christian people in real earnest—parents, godparents, and congregation—who are called upon to give thanks for the regeneration of the child in baptism, a regeneration which so far has only taken place first in the environment, and secondly because of that environment, in promise, “They promise them both (that is both repentance and faith) by their sureties.”



If you accuse the Church of England of teaching that every baptised child is regenerate you must also, to be consistent, accuse our county council of teaching that every child in their schools listens to the voice of Jesus of Nazareth, and knows that he belongs to Him alone, or accuse the minister who gives out hymn No. 299 of teaching that every member of his congregation, every person among his audience, has been consciously made free from condemnation. Our Catechism, however, plainly states that no one is regenerate until he repents and believes.

James Mozley, on the *Baptismal Controversy*, p. 337, says that no statement of the doctrine that "all infants are regenerate in baptism can be found in the whole of our formularies from beginning to end. We find indeed a statement in our baptismal service, made over every infant after baptism, that it is regenerate, and we find the statement put into the child's mouth in the Catechism—that in baptism he was made a child of God. But when we examine the principles upon which church services and catechisms are constructed, we find that they admit of a class of statements which are literal in form, but hypothetical in meaning. We find this as a known and established usage of language in these classes of formularies. The statements . . . . have not the force of positive and dogmatic statements."

In our Articles of religion, Mozley points out there is no such assertion "that all infants are regenerate in baptism"—were there such an assertion it would be dogmatic; but in the absence of any such assertion elsewhere in our formularies, "an assertion pronounced over the child in a service, or put into the child's mouth in a Catechism, does not possess this (dogmatic) force."

## CHAPTER III.

## THE THANKSGIVING IN THE INFANT BAPTISMAL SERVICE.

PERHAPS, however, you do not object to the infants of Christian parents being baptised, but you object to the words in our baptismal service, you object to the place where we thank God "that this infant is now regenerate." In the adult service you thank God "that this adult is now regenerate," and you do not object to the words, although you know that after all the man may not be truly regenerate, he may not be honest in his profession of Christianity.

We know that our missionaries are often disappointed in those whom they have baptised—not so often as some foolish people imagine—but, alas, they do sometimes find that the man or woman they have baptised has only professed to be a Christian in order to gain some trivial end.

But though you do not object to the words being used at adult baptism, you do strongly object to their use at infant baptism. Let me point out two things to you which will perhaps help to remove your objection. First that in one sense no one is ever truly regenerate in this world; secondly, that regeneration is a long process—not a momentary event—and a process which has to some extent commenced in the case of the child of Christian parents. First then I contend that, strictly speaking, no one is ever regenerate in this world, for, from the scripture point of view, regeneration implies sinlessness. The words of St. John, 1st epistle, iii. 9, "Every one who is born of God sinneth not, for His seed remaineth in him, and he is not able to sin because he is born of God," show us that to be regenerate



is to be sinless, is to have made complete severance from sin, is to have reached a state when sin has become impossible.

You will find that the same idea is expressed by St. Paul, and very strongly insisted upon. Take for instance Rom. vi. 2, "Those of us who died unto sin, how shall we any longer live in it?" Here he looks upon himself and the other believers as being dead to sin. Now a dead man cannot move, cannot act; a man dead to sin cannot sin: the very same truth St. John insists on. St. Paul goes on to connect this idea with the idea of baptism, verse 3, "Do ye not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? We were buried therefore with Him through baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so also we should walk in newness of life"; and in verse 6, "knowing this that our old man was co-crucified—(I have invented a word to express the original; it would be better, perhaps to write 'crucified with Christ')—that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we might not serve sin, for he that is dead is justified from (freed from the condemnation of, from the power of) sin."

Here we see that the idea of baptism, and therefore of regeneration, of which baptism is the sacrament, is that the baptised person is as absolutely free from sin as a dead person—he is dead to sin in idea, cannot hear it, or see it, or wish for it. Just as death separates between a man and his wife, so that if the man die the woman may marry again without committing adultery, so death separates a man from sin, and a man who has been baptised has in idea joined himself with the death of Christ, has been crucified with

Christ (see Galatians ii.), has done with sin, and done with it for ever. That this is the idea, not necessarily the actuality, in this world, is seen both when we study St. John and when we study further St. Paul.

Thus St. John carefully tells us in his first chapter that "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves" (I. John i., 8), and St. Paul (in Romans vi., 11) tells us that we are "to *reckon* (or to *count*) ourselves dead unto sin," showing that he knows well enough that we are not really, or actually so, which he shows still more plainly in his next sentence, where he says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body"—an exhortation which would, of course, be quite unnecessary if we were actually dead unto sin.

Regeneration therefore means actual death to sin, actual inability to sin. It is expressed clearly in II. Cor. v., 17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new," just like the regeneration which our Saviour speaks of, the regeneration when the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and like that glorious regeneration which the prophets so often speak of when there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, when all nature, groaning and travailing now, shall be newborn, when the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing, when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the lion and the calf lie down together. But if regeneration means sinlessness, can it be said that any of us are regenerate? Not fully, of course. The child baptised in infancy is certainly not incapable of sinning; the man baptised in riper years is certainly not incapable of sinning; and yet, just as the man of riper years, when he comes to the

baptismal font, has or ought to have commenced the regenerate life, the full fruition of which he will have hereafter, and may therefore be called in the language of presumption a regenerate man—presumption, because in so calling him, we presume that he will continue his Christian life; so has the infant of Christian parents (or, if you like better, the infant in a Christian country) commenced already his regenerate life. The fact that he is the infant of Christian parents, or that he is an infant in a Christian country, this fact—or often enough both these facts—are themselves the commencement of regenerate life, and for that reason in the language of presumption we can speak of him as a regenerate infant, while at the same time we can pray God that he may live the rest of his life according to this beginning. Indeed, it is this last prayer which shows us that in speaking of the infant as regenerate we are using the language of charitable presumption, for if he were actually and completely regenerate there would be no need to pray to God that he might live a regenerate life.

We find, therefore, two classes of statement in the baptismal service; one class speaks of the child as regenerate, the other prays that he may be so. In Scripture we find the same two classes of statement: the apostle speaks of Christian people as being dead to sin, but at the same time he often blames them for their sinful lives, and often exhorts them to holiness of life.

You will perhaps say if regeneration be but an idea, and the reality only attainable in the next world, of what use is it to consider Christian people regenerate? Would it not be better to speak the plain truth and say that they are not yet regenerate? My answer to this is that it is



of the very greatest use to have before the eyes an ideal, a goal. You bring your child to baptism, and then as he grows old enough you proceed to teach him. You tell him that he is baptised into Christ, and that it is his duty therefore, and his privilege, to live free from sin. You would not then think of telling that child that owing to his sinful nature it is of no use his trying to live free from sin—at least, if you so told him, that would not be by any means all that you would tell him. You would set before that child, as far as he was able to grasp the idea, a life of perfect sinlessness, and you would give him to understand that you expected him to conform to that high standard, and you would, in the ordinary course of dealing with that child, assume that he was so conforming. You would know well, if you have had anything to do with training of children, that they require to be encouraged and praised, as well as blamed and corrected. You would appeal to the child as though he were living a holy life; you would tell him, in fact, to realise his baptism, to live up to the meaning of that baptism; and that meaning is not that he should be *half* free from sin, or *three-parts* free from sin, but that he should be *wholly* free from sin—in other words, regenerate. The child falls into some sin or fault, and you blame him for it; you point out to him that he has distressed our Master, whose child he is, by this his fault, that he has disgraced his Christian profession. And what is the Christian profession? The baptismal service explains that it is to follow Christ, and to be made like unto Him, “So should we who are baptised die from sin and rise again unto righteousness; continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living.” Exactly

so ; the baptised person is to live a sinless life as Christ lived—in other words, a regenerate life. But none of us do so live ! No, we only partially follow Christ ; at best we are only partially, imperfectly like Him, we are only partially regenerate ; we have incipient regeneration, as Mozley calls it, and this may be called regeneration because it is the beginning of it, because it partakes of its nature, because it is the same thing in its early stage. A child is called a man though he be not yet full grown ; a house is called a house though it be not yet completely built ; a road is called a road, though it be much out of repair, and perhaps impassable for traffic at the time we so speak of it. We speak of a friend as being a good man, though we know that his goodness is still imperfect, and know, too, that there is but One good in the strict sense of the word. We speak the language, use the language of charitable presumption, and we do the same when we speak of all the baptised as being regenerate, while we well know that none of them are so perfectly, and that many of them have only the very weakest claim to be called so.

Of course, in dealing with individuals, or in the work of exhortation, we may often have to use very different language. St. Paul often speaks of the whole of the baptised Christian community as “ saints,” yet he tells us that some of them are the “ enemies of the cross of Christ.” Alas, many baptised persons in the present day are no friends to the cross of Christ, no friends to Christ Himself.

Secondly, I contend that the word regeneration, whatever be its derivation, is used in Scripture and by writers of all schools of thought, of a process, not of an event. The great part of the difficulty concerning our Church of England



service, and this thanksgiving in particular, will disappear if it is once realised that regeneration—although the term may perhaps rightly be applied to an operation taking place in a moment—is in its full meaning a process rather than an event. Let me try to make this statement good ; for I believe both the high Churchman, and to some degree also the evangelical, has stumbled at this stumbling-block. The high Churchman (following the Romanist) insists on regeneration taking place at the moment of baptism—at that exact moment and no other. He therefore argues that regeneration has nothing to do with morality, and does not imply that any moral change has taken place in the regenerate man. Here he is dead against the fathers, as I shall show, and dead against the tenor of our Articles. In making regeneration to take place at the moment of baptism he is in seeming accord with the fathers, who use the term regeneration as if it meant baptism pure and simple, and nothing else. This is a way the fathers had of speaking of a sacrament as if it was the exact thing it signified : a little care would show that they do not mean that it is so, but that they use this method of speech for convenience and effect. The high churchman, too, is puzzled with his own creed. He will not baptise an adult unless the adult has some marks of being a real Christian ; he will not take an uninstructed heathen and baptise him—he insists on some change in the heathen before baptism ; he is even willing to acknowledge that unbaptised persons may be real Christians, and may die, if they die still unbaptised, with a good hope of eternal life ; and yet he cannot bring himself to believe that such an unbaptised person can be regenerate. He sticks so closely to his theory

that regenerate means baptised that he is obliged to hold every unbaptised person to be unregenerate, however noble may be the Christian life that such a person may be leading, and however plainly our Saviour has declared that except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. Thus the creed of the high Churchman stands self-condemned; it admits unregenerate persons to the kingdom of heaven. I do not merely condemn this creed because of its illogical nature, theology being a science which at its best can only be partially grasped—its tenets must at times be tinged with that which seems illogical; but our creed should at all events not contradict the plain language of our Saviour, His most solemn declarations.

The Evangelical, on the other hand, has connected regeneration with the exact moment of conversion, and by so doing has perhaps incurred the just wrath of the high churchman, who carefully separates between the two. Because of this creed the Evangelical cannot see how an infant can in *any* sense be called regenerate; an infant is incapable of repentance and faith, so our Catechism teaches us, and the evangelical concludes that he must also be incapable of regeneration in any sense. I grant that in the full complete sense he may be so incapable, but, as I have shown, no one in the full complete sense is regenerate this side of the river of death. Once perceive that regeneration is really a process which in the case of infants in Christian countries has often commenced before their baptism, a process which becomes consciously assimilated to the person's own will and endeavour at the time of conversion, whether that time be a moment or a long period, and will only be thoroughly

complete when we who love the Saviour shall see Him as He is, and be like Him, and the difficulty contained in this thanksgiving vanishes. Do not misunderstand me: I very much prefer the evangelical theory to that of the high churchman—to say with the latter that regeneration implies no moral change is to say that which is in the highest degree absurd—but I think they both miss a point which is of the very greatest importance to remember, namely, that God works as much through what are called natural processes as He does through what we call supernatural; it may well indeed be doubted whether from the point of view of God Himself there is any difference, any sharp line of demarcation, between the natural and the supernatural, between the grace which has given the infant of Christian parents this inestimable blessing, and the grace which in answer, perhaps, to the same infant's earnest prayer and striving later in life, is poured into his heart at the time of his conversion. I believe both may be called the grace of regeneration; they are both workers in the same great process.

Let us take an illustration. Let us suppose for a moment that you had gone with Ananias, knowing all that Ananias knew, to the baptism of Saul of Tarsus in the street called Straight. With great joy and rejoicing you would have watched that solemn baptism, and had Ananias asked you to join with him in a psalm of thanksgiving after the baptism you would willingly have thanked God that this Saul was now regenerate. What would you have been thanking God for? Merely for the baptism? Not so; but for the great change which had taken place in the baptised person—a change which had made him a fit person to be baptised, a change which you might



perhaps think had taken place in a moment. But stay ; did that change really take place in a moment ? What about the pricks which Saul had been kicking against ? Cannot we see that in all probability many things led up to that change, things not seen at the time by those who knew the man in his blindness, but things which he must, as he looked back, to some extent have seen himself. The preaching of Stephen, the death of Stephen, the very presence of Saul at this preaching and this death, the knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures which Saul possessed—all these things, had you known them at the time, you would have been glad to be thankful for, and all these things are a part of a process which had been going on for some considerable time.

Leave Saul, and come to the case of some adult baptised in England. You have known the man perhaps a long time prior to his baptism ; you have spent some time persuading him to come forward for baptism ; you have felt that in his life and conduct there was a true title for baptism ; and now you thank God for his regeneration. Are you thanking God for his baptism merely ? Not for a moment. You are thankful, of course, that he has come forward at last, but you are still more thankful that you feel convinced he is a converted man, and therefore regenerate. But are you not also thankful for that long period of training, of the watchful providence of God which has led to that man's conversion ? Are you so forgetful as to fail to remember, perhaps, the pious mother, the God-fearing day-school teacher, the kind Sunday-school teacher, the earnest sermons of the pastor, the persuasion of the district visitor—all these things have had a hand, you well know, in the work, and you thank God for them. Why

should not all these things be considered portions of the great work of regeneration?—preparatory portions if you like, but still portions. You will say, “I should not consider the man regenerate unless I felt convinced that he was a converted man,” but are you correct in this? And even if you are correct now that you do consider the man regenerate, can you not perceive that the process of regeneration has been going on for a long time, has been spread over a long period? You did not feel sure it was going on till the man was converted to God; but now he is converted you may feel sure, and you may be thankful. You see my meaning? In the case of the adult you thank God for something which has been going on *before* his baptism. I am anxious you should do the same in the case of the infant.

Remember that the word regeneration is usually employed as a description, not of a momentary act, but of a long continued process.

In a certain work, written many years ago, the other day I read a prophecy that railways would be the true regenerators of Ireland, the writer, in using the word regenerators, was evidently looking forward to a process, not an event. In the message from the China Centenary Conference to the home churches given in the *Church Missionary Review* for March, 1908, occur the following words:—“The uplifting of woman is a first need in the moral regeneration of a people.” The late Mrs. Bishop, the celebrated traveller, is quoted in the *Church Missionary Review* for March, 1907, as having said, “It may be that the gospel will yet bring about the regeneration of China.” I read a speech by some statesman the other day, in which he said that there was a time when Persia might have been regenerated by English gold.



Come to a more important instance. I suppose the late Bishop Lightfoot knew the meaning of words as well as most people, he was a great and most accurate scholar ; and how does he use the word regeneration ? He is commenting on the expression " new creature " in Galatians vi., 16, and says, " The idea of spiritual enlightenment as creating anew appears also in . . . regeneration."

Another and more extraordinary instance occurs in the life of the late Archbishop Benson. Dr. Benson, who, as all know, was a high church bishop, and splendid scholar, visited Florence, and writing home from there he said (see his life, p. 481), " Florence . . . Ah ! what a place—but the churches dead, the orders dead, the clergy nowhere, Roman doctrine totally incapable of regenerating." These words were addressed to Canon Mason, who probably, although himself a high churchman, saw nothing strange in them. Yet what a reversal of high church doctrine they contain ! It is not baptism, then, which the good Archbishop expected to be capable of regenerating, but doctrine. He does not say Romish baptism incapable of regenerating, as he ought to have said, surely, if he had been a consistent high churchman, or rather he ought to have known that according to high church theories Romish baptism is quite capable of regenerating—but no, it is the doctrine apparently, in his opinion, which regenerates, and Romish doctrine, as opposed to the English Church doctrine, is incapable of doing so. My brother who called my attention first to this passage in Benson's life, adds, " Evidently if baptism regenerates, then there are two kinds of regeneration—one produced by baptism, the other not produced by it and incapable of being produced by it, or by orders, for the clergy are

nowhere, *i.e.*, they are not regenerate and incapable of regenerating."

The great Tertullian wrote a treatise in which he argued that the soul of man was naturally Christian. I think we might point out that when men speak naturally, they use the word regeneration in its true meaning.

Now take regeneration to be, as Dr. Benson evidently took it to be, a process, and you will see that in a certain sense that process has been commenced in the case of every infant in a Christian country, and that commencement is the promise which gives the infant a title to baptism, and is the regeneration for which we can be deeply thankful. Think of any earnest Christian whom you know, and remember all the steps which led up to that person becoming what you now know him to be. His conversion may have been the work of a moment almost, yet he will tell you that there was much in his previous history which led up to it, and in many cases one of the principal factors has been the possession of a pious mother, or of pious parents, or of pious Christian friends, or the coming under the influence of some pious teacher.

The people of Florence had, I suppose, been almost all of them baptised, and yet the good Archbishop did not consider them regenerate, nor had apparently much hope of their regeneration. For regeneration he considered they required better doctrine. The promise of regeneration for which we thank God when the infant of Christian parents is baptised consists to some extent in the promise of the Christian teaching which that child will receive. This is not lost sight of in the baptismal service, as you can see for yourself.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE FAILURE OF THE HIGH CHURCH VIEW  
OF REGENERATION.

POSSIBLY you do not object to the statements made in the Baptismal Service and the Catechism, but you object to the use which is made of these statements by certain members of the Church of England ?

The high church party in the Church of England place a peculiar meaning on these statements ; they say that the expression in the baptismal service thanking God for the regeneration of the baptised infant means that every baptised infant necessarily receives complete regeneration on the moment of baptism. And they say that the child, being taught to say that it has been made a child of God at baptism, means that every baptised infant is actually made a child of God at the moment of baptism. This view at first sight is plausible, but a brief examination of it will show that it is untenable—it is contrary to scripture, it is contrary to the writings of the fathers, and it is contrary to the writings of the great English divines at the time of the Reformation, and in later times ; it is also contrary to the method on which services and catechisms are invariably constructed.

In order to defend their view, high Churchmen are in the habit of placing a very low value on the word regeneration. The fact that many baptised persons have never lived a godly life, the fact that it would be very difficult to tell in a Christian country which children had been baptised and which had not—these facts are so strongly against the view that baptism of itself confers regeneration, that the high Churchman



has been obliged to invent a new kind of regeneration—and one the usefulness of which it is indeed very hard to discover—a regeneration which confers no moral change whatever on the regenerate person. This is a view which is very hard at first to grasp ; it needs to be very plainly stated. The high Churchman actually believes that a child may be regenerated and yet may be not one whit better than it was before ; it has received, he will tell you, a great gift ; but this great gift has made no moral change in the child. This is not at all the view of the fathers, as they are called, as Dr. Mozley clearly shows, for that the fathers held that regeneration implied actual holiness is very evident from their writings.

Mozley gives many extracts ; I have but space for one. “Augustine was in the habit of speaking of the whole of the baptised as regenerate, and yet when he spoke of individuals his language was very different : ‘Behold the baptised man hath received the sacrament of nativity. He hath a divine, a holy, an ineffable sacrament—a sacrament which renews by the remission of all sins. Yet let him look within, and see if that is accomplished in his heart which is done in the body. Hath he love ? If he hath, then let him say, I am born of God. If he hath not, a mark indeed hath been placed upon him, but he is a deserter and vagabond. Let him not say he is born of God unless he hath love. Will he say I have the sacrament ? Let him hear the apostle : ‘Though I understand all mysteries,’ &c. ‘Let him hear another apostle’ (he then quotes St. John’s epistle) and ends ‘let all sign themselves with the sign of the cross ; let all say amen ; all sing Halleluiah ; all be baptised, go to church, build churches, love alone is the distinction. They who love are born

of God ; they who have it not are not born of God ' ' (Mozley, on *Baptismal Regeneration*, p. 116).

A regeneration, again, which implies no moral change in the person regenerated is not the regeneration spoken of in Scripture. The word regeneration is indeed only twice used in the New Testament, once for something which takes place at the commencement of the Christian life, and once for the glorious consummation of that life; but the thing implied by the word is very often spoken of. The expressions " children of God," " sons of God," are frequent. Now a careful examination of the New Testament will show that the expressions " son of God," " child of God," imply likeness to God. Our Saviour, who is the Son of God, is said to be the express image of His person, the outshining of His glory; and our Saviour Himself in arguing with the Jews in St. John viii. denies that they are the children of God or even the children of Abraham. While acknowledging that they are literally children of Abraham, He argues that if they were really so they would do the works of Abraham. He goes as far as to tell them that they are the children of the devil, but He does so on this special ground, that they are doing the works of the devil. Sonship implies likeness, and to be a son of God is to be in some measure like God. Want of likeness to God implies that the person is not a child of God. These words of our Saviour (in St. John viii.) are completely destructive of the high church theory of regeneration. Of course the whole of the baptised community may be spoken of as children of God; they are so by profession, they are so in idea, they are so by hypothesis—but this does not mean that they are all so in reality any more than my saying that the English

are a brave nation would mean that every Englishman is actually brave.

The Church of England service speaks of the King as being "our most religious and gracious King." Who would argue from this that the Church of England holds that every monarch of England has been religious? The Church of England service speaks of every one buried by the ministrations of its clergy as being received by God, as being laid to rest in the sure and certain hope of everlasting life; but who would argue that the Church considered that every one over whose body the service has been read is actually laid to rest in this sure and certain hope? The language is evidently the language of charitable presumption, very fitting language for use in a public service, but not intended for instruction on doctrine. Is there a statement in the Articles that every person laid to rest is so laid in sure and certain hope? Is there a statement in the Articles that every monarch of England has been actually religious? Is there a statement in the Articles that every baptised infant is actually regenerate at the moment of baptism?

The church baptises because baptism is an ordinance of Christ's; it baptises infants because it thinks this course most agreeable to that ordinance; but it is wisely reticent as to the exact effect of baptism on the infant, and goes as far as providing for infant baptism a service which is practically identical with that for adults, and in which the sponsors speak in the name of the child, attributing to the child a repentance and faith which they devoutly hope and pray it will eventually attain to.

That the high Churchman is not quite happy about his own doctrine of regeneration may be



shown by the fact that whatever the members of the Italian Church may do, it is not the custom of the Anglican minister, however "high" may be his views, to baptise the infant of heathen parentage unless that infant is to be entrusted to the care of Christian people. If the mere fact of baptism, correctly ministered, actually conferred regeneration on the infant, it would surely be the duty of the missionary to use any and every opportunity of baptising the heathen infant ; but the high Churchman does not do so : he contends that an infant must have a title to baptism before it can be right to administer the sacrament to him. Either, therefore, the high Churchman does not believe that regeneration always accompanies infant baptism, or he does not believe that the regeneration which accompanies baptism is very much use to the infant.

Now I believe the high Churchman is right to refuse baptism where there is no title to baptism, but I believe the reason is a very simple and very plain one : the title to receive baptism is the regeneration which is sacramentally conferred and sealed by baptism. An adult brought to the knowledge of Christ has a title to baptism, and that title is the fact that he is already regenerate ; he comes as a man in whom the work of regeneration is already proceeding, to the sacrament of regeneration, just as Abraham was already reckoned righteous when he received the seal of righteousness.

Now the infant of Christian parents, or even the infant of heathen parents if he is to be entrusted to the care of Christian foster parents, as in some home or orphanage, has a title to baptism, and that title is in the fact that in his surroundings has already commenced the work of regeneration.

He is brought to the font by Christian people who love and care for him, and as he grows he comes in contact with other Christian influences, and in these facts consist the regeneration for which we thank God at the baptism of that infant. These facts contain the promise of regeneration sometimes weak, sometimes strong, but in the case of the infant of Christian parents in a Christian country always present.

I heard a clergyman say that if religious teaching were done away with in the day schools, it would be our duty seriously to consider whether we could continue to baptise infants. Whether he knew it or not, he was taking in these words the view which I advocate. He considered that the teaching the parents were likely to give their children was insufficient title for their baptism; he considered the title which the children had for baptism consisted in the fact that they would come under Christian influence in the day school. Take away that Christian influence and these infants would have no title. I am not so sure that they would have no title in a Christian land such as ours, but the principle which the clergyman was giving voice to is the very principle which I maintain, namely, that the child is baptised because of something which exists in the surroundings of that child which gives it a title to baptism. The adult is baptised because he is already regenerate, or professes to be so; the infant is baptised because there already exists in his surroundings, or at all events professes to exist, the promise of regeneration. Might it not be said that the infant of earnest Christian parents, with schools waiting to receive him armed with religious teachers and religious instruction, and with Christian relatives and neighbours, would

possess all the regeneration an infant is capable of possessing, and it is for such ideal conditions that our service is, and must be, constructed.

“ All baptised persons are asserted in Scripture to be regenerate. I say this with full knowledge that my statement requires explanation ; but the explanation is not difficult. First, then, under the phrase ‘ asserted to be ’ regenerate, I mean to include all those places in which Christian communities are addressed as such, in which, that is, the fact is implied, or taken for granted, rather than stated. And this may fairly be done, for a reference to a fact is equivalent to asserting it, and it is all one whether you say something of a person, or address him as being it. Again under the term regenerate, I include a class of expressions synonymous with it, and obviously signifying or implying a new or second birth. Thus Christians are addressed by St. Paul as ‘ dead to sin ’ ; but a death implies that a former life is over, and that the life which the Christian is living now is a new or second life, which, of course, involves a new or second birth. They are addressed again as ‘ dead with Christ,’ ‘ buried with Christ,’ . . . . ‘ risen with Christ,’ . . . . ‘ quickened,’ . . . . ‘ alive from the dead,’ . . . . ‘ alive unto God.’ . . . . The members then of the Christian societies to which St. Paul writes are all, without distinction, addressed as regenerate or born again ; and therefore it may . . . . with perfect truth, be said, that Scripture asserts all baptized Christians to be regenerate. Now how is this assertion to be interpreted ? It may be said that we must go to the fathers for this purpose ; but the fathers throw no new light on this language. for they simply repeat it. They use substantially the same language which Scripture uses, only



somewhat expanded and enriched."—(pp. xi. xii. preface to Mozley's *Primitive Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration*).

The high church view has the advantage of taking the statements in our Catechism and our baptismal service literally, but it does so by giving to the word regeneration a meaning which it never has either in Scripture or the fathers, and it forgets that however you may deal with the thanksgiving in the infant baptismal service you cannot take that in the adult baptismal service literally, for by common consent the regeneration of the adult depends on his repentance and faith. Space forbids my giving further quotations from the works of standard English church divines which bear out the view which I have taken in this tract; they may be read in Mozley or in Goode. But I have said enough to show that we who hold that infants are not necessarily regenerated in baptism have as good a right, and probably a better right, to claim that we are true Churchmen, than those who in defiance of Scripture and the Fathers, and in forgetfulness of the use in liturgies of hypothetical language, cleave to the opposite opinion.

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