

THE
PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.

JUNE, 1821.

Communications.

BRIEF THOUGHTS ON BAPTISM.

(Continued from page 224.)

But it may be asked, of what use is baptism? An inquiry that may be prompted by two very different states of mind. If it proceed from a temper determined to regard the ordinance as destitute of authority, unless its use be perceived and acknowledged, it deserves severe animadversion. Does it become creatures to dispute the propriety of appointments made by their Creator? Is it for us, who are but of yesterday, to question the wisdom of any institution ordained by the great Jehovah? Should it not be deemed sufficient to satisfy our minds that an appointment is both wise and useful, to be informed that it is his appointment? Neither its wisdom nor its utility can be affected by the dulness of our perception. These properties are independent of our apprehensions; they remain precisely the same whether we perceive them or not; just as light is light, whether the human eye see it or not. Humility becomes us; and it should always be sufficient to silence every objection, to know that the Lord hath commanded or appointed a thing.

But the question may proceed from a very different state of mind; from a disposition to understand the purpose for which this positive

institution has been appointed by the Great Head of the church, and a desire to derive the benefit for the conveyance of which it was designed to be the vehicle. In this case, it merits respectful notice. In reply to this inquiry we shall just hint at two purposes for which baptism was instituted.

One is, to afford to adults a favourable opportunity for making a solemn and public dedication of themselves to the service and glory of God. All who sincerely and properly receive this sacred rite, will have previously made this act of devotion in private. But this by no means renders a public repetition of it unnecessary. It is well known in the experience of exercised Christians, how much it contributes to their stability in religion, frequently and daily to renew their covenant engagements with God: And if benefit result from this act when done in secret, may we not anticipate more from the performance of it in public, attended by circumstances calculated to deepen on the mind the remembrance of the interesting transaction, and to strengthen the ties by which we bind ourselves to our God?

Nor is the advantage arising from such a solemn act of public devotion confined to the recipient of the ordinance. It may do good to spectators. For when baptized Christians witness the dedication of another to the service of God, they are reminded of the sacred engage-

"In order to prevent any from intending the work of the ministry who are not qualified, I will briefly mention the necessary qualifications for it. The work is so high, and miscarrying in it is of such dreadful consequence, that no one should be resolutely devoted to the ministry who hath not the following endowments.

"1. A good natural capacity. It should be somewhat above the ordinary degree. Grace supposes nature; and by sanctifying it, turns it the right way; but does not use to make wise teachers of natural drones, or weak headed lads who have not sense enough to learn.

"2. A competent readiness of speech. One who cannot readily speak his mind in common things, is not likely to have that fluent delivery which is necessary to a preacher.

"3. He must be hopeful for godliness. He must be captivated by no gross sin. He must not only have a love to learning, but religion; to the word of God, and good company; to prayer, and good books. He must show that he has a serious concern about his soul, and the life to come; that his conscience is under some effectual convictions of the evil of sin, and the excellence and necessity of a godly life. The youth that hath not these qualifications, should not be devoted to the ministry. To devote an incapable, ungodly person to such an holy work, is worse than of old to have offered to God the unclean for sacrifice. To do it under pretence of hoping that he may have grace hereafter, is a presumptuous profanation, and worse than to design a coward to be a soldier, or a wicked, unsuitable person for a partner in life, in hope that they may become fit afterwards.

"If therefore your parents have been so unwise as to dedicate that to God which was unfit for his acceptance, it concerns you quickly to look better to yourselves, and not to run into the consuming fire. You ought to be conscious of your own condition. If you know that you want either natural capacity, or readiness of speech, or serious piety and heart-devotedness to God, do not meddle with that calling which requires all these.

"Perhaps you will say, 'What shall we do with ourselves? We have gone so far, that we are fit for nothing else.' I answer; You are less fit for the ministry than for any thing. That which requires the highest qualifications, will most shame and condemn you if you want them. If you are not for physic or law, seek something else. You had better become servants, or turn to the basest employments, than to run into the sad case of *Hophni* and *Phineas*; or of *Nadab* and *Abihu*, to the utter undoing of yourselves, and to the loss and danger of many others. But remember, if

your unfitness be your *ungodliness*, whether you are ministers or not, you will be for ever miserable, unless your hearts and lives be changed. When that is done, I would not discourage you; but, (believe me) it is far better to be a cobbler or a chimney sweeper, or to beg your bread, than to be an ungodly minister, though with the greatest preferments, riches, and applause.

"Perhaps parents will say, 'If we devote none to the ministry till godliness appears in them, few will be so devoted, since children seldom discover much savour of religion; and some turn out bad, who when young, promised exceeding well.' I answer: Children cannot be expected to show that understanding in religion which men may; but if they discover not a love to it, a conscientious regard to God's authority, and the life to come, and a dislike of ungodliness and sin, you have no reason to presume they will be fit for the ministry. You can judge but upon probabilities; if they prove bad after an hopeful profession, it will not be chargeable upon you. But we all know that a hopeful youth is a great preparation to an honest age."

These are weighty sayings; and if they deserve the attention of those youth who are able to support themselves, while prosecuting their studies, much more should they be prayerfully examined and applied by those, who, if educated at all, must be maintained for several years by the charitable funds of the church. A youth may be pious, and yet may be very destitute of good common sense, of an aptitude to learn, of the common readiness of speech, of the ordinary share of self-possession, of the bodily health requisite for study and ministerial labour; and in every such case, should be advised to serve God faithfully, in some other profession than that of a public preacher.

E. S. E.

A Word to the Rev. J. R. Willson.

We have seen an angry publication of the *Rev. J. R. Willson*, complaining that a review sent by him was not inserted in our Magazine. He appears to have misunderstood the meaning of a notice on the cover,

in reference to communications from our brethren: which states, that the committee of publication "will hold themselves answerable for the sentiments expressed in the same (any communication), unless it is subscribed by the author's name in full." This notice contains no pledge that every communication that may be signed by the author's name shall be inserted, but only a piece of information that for such productions, when published, the writer alone is to be considered as responsible. To prevent any misconception of the meaning of that part of the notice, it was obliterated from the *fourth* number of the Magazine.

We can assure brother *Willson*, that he is entirely mistaken in regard to the motives which he supposes influenced the committee in refusing to insert his review. They had no apprehension of offending either *Arians* or *Hopkinsians*; for they are in the constant practice of holding up to the view of their congregations the doctrine of the *Trinity* and of *total depravity*.

The simple story is this: When they had read as far as discovered to them the design of the writer to make an attack on Dr. Watts, they were able to conjecture from his *known hostility* to the use of Watts' Psalms and Hymns in the worship of God, what was about to follow; and therefore, without reading any farther, they laid it aside as inadmissible. In this determination the committee were *unanimous*.

We can assure brother *Willson* too, that while his communication was undergoing examination, the pen was in the hand of that member of the committee whom he wishes to exculpate from the blame that he attaches to the other two. The crosses drawn over a part of his review, were made from no such motive as he ascribes to the committee, but only with a view to shorten his communication, so as to bring it within the limits required by the Magazine.

Our brother appears altogether to have failed in his guesses. His failure may admonish him to be more cautious in future how he imputes motives to others for which he has no evidence. We really have felt no displeasure at him. We know the man; and could not help *smiling*, while reading his *philippic* against us.

J. J. J.

Religious Intelligence.

A Narrative of the State of Religion, within the bounds of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church; and of the General Associations of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, during the last year.

The General Assembly have now under their care, sixty-two Presbyteries; fifty of which have sent up annual reports of thirteen hundred churches within their respective bounds. With the subjects of those reports our churches are already *familiar*. The interest, therefore, which these subjects will excite, can be derived only from the charms which the providence and the grace of God may from time to time throw around them.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten, the beloved and co-equal *Son* of God, has, in every age, had a church upon earth. The existence of that church commenced with the promise that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." It has since subsisted amid the rage and persecution of surrounding enemies; and, in spite of the power and policy of hell, will subsist till the end of time; when its visible and militant state will be succeeded by a triumphant state in glory. That church has not indeed, in every age, been alike *visible* and prosperous. Sometimes it has been confined to a particular family, and at others to a particular nation. Sometimes it has been hid like a grain of mustard seed in the earth; and at others, it has been comparatively a great tree, under whose shadow immortal souls have found security and peace. But amidst all the vicissitudes it has experienced, it has increased, and will increase until its borders shall be the borders of the earth: it has shone, and will shine more and more, unto the perfect day. These remarks are illustrated and verified in the reports which the Assembly have received for the past year; a summary account of which they hereby transmit to the