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THE .
C H A R A C T E R
O F
SIMON THE SORCERER:
A
S E R M O N,

DESIGNED TO PROVE THAT
BAPTISM IS NOT REGENERATION.

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CITY OF NEW-YORK.

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M, D C C, X C, V I I.



A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE following Sermon was preached in the New Church, on the Lord's Day, Nov. 25th, 1792. Some who heard it, were pleased to express their Approbation of it, as a seasonable Reprehension of certain Errors, particularly those concerning the Efficacy of Baptism, which have been lately published. It is now, with some little Addition, the Notes, and an Appendix, committed to the Press, in hope that it may more extensively serve the Cause of Truth.

NEW-YORK, January 22, 1793.

THE
C H A R A C T E R
O F
SIMON THE SORCERER.

ACTS viii. 23.

FOR I PERCEIVE THAT THOU ART IN THE GALL OF BITTERNESS, AND IN THE BOND OF INIQUITY.

THESE severe words were directed by the Apostle Peter to Simon the Sorcerer. There must have been something particular to justify them, for it is not the spirit of the gospel to pass a rash and uncharitable censure. I purpose, first, to show the occasion and meaning of them; and then, to make such reflections as may naturally arise.

THE occasion will be seen by attending to the preceding history in this chapter. Philip, one of the seven Deacons chosen by the advice of the Apostles, having preached Christ, and wrought numerous miracles in the city of Samaria, attracted the general attention. There was great

joy among them, both on account of the diseases which he healed, and the tidings of salvation which he brought. Previous to his coming, a certain man, called Simon, who used enchantments, and gave out *that himself was some great one*,* had excited the wonder of the people, and gained much influence over them. His pretensions, and the works which he did, led them to believe, that he was some extraordinary personage, who could either assist, or punish them at his pleasure. We find frequently, that the 'unthinking multitude are deluded by conjurers, diverted by jugglers, and easily imposed upon by bold pretenders in any profession, while the more wise discern and shun the imposture; but this man had bewitched the Samaritans, and obtained a very extensive fame. *To him they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God*;† by which, most probably, is meant, that they viewed him as a Minister of God, or one who acted by power derived from him. Several of the Fathers assert, that he pretended to no less than Divinity; assumed the names of the Sacred Three; propagated the most dangerous heresies; and indulged himself in the greatest impurities. It can hardly be doubted, however, on the respectable

* Verse 9.

† Verse 10.

testimony extant, that after he was rejected, he deserved this character.

ON the preaching of Philip, the people were brought to embrace the Christian religion, and were initiated into the Church by baptism. They received this sacred rite, as a token of their profession, and which, to all who were sincere, was a seal of those precious blessings which Christ had purchased by his death.*

SIMON now saw his influence decline. Aaron's rod swallowed up the magician's rod. The servant of Christ trod upon all the power of the enemy. Whether a momentary conviction seized the heart of Simon, or whether from interested

* The nature and use of the sacraments are justly expressed, and in conformity to the doctrine of our own Church, by archbishop Leighton, in his expository works, vol. 2. p. 116. "Signs they are, but more than signs, merely representing; they are means exhibiting, and seals confirming grace to the faithful. But the working of faith, and the conveying of Christ into the soul to be received by faith, is not a thing put into them to do of themselves, but still in the Supreme hand that appointed them: and he indeed both causes the souls of *his own* to receive these his seals with faith, and makes them effectual to confirm that faith which receives them so. They are then, in a word, neither empty signs to them that *believe*, nor effectual causes of grace to them that *believe not*."

motives, he feigned submission, is not certain. We are informed, that he *believed*, was *baptized*, *continued with Philip*, and *wondered*, beholding the *miracles and signs which were done*.* He might have been sensible, that the power by which Philip acted was superior to his, and wished, for his own reputation, to acquire the same. His conduct afterward seems to bespeak this. But since it is said, that he *believed*, perhaps, the most just interpretation, and certainly the most favorable one which can be admitted, is, that he was the subject of what is called an historical faith. He gave credit to the report of the gospel, made an outward and visible profession of it, but his heart was not changed, and he was secretly attached to his sins.†

* Verse 13.

† “ A man may be said to believe, and yet not be a believer; as a righteous man to sin, and yet not be a sinner. To be a believer, is to believe all that is to be believed, and to have the heart united to it: Thus Simon believed not. His faith seems to be only such a belief concerning Philip, as the Samaritans lately had concerning Simon, viz. That he was the great power of God. For finding himself over-matched by Philip, who cast out the spirits which he, perhaps, had possessed them with, he could not now but give the precedency to Philip, as having a greater power than himself; and therefore he *continued with Philip, wondering at what he did*. His

THAT there is a faith of this kind, which is not effectual to salvation, is abundantly clear from scripture. We are informed, that when our Lord was in *Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.* The historian immediately adds, *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men ; and needed not that any should testify of man ; for he knew what was in man.** Again, it is recorded, that, after our Lord's discourse on the bread of life, which came down from heaven, *Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.†* Of this faith the Apostle James likewise speaks. *Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God ; thou doest well : the devils also believe and tremble. But*

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“believing seems to be no more than an outward professional faith, taken up for by-respects, to preserve his interest and repute among the people, who now began to fall from him, and to follow Philip ; whose disciple he himself will profess to be, rather than to be quite cashiered. Besides this profession of his might (in his conceit) be a step towards *purchasing the gift of the Holy Ghost*, which, if he could obtain, he had been again in as good a condition, both for reputation and profit, as before.” Coles on God's Sovereignty.

* John ii. 23—25.

† John vi. 66.

*wilt thou know, O, vain man! that faith without works is dead?** Let me farther refer you to the parable of the sower, in which we are taught the different effects of the word upon it's hearers. You will particularly remark the explanation of the seed which fell upon stony places. *He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word, by and by, he is offended.†* From these words has come the distinction of a *temporary* faith, which is still higher than historical, and which, besides the knowledge of revealed truths, and the assent to them, contains a degree of approbation and joy. Such was the faith of Herod, who *feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.‡* This faith is not saving. It does not proceed from a new nature, and may consist with the love and dominion of sin. Hence the Apostle, in order to distinguish true faith from false, says, *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; he speaks of faith unfeigned; and of faith which worketh by love.*

* James ii. 18—20. † Matthew xiii. 20—21. ‡ Mark vi. 20.

IT is not the design to pursue this subject at present, farther than to show, that there is good foundation for the distinction which is made, and that the conduct of Simon, in receiving baptism and continuing for some time in his profession, is easily accounted for on another principle than a change of heart. He is one among the many mournful instances, who were alarmed for a season, or excited by some worldly motive, but were never the subjects of special grace.*

WHEN the Apostles, who were at Jerusalem, heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John.† These went down in order to establish the new converts, and to confer upon as many of them as were designed for offices in the Church, the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost. Though they had received the regenerating influences of the Spirit, yet the gifts of healing, tongues, and prophecy had not been bestowed upon them.

* See the subject of faith fully and judiciously treated ; the different kinds described ; and that which is saving, distinguished from all others, by Dr. M'Knight in his Six Sermons. See also the different appearances of religion in persons who come short of a real conversion and saving change, accurately pointed out in Dr. Witherspoon's practical treatise on regeneration ; a work of sterling value.

† Verse 14.

WHEN Simon saw the wonderful effects of the imposition of the Apostles hands, he offered them money, supposing that they could communicate the same power to him. This he desired, not that he might glorify God, or confirm the truths of the gospel by it, but to advance his own interest and reputation in the world. From this motive his conduct is generally thought to have proceeded; and hence the crime of buying or selling preferment in the Church has since been called Simony. But his sin did not consist only in ambition and avarice. He struck at the very foundation of the Christian faith, by alledging, that the Apostles were acquainted with some higher art of magic, than that which he had learned, and could teach it to others. This discovered at once his real character. Had not the Apostles had the gift of *discerning of spirits*, this proposal showed in what light he considered the gospel and its preachers. To him, as to the modern deists, the gospel appeared a cunningly devised fable, and miracles only a fallacy of the senses, or arts of magic.

PETER rejected his offer and insinuation with the utmost abhorrence, and in words which contained his doom, unless he repented. *Thy money*

*perish with thee.** As this upright Apostle did not himself preach the gospel from views of gain, so neither could any bribe induce him to honor the unworthy. Indeed what Simon asked was not man's to give, and therefore the Apostle declared to him the great wickedness there was in thinking, that the gift could be purchased; told him plainly his dreadful situation; and exhorted him to repentance and prayer, as the appointed means of grace.

THE sinful state of this man is strongly and repeatedly asserted by the Apostle. *Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.†* And again in the text, *I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.* Can words more strikingly paint one whose heart is altogether vile? Whenever such severe expressions fell from the lips of Christ and his Apostles, they were invariably directed to persons of the most wicked character. Hear the words of our gracious Lord; *Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead mens bones,*

* Verse 20.

† Verse 21.

and of all uncleanness. *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers ! how can ye escape the damnation of hell ?** Hear also the words of the Apostle Paul to Elymas the forcerer, who sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith ; *Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty, and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness ! wilt thou not cease, to pervert the right ways of the Lord ?*† Will any one say that this language was proper, excepting to characters extremely wicked ? Or, that the words of Peter can be justified in any other way ?

SIN is here compared to *gall* ; to gall of *bitterness*, to make the expression more emphatic. This signifies, that the disposition of his soul was like a body through which the gall is diffused. It may be remarked, that it is not said, that the gall was *in him*, but that he was *in the gall* ; wholly poisoned and corrupted. Sin is farther compared to a *bond* which held him fast.—Melancholy description ! To be thus told, by an Apostle, one endowed with a divine spirit, and commissioned to speak in this manner by the Lord and Judge of all, must have abashed the most shameless face,

* Matthew xxiii. 27—33.

† Acts xiii. 10.

and confounded the grossest hypocrite. Simon requested the Apostles to pray to the Lord, that no judgment might overtake him. Laid open to himself and others, he contemplated for a moment some sudden vengeance, like what fell upon Ananias and Sapphira, of which he had probably heard. The greatest profligates are sometimes liable to the most alarming fears.

THOUGH we have no farther account of him in sacred history, yet early ecclesiastical writers inform us, that henceforward he gave himself up more than ever to forcery, violently opposed the gospel wherever he went, contended with the Apostles at Rome, where he was countenanced by the Emperor, and where there was a statue erected for him with this inscription, "To Simon the holy God;" until at length he died in shame and remorse.*

THESE words, which were directed to Simon, are applicable only to those, and to all those who are in an unregenerate state. Though they may not have arrived at the same degree of wickedness, yet the same evil principle is within them, and is continually gathering more strength. None become on a sudden very base. There was a

* Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian.

time when atrocious sinners trembled at the thought of those things which they now freely commit. The seeds of wickedness, unless subdued by grace, will, in time, take root and spring up. Let us meditate a little on the propriety and import of the metaphors used in the text, as they respect every natural man.

He is so depraved, as that he is said to be in the gall of bitterness. His depravity may be so called on account of its opposition to God, and its effects to himself.

He is opposed to the perfections of God; particularly to his holiness and justice. He quarrels with his absolute decrees. He rebels against his law. Hence the Apostle says, *The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.** From this enmity, the repugnance to the way of salvation, the opposition to the vital principles of piety, and the bitter persecution of Christians proceed. However men may disguise their conduct to others, and impose upon themselves, to no other proper source can we trace these things, than to pride, and a hatred against holiness. This temper, my

* Romans viii. 7.

brethren, is more or less in every unrenewed man. Only the Spirit of God can overcome it, and make a willing people in the day of his power.

AGAIN, The effects of the sinner's depravity are bitter to himself. He has no solid peace of mind. Guilt causes stings of conscience. The pleasures of this world cannot give him satisfaction.—Who can describe the bitterness which awaits him in another world, when deprived of all his pursuits, and fallen under the everlasting displeasure of a righteous God?

THE Apostle uses likewise the metaphor of a *bond*, which is expressive of the dominion of sin in the human heart, and the liability to punishment. It has so bound the man that he cannot free himself, or rather, he is become a willing slave. How many miserable examples of this are found among those who have long indulged themselves in the practice of iniquity! They seem proof against every mean of reformation, and rush headlong on destruction. Their evil inclinations serve like cords to bind them. The original corruption of their nature is strengthened

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by habit. This was the unhappy case of Simon, for, if we may credit ancient historians, he never was freed from the gall of bitterness, and loosed from the bond of iniquity ; but they seemed more and more to prevail over him. This, all have reason to fear as to themselves, who do not partake of saving grace. Sin, if not weakened, grows stronger. The *bond* may also imply a liability to punishment. To this, iniquity binds them over. Death is, by the law, the certain consequence. In both these respects we are all bound until Christ set us free. To him, let us earnestly look, for his blood to cleanse us, for his spirit to mortify our corruptions, and to implant within us divine principles, that so we may honor and fear him, and be prepared to dwell in his presence for ever.

There are some general reflections which arise from this subject, and to which let us now attend.

FIRST, An external profession of the Christian religion, entitles persons, in the sight of the Church, to the ordinances of the gospel. Simon, though he had been guilty of much wickedness, yet upon his visible reformation and profession of faith, was admitted to baptism. Men cannot

know the heart. They can judge only by the words and conduct. When these are agreeable to the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, the judgment of charity is, that the heart is also sincere. This is acting according to the test which our Lord hath given, *by their fruits ye shall know them.*

AT the first publication of the gospel, a profession was required before baptism, which profession was always supposed to be, and in most cases really was the consequence of a change of heart. Regeneration in persons adult, instead of being conferred in baptism, was requisite to it, and a reason for its administration. *Can any man, said Peter, forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we.** That repentance and faith, which are inseparable from regeneration, were required previous to baptism, is evident from his address to the Jewson the day of Pentecost; *Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, &c.†* The sacred historian adds, *They that gladly received the word were baptized.‡*

* Acts x. 47.

† Acts ii. 38.

‡ Acts ii. 41.

It is no reason, that because persons have been once publicly vile, they ought not to be received into the Church ; for divine grace hath often brought such, and may have brought these to repentance and amendment : nor is it an evidence, that those who administer the ordinances, did wrong, because persons afterward walk contrary to the gospel ; for this could not be foreseen, and if it could, it is not the rule of judgment. The present profession, and the present appearance, are all with which we have to do. *The Lord knoweth them that are his.* If insincerity manifest itself by the future behavior, then admonition and rejection are proper, as in the case before us ; but, at first, Philip was justifiable in baptizing Simon.

THIS reflection shows us, how inconsiderately sometimes officers of the church are censured for the admission of unworthy persons, as though they could prevent this, or ensure a *conversion as it becometh the gospel of Christ*. The officers of the church may not refuse ordinances to any whose knowledge of the truth is sufficient, and who avow their obedience to the commandments of God.

SECONDLY, Though an external profession be that by which we must judge, yet persons may make this, while their hearts are not right in the sight of God. Christ may be confessed from interested motives, or from sudden convictions of sin, and a desire to atone for it, when there is no rational and lasting effect of the truth upon the mind. As soon as these motives cease to excite, the goodness vanishes as the morning cloud, and as the early dew. How unwise and improper, then, to pronounce positively as to the conversion of men ! Time only can prove their sincerity. Simon was soon unmasked, and stood confessed a forcerer still. In latter days his conversion would have been much boasted of by some ; he would have been carried about as a trophy, if not made a preacher ; but, alas ! where would have been the triumph, when, according to their own tenet, Simon had fallen from grace. We ought neither, on the one hand, hastily to condemn, nor, on the other, hastily to approve, but hope all things, patiently waiting their issue, and *being confident, that he which hath begun a good work, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.** Those who are the

* Phil. i. 6.

subjects of supernatural grace, cannot totally, or finally, fall away. The same divine Agent who began, will perfect the work. Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of faith. *There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. They are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.* "The seed which is planted by divine grace, shall be preserved by divine power. A gracious God will neither suffer it to be smothered by contending weeds, nor destroyed by the inclemency of this tempestuous climate, until it be transplanted into the milder regions of peace and serenity above.*"

THIRDLY, Hypocrites set a higher value upon external gifts, than upon internal graces. See this in the character under consideration. He coveted the power which he thought the Apostles had, because it would serve to recommend him to the notice of men, while he was inattentive to the purity of his heart. What pride and ambition were evident in him! Though his life had been infamous, and he had lately embraced the Christian religion, yet he aspired at

* Dr. Witherpoon's treatise on regeneration, which is fraught with instruction, and will be read with great pleasure and profit by Ministers and private Christians.

once to be equal to an Apostle. Not contented with receiving extraordinary gifts by the interposition of others, he aimed to communicate them himself. No object appeared to him so desirable as self-interest or self-glory. This is a certain mark of a carnal heart; and by which let us try the sincerity of our profession. Are we more fond of public than of secret duties? Are we more careful in the performance of such things as procure a good reputation, than of such as must pass unnoticed? Is self-denial, the mortification of sin, forgiveness of injuries, and the like, esteemed of little account? In short, what is our chief end in all religious duties? Is it, that we may receive the flattery of our own hearts, and be gratified with the flattery of others? If so, we have great reason to suspect ourselves. If this be our habitual character, we sacrifice to the work of idols, and dishonor the living God.

ONCE MORE, Every person who is baptized is not regenerated. This is a proper and important reflection on this part of sacred history. One principal design in choosing it, was to establish this truth. By regeneration is meant a new birth, or being born again; and by this is meant a change produced by the Spirit of God.

upon the understanding, will, and affections, so that the person becomes a new creature.* This

* This is the sense in which regeneration is generally understood, and which the word plainly imports. Regeneration, renovation, and renewal are synonymous terms.—Though a distinction may be made between these and conversion, yet this also is used by accurate writers in the same sense. If by regeneration be understood only a change of the external state—a being born into the Christian society—a being made a visible member of the Church, or a translation from the world into the Church of God, then baptism is regeneration. But this is not the meaning of the word as authorized by scripture, and used by divines. Archbishop Tillotson and Dr. Whitby, who teach some doctrines contrary to those received by the Reformed Churches, both agree in this. The first says, “Regeneration is a metaphor which the scripture useth to express our translation and change from one state to another, from a state of sin and wickedness, to a state of grace and holiness, as if we were born over again, and were the children of another father, and from being the children of the devil, did become the children of God.” And again, “Regeneration is the change of a man’s state, from a state of sin to a state of holiness, the man being, as it were, quite changed or made over again.” “This change,” says he again, “is effected and wrought by a Divine power, of the same kind with that, which created the world, and raised up Christ Jesus from the dead.” Dr. Whitby, in his paraphrase on these words, *Except a man be born again*, says, “That is, renewed in his mind, will and affections, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and so become a new creature.”

change does not always accompany the administration of baptism. It may precede, or it may follow, or it may never take place. No one will venture to say, that Simon was not *regularly* baptized, or that Philip had not *competent authority* for the purpose; and yet we see, that the subject continued in an unregenerate state. This single example is sufficient to establish the doctrine beyond any reasonable dispute; for if one can be produced, we may presume that there are many.*

* Exactly consonant to this was the sentiment of the great and good Archbishop Usher, a first rate luminary in the Episcopal Church. His words are, in his Body of Divinity, folio volume, page 416.

"Doth the inward grace always accompany the outward sign in those of years baptized?"

"No: but only then when the profession of their faith is not outward only and counterfeit, but sincere and hearty; they laying hold on Christ offered in the sacrament by a lively faith, which is the hand to receive the mercies offered. Acts viii. 37. *If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest be baptized*, saith Philip to the Eunuch. For it were absurd to extend the benefit of the seal beyond the covenant. Now the covenant is made only to the faithful. John i. 10.—Mark xvi. 16. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but *he that believeth not*, whether he be baptized or no,

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If any insist that Simon was regenerated, then they must assert likewise, that he afterward returned to his old state ; for though the regenerate are not perfect, and may fall into sin, yet the words of the Apostle are too strong to mean only that corruption which still dwells in them. If any insist, that a sufficiency of grace was given him, which had he improved, he would have been saved, then they must assert likewise, that our salvation stands in the will of men. These doctrines are inseparable from one another, and all of them are contrary to divine revelation. The advocates for regeneration in baptism, to be consistent with themselves, are obliged to embrace these, and thus one error leads to another, until the very spirit and design of the gospel is contradicted, and sometimes wholly rejected. It is this manner of accommodating the gospel, to the natural pride of men, that encourages their security in sin, and leads them to despise the cross of Christ. Those doctrines, usually called the doctrines of grace, have been, and ever will be found the most efficacious in converting sinners, and in promoting holiness of heart and life.

shall be condemned. Simon, Magus, and Julian, and thousands of hypocrites and formalists, shall find no help in the day of the Lord by the holy water of the baptism, without it be to increase their judgement."

It would be hard to ascertain the precise time between Simon's baptism and the Apostle's declaration to him ; but it could not be very long. Samaria being only one day's journey from Jerusalem, the news of Philip's success must have soon reached the Apostles, and Peter and John must soon have gone down. Is it reasonable, then to suppose, that in this short space of time, a man from being a new creature should become totally corrupt ; that he who so lately received the sincere milk should now be in the gall of bitterness ; or that he who so lately was made free by the Spirit of God, should now be in the bond of iniquity ? If regeneration be, as some seem to think, only good habits gradually acquired by our own endeavours, even on this principle we must gradually revert to the bad ; but this man was now destitute of every good habit.* No sign of grace appeared, but on the contrary, signs of great depravity were manifest.

* " Spiritual life is prior to and the source and principle of all acts of evangelical holiness ; and consequently it cannot be gradually acquired by such acts, but must be implanted previously to the putting forth of any such acts ; as reason is not acquired by reasoning, but is a pre-requisite and principle of all the acts of reason. There must be a first act of holiness ; for if there be not a first, there cannot be a second, &c. Now since a principle of spiritual life is the spring, and the

As to the opinion of a sufficiency or universality of grace, it is by no means admissible. Is it said, that this man might have improved his measure of grace if he would? Then the counsel of salvation rests merely on the human will. Grace is given which mankind may, or may not improve: and consequently all may be saved, or none may be saved. This is, if I may express it, making the infinitely wise God to act at random, and give his Son to die in vain.

It appears then, from this example of one having been baptized according to the rule of the Church and still remaining unrenewed in his heart, that regeneration is not always, or necessarily connected with baptism. You will, my brethren, give the observations which have been made all that attention and weight to which they are entitled. The argument by no means rests here; farther than this, that if it be evident that Simon was not regenerated, then it is conclusive reasoning to say, that baptism is not regeneration. The doctrine is of importance as it beginning of all acts of holiness, it must be, in order of nature, prior to the first act of holiness; and consequently it is not gradually acquired by such acts, but precedes them all, and therefore must be instantaneously infused." Davies's Sermons.

stands connected with others ; and should any of us depend on our admission into the Church by baptism, as being all the change in our state which is required, the consequence will be fatal and dreadful. Hear how a learned and pious Divine addresses the person who says he has been baptized, and is therefore regenerate. “ Dost thou venture thy soul upon it ? that this is all God means, by *having a new heart created, a right spirit renewed in us* : by being made God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works : by becoming new creatures, old things being done away, all things made new : by so learning the truth as it is in Jesus, to the putting off the old man, and putting on the new ; which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness ; by being begotten of God's own will by the word of truth ; to be the chief excellency, the prime glory (as certainly his new creature is his best creature) the first fruits, or the *devoted part* of all his creatures ; by *having Christ formed in us* ; by *partaking the divine nature, the incorruptible seed, the seed of God* ; by being born of God, Spirit of Spirit ; as of earthly parents we are born *flesh of flesh*. When my eternal blessedness lies upon it, had I not need to be sure, that I hit the true meaning of these scriptures ?

35 CHARACTER OF SIMON THE SORCERER.

Especially, that at least I fall not below it, and rest not in any thing short of what scripture makes indispensably necessary to my entering into the kingdom of God ?”*

UPON the whole, my brethren, let me beseech you to attend with all diligence and care to the things of your everlasting peace. Certain it is, that the enjoyment of no privileges alone, will save us. We must believe with our hearts in Jesus Christ the only Saviour, and we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds, if we would partake of the heavenly joys. We can be justified before God, only by the righteousness of Christ as our surety, imputed to us, and made holy only by continual influences from above. Let us be afraid of resting in something short of real godliness ; let us be careful in self-examination ; and let us *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling ; for it is God which worketh in us, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.*

* Howe's works.

F I N I S.

A P P E N D I X.

WHOEVER reads the foregoing sermon, and has seen one entitled, "The doctrine of regeneration asserted and explained," published by the Rev. Dr. Moore, will find, that we differ in sentiment on this subject. I once thought not to mention his name in this business, or refer particularly to his sermon; but as a reference would naturally be made, I did not know whether he would reckon it a compliment or not to pass him in entire silence; and I am unwilling to give him the least just ground of offence. He is esteemed in that church to which he ministers, and has the character of a man of genius, learning and taste. These considerations, besides personal friendship, would prevent me from seeking any controversy with him. To manage a controversy, indeed, is neither my talent, nor my inclination; and it so seldom tends to edification, and so frequently produces an improper spirit, that every man ought to be jealous of the motives from which he engages. The evils of this life are enough without increasing them by strife and contention. We are all so prone to err, that we should counsel and assist, not *bite and devour one another*. The doctrine, however, advanced by Dr. Moore, appears to me so opposite to what is received in the Reformed Churches, so connected with some others, and so dangerous in its consequence, that it should not escape notice; and surely, his liberality will allow me the same liberty in contradicting, which he has taken in asserting. He has published a second edition of his sermon with an appendix, from which we may infer, that he is fixed in his opinion, and desirous of its propagation. His sermon, though intended for his own hearers, yet has fallen into other hands; his character will give it circulation; and if who-

ly unnoticed, the people may think, either that we are unfaithful, or that we cannot defend the old doctrine, or that it is not worthy of being defended.

It is not my design to enter minutely upon an examination of this sermon, but merely to point out, in as few words as possible, whence his error as to baptism seems to arise. One would think sometimes from his expressions, and the little notice which he takes of the *renewing of the Holy Ghost*, that he means no more by regeneration than a solemn admission into the Church by baptism. Were this all, then his only mistake would be the use of a term in a sense in which he is not warranted by scripture, and the language of divines; in a sense which is improper and unsafe. But it is too evident, that he means by regeneration more than this. He first shows "the natural state and condition of mankind." This he says, is "a state of sin and misery." Then after ascertaining, as he alledges, "the true meaning" of the *washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*, he asserts, "that baptism is the *only instituted mode* of taking us out of a wicked world, and making us the children of God by adoption; and that those, whose natural state and condition is thus changed, are said to be *regenerate, or born again*." Again, he asserts, that "with baptism is always connected reception into the Church, and regeneration, and remission of sin." Again, "that a sufficient degree of preventing and assisting grace always accompanies the regular administration of baptism." And, to quote no more, he says, "after this change in our natural state and condition, by a diligent use of the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we grow in grace." Does it not appear, that he means more by regeneration than a change of the external state? That he means a real change of heart; of the *natural state and condition of sin and misery*; that he connects with baptism, *remission of sin*; a being *born again*; such a change as is the foundation of *growth in grace*? Let any one read and take words in their common acceptation, and must he

not see that Dr. Moore teaches, that no other change is necessary than what is always made in baptism? Himself being judge, will say, that I have quoted his words exactly, and that my construction of them is fair. If he means by regeneration any thing different from the common sense in which it is received, why has he not accurately defined it and given his reasons? Is there one who reads his sermon who does not understand him as holding, that whenever a person is regularly baptized, the Spirit of God begins a work of holiness within him, which, by a gradual increase, prepares for complete and eternal salvation? He either means this, or he must deny altogether the necessity of any supernatural change. He either means this, or he has been, for once, unhappy in his mode of communication. In short it appears, that he means by regeneration, to repeat his own words, a "change in our natural state and condition," wrought by "assisting grace;" and the thing about which we principally differ is, that he affirms that this change always accompanies baptism.—I proceed now to point out whence this error, in attributing a too great efficacy to the ordinance of baptism, seems to arise.

1. FROM an inattention to the figurative language of scripture and the nature of a sacrament, in which the sign is often put for the thing signified. Thus, baptism being the sacramental sign of regeneration, may be called *the washing of regeneration, the washing away of sins*, just as Christ, by the same figure, says of the bread in the holy supper, *This is my body*. This mode of speech was, from the use of it in scripture, adopted by the Fathers, and is continued in the Church until this day. Hence in distributing the elements in the supper we say, *This is his body*, and *This is his blood*; *his flesh is meat indeed*, and *his blood is drink indeed*. Hence the Protestant Episcopal Church in the office for the public baptism of infants, says, "We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to *regenerate* this infant with thy Holy Spirit;" and in the order for the administration of the

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Lord's Supper, the minister is directed to publish in these words, "I purpose to administer to all, &c. the most comfortable sacrament of the body and blood of Christ." Again, when kneeling at the table, they pray thus, "Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, &c." And again, in the prayer of consecration, they pray that they "may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood." With as much propriety then, may it be said that the doctrine of transubstantiation is taught in scripture and asserted in the offices of this Church, as that baptism is asserted to be regeneration. I might have said with more propriety, for Christ expressly says of the bread, *This is my body*, but in no place is it expressly said of baptism with water, *This is regeneration*.

2. ANOTHER cause of error seems to be the not distinguishing between the visible and invisible Church, or, between the external dispensation of the gospel, and the real communication of grace. All who profess faith in Christ and are baptized, belong to the visible Church, and are externally in covenant with God; but only such as are united to Christ and renewed by grace belong to the invisible Church. To such only are the sacraments *seals* of spiritual blessings. *They are not all Israel which are of Israel*. As a seal is a witness or confirmation of a transaction which has already taken place, so in the administration of the sacraments the subjects are always supposed to be already the partakers of saving grace; and the sacraments do not confer the grace, much less are they the grace itself.

DR. MOORE appears to have overlooked this distinction in stating the principles both of his own and other Churches. In his own it is clearly made, Art. 26, "In the visible Church, the evil be ever mingled with the good." With respect to the efficacy of the sacraments, it is said, Art. 25, "In such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation." Again in

Art. 28, *of the Lord's Supper*, it is said, "To such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ." And again, in Art. 29, "The wicked, and such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth, as St. Augustine saith, the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ."

We may now see how the Catechisms and Confessions of the Reformed Dutch and Presbyterian Churches are to be understood. They are uniform with the Protestant Episcopal Church in this doctrine. Neither of them hold, as Dr. Moore affirms, that the outward washing of baptism is always accompanied with the inward washing of the Spirit; but that it is an exhibition of spiritual blessings, a badge of profession, and a seal or confirmation of the faith of those whom God hath ordained to life. The Presbyterian Church says in her Confession, chap. 28, "Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated." Agreeably to this is the doctrine of the Reformed Dutch Church, which is well known. The questions in the Heidelberg Catechism are addressed not only to a believer, but to one who has full assurance, or faith in lively exercise; and the answers are such as one of this character would make. It is a singularity in this catechism, that it does not lay down the doctrines merely in propositions, or teach them speculatively, but shows the practical effect which they have upon believers. In this view what is said on baptism is perfectly just. With respect to the Episcopal Church, hear the words of the pious Bishop Hall; "A man may have a saving faith before baptism: Abraham first believed to justification; then after received the sign of circumcision, as a seal of the righteousness of that faith, which he had when he was uncircumcised. Who

takes baptism without a full faith, saith Hierom, takes the water, takes not the Spirit. Thou seest water, saith Ambrose, every water heals not, that water only heals which hath the grace of God annexed. Baptism therefore, without faith, cannot save a man, and by faith doth save him." Hear also the doctrine as clearly and excellently taught by Archbishop Usher, in his body of divinity, page 415, "Though God hath ordained these outward means for the conveyance of the inward grace to our souls; yet there is no necessity that we should tie the working of God's Spirit to the sacraments more than to the word. The promises of salvation, Christ and all his benefits, are preached and offered to all in the ministry of the word; yet all hearers have not them conveyed to their souls by the Spirit; but those whom God hath ordained to life. So in the sacraments, the outward elements are dispensed to all, who make an outward profession of the gospel (for in infants, their being born in the bosom of the Church is instead of an outward profession) because man is not able to distinguish corn from chaff: but the inward grace of the sacrament is not communicated to all, but to those only who are heirs of those promises whereof the sacraments are seals. For without a man have his name in the covenant, the seal set to it confirms nothing to him."

3. THE language of Scripture and of the Fathers is liable to be misconstrued when we do not attend to certain circumstances in the primitive Church. Such were the discouragements; that the very profession of Christianity was a good test of men's characters. The Apostles, therefore, address professing Christians, in the general, as though they were *adopted, sanctified, justified, &c.* as well as *regenerated*; because they had reason, in the judgment of charity, to think thus of by far the greatest part of them. It ought to be remembered too, that "in the earliest ages of the Church, persons were generally baptized as soon as they were

converted to the cordial belief of Christianity ; and therefore the time of their conversion and that of their baptism might naturally enough be spoken of as one. Just as *illumination* also among the Antients signifies baptism : Not to intimate, that the grand illumination of the mind was made by this rite, or at the time of it ; for that would be supposing the person in darkness when he embraced the gospel, and determined to be baptized ; but because it was taken for granted, and that very justly in those days, that every one savingly enlightened would soon be baptized, that so he might be regularly joined to the society of enlightened or regenerated persons, that is to the Christian Church.”---The inattention to these three things which have been mentioned is, perhaps, the great cause why some have erred on this subject. When duly weighed, nothing more will be required to convince us that regeneration does not always accompany the administration of baptism,

REGENERATION, being a “ change of our natural state and condition,” is absolutely necessary to salvation ; but baptism is not absolutely necessary ; and, therefore baptism is not regeneration.—Again, Faith and repentance are the fruits of regeneration ; but a profession of these is required of adults previous to baptism ; and therefore, baptism is not regeneration.—Again, Baptism is a visible sign and seal of inward grace, and not the grace itself ; but regeneration is the grace itself ; and therefore, baptism is not regeneration.—Again, Baptism is to be administered to all who profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him ; but the profession may be insincere and the heart remain wicked ; and therefore regeneration is not inseparably connected with baptism.

LET me subjoin here an extract from a sermon of the learned and pious Mr. Davies, whom America enrols among her earliest and worthiest sons. “ If baptism,” says he, “ be regeneration in the scripture sense, then whatever the scripture says concerning

persons regenerated, born again, or created anew, will also hold true concerning persons baptized. This is so plain a principle, that it is hard to make it plainer; for if baptism be the same with regeneration, the new birth, or the new creation, then the same things may be said of it. Proceeding upon this obvious principle, let us make the trial in a few instances. It may be truly said of him that is born of God, in the scripture sense, that he does not habitually sin, &c. Now substitute baptized, instead of born of God, and consider how it will read,—“Every one that is baptized sinneth not; but he that is baptized keepeth himself; and the evil one toucheth him not.”—Has this the appearance of truth? Do not all of you know so much of the conduct of many who have been baptized, as to see this is most notoriously false? For where can we find more audacious sinners upon earth, than many who have been baptized? Let us make another trial. *Whosoever is born of God*, in the scripture sense, *overcometh the world*. But will it hold true, that whosoever is baptized, *overcometh the world*? *If any man be in Christ*, in the scripture sense, *he is a new creature; old things are past away, and all things are become new*. But how will it sound if you read, *If any man be baptized, he is a new creature; old things are past away, and all things are become new*? Does baptism universally make such a change in the subject, as that it may, with any tolerable propriety, be called a new creation?—“Let me borrow a very plain and popular, and yet substantial argument from Limborch. “The great design of Christ’s coming into the world was, to renew and regenerate men: this is a work worthy of his own immediate hand. And yet we are told *Jesus baptized not, but his disciples*. A plain evidence that he made a distinction between baptism and regeneration. St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, *I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius*.” But if baptism be regeneration, his meaning must be, I thank God that I regenerated none of you.—But is this cause of thanksgiving? Could

he give thanks to God that he had not regenerated any of them ? *Christ*, says he, *sent me not to baptize* :---But can we think *Christ* did not send the chief of the Apostles to promote the great work of regeneration ? He, elsewhere, calls himself their spiritual father, *for*, says he, *in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel*. But if baptism be the new birth, he would not have been their father, or begotten them, unless he had baptized them. From which it is evident, that St. Paul made a great difference between baptism and regeneration."

THE reader might suppose me unnecessarily tedious did I proceed farther. He will think this sufficient to enable him to judge how far Dr. Moore has " simply attended to the doctrines of scripture, and the avowed principles of his own and other reformed Churches ;" and how far he has set the " controverted subject in a clear and simple point of view, disengaged from all those clouds of mystery, in which it has been involved by ignorance and enthusiasm." Were he followed in his denial of election and the final perseverance of the saints, he would be found equally unsupported by scripture and the articles of his own Church.---When some things in his performance are considered, such as his unwarrantable interpretation of our Lord's words, *Except a man be born again*, what he says of *inexplicable feelings*, and the notions about conversion, my animadversions will be thought too mild and general. I am studious to avoid giving offence ; and I sincerely hope, that the bare mention of these things will lead the Author carefully to review them. It is his business and mine, to *take heed unto ourselves, and unto our doctrine*, that so we may *both save ourselves and them that hear us*. The doctrines of his own and other reformed Churches are too well known, and established, to be easily brought into discredit. The more they are examined, the brighter evidence will attend them ; and let their opposers be assured, that they are still precious to many in

our day, and shall never want, until the end of time, open assertors and defenders. But I rest with this small testimony, though it were the last I should ever publicly bear, for those truths in which I was early instructed, have always preached, and which thousands on the way to glory have found to be for their edification and comfort.



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