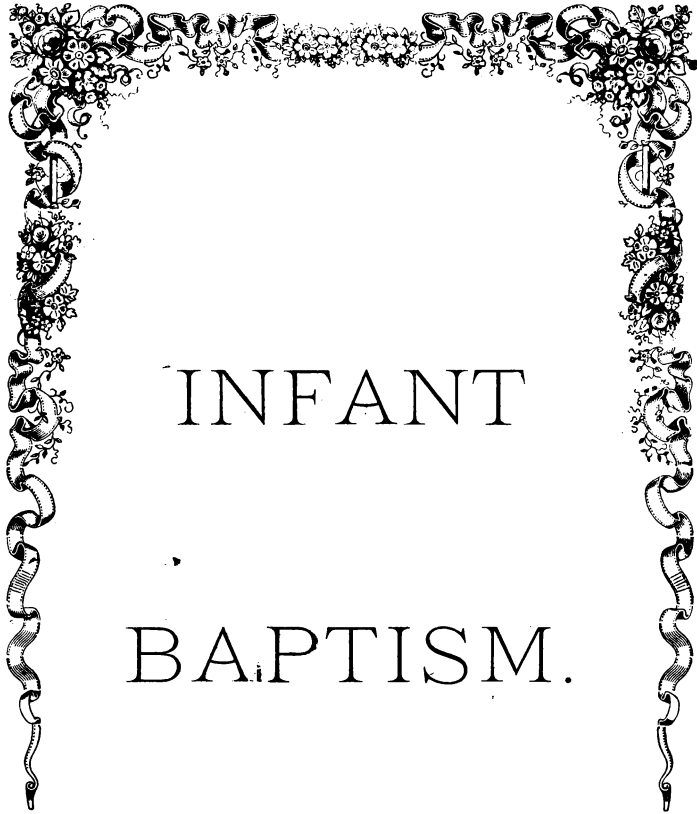


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INFANT
BAPTISM.

THE ORIGIN
OF
INFANT BAPTISM.

A LECTURE DELIVERED IN WALNUT-STREET BAPTIST CHURCH ON
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By WM. H. WHITSITT.

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THE ORIGIN OF INFANT BAPTISM.

I am expected this evening to furnish a brief account of the origin of infant baptism.

By your leave I shall present the remarks which I intend to offer under the three following divisions :

1. The sources whence the history of the origin of infant baptism is taken.
2. The earliest traces in history of the practice of baptizing infants.
3. The considerations which suggested to the minds of early Christians the idea of infant baptism, and led them to introduce the practice.

I.

THE SOURCES WHENCE THE HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN OF INFANT BAPTISM IS TAKEN.

These are the writings of the fathers of the church. I shall have occasion to mention in the progress of my discourse the works of Tertullian, a presbyter of Carthage, in Africa, who died at

a great age, between the years of 220 and 240 of the Christian era. He is the first author in whom we meet a distinct and undoubted allusion to the practice in question. It is found in the eighteenth chapter of his treatise on baptism.

Origen, the great master of the Christian school at Alexandria, who died at Tyre in the year 254, appears to have spoken in several places of infant baptism.

I shall likewise have occasion to mention Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, whose death occurred in the year 258, and, in passing, Augustine, who died in 430.

Some are inclined to believe that Irenaeus, a Greek father born in Asia Minor, but afterwards Bishop of Lyons, in France, who died in the year 202, has referred to infant baptism, but, after a patient examination of the passage, I am not quite able to persuade myself that this opinion is correct.

It will be observed that I have excluded the Holy Scriptures from the above list of sources for a history of the origin of infant baptism, and some of the audience may fancy that I have been moved to adopt this course out of caprice or dogmatical prepossessions. But a conclusion of that sort would greatly misrepresent my sentiments, and inflict a painful injustice upon me be-

sides. In the hope of being able thereby to set my conduct in a proper light, I crave your attention to a short account of the considerations which have induced me to omit our sacred writings from the list of authorities.

Nearly all of the scientific expositors of the Scriptures in the present age are members of Pedobaptist communions. But Dr. George Edward Steitz, a well-known Lutheran, in his treatise on baptism (Herzog's Encyclopedia, Vol. XV. page 431) asserts that "among scientific exegetes it is regarded as an established conclusion that not a trace of infant baptism can be discovered in the New Testament." Of course, if the New Testament furnishes no trace whatever of this usage, it will not be argued that the Old Testament makes any utterance with regard to it; for even those who plead the Abrahamic covenant exclusively as a foundation for it assert that the New Testament recognizes and supports that position.

I have been at some pains to examine the literature to which Dr. Steitz alludes, and my observations have confirmed the truth of his statement. He has not expressed himself too decidedly. All the commentators of the present generation, who can by any stretch of literary charity be denominated scientific, agree in the

opinion that no text of the Bible *inculcates* infant baptism, with the exception of Dr. Karl Braune, of Saxon Altenburg, in his exposition of the Ephesians in the Lange Series. There are hardly two questions besides in the whole range of theological inquiry where such a general and striking agreement can be found among scientific Pedobaptists. They advance many reasons, drawn from nature, philosophy and tradition, in support of the practice ; but only a single one, and he a comparatively obscure name, ventures to appeal to any words of the Bible in its favor. Dr. Meyer, who is, all things considered, the leading commentator of the New Testament, represents the prevailing opinion. In his exegesis of Acts xvi : 15, he says : “ Therefore the baptism even of the children of Christian parents, of which there is not a trace in the New Testament, was not, as Origen supposed, an apostolical custom, inasmuch as it met with early and prolonged resistance ; but it is a practice which arose after the age of the apostles, by a gradual process in connection with the development of church life and church doctrine. There is no reliable testimony concerning it until the age of Tertullian, who opposed it with earnestness. It was defended, however, by Cyprian ; but it

was only in the time of Augustine that it became general."

In a word, Dr. Steitz speaks advisedly. The scientific expositors of the Pedobaptist world have come to a well-nigh unanimous conclusion that the New Testament makes no allusion to infant baptism.

With these facts before your minds, you would justly charge me with an unpardonable blunder if I were thoughtless enough to reckon the word of God among the sources given above. It would be possible to explain such a course only on the ground that I had been profoundly asleep for a whole generation. Conclusions which are so firmly and widely accepted among scholars, and so notorious as this one, may not be ignored without peril. I am sure that no Pedobaptist writer, at the present time, who has the slightest desire to obtain or retain a position among scientific interpreters, would dare perpetrate such an anachronism. He could not in the least afford to put his reputation to such a test; he could not afford to have his colleagues receive his work with lifted brows and forbearing silence. I was about to say he would sooner thrust his hand into a blazing furnace than to trifle in this way with his scientific conscience or compromise his literary reputation.

Scholars who have even a moderately fair name to lose are too wary for that. In short, Pedobaptist commentators have settled this question among themselves and for themselves. It is a closed question, and there is little reason to apprehend that any one of them, whose attainments are at all worthy of respect, will ever again be guilty of so wild a freak as to claim that a single passage of Holy Scripture distinctly and definitely enjoins infant baptism. I, therefore, respectfully submit that, inasmuch as I am convinced that they have arrived at the proper conclusion, it is wise and seemly that I should bow to their decision.

But inasmuch as there are authors not belonging to the scientific class who still insist on the antiquated notion that the Bible does mention this practice, it has been deemed advisable to review in a rapid way the passages which led the old-time theologians to advocate that idea :

1. A number of years ago Dr. Hofmann, Professor in the University of Erlangen, in a work which has enjoyed a wide circulation (*Der Schwiftbeweis*), insisted that apostolical authority was accorded to infant baptism by Ephesians vi: 1. The passage reads as follows: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for

this is right." He assumed that the writer was here addressing himself to members of the church exclusively, and hence that in speaking to children he indicates that infants were at that time recognized as members of the church, and as a consequence the baptism of the children of Christian parents at least was a common event in Apostolic times. This view, I believe, finds at present no support at the hands of scientific commentators in the Pedobaptist world, with the single exception of Dr. Karl Braune, already mentioned, in his work on Ephesians in the Lange Series, but it deserves to be considered, because it is the last outpost which the more learned friends of this practice have attempted to defend in connection with the Sacred Scriptures.

We are willing to allow that the children upon whom the injunction of our text was laid were members of the church, but not that they were infants. For, in the first place, the fact that they were addressed at all goes to prove that they were of sufficient age to comprehend what was said to them; and, in the second place, the manner in which they were addressed shows that they were regarded as united to Christ by faith, inasmuch as the expression, "in the Lord," indicates that the obedience which they

were desired to render was to be rendered out of Christian motives—obedience in the Lord. The idea of the extent of obedience is also hinted at. The children were not required to obey any commands, even of their parents, which conflicted with their obligations to the Lord, and the duty was hereby laid upon them, I think, of deciding for themselves in respect of a particular command whether it was in the Lord or otherwise—whether the performance of it would conflict with their higher obligations as servants of the Lord.

Now, both of these points pre-suppose a considerable advance; the first an advance in religious experience, and the second an advance in religious intelligence, in each of which cases the class of infants are necessarily excluded. We may, therefore, with excellent reason, conclude that the children in question, like Timothy, had known the Scriptures from early years, and had already attained a degree of ripeness.

A parallel case is proposed for your consideration. Mr. Charles Spurgeon was compelled by sickness to be absent from his church in London a few Sundays since. But, in order to show his people that he still bore them on his heart, he wrote them a letter, which was distributed on printed slips in all the pews before service.

I have no information as to what he said to them, but in case he had addressed the young people with the injunction, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right," you would have had just the same reason to assert that Mr. Spurgeon was a Pedobaptist as that the Apostle Paul was a Pedobaptist. There are a multitude of children in his church, just as there were children in the church at Ephesus; but neither in the former instance nor in the latter were they baptized in infancy.

2. Another argument, which, by the way, is still urged by the Princeton theology, and also by Alford, in favor of the biblical origin of infant baptism, was drawn from the Abrahamic covenant and from the usages of the Jewish commonwealth, but, inasmuch as that matter was treated in the first lecture of this series,* it is only necessary to allude to it here for the sake of completeness.

3. It was also once the custom to appeal to Matthew xix: 13-15 (and the parallel passages): "Then there were brought unto Him little children, that He should put His hands on them and pray, and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, 'Suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto me, for of such is the

* Delivered by Dr. Toy.

Kingdom of Heaven.' And He laid His hands on them and departed thence."

The argument turns upon the words, "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," and it is claimed the passage teaches that actual children as members of the kingdom are entitled to baptism. But this view is clearly a misrepresentation of our Lord's expression, and is not confirmed by the tenor and spirit of His teachings. The parallel passage in Mark contains a commentary which casts full light on the meaning of the speaker, and shows how our Lord desired to be understood; for after the words, "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," we find there the words, "Verily, I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter therein."

It is expressly taught in this commentary that children in age were not alluded to by Christ as enjoying a right to the kingdom, but rather those persons who are converted and become as little children. And it is indeed remarkable on the supposition that Jesus ever intended to afford us any light on the status of infants, that He should have omitted to mention children as partakers of some one of the beatitudes which introduce the Sermon on the Mount. That instance of neglect should not be lightly regarded.

The silence which is observed there shows very distinctly that the Lord did not propose to enlighten our ignorance on the point in question.

But the most important, and a conclusive proof that our Savior did not *in this text* intend to assert that children as such are members of the kingdom of heaven, is found in His own conduct in reference to the children who were brought to Him. He would in all probability have baptized them, or at least would have commanded His disciples to baptize them, if He had here designed to teach that they were in this blessed state. But we can not find that any such idea occurred to His mind, for we are simply informed (Matthew xix : 15) that He "laid His hands on them, and departed hence." It was an ordinary event for parents of that time to bring their children to the elder of the synagogue, or to any other person who was renowned for saintly worth, and request him to pray over them and lay his hands upon them, as a means of communicating the blessings which had been entreated. Jesus did nothing more in the present instance than fulfill that firmly established usage, and few incidents of his career touch our hearts with a gladder tenderness. The act contains a direction for all good men in respect to their conduct towards the young.

But Pedobaptists do not preserve entire consistency in their treatment of children as based on this text. If our Lord intended, as they affirm, to teach that infants are members of the kingdom of heaven, how can they justify themselves in the practice of limiting baptism, as is commonly the case, to children of believing parents? If the language used by our Savior applies to infants at all, it surely applies to all infants, and one is as much entitled to baptism as another, whether his parents are Christians or infidels.

Again, if our Lord has here taught us that children in age are members of the kingdom, they are, as a consequence, entitled, not only to baptism, but to the Lord's Supper as well, and no position which our honored fellow-christians have ever assumed has justified the act of caprice by which the Eucharist is by them withheld from infants. If they deprive these members of the kingdom of one of the ordinances, I submit they should not complain that we, imitating the example which themselves have set, should deprive them of another. Certainly they of all persons in the world have the least ground to present the objection that children are defrauded of their rights. Let them, rather, remove the beam from their own eye.

Therefore, as far as this text is supposed to refer to our subject, I would say that whether our Lord regarded these infants as members of the kingdom or not, one thing is undisputed, namely, that He did not baptize them, or command them to be baptized, and hence the passage does not furnish any material for a history of infant baptism.

4. The accounts of household baptisms recorded at several places in the Acts of the apostles, and in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, were formerly much relied on for proof that infant baptism was an apostolical practice, but the verdict of scientific Pedobaptist expositors in our own times is that the point in question can by no means be established from those passages. The first instance of the kind is that of Lydia and her household ; the second is that of the jailer at Philippi, and the third is the household of Stephanas. In neither of these can it be shown, or even rendered probable, that infants were found. It is not unfrequently the case at present that household baptisms are reported in the religious newspapers of our own denomination, which forbids pedobaptism, and there is nothing inconceivable, or even unlikely, in the supposition that there were also no infants in these families. I will allow the great Lutheran

expositor, Dr. Meyer, who may justly be regarded as one of the foremost interpreters of the New Testament, to state the position which is now generally maintained by real scholars on his side of the question in reference to these household baptisms.

In his commentary on Acts xvi : 15, he remarks : " If there were children in the Jewish and heathen families, which accepted Christianity, the baptism of these can be supposed only in those cases where they were sufficiently advanced to be able to confess their faith in Jesus Christ, and actually did confess him ; for this confession was the universal and absolutely essential prerequisite to the reception of baptism. If, on the other hand, there were children in addition to those mentioned, who were incapable of making this confession, baptism would not have been administered to them, since in their case the necessary prerequisite was lacking."

I am not able to find a really scientific interpreter among the advocates of infant baptism who hesitates to yield assent to the above opinion. In the face of so many able scholars, then, I should hardly dare to assert, even if my own opinion was contrary to theirs, that these texts furnished any materials for a history of this custom. The author just mentioned remarks

in a foot-note: "Infant baptism is the most striking example of the recognition of the authority of historical tradition by the Evangelical Church."* And Dr. Hase, the author of one of the foremost works on church history, styles it "the element of Romanism which inheres in the body of Protestantism."†

Indeed, when one considers the almost unanimous consent of the more learned scholars, who belong to communions which maintain this practice to the effect that the Bible furnishes us no authority in favor of it, he is at some loss to discover their reason for adhering to it. But, if you will remind yourself that in many countries of Europe the position of the Scriptures, as the guide of our practice, is not recognized in precisely the same fashion as we recognize it, you will find the solution of the problem. Infant baptism is admitted by these interpreters to rest upon historical tradition alone, but historical tradition means for them far more than it means for us. It is little wonder that in this country, where the normative authority of the word of God is more highly

* *Kritisch-exegetisches Handbuch ueber die Apostelgeschichte*, Edition 4, p. 361.

† *Handbuch der Protestantischen Polemik*, Edition 3, p. 360.

esteemed by all parties, infant baptism should daily lose friends and appear to be on the way to obsolescence. For my own part, I should greet with satisfaction the day when the practice was totally disused and abandoned by our respected fellow-christians who now sustain it with so much feebleness and difficulty and lack of genuine conviction.

5. In the next place, I shall bring before you a passage which has been greatly relied on by the supporters of this practice. The Apostle Paul says, at I Corinthians vii: 14, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were your children unclean; but now are they holy."

The celebrated de Wette, who is also one of the best Pedobaptist commentators, remarks on this text (*Studien and Kritiken*, Vol. III., p. 671): "Accordingly we find in this passage a proof that at the time of the apostles infants were not yet baptized; but it contains at the same moment a justification of the practice of infant baptism." The argument which he adopts, in order to arrive at the conclusion that infant baptism was not in existence at the time of the apostles, is that children in virtue of their family connections were regarded as holy

already before baptism. But history shows that the custom of baptizing infants arose from the idea that they were affected by original sin. The fear of taint from that source is historically considered prior to infant baptism, and occasioned the introduction of it. Now, concludes de Wette, here is an example where the dread of original sin is not apparent, and hence baptism, which followed the development of that doctrine, in the order of time, was clearly not administered in the apostolical age. In short these children were holy without baptism, while at a subsequent period no children were regarded as holy without baptism, and this fact, he avers, shows that the practice in question was not yet invented.

It is quite sufficient for our purpose to be able to show from this text, which Pedobaptists have insisted upon with great rigor, that it proves the very opposite of what they assert and desire—it proves that infant baptism was not an apostolical institution. But we can not dismiss this matter without addressing ourselves to the second member of the citation from de Wette, namely, that the passage contains a “justification of infant baptism.” His argument in this instance is, that, “if, according to the apostle, children, by virtue of

their relation to their parents, were members of the Christian community, we do nothing improper if we accept them *formally* as members, even before consciousness and understanding are awakened in them, for the spiritual communion of children with their parents begins with the earliest moment of life, even though it should be in the way of instinct and unconsciously."

This is a complete shifting of positions. The early advocates of infant baptism insisted that it should be administered because children are sinners, and must be cleansed from impurity. De Wette, on the contrary, insists that they are members of the religious community (or holy), and on that account it is not improper to administer baptism.

I object to this argument on the ground that it incorrectly supposes the word "holy" in the text to be synonymous with the phrase, "member of a Christian community."

I also object to it because it proves too much, namely, that if the children mentioned were entitled to baptism, by virtue of their relation to their parents, so also was the unbelieving husband or the unbelieving wife. Children, the apostle informs us, were sanctified by their family connections precisely in the same way as

the unbelieving parents. If, then, this text justifies infant baptism, or, at least, renders it not improper, it likewise justifies the baptism of heathen unbelievers, or, at least, renders *it* not improper.

It is just to state that Meyer, also, who asserts in his remarks on Acts xvi: 15 that there is not a trace of infant baptism in the New Testament, nevertheless claims that the passage at Matthew xix: 13 furnishes a justification of it after it had been introduced, and that Alford copies him in this particular. I can perceive how the act of Jesus in laying His hands upon children might be pleaded in justification of a similar custom if it prevailed in our times, but that it should furnish a justification of something in all respects different from that is not quite so evident.

But if the most that scientific expositors, with the exception of Dr. Karl Braune, already mentioned, claim is that the New Testament does not contain a trace of infant baptism, but that after it had been invented by persons living at periods remote from the age of the apostles, it would be *justified* by one or two passages, we shall not, even upon the most favorable showing, find any reason for admitting that the Scriptures may be appealed to for a history of its origin.

6. In the last place, it has very strangely been

urged, from the silence of Scripture, that infant baptism was a common practice in the time of the apostles ; namely, that the Jewish Christians, having previously been accustomed to see children circumcised, would have uttered complaints if in the Christian churches no corresponding provision had been made for them. But we hear nothing of such complaints, and therefore it is concluded, that as the children were formerly circumcised, they were now baptized.

This argument assumes that circumcision had been generally abandoned by the Jewish Christians of the first century, and that baptism was substituted in its place. But neither of these suppositions is tenable. The Jewish Christians did not surrender the custom of circumcision, but, on the contrary, maintained it punctually and persistently in addition to baptism, and were highly displeased when they were unable to impose it upon their Gentile fellow-christians as well. It was in their eyes an occasion of grave suspicion against the Apostle Paul that he was reported, but, as we know, quite untruthfully, to be opposed to the circumcision of Jewish children. "And they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."

Acts xxi: 21. That passage shows decidedly that "the multitudes of Jews who believed" still adhered to the customs of their fathers, and particularly to that of circumcision. This being evident, it will be seen that the Jewish Christians had no occasion to make a noise because baptism was withheld from their children, and their silence proves nothing to the point.

With regard to the other supposition, that baptism had come into the place of circumcision, it will be sufficient to remind you that each of these occupied its own place; that the Jewish Christians practised both of them throughout the apostolical age, and even much later.

To conclude the whole matter, then, as far as the Scriptures are concerned, I feel compelled by the facts of the case to take sides with the more learned and scientific portion of the Pedobaptist expositors, instead of their less able brethren. The statement of Dr. Steitz, already cited, to the effect that "among scientific expositors it is regarded as an established conclusion that not a trace of infant baptism can be discovered in the New Testament," is abundantly established by the literature in question. And if any person is disposed to complain that the Bible is excluded from the list of authorities on the subject in hand, they will not surely attribute any blame to

me. If there is any fault in the premises, it falls upon the authors of the Scriptures. In a word I earnestly believe that the scientific Pedobaptist interpreters are in the right, and that the others are in the wrong, and, moreover, that the fashion of appealing to the Bible on this subject is antiquated and unsuitable. I trust, therefore, that I shall be pardoned for declining to follow it.

II.

THE EARLIEST TRACES OF THE PRACTICE OF BAPTIZING INFANTS.

The first distinct and unquestionable reference to infant baptism is found, as before stated, in the writings of Tertullian, who died somewhere between the years of 220 and 240 of our era. Your leave is desired to cite the passage in full: “But they whose duty it is to administer baptism are to know that it must not be given rashly. ‘*Give to every one that asketh,*’ has its proper subject, and relates to alms-giving; but that other command, rather, is here to be considered: ‘*Give not that which is holy to dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine;*’ and that, ‘*Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins.*’ Therefore, according to every one’s condition and disposition, and also their age, the delaying of baptism is more profitable, especially in the case of little

children. For what need is there that the god-fathers should be brought into danger? Because they may either fail of their promises by death, or they may be mistaken by a child's proving of a wicked disposition. Our Lord says, indeed, '*Do not forbid them to come to me.*' Therefore, let them come when they are grown up; let them come when they understand, when they are instructed whither it is that they come; let them be made Christians when they are able to know Christ. What need their guiltless age make such haste to the forgiveness of sins? Men will proceed more cautiously in worldly affairs, but he that is not intrusted with earthly goods is thought worthy of being intrusted with heavenly goods. Let them know how to desire this salvation that you may appear to have given to one that asketh.'" (De Bapt., chap. 18.)

The above extract will show that the baptism of infants was already practiced to a certain extent in the time of Tertullian, and that it was regarded by him with disfavor, he standing firmly in support of the baptism of adults only.

It is scarcely possible for us to decide from the language of Tertullian precisely how far the custom had progressed. I believe that the writer had the very beginnings of it under his eyes, and was exerting the weight of his influence to

put a stop to what he foresaw would be a dangerous innovation. It may be true, on the other hand, that it was already somewhat in progress, and that he was protesting against a growing evil. But it is scarcely likely that the practice had obtained great headway prior to the year 200, for in that case it would be difficult to explain the silence of earlier Christian writers in regard to it.

To be sure, as I mentioned already, some authorities are inclined to believe that Irenaeus, who died as the Bishop of Lyons in the year 202, has spoken of infant baptism, but I am not able to assent to that construction of his language. I will cite the passage, in order that you may form your own opinion. Speaking of Christ he says:

“Therefore, as He was a Master, He had also the age of a Master. Not disdaining, nor yet transcending human nature, nor breaking in His own person the law which He had appointed for mankind, but sanctifying every age of life by the likeness that it had to Himself. For He came to save all persons through Himself; all, I say, who through Him are regenerated unto God—infants, and little ones, and children, and youths, and elder persons.” Adv. Her., ii: 22.

The phrase, “regenerated unto God,” in this

passage is claimed to mean "baptized," and hence Irenaeus is considered to furnish testimony that in his time infant baptism was not unknown. Whatever may be the truth in regard to that matter, Irenaeus does not appear at this place to have alluded to baptism at all, for there is no necessity and indeed little propriety in translating the words, "regenerated unto God," by the word "baptize." Moreover, it has been questioned whether the passage is genuine or not, since in the context it attributes to Jesus an age of fifty years; but even if its genuineness be allowed, the work in which it is contained has descended to us only in a Latin translation, the original Greek being no longer in existence. All these points considered, I am not disposed to lay any stress on the alleged testimony of Irenaeus.

The next witness who brings testimony bearing on the subject is the Alexandrian theologian, Origen, who died in the year 254. All the works of this writer were composed originally in Greek, but large portions of them as in the case of Irenaeus exist at present only in Latin translations, which are allowed to have taken unjustifiable liberties with the text. In that portion of his writings which remains to us in Greek, Origen has made but a single allusion which is judged to bear upon this discussion, and

there it is agreed that his language is ambiguous and may be claimed by the advocates of adult baptism as being favorable to their views.

But it is proper to lay before you the passages themselves. The first is taken from his Eighth Homily on Leviticus: "Hear David speaking: '*I was,*' says he, '*conceived in iniquity, and in sin did my mother bring me forth,*' showing that every soul that is born in the flesh is polluted with the filth of sin and iniquity, and that on this account that was said, which we mentioned before, that none is free from pollution, though his life be but of the length of one day. And this latter consideration is to be added to the preceding when it is asked why it is, since the baptism of the church is bestowed for the forgiveness of sins, that, according to the observance of the church, baptism is also bestowed on infants; since, verily, if there were nothing in infants which wanted forgiveness and mercy, the grace of baptism would be needless for them."

The second is derived from his Fourteenth Homily on Luke: "Taking advantage of the occasion which this text supplies, I will mention a thing that causes frequent inquiries among the brethren. Infants are baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Of what sins? or, when have they sinned? or how can any need of the laver exist

in their case, except, according to the idea we just now mentioned, that none is free from pollution, though his life be but of the length of one day upon earth? And because by the sacrament of baptism the pollutions of our birth are removed, infants are baptized.”

The last citation is drawn from the Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Lib. 5, chap. ix, as follows: “For this cause also the church has received from the apostles a tradition to give baptism even to infants. For they to whom the divine mysteries were committed knew that there is in all persons the natural pollution of sin, which must be done away by water and the spirit.”

The above citations are, as before remarked, all found, not in the original Greek of Origen, but in a Latin version, and when one considers the facts involved, he is prone to regard them as suspicious. For example, the translator, Rufinus, remarks in the preface to his version of Origen's Commentary on Romans: “People tell me there is so much of your own in these things that you ought to call them by your own name, and entitle the work an Explication of the Epistle to the Romans, by Rufinus.” I am, therefore, highly disposed to regard the assertion contained in the last passage that “the

church had received from the apostles a tradition to give baptism even to infants," as one of the additions of Rufinus, for in view of the fact that Tertullian had so recently opposed the baptism of infants with all the weight of his authority, it is hard to believe that Origen could have spoken about it in the decided manner indicated by these extracts.

If, however, these are genuine words of Origen, we must claim, with Dr. Meyer* and others, that he was misinformed when he attributed the tradition in question to the apostles ;

1. For they, as we have seen, had nothing to say on the subject.

2. That it was an apostolical tradition is out of keeping with the well-established and unquestionable fact, that in the early church all persons were required to pass through a catechumenate, ordinarily of three years in duration, before they were admitted to baptism. It not seldom occurred that these catechumens were seized upon by the civil authorities and put to death before their baptism, and that was the occasion of what is known in the Roman church as the baptism of blood; namely, if such a person died by the hand of the persecutor before he had received the baptism of water, his death was a

* Com. on Acts XVI. 15.

baptism of blood, and this was, and still is, regarded as valid for all the purposes for which water baptism is administered by that communion. Now, if infant baptism had been an apostolical tradition, it would have been generally practiced. If it had been generally practiced all the catechumens would have received it at birth, and hence there would have been no sufficient occasion for the distinction with regard to the baptism of blood. Akin to this baptism of blood is the baptism of desire, which is still recognized by the Roman Church. In case a catechumen died by illness before his period of study was closed, and his confession of faith given, the mere fact that he had desired baptism was considered to answer all the purposes of water baptism. These distinctions show that it was in the outset imperatively necessary that baptism should be delayed until the catechumen had made the Christian confession, and that not even in the presence of death was the rule transcended.

The last authority whom I shall detain you to cite is Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, who died in the year 258. In his Epistles, the one bearing the number 59 in the Benedictine edition is addressed to Fidus, a country Bishop, who had requested him to decide whether, in defer-

ence to usage in the case of Jewish circumcision, an infant should be baptized on the eighth day, or as early as might be convenient after birth. That inquiry, and the lengthy and respectful discussion which it elicited, show that the practice was still unsettled as to many of its details, and hence still new.

Since it was desired that I should confine myself to an account simply of the origin of infant baptism, and not pursue its history, it will hardly be necessary that I should refer to any further authorities.

The results which I have arrived at may be stated as follows:

1. That infant baptism arose about the close of the second century after Christ, in North Africa, perhaps at Carthage.

2. That it gained ground slowly, and in the face of vigorous opposition.

3. If the limits of my task did not forbid, I would also show that it became at last firmly established in Africa, and recognized in some other countries, through the labors and influence of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, who died in the year 430; and

4. That opposition to it within the bounds of the Catholic Church was not silenced entirely until the twelfth century of our era.

III.

THE CONSIDERATIONS WHICH SUGGESTED TO THE MINDS OF EARLY CHRISTIANS THE IDEA OF BAPTIZING INFANTS, AND LED THEM TO INTRODUCE THE PRACTICE.

1. The first of these considerations was derived from their often extreme and incorrect views with reference to the doctrine of original sin. It was believed that infants were involved in this calamity and affected by it so disastrously that even if they died in infancy, and before they had time or occasion by an overt act to develop positive guilt, the passive sin which existed in their hearts in an undeveloped form was heinous enough to consign them to eternal sorrows. This presumptuous and cruel inference probably occasioned among parents a great deal of uneasiness in regard to the spiritual condition of their children, and caused them to look anxiously about for means to avert a calamity which they mistakenly fancied to be impending.

2. It was the general opinion in those rude and imperfect times — an opinion which was due in a large degree, I fancy, to the still prevalent influence of Judaistic conceptions — that baptism effects regeneration. Persons who had long been in a state of unnecessary anxiety with regard to their infant children gradually connected

the idea of original sin with the idea of baptismal regeneration, and came to the conclusion that if the sacrament was sufficiently efficacious to cleanse an adult person from actual sins (and they believed it was) that it was also sufficiently efficacious to cleanse an infant from passive, original sin. Reasoning thus, they resolved upon carrying their theories into practice, and infant baptism was the result.

It is a naive, and among scientific students of church history at least, an acknowledged error to suppose that the first ages of the Christian Church were the purest and best. The Christians of those times were very little enlightened; Christian truth was very imperfectly comprehended; the shackles of Judaism still fettered the masses of the people. On the one hand, they could not well guard themselves against a cruel and presumptuous superstition with regard to the spiritual state of children, and on the other, they could not divest themselves of Jewish notions with regard to the efficacy of mere outward acts of worship. We, whose lives are passed in a more enlightened and happier era, and whose acquaintance with the teachings of Christ and His apostles is far more extensive, accurate and intelligent, should not blame them too severely. And yet one thing is hard to forget,

namely, the inhumanity of the men who introduced this practice; for they invented an improper application of the doctrine of original sin, (a true doctrine in itself,) which consigned all innocent children, whether in Christian or in heathen countries, to eternal destruction. Every friend of mankind must shudder in view of such enormous cruelty. And the complacent selfishness with which baptism, the fancied remedy against this unspeakable but fancied calamity, was confined to the children of believing parents alone, was in keeping with the thoughtlessness and narrowness of an imperfect grade of historical development. We can not be too grateful that those times lie so far away from us. Infant baptism, though it still exists, no longer, I believe, seeks support by means of an idea which consigns so many millions of helpless and unconscious human creatures to penal tortures. It no longer demands the "slaughter of the innocents" from among the heathen. Progress has been made; we anticipate that still further progress will one day quietly displace what feeble remnants of this custom are still left among us.

The profound and learned Schleiermacher, a Pedobaptist, and the prince of modern German theology, in his great work on Dogmatical The-

ology,* suggests several other considerations, which he thinks might also have contributed to create the idea of infant baptism and induce the early Christians to introduce the practice. He states his views as follows: "All the traces of infant baptism which are believed to be met with in the New Testament must first be imported into it. Owing to the lack of definite historical information, it is difficult to determine in what manner this deviation from the original institution of baptism could have arisen and established itself so extensively. It would also be difficult to discover a single reason which, considered by itself, would adequately account for the change, but there are several considerations which, taken together, might have inclined the sentiments of the early Christians to favor it.

"1. The first of these perhaps was the desire to number such children as died before the completion of their course of instruction as catechumens among those who had died in the Lord.

"2. The desire on the part of Christian parents to place the members of the church under the strongest obligations to their children, in case they themselves should not be in a situation to afford them adequate support and instruction. And finally :

* *Christliche Glaubenslehre*, vol. 2, § 138.

“ 3. The desire to establish a broader line of distinction between Christian children, on the one hand, and Jewish and heathen children on the other.”

While Schleiermacher suspects that these were most likely the original considerations which suggested this deviation from the apostolical baptism, he acknowledges that, *after the new custom became established*, the idea of baptismal regeneration was intimately connected with it, and served to win for it still farther the favor of the people.

I am not able to assert that these conjectures are unfounded. Certainly they are thoughtful and very reasonable; but it would be difficult to show from historical data that the course of opinion was in any respect different from that which I had the honor to describe above. I am willing, however, to allow that the considerations which Schleiermacher advances co-operated with the early notions with regard to original sin and baptismal regeneration, and that all these, being in force at the same moment, produced the result which we have had such abundant occasion to deplore.

In conclusion, when one surveys the above considerations in detail, he is constrained to believe that they have now lost their force and

pertinency, for the most part at least ; and hence that the day of infant baptism is waning to its close.

1. The doctrine of original sin is no longer applied to infants, as was the case in former ages. Scarcely any body now says that "elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit," but it is every-where taught, except in a few obscure Scottish circles, that *all infants* dying in infancy are saved by Christ.

2. With regard to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, likewise a great amount of progress has been made. It was well enough for the early Christians, with their lack of intelligence and their bondage to Jewish forms of thought, to be carried away by such a superstition, but the Christian world of the present time has acquired a far too accurate acquaintance with the teachings of the Bible to be any longer satisfied with this view. It is being more and more relegated to the category of curiosities in religion.

3. The first of the considerations mentioned above by Schleiermacher is likewise no longer available, for people are now able to cherish a comfortable hope that their children have died in the Lord, even though they may be unbaptized. The hope would be not more comfortable and not more clear if they were baptized.

4. As far as placing the church under stronger obligations to the children is concerned, which Schleiermacher mentions in his second place, it may be doubted whether baptism is any longer efficient for that purpose. Pedobaptist churches now have among them almost as many children who are unbaptized as there are of the opposite class, and I have never been informed that there was any difference in their treatment of them. The unbaptized appear to enjoy the watchcare of the church and partake of their pious solicitude to quite as large an extent as the baptized. Indeed, I suspect that three-fourths of the communicants would scarcely be able to decide, concerning a given person in the congregation, whether he had received baptism in his infancy or not.

5. The last consideration which Schleiermacher mentions was suitable enough to the condition of affairs in the third and fourth centuries of our era, but the Jews and heathen have both declined in relative importance since that time, and it is no longer desirable to maintain the same kind of a line of distinction. There are no heathen among us, and very few Jews, while the conflicts which were formerly waged with both are at present carried forward under very altered conditions. The great theologian

in question, who was also, I am prone to believe, one of the foremost intellects of the present century, has added, at the close of his treatment of the subject of infant baptism (*Christliche Glaubenslehre*, Vol. 2, p. 388), the following reflections: "Whoever does not perceive any magical efficacy in this sacrament will be unable to perceive any difference between children who have been baptized indeed, but who die before their confirmation at twelve years of age, and other children who die without baptism. On that account it would be proper to leave it to the decision of every Christian family, whether they prefer to have their children baptized in the manner at present adopted, or would choose to wait and have them baptized when they confess their faith at the time of confirmation; and we should add, that the sentence of condemnation which was pronounced upon the Anabaptists should be revoked in reference to this particular point. Also, for our part, we are ready to renew ecclesiastical communion with the Mennonites and other Baptists of the present day, if they would only consent to refrain from denouncing that baptism, which is complemented by a confession of faith and confirmation, as being absolutely invalid; concerning which point it would perhaps be an easy matter to come to an understanding."

This extract displays a marvelous advance. The suggestion that families should be permitted to decide whether they will have their children baptized or not, has long since been adopted by the laws of Prussia, and at present the statistics of the great cities show that comparatively few parents bring their children to the font. On the other hand, the union with the Baptists has not been effected by the German Established Church, nor, so far as I am informed, even attempted, but the fact that a wish for it could be uttered shows a decided progress in comparison with the estimation in which our people formerly were held, and entitles us to hope for a time when we shall all see eye to eye.

In a word, the practice of infant baptism appears to have entered a stage of decadence when one of its leading advocates can safely allow himself to speak in vindication of even the despised Anabaptists. Certainly the foundations upon which the doctrine was built at the outset are undermined and destroyed by the superior knowledge and piety, and by the Christian progress of our times. The outward circumstances which appeared to render it desirable at first are all changed, and it no longer can show a reason for its existence. Baptists, therefore, may anticipate that their honored fellow-christians of other

names will sooner or later cast it aside as an anachronism in religion. A crude relic of the times when Christianity was yet in an imperfect state, and under the dictation of that Judaism which Paul had struggled against so masterfully, and yet in the end so unsuccessfully, it is highly out of place in an era of light and of pure doctrine. Devoid of all biblical authority, it can claim no position in confessions which appeal in every sentence to the Sacred Word. The Christian dispensation has arrived at last, after many sad experiences, at its age of majority, and the claims which it now imposes upon us are severer than ever before; claims which we can not satisfy as long as the shackles of the third century and the Middle Ages are bound to our bodies. "When I became a man I put away childish things." The signs of progress are on every side of us. The world has attained to a manlier Christianity, a profounder knowledge of the Sacred Oracles, a juster view of history, a loftier, calmer and more confident Christian trust and bearing, and all religious confessions are rapidly "going on unto perfection." What an inestimable achievement for our noble brethren of other communions, for Christianity, for "the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace," for all mankind, when infant baptism shall not only among the more learned

but every-where be recognized as a vanquished standpoint !

And now, having accomplished as well as I could the task which you were pleased to assign me, I close, as did the previous lecturer in this course, with the Apostle's word, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."