

BAPTISM.

WHAT IT WAS ;

WHAT IT IS ;

WHAT IT WILL BE.

By JOHN FORT.

TUNBRIDGE WELLS ;
PEARCE & Co., Printers & Publishers, Crescent Road.

Price 2d. each, or 2½d. post free, 6 copies post free, 1/-,
or 12 copies post free 1/8.

BAPTISM.

WHAT IT WAS ;

WHAT IT IS ;

WHAT IT WILL BE.



IT is remarkable that on such an important subject as Baptism, professing Christians—even such as would declare that the Word of God is their sole guide—hold such divergent views. Hence when, some years ago, the writer was asked to give an address on Baptism to a number of young believers who were desirous of submitting themselves to that rite, he did not turn to the writings of teachers however gifted, but determined that his message should be one based entirely on God's Word. With that end in view he turned up all the Scriptures that dealt with the subject, and the address which resulted from the study of them is embodied in the following pages.

That much which is herein written will come as a surprise to many, the writer does not doubt : indeed his study of the texts led to some surprises to himself : and all he asks is that everything he has put down should be tested by the Word alone : *“Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good.”*

Let us consider, then, first,

WHAT BAPTISM WAS.

If we turn to Matt. iii, 1, 2, we find that John the Baptist was the first to introduce the rite. In this passage he calls upon his Jewish hearers to repent, declaring to them that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand. As a matter of fact the King Himself was in their midst—the One of whom Isaiah had spoken as being Jehovah; and John himself, by baptising, and preaching repentance, had come to prepare Jehovah's way, and to make the paths straight for the reception of the King.

Now it will save us from erroneous thoughts if we at the outset ask, "Of what did John's baptism consist?" Let John himself reply: "I indeed baptize you with water *with a view to repentance.*" Now this statement makes the matter absolutely clear. John did not baptize those who *had* repented, but those who were willing to submit to the rite *with a view to repentance.* We have so far therefore learnt that

John's Baptism preceded Repentance ;

it did not follow on it. Next let us turn to Mark i, 4. We shall find that he carries the matter a little further, for he tells us, "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance *with a view to the remission of sins.*" We learn therefore from Matthew that John's baptism was with a view to repentance, while Mark tell us that this baptism of repentance was with a view to the remission of sins. Here then, at the very outset of our study of the subject, we find the negation of a very common expression among certain believers, namely, that of "following the Lord in baptism." Little do those who use it see that the only baptism with which the Lord identified Himself was a

Baptism with a view to the remission of sins.

Do they indeed wish us to follow the Lord in that ?

And here it might be helpful if we turned aside from our subject for a moment to explain why it was that our Lord identified Himself with such a baptism as this. He was, of course, Himself holy, harmless, and undefiled. He did no sin: He knew no sin; but seeing sinners taking their true place as such before God, and being baptized and confessing their sins with a view to their remission, He graciously identifies Himself with this gracious movement in these Jewish hearts, and Himself comes to John for baptism: and, when the latter demurs, replies, "Thus it becometh *us* (Me and you John) to fulfil all righteousness." It was a righteous thing for those poor Jewish sinners to do: the Lord would identify Himself with this righteous act. Precious Saviour! What grace in Him to thus identify Himself with them, and thus fulfil all righteousness on their part! What wonder that God opened the heavens, and declared that this was His beloved Son in Whom He had found His delight! And what an encouragement is this, too, to us, to identify ourselves with every movement which has God's glory in view, so far at least as we can do so without abandoning divine principles.

Such then was the baptism of the past. It was effected in no Name, but was effected with a view to repentance and the remission of sins.

Let us now proceed to consider

BAPTISM IN THE PRESENT.

This we shall have to consider first in relation to the Jew, and, second, as to the Gentile, for the administration of the rite to the one stands in strong contrast with its administration to the other. Let us then proceed to consider it

i, AS IT RELATES TO THE JEW.

If we turn to Acts ii, we note that in verse 22, Peter addressed Jews, and Jews only, on the day of Pentecost: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words," he cries. They were Jews therefore, to whom he says in verse 38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

with a view to the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Note therefore, and it is of all importance that we should do so, the three following facts: (1) These Jews were called upon to repent and be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ—not in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; (2) This baptism was, like John the Baptist's, with a view to the remission of sins; (3) Having got baptized, and, having obtained the remission of their sins, they are told that they would receive the Holy Ghost. For the Jew therefore

Baptism precedes the Remission of sins, and the Reception of the Holy Ghost,

and, in the writer's opinion, this order has never been abrogated; for the Jew, unlike the Gentile, has to undergo a double conversion. First he accepts the fact that Jesus, whom his nation crucified, is his Messiah; thereupon he gets himself baptized in His Name. He next perceives that his Messiah died for his sins, whereupon he receives the remission of them, and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Having announced these three facts, Peter goes on in verse 40 to exhort his Jewish hearers to

"Save yourselves

out of this perverse nation." But how could they do this? The next verse tells us, for we read, "Then they that gladly received his word *were baptized*." Thus Baptism then, as now, enabled the Jew to cut himself adrift from his nation which had crucified its Messiah. By baptism he judged his nation for their *national* sin, and took Christian ground: he was baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ: he thereby saved himself out of that perverse nation.

And if we have rightly understood Peter's words here, we shall find little difficulty in the words of Ananias to Paul in Acts xxii, 16, "Arise and be baptized and

wash away thy sins,

calling upon the Name of the Lord. But here someone probably objects, "I thought that the Blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, alone cleanseth from all sin: how then could Paul by water baptism wash away his sins?" He could, and did, wash them away in baptism, for by it he, as a Jew, and a persecuting Jew, took himself clean off Jewish ground; by it he condemned his nation, and condemned himself, and so washed away those his specific sins, the rejection of Christ, and his persecution of Christ's people.

Baptism saves you.

And Peter's exhortation of "Save yourselves," may help us to understand another statement of his, in I Peter iii, 21. He had been speaking of the Ark and the salvation of Noah's household through water, and adds that the like figure to the Flood, namely Baptism, saves these Jewish believers* scattered throughout the provinces of Asia Minor, to whom he was then writing, How could baptism do this? It provided them with a good conscience before God, for by it they had, as we have seen, saved themselves out of their perverse nation, and stood before God on the new ground afforded them—not by the baptism of John which looked on to a Messiah on earth, seated on His father David's throne—but by a baptism in connection with that same Messiah's death, and resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. Noah had been saved through water out of a judged world: by entering the Ark he condemned the world in which he had lived, and became the heir of another world, into which the subsiding Flood introduced him. So too, in the case of believing Jews since Pentecost, baptism in the Name of Christ—a Christ Who has died, and is risen—dissociates them from their nation, and gives them a good conscience before God, and in *that sense* saves them. How different is the language of Paul, when writing to Ephesian Gentiles, from that of Peter writing to saved Jews! The former declares "By grace are ye saved,

*The better rendering appears to be, "saves *you*." This agrees with the fact that Peter himself was not baptized. Water baptism saves the Jew by giving him a good conscience before God: the Gentile is only baptized when he has got a good conscience, and has received the Holy Ghost,

through faith ; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God (Eph. ii, 8)'' ; the latter tells us that baptism does now save you Jews, giving you, as it does, a good conscience towards God. The Jew had slain his Messiah : the Gentile was guiltless in this respect ; the latter needed not therefore a baptism which would wash away this specific sin, and save him from it.

Why were the Twelve not Baptized ?

And what we have written as to this may help us to answer a question which may have occurred to thoughtful minds, viz., Why, when Peter said to others, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost," did the Twelve themselves remain unbaptized ? The answer is surely this ; The Apostles had for long identified themselves with the rejected Messiah ; they needed not therefore, as others who had rejected Him, to be baptized, and to judge the nation which had crucified Him, and so save themselves out of it. Baptism therefore would have been a ceremony without meaning to the Apostles ; besides this they had already, that very morning, received the Holy Ghost, so that Peter's declaration that, on baptism, his hearers would receive the Holy Ghost, could have no application to themselves who had received Him. The Apostles therefore, while calling on others to be baptized, remained unbaptized themselves.

Let us now turn to the next reference to the rite in Acts viii, 14-17. Philip, who seems soon to have outgrown his local office of deacon, goes down as an evangelist to Samaria. Many of the Samaritans, as a result of his preaching, believed and were baptized *in the Name of the Lord Jesus*. And note again that, in common with Peter, Philip did not, as moderns do, baptize in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Thereupon, the Apostles, who seem to have centralised themselves at Jerusalem, hearing of the blessing at Samaria, sent down Peter and John, who prayed that the Samaritan converts might receive the Holy Ghost. They then laid their hands on them, and they received the Spirit.

Why the Samaritans did not receive the Spirit on belief.

Why, it may be asked, did not the Samaritans, being Gentiles, receive the Spirit immediately they believed? Why was it necessary for the Apostles first to lay their hands on them? Because Samaria was the seat of a spurious worship set up at Gerizim in antagonism to that set up by Jehovah at Jerusalem. God would not therefore give the seal of the Spirit to these Samaritan converts save in connection with the Apostles from Jerusalem. So when these latter had laid their hands on them, thus linking them up with Jerusalem, the converts received the Holy Ghost. The circumstances were, of course, entirely exceptional and peculiar, and when, later on, Paul and others preached at Antioch, the Holy Ghost was not withheld, but the Gentile converts received at once the seal of the Spirit.

BAPTISM AS IT IS.

ii, AS IT RELATES TO THE GENTILES.

Before considering baptism as it relates to Gentiles, let us briefly recapitulate what the Divine order as to the Jew was, and, as the writer believes, still is. The Jewish convert believed (1) that his Messiah had come, and had been rejected; (2) He repented and judged the national sin of rejection of Messiah, and thereupon was baptized with a view to the remission of his sins; (3) He received the remission of his sins and the Holy Ghost. Now let us compare this with the case of the Gentile convert. Here

The Divine order as to Baptism is reversed.

for the Gentile (1) believed the Gospel of his salvation; (2) thereupon received the Holy Ghost; and (3) as a result, was baptized. Thus *baptism is the divine starting point with the Jew: it is the culminating point with the Gentile.* In order to prove this latter statement, let us turn to the case of the first purely Gentile converts*—Cornelius and his house, Acts x. In verse

* We say purely Gentile, for the Samaritans, though Gentiles, had adopted a counterfeit worship of Jehovah; and the Eunuch was a proselyte.

43 Peter declares, "To Him give all the prophets witness that through His Name *whosoever* believeth on Him shall receive the remission of sins." Peter had learnt his lesson from the thrice-lowered sheet with its clean and unclean contents, and declares that *whosoever* believeth, and this will include the Gentile Cornelius and his house, shall receive the remission of sins. He is speaking to Gentiles: he does not therefore enjoin baptism first, as he did to Jews in Acts ii; for, if Gentiles believed, the remission of sins was *at once* theirs. Cornelius and his house did believe, and, "the Holy Ghost fell on all those who heard the word." Thereupon, since the Holy Ghost had been poured out on the Gentiles as He had been poured out on the Jews at Pentecost, Peter commanded them to be baptized *in the Name of the Lord*: not, again let it be noted, in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. This latter is a practice, whether for Jew or Gentile, *entirely at variance with Apostolic usage*.

Let us now turn to the next example of baptism given us in chapter xix. Apollos, a Jew, who knew only of John's baptism, came to Ephesus and taught there in the synagogue. He could not, naturally, bring his disciples further into the light than he was himself. After his departure to Corinth, Paul arrived at Ephesus, and found there twelve disciples, who were doubtless the fruit of Apollos' labours. Paul appears to have been at once struck with some spiritual lack in these men, and accordingly asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?" His question elicits the reply, "We have not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost is (come)." "To what then were ye baptized?" queries Paul. "Unto John's baptism," they reply. Now this baptism was, as we have seen, a baptism unto the remission of sins, in view of the coming of Messiah, the King. This was all that Apollos at that time had known, and it was therefore as far as he could spiritually lead his disciples. To them Paul explains that John had baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on Him Who should come after him, that is Jesus Christ. Thereupon they were baptized *in the Name of the Lord Jesus*. Again we have to note that moderns—and ourselves—have gone counter to Apostolic custom.

Now these converts, *being Jews*, were baptized first, for reasons which we have already given : then, Paul having laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them. The case of these converts was, of course, quite exceptional, but the divine order that Jews should be baptized first before they received the Holy Ghost was observed. It was the same order that had been observed at Pentecost.

Paul's Teaching as to Baptism.

We have had hitherto under consideration Peter's line of teaching, whether as to Jews or Gentiles. We are now to turn to Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, to see what we can learn from him.

Baptism, he tells us, formed no part of his commission : he was not sent, like the twelve, to baptize, but to preach the Gospel. But, being the Apostle of the Gentiles, we may be sure that his teaching—quite distinct from Peter's as it is—will be of vital importance to ourselves.

Let us turn, then, to Romans vi, 3, to see what instruction he has to give us on the subject. "Know ye not," he says, "that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ" (for, unlike the twelve, Paul had submitted to the rite, it being necessary in his case), "were baptized unto His death? We have been therefore buried with Him by baptism unto death, that like as Christ was raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Now, though the repetition may appear to be tedious, let us note that Paul, in perfect conformity with Peter, writes of

Baptism unto Jesus Christ;

for he knows nothing, for us in this dispensation, of baptism in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost : indeed his whole argument is based on the fact that one Person of the Deity had been incarnate, and had died, and that Person was the Son, Jesus Christ. Since, therefore, the spiritual import of baptism depends on the death and resurrection of God's Son, Paul shows that

Baptism must be in His Name only.

for, "so many of us as were baptized unto* Jesus Christ were baptized unto His death." See, too, Paul's declaration to the Galatians in chapter iii, 27, "As many of you as have been baptized *unto Christ* have put on Christ."

Since Apostolic usage in this respect has been so commonly disregarded among us, it is no great wonder that the import of baptism also has been commonly ignored. Thus the writer was present at a baptism where for twenty minutes the baptizer laboured the point of obedience—what is termed "following the Lord in baptism"—rather a futile proceeding one would think since those about to be baptized by their presence there surely signified their willingness to submit themselves to the rite: meanwhile the baptizer entirely omitted, most probably through ignorance of it himself, to put before the people he was about to baptize what the true meaning of the rite was. What, we may ask then, is its meaning? Let us say at once that its meaning is *not* the one given it by many who profess to know. They say, "Baptism signifies this; I have died with Christ, therefore I am going to be baptized with Him in water to publicly signify the fact." *But this is not what Scripture teaches, but the reverse.* True that, in the natural realm, a man has to die before he is buried; but the converse of this is true as to baptism in the spiritual realm; there

BURIAL PRECEDES DEATH,

that is to say, we are buried in the water in baptism *in order that we may die*. Note well, in proof of this, the Apostolic language, "We have been therefore buried with Him in baptism *unto (i.e., with a view to) death*, that like as Christ was raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Thus baptism signifies—let us repeat it—

NOT DEATH UNTO BURIAL, BUT BURIAL UNTO DEATH;

* Note that baptism is unto Christ, not into Christ as in the A.V. and R.V., where the translators were biased by theology. In I Cor. x, where there is no theological bias, they translate it correctly, "baptized unto Moses."

death, that is, to all the old life of the flesh, in order that we might walk in the power of a new life. And as to this the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts viii, may be able to teach us something. Philip had read to him of a Christ whose "life is taken from the earth." "See here is water," in effect replies the eunuch, "Why should not I too have *my* life taken from the earth?" That, and that alone, is Paul's teaching as to baptism—we are buried therein unto death, so that our old life may be taken from the earth, and that henceforth we may live in newness of life. May the Lord give writer and reader alike to know practically what this burial unto death implies and involves!

BAPTISM IS NOT A PUBLIC TESTIMONY.

And here the writer would submit that the commonly accepted idea that baptism is a *public* testimony to a *past* fact, finds, as far at least as the Gentile is concerned, no countenance in the Word of God. The Jew, as we have seen, by baptism publicly cuts himself off from his nation; the Gentile, on the other hand, if he follows Scripture instead of tradition, is baptised with a view to a moral state *for the future*, that moral state being death with Christ. Now, as any sensible person can see, it is impossible to publicly witness to a future moral state, for a moral state in any case, is purely a matter between the person baptized and God—not the person baptized and the public. The public will judge of my moral state, not by my profession in baptism, but, by my life. Accordingly, that publicity has nothing to do with Gentile baptism, the Philippian Jailor proved, for, when he and his house were converted they were straightway, *while it was still night*, baptized. Where? Doubtless in the bathroom ordinarily attached to a Roman house. And who were present? Paul and Silas only—unless we are gratuitously to assume that the Jailor opened the doors of the cells, and summoned the prisoners to witness a, to them, unmeaning rite. So we see that the Jailor—acting under Paul's direction—did not wait for daylight, and then go forth to some public piece of water to testify to his new-found faith; he was *privately* baptized in his own bathroom. So, too, Philip and the Eunuch find a water-hole in some wady *in the desert*, sufficient for their purpose. There would not be any publicity in a desert one

would think. There is therefore no need at all for public baptisms. The baptism can take place equally well in any private house, the baptized and baptizer, if it is desired, being alone present; indeed in the case of women the writer would submit that this mode of baptism is distinctly preferable, for they could then, without the distraction caused by a natural womanly shrinking from the gaze of curious, and often half amused, on-lookers, give their undivided attention to the solemn fact that they were being buried in the water with a view to, for the future, death with Christ, to be followed by an entirely new life.

BAPTISM IN THE FUTURE.

The observant reader of the Gospels will have noted that the Commissions to the Eleven in Matthew, on the one hand, and in Mark and Luke on the other, are quite distinct. Thus in Matthew our Lord speaking to His disciples *in Galilee*, said, "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have enjoined you. And behold I am with you all the days until the completion of the age." In Luke, on the other hand, speaking to the Eleven *at Jerusalem*, just before His ascension, He said "thus it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from among the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Now on which of these two commissions did the Apostles act? We have already shewn that they *never* acted on the Commission in Matthew: evidently the Commission they thought binding on them was that in Luke, who both gives in his Gospel the terms of the Commission, and chronicles in the Acts the way in which they carried it out.

IS THEN THE COMMISSION IN MATTHEW NULL AND VOID

Most certainly it is not; it is in abeyance only, and will find its place at the close of the dispensation of the law—"the completion of the Age" as our Lord calls it. Speaking of that time, "All power," He says, "has been given to Me in heaven

and upon earth": in heaven, for Satan was about to be finally cast out therefrom; upon earth, for He was about to take His throne on earth and reign there. In view of this our Lord's Jewish messengers will at that time go forth and make disciples of all the nations (i.e., the Gentiles), by baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things that He had enjoined them. What, we may ask, were those things? Essentially, we would reply, the things concerning His Kingdom—the rules for His subjects given them in the Sermon on the Mount. And our Lord assures His Jewish messengers that they would not go forth unprotected. He would Himself be with them until the completion of the Age of Law, which Age has been broken off at Pentecost, so that the Church, in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile, might intervene. The removal of the Church by the Rapture having taken place, and the present interval having come to an end, the Age of Law would re-commence, and, till the termination of that age by the return of Christ to set up His Kingdom, His presence was assured to these Jewish messengers of the latter day.*

MATTHEW'S COMMISSION ELIMINATES ALL CHURCH TRUTH.

But suppose for a moment that we really acted on the Commission in Matthew now, what would be the result? The whole of Pauline truth—all that relates to the Church of God—would be eliminated from our teaching of converts! Are we prepared to sacrifice all that we have learnt as to this in the last eighty years? If we accept the Commission in Matthew as binding on us we are bidden by the Lord to do so! But, as a matter of fact, if we have intelligence of divine things, and are in the current of God's thoughts, that is just the

* See as to these Jewish messengers, Isaiah lxi, 18, 19, and "these my brethren" in Matt. xxv, 40. They will go forth on their world-wide mission from Galilee, the northern confines of the Land. The Apostles, on the other hand, were bidden by the Lord to commence at Jerusalem—"beginning at Jerusalem": and this He enlarged in Acts i, 8, into "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Thus the Gospel of the Grace of God commenced at Jerusalem: the Gospel of the Kingdom will re-commence in Galilee.

opposite of what we do in practice ; for, apprehending that we are in the Church, and not in the days of Law immediately preceding the end of the age, we take our converts at once to Paul's epistles, and show them what the Church is, and that our portion is a heavenly one, united as we are by the Spirit to Christ in heaven, and having, even now, Christ in us, with glory on beyond as our hope. Blessed indeed will be the scene when Christ returns to take His father David's throne : into that scene, we apprehend, the baptism of Matthew will introduce people : infinitely more blessed is *our* portion *now*. But all this peculiar blessedness of ours is *outside the scope of Matthew's Commission* ; God has indeed, "foreseen some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

Baptism with the Holy Ghost.

The subject which has occupied us has been baptism with water, but as there is so much confusion as to the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and as Paul's baptism of the unsealed converts at Ephesus is often quoted to give colour to the mistaken doctrine of what is called "The second blessing," or, "The Baptism of the Holy Ghost," it might not be out of place if we drew our readers' attention to the fact that Baptism *with* the Spirit—not Baptism *of* the Spirit, as it is unscripturally termed—is exclusively in God's word

A CORPORATE BLESSING,

and *not* an individual one, though individuals, of course, share in it; that is to say, it is *only* used in Scripture *in connection with the Body*. Thus we read in I Cor. xii, 13, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized *into one body*, whether we be Jews or Gentiles." The result therefore to us of Baptism with the Holy Ghost is to incorporate us into the one Body—the mystic Body of Christ—the Body which He has on earth, consisting of Jew and Gentile alike, and of which He is the Head in heaven. Baptism with the Holy Ghost is not therefore a matter of *individual attainment in spirituality*, but is *the portion of every sealed believer*, however small his spiritual advancement, as the words, "By one Spirit are we *all* baptized into one Body," prove. Thus the most ignorant believer is as much a member of the Body of Christ as the most advanced Christian,

and he owes this corporate blessing to the Baptism with the Holy Ghost.

Two Solemn Questions.

Our paper on baptism is finished ; but ere we lay down the pen we should like to ask two pertinent and solemn questions, one as to our practice, and one as to our doctrine.

(1) If the Apostles' usage was to baptize in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, why do we, who profess to be guided by Scripture, not adopt it ?

(2) If the Pauline teaching as to baptism is that in it we are buried unto death, why do we not teach it ?

As to this last question, the writer feels sure that if, instead of baptism being represented, as is too generally done, as a mere act of obedience (which has no permanent moral teaching or practical effect on life), the submission to baptism were solemnly presented to those who were about to be baptized in its true aspect of burial *unto* death, the whole future life of those baptized—if indeed they imbibed the doctrine—would be influenced, for they would have apprehended that in baptism their lives, as men and women in the flesh, had been taken from the earth. May the Lord use this paper to this end.

