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BAPTISM.

A GLANCE AT CHRIST'S VIEW OF IT.*

BY REV. C. A. HOBBS, D.D.

I. UP TO HIS OWN BAPTISM.

Drop down into that old world at the time of the preaching of John the Baptist. The Jews in and around Jerusalem have been lifted out of the monotony of the common into an atmosphere of fervor and fire.

To what shall we liken it? Had you lived in England under brave Queen "Bess", when foreign invasion seemed certain, and the "Armada" was still called invincible; when every Englishman, at the danger threatening his country, was stirred to his heart's depths—or if you did live in that nearer time of our dread Civil War, feeling the passionate demand that North and South swallowed up every other issue, you might be able a little to measure the kindred feeling that two thousand years ago swept Judea like a tidal wave. Even thus, the greater intensity was in favor of Judea. For there you must add piety to patriotism as a compelling motive—fanatical piety, if you will.

Never had the profound deeps of a people been more profoundly moved. John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness! Not to him only, but to the multitudes, his was a voice, and that the voice of God. Everywhere, agi-

* It is proper to say at the beginning that the writer seeks here to study the view of Christ concerning baptism, without entering into the consideration of possible differences between that of John and Christ or the apostolic. These can not, indeed, be contradictory, but our question is: Did our Lord look upon this act as a matter, practically of indifference, or did he hold it in high regard?

Nor do we believe baptism to be the only important teaching. Very far from it! But in the time and place for it, one can no more omit it, and have a perfect whole, than he can omit seeing and hearing and have a perfect body.

tation! "Is the Messiah, with all the hopes and possibilities involved, indeed at hand?"

Here, when by chance or purpose, men met together, there in the households, till the excitement spared neither man nor woman nor child, this must have been the theme of conversation. No rank nor age escaped the swirl of the waves as the new movement gathered force.

In this excited and exciting time, this tempest of desire and hope, where the greatest possibilities for the Jew that could ever find realization, seemed on the eve of fulfilment, lived and thought and felt and wrought the generation which was to see the baptism of Jesus Christ and know the Christ himself.

How vivid is the account of Mark! Did he, as reporter, catch the very expressions of the swift speech of a Petrine sermon? However that may have been, we can easily imagine that Peter, as he spoke, lived over once more those early days. (Mark 1. sq.) Note these words:

"And there went out to him" (*the Baptist*) "*all the country of Judea and Jerusalem*", (*what an impression the crowds had made on the observer!*)—"and they were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." * * * "And he preached, saying, "there cometh One after me that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am unworthy to unloose; I baptize you in water, but he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit."

Equally profound is the impression of John's advent, given by Matthew (3. —) and Luke (3.). Nor must we omit the Gospel of John. (1:19-34). That the stir of the reformation reached beyond Judea, can easily be noted, as is evidenced in the different places which were the scenes of John's baptisms. But the manifestation of the great reformation, the high climax toward which the movement irresistibly swept, was the *preaching of repentance finding its expression in the baptism of John.*

Among those affected deeply by the intense national feeling, was a young man of Nazareth, known among his associates as a carpenter. Deeply affected we say, for

of the group of young men brought to view in the gospels, religious, earnest, impressionable, he must easily have been foremost. We speak of that which appeared to the observer. Even so, because of his growth in spiritual life, to which the call of John would especially appeal, his knowledge of the Scriptures, his obedience to God, Jesus would be in advance of others.

But he was more than man. And though the evidence should not be manifested till his baptism, who may deny an understanding opening swiftly to the truths proclaimed, as the Century Plant, long hiding its gathering strength, suddenly bursts into glorious bloom?

Where no one was indifferent, could *he* be indifferent? Could he even be indifferent to this hour, he, the One for whom this hour was set? Could he be indifferent? Could he even be indifferent to that baptism, which for a new era was at once the expression and manifestation? Impossible! We think we know this from the national feeling already described. But let us advance to the particular. We know it concretely from the personal act of Christ. It is said that "acts speak louder than words". Give due weight to the statement. Jesus soon made the long journey to the Preacher's presence, and was baptized by him under conditions so remarkable that, though familiar, they must be noticed anew (Mark 1:9-11). "And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens rent asunder and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him; and a voice came out of the heavens, thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". Luke adds (3:21) that all the people were baptized first, and "that Jesus also, having been baptized *and praying*, the heaven was opened." The Gospel of John agrees substantially with these accounts (1:28-34), but tells us that the descent of the Spirit was also to be a sign to the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah. Matthew adds two points: John's protest

with Christ's insistence, and the Holy Spirit's coming as a sign to Christ as well as to John. And we should say here that the agreement of all the gospels on this remarkable historical fact, showing in its nature the high importance of baptism, makes it weighty testimony indeed.

However, let us now look at the significant fact that Christ overruled John's vigorous protest. It is Matthew who records this. *Jesus was not to be denied. The duty was urgent. †"Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." Neglect it, and "sin crouched at the door." At least for Christ, baptism was a part of this righteousness. He would not omit it. Every objection, however valid as others saw it, must be swept away. So great was the duty that John must not even tarry. This conduct on the part of our Lord can be interpreted in no other way than that he held baptism to be of high importance.

All this shows its significance as Christ regarded it, applied to himself. But the action at the Jordan, and the words connected therewith, show its value for others. Could John ever forget that against his will, as he first saw the demand, he administered the ordinance? or that he was afterward convinced, from the opening heavens, that it was surely the will of God? This would empha-

*That Matthew's gospel is to be relied on, there is evidence at the hands of scholars in plenty. We here quote the opinion of Ernest W. Burton, Professor of New Testament Interpretation of the University of Chicago. "(Short Introduction to the Gospels, pages 9 and 19.) "In the light of this purpose of the book the *unity*" (Burton's Italics) is clearly evident. From the assertion in the first verse, that Jesus is the Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham, to the *commission which in its closing paragraph, this Christ now risen from the dead, goes to his apostles to make disciples of all nations,*" (Italics ours,) "one thought dominates it. This is no patchwork put together by several hands, working with different conceptions, or by one editor whose only thought was to include all evangelic material he possessed. The writer may have employed as sources of his book other gospel writings,—the resemblance of some of the material to that which is contained in other gospels seems to show that he had such sources; but whether so or not, he has wrought all his material in to a real book with a definite course of thought and a clearly defined aim." See other references on page 14.

†"Jesus puts the matter upon the ground of duty". "Life of Christ," page 57. Burton-Matthews.

size for John its high import. And as the disciples of Christ learned the whole story, if they did not witness the scene, how could they hold other than the same opinion? Study those words, "Thus it becometh *us* to fulfill all righteousness." Who? Certainly the followers of Jesus! Christ's "now" is indeed not theirs. That belonged to him at his crisis hour. Nevertheless, there must be a "now" for others, or the great proposition ceases to have any force. But observe it is spoken thus in connection with baptism. Other duties may be included—baptism must be. Once more: The surroundings of that baptism would make the act forever memorable. Came there the transcendent revelation of God's Fatherhood, the Sonship of Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit abiding now in his fulness (God *one, triune*) with the Messianic Ministry begun!

And this high crisis hour was a baptismal hour! Moments of crises are not moments of indifference. Moments of crises so weighty as these could never lose their impressive meaning. Was this not also to Christ the first clear vision of his future death and burial, represented so strikingly in the initial act of obedience? We are sure at least that his baptism held such potency from its unique and mighty environments, that it never could be looked upon with light regard.

So must we see him, enfolded by this atmosphere, his character affected by the experience, his memory cherishing it, if we would rightly interpret his thoughts thereafter upon many themes. But for our purpose, upon baptism itself.

II. AFTER HIS BAPTISM TO HIS DEATH.

Under the spell of this initial manifestation, to make Jesus careless concerning this ordinance, would not only seem unnatural, but to charge him with grave inconsistency. We would conjecture a conduct that would involve a continued belief in its significance.

Happily this is a matter of record. A curious bit of history is that found in the Gospel of John, (3:25, 26). "There arose, therefore, a questioning on the part of John's disciples, with a Jew about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou hast borne witness, behold *the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.*" The popularity of Jesus continues. (Jno. 4:1-3): "When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that *Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John*, although Jesus baptized not, but the disciples," etc. Christ would avoid all rivalry, so he departs from that place. But what a story this tells of multitudes immersed under the direct authority of Jesus. What witnesses they would make for us, if we could but get at them. This record is the testimony of an eye witness*. Again we find that the argument from silence is not decisive. Even if the other narratives do not speak further of Christ's acts in this direction, we know that Jesus did baptize during his ministry because John the apostle declares it. When did he stop baptizing? Let us admit the fact, nay, proclaim it with emphasis, that *nobody knows*. When, if ever that hour did come, and because in a life so brief so much must be done—other phases of it must have attention—we may be assured, not only from the first great experience, but also from this incident, that Jesus Christ did not look with indifference upon baptism. This conclusion may be accepted more readily if enforced by other considerations. Let us glance swiftly at some of them. Every reference to John the Baptist would be a reminder of the unique beginning of the Lord's work. The eulogy which the Savior pronounced upon his Forerunner necessarily involved his mission. Consult the paragraph (Luke 7:24-29). "None greater than John." But the Pharisees

*Burton says: '(Short Introduction to Gospels, page 119.) "The author constantly speaks as if he were an eye witness of the events he narrates." Other illustrations are given, then this incident is mentioned.

and the lawyers *rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized of him.*" Once more: When so important an issue as the authority of Christ is at stake, it is John's baptism that must serve as a text. If the ordinance was of small value in the thought of Jesus, it seems strange to find such reference here, Mark 11:28, sq. His enemies enquire: "By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority to do these things?" And Jesus said unto them, "I will ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: the baptism of John, was it from heaven or from men? *Answer me!*" (Italics ours.) The opposers knew well enough that the baptism was from heaven (as Christ indicates, and which shows its value), but they were too cowardly to confess it. Up to this time that baptism seems to have been a vital question. The very discussions where Christ by some was thought to be John the Baptist (Mark 8:27, 28) would keep the issue alive. And could Christ have heard the grievous tidings of John's death without recalling the old associations?

Observe also that the word "baptize" is a great word in the Lord's vocabulary. There is no word like this to express the thought of his suffering and death. (Mark 30:37-41), (The answer to the request of James and John.) The agony of the atonement touches Christ. How shall this be described? "But I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." (Luke 12:49, 50.) The words must be interpreted by Gethsemane and Calvary.

This was not only a great word in his vocabulary, ready at call, but he knew its significance. When he was buried beneath the waters of the Jordan, that baptism must have flashed forth his future, his death, burial, resurrection! What Paul knew he must have known. (Rom. 6:3-6. cf. Matt. 16:21, Luke 9:22.) The one word, however, that told it all was baptism. It is no wonder that this ordinance stood at the threshold of his

ministry. It is no wonder that it takes the same place in his church. One calls for the other.

It is well that Baptists press home the profound meaning of the ordinance. An impressive sentence spoken at the late Baptist World's Congress, London, was by Rev. B. F. Meyer in its closing session at Albert Hall: "We also go back from our Pentecost determined to maintain the rite of believer's baptism. Those early Christians had learned what they had never known before, as they saw thousands baptized in the temple tanks, the tanks prepared for the divers washings of the Jews. They had seen the death, burial and resurrection of Christ set forth, and from that moment they put the lakes, the rivers, and the oceans of the world to a new use. We, too, pass away with the same great purpose, because we hold the rite is not only characteristic of ourselves, but is symbolic of a great and essential doctrine." If we can note such significance, much more Christ; and it is not likely that as the shadow of that death drew nearer, he became indifferent to the symbol which preached thus the doctrine of the atonement.

Again, that Christ established another "positive institution", reinforces the belief that he would not ignore nor abandon the equally significant first. When the "Supper" became a fact, holding, too, the story of his death, he could not be charged with indifference as to keeping alive such truths in symbolic form. But the supper presupposed baptism as the significance of each would seem to indicate. For, while the Supper showed the death of Christ, it also called for a Christian life continued and nourished. Bread often! But the emphasis of baptism lay on the starting of Christian life. It is a death, but it is a burial also, thence a resurrection, and the new life *begun*. Begun *once* only, of course. The Supper takes it up where baptism, with its chief symbolism leaves it. Thus the Supper, the second, supplements baptism, the first. Hence, when the second took its place we think our Lord endorsed the first; assuredly he

could not have meant to put a slight upon it. It should be added here, probably, that the Lord's expectation of a church, in which his plan should find its fitting development, and which could only come into being after his death, may account for whatever silence exists in the gospels concerning baptism.

III. AFTER HIS DEATH.

After the cross and sepulcher will Christ care enough for baptism to place it in his church? That he would do so, all our previous study demands. Remembering this, let us swing over the not long period which follows, and look upon the powerful apostolic church. What do we see? Baptism everywhere! Peter and the apostles set the example at Pentecost. Philip baptizes in Samaria, an obscure disciple at Damascus leads the great Saul into the baptismal waters, and presently Saul-Paul, writes the sixth chapter of Romans, which has probably made more Baptists than any other document after Christ. Even our enemies being judges, baptism became universal in the church. How shall we account for this early, far-reaching, powerful effect? There is only one just conclusion. Jesus Christ is responsible for it. His Spirit should lead the disciples along the path of his commands. This is a sufficient cause. No other is. But Jesus Christ did command baptism and one command should be sufficient. Matt. 28:19, 20: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." And to any who would cast discredit on this, the Great Commission, we refer again to the highest modern scholarship. It is the state-

ment of Burton and Mathews of the University of Chicago. (Compare Note on page 6.) "The Book that begins strictly within the circle of Jewish thought, setting forth Jesus the Son of David, and the Christ of prophecy, ends with the Great Commission of the Messiah rejected by his own nation. "Go make disciples of all nations." ("Life of Christ", p. 21. Cf. p. 28.) So, too, we have the command in Mark 16: 15, 16.*

Here, however, we come upon the story of the "Missing Leaf." These words are supposed to be supplied by a later hand than that of Mark. But even so it makes splendid evidence as to what the early church did believe as coming from the lips of their Lord. Where did they get the conviction? And if this added account is, as Burton suggests, based on the accounts of the other gos-

*Note.—Since the Trinity is revealed in action at the beginning of Christ's ministry (recall the scene of his baptism), why should not Christ put the same into words, at the end? There again was for his servants the new beginning. This was a fitting close on the Lord's part and seems to form a presumption that such statement would be made. Of course we believe there is good authority for the text as it is.

Apropos to this question of critical authority and our reliance upon it: Harnack is vigorously quoted among us in support of the lateness of the form of the great Commission.

But as noticed, Harnack has changed his view concerning some other books of the New Testament—note what he holds now about Luke as the author of Acts—and thus shows that other changes are not impossible. Ramsey, too, has again got the "Paul of his mother", after a long refusal.

Should we not be a bit cautious about resting too heavily upon any man's conclusions, lest our experience be similar, though in another line, to Mark Twain's excursionists? They followed when lost the lead, as they supposed, of their guide, who was ahead with a long rope, only to discover later that the guide had dropt it and disappeared, while the rope had become attached to a wandering goat, whose leadership it must be admitted was rather erratic. All the more cautious, since there are at least two certainties beyond all possibility of being called in question. The first is Christian experience, the Christ revealed in the soul of the believer; and revealed so that the soul to begin with may best know him in the Bible as we now have it, practically. The second is the Book itself, whose marvelous influence has affected the world for good, and, substantially as possessed today, done such work as no human production merely ever has accomplished.

pels, then have we even here a record as close practically as they. However, let us supply the "Missing Leaf". Why not? Let us ask Peter about it—Peter who is the source of Mark's gospel. Peter, did you have direction to preach the gospel everywhere? "Preach the Gospel!" we imagine him to reply, "how could the Lord fail to give such command? I remember his words." (Quotes Matthew 28:19, 20.) But we, of the twentieth century, somewhat advanced beyond the apostles, say, "Can you give us any other words?" "Without doubt", he replies—"Words never to be forgotten, for they were spoken in the last walk we ever took on earth with him, 'But ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth'." (Acts 1:8.) We answer: "Well, Peter, that is indeed the 'Great Commission', except baptism. Did Christ leave that out?" "Leave that out?" we imagine Peter asking with energy. "Impossible! I was following his direction when I baptized at Pentecost, and bade 'every one' who had repented, to be baptized. That is what we always expected to do. That's what the Holy Spirit led us to do."

Now with that first chapter of Acts, and the Day of Pentecost, we certainly have the substance which will make up the "missing leaf" in very good fashion* But this leads us to our last statement. The apostles were definitely led by the Spirit of God into the will of Christ, which was manifested in the establishment of baptism in the visible church. First, the apostles would be educated into the idea of baptism, as shown in our previous

* *William M. Ramsey*, once advocating the view of Baur concerning this book of Acts, is now a strong advocate of its historical character. *Harnack* even, recently gives as his conclusion that the author of the "we" sources in Acts wrote the entire book, which means—and he indicates this fact—that the author is Luke, also author of the gospel having that name. (See excellent review of Harnack's work in the January, 1907, number of "The Review and Expositor.")

study. This must be, and must be held to be, their starting point. Who else but they would have baptized at the directions of their Lord?—the many disciples mentioned in John 3 and 4? How easy it was later to do a similar service! But after the departure of Christ it is revealed, if anything could be revealed, that they were to be led by the Spirit into certain duty. Now the extraordinary power of the Spirit was no new thought even for John to give us, John the apostle of spiritual insight. Peter had it early in his experience from John the Baptist. (Mark 1:8). It is a knowledge common to those who heard the preaching of the Forerunner. (Matt. 3:11. Luke 3:15.) John the apostle remembered the Baptist's statement concerning it (John 1:33). Long familiar with this thought, the words of Luke 24:49, "And behold I send forth the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be clothed with power from on high;" Or the similar words in Acts 1:4, 5-8, would prepare them fully for the truth made evident concerning the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John. That, at most, only gave in detail what they already possessed in general. It is by no means impossible that these men knew more the full truth, afterwards voiced by John, than we have on record. But let us take John's account. We can rely upon it.

Recall the words of Professor Burton: "The narrative of the life and discourses of Jesus proceeds from an eye witness of the events, a personal disciple of Jesus, in all probability John the son of Zebedee." ("Introduction to the Gospels"); or Burton and Mathews', "*Life of Christ*" in love, "The Gospel has been from very early days attributed, and rightly, we believe, to John the apostle, the son of Zebedee." Other names as William Drummond and Sanday supporting this view will occur to the reader, but these are enough. John's Gospel is to be received as authority. In his sixteenth chapter (16:7) Jesus declares the Spirit's coming is more important than his remaining. Also when the Spirit comes he will

not only convict the world in respect to sin, etc., but he will have a mission to those already disciples. He as another Helper, will carry forward the work which Jesus began, and more effectually (16:7). He shall teach the disciples "*all things*", and "*bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had said unto them*" (14:26). He shall bear witness of Christ (16:26). He shall guide the disciples into all truth, speaking not from himself, but what he hears. He will glorify Christ and "*take the things of mine and declare them unto you*" (16:13-15). What a commission! What powers! If this Ambassador, this "Comforter" this Helper lacked aught to carry on the work of Jesus Christ it is impossible to name the thing left out. He comes fully equipped. Now Peter declares that he came, and all promises concerning him were fulfilled (Acts 2:33). Pentecost was the evidence and effect of the Spirit. The apostles are controlled by him; he brings to remembrance, or emphasizes, what Christ has already said, he guides into any necessary new truth, and in brief directs the Christly work of that memorable day. Now we can see Peter, representative of all, as he rises to speak. How his memory glows with the experiences of former days, while his eye, spirit taught, catches the application of past and present revelation to the issue at hand. How easy now to reply—as of old—to the penitent, "be baptized". In the beginning of this new movement he sees that baptism must again appear. An influence more than human is upon him. He knows once more the will of Christ as definitely as he ever knew it when he walked with his Savior on the earth. It is not Peter's decision, it is the demand of the Lord, that baptism shall follow repentance, and the baptized penitent become a church member (Acts 2:38 sq.). For this record traces all back to Jesus Christ.

So far, then, from being indifferent to this ordinance, our Savior held it in highest regard. That it should find initial place in the visible church is a natural, nay, necessary conclusion. The tide of all previous teaching and

example swept to this consummation; the direct command made it imperative; Christ's will, as revealed in the Spirit's mission and guidance, authorized and established it; the swift growth of universal practice when hearts were warm and loyal clinched the evidence. Baptism in the visible church is an institution of Jesus Christ.