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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

CORRESPONDENCE.

OUR BAPTISMAL FORMULARIES.

SIR,—I am sorry “A Student of the Prayer-Book” thinks my suggestion would reduce what is now a consistent whole to discord and contradiction. I thought I was removing discord and inconsistency by removing the prayers that infants may be delivered from God’s wrath, while of such, we are told, is the kingdom of heaven, and that they may receive remission of their sins, while yet we are exhorted to follow their innocency. I thought I had avoided calling baptized infants “new-born” in any sense which could be misunderstood, explaining the new birth to mean, in the case of infant baptism, not a moral change of disposition, but a solemn reception on God’s part and ours into the visible Church. The Catechism teaches that baptism is not complete, and that, consequently, the new birth, or, rather, the new generation, is not complete, without repentance and faith on the part of the baptized. And certainly there is no ground for thinking that a child’s regeneration, in any sense whatever, depends upon its sponsors having personated the child in a kind of sacred drama, with which the child’s “desire” has nothing whatever to do, and which, at private baptism, has no place. The phrase “Baptism doth represent unto us our profession,” refers, not to an accessory ceremony which could be altered or removed at any time by lawful authority, but to the outward and visible sign of the baptism itself, the being dipped in the water and brought up again, “that like as Christ died and rose again for us, so should we who, are baptized die from sin and rise again unto righteousness”—a representation, however, which is much weakened when, as is customary with us, the water is only poured, and still more when, with no rubrical authority at all, it is only sprinkled. The ancient fonts are large enough for immersion; and immersion is the Prayer-Book *rule* to this day. When the service was written, immersion was probably the custom.

Augustine’s letter to Boniface happens to be very familiar to me. I printed a long extract from it many years ago in a sixpenny tract on “The Witness of the Missal against the Doctrine of the Mass.” The fact that the sponsorial drama puzzled a Bishop in St. Augustine’s days hardly proves that it ought not to puzzle unlearned people in our days. In 1662 an attempt was made to mitigate the puzzle, but not, I think, with much success. Indeed, if the drama is to continue, I am not sure that the straightforward questions and answers of 1549 would not be better than either the modification of 1552, or that of 1662 which is still with us.

I have no desire to abolish Infant Baptism. But I am sure that under our present forms it is presented to our people as in a mist. I believe, also, that this want of clearness has helped to degrade the service, very, very often, into a mere provision for Christian burial. And I think such a form as I gave in my article would do something towards making parents and godparents see that baptism is for living, not for burying. When the time comes, as come it must, for an improved Baptismal Service, my little effort may have been forgotten, and yet may have done something towards preparing the way; and I thank you for printing it.

J. FOXLEY.