

### III. The mode of baptism remains to be considered.

Although the manner in which water is applied in baptism is but a circumstance in this sacrament, it will not be a matter of surprise to those who reflect upon the proneness of men to attach undue importance to comparative trifles that it has produced so much controversy. The question as to the proper subjects of baptism is one which is to be respected for its importance; that as to the mode has occupied more time, and excited greater feeling, than it is in any view entitled to. It cannot, however, be passed over, because the advocates for immersion are often very troublesome to their fellow Christians, unsettle weak minds, and sometimes, perhaps, from their zeal for a form, endanger their own spirituality. Against the doctrine that the only legitimate mode of baptizing is by immersion, we may first observe that there are several strong presumptions.

1. It is not probable that, if immersion were the only allowable mode of baptism, it should not have been expressly enjoined.

2. It is not probable that, in a religion designed to be universal, a mode of administering this ordinance should be obligatory, the practice of which is ill adapted to so many climates, where it would either be exceedingly harsh to immerse the candidates, male and female, strong and feeble, in water; or, in some places, as in the higher latitudes, for a great part of the year impossible. Even if the immersion were in fact the original mode of baptizing in the name of Christ, these reasons make it improbable that no accommodation of the form should take place, without vitiating the ordinance. This some of the stricter Baptists assert, although they themselves depart from the primitive mode of partaking of the Lord's Supper, in accommodations to the customs of their country.

3. It is still more unlikely that, in a religion of mercy, there should be no consideration of health and life in the administration of an ordinance of salvation, since it is certain that, in countries where cold bathing is little practised, great risk of both is often incurred, especially in the case of women and delicate persons of either sex, and fatal effects do sometimes occur.

4. It is also exceedingly improbable that, in such circumstances of climate, and the unfrequent use of the bath, a mode of baptizing should have been appointed which, from the shivering, the sobbing, and other bodily uneasiness produced, should distract the thoughts, and unfit the mind for a collected performance of a religious and solemn act of devotion.

5. It is highly improbable that the three thousand converts at the pentecost, who, let it be observed, were baptized on the same day, were all baptized by immersion; or that the jailer and "all his" were baptized in the same manner in the night, although the Baptists have invented "a tank or bath in the prison at Philippi" for that purpose.

Finally, it is, most of all, improbable that a religion like the Christian, so scrupulously delicate, should have enjoined the immersion of women by men, and in the presence of men. In an after age, when immersion came into fashion, baptisteries, and rooms, for women, and changes of garments, and other auxiliaries to this practice came into use, because they were found necessary to decency; but there could be no such conveniences in the first instance; and, accordingly, we read of none. With all the arrangements of modern times, baptism by immersion is not a decent practice; there is not a female, perhaps, who submits to it, who has not a great previous struggle with her delicacy; but that, at a time when no such accommodations could be had as have since been found necessary, such a ceremony should have been constantly performed wherever the Apostle the first preachers went, and that at pools

and rivers in the presence of many spectators, and unbelievers and scoffers, it is a thing not rationally credible.

We grant that the practice of immersion is ancient, and so are many other superstitious appendages to baptism, which are adopted under the notion of making the rite more emblematical and impressive. We not only trace immersion to the second century, but immersion three times, anointing with oil, signing with the sign of the cross, imposition of hands, exorcism, eating milk and honey, putting on of white garments, all connected with baptism, and first mentioned by Tertullian; the invention of men like himself, who, with much genius and eloquence, had little judgment, and were superstitious to a degree worthy of the darkest ages which followed. It was this authority for immersion which led Wall, and other writers on the side of infant baptism, to surrender the point to the Antipædobaptists, and to conclude that immersion was the apostolic practice. Several national churches, too, like our own, swayed by the same authority, are favourable to immersion, although they do not think it binding, and generally practise affusion or sprinkling.

Neither Tertullian nor Cyprian was however, so strenuous for immersion as to deny the validity of baptism by aspersion or affusion. In cases of sickness or weakness they only sprinkle water upon the face, which we suppose no modern Baptist would allow. Clinic baptism, too, or the baptism of the sick in bed, by aspersion, is allowed by Cyprian to be valid; so that "if the persons recover they need not be baptized by immersion." (*Epist. 69.*) Gennadius of Marseilles, in the fifth century, says that baptism was administered in the Gallic church, in his time, indifferently, by immersion or by sprinkling. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas says, "that baptism may be given, not only by immersion, but also by affusion of water or sprinkling with it." And Erasmus affirms (*Epist. 76.*) that in his time it was the custom to sprinkle infants in Holland, and to dip them in England. Of these two modes one only was primitive and apostolic. Which that was we shall just now consider. At present it is only necessary to observe that immersion is not the only mode which can plead antiquity in its favour; and that as the superstition of antiquity appears to have gone most in favour of baptism by immersion, that is a circumstance which affords a strong presumption that it was one of these additions to the ancient rite which superstition originated. This may be made out almost to a moral certainty, without referring at all to the argument from Scripture. The "ancient Christians," the "primitive Christians," as they are called by the advocates of immersion, that is, Christians of about the age of Tertullian and Cyprian, and a little downward,—whose practice of immersion is used as an argument to prove that mode only to have had apostolic sanction,—baptized the candidates naked. Thus Wall, in his History of Baptism: "The ancient Christians, when they were baptized by immersion, were all baptized naked, whether they were men, women, or children. They thought it better represented the putting off the old man, and also the nakedness of Christ on the cross; moreover, as baptism is a washing they judged it should be the washing of the body, not of the clothes." This is an instance of the manner in which they effected to improve the emblematical character of the ordinance. Robinson, also, in his History of Baptism, states the same thing: "Let it be observed that the primitive Christians baptized naked. There is no ancient historical fact better authenticated than this." "They however," says Wall, "took great care for preserving the modesty of any woman who was to be baptized. None but women came near her till her body was in the water; then the priest came, and putting

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