

POPULAR BAPTIST ARGUMENTS
REVIEWED.

(Brought from page 83.)

in Asia; a very specious forgery. Now, supposing a sect to take this Epistle under its special patronage, and put it forth to the world as equally canonical, or as a rival to St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, how would the Baptist refute the claim of the newly discovered manuscript? His only method would be the following:—he would, no doubt, say, "it is very strange that, if this Epistle be as it pretends, a genuine production, it never was heard of for sixteen centuries? How did it happen that it never found its way into the catalogue of Scripture handed down to us? Surely the earliest ages of Christianity, which had the best opportunity for deciding the question, would have recognized it, if genuine; and if it ever formed part of Holy Scripture, it could not have dropped out of the book unnoticed. When the canon of Scripture was compiled, it could not have been acknowledged; because, had it been acknowledged, it never could have been allowed to escape from the sacred volume without remembrance." Now, let the Baptists apply this same valid reasoning to their peculiar system, and they must come to the same conclusion, viz:—that had adult baptism been the exclusive practice of the earliest and purest ages, the Christian world could never have been so completely revolutionized that infant baptism could have been introduced, either surreptitiously without detection, or openly without rebuke. The practice of infant baptism is proved Apostolical by the same reasoning which detects the forgery to be not Apostolical.

If, then, Scripture contains no precept which either expressly or by inference forbids infant baptism; if those texts which relate the baptism of the first converts are naturally more applicable to adults, but yet neither plainly affirm nor imply that infants were excluded; if, on the other hand, some of the texts which seem to be exclusively applicable to adults, are easily reconciled with the supposition of infant baptism having been practiced, if some other passages of Scripture give clear intimations of infant baptism, for example, 1 Cor. 7, 14, which declares the children of a believer holy; and if capable of holiness, why not of baptism? If it is unreasonable to suppose that our Lord would have failed to undeceive his Apostles when he bade them baptize "all nations;" if it is incredible that the sacred writers, when addressing Jews to whom infant baptism was familiar, would not have forbade the custom, had they disapproved of it; if we can detect no trace of the practice of infant baptism having supplanted adult, and if it is impossible that such an event could have occurred without being remarked and criticized; if we cannot believe that, had adult baptism been the exclusive practice of the Apostolic age, infant baptism could have overspread the whole Christian world, without exception, and adult baptism have died away without leaving behind it even a faint echo in history; if circumcision, under the Jewish dispensation, was applied to infants to bring them into covenant with God, and the Apostles were never taunted by the Jews with refusing admission to infants under the Gospel covenant; if we never read of baptism having been deferred on account of youth; if all these things be true, then is the Church of England warranted in affirming that "the baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ."

We are not so much concerned in refuting the Baptist theory of immersion, because our Church prescribes it, not, however, forbidding pouring and sprinkling: the question being important only so far as this—whether persons who have been baptized by pouring of water, can be said to be baptized at all? Baptists affirm that pouring or sprinkling is not baptism. Now, how is this proved? It would be but natural to expect that men who upbraid us for baptizing infants without express command, would produce some express command for immersion, particularly as they go so far as to say that without it there is no baptism. Yet they adduce no such command—for none such exists—they are, therefore, contented to establish their favourite subject of immersion by gathering *intimations from the meaning of words and from the prohibitions contained in*

narratives—a mode of proof denied to us. Now is not this a grievous inconsistency? The admission of eminent English Churchmen that the Scriptures contain no express command to baptize infants, is triumphantly recorded by Baptists. Now, we are not more positive about retaining infant baptism than they are in prescribing immersion. We are, therefore, naturally led to apply to them their own principles, and to ask for a plain, express command for immersion, or against pouring or sprinkling. And really we might have expected such a command, if Christ intended to restrict baptism to immersion. The essential elements in a sacrament would naturally have been such as could be everywhere easily procured, prescribed as they were by one whose motto was—"I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." Now, a large portion of the world is so arid, that in many countries it would be a matter of serious difficulty, if not altogether impossible, to procure water enough to immerse an adult. Again, a large portion of the world is so cold, that immersion would be dangerous. But, though we might reasonably have looked for an express precept; yet we do not require the Baptists to produce one. We are willing to take their arguments on their merits, because we think that the cavilling about express commands is unfair. If we can plainly gather from Scripture an argument which proves that a practice was countenanced by the inspired writers, it is sufficient. We have no express commands to worship the Holy Ghost, to admit females to the Lord's Supper, to change the original Sabbath, or forbidding polygamy. All these are not the subjects of positive precepts; but because they may be gathered by inference from Scripture, are binding on Christians. No one will affirm that immersion is commanded so authoritatively, so particularly, as the rigid observance of the Sabbath; yet, on the occasion of our Lord's disciples infringing the precepts relative to that day by plucking the ears of corn, Christ not only said, in regard to that particular case, that his disciples were justified, but he made a general rule for *universal guidance*—"I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." So that even on the supposition of there being a plain direction in the Bible to immerse, yet even then the circumstance of the case should guide us. To immerse a sick man in the colds of Siberia is not in accordance with the spirit, but the letter of the Scripture; nor would it seem more rational, though perhaps less wicked, than to justify a slanderous attack on a stranger, because the ninth commandment speaks of one's neighbour. That immersion was practised by the Apostles and earliest ages, we willingly admit; but the question is, did they practice it exclusively to the absolute prohibition of pouring or sprinkling? Most certainly the earliest ages did not; as we know that in cases of clinical baptism, that is, when the sick or dying wished to be baptized, pouring was thought sufficient. That there are analogies drawn in Scripture from the immersion of baptized persons, viz:—burial with Christ, &c., we readily acknowledge; but there are also analogies from sprinkling:—"blood sprinkling the unclean sanctifieth."—Heb. 10, 22; also 1 Peter 1, 2. Let us, then, examine the Scriptural instances of baptism adduced by the Baptists, with a view to ascertain whether there be ground for concluding from the narratives that sprinkling or pouring is prohibited; and if we find that there is no such ground, we must convict the Baptists of attaching as much importance to mere ritualism as Rominists themselves.

As a general answer to those instances, we cannot reply better than in the words of "Bishop Bagot's caution against Anabaptists."—"It is true that Christ was baptized by John in the river, and so was the Eunuch by Philip; but the text doth not say that either Christ or the Eunuch or any one baptized either by John or by Christ's disciples were plunged over head and ears. But allowing that it were so, the bare example in such a case could not bind without a precept. Provided the essentials of a sacrament are preserved, the mere mode of application, unless limited by a positive restriction, must be free. In matters of this kind, what may be proper at one place and at one time, may in others become highly improper, and even impossible. At the beginning, Christians had no Churches with fonts in them; besides the multitudes of people to be baptized, made

it expedient to go down to rivers and places where were *many waters*, as St. John did at Amon, at which place, by the account of credible writers, there are indeed many waters, that is, a great number of small rivulets, but so shallow as hardly to reach the ankles, and, therefore, could not well answer the purpose of dipping." "In Acts 2, 41, we read of 3000 baptized in one day, and that in the city of Jerusalem, where water could not have been easily procured for the dipping of so many; besides which, it must have taken up a much larger time in the performance than one day: hardly less than a week would have sufficed. Read, likewise, the baptism of Paul by Ananias, where, from the whole passage, it is next to certain that he was baptized in his lodging; likewise, in the house of Cornelius, St. Peter's words "can any man forbid water," imply, certainly, that the water was to be brought for the baptism of the new converts, and not that they were to go out in the water. The situation of St. Paul (Acts 16, 37) renders it extremely improbable that he should carry the jailer and all his family out at the dead of night to a pond or river to be baptized. These instances are sufficient to show that no conclusive argument can be drawn from the cases recorded in Scripture that a total immersion is of absolute necessity to baptism."

But even though the instances were altogether precise and definite on the subject of immersion, so that it was quite clear that all the earliest converts were immersed, yet still we hold that—provided that no alterations were made in the essentials of the sacrament, viz: by water and in the name of the Holy Trinity—the Church would have been justified in changing immersion into pouring, always provided the change was not forbidden.

The Jewish Passover, in many of its particular observances, was greatly altered to suit changes in times and manners, yet our Saviour partook of it, without objection: he celebrated the festival as it was usually observed by his countrymen, without finding fault; and by his example gave a decided sanction to the claims of the Jewish and Christian Churches to determine mere rites and ceremonies "according to the diversity of the times and mens manners." The Passover was originally required to be observed with the lions girded, the shoes on the feet, and staff in the hand, and in haste. In process of time, to suit their altered circumstances, it was celebrated in a reclining posture, not in haste, to mark the repose of the Jewish nation. The drinking of wine, and the singing of Psalms, were introduced; and yet all these innovations were sanctioned by the countenance our Lord gave them, by reclining himself, by drinking wine, and by singing a hymn or psalm. Now, had the Jews interfered with the essentials of the sacrament—had they made any alteration in the slaying of the lamb, or the use of unleavened bread—we cannot doubt that our Lord would not only have withheld the sanction of his example, but would have pointedly condemned the innovation; and so, even though immersion were clearly established (as it is not) by the Apostles, we should still, in the absence of a precept, consider ourselves not bound to that particular mode of baptism; for we hold that "the Church hath power to decree rites and ceremonies, provided nothing be decreed contrary to God's word written." In concluding this review of Baptist arguments, we may observe, that in the *importance* of baptism, we coincide with them, though, perhaps, for different reasons. We shall, therefore, omit all consideration of this point, and only draw their attention to the consequences which necessarily, which from their own admission, must follow from their tenets. They, truly enough, say, "the permanent duration of the ordinance is plainly implied in the promise, 'Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'" This important promise was given at the time the ordinance was instituted, and it plainly supposes the continuance of baptism, even to the end of the world." Now, if Baptists are correct in their creed, Christ has not fulfilled his promise. For a long period, for many centuries, there was no Church of Christ's on earth, for the Church was composed of men baptized in infancy. The whole world, with the exception of heathen converts, (and they cannot be said to have been baptized, as they who administered the rite were unbaptized themselves, being baptized in infancy) having

practiced infant baptism. Yet, with this consequence before them, Baptists do not hesitate to say that "those who have been baptized in infancy have not, in the sense of Scripture, been baptized at all: they are yet unbaptized, and, without doubt, they ought to consider themselves as unbaptized." We stand aghast that men are to be found who thus strive to persuade the world that Christ falsified his promise: for falsify it he did, with regard to the continuance of baptism; the true admission into his Church was lost for many an age. To men common understanding we appeal, as did St. Paul—"I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say."

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33-11

NOTICE.

THE DEPOSITORY
OF
THE CHURCH SOCIETY
IS Removed to the Store of HENRY ROW-
SELL, Bookseller and Stationer, King-street
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Church Society is also removed to H. Rowse's.
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