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"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS X. 24.

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DIVINITY.

SCRIPTURE BAPTISMS.

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LET US consider some of the more prominent cases of Baptism recorded in the New Testament, and see what appears to have been the probable mode of Baptism in those cases.

I. We will begin with the case of Saul of Tarsus:—

Saul was struck to the earth, on his way to Damascus, by a sudden blaze of light; and a voice proclaimed, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." His eyes were "blasted with excess of light," so that he was blind three days and three nights. You can easily imagine his excitement of mind, and his consequent prostration of bodily strength, especially when you consider that during these three days and three nights, "he neither did eat nor drink."

As he sat in the house, there came to him one of his intended victims, the leader of the Christian band, and probably the one to whom he would first have done violence. The meek disciple lays his hand upon the blind man's head, and says, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, who appeared to thee in the way as thou camest, has sent me that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." Were there no strong emotions in the mind of Saul, at the pressure of that hand, and at the sound of that voice? And when "there fell from his eyes, as it had been scales, and he received sight," and looked round upon the little company of disciples watching him with wonder and compassion, and compared the scene with the anticipated scenes of blood for which he had come to that place, could his condition have been such as to admit of his being led out to a river to be immersed? He had not eaten anything for three days and three nights, and did not eat till he had been baptized; for it is said, "He arose and was baptized; and when he received meat he was strengthened." How natural to suppose that water was applied to him in a way consistent with his exhausted condition. It is most rational to suppose that it was done by affusion.

The public baptism of Saul, the persecutor, in "Abarna or Pharphar, rivers of Damascus," would have made such an impression in favour of Christianity, that it is probable it would not have been omitted, if the practice of the apostles had been to baptize by immersion. They would have strengthened him with meat, and then would have made a great occasion of his Baptism. Had this been done, it seems probable that so exciting a scene would have been noticed by the sacred historian. But it is not said that Saul went anywhere, and the Baptism is passed over with a few words, because, as we believe, it took place in the house, and was performed by sprinkling, inasmuch as the condition of Saul could not have permitted any other mode.

II. Another case in which there is every reason to believe that the mode of Baptism was not immersion, is that of the jailer at Philippi. Paul and Silas were bruised and sore, from the stripes which they had but just received. The earthquake had, of course, alarmed the city, and the streets were not so empty and still as at other times. Can any one suppose that Paul and Silas would have ventured forth, with a whole household, into the streets of a city just alarmed by an earthquake? Would the jailer have had such disregard for his own life, and for that of the apostles, as to have carried these state prisoners out-

side the prison gates at midnight? Would the apostles have ventured into a river, at that season, in the wounded state of their bodies? Can any one suppose that immersion held such a place in the minds of the apostles, that they would disregard all these circumstances, for the purpose of getting this family into the river at the dead of night?

"But the jailer, and his household, and Saul, may have been immersed in a bathing vessel."

And they may have been sprinkled. One supposition is as good as the other.

There is more probability that sprinkling or pouring was used, than immersion in a bathing vessel. There is something offensive and unnatural in the supposition of the latter mode. Think of the process of baptizing a whole family in this manner. From the expression, "all his house," there would seem to have been a considerable number in the jailer's family, either of adults or children. Suppose that they were all adults;—and that some of them were such, is probable from the occupation of the jailer, which required assistants or servants. A bathing vessel is filled; the jailer is ordered to prepare himself, his family and domestics, to be immersed. Is it probable that they all had garments suited to the service? One of them lies down in the vessel, and Paul or Silas bends his aching body, and in so doing, breaks the wounds which had stiffened in their blood. It requires no small exercise of strength to lay a full-sized man into a bathing vessel, and lift him up again, and the apostles, only a few hours before, had been severely beaten. The service for the jailer is finished. The wife comes next; an hour before, she was a heathen, and had just received impressions of divine truth which had filled her with wonder and joy; now she is commanded to lie down in the bathing vessel before her servants, and two strange Jews.

Is the same water used for each successive subject? Or are their common feelings of decency such that the vessel must be emptied and filled again after each Baptism? No one of them would ordinarily bathe in the water which another had immersed himself in; they, therefore, must have filled the vessel each time with clean water;—and all this is supposed to have been done in that most interesting hour when the minds of the household were awakened and anxious, or were just rejoicing in hope. Their thoughts must be turned off from Christ and the way of salvation, to the process of lying down in a bathing vessel—a service which must have been strangely inconsistent with their state of mind, and must have given them had impressions of a religion that could neglect the soul in its moments of intense feeling, for a ceremony so inconvenient, unnatural, and improper, and of ludicrous rather than impressive effect.

Nothing is gained by supposing that there was a large number of vessels in the house or prison. The performance of a service that required such effort on the part of the apostles, and such preparation on the part of the household, at such a time—a service that must have occasioned a distraction of thought and feeling, which the apostles would have been anxious to prevent—has no semblance of probability in its favour.

But look at a different scene. The family are gathered in one room. One of the apostles is preaching to them Jesus. The way to be saved is clearly pointed out; one after another breaks forth in some expression of penitence, confession or joy. The apostles discern the evidence of true conversion, and wish to consecrate the household to the Christian faith. Water is brought in a convenient form. Each bows the head, and the emblem of the Spirit's influence descends like the

small rain upon the tender herb. All is still, save when the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is uttered by the apostle, or the feelings of the new converts break through the restraint of the service. Everything in the scene deepens the impressions of divine truth; no change of garments, no labour, no promiscuous meeting, or exposure, around a bath, disturbs the thoughts of the inquirers after eternal life. It is difficult to believe that this household were not baptized by sprinkling.

III. The case of the eunuch will next be considered. When he said, "See, here is water," what reason is there for concluding that it was a deep river, and not a shallow stream? And why could they not go down out of the chariot to a brook, as well as down into a river? for the prepositions here used, may be rendered either way. It is as probable that the eunuch descried a running stream by the road-side, as that they came in sight of a lake or river.

Besides, if the expression, *down into the water*, certainly denotes that the eunuch was immersed, then Philip must have been immersed also; for they both went *down into the water*, "both Philip and the eunuch." Many do not consider that *down into*, does not mean *down under*; if it does, the eunuch must have immersed Philip, or Philip must have plunged into the stream; for one went as much *into the water* as the other. The preposition here used do not necessarily lead any further than to the edge of the water—*down to* the water. And then, allowing that they did stop *into the water*, it is as likely that springling took place, as immersion.

It is not probable that the eunuch would put the garments, in which he was riding, upon his wet body; nor that he had conveniences for making himself comfortable after bathing; nor that he took the trouble to have his change of raiment removed from its secured place; for he merely commanded the chariot to stand still, and took nothing with him to the water, nor did a servant bear anything after him, nor do we read that he went through any process of arraying himself afresh after his Baptism. The whole narrative leaves the impression upon the mind, that he and Philip stood in the water, or by the side of it, (according as the preposition is translated *down into*, or *down to*), and that Philip baptized him with water raised in his hand. Here, if any change at all was needed in their dress, it could only have been to loose their sandals from their feet; for in those countries, the lower part of the limbs was bare, and the loose garment which they wore around them could easily be adjusted without being removed. We never see the picture of "Philip baptizing the eunuch," in which they are both represented as up to their waists in water, without thinking of all the inconveniences before and after the service, which make it improbable that immersion was the mode of Baptism. It is much more easy to think of them as standing by the side of the water, and the Ethiopian, without the confusion which exposure to a stranger would occasion, without the inconvenience or trouble of a change of dress, or the natural agitation which any one feels in the hands of another in the water, receiving from Philip the simple sign of the affusion of God's Spirit, while the small drops that flow from his temples upon his dress, affect his mind more than the violent rushing of waves over him. Without excitement, agitation, or delay, his thoughts averted not even for a moment by the simple rite from the theme of Philip's discourse, and bearing upon his head the fresh emblem of his separation to the Christian faith, he ascends the chariot, and goes on his way rejoicing.