

and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan," to be baptized of him, *in that river*, we do not very naturally come to the conclusion that he immersed them all. In such promiscuous assemblages of age, rank and sex, and of a people distinguished for delicacy and reservedness, it is not in the least degree probable, either that they were undressed for the purpose of immersion, or that they were all conveniently supplied with bathing robes for the purpose, according to the practice followed now by the advocates of adult baptism and total immersion. It is much more reasonable to suppose that the convenience of the prophet, and of the parties applying to him, required a more expeditious method; and the impression made on us from the whole circumstances, is, that after the Baptist had addressed the multitudes on the bank of the river, enforcing the doctrine, and calling on them to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, those who professed went down with him to the very margin, or perhaps into the stream, and were sprinkled with the baptismal water by John, using, it may be, as the Jews were wont to do in purifications, a branch of hyssop for a sprinkler: this being done, *they went up out of the water*. The same observations may be applied to the baptism of the three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost.† We should be not a little perplexed to account for the arrangements necessary for the baptism of so great a multitude by immersion, in the city of Jerusalem, independent of the obstacles arising from Jewish feelings of delicacy and reservedness. We can scarcely suppose that the necessary means could be furnished in private houses, and there was no stream in, or near, the city adapted to the purpose. The same obstacles did not stand in the way to prevent the baptism of the Ethiopian prince‡ by immersion: Philip and he were alone, or only in the company of servants; and we may readily suppose there was water enough; and hence we can offer no reason why this form should not have been employed, except the single one, that sprinkling was much more convenient. Again, the case of the Philippian jailer,§ seems to us very conclusive in favor of the latter mode. For it is barely possible, that in the prison, at the hour of midnight, on a sudden and unforeseen emergency, there could be found all the prerequisites for administering baptism by immersion.

I have directed attention to these instances, not with the view of establishing that either dipping or sprinkling was the uniform and instituted manner in apostolic times. Enough will be gained to the ar-

gument, if I have shown that it is difficult to determine whether the primitive christians confined themselves always either to the one or the other—whether they immersed or sprinkled in baptism, or used either method indifferently. And that the wisest and best men have entertained different views of the primitive practice, would seem to authorize the conclusion, that the great Head of the church has not determined the mode by any precise rule, or by any clear and unvarying model. It seems to be a mark of divine wisdom, that the mere manner and non-essentials of the form of baptism, are left thus indeterminate and variable, as the circumstances of individuals and the diversities of climate may require. In tropical and warmer regions it may be suitable to employ immersion. In northern and polar latitudes, where this mode might prove dangerous to health, and inconvenient and cumbrous in its administration, the simpler form of sprinkling might be employed; and yet each be in perfect consistency with the revealed will of Christ, and in entire subserviency to the great end for which this ordinance was instituted, as a sign and seal of our admission into the visible church.

While we think the sacred scriptures do not precisely prescribe the manner of administration, and that a considerable latitude of variety may not invalidate the essentials of the ordinance; and while we admit that we cannot charge disobedience to God upon such as depart in the above degrees from the prevailing practice, we may express our high approbation of the simple, becoming and scriptural manner in which this rite is now performed by most of the protestant reformed churches. Sprinkling with water is now almost universally used. The smallest quantity of the material element is justly deemed a sufficient emblem of the spiritual baptism without which the external washing can prove of no avail. And our church, rejecting all idle ceremony and pomp, and sprinkling only in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, the mind is left free to expatiate on the mysterious but delightful cooperation of the blessed Trinity, in the scheme of man's redemption, as it is set forth in this divine institution.

6. In conclusion, let us advert to the obligations under which christians are placed by this solemn ordinance. By it they become the professed disciples and subjects of the Lord Jesus. Every wilful and deliberate violation of his commandments, becomes therefore a kind of perjury. It is not simply an act of disobedience against God—of this all sinners are guilty, whether they be baptized or not. But to renounce our christian profession after a new covenant engagement to it through this holy

† Acts, ii. 41. ‡ Acts, viii. 36. § Acts, xvi. 33;