

The Christian.

ST. JOHN, N. B. . . . MAY, 1891

EDITORIAL.

ON BAPTISM.

"Please inform me briefly why so many devout and scholarly men seem to advocate sprinkling as a mode of baptism rather than immersion when nearly all great scholars of every denomination admit that *baptizein* means to dip, and that Jesus was in all probability thus baptized. I ask from a purely unpolemical point, for I myself was sprinkled in my childhood, and the matter has puzzled me of late."

Ans. Dean Stanley says: "The reason for the change is obvious. The practice of immersion, though peculiarly suitable to the southern and eastern countries for which it was designed, was not found reasonable in the countries of the north and west." *Christian Institutions*, p. 22, "The essential significance of the rite does not depend on the quantity of the water used as a symbol of purification."

The above is taken from *The Christian Union* of the 22nd of January and seems to claim special attention. We will first consider the question.

I. It comes from one who is anxious about himself and not for the sake of controversy. In childhood he had been sprinkled for baptism and was now puzzled over the matter. How many honest persons are in a similar condition? Men who carefully study the New Testament can see in baptism the first public act of the Saviour, deemed by Him so important that He came from Galilee to Jordan and removed every scruple from the mind of John until he baptized Him. They see that the Holy Spirit rested on Him and that God proclaimed Him His beloved Son as He came up out of the water. They also see Jesus in His last commission offering pardon on these plain terms: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." And the man who loves the Son of God feels it very hard to refuse to obey Him in an action which He has positively commanded and which He has shown him by doing it Himself; hence, many say, "If I had not been baptized in childhood I would do so at once."

When their teachers persuade them that being sprinkled in infancy is quite sufficient, many are so satisfied with this substitute that they give up the investigation and quietly move along with the multitude. Others looking at the great difference between this unauthorized substitute and what Jesus did Himself and commanded others to do for themselves, come out in the face of all opposition and are buried with their Lord in baptism and rising to walk in newness of life, enjoy what He has graciously promised.

II. We will next consider the answer in *The Christian Union*, the popular pedit-Baptist paper of Beecher and his successor. The enquirer is pointed to Dean Stanley, who has not a word to justify the "men who seem to advocate sprinkling as a mode of baptism instead of immersion." In his article on Baptism, Stanley elaborates the fact that immersion and not sprinkling was what the Saviour did Himself and commanded others to do. He says immersion is the meaning of the word He used in the command, and that the Apostles plunged their converts into the deep waters and raised them out. So Stanley and *The Christian Union* condemn the man that advocates sprinkling to be the meaning of baptism, and they do this in common with "nearly all great scholars of every denomination." These are among the facts that show us how surely and how steadily light is pre-

vailing against darkness, truth against error, on the subject of baptism. Just as certainly as it is honestly and intelligently examined will the number who contend for sprinkling being what the Lord commanded to be done for baptism decrease. Every decade is making the number "beautifully less," and the day is not far distant when such contention shall have to take its place among the occult curiosities of the past.

But it seems strange to many *why* such a man as Dean Stanley, so learned, so amiable and truthful, would insist that immersion was what the Lord commanded and what primitive Christians practiced, and still practice sprinkling himself. He explains this himself. We must notice the difference between a witness to facts and one giving his opinion for or against the propriety of those facts. Stanley did both. His education, religious and moral, tended to increase his love for truth, so that if ever called upon to give his testimony he would adhere strictly to facts, whether these would be for or against himself. It also increased his confidence in the goodness and wisdom of the church of his fathers so that he would be ever ready to justify as good and true what the church did and said.

Now, as a scholar and historian of high rank, he testifies: 1. That Jesus was immersed. 2nd. That He commanded others to be immersed. 3rd. That the apostles and primitive Christians always immersed. He gives this clear and unhesitating testimony to immersion, although it was against his own practice. Nothing but a sense of truth and justice could induce him to give such testimony. He then says the church long after the apostles' day changed it to sprinkling.

He now leaves the witness stand and gives his opinion, which is that the church did right in making the change. Here is honest work. We can see where he stands. As a witness he tells the truth; as a philosopher he gives his opinion in favor of the church changing what the Lord had positively commanded. In his case we see how terribly the judgment of great and good men can be warped by early prejudice. When Jesus commanded immersion it was for "all the world," but the church found it unreasonable for the north and west countries, and changed it to sprinkling. Here then was the point at issue between Christ and the church, and the celebrated Dean takes the side of the church in omitting what Jesus *did* command and in doing what He did *not* command. No doubt he had often read where men found the positive commands of God unreasonable, and they did something else which they deemed better without ever thinking of taking sides with those who made the change. He would not think of justifying Uzza, who touched the ark because he thought it unreasonable to let it fall from the cart, or taking the side of Saul, who found it so much more reasonable to take the beautiful cattle of the Amelkites and sacrifice them to the Lord than to utterly destroy them, as the Lord had positively commanded (1 Sam. xiv.), but he can take the side of the church, who can give no better reason for changing the command of the Son of God than could Uzza and Saul for their change. But the honest Dean will tell the truth on what Jesus did command, and not attempt to deceive the people. While prejudice will greatly warp the judgment of an honest man, it will not prevent him from telling what he knows to be true. Stanley did not choose to be sprinkled. It was imposed upon him without his consent or knowledge, and since the church did it, he seemed comparatively satisfied, although he contended for immersion being practised now, and in favor of those who had never abandoned it.

We next come to the remarks of the *Christian Union*. After quoting and endorsing Stanley, it says: "The essential significance of the rite does not depend on the quantity of water used as the

symbol of purification." From this we gather the following propositions:

I. The use of water, regardless of quantity, is Christian Baptism.

II. Christian Baptism is a symbol of purification.

Prop. I. The use of water regardless of quantity is Christian Baptism.

Christ was immersed in water for baptism, and positively commanded believers to do the same. To use water differently is *not* following Christ's example nor obeying His command. Otherwise when Jesus commanded his apostles to baptize He told them to use water in any way which they or others might see fit. Who can admit such an absurdity? Baptism is a positive institution.

Prop. II. Christian Baptism is a symbol of purification.

Only believers were commanded to be baptized, and baptism was a symbol of what they believed, or of the gospel of their salvation. What the gospel is Paul tells plainly in 1 Cor. xv. chap., viz.: "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day, according to the scriptures." These three facts Paul preached. The Corinthians believed, and were saved if they kept them in mind. Baptism is a symbol of these facts. It points the believer to the death, and burial, and resurrection of Christ rather than to purification, which is only one of the blessed effects of Christ's work. How would it do to say that the Lord's supper is a symbol of the sweet enjoyment of the faithful partaker rather than a symbol of the Lord's death. This would be a similar mistake to the one that makes baptism a symbol of purification rather than the work of Christ. When men's hearts were so changed by believing the gospel that they died to sin they were buried with Christ in baptism, in which also they were risen with Him. (Col. xi:12; Rom. vi:4; see also 1 Pet. iii:21.) The benefit received is when we see through it the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, which is the gospel of our salvation.

Search the scriptures, said Jesus, for they are they that testify of ME. The Old Testament, in its ordinances and preaching, points to Christ. So does the New, only more clearly and more directly. He is Lord of all, and says even of the Holy Spirit: "He shall testify of ME." "He shall not speak of Himself." "He shall glorify ME." (John xv:26; xvi:13.)

The Old Testament has institutions pointing to the death of Christ, the New has one, the Lord's supper. But baptism is the only one that points to His burial and resurrection. He instituted it after He had abolished death, and when He was bringing life and immortality to light in the gospel. Take away from it the idea of a resurrection and there is nothing left. But it points the true believer to Jesus' finished work, while it inspires also in himself the hope of a resurrection. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him, etc. (1 Thess. iv:14, 15, 16, 17.) At his baptism he enters a system that will last till the resurrection of the just. His life is hid with Christ in God to appear at "that day." He is thus baptized for (the resurrection of) the deed. "That day" is the grand terminus of his religious course when faith shall end in sight, and hope shall lead to full possession, and love that will never fail shall fully appear in solitary glory.

We regard it as an indication of increasing light and greater triumphs of truth to see these noble men who have the courage of their convictions honestly stating what the Lord has commanded on the one hand, and what men who have changed the Lord's appointment have commanded on the other hand, and offering the best apologies they can for this departure and change. By so doing they leave intelligent readers, in a great measure, free to choose for themselves whether to obey God or man. We are hopeful that many, very many, will choose the better part, although sometimes when alternating between hope and fear we are led to exclaim, like the anxious father, "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief."