

The Christian.

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NON-TRANSLATION AND NEUTRALIZATION OF A PART OF THE SCRIPTURE.

We cheerfully devote the editorial column of this number to the excellent article of President C. L. Loos in the *Christian Standard* of the 10th of September, on Judson's Burmese Bible, as we think it will be interesting and instructing, especially to our aged readers who can remember the persecution endured by our Baptist brethren fifty years ago for their fidelity to God and His word, in refusing to hide from the millions of India the last command of the ascending Son of God. The Baptists were the pioneers of eastern heathen missionaries, and their translations the first among the Hindoos and Burmese. They had, as far as possible in their power, given a faithful translation in their own language to each nation, of every word as they found it in the original, not excepting the word *baptizo*. So things went on for a time. At length pedobaptist missionaries followed, and often found it very difficult to satisfy their converts with sprinkling. Whereupon they informed the societies who supported all the missionaries from funds gathered for the purpose, of their trouble. These societies were anxious for these translations to be called in, and the word *baptizo* to be transferred as in the common English version, and urged the translators to do this. But the translators could not do this, but they and their friends wished their translations to be tested by the severest criticism. They asked them to call in the most approved pedobaptist scholars and let them decide on the merits, but persisted that they could not, dare not, hide God's truth from the nations. After much deliberation and conferences were held between the agents of the societies and the friends of the missionaries, the latter were cut off from all support from the funds collected from Baptists as well as others. Thus they were left penniless. The societies, especially the American, kept the funds, but left these true men to starve in a foreign land.

How strange that when Jesus sent His gospel to every creature, and declared that "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," that there should be such a determination on the part of so many to hide from the people the meaning of that positive action. Will they not, can they not, see that no one can have the assurance that they have obeyed Christ.

How strange it is that when Jesus sent His gospel into all the world to be preached to every creature, and declared that "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," there should be such determination by his professed friends to prevent the people understanding what He meant by being baptized.

Will they not, can they not, see that no one can have the assurance that they have obeyed Jesus in a positive command, unless they understand what was the positive thing which He has told them to do?

We desire to bring to the attention of our readers a correspondence between the Bishop of Rangoon and Secretary Murdock, of the American Baptist Missionary Union, and also correspondence between the latter and British and Foreign Bible Society, both concerning the Burmese New Testament—the translation of Judson—published by the Baptists for their missions in Burmah.

Judson's Burmese Bible is known to be an admirable translation, and, if we mistake not, the only one yet existing, at least so far as the whole Scripture is concerned. The Baptists have hitherto had the Burmese mission field to themselves, and hence no trouble has thus far arisen about the use of this version in the Christian missions in that land. But now, it seems, other missionaries, not Baptists, are preparing to enter Burmah, at present,

from Great Britain, and the English Bishop of Rangoon has opened this correspondence with the American Baptist Union about the use of the Baptist Burmese Bible. Of course the Baptist Union can have no reasonable objection to any other Christians also establishing missions in this fruitful territory, thus far so successfully occupied by them alone. Nor would they hesitate a moment to furnish to these new missions Judson's Bible. But Judson translated the word *baptizo* into Burmese, and correctly, by a word signifying to immerse; hence a serious difficulty with these new missionaries about using this version. There is no other one at hand, and to make a new translation would be a task of immense magnitude and cost.

The Bishop of Rangoon, therefore, asked the Baptist Union whether it would not consent to the publishing of an edition of the Burmese New Testament owned by them and allow "the use either of the Greek word or some neutral word in those few passages which make it so difficult for us to use this excellent translation."

The other correspondence relates to the same serious "rock of stumbling." The (Baptist) Burmah Bible and Tract Society applied to the British and Foreign Bible Society for an appropriation to circulate Judson's Bible. The latter at once agreed to furnish the solicited aid, so far as the Old Testament is concerned; and the New Testament only on the condition of transferring the troublesome Greek word, or rendering it by some neutral word; if the Greek word be used, this note might be placed in the margin, "Some translate by *immerse*" (i. e., using a Burmese word meaning this).

The American Baptist Missionary Union, which has the entire control of this matter, promptly rejected these proposals. It would not allow Judson's translation to be thus corrupted, either for the sake of pedobaptist missions in Burmah, or to obtain aid in its own work, from the British and Foreign Bible Society. And this is as might have been expected. The American Baptists have long since shown their devotion to conviction and conscience in this matter, in the hard-fought controversy with the old American and British Bible Societies, especially the former, occasioned by the very translation, now in question, a controversy which gave birth to the separate American Baptist Bible Society.

It is rather surprising that such a proposal should be made by the Bishop of Rangoon and British Bible Society. It is a proof that it is well-nigh impossible, even yet, for pedobaptists to understand and take into clear, strong consciousness, the conscientious, unyielding convictions of immersionists, on this important point of Bible teaching. But it is a quality of our nature; one man cannot thoroughly comprehend another in whom he is not in sympathy, and in strong sympathy. Every day's experience gives us accumulated evidence of this. Those who have been reared and educated in loose, undefined, indifferent notions about baptism, especially as to the "external form," can not understand why "Baptists" should be "so bigoted about immersion."

Dr. Murdock, Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Union, gives a full and fitting answer to the Anglican Bishop and to the British and Foreign Bible Society. To the Bishop he says: "All Christian scholars worthy of a name agree with Meyer in his note on Mark vii. 4, that *everywhere* in the New Testament *baptizo* means *immerse*. The Union is now asked to substitute for the translation the Greek word, which means nothing to the unlearned reader, or some neutral word which means nothing in particular. And to effect your purpose, you must change or neutralize not only words but sentences."

It would be better to all who profess the name of Christ to adjust their sentiment and action to the Word of God, rather than seek to change the word to suit their convenience. We must maintain that conservative literalism, both in translation and interpretation, which takes the word of God as it stands, and seeks to conform all Christian rites and politics to plain teaching." In the answer to Dr. Wright, Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Dr. Murdock says, "We can not consent to obscure or neutralize the plain meaning of our Lord's command. The leading authorities, both in classical and New Testament Greek, define the word *baptizo* by words signifying to immerse or to dip. In such a question we must be guided simply by a sense of loyalty to Him who gave the Word, and not by a desire to conciliate those who, in this respect, seem to disregard His authority, much as we desire, under other circumstances, to meet their wishes. We can not, we dare not, deliberately obscure or neutralize any word of Christ."

It is cheerful and invigorating to hear words like these in the midst of so much unfaithfulness and indifference to the strict demands of divine author-

ity, of so much compromising with false views and concession to popular opinion.

And now, is it not a sad exhibition of the woeful effects of inveterate error to see eminent Christians, entire bodies of enlightened, "evangelical," earnest-minded believers, active in gospel missions, treat the things of God, the doctrine of Christ, in divine ordinances, as is done in those instances by this Anglican bishop and the representative of the great British and Foreign Bible Society? that the words which by divine choice embody an ordinance and a doctrine, of such high prominence in the Christian religion, so sacred in its significance, so momentous in its vast importance in the life of individual Christians and in the great history of the Church, should not be allowed to be translated, i. e., their simple meaning should not be permitted to be given to the Church of these modern ages; that they should not be translated as the rest of the divine revelation; or that they should be represented by "neutral words," that is, such as have no definite meaning, that express really nothing! Can it be believed that so great and significant an ordinance, and one that is a command enjoined on every soul, *exceptionally* (and why this?), should have no exact definition in the Word of God? Can it possibly be that the word embodying it is so obscure, so indefinite, so ambiguous that it is—as the anti-immersionist view really implies—impossible to determine its sense? Would this not be the strongest anomaly in all the Bible? Could any other such instance be cited in its entire extent? But such is the weakness and vice of the anti-Baptist position on the meaning of *baptizo*; and it is one of the saddest aberrations in Christendom, one of its most grievous blots.

Let the advocates of the "non-translation," the "neutralizing" of the Word and law of God, learn once for all, that we shall never yield to the breadth of a hair in this matter; so clear does this ordinance and the law of God in regard to it stand forth in the Holy Scripture; so universal is the consent of all Christendom, in all its history, to this truth; so firm, so beyond all question and doubt is our conviction of the correctness of our position as to the meaning of the word baptism, and the law of God that enjoins on us fidelity to this conviction.

Original Contributions.

MISSION.

The Monday evening meeting of our Annual was in the interest of missions. Seven of the preachers improved the time. Many good things were said, and well said. One thought was especially emphasized, i. e., that the command to GO and preach the gospel is as important and essential to the salvation of the saint as the acceptance of the gospel is to the sinner. We say, unless you repent and obey the gospel you cannot be saved. The word of God makes this obligatory, not more so, however, than the duty of the dissemination of the gospel. The going into the highways and hedges of life is as necessary for our own salvation as the coming is to those we call. We are too apt to think that the great loss is on the part of those who do not hear the gospel. But a second thought will open our eyes to the fact that the most serious side of this question is on the part of those who do not interest themselves in the salvation of others, who are not enlisted in the mission work. It is infinitely worse to know our duty and not do it than not to know it. The necessity of being actively engaged in the cause of missions in order to our own salvation can be seen very plainly in the co-operative order of the church. We know the church of Christ is one. The fact of the different congregations in different localities does not vitiate in the least, the order or unity of the church. In Acts ix. 31, according to the new version, we find all the churches or congregations were called "the church." We see by this how impossible it is for us to be interested in ourselves if not interested in others. How can the member of the body promote its own interest unless it promotes the interest of the body of which it is a member, and how can we promote the interest of the body unless it be through the members of the body? Every member must be a fellow-helper of each other in order to the health of the body. This