

ARTICLE III.

BAPTIST VERSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

WE are not able to say, positively, that the question, *Whether the present authorized version of the New Testament be sufficiently explicit as to the mode and subject of baptism*, has been agitated to any great extent; nor can we point directly to the quarter whence it has proceeded, not having noticed any discussions respecting it, except cursory ones in some religious periodicals. But it is enough to know, that such a question has been more than once moved, and that a proposal for a modified version of the present text has obtained a favorable hearing in sundry places. Nor is this all; for it is understood, that those who disallow the proposal, and who consider it most consonant with safety and integrity to retain unmutated the established translation, are regarded as very lukewarm advocates of the denominational faith, and as the authors of a policy at once temporizing and spiritless. So they have occasion not only to defend their position, but to repel the missiles which are likely to be thrown by such as have entrenched themselves in a new location. We do not profess to stand between these two parties; for if we should be so imprudent, we might,—to use a figure of the Greek historian,—be cut to pieces by both. And though we should escape injurious force from either side, still, according to the laws of perspective, we should appear to each adverse party to stand nearest his opponent; since an object midway between two stations, when viewed from either, will appear most remote from that at which the observation is made; and will, consequently, seem to be nearest to the opposite point. We shall rid ourselves of the suspicion of designing to occupy any middle ground, by proclaiming, *in limine*, our sincere and unchanged attachment to the good old English version made by the order of king James I. It is our heart's desire and prayer to God, that this venerable monument of learning, of truth, of piety and of unequalled purity of style and diction, may be perpetuated to the end of time, just as we now have it. Let no daring genius meditate either change or amend-

ment in its structure and composition; neither let any learned impertinence presume to disturb the happy confidence of the tens of thousands who now regard it as,—next to the original languages,—the purest vehicle through which the mind of the Holy Spirit was ever conveyed to mortals. Under God, and with God, we feel prepared to stand or fall with this consecrated instrument, known, and quoted, and familiarized, as the common standard version. Its errors and defects,—fewer than those of any translation ever yet made,—we impute to human imperfection. Its unrivalled excellence and accuracy we ascribe to the care and direction of divine providence. We are not anxious to divest ourselves of the idea, that the translators, whatever their character and motives may have been, were under the promptings and counsels of the Holy Spirit, in achieving the work which they gave to the world. By this, we mean not to intimate, that the gift of inspiration, in any peculiar sense, was their's; nor yet that they were so directed in choosing a form of words, as that the only expressive and suitable ones were in every case suggested; but this we do mean and insist upon, namely, that they were eminently fitted and qualified, by the unction of the divine Spirit, for the performance of a work destined to exert a mightier influence over rational nature, than was ever before exerted by any human composition. We trust, that its destiny is only yet in the incipency of development,—that its past successes and beneficial results are but the earnest of that widely diffused blessing which mankind are yet to receive through the medium of its luminous pages.

Of late, the complaint has been loud and strong, that a certain word, with its cognations and derivatives, had not been translated, instead of being transplanted into the common version. And it is more than insinuated, that much injustice is done to us as a denomination, by the fault of the translation. It is contended, that if, instead of *baptize* and *baptism*, *immerse* and *immersion*, or some equivalent words, were substituted in the standard text of the New Testament, a more faithful and consistent sense would be secured, while we, as Baptists, would enjoy an ampler vindication of our views and sentiments, when appealing to scripture authority. It is accordingly projected, as we learn, that the one transplanted word above named, with its derivatives, be rooted out of our version, and a new term of tantamount signification inserted in its place; and

that this amended version shall be for the use of the Baptist denomination. And what then? The amended version cannot make us stronger Baptists than we now are; it will therefore be a work of supererogation amongst ourselves; and when offered to those whom we may wish to convert to our views, it will be promptly rejected as a mutilated instrument. Thus we shall have a version needless at home and powerless abroad. Our zealous study of exactness and precision will defeat itself.

But why should the stem of a Greek root, transferred to the English soil of our vulgar tongue, and there left standing and growing until it becomes naturalized, be offensive to us in these times? Had our predecessors, who first met this exotic upon holy ground, almost two hundred years ago, then objected, and demanded its eradication, it would have appeared in them proper and reasonable, because they might have urged that it was not indigenous. They, however, so far as we know, made no objections, but began to preach, and quote, and expound the king's version. Now, when *baptism* and *baptize* have acquired an appropriate use, and have obtained a fixed and definite meaning in our language, and have a sacred and honorable enrolment on the records of history, it is proposed to have them superseded by other and less pregnant terms! We do object to this, with all the earnestness of deprecation.

We hope to show, *first*, that the untranslated word *baptism* and its derivatives have a fixed and determinate sense in the history of the Christian church, and therefore need no alteration. And,

Secondly, That the substitution of other words in lieu of these, would be a weak and pernicious expedient.

Thirdly, That our opponents on the baptismal question would have reason to congratulate themselves, in the event of such an innovation.

Fourthly, We should thereby deprive ourselves of a very powerful argument in the baptismal controversy.

Whilst, *lastly*, we might be in danger of laying too much stress upon an external rite.

First. It may be useful, to advert to one source of misconception in regard to such words as are transferred and not translated, in our version of the Scriptures. It is usual to speak of such words, and especially of baptism and its kindred

terms, as if they were, in fact, unintelligible Greek, in Roman letters. The idea is, that there is nothing English in them, except the alphabetic character, and that, in other respects, they are little better than a barbarous jargon. This notion, we judge, has been productive of much discontent amongst us, and has generated an importunate demand for new versions and adequate translations. But it is evident, that this demand is based upon misunderstanding. Are we to be told, that a word which has been incorporated into the English language from the earliest times,—which has had a fixed and full import,—which was sounded forth in direct connexion with Christian worship for ten centuries, with a sense free from all ambiguity, is now to be thrust aside, for the sake of introducing a so called translation? As well might we expel from their ancient places the AMEN and HALLELUIA of prayer and praise, and even the blessed name of CHRIST, upon the plea, that they need an English rendering. We meet the language of the common Bible just as we meet old friends. Their looks, their gestures, their open bearing, their guileless simplicity, all please and edify us. The pragmatic diligence which would displace them and foist in strangers upon us, would not entitle itself to our thanks. For our part, we are free to confess, that we should not feel quite 'at home, were we to meet in the study of the sacred word, *immersion*, *plunging*, *dipping*, or any other expression, in place of baptism. We should feel that we were in strange company, and should begin to inquire for the rightful tenants of the habitation. The words *sanctification* and *redemption*, in theology, are technical terms, and are transferred from the Vulgate to our version; but does any one object to these words on account of their Latinity? Their meaning is admitted by general consent; and all persons using them are mutually intelligible. The transplantations from Latin into our language have added materially to its copiousness and beauty, if not to its expressiveness. Still more material to the advancement of science and art, have been the importations from the Greek. Is it just, to censure the words, either of a Greek or Latin original, provided they be faithful representatives of the things which they promise to represent? We shall prove, in the sequel, that the word *to baptize* has become truly and philologically an English word, and that it has faithfully discharged the important trust committed to it.