

## ARTICLE VIII.

## THE RISE OF THE USE OF POURING AND SPRINKLING FOR BAPTISM.

BY REV. NORMAN FOX.

IN the Roman Catholic Church the ordinary act of baptism is a pouring of water upon the head of the candidate. In the Greek Church, on the other hand, it is immersion; and, in his "Lectures on the Eastern Church," Dean Stanley declares that "the most illustrious and venerable portion of it, that of the Byzantine Empire, absolutely repudiates and ignores any other mode of administration as essentially invalid." To the student of history these facts suggest the question, Whence arose this difference between the Eastern Church and the Church of Rome? If immersion was not practiced in the primitive Church, when and how did it come into use? If the apostolic Churches used pouring and sprinkling, together with immersion, when and why did the Eastern Church come to deny their validity? On the other hand, if we say that pouring was unknown to apostolic practice, we must ask:

1. When did it make its appearance in the Church?
2. For what reason was it introduced?
3. By what means has it become able, in the Western Church, to supplant immersion almost entirely?

The date of the first use of pouring is fixed with tolerable precision by the epistle of Cyprian to Magnus, in which we find the oldest extant argument for the recognition of affusion as baptism. This epistle is the most ancient document in the voluminous literature of "the baptismal controversy." Cyprian says:

"You have also inquired, dearest son, what I think concerning those who, in sickness and debility, have laid hold on the grace of

God, whether they are to be regarded as Christians in regular standing, seeing they have not been immersed in the water of salvation, but it has merely been poured upon them.

"So far as my poor ability comprehends the matter, I consider that in the sacraments which pertain to salvation, when the case is one of strict necessity and God grants his indulgence, divine simpler methods confer the whole benefit upon believers.

"And it should not disturb any that the sick are only sprinkled or poured upon, since the Holy Scripture says [Here he quotes Ezekiel xxxvi, 25: 'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you,' and certain passages in Numbers about the sprinkling of the water of purification]. Whence it appears that the sprinkling of water has equal efficacy with the full bath of salvation."

But he finally says:

"If any think they have not obtained the blessing, since they have merely been poured upon with the saving water, they must not be ensnared; and so, if they escape the ills of their sickness and recover, let them be baptized. But if they can not be baptized after they have been sanctified by ecclesiastical baptism, why should they be troubled as to their own faith or the mercy of the Lord?"

"I have answered your letter, dearest son, so far as my poor and small ability is capable of doing, and so far as in me lies I have shown what I think; prescribing, however, to no officer that he go contrary to what he considers right, for each must give account of his own conduct to the Lord."

The first thing shown by this letter of Cyprian, and it is shown beyond any possibility of denial, is that when this epistle was written (that is, in the middle of the third century), the ordinary baptism was immersion. What called forth the letter was a denial of the "good and regular standing" of certain persons who, converted in sickness, when immersion was impossible, had merely been poured upon. How could such a denial have arisen had not immersion been the regular practice? The standing of these persons is challenged on the ground that they have merely received pouring. Does not this prove conclusively that pouring was only an exceptional usage? And, regarding affusion or aspersion, all that Cyprian asks is that it be not condemned in the case of the sick, in cases where immersion is absolutely out of the question. He does not even intimate that the use of pouring would be

proper in ordinary cases. He proceeds on the assumption that when immersion is practicable, the convert is, of course, to be immersed. The use of affusion, in cases other than that of necessity, is plainly something which was never thought of by any one at that day. His elaborate argument, that affusion might be used in extraordinary cases, is proof positive that in ordinary cases it was never employed. To prove, then, that the baptism of the early Church was immersion, we need cite merely this one document. This epistle of Cyprian to Magnus settles the matter beyond any question.

But other passages, to the same effect, may be cited in abundance from the writings of the second and third centuries.

That ancient document, called The Epistle of Barnabas, one of the earliest writings of the post-apostolic Church; speaks of baptism as a descent into and emersion from the water; and this form of speech is used by many of the Fathers.

The Shepherd of Hermas, in fanciful imagery, represents baptism by the rolling into the water of the stones of which the tower, representing the Church, is to be built.

Clemens Alexandrinus speaks of baptism as a birth from water as from a mother.

Irenæus compares baptism to the dipping of Naaman in the Jordan.

Tertullian describes it by the word *mergitamur*. He compares it to the bringing forth of living creatures by the waters at the creation; to the lame man's dipping in the pool which was troubled by the angel; to the purging by the deluge of the iniquity of the ancient world; nay, he even finds a suggestion of it in the text, "another flesh of fishes."

Cyprian repeatedly speaks of baptism as a dipping, and says that "in the laver of saving water the fire of Gehenna is extinguished."

The ancient writers repeatedly compare baptism to the burial of the Lord. The baptism of Jesus is compared by