

IMMERSION ESSENTIAL TO CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

THE object set before us is to maintain the proposition, that *Immersion in water is essential to Christian Baptism.*

The point here involved is not by any means the most important of those upon which Baptists differ from many of their fellow Christians. The questions: Who ought to be baptized? and, What does baptism signify and effect? appear to us, so far as it is proper to assign degrees in matters of divine ordinance, to be of far greater consequence.

To insist on the scriptural act of baptism is a necessary consequence of a great fundamental principle, which was once held by Baptists almost alone, but which many of our brethren of other connections are now coming to share—the exclusive authority of Scripture. We do not say simply the authority, nor the paramount

authority, but the exclusive authority of Scripture. Baptism is performed at all, simply because the Scriptures direct us to perform it; therefore we feel bound to inquire what it is that they direct, and to do that. We cannot acknowledge any other authority. The opinions and practices of eminent Christians in past ages, yea of our own best friends, our pastors, our parents, must not be regarded, except so far as they may help us to determine what is taught on the subject in the Scriptures.

And it is not an inquiry as to the mere *manner* of performing a duty. The popular phrase, "*mode* of baptism," seems to us to beg the question. The real question is, What *is* baptism? Compare the case of the Lord's Supper. No Protestant insists strongly on any particular *mode* of observing the Lord's Supper. We may have our preference, and may recommend it—as sitting around a table, kneeling around a railing, sitting in the pews, etc.—yet we do not insist. But when the Romanist gives only the bread to the laity, reserving the cup for the priests, all Protestants cry out. The Romanist might say, "Why, does not the bread really

represent the great fact that Christ gave *himself* for us? Does not the body include the blood? May we not get all that is essential to the ordinance in taking the bread alone?" We—all who are commonly called Protestants—answer two things. First, to take the wine also, makes a more complete and expressive representation. Second, our Lord *told* us to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of him; what right have we to alter that which he appointed, as if we knew better than he? Now just the same ground do Baptists take as to baptism. They do not insist strongly on the mere manner and circumstances of its administration. Thus, it is a mere question of taste and convenience whether it shall be performed in a stream or a baptistery. Dr. Judson preferred to baptize face foremost. Even the practice of trine immersion, which was once very common, and still exists in some quarters, while it is in our judgment unwarrantable and improper, may be considered a matter of no great importance. The question is, not what is the most appropriate manner of performing baptism, but what is the act to be performed. And when any think proper to alter this act, we

object most earnestly, and for the same two reasons as in the other case. First, the act enjoined gives a more complete and expressive representation of those things which baptism denotes; in fact without it, the representation is grievously defective. Second, our Lord *told* us to baptize; what right have we to alter his appointment? He did not tell us to recline at a table as he was doing, and take bread and wine, but he told us to take bread and wine; and we do not insist on the reclining, we insist on the bread and wine. He did not tell us to be baptized in the Jordan, or in a river as he was, but he told us to be baptized; and we do not insist on the Jordan, or any river, or any other mere circumstance, but we insist on the baptizing.

What then do the Scriptures teach as to the action which constitutes baptism? Every one should try to decide this question for himself. It is the duty of Christian people to settle every religious question, if possible, by their own personal examination of Scripture. Luther contended for the *right* of private judgment; is there not a corresponding *duty* of private judgment?

A plain man of average intelligence has be-