

CHAPTER III.

ENGLISH BAPTISTS

In discussing this question in connection with English Baptists, it should be remembered that the titles Baptist and Ana-baptist, were much of the time used interchangeably, referring to the same people. As long as their enemies were able to control the matter, they persisted in dubbing them as Ana-baptists, notwithstanding the Baptists have always protested, claiming that they were not Ana-baptists, but simply Baptists.

Baptists have, through the ages, been great sufferers on account of persecution, but some of the bitterest persecution known to history, was inflicted on the Baptists of England during the century following the Reformation.

It would take a great stretch of credulity to believe that these persecuted Baptists would recognize their persecutors as proper channels for the administration of the ordinances of God's House.

Of the Ana-baptists, who operated in England following the Reformation, Owen says (Works, Vol. 13. p. 184): "The Donatists rebaptized those who came to their societies (churches) because they professed themselves to believe that all administration of the ordinances not in their assemblies was null, and that they were to be looked upon as no such thing. Our (English) Ana-baptists do the same thing." -Church Perpetuity, p. 343.

It will be seen here that the whole matter turned upon the authority of the administrator; no other point being referred to. The mode was not controverted, for it is a matter of open history that the Church of England immersed for the first hundred years after the Reformation.

It is admitted that the facts connected with John Smyth are not altogether as clear as we would like. (We may say, that this author seriously doubts the story of his baptizing himself.) But whatever the facts may be, it is an undisputed fact, that he and the Brownists had a heated discussion over the validity of administrations performed by the Church of England.

Armitage records the following: “When the Brownists left the English State Church, they objected to its hierarchy, liturgy, constitution and government, as anti-Christian. Smyth, therefore, broke with them on the issue, that if that church was apostate, as a daughter of Rome, then its clergy were not qualified to administer Christ’s ordinances. The Brownists, however, considered them valid, and called the English church their ‘mother’, while they denounced her as ‘harlot’, and ‘Babylon’; but Smyth, having been christened in her pale, concluded that he was yet unbaptized.

Bishop Hall caught this point keenly, and was severe on the Brownists when he opposed Smyth. He wrote: “ ‘You that cannot abide a false church, why do you content yourselves with a false sacrament? (baptism), especially since our church (Episcopal) not being yet gathered to Christ, is no church, and therefore her

baptism a nullity!...He (Smyth) tells you true; your station is unsafe; either you must forward to him, or back to us...You must go forward to Ana-baptism, or come back to us...All you rabbins cannot answer that charge of your rebaptized brother...If our baptism be good, then is our constitution good...What need you to surfeit of another man's teacher?...Show you me where the apostles baptized in a bason!'

“Smyth having rejected infant baptism also on its merits as a human institution, Ainsworth said, in 1609 A. D., that he had gone over to the abomination of the Ana-baptists.” -Armitage, p. 158.

Whatever may be said about immersion in England (and it is not the purpose of these pages to discuss this feature only as it affects this question), it is clearly apparent, that the Baptists of England made the validity of baptism rest largely in the administrator. Armitage says: “And there are many reasons for believing that this is a similar case, and that these fifty-three members of the same congregation declined to accept immersion from what they considered an unauthorized administrator.” – Armitage, pp. 165-166. Hence they sent Richard Blunt to Holland to secure regular baptism at the hands of the Dutch Ana-baptists. “He was immersed by the Collegiants at the hands of their teacher, Mr. John Batte. Upon his return he immersed Samuel Blacklock and the two immersed the rest (of the fifty-three) in 1641.” –A Review of the Question, p. 57.

Gov. John Hutchinson and his wife, Lucy Hutchinson, were leading Baptists of England in the seventeenth century. To show how they stood on this question, we quoted the words of Crosby :

“The former of these (methods) was, to send over to the foreign Ana-baptists, who descended from the ancient Waldenses in France or Germany, that so one or more receiving baptism from them might become proper administrators of it to others. Some thought this the best way and acted accordingly, as appears from Mr. Hutchinson’s account in the epistle of his treatise of Covenant and Baptism.”

Hutchinson says: “The great objection was the want of a proper administrator; which, as I have heard, says he, was removed, by sending certain messengers to Holland whence they were supplied.” – English Baptist Reformation, p. 84.

Crosby, who wrote in England one hundred years after Hutchinson, in the eighteenth century, says of this same event: “So those who followed this scheme did not derive their baptism from the aforesaid Smyth, or his congregation at Amsterdam, it being (from) an ancient congregation of foreign Baptists in the Low Countries to whom they sent.” –Ibid., p. 85.

These statements are not only important to show the facts they record, but they also show how these leading Baptists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries stood on this question. Whatever may be said about immersion earlier than this date

referred to, it is a fact, if these historians are to be relied on, that Richard Blunt went all the way to Holland, by church or congregation action, to be baptized, and the remainder of the congregation awaited his return, simply upon the ground that they would not receive immersion at the hands of an administrator about whom there was the least doubt as to his qualifications.

(This Blunt affair is of doubtful authenticity. Whether authentic or not, it proves that this was a live question in England, and that English Baptists stood for regular baptism by a legal administrator, or such question never could have been raised.)

We come now to the doctrinal statement of the English Baptists as found in their Confession of Faith. We take the first (1643) and last (1689) of the Calvinistic Confessions of the seventeenth century. The first of these has this to say upon this point: Art. 41 –“The person designed by Christ to dispense baptism, the scripture holds forth to be a disciple, it being nowhere tied to a particular church officer or person extraordinarily sent, the commission enjoining the administration, being given to them as considered disciples, being men able to preach the gospel.”

The latter of these (1689) says:

Art. 28 – “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, to be continued in his church to the end of the world. These holy appointments are to be administered by those

only who are qualified and thereunto called, according to the commission of Christ.”

The former of these was adopted by seven Baptist churches in London; and the latter by more than one hundred “Baptized” (Baptist) churches in England and Wales.

If language has any meaning it seems apparent that in both of these articles the administration of baptism is confined to the pales of the church, and must be performed by the authority of the same. In the first, it must be a disciple and also it must be a man capable of preaching the gospel. In the latter it confines it not only to the church, but to those called and set apart for that specific purpose. The seeming difference may be explained in this way: When the first Confession was adopted the clergy, of the State Church, had made themselves very obnoxious, and had assumed such authority as to create a prejudice with the Baptists against anything that savored of clerical domination. This article, no doubt, was intended to assert church authority on the one hand and rebuke an arrogant clergy on the other. When the latter Confession was put forth matters had changed up, and assumed a somewhat normal attitude. It would be hard to get stronger and plainer language than is found in the Confession of 1689. But, the question comes back: “Did the framers of these Confessions intend to confine the administration of baptism to the authority and agency of Baptist churches? Were they Baptists of the strict type?” This must be answered in the affirmative. There was a living link which binds

the two Confessions together. The name of William Kiffin is appended to both these Confessions. He was the first to sign the Confession of 1643, and the second to sign the one of 1689. He was a leader of Baptist thought in his day. When you would learn the doctrinal standing of William Kiffin and Hansard Knollys, you would know the doctrinal caste of the Baptists of England in the seventeenth century. Concerning Kiffin we find the following in Cramp's Church History: "The young man (Wm. Kiffin) became an independent inquirer, prepared to follow the leadings of truth regardless of consequences. Observing that some excellent ministers had gone into voluntary banishment rather than conform to the Church of England, he was induced to examine the points in dispute between that church and her opponents. He had been five years a member of the Independent church, then under the care of Mr. Lathrop, when, with many others, he withdrew and joined the Baptist church, the first in England of the Particular Baptist order, of which Mr. Spilsbury was pastor. Two years after that, in 1640, a difference of opinion respecting the propriety of allowing ministers who had not been immersed to preach to them—in which Mr. Kiffin took the negative side—occasioned a separation. Mr. Kiffin and those who agreed with him seceded, and formed another church, which met in Devonshire Square. He was chosen pastor, and held that office until his death, in 1701 (sixty-one years), one of the longest pastorates on record."—Baptist History (Cramp), p. 447, and Both sides, p. 22.

Such was the type of the Baptists who framed the London Confession of Faith. He and his church did not only reject the administration of the ordinances at the hands of unbaptized ministers, but made the preaching to them of such a minister a test of fellowship, sufficient to create a division in the church. Can any one conclude for one moment that such Baptists would tolerate alien immersion? or frame a Confession of Faith in any way favorable to it? or that they would even wink at it?

We would not undertake to say that there were not some individuals in England who held connection with Baptist churches that would tolerate alien immersion. And that they have grown more loose during the last century is admitted. What we mean to say is that the Baptists of England and Wales during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as a denomination, stood unflinchingly against all such innovations as alien immersion and mixed communion.