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BAPTIST PRINCIPLES

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BAPTIST PRINCIPLES

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PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION

THE continued demand for this little book shows that it is meeting an educational need. This edition differs from its predecessors only by the addition of some references to later books or by a few verbal alterations.

There is growing recognition of the need for more systematic instruction in our denominational principles. If we make no more of our distinctive position than some Baptists seem to do, there is no justification for our separate existence. On the other hand, right understanding of the meaning of baptism in the New Testament implies much more than the conservative retention of an ancient ceremony; it implies that baptism is a sacrament of grace. Those who follow the practice of the New Testament in administering baptism to believers only, ought also to follow it by more closely associating it with the baptism of the Holy Spirit; they are the only people who can do this without risk of "sacramentarianism," since they alone require those moral and spiritual conditions in the recipient of baptism which rule out a materialistic mediation.

H. WHEELER ROBINSON.

January, 1938.

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BAPTIST PRINCIPLES

INTRODUCTION.

“THE great object,” said one of the most distinguished students of history in the last generation, “in trying to understand history, political, religious, literary, or scientific, is to get behind men, and to grasp ideas.”* We do not know men until we realise their convictions, and penetrate to the permanent principles of thought and conduct underlying those convictions. A Baptist Church, by its presentation of Believers’ Baptism, claims more emphatically than any other to be built up of convinced men. This ideal it stands for, and offers as its characteristic contribution to the religious life of the world. As members of a Baptist Church, therefore, even more than of any other, we ought to grasp the ideas that justify its existence, chief amongst which is the necessity of personal conviction in religious life.

Baptists are sometimes regarded as Congregationalists plus a harmless eccentricity. There is a certain plausibility in this attitude towards Believers’ Baptism, because the earliest Baptist

* Lord Acton, *Letters*, p. 6.

Churches of England had their origin in the "Congregationalism" of the day and because the mode of Church government remains the same for these two divisions of the Church Universal. Yet there is a real difference in their tone and temper, not to be ignored by those who have any inner familiarity with both, and often impressing the impartial observer. Here are two examples of the impression made:—"The strong effort made to maintain unity of doctrine is an essential characteristic of the Baptist, as compared with the Congregationalist position, and throughout the whole body the teaching is very definite . . . the Baptist community is virile beyond any other Christian body . . . the Baptist Churches are a great spiritual force in London; and the religious influence they exert is very deep . . . compared with that of the Congregationalists it is far more intense."* By the side of this opinion of a well-known social observer, we may place that of a well-known historian, with his eye turned on the origin of the two denominations:—"The weakness of Congregationalism lay in the fact that it was too purely a protest. The more logical and consistent system of the Anabaptists (*i.e.*, English Baptists) contained all that the Congregationalists strove for, and went further. . . . The aim of the Baptists is higher than that of the Congregationalists, who discarded the idea of a visible Church that they might affirm the rights of separate congregations.

* Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*. Third Series. Vol. vii., pp. 121-128.

The Baptists, on the other hand, affirmed the right of freedom from outward control not as an object in itself, but as a condition necessary for the discharge of their duty to create a visible Church of perfect purity.* These words are quoted, not to minister to Baptist self-complacency, but to rebuke that cheap and tasteless witticism which sometimes describes the difference between the sister denominations as one of little or much water. The difference is a real one, whatever we may think of its value. But, in granting its existence, the cause can lie only in that assertion of Believers' Baptism which characterises Baptists.

It is sometimes urged, even by those who are in general sympathy with the ideas for which Baptists stand, that this emphasis is both unspiritual and unnecessary.† It is said to be unspiritual because it lays stress on an external act, whereas the essence of Nonconformity is "the spirit which exalts life above organisation."‡ We might fairly answer that the name we bear, which does throw an external rite into prominence, was first given us by others (*i.e.*, in the form "Anabaptist"), and not chosen by ourselves, any more than the name "Quaker" or "Methodist." Moreover, this criticism should properly come from those only who have discarded the external rite of baptism in *any* form (e.g., the Society of Friends), and not from those who retain

* Creighton, *Historical Lectures and Addresses*, pp. 54, 64. I am indebted to Dr. Whitley for this reference, and for suggestions as to some other points in this chapter.

† *E.g.*, by Clark, *History of English Nonconformity*, pp. 302f.

‡ *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

it in a mode and meaning for which no New Testament basis can be found. But we can answer from a higher level when we have once grasped the idea which underlies this rite and justifies its continuance, the idea of a spiritual change wrought in human nature by the Spirit of God in Christ. The New Testament describes this change as a "new birth," *i.e.*, a new beginning of life.* But it is not like natural birth, an event of which the new life is itself unconscious; it is not wrought against a man's will, but with it, and that surrender of the will is called "faith." † Both aspects of this experience find expression in Believers' Baptism, which implies both a profession of faith and a change of heart. This is the primary meaning of baptism to a Baptist; he values the external rite just as far as it means this, and no further. To emphasise Believers' Baptism is to emphasise *this*; how, then, can it be called an unspiritual emphasis, if the spiritual is to be allowed to find expression in material signs at all? The same answer really meets the second part of the criticism, *i.e.*, that the testimony of separate Baptist Churches to such spiritual truths is unnecessary. If these truths are important—and surely they are of paramount importance in the Gospel of the New Testament—the clearest testimony to them is also necessary. Members of other Christian Churches may, and often do, hold Baptist convictions as

* John iii. 3f.; cf. Gal. vi. 15.

† John i. 12, vii. 17; cf. 1 Ep. John v. 1: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God."

earnestly as do members of Baptist Churches. But individual conviction on the part of some does not make unnecessary collective witness towards all. Both criticisms, in fact, spring from the idea that baptism is, after all, a little thing. But it is not a little thing in its spiritual meaning to the Baptist, any more than it is a little thing in its sacramental meaning to the Anglican. It is a little thing only to those who have first made it little.*

The Baptist Churches, therefore, claim to exist as the representatives of a still living idea, of fundamental importance in Christian life. If they lose it themselves, they become its melancholy monument; if they keep it, it will keep them. Here we shall review: (1) the principles implied in the Believers' Baptism of the New Testament; (2) the process by which it came to be abandoned by the Church; (3) the witness of history to these principles apart from Believers' Baptism; (4) the return to Believers' Baptism, culminating in the Baptist Churches of to-day.

* See note § to pp. 14, 15.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION.

What do you think is the strength, and what the weakness, of the Baptist position? Ask friends of other Churches to write down frankly what *they* think, and compare their answers with your own.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRINCIPLES IMPLIED IN BELIEVERS' BAPTISM.

THE curious spectator of the distinctive rites of a Baptist Church, who knows nothing of the history of Believers' Baptism, usually regards it as a peculiar and unattractive innovation on Christian use and wont. He wonders why the highly inconvenient practice of immersion has replaced the aspersion or sprinkling with which he is probably familiar; he may also notice that more or less grown-up people are being immersed, and may ask why children are excluded from the supposed benefits of the rite. Tell him that what he has seen is no innovation, but a simple return to primitive Christian custom, and let him convince himself by enquiry that this is the case, and he is likely to swing to the opposite pole, and demand the reason for such narrow conservatism. He will hardly do justice to the Baptist position until his attention is turned from the obvious facts of the manner of baptism, and its limitation to the adult, that he may consider the less obvious but more fundamental *idea* it incorporates. Conservatism is an essential condition of progress, when it conserves something of permanent value. In this sense, then, Baptists are conservative; their denominational name means that

they retain a New Testament rite in its New Testament meaning; their principles gather round it as their sole and adequate confession of faith. If they are asked what they understand to be the New Testament meaning of this rite, the answer can be put into a sentence. *The baptism of the New Testament is the immersion of intelligent persons, as the expressive accompaniment of their entrance into a new life of moral and spiritual relationship to God in Christ.*

There is nothing peculiar to Christianity in baptism; it is a custom found amongst many peoples, with whom the solemn washing of the body, as a religious ceremony, is believed to purify the soul from evil.* It is more than a symbol, for it is held to have a mysterious potency in its own right. Something of this we may see in the "washings" of the Old Testament, such as the cleansings of Naaman, or the purification of the priest.† In New Testament times, baptism was familiar enough to Judaism, as one of the three requirements from the proselyte, the others being circumcision and the offering of a sacrifice.‡ This baptism was a cleansing from the stains of heathenism, and a consecration of the new member of the chosen people. It was certainly not designed for infants, since instruction preceded it. The candidate immersed himself, after being addressed by the

* Examples of such baptisms, infant and adult, are given in the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. ii., pp. 367f.

† 2 Kings v. 14, cf. Lev. xiv. 8; Ex. xxix. 4.

‡ Baptism, it should be noted, did *not* replace circumcision, as has often been argued, since circumcision was required in addition to it.

Rabbis, whilst standing in the water. It was perfectly natural, therefore, that John, who came to be known as "the baptiser," should borrow an existent and familiar religious practice, and adapt it to his own needs. But, in borrowing it, he gave it a new meaning, and transformed it into something it had never been before. It had been a ceremonial purification; he made it the pledge of a moral conversion, the utterance of a new purpose. The moral earnestness of John made baptism itself moral, and prepared for the yet fuller meaning it was to have for the disciples of Christ. When He came forward, He was first baptised with John's baptism, and proclaimed John's message, as though to remind us that, whatever else Christian baptism may mean, it means something profoundly moral.* The disciples Jesus made outside the circle of those who had been baptised by John were themselves baptised, with His approval, if not by His hands, and the risen Lord was believed to have appointed baptism as the manner of entrance into the new faith for all men.† What, then, was the interpretation put upon the ceremony by those who were so baptised?

Baptism in the New Testament is so identified with the new experience it initiates that it is difficult to summarise its meaning without describing that experience itself. As Dr. Denney has said, "both the Sacraments are forms into which we may put

* Mark i. 4, 9, 15.

† John iv. 1, 2; Matt. xxviii. 19, 20; cf. John iii. 5; Mark xvi. 16.

as much of the gospel as they will carry; and St. Paul, for his part, practically puts the whole of his gospel into each."* But Christian baptism in the New Testament certainly means four great things, in the sense that these are its normal accompaniments. It implies a *cleansing from sin*: "Arise and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on His name."† It is linked to *the gift of the Holy Spirit*, the experience of those new powers which distinguish it from the baptism of John: "Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptised which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"‡ It is *administered to believers*, and there is no evidence § in the New Testament that it was ever administered to any but believers:

* *The Death of Christ*, p. 137 (ed. 1).

† Acts xxii. 16; cf. 1 Pet. iii. 21; 1 Cor. vi. 11; Eph. v. 26; Heb. x. 22, 23.

‡ Acts x. 47; cf. viii. 16, 17, xi. 15, 16, xix. 1-7; Titus iii. 5; 1 Cor. xii. 13.

§ Occasional allegations to the contrary spring from faulty exegesis ("the holiness of believers' children," 1 Cor. vii. 14) or the "argument from silence" ("household," Acts xvi. 33), or failure to see the real point at issue (little children blessed, Mark x. 13-16). On these, see Rooke, *The Doctrine and History of Christian Baptism*, pp. 30-44. On 1 Cor. vii. 14, note what is said by the Anglican authors of the *International Critical Commentary* on 1 Corinthians (Robertson and Plummer), p. 142: "He is not assuming that the child of a Christian parent would be baptized; that would spoil rather than help his argument, for it would imply that the child was not [holy] till it was baptized. The verse throws no light on the question of infant baptism." See, further, the valuable note on Infant Baptism in "The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin" (pp. 550-554) by Dr. N. P. Williams, the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford, and in particular, what is said on p. 552:—"It must suffice to state that in the author's view the argument *a praxi ecclesiae*

“Repent ye and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” || For Paul, at any rate, it meant an *experimental union with Christ* in His redeeming acts, deeper in meaning than words can express: “We were buried therefore with Him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.” * If it is asked just what the outer act of baptism contributed to these inner experiences of forgiveness, regeneration, faith and fellowship with Christ, we must reply that *the New Testament never considers them apart* in this detached manner. The baptism of which it speaks is no formal act, but a genuine experience; on the other hand, the New Testament knows nothing of unbaptised believers. It is only when later generations separate the outer act from the inner experience that it is possible to press the words of the New Testament into the service of sacramentarianism on the one hand, or of the entire rejection of sacraments on the other. We shall see

[from Church practice] is the only, but also a sufficient, ground for affirming the legitimacy and laudability of Paedo-baptism: and that those who do not trust the instincts of the historic Church to the extent which this argument requires should in logic either abandon the custom altogether or interpret it solely as a picturesque and dramatic method of registering the name of the infant as an honorary member of the Christian society.”

|| Acts ii. 38; cf. viii. 12, 36, ix. 17, 18, xvi. 31-34; Gal. iii. 26, 27.

* Romans vi. 4; cf. Col. ii. 12; Eph. iv. 4-6.

that the later history of baptism is, in large measure, the history of this separation. It became possible to administer baptism to unintelligent recipients only through the transference of emphasis from the moral and spiritual to the sacramental side of the rite.

If justice is to be done to the Baptist position, a clear distinction must be drawn between the principle that believers only should be baptised, and the practice (which usually accompanies it at the present time) of baptism by immersion. Both the principle and the practice can appeal to the New Testament for their justification. There may be perfectly valid reasons for retaining the New Testament mode of baptism. But to equate the practice with the principle would be to stultify the principle itself, which emphasises the inner essential of faith, and declares that without it all external ceremonies are valueless. Baptists are sometimes called ritualists by those who have failed to grasp this principle, their eye being caught by the external act alone. Baptists would deserve the name if they asserted that the mere outward form of a ceremony could be comparable in value or importance with its spiritual conditions. Whatever value or importance can be claimed for the practice of immersion must be due to its ministry to spiritual truth, ranging from the duty of simple obedience to the authority of the New Testament, up to emphasis on the evangelical experiences which are symbolically declared by immersion. The essential principle of *Believers' Baptism* does not stand or fall with the form which that Baptism may take, however inex-

pedient or unjustifiable it may seem to us to abandon the New Testament practice. As a matter of history, the return to Believers' Baptism in Switzerland in the sixteenth century and in England in the seventeenth, as will be shown later on, was *not* accompanied in the first instance by a return to the practice of immersion. If those to whom we owe the origin of Baptist Churches in this country are not to be refused the name of "Baptist," then neither could we refuse that name to those who might feel justified in administering baptism to believers only, by affusion or aspersion.

If Believers' Baptism (considered apart from the particular mode of administration) be really central and fundamental enough to justify the existence of a distinct denomination to urge its claims, we ought to be able to show that great and permanent principles are implied in it. What, then, are the principles which logically follow from the acceptance of Believers' Baptism? The answer to this question is not, of course, a statement of the whole outlook, the entire body of convictions and doctrines belonging to Baptists in this or in any other generation. It is rather a summary of the truths which must be regarded as essential to the Baptist position, the permanent principles which run on from one generation to another, and gather around them varying expansions or applications suggested or required by the varying circumstances of each successive age. But it must not be supposed that, in claiming these principles as vital to Baptist faith and testimony, Baptists claim any monopoly of

them. Just because they are essential principles of the Christian religion, and of cardinal importance to its fullest operation, they will be found at work in many Churches, even alongside other principles or practices which seem to Baptists to be inconsistent with them. All that the Baptist has the right to claim is that his emphasis on Believers' Baptism is the best guarantee that these truths shall be recognised. In fact, his denominational position ultimately stands or falls with this contention.

In the first place, Believers' Baptism emphasises, as no other interpretation of the rite can ever do, the significance, the necessity, and the individuality of *conversion*.* If baptism be the accepted and generally recognised mode of entrance into the visible Church, as it is, in some sense or other, for all the Churches which practise it, then to confine it to believers is to assert in the plainest and most unmistakable way that personal faith is the most essential element in religion. But personal faith implies that victory of truth over the whole human personality, in thought and feeling and will, which we call conviction. The Christian Gospel rises so far above the purely natural instincts in its demands, and is so far-reaching in its consequences when it becomes a personal conviction, that we are justified in speaking of a changed nature, a new heart, a surrendered will. It is this change of attitude which is meant by the term "conversion"; it is the significance of this inner change, as the beginning

* See *Conversion, Christian and Non-Christian*, by Professor A. C. Underwood (1925), especially ch. ix.

of the Christian life, which is declared by the outer ceremony of Believers' Baptism, in accordance with its original meaning.†

The change of character which is thus signified by Believers' Baptism can hardly be called a little thing by those who are willing to grant its possibility. A man who is converted in the New Testament sense is one who has surrendered to forces immeasurably greater than anything he has of himself; one who has awakened to the overwhelming consciousness of a spiritual world brought to a focus before him in the Person of Christ; one who finds the little bay of his individual life, with all its little pebbles, and little shells, and little weeds, flooded by the tide of a great deep over which the very Spirit of God broods. The converted man, as has been said, is the convinced man, and to be convinced means literally to be conquered. The man thus conquered by the Spirit of God becomes, to the measure of his conviction, a lever by which human life is lifted. Convictions are the key to history; its chapters might draw their titles from the convictions of the world's great men. At each cross-road someone has arisen, having for his chief equipment not birth nor wealth, not intellect nor influence, but a conviction. Convictions lie at the back of life, and down among its roots. They have

† Cf. Gwatkin, *Early Church History*, vol. i., p. 247: "The primary significance of the rite in early times was confession before men"; Deissmann, *Paulus*, p. 89: "Baptism [for Paul] does not produce fellowship with Christ, but sets the seal upon it."

built our hospitals and churches, have framed systems of philosophy and the constitutions of states, have struggled for adequate expression in art and literature, have sent Columbus westwards and Carey eastwards. A conviction, when it is not a mere borrowed opinion, flaunting in the disguise of that which it dishonours, when it is not mere stubborn prejudice, buttressed by ignorance—a conviction meriting the name is worthy of all reverence, for from it, and from the heart that is possessed by it, flow the issues of life. There has been no conviction in history more stupendous in its consequences, more daring in its assumptions, than that which is expressed in a confession of Christian conversion—the conviction that the unseen God has stooped from His unimaginable throne above the universe, and has worked this miracle of grace in a human heart, changing its nature by the breath of His Spirit, and enabling it to say, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” Baptists cling to Believers’ Baptism because they can see no better way of recognising the supreme importance of this conviction, and of the conversion it actually works in those who are dominated by it. The criticism that Baptists are no better than other people, whether true or false, does not touch the present issue. We are concerned with the *effective* recognition of a vital truth, which many other Christians hold along with ourselves. We claim that this truth is more clearly expressed by Believers’ Baptism than in any other way, and that it is obscured by the adaptation of baptism to the expression of other ideas, which

were not original to it, even if some of those ideas be true in themselves.

One objection that is sometimes made to such an emphasis on conversion—that it tends to force the rich variety of Christian experience into too narrow a channel—springs from misunderstanding of what that conversion is which Believers' Baptism emphasises. Conviction implies an individual surrender to truth, and where there is individuality there must needs be variety. Baptists have sometimes erred by requiring conformity to one type of experience in conversion, but the mistake is not peculiar to themselves. In fact, the best safeguard against it lies in the clear declaration of the individuality of faith. Faith must be individual, if it is to be faith. It may begin in one truth, and radiate from that as centre, without failing to be genuine faith in its earlier stages because it is as yet incomplete, judged by normal Christian standards. One truth, it has been well said, was enough to make a prophet of the Old Testament. One truth, we may also say, makes a believer in the New. Bunyan's fine reverence for the facts of life is never seen more clearly than when he shows the humble beginnings of conversion. What Evangelist said to the Pilgrim was simply this: "Do you see yonder wicket-gate? The man said, -No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then, said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the gate." And just as it is a secondary matter where you start with Christian truth, so long as the truth is

Christian, so is it of secondary importance whether conversion be "sudden" or "gradual." We may be as ignorant of the dawn of our Christian consciousness as we all are of the dawn of personal consciousness. In fact, the more we study the psychology of conversion, the more apparent it is that such hard and fast lines as "sudden" and "gradual" imply cannot be drawn. Silent and unnoticed influences are shaping character, only to emerge, perhaps, in some overwhelming hour of intense thought and feeling; on the other hand, such hours reveal their full meaning to us only gradually. A genuine conviction is, in fact, the product of life as a whole, and not of any single one of its influences. It is built up like the coral reef beneath the visible ebb and flow of the tide, by a myriad unconsidered trifles. Many lines of preparation converge on that hour of opportunity, in which great issues are first clearly seen. Prayers have gone up from Christian homes, even at the cradle side; on those prayers, as on eagles' wings, believing hearts have risen to behold from afar the appointed hour of their child's conversion. The Sunday school has helped to bring the answer to those prayers; some friend or companion has become, even unconsciously, the ambassador of truth. The loneliness of a sundered companionship has made vital and winning the promise of a Saviour Friend; the firm grip of vicious habit by its very cruelty has provoked appeal to the Spirit's aid; remorse for the unforgotten sin has lifted on its dark wave some despairing soul, and flung it into

the haven of penitence, and the calm waters of the Father's forgiving love. We do not ignore these cumulative influences when we baptise those only whom they have brought to conscious faith and open confession. We do not forget the place which little children have in the Father's heart, and our responsibility for them to Him, because we wait until the years of adolescence have made them capable of an intelligent choice, and taught them the need of religion by the storm and stress of those very years. It is true that Baptists might well develop and systematise more thoroughly than they have yet done something corresponding to the early catechumenate, *i.e.*, the period of instruction in Christian faith and practice. But this, after all, is a question of method. In principle, Believers' Baptism leaves ample room for the fullest possible recognition of the claims of the child on the Church, and for the manifold variety of Christian experience into which that child may grow. Its central assertion is that conversion is not some stile opening on By-path meadow, leading to morbid gloom, but the one gate on the King's highway, through which every traveller must pass, though at his own time, and in his own manner.

In the second place, Believers' Baptism forms a *direct* link of relation to the spiritual authority of the New Testament, and of the Lord it reveals to us. No other baptism but that of believers, as we have seen, can find a precedent in the New Testament, which means that every other type of baptism is indirectly related to it, by way of the

authority of the Church, or the custom of the ages. Those who build their faith and practice on the authority of the New Testament, yet offer to the world a baptism other than that of believers, and inconsistent with its teaching, are contradicting their own position, and weakening their own testimony. Those who loyally continue the New Testament principle of Believers' Baptism are constantly thrown back upon that book for their justification. It means much in the way of education to be dealing with original documents, first-hand sources. To have the New Testament in one's hand, *as a necessary consequence of one's denominational testimony*, is the great safeguard against unscriptural teaching, the surest foundation for a faith that claims to continue the principles of the Reformation. This does not mean that Baptists, any more than other Christians, are committed to theories of the inspiration of Scripture which will not stand the test of enquiry. That which they are committed to maintain, by the very practice of Believers' Baptism, is the spiritual authority of Scripture, its unique and permanent worth as the spring and source of Christian faith and practice throughout the generations. That spiritual authority springs from Christ, and Believers' Baptism directly relates the believer to Christ, not simply because it is in His name (for this applies to all forms of Christian baptism), but because here alone there is *conscious* acceptance of His authority, *personal* submission to His will, the confession of *individual* loyalty. Many consequences flow from this direct relation to Christ, which

can be merely indicated. It gives the right of individual interpretation of Scripture, in the light of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. It asserts the spiritual priesthood of all believers, since nothing comes between the soul and Christ, no Church, no priest, no custom, however hoary and firmly established. It summons all believers into the apostolical succession of missionary labour, at home and abroad, for every one of them holds a direct commission from his Lord to evangelise, and is personally responsible for its fulfilment, according to the measure of his powers and opportunity. It secures the Gospel from being identified with the Law, even with the Law in the form of a creed, for it says in effect to the believer, "See, you have been brought to the feet of Christ your Lord, and nothing ought to come between your enlightened conscience and Him; work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure." Indeed, the Pauline interpretation of Christ essentially and intrinsically depends on the establishment of such a direct relation as is the ideal implied in Believers' Baptism.

Lastly, Believers' Baptism, as a result of the two principles already stated, carries with it an unmistakable definition of *the Church*, to which it is the door of entrance. The Church is a spiritual society composed of converted men who acknowledge the supreme Lordship of Christ. In this definition the full New Testament meaning must be given to the word "spiritual." The Church is the creation

of the Spirit of God; for the Spirit is the agent in that regeneration which is the Godward side of conversion, and in the completion of the work of "the Lord the Spirit." The three great metaphors used of the Church in the New Testament all illustrate this. The Church is conceived as built up of "living stones" that it may be "a spiritual house";* it is a family made one in the Father by His Spirit, "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God";† it is a body, animated by the one Spirit throughout its members, "dividing to each one severally even as He will."‡ We need not be surprised, therefore, that the New Testament so closely links the gift of the Spirit with Believers' Baptism, and indeed makes the experience of that gift the test of the rite. To recognise this, as we must do if we are faithful to the New Testament, does not commit us to any theory of baptismal regeneration. There are two distinct ways of representing the operation of the Spirit of God in regard to baptism. We may think of the external act, and the material means, as the prescribed channel of the work of the Spirit, and then the result is what is commonly known as sacramentarianism. Or we may think of the internal conditions, the personal faith and conversion emphasised in Believers' Baptism, and see in them the true realm of the Spirit's activity; "the Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of

* 1 Pet. ii. 5; cf. Eph. ii. 20-22.

† Romans viii. 14; Eph. iii. 15.

‡ 1 Cor. xii. 11, 12; cf. Eph. v. 30.

God.”* In fact, when we speak of Believers’ Baptism, we mean that baptism in the Spirit of God, of which water baptism is the expression. We can hardly exaggerate the importance of this experience as the common bond in the fellowship of New Testament Christianity. The consciousness of the presence of the Spirit of God gives to the New Testament Church a peculiar and subtle atmosphere, a transfiguration of common things in more than common light, a baptism of life and thought that makes all things new. The sense of illimitable and exhaustless vitality which impresses us as we read the New Testament is due to nothing so much as to this assurance of the immediate and ever-present activity of God. The emphasis on unseen energies gives a new value to all that relates to the Church—its sacraments, its organisation and ministry, its confession of faith, and the morality of its members. As there is one Lord and one faith, so there is one baptism in the energies of that spiritual world which Christ rules, and faith enters.† The Lord’s Supper is a communion of the body and blood of Christ,‡ but one enjoyed along the high-road of the Spirit, and not the valley path of a materialised presence. The ministry of the New Testament is, on its higher level, a ministry of gift, the service of those who can preach or teach or prophesy because of the Spirit of God given to them; even the lower ministry, the local ministry of “bishops” and

* Romans viii. 16.

† Eph. iv. 5.

‡ 1 Cor. x. 16.

deacons is appointed by the Holy Spirit.‡ No man can make the primitive and fundamental confession of faith, "Jesus is Lord," but in the Holy Spirit.§ The Christian character is summed up in the phrase, "the fruit of the Spirit." || All this ought to be implied when we speak of the Church as a spiritual society, and all this *is* implied when we accept Believers' Baptism. Baptists are the enemies of sacramentarianism, not because they deny the presence of the Spirit of God within the Church and its activities, but because they are bound by the principle involved in Believers' Baptism to look for that presence along the highest line of experience, and to find the true temple of the Holy Spirit in the human personality itself. Their testimony is the clearest antithesis to sacramentarianism because it brings into prominence the positive principle which replaces it. However true it be that they have failed to realise the great ideals to which they are committed—and perhaps the failure is more marked in regard to this doctrine of the Holy Spirit than anywhere else—they can still claim to offer the simplest, most direct, and most unmistakable contrast which the religious life of England affords to the conception of the Church as a sacramental institution. The contrast does not depend on the Congregational or any other form of polity. Baptist principles are, or ought to be, independent of external forms here or elsewhere. From the stand-

‡ *E.g.*, 1 Cor. xii. 28; Acts xx. 28.

§ 1 Cor. xii. 3.

|| Gal. v. 22.

point of Believers' Baptism, the Church is free, like its individual members, to work out its salvation in the forms which best minister to the truths for which it stands. If it be found that some kind of Congregationalism be most congenial to those forms, this is enough to justify its adoption, while leaving the Church free to change its polity from generation to generation, that it may the better preserve the permanent presence of the Spirit of God.

To this summary of the leading principles which spring from *Believers' Baptism*, there may be added some indication of the reasons which induce Baptists to retain the New Testament *form* of Baptism, viz.: immersion. First of all, though the manner of administration of the rite is quite subordinate to the principle that it is to be administered to believers only, there is an added closeness of relation to the New Testament in maintaining the New Testament mode. Some practices of the New Testament, such as the laying on of hands, Baptists in general no longer continue, and the actual mode of New Testament baptism might reasonably fall into the same class, if it could be shown that its practice was no longer expedient or advisable. But granted that there is no such reason, as Baptists maintain, then the continuity of form has a certain subsidiary value in contributing to the sense of direct obedience. He that is faithful in that which is least is in training to be faithful in that which is greatest. There is a strong simplicity in the adherence to Believers' Baptism which is symbolised, we may say, by the retention of its most ancient form, though that form

can have no spiritual value apart from the attitude of the baptised to it. Then, in the second place, baptism by immersion is an impressive and memorable landmark of self-surrender, and of confession before men. Properly administered, as it can be with ordinary care and fitting reverence, it can hardly fail to impress both the candidates themselves and those who stand by, in a way that no other form of the rite does. It is something to which the candidate himself usually looks back as an hour of peculiar consecration; it is a clear witness to the definiteness of decision, not lightly accepted. Thirdly, and most important of all, in the present writer's view, baptism by immersion takes the place amongst Baptists of a formal creed. Its symbolic significance, *i.e.*, the spiritual death to self, union with Christ, and resurrection of the believer, was emphasised by Paul; it expressed in vivid manner the very heart of Christian experience, as he conceived it. It is an action that speaks louder than words; by its unspoken eloquence, it commits those who are baptised to the most essential things. Yet it leaves each generation free to interpret the fundamental truths in its own way. It leaves much to each believer's loyalty to Christ, and the best things in spiritual life are attained only through such freedom. Give the believer that which baptism sets before him as the heart of his faith, and we can well leave him to interpret and apply that truth as the indwelling Spirit of God may guide him. In baptism by immersion, even more than in the Lord's Supper, we show forth the

Lord's death till He come. The washing away of sin, and the strength of a life already victorious over death, are linked with the death and resurrection of our Lord. Need we wonder, then, that even without any common written creed, the Baptists as a body are conspicuously faithful to evangelical faith?

Note on the term "Sacrament." There is no need for Baptists to be afraid of this word, which has its legitimate use in a New Testament sense. *Sacramentum* was used classically of the deposit in a law-suit, and of the soldier's oath of allegiance, the common feature being "something sacred." Christians used it in this quite general sense in the early centuries, *e.g.* of the Christian religion (Tertullian) or of the Church (Cyprian). Later on (Augustine), it came to denote a rite of symbolic meaning, a usage properly describing Baptism and the Lord's Supper in their New Testament sense. The term "Sacrament" is, indeed, often used to imply what Baptists would regard as a mechanical or material conveyance of grace; but this misuse of a useful term ought no more to discredit it than the misuse of the term "baptism" by non-Baptists make us give up *that* term.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION.

- 1.—Describe the most impressive baptismal service you have attended, and say what impressed you in it.
- 2.—Ought an evangelical Church to insist on a particular *form* of baptism? If so, why?
- 3.—Do Baptists sufficiently recognise the responsibility of the Church for young children, and their relation to the Church?
- 4.—What is meant by “conversion”? Give examples of the different ways in which it may come about.
- 5.—What ought Believers’ Baptism to mean in (a) Christian character; (b) Christian faith?
- 6.—What does the New Testament teach about the Holy Spirit *in relation to Baptism*? Are Baptists loyal to the New Testament in this respect?

CHAPTER II.

THE ABANDONMENT OF BELIEVERS' BAPTISM.

WE have next to review the gradual process by which Believers' Baptism came to be abandoned by the Church. As already stated, this process essentially consisted in the divorce of the sacramental aspect of baptism from its moral and spiritual meaning as interpreted in the New Testament. When the Church outgrew its Hebrew childhood and went to school in a Greek world, the home emphasis on the spiritual experience accompanying baptism was transferred to the outer act, with the result that the sacrament could plausibly be interpreted in a manner foreign to the New Testament. This may be clearly illustrated by the comparison of two well-known passages. The first belongs to the middle of the second century, and describes the custom of baptism as known to Justin Martyr, before there is any evidence for the rise of infant baptism :

“As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is

water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. . . . Since at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, by our parents coming together, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training; in order that we may not remain *the children of necessity and of ignorance*, but may become *the children of choice and knowledge*, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over *him who chooses* to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the Universe. . . . And this washing is called illumination, because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings. . . . But we, *after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching*, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptised person."*

Here it is evident that baptism is not represented as doing something apart from conscious faith. Now let us set by the side of this a passage from the fourth century, written by the great Augustine. He is describing the illness of an intimate friend, who shared his then anti-Christian views :

"He was sick of a fever, and lay long unconscious in a deadly sweat. All hope being at an end, he was baptised, while yet unconscious, nor did I care, for I felt sure that his soul would retain what he

* Apology i., 61, 2, 65, 1; Eng. trans. by Dods in the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, pp. 59-63. The italics are mine.

had learned from me, and that it mattered little what was done to his insensible body. Yet it turned out quite otherwise, for he was newborn and made whole. As soon as I could have speech with him—and that was as soon as he could bear it, for I never left his side, and we were bound up in one another—I ventured a jest, thinking that he would jest too, about the baptism which he had received, when he could neither think nor feel. But by this time he had been told of his baptism. He shrank from me as from an enemy, and, with a wonderful new-found courage, warned me never to speak so to him again, if I wished to remain his friend.”*

This example is the more impressive because it shows Augustine being convinced against his own judgment of the miraculous power of baptism on the unconscious subject. Anyone who will carefully compare the two passages which have been quoted may satisfy himself of two things. A great change has come over the interpretation of baptism within a couple of centuries, and this change consists in laying stress on the external act of baptism at the cost of its moral and spiritual meaning. Without such a change, the administration of baptism to unconscious infants would be inexplicable, because implying a contradiction in terms.†

The rise of this practice may be tersely summarised in the words of Professor Loofs, one of the

* *Confessions*, iv. 4; Eng. trans. by Bigg.

† Modern explanations of infant baptism as the sign and seal of a covenant with believers' children, or as the simple dedication of the child to God, may be plausible enough in themselves, but they are certainly not true for the ancient world. They are simply attempts to explain an existent practice by those who repudiate its original meaning. Baptists are more logical in their repudiation of the practice itself.

most distinguished and impartial historians of dogma: "Infant baptism, first demonstrable in Irenaeus, still contested by Tertullian, was for Origen an apostolic custom." * In other words, absolutely no evidence exists for the baptism of unconscious infants before 180 A.D.; the practice could be criticised by a distinguished thinker at the end of the second century; but by the middle of the third, it is old enough for its real beginnings to have been forgotten. In the case of Irenaeus the reference is indirect, but hardly to be questioned in view of the terms he uses. He says of Christ that "He came to save all through Himself; all, I say, who through Him are *born again unto God*, infants and little children, and boys and young men, and old men." Elsewhere he describes baptism as "the power of new birth unto God," so that he must be taken as referring to all these classes as the subjects of baptism.† Tertullian objects to the baptism of little children, not because he considers them to be incapable of receiving its benefits, but because those benefits are best reserved for later years:

"According to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children. . . . Let them come, then, while they are growing up; let them come while they are learning, while they are being taught whither to come; let them become Christians when they have

* *Dogmengeschichte*, ed. 4, p. 212. The useful anthology of patristic references under the title of "The Evolution of Infant Baptism," by T. Vincent Tymms, needs correction so far as the references to Irenaeus and Origen are concerned.

† *Against Heresies*, ii. 22, 4; iii. 17, 1.

become able to know Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the remission of sins? ” *

Within half a century we find Origen saying that “the Church has received a tradition from the Apostles to give baptism even to little children.” † His contemporary Cyprian expressly directs that infants should be baptised as soon as possible, on the ground that this secures the forgiveness of the “original sin” (the contagion of their descent from Adam) with which they enter the world. ‡ When Augustine elaborated the doctrine of original sin, and defended it against Pelagian criticism, a century and a half later, he could appeal to the existent practice of infant baptism as conclusive proof of that doctrine—a proof so far beyond challenge that the Pelagians were driven to invent a new explanation of a practice which they dare not impugn. §

But even when the custom of infant baptism was fully established, it was by no means universal. Baptism was often delayed until adult life, or the near approach of death, for the reason assigned by Tertullian. Novatian, for example, as we are told by a contemporary writer in the middle of the third century, “fell into a severe sickness; and as he seemed about to die, he received baptism by affusion, on the bed where he lay; if indeed we can say that

* *On Baptism*, ch. xviii.; Eng. trans. in ANCL, vol. xi. p. 253.

† *Commentary on Romans*, v. 9.

‡ *Ep.* 64; Eng. trans. in ANCL, viii., pp. 195f.

§ *Against two letters of the Pelagians*, iii. 26 (x); Eng. trans. iii., p. 327. Baptists have not realised that the dogma of “original sin” partly rests on the existence of the very practice they condemn, *viz.*, infant baptism.

such a one did receive it.”* The Emperor Constantine postponed his baptism until death was close upon him (A.D. 337), “firmly believing,” as his biographer tells us, “that whatever errors he had committed as a mortal man, his soul would be purified from them through the efficacy of the mystical words, and the salutary waters of baptism.” † The reason for such delay is clearly given by Augustine; owing to a sudden and severe illness in his own boyhood, preparations had been made to baptise him, when he suddenly revived. “And so,” he says, “my cleansing was deferred, as it seemed certain that I should be still further defiled, since I was to live; because, forsooth, after that bath the guilt and the vileness of sin would be greater and more perilous.” In fact, people used to say then, “Let him do what he likes; he is not yet baptised.” ‡

It was not until the fifth century that infant baptism became the general practice.§ About the middle of that century we find it enjoined on all, at least in the Syrian Church: “Let the lambs of our flock be sealed from the first, that the Robber may see the mark impressed upon their bodies and

* Eusebius, *Church History*, vi. 43 (p. 288 of McGiffert's trans.).

† Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, iv. 61 (Eng. trans. by Richardson, p. 556). Other well-known cases of adult (postponed) baptism are those of Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea.

‡ *Confessions*, i. 11.

§ The fullest account of baptism in the fourth century is supplied by the Catechital Lectures given by Cyril of Jerusalem to candidates, who are obviously adults, not infants.

tremble. Let not a child that is without the seal suck the milk of a mother that hath been baptised. . . . Let the children of the kingdom be carried from the womb to baptism." * Up to this time, the catechumenate, *i.e.*, a period of pre-baptismal instruction, had been an important feature in the discipline of the Church. In fact, many seem to have remained without baptism as catechumens, or as we might call them, adherents, of the Church throughout their lives. But the discipline provided by the catechumenate was now largely replaced by the penitential system which is characteristic of the Church onwards to the Reformation. Heathen peoples were now enrolled into the Church by the mere act of baptism, without anything corresponding to moral and spiritual conversion. We need not wonder, therefore, that children were similarly included as a matter of course. The obvious result was a marked degradation of the Christian standard of morality and religion. Let us listen to the words of a distinguished Anglican scholar, who cannot be accused of Baptist prejudice: "When infant baptism became general, and men grew up to be Christians as they grew up to be citizens, the maintenance of the earlier standard became impossible in the Church at large. Professing Christians adopted the current morality; they were content to be no worse than their neighbours . . . that which had been the ideal standard of qualifications for baptism became the ideal standard of qualifications

* Assemani, *Bib. Orientalis*, I., 221; quoted in *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, vol. i., p. 170.

for ordination; and there grew up a distinction between clerical morality and lay morality which has never passed away."* The contention of Baptists is that wherever the New Testament ordinance of Believers' Baptism is degraded to the custom of infant baptism, there will always be the tendency to a parallel degradation of Christian morality and religion. This contention is not met by saying that the necessary instruction and discipline can follow baptism as well as precede it. The majority of men will continue to believe that the baptism which has preceded the training has done something for them in spite of themselves, whether that baptism be interpreted as a dedication, a covenanting, or an act of sacramental efficacy. But morality and religion must necessarily suffer when the emphasis thus falls on the external act, rather than on the internal attitude.

So far our concern has been simply with the *subject* to whom baptism is administered, and nothing has been said as to the change in the *mode* of baptism from the immersion which is described in the New Testament,† to the aspersion or sprinkling which is common at the present time. This change came about in a perfectly intelligible manner, because circumstances might easily arise in which the original mode was difficult or impossible. This is clearly illustrated by a document probably

* Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, p. 140.

† Rom. vi. 4f. This is now generally recognised by scholars of all denominations, and needs no argument.

belonging to the beginning of the second century, known as "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles":

"But concerning baptism, thus shall ye baptise. Having first recited all these things [*i.e.*, the moral instruction known as 'The Two Ways,' which forms the first part of the treatise] baptise in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit in living (running) water. But if thou hast not living water, then baptise *in other water*; and if thou art not able in *cold*, then in *warm*. But if thou hast neither, then *pour water on the head thrice* in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."*

Here four varieties in the mode of baptism are indicated in their preferential order, viz., immersion in a stream, immersion in standing water, either cold or warm, and triple affusion, or pouring. This last mode of baptism is therefore recognised as valid at an early date, although immersion is preferable where possible. How far the practice of affusion prevailed in the early centuries we can hardly say. In case of sickness, immersion might be impossible, and affusion was the natural alternative, as is illustrated by what was said of Novatian above.† The prevalent type of baptism illustrated in early pictures is that of a nude youthful figure standing in the water, whilst the hand of an older man is on or above his head. Sometimes a stream of water is seen flowing from above. This

* 7 (Lightfoot's trans.; italics are mine).

† The objection to Novatian's baptism was not that affusion replaced immersion in this case, but that the baptism was accepted under the constraint of fear, and was never properly confirmed.

suggests a method of immersion or submersion somewhat different from that practised by most Baptists at the present time.*

The primitive mode appears to have been this: "The administrator and candidate both standing in the water, the former placed his right hand on the head of the candidate, and, pronouncing the baptismal words, gently bowed him forward till he was completely immersed in the water."† No evidence for aspersion (sprinkling) has been discovered within the first eleven Christian centuries. The facts as to the history of the mode of baptism are concisely summarised by Professor Drews as follows, and the summary should be remembered alongside that already quoted from Professor Loofs in regard to the subject of baptism: "Until Cyprian's time (A.D. 250) submersion was the prevalent custom, unless in peculiar circumstances. After the fourth century, it was customary in some Churches to replace submersion by a copious pouring on the head; the person to be baptised stood, however, in the water. The sprinkling of the head, as we practise it, first became the generally recognised custom after the thirteenth century, but only in the West. The Eastern Church still

* The average depth of 29 early baptisteries described by C. F. Rogers in *Baptism and Christian Archaeology*, is 3ft. 2in. The baptistery in the catacomb of S. Ponziano, Rome, is said to be 4½ft. long, 3½ft. wide, 3½ft. deep, which would be ample for immersion of a kneeling candidate (cf. the Paulician method).

† *The Archaeology of Baptism* (p. 31), by Cote, who gives references to the evidence for his statement. Dr. Whitley informs me that he has seen baptisms in Bengal by this method, borrowed from the Hindus at their daily immersions.

maintains complete submersion."* In England, dipping appears to have remained the standard mode of baptism until the middle of the sixteenth century, as is shown by the rubrics of "The Book of Common Prayer." As we shall see further on, the revival of immersion on the Continent came through some of the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, and in England through the Particular Baptists in 1642.

* In his article on the ritual of baptism in the leading theological Encyclopædia (*Realencyklopædie*, ed. 3, vol. xix, page 432).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION.

- 1.—Why was infant baptism substituted for Believers' Baptism, and with what results?
- 2.—In what different ways has Christian baptism been administered? What can be said for each?
- 3.—Can we defend our retention of Believers' Baptism on any other ground than the authority of the New Testament?

CHAPTER III.

THE HISTORICAL WITNESS TO NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES.

WE have seen that Believers' Baptism implies the three primary principles of conversion by conviction, loyalty to the Scriptures and the risen Lord they reveal, and the spiritual constitution of the Church. As a matter of history, all these truths were imperilled when Believers' Baptism was abandoned by the Church, a fact highly significant for its value. With the great Augustine, we pass into a period extending over many centuries in which the Church becomes a vast sacramental institution, an authoritative corporation vested with supernatural powers, controlling the secular arm in this world, and reaching far with its own right hand into the other. Her service to the world was often great and noble, and must not be forgotten. But her power to serve too often became a temptation to tyrannise. It is difficult for most of us to-day to realise the immensity of that power in the Middle Ages, for the progressive nations in the world have largely escaped from the influence of the assumptions on which it rested. The Church controlled the sacraments, and the sacraments were essential to salvation; the terrors of the world to come were brought home to men by the judicial

perils and social disabilities of those from whom the Church withdrew her protection in this world. The Lord's Supper, after the first two centuries, had been transformed from a thankful remembrance of the Lord, and, in particular, of His death, to a repetition of the sacrifice offered by Him. Baptism had been transformed from a personal confession of faith into a quasi-magical operation on an unconscious subject. To these two sacraments, thus transformed, there had been added a third, the Sacrament of Penance, which became in practice the most important of all. With these prerogatives in his hand, and the Church at his back, the priest was omnipotent, because having a monopoly of that which all men must buy. "Just as the Lord's Supper removes venial sins, and baptism the guilt of original sin, so is Penance appointed for doing away with mortal sins. . . . The whole religious life had its centre in the institution of Penance." * This towering background of priestly authority is the characteristic feature in the religious life of the Middle Ages. When we look for any independent assertion of those principles which spring from the abandoned Believers' Baptism, we must not look for it in the form of a continuously existing Baptist Church, nor even as always linked to Believers' Baptism. Baptist Churches do not exist in England, if we are to use words with their accepted connotation, until the seventeenth century; whilst the very extensive "Anabaptist" movement which arose on the

* Seeberg, *Dogmengeschichte*, Part ii., pp. 117, 159.

Continent in the early part of the sixteenth century was checked in its normal ecclesiastical development by the persecution excited by its excesses, and survived chiefly in the Mennonites. But, if we cannot expect to find Baptist Churches, we may reasonably look for the activity of the great principles of New Testament religion already noticed. Apart from the eventual return to Believers' Baptism, this activity may be illustrated from various attempts (a) to assert the spirituality of the Church; (b) to oppose sacramentarianism; (c) to revive Scriptural religion.

In regard to the prior truth of conversion by conviction, illustrations will recur to all, and they need not be amplified. Great souls can never be fettered, even by the very errors they may perpetuate. An Augustine would break through to God under any system of thought we might conceive; a Francis would see visions and dream dreams of the Eternal in any century. It need not surprise us, therefore, when we read the famous stories of the conversion of these men, to be lifted up into the realm of great issues, and of permanent values, above all controversy; for these men were brought by the experiences of life face to face with God in Christ. The voice that Augustine heard in the garden at Milan, and Francis in the little chapel of Assisi, is the voice of One who is the same yesterday, to-day, yea, and for ever, though our interpretation of His call will vary from age to age. Wherever there is religion at all, there will be the possibility of such experiences as these, for

man will be seeking God, as God is always seeking man. Whatever be the system of thought under which they live, great souls will find God. But for smaller men, men of the rank and file, the way of salvation needs to be made very plain if they are to find it. In an age which held that there was no salvation outside the visible Church and its sacraments, we cannot measure the average man's religion by the spiritual experiences of an Augustine, or a Francis, though we may be sure that many a lesser man, in spite of current superstitions, was feeling after God, if haply he might find Him.

As early as the middle of the second century, a classical example of spiritual protest against the growing ecclesiastical organisation of the Church is afforded by Montanism. This movement began in a part of the Roman Empire where Christianity was then strongest, viz., Asia Minor, and in that part of Asia Minor conspicuous for the intensity of its religious life, viz., Phrygia. The scattered Christian Churches were then being welded together into the Catholic Church, and Montanism was an instinctive reaction against the emphasis on the external side of the Church's life which accompanied, if it did not constitute, that consolidation. The form taken by the Montanist reaction was a return to the New Testament liberty of prophesying; this was naturally linked with the renewed emphasis on the nearness of the end of things, a New Testament doctrine which was fading away from the consciousness of the Church in general. The best modern parallel to Montanism is the movement which arose

under Edward Irving in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, and the parallel extends to the vagaries as well as to the truth that was urged in both movements. Montanus and his prophetesses were justified in asserting the New Testament emphasis on the Spirit of God, though not in identifying their own narrow outlook with the complete revelation of the "Paraclete," or new "Helper." They were right in recognising the perils of officialism, as later history has amply shown; but they did not escape the perils of their own unregulated enthusiasm. Their protest against the lax and worldly discipline of the Church of their day deserves our full sympathy, even though we must not extend that sympathy to their ascetic teaching and condemnation of marriage. It has often been pointed out that a movement which could win to itself a great thinker and a passionately earnest Christian like Tertullian, and a martyr so pure and lovely in thought and character as Perpetua, could not have been barren in great and permanent spiritual truths.

A further attempt to assert the spirituality of the Church, though on altogether different lines, characterises the followers of Novatian in the middle of the third century. The Novatianists were, and indeed called themselves, "Puritans." They shared entirely in the orthodoxy of their day, but they maintained that mortal sin after baptism disqualified for re-admission to the Church. Whatever we may think of their rigorism, we cannot deny the truth of their main contention, that membership in a

Christian Church ought to mean a changed character. It is significant that over against them, as their chief opponent, stands Cyprian, in whose hands the Lord's Supper first becomes a priestly sacrifice, the imitation of that which was offered on Calvary. A little later on, in the early years of the fourth century, the Puritan protest of the Novatianists was continued by the Donatists of Africa. Against the doctrine that ultimately prevailed, they contended that the continuity of the Christian Church lies in holy persons, rather than in holy institutions. For a century they may be called the Church of Africa, until Augustine, with imperial resources behind him to enforce his opinions, suppressed the schism. His victory meant the victory of that doctrine of the sacraments which characterises the Western Church. The holiness of the Church is held to lie in them, and in their efficacy; outside the Catholic, *i.e.*, universal Church, there is no salvation. It is true that Augustine recognised the validity of "heretical" baptism; but then its virtue was realised only when the baptised person passed into the one true Church. Henceforth the Augustinian doctrine of the sacraments prevailed, until the Reformation, though already there lay in the larger thought of Augustine himself principles from which that Reformation would spring. For he taught that the true congregation of the saints is a smaller group within the visible Church, and is ultimately decided by divine predestination—a doctrine really irreconcilable with that of sacramental efficacy.

But even as early as the twelfth century we have evidence of anti-sacramentarian testimony, not in one place only, but in many. * In the Netherlands and in Brittany, in Cologne and the Rhine districts, in France and in Italy, there arose men who traced the corruption of the Church to the falsity of its fundamental principle of the sacraments. In some cases, at least, as will be seen in the next section, this was accompanied by a return to Believers' Baptism, and there are indications, even where our information is too scanty for certainty, that its abandonment was blamed as one source of the existent evils. Thus, the Archbishop of Rouen writes of certain heretics about the middle of the twelfth century, that their teaching declares the sacraments to avail only for those who know, not for those who are ignorant of what is being done. "They condemn," he says, "the baptism of little children and infants, and say:—In the Gospel it is read, He who believes and is baptised will be saved, but little children do not believe, therefore baptism does not avail little children." † We may be sure that an undercurrent of such thought and conviction was flowing in the Church itself from this time onwards until its emergence in the Reformation, even though the evidence at our disposal does not allow us to trace any earlier forms of it in the Western Church. This, of course, is very different from suggesting that such convictions had yet given rise to Baptist

* For fuller details see Newman, *History of Anti-Pedobaptism*, chapter iii.

† Gieseler, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. iii. p. 389.

Churches. The movement as a whole is more properly described, on its negative side, as anti-sacramentarianism.

The more positive preparation for the Reformation may be seen in the revival of evangelical religion exhibited by various movements in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. If we seek for the common feature which unites the Waldensians, the Lollards, and the Hussites, we may, perhaps, best find it in their devotion to Scripture, including both their appeal to the authority of the Bible, and their efforts to promote its circulation. In this way they made possible that exaltation of the authority of the Scriptures which was the most effective weapon of the Reformers against the usurped authority of the Church. Waldo and his followers remained within the sphere of Catholic thought and piety, as John Wesley did within that of Anglicanism. It was the study of Scripture which, in 1773, won Waldo to the ideal of personal evangelisation after the pattern of apostolic poverty, and made him, in this respect, a forerunner of Francis of Assisi. Waldo was not concerned to attack the doctrine of the Church, but to assert the right and duty of laymen to evangelise. It was a reformation of Christian life, rather than of Christian thought, at which he aimed, though the opposition of the ecclesiastical authorities naturally forced his followers into a different position. The success of the Scriptural appeal may be measured by the fact that within a quarter of a century of Waldo's conversion to Scriptural poverty and piety

a Papal letter was necessary discouraging the use of the Bible by the laity (1199).^{*} Wiclif, on the other hand, started, like Luther, from the definite criticism of abuses, though, unlike him, without the positive content of evangelical doctrine. Wiclif's activity was stirred by the unpopularity of the hierarchy in the England of his day. His Augustinian views on predestination did not bring him into collision with the doctrines of the Church. Though he rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, yet he continued the Catholic emphasis on the sacraments; the central note of the Reformation—justification by faith—was absent from his teaching. Wiclif's essential contribution lay rather in the translation of the Scriptures, and in their dissemination through his "poor priests." His appeal to Scripture against Popes and Councils is unmistakable; by Scripture the institutions and doctrines of the Church are to be judged. The work of Huss in Bohemia directly continued that of Wiclif, from which it sprang, though Huss did not proceed so far as to deny the doctrine of transubstantiation. But his more advanced followers, the Taborites, carried the appeal to Scripture almost to its fullest issues. "No mediæval party," says Professor Newman, "came nearer to the Baptist position than the Taborites in their conception of the relation of Scripture to doctrine and practice. But they failed to see the inconsistency of infant baptism with the position they had taken, and perpetuated this

^{*} At the Council of Toulouse (1229) laymen were forbidden to possess a Bible.

non-Scriptural practice.” * This applies also to the two other movements here noticed. Neither Wiclif nor his followers denied infant baptism, and the Waldensians as a body seem to have maintained “the necessity of water baptism to salvation, even in the case of infants.” †

Of the Reformation itself it is not necessary to say more than will be said in regard to the Anabaptists in the following section. Here the aim has been to show that Baptists, in their return to Believers' Baptism, continue the line of vital religion which runs more or less visibly through the centuries. The value of such a return lies in the degree to which it gives fuller expression and clearer testimony to vital Christian truth. We have already seen that the principles here illustrated rationally follow from the acceptance of Believers' Baptism. That these principles are of supreme importance, at least for all those who value the Reformation itself, is beyond question. When they are seen on the larger arena of history, even though mingled with alien principles, their importance is confirmed. In view of current misunderstandings, it cannot be too often asserted that Baptists value Believers' Baptism not because of mere conservatism, or of superstitious trust in the rite itself, but because of their belief that it most effectively maintains these essential principles of New Testament religion.

* *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

† *Ib.*, p. 42.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION.

- 1.—What exactly do you mean by “Baptist principles”? In what do they differ from the principles of other evangelical Churches?
- 2.—Give examples from history of the revival of evangelical religion through the study of the Bible.
- 3.—In what sense is it true, and in what false, to say that there were Baptists before the Reformation?

CHAPTER IV.
THE RETURN TO BELIEVERS'
BAPTISM.

WE have so far seen that, though the only baptism known to the New Testament is that of believers, this was gradually abandoned by the Catholic Church in favour of the baptism of infants. We have found that the acceptance of Believers' Baptism implies conversion by conviction, belief in the spiritual authority of the Scriptures and of Christ, and the spirituality of the Church. We have also found these principles asserted from time to time in the history of the Church between the sub-Apostolic age and the Reformation, apart from Believers' Baptism. We have now to consider the chief instances of their occurrence in explicit connection with Believers' Baptism until the rise of Baptist Churches in the seventeenth century. Even if space were unlimited, the evidence at our command would not allow more than a series of vignettes without external continuity. Perhaps it is the more fitting that this should be the case, for the continuity of Baptist history does not depend on an apostolical succession of Baptists, but on the power of the New Testament to win new witnesses to its forgotten truths from age to age.

In the realm of the Western Church, no example of such a return to Believers' Baptism offers itself before the twelfth century. But a comparatively recent discovery has brought to notice a striking instance of such a return or survival in the Eastern Church. The Paulicians were previously known to us as a community of heretical Christians flourishing in the Eastern Empire in the eighth and following centuries, who were regarded by their opponents as Manichaean dualists. Whatever truth there may be in this accusation, as levelled against later forms of the movement, it does not seem to apply at all to the earlier, as revealed in the document called "The Key of Truth," an account of their faith and practice dating from A.D. 800.* Dr. Adeney (who devotes a chapter to the Paulicians in his book, *The Greek and Eastern Churches*) says, on the evidence of "The Key of Truth," "Ancient Oriental Baptists, these people were in many respects Protestants before Protestantism." † This verdict will be confirmed by the following extracts from "The Key of Truth," which are given at some length in view of their interest to Baptists, amongst whom they have hardly aroused the attention they seem to deserve.

The general position of the Paulicians in regard to the sacraments is thus stated by themselves :

"There are three divine mysteries, which He proclaimed from above to His only-born Son, and

* *The Key of Truth*, a Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia, edited and translated by F. C. Conybeare, 1898.

† *Op. cit.*, p. 219.

to St. John, the great prophet. First, repentance. Second, baptism. Third, holy communion. For these three He gave to the adults, and not to catechumens who have not repented, or are unbelieving" (pp. 116, 117).

It should be noticed that here, as elsewhere, the word "catechumen" employed by the translator has evidently lost its original meaning, and is applied even to infants. The assertion of adult, in place of infant baptism, is perfectly clear in such passages as the following:

"For as St. John taught first repentance and faith, and after that granted baptism, and then showed them the way, the truth, and the life . . . so we also must follow in accordance with this truth, and not according to the deceitful arguments of the tradition of others, who baptise the unbelieving, the reasonless, and the unrepentant" (p. 74).

"Thus also the Lord, having learned from the Father, proceeded to teach us to perform holy baptism and all His other commands at an age of full growth (*or lit.* in a completed or mature season), and at no other time" (p. 75).

"Therefore, according to the word of the Lord, we must first bring them unto the faith, induce them to repent, and then give it unto them" (p. 77).

"And the door of salvation speaks concerning believers and not unbelievers. . . . For in no wise at all do they know God, nor is their knowledge of Jesus Christ, and of the holy Church of Christ, that is, of the holy apostles. Moreover, they know not joy and sorrow, their father or their mother, and are like brass that sounds or cymbals that clash" (p. 87).

The mode of baptism of the adult believer is thus described; the administrant says:

“My little child, thou who wishest to be released from the bonds of the devils of Satan, what fruit of absolution hast thou? Tell it to us before the congregation. But the penitent, if he has learned and received the perfect faith, with unfeigned trust, shall at once come on his knees into the midst of the water, and say with great love and tears [the confession of faith which is given] . . . And then, as he that has believed completes his holy profession of faith, the elect one [*i.e.* the administrant] instantly takes the water into his hands, and looking up to heaven . . . shall directly or indirectly empty out the water over the head, saying: In the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit is baptised this man or woman—mentioning the name—by the testimony of the congregation here present.” [A triple pouring follows in the names of the three Persons of the Trinity] (pp. 96f.).

But even with such clear emphasis on Believers' Baptism, the recognition of the claim of children on the parents and the Church is not forgotten. On the eighth day after birth a species of dedication service is enjoined, with a prayer of singular beauty; the minister:

“shall comfort the parents with great love and give to them good spiritual advice, that they shall train up their offspring in godliness, in faith, hope, love, and in all good works . . . it is necessary for the parents themselves ever and always to give for instruction and study to their infant offspring as it were milk; and they shall not be at all sparing” (pp. 87, 88).

The prayer runs as follows:

“Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we beg and entreat thee, keep this catechumen from evil, and

fix Thy holy eye upon him, and keep him from all temptations of the world ; and give him life according to Thy good will, that he may pass through the season of his childhood and become acceptable to Thee, to Thy Son, and to Thy Holy Spirit. And bring him through to reach holy baptism, and call him under the shelter of the wings of Thy beloved Son" (p, 90).*

The minister himself is solemnly charged with his duty to the young of the flock :

"Ye, the elect ones, must observe the utmost care that they receive before baptism instruction and training, both of body and soul" (p. 91).

With the condemnation of infant baptism is associated that of other practices of the day :

"Ye are followers of your father, the evil one, who gave you his law, namely, to baptise unbelievers, to worship images, to make silver and gold into the form of an image . . . and to adore the same, to pry into the sins of men and women, to explore the same, and grant remission" (p. 86).

"Concerning the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not of any other holy ones, either of the dead, or of stones, or of crosses and images. In this matter some have denied the precious mediation and intercession of the beloved Son of God, and have followed after dead (things) and in especial after images, stones, crosses, waters, trees, fountains, and all other vain things ; as they admit and worship them, so they offer incense and candles, and present victims, all of which are contrary to the Godhead. All these things our Lord put under His feet when He said, 'I am the door'" (p. 115).

* The service might well become a model for a similar dedication of infants by Baptists, and is partly incorporated in M. E. Aubrey's *A Minister's Manual*.

The discoverer and translator of this remarkable document connects the Paulicians with the primitive Church, their conservatism being due to their geographical isolation, whilst on the other hand he sees their influence in the later rise of the Anabaptists and Socinians.* The peculiar Paulician doctrine of Christ, itself a survival from earlier ideas, must not blind us to the spiritual value of their testimony. Believers' Baptism, in the case of the Paulicians, is clearly linked to the cardinal principles of conversion by conviction, the authority of the New Testament and of Christ, and the spirituality of the Church, as the passages cited have sufficiently shown.

The first example of a return to Believers' Baptism within the Western Church is that of Peter of Bruys, in the first quarter of the twelfth century. Unfortunately, we are able to see him and study his opinions through the eyes of an opponent only. It is quite clear that he repudiated the baptism of infants in favour of Believers' Baptism, for in a summary of his "heresy" we are told :

"The first article of the heretics denies that little children below the age of intelligence can be saved by the baptism of Christ, and that the faith of another can profit those who cannot exercise their own; since the Lord says, He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." †

* The "Racovian Catechism" of the Polish Socinians (1605) equally rejects infant baptism in favour of Believers' Baptism by immersion.

† The original is given in Gieseler's *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. iii., p. 391.

In full harmony with this statement are some of the few words quoted from these heretics themselves :

“ But we await a time suitable to faith, and baptise a man, after he is ready to recognise his God and to believe in Him; we do not, as you charge us, re-baptise him, because the man who has not been washed with the baptism by which sins are washed away ought never to be called baptised.” *

There are four other counts in the indictment of these “ Petrobrusians ” (as they have been called after their leader), which are of considerable interest as showing the general outlook accompanying this assertion of Believers’ Baptism. They are charged with saying that sacred buildings are not essential to prayer, since God hears men praying in the tavern as well as in the church, in the market place as well as in the temple, before the altar and before the stall. They attack the current veneration of the cross, saying that it ought to be burnt rather than worshipped. They deny the repetition of the sacrifice of Christ on the altar. They allege that sacrifices, prayers, alms, etc., for the dead are of no avail. The earnestness of their opposition to the veneration of the cross is illustrated by the fact that it eventually led to their founder’s martyrdom, after twenty years of work in the south of France. He was burnt by a mob on a pile of crosses which he was engaged in destroying. But his work and testimony seem to have been continued by Henry of Lausanne. This “ pseudo-apostle ” of his, to use

* The original is given in *Neander’s Church History*, vol. viii., p. 339.

the enemy's title, was not like Peter of Bruys, a priest, but a monk, distinguished by his remarkable eloquence as a preacher of repentance, and a rebuker of clerical laxity. He lived until about the middle of the twelfth century.

The great Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century is properly regarded as continuing that revival of evangelical religion in the three preceding centuries which has been noticed already, and, in particular, the work of the Waldensians. As Professor Lindsay has said, in his excellent account of Anabaptism, "The whole Anabaptist movement was mediæval to the core." * The revived evangelicalism became a nucleus for the long gathering social unrest, and sense of economic injustice. The alliance of this distinct line of mediæval influence with the purely religious, in the more extreme forms of the Anabaptist movement, led to the tragedy of its practical destruction by persecution. The very wide extent of this movement, as brought out by recent research, may best be realised from Professor Lindsay's map, which shows its presence right across Europe, from the Eastern counties of England in the West to Poland in the East, and, south of this long line, from Switzerland and Northern Italy into Hungary. But this vast movement was very far from being the unity which its name might imply; it contained as rich a variety of both clean and unclean life as Noah's Ark. The baptism of adults was more or less associated with the movement as a whole, and this practice was

* *A History of the Reformation*, vol. ii., p. 441.

what caught the eye of the outsider, and won the nickname of Ana- (*i.e.*, *re-*) baptism. But we must not imagine that Believers' Baptism supplied the principles or inspired the practices which have made Anabaptism notorious, and in some countries still throw their shadow on the very name "Baptist." As an impartial historian has said of the form which Anabaptism took in Münster, for example, "the term by which it is known represents a mere accident of the movement as being its essence." *

We might represent the earlier history of the movement diagrammatically by an almost isosceles triangle, with its base line drawn from Münster in the North to Zwickau in the East, and its apex resting on Zurich in the South. We could then say that it is only in religious activities which centred in the apex of the triangle at Zurich that "Anabaptism" deserves its name. The movement that emanated from Zwickau at one end of the base (1520) and had Münster and Storch as its representative leaders, was as much socialistic as religious, and Münster identified himself with the Peasants' Revolt which ended so disastrously in 1525. Similarly, at the other end of the base, we have the attempt to establish a "kingdom of God" at Münster on fanatical and insurrectionary lines, which ended not less disastrously in 1535. In both cases we have to do with perilous and un-evangelical tendencies, which have nothing to do with the rite which was superadded to them. In fact, Münster

* A. F. Pollard, in *The Cambridge Modern History*, vol. ii., p. 222.

himself was not a "re-baptiser" at all, but continued to practise infant baptism.* It was George Blaurock, a monk of Chur, who in Zurich first revived Believers' Baptism, at the end of 1524.† It is for Swiss Anabaptism, which arose independently of Múnzer, and opposed his violence, that the title given is no misnomer, and is linked to the principles naturally implied in Believers' Baptism.

The step taken by Blaurock was the outcome of a discussion of the value of infant baptism which had gone on for the greater part of a year, amongst some of Zwingli's friends. It was initiated by Reublin's denunciation of infant baptism as "the greatest abomination of the devil and of the Roman Papacy." Such language may seem extravagant to us, but it was at least not more extravagant than the measures adopted by the authorities to suppress it, such as the drowning of Manz, and the scourging of Blaurock through the streets in 1527. We must remember, in regard to the baptism both of infants and of believers, that the meaning of a rite is given not so much by its theoretical definition as by the whole body of usage, the whole spiritual outlook which may naturally be linked with it, or deduced from it. These men who returned to Believers' Baptism were seeking to return to the simplicity and

* Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

† This baptism was administered with a "dipper," *i.e.*, by affusion, and affusion seems to have been the prevalent form of the rite amongst Anabaptists, though immersion was practised in some cases (*e.g.*, that of Uolimann in 1525). Hubmaier, for example, is said to have baptised more than three hundred believers from a milk-pail. Affusion was practised by the Mennonites.

purity of the primitive New Testament Church. "The real Church, which might be small or great, was for them an association of believing people; and the great ecclesiastical institutions into which unconscious infants were admitted by a ceremony called baptism long before they could have or exercise faith, represented to them an idea subversive of true Christianity." *

It was a misfortune, not only for themselves, but surely for the whole Church, that those of Zwingli's friends who returned to Believers' Baptism, as both the proper consequence and the natural expression of their convictions, were not able to carry the great Reformer with them. For not only were they at one with him in regard to the Lord's Supper—the point that separated him from Luther—but Zwingli himself at one time looked on infant baptism with a very doubtful eye. These men, after all, were simply carrying out Zwingli's principles to their full issues. Whether we think of the Scriptural appeal of the Reformers, or of the religious ideal of a direct and individual approach of man to God, the Swiss Anabaptists were in the direct line of Reformation faith. Had they but taught the Reformers that principle of the liberty of conscience for which Hubmaier, one of their best representatives, so earnestly pleaded, † how much less sorrowful and humiliating the history of Protestantism would have been! Had

* Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 443.

† A summary of his argument will be found in Newman, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-98.

they but made those apostles of New Testament faith realise the perils of a practice which contradicts it, how different might have been the position of Protestantism at the present time, in offering its convictions to a world that is largely heedless of them! There can be no form of infant baptism, *taken seriously*, which does not tend to weaken the sense of direct moral responsibility, which is the very heart of personality; for if we baptise infants we assert by an action louder than words that entrance into the Church of Christ turns on something else than personal faith. The failure of the Anabaptists to convince their fellow Protestants, in spite of the logic of their argument, and its widespread acceptance, was doubtless in large measure due to the unhappy association of the Anabaptist position with the Peasants' Revolt on the one hand, and the "kingdom" of Münster on the other. The universal condemnation of such excesses did more than nullify the power of the appeal to Scripture and to reason. It led to a persecution of Anabaptism so severe that the movement was paralysed, just as the pervasive influence of early Christianity would have been paralysed by systematic persecution, had Paul's letter to Philemon been a summoning of slaves to armed revolt. The great work of Menno Simons (1492-1559) was to unite and organise the Anabaptism that survived this persecution. It became the supreme aim of his life to develop that ideal of a Church of believers which is the legitimate and necessary consequence of Believers' Baptism. The chief troubles he had to

encounter were those that came from enforcing discipline; this is only to say that every great principle brings its own peculiar perils when it is pushed to extremes, and when men forget to see life steadily and see it whole. The Mennonite Church, which flourished particularly in the Netherlands, has an important historical place, through its influence on the Baptist Churches of England and America.

The Baptist Churches which arose in England in the seventeenth century can be traced along two distinct lines—the “General” and the “Particular”; the distinction is that between the Arminian and the Calvinistic systems of doctrine, especially as to the scope of the Atonement, and has nothing to do, as is sometimes imagined, with the very different question as to “close” or “open” communion. The earliest example of a General Baptist Church is that founded by Smyth in Amsterdam in 1609, a portion of it being brought by Helwys to London in 1612; the existence of a Particular Baptist Church cannot be proved before some date between 1633 and 1638.* In the case of the former, the influence of Continental Anabaptism is commonly recognised. “The General Baptists are an English

* Burrage (*Early English Dissenters*, i., 223) shows that an (unnamed) Englishman had baptised himself, and then others, in Amsterdam before 1600. The most convenient discussion of these facts in brief form is that of Shakespeare's *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers*; for a fuller account of the origins of the first General Baptist Church see Burgess, *Smith, the Se-Baptist, Thomas Helwys, and the First Baptist Church in England*; the documents relating to the first Particular Baptist Church are given in full, and annotated by Whitley, in the *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, vol. i., No. 4 (January, 1910).

outgrowth of the Continental Anabaptists, acting upon the Lollards. In some districts the Anabaptist element was very strong, especially the Eastern coast of Essex and Kent, to which immigration was very easy. In other districts the Lollard element was predominant, as in Bucks. and Berks. . . . their common aim was at a holy life, and this caused the two streams to blend." * There are instances of the persecution of some of these Anabaptist immigrants from 1535 onwards. The impression made by Anabaptist teaching is shown by references to some of their convictions in the Articles of Religion of the Anglican Church (XXXVII., XXXVIII., XXXIX.). But the relation between the Anabaptists of the Continent and the English General Baptists is even closer than this preparation of the soil for the seed sown by Helwys. His friend and leader, John Smyth, an English Separatist, † after migrating to Amsterdam to secure religious liberty, baptised himself there in 1609 by affusion, and it is natural to suppose that this was partly due to the surrounding Mennonite influence. Prior to this New Testament basis of Church fellowship, Smyth's community,

* Whitley, *Minutes of the General Assembly of the General Baptist Churches*, pp. ix., xii. Burrage, however, thinks "that Anabaptism had practically no influence on separatism in England before 1622" (*op. cit.*, i. 68).

† *i.e.*, one who had withdrawn from the State Church, in order to uphold a self-governing community of the regenerate, in opposition to the Anglican unit of the parish. *The Works of John Smyth* were published in two volumes by the Cambridge University Press (1915), edited by Dr. Whitley, who contributes an extensive biography of Smyth.

like that of other Separatist Churches of the time,* had been gathered on the Old Testament basis of a "covenant"; the covenant in the case of Smyth's community seems to have run thus: "We covenant with God and with one another to walk in all His ways made known or to be made known unto us according to our best endeavours whatsoever it shall cost us." From this covenant sprang the authority of the Church; in Smyth's own words: "the power of binding and loosing is given to the body of the Church, even to two or three faithful people joined together in covenant." † It is instructive to notice that Smyth comes to regard Believers' Baptism as the New Testament substitute for such a covenant; by this act Christians are bound together into Church consciousness and fellowship. This principle is reflected in the earliest Baptist Confession of Faith, drawn up by Smyth in 1610:

"The Church of Christ is a company of the faithful, baptised after confession of faith and of sins, which is endowed with the power of Christ. . . . Baptism is the external sign of the remission of sins, of dying, and of being made alive, and accordingly does not belong to infants."

This was the denominational principle brought back to England by Helwys, which was the characteristic feature of the first Baptist Church on English soil. It was reached rationally and

* Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 85; cf. p. 145.

† Quoted by Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

scripturally as the consequence of Separatist convictions, and Baptists hold it still to be the best safeguard of those convictions. With it, as an outcome of its spiritual individualism, is bound up the principle of religious liberty. It was natural, therefore, that the first English assertion of this should have come from the first Baptist Church in England. The first known statement is that of Thomas Helwys (1612) in *The Mystery of Iniquity*, which has been published in facsimile by the Baptist Historical Society. In 1615, John Murton, who had returned with Helwys, published a book maintaining the principle "that no man ought to be persecuted for his religion."* This liberty of conscience in religion is still expressed by Believers' Baptism, and is kept from becoming licence by the loyalty to Christ which that principle demands.

The evolution of Particular Baptists, in the earliest case which we can trace, presents an interesting repetition of the movement from Congregational Separatism onwards to its full expression in Believers' Baptism. A Church of Congregational Separatists had been founded in London in 1616, sometimes now called the "Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey" Church, from the succession of its pastors. According to the records of this Church,† a secession

* Leonard Busher's work, *Religion's Peace, or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience*, is a year earlier, but he may have been a Dutch Anabaptist, in view of Whitley's argument in the *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, vol. i., No. 2 (April, 1909), pp. 107-113. Burrage contests this (*op. cit.*, i., p. 278), but points out that the tract was written in Holland (*ib.*, i., p. 276).

† Given in the *Transactions*, *l.c.*

led by a certain Mr. Dupper took place in 1630, which rejected baptism by the parish clergy, to whom some members still resorted.* In 1633 other members were granted dismissal on similar grounds, but there is a reference to "Mr. Eaton with some others receiving a further baptism."† In 1638, there was another definite rejection of infant baptism on the part of another group, which is said to be "of the same judgment with Sam. Eaton."‡ Finally, in 1642, the mode of baptism by affusion hitherto practised was replaced by immersion. Richard Blunt was sent to make enquiries in Holland, where immersion had been revived by the Collegiants (at Rhynsburg) since 1619. There he was baptised, and on his return he baptised Blaiklock; together they baptised the others.§ From this group, it seems that the mode of immersion spread to the General Baptists, as well as to other Particular Baptists, so that it soon became the only form practised in Baptist Churches. The first (Particular) Baptist Confession to prescribe the mode of immersion is that of 1644:

"The way and manner of the dispensing of this Ordinance the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water; it being a sign, must answer the thing signified, which are these: first, the washing the whole soul in the blood of Christ; secondly, that interest the Saints have in the death, burial, and resurrection; thirdly, together with a confirmation of our faith, that as certainly as the body is buried under water, and

* *Ib.*, pp. 219, 225.

† *Ib.*, pp. 220, 230.

‡ *Ib.*, pp. 231, 221.

§ *Ib.*, pp. 232-234; cf. Burrage, *op. cit.*, i., p. 334.

riseth again, so certainly shall the bodies of the Saints be raised by the power of Christ, in the day of the resurrection, to reign with Christ."*

Further study of Baptist history can now be pursued in Dr. Whitley's very valuable book, *A History of British Baptists* (Kingsgate Press). But this review of the origin and history of Baptist principles should hardly close without some indication of the possibilities and prospects of Baptist principles, as they show themselves to the writer of these pages. It need not be said that such an outlook is simply a modest exercise of that liberty of individual judgment which Baptists have always claimed. There seems to be a great future for the Baptist Churches, if three conditions suggested by present-day needs are fulfilled. Those conditions are (1) catholicity through conviction; (2) the recovery of the New Testament emphasis on the Spirit of God; (3) the deeper recognition of individual liberty of conscience and judgment.

It is often said to-day that the older denominational barriers are breaking down, and, if not wholly removed, are yet largely disregarded. So far as this means the removal of narrowness of outlook,

* McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 185. A reference to a case of immersion in 1635, alleged by Burrage (*op. cit.*, i. p. 379), is not convincing. Leonard Busher's reference to immersion in 1614 does not prove the actual practice (*op. cit.*, i. p. 277). Dr. Whitley sends me (1925) the following note:—"The Blunt episode had a great influence on Londoners, but I am not sure that immersion was not revived earlier. John Taylor, 'A Swarm of Sectaries,' collected by Thomason in June, 1641, twits Spilsbury and Eaton with baptising at the Bankside. Thomas Lamb was 'ducking over head and ears in Severne,' as the vicar of Cranham told in a book that Thomason got on 5 September, 1642."

and bitterness of judgment, it is surely a sign of Christian progress. But so far as it springs from an unconfessed indifference to the principles which gave birth to the several denominations, it is simply a feature in the decay of genuine religious vitality. Men may fraternise because they have lost interest in the convictions that once separated them, as well as because they really love each other more. The only catholicity that is worth having is that which comes through conviction, not because conviction is lacking. It is sometimes suggested that Baptists ought to amalgamate with Congregationalists and drop their own distinctive testimony. If that were to be brought about, it would simply mean that a new Baptist testimony would arise from other lips and lives to replace that which had condemned itself. Yet such testimony does not mean, at any rate ought not to mean, the loss of that larger corporate consciousness which belongs of right to all who are members of the Church of Christ. That larger consciousness can be attained by all who feel their convictions deeply enough to enter through them into the common home of all spiritual truth, the common experience of all hearts God has touched. Baptists need more of this larger consciousness; they need to extend that historic sense they have been trained to feel along one line of conviction until they realise it along other lines of spiritual truth. The way to reach this "catholicity of conviction" would be through a more systematic teaching of Baptist principles, not in the spirit of narrow denominationalism, but in order to reach

through them the great spiritual truths shared with other Christian Churches.

In the second place, we need to recover more of that characteristic quality of the New Testament, which is specially linked to Believers' Baptism—the emphasis on the Spirit of God. It is this, more than any other single truth, which gives to the pages of the New Testament their expansive and vital atmosphere, the sense of great things to be and to do, and great powers with which to attain them. Its absence has more to do with our failures than we are ready to admit, for we may preach the New Testament Gospel without the energies of that Spirit which can make it the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. The recovery of this emphasis on the great things of the spiritual world, so much greater than our highest attempts to utter them, the witness to a baptism of the Spirit which exhilarates, expands, purifies the whole personality, intellectual and emotional and volitional—how much this would do to meet the growingly insistent needs of the world about us! Thought has changed and is changing; interests have shifted; some of the old appeals have lost their force, and only prejudice the eternal truths they seek to serve. The future, not of the Baptist Churches only, but of Protestantism as a whole, is at stake. Unless the Protestant Churches respond to the new demands the world is making upon them, they will surely meet with the fate of the Roman Catholic Church, and pass into the background, whilst the Spirit of the ever-living God creates for Himself new organisms

as His agents. The revival of religion will come, as all great and permanent revivals have come, in living relation to the whole national life, and will be felt by all the Churches that have not raised their barriers against its current. We need here the willingness to be led, and the patience that can learn to wait for the leading; but what is this but to say that we need a fuller, deeper, and more constant emphasis on the "spirituality" of the Gospel? To this Baptists are pledged by Believers' Baptism itself, for that Baptism, in its New Testament context, is always a baptism of the Spirit.

Thirdly, there is need for a deeper recognition of the principle of individual liberty amongst Baptists themselves. We stand for three great truths as a consequence of Believers' Baptism: the necessity of conversion, the inspiration of Scripture, and the spirituality of the Church. But we must beware lest we thrust into the foreground any particular theory of these truths, as though the theory were itself the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Conversion is a spiritual necessity, but no catalogue of conversions can ever exhaust the ways by which the Spirit of God may lead a man into light. We need a wider, larger view of what conversion really and essentially is, in order to counteract the narrowness that would limit it to one particular type. Again, the inspiration of Scripture does not *necessarily* mean its verbal inspiration, as some Baptists seem to think. Whatever conclusion we reach as to the theory of inspiration, it is necessary to recognise

that the same truth may be expressed in other ways, even if not, as we may think, so adequately. This applies to all schools and types of thought. Further, the spirituality of the Church does not necessarily commit us to one particular form of polity and organisation; there are many ways in which baptised believers may organise their corporate life and service. Perhaps there is nothing that so hinders the efficacy of Baptist testimony to-day as the neglect of these warnings to respect the liberty of the individual conscience, in these three important applications. For that liberty is dishonoured by words and by judgments as well as by acts, and narrowness in these realms of personal judgment may alienate men from the truth as we conceive it, not less surely than did the more flagrant excesses of Anabaptism. Believers' Baptism means an individual approach to God, which no man can make for another, and every man must make in his own way. Let us grant, as well as claim, the fullest liberty.

Given these conditions, there is the clear promise of a growing success. There is a strong simplicity in the Baptist appeal, when once it is separated from the excrescences and accretions which have sometimes disfigured it, that makes it powerful to convince in many ways. Believers' Baptism is scripturally sound, psychologically true, intellectually free, symbolically rich in meaning. Its definite expression of a personal decision is attractive most of all to the young life that burns with loyalty to its own dimly seen ideals, and needs only guidance to find them realised in Christ. It is not fettered by a creed outworn, a

historic document that should be left to the student and historian; it makes a confession of faith that admits of new interpretation in each generation, without abandonment of the unchanging relationship of loyalty to Christ. It respects men's reason by its condemnation of sacramentarianism; yet it provides a connecting link, a point of contact with the spiritual forces of New Testament Christianity, which is enough for the religious needs of life. Believers' Baptism, as the distinctive testimony of a Christian Church, is an asset so great that it can hardly be exaggerated, when once we have taught men to see the permanent spiritual principles which it effectively expresses. If these principles are faithfully set forth, and adorned by the life they should inspire, they will conquer modern democracy for Christ not less effectually than when they brought Roman imperialism to His feet in the early centuries.

A fuller statement of Baptist Principles, as illustrated in the life and work of Baptist Churches up to the present time, will be found in the author's book, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists* (The Kingsgate Press).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION.

- 1.—Should Baptists hold “dedication” services for infants?
- 2.—What interest have Baptists in (a) Paulicians, (b) Petrobrusians?
- 3.—What is the connection between English Baptists and the Anabaptists of the Continent?
- 4.—Explain how there came to be both “General” and “Particular” Baptists. What do these names mean?
- 5.—Compare John Smyth with Robert Browne (the founder of Congregationalism).
- 6.—What contribution can Baptists make to the Universal Church? Is it necessary for them to maintain a separate denominational existence in order to make it?