

## The Revival of Immersion in Holland and England.

**T**HIS subject has been much discussed among Baptists since Barclay of Reigate published in 1876 his "Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth," and traced it back from England in 1641 to Holland, thence to Poland, and ultimately to Switzerland, in 1525. He named as his authority Professor J. G. de Hoop Scheffer; but curiously enough scarcely any writer in English seems to have followed up this line of inquiry. A storm of incredulity on the topic raged in America, but although the late Professor Whitsitt in 1896 drew attention to a monograph by de Hoop Scheffer, published as far back as 1883, it does not seem that this has been presented to English readers. In some quarters it has been confounded with an earlier monograph by the same author, dealing with the Brownists of Amsterdam, and therefore it is well to quote the exact title: *Overzicht der Geschiedenis van den Doop bij Onderdompeling*. In 52 pages it deals with the whole history of Immersion, from the days of the apostles, with abundant references and quotations in Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, and English. It may be worth while to lay some of his facts before our readers.

The novelty of immersion at Zurich in 1527 is attested by the savage decree of the Senate: *Aquis mergere qui merserit bap-tismo eum, qui prius emerserat*. Twenty years later the Socinians of Vicenza and Venice fled to Switzerland and became acquainted with the practice. Thence they went to Poland, Faustus Socinus himself arriving by 1551. Now in Russia the practice of immersion had been continuous, as indeed it is till the present day; and this influence had kept the Poles and the Letts equally conservative, so that Christians of every denomination were immersing infants. The Italians raised the question whether any should be baptized except believers, and this was discussed in two or three

## 32 The Revival of Immersion in Holland and England

synods. Stanislaus Farnesius at last took a decided stand for the immersion of believers only, and in 1574 the *Catechesis et Confessio*, published at Krakau, the first manifesto of the Socinians, declared *Baptismus est hominis Evangelis credentis, et pœnitentiam agentis, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, vel in nomine Jesu Christi, in aquam immersio et emersio &c.* Henceforward the Socinians in Poland, Lithuania, Pomerania, and Silesia adopted the practice. Silesia, we interpose, is to be noted particularly, because references to it in the story of English Baptists have been usually inquired into in connection with Schwenckfeld, and so have yielded no result.

A generation earlier, a Belgian was in this part of the world, and a descendant of his, Jan Evertszoon Geesteran, was born at Alkmaar in 1586, becoming pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church there in 1610. After the synod of Dort pronounced for high Calvinism, he was ejected, and came to the little village of Rijnsburg, on the Rhine, two miles below Leijden, where the Remonstrants were rather strong. A congregation had been formed at this village under the patronage of the brothers Van der Kodde, one of whom had been ejected from the Hebrew chair at Leijden. To these people, still plastic, he introduced the practice of the immersion of believers, and he himself was the first in Holland to revive the ordinance and submit to it in his own person, during the year 1620. It attracted some attention, for Geesteran was a man of mark, and was even invited by the Poles to become rector of the university at Rakow. He did not stay long at Rijnsburg, but organised similar societies in other towns, of which Amsterdam is the only one we need notice. The bond of union in any of these was very informal, and immersion never became obligatory; but it did become common, and abundant details are available.

At this point we take leave of Scheffer, and offer the result of investigation in other quarters.

At Leijden there lived in 1619 Jan Batten, who was a prominent member of the nascent community at Rijnsburg before Geesteran came. This we learn from a Remonstrant minister whose services he did not care for, Paschier de Fijne, author of an account of those early days to which all opponents of the movement were indebted.

Jan Batten moved to Amsterdam, a fact attested by IJpeij, in his *History of the Christian Church during the Eighteenth Century*, volume 9, page 189, a fact apparently unknown to English-speaking students of this whole incident, but one which leads to a far better comprehension of subsequent events. It is

to be noted that Batten is not known to have continued with the Rijnsburg circle long, and when he moved to Amsterdam he does not seem to have worshipped with the parallel Collegiant congregation there; Van Slee finds nothing about him in the Collegiant archives there.

In Amsterdam there was a Brownist Church, formed in London during 1592, whose headquarters had soon been shifted here. About 1623 John Canne became its pastor when it was in very low water, and in ten years it was flourishing again. He kept up a close connection with England, printed English books, and even began writing, so that he was a notable figure among the dissenters at Amsterdam. It is very probable that Jan Batten and John Canne became acquainted, for when, at Easter 1641, Canne was in Bristol, he was "a BAPTIZED man," according to Mr. Terrill in the Broadmead Records. He laid stress on immersion, and the distinction between it and affusion is discussed by Terrill in this connection. Observe that Canne's baptism by 1641 has never yet been accounted for, and the other fact that for several years he had been living in the same town with Jan Batten goes a long way to explain it.

The influence of Canne may perhaps be traced in this district by Wynell's Covenants Plea for Infants, published September 1642. The spread at Painswick and Gloucester he seems to connect with Thomas Lamb, who had also been at Norwich in February. But he asks, at page 57, What mark is there left upon your flesh, since you were washed in Severne, though you were duck'd over head and eares?

Now Canne was in touch with London, and in 1630 had been urging the church of John Lathorp to renew its covenant in a certain way, as may be read in these "Transactions," I., 225. Ten years later this same church had multiplied under Henry Jessey, and the question of immersion was raised. How did the idea occur? There are two obvious channels.

About 1595 Cyril Lucar, a Cretan, who had studied at Venice and Padua, then at Geneva, settled to work in Poland and Lithuania, where he, himself accustomed to the immersion of infants, must have known of the Unitarian practice of immersion of believers. He was chosen patriarch of Alexandria in 1602, and set to work to reform the Greek Church on Calvinistic lines. With this end in view, he sent many young Greeks to the Swiss, Dutch, and English universities. We have already suggested in volume I., page 230, that Emanuel Lucar of London in 1613, with his sons, Emanuel, Ciprian, and Mark, was related to him. Mark, in 1633, was a member of this church, and on 11 January,

## 34 The Revival of Immersion in Holland and England

1641-2, was immersed. As all the Greeks sent by Cyril, down to his death in 1637, were familiar with immersion, and recognised nothing else as baptism, the question may well have been mooted by Mark Lucar in this circle.

But it may also have come to their notice through Canne, who was well-known to them, and was keen on the point by April 1641. That he was involved in the matter is probable, because they sent Richard Blunt with letters of commendation to Holland, and he found his way to Batten's church; and it is emphasized in this connection by the latest historian of the Collegiants, Van Slee, that this church was at Amsterdam. Who else than Canne is so likely to have directed them? Kiffin did not begin his Dutch connection till after this time. It may be asked why they sent to Holland at all, when Canne was here in England; and as this difficulty arises on any theory at all, it claims a reply. Canne was an open-communion Baptist, and the very point exercising these people would lead them to look further in hopes of finding those who inclined to a more clear-cut position, for they speedily showed themselves rigidly Close-communion.

What was Batten's exact theological position, we are not in a position to say. On one point we may be sure, he was not a Calvinist, for the troubles of 1619 had arisen on the Five Points of Calvinism. And it is obvious that in another respect the Londoners who sent to him would be rather disappointed, the continuity of immersion. In Holland a perfectly new start had been made in 1620, when Geesteran was baptised by some one unknown, who presumably was not himself baptised, for it was expressly noted that this was the first case, and there is no mention of any but Dutchmen there.

This question of succession did trouble many minds then, and was discussed by Francis Bampfield in his extraordinary book, *Shem Acher*, 1681. The discussion was extracted by Benjamin Stinton about 1711 and was numbered 18 in his *Collection of historical matters*. Here Crosby saw it and used it to some extent, as is noted in our volume II., pages 85, 86. Bampfield was told by two members of the earliest London Baptist church, that their first administrator [Richard Blunt] was one who baptized himself, or else he and another [Samuel Blaiklock] baptized one another. This latter was the case with many of the baptizings in London, and has been paralleled more than once elsewhere.

Disregarding any claim of candidates and administrators, we note that the idea of immersion seems to have come to nearly all parties from the Greek New Testament, where the Greek word has no such meaning as "pour" or "sprinkle." There was

intercourse between them, but no succession, along the line of Richard Blunt, John Canne, Jan Batten, Jan Geesteran, the Polish Socinians, the Swiss Anabaptists. In this line the Collegiants, strictly speaking, do not appear.

These differences of theology may remind us of another Londoner, more likely to agree with the Collegiants in belief and practices. Edward Barber was a merchant tailor, connected with the community descended from John Smyth and settled in 1612 at Spitalfields, where he was ministering to it in 1640. This church was distinctly anti-Calvinist, and two years later Barber was opposing Kiffin. Up to this time there was nothing to show that these General Baptists had thought about the question of immersion, but once it was raised in the Calvinist circle, and discussed for several months, it could hardly escape notice in the older church. So two months after Blunt baptized the two groups from the churches of Jessey and Barbon, Edward Barber published the first pamphlet in England on the subject, arguing for Dipping. Within a few years most who had pleaded for the baptism of believers, added the further plea, that it be Immersion.

Those who desire to follow minutely the discussions and variations in England down to 1700, will find the principal facts set forth by Mr. Champlin Burrage in a pamphlet published first in the January number of the American Journal of Theology, since this article was written. It is a pleasure to find independent corroboration on some points, though Mr. Burrage does not observe that it was quite gratuitous on the part of Barclay and Dexter to introduce Rijsburg or the Collegiants into the English story; all the evidence points to Amsterdam.

W. T. WHITLEY.

Here lyeth the Body of Francis Smith [in Bunhill Fields], Book-seller [at the sign of the Elephant and Castle, near Temple Bar], who in his youth was settled in a separate Congregation [being licensed in 1672 both for Cornhill and for Croydon], where he sustained, between the Years of 1659, and 1688, great Persecution by Imprisonments, Exile, and large Fines laid on Ministers and Meeting Houses, and for printing and promoting Petitions for calling of a Parliament, with several Things against Popery, and after near 40 Imprisonments, he was fined 500l for printing and selling the Speech of a Noble Peer, and Three Times Suffered Corporeal Punishment. For the said Fine, he was 5 years Prisoner in the King's Bench: His hard Duress there, utterly impaired his Health. He dyed House-keeper in the Custom-House, December the 22nd, 1691.