

A History of the Baptists

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CHAPTER XIV THE BRITISH BAPTIST CHURCHES

THE existence of Baptist people and principles in England, extending back to remote periods, as related by the historians, is unusually clear and convincing.

Thomas Crosby began the first volume of his history of the English Baptists in 1738, with the story of John Wyclif.

This was the point where Neal had commenced his History of the Puritans. Crosby apparently had not, at the time he began to write, gone deeply into the subject. He had married a daughter of the celebrated Benjamin Keach, was a Baptist deacon, and taught a private school in Southwark. His brother-in-law, Mr. Benjamin Stinton, had gathered material for an English Baptist history. At the time of his death he had only finished the Introduction which was an account of foreign Baptists, in which he traced them back to the times of the Apostles.

Mr. Stinton died and the material came into the hands of Mr. Crosby, who had no intention of writing a history. After vainly trying to induce others to undertake such a work Crosby wrote the history.

The beginning by Crosby of his history of the English Baptists with Wyclif, and the statements he makes in regard to "the reviving of immersion," led to misapprehensions in the minds of some. There was much discussion among English Baptists in regard to the administrator of baptism, and Crosby gives an account of how certain English Protestants were in favor of reviving the ancient practice of immersion, in the time of James I., and again in 1633.

All of this had a confusing effect upon some readers. His history was immediately attacked by the Pedobaptists and criticized by the Baptists. The Rev. John Lewis, a clergyman of the Church of England, in Kent, wrote against Crosby at great length. He published a volume entitled, "A Brief History of the English Anabaptists," and besides this he left in manuscript form, in many volumes, his researches concerning the Baptists in England (Rawlinson MSS. C. 409. Bodleian Library). He was violent and venomous, but he gathered much valuable information concerning the Baptists. Crosby

replied to Mr. Lewis with spirit He says: "There were many Anabaptists and learned ones before the year 1600" (Crosby, A Brief Reply to the 'Rev. Mr. John Lewis, 20. London, 1738).

These criticisms led Crosby to take up the entire subject, and to make some original investigations. These studies led to his second and subsequent volumes.

If there was doubt as to the meaning of Crosby in the first volume there was none in the second. He is strong and clear. In the first volume he traces Baptists through foreign source's to the Apostles, in the second volume he makes out an English line of succession. No advocate of church succession would require a stronger statement. He says:

This great prophet John, had immediate commission from heaven, Luke iii 2, before he entered upon the actual administration of his office. And as the English Baptists adhere closely to this principle, that John the Baptist was by divine command, the first commissioned to preach the gospel, and baptize by immersion, those that receive it; and that this practice has ever since been maintained and continued in the world to this present day; so it may not be improper to consider the state of religion in this kingdom; it being agreed on all hands, that the plantation of the gospel here was very early, even in the Apostles days (Crosby, A History of the Baptists, II. ii).

Crosby gives a sketch of the preservation of immersion from the days of Christ to the beginning of the seventeenth century. He nowhere intimates that any Baptist church in England ever changed its practice from sprinkling to immersion. He assumes throughout that the Baptists had all along practiced immersion. He is at pains to point out that the Continental Anabaptists practiced immersion. He believed that immersion had been continuously practiced in England since the time "the gospel was preached in Great Britain soon after our Saviour's death" (II. 9). He says, in speaking of the opinions of Wyclif: "I shall only further observe that the practice of immersion or dipping in baptism, continued in the church until the reign of James I., or about the year 1600" (II. xlvi). By church he evidently meant the Church of England, since he also says: "That immersion continued in the Church of England till about the year 1600." "Yet," he further says, "there were some who were unwilling to part with this laudable and ancient practice" (II. lii). He quotes with great approval Sir John Floyer, who says: "The age which has practiced sprinkling in England began 1644, and to the present year are 77 years" (Floyer, An Essay to Restore the Dipping of Infants, 61. London, 1722). Once more Floyer says: "Dr. Lightfoot wrote about 1644, near the time that sprinkling was introduced" (Ibid, 33). Such is the testimony of Crosby to the existence of Baptists in England.

No less important is the statement of B. Evans, who wrote an important history of English Baptists. He says:

The true origin of that sect which acquired the denomination of Anabaptists by their administering anew the rite of baptism to those who come over to their communion . . . is hid in the remote depths of antiquity, and is, of consequence, extremely difficult to be ascertained" (Mosheim, IV. cent, xvi. chap. iii. 429). No one conversant with the records of the past can doubt this. The whole facts of history place the truth beyond dispute. I have seen enough to convince me that the present English dissenters, contending for the sufficiency of Scripture, and for primitive Christian liberality to judge of its meaning, may be traced back in authentic manuscripts to the Nonconformists, to the Puritans, to the Lollards, to the Vallenses, to the Albigenses, and I suspect, through the Paulicians and others, to the Apostles (Robinson, Claude of Turin, II. 58). Dissidents from the popular church in the early ages, compelled to leave it from the growing corruption of its doctrines and morals, were found everywhere. Men of the apostolic life and doctrine contended for the simplicity of the church and the liberty of Christ's flock, in the midst of great danger. What the pen failed to do, the sword of the magistrate effected. The Novatians, the Donatists, and others that followed them are examples. They contended for the independence of the church; they exalted the divine Word as the only standard of faith; they enaintained the essential purity of the church, and the necessity of a holy life springing from a renewed heart. Extinguished by the sword, not of the Spirit,—their churches broken and scattered,—after years of patient suffering from the dominant sect, the seed which they had scattered sprung up in other lands. Truth never dies. Its vitality is imperishable. In the wild wastes and fastnesses of Europe and Africa it grew. A succession of able and intrepid men taught the same great principles, in opposition to a corrupt and affluent state church, which distinguished modern English Non-conformists; and many of them taught those peculiar views of Christian ordinances which are special to us as Baptists. Beyond all doubt such views were inculcated by the Paulicians, the primitive Waldenses, and their brethren. Over Europe they were scattered, and their converts were very numerous, long before the Reformation shed its light in the darkness of Europe (Evans, The Early English Baptists, I. 1. 2).

Adam Taylor, the historian of the English General Baptists, says:

But we may be permitted to state a few facts, which will prove that, in all ages of the church, there have been Baptists, who have heartily joined with the first Baptist, John, in pointing sinners "to the Lamb of God, which taketh

away the sin of the world" (Taylor, History of the English General Baptists, I. 1.2).

These are the most weighty historians who have written on English Baptist history. It is no less interesting to note that historians who are not Baptists give great antiquity to the Baptists of England. Barclay, a Quaker, who wrote a hook, in which he largely treats of the Baptists, says:

As we shall afterwards show, the rise of the Anabaptists took place long prior to the foundation of the Church of England, and these are also reasons for believing that on the Continent of Europe, small hidden societies, who held many of the opinions of the Anabaptist, have existed from the times of the Apostles. In the sense of the direct transmission of divine truth and the true nature of spiritual religion, it seems probable that these churches have a lineage of succession more ancient than the Roman Church (Barclay, The Inner life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth, 12).

The testimony of Professor David Masson, of the University of Edinburgh, is important because he gave the matter critical attention. He says:

The Baptists were by far the most numerous of the sectaries. Their enemies (Featley, Paget, Edwards, Baillie, etc.) were fond of tracing them to the anarchical German Anabaptists of the Reformation; but they themselves claimed a higher origin. They maintained, as Baptists still do, that in the primitive or apostolic church the only baptism practiced or heard of was an immersion in water; and they maintained further that the baptism of infants was one of the corruptions of Christianity against which there had been a continued protest by pure and forward spirits in different countries, in ages prior to Luther's Reformation, including some of the English Wyclifites, although the protest may have been repeated in a louder manner, and with wild admixtures, by the German Anabaptists who gave Luther so much trouble (Masson, The Life of Milton, V. 146-149. London, 1871).

Thus standard Baptist writers are reinforced by eminent historians who are not Baptists, but who have investigated the history of English Baptists. They all agree in giving great antiquity to the Baptists, and some of them assign an antiquity to them reaching to the days of the Apostles.

The first churches planted in Great Britain were Baptist churches. "The prevalence of Baptists in Britain," says Dr. R. B. C. Howell, "from the earliest times and in no small numbers, will be questioned by no one who is at all familiar with the religious history of the land of our fathers" (Howell, The Early Baptists of Virginia).

The tradition is that the gospel was preached in Britain in the apostolic age (Collier, Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain, I. 27); though it is difficult to ascertain who first carried it there. The Roman Catholic historian Lingard, who tries in every way to throw doubt upon the early progress of Christianity in Britain, is compelled to admit that in apostolic times "the Christian doctrines were silently disseminated among the natives" (Lingard, The Anglo-Saxon Church, I. 2. London, 1858). We see the light of the world shining, but we do not see who kindled it. Gildas, the most ancient British chronicler, says: "Meanwhile these islands, stiff with cold and frost, and in a distant region of the world, remote from the visible sun, received the beams of light, that is, the holy precepts of Christ, the true Sun, showing to the whole world his splendor, not only from the temporal firmament, but from the height of heaven, which surpasses everything temporal, as the latter part, as we know, of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, by whom his religion was propagated without impediment, and death threatened to those who interfered with its professors" (Gildas, The Works, 302).

Missionaries multiplied rapidly. The superstitions of the people gave way and the common people gladly accepted the Word. At length, in the year 180, Lucius was converted. He was the first king to receive baptism (Bede, Ecclesiastical History of England, 10). He and his people were baptized upon a profession of their faith (Fox, Martyrology, I. 1381), It is generally agreed that at this period many pagan temples were turned into edifices for the worship of the true God. Religion had spread so wonderfully that Justin Martyr said:

There is no nation; whether of Barbarians or of Greeks, or any other by what names soever they are called; whether they live in wagons, or without houses, or in tents, among whom prayers are not made, and thanks giving offered up, to the Father and Creator of all, through the name of the crucified Jesus.

Under Diocletian, about the year 300, the British Christians suffered a fierce persecution. Their books and churches were burnt, and many of them put to death. "God, therefore, who wished all men to be saved, and who calls sinners no less than those who think themselves to be righteous, magnified his mercy toward us, and, as we know, during the above named persecution, that Britain might not be totally enveloped in the dark shades of night, he, of his own free gift, kindled up among us bright luminaries of holy martyrs, whose places of burial and martyrdom, had they not for our manifold crimes been interfered with and destroyed by the barbarians, who have kindled in the minds of the beholders no small fire of divine charity" (Gildas, The Works, 303). "Whom I must regard as Baptist martyrs," says Crosby, "till the Paedobaptists convince me to the contrary" (Crosby, History of the

English Baptists, II. xiv).

Were these early Christians Baptists? Crosby makes no qualifications. He says:

Now In this inquiry, so much has occurred to me, as carries with it more than a probability, that the first English Christians were Baptists. I could not therefore pass by so material a fact in their favor. And because it cannot be placed where it belongs, I have fixed it by way of preface to this second volume (Crosby, II. To the Reader).

Further on he says:

The true Christian doctrine, and form of worship, as delivered by the Apostles, was maintained in England, and the Romish government and ceremonies, zealously withstood, till the Saxons entered into Britain, about the year 448. During which time there is no mention of any baptizing in England, but adult persons only. And from this silence of history, touching the baptizing of infants in England; from the Britons being said to keep so strictly to the holy Scriptures, in doctrine and in ceremonies; in which there is no mention of the baptizing of infants; and from the accounts of those who were baptized which expressly mention their faith and conversion, the English Baptists have concluded, that there was no such practice as baptizing of infants in England for the first three hundred years after it received the Gospel and certainly he would have a very hard task that should undertake to prove that there was (II. xii).

Davis, the Welsh Baptist historian, says:

Infant baptism was in vogue long before this time (A D. 600) in many parts of the world, but not in Britain. The ordinances of the Gospel were then administered exclusively there, according to the primitive mode. Baptism by immersion, administered to those who professed repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Welsh Christians considered the only baptism of the New Testament. That was their unanimous sentiment as a nation, from the time that the Christian religion was embraced by them, in 62, until a considerable time after 600 (Davis, History of the Welsh Baptists, 14).

There is no question that baptism was performed by immersion. The original word among the Britons for baptize means to dip (Richards, A Plain and Serious Discourse Concerning Baptism. Lynn, 1793). An instance of baptism is given by the Roman Catholic historian Bede. He says:

The holy days of Lent were also at hand, and were rendered more religious by the presence of the priests, inasmuch as the people being instructed by daily sermons, resorted in crowds to be baptized; for most of the army desired admission to the saving water; a church was prepared with boughs for the feast of the resurrection of our Lord, and so fitted up in that martial camp, as if it were a city. The army advanced, still wet with the baptismal water; the faith of the people was strengthened; and whereas human power had before been despaired of, the Divine assistance was now relied on (Bede, 31).

For the space of forty years the noted St. Patrick, a Briton born, preached extensively among the Irish, Scotch and Britons. The time of his birth, even the century in which he was born, is unknown. It was probably the close of the fourth century.

No certain data can be given concerning his beliefs. It can, however, be positively stated that he was not a Roman Catholic (Nicholson, St. Patrick. Dublin, 1868); and that he approximated in many things the doctrines of the Baptists. Cathcart (Ancient British and Irish Churches. Philadelphia, 1894) argues at length and with much ability that he was a Baptist. He did not hold to the Roman Catholic idea of church government, and he ordained one or more bishops in every church (Nennius, Historia Britorium, 3, 54). He did not believe in purgatory (Hart, Ecclesiastical Records of England, xxii).

In regard to the form of baptism Patrick practiced immersion upon a profession of faith. During his life he is said to have immersed one hundred and twenty thousand people. He baptized Hercus, a king, in the fountain Loigles, and thousands of others on that day (Todd, life of Patrick, 449).

His opinions on the subject of the Lord's Supper were equally meritorious. Sedulius, an Irishman, who flourished in the fifth century, tells us (Commentary of 1 Cor. xi), that our lord left "the memorial unto us, just as a person going to a distance leaves a token to him whom he loves, and as often as he sees it he may call to his mind his benefits and friendship" (Hart, Ecclesiastical Records, xvii). He also speaks of the elements of the communion as "the sweet meat of the seed of wheat, and the lovely drink of the pleasant vine." The Lord's Supper was taken in both kinds, and there was no mention of transubstantiation.

In the year 597 Gregory the Great sent Austin, or, as he is sometimes called, Augustine, to Britain to convert the Saxons. Gregory when a monk had seen some fair-haired Saxon youths, and when he asked them from what country they came, they replied from the land of the Angles, but Gregory thought they should more appropriately *be* called angels. He was

anxious to go on a missionary journey to this people, but he was so popular in Rome he was raised to the papal see. He did not, however, give up his cherished design to convert the Saxons. He could not go, but he persuaded Austin to undertake the mission, and Austin reached the country in the year indicated above. Austin was to offer them the most liberal terms, and allow them to retain all of their former practices, if they would submit to baptism. He was not to destroy the heathen temples; only to remove the images of their gods, to wash the walls with holy water, to erect altars and deposit relics in them, and so convert them into Christian churches; not merely to save the expense of new ones, but that the people might easily be prevailed upon to frequent those places of worship to which they had been accustomed. Gregory directed him further to accommodate the services of the Christian worship, as much as possible, to those of the heathen, that the people might not be startled at the change; and in particular, he advised him to allow the Christian converts, on certain festivals, to kill and eat a great number of oxen to the glory of God, as they had formerly done to the glory of the devil (Henry, *The History of Great Britain*, 111.194. London, 1800).

Austin met with success; the king and great numbers of the people were converted to his views, and baptized. They came in so fast that he is said to have baptized ten thousand by immersion in one day in the River Swale (Fuller, *Church History of Britain*, I. 98).

After his success with the Saxons Austin turned his attention to the British Christians to bring them, if possible, in subjection to the pope. The native Christians did not acknowledge the supremacy of Rome. They did not practice infant baptism. These and other questions greatly perplexed Austin. As he was not able to determine the questions, he wrote Gregory, who gave him the needed instruction (Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 45).

It was finally agreed that Austin should meet representatives of the Britons. In the conference which followed Austin said to them:

You act in many particulars contrary to our custom, or rather the custom of the universal church, and yet, if you will comply with me in these three points, viz. to keep Easter at the due time; to administer baptism, by which we are again born to God, according to the custom of the holy Roman Apostolic Church; and jointly with us preach the word of God to the English nation; we will readily tolerate the other things you do, though contrary to our custom. They answered that they would do none of these things, nor receive him as their archbishop; for they alleged among themselves, "If he would not now rise up to us, how much more will he condemn us, as of no worth, if we begin to be under his subjection(Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 71).

Austin affirmed that there were many differences between the Roman Catholics and the British Christians, and the Britons asserted that they were not subject to Austin and would not receive him as archbishop. They differed on the subject of baptism. The Britons did not baptize after the manner of the Roman Church. As there was no difference between them on the act of Baptism as all parties practiced immersion, it must have been on the subjects of baptism. There is no proof that the Britons practiced infant baptism. Fabyan, an old Roman Catholic writer, explains what Bede meant by "baptism according to the custom of the Holy Apostolic Church." Fabyan says of Austin:

Then he said to the: Sins ye wol not assent to my hestes generally assent ye to me specially in iii. things.

The first is, that ye kepe Ester' day in due fourme and tyme an it is ordayned.

The seconde, that ye geve Christendome to children.

And the thyrde is, that ye preache unto the Anglis the worde of God, as afortimes I have exhorted you. And all the other deale I shall suffer you to amende and refourme within yourselves, but they would not receave of theyr brethren peace, they should recieve warre and wretche, the which was put in experience by Ethelfirdus, King of Northumberland (Fabyan, The New Chronicles of England and France, I. 115. London, 1811).

Austin was true to his threat, and he did bring war and wretchedness upon the Baptists of England. Roger de Wendover says that "all of this came to pass in every respect as he had foretold, through the working of God's vengeance" (Roger de Wendover, The Flowers of History, 60). True to the principles of Roman Catholics, and Pedobaptism, an army was sent, with orders that the Britons should be slain, even though they bore no arms. About twelve hundred of them who came to pray are said to have been killed, and only about fifty escaped by flight. The facts in regard to Austin have been summed up as follows: "He found here a plain religion, (simplicity is the badge of antiquity), practiced by the Britons, living some of them in the contempt, and many more in the ignorance, of worldly vanities, in a barren country; and surely piety is most healthful in those places where it can least surfeit of earthly pleasure. He brought in a religion spun of a coarser thread, though guarded by a finer trimming, made luscious to the senses with pleasing ceremonies; so that many, who could not judge of the goodness, were courted with the gaudiness thereof. Indeed, the papists brag, that he was 'the apostle to the English,' but not one in the style of St. Paul" (Fuller, The Church History of Britain, I. 101).

The first instance of infant baptism on record in England occurred in the year 626. King Edwin promised Paulinus, the Roman Catholic archbishop, that he

would believe in his God if he would give him the victory over his enemy Quichelm, "and as a pledge of his fulfilling his promise, he gave orders that his daughter should be baptized" (Roger de Wendover, *Flowers of History*, 67). In the following year Edwin was immersed in York by Paulinus. On going with the king to his country place, the zeal of the people was so great, that for thirty-six days, Paulinus, "from morning to night, did nothing else but instruct the people resorting from all the villages and places, in Christ's saving word; and when instructed, he washed them with the water of absolution in the river Glen, which was close by" (Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 96-98). In like manner he baptized great numbers in the river Swale.

The Roman Catholics enforced infant baptism with great difficulty. The laws of the Northumbrians, A. D. 950, demanded:

Every infant to be baptized within nine days, upon pain of six ores; and if the infant die a pagan (unbaptized) within nine days, let the parents make satisfaction to God without any lawful mulct; if after he is nine days old, let him pay twelve ores to the priest besides (Wilkins, *Councils*, I. 228).

The 15th canon made in King Edgar's time, A. D. 960, reads:

That every infant be baptized in thirty-seven nights; and that no one delay too long to be confirmed by the bishop (Hart, *Ecclesiastical Records*, 196)

The Constitutions of the Synod of Amesbury, A. D. 977, were drawn up by Oswald, and required children to be baptized in nine days of their birth. In commenting upon this decree Collier, the English Church historian, says:

It is plain as will be shown farther, by and by, that the English Church used the rite of immersion. It seems that they were not at all discouraged by the coldness of the climate, nor thought the primitive custom impracticable in the northern regions; and if an infant would be plunged into the water at nine days old, without receiving any harm, how unreasonable must their scruples be who decline bringing their children to public baptism for fear of danger? How unreasonable, I say, must this scruple be when immersion is altered to sprinkling? (Collier, *Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain*, I. 471).

After the year 1000 the Paulicians began to make their appearance in England. In 1154 a body of Germans migrated into England, driven into exile by persecution. A portion of them settled in Oxford. William Newberry (*Rerum Anglicarum*, 125. London, 1667) tells of the terrible punishment meted out to the pastor Gerhard and the people. Six years later another company of Paulicians entered Oxford. Henry II ordered them to be branded

on the forehead with hot irons, publicly whipped through the streets of the city, to have their garments cut short at the girdles, and be turned into the open country. The villages were not to afford them any shelter or food, and they perished a lingering death from cold and hunger (Moore, *Earlier and Later Nonconformity in Oxford*, 12).

At an early date a Baptist church was located at Hill Cliffe, near Warrington, in Cheshire. English Baptists constantly mention this church as having had its origin far beyond the Reformation. The historian Goadby appears to give a fair representation of the facts. He says:

We have reliable evidence that a Separatist, and probably a Baptist church, has existed for several centuries in a secluded spot of Cheshire, on the borders of Lancashire, about a mile and a half from Warrington. No spot could be better chosen for concealment than the site on which this ancient chapel stood. Removed from all public roads, enclosed by a dense wood, affording ready access into two counties, Hill Cliffe was admirably situated for the erection of a "conventicle", an illegal conventicle. The ancient chapel built on this spot was so constructed that the surprised worshippers had half a dozen secret ways of escaping from it, and long proved a meeting place suited to the varying fortunes of a hated and hunted people. Owing to the many changes inseparable from the eventful history of the church at Hill Cliffe, the earliest records have been lost. But two or three facts point to the very early existence of the community itself. In 1841 the old chapel was enlarged and modernized; and in digging for the foundation, a large baptistery of stone, well cemented, was discovered. How long this had been covered up, and at what period it was erected, it is impossible to state but as some of the tombstones in the graveyard adjoining the chapel were erected in the early part of the sixteenth century, there is some probability for the tradition that the chapel itself was built by the Lollards who held Baptist opinions. One of the dates on the tombstones is 1357, the time when Wyclif was still a fellow at Merton College, Oxford; but the dates most numerous began at the period when Europe had just been startled by Luther's valiant onslaught upon the papacy. ... Many of these tombstones, and especially the oldest, as we can testify from a personal investigation, look as clear and as fresh as if they were engraved only a century ago . . . Hill Cliffe is undoubtedly one of the oldest Baptist churches in England, . . . The earliest deeds of the property have been irrevocably lost, but the extant deeds, which go back considerably over two hundred years, describe the property as being "for the Anabaptists" (Goadby, *Bye Paths of Baptist History*, 23).

The latest book on the subject is by James Kenworthy. He says: "On the subject of baptism they have always followed the practice of the Christians

of the New Testament and of the early churches — baptism by immersion or dipping" (Kenworthy, History of the Baptist Church at Hill Cliffe, 14).

Walter Lollard, a Dutchman, of remarkable eloquence, came, according to Fuller, into England, in the reign of Edward III., "from among the Waldenses, among whom he was a great bard or pastor." His followers rapidly increased so that Abelard declared "our age is imperiled by heretics, that there seems to be no footing left for the true faith." Knighton, the English chronicler, says: "More than one-half of the people of England, in a few years, became Lollards" (Knighton, col. 2664). Hallam says in his History of the Middle Ages: "An inundation of heresy broke in the twelfth century over the church, which no persecution was able to repress, till it finally overspread half the surface of Europe." The Clergy were so alarmed that they dispatched the Arch-bishop of York and the Bishop of London, to the King in Ireland, to entreat him to immediately return to England, to protect the church which was in danger of destruction." As soon," says a contemporary historian, "as the king heard the representation of the commissioners, being inspired by the divine spirit, he hastened into England, thinking it more necessary to defend the church than to conquer kingdoms" (Walsingham, Historia Anglica, VIII. 213). This address of the commissioners was occasioned by the Lollards having affixed a number of theses to the church doors against the scandalous lives of the clergy and the received doctrines of the sacraments (Collier, Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain, III. 213).

At this period, A. D. 1371, Wyclif was the greatest man in England. He was educated at Oxford and none doubted his learning. Knighton, who was his enemy, described him as "second to none in philosophy, in scholastic discipline altogether incomparable." The popularity of the doctrines of Wyclif at Oxford is abundantly attested by the reiterated complaints of Archbishop Arundel, who affirmed that Oxford was a vine that brought forth wild and sour grapes, which, being eaten by the fathers, the teeth of the children were set on edge; so that the whole Province of Canterbury was tainted with novel and damnable Lollardism, to the intolerable and notorious scandal of the University." She who formerly was the mother of virtues, the prop of the Catholic faith, the singular pattern of obedience, now brings forth only abortive children, who encourage contumacy and rebellion, and sow tares among pure wheat" (Le Bas, The Life of Wyclif, 278).

Thomas Walden, who had access to the writings of Wyclif, charges him with holding the following opinions:

That it is a blasphemy to call any "head of the church" save Christ alone. That Rome is not the seat in which Christ's vicar doth reside. That the doctrine of the infallibility of the Church of Rome, in matters of faith, is the

greatest blasphemy of anti-Christ. That in the times of the Apostles, there were only two orders, namely, priests and deacons, and that of bishop doth not differ from a priest. That it is lawful for a clergyman to marry. That he defined the church to consist only of persons predestinated. That those are fools and presumptuous who affirm such infant,, not to be saved who die without baptism; and also, that he denied that all sins are abolished in baptism. That baptism does not confer, but only signifies grace, which was given before (Fuller, *The Church History of Britain*, I. 441).

The above paragraph contains, as far as it goes, a satisfactory statement of doctrine. Upon the Lord's Supper and other matters of belief Walsingham says:

That the eucharist, after consecrations, was not the true body of Christ but only an emblem or a sign of it. That the Church of Rome is no more the head of all churches than any other church, and that St. Peter had no greater authority than the rest of the apostles. That the pope of Rome has no more jurisdiction in the exercise of the keys than a common priest. That the Gospel is a sufficient direction for the life and government of a Christian. That all other supplementary rules, instituted by holy men, and practiced in the monasteries, give no more improvement to Christianity than whiteness does to a wall. That neither the pope, nor any other prelate, ought to have prisons for the punishment of offenders against discipline; but every person ought to go at large, and have his liberty, both in notion and practice (Walsingham. *Historia Anglicana*, 191).

It is evident that Wyclif made great advances in reform over the Roman Catholic Church of his day. Year after year marked a further departure from Rome and her dogma. In nothing was this more manifest than in infant baptism. In the early years Wyclif firmly believed in the efficacy of infant baptism, but in later years he appears to have greatly modified his views. Thomas Walden goes so far as to call him "one of the seven heads that came out of the bottomless pit for denying infant baptism, that heresy of the Lollards, of whom he was so great a ringleader." Walsingham says: "That damnable heretic, John Wyclif, reassumed the cursed opinions of Berangarius" (Walsingham, *Ypod. Neust.*, 133), of which it is certain denying infant baptism was one. Collier expressly tells us "he denied the necessity" of infant baptism (Collier, *An Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain*, III. 185). The statement of Collier is unquestioned. Wyclif did not deny infant baptism itself, but the necessity of it. He did not believe that a child dying unbaptized would be lost (Wall, *History of Infant Baptism*, I. 436, 437). This was greatly in advance of the age and marked Wyclif at once a heretic and "an enemy of the Church."

There is no effort in this place to assign Wyclif to a position among Baptist martyrs, but there is no doubt he held firmly to many Baptist positions. Crosby, on the other hand, declared he was a Baptist and argues the question at great length. "I am inclined to believe that Mr. Wyclif," says he, "was a Baptist, because some men of great note and learning in the Church of Rome, have left it upon record, that he denied infant baptism." Among other authorities he quotes Joseph Vicecomes (De Bit. Bapt., lib. ii. chap. i). "Besides," continues Crosby, "they charged him with several of those which are called Anabaptistical errors; such as refusing to take an oath (art. 41. condemned by the Council of Constance), and also that opinion, that dominion is founded in grace (Fuller, Church History of Great Britain, 1.444, Art. 51). Upon these testimonies, some Protestant writers have affirmed that Wyclif was a Baptist, and have put him in the number of those who have borne witness against infant baptism. And had he been a man of scandalous character, that would have brought reproach upon those of that profession, a less proof would have been sufficient to have ranked him among that sect" (Crosby, The History of English Baptists, I. 8, 9).

No doubt the sentiments of Wyclif, on many points, were the same as those of the Baptists, but there is no document known to me that warrants the belief that he was a Baptist (Evans, The Early English Baptists, I. 13).

It is certain that the Lollards, who had preceded Wyclif and had widely diffused their opinions, repudiated infant baptism (Neal, History of the Puritans, II. 354). The testimony of Neal is interesting. He says:

That the denial of the right of infants to baptism was a principle generally maintained among Lollards, is abundantly confirmed by the historians of those times, (Neal, History of the Puritans, II. 354).

The followers of Wyclif and Lollard united and in a short time England was full of the "Bible Men." "Tis, therefore, most reasonable to conclude," says Crosby, "that those persons were Baptists, and on that account baptized those that came over to their sect, and professed the true faith, and desired to be baptized into it" (Crosby, I. 17).

The Lollards practiced believers' baptism and denied infant baptism. Fox says one of the articles of faith among them was "that faith ought to precede baptism." This at least was the contention of a large portion of those people.

The Lollard movement was later merged into the Anabaptist, and this was hastened by the fact that their political principles were identical (Hook, Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, VI. 123). The Lollards continued to the days of the Reformation. Mosheim says: "The Wyclifites, though obliged to

keep concealed, had not been exterminated by one hundred and fifty years of persecution" (Mosheim, Institutes of Ecclesiastical History, III. 49).

Davis (history of the Welsh Baptists, 21) claims that William Tyndale (A. D. 1484-1536) was a Baptist. He was born near the line between England and Wales, but lived most of the time in Gloucestershire. "Llewellyn Tyndale and Hezekiah Tyndale were members of the Baptist church at Abergaverney, South Wales." There is much mystery around the life of Tyndale. Bale calls him "the apostle of the English." "He was learned, a godly, and a good-natured man" (Fuller, Church History of Britain, II. 91). It is certain he shared many views held by the Baptists; but that he was a member of a Baptist church is nowhere proved. He always translated the word *ecclesia* by the word congregation, and held to a local conception of a church (Tyndale, Works II. 13. London, 1831). There were only two offices in the church, pastor and deacons (1.400). The elders or bishops should be married men (I. 265). Upon the subject of baptism he is very full. He is confident that baptism does not wash away sin. "It is impossible," says he, "that the waters of the river should wash our hearts" (Ibid, 30). Baptism was a plunging into the water (Ibid, 287). Baptism to avail must include repentance, faith and confession (III. 179). The church must, therefore, consist of believers (Ibid, 25). His book in a wonderful manner states accurately the position of the Baptists.