

History of the Baptists

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CHAPTER XVIII A GREAT DEBATE ON BAPTISM

THE reign of Charles I, AD 1625-1649, brought almost unlimited disaster upon England. The claim that the king was above law came in with the Stuarts. "He had inherited from his father," says Macaulay, "political theories, and was much disposed to carry them into practice. He was like his father, a zealous Episcopalian. He was, moreover, what his father had never been, a zealous Arminian, and, though no Papist, liked a Papist much better than a Puritan" (Macaulay, History of England, I., 64). Dr. Humphrey Gower, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, accurately stated the contention. He says:

We still believe and maintain that kings derive not their titles from the people; but from God. That to him only they are accountable. That it belongs not to subjects, either to create or to censure; but to honor and obey their Sovereign; who comes to be so by a fundamental hereditary Right of Succession; which no religion, no law, no fault or forfeiture, can alter or diminish.

Account must be taken of another person who was the most intelligent, unscrupulous, and tyrannical enemy that the Baptists of England ever had. Abbot, at the beginning of the reign, was Archbishop of Canterbury; but he was to be succeeded by William Laud the growing Churchman of the times. Macaulay says of him:

Of all the prelates of the Anglican Church, Laud had departed farthest from the principles of the Reformation, and drawn nearest to Rome. His theology was more remote than even that of the Dutch Arminians from the theology of the Calvinists. His passion for ceremonies, his reverence for holy days, vigils, and sacred places, his ill-concealed dislike for the marriage of ecclesiastics, the ardent and not altogether disinterested zeal with which he asserted the claims of the clergy to the reverence of the laity, would have made him an object of aversion to the Puritans, even if he had used only legal and gentle means for the attainment of his ends. But his understanding was narrow, and his commerce with the world had been small. He was by nature rash, irritable, quick to feel his own dignity, slow to sympathize with the suffering of others, and prone to the error, common in superstitious men, of making his own peevish and malignant moods for emotions of pious zeal. Under his direction every corner of the realm was subjected to a

constant and minute inspection. Every little congregation of separatists was tracked out and broken up. Even the devotions of private families could not escape the vigilance of his spies. Such fear did his rigor inspire that the deadly hatred of the Church, which festered in innumerable bosoms, was generally disguised under an outward show of conformity. On the very eve of troubles, fatal to himself and his order, the bishops of several extensive dioceses were able to report that not a single dissenter was to be found within his jurisdiction (Macaulay, I. 68).

By persecution and imprisonment Laud was to press his views till the whole country was brought into a state of insurrection and the King and Laud were both to lose their lives in the conflict.

Every year, in the former reign, marked the growth of the Baptists in England. This is likewise true of this reign. "The prevalence of Baptist principles," says Evans, "and the moral heroism of many who held them in the past reign, have already been noticed, yet only glimpses of their organization can be gathered from the records of those times. Their existence is certain, but beyond this we can scarcely affirm" (Evans, *Early English Baptists*, II. 20). There are more instances than Evans supposed (Evans, II. 54). The names of some of the Baptist churches are: Ashford, Maidstone, Biddenden and Eythorne, and probably others in Kent (Taylor, *History of the General Baptists*, I. 281, 283); in London there were probably several; Lincoln, Sarum, Coventry, Tiverton (Amsterdam Library, No.1372); Newgate, Stoney Stratford (Evans, II. 54); Amersham, in Buckinghamshire (Taylor, I. 96); and certainly one in Southwark. Dr. Angus adds the following churches to this list: Braintree, Sutton, Warrington, Crowle and Epworth, Bridgewater, Oxford and Sadmores. Here are the names of twenty-one General Baptist churches in existence till 1626. In 1683 we can add the following churches: King, Stanley, Newcastle, Kilmington (Devonshire), Bedford, Cirencester, Commercial Street (London), Dorchester and Hamsterly. Such is the statement of Dr. Angus. A small Baptist church was supposed to have been organized in Olchon, Wales, in this year (Thomas, *History of the Baptists in Wales*, 3).

Early in his reign Laud gave the Baptists a taste of his cruelty. Three of their most popular ministers in Kent, Thomas Brewer, Turner and Fenner were arrested and placed in prison, where Brewer remained no less than fourteen years. Two years later, 1627, Laud mentions to the King these persons in prison and says:

I must give your Majesty to understand, that at about Ashford, in Kent, the Separatists continue to hold their conventicles, notwithstanding the examination of so many of them as have been discovered. They are all of

the poorer sort, and very simple, so that I am utterly to seek what to do with them (History of the Troubles and Trials of William Laud. Written by himself, 535).

The King endorsed the above with his own hand and wrote: "Keep these particular persons fast, until you think what to do with the rest." The malignant hatred of the Baptists almost surpasses belief. "If I hate any," says a courtier of these times, "it is those schismatics that puzzle the sweet peace of the church; so that I could be content to see an Anabaptist go to hell on a Brownist's back" (Howell, Letters, 270).

Search was everywhere made for them, Complaint was made, A.D. 1631, that:

All God's true children had continual cause of lamentation and fear, In respect of the daily growing and far spreading of the false and blasphemous tenets of the Anabaptists against God's grace and providence, against the godliest assurance and perseverance, and against the merits of Christ himself (Life of Sir D' Ewes, II. 64).

There were in London alone eleven congregations. Bishop Hall writing to Archbishop Laud, June 11, 1631, says:

I was bold last week to give your lordship information of a busy and ignorant schismatic lurking in London; since which time, I hear to my grief, that there are eleven several congregations (as they call them) of Separatists about the city, furnished with their idle-pretended pastors, who meet together in brew houses and such other meet places of resort every Sunday (Letter in State Paper Office).

Repeated inquiries revealed the presence of the Baptists throughout the kingdom. Many of them were in prison and others vehemently suspected. Credible information was given that there were present in London and other parts Baptists who refuse on Sundays and other festival days to come to their parish churches, but meet together in great numbers on such days, and at other times, and in private houses, and places, and there keep conventicles and exercises of religion, by the laws of this realm prohibited. For remedy whereof, taking with him a constable and such other assistance as he shall think meet, he is to enter into any house where such private conventicles are held, and search for such sectaries, as also for unlawful and unlicensed books and papers; and such persons, papers, and books so found, to bring forthwith before the writers to be dealt with as shall he thought fit (Calendar of State Papers, Febry 20, 1635-1636. Lambeth, CCCXIV. 242, 243).

That the Baptists of 1641 were hated and persecuted cannot be doubted. They were called "devilish and damnable." it is refreshing in the midst of all of this scandal to find one high authority who spoke well of them. Lord Robert Brooke says:

I will not, I cannot, take on me to defend that men usually call Anabaptism: Yet, I conceive that sect is twofold: Some of them hold free will; community of all things; deny magistracy; and refuse to baptize their children. Truly such are heretics (or Atheists) that I question whether any divine should honor them so much as to dispute with them, much rather sure should Alexander's sword determine here, as of old the Gordian knot, where it requires this motto, *Qusa solve no possum, dissecabo*.

There is another sort of them, who only deny baptism to their children, till they come to years are of discretion; and then they baptize them but in other things they agree with the Church of England.

Truly these men are much to be pitied; and I could heartily wish, that before they be stigmatized with the opprobrious brand of schismatic, the truth might be cleared to them. For I conceive, to those that hold we may go farther than Scripture, for doctrine or discipline, it may be very easy to err in this point in hand; since the Scripture seems not to have clearly determined this particular (Lord Robert Brooke, *A Discourse opening the Nature of the Episcopacie, which is Exercised in England*, II. 99, 100. London, 1641).

There was now a turn for the better. Soon after the convocation of the Long Parliament, early in January, 1640, Archbishop Laud was impeached for high treason. Parliament June 24, 1641, put down the High Commission Court of the Star Chamber. With the impeachment and final execution of their greatest enemy in the person of Laud; and the abolishment of the infamous courts which had so sorely pressed them the Baptists appeared in England in incredible numbers. The year 1641 was the year of liberty. Previous to this date they had been hunted and persecuted, and in every way possible they concealed their numbers and meeting places. Now they sprang into publicity with amazing rapidity, they had so many preachers, and won converts with such ease, their baptisms in the rivers were so frequent and so open, their preaching was such a novelty, and their boldness so daring, that their enemies were thrown into consternation. They made mention of the baptizing as a novelty, their doctrine as sour leaven, their pretensions as impudence, and their numbers as nothing less than a public calamity. Heretofore they had suppressed them with the sword, by the stake and the High Commission Court; now as these were abolished, they made up in the fury of their declarations what they had formerly expressed in blood. The enemies of the Baptists literally filled the world with sound. The incredible

number of books and pamphlets which were hurled against them was only surpassed by the horrible things said about them. Controversies raged and England was turned into debating clubs.

To a complete understanding of the great debate on baptism which began in 1641 it will be necessary to trace the history of the form of baptism from the accession of Charles I. Even the Puritans provided for the baptism of adults. A work for the Wisely Considerate (pp.24, 25), in 1641, has a form "for the administration of the sacrament of baptism." It provides that "the persons of years to be baptized are noted to be such as believe and repent." Provision was made by these Pedobaptists equally for adults and infants.

The Church of England everywhere tried to enforce the rite of immersion. The bishops were diligent in rooting out the basins which were substituted in some places instead of the font. The font was for immersion; the basin was used for affusion. The inquiries were for the purpose of obtaining information on any departure from the custom of the Church, and on no point were they more particular than this.

The Bishop of London, 1627, inquired concerning the clergy:

Whether your minister baptize any children in any basin or other vessel than in the ordinary font, being placed in the church or doth put any basin into it? Concerning the Church he esquires: whether have you in your church or chapel a font of stone set up in the ancient usual place?

Like inquiries were made by the Bishop of Exeter, in 1638; the Bishop of Winchester, in 1639; the Bishop of London, in 1640; and the Bishop of Lincoln, in 1641.

The activity of the bishops put fonts in nearly all of the church houses in England, and vast numbers of these fonts and baptisteries may be seen to this day in these churches. Take for example the City of Canterbury. The Church of St. George the Martyr has the ancient octagonal font, the basin being upheld by eight small shafts and a thick center one. The Church of St. Magdalene and St. Thomas, the Roman Catholic Church, both have beautiful baptisteries. St. Martin's Church was the place of the immersion of ten thousand converts at one time. There is an immense baptistery in St. John's. In 1636 this baptistery was in ruins and the want of a font in the Cathedral was regarded as a scandal. Bishop Warner presented one to the Church with great ceremony (The Antiquity of Canterbury, by William Sumner. London, 1840), and when it was destroyed in the troublesome times of 1641 it was rebuilt in 1660. Several persons were baptized by immersion in this font from 1660 to 1663 (Archaeology, XI. 146, 147). These fonts were large

enough for immersion (Paley, *Illustrations of Baptismal Fonts*, 31). Samuel Carte says of the fonts of England: "Give me leave to observe, that anciently at least the font was large enough to admit of an adult person being dipped or immersed therein."

The bishops of the Church of England stood squarely against the innovation of affusion in the reign of Charles I. They accounted it a bad practice.

There are those who mention the practice of dipping in those days. Thomas Blake writing in 1645 relates:

I have been an eye witness of many infants dipped and know it to have been the constant practice of many ministers In their places, for many years together (Blake, *Infants Baptisms Freed from Antichristianisme*, 1,2).

Another witness is Walter Craddock who organized in 1638, in Llanvaches, Wales, an Independent Church. Joshua Thomas in his history of the Welsh Baptists says that "the history of this church says that it was composed of Independents and Baptists mixed, but that they united in the communion, and that it had two ministers, and that they were co-pastors, Mr. Wroth an Independent and Mr. William Thomas a Baptist (J. Spinther James, *History of the Welsh Baptists*). Craddock himself was not a Baptist. On July 21, 1646, he preached before the House of Commons, at St. Margaret's, Westminster. In that sermon he gives valuable information to the practice of immersion in England. He says:

There is now among good people a great deal of strife about baptism; as for divers things, so for the point of dipping, though in some places in England they dip altogether. How shall we end the controversy with those godly people, as many of them are. Look upon the Scripture; and then you shall find *bapto* (to baptize), it is an ordinance of God, and the use of water in the way of washing for a spiritual end, to resemble some spiritual thing. It is an ordinance of God, but whether dipping or sprinkling, that we must bring the party to the river, or draw the river to him, or to use water at home, whether it must be in head and foot, or be under the water, or the water under him, it is not proved that God laid down an absolute rule for it. Now what shall we do? Conclude on the absolute rule that God hath laid down in Scripture, and judge of the rest according to expediency (Craddock, *Sermon*, 100).

Daniel Featley is also a good witness (*Clavis Mystica*, 1636). He says:

Our font Is always open, or ready to be opened, and the minister attends to receive the children of the faithful, and to dip them in the sacred laver.

William Walker, a Pedobaptist, who wrote in 1678, says:

And truly as the general custom now in England is to sprinkle, so in the fore end of this century the general custom was to dip (Walker, *The Doctrines of Baptism.*, 146 London, 1678).

Rev. Henry Denne, who was one of the foremost Baptist preachers of the century, is a good witness of the practice of immersion in England previous to 1641 for he mentions that date. In a discussion with Mr. Gunning, A.D. 1656, he says:

Dipping of infants was not only commanded by the Church of England, but also generally practiced in the Church of England till the year 1600; yea, in some places it was practiced until the year 1641 until the fashion altered . . . I can show Mr. Baxter, an old man in London who has labored in the Lord's pool many years; converted by his ministry more men and women than Mr. Baxter has in his parish; yea, when he hath labored a great part of the day in preaching and reasoning, his reflection hath been (not a sackporrit or a candle), but to go into the water and baptize converts (Denne, *A Contention for Truth*, 40. London, 1656).

Sir John Floyer, a most careful write; says:

That I may further convince all of my countrymen that immersion in baptism was very lately left off in England, I will assure them that there are yet persons who were so immersed; for I am so informed by Mr. Berisford, minister of Sutton, that his parents immersed not only him but the rest of the family at his baptism (Floyer, *The History of Cold Bathing*, 182. London, 1722).

Alexander Balfour says:

Baptizing infants by dipping them in fonts was practiced in the Church of England, (except in cases of sickness or weakness) until the Directory came out in the year 1614, which forbade the carrying of children to the font (Balfour, *Anti-Pedobaptism Unveiled*, 240. London, 1327).

Dr. Schaff, himself a Presbyterian, says:

In England immersion was the normal mode down to the middle of the seventeenth century. It was adopted by the English and American Baptists as the only mode (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VII. 79),

All of these writers affirm that immersion was the common practice in England; they mention many persons who were immersed and that affusion did not prevail till the introduction of the Directory in 1644. The most splendid English divines spoke out in no uncertain words. The bishops by their visitation articles were opposing the innovation, as sprinkling was called, and the English scholars by their writings were sustaining them, They were opposed by "the love of novelty, and the niceness of parents, and the pretense of modesty." With these facts in mind the authorities here presented may be interpreted.

The Greek lexicons used in England in the first half or the seventeenth century were Scapula, Stevens, Micaeus and Leigh. These all define *baptizein* as dipping or submerging. A Greek lexicon is unknown prior to 1644 which gives sprinkle as a definition of *baptizein*; and the few that have since given such definitions appear to have been under the influence which shaped the action of the Westminster Divines.

Joseph Mede, A. D., 1586-1638; a learned divine, says:

There was no such thing as sprinkling in baptism in the Apostles' days, nor many ages after them (Mede, Diatribe on Titus 3:2).

Henry Smith, of Husbands, Borneswell, A.D., 1629, preached a sermon at the installation of Mr. Brian Cane, high sheriff of Leicestershire. He said:

First the word baptism according to the true meaning of the Greek text. Baptism doth signify not only a dipping, but such a dipping in water as doth cleanse the person dipped; and for it the primitive church did it to put the party quite under the water . . . Baptism is called a regeneration, and yet baptism is a dipping of our bodies in water; but regeneration is the renewing of our minds to the image wherein we are created.

Dr. John Mayer, Pastor of the Church in Reydon, Suffolk, says:

The Lord was baptized, not to get purity to himself, but to purge the waters for us, from the time he was dipped in the waters, the waters washed the sins of ail men (Mayer, A Commentary on the Four Evangelists, V.76).

An important book of the times was written by Daniel Rogers, a Church of England man. He says:

Touching what I have said of sacramental dipping to explain myself a little about it; I would not be understood as if schismatically I would instill a distaste of the Church into any weak minds, by the act of sprinkling water

only. But this (under correction) I say; That ought to be the churches part to cleave to the institution, especially it being not left arbitrary by our Church to the discretion of the minister, but require to dip or dive the infant more or less (except in cases of weakness), for which allowance in the Church we have cause to be thankful; and suitably to consider that he betrays the Church (whose officer he is) to a disordered error, If he cleaves not to the institution; to dip the infant in water. And this I do aver, as thinking it exceedingly material to the ordinance and no slight thing; yea, with both antiquity (though with some slight addition of a threefold dipping; for the preserving of the impugned Trinity entire) constantly without exception of countries cold or hot, witnesseth unto: and especially the constant word of the Holy Ghost, first and last, approveth, as a learned critic upon Matthew chap. 3, verse 11, hath noted, that the Greek tongue wants not words to express any other act as well as dipping, if the institution could bear it (Rogers, A Treatise of the two Sacraments of the Gospel, Baptisme and the Supper of the Lord, 71. London, 1633).

The Baptists never failed to quote Rogers in support of their practice of dipping.

Stephen Denson, 1634, says:

The word translated baptizing doth most properly signify, dipping over head and ears, and indeed this was the most usual manner of baptizing In the primitive church; especially in hot countries, and after this same manner was Christ himself baptized by John (Denson, The Doctrine of both Sacraments, 39, 40. London, 1634).

A little in advance he had said of the Baptists:

And the use of all that hath been spoken serves especially for the condemning of the practice of such as turn to Anabaptism, who though they know and do not deny, but that they were once baptized in the Church of England, or other where; yet require to be baptized again, making no better than a mockery of their first solemn baptism.

Edward Elton, 1637, says:

First in sign and sacrament only, for the dipping of the party baptized in water, and abiding under the water for a time, doth represent and seal unto us the burial of Christ, and his abiding in the grave; and of this all are partakers sacramentally (Elton, An Exposition of the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Colossians, 293. London, 1637).

John Selden was regarded as the most learned Englishman of his times. He says:

The Jews took the baptism wherein the whole body was not baptized to be void (Selden, *De Jure Nat*, c. 2).

Bishop Taylor, 1613-1677, says:

If you would attend to the proper signification of the word, baptism signifies plunging into the water or dipping with washing (Taylor, *Rule of Conscience*, 1.3, c. 4).

There is no great amount of evidence of the practice of the Catholics of England on the subject of dipping, but that which is at hand is singularly interesting and clear. Thomas Hall, in an attack which he made on a Baptist preacher AD 1652, by the name of Collier, declared that Anabaptism is "a now invention not much above an hundred years old," and then he declared that the Catholics themselves were great dippers. his words are:

If dipping be true baptizing, then some amongst us that have been dipped, should be rightly baptized. The Papists and the Anabaptists like Samson's foxes, their heads look and lie different ways, yet they are tied together by the tails of dipping (Hall, *The Collier in his Colours*, 116; also, Hall, *The Font Guarded*, 116. London, 1652).

It was the Presbyterians who changed the practice of dipping in England. The rise of sprinkling for baptism in England is traced by Dr. Schaff who was a Presbyterian. He says:

King Edward VI. and Queen Elizabeth were immersed. The first Prayer Book of Edward VI. (1549), followed the Office of Sarum, directs the priest to dip the child in water thrice: "first, dipping the right side; secondly, the left side; the third time, dipping the face toward the fonte." In the second Prayer Book (1552) the priest is simply directed to dip the child discreetly and warily and permission is given, for the first time in Great Britain, to substitute pouring if the godfathers and godmothers certify that the child is weak. "During the reign of Elizabeth," says Dr. Wall, "many fond ladies and gentlewomen first, and then by degrees the common people, would obtain the favor of the priests to have their children pass for weak children too tender to endure dipping in water." The same writer traces the practice of sprinkling to the period of the Long Parliament and the Westminster Assembly. "This change in England and other Protestant countries from immersion to pouring, and from pouring to sprinkling, was encouraged by the authority of Calvin, who declared the mode to be a matter of no importance; and by the Westminster

Assembly of Divines (1643-1652), which decided that pouring and sprinkling are "not only lawful, but also sufficient." The Westminster Confession declares: 'Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person (Schaff, Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, 51, 52).

It was largely through the authority of Calvin that sprinkling came into general use in England. Sir David Brewster is unquestioned authority. His account is as follows:

During the persecution of Mary, many persons, most of whom were Scotchmen, fled from England to Geneva, and there greedily imbibed the opinions of that church. In 1556 a book was published in that place containing "The Form of Prayer and Ministration of the Sacraments, approved by the famous and godly learned man, John Calvin," in which the administrator is enjoined to take water in his hand and lay it upon the child's forehead. These Scotch exiles, who had renounced the authority of the Pope, implicitly acknowledged the authority of Calvin; and returning to their own country, with Knox at their head, in 1559, established sprinkling in Scotland. From Scotland this practice made its way in the reign of Elizabeth, but was not authorized by the established Church. In the Assembly of Divines, held at Westminster in 1643, it was keenly debated whether immersion or sprinkling should be adopted: 25 voted for sprinkling, and 24 for immersion; and even this small majority was obtained at the earnest request of Dr. Lightfoot, who had acquired great influence in that Assembly. Sprinkling is therefore the general practice of this country. Many Christians, however, especially the Baptists, reject it. The Greek Church universally adheres to immersion (Edinburgh Encyclopedia, III, 286).

Wall says of the Presbyterians who introduced affusion into England:

So (parallel to the rest of their reformations) they reformed the font into a basin. This learned assembly could not remember that fonts to baptize in had always been used by the primitive Christians, long before the beginning of popery, and ever since churches were built: but that sprinkling for the common use of baptizing, was really introduced (in France first, and then in other popish countries) in times of popery (Wall, History of Infant Baptism, I. 583).

He also says:

For sprinkling, properly so called, it seems that it was in 1645 just then beginning, and used by very few. It must have begun in the disorderly times after 1641; for Mr. Blake had never used it, nor seen it used.

For a long time a revolution had been brewing in England, and it came with the Civil Wars of 1641. The result of the war was not only the overthrow of the King and Laud, but it overthrew the Church of England as well. The Presbyterians took charge of the ecclesiastical affairs of the kingdom. They set out to reform everything. The Westminster Assembly convened and put forth the Confession of Faith and the Form of Church Government which bears that name. One of the things which they reformed was baptism, and they substituted sprinkling for immersion as the law of the land. The Reformed Churches of Calvin practiced pouring, and so must the Reformed Church of England. They took hold of the matter with a bold band and in time succeeded. Thus pouring, through the Westminster Assembly, triumphed for a time in England. With all of the prestige of Calvin it was no easy task to accomplish. There was stubborn opposition, and when a vote was taken for the exclusion of dipping there was a tie vote, and Dr. John Lightfoot, who had acquired great influence in the Assembly, secured the deciding ballot. There was no particular sentiment in England in favor of affusion outside of the Westminster Assembly in 1645.

Dr. Lightfoot gives an interesting account of the debate in the Westminster Assembly. He says:

Then we fell into the work of the day, which was about baptizing "of the child, whether to dip him or to sprinkle." And this was the proposition, "It is lawful and sufficient to besprinkle the child," had been canvassed before our adjourning, and was ready now to vote; but I spake against it, as being very unfit to vote; that it is lawful to sprinkle when every one grants it. Whereupon it was fallen upon, sprinkling being granted, whether dipping should be tolerated with it. And here fell we upon a large and long discourse, whether dipping were essential, or used in the first institution, or in the Jews' custom. Mr. Coleman went about, in a large discourse, to prove *tbilh* to be dipping overhead. Which I answered at large. After a long dispute it was at last put to the question, whether the Directory should run thus, "The minister shall take water, and sprinkle or pour it with his hand upon the face or forehead of the child;" and it was voted so indifferently, that we were glad to count names twice; for so many were so unwilling to have dipping included that the votes came as an equality within one; for the one side were twenty four, the other 25, the 24 for the reserving of dipping and the 25 against it; and there grew a great heat upon it, and when we had done all, we concluded upon nothing in it but the business was recommitted.

Aug. 8th. But as to the dispute itself about dipping. it was thought safe and most fit to let it alone, and to express it thus in our Directory: "He is to baptize the child with water, which, for the manner of doing is not. only lawful, but also sufficient, and most expedient to be by pouring or sprinkling

of water on the face of the child, without any other ceremony (Lightfoot, Works, XIII 299. London, 1824).

On this particular 7th day of August, when this matter of pouring was introduced, complaints were brought into the Assembly of the increase of the Anabaptist conventicles in divers places" (Baillie, Journal, II. 215). This was an opportune item to the anti-dippers in the Assembly.

The action of the Westminster Assembly was followed by acts of Parliament which fully confirm the contention of Wall that sprinkling began in England "in the disorderly times of 1641," and that in 1645 it was "used by very few." The Presbyterians were not satisfied with an ecclesiastical law to govern the church, but now as they had authority they followed it with the laws of Parliament to control State action. These acts of Parliament have been summed up by Rev. J. F. Bliss as follows:

The original law of 1534 enforced immersion, and those who were not baptized were to be treated as outlaws. The law was passed when the Roman Catholic Church was abandoned and the present Established Church inaugurated in its stead. However, this law was repealed by an act of Parliament in 1644, at least so much of the old law as enforced immersion. and they passed an act enforcing sprinkling in its stead, and left the original penalty annexed to outlaws, being deprived of the inheritance of the state, the right of burial, and in short, of all of the rights to other sprinkled citizens of the realm . . . After 1648 immersion was prohibited and for many years made penal (Bum, Letters on Christian Baptism).

The laws that the Presbyterians enacted to exclude immersion and to establish pouring are exceedingly strong. They may be found in Scobell's Collection of Acts of Parliament, Anno 1644. It was decreed that "the Book of Common Prayer shall not henceforth be used, but the Directory for Public Worship." The Book of Common Prayer prescribed immersion; the Directory prescribed pouring. It was ordered that under penalty the Directory should be used throughout the United Kingdom. In order that none might escape and no other form of baptism be used it was decreed that "a fair Register Book of vellum, to be kept by the minister and other officers of the Church; and that the names of all children baptized, and of their parents, and of the time of their birth and baptizing, shall be written and set down by their minister," etc.

This infamous law was intended as a check upon every Baptist in the land, and all that was needed for a conviction was to turn to the Register Book. That there might be no mistake in the form of baptism it was decreed:

Then the minister is to demand the name of the child, which being told him, he is to say (calling the child by name)

I baptize thee in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

As he pronounceth the words, he is to baptize the child with water; which for the manner of doing it is not only lawful but sufficient and most expedient to be, by pouring or sprinkling of the water on the face of the child, without adding any other ceremony.

This law directly replaced immersion by pouring and it was passed January 3, 1644-45. It was not, however, till 1648, that the Presbyterians were enabled to enact the "gag law." They had already substituted pouring for dipping, but they went further and enacted a law to punish the Baptists as "blasphemers and heretics." It was enacted that any person who said "the baptism of infants is unlawful, or such baptism is void, or that such persons ought to be baptized again, or in pursuance thereof shall baptize any person formerly baptized," shall be placed in prison and remain there until they "shall find two sufficient sureties" that "they shall not publish the same error any more." Under this infamous law four hundred Baptists were thrown into prison. This was the triumph of pouring in England, and reached its culmination in 1648. Pouring began in 1641, became ecclesiastical law in 1648, civil law in 1644-45, and was vigorously pushed in 1648; and those who held to dipping were punished as heretics and blasphemers. Thus did pouring prevail in England. This law was repealed with the fall of the Presbyterians, and the old law for immersion was reenacted by the Church of England.

The Presbyterians brought in with their reforming two novelties. One was that baptism came in the room of circumcision and hence that an infant ought to be baptized on the faith of its parent. The other was that pouring was baptism, and that it was commanded by the Scriptures. This was a novelty. The Baptists forthwith replied that immersion only was taught in the New Testament. They did not change their position but they did change the accent. Previous to this time there had been no occasion for this emphasis. They were practical men, and only combated error when it appeared. It is remarkable how speedily they detected this new error of the Presbyterians.

There grew up in the reign of Charles I one of the most tremendous debates on baptism known in history. It raged continuously from about the year 1641 to the close of the century. ~The Presbyterians had brought in the innovation of pouring, and the Baptists, now for the first time permitted legally to speak, answered boldly. It has been sometimes said that the Baptists had just adopted immersion, but the evidence is to the contrary.

There is no proof that in those days one English Baptist was in the practice of sprinkling. What really happened was that an occasion occurred, in the judgment of the Baptists, for a discussion of the act of baptism, and the Baptists seized the opportunity.

The views of some experts on the practice of the Baptists is here given. Dr. W. H. King, London, who made an extensive investigation of the pamphlets in the British Museum, says:

I have carefully examined the titles of the pamphlets in the first three volumes of this catalogue, more than 7,000 in number, and have read every pamphlet which has seemed by its title to refer to the subject of baptism, or the opinions and practices of the Baptists, with this result: that I can affirm, with the most unhesitating confidence, that in these volumes there is not a sentence or a hint from which it can be inferred that the Baptists generally, or any section of them, or even any individual Baptist, held any other opinion than that immersion is the only true and Scriptural method of baptism, either before the year 1641 or after it. It must be remembered that these are the earliest pamphlets, and cover the period from the year 1640 to 1646 (*The Western Recorder*, June 4, 1896).

Dr. George C. Lorimer, who gave much attention to Baptist history, said in an address September 14, 1896, before the students of Newton Theological Institution:

I insist that it is due our Baptist churches and their action on the world's progress should not be ignored. As a rule they do not receive the recognition they deserve. Dr. Dexter in his True Story of John Smyth has, let us believe unintentionally, put them in an entirely false light; and his representation that Edward Barber originated the practice of immersion in England, and that before the publication of his book (1641) the Baptists poured and sprinkled, is, to put it mildly, incorrect. I have just returned from the British Museum, where I went over the documents which are supposed to substantiate such a view, and I solemnly declare that no such evidence exists.

Dr. Joseph Angus, former President of Regents Park College, London, member of the committee who translated the Revised Version of the Bible, says:

During this period, very little is said about immersion, and the silence of the writers on the mode is said to be deeply significant. But it is overlooked that in that age immersion was the generally accepted mode of baptism in England. The Prayer Book has all along ordered the child "to be dipped

warily" in the water. The practice of dipping was familiar in the days of Henry VIII., and both Edward VI. and Queen Elizabeth were dipped in their childhood. In that century it was not necessary to lecture on the meaning of the word, or to insist on the mode of baptizing, which is still described in the English service as "dipping." . . . That there was no such delay in forming Baptist churches as our American friends have supposed, is proved by the dates of the formation of a number of them. Churches were formed, chapels built and doctrines defended long before 1641, and others, down to the end of the century, owing probably to the discussions of that year (*The Western Recorder*, October 22, 1896).

Daniel Featley states that the Baptist churches were in the practice of dipping. He was born at Charlton, Oxfordshire, March 15, 1582, and died at Chelsea, April 17, 1645. He had, in 1641, a debate in Southwark with four Baptists. Shortly afterwards he published an account of the debate in his book "The Dippers Dipt." In the Dedication to the Reader he says: "I could hardly dip my pen in anything but gall." He was a personal witness to the acts of the Baptists of that period. He says for twenty years writing in 1644, they had lived near his residence and had been in the practice of dipping.

The words of Featley are especially significant. He spoke of the Baptists from personal knowledge, and there are no reasons to believe that he exaggerated the facts. However loosely he may have used the phrase, twenty years, it would refer to about the years 1621-4. He nowhere intimates that the Baptists or the form of baptism by dipping were a novelty. In his Epistle Dedicatory he says:

Now, of all the heretics and schismatics, the Anabaptists in three regards ought to be most carefully looked into, and severely punished, if not utterly exterminated and banished out of the church and kingdom.

His reasons are as follows:

First, In regard to their affinity with many other damnable heretics, both ancient and later, for they are allied into, and may claim kindred with. . .

Secondly, In regard to their audacious attempts upon the Church and State, and their insolent acts committed in the face of the sun, and in the eye of the High Court of Parliament.

Under this second head he says:

They preach, and print, and practice their heretical impieties openly and hold their conventicles weekly in our chief cities, and suburbs thereof, and there

prophesy in turns; and (that I may use the phrase of Tertullian) *aedificantur in ruinam*, they build one another in the faith of their Sect, to the ruin of their souls; they flock in great multitudes to their Jordans, and both sexes enter the river, and are dipt after their manner, with a kind of spell containing the heads of their erroneous tenets, and their engaging themselves in their schismatical covenants, and (if I may so speak) combination of separation. And as they defile our rivers with their impure washings, and our pulpits with their false prophesies, and fanatical enthusiasms, so the presses sweat and groan under the load of their blasphemies. For they print not only Anabaptism, from whence they take their name; but many other most damnable doctrines, tending to carnal liberty, Familism, and a medley and hodge-podge of all religions.

Thirdly, In regard to the peculiar malignity this heresy hath to magistrates, etc.

He then proceeds to say that he had known these heretics near his own home for twenty years. His words are:

As Solinus writeth, that in Sardinia there is a venomous serpent called Solifuga, (whose biting is present death) there is also at hand a fountain, in which they who wash themselves after they are bit are presently cured. This venomous serpent (*vera. Solifuga*) flying from, and shunning the light of God's word, is the Anabaptist, who in these later times first shewed his shining head and speckled skin, and thrust out his sting near the place of my residence for more than twenty years.

He distinctly says the Baptists had practiced immersion near his residence for more than twenty years. This was first said in the debate with Kiffin in 1641. A little later he traces the Baptists to Germany in the time of Storch at the Reformation; that this man was a blockhead and kindled the fires from the chips of the block; that the fire burned in England in the times of Elizabeth and other sovereigns; and lately the fires burned very brightly.

This Southwark church was located in the borough where Spurgeon's church is found. It has always been a great Baptist center. It is in the old district called Horsleydown. It is here the debate occurred. The Baptists had here a great baptizing place (Wall, *History of Infant Baptism*, II. 459). A *baptisterion* was finally erected here for the use of a number of Baptist churches, and it registered according to an act of Parliament, in the year 1717 (Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, IV. 189). Manning and Bray (*History of Surrey*, III.613) speaking of the early and later history of this place say:

It seems that the Anabaptists had fixed themselves here in considerable numbers. In the year 1775 there were four meeting houses of that persuasion.

Featley not only affirms there had been Baptists long in England but he connects them with the Baptists of 1641. He says:

Of whom we may say, as Irenaeus sometime spake of the heretic Ebon, the father of the Ebonites, his name in the Hebrew signifies silly, or simple and such God wat he was: So we may say, the name of the father of the Anabaptists signifieth in English a senseless piece of wood or block, and a very blockhead was he; yet out of this block were cut those chips that kindled such a fire in Germany, Halsatia, and Swabia that could not be fully quenched, no not with the blood of 150,000 of them killed in war, or put to death in several places by magistrates.

This fire in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James and our gracious sovereign, till now, was covered in England under the ashes; or if it brake out at any time, by the care of the ecclesiastical and civil magistrate, it was soon put out. But of late since the unhappy distractions which our sins have brought upon us, the temporal sword being in other ways employed, and the spiritual locked up fast in the scabbard, this sect among others, hath so far presumed upon the patience of the state that it hath held weekly conventicles, rebaptized hundreds of men and women together in the twilight in rivulets, and some arms of the Thames and elsewhere, dipping them over head and ears. It hath printed divers pamphlets in defense of their heresy, yea and challenged some of our preachers to disputation. Now although my bent hath been hitherto against the most dangerous enemy of our Church and State, the Jesuit, to extinguish such balls of wild fire as they have cast in the bosom of the Church, yet seeing this strange fire kindled in the neighboring parishes and many Nadab's and Abihu's offering it to God's altar, I thought it my duty to cast the waters of Siloam upon it to extinguish it.

In another place he calls the rebaptizing of the Baptists "a new leaven," and that their position "is soured with it," but this is to be read not as a detached statement, but in the light of what is said about it. He explains there are two kinds of old Anabaptists and one kind of new Anabaptists. These new Anabaptists began in 1525. This he fully explains:

They first broached their doctrine about the year 250 which was this: That all of those who had been baptized by Novatus, or any other heretics, ought to be rebaptized by the orthodox pastors of the church.

The second broached theirs about the year 380, which was this: That none were rightly baptized but those that held with Donatus, and consequently, that all others had received baptism in the Catholic Church, by any other save those of his party, ought to be rebaptized.

The third broached theirs in the year 1525, which was this: 'That baptism ought to be received by none, but such as can give a good account of their faith; and in case any have been baptized in their infancy, that they ought to be rebaptized after they come to years of discretion, before they are to be admitted to the church of Christ

The first tenet which he says is "peculiar to this new sect," which had their origin in 1525, was "that none are rightly baptized but who are dipped." Featley declares there were Baptists in his neighborhood prior to 1625 that they had existed in England during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, James I; and of his own personal knowledge they had dipped in rivers for more than twenty years previous to 1644.

There is a fine statement made by William Ames who was a Brownist. He had a controversy with Bishop Morton. In the year of his death, 1683, he wrote a book (A Fresh Suit against Ceremonies in God's Worship), which made a Nonconformist out of Richard Baxter. In his hook he points out the attitude of the Baptists toward dipping. He says:

I will easily grant the Catabaptists, and confess that the strife which they made about baptism, hath been not altogether without benefit; for hence it comes to pass that those things which the foolish superstition of human reason had added thereto, being brought into question, are now become vain and unprofitable.

Christ Jesus who instituted baptism with such simplicity and purity as knowing better than all men; what arrogance to add, alter or detract, on the part of man.

Dipping is preferred to sprinkling for dipping is not a human ceremony.

Calvin's devise of a new washing, was an idle vanity, he added to the washings which God had set.

In vain do they worship me teaching the doctrines and precepts of men i.e., such things as men set up themselves against the commandment of God.

Christ is the only teacher of his church, therefore there may be no means of teaching or admonishing but such as be ordered.

When Christ himself instituted baptism he required it to be used; Is it a very hard question whether it be lawful for men to add other than the above. As if what Christ himself prescribed were not fit enough. In divine institutions as we must take nothing from, so we must not alter, so we must add nothing to them. What rites he would have used he himself appointed.

Sprinkling of water upon the people for baptism, an Apist imitation.

The Anabaptists hold fanatically about rites and formalities (they say) it is not lawful to worship God with other external worship save that which is in Scripture prescribed us. And human inventions without warrant from God in Scripture are to be reprehended. It is well known that Anabaptists have certain times and places of meeting for worship; certain order of preaching and praying; may in baptizing of grown-men, as even bishops can scarce be ignorant of.

One of the foremost Baptists of those times was Thomas Collier, of Whitley, in the parish of Godalming. He was described by his enemies as of obstinate demeanor, refusing to pay all tithes into the Church where his estate lies (Calendar of State Paper; January, 1635. CCLXXXII. 82). He preached through the counties of West England in Surrey and Hampshire. He wrote books, traveled as a missionary, and immersed many converts (Edwards, Gangraena, III.41. London, 1646). For more than twelve years he had labored in this field and prospered under the fiercest persecutions. He was an intense Baptist and held firmly to the faith in 1646 as he had previously done in 1635.

He linked the word Anabaptists with "Baptized Christians," which was understood in those days to mean immersed believers. His words are: "They, these persecutors, would say as much of the Anabaptists, or rather of the baptized Christians of this nation." He further remarks that these "persecutors are maliciously mistaken," and show their ignorance "in calling them Anabaptists, for the practicing baptism, according to Scripture, that grieves you it seems; but you have learnt a new way, both for matter and manner, babies instead of believers; for manner, sprinkling at the font, instead of baptizing in a river; you are loth to go with your long gowns, you have found a better way than was ever prescribed or practiced; who now Sir are the Ignoramuses?"

Lewes Hewes, who describes himself as a minister of God's Word, attacked the follies of infant sprinkling, affirms adult baptism by immersion, addressed, A.D. 1640, to the Parliament on the abuses of Popery introduced into religion. The book is in the form of a dialogue between a Minister and a Gentleman. Some of the passages are:

Gent. Many do say, that the manner of administering the holy sacrament of baptism prescribed in the Service Book is very absurd, and full of Popish errors, and so ridiculous as that they cannot but laugh at it. I pray you tell me, what do you find in it so absurd and ridiculous, as they cannot but laugh at it?

Min. The interrogatories ministered to infants that have no understanding and the answers of the godfathers are so absurd and ridiculous. as they cannot but laugh at them: as first, the minister must first examine the infant and ask him, if he doth forsake the devil and his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, the covetous desires of the same, the carnal desires of the flesh, so as he will not follow nor be led by them; he must also ask him, if he doth believe all the Articles of the Christian faith, and if he will be baptized in that faith.

Gent. Were not these interrogatories administered to infants in the primitive church?

Min. No, these or the like were then administered to such as were of years, when they were converted and came to be baptized, and afterwards commanded by the Pope to be administered to infants.

In another prayer thanks is given to God for regenerating the infant with the Holy Spirit, that the children of God do receive the Spirit of God to regenerate them, not by sprinkling of water in baptism, but by having the Gospel preached, 2 Cor. 3:8, Acts 10:44 (Lewes Hewes, Certain Grievances, well worthy of the serious consideration of the right honorable and High Court of Parliament, 12-13, London, 1640).

One of the striking Baptist preachers of those times was Thomas Lamb. His occupation was that of a soap boiler. He was an active minister from the earliest days of Charles I (Wood, History of the Baptists, 109). After he came to London he was pastor in Bell-alley, Coleman Street. He was soon cast into prison and he was released on bail June 25, 1640 (Acts of the High Court of Commission, CCCCXXXI. 434), with the injunction "not to preach, baptize or frequent any conventicle." About October 15, of the same year, he was in Gloucestershire preaching and immersing his converts. The people of that section had largely departed from the Church of England and the Baptists had a great following (Wynell, The Covenants Plea for Infants, Oxford, 1642). Here he was opposed by Mr. Wynell the rector. It was from this congregation that Richard Baxter, about 1639, became acquainted with the Baptists, and the practice of dipping greatly shocked him (Baxter, Life and Time, I. 41). As a result of the controversy the Baptists had sent to London for Mr. Lamb. He came and baptized many converts in the River Severn. He

brought with him Clem Writer, who was also a Baptist preacher. Wynell says Lamb held his services in a private house "and by preaching there he subverted many, and shortly afterwards in an extreme cold, and frosty time, in the night season, diverse men and women were rebaptized in the great River Severn in the City of Gloucester." These immersions took place in the early winter of 1640.

John Goodwin was one of the most interesting men in London. He was rector of St. Stephen's Church, Coleman Street, and was a near neighbor of Thomas Lamb, of Bell-alley. One of Goodman's members, Mr. William Allen, turned Baptist and united with Lamb's Church. This made Goodwin furious and he attacked the "new mode of dipping." Allen replied (An Answer to Mr. S. G.) and affirmed that dipping was the old form. Lamb took up the quarrel and expressed indignation at the attack of Goodwin. He had himself been for some years in the practice of dipping. His opinion of Goodwin's book was expressed in Vigorous English (Truth Prevailing, 78. London, 1655). Mr. Goodwin in the meantime had opportunity for reflection and he wrote another book (Water Dipping no Firm Footing for Church Communion) and apologized for his "grasshopper expression" calling dipping new. He, in this new place, says the Baptists had practiced dipping since the Reformation of Luther. His language is:

First we understand by books and writings of such authority and credit; that we have no ground at all to question their truth that that generation of men, whose judgments have gone wandering after dipping and rebaptizing, have from the very first original and spring of them since the late Reformation.

Edward Barber was a merchant tailor of London, a gentleman of great learning, at first a minister of the Church of England, but long before the Civil Wars he became a Baptist (National Biography, III. 146). He was the agent in convincing many that infant baptism had no foundation in Scripture. He soon gathered a numerous congregation which met in Spital in Bishopgate Street. In his book (A Small Treatise on Dipping) he says he was cast into prison for "denying the sprinkling of infants" He was cast into prison in 1639 and on Wednesday, June 20, of that year, he appeared before the King's Commission (Tanner MSS. LXVII. 115. Bodleian Library). So that Edward Barber denied infant sprinkling before 1639. While in prison in 1639 Barber discussed immersion with Dr. Gouge who was a prominent man in the Church of England, and Barber made him admit that sprinkling "was a tradition of the Church" (Blackwell, Sea of Absurdities concerning Sprinkling driven back, 6. London, 1650).

This corresponds with the statement of Wall that sprinkling did not prevail till 1644 and began as a policy of the government in the troublesome times of 1641.

Dr. Gouge discussed the subject of immersion with Barber. The latter affirmed that immersion was the proper act of baptism, and Gouge admitted that sprinkling was only a tradition. This corresponded exactly with the statement of Barber that he was imprisoned for denying the sprinkling of infants. This date was before June 20, 1639. Barber makes it perfectly plain in his book that the Baptists had long been in the practice of dipping.

Among other objections urged was that the Baptists immersed women and that the clothes were immersed as well as the person. Barber answered that these objections did not avail since immersion had long been the practice. He said he was chosen of God to divulge immersion. The word "divulge" in those days simply meant to publish without reference to the order of time. For example, Henry Denne, who was baptized in 1643, and from that date was a preacher, was sent on a special mission by the church at Fenstanton, October 28, 1653, and it was said of him: "On that day he was chosen and ordained, by imposition of hands, a messenger to divulge the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Taylor, History of the General Baptists, I.150). Barber was a great preacher and he divulged the Gospel of Immersion.

William Jeffery was born of pious parents in the year 1616, in the parish of Penhurst, and afterwards lived in Bradbourn, Seven Oaks, Kent, where he and his brother David were great supporters of a meeting (Crosby, The History of English Baptists, III. 97). It is probable that he was engaged in the propagation of the Baptist faith several years prior to the Civil Wars (Taylor, History of the General Baptists, 1. 109). He was a minister of a congregation about Orpington which increased greatly under his ministry. He was a successful, and unwearied supporter of the Baptist interest, and suffered with great patience. He had several debates with men of the Church of England, and also with the Independents and Quakers. He was much valued for steady piety and universal virtue.

Clem Writer, or A. R(itter), was a prominent Baptist in London. He originally came from Worcester and was formally a member of the Church of England. He became a Baptist about the year 1637. He was a man of education, attended public meetings, and on several occasions drew up petitions to Parliament and transacted other business. Edwards abused him on all occasions, and even pronounced him an atheist. He "is now an arch-heretic," says Edwards, "and fearful apostate, an old wolf, and a subtle man, who goes about corrupting and venting his errors" (Edwards, Gangraena, I. 27).

His works on the Vanity of Childish Baptism are the most scholarly of all the books written on the baptismal controversy of 1641. The first volume was written against the position of the Church of England, in 1641, and the next year, the second volume appeared against the position of the Independents. On the subject of dipping he states his position in words that imply that it had always been the Baptist practice. He says:

The institution of Christ requireth that the whole man be dipped all over in water . . . The Greek authors account *bapto* and *baptizo* to signify that the Latins use *mergere*, *immergere* (*tasgere immergendo*) (that is to say) to dip, to plunge, to douse overhead or under water (A. R., A Treatise on the Vanity of Childish Baptisme, I.10).

He concludes that for a thousand years there was no other practice except dipping in the Christian world. Among Baptists it had been the practice since Luther's time. Says he:

And if any shall think it strange and unlikely that all of the godliest divines and best churches should be, thus deceived on this point of baptism for so many yeares together, let him consider that all Christendom (except here and there one, or some few, or no considerable number) was swallowed up in grosse Popery for many hundred yeares before Luther's time, which was not until about 100 yeares agone.

This scholarly Baptist had an opponent. It is really interesting to note how closely his antagonist resembles the Pedobaptist controversialist of to.day.

The Baptists of the middle part of the seventeenth century were controversialists. They were compelled to debate. The Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Brownists and Independents agreed with each other only in one particular of hating the Baptists.

"Various methods were adopted," says Goadby, "for removing this general dislike, and answering the wicked accusations made against them. They issued pamphlets in defence of their opinions. They subscribed to numerous Confessions of Faith. They were ready, in season and out of season, to meet their opponents. They challenged them to public disputations; now in London, now in the country. Ordinary buildings proved too small and inconvenient for the excited and eager crowds who attended these disputations; and the largest accommodation being afforded by the parish church, to the parish church they commonly hurried. The occasion of these discussions was often fierce opposition of local clergymen, but was sometimes the uneasy consciences on the subject of baptism of some members of the congregations. The victory, as in all such public discussions,

was usually claimed by both sides. The disputations themselves illustrate the habits and the ferment of a former age" (Goadby, *By-Paths in Baptist History*, 139).

The report of the debates were usually published by the opponents of the Baptists. There was large room for partiality and unfairness. These one sided accounts were published often with marginal commentaries, and one at least published a scandalous frontispiece which depicted fifteen different sorts of Anabaptists.

The first of these debates occurred in 1641 between Dr. Featley and four Particular Baptists. It was "somewhere in Southwark," probably in the parish church. Sir John Lenthall was present, "with many knights, ladies and gentlemen." There were also present some of the illiterate sort, Upon whom Dr. Featley looked with disdain. The discussion was held in the year that Charles I. had broken with Parliament. Two months before it began the royal standard was unfurled at Nottingham, and a week after it had closed Charles fought his first battle.

The disputants were hardly fairly matched. Dr. Featley was a veteran debater, and had won many encounters with the Jesuits. His intimate friend had said the Catholics "contemned him for that he was low of stature, yet admired him for his ready answers and shrewd distinctions." Yet this friend of thirty-seven years had found him "meek, gracious, affable, merciful." This would not be suspected from reading this debate. In European seminaries he was regarded as "the Sagacious and Ardent" Doctor.

His opponents were four Baptists. One of them was described as "a Scotchman," another was called "Cuffin." This was none other than William Kiffin, for two years past the pastor of Devonshire Baptist Church. He was now only thirty six years of age, and yet had before him fifty-nine years of pastoral and checkered life. Of the other two disputants there is no information.

The version of the debate as given by Featley is a long drawn out rambling discussion on baptism. Featley was insulting, but not convincing. At the conclusion, says Featley, "it grew late, and the Conference broke off." Featley was self-complacent. He says:

The issue of the Conference was, first, the Knights, ladies and gentle men gave the doctor great thanks, secondly, three of the Anabaptists went away discontented, the fourth seemed in part satisfied, and desired a second meeting; but the next day, conferred with the rest of that sect, he altered his resolution, and neither he, nor any other of that sect ever since that day

troubled the doctor, or any other minister in this borough with a second challenge.

Featley's version of the debate was published two years and one-half after the debate under the title: *The Dippers Dipt, or, the Anabaptists duck'd and plung'd over head and ears. at a Disputation in Southwark, London, 1645.* The debate was not printed until Featley was in prison suspected of being a spy. The most exciting political events had in the meantime taken place, and all recollection of the debate had passed from the mind of "the auditors." While in prison he had a debate with Henry Denne, who was there for preaching the word. He and Denne debated the issues at stake in baptism. The result was that on January 10, 1644, Featley printed his book. In a little less than a month Denne had his reply under the title of *Antichrist Unmasked.* Samuel Richardson took up the challenge and gave Featley a severe handling in a book entitled: *Some Brief Considerations on Dr. Featley's Book.* With a chuckle Richardson says:

The knights and ladies thanked him, but he cannot say he deserved it. The Anabaptists went away discontented and grieved. It seems they were sorrowful to see his great blindness and hardness of heart. He saith, none of them ever after that troubled him; it seems they could do him no good, and so they resolved to leave him to GOD till he should please to open his eyes.

Many and notable were the debates of the period. The Presbyterians now being in power tried to dismiss the subject of baptism. But debates would not down. A great debate, between Richard Baxter and John Tombes occurred at Bewdley, January 1, 1649. The debate continued throughout the day until intermission until the disputants were exhausted. Both sides claimed the victory; but Wood declares: "That all the scholars then and there present who knew the way of disputing and managing arguments, did conclude that Tombes got the better of Baxter by far."

Tombes had a more celebrated debate in 1653, in St. Mary's Church, Abergavenney, with Henry Vaughn and John Cragge. The writer who records the discussion, speaks in no very complimentary terms of the Baptists. "They inveigled the poor, and simple people especially. "Women, and inferior tradesmen, which in seven years can scarce learn the mystery of the lowest profession, think half seven years enough (gained from their worldly employments) to understand the mysteries of divinity, and whereupon meddle with controversy, which they have no more capacity to pry into than a bat to look into the third heaven." The writer also gives his version of the public discussions of Tombes elsewhere. "The disputes at Bewdley, Hereford, and Ross, have been successful to astonishment; and in the last, at Abergavenney (though tumultuary, and on a sudden), hath appeared the

finger of God. He hath, with spittle and clay, opened the eyes of the blind, overthrown the walls of Jericho with the second ram's horns; with these weak means hath wrought strong effects, that no creature may glory in an arm of flesh".

Mr. Tombes had been heard with much amazement. Some persons were highly offended. Others were "staggered or scrupled; and some, not knowing what to think of their own, their childrens', or their ancestors' salvation." Many well learned, heard Mr. Tombes, and heard with amazement. Among them were Vaughan, "schoolmaster of the town, formerly fellow of Jesus College, Oxford," and Mr. Bonner, an aged clergyman of the neighborhood. No one spoke after the service in answer to the challenge of Tombes; but Bonner "closed with him on the way to his lodging." "That night, and especially the next morning, the Anabaptists triumphed, saying, Where are your champions now?"

The next day excitement ran high. Cragge, Vaughn and Bonner went to the house where Tombes was staying, and a public debate was arranged. The church house was overflowing with people. Bonner was preparing "to give an onset," but he was dissuaded "lest in his aged and feeble state he should impair his health." The debate continued with much heat for six hours.

The century closed with a famous debate at Portsmouth. Mr. Samuel Chandler, a Presbyterian minister of Fareham, established a lectureship at Portsmouth. In the course of his lectures he defended infant baptism. His remarks were reported to Mr. Thomas Bowes, the General Baptist minister. He conferred with Mr. Webber, the Particular Baptist minister of the town. A debate was arranged between the parties. William Russell, M.D., the well-known General Baptist minister of London, was chosen to defend the Baptist cause. With Dr. Russell in the position of "junior counsel" and "moderator," were John Williams, of East Knowle, and John Sharpe, of Frome, both Particular Baptist ministers. The Presbyterians selected Samuel Chandler, Mr. Leigh, of Newport, and Mr. Robinson, of Hungerford. The debate occurred in the Presbyterian meeting house February 22, 1698-9. The assembly was worthy of the debate. The governor and lieutenant-governor, the mayor and magistrates of Portsmouth were all present. The military were also there. The debate continued nine hours. The debate came to an end between six and seven o'clock.

A few days after the discussion an article appeared in the *Postman* newspaper, from the pen of Colonel John Gibson, the Lieutenant-Governor, as follows:

Portsmouth, Feb. 23.-Yesterday the dispute between the Presbyterians and the Anabaptists was held in the Presbyterian meeting-house. It began at ten o'clock in the morning, and continued till six in the afternoon, without intermission. The theme of the dispute was, the subject of baptism, and the manner in which it is to be performed. Russell and Williams were the opponents for the Anabaptists, and Mr. Chandler and Mr. Leigh for the Presbyterians; Mr. Sharpe was moderator for the former, and Mr. Robinson for the latter, Mr. Russell opposed infant baptism with all the subtlety and sophistry of the schools; and it was answered with good reason and learning. Upon the whole, it was the opinion of all the judicious auditory, the Presbyterians sufficiently defended their doctrines, and worsted their adversaries, when they came to assume the place of opponents.

Another article appeared in the *Flying Post*, which was one sided and unfair. Dr. Russell published an account of the debate which brought an answer from the Presbyterians. The debate and these various articles and replies brought on much bitterness.

All of the Baptist historians record their pleasure that this was the last debate of the kind that ever occurred in that country.