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Baptized—Dipped for Dead.

1560 TEXT, 1614 COMMENT, 1640 PRACTICE.

LEONARD BUSHER, a citizen of London, in 1614 wrote and published a plea for religious liberty, which he entitled Religions Peace. It was presented to King James and the high court of Parliament then sitting, in the hope that a scheme for a peaceable reconciling of those who differed in opinion might result. His hopes were by no means fulfilled; Thomas Helwys who had issued two years earlier a similar plea, perhaps personally presenting a copy to the king, was languishing in Newgate prison, and died within a year, while a bishop was considering whether the public would tolerate burning of more heretics. Laud rose to power and steadily persecuted those who differed from his ideals of uniformity, till the Long Parliament of 1640 swept him from power and into prison. Next year Busher wrote from Delft to a Dutch friend for help, as he was now nearly seventy years old. By 1647 he was back in England, where a measure of religious liberty was now secured, and for two years was engaged in discussing the Second Coming of Christ with James Toppe, a Baptist of Tiverton.

Meantime, Henry Burton had seen the pertinence of the pamphlet to this generation, had secured the licence still necessary for printing, and by April 25 a second edition was on the market; at least six copies are still to be consulted. This time the plea was made against the Presbyterians, who were equally intolerant, and maintained even restrictions on publication, which were challenged by Milton, who refused to ask leave before publishing. Exactly two hundred years later, the Hanserd Knollys Society edited this second edition again, with copious notes; this reprint had its text modernised in spelling and punctuation.

The plea of Busher has been well summarised by Dr. W. K. Jordan of Harvard, in his second volume of *The development of religious toleration in England*". St. John had already recognised that " in this polemic we have a pioneer in an unfrequented region of thought, presenting boldly, though in the face of danger, and with clearness and force, a most noble conception ". Jordon adds that " Busher and Helwys had, at the moment when the Baptist sect was founded in England, firmly laid the permanent basis of the thought of their communion on these important questions ". " He leaned most heavily upon the New Testament, and shared the normal Baptist tendency to regard the Old Testament as of secondary importance. . . . Here we have no abject pleading by

a sectary for the bare toleration of his own group, but a thoughtful and noble demand for religious liberty for all men, because they are men ordained by God to share in the general redemption through the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice."

Such was the express purpose of the book. But there is one sentence on page 59 of the Hanserd Knollys edition which seems surprising at the date 1614, and raised qualms as to whether it was inserted in the 1646 reprint. As Dr. Jordan had discovered that a unique copy of the original was lodged in the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery at San Marimo in California, application has been made, and Herman R. Mead, the Bibliographer there, has favoured our society with a minute account. The original has one preliminary leaf, thirty numbered pages and three unnumbered, with signatures A-D4, E2. Two cancel slips are pasted in, whose readings are reproduced in the edition of 1646, and therefore of 1846. Also there are manuscript corrections (by Busher?) which are followed in the 1846 edition at the footnote on page 52. More important is the side-note at the very foot of page 59, with the reference to the verse quoted in the text "We are buried then with Him by baptism, &c." This is the Genevan version of "Rom. vi. 4" as is penned at the side.

Busher was concerned entirely with toleration, and does not diverge to discuss baptism. In the Netherlands he was aware of the Mennonites, who retained baptism, in the form practised by Catholics, sprinkling. So it is interesting to find that the solitary paragraph which touches the subject contains two sentences showing his teaching: "Christ commanded His disciples to teach all nations and baptise them; that is, to preach the word of salvation to every creature of all sorts of nations, that are worthy and willing to receive it. And such as shall willingly and gladly receive it, he hath commanded to be baptised in the water; that is, dipped for dead in the water." The point that may excite doubt is the last eight words, defining baptism as dipping. It now proves that these words were in the original text of 1614. It does not prove that Busher or any one known to him, did actually practise dipping. The modern Book of Common Prayer still directs the Priest at baptism "if they shall certify him that the child may well endure it; he shall dip it in the Water discreetly and warily." Yet in practice this is scarcely ever done. Therefore we must not imagine that Busher knew any one, or any body of people, who did actually practise dipping in 1614. It may be well to repeat that John Smyth, Thomas Helwys and their friends at Amsterdam, had not yet noticed the point, having concentrated on the vastly more important question that baptism was enjoined on believers, and on them only. Yet within three years of Busher's book, the Collegiants who lived on the lowest Rhine,

and had discarded the guidance of all ministers, studying the Bible for themselves, did pay attention to this point of ritual, and did restore dipping. In the next generation, while Busher still lived, English Baptists sent to the Netherlands to seek friends, and hearing of these Collegiants, Richard Blunt went with letters of commendation to Leijden, where he was immersed by the Collegiant leader, John Batten, in May 1640. No previous case for an English Baptist has been recorded; and in 1664 a manuscript, printed and annotated in the first volume of our Transactions, tells the incident as if it were actual practice as distinct from mere antiquarian theory.

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