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BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

The Origins of the Modern Baptist Denomination.

By Principal Gould, M.A., President of the Society.
Being a Tercentenary Paper read on 25th April, 1911, to the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland.

IN the year 1611 there returned to this country a small company of Christian people, who for the previous four or five years had been living as exiles in Holland. Whatever they had or lacked they brought back with them very settled convictions on these four points :—

1. That in matters of religion there should be absolute liberty.
2. That the Church of Christ is a company of the faithful.
3. That baptism, as the initial rite of the Church, should be administered only on a profession of faith.
4. That every community of believers is autonomous—subject only to the Headship of Christ.

Not separately, but in their combination, those tenets were new to this land, and thus combined they came to stay ; and we, counting them a sacred inheritance, look back across the three hundred years and reverently thank God for the brave-hearted men and women through whom He was pleased that so great a boon should descend. It is worth while for us to fix our thoughts on those servants of His—to recall, though it must be in very fragmentary fashion, the conditions and

circumstances amid which they entered themselves into possession of the truths which they were to transmit. It is an old story, often re-told, and in these last years re-told by the Secretary of our Union with such accuracy and power, that any detailed recital of it in this Assembly may well appear needless. I shall confine myself to the attempt to answer three questions, which might be raised by any to whom the subject is unfamiliar: (1) Why had those people been in exile? (2) What did they learn in exile? and (3) Why did they return to England?

(1) Why had they been in Exile?

Did England at the outset of the seventeenth century not afford a fit home for any reasonable free men? Had there not been a Reformation whose beneficent effects—interrupted no doubt during the reign of Queen Mary—were enjoyed again to the full with the accession of Elizabeth, and under that "most high and mighty Prince James," whose praises greet us as soon as we turn the cover of our Authorized Version? Well, there had been a sort of a Reformation: the papal supremacy was indeed gone, and its place was taken by the supremacy of the Crown—matters ecclesiastical were controlled not by a foreign court, but by the court at home—but for the rest, so far from there being a *re-forming*, the change effected was so slight that clergy who did not scruple the loss of the Pope's supremacy, found it possible to hold under Elizabeth the cures they had held in Mary's reign. Dr. Dexter, commenting on "the very mild form of the Reformation in England" at the time to which I am referring, says: "Upon Elizabeth's accession almost the whole clergy was Romanist, but out of 9,400 priests apparently less than 200 resigned, although of course the extreme Romanists now took their turn abroad. . . . . Like priest, like people.

Comparatively few of the laity, however bigoted Romanists, felt obliged, during the first five years of Elizabeth's reign, to absent themselves from the Churches with their modified service." And if the more moderate Romanists were not aggrieved by the course taken at the beginning of that reign, they found little cause of complaint afterwards. For throughout from first to last the Queen's policy was one and unchanged. Her aim, pursued with untiring and relentless energy, was *Uniformity*. Men should think as she thought, and worship as she dictated. She signalized her accession to the throne by an Act of Uniformity, to compel the attendance of all her subjects at the parish churches. Then followed the appointment of a Court of High Commission to see that the Act of Uniformity was made effective, and that its pains and penalties were duly enforced. Next by the Queen's command so-called "Advertisements" were issued yet further to promote unity in doctrine and practice, and to this end forbidding all unlicensed preaching, prescribing the vestments of officiating clergy, the posture of communicants, and even the ordinary garb of all "ecclesiastical persons." That was but the beginning of woes. Harder and harsher measures followed culminating in the Act of 1593, condemning persistent Nonconformists to banishment or death.

Looking back upon it from this point of time one is struck—apart from its religious aspects—with the incredible folly of such a policy. Remember that the 16th century was ushered in by the Renaissance. The oppressive slumber of Mediævalism had been broken; men were aroused to look out upon the recovered glories of the ancient world; but the thought which was wakened and stimulated by the achievements and ideals of the past, quickly turned in those who were most awake to contemplation of the unideal present and its most clamant needs. It was an age of quickened thought and enquiry, and

fearless criticism of what had been accepted with least of question, and certainly with least hope of change. What Rudolf Sohm has said of the 15th century applies with equal force to the 16th: "In the abuses of the Church, in the degradation of spiritual things, in the troubling and stopping of those springs from which the commonwealth draws its moral nourishment, the instinct of the age recognised with unerring certainty the causes of the wide-spread corruption. The Church was merged in the world. The salt had lost its savour . . . . . therefore, through all the joy of the Renaissance, through all the rejoicing which breaks forth from this renewing of the life of art and learning, ever and ever louder the great cry resounds. . . . . 'Reformation of the Church in heart and members.' Reformation, not merely of the scholarly and æsthetic life, but of that which is far harder—the religious life." How true that is of what men term admiringly 'the spacious days' of Queen Elizabeth. And yet she cherished the illusion that by sheer force of intolerance she could in such a time constrain the thought and repress the righteous demands of her subjects.

Perhaps when we remember that the principle of religious liberty was still beyond the range of vision of such really great and enlightened men as Luther and Zwingli and Calvin, we may wonder the less that it did not come within the purview of Tudors and Stuarts. But the things which were hidden from the wise and prudent, and the world's great ones, were revealed to the lowly and undistinguished. For when we go on to speak of the leaders of this and the other dissenting party, whose existence repressive measures served to disclose rather than to check, we speak of those who were interpreters even more than leaders—they made articulate and gave practical effect to thoughts and intents already formed and waiting for expression in the poor and unlettered. Notably it was so in

the case of Robert Browne—that meteoric man, who flashed out with such brilliance, but whose clear shining was so transient. Cherishing thoughts of reform beyond any which had been realized so far, he goes from Cambridge to Norwich sometime in 1580, because he hears that in that city there were many 'very forward'; and he finds those forward people, not waiting to be persuaded, but ready to go with him the full length of renouncing a communion, in which believing and unbelieving were blended without distinction, in which there was scarce any attempt at discipline, and which was in an unscriptural subservience to the State. As Mr. Shakespeare has said: "Congregationalism arose partly in opposition to the episcopal form of government in the Church of England, but much more as a protest against the complete obliteration of the distinction between the Church and the world." To restore and maintain that distinction was uppermost in the minds of Robert Browne and his friends at Norwich, as they solemnly entered into covenant with one another and constituted themselves a Church, appointing its own Ministers, determining the character and conduct of its meetings, giving liberty to any to "protest, appeal, complain, exhort, dispute, reprove, etc., as he had occasion, but yet in due order"; and enjoining that "all should further the Kingdom of God in themselves, and especially in their charge and household, if they had any, or in their friends and companions and whosoever was worthy." So with lofty purpose and brave assertion of the liberty of Christian manhood these Separatists started their 'Reformation without tarrying for anie' (to use the familiar terms of the title of one of Browne's books), and without stopping at any intermediate stage achieved at a bound, so to say, an independency in direct antithesis to the uniformity which was being thrust upon the nation with all the powers of the State.

No need to disguise from ourselves that the first experiment

of modern times in Independency, save as it was a clear, uncompromising assertion of a great principle, was not an unqualified success. With two or three months of the Covenant-act it became impossible for the community to remain with any measure of safety in Norwich; so they went across sea to Middelburg, in Zeeland. There while Browne, in addition to his other duties, wrote books to enforce the duty of separation, and to show the 'Life and Manners of all true Christians,' his own people—possibly through having in a foreign land little opportunity for other forms of service, devoted themselves too exclusively to the disciplining of one another. No doubt they all had, what Mr. Asquith recently called, the "saving salt of individuality," and in some of them the salt may have been rather in excess. Anyway there were bickerings, and feuds, and sundering of fellowship; and within two years Browne and a remnant of his flock sadly set their faces homeward. But let no one say that Robert Browne had failed. He had done a work that could not be undone, not even by himself—by his vacillations in the years following upon his return to England, or by his ultimate conformity. The true soul of the man had been flung into the effort to give expression to Independency, and that soul of him went marching on, when what remained of him halted, drew back, and passed into sorrowful obscurity.

The effectiveness of what he had done is manifest in nothing more clearly than in the frenzied efforts made by the State-Churchmen to crush out what had come to be known as 'Brownism.' Two men were actually hanged at Bury-St-Edmunds for no greater crime than the "dispersinge of Browne's bookes and Harrison's bookes" (Harrison having been Browne's intimate friend and colleague). All that the bitterest hostility could devise was done to suppress the Separatists and to prevent their communities and conventicles. The story of that

struggle must be passed over here—we may not stay to dwell even on the cruel stringency of the year 1593, when Barrowe and Greenwood and Penry were sent to the gallows, and a considerable proportion of the members of the Barrowist community in London—'The Ancient Church' as it came to be designated—accepted the bitter alternative of perpetual exile, and sought refuge in flight.

One fact, however, we must tarry to notice, because it directly concerns those other exiles of whom we are to speak, viz.: that hopes, which had been entertained by Puritans within the Church of England and by Separatists alike, of altered conditions which would come with change of ruler, were doomed to bitter disappointment. James I. might have a less vigorous hand than Elizabeth, but he was no more disposed to toleration than was she. He was inordinately vain of his kingly prerogative, and intended to make it felt in ecclesiastical as well as civil affairs. "For him," it has been well said," the true relation between Church and State was that which he found in England, where there were bishops appointed and controlled by the crown, and controlling the inferior clergy by whom the people were instructed." Said James, "It is my aphorism, no bishop, no king," and he was resolved to oppose every form of Church policy other than that of Erastian episcopacy. In the early days of 1604 he allowed representatives of the Puritan party—conformists who nevertheless desired to see the Church of England reformed on the lines of Genevan Presbyterianism—to meet him in conference at Hampton Court. But it was only to insult them. Of Christian liberty he declared: "I will none of that; I will have one doctrine and one discipline, one Religion in substance and in ceremony." To these men with Presbyterian leanings he declared, that Presbytery "as wel agreeth with a Monarchy as God and the Devil." And finally

he left the Conference with the threat: "I shall make them conform themselves, or I will harry them out of the land, or else do worse." Convocation met in the same year, and set itself with alacrity to give effect to what it knew to be the royal will. It aimed not only at purging out the Puritan leaven from the Church of England, but at constraining and intimidating all who had separated themselves from that Church. It denounced all such, and all who combined in a new brotherhood and held "that ecclesiastical rules may be without the royal authority"; it enjoined "that every parishioner must receive the communion at his rector's hands at least thrice in the year . . . . . that the license of all non-conforming ministers, remaining after such admonition, shall be void; that no religious meeting shall be held in private houses, and that all whom churchwardens, questmen, or assistants regard as schismatics shall be presented to the bishop's court." Those ordinances of Convocation were endorsed by a royal proclamation, "that every minister should read them to his congregation in church once a year." Evidently the change of monarch had brought to Separatists no relief; their outlook was threatening and troubled in the extreme; and the question could not but present itself, whether they could best serve the cause they had at heart by staying to suffer dispersion and bonds, or by holding together and seeking—like the 'Ancient Church,' to which allusion has been made—the asylum of a land in which they might maintain their faith and practice, none making them afraid.

That alternative was faced in 1606 by a community at Gainsborough. In that town and in the adjacent district the "very forward" in religion had been numerously represented. In 1602—or "thereabouts," as Dexter cautiously put it, a church had been formed by covenant—a church having a strong contingent at Scrooby, ten miles away. Distance

mattered less then than in these days of easy transit. In 1606—possibly because it was increasingly dangerous for so numerous a company to come together—the two sections of the church parted by mutual agreement, and the Scrooby section—including Clyfton and John Robinson and Brewster and Bradford—met in the old Manor House, until they, two years later, took the course which their Gainsborough brethren resolved to take without any further delay, the course of voluntary exile.

It is easy to state that resolution as a historical fact, but it is not easy to recover all that it meant to the men and women who made it, all the anguish and heart-break. They loved their native land, though it had treated them so ill; and they loved their homes, and not the less because of the sorrow they had suffered in them; and they had their associations and their occupations and what would be regarded as their worldly prospects—and they rose up and went forth, because to them religion was before all else and far outweighed all else—because in very truth they sought "first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." Said an old saint of those days and of those same parts, though not of our Gainsborough church, who had followed her husband into exile at Antwerp: "I accounted all nothing in comparison to liberty of conscience for the profession of Christ." So was it with the Gainsborough church: and for us, reverencing the like devotion wherever and by whomsoever displayed, there is special significance and appeal in the fact that they, in whom the modern Baptists were to take their rise, did manifestly account all nothing in comparison to liberty of conscience for the profession of Christ. Therefore was it they became exiles. But they were not yet Baptists when they left their home for Amsterdam: that was yet to come.

The story of how it came about belongs to the answer to our second question:

(2) What was Learnt in Exile?

Restricting ourselves entirely to matters religious and ecclesiastical, I do not know that the extent of the changes that transpired in the interval of exile can be appreciated better than by comparing the positions adopted by John Smith, the Pastor of the Church, in the book on the Lord's Prayer, entitled "The Paterne of True Prayer," which he published in 1605, the year before he left England, with the positions at which he had arrived five or six years later. An altogether notable man this John Smith, and wholly unconventional, spite of his name. He had been a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, had manifested 'forward' tendencies, had fulfilled the office of Lecturer at Lincoln (where he delivered the course on the Lord's Prayer just referred to), had renounced his Anglican orders, and thrown in his lot with the Gainsborough Separatists, and had received from them the only ordination which thereafter counted with him. A man eager, alert, quick to learn, and fearless in practice—men of slower mental habit and less disposed to reconsider conclusions once formed, would be sure to misjudge him and deem him unstable and flighty. He was perfectly aware that he was so misjudged. So in his 'Last Book' he defends himself thus: "Now I have in all my writings hitherto received instructions of others, and professed my readiness to be taught by others, and therefore have I so oftentimes been accused of inconstancy; well, let them think of me as they please, I profess I have changed, and shall be ready still to change for the better, and if it be their glory to be peremptory and immutable in their articles of religion, they may enjoy that glory without my envy, though not without the grief of my heart for them." Take three points in the book of 1605, which may help us to realize how far Smith travelled in the few years he spent at Amsterdam: the use of

liturgical forms in worship, repudiation of Anabaptism, assertion of the right and duty of the civil ruler to interpose in matters of religion.

As to the first of these matters he says: "I do here ingenuously confess that I am far from the opinion of them who separate from our Church concerning the set form of prayer (although from some of them I received part of my education in Cambridge) for I do verily assure myself . . . . that a set form of prayer is not unlawful; yet as Moses wished that all the people of God could prophesy, so do I wish that all the people of God could conceive prayer." Further on he says that "it is safer to conceive prayer than to read a prayer," because there is less fear of "babbling" in the one case than in the other. Yet he adds, without qualification, that "An uniform order of public prayer in the service of God is necessary."

As to the second point, he alludes to the Anabaptists in terms which show that he regarded them with unmixed aversion. He speaks of their "confident heads," into which Satan has inspired "devilish doctrines"; while in another writing, slightly later than 'The Paterne,' he permits himself to ask: "Do you think that God accepteth the prayers and religious exercises of the Papists, the Anabaptists, the Familists, or any other heretics or Antichristians?"

As to Magistracy we find this, with much more to the same effect, in 'The Paterne': "We acknowledge every King in his Kingdom the supreme Governor in all causes, as well ecclesiastical as civil, next and immediately under Christ." And this: "The Magistrates should cause all to worship the true God, or else punish them with imprisonment, confiscation of goods, or death, as the quality of the cause requireth."

Now let us see what changes passed in a few brief years of exile on the thought of the man who had so expressed himself

in 1605. By 1608 Smith had reached the conviction that, not only should no liturgical forms be used in worship, but that even reading the Scriptures from a book was not consonant with the spirituality of worship. He wrote that it was "the invention of the man of sin, it being substituted for a part of spiritual worship." "He urged that the Spirit is quenched by all forms of worship, because the Spirit is then not at liberty to utter itself, but is bounded in. The New Testament churches used no books in time of spiritual worship, but prayed, prophesyed and sang out of their hearts." With Smith it would be matter of conscience to press his new views on the attention of the neighbouring community of English exiles—that 'Ancient Church' of which mention has been made—whose chief officers were Francis Johnson (once Smith's tutor at Cambridge) and Henry Ainsworth. The two churches, while remaining distinct, had maintained brotherly intercourse from the time of the arrival of the Gainsborough people at Amsterdam. But this discussion about the use of books in worship strained their relations, and brought about a breach, which was not healed. One cannot but sympathise with Ainsworth when he complains, that Smith "charged us with sin for using our English Bibles in the worship of God, and he thought that the teachers should bring the originals—the Hebrew and Greek—and out of them translate by voice. A written translation was as much a human writing as a homily or prayer written or read."

Ainsworth was himself an accomplished scholar, but even he felt that word about "the originals" to be a hard saying. Maybe it would be felt to be so, if pressed upon the ministry of to-day.

Something quite as unexpected and of far more enduring importance was about to transpire in regard to Smith and his church. It is probable that the more extreme isolation in

which they found themselves through the discussion about spiritual worship had some influence in stimulating a more thorough searching of their own ways and position. Certain it is that a few months later, in that same year 1608, it became clear to them that there had been an initial flaw in their procedure. They had renounced the church in which they had all been baptised as infants, and they had renounced all belief that membership in the Church of Christ is for others than professed believers; so professing they had entered into covenant relationship. but without the rite which, according to the teaching of the New Testament, should follow upon belief and be its sign. The only way open to them to put themselves right seemed to be to begin *de novo*—to dissolve the church and reconstitute it with the initial rite of baptism on profession of faith. It was resolved so to do.

How that resolve was carried out may be told in the words of John Robinson, who had arrived with his flock from Scrooby, and was in Amsterdam at the time of which we are speaking. Robinson says that what took place, as he heard "from themselves," was on this manner: Mr. Smith, Mr. Helwisse and the rest, having utterly dissolved and disbanded their former church state and ministry, came together to erect a new church by baptism . . . . and after some straining of courtesy who should begin . . . . Mr. Smith baptized first himself, and next Mr. Helwisse, and so the rest, making their particular confessions." Naturally such a proceeding, especially Smith's 'Se-Baptism,' excited attention and called forth denunciation. "Baptizing himself!" exclaims John Robinson, "I demand into what Church he entered by baptism!" But to others, who were far from favouring Baptist views, it seemed that Smith had simply carried the fundamental principle of Separation to its logical issue. So Bishop Hall writes to Robinson himself. "There is no remedy. You must go

forward to Anabaptism, or come back to us. . . . He (Smith) tells you *true*; your station is unsafe." Three or four decades later Robert Baylie, the Presbyterian, makes precisely the same point, and presses upon the Independents of his day that, granting their fundamental principle—that of all the Separatists—as to the Church, their true goal is Anabaptism. He says: "The Independents lay a pathway to Anabaptism . . . they esteem not baptized infants to be members of their Church before they have entered in their Covenant; till then they hold them from the Lord's Table and all the acts of discipline as people without the Church and not members of it. If so, their baptism was of so small use that well they might have wanted it to the time of their admission to be members." Smith himself was content to rebut charges of inconstancy in these terms. "To change a false religion is commendable, and to retain a false religion is damnable . . . . therefore that we should fall from Puritanism to Brownism, and from Brownism to true Christian baptism, is not simply evil or reprovable in itself, except it be proved that we have fallen from religion: if we, therefore, being formerly deceived in the way of Pædo-baptistry now do embrace the truth in the true Christian Apostolic baptism, then should no man impute this as a fault unto us."

But in one respect Smith was not prepared to vindicate the action he had taken. He had acted under the impression, as he expresses it, "that there was no Church to whom we could join with a good conscience and have baptism from them." That points to the conclusion that in what he had done he was not consciously influenced by the example of any existing Antipædobaptists. But shortly after he seems to have realised that with the Mennonite Baptists, who were numerously represented in Amsterdam, he was in such accord that he might and therefore ought to have sought baptism from them.

These Mennonites were Anabaptists of the non-political and non-combatant order; they maintained that baptism was for believers only; in church polity they were Independents, but with a close association of their communities for mutual help and advice; doctrinally, they were Arminians. Now in all this Smith and his church were in entire agreement, for they too—unlike the other Separatist exiles—had ranged themselves with the followers of Arminius in the great controversy which for two decades had been dividing Holland and was leading on, at the end of yet another decade, to the Synod of Dort. That Smith did not come earlier to a just appreciation of the Mennonites may be due in part to the strong prejudice he had entertained in other days against any who were branded with the Anabaptist name; and partly to the barrier which difference of speech interposed to freedom of intercourse. The mistake in judgment was no sooner recognised than it was acknowledged. To Smith it appeared that he had erred in ignoring brethren with whom he should have sought association and help; he deemed that such action as his tended to break "the bond of love and brotherhood in the churches." His feeling was not shared by all in his own church. By Helwys and others it was resented. To them it seemed that Smith was wilfully closing his eyes to light which had come to him in the matter of the liberty of Christian men to found churches. Differences passed into strife, and strife ended in disruption. Smith and some thirty or more, who sided with him, were excluded. They forthwith sought to be received into communion by the Mennonites. This led to very careful and deliberate inquiry, so deliberate that it was not till 1615, after the lapse of six years, that the Englishmen, such of them as survived, gained the fellowship for which they had applied. Meantime John Smith passed away in August, 1612, leaving in his 'Last Book' a singularly noble and pathetic document.

The desire to cite from it must be repressed, and I hasten to say that the earlier negotiations with the Mennonites led to the drafting both by the Smith-party and by the church, then under the leadership of Helwys, of statements of their faith and practice, which tell us with precision for what they then stood and the positions they were prepared to vindicate. These matters, amongst others, emerge with clearness:

1. That these Baptists had received and that they apprehended with utmost distinctness *the principle of absolute religious liberty*. They went further than Robert Browne, who hesitated and wavered in this regard, and further than John Robinson and other Independent leaders who did not hesitate, but consistently allowed—as Robinson's biographer admits—the interference of the magistrate to compel attendance on public worship. In contrast to that listen to Smith's final deliverance on the subject: "That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion or matters of conscience, and force and compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine; but to leave Christian religion free to every man's conscience . . . . for Christ only is the King and law-giver of the Church and conscience." No need to demonstrate that Helwys and the rest were wholly at one with Smith in maintaining this doctrine. It was they went home to proclaim it, and to them belongs the glory of being the first to proclaim it in our England—the doctrine of absolute freedom in matters of religion. What that proclamation has meant to this land, and what it means as it wins its way among all truly progressive peoples, it is not possible to overestimate. And among all who rejoice in that word of liberty there can be none who will not gladly render their tribute of homage to those by whom it was first uttered, and through whose fearless testimony, with the blessing of God, it was made "current coin."

2. Next we notice that, whatever changes passed upon the views of the exiles, they kept unchanged *their concept of the Church and of the independency of the Churches.* Thus Smith affirms that "the outward Church visible consists of penitent persons only, and of such as, believing in Christ, bring forth fruits worthy amendment of life." So in the 'Declaration' of the Helwys-party of 1611, the year of their return—"The Church of Christ is a company of faithful people," and that is followed by this explicit statement: "though in respect of Christ the Church be one, yet it consisteth of divers particular congregations, even so many as there shall be in the world; every of which congregations, though they be but two or three, have Christ given them with all the means of their salvation, are the body of Christ and a whole Church . . . . . that as one congregation hath Christ, so hath all . . . . . And therefore, no Church ought to challenge any prerogative over any other." If the primary tenets of Independency had not been learned in Holland, at any rate they had not been forgotten or qualified there, in spite of the prevalence in that land of Genevan thought and polity.

3. Once more. *As to Baptism* these later statements of the exiles are in entire accord. Smith's 'Confession' says: "The outward baptism of water is to be administered only upon such penitent and faithful persons as are aforesaid, and not upon innocent infants, or wicked persons." Similarly the Helwys 'Declaration': "Baptism, or washing with water, is the outward manifestation of dying unto sin and walking in newness of life; and therefore in no wise appertaineth to infants." Entire clearness, you observe, as to the *subject* of baptism: entire silence as to the *mode.* No question where the emphasis was laid. Infant Baptism had obscured the demarcation between Church and world: believers' baptism made it distinct again. That was to our exiles of primary

account: to them for the time being the form of the rite was of secondary moment. Not a single contemporary writer in alluding to the strange incident of the Self-baptism suggests that there was anything unwonted in the *manner* of it. Everyone assumes that the mode was quite conventional, the conventional mode being sprinkling or affusion. When Smith and his followers sought fellowship with the Mennonites we read that "the said English were questioned about their doctrine of salvation, and the ground and the *form* of their baptism. No difference (says the Mennonite report) was found between them and us." Benjamin Evans in citing that says: "This statement is singular, as the members of this (the Mennonite) community were not immersionists." He is quite right, the Mennonites practised baptism by affusion, as they to do this day. And so did Smith and Helwys and their Church. Whatever I claim for them, I cannot assert that through them the practice of the baptism of believers *by immersion* was introduced to this land. No, that came later by some thirty years than the time of which we are thinking, came when Calvinistic Independents, seceding from the Southwark Church on the question of Pædobaptism, did lay stress on the mode of baptism as well as on its subject, and sent one of their number to be immersed in Holland indeed, but in connection with an Arminian sect—the Collegiants—which had no existence till several years after Helwys and his Church had left the country, and which did not commence the practice of immersion till 1620. How immersion came to be adopted by the Collegiants is itself an interesting story, but is beyond my province now.

With utmost brevity let me answer the last of the questions with which we started:—

(3) WHY DID THE EXILES RETURN?

If it was for conscience sake that they had left England, it

was no less a matter of conscience that brought Helwys and his companions back. It was borne in upon them that by continuance in exile they were depriving their own countrymen of a witness they might bear, and were failing to communicate as they should the truths in which they themselves rejoiced. There had come to them, as we have seen, great gains in the years of expatriation: they had found the true word with which to confront religious intolerance; and they had recovered, so they held, New Testament teaching as to baptism, the obscuring of which had been of such far-reaching significance. Of these gains they were stewards rather than possessors, and they longed to fulfil their trust, and to fulfil it among their own people. But before all else it was a true evangelical impulse dictated the return in 1611. I know Helwys wrote harsh things about those who did not share his feeling and remained in the security which a free country like Holland afforded. Make allowance for that, and you will discover the true spirit of the man and of those associated with him in these few sentences from a treatise in Dialogue-form issuing from the church of which he was pastor soon after its settlement in London. One of the characters is made to say: "One thing there is which hath much troubled me and others, and in my judgment hath hindered the growth of godliness in this Kingdom, and that is that so many, as soon as they see or fear trouble will ensue, they fly into another nation who cannot see their conversation, and thereby deprive many poor ignorant souls in their own nation of their information and of their conversation among them." To which another makes answer: "Oh that hath been the overthrow of religion in this land, the best and ablest part being gone and leaving behind them some few, who by the others' departure have had their afflictions and contempt increased . . . . if any of these men can prove that the Lord requireth no work

at their hands to be done for His glory and the salvation of thousands of ignorant souls in their own nation, let them stay in foreign countries." But Helwys and his comrades were sure that the Lord had given them a work to do for Him, and knew that He had entrusted them with that which their countrymen most needed. So they hastened home; bonds and afflictions might await them, but they held not their life of any account as dear to themselves, so that they might accomplish their course and the ministry which they received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. They called to mind that saints of old had overcome "because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony"; and they craved a place in that succession.

Such were the Baptists who returned to these shores and came to this Metropolis in 1611, and such was the purpose they cherished. We do well to think of them, and in these easier times to scan our own loyalty to the Saviour, our devotion to the great principles we profess, and our passion for the salvation of our countrymen, by the light of theirs.

"They climbed the steep ascent of heaven,
Through peril, toil, and pain;
O God, to us may grace be given
To follow in their train."