

John Smyth and the Freedom of Faith

ALL Englishmen who know anything of their own history are proud of the Elizabethan age. The last of the Tudors was a great queen, in spite of her obvious littlenesses. She brought her country out from the shadow of Roman Catholic tyranny which had fallen upon it during the reign of her sister, and she saw the utter destruction of its most elaborate attempt to conquer England in the overthrow of the Armada. Her great sea-captains are noble and picturesque figures, and the story of Sir Richard Grenville's brave fight on the little *Revenge* for fifteen hours against fifteen battleships of Spain will live for ever. A larger world was opened up before men's eyes with the colonization of America, and the name borne by the state of Virginia dates this expansion (as begun under the Virgin Queen of England). But the greatest glory of the Elizabethan age is its literature, and especially its drama, in which that age is so brilliantly reflected. The freedom of the nation from foreign peril inspired a liberation of the imagination also; Shakespeare's "cloudless, boundless, human view" and exuberant vitality are but the expression through genius of the spirit of the age, exulting in its new freedom.

But to the Elizabethan age there also belongs the beginning of another movement of thought and life, which seems in strongest contrast with this sense of freedom and spacious expansiveness. To many people, the name "Puritan" still means a narrow and warped view of life, pedantically concerned with the mint and anise and cummin of a misconceived law, and blind to the larger humanities. It is quite true that the Puritans would have suppressed the drama then, as they did later, had it been possible. A Puritan sermon from St. Paul's Cross comments on the closing of the theatres because of the plague: "I like the policy well if it hold still, for a disease is but lodged or patched up that is not cured in the cause, and the cause of plagues is sin, if you look to it well: and the cause of sin are plays: therefore the cause of plagues are plays" (Thomas White, 1578). However much we may sympathise with the Puritan condemnation of the immorality associated with plays or their performance, we

may be glad that they have not robbed our English literature of an adornment which ranks next to the English Bible. We may do more. We may see in the Puritanism of the Elizabethan age, in spite of its direct challenge of much contemporary use of freedom, a parallel and related movement for the liberation of moral and religious life. History often teaches us to see the underlying unity of two irreconcilable opponents, to see that all unconsciously they were but working out different applications of the same truth. The Puritans, no less than the sea-captains and the dramatists, were working out a larger liberty, though their path led them through seeming constraints. The Puritans have helped to bring us into that civil and religious freedom which we take for granted to-day. Freedom means something more than large horizons and exuberant life on land and sea; it means the vision of the sky above as well as of the earth beneath, and the right to seek and find and worship Him of whose spiritual dwelling that sky is the emblem. There is a world within as well as a world without; there is a freedom of spirit as well as of body, a freedom of faith that seeks more than deliverance from the Spanish Armada, and the thumb-screws of the Inquisition.

John Smyth was an Elizabethan Puritan, the close contemporary of Shakespeare. The year in which Smyth matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge (1586) was the year in which Shakespeare matriculated in the larger University of London life. The year of Smyth's death (1612) was that by which Shakespeare's literary productivity seems to have closed. It would be difficult to conceive a stronger contrast than that between the scholar-preacher, destined to be the pioneer of the Baptist faith, and the actor-dramatist, destined to be the world's greatest poet. What would they have made of one another, if they had met, and if the genial tolerance of Shakespeare had overcome the Puritan's aversion from him and his trade? We can imagine Smyth feeling bound to utter a protest against "all proud persons that minde nothing but the trimming of themselves, gay apparrell, and the credit of the world; all wanton persons that minde nothing but the pleasures of the flesh" (*A Patern of True Prayer*, p. 144). We can imagine Shakespeare listening lightly to Smyth's denunciation of the Established Church, and murmuring, "A plague on both your houses." Yet both were the children, in their different ways, of that new passion for freedom which characterised their age, and both of them, in their larger and smaller spheres of action, were to help in the creation of a new world.

The peculiar interest of Smyth's life (apart from his historical place as the first English Baptist from whom our

denominational history can be traced), is that his development can be so clearly seen from stage to stage. First, he is before us as a Puritan, remaining within the Anglican Church, and seeking to reform it from within. Then he is seen as a Separatist Puritan, leaving the Anglican Church to gather a separate group of true Christians. Then, though not in this country, he is led onward by his study of the New Testament to the conviction that such a Church should be constituted by Believers' Baptism. Finally he passes into the true Church Catholic by abjuring his own controversial spirit, and showing the serenity of a mind at peace with God and man. From each of these phases there remain books which he wrote, so that we may get to know him at first hand in each of them. They give us an epitome of the movements of the time as these affected some of the most earnest spirits, for we learn more of men in general by studying one life in particular. The stage on which he acts his part is narrow enough in visible shape—we see him at Lincoln as city chaplain, the involuntary centre of municipal jealousies and wire-pulling, at Gainsborough amongst a little group of like-minded seekers after liberty, and finally at Amsterdam, the pastor of a very small and by no means united Church. Yet a man's significance lies in the issues which find expression through him, rather than in the magnitude of their display. The existence to-day of more than ten millions of Baptists shows that their pioneer, John Smyth, was finding his way to something that really did matter, something that was going to count.

It is easy to see in such a development as this the sign of an unstable mind, carried away by every wind of doctrine, as did some of Smyth's contemporaries—it is easy, but it is wrong. There is a deeper consistency than that of formal agreement and rigorous uniformity of utterance. John Smyth was a man who obeyed the exhortation of Richard Hooker, the most gifted contemporary opponent of Puritanism—"If truth do any where manifest itself, seek not to smother it with glosing delusions, acknowledge the greatness thereof, and think it your best victory when the same doth prevail over you" (Preface to the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, IX. 1). At each stage, Smyth yielded himself captive to the truth he saw, conscious to an unusual degree that there was larger truth into which he might yet enter. This consciousness is one of the finest things in Smyth, and he has not received the credit due to him for it. All who know anything of the Puritan Fathers know the noble words of John Robinson, when at Leyden he bade farewell to those who were to cross the sea. "He charged us," says one who heard him, "to follow him no farther than he followed Christ. And if God should reveal

anything to us by any other instrument of His, to be as ready to receive it as ever we were to receive any truth by his ministry; for he was very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word." Those are words of true magnanimity, with the hall-mark of truth, the humble yet progressive spirit, clearly upon them. But John Robinson learnt that spirit from John Smyth, whose assistant he had been. We find it expressed already in the covenant of the Separatist group at Gainsborough, led by Smyth: "So many, therefore, of these professors as saw the evil of these things in these parts, and whose hearts the Lord had touched with heavenly zeal for His truth, they shook off this yoke of anti-Christian bondage and as the Lord's free people joined themselves, by a covenant of the Lord, into a Church estate in the fellowship of the Gospel *to walk in all his ways made known, or to be made known, according to their best endeavours whatsoever it should cost them.*" We ought to be proud that the pioneer of our freedom of faith himself conceived that freedom in such lofty terms as a freedom within the truth, not beyond it, and a knowledge of truth destined to grow with our growth. It is only a bastard Baptist who conceives truth to be static instead of dynamic, and such a Baptist is no true son of John Smyth, or indeed of the Apostle who said, "We know in part, and we prophesy in part."

I. The first phase of Smyth's pilgrimage into the freedom which faith demands in order to be itself was that of Puritanism. So far as the Elizabethan age is concerned, this means the continuation of the Protestant Reformation within the Anglican Church. The English Reformation of religion in the sixteenth century had followed a most peculiar course into a unique compromise, and I am not surprised that Lindsay, in his coloured map of the Reformation in Europe, has to find a peculiar colour—a sort of faded purple—to indicate the difference of the result from that in any other country. The peculiar character of the Reformation in this country was due to three principal causes: (1) the entanglement of anti-Papal feeling with the divorce-suit of Henry VIII, (2) the varying policy of four successive sovereigns, Henry, Edward, Mary and Elizabeth, (3) the absence of any dominating Reformer, comparable in influence or personality with Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, or Knox. The result of this peculiar development, with its comparative lack of doctrinal unity, is to be seen partly in the rise of various types of Nonconformity in the seventeenth century, each seeking to carry out Reformation principles to their more logical issue, and partly in the subsequent history and present character of the Anglican Church itself, marked as it is by wide elasticity of interpretation in respect of liturgy, ministry and sacraments. The compromising

character of the established religion is well typified in the clauses in the Communion Service dealing with the Elements. The First Prayer Book of Edward VI, following the ancient Catholic formula, said, "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life." "The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life." But the Second Prayer Book of 1552, framed under the influence of continental reformers, read, "Take, and eat this, in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving." "Drink this, in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for thee, and be thankful." The object of the change was, of course, to avoid any doctrine of the Real Presence implied in calling the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ. What did the Elizabethan Prayer Book of 1559 say on such a vital issue of doctrine? It shrewdly, if not cynically, threw the two opposing statements together, leaving people to dwell on which they preferred, so that to-day the Anglican priest is ordered to say both of them in the administration of the elements. No doubt, it may be said that such a compromise was the only thing possible, since the majority of the people were not ready for any violent change. Life in the country parishes went on without nearly as much change as we are apt to think when we speak of "Reformation." I remember two brasses in the Coleshill Church (Warwickshire) to the memory of former vicars, one before and one after the "Reformation." The earlier is in priestly vestments and holds a chalice; the later is in cassock and gown and holds a Bible. The parson dressed a little differently; and religious life went on without real break of continuity.

This, then, was the position faced by more ardent reformers who came back from the Calvinistic influences of the continent, hopeful of great things under the Protestant Elizabeth. They objected to the fixed liturgy, the use of vestments and certain ceremonies, to the royal supremacy and the episcopal constitution, to the laxity of discipline and of Sabbath observance. In 1570, Thomas Cartwright was deprived of his Cambridge Professorship for attacking the constitution of the Anglican Church from the Puritan standpoint. Cambridge was a Puritan stronghold, and it was here that John Smyth must have imbibed his Puritanism, for his tutor was Francis Johnson, who ultimately became a Separatist. We must not, however, think of the Puritans as necessarily Separatists. They had no intention of leaving the Anglican Church, but wished to reform it from within in the Protestant interest. Their position may be compared with that of the Anglo-Catholics to-day, much as both parties might resent

the comparison. They were earnest and conscientious in their evasion of the law, and they were the most living and active people in the Church. It was not until the Hampton Court Conference of 1604 that Puritanism was seen to be incompatible with Anglicanism and the way prepared for its wider and more belligerent history in politics and religion, outside the Anglican Church.

John Smyth remained at Cambridge for twelve years (1586-1598), becoming a Fellow of Christ's College. He was appointed in 1600 as Lecturer, or, as we should say, Chaplain to the City of Lincoln. His preaching, as recorded in the two books of his that come from this period, shows him to have been a Puritan of the more moderate type, who did not, for example, object to a liturgy as such. Thus, he writes of his former Cambridge tutor Johnson, "There are some (whom we will account brethren, though they do not so reckon of us, seeing they have separated from us) which think it unlawful to use the Lord's Prayer as a set prayer, or any other prescribed form of prayer." This occurs in the book called *A Paterne of True Prayer*, still worth reading. Smyth's argument makes the Lord's Prayer the ground-plan or synopsis of all prayers: "there is no prayer in the holy Scripture but it may be referred unto this prayer: and all the prayers which have been, are, or shall be made, must be measured by this prayer, and so far forth are they commendable and acceptable as they are agreeable hereunto." Yet the mere repetition of this perfect form of words is valueless: "It is one thing to say the Lord's prayer, another thing to pray it." Wisely to build the house on this ground-plan is no light task, and it calls for earnest and diligent preparation: "It is our duty to strengthen our soul before prayer with premeditate matter: that so coming to pray and having our hearts filled with matter, we may better continue in prayer: for as a man that hath filled his belly with meat is better able to hold out at his labour than being fasting; even so, he that first replenisheth his soul with meditations of his own sins and wants, of God's judgements and blessings upon himself and others, shall be better furnished to continue longer in hearty and fervent prayer, than coming suddenly to pray without strengthening himself aforehand thereunto." In fact, Smyth links the sermon and the prayer together, in a way that dignifies both: "There is no difference betwixt preaching and praying but this: that preaching is directed to men from God, prayer is directed from man to God, both preaching and prayer is the word of God, or ought to be so." Smyth is, however, sadly conscious how far our actual praying falls below this ideal of public prayer; for example, through wandering thoughts, "as about our dinner, our money, our cattle, our pleasures, our suits and adversaries,

and a thousand of like quality: so that if our prayers were written as we conceive them, and our by-thoughts as parentheses interlaced, they would be so ridiculous as that we might very well be ashamed of them."

The reference to "our suits and adversaries" has the personal note in it, for Smyth lost his chaplaincy after two years of it, being displaced by the nominee of a rival party on the town council, and was involved in protracted legal proceedings; one of the aldermen felt that he had been preached at, and Smyth's party acted injudiciously. Smyth also had put himself in the wrong by not securing a licence from the bishop of Lincoln.

II. He reappears at Gainsborough in 1606, and this brings us to the second phase of his development in which he becomes a Separatist Puritan. He was not a Separatist at Lincoln. He tells us explicitly in the preface to the book from which I have been quoting, published in 1605: "I doe here ingenuously confesse that I am far from the opinion of them which separate from our Church concerning the set forme of prayer (although from some of them I received part of my education in Cambridge)."

Who were these Separatists who led the way for Smyth? He is here doubtless referring to his Cambridge tutor, Francis Johnson, who had been deprived of his Fellowship for Puritanism in 1590, but was so zealous against Separatism that he superintended the public burning of Separatist literature. Yet he kept a book from the pile to see their errors, read it, and was converted to Separatism by it (1592). There had been Separatist tendencies much earlier, at least from 1567 (Fitz), but Robert Browne of Norwich is justly regarded as the first to establish in England (1580) a self-governing community of the regenerate, in opposition to the Anglican unity of the parish. But, though Browne is thus the founder of Congregationalism as we know it to-day, after five years he abandoned the cause he had started, and returned to the Anglican Church. The book which converted Johnson was by Barrowe and Greenwood, two Cambridge men, who were hanged at Tyburn for publishing what were regarded as seditious books. Francis Johnson became a minister of the Separatist Church to which they had belonged in London, the Church which migrated to Amsterdam. Another Congregationalist martyr of the time was John Penry, hanged in 1593 in connection with the "Martin Marprelate" tracts.

John Smyth became a Separatist only after much thought and discussion with his Puritan friends, many of whom were within easy reach of Gainsborough. He meets the charge of vacillation made by Richard Bernard, one of these friends, by

saying, "I remayned doubting alwayes till I saw the truth after I once doubted, but during the tyme of my doubting which was 9. Months at the least I did many actions arguing, doubting, but that I ever fel back from any truth I saw, I praise God, I can with a good conscience deny it." The words are characteristic of the man; his progress towards the decisive step of Separatism was but slow, the first step being the rejection of that episcopal authority which was pressing on him and his Puritan fellows, the next, the recognition that the Anglican Church was corrupt in ministry and worship, though valid as a Church, the final step his conviction that the constitution of the established Church was itself wrong. External events doubtless helped to shape inner convictions, as they always do. The voluntary work he sought to do at Gainsborough within the Anglican community was officially checked; the failure of the Hampton Court Conference to redress Puritan grievances was followed by increased pressure on Puritans. On the other hand, when Smyth did commit himself to the formation of a Separatist Church, it was not on the "Presbyterian" lines which Puritans in general had desired, but on what we should call "Congregational." The basis of the Church was that voluntary covenant to which I have already referred, with its notable emphasis on the truth yet to be known, the truth into which these believers had not yet fully grown. How notable that feature was to be Smyth's whole career will illustrate.

Smyth was pastor of this Gainsborough Church for two years (1606-8), after which the legal pressure upon them, including the imprisonment of some of them, led to the migration of the group as a whole to Amsterdam, where Johnson's Separatist Church already was. John Robinson had been a friend and helper of Smyth, ministering to the closely connected group of Separatists at Scrooby, and he followed him to Amsterdam a little later, there forming a distinct church, and subsequently migrating to Leyden, the starting-point of the "Pilgrim Fathers." The reason for this general migration of English Separatists to Holland was that the Dutch used the liberty they had so bravely won from the tyranny of Spain in the previous century to give religious freedom to all within their borders.

There is an interesting account of the worship of Smyth's Separatist Church in Amsterdam in a letter written by one of his people to a relative in England.

We begin with a prayer, after read some one or two chapters of the Bible; give the sense thereof and confer upon the same; that done, we lay aside our books, and after a solemn prayer made by the first speaker he propoundeth

some text out of the Scripture and prophesieth out of the same by the space of one hour or three quarters of an hour. After him standeth up a second speaker and prophesieth out of the said text the like time and space, sometimes more, sometimes less. After him, the third, the fourth, the fifth, etc. as the time will give leave. Then the first speaker concludeth with prayer as he began with prayer, with an exhortation to contribution to the poor, which collection being made is also concluded with prayer. This morning exercise begins at eight of the clock and continueth unto twelve of the clock. The like course of exercise is observed in the afternoon from two of the clock unto five or six of the clock. Last of all the execution of the government of the Church is handled (*Hughe and Anne Bromehead*).

The reference to the laying aside of the Bible is significant. The rigorous conscientiousness and scrupulosity of Smyth is nowhere more marked than in his attitude to the formal reading of Scripture and the use of translations. Worship, as he told us in the account given of prayer, must be free from mere formality to be worship. The sermon, like prayer, was part of worship, but not the formal reading of the Scripture, though this might fitly precede worship. Smyth felt that formality quenched the Spirit, and that though the Hebrew and Greek originals were inspired, the translations were not, since none of them perfectly reproduced those originals. It must certainly seem to us a case of hair-splitting, to which that age as well as Smyth was prone, when we are told that it is lawful to read from the Bible before we begin to worship God, but unlawful to have the Bible as a help to the eye whilst we are actually prophesying, or that we may sing a psalm spiritually as part of worship, but not if we have the book before us. The *reductio ad absurdum* of this kind of distinction comes when Smyth gravely raises as a question to which he has not yet found the answer this knotty point :

Whither in a Psalme a man must be tyed to meter and Rithme, & tune, & whither voluntary be not as necessary in tune & wordes as in matter?

If Smyth's congregation sang psalms each to his own tune, the effect may have been spiritual, but it certainly was not harmonious. Nor was the insistence on such points as these harmonious in a more figurative sense, for it formed one of the points of contention with Johnson's Church, another being that Church's distinction of Pastors, Teachers and Rulers in the government of the Church. Perhaps some of the things that separate men to-day may seem as foolish to a later generation as do most of these points to us. There is something pathetic in the way Smyth and others rushed into vehement print in the

discussion of such matters which to us have become largely or wholly negligible.¹

III. But Smyth was now to raise another point which differentiated him from the Separatists of his time, and a point proved by subsequent history to be by no means a trivial one. From being a Separatist Puritan, he now became a Baptist Separatist Puritan, and the founder of Baptist Churches. He was not, indeed, the first to raise that issue, since the days when the Church in general had abandoned Believers' Baptism. In the eighth century a Christian sect of the Eastern Empire called the Paulicians practised it. In the twelfth century a movement led by Peter of Bruys was the first to revive it in the Western Church. In the sixteenth century there arose the great Anabaptist movement over the whole of Europe, about which there has been, and still is, so much misconception. It represents the continuation of certain evangelical movements of the Middle Ages, notably that of the Waldensians, in alliance with a deep sense of social and economic injustice. But though the men who belonged to it, in one shape or another, received the nickname of "Anabaptists," i.e., re-baptizers, the most notorious activities of the movement have very little to do with Baptists. The socialistic tendencies which issued in the Peasants' Revolt, and the apocalyptic tendencies which culminated in the excesses of the "Kingdom of God" at Muenster have nothing to do with the principle of Believers' Baptism. Only in Switzerland amongst friends of Zwingli does Anabaptism so-called form a link in the chain. The saner form of Anabaptism was organised by Menno Simons, and the Mennonite Church was represented in Holland, where it may possibly have influenced Smyth as well as certain individuals who raised the question before him.

The direct line of influence upon Smyth is, however, that of the New Testament. When, as a Separatist in England, he formed a church on the basis of a covenant, he was consciously following Old Testament precedents. The use of such a covenant was itself a virtual rejection of infant baptism, though Smyth did not at first see the logic of this. But in Amsterdam he came to see that he was illogical in rejecting the ordination of the Anglican Church whilst retaining, in form at least, her baptism. This led him to see that the New Testament offered

¹ We may compare the excessive conscientiousness of another Baptist pioneer of liberty, Roger Williams. In Massachusetts, Williams had taught that a man should not call on an unregenerate child to give thanks for his food. A Puritan opponent "proved to the satisfaction of everybody but the culprit that it was not lawful for Williams, with his opinions, to set food before his unregenerate child, since he did not allow an irreligious child to go through the form of giving thanks" (Eggleston, p. 289).

no warrant at all for infant baptism, and that his own church was not constituted on a New Testament basis. The admirable thing about Smyth is that he always had the courage of his convictions, as soon as they were formed, so he forthwith resolved to put things right, and persuaded his followers to act with him. They dissolved their Church and started afresh, regardless of the scorn or indignation of their Separatist friends. But how were they to begin? Smyth did not realise, apparently, that they might have sought baptism at the hands of that branch of the Mennonite Church which was in Amsterdam, a fact which implies that he was not consciously influenced by their teaching and practice. The only alternative was for one of them to baptise himself, and then baptise the others. Smyth did not shrink from this, though it provoked much ridicule and made him notorious. The most courteous account of their proceedings, in which the sense of humour is apparent, is that gathered at first hand by John Robinson :

Mr. Smyth, Mr. Helwisse, and the rest, having utterly dissolved and disclaimed their former church state and ministry, came together to erect a new church by baptism unto which they also ascribed so great virtue as that they would not so much as pray together before they had it. And after some straining of courtesy who should begin, and that of John Baptist (I have need to be baptised of thee and comest thou to me) misalleged, Matt. iii. 14, Mr. Smyth baptised first himself and next Mr. Helwisse and so the rest, making their particular confessions.

Thomas Helwys, who is mentioned in this satirical account, had been a close friend and helper of Smyth in England, and speaks of him in the warmest tones of affection to the very end: "All our love was too little for him and not worthy of him." But though Helwys had followed Smyth so far as Believers' Baptism in his pilgrimage of faith, Smyth was to put a strain on his loyalty too great for it. For, subsequently to this re-constitution of the Church, which gave Smyth his epithet of the se-Baptist, or self-baptiser, Smyth came to realise that he might have sought baptism from the Mennonites, and accordingly proposed that the Church should do this, as more in accordance with the New Testament. This was too much for Helwys and some of the rest, especially as doctrinal differences from the Mennonite Church were also involved. Accordingly, after embittered controversy, Helwys and others returned to London in 1612, to found the first Baptist Church in England. Thus was evil over-ruled for good. In the same year Smyth died, before his desire for union with the Mennonites was consummated.

IV. If it were not for history, and for our own insight as Baptists into the real significance of the issues raised by Believers' Baptism, we might easily join in the chorus of disapproval and scorn which was raised then by Smyth's humble loyalty to conscience. His controversial writings display the man in his faults and limitations, though these were by no means peculiar to himself. It gives us something of a shock to realise that the title of his Baptist book, *The Mark of the Beast*, refers to the infant baptism of the Anglican Church. His transition from one phase to another does at first sight and to a superficial observer give the impression of instability of purpose. Yet it is not so. In the discovery or the re-discovery of religious truth there must be the same exposure to error, the same trial experiments with negative results, the same re-tracing of steps till the clue is reached, as in the work of a scientific laboratory. It is the cost and yet the deep significance of such religious discovery that it involves the whole man, and that his mistakes cannot be decently shrouded behind locked doors, whilst the clear-cut result alone is exposed to the public eye. John Smyth was a great re-discoverer of New Testament truth, as the reward of his fidelity to conscience, and his passion for the freedom of faith. His return to Believers' Baptism was the reassertion of a vital principle in its most effective and its most consecrated form of expression. That vital principle was the true constitution of the Church, as "a company of the faithful, baptised after confession of faith and of sins, which is endowed with the power of Christ." The other Separatists also professed this, but obscured it then, as they do still, by their retention of the baptism of infants. Of such, Smyth's logic still holds, that "the Separation must either go back to England (i.e., to the Anglican Church) or go forward to true baptism." It is not a question of the precise mode of baptism, the quantity of water, as is sometimes said by those who are ignorant of the issue. As a matter of fact, Smyth's baptism was by affusion, and it was not for some thirty years that Baptist churches in England returned to the New Testament mode of immersion. The mode is quite secondary to the principle, and the principle is that of intelligent faith as the only adequate basis for the constitution of the Church.

If we have any lingering doubts about our right to be proud of our great pioneer, it can be removed by reading the last book Smyth wrote, in which he shows that he has passed into the true catholicity of the Christian man, the freedom of the Catholic Christian, no longer fettered and bound by his own prejudices. In this fine utterance, worthy to rank with the better-known confessions of Richard Baxter, Smyth humbly expresses his

regret for his censure of others, and his failure adequately to recognise the true Christianity of his many opponents. His entanglement in so many controversies has prevented him from seeing how large an extent of common ground he occupied with them. He is conscious of having put too great an emphasis on outward things, instead of on the inner brotherhood of all true Christians, in spite of their external differences. He has been wrong, in so far as he has contended for outward things and broken the rules of love and charity. But he has the rights of one who has kept his independence, for he has been chargeable to no man (as a matter of fact, he made his living as a physician, whilst ministering to the Church). He is quite aware of the impression made upon others by his own changes of conviction, but his answer is ready, and is adequate: "I have in all my writings hitherto, received instruction 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." There rings out the old principle of the Gainsborough covenant, which it was to cost Smyth so much searching of heart, and so much obloquy, faithfully to retain: "to walk in all His ways made known, or to be made known." The spirit of peace breathes through these pages, without any abandonment of principle, and peace, true peace, within, is the rarest of all the fruit of the Spirit. That peace of God guards John Smyth's death-bed, and is uttered in his last recorded words: "The Lord hath holpen me; the Lord hath holpen me. . . . I praise the Lord, He hath now holpen me, and hath taken away my sins." We shall not think, if we read the story, that Mandell Creighton's words about Smyth are any exaggeration, words which honour the broad-minded sympathy of an Anglican scholar as much as they do John Smyth: "None of the English Separatists had a finer mind or a more beautiful soul." On the Sunday when I worshipped in that Amsterdam Church in which John Smyth was buried, the text of the sermon, by a singular appropriateness, was, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." The deepest sense of that rest is not the sleep of death after life's fitful fever, or even simply the peace of life beyond this world (as in the Epistle to the Hebrews), but the peace of heart which is its present earnest, the peace of a service which is perfect freedom.

The successors of Smyth have claimed a foremost place in the liberation of the world from outward constraints and tyrannies, and in winning a freedom *for* faith. Let them learn of him the lesson he teaches so well, that true freedom of faith is always progressive, always criticising its own assumptions and

prejudices, always seeking more light. There is a tyranny of thought within as well as of monarch without. There are fetters of custom as well as of the dungeon. It may be that we have not yet fully occupied the territory that John Smyth re-discovered for us, and that, even as Baptists, there is a baptism of the Spirit which the New Testament has yet to teach us, and a larger meaning in our own testimony than we have yet realised. We shall learn it only if we live, like John Smyth, with our minds to the light, ever striving to enter into more and more knowledge of the truth which makes men free.

H. WHEELER ROBINSON.