

Some Rare Seventeenth Century Pamphlets.

IN his *History of the English Baptists*, Dr. A. C. Underwood refers to the Particular Baptists of seven London churches and the publication of their first Confession of Faith in 1644. The repeated editions called for and the subject matter of the preamble bear witness to the keenness of the theological controversy of the time. This controversy was no academic or dry-as-dust affair: an interested historical imagination can detect purposeful Christian believers wrestling with statements of faith, because they were aware that beliefs determine our nature and destiny. The Reformation was not very old, and the "displaced persons" from an abandoned Roman territory of faith could not easily reach a settled dwelling in the confidence that they had discovered the city whose builder and maker was God; and nothing less would satisfy them. Pioneers say and do strange things but they must be judged by their purpose, and in this light the Baptists of the Commonwealth period exhibit worthy valour.

The Preamble to the London Confession disclaims such calumnies as "holding free-will, falling away from grace, denying original sin," it bears witness to the desire for an adequate dogmatic statement of the faith for the practical purpose of helping the churches and their members to live well. The ferment of inquiry, this search for facts, that faith will give boldness to interpret, was not confined to London: there were centres of similar persuasion in the West.

Miss E. K. Adams, or Kingsbridge, Devon, has recently presented to Bristol Baptist College Library a bound volume, 8 in. x 5 in., entitled *A Confession of Faith* and certain pamphlets bound up with the confession are of considerable historical value.

The full title of the Confession is, "A Confession of the Faith of several churches of Christ, in the county of Somerset and of some churches in the counties adjacent." At the bottom of the title page, there is added, "London, printed by Henry Hills, and are to be sold by Thomas Brewster, at the three Bibles at the West End of Pauls, 1656." The Dedicatory to this Confession is signed by Thomas Collier. Of this man the Dictionary of National Biography says, "A Baptist who owned land in Godalming in 1634, a Baptist preacher in Guernsey and Yorkshire in 1646 and in the south and west of England, and one who

published polemical tracts 1645-1691." Dr. Underwood says, "Collier was the leader of the Particular Baptists of the West, but little is known of his life, except that the Western Association in 1655 appointed and ordained him General Superintendent and Messenger to all the associated churches." (p. 109.)

In the "Epistle Dedicatory" to the Confession, it is emphasised that the churches in London are not alone in their stand: in the West also "to our knowledge many . . . churches . . . stand fast in the profession of the unchangeable love of God in Jesus Christ to his people." The confession has been shaped because of the "great distractions and divisions among professing people in the nation," "the great departing from the faith and that under glorious notions of spiritualness and holiness." Collier and his fellow signatories show their pastoral concern for practical issues when they urge, "that it be your care and that which may daily lie next your heart to have a high and precious esteem of Jesus Christ and of him crucified; God having made him to his people, to be the way, the truth and the life." This Dedicatory is concerned with no trivial matters that disappear with the passing of time: such believing people, who speak here have penetrated to the heart of the New Testament religion and know what corresponds to a healthy blood circulation. "Oh be not easily cheated out of your esteem and interest in a crucified Jesus," they say: "Oh little do souls think what they lose when they part with the man Christ Jesus . . . for nothing but wind and vanity, they sow the wind and shall reap the whirlwind." Again, "let it be your care to press after and live more in the power of the Gospel." These seventeenth century preachers in their condemnation of "pride and covetousness," and an undue regard for the outward adornment of dress, were seeking a true religion, such as Isaiah sought when he spoke of a vital faith that would turn weapons of destruction, "swords," into instruments of creative goodness, "pruninghooks," for it was recognised that the very lusts that destroy become saving as they are turned into wholesome ministries, "clothing the backs and refreshing the hovels of the poor." The Epistle closes with the signatures of those appointed by the several churches and contains the names of persons from Somerset, Wilts., Devon, Gloucester and Dorset, with the name Thomas Collier, boldly signed at the end.

It will be obvious to all who are aware of the revived interest in theology today and in particular the earnest debate concerning the nature of the Church that this book emerged from the urgency of deep need. Truly understood, if the Baptist Church understands its real genius, it will be seen as the most significant fellowship in any town. Collier, and all who are in the succession, take their stand on the knowledge that "true freedom," to quote

Kierkegaard, "consists in freely appropriating that which is given and consequently in being absolutely dependent through freedom." The given is the Deed of God in Christ, the one event in time that has meaning for all time. We are free in Christ and never apart from Him. It is with such deep things that the seventeenth century Baptists were concerned. The confessions were calls to action not sentimental musings or enervating complainings like the man, to whom the Danish philosopher referred, who when caught in the quicksands, began to calculate how far down he had already sunk, forgetting that all the while he was sinking all the deeper.

This Somerset Confession, of which we have written, together with the dedicatory epistle in full was published by E. B. Underhill in his *Confession of Faith*, pp. 61f. The Confession alone appears in McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, pp. 202f. *It is thus accessible to all.* It would appear that the pamphlets bound up with Miss Adams' copy are of even greater interest and reference will be made to them. In all there are seven pamphlets included.

The first pamphlet is entitled, *An antidote against the Infection of the Times*, with a sub title, "a faithful watch-word from Mount Sion, to prevent the ruin of souls." The same page says that it is published for the good of all by the appointment of the Elders and Messengers of the several churches of Ilston, Abergavenny, Tredinog, Carmarthen, Hereford, Bredwardin, Cledock and Llangors meeting at Brecknock upon "the 29 and 30 daies of the fifth moneth 1656." Seventeen pages of the *Antidote* are devoted to some nine "considerations presented to sinners," Adam's sin with its consequences in man; God sending forth a deliverer, even Jesus the Righteous, whose earthly life and ascension are outlined with meaning in terms of the perfecting of the saints "by consecrating a way forth to Heaven" and the "rule in the height of majesty and glory"; the expectation of the second coming of Christ. Such objective facts from the Scriptures are boldly interpreted in the appeal of the final considerations; there is no other way "for miserable man to be saved but by him alone who of God is made unto such as receive him, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption"; the warning against false Christs even when the sinner is "inquiring for him," and the plea to search the scriptures, to look upon the ministers of the Gospel as God's ambassadors and "to frequent the ministry of the word."

Some twenty-two pages of the *Antidote* are taken up with "Admonitions to Saints." Here are warnings against "the reigning sins of these perilous times"; spiritual pride, hypocrisy contempt of magistracy with its despising of government,

"presumptuous are they and self-willed"; worldly-mindedness; decay of love, which "wounds the souls of the followers of the Lamb," with a final appeal to "give over censurings and tyrannical lording over the consciences of your brethren," to seek above all things fervent charity, since without it "all your gifts and other religious flourishes, are nothing worth."

The last pages of this pamphlet contain "Invitations to Backsliders," and the earnest appeal is directed to many motives for the desired return: the misery of the back-slidden state; the good that back sliders once found in the ways of God; the great loss that a back slider is at; the sad consequences and the ingratitude that back-sliders show to God; the shortness of a man's life; the readiness of the Lord to receive such. "Delay not therefore," "forsake every false way," "return to the Lord thy God, who is ready to receive thee into his grace and glory" are the last words of this earnest tract.

The second pamphlet is entitled *A brief answer to some of the objections and demurs made against the coming in and inhabiting of the Jews in this Commonwealth*, with a plea on their behalf to give them liberty and protection in this nation. *Isaiah* xvi. 3 is quoted on this title page, "hide the outcasts: betray not him that wandereth" and also xvi. 4, "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler." The Epistle Dedicatory is signed by "The unworthiest of the Lord's servants, Thomas Collier." The writing takes the form of a stated objection with its answer. Such objections encountered by Collier were, that "notwithstanding they were the people beloved of God . . . yet they were always a rebellious and stiffnecked people; because they are enemies of Christ . . . and we are commanded not to receive such into our houses; because of their bad demeanour in the nation formerly and by their ill behaviour were a burden; because they are likely to draw away disciples after them and make proselytes; because their ends in desiring to come are their own advantage, they being a covetous people; if God doth intend conversion to them, yet it is not to be expected but in a miraculous way, therefore to let them come in on such an account is but in vain; their liberty in other protestant countries meant little or no good; their coming would be a means to ruin trade since they were so exercised on merchandizing; the favour that Christians show them, so far from drawing them to Christ rather hardens them; now they are out it is better to keep them out; if they be permitted to come in, papists and jesuits may come over in pretence of being Jews. Each of the objections is squarely met by Collier: for example, on the issue of trade he says, "I suppose there might be and are as well ways of exportation

as of importation, the more is brought in, the more may be carried out: if it should be some loss to some rich merchants, yet it could be advantage to the people in general, the more is brought in the plentier and cheaper it would be, what a few rich men might lose, a great many poor men might gain and that would be in deed and in truth no loss at all." Since attack is recognised as the best defence, Collier moves to a more positive appeal: he declares, "it is not only lawful but a duty to permit the Jews a being in the nation"; "God still owns them as his people . . . and shall we be enemies to them that God owns . . . what if they be accounted as the worst of men, yet if God esteem them let us not be enemies;" the "grafting" verses of *Romans* xi., are quoted and the comment is made "let it be enough that we have their riches, let us not be unmerciful to them"; the scriptures make it clear that God is correcting his people with a view to their salvation and since this is so, "would it be a seemly or acceptable thing when a father is correcting a child . . . that a brother should come and lay on stripes too." Collier quotes the appeal to Moab (*Isaiah* xvi. 4) "be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler," and adds although we know not whether we are of the posterity of Moab, he is sure that "God hath made them, viz. Abraham, Christ and his apostles, friends to us that believe, hence it is that believing Gentiles are called and accounted Abraham's children, and shall we be unkind to them who are the natural seed in their affliction"; it would be a sin for christians so to do, says Collier. The closing pages of this *Brief Answer* are in similar vein and many queries are presented such as the last wherein it is asked, "whether now the day of their deliverance drawing near, we may not expect that an act of mercy of this kind be very acceptable to the God of mercy, who will have mercy on these people, and they that upon a good account do show them mercy, shall obtain mercy."

Dr. Whitley, in his *Baptist Bibliography* notes a copy of *A Brief Answer* as in the British Museum, but not in any of the other libraries he examined, which included the Bodleian, Cambridge University, and all our Baptist Colleges.

Another pamphlet is entitled *The Seventh Day Sabbath opened and discovered, as it is brought forth, and to be observed now in the Days of the Gospel; and the first day of the week, the Time for Public Worship*. The subject is a matter for keen concern and Collier delays writing on it, not desiring to provoke vain controversy; he asks that the reader will suspend judgment, "till he hath gone through" and although he is confident that the "sober inquiring christian will do so," he expects little less than "hard censures from all parties." Collier proceeds, "I shall, therefore, with as much evidence from the scripture

as I may, give some grounds why the seventh day Sabbath is not to be observed as the Sabbath of Believers in the Gospel day under the New Testament ministration, by virtue of an institution or command of Jesus Christ the Lord of the Sabbath and of the Gospel Ministration." The grounds are duly set forth and one can sense the atmosphere of keen critical controversy that prevailed at the time, since at the end Collier says, "in the meantime, let there be love and union: avoid rentings and divisions, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you, which is the prayer of him that waiteth Zion's Glory."

Professor E. A. Payne, of Regent's Park College, in a letter, says that another pamphlet, *An answer to an Epistle written by Thomas Salthouse, to the churches of the Anabaptists, so called,* appears to be even rarer than that to which we have referred, *A Brief Answer*. Dr. Whitley, says Professor Payne, did not discover any copy at all, though its issue is proved by the replies which it provoked. This "Answer" by Collier, contains a vigorous comment on Salthouse, "a man of note among the people called Quakers," and his Epistle which according to Collier has been "weighed in the balance and is found too light."

A similar theme is found in the pamphlet written by T. Higgenson, *A Testimony to the true Jesus and the Faith of him* and aims to set forth "wherein the way of the People called Quakers is in meekness and righteousness summed and weighed," the principles of the Quakers being examined as they are found in a book of theirs called *Love to the Lost*.

The pamphlet in this book which may prove to be a fresh discovery, since it is not catalogued by Dr. Whitley at all, is styled *The Personal Appearing and Reign of Christ's Kingdom upon the Earth, and the State of the Saints till then proved to be a state of suffering and not of reigning and conquering with a material sword as some imagine.* Thomas Collier here has Mr. Tillinghast in view who in his book called *The Signs of the Times* gives his grounds for the practice. This Tillinghast was a Fifth Monarchy Man, a graduate of Caius College, Cambridge, who after being rector of Streat, 1637, became an Independent and a publisher of religious works. Collier in his preface, says he has endeavoured to clear three things: (1) the personal Reign of Christ upon the Earth; (2) that the state of the saints will be a suffering state until that time; (3) to answer such grounds as are produced by Mr. Tillinghast for the introduction of the Kingdom of Christ by the material sword in the hands of the saints. Collier says, that "the danger to me appears in seeking Sion's good in such a way of war and force as is by some so much spoken of and prayed for, to me appears the high way both to dishonour God and ruin Sion." Collier quickly passes from the pages which

prove from the Scripture that Christ shall personally reign on the earth, to the paragraphs which present his answers to Mr. Tillinghast. A few sentences will indicate Collier's thought carefully extended in the pamphlet: "believing Gentiles under the Gospel ministration is clearly stated in the New Testament to be a suffering state, and that till Christ comes": "Jesus Christ was a pattern in his own person to all his people, . . . whose life was a life of suffering": "the Kingdom is promised to the meek and suffering Lamb of Jesus and not to the froward that would gain the Kingdom by a worldly wayfare": "because Christ's Kingdom is not of this world"; "the endeavouring to set up the Kingdom by a worldly warfare is inconsistent with the Gospel ministration of peace": "the saints are to exercise faith in believing and patience in waiting, until the Lord's time is come": "the saints are not in a capacity to reign before Christ comes," they must be judged themselves before they can judge others, Collier says who is arrested by the thought that all men are sinners and not to be trusted as complete rulers of society. Moved by such convictions Collier devotes the last nineteen pages of his writing to a consideration of each of Tillinghast's eight grounds for his doctrine, set out in the book called *The Signs of the Times*.

Such is the book which, through the kindness and thought of Miss Adams, will now form a significant addition to the treasures of Bristol Baptist College Library. It will be fitting to add that we, as Baptists, are in this Collier succession. We have the freedom, which he claimed, to interpret with all boldness of imagination and gathered intuitive experience the objective and unalterable facts of the Gospel, but like Collier, we have to bring our judgments to the test of God's revealed word lest we be lost in speculation with no anchorage in the truth that abides. We are one with our seventeenth century brethren in seeking sound doctrine only that we may live soundly and herein we are building on the New Testament where doctrine and duty, creed and conduct, walk in holy alliance. We are one with Collier and his fellow questers in that we seek a faith and a practice which our children can grow up into and not grow out of, and thus find that all things are theirs because they "are Christ's and Christ is God's."

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