

The Portsmouth Disputation of 1699

THE continuing baptismal controversy reminds us that Baptists have been so engaged, now vigorously, now fitfully, for over three centuries. Not always has it been conducted as it is today, however, and although there is, doubtless, room for further improvement, we can be thankful that the acrimony is gone that characterised the public debates of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Of all these disputations, perhaps the best documented, at least on the Baptist side, is that held at Portsmouth in 1699. It has also the distinction of being the last held under Royal Licence,¹ although other unlicensed debates were subsequently held.²

Soon after the Revolution, a Particular Baptist church was formed at Alverstoke, Gosport. Nothing is known of it before the mention of John Webber as its pastor, and the church appears to have dissolved at his death. Before that event, however, its numbers were considerably reduced when several members moved to the other side of Portsmouth Harbour and founded the first Particular church there. During the earlier part of Webber's ministry in Gosport it is recorded that the church was "so blessed . . . that in a short time they had gathered Twenty Members, very worthy Persons, who were added to them by Baptism. . . ."³ Because, apparently, they had lost some of their own members to this Baptist church, the Presbyterians began to preach and to teach against believers' baptism. Most notable among them was one of their ministers, Samuel Chandler of Fareham, five miles north west of Gosport. Extracts from two of his sermons illustrate the arguments he used. At Portsmouth on 10th November, 1698 he said :

It is not likely that God that will have mercy and not sacrifice, would institute an Ordinance so prejudicial to the Bodies of Men : and that it's very unlikely that Dipping, which whenever it is mentioned, is used as a Token of God's Vengeance, should in this Sacrament be used as a Token of his Mercy. Where your read of Dipping, you find it mentioned in a way of Wrath and Vengeance. Thus the old World was Dip'd and Drowned for their Sins : God's Vengeance followed them, and they sunk as Lead in the mighty Waters. Thus the Egyptians were Dip'd and Drowned in the Red Sea. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ shall come down from Heaven, to render Vengeance on his Adversaries; cloathed with Garments Dip'd in blood, *Rev. xix. 13. . . .*⁴

And on 24th November, preaching on 1 *Cor. xii. 13*, he said :

First therefore in the sight of God, Repenting Believers

are to be baptized, they have an undoubted right to this Ordinance. . . . These were the Subjects of Baptism when the Ordinance was first instituted and appointed. . . . So that if we were sent into an Heathen Nation, we ought to engage them to repent and believe before we administer this Ordinance.⁵

Although elsewhere Chandler is very ready to defend infant baptism, here he is altogether concerned to refute 'Dipping' as the proper mode, even for adults. Facts that came to light after the Portsmouth disputation were, in view of this, to prove damaging to the Presbyterian arguments.

The nearest Baptist church to the Particular one at Gosport was, at this time, a General one at St. Thomas's Street, Portsmouth. This had been founded through the itinerant ministry of an unconventional Anglican clergyman, James Sicklemore—incumbent of Singleton, seven miles north of Chichester. Persuaded of believers' baptism about 1640, he had established a General Baptist church in Chichester as well as at Portsmouth. By the time of the disputation, a building had been erected and the pastor was Thomas Bowes, a farmer at Milton on Portsea Island. Bowes and a number of the members of this church attended lectures at the Portsmouth Presbyterian Meeting House given by the minister there, Francis Williams, assisted by Chandler of Fareham. At the close of one such lecture given by Chandler on Thursday, 22nd December 1698, Bowes stood up and opposed the arguments advanced in favour of the Presbyterian practice of baptism. Both parties soon agreed that only a public debate would suffice for the demands made on either side. Bowes and Webber now conferred on the choice of a disputant to represent the Baptists of both Portsmouth and Gosport. Bowes proposed that Matthew Caffin of Horsham should be invited but Webber rejected him because of his Christology. They then agreed to ask Dr. William Russel to oppose the Presbyterians on their behalf.

In many ways Russel was a natural choice. A graduate in medicine and art, and a member of the senate of Cambridge University, he was the first pastor of High Hall Baptist church and was ". . . well versed in the logical methods of disputation. . . ."⁶ Yet the choice was curious. Bowes attended, as a Messenger, the annual assemblies of the General Baptist churches, and his signature occurs frequently in the minutes. When this assembly met in 1698 it sent a letter to representatives of the Particular Baptist churches, bearing the signatures of John Amory of Wrington in Somerset, and Thomas Bowes :

A copy of the Letter sent to Whites Alley touching Bror Wm. Russell

The Genall Assembly of the Messengers Elders & Brethren mett in Goswell Street Meeting House the 15; 16 and 17 of the 4th Month 1698

Unto our Dissenting Brethren Mett at Whites Alley Meeting House on the Day or Days above Mentioned.

Beloved Brethren

for as much as Bror Wm. Rusell a Member of your Society by the Testimony of sevall credibly Witnesses is proved in our Assembly to be guilty of severall & great Imoralities We have thought meet thereby to acquaint you therewith & do Earnestly do desire you speedily to admonish him thereof And to Suspend him from Exercising any Ministeriall gift in the Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ And also further to deal with him as god's word Directs in such Cases And further also we do desire & in God's fear Beseech you to consider & Examine well your present Station And remember from whence you are fallen & repent & do your first workes. Brethren the Honour of God and the Glorious Gospell of our Lord Jesus Christ being so much Concerned we hope you will answer these our request.

Subscribed in the name and by
the order of the Assembly

Jo : Amory
Thos Bowes⁷

Although Russel's name is otherwise spelt in this letter, a nearby footnote in the minutes makes it clear beyond doubt that this does refer to the disputant.⁸ It can only be assumed that whatever differences were the cause of this letter, they had been composed, at least as far as Bowes was concerned, before he and Webber began to seek a champion.

The church at Gosport now wrote to Russel :

To our esteemed Brother Russel, we of the church of Christ at Gosport, send Greeting.

We being under a Pressure of Conscience, having of late had the great Ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ (viz. that of Believers' baptism in water) inveighed against, and ridiculed by one of the Presbyterian ministers (Mr. Chandler by name) and being much grieved that the Ordinance of Christ should be thus triumphed over, and trodden under foot, and hoping you have so far engaged yourself in Christ's Cause, and that God hath given you Abilities to defend it, we don't only Beg, but Require your Personal Presence, and desire your Assistance to defend that sacred Ordinance.⁹

At the same time were sent " . . . several other Letters, signed by the Ministers, and other Private Brethren, to press him to it."¹⁰ It seems that Russel was not at first anxious to comply. He suggested that he and Chandler should exchange letters "to try the strength and length of their Weapons; and thereby prevent a Publick Disputation, if possible. . . ."¹¹ When he was assured, however, that only a public debate was acceptable to either side, he agreed to attend.

Originally it had been "Agreed, The Disputation be held . . . on Friday the 10th of February next ensuing (if God permit) . . . And if . . . either Party should fall sick, or any other unavoidable Circumstance happen; that then the Time shall be deferr'd to another Day, to be agreed on by the Parties concern'd, not exceeding a Fortnight after; provided a Weeks Notice be given thereof before the 10th of February. . . ."¹² For some unrecorded reason this provision must have been invoked for the dispute did not take place until Wednesday 22nd February. Meanwhile the Baptists asked the Presbyterians to apply for the Royal Licence to dispute. Thus a letter was sent to William III through the Mayor, Henry Seager, and Major-General Earl and Col. Gibson, Governor and Deputy Governor respectively of the Garrison at Portsmouth, requesting His Majesty :

That he would grant permission to the Presbyterians, publicly to vindicate the common cause of the reformed churches, and to settle the wavering among them in the belief and practice of those truths, which tended very much to the advancement of early piety and religion.¹³

In granting the Licence the King commanded that all civil and military officers should attend to maintain peace and order!¹⁴

The Presbyterian Meeting House in Penny Street, Portsmouth was used for the disputation which began between nine and ten on the morning of February 22nd. Debate continued throughout the day without adjournment of any kind until between six and seven in the evening. Disputants for the Baptists were Dr. Wm. Russel, John Williams, minister at East Knoyle, Wilts. (not to be confused with Francis Williams who was Presbyterian minister at Penny Street) and John Sharp, (Moderator), minister at Frome, Somerset. Opposing them were Samuel Chandler, a Mr. Leigh of Newport, I.W., and Benjamin Robinson, (Moderator), of Hungerford. There were at least three recorders present. These were a Mr. Bissel, the Town Clerk for Portsmouth, Samuel Ring for the Baptists and a Mr. Smith for the Presbyterians. One account reads: "William Smith, M.D., the founder of the Grammar School, was present at this disputation, and took a

verbatim account of the proceedings.”¹⁵ All reports speak of the large number who attended.

Russel began by proposing that prayer should be offered. This was agreed to, and Chandler prayed, afterwards addressing the audience :

MY FRIENDS,

It is not out of Vanity or Pride I appear in this place upon this Occasion at this Time. Most of you know, and I suppose many of you have heard, that in the Course of my Lecture in this Place, I have Discoursed of the great Principles of Religion; and having explained the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, I came to give an Account of the Two Sacraments of the New Testament; and therein was unavoidably concerned to speak to those Truths that are contradicted by these Gentlemen here present. Those that heard me know, that I was very Modest in expressing my self in this Controversie; But a bold and confident Challenge was given me, which I knew not how to refuse; unless I would betray the Truths I believe in my Conscience, or confess my self not able to vindicate them. And accordingly these Men have sent for some Assistance to oppose us in this Matter. I desire these things may be handled with a great deal of Calmness; that we may discourse of things as becomes Christians; And as we have the Favour of the Government both Civil and Military so we may give them no occasion to repent of allowing us this liberty. And also I desire that nothing may be done unbecoming this Place, where we usually meet together for the more immediate Worship of God. And I would have you join with me in this Petition; That God would grant his Truth may take place.¹⁶

There were two questions to be debated: 1) WHETHER, according to the commission of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, adult believers are only the proper subjects of baptism, and not infants? and 2) WHETHER the ordinance of baptism, as appointed by Christ is to be administered by dipping, plunging or overwhelming only and no otherwise? Russel asked how the issues were to be examined and appeared to favour exegesis of the commission with recourse to other texts. The Presbyterians, however, required that the arguments should be framed syllogistically.

Crosby¹⁷ gives an abridgement of the account of the proceedings as given by Russel in his book *A True Narrative of the Portsmouth Disputation Between some Ministers of the Presbyterian and others of the Baptist, Persuasion, concerning the Subjects and Manner of Baptism*. For convenience, the extracts below are

taken from Crosby's account; whilst Russel's unabridged version is here and there a little less abrupt, Crosby gives enough space to his abridgement faithfully to record the impressions that a reading of Russel's book affords. The modern reader deserves to be excused if he sometimes wonders whether the protagonists were not more anxious to win the arguments than they were to convince their opponents of the truth.

The opening exchanges are typical of the tenor throughout :

Dr. Russel. IF Christ hath no where required any of his ministers to baptize infants, then the baptism of infants is not according to the commission of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But Christ hath no where required any of his ministers to baptize infants. Therefore the baptism of infants is not according to the commission of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Mr. Chandler. IF you will allow good consequences drawn from scripture, I will deny your minor.

Dr. Russel. THEN you must suppose that Christ hath required some of his ministers to baptize infants.

Mr. Leigh. WE distinguish between consequential truths and express words.

Dr. Russel. AND so do we; but I hope our Lord's commission, about holy baptism is delivered in express words, and not in consequentials; the term, in my argument, is very lax; I do not say there commanded, but required; and if you prove the baptism of infants any where required by Christ, 'tis sufficient.

Mr. Leigh. WILL you allow good scripture consequences in this case, or do you expect plain scripture words?

Dr. Russel. I SAY again, the term I use admits of any proof; he is not thereby obliged to produce any express command, if he can do without it. If he can prove that Christ hath any way required it, it will suffice. But you must remember that you are to prove it according to Christ's commission; (for those are the terms in the question) and I believe you will find a difficult task to do that by consequence.

Mr. Chandler. WHAT from the commission?

Mr. Robinson, the moderator, cries out to Mr. Chandler, hold. Dr. Russel must prove it by an universal negative.

Dr. Russel. THEN Mr. Chandler must deny some part of my argument, which I have not yet been able to prevail with him to do.

Mr. Chandler. I DENY the minor.

Dr. Russel. BY denying the minor, you say, that Christ

hath somewhere required some of his ministers to baptize infants.

Mr. Chandler. BY good consequence.

Dr. Russel. THEN I will make good my minor thus : If Christ hath any where required any of his ministers to baptize infants, it is somewhere so recorded in the holy scripture : but it is no where so recorded in the holy scripture ; therefore Christ hath not any where required any of his ministers to baptize infants.

Mr. Chandler. IF you mean by being recorded in scripture, being recorded in express words, I deny your major ; but if you mean by consequence, I deny your minor.¹⁸

And so on !

To the first of the two questions debated, that concerning the proper subjects of baptism, Russel produced four arguments in favour of adult believers only. The first was, as the above extract shows, that Christ has not commanded the baptism of infants. The answer of the Presbyterians is also indicated above, that infant baptism is a consequence of our Lord's teaching. Secondly, Russel affirmed that discipleship is the prerequisite of baptism, and that infants cannot be disciples, since they cannot be taught. Reply was made that infants could be regarded as 'incomplete disciples.' Next, Russel turned to the Pauline epistles, saying that the apostle " . . . did declare all the counsel of God, and kept back nothing that was profitable for the church of God . . ." but since he nowhere refers to infant baptism, that practice cannot be held to be part of the Gospel. To this Mr. Leigh retorted that the extant epistles are " . . . not the 100th part of what Paul preached . . ." and rejected Russel's argument from silence. Sarcastically, Russel said he had heard that there were unwritten traditions locked up in the Pope's breast, but he had not heard that the Presbyterians had been entrusted with such treasure. The last argument Russel used in this section was based on the express words of the commission which, he asserted, excluded the possibility of the baptism of infants. Mr. Leigh, however, claimed that infants were " . . . included in the word 'all nations' . . ." This argument occupied a considerable time. The account makes it clear that voices were raised and tempers frayed. The hope that Chandler had expressed at the outset that the dispute would be conducted with " . . . a great deal of Calmness . . ." now proved forlorn. At one point in this section, Leigh for the Presbyterians asked : " I challenge you to give one instance of any one, born of believing parents, baptized at age." It seems that whilst Russel continued the debate, John Williams was trying to recall one instance from the New Testament, and soon this curious dialogue follows :

Mr. Williams. WAS not the mother of our Lord a believer when Christ was born?

Mr. Leigh. WHAT do you ask that question for? every body knows that?

Mr. Williams. BUT do you believe it?

Mr. Leigh. YES, I do believe it; what then?

Mr. Williams. THEN here is an instance for you, from scripture, of the child of a believer, that was a believer before he was born; and yet he was not baptized till he came to years; and this we can prove.¹⁹

Shortly afterwards the debate on the first question was concluded but not before Russel had said :

. . . doth he (i.e. Robinson) not know that the church of Rome baptize things of an inferior nature? for they baptize churches and bells. And if I had compared your practice to theirs of baptizing bells, you had no reason to complain, for they are both passive in the act; only, if you will give credit to one of the fathers, viz. Augustine, the bells are upon that account the fittest subjects, for they are wholly passive; but, saith he, the little children are not so, for they shew their resistance by their crying.²⁰

In debating the second question which was concerned with the manner of baptizing, some time was spent on etymology. Chandler declared that the Greek 'baptizo' could be translated as 'wash,' and need not carry the meaning of 'dip.' Russel then quoted from the *Lexicon Theologicum* of Alstedius in which, so he recalled, the primary sense of 'baptizo' was given as 'to dip,' and the rendering 'to wash' was "secondary and remote." A short extract here will show the temper of the dispute :

Dr. Russel. THE holy scripture shews us the right way of baptizing, as appointed by Christ : but it doth not shew us that it ought to be done by sprinkling; therefore sprinkling is not the right way of baptizing.

Mr. Leigh. SIR, you must bring in that dipping is absolutely necessary; what do you talk of sprinkling for?

Dr. Russel. I HOPE you are not ashamed of your practice; but if you will disown sprinkling to be the right way of baptizing, I am contented, I will not then insist upon it.

Mr. Robinson. WE are not discoursing upon that now; you are to prove dipping to be the only way; and you must and shall prove it.

Dr. Russel. MUST and shall! must and shall is for the king, and not for Mr. Robinson. . . .²¹

The account of the proceedings closes with these words :

AFTER much pro and con about words to no profit, but the subverting of the hearers, and a confused jangling and noise, Mr. Williams, the Presbyterian minister, said, he thought there had been little said to the purpose. Upon which Dr. Russel said, Mr. Williams, I think there hath been a great deal said, more than hath been answered. But if you are not satisfied we will wave all that hath been said, and I will dispute it over with you, de novo. Mr. Williams shrugged, and answered, No, I am not very well. Upon which it was thought meet by them to put an end to the disputation. And Mr. Leigh, after he had made a speech to thank the governor and the mayor for their civility to them, and the Baptists had returned their thanks also, he then concluded in prayer, and so dismissed the assembly. It was between the hours of six and seven of the clock, when the dispute ended.²²

The Portsmouth Disputation was at an end, but the sequel was a very long one. We may perhaps be pardoned if we are surprised to find that there were some who, as a direct result of that day's long and wearisome debate in the logical form, were persuaded of the claims of the Baptists, were baptised and joined the churches at Portsmouth and Gosport. The first development, however, took place next day. It seems that Sharp, Moderator for the Baptists, Leigh, the Presbyterian from Newport, John Williams, minister of East Knoyle Baptist church, and two other Baptists met together at the house of Francis Williams, the Portsmouth Presbyterian minister, in whose church the disputation had taken place.

. . . there came in Mr. Erle, Mr. Bowler, and Mr. Farrel, three Presbyterian Ministers . . . Mr. Farrel, in the Presence of the forementioned Ministers, saluted Mr. John Williams, the Disputant, after this manner.

Mr. Williams, I must tell you, and that not as my own Sentiments only, but as the Sentiments of every one of our Brethren, that what credit was gained to your Cause, was gained by you. . . .²³

This estimate reflects the esteem in which the elderly John Williams was held and demonstrates, by implication, that the Presbyterian evaluation of Dr. Russel was not high. This is abundantly borne out elsewhere. It may have been due, in part at least, to the contempt in which provincials have often held those who live in the capital. It is also possible of course that they were unwilling to admit the abilities of Russel, to which others were ready to testify.

Subsequent to this meeting, Williams wrote a letter to Leigh which for charitable expression compares very favourably with the many other books and pamphlets that were issued on either side. He wrote :

Brother Leigh, for so I can heartily call you, and own you if you please to accept of it : the occasion of writing these few Lines to you is this. I have in my reflex Thoughts weighed what was offered upon both sides in the Dispute; not being willing to abide by any thing that has not a foundation in the Word, nor to reject any thing that is offered against my present Opinion, could I see it were bottomed on the Word, because I know I must one day be judged by the Word. You told me you could have said four times more for our Cause than was spoken by us, and ten times more than you did for your own. Possibly you might have spoken four times as many words as we did : but I think it would have been a hard task to have offered Arguments that had four times more weight and substance than those that were offered by us . . . yet I would not undervalue your Abilities, nor set our own in competition with yours : had we not had Truth on our side, your Abilities would soon have overturn'd mine. . . .

Whatever you could have said, I know not; you know you did not give us an instance for Infant-Baptism . . . and must we still look on Infant-Baptism to be an Ordinance of God . . . ? But, Sir, if you can say ten times more for your Practice than you did, it is not too late to offer it yet; and if you please to send it me, and it be such as is convincing, I will spread it for you; if not, I will fairly answer it, and not publickly spread it. Sir, when I consider what was offered by us, and denied by you, and with what Props your own Arguments were supported, being Men of such Parts and Piety as you are, on whose credit the Ordinance of Christ is like to be administered to a wrong Subject for the future, as it hath been for Ages past upon a like traditional Bottom; I am really grieved, and that is the reason of my setting Pen to Paper.

The letter then recapitulates some of the arguments offered on either side in the dispute but adds little significant to the record we have. The concluding sentence reads :

I shall now take leave, and remain your truly loving Friend,
John Williams.²⁴

It is a pity that there is not preserved any reply to this letter, whereas we have much of a different temper.

Within about a year of the disputation Williams had died but we have still a sermon of his preached in the Baptist Meeting House at Wallup near Andover, Hampshire. The sermon on the commission of our Lord as given in *Matt.* xxviii. 19, occupies some forty-three pages of closely set type! The following extracts illustrate Williams' exegesis and argument at certain points:

It appears it (i.e. the manner of baptising) is by Dipping, in that the whole of the Subject is to be baptized, and not a part only; the Commission is to baptize the Person, the Face is no more mentioned than the Feet, nor is there any part mentioned but the whole; the word is, baptizing them. If it be objected that the Face doth signify the Person; I answer, if that be granted, yet the Person doth not signify the Face: It's the Person that is to be baptized; but the sprinkling a little Water on the Face doth never wash the whole of the Subject; and this being done on the Face of a little Infant, is neither the washing away the filth of the Flesh, nor yet the answer of a good Conscience, by the Resurrection of Christ: there is neither the Figure, nor the thing figured.²⁵

On 1 *Cor.* vii. 14:

Tho one of the Parents to whom the Apostle wrote was a Believer when he wrote to them, yet they were not so to be considered in their being sanctified each to the other, but as Husband and Wife. . . . Be they who they will, Believers or Unbelievers, they did not live in Fornication; but in Wedlock they were Husband and Wife. . . . Their Cohabitation was lawful according to the Word of God, and in this sense the word sanctified is taken elsewhere (for that which is lawful) 1 *Tim.* iv. 5. Every Creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused; for it is sanctified by the Word of God, etc. that is, lawful to be used; they were married, and so were sanctified each to the other; this he illustrates by an Argument drawn from their Offspring, Else were your Children unclean, but now they are holy. If they had not been married, and so sanctified each to the other by the Ordinance of God, their Children had been unclean, they had been illegitimate, unlawfully begotten. . . .²⁶

When giving "a Description of Baptism," Williams said:

The Administrator, that must be a Minister of Christ, and one that hath Commission from Christ to preach the Gospel: Go preach and baptize. Now here I do not tie it to a Minister in Office, that is, to an Elder, one that hath a Pastoral Relation to a particular People, but to a preaching Disciple:

Baptism being no more tied to Office or Power, than Preaching is; Preaching is not restrained to Office or Power by the Commission, as I have shewed already: every one that is gifted and qualified by the Spirit, and providentially call'd, ought to have Commission to preach, *Acts xi. 20*, therefore such have Commission to baptize, Go teach and baptize.²⁷

No date is affixed to this sermon, but the pattern of argument makes it clear that it was delivered after the Portsmouth disputation, and this view gains strength from the prefixed letter to Leigh and the fact that the date of publication is 1700.

In contrast to the mildness of that part of the sequel to the dispute in which John Williams figured, that which concerned Russel was vigorous and often bitter. On the morning of the day following the debate, Russel, whose wife was ill, set out once more for London.²⁸ Two mornings later this advertisement appeared in a newspaper:

Portsmouth, February 23rd. Yesterday the dispute between the Presbyterians and Anabaptists, was held in the Presbyterian Meeting-house. It began at ten of the Clock in the morning, and continued till 6 in the afternoon, without any intermission. The Theam of the Dispute was the subject of Baptism, and the manner how Baptism is to be performed. Russel and Williams were the Opponents for the Anabaptists, and Mr. Chaunler and Mr. Leigh Defendants for the Presbyterians, Mr. Sharp, Moderator for the former, and Mr. Robinson for the latter. Mr. Russel opposed Infant Baptism with all the subtlety and sophistry of the Schools, and was answered with good Reason and Learning. Upon the whole, it was the Opinion of all the Judicious Auditory, the Presbyterians sufficiently defended their Doctrine, and also worsted their Adversaries when they came to assume the place of Opponents.²⁹

This advertisement was unsigned, but it appears that it was inserted by the authority of the Deputy Governor of the Portsmouth Garrison, for Ivimey records:

It afterwards appeared that this was sent by Colonel John Gibson the Lieutenant Governor, who gave Mr. Chandler liberty to publish a certificate signed by his own hand June 9, 1699. In this he declares, "I say, the above advertisement was inserted, as above, by my direction. I do also own, I was then, and am still of the same opinion so mentioned in the above said advertisement."³⁰

As was inevitable both sides were laying claim to victory, for although the Baptists did not hurry into print with their claims

they were nevertheless made, as later publications were to testify. Moreover, other rumours and accusations were being let loose, two of which were personal attacks on Russel. It was being said that he had required of the Baptists of the district a fee for the services he rendered, whilst doubts were also being cast on his right to the style of 'Dr.'. Then, on April 1st 1699, another Presbyterian notice appeared in a newspaper :

SIR

UNderstanding that the Anabaptists do every where make high Boasts, as if they had obtained the Victory in the late Disputation at Portsmouth, I thought fit to give you the following Account of the Occasion and Issue of it. Mr. Samuel Chandler of Fareham, carrying on a Week-day Lecture at Portsmouth in conjunction with Mr. Francis Williams (the Nonconforming Minister there) entered upon the Doctrine of the Sacraments (after he had gone through the Creed and Lords Prayer, as Mr. Williams in his Course was going through the Decalogue) with a Design thereby to compleat a Body of Divinity; and being upon the Point of Baptism, the Anabaptists came, in a considerable Body, upon one of his Lecture-days, and after Sermon one Farmer Bowes, a preacher amongst them stood up; and charging Mr. Chandler with delivering several things that were false, challenged him in the face of the Congregation, to dispute publicly upon the Point, with such a Person as they should procure. Mr. Chandler (apprehending the Interest of Religion, as well as his own Reputation, was likely to suffer if he should decline it) accepted the Challenge; and the next day some on both sides met, and adjusted Preliminaries, viz. That Mr. Chandler aforesaid, and one Mr. William (by some call'd Dr.) Russel of London, should be the Disputants; the Time, Place, and Questions to be debated were all fixed; that each of them should be allowed a Second, and each Side have a Mediator, and that the Rules of Disputation should be strictly observed. Accordingly Mr. Leigh of Newport, in the Isle of Wight, was declared Mr. Chandler's Assistant, and Mr. Benj. Robinson of Hungerford in Berks, was chosen Mediator on their side. One Mr. John Williams of East Knahil near Shaftsbury was Mr. Russel's Second, and one Mr. Sharp of Froom in Somersetshire, was Mediator on the Anabaptist side. — It was visible to every One, That though Mr. Russel made use of all the little Arts of Sophistry, with which a bad Cause is wont to be supported; yet the Disputants on the other side by Distinguishing upon him and

their Moderator, by preventing his Excursions, and keeping him close to the Rules of Disputation, broke all his Measures, so that he gained no Ground upon them in either Question. But when they, in their Course, opposed, the Evidence and force of the Reasonings, was such as once and again put the Anabaptists to silence.³¹

This last advertisement prompted Russel to publish his own account of his debate, *A True Narrative of the Portsmouth Disputation Between some Ministers of the Presbyterian and others of the Baptist, Persuasion, concerning the Subjects and Manner of Baptism*. This is the account which Crosby used and from whose abridgement extracts have been taken. Later, justifying the publication, Russel said :

And this, (i.e. the above quoted advertisement) together with the Noise and Clamour they made in the time of the Dispute, by which the People were hindred from hearing what was spoken, were the Reasons why it was thought meet to make it publick. . . .³²

In the book itself Russel wrote :

We being silent and not using the same Methods as they did, to squirt out foolish Advertisement in common Newspapers, these men grew confident; and upon the 1st of April following, in the Flying Post, they publish a long Story full of Untruths and silly squint-ey'd Reflections, not becoming their Learning or Profession: and all to support a sinking Interest.³³

Affirming that he had received from John Williams a record of the arguments that he had used at the dispute, and that he had had letters from "divers other Persons that were present . . .", Russel yet goes on to anticipate that the Presbyterians will object to his account, for he says :

And if there be any thing omitted therein, they must blame themselves, or their own Scribe, and not us. For Mr. William Leddel went to Mr. Smith their Writer, and carried our Copy with him and desired him to compare it with his: He answered that his was very imperfect, it being the first time he was in a Dispute, and he could not take it, but some things were left out; and said that it was not as yet wholly written over. Mr. Leddel waited upon him a second time, but could not obtain a sight of it to compare them together, although he was satisfied it was then finished. . . .³⁴

About the charge that he had required a fee for his attendance, Russel said :

They have also reported, That I am a Hackney Disputant, and that I refused to come down to Portsmouth under thirty Guinea's; but that at last I was prevail'd upon to take Twenty . . . I think fit hereby to tell the World, That I did not so much as demand one farthing of them for my Journey, neither before nor after. For all that are thoroughly acquainted with me know, that I do neither Preach for Hire, nor Divine for Money, as some of them do. . . .

But that I may do Right to our Friends at Portsmouth and Gosport, I do acknowledge that of their own free good Will (without asking) they did pay my Coach—hire and bear my Charges. . . .³⁵

At the conclusion of his record of the proceedings, Russel added a list of authorities to strengthen his arguments, making citations from British and continental scholars of varying doctrinal allegiances.

As Russel had foreseen the Presbyterians quickly rejected his account. Their first act was to send out a certificate over the names of Chandler and Leigh.

THese are to certify all whom it may concern, That Dr. Russel's Narrative of the Portsmouth Disputation is full of palpable notorious Falshoods, and that there are many Alterations, Additions and Omissions, even from Mr. Samuel Ring's own Copy which he hath honestly given to us. We can procure the hands of vast numbers both of the Church of England and Dissenters, and some Anabaptists themselves, that will acknowledge we obtain'd an intire Victory. The Governor and Mayor have promised their Testimonials, but being both now at London, we cannot send them at present, but shall publish with all convenient speed a full Answer to Dr. Russel's Book, with the Attestations of the principal Gentlemen present: Therefore we humbly desire all Persons would suspend their Judgment of this matter till they have a view of our Answer.

Signed by
Sam. Chandler,
Will. Leigh³⁶

Portsmouth, June 1, 1699.

This certificate was widely circulated in the churches of the West where those who still retained an interest in the issue of the battle eagerly awaited the promised account by Chandler and Leigh. When it was published, the name of Robinson, the Presbyterian Moderator, appeared with those of Chandler and Leigh as joint

author. The title was *An impartial account of the Portsmouth Disputation. With some just reflections on Dr. Russel's pretended narrative. . .*.³⁷ This in turn gave rise to a publication by Sharp, the Baptist Moderator, entitled, *Truth Prevailing against the Fiercest Opposition. Being a Vindication of Dr. Russel's True Narrative of the Portsmouth Disputation.* This volume includes the criticisms not only of Sharp but also of Russel who, having listed 39 errors in the Presbyterian account, states that he has "not yet fully advanced so far as three Leaves and a half in their printed account . . .",³⁸ and so he gives up any attempt to provide a complete catalogue of errors.

Another small work entitled *A Dialogue between a Paedobaptist and an Anti-Paedobaptist, containing the Strength of Arguments offered on both sides at the Portsmouth Disputation*³⁹ was published anonymously. A reply to this was entitled *Truth Vindicated*.⁴⁰ The title-page observes that the *Dialogue* which it sets out to answer was "Published by Samuel Chandler, and William Leigh, by the Advice of their Brethren from Divers Parts." More interestingly still, the anonymous author of *Truth Vindicated* is described as "one, who was referr'd to the Account of the Dispute at Portsmouth, etc. for his Conviction, but hath since separated from the Presbyterians, and now is a Member of a Baptist Congregation." For one so recently a Presbyterian, the tone of the pamphlet is surprisingly bitter.

A Dr. Bereault next issued an answer to the Portsmouth disputation and this led Russel to write a tract entitled *Infant Baptism is Will—Worship. . .*.⁴¹ Whitley lists one more publication, an 82 page tract by J. Morgan entitled *The Portsmouth Disputation examined. Being a Brief Answer to Arguments used by the Anti-Paedobaptists in Dr. Russel's narrative . . .*, published in 1713 in New York.⁴²

Perhaps the most damaging evidence used by the Baptists against the Presbyterians was that concerning Joseph Fox. In his lectures and sermons given towards the end of 1698, Chandler, as has been shown, did not deny that initially at any rate baptism was for "Repenting Believers." He challenged the Baptist claim that baptism by immersion was the correct mode. After the dispute, however, it was shown that Joseph Fox, a Presbyterian of about 40 years of age, had been baptised by immersion. The baptism took place at Havant, some eight miles north east of Portsmouth, and the baptising minister was Earl, the Gosport Presbyterian.⁴³ So Russel wrote :

And why (after all this) they should quarrel with us, we cannot understand when they practise it after the same manner as we do, and call it dipping.⁴⁴

SOURCES

- ¹ Underwood: *History of English Baptists*, London, 1956, p. 126.
- ² Crosby: *History of English Baptists*, London, 1740, Vol. 4, pp. 177-183, where he refers to a dispute between Baptists and Quakers at Burton in Northants, in 1717.
- ³ Russel: *True Narrative of Portsmouth Disputation*, London, 1700. Dedication.
- ⁴ *Ibid.* Dedication.
- ⁵ Sharp: *Truth Prevailing against Fiercest Opposition*, London, 1700. p. vi.
- ⁶ Crosby: *History of English Baptists*, London, 1740, Vol. 4, p. 259.
- ⁷ Whitley: *Minutes of Gen. Assembly of General Baptist Churches in England*, London, 1909, Vol. I, pp. 55-6.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- ⁹ Ridoutt: *Early Baptist History of Portsmouth*, Portsmouth, 1888, p. 18.
- ¹⁰ Russel: *True Narrative*, London, 1700. Dedication.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.* Dedication.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ¹³ Ridoutt: *Early Baptist History of Portsmouth*, Portsmouth, 1888, p. 19.
- ¹⁴ Ivimey: *History of English Baptists*, London, 1811, Vol. I, p. 555.
- ¹⁵ Gates: *History of Portsmouth*, Portsmouth, 1900, p. 296.
- ¹⁶ Russel: *True Narrative*, London, 1700. Dedication.
- ¹⁷ Crosby: *History of English Baptists*, London, 1740, Vol. III, pp. 314-353.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-317.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 345.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 349.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 350.
- ²² *Ibid.*, pp. 352-3.
- ²³ Russel: *True Narrative*, London, 1700. Dedication.
- ²⁴ Bound with Sharp's *Truth Prevailing*, London, 1700, pp. 128-134.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-7.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- ²⁸ Sharp: *Truth Prevailing*, London, 1700, p. iii.
- ²⁹ *The Post-man and the Historical Account*, London, from Thursday, February 23 to Saturday, February 25, 1699.
- ³⁰ Ivimey: *History of English Baptists*, London, 1811, Vol. I, p. 558, where he quotes from *Impartial Account* by Chandler, Leigh and Robinson.
- ³¹ *The Flying Post or The Post-Master*, London, from Thursday, March 30 to Saturday, April 1, 1699.
- ³² Sharp: *Truth Prevailing*, London, 1700, p. iv.
- ³³ Russel: *True Narrative*, London, 1700. Dedication.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.* Dedication.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.* Dedication.
- ³⁶ Sharp: *Truth Prevailing*, London, 1700, p. 35.
- ³⁷ Whitley: *Baptist Bibliography*, London, 1916, Vol. I, p. 133. 7-699.
- ³⁸ Sharp: *Truth Prevailing*, London, 1700, p. 88.
- ³⁹ Whitley: *Baptist Bibliography*, London, 1916, Vol. I, p. 133. 8-699.
- ⁴⁰ Sharp: *Truth Prevailing*, London, 1700, pp. 93-125.
- ⁴¹ Whitley: *Baptist Bibliography*, London, 1916, Vol. I, p. 136. 40-700.
- ⁴² *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 144. 13-713.
- ⁴³ Russel: *True Narrative*, London, 1700. Dedication; and Sharp: *Truth Prevailing*, London, 1700, pp. 89-92.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.