

Debate on Infant Baptism, 1643.

HANSERD KNOWLES, or Knollys, wrote an autobiography in 1672, which was completed and published by his friend William Kiffin in 1672. It is however obscure as to the circumstances under which he became a Baptist, and even in 1895 Dr. Culross supposed it was before 1641. This manuscript shows that the problem of Infant Baptism only arose for him in 1643, and was not settled till next year. This explains why his signature does not appear to the confession of 1644, and why it does appear in 1646. His previous history is easily summarised.

Born 1598 in Lincolnshire, in a district already Puritan and presently to be Baptist, he lived from 1613 at Scartho near Grimsby, his father being rector. In 1629, being a pensioner of St. Catharine's College, Cambridge, he was ordained Deacon and Presbyter by Bishop Dove, and then became Master of the Free School at Gainsborough, where the memory of John Smith may still have lingered. In 1631 he became incumbent of Humberstone, near to his father's living. But Puritan scruples intensified, and feeling that he could not admit to communion every parishioner irrespective of character, he resigned his post in 1633. Bishop Williams was sympathetic, and allowed him to lecture wherever opportunity offered. But about 1636 he felt no free to do even this by virtue of his episcopal ordination, so renounced it and remained silent. From his spiritual troubles he was delivered by the preaching of "one Mr. How"—query, our Samuel How the cobbler—and became an avowed sectary. This led to his imprisonment under a warrant from the High Commission. But the jailer set him free of his own accord, so that he went to London and preached as he found an opening. Under Laud this was difficult, so he emigrated in April 1638. In Boston, New England, he found an even worse state of things so far as coercion went, and moved to Piscataqua or Dover, where he formed a Separatist church. But the appearance of another minister of more ritualistic tendencies provoked trouble, and in 1641 he returned to England. In 1642 he opened a school on

Tower Hill, and presently was appointed to the Free School in St. Mary Axe. Nothing is said of any parish work, only of preaching to the soldiers. This manuscript implies that he became a member of Jessey's church.

The manuscript also clears up one or two other points. As late as 17 March 1643-4, both Knowles and Kiffin were members of Jessey's church; unless Kiffin was called in from the outside, a procedure adopted afterwards but apparently not at this date. Now by 16 October 1644, when the Confession was published, Kiffin was officer of another church; so we get the foundation of this within narrow limits. Again, the secession of Knowles and of Blunt is spoken of as if it were one movement; but Knowles was a member still on 17 March 1643-4, therefore Blunt was still a member of Jessey's church when he in January 1641-2 immersed Blaiklock and others. This quite agrees with the fact that Jessey during 1642 accepted immersion as the only baptism, though he still administered it to infants: the act of baptism was agreed upon within Jessey's church by 1642. Again, besides the questions (1) Who should be baptized, (2) What is baptism, there emerged (3) Who should baptize? Six and twenty people, apparently on about 29 May 1644, were convinced that they ought to be baptized on profession of their belief, but hesitated to whom they should turn. Their own Elder was himself unbaptized, even on his own premisses: Spilsbury had no known pedigree of baptism; Blunt's group derived its baptism from a somewhat Unitarian society of Dutchmen. Nine of them at last concluded that any one fit to teach and evangelize was also fit to baptize.

By about 1645 secessions were taking place to Knowles and to Kiffin, who were clear against Infant Baptism. Jessey discussed with Pædobaptists, and was not convinced by them, so on 29 June 1645 he was baptized by Knowles, and introduced Believers' Baptism in his own church. Then six of those who had seceded returned. But as Jessey clung all through life to Mixed Communion, not insisting on Baptism as a condition of fellowship, he found his affinities with Tombes and Bunyan; not with Knowles and Kiffin. His own church only fell into line under his successor James Fitten.

The debate here recorded is interesting as showing how slowly the trained clergy could abandon their traditions, and how an unsophisticated layman taught them in a clear-cut proposition. It may be summarised in five sentences:— (Jessey): Besides the clear Gospel ordinances, draw an inference from the church of Abraham. (Knowles): Abraham had a seed, not a church. (Jessey): Those who were in a covenant are entitled to its token. (Knowles): The token is an express ordinance of God, and is not

naturally or always linked with the covenant. (Kiffin): Neglect the Old Testament altogether, to learn what Christ ordained, and go to the New only.

Kiffin's clear common sense led to other Old Testament imitations being abandoned. The Separatists had been very fond of covenanting together when they formed their churches, but Knowles replying to Bastwick in 1645 declared the practice of some churches in London was simply to insist on three terms of communion: Faith, Repentance, and Baptism, and nothing else. They did not urge or make any particular covenant with members on admittance.

This document shows that Knowles was not quite clear on infant Baptism even in the early months of 1643. Some students have assumed that he became an Anabaptist when in America, forgetting that if this had been so, the Puritans of Massachusetts would probably have said so at the time. They were not silent about Roger Williams. The fact that under Presbyterian rule in London he yet was made master of the Free School, was rather against this early dating. The one phrase that seemed to support it was, "Some godly Anabaptists as, namely, Hanserd Knollys . . . of Dover, who afterwards, removing back to London, lately died there." This certainly suggests that Knowles was an Anabaptist at Dover in New Hampshire: but two points ought to be noted. First, many men in their progress away from tradition towards New Testament truth, did adopt baptism on profession of their faith, before they came to the conclusion that infant baptism was needless: such men, while yet in this half-way position, were called Anabaptist; and Knowles may have reached this precise point at Dover. Second, these words were published by Cotton Mather in 1702, sixtyone years after Knowles left the colonies, forty-nine years after he certainly did abandon infant baptism: is it a bad mistake of Mather to fore-shorten the perspective?

Numb: 4

An Account of divers Conferences, held in y^e [Crosby
uses
at I. 311.] Congregation of w^{ch} Mr Henry Jessey was Pastor, about Infant baptism, by w^{ch} Mr H. Jessey & y^e greatest part of that Congregation were proselited to y^e Opinion & Practice of y^e Antipedobabptists.

being an old M.S.S. w^{ch} I rec^d of Mr Adams, supposed to be written by Mr Jessey, or transcribed from his Jurnal.

1643

About Baptisme. Qu: 'Ans:

Hanserd Knollys our Brother not being satisfied for Baptizing his child, after it had bin endeavoured by y^e Elder, & by one or two more; himselfe referred to y^e Church then that they might satisfye him, or he rectify them if amiss herein; w^{ch} was well accepted.¹

[Gould quotes this paragraph on page cxxix.]

Hence meetings ware appointed for conference about it at B. Ja: & B. K.: & B. G.:² & each was performed wth Prayer & in much Love as Christian meetings (because he could not submitt his judgment to depend on wth its power: so yelded to) Elder³ The maine Argument was from these fower conclusions

1. Those in Gospel Institutions are so set down to us. those not cleare⁴
2. What ever Priviledg God hath given to his Church as a Church is still given to all Churches.
3. God hath once given to his Church as a Church

¹ Within this church, the successive questions mooted in connection with baptism were these:—1630, Dupper, and 1633, Lucar: Is "baptism" by the parish clergy sufficient, or must there be a new "baptism" on profession of belief? 1640, Blunt, Kilcop, Lukar, Blaiklock, Munden, Skippard: Is anything baptism except immersion? Now arises a complement of the first question; 1643, Knowles: May infants be baptized at all? And in the course of discussion there arose a fourth; 1644?, Knowles: Is any qualification for the administrator needful except ability to teach and evangelize?

² Brother Jackson and Brother Knowles and Brother Golding; as may be gathered from the lists below.

³ Jessey.

⁴ Article XXVII. peremptorily says that the baptism of young children is to be retained in the church. Knowles asks why. Jessey admits it is not clear, and is not a gospel institution, but looks further back; herein he throws over the statement that is is "most agreeable with the institution of Christ."

Believers' Baptism had been accepted by John Smith thirty years earlier, and had been practised in London by the followers of Helwys and Tookey; it had been adopted in this circle by Eaton about 1633; it had been brought to general notice by the reversion to dipping. But hitherto there had not been any general move against the baptism of infants, nor any defence of it needed since 1624. Now however Barbon began a defence in April 1642, to which Kilcop answered at once that only Christ's disciples or believers were to be baptized. A[ndrew] R[itor] and R. B[arrow] supported him, while Wynell, Chidley, and Blake condescended to defend their church. But when Stephen Marshall

this Priviledge *to have their Children in a Gospel ¹⁶ covenant, & to have its token in Infancy. Gen: 17.

7. 10.

4. Baptism appears to be in ye rome of Circumcision

Conclusion: to be now to Churches Infants
 H.K.⁵ Ans: To ye third on wch ye weight lyes, that it wants ground & proof from Scripture. That Gen: 17 proves it no more to be given to a Church as a Church, for their Infants to have the token of Covenant in Infancy, then for the Churches Servants all bought wth money &c without exception of Religion to be Baptized; & yt not only ye Chil: but Childrens Children to many Generations though neither Father nor Grandfather ware faithfull must be Members, for thus was it wth Abrahams posterity. therefore this was not with it as a Church, but as Jewish or as peculiar to Abrahams Seed Naturall. Unless we may say of the Children of such wretches, that certainly ye Lord is their God & they his People, contrary to I Cor: 7. 14.

Elder All such as we ought to judg to be in Gods Ma:covenant, under promises should have ye token Mi:⁶of ye Covenant. Thus of ye Infants of Believers especially Church members.

Ans: To ye first proposition or major its not ye Covenant yt intrests to ye token of itselfe, but Gods Institution, proved thus.

preached in Westminster Abbey in August 1644 on the subject, it was useless to pretend that the matter was one of tradition, and pamphlets poured from the press for the rest of the year. The most important was issued on 16 October, being the Confession of the Seven London churches.

⁵ Hanserd Knowles.

⁶ To debate in syllogisms, with their major and minor propositions, was a necessary part of every university man's training. On 17 October 1642, Dr. Featley had said to a company of Baptists including Kiffin, If you dispute by Reason, you must conclude Syllogistically in Mood and Figure, which I take to be out of your Element. In this

1. The Lords Supper is a token of the New Covenant, it must be to such children as being in Covenant, if Argument good.

2. Enoch, Methusala, Noah, Sem, were in Covenant, & to be judged So, & Abraham at 75 Years old, & Isaac at two days old; these then must have Circumcision, if major be sound, but not so.

besids being in Covenant there must be a word of Institution touching the time & adjuncts—&c

B.Ki⁷ In Gospell times wherein all these are; New,
 Argumt there are new subjects, Gentiles, a new way of
 taking them in; new Ordinances, *new time to ¹⁷
 them, as y^e Lords Supper So Bap: As we must
 not goe to Moses for y^e Lords Supper, its time,
 Persons to pertake &c but to New Testament, so
 we must for Baptism. now in New Testament is
 no Institution for Infants baptism.

The being y^e Seed of Abraham, of Godly Parents, would not qualify them for Baptism, Matth: 3. This is y^e Substance of w^t was discussed in all Love for many weeks together.

Issue whereof was y^e conviction of Bro: Iac: & S. K. B. S.⁸ now against Pedobap: & y^e Stagering of more, whereof some searched y^e Scriptures, some prayed earnestly for light, & had such impressions on their Spirits against Pedobaptisme, as they told y^e Elder upon his enquiry, that he could

he rather under-rated their intelligence, for one of them offered him an excellent specimen of Barbara:—

They that persecute good men are ungodly men.

But all your Bishops persecute good men.

Ergo, the Bishops are ungodly men.

To which Kiffin gave a corollary:—

He that is called by Saints to preach, is better called than he that is called by ungodly men.

But I am called by Saints.

Ergo, my calling is better than yours.

⁷ Brother Kiffin. Apparently a member of Jessey's church at this date.

⁸ Brother Jackson, and Sister Knowles, Brother and Sister [Golding].

not but judg there was much of God in it, yet still he then remained in his judgment for it: though thus 16 ware in a weeks space against it: wth little or no speach each wth other. This was about the 17th of 1 Mo 164³/₄ Having had weekly loveing confereance wth prayers from ye midst of 11 Mo 1644⁹

1644. 2. 28: Concluded that to our friends y^t then lived in ye Country (about 12) a Letter should be writt from Church to each wth tender care, exhortation & consolation.¹⁰

1644 1^d & 2 Mo. Haveing sought the Lord wth fasting for those friends that left us, as not satisfied we were baptized as a true Church & for our And haveing by conference not satisfied y^m

1644 At M^r Fountains ye Church considered w^t 3.29 further to do, some judged y^t ye Church censure should pass others not

Conclusion was to desire ye Advice of ye Elders & Brethren of other Churches, w^{ch} was done 1644. 3. 27. at M^r Shambrookes where ware present These: M^r Barbone, Rozer, D^r Parker, M^r Erbury, M^r Cooke, M^r Tho: Goodwin, M^r Phillip Nye, M^r G. Sympson, M^r Burrows, M^r Staismore,¹¹

[18] *These by enquiry not Satisfied that in these [18] absenters was obstinacy but tender Conscience & holyness, & not disturbing us in our proceeds advised us

⁹ This is an obvious error of transcription. Gould reads "from the midst of the eleventh month, 1643-4."

¹⁰ This is not the first allusion to the country members, from Isleworth up the Thames to others down in Essex, perhaps even at Colchester still.

¹¹ These counsellors are interesting. Barbon and Staismore had been associated with the church, Daniel Rogers had published a good catechism in 1633, Erbury was labelled or libelled on 11 January 1648 as "the Seeker and Socinian"; the rest were ex-clergy who in Holland had renounced their orders and had formed new churches. They were substantially Brownists, but preferred a new title, Independents. All held to the baptism of infants.

1. Not to Excoṁunicate, no, nor admonish, wch is only to Obstinate. [Gould quotes advice page cxxx.]

2. To count them still of our Church; & pray, & love them.

3. Desire conversing together so farr as their principles permitt them, so waiting till either (1) some come in, or (2) some grew giddy & scandalous their¹² proceed against them, to this we agreed & so parted.

The Names of some of our Dearly beloved Friends y^t scrupled about ye Administrator of Baptisme &c & in tenderness forbore ware these

B. } Jackson	S. Knollys
S. } Jackson	S. Kenaston
B. } Nowell	B. Hen. Jones
S. } Nowell	S. Pickford
S. Bayh	S. Dorrell
B. Berry	Eliza Phillips
B. W ^m Hulls	S. Reves-& afterwards these
S. Phillis Atkinson	Bro: Wade &
S. Eliza Alport	S. Wade

S. Eliza Michael	After some time all these in ye 2 ^d row were satisfied in their scruple & judged y ^t Such Disciples as are gifted to teach & Evāgelize may also baptize &c & ware baptized. ¹³
S. Lydia Strachen	
S. Kathe: Pordage	
S. Goteldy	
S. Agnes Wadinam	
B. } G	
S. } Golding	
S. Kent y ^t dyed	

Some before H Jessey & the rest of ye Church ware convinced against Pedobaptism And hence [19] desired to enjoy it *where they might, & joynd [19]

¹² Gould reads, then.

¹³ The question in those days was very urgent: Granted that a new baptism is necessary, what qualifications are needed in the administrator? John Smith of Lincoln had cut the knot by baptizing himself at Amsterdam. Roger Williams was baptized by Holliman, and then he in turn baptized Holliman. But both Smith and Williams regretted their acts. We do not know how Spilsbury faced the question, and he seems

also, some wth Bro: Knollys, some with B. Kiffin,¹⁴ thus These

B. S. Knollys	B. Ford
B. S. Wade	B. Patshall
B. Carver	S. Dormer
S. Jone Tolderoy	S. Pickford
S. Eliza Phillips	S. Reves
	B. Darel
	B. Blunt

After that H. Jessey was convinced also, the next morning early after that w^{ch} had been a day of Solemne Seeking y^e Lord in fasting & prayer (That if Infants Baptism were unlawfull & if we should be further baptized &c the Lord would not hide it from us, but cause us to know it) First H. Jessey was convinced against Pedobaptisme, & then that himself should be baptized (notwithstanding many conferences wth his honoured & Beloved Brethren, M^r Nye Mr Tho: Goodwin, Mr Burroughs, Mr Greenhill, Mr Cradock, Mr Carter, &c,¹⁵ & wth Mr Jackson, Mr Bolton, &c) And was baptized by M^r Knollys, and then by degrees he Baptized many of y^e Church, when convinced they desired it.

1645
4 Mo.
vulgr
June
29.

Then in time some of those before named returned to communion wth this Church, as

S. Kenaston	B. & S. Wade
B. Hen Jones	S. Dorrell
S. Buckley	S. Huddel als. Levill.

the first Calvinist in England to have re-baptized. Blunt preferred to be baptized by the Collegiants. But even in 1609 Helwys and Morton had declared that Succession was the chief hold of Antichrist, and that the pedigree of an administrator was immaterial. Now several Calvinists saw the matter in the same light.

¹⁴ Therefore after 17th March, 1643-4, when the debate was held, and before 29 June 1645 when Jessey was baptized, Knowles and Kiffin had quitted his church and founded two others. Kiffin's separation was before 16 October 1644 when he had signed the Confession.

¹⁵ These ministers were Independents, and all but Burroughes were afterwards on Cromwell's commission of Tryers, on which Jessey and Tombes also were placed.