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Baptists and the Laying on of Hands

MOST Baptists—probably the very great majority—if asked whether Baptists practise the laying on of hands would reply in the negative. A few might perchance have been present at an ordination service where the rite was employed, but probably almost apologetically and certainly not in a manner to focus attention upon it. There would be general surprise were it claimed that during the greater part of Baptist history the laying on of hands, not only at the ordination of pastors but also of deacons, has been explicitly enjoined in formal pronouncements and generally practised, and also that, in addition, not a few Baptists for more than a hundred and fifty years practised the laying on of hands on baptized believers as a rite closely akin to the confirmation ceremony of other Christian traditions. Yet such is the case. The laying of hands on believers immediately after their baptism is practised today by the Baptists of Denmark and perhaps other countries. Further, at various times and places the leaders of local churches have laid hands on the sick.

I.

From very early days Christians have used the laying on of hands as part of the ceremony of ordination or delegation to office in the Church. In both Old and New Testaments there are passages which provide example and authority for the use of this rite for the commissioning of men to some task, and particularly to the Christian ministry in its specialised sense.

The early Baptists, who desired to keep close to scripture, saw no reason to depart from Christian tradition in this matter. Declarations regarding its use in ordination services can be traced back to the beginnings of modern Baptist witness among the Separatists in Holland. The laying on of hands was already practised by the Mennonites.

About 1580, Hans de Ries and Lubbert Gerrits, Dutch Mennonite leaders, drew up a confession in which it was declared that new officers should be called out by ministers and members of the local church acting together after seeking divine guidance. After such election, says the Confession,

> "confirmation in the ministry itself is performed by the elders of the people in the presence of the church and that for the most part by the imposition of hands" (McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, pp. 40-41).

Smyth moved closer to the Mennonites in his last years. In 1611 or thereabouts, with forty-one followers, he signed a Confession closely similar to that of Hans de Ries. The passage parallel to that quoted above reads:

> "the investing into the said office is accomplished by the elders of the church through the laying on of hands" (McGlothlin, p. 61).

Helwys differed from Smyth on certain matters, but not on this one. The Confession prepared by Helwys and his group in 1611 states that:—

> "officers are to be chosen . . . by election and approbation of that church or congregation whereof they are members (Acts 6: 3-4 and 14: 23), with Fasting, Prayer and Laying on of hands (Acts 13: 3 and 14: 23)" (McGlothlin, p. 91).

On this matter there was little difference of opinion among seventeenth century Baptists. The 1651 Confession of thirty General Baptist congregations in the Midlands says:—

> "That Fasting and Prayer ought to be used, and laying on of hands, for the Ordaining of servants or officers to attend about the service of God (Acts 13: 3)" (McGlothlin, p. 108).

The so-called Standard Confession of 1660 also stipulates for fasting, prayer and the laying on of hands (McGlothlin, p. 113). The Orthodox Creed of 1678, which was closely modelled on the Westminster Confession, speaks of three kinds of church officers —bishops or messengers, who covered a wide area somewhat in the manner of our General Superintendents; elders or pastors, and deacons or overseers of the poor. The bishops, it is said, are to be chosen by the common suffrage of the church and

> "solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with imposition of hands, by the bishops of the same function, ordinarily" (McGlothlin, pp. 146-7).

The pastor is to be "chosen by the common suffrage of the particular congregation and ordained by the bishop or messenger God hath placed in the church he hath charge of" (*ibid.*, p. 147).

Similar declarations were made by the Particular or Calvinistic Baptists. The 1677 Confession says that the bishop or elder—the Particular Baptists had a two-fold, not a three-fold, ministry—is to be chosen

> "by the common suffrage of the church itself; and solemnly set apart by Fasting and Prayer, with imposition of hands of the eldership of the church, if there be any before constituted therein" (ibid. p. 266).

Hercules Collins, a well-known London Baptist minister, writing in 1702, spoke of ordination as "a gospel ordinance." "Ever retain," he said, "and never part with that Rite and Ceremony in Ordination of Imposition of Hands, with Prayer, on the Person

ordained" (*The Temple Repaired*, 1702, pp. 58-59). Two years later, in 1704, when an attempt was made by thirteen Particular Baptist churches in London to revive a London Association, it was declared that the imposition of hands at the ordination of elders and deacons was "an ordinance of Jesus Christ still in force" (Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, p. 131, quoting Ivimey).

The observance of the rite at ordination services is attested by the records of local churches throughout the eighteenth century. Scores of illustrations might be given. One may here be cited because it is accompanied by an interesting statement as to what was felt to be involved. In 1743 the church at Salendine Nook, Huddersfield, was formed. John Wilson, the pastor of the church at Rawdon, Alverey Jackson, of Barnoldswick, and Thomas Ashworth, of Cloughfold, joined in the ordination of the first pastor, Henry Clayton. A contemporary account includes this statement, prepared apparently by John Wilson :—

> "I only observe with respect to the Imposition of Hands that a relation or a Power of office in the church is not conveyed by it; for no imposition of hands by any man, or set of men whatsoever, can give any man the place and power of an office in any church of Christ, without their consent, their choice and call of him to that office, and his own choice and consent to it, publicly and jointly testified. Much less do we think that any man or set of men upon earth, have any power or commission from the Lord Jesus Christ to bestow either spiritual gifts or sanctifying graces, to qualify and fit any person for the discharge of any office in the church of Christ, by the laying on of their hands;—but as we find in the New Testament, that the laying on of hands was used with prayers as an orderly way of separating men to that work and office in the church, for which they were already qualified by the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, and to which they were duly qualified by the church; so we look upon it, and continue the use of it (Acts 6: 3, 5, 6 and 13: 1, 2, 3)" (Percy Stock, *Foundations*, 1933, p. 73).

Both in its positive and negative affirmations that is a typical Baptist statement. It emphasises the call of God to the individual and the call of the church. It denies that grace is conveyed by any ministerial order. It indicates the desire to follow New Testament practice. It does not offer any very clear theological interpretation of what the rite is intended to signify.

William Carey was ordained at Moulton with the laying on of hands. The rite was not, I think, repeated when he set out for India. But hands were laid on a number of the early missionaries when farewell services were held. The sending forth of Grigg and Rodway to Sierra Leone in 1795 is a case in point. The account will be found in one of the early numbers of the *Periodical Accounts*, (I. p. 104).

In the nineteenth century the rite appears to have fallen into

disuse. Why was this? Partly, at any rate, it was probably the result of a wave of anti-clericalism due to reaction from the claims put forward by the Tractarian Movement. In some quarters any kind of ordination service came under suspicion.[1] It is doubtful whether Spurgeon was "ordained," though to base argument or practice upon what happened in his case would obviously be dangerous. Of recent years there has been a noticeable tendency to return to earlier Baptist practice. In 1923 the Baptist Union Council issued a statement in regard to Ordination and Recognition Services. It continues to be printed in the *Handbook*. The statement makes no reference to the laying on of hands, but it points out how desirable it is that "the ordination should receive the concurrence and approval of the County Association" and suggests that it should include the observance of the Lord's Supper (a relatively new feature). Principal Child in the valuable statement on "Baptists and Ordination" published in the April, 1952 issue of the *Baptist Quarterly* describes modern practice and says:

> "Prayer is offered on his (the candidate's) behalf, and this may or may not be accompanied by the laying on of Hands, and or the giving of the right hand of fellowship." (*Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, p. 245.)

American Baptists appear to have maintained the rite of laying on of hands in ordination services. So do other groups of Baptists. In 1847 J. G. Oncken prepared for the German Baptists a Confession, which is still regarded as authoritative.

> "By ordination we understand the usage, which the holy Scripture teaches us, that the persons chosen by the church for service are set apart by the elders and preachers of this or some other church, by the laying on of hands and through prayer, to the work of their calling." (McGlothlin, p. 343.)

Is there any more fitting symbol of what is taking place than the laying on of hands, particularly when we have in mind the instances recorded in the New Testament?

G. W. H. Lampe in *The Seal of the Spirit* has recently given us a careful examination of the rite in its New Testament setting. "The laying on of hands," he says, "is a sign of association in the apostolic or missionary task of the Church (p. 76) . . . by which a man is constituted a sharer in the apostolicity of the

[1] cf. P. T. Forsyth, *Congregationalism and Reunion*, 1953, pp. 58-59:— "Half a century ago (i.e. in the 1860's) we renewed an old revolt of ours against ritualism and officialism; and at the extreme end there was a piquant group of that sterile breed called freelances (sometimes immigrants and adullamites from rigid bodies outside) who thought to magnify the liberty of prophesying by discarding an ordaining rite, or by reducing it to the level of a public meeting . . . About the laying on of hands some still cherish a trivial queasiness which is the relic of the same unreasonable dread of symbolism." Forsyth was speaking in 1917.

apostles of Christ. . . . It is a commissioning for active service in the missionary enterprise" (p. 78). Care is needed in the use of the word "constitute." How much or how little is to be put into it? Otherwise Mr. Lampe's words provide a good definition.

II.

If the laying on of hands is interpreted in this way there is clearly no reason why it should be confined to the ordination of ministers and missionaries. There is good scriptural authority, as well as sound reason, for making use of the laying on of hands in the setting aside of deacons. So the early Baptists believed.

From the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century the laying on of hands was general at the appointment of deacons. In some of the Confessions already quoted the term "officers" clearly applies to both pastors and deacons. The word "ordination" was applied to both, and the means of marking it were similar in each case. Other Confessions refer separately to deacons. The Standard Confession of the General Baptists (1660) speaks of

> "Deacons (called Overseers of the poor) being faithful men, chosen by the Church, and ordained by Prayer and Laying on of Hands, to that work." (McGlothin, p. 118.)

The 1677 Confession of the Particular Baptists says of a Deacon

> "that he be chosen by the like suffrage, and set apart by Prayer, and the like Imposition of hands" (McGlothlin, p. 266).

An entry in the records of the Church at Fenstanton in Huntingdonshire for 1653 may be taken as typical for many subsequent generations:—

> "The eight and twentieth day of the eighth month, according to former order, a fast was observed, with prayer to Almighty God for wisdom and discretion after which Hen. Denne was chosen and ordained by laying on of hands, a messenger to divulge the Gospel of Jesus Christ."
>
> "And John Gilman was chosen and by the laying on of hands, ordained a deacon." (*Fenstanton Records,* Hanserd Knollys Society, 1854, p. 72.)

Twenty-five years later Thomas Grantham could say that the right of the people

> "is restored and maintained in the baptised churches, where none are elected messengers, bishops or deacons, without the free choice of the brotherhood when such elections are made. And after such election of persons of known integrity and competent ability, we proceed to ordination with fasting and prayer, and the laying on of hands, according to the scripture. Acts 13: 3, 14: 23, 6: 5 and 6 All which apostolical practices are religiously observed in the baptised churches without any devised adjuncts or ceremonies of our own or others." (*Christianismus Primitivus,* 1678, p. 131.)

There are plenty of allusions to the ordination of deacons with

the laying on of hands in eighteenth century church books. The service held at St. Mary's, Norwich, in 1782 may be cited as an example (see *Baptist Quarterly*, X, p. 287).

In the nineteenth century the deacon came to be regarded as a "layman," as distinct from an ordained minister. His appointment was often a more casual affair and rarely marked by any special service. The office was regarded as temporary. This was partly due to growth in numbers and democratic tendencies, partly to increasing movement from one part of the country to another, and from one church to another. These developments have been by no means all gain. A reconsideration of the status and function of the deacon in our polity is long overdue. Would a return to the laying on of hands help or hinder the return to that greater seriousness of approach to the office which all desire?

III.

G. W. Lampe in *The Seal of the Spirit* discusses those New Testament passages in which the laying on of hands appears to be associated directly or indirectly with the rite of baptism. The visit of Peter and John to Samaria after the evangelistic work and baptizings of Philip (*Acts* iv. 5-19) is one of the key passages: "Then laid they their hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost." The action of Paul at Ephesus (*Acts* xix. 6) is another case in point. *Heb.* vi. 2 with its reference to "the doctrine of baptism and of laying on of hands" is a third instance. These passages are of course cited by Anglicans and others in their discussions of the rite of confirmation. In a recent issue of the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (June, 1952), Mr. H. W. Turner draws attention to the fact that Calvin was anxious to retain the laying on of hands as an act of benediction on church members, but says that his hopes came to very little in the Reformed Churches until quite recently. Mr. Turner's survey ought certainly to have included some reference to Baptist practice. The laying on of hands on all believers immediately after baptism was widely practised among Baptists in the seventeenth century. It was, however, the subject of considerable controversy.

It does not appear to have been customary in the early decades of the seventeenth century. But an Assembly of "Messengers, Elders and Brethren" belonging to General Baptist Churches, meeting in London in 1656, declared:—

> "It is jointly agreed by this Assembly that mixed communion in breaking of bread with persons denying laying on of hands is not lawful. Romans 6: 17 compare 16: 17; Thes. 2: 15, 3: 6, Tim. 6: 3, 4, 5 compare 1: 3 2 John 9-11. Compare Heb. 6: 1, 2" (*Minutes*, edited by Whitley, I, p. 6.)

There were present at this Assembly leaders from Kent, Sussex,

Northamptonshire, Hertfordshire, Dorset and London. The Standard Confession of 1660, signed by some forty leaders from many parts of the country, is equally definite :

> "That it is the duty of all such who are believers Baptised, to draw nigh unto God in submission to that principle of Christ's doctrine, to wit, Prayer and Laying on of Hands, that they may receive the promise of the Holy Spirit. Heb. 6 : 2, Acts 8 : 12, 15, 17, Acts 19 : 6, 2 Tim. 1 : 6." (McGlothlin, p. 116.)

In the 1650's and again in the 1670's the subject caused considerable agitation in General Baptist circles and also among the Particular Baptists.

In 1674, in a supplement to the second edition of his *Treatise on Baptism*, Colonel Henry Danvers wrote vigorously against the practice. Danvers had been one of the many Baptist officers in the Parliamentary Army and was for a time Governor of Stafford. He had later to seek refuge abroad because of his share in Monmouth's rebellion and died in exile in 1687. In the book referred to he gives an account of the origin of the laying on of hands on baptized believers as he had received it from "an eye and ear witness of the same." According to Danvers, about the year 1646 Francis Cornwell, a Baptist minister in Kent, came to the original General Baptist Church in White's Alley, Spitalfields, and began to preach "the necessity of laying on of hands," inferring from *Heb.* v. 12, 13 and vi. 1, 2, that "those that were not under laying on of hands were not babes in Christ, had not God, nor communion with God" (*op. cit.*, p. 58). The Church for a time allowed those whom Cornwell convinced liberty of conscience on this matter, but Cornwell and his friends began to urge that there must be no communion with those that had not had hands laid upon them. This perhaps issued in the formation of the separate General Baptist Church in Dunning's Alley with John Griffith as pastor. Danvers says that the practice of the laying on of hands was advocated in a book called *God's Oracles and Christ's Doctrine*, and that vigorous attempts to spread the practice were made in all parts of the country.

We know a little about Francis Cornwell. He had been a Anglican clergyman, trained at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and holding the living of Marden, in Kent. His Puritan views brought him into conflict with Archbishop Laud and he was imprisoned. In 1644 he was baptized by William Jeffery, one of the General Baptist messengers and, returning to Marden, gathered a Baptist Church about him. About the same time Henry Denne, another clergyman, who held the living of Pyrton, in Hertfordshire, became a Baptist. Whitley appears to suggest that it was the accession of these former clergymen to the ranks of the Baptists that led to the adoption of the custom of the laying on

of hands on those baptized. It was, that is to say, a continuation of the practice of confirmation.

In his *Bibliography* Whitley gives the date of *God's Oracles and Christ's Doctrine,* the publication to which Danvers refers, as 1648, but gives no other particulars or details of extant copies. He lists, however, a book of the same title by John Griffith under the year 1655 as well as one the previous year which was a reply to an attack on the laying on of hands by Edward Harrison under the title *Touchstone*. The 1648 reference is probably a mistake.

The controversy spread rapidly in the early 1650's. We can follow it in some detail in London, in the North and Midlands and in the West. We know that it reached Wales. In 1652 William Rider withdrew from the General Baptist Church in Southwark together with those who desired to practice the laying on of hands and established a new church in Borough Road. Three years later, in 1655, Rider himself and Robert Hopkins were sent down into Wales and conferred with the Llanwenarth Church on this issue. Fifteen men and women submitted to the imposition of hands and the custom was maintained in Llanwenarth until 1819. Rider was the author of a 1656 publication entitled *Laying on of hands asserted. . . . 1. Upon persons for healing. . . . 2. Upon persons to office. . . . 3. Upon believers baptized as such.* This was a reply to a work on the other side, probably by John Gosnold (1626-78), of the Barbican, a publication enlarged in 1657 and reprinted in 1680, 1701 and 1711. Rider was not a signatory of the 1656 or 1660 Confessions, but it was with the Southwark Church which he established that Benjamin Keach was associated in his early days in London and there Keach was ordained in 1668. Keach remained an advocate of the laying on of hands even when he became a Particular Baptist.

Much earlier than that the practice had established itself among certain of the Particular Baptists. In 1651-52 Thomas Tillam made his way to the north of England. He went out either from the original Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey "mixed communion" church, or from a group which had left it and was under the leadership of Hanserd Knollys. Tillam was responsible for the establishment of a church in Hexham, Northumberland. He administered "the holy ordinance of baptism (under the 4th principle)," that is, with the laying on of hands according to *Hebrews* vi. 2. In 1653, with the approval of the Hexham church and of brethren in London, Tillam was at work in Cheshire. He had acquainted the Coleman Street church with his "purpose to obey Christ in that fourth principle" (*Fenstanton Records,* p. 323). The Baptists of Newcastle, however, sent one of their leaders to London to protest against Tillam's activities, and in 1655-56 the Coleman Street church disowned Tillam "and all that are in the practice of the

laying on of hands" (*ibid*, pp. 289, 295). Thomas Tillam's publication *The Fourth Principle of Christian Religion: or the Foundation Doctrine of Laying on of Hands, asserted and vindicated by way of answer to . . . Paul Hobson* (1655) was part of the literary controversy which went on.

Meantime the same issue was exercising the Baptist churches of Lincolnshire and Huntingdonshire. In 1653 the Westby (Lincs.) church remonstrated with the Fenstanton church because:

> "although you will not go amongst others, and sit down in communion with them that are disobedient to part of Christ's doctrine, nor mix yourselves in communion with such people at their Assemblies that are against the fourth principle, viz. the laying on of hands on all baptised persons that do believe Christ's doctrine; yet if such persons that have not obeyed come and offer themselves amongst you, and sit down with you in your fellowship, you bear with them, and permit them to do." (*Fenstanton Records*, p. 61.)

Westby Baptists were clearly taking a very strict attitude on this issue. The Fenstanton Church returned a dignified answer to the complaint from Westby. "We judge them (i.e. those who had not had hands laid upon them) faithful in the Lord, although ignorant in that particular" (*ibid*, p. 69). Shortly afterwards "the church of God in and about Langtoft and Thurlby" in Lincolnshire wrote to Fenstanton about the divisions in their midst because their pastor, Robert Wright, "was under that practice of imposition of hands" (*ibid*, p. 63) and repudiated many of the members of his own church. With the help of Samuel Oates (father of the notorious Titus Oates), who was in the neighbourhood, there was peace for some six months on the understanding that no compulsion should be exercised on either side. But before long trouble broke out again, involving both Robert Wright and his wife. The church finally found Wright guilty of scandalous conduct and sought the advice of the Fenstanton friends.

John Denne, of Fenstanton, was in Wisbech in 1654 and says that at a meeting of the congregation they

> "had some discourse concerning the doctrine of laying on of hands, which was mightily opposed by our brother Taylor, who laboured mightily to overthrow it. But it pleased God wonderfully to appear with us, and to carry on his own truth, insomuch that his mouth was stopped, and not only so, but many others were convinced; insomuch that about thirteen were obedient thereunto" (*ibid*. pp. 138-9).

In the same year John Denne and Edmond Mayle were requested to visit the Peterborough church.

> "We had much conference about the doctrine of the laying on of hands," Denne reported. "The brethren were generally convinced, and about fourteen were obedient thereunto." (*Ibid*. p. 142.)

In the book of the Warboys church it is stated under the year 1654:

> "The doctrine of laying on of hands on each particular Christian received, and several of the brethren received under laying on of hands by the elders of Fenstanton, who came for that work to Warboys to us." (*Ibid.* pp. 271-2.)

In 1656 the Peterborough friends, who were in touch with the General Baptists in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire, appealed for encouragement to Fenstanton

> "knowing what great need we have of encouragement from you, who are under laying on of hands, by reason of the little help we can expect from them that are not under laying on of hands" (*ibid.* p. 197).

The church at Thorpe in Rutlandshire had trouble over the matter in 1656, which some of their number reported to Fenstanton. The elders of the church denounced the practice, comparing it with the sin of Nabab and Abihu. Those who wished to maintain the rite wrote from Wakerly for help (*ibid*, p. 202).

So much for the Midlands. Churches in the West country sent representatives to a gathering in Wells, Somerset, in 1653. Among the questions debated was: "Whether laying on of hands on baptized believers was an ordinance of Christ?" The majority were of the opinion that neither precept nor precedent warranted it. Laying on of hands should be used in the ordination of ministers. If it was practised in the case of baptized persons, it should not be a term of communion. No minister contending for it as a necessity should be allowed to preach in any of the associated churches. The circular letter to the churches from the Wells gathering was signed by Thomas Collier, the great evangelist of the west (Ivimey, IV, p. 257).

As already indicated, Danvers' 1674 publication shows that the issue was still a live one more than twenty years later. Danvers strongly condemned the practice of the laying on of hands. Among those who at once replied to Danvers' attack was Thomas Grantham (1634-93), of Lincolnshire and East Anglia. Grantham had already in 1671 debated the matter with Jeremiah Ives (see *Transactions,* VI, p. 256) and had written two pamphlets in favour of the laying on of hands. His 1674 publication was entitled *The Fourth Principle of Christ's Doctrine Vindicated, being a Brief Answer to Mr. H. Danvers' Book.* At the end of it, Grantham pleaded for a summer conference of representatives of both views "to consult and offer such an expedient to the churches." He states that he never expects to see an end to the controversy by the writing of books. The following year, however, in 1675, Benjamin Keach, who had become a Particular Baptist, entered the lists with *Darkness Vanquished, or Faith in its primitive purity.* As this pamphlet was advertised, intentionally or otherwise, under the initials B.R., its authorship was not widely known

until 1698, when Keach enlarged it under the title *Laying on of Hands upon Baptized Believers, as such, proved an ordinance of Christ.* Thomas Grantham had returned to the defence of the rite in his *Christianismus Primitivus,* published in 1678.

The Particular Baptists never committed themselves as a body to the laying on of hands on believers, but it continued to be observed in certain churches well into the eighteenth century. In the Minute Book of the church of which Dr. John Gill was pastor for fifty-two years—later New Park Street, and later still the Metropolitan Tabernacle—an entry under March 21st, 1721 reads :

> " Jane Wiltshire and Sarah Pullen having not at their first entrance into the Christian Church come under the Ordinance of Laying on of Hands, it being not the practice of those churches to which they gave up themselves, did now submit thereunto and had Hands laid on them according to the practice and example of the Holy Apostles."

But eight years later, in 1729, it was stated :

> " Bro. Gill declaring his dissatisfaction in using ye custom of laying on of hands at ye admission of members, it was agreed he be left at his liberty in ye point for ye future " (*Baptist Quarterly,* V, p. 93).

The practice seems gradually to have died out in almost all Particular Baptist churches.

In the General Baptist churches the case was different. Many, if not most of them, maintained the practice. At what is described as a General Association, meeting in White's Alley, London, at Whitsun, 1704, and attended by representatives from churches in Middlesex, Essex, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Dorset, the leader of the White's Alley church asked :

> " Whether in the administration of that ordinance of laying on of hands upon Baptised Believers for the Gift of the promised Spirit it be not most agreeable to the word of God and the Practice of the Primitive Churches to be administered jointly where two Lawful Administrators may be come at? "

The answer agreed upon was :

> " Where there is Lawful Administrators they may jointly lay hands upon Baptised Believers.
>
> Where there is two Lawful Administrators though but one of them lay hands upon a Baptised Believer it is sufficient " (*Minutes,* I, p. 85).

Towards the close of the eighteenth century the whole matter was in dispute again. In 1782 there were controversies over the rite in Portsmouth; in 1791, and again in 1794, at Church Lane, Whitechapel. The practice became first optional, then rare and in time it disappeared. In Matthew Caffyn's old church at Horsham—unorthodox as it was on trinitarian teaching—the

practice was maintained as late as 1829. Charles Lloyd (1766-1829) in his strange autobiographical volume *Particulars of the Life of a Dissenting Minister* (1813) recorded his experiences in the General Baptist Church at Ditchling in 1790. The church wanted Lloyd as minister, but the Assembly advised against having anyone who was not baptized, or ready to be baptized, with imposition of hands. Lloyd was prepared for baptism, but objected to the laying on of hands either in baptism or ordination. In the end he became the regular preacher, but the Lord's Supper and baptism were administered by a General Baptist Messenger or Elder. Later, Lloyd was baptized by a minister ready to perform the ceremony without laying on of hands.

> "I was not the only one that did not receive imposition of hands," he says. "Thus I was the means of excluding from this people all further claim to impose this unscriptural condition of church membership" (*op. cit.*, 1911 reprint, p. 111).

When, under influences connected with the Evangelical Revival, the New Connexion of General Baptist Churches was formed in 1770, the practice of laying on of hands was not adhered to and this appears to have been one of the reasons why some of the older General Baptist Churches felt unable to join the New Connexion, though the desirability of mutual liberty on this issue was pleaded for as late as 1791 (*Minutes*, II, 205n.).

There were parallel developments in the Baptist churches in America. In 1701 a separate Welsh Tract Church was established in Pennsylvania, which insisted on the laying on of hands as a term of communion. The whole Philadelphia Association adhered to the practice in 1783, though it was prepared to consider applications for membership from churches which did not insist upon it. It was still obligatory in Virginia in 1790, and in North Carolina in 1809.

IV.

What really lay behind all this? Not simply loyalty to *Hebrews* vi. 2 or certain passages in the New Testament, but a desire to emphasise and secure the gift of the Spirit. In these protracted, and now largely forgotten, controversies, Baptists were wrestling with the somewhat confused pattern of primitive Christian teaching and practice regarding the rite of Christian initiation. These matters are of more than antiquarian interest and importance. In modern times some of our brethren on the continent of Europe—those in Denmark for instance—have, probably without any knowledge of the facts set out above, developed the custom of following the rite of believer's baptism with the rite of the laying on of hands accompanied by prayer for the gift of the Spirit. Are they wise or unwise? In Danish Baptist churches the double

ceremony is followed by the observance of the Lord's Supper. The three acts together are deeply impressive and more satisfying than our English procedure often is. The questions involved are not unrelated to the discussions on baptismal procedure now taking place in the Anglican Church and the Reformed Churches on the Continent. Was Dom Gregory Dix right in arguing that baptism and confirmation cannot properly be separated? And has not all this its bearing on the proposals now being put forward in Ceylon, North India and elsewhere in regard to Christian initiation? Questions like these are easier to ask than to answer. In thinking about them, we should not forget the long continued tensions among Baptists about the laying on of hands.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.

From York Diocesan Registry, Visitation Book Rvi: A 14f150 and B xi (printed in J. S. Purvis *Tudor Parish Church Documents of the Diocese of York,* Cambridge, 1948, pp. 49, 124) (1595-6) "Danbie. 7 obstinate recusants . . . Willm. Phillips dothe kepe his childe from baptisme. He will pay no cesmentes to the chappell cessed by his neighbours." (c. 1575) "Danbye. Simon Thirkleby curate of Danbye. Latine non intelligit, in scripturis parum aut nihil versatus. Anglice legit mediocriter. catechismum docet et conciones habuit v per biennium."