

HISTORY

OF

Communion Among the Baptists.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE WALNUT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH,
LOUISVILLE, KY., OCTOBER 26TH, 1879.

BY

W. H. WHITSITT.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY LIBRARY
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

NEW YORK:

J. K. LEES, PRINTER, 169 AND 170 FULTON STREET.

1880.

VV G. I

R_i

HISTORY OF COMMUNION AMONG THE BAPTISTS.

Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths.—Jeremiah, VI, 16.

At the request of your pastor I have come to deliver a discourse on the History of Communion among Baptists.

The subject before us falls naturally into two divisions:

- I. The History of Communion among the Baptists of England, and
- II. The History of Communion among the Baptists of America.

In treating the issues that shall come to our notice, it will be necessary to confine our attention almost entirely to the evidence that is supplied by the various creed-statements of our beloved denomination; for, while it might be of interest and value to consult the opinions of theologians and other writers, and collate the records and acknowledged usages of individual churches, the time at our disposal is so limited that we cannot allow the discussion to take so wide a range without incurring the risk of wearying your patience beyond measure. With this understanding in view, we shall, without delay, address ourselves to the consideration of the first division of our investigation, as mentioned above, viz.:

- I. The History of Communion among the Baptists of England.

Under this division I shall beg you to give attention to five several periods, as follows:

1. The first Strict Communion Period—1611-1677.
2. The first struggle in favor of Loose Communion—1677-1695.
3. The second Strict Communion Period—1695-1771.
4. The second struggle in favor of Loose Communion—1771-1815.
5. The Triumph of Loose Communion—1815-1879.
1. The First Strict Communion Period—1611-1677.

Taking up these periods in the order of mention, it gives me great pleasure to remark that from the year 1611, the date of their earliest public confession of faith, to the year 1677, when what is denominated the second London confession was published, almost all the Baptists of England were on the orthodox side of this question. What I have alluded to as the first confession of Modern Baptists was the production of Thomas Helwyss, who is justly recognized as the founder of the General or Arminian Baptists of England, and it was put forth mainly as a declaration against the opinions of the Mennonites and of John Smyth, who had left Helwyss and was now associated with that Community. It is very pointed in the assertion that Baptism is a condition of church fellowship, but not so clear in regard to the point that it is a condition of communion at the Lord's Table. Art. 13 holds the following language: "We believe and confess that every church is to receive in all their members by baptism upon the confession of their faith and sins, wrought by the preaching of the gospel according to the primitive institution and practice, and therefore, churches constituted after any other manner, or of any other persons, are not according to Christ's testament." In Art. 15, Helwyss says, "The Lord's supper is the outward manifestation of the spiritual communion between Christ and the faithful, mutually to declare his death till he come." The former of these extracts is explicit enough, and leaves no doubt as to the author's intent; but the latter is conceived in general terms and does not enable us to arrive at a positive conclusion. Nevertheless, from other sources of information in regard to Helwyss and his people, it is scarcely a matter of dispute that they

were advocates of strict communion at the Lord's Table. Apart from several plain hints within the body of this confession, I would cite attention to the fact that after the return of Helwyss and his party to England it was customary for many years to employ the censures of the church even to the extent of excommunication against persons who even went to hear ministers of other than the Baptist denomination. These were all, without any discrimination, regarded as false prophets, and to attend their discourses was, as late as the year 1631, denounced as a species of iniquity (Evans 2, 45-48,) for which no excuses were admitted. Now, if this was the undoubted state of opinion at that time, does not the greater include the less? Who can believe that the general Baptists would have invited a member of another church to commune with them, after being informed that it was an actionable offence even to be present at the devotional services of other Christians?

The next confession that I have the honor to lay before you is that of John Smyth, who, though he was for a short season intimately connected with Helwyss, left his party in the year 1609, and essayed to join himself to the Mennonites. After the Creed of Helwyss had appeared, Smyth, perceiving that it contained numerous attacks against himself, and desiring to be in no respect outdone, replied in a creed of his own construction, entitled "Propositions and Conclusions concerning the Christian Religion, containing a Confession of Faith of certain English People living at Amsterdam." Here, in Art. 74, he asserts that "only baptized persons are to taste the elements of the Lord's Supper," which is reasonably good evidence of what was the ordinary sentiment of that time. Taking these materials as a basis upon which to found an opinion, I am brought to the conclusion that our predecessors in the faith were at the beginning very strict in their views in regard to communion; nay, that they went much farther than is now thought allowable by the greater portion of our people, since they felt no hesitation about the propriety of instituting ecclesiastical complaints and proceedings in the case of those who ventured to indulge the very slight liberty of hearing the gospel at the hands of other ministers than their own.

Having considered the earliest Baptist confessions, and having set before you the nature of their teachings in reference to the point before us, we shall now make an advance of a few years, and bring under review the first public confession of the Particular or Calvinistic Baptists. This appeared in the year 1643; but, notwithstanding the most persistent efforts, no copy of that edition has come into my hands. A second impression was circulated in the year 1644, which I have likewise never seen. The edition from which all our modern copies are taken was published in the year 1646, and to it I would now direct your attention. It was "set forth by Seven Congregations or Churches of Christ in London, which are commonly but unjustly called Anabaptists, for the vindication of the truth and the information of the ignorant." Its Thirty-ninth Article is that which relates to the subject in hand. The exact words of that article may be quoted as follows: "Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ to be dispensed upon persons professing faith or that are made disciples; who upon confession of faith ought to be baptized, and after to partake of the Lord's Supper." The distinctness of the last clause is admitted on all hands. It leaves no room to doubt that the people who acknowledged this creed were Strict Communion Baptists. Nevertheless, this definite and unquestionable utterance is further supported by an appendix to that confession, which was composed by the celebrated Benjamin Cox, one of the subscribers to the edition of 1646. He there says, Art. 20, "We do not admit any to the use of the Supper, nor communicate with any in the use of this ordinance but disciples baptized, lest we should have fellowship with them in their doing contrary to order." There can be no question, therefore, that the Particular Baptists were at this date firmly fixed in the principle and practice of Strict Communion. At any rate,

that is true of nearly all those who resided in London, and of many who sympathized with them in the army and elsewhere. Mr. Bunyan charges that in these days they even went to the extreme of refusing to receive into the church or of praying with men as good as themselves because they were not baptized, and there are many evidences in the literature of the period which tend to confirm the correctness of that assertion.

Taking our stand, therefore, upon the first three Confessions of Modern Baptists, we may, with all manner of confidence, maintain that at the time when they were published, both the General and the Particular Baptists were Strict Communionists. Only an interested ingenuity would be inclined to bring this fact into dispute, and inasmuch as there is no probability that it will be questioned in the future, I shall take liberty to pass to the next Baptist Symbol that demands our attention. This appeared in the year 1656, and is entitled "A Confession of the Faith of several Congregations of Christ in the County of Somerset, and some Churches in the Counties near adjacent." These articles do not make any unquestionable declaration upon the subject of Communion at the Lord's Table, although the expressions contained in Art. 24 are thought to be capable of an interpretation in favor of the strict practice. At any rate, they leave no room to doubt that baptism was looked upon by the men of Somerset as essential to membership in the church. The people who here come before us were under the general supervision of the celebrated Thomas Collier, and inasmuch as we shall find them later asserting a very decided conviction on the side of Strict Communion, I am inclined to believe that their language in 1656 should likewise be interpreted in that sense.

The General Baptists presented the next creed that we shall mention, to his Majesty Charles II., on the 26th of July, 1660, shortly after his accession to the English throne. If you will take the trouble to consult Arts. 11-13, which are too lengthy for citation here, you will find that this community were still very strict in their notions both in regard to the question of membership and of communion at the Lord's Supper. Baptism was avowed as a pre-requisite in both cases.

Thus I have gone over, as briefly as I could, all the public declarations of Baptist faith between the years 1611 and 1677, and the result is found to be that not a single one of them advocates loose communion, while most of them are in express terms opposed to it. We are, therefore, clearly entitled to denominate this period of our history a strict communion period. It was an era of strife and conflict, when every man's hand was against his neighbor, and every nook and corner of England was full of the sounds of debate. Denominational lines were therefore in general quite distinctly drawn, and there was no great amount of trouble with such as desired to overstep them.

2. The first struggle in favor of Loose Communion—1677-1695.

We now approach an epoch in which altogether a different state of opinion is perceived. Almost from the beginning of the troublous period which then obtained in English affairs, there were indeed a few men and churches distributed in different portions of the Commonwealth, who could gain their consent to require nothing whatever except a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, and holiness of life, as conditions of membership in their organizations, or of Communion at the Eucharist. Among these may be mentioned John Gifford and John Bunyan, with their somewhat numerous bodies of adherents in Bedfordshire; the church at Broadmead, Bristol; Mr. Jessey's church, in London, and the various churches organized by Vavaser Powell, in Wales. There was so much activity in the political life of the nation, from 1646 until 1660, that these opposing tendencies did not become very observable until the king was restored to his throne. After that period there was room and better opportunity for development, and the influence of the Bunyan party began to increase perceptibly. This result was promoted by the persecution which Charles and his counsellors visited upon non-

conformists of all names, since persons who had hitherto pursued their own several paths, and enjoyed little contact with their neighbors, began to be drawn closer together by sympathy in suffering and by common sentiments of opposition to the royal policy.

The Baptists of Bedford being exceedingly attached to their opinions in regard to the proper method of constituting a church, as a matter of course there was no small amount of friction between themselves and their more logical and consistent brethren in London, each side complaining strenuously of unfairness and lack of candor on the part of the other.

In the year 1671 Mr. Bunyan, who was rapidly rising to a position among the foremost men and preachers of his time, became persuaded that the controversy which for 15 years previously had been carried on in a private way, would be concluded at once in his favor if only his opponents and others could obtain a consecutive and clear statement of his views in regard to it. Accordingly he published a short tract entitled "A Confession of my Faith and a Reason of my Practice in Worship." This piece produced a considerable sensation, and soon met with a reply under the title of "Some serious reflections on that part of Mr. Bunyan's Confession of Faith touching Church Communion with Unbaptized Believers." Bunyan answered this in 1672 with a work styled "Differences in Judgment about Water Baptism, or to Communicate with Saints as Saints proved Lawful." Therefore, Mr. Henry Danvers and Mr. Thomas Paul each entered the field against Bunyan, who soon closed the controversy with "Peaceable Principles and True, or a Brief Answer to Mr. Danvers and Mr. Paul's Books."

The weight of his intellect, combined with the sweetness and poise of his spirits, gave the immortal dreamer an easy victory over his opponents, while his influence, which was steadily advancing in London, where his sermons were often heard and admired by multitudes, drawn from every class of society, impressed the minds of his brethren there to a very large extent. Add to this the fact that in 1675 he acquired an exceedingly able and skillful advocate in the city itself by the removal to the church at Petty France of Nehemiah Cox, who entered the Christian ministry on the same day as himself, and had been his true yoke-fellow at Bedford for many years, and you will understand why Bunyan was enabled to carry everything before him. Hardly had Mr. Cox been a twelvemonth in the city before he suggested the notion of renewing the associational meetings which had been so seriously interfered with by the watchful suspicions and severe persecutions of the government. It was not long until his exertions were rewarded by success, and in 1677 a body of that kind was organized. We cannot determine whether its first session was held in the country or in London, but the former is most likely, as I find Mr. Cox, who was its leading spirit, on a visit to Pithay in Bristol on the 3d of August, 1677. He was in company with Mr. Daniel Dyke, the assistant of Mr. Kiffin, and together they ordained Mr. Andrew Gifford, (Ivimey 2, 545) afterwards so famous in Baptist annals. It is probable that on this journey both these gentlemen attended and helped at the formation of the new and perilous enterprise. If that conjecture is admitted, we can tell very nearly the origin of the famous Confession of Faith which was adopted by the association, for we read in the records of the Petty France Church over which Mr. Cox presided, a minute to the following effect, dated August 26, 1677: "It was agreed that a Confession of Faith, with the appendix thereunto having been read and considered by the brethren, should be published." In a word, there are grounds enough to support the conclusion that Mr. Nehemiah Cox, the early associate of Bunyan, and his representative and spokesman in London, was the author of this work, for it displays in almost every line the influence, and I am inclined to fancy the suggestions likewise, of the Bedford pastor. If you will take the time to examine the terms in which this symbol, which bears the name of '

"confession of their faith, put forth by the elders and brethren of many congregations of Christians Baptized upon Profession of their Faith, in London and the country," was expressed, you will discover at a glance that the condition of affairs is widely different from that which prevailed in the former age. The advocates of Mixed membership and loose communion had made surprising advances. I must allow that I was much impressed when this was first brought to my attention, and that it gave me new conceptions in regard to the power and authority of Mr. Bunyan. Of all the men in the world, one would fancy that Mr. Wm. Kiffin would have maintained his independence and asserted his convictions, he who had endured persecution on several occasions for the faith he cherished; but even Mr. Kiffin, or at least his church, had a share in the deliberations of this association, and sanctioned in many ways the creed they produced (Ivimey 3, 314). Indeed a few years later in 1689, the entire General Assembly of English Particular Baptists embraced this Bunyan Confession, without altering a line or a syllable, and Mr. Kiffin was among the foremost to subscribe his name, and with all the weight of his character and position commend it to the favorable attention of mankind.

In the Introduction the compilers of this confession cite our attention to the fact that they had been studious to adopt, as far as they could, the sentiments of the Westminster Confession, "making use of the very same words in those articles wherein our faith and doctrine are the same with theirs." Let us, however, observe one of the articles wherein the faith and doctrine of the Baptists of 1677 is represented as differing from that of the Presbyterians, and we shall obtain an idea to what lengths Mr. Bunyan had carried matters. I will place Article 28 of the Westminster Confession by the side of Article 29 of the Confession of 1677, in order that you may discover at a glance the nature of the alteration that was made.

WESTMINSTER CONFESION.

ART. 28. OF BAPTISM.

Baptism is a Sacrament of the New Testament ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the Visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace, of his Ingrafting into Christ, of Regeneration, of Remission of Sins, and of giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.

BAPTIST CONFESION.

ART. 29. OF BAPTISM (1677.)

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized a sign of his fellowship with Him, in His death and resurrection, of his being Engrafted into Him, of Remission of Sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.

You will perceive that the Baptist Confession omits the requirement found in the Presbyterian that baptism shall be a condition of admission into the Visible Church; or, in other words, it provides for mixed membership. In this omission, I insist again you may distinctly trace the hand of Mr. Bunyan, and you must be impressed at once by his boldness and his power. Not another man in Christendom could have brought William Kiffin and Hanserd Knollys to the sad pitch of submitting to such a suggestion. They were as pygmies in the hands of the giant of Bedford.

Furthermore, although both of these gentlemen were in favor of Strict Communion at the Lord's Table, and had so expressed themselves in the Confession of 1646, they now submitted as quietly as children to Art. 30 of the new Confession, which provides for Loose Communion at the Lord's Supper. It has been suggested that this was the result of a mere accident, but that view will be regarded as quite unreasonable by those who take the trouble to consult the Appendix of the Confession in hand, where the compilers are solicitous to advertise us that the changes were consciously and intentionally undertaken. "We are not insensible," they say, "that as to the order of God's house and entire communion therein there are some things wherein we as well as others are not

at a full accord among ourselves; as for instance, the known principle and state of the consciences of divers of us that have agreed in this Confession is such that we cannot hold church communion with any other than baptized believers and churches constituted of such; yet some others of us have a greater liberty and freedom in our spirits that way, and therefore we have purposely omitted the mention of things of that nature." This expedient of silence was not, as they fancied, a compromise, but a total defeat and an inglorious surrender to the adversaries of long established Baptist usage. Many other alterations of inferior importance might be brought forward, all pointing in the same direction, and demonstrating a deplorable and culpable latitudinarianism, but as we should hasten forward, those above given must suffice for specimens.

Though Bunyan, in his struggle for Mixed Membership and Loose Communion, had thus captured the camp of the Particular Baptists, and was the acknowledged master of the situation, the General Baptists were still unterrified. Accordingly, during the following year, 1678, they met in great numbers, and issued what is known as the Orthodox Creed, which in several respects constitutes and was designed as a protest against the positions of the confession of 1677. Particularly is that the case in respect to Mixed Membership and Loose Communion. In proof of what I have claimed I offer a couple of quotations, the first from Art. 28, and the other from Art. 33 of the Orthodox Creed.

Orthodox Creed (1678,) Art. 28, Of the Right Subject and Administration of Holy Baptism.

"Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized or dipped a sign of our entrance into the covenant of grace, and ingrafting into Christ, *and into the body of Christ, which is His church.*" * * * "And orderly none ought to be admitted into the visible church without being first baptized."

Many Baptists in London must have winced as these plain words were uttered in their hearing, to think of the unsoldierlike fashion in which they had deserted the simplest landmarks of the faith and practice of all evangelical churches of Christ.

Orthodox Creed, Art. 33, Of the end and right administration of the Lord's Supper:

* * * "*And no unbaptized, unbelieving, or open profane, or wicked heretical persons ought to be admitted to this ordinance, to profane it.*"

This expression as well as the preceding bears directly upon the lamentable defection of the Particular Baptists a year previously, and these people deserve gratitude and all honorable mention for their steadfastness in asserting the principles to which all alike had formerly been committed.

After this vigorous and manly protest on the part of the General Baptists, things went on very quietly for two or three years among the Particular Baptists, no man daring to "pout or mutter," lest Bunyan should impale him alive on the point of his pen. The current of public sentiment, therefore, set strongly in the direction of loose principles and practices, and though multitudes deplored it, they were not able to offer any effective resistance.

In the year 1680 Mr. Hercules Collins, who, after the death of John Norcott, had been called to the pastorate of the church of old Gravel Lane, Wapping, London, but who seems to have been hitherto, in some way, connected with Petty France, that stronghold of Bunyan, published a work which he denominated "An Orthodox Catechism, being the Sum of the Christian Religion contained in the Law and the Gospel, for Preventing the Canker and Poison of Heresy and Error." Since the church over which he presided was the same as that founded by John Spilsbury in 1633, his position gave him an introduction to the English Baptists that was exceedingly serviceable for the promotion of his tenets. In answer to the question, "Who are to come to the table of the Lord?"

Mr. Collins expressed views that were derived from and clearly based upon Art. 30 of the Confession of 1677, and hence, as a matter of course, in favor of Loose Communion. (St. Mary's Norwich Chapel case—Introduction, p. cxxvi.)

That proceeding, however, was too great a strain for the patience of Mr. Kiffin, who, although he had submitted to the adoption of the Confession of 1677, could not endure that one of his London colleagues should express himself so boldly in reference to matters which he himself greatly deplored. Accordingly, in the year 1681, he appeared with "A Sober Discourse of the Right to Church Communion, wherein is proved by Scripture, the Example of Primitive Times, and the Practice of all that have professed the Christian Religion, that no Unbaptized Person may be Regularly Admitted to the Lord's Supper."—*Ivimey* 3, 315.

I cherish an ardent admiration for the character and achievements of Mr. Kiffin, who, beyond any question, was a great and worthy man; but I must believe that on this occasion he forgot what was due to himself and to his reputation. In a word, we must acknowledge that his conduct was unhandsome and reprehensible. It was a very easy matter to attack and perhaps to overwhelm poor Hercules Collins, but such a triumph does little credit either to his head or his heart. Why did he not, like a brave man, fling down the gage of battle to the Tinker of Bedford? Even an inglorious defeat would have been an honorable result in that contest, but the jousts which they had tilted in 1671-2 had inspired him with an undue and unbecoming dread of Mr. Bunyan, and the effects of that alarm are too apparent in all his conduct throughout this period. Alas, Mr. Kiffin, even a great man sometimes enacts an unworthy rôle. It was his solemn duty to God and to his people to pursue a bolder policy, and even to this day we have not ceased to experience the results of his indecision and lack of nerve. Had there been a man upon the scene who was equal to that emergency, he might have accomplished a service for our Denomination of which the value cannot now be estimated.

The onslaught upon Hercules Collins, since it was construed as a confession of weakness and fear, did more harm than good to the cause of strict communion. The opposite view was gaining adherents in all quarters. Bunyan's fame and favor, not only among the Baptists, but everywhere in England, were approaching the zenith, and he was admired and revered by all sorts of men as one of the greatest characters that the nation had produced. He was often in London, and during these visits quite overshadowed his brethren of the baptized way, and filled them with admiration. Affairs went forward in that way until the year 1688, when Mr. Bunyan was suddenly cut off in the midst of his days. One would have thought this a fine opportunity for Kiffin and the numerous friends of strict communion to assert their existence and independence, but their cause meanwhile was become so reduced that they did not have the courage to do so. A general assembly of all the Particular Baptists of the kingdom was called to meet in London, Sept. 3, 1689, and it was attended by representatives of more than a hundred churches. Here was an excellent opening for a proposition to change Art. 29 of the Confession of 1677, so as to require baptism as a condition of admission to the church, and Art. 30, so as to put an end to Loose Communion at the Lord's Table, but nothing of the sort is alluded to; the confession of 1677 was adopted without any alteration (*Crosby* 3, 258,) and the brethren were even condescending enough to declare in addition, "that in those things wherein one church differs from another church in their principles or practices in point of communion, we cannot, shall not impose upon any particular church therein, but leave every church to their own liberty to walk together as they have received from the Lord;" (*Crosby* 3, 250). So far from any protest on the part of Kiffin and Knollys against these proceedings, in the advertisement which recommended the confession to the attention of the general public, and

which is signed by 37 persons, we find (as I have already remarked) their names at the head of the list. The discovery of such a fact, it must be allowed, makes a disagreeable impression, and the Baptist historian will find it a difficult task to understand or to forgive it.

This General Assembly met annually until the year 1693, when, owing to "fears and jealousies of the churches" on the one part; and to a very decided opposition to ministerial education on the other (Ivimey 1, 531, Ivimey 1, 528), which was one of the principal objects to be promoted by the union, it was happily dissolved. The word happily is appropriate in that connection, because as long as the General Assembly lasted, the tendency toward Mixed Fellowship and Loose Communion, supported as it would naturally be by the desire to obtain the co-operation of all the Baptists of England and Wales, was still very strong, even though Mr. Bunyan had been resting in his grave at Bunhill Field since the summer of 1688.

An intimation of the state of feeling which during these years was abroad in the country may be perceived in the second Somerset Confession. You will recall the fact that the Baptists of that county, under the leadership of Thomas Collier, had published the first Somerset Confession in 1656. Perceiving that their brethren were now departing from the faith, these disciples of Collier and faithful Baptists were induced to appear with a new confession in the year 1691; (Crosby 3, 259). Here, in Art. 13, they declare that "none ought to communicate in this holy ordinance (The Lord's Supper) but such as are orderly members of the church of Christ, made so by repentance, faith and baptism, and then they have a lawful right unto it." These consistent and thorough-paced strict communionists, however, candidly confess that in 1691 they were "like the voice of one crying in the wilderness," almost all the other Baptists having proved recreant to the practices with which they had been so familiar 40 years before. "We are looked upon," they inform us, "as a people degenerated from almost all other baptized congregations, at least in our parts of the nation;" (Crosby 3, 260.) The Bristol churches, Broadmead and Petlay, with many others in Somerset, some of which had been established by the labors of Collier and his assistants, had long since joined themselves to the General Assembly and left the balance of their brethren to be considered "as a by-people, and rejected," very largely on account of their manful adhesion to the principles which their fathers had always maintained.

The period which we have now had under review is one of the most instructive in our annals. The struggle for Loose Communion and Mixed Membership was exceedingly active, and if Mr. Bunyan had lived only a few years longer, doubtless it would have been entirely successful; but his death in 1688, and the destruction of the General Assembly in 1693, prepared the way for a different order of things, which was duly introduced about the year 1695.

3. The Second Strict Communion Period, 1695—1771.

I have been induced to fix upon the year 1695 as the beginning of this epoch, because there is reason to suppose that the Baptist Catechism, which was composed by William Collins (Ivimey 1, 533,) was published at that time. At any rate, we can supply proof that it had not appeared by the 17th of April, 1694 (Ivimey 1, 535), and that more than one impression had been distributed by the 5th of July, 1698 (Ivimey 2, 414.) This famous catechism, in the compilation of which it is probable that Benjamin Keach was likewise engaged, since it was afterwards commonly designated as Keach's Catechism, is faithful to the old and well-established Baptist doctrine of Strict Communion, for under the question, "Who are the proper subjects of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper?" it answers, "Godly persons who have been baptized upon a personal profession of their faith in Jesus Christ, and repentance from dead works." Nothing could be more distinct and satisfactory, and this circumstance proves that our forefathers in England, after forsaking their

principles for a period of almost twenty years, had now at last returned to them, and were trying to walk once more in the old paths. I attribute this happy result to the influence of Mr. Keach, for it is hard to believe that William Collins, who for many years was the colleague of Nehemiah Cox, at Petty France, would have reassumed the strict position of the earlier Baptists without some decided suggestions from another quarter.

After the appearance of the catechism the tendency of Baptist opinion on the subject of Communion was almost all in the right direction. It is granted that at Broadmead and several other places they continued to practice Loose Communion, and perhaps some churches had a mixed membership, but the great body of the people were opposed to this policy. For the rest, it is only fair to state that the period we are now engaged upon is one of the most comfortless in all the annals of our Denomination. A steady and apparently irresistible decline was manifest in every department of Baptist interests. Many churches perished utterly, and a still larger number shrunk away to mere skeletons. The General Baptists were so much affected by Socinianism that their wing of the Denomination became almost extinct, until the dying embers of religious interest were revived among them through the memorable labors of Daniel Taylor. In 1760 he founded the organization known as the General Baptists of the New Connection, which is represented as being quite distinct from the original General Baptist body, but there is no doubt that divers of its members rescued themselves from spiritual decay in the infant society.

The Particular Baptists, likewise influenced on one hand by the Latitudinarian notions of the Deists then so widely prevalent, and by Antinomian proclivities on the other, had lost nearly all traces of spiritual life, so that Mr. John Ryland, in 1753, estimates the number of members in the communion of Baptist churches in England and Wales at 4,930, all told. (Ivimey 3, 279.)

During this period but a single effort in favor of Loose Communion has come under my notice. It was made by the celebrated and admired Dr. James Foster, a General Baptist Minister, who was Pastor of Paul's Alley, Barbican, from 1724 to 1753. Though his sect was in a measure obscure, this gentleman was known for twenty-five years as one of the most popular pulpit orators of the metropolis, and enjoyed the friendship and distinguished regards of all classes in the community. Mr. Pope, who greatly honored his talents, has complimented them in the well-known couplet:

"Let modest Foster, if he will, excel
Ten metropolitans in preaching well."

Epilogue to Satires.

Dr. Foster's attention being directed to the subject before us, he preached and published a sermon under the title of Catholic Communion, which occasioned some stir in his own branch of the Denomination, and received a reply at the hands of Mr. Grantham Killingworth, (Ivimey 2, 33.) But the popular pastor was so far gone in the error of Socinianism, that his influence, especially among Particular Baptists, was circumscribed, and it does not appear that they considered his representations as in any way deserving their attention.

4. The Second Struggle in favor of Loose Communion, 1777—1815.

A new spirit of activity and christian enterprise was manifest among our people for a considerable time before the beginning of this period, and everything seemed to be going on as prosperously as in reason could be anticipated. But almost simultaneously with the decease of the renowned Dr. Gill, in the year 1771, Mr. John Ryland, Sr., of Northampton, Mr. Turner, of Abingdon, and Mr. Robert Robinson, of Cambridge, who was then in the full order of orthodoxy, each published treatises arguing and urging the propriety of adopting Loose Communion. (Ivimey 4, 35.) After such a long season of repose, a considerable sensation was started by the renewal of this controversy, and Mr. Abraham Booth

appeared on the opposite side of the question in an elaborate and able work, the well-known "Apology for the Baptists," in which he defends his brethren against the charge of "laying an unwarrantable stress upon the ordinance of baptism." (Ivimey 4, 36.) Because no reply was made to this treatise it was believed that the discussion was at an end, and many hoped that nothing more would be heard of it. But this was far from being the case. The unusually active and cordial association of the various denominations of Dissenters in the splendid religious enterprises then inaugurated produced a decided effect upon the Baptists of England, and the friends of Loose Communion gained strength constantly and steadily, until there were few churches where the question was not anxiously discussed, and the contending parties clearly distinguished. Nevertheless, there were comparatively a small number of persons who felt at liberty to engage openly in celebrating the Lord's Supper with Christians of other communions, because Mr. Fuller, then regarded as the leading promoter of every good work, whether the same was confined to the limits of his own church or was exercised in connection with others, cast the weight of his authority in favor of the established custom and against the innovation, even going to the extent of publishing a treatise in defense of Strict Communion, which, however, is suppressed in most editions of his writings. But the leaven was constantly at work; it was becoming every year more difficult to keep the people under control.

5. The triumph of Loose Communion, 1815—1879.

The year 1815 constitutes a turning point in our history, because at that time appeared the famous work of Robert Hall, entitled "Terms of Communion." The Baptist public, in all portions of the kingdom, were more or less prepared for its reception, and it produced in consequence a very great impression. The friends of Loose Communion, proud of such a distinguished advocate and able leader, rallied instantly and with enthusiasm under his standard. A free invitation was extended in many churches to all who would, to come nigh, and much larger numbers than formerly was the case, allowed themselves on the other hand to partake of the elements in churches of other communions. When a congregation was divided in sentiment, the minister commonly established two services, one to meet the wants of the Strict and the other for the benefit of the Loose Communion party. Thus matters have progressed until the Strict party has almost disappeared, what small remnants of them that remain being scarcely able to maintain divine service, or to make even a slight impression upon the progress of opinion in the Denomination.

The last decided stand that was made by them occurred at St. Mary's Chapel, Norwich. The celebrated suit which was entered by the Strict Baptists, in order to retain the property of this church, came to trial in the year 1860 and was decided adversely, the Loose Communionists carrying the day completely. It was natural that the struggle should end at this point, for St. Mary's was the church over which presided, up to 1832, the distinguished Joseph Kinghorn, Mr. Hall's chief adversary in the controversy which occurred on this subject after 1815. This gentleman, who in his youthful time had been entirely unsettled as to which side of the question he should espouse, (St. Mary's Norwich Chapel case, pp. 185—188) was by the year 1815 sufficiently established in his views to take up the cudgels in favor of the Strict view. The result of the discussion held by him has been indicated above, but out of piety to the memory of a venerable and beloved pastor, several members of the congregation, long after his decease, were slow to submit to the new practice, and contended violently against it. Upon their defeat before the courts of law, the history of Strict Communion in England was virtually closed, and the triumph of Loose Communion was completed.

With greatly fewer words I shall be able to treat the second division of my subject, which relates to

II. The history of Communion among the Baptists of America.

There is no need for any division into periods under this head, for happily the entire tract of time involved may be embraced in one and the same period. The Baptists of America have had many discussions on other points, resulting in wide differences of opinion and sentiment, but they have always been practically united on the question of Communion, and let us hope that this harmony will not be disturbed. The only exception that can be mentioned is the case of a few Separate Baptist Churches in Nova Scotia, who for a short while after their organization practiced Loose Communion, but the Association of that Province dropped them from fellowship at its annual session in the year 1809, since which date no effort in this direction has been made. (Benedict 1, 306.)

The security of our brethren in this country, as a general thing, has been so well established that there is reason to fear that, counting too much upon it, they have displayed a smaller amount of prudence and caution than the circumstances, when properly considered, would appear to demand; and in concluding these remarks it might not be amiss, nay, it appears to be my duty, to allude to certain particulars in which it might be judged expedient, and even necessary, for them to provide against possible emergencies.

1. First among these I should think it important for the leaders of opinion among us to give more attention to the fact that what I have described and deplored as the Bunyan Confession of Faith, on the ground that it was composed in his spirit, and, perhaps, under his direction, has been owned and adopted by the leading historical associations of American Baptists. The first of these bodies which took that step is the famous Philadelphia Association, organized in 1707. At what time it accepted the doctrine in question as its creed statement cannot now be determined, but the date appears to have been prior to the year 1724 (Cutting, Hist. Vindications, p. 93.) Since the circumstances under which this action was taken have never come to light, it would be futile to indulge conjectures; but subsequent occurrences render it certain that the body very early protested against the provisions in favor of Mixed Membership and Loose Communion, for in the introduction to the Book of Discipline, Mr. Benjamin Griffith, one of the leading ministers, alludes to something of that sort (Cutting, Historical Vindications, p. 200,) while the Discipline itself contradicts the provisions of the Confession in the direst manner. (See Concerning a True and Orderly Church, Sec. 5; also, On the Admission of Church members, Sec. 3.) Moreover, the Catechism of William Collins and Benjamin Keach, already described above, was adopted by the Association in 1742, and, as I pointed out, this provides for Strict Communion. The Philadelphia Association, therefore, has exerted itself in order to avoid being placed in a false position, and perhaps has sufficiently declared its principles.

The same thing, I have every reason to think, is true of the Charleston Association, which adopted this Confession (known since 1742 as the Philadelphia Confession) in the year 1767; for in the summary of Church Discipline, which is attached, the expressions upon the subjects before us are too distinct to admit of mistake.

Whether the Warren Association observed these wise precautions I cannot at this moment determine, and the same remark applies to the United Baptists of Virginia, who acknowledged the Philadelphia Confession in 1787, to the Holston Association of Tennessee, and the Elkhorn of Kentucky, which latter accepted this Confession shortly after its organization in 1785. But whatever may be true in any one of these instances, there can be no question that the Baptists of America, as a body, have consistently practiced Strict Communion. I cannot hope that my voice will be much regarded by any one of the venerable and honorable bodies here mentioned, but if that could be, I would respectfully propose the inquiry whether it would not be feasible and wise to

alter Sections 29 and 30 of this Confession, so that it shall speak a language in harmony with their sentiments. Is it not time for us to rid ourselves at length of the domination of Mr. Bunyan? This document is often printed by itself, without explanation or comment, and hence it must often convey to the general reader the impression that the Baptists are the only evangelical Denomination of Christians in America who do not require baptism either as a condition of membership in their churches or of communion at the Lord's Supper. It is not necessary to add that it is exceedingly important to avoid such a misapprehension and mistake on the part of the Christian public. Would it not be easier to adopt the modest suggestion here proposed than to accept the possible consequences of declining it?

2. The title deed of the Second Baptist Church, in Boston, bearing date July, 1745, is so drawn that its validity is made to depend upon the continued adherence of the church to the Confession of 1689. (Cutting, Historical Vindications, pp. 90 and 91.) This fact amounts to a clear demonstration that while the Associations were in general aware of the defects of that instrument, individual churches were not always so well advised, or so prudent in their conduct. It would be well if diligent examination were made in respect to the title deeds of all the churches on the Atlantic seaboard from Boston to Charleston, and in any other places where there may be ground to suspect that something is awry, in order that our people may be prevented from bestowing any further expense upon property where right of tenure is jeopardized in this way. Notwithstanding the fact that serious losses might be brought to view by such an inquiry, it should be fearlessly undertaken, in order that we may know the worst and be enabled, in good time, to prepare for it. The losses hinted at are inevitable at some time or other, and we should therefore observe the good old adage, that what cannot be cured must be endured. I trust that our brethren in all places will have the courage of their convictions; that there will be no disposition to compromise or waver, but that all concerned will show themselves as full of decision as they are innocent of wrong.

3. Many churches on the Atlantic seaboard, and perhaps in other sections, have adopted the Philadelphia Confession as their Creed, in some cases by a separate vote, in others by including it in the Church Covenant. The exact state of affairs ought, in every such instance, to be investigated and determined, and then as speedily and quietly as possible, appropriate legislation should be enacted. The reason for this is apparent to all. Every congregation among us ought to set its house in order. There is no special reason to anticipate that any attack is to be made upon our principles and practices, but eternal vigilance is the price of security. Fearful blame will rest somewhere in case our people are found at any future time in an unprotected situation, when, which Heaven forbid, a storm shall burst upon them.

And now commanding our beloved Denomination to the mercy of the Lord, and praying that the leaders of its councils may always enjoy the direction of divine wisdom and the smiles of divine approval, let us each one determine, in the sphere where God has placed him, and in all godliness and honesty, to do whatever may be in his power to edify the body of Christ, and render it purer, stronger and worthier, as its history advances.

WORKS REFERRED TO IN THIS DISCOURSE.

Confessions of Faith (1611—1688,) Hanserd Knollys Society, London. 1854,
Evans' Early English Baptists, 2 vols., London, 1862.

Bunyan's Works.

Ivimey's History of the English Baptists, 4 vols., London, 1811—1830.

St. Mary's Norwich Chapel Case, Norwich, 1860.

Crosby's History of the English Baptists, 4 vols., London, 1738—40.

Works of Robert Hall.

Benedict's History of the Baptists, 2 vols., Boston, 1812.

Cutting's Historical Vindications, Boston, 1812.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY LIBRARY

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY