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The Spread of Baptist Principles During the Century.



BY

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"Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours,
And ask them what report they bore to heaven."

To talk with the past days, years and century and ask what report they bore to heaven is eminently wise: To stand beside time's ever moving current and reflect upon and recount, not scenes of grim-visaged war, but of peace and of glory which will live in eternal memories when the favorites of earthly fame, with all their renowned achievements will have been lost in oblivion;—to record with grateful acknowledgments the spread of God's truth, of immortal principle—this is a duty and a privilege, in which every member of Christ's churches should cheerfully engage.

It is a Memorial Year.

When the Lord gave Israel victory, we read "Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen and called the name of it Ebenezer (the stone of help) saying, *hitherto hath the Lord helped us.*"

And though we raise no monuments of marble or brass, we should make each heart an Ebenezer, each church a memorial witness, each association and convention a chorus of grateful praise, and with one-voiced acclaim recount God's blessings on the work of our hands, on the labors of our fathers, on the spread of our principles, and do it in a way that the world shall hear, proclaim. *"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."*

One Hundred Years Ago.

The "Baptized People" at the beginning of the century were few, feeble and their principles generally despised, with no prestige of princely names, with no earthly head, with no strong central government, with no authoritative creed to give them unity in their teachings or direction in their aims, they rose with the century, in face of general opposition, steadfastly, onward and upward and forced by moral and spiritual power, such acknowledgments as this, from the learned and eloquent Dr. Chalmers, at that time a state church Presbyterian of Scotland: "Let it never be forgotten of the Baptists, that they form the denomination of Fuller, Ryland, Carey, Hall and Foster; that they originated one of the greatest of all Missionary enterprises; that they have enriched the Christian literature of our country with an authorship of the most exalted piety, as well as the first talent and the first eloquence; that they

have waged a noble warfare with the hydra of Antinomianism; that perhaps there is not a more intellectual community of ministers or who have for their number put forth, a greater amount of mental power and mental activity in the defense and illustration of our common faith, and what is still better than all the triumphs of genius or understanding, who, by their zeal and fidelity, and pastoral labors, among the congregation which they have reared, have done more to swell the lists of genuine discipleship in the walks of private society, and thus both to uphold and extend the living Christianity of our Lord." (Lectures on Romans).

That was written about the middle of the century. It can be said now and of the Baptists of America with thrice the force and fairness it was said then.

The growth of the Baptists Brotherhood during the century against all the adverse surroundings proclaims trumpet-toned the vitality of their principles, and the approval of the Lord.

In 1800 they numbered eighty thousand. At the close of 1899 they numbered more than FOUR MILLION AND A HALF.

The population of these United States *then* was *seven millions*. It is *now* nearly *eighty millions*, that is ten times what it was in 1800. What a growth? Immigration of course

greatly helped in this astonishing increase. But the Baptists during the same period increased, not merely ten times, but sixty times. In other words, Baptists have multiplied during those 99 years *fifty times more than the population has*, and the increase of the Baptists during the last year exceeds their whole number at the commencement of the century.

Baptist Principles.

What then are those principles, which, ever since the Lord Jesus proclaimed them, distinguished those people, now called Baptists?

I. That only a disciple of Christ should be baptized and received into church membership.

II. That discipleship involves the profession of repentance towards God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, regeneration, pardon, justification, adoption and sanctification.

III. That a figurative burial with Christ, or an immersion in water is the only baptism which is commanded and exemplified in God's word.

IV. That each church is an independent self-governing body, with no head, no legislator but Jesus Christ.

These cardinal principles are summed up in the apostolic aphorism, "*One Lord*," of the conscience, of the soul, of the destiny. "*One Faith*" in the *one* Lord as mediator, in His teaching and example, in His blood for the remission of

sins, in His promise of salvation to the uttermost. "*One Baptism*" for the one object, to show forth His atoning work—His death, burial and resurrection—to show the oneness of His people in privileges and obligations, one hope, the resurrection from the grave and life eternal.

Baptists have ever denied that Baptism was a seal, a pledge, a means of remission or regeneration or a transmission from Satan's Kingdom to the Kingdom of Christ.

They have ever denied that magistrates, governors, princes, kings and legislatures have any control, rulership or official connection with the churches of Jesus Christ.

They have ever held without compromise, that a gospel church is composed of those only who make a credible profession that they have been born from above "not of blood, not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God"—not by pressure from without in which the subject has no choice; not because of descent from pious parents; not by the operation of baptism, confirmation, or ought else, *but of God*.

In other words, Baptists have learned from divine teaching that it is through Christ (the only door) to baptism; through baptism to church membership (as a necessary prerequisite) and through the church in its fellowship, to the Lord's Supper.

At the beginning of the century, all other denomi-

nations made baptism the door to Christ, to pardon indeed, to salvation. Hence all pedo-baptists quoted, "Suffer little children to come unto me." How are they to come unto Him, it was asked, but through or by baptism. The incessant attacks of Baptists on this perversion of Christ's Words, and the soul injuring conclusion drawn from it have wrought a wide spread change in all evangelical denominations. The greatest theological writer of this century among the Presbyterians, Dr. Hodge, abandoned the argument from the covenant of circumcision. He wrote in the "Princeton Review," "There can be no greater mistake than to confound the national covenant with the covenant of Grace and the (Jewish) commonwealth founded on the one with the church founded on the other. It yields the main position of church identity and consequently of infant church membership in a gospel church.

Dr. Hodge continues, "with Christ the (Jewish) commonwealth was abolished and there was nothing put in its place. The church remained a spiritual society with spiritual promises on condition of faith in Christ. In no part of the New Testament is any other condition of membership in the church than that contained in the answer of Philip to the Eunuch "If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest." The church therefore is essentially a company of believers. (Princeton Review 1852.)

This is the gospel truth for which Baptists have contended, and for which they have been proscribed by the earlier Presbyterians and all others, Catholics and Protestant, for ages.

Litton an "English church man" of Oxford in his admiral work, entitled the "Church of Christ" makes the same clear statement, adding however that, infants born within the pale of the church is an exception, and that in our conclusion we must be guided by the cases actually recorded "in the Holy Scriptures." His American Editor in fact denies infant baptism altogether as having no effect upon those who receive it.

Dr. Bledsoe of the Southern Methodist Review spoke in still stronger language in regard to it. He boldly denied that there was any proof in the New Testament for the "infant rite. While the congregationalists have, in one of their large associations suggested, and indeed advised the abandonment of infant baptism and with it of course infant church membership altogether and the adoption of formal dedication of children in its place.

What a change in a short century. In the early years of it, the great Methodist Book Concern published, among others of Mr Wesley's Doctrinal Tracts one in regard to baptism in which he said:—

"Infants are guilty of original sin, they are therefore proper subjects of baptism, seeing that in the ordinary way they cannot be saved

unless this is washed away by baptism." "The benefit of this (Christ's death) is to be received through the means he hath appointed through baptism in particular." "I do not now speak with regard to infants, it is evident that our church supposes that all who are baptized in infancy are at the same time born again, and it is allowed that the whole office of baptism proceeds on this supposition.

"By water as a means we are regenerated and born again." (Doc Tracts P. 251.)

But these tracts have gone out of print; it is difficult to obtain a copy. Few if any candid Methodist minister or member but will repudiate the sentiments above quoted.

True it is still in their ritual. It reads, "We call upon Thee, that they coming to thy Holy Baptism may receive the remission of their sins by spiritual regeneration." That is the germ of Romanism: But thank God few accept it. Their belief and their discipline antagonize.

Custom is masterful. Its influence to a great extent controls the masses and the millions. The custom of infant church membership or baptismal efficacy, with the superstitions which cling to it had a strong grip upon all the Reformed or Protestant communions. It was difficult to loosen its grasp or weaken its mastery. But it has been done. The spread of the Baptist principle of a voluntary converted church member-

ship, of discipleship with all it involves as a prerequisite to baptism is proven by the following brief statistics from official sources.

There is no record of the proportion of infants sprinkled in the "Presbyterian Church" in 1800. The earliest is to be found in the annals of 1827. In that year one infant was "baptized" to every $13\frac{1}{2}$ communicants.

In 1898 one infant was baptized to every $38\frac{1}{2}$ communicants—a decrease of more than one-half, nearly two-thirds.

This falling off has been continuous and increasing.

In the Southern branch of the Presbyterians it has been the same. In 1874 they numbered 105,956 and had 4,229 infant baptisms or 40 baptisms to the thousand. In 1899 they report 221,022 communicants and 4,588 infant baptisms or 20 to the thousand, a falling off one-half.

With the Methodists, though no exact statistics of their infant rites are given, the falling off is still larger, and in many districts it has become almost a thing of the past, has ceased altogether.

The statistics of the Presbyterian churches are a pretty sure gauge by which to measure the minor pedobaptist denominations. For that people cling to the covenants and to the identity of the Jewish and Gospel dispensations and therefore to infant church membership with a tenacity outdoing other reform communions. But bap-

tist principles have permeated them all, and infant baptism that "pillar of popery" totters before the blows of gospel truth and common sense.

Taking into view the foregoing fact it is not an exaggeration or extravagant to affirm that

We Live in a Baptist Country.

The doctrine of soul freedom, absolute severance of church and State, for which Baptists fought and suffered for ages, has become so embedded in the American mind that no power can uproot it; so general that none are found to oppose it. And then the great leading principle, the ground rock of religious liberty is this, that no one, young or old shall be considered a christian or a member of a church, until he or she shall voluntarily follow the dictates of conscience and reason, and ask admission into it. No compulsion, no dictation but absolute freedom of choice. Now in America this has become public opinion. No matter what church standards say concerning baptism initiating the unconscious infant into the church and the "badge of distinction from heathenism." No one recognizes this distinction. Public opinion, even in the churches whose creeds so teach, denies and will not acknowledge the child a member until it voluntarily acts for itself. The parent, the child itself, when able to answer, will reply to the question, is he or she or you a member, *no!* The fact is, that in America

few now, (Romanists excepted) believe in infant church membership; and those few are becoming fewer every year. In this regard the victory is achieved, and the great gospel principle of voluntary church membership, of disciples only the proper subjects of baptism, the principle for the advocacy of which Homes was whipped in New England and the Craigs and Wallers were imprisoned in Virginia, is prominent and dominant. *Ebenezer* "The Lord hath helped us" and this Memorial Year we "thank God and take courage."

The Spread of Baptists' Principles in Regard to the Action of Baptism.

Dean Stanley after his return from a visit to the United States in 1878 delivered an address on the Aspects of the churches in America before the professors and students of Oxford University in Zion College, March 17, 1879, It was published in McMillan's Magazine. After mentioning the strength (or weakness) of the Episcopalian and Unitarian, and the strength of the Methodists he said,

"Of the Baptists, it is only necessary here to say that in numbers they exceed all other American churches except the Methodist." "One interesting feature in their history deserves to be recorded. Many are accustomed in those latter days in England to speak as if the chief mode by which Christianity is propagated must be the im-

portance attached to sacramental forms. It is worth while for us to contemplate this [these] vast American church [churches] which more than the corresponding community in England lays stress on its retention of what is *undoubtedly* the primitive apostolic and was till the thirteenth century the universal mode of baptism in christendom, which is still retained throughout the Eastern churches, and what is still in our own church as positively enjoined in theory as it is universally neglected in practice, namely the Oriental, strange inconvenient and *to us* almost barbarous practice of immersion."

Two things are here admitted by this candid scholar in regard to Baptists—the rejection of the "sacramental" efficacy of Baptism, and the retention of the *primitive, apostolic* action *immersion*.

Those holding and advocating this apostolic action have more than doubled since Dean Stanley made that address; and this "undoubtable apostolic practice" has by their example and advocacy forced its way into nearly all denominations.

The number of persons really baptized (that is immersed on a profession of faith) among Methodists, Congregationalists, Cumberland Presbyterians and other minor Communions is no where given, but it is legion. It has been said that more than one third of the Southern Methodist have been immersed, and that twice that number in line with Dean Stanley acknowledge

that "it is the apostolic and primitive mode "are Baptists in theory" as Dr. Bushnell said of congregationalists.

To show, beyond question the spread of this "primitive practice" the following figures are presented from official sources.

In 1880 they numbered 2,296,327, a little more than two millions and a quarter. They now, at the beginning of 1900 number 4,443,628, nearly four millions and a half. They have doubled in numbers in twenty years.

During 1899 the "Regular Baptists gained eighty thousand two hundred members (80,200) while the Methodists gained only about twenty thousand, one fourth as many; and the Baptists gained twenty five thousand more than the Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians and Congregationalist *combined*. Here is the table of official figures published in the New York Independent of January last.

	Per cent.	In numbers.
Baptists.....	2	80,201
Roman Catholics...	6-10 of 1 per cent.	52,123
Congregationalist ..	3-10 " "	2,370
Disciples.....	3	32,781
Episcopalians	1½	10,978
Methodist.....	½	33,021
Presbyterians	1 2-10	18,446

Now counting one adherent for every Baptist member (we might suppose three) for every Bap-

tist i. e. one in each family, or connected with each Baptist, there at least nine million who are baptists in principle, besides those in Pedobaptist communions who are "Baptists in theory."

In other words, the Baptists in 1800 numbered (approximately) one hundred thousand, when the population of the States was 6,310,520, that is one Baptist (not counting adherents) to every sixty-three persons of the population. The Baptists *now* number four and a half millions, and the population is recorded at seventy-two millions which is a Baptist member to every sixteen of the population. Think of it—one to every sixty-three, *then*, to one to every sixteen *now*.

Then if counting one adherent to every Baptist it is, one to every eight of the population. Add to this the Disciples, nearly a million and a half, immersionists and those in Pedobaptist communions; and it will be one to every six, who acknowledge the apostolic and primitive mode. What a change. What has wrought it? Not only have the scholars of the world given their verdict as regards the meaning of the word and the character, or "mode" of the action, but the general public has accepted the truth in the advocacy of which Baptists have labored and suffered through the ages—a burial with Christ in immersion essential to the ordinance of baptism. Truth is might, God's own breath is in it, and "the eternal years are hers."

Spread of Baptist Principles as Regards Church Government.

One of the most obnoxious tenets (in the views of men) held by Baptists through the ages was their firm denial of all earthly authority (in religious matters) beyond or above the assembled church; and the equality of its members. Cleros, the select and official clergy and clergymen as a ruling power, were unknown in their assemblies. The Laos, or people, decided when decision was called for.

The Scriptures taught them that the primitive churches were not a universal church with all the "local" churches like links of a chain, attached to an earthly "head-center" pope, bishop assembly or conference; which head-centre could be attached, like a staple-ring, to the throne or the state. They learned from the New Testament, as Gibbon and Mosheim express it. "That the primitive churches were little independent republics; "not monarchies or aristocrasies, that is, ruled by one man, or by a select set of men. They therefore held that each church had a supreme management of its own affairs with no court of appeals on this earth, that all were one, equally responsible and equally free. This was considered a standing rebuke to Kingcraft and Priestcraft. It was therefore hated, denounced and punished. But during the past century this revolutionary doctrine has

spread through all sects and denominations and while still condemned by them in theory, is dominant in practice.

The Methodists have, after fierce opposition, lay delegates to their Conference. Their "charges" as they used to be called, are now considered churches; and these churches in fact, choose their own pastor by "petition" if not by a formal call.

It is still more pronounced by the Presbyterians. They call their own pastors, and what is termed installation, which used to be the actual settling of a pastor, has become a mere form. The Episcopalians no longer look to their bishop to place a rector over them. The very word *rector*, which means ruler, has gone pretty much out of use or is meaningless; and the people, by their elected vestry, choose their pastor, and that which used to be termed a parish (which is place or territory) is called a church. Scriptural church power prevails. Even Romanists have felt the power of our scriptural republican church policy. Just recently in a large Romanist society, called parish in East St. Louis, the officiating priest died. The bishop appointed a successor, without consulting the people, as the Methodist bishops used to do. The people rebelled. They closed the place of worship, surrounded it with volunteer guards and allowed no service to be performed. The bishop excommunicated all of them. They despised the "bull" and defied him. After months of conflict and denunciation, the head

authority, the Pope's representative, was morally forced to yield to the laity. The appointed priest resigned, and the peoples' choice was appointed. And this determined stand, by these Romanists was applauded by their fellow-religionists generally. It was working among them of the scriptural principle for which Baptists have ever contended; the independence, and the supremacy of the "local" church.

And this principle permeates the whole American population. Its slow but sure progress through the century, is patent. The religious "anarchy" of the Anabaptists as it was called, and to stamp out which Popes, priests and princes combined, has spread to a degree, which assures its approaching completion. "What prospects then, open before us in the future? What courage, what energy should these prospects inspire? Our principles are spreading, and, like the dawning light, shall soon flood the world with the noontide splendors of the latter day glory. In every denomination our principles are more or less known and respected, and are working their sure though silent way toward a final and glorious triumph. The smiling skies bend kindly over us. The example of our ancestors, by all their suffering, by all their labors, by all their deeds of noble daring, in silent eloquence invokes us to fight manfully the battles of our Lord. Let the invocation be answered by a fresh consecration of ourselves to God.

And let that consecration be accompanied by a solemn prayer, that the spirit of our martyred brethern may be ours, that their piety may be ours that their courage may be ours that we, united under our great and only Captain, may move on in solemn column, admitting of no relaxation, and not knowing the name or sound of retreat; and soon the music of heaven shall announce the advent of the era, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever.

Appointed by the Southern Baptist Convention to call the special attention of the churches to the blessings vouchsafed to us as a people, what appeal shall we make to you. The *past* is our appeal. Its voice is the utterance of God's providence, to make this year memorable by a grateful remembrance, by a sublime resolve, by a lofty aim and by a supreme effort to spread His truth, and usher in His reign.

“Our Father's God from out whose hand,
The centuries fall like grains of sand,
We thank Thee for the ere agone
And trust Thee for the coming one.”