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Poetry.

THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST TO ME.

My song has found its dearest theme—
Not dashed with tears, or light with glee—
For such a singer all too sweet—
The ministry of Christ to me.

What were I but for Thee, my Lord—
I, grovelling low with earth and sense?
'Tis Thou hast taught me what I am,—
By Thy contrasting excellence."

I had no knowledge, nor aspired
To aught above the dust I trod,
Till Thy attraction drew me up,
And won my soul to ask for God.

I should not know, dear Lord, how cold
And empty is this heart of mine,
Did not its feeble pulses thro'—
'Gainst the full tenderness of Thine.

I did not know how vain my thought
For purpose, plan, or will might be,
How helpless, weak my puny arm,
Until I measured strength with Thee.

I should not see but I was fair,
Did not Thy beauty shine so bright;
I were not in my darkness blind,
But for the radiance of Thy light!

I never felt how small and poor
My gifts of being, or how few—
Till the magnificence of Thine
O'erwhelmed me with the wondrous view.

Life seemed a glad and idle day
To seek a pleasure, gain a toy;
Thy life rose up so pure and high,
It broke my selfish scheme of joy.

I deemed my treasures only mine,
And wept for every earthly loss;
I saw the sacrifice of Thine,
And yielded all before Thy cross.

I shrank before the touch of pain,
The smart of tears beyond control;
The anguish of Thy passion shamed
The coward weakness of my soul.

I had not turned my eye within,
To leathe the dark corruption there,
Did not Thy spotless being show
How blest the pure in spirit are.

I had not been from sin restored,
Or tasted of salvation's cup,
Had not Thy mercy stooped so low
To lift the prostrate rebel up.

Oh 'tis Thyself made manifest—
Thyself dear Lord, just as Thou art,
Standing complete before my soul,
That triumphs o'er my sinful heart;

That triumphs o'er my sense of self;
That loses self in sense of Thee;
My loss the gain of endless life,
By Thy life's constant ministry.

Religious.

WHAT IS A BAPTIST CHURCH?

A Sermon delivered on Block Island, Sept. 1, 1875, before the Narragansett Association, by REV. N. M. WILLIAMS, D. D.

"The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth."—1 Tim. 3:15.

We greatly rejoice, brethren to meet you in this well known island of the sea. We come to you as Christians,—our first and greatest joy,—and as Christians we always delight to meet Christians. The man that cannot love the Lord's people, whatever denominational name they bear, and cannot pray for their success in winning souls to Christ, needs nothing so much as repentance for the narrowness of his spirit.

But we are still under the necessity of keeping in mind that Christians, though one in spirit, are not quite one in their understanding of all parts of the Word of God. There are some truly devout souls in the corruptest ecclesiastical bodies, but we cannot for that reason become indifferent to the errors of purgatory and praying to the Virgin. A Christian bearing the name of Presbyterian is under no obligation to be silent concerning his peculiar views, nor is a Methodist Christian under obligation to be silent relative to his. They may talk in good strong English, may use hard arguments, may adduce well authenticated facts from history, painful though they may be,

but the spirit in which it is done must be respectful and loving. Unless the contrary is forced upon them by actual facts, they must give the utmost credit to the motives of those whose opinions they may attempt to controvert. Christians of different names should not take pleasure in listening to another's opinions.

As this Association has never met with you before, and as nearly one hundred and fifty persons have but recently become members of the church with which we meet, it has seemed not improbable that some of you are desirous to know yet more concerning the views which distinguish us from much the larger part of the Christian world. You will doubtless listen with prayerful candour, while I endeavour to answer this question:

WHAT IS A BAPTIST CHURCH?

After answering the question, let us inquire whether a Baptist church, as defined, is to be found in the New Testament? Were it allowable to take two or three hours for the discussion more justice, perhaps, could be done to the subject. Let us do as much as possible in the time that can be spared.

1. WHAT IS A BAPTIST CHURCH.

1. Who may be members of a Baptist church? This question resolves itself into two:—How many? What kind? The smallest number that could be regarded as a church is two or three. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them." The Jewish Rabbis said that a synagogue ought not to consist of less than ten persons. "A smaller number," they said, "God despises." It would rarely be expedient, that a church be formed with so few members as two or three, but there is nothing in the nature of the organization to make it wrong. But how large may a Baptist church, the church on Block Island, for example, be allowed to become? Assuming that the church, continuing to grow, might properly consist of all the inhabitants of the island, what then? May it extend itself to the main land, taking in believers in the southern tier of towns, and, working still further north, cover the State? May it extend itself in like manner, into all the States of the Union? The fact is, Christian brethren, that a Baptist church is never allowed to become so large as to cover national territory, or even the territory of a State. Hence, you are asked to notice very carefully that there is no such body as the Baptist church of the United States, or even the Baptist church of Rhode Island. Our ministers and churches would be opposed to organizing one great church, consisting of all our local churches. We have a denominational foreign missionary society, a home missionary society, and a publication society, but neither of these is in any sense the Baptist church, or a Baptist church.

What is the wider limit, then? We confine each of our churches to a town, and we may have several churches in one town; as for example, eleven in Providence, and four in Newport. A Baptist church, in a word, may consist of as many persons as can conveniently meet together in one place to worship God. It may consist of two or three, or of five hundred.

But what kind of a body is a Baptist church? Does it consist of men, women and children, received without condition? May the members believe anything or nothing? be regenerate or unregenerate? moral or immoral? Then all the inhabitants of the earth ought to be organized into such churches as soon as possible. Thus the church and the world would be one and the same. Some might be wheat; but all might be tares. Some might be sheep; but all might be goats. Some might be good fish; but all might be bad fish. Dr. Bellows has recently said on behalf of the Unitarians: "We can and do admit all manner of men into our society; Spiritualists, Catholics, Atheists, Infidels,—all are equally welcome." A Baptist church is not so constituted. It does not receive human beings

merely on the ground of their humanity. It requires compliance with certain conditions.

May any one, then, become a member on condition of being baptized? By no means, for it is possible to baptize infants, but that is what we never do. You may think us willing to receive them on condition that they are immersed; for it is well known that one of the largest churches in the world, the Greek, immerses infants, never sprinkles them. Though we practice immersion, we could not receive immersed infants into our churches. The greater quantity of water would not relieve us of our difficulty. This shows that Baptists do not make everything turn on a given amount of water. Our objection to receiving infants who may have been sprinkled, pertains to something more important than the shallowness of the water. It is because the baptized infant is an *infant*, that we think him unfit to be a member of a church. Our churches hold this principle as one of inconceivable importance, that a profession of religion is a voluntary act. We affirm that the very word *profession* implies voluntariness for the words *involuntary profession* contradict each other. Infants, we say, are not voluntary, and therefore they cannot make a profession of religion. The idea that others can make a profession for them under the name of sponsor, godfather or godmother, we entirely reject. We affirm that no being on the earth has the moral right to stand up before a congregation, and *commit* an unconscious being, idiot or infant, to a given course of life, or a given system of truth, or to a given church. We hold that every infant should, in these respects, be left free to choose for himself, when he knows enough to do so. Freedom to choose any church, any creed, any course of life, is the right of every human soul, the Romish church or any Protestant church, to the contrary, notwithstanding. We dare not, therefore, take an infant and commit it even to the Baptist faith. Let no one be under the necessity of saying "When I was in the unconsciousness of infancy I was baptized into a church. I knew not when it was done, by whom, or for what end." We prefer to lose fifty thousand persons every year, than to gain them by such an infliction upon the rights of the human soul. If we cannot receive infants into our churches, whom can we receive? Baptized adults? Not unless much more can be said than that they are baptized adults. That an adult has been baptized is not, to us a reason why he should become a member of a Christian church. Here, also, it may be seen that the Baptist idea of church-membership does not depend solely, or even chiefly, upon the amount of water employed.

What, then, is the chief condition of membership? Moral character? A religious education? No, not even that. The old Pharisees had a religious education, and many of them were highly moral; but a Nicodemus and a Saul of Tarsus would not be received as such into our churches. We intend to receive no such persons. We receive only such as give credible evidence of having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit; and credible evidence that they have been regenerate, would consist in being penitent for sin, and in accepting Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Not till after they have given evidence of regeneration do we consent to baptize men. We do not baptize in order to regenerate; the doctrine of baptismal regeneration we are wholly unable to accept. We believe it to be the parent of a vast progeny of evils. Baptism saves no man. It makes no man a Christian. First regeneration, then baptism, is the doctrine of Baptists. Unregenerate men may find their way into our churches, as Ananias and Sapphira and Simon Magus found their way into apostolic churches, but this is in spite of our plan, not because our plan embraces them.

You will expect me to say something upon the communion question; but I have very little to say concerning it. It was my purpose to speak of what distinguishes us from our brethren of other names; but, with the exception of two or three of the smallest denominations in the world, we hold no views concerning the relation of baptism to the Lord's Supper unlike those of other denominations. The Greek church, the Roman Catholic, the Episcopal, the Lutheran, the Reformed, constituting much the larger part of the Christian world, baptize before admitting to the Supper, and this order has been held in all ages of Christianity to be the order practised by the churches of the apostolic age. Our Methodist brethren are not entirely united relative to the question. Some of the most earnest defences of the pre-requisiteness of baptism to the Supper have been written by those who were not Baptists. Rev. Dr. F. G. Hubbard, of the Methodist church is the author of a large work written in defence of sprinkling, and of infant baptism. Part 11, chapter XI, treats of the relative order of baptism. "Is Christian baptism itself essentially pre-requisite to a Scriptural participation of the Lord's Supper?" The candor and kindness with which the affirmative is sustained is clear and decisive. Dr. Hubbard's incursions into the argument of the English Baptist champion of "open communion," Robert Hall, are, sharp and deep. Few Baptist writers have given a better argument in support of the almost universally acknowledged view, that baptism was intended by our Lord and the apostles to precede the Supper. Do all the principal churches in the world restrict the Supper to those whom they judge to be baptized? Then do they practise "close communion," so called. Baptists do the same thing, it is admitted. In his introductory remarks, Dr. Hubbard says that the Baptist and pedo-baptist churches "agree in rejecting from communion at the table of the Lord, and in denying the rights of church-fellowship to all who have not been baptized. Valid baptism they [the Baptists] consider as essential to constitute visible church-membership. This also we [Methodists] hold. The only question, then, that here divides us is,—What is essential to valid baptism? . . . The charge of *close communion* is no more applicable to the Baptists than to us, inasmuch as the question of church-fellowship with them is determined by as liberal principles as it is with any other Protestant churches; so far, I mean, as the present subject is concerned; that is, it is determined by valid baptism."

Seeing, therefore, that our belief that baptism should precede the Supper is precisely like that of nearly the entire Christian world, I need not feel called upon by the subject of my discourse to present the proof from Scripture upon which the conviction rests.

2. What are the officers of a Baptist church? As we have no such general body as the church, including all our local or particular churches, so we have no General Officer standing above all others, no Pope, no Patriarch, no Archbishop. Nor is our denomination presided over, like the Methodists, by twelve or fifteen bishops. We have no presiding elders, no travelling, preaching deacons, and no class leaders. Unlike the Presbyterians, we have no ruling elders. Every Baptist church, when fully organized, has two officers, and only two, which it believes to be of divine authority, minister and deacon. The minister may be called by different names, bishop, elder, overseer, or pastor, but whatever the name, the office is the same. Our ministry, it will be seen, does not consist of different orders or ranks. All have the same amount of official authority. Some of our churches have a standing committee, the chief object of which is to examine candidates for baptism, prior to their examination by the church.

3. What are the powers of a Baptist church? Our church government is not monarchical, is not aristocratic. It is democratic, or popular. It is often called the congregational form of government, because the entire congregation of believers is supposed to take

part in it. The churches of the Congregational denomination have the same form. What Thomas Jefferson said concerning it is worth repeating, though told so often: "The only pure form of democracy in the world—the best plan of government for the American colonies."

Every Baptist church assumes the right to choose its own pastor,—the smallest church as well as the largest. It would no sooner permit another Baptist church to appoint its pastor, than the people of Rhode Island would permit the people of Connecticut to choose its governor. Were we to go so far as to have a bishop, it is quite probable that we should go farther, and let the bishop appoint pastors for the churches but every church chooses to appoint its own pastor. No man on the face of the earth, however wise and good, would be intrusted with a duty which the people themselves, in our judgment, have the exclusive right to do. A Baptist church has also the right to decide who shall be received, and who shall be excluded. If the Baptist churches of Rhode Island, for example, had a bishop, they would probably allow that bishop and the pastors to decide the whole question; we should have no church meetings in which the people could decide for themselves who should be members and who should not be. If, after due consideration, we deem any of our members unworthy to continue in church relation, we exercise our popular and congregational right, and vote to exclude them. The pastor has no right to exclude them; the deacons have no right; the standing committee has no right. No Baptist Association has the right to interfere with the exercise of discipline in a Baptist church;—it can only say what church may be a member of its own body;—and no Baptist State Convention has the right. A church has been known to call a Council of neighboring churches, two or three delegates from each, to advise, only to advise it in a difficult case, but Councils for such a purpose are seldom called, and they are less and less employed for the settlement of a church difficulty. We have no courts of appeal; for we hold that the people of each church have the right to settle difficulties arising between its members, and such difficulties we think, are settled more easily than in those denominations whose form of government is less popular. A Baptist church, in a word, is a little independent republic, yet the twenty thousand of these little independent republics which are found in the United States are wonderfully united in love, doctrine, and practice. We are held together by no central power; our articles of faith are alike in sentiment, but are not run into the same form of words, and were not imposed upon us by one man, nor by any set of men, but were freely adopted by each church for itself; and if any church thinks it could improve the language of its articles, making them fuller, or briefer, or clearer, it has perfect right to do so without a bishop, or a general assembly, or a pope. If the members of a Baptist church become Second Adventists, or Methodists, or Free-will Baptists, they have the right so to change their articles of faith as to express their new views, but in that case they should practice common honesty, and no longer call themselves Baptists.

[Conclusion in our next.]

SUNSHINE IN THE SOUL.

That is what we all need and all may have. The following receipts may help us to secure it:

1. Look at your mercies with both eyes; at your troubles and trials with only one.
2. Study contentment. In these days of inordinate greed and self-indulgence, keep down the accursed spirit of grasping. What they do not have, makes thousands wretched.
3. Keep at some work of usefulness. Working for Christ brings heart-health.
4. Keep your heart's window always