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WHOLE SERIES.
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Poetry.

THE JOY OF INCOMPLETENESS.

If all our lives were one broad glare
Of sunlight clear, unclouded,
If all our paths were smooth and fair,
By no soft gloom enshrouded,
If all life's flowers were fully blown,
Without the sweet unfolding,
And happiness were rudely thrown
On hands to weak for holding,
Should we not miss the twilight hours,
And gentle haze and sadness,
Should we not long for storms and showers
To break the constant gladness?

If none were sick and none were sad,
What service could we render?
I think if we were always glad,
We scarcely could be tender.
Did our beloved never need
Our patient ministrations,
Earth would grow cold and miss indeed
Its sweetest consolations.
If sorrow never claimed our heart,
And every wish were granted,
Patience would die and hope depart—
Life would be disenchanting.

And yet in heaven is no more night,
In heaven is no more sorrow!
Such unimagined new delight,
Fresh grace from pain will borrow—
As the poor seed that underground
Seeks its true life above it,
Not knowing what will there be found
When sunbeams kiss and love it.
So we in darkness upward grow,
And look and long for heaven,
But cannot picture it below,
Till more of light be given.

J. BRUMMER.

Religious.

WHAT IS A BAPTIST CHURCH?

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

(Concluded.)

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

2. IS A BAPTIST CHURCH, AS DEFINED, TO BE FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

1. The New Testament speaks of churches as small bodies, each in a city or town, as the church in Pergamos, the church in Ephesus, the churches in Galatia, and even the church in the house of Philemon. But there is no such body in the New Testament, as the church in Palestine, or the church of Asia Minor, or the church in Macedonia, or the church of the Roman Empire. In a few instances the word church is used for all believers, but it never denotes all believers organized into a visible body. It never denotes all believers in one country. In this respect a Baptist church can be found in the New Testament.

But what do we see to-day? We see the Roman Catholic church, the Greek church, the Lutheran church, the church of England, the Protestant Episcopal church of the United States, the Methodist Episcopal church of the United States, and the Presbyterian church of the United States. Each of these is an organized body, embracing a larger or smaller number of little local bodies. Organic unity is the great, and, to us, unscriptural idea which underlies all these bodies. If this idea has any Scriptural foundation, we affirm that the Romish church is, in this respect, more consistent than any of them. The Roman church calls itself the Roman Catholic church, and the word Catholic, you are aware, means with respect to the whole; that is, the Roman Universal church. That is consistent. If the idea of organic church unity must be made to embrace the territory of one nation, why stop there? Why not like the Catholic church, make it embrace all lands? If the Scriptures give no authority for a universal church, where do we get authority for a church which shall be co-extensive with the United States?

Let us inquire when and where this unscriptural notion had its birth. A little more than two hundred years after the death of Christ, a man was converted to Christianity, by the name

of Cyprian. He became Bishop of Carthage, North Africa. Pious, learned and able, he yet fell into the current unscriptural views relative to church government. He conceived the unity of the church, as the phrase had already come to be, as external. It was difficult for Cyprian to see how a particular church could be a church of Christ, unless it should acknowledge itself as connected with one great organization, *The Church*. The churches which declined such incorporation were branded as a sect. Members of such churches were heretics. But calling a given body the church, did not give it the unity for which Cyprian pleaded. How was that unity to be secured? The popular form of government which everywhere prevailed in the age of the apostles, had already received a deadly blow. Men wanted to be bishops, and bishops became plenty. But as children become dissatisfied with a much coveted plaything, after it has been used awhile, so bishops wanted something new. Metropolitan bishoprics arose, vanity was gratified, ambition grew fat. Cyprian's idea of organic unity was therefore not so very difficult to be realized; and at length the idea was personified in one man,—the Pope of Rome. When, in the sixteenth century, Luther left the church of Rome most unfortunately he did not see the apostolic model of a Christian church. So far, Protestantism is a failure. The idea of a great organized body under the name of the church, still holds great sway over men. Spiritual union and organic unity are very different things. Organic unity may exist without spiritual union. The apostolic churches, like the Baptist churches of the present day, had literally no organic unity, but they had abundant spiritual union. We sincerely regret what we regard as the mistake of so many of our Protestant brethren, and pray that the time may be hastened when it shall be corrected by a return to the beautiful New Testament idea of an indefinite number of little local churches, held together by no other bonds than those of faith, love and obedience.

We have also seen that a Baptist church consists of none but baptized believers. If a baptized unbeliever becomes a member of a Baptist church, it is not because our principles require it, or allow it. Is such a church, then, to be found in the New Testament? Is there any intimation there that a church may consist of converted and unconverted persons? Who were baptized? "They that gladly received His word." Who were added to the church? "The saved ones." What kind of people did Paul believe himself to be addressing, when he wrote his letter to the church in Rome? A mixed company of believers and unbelievers? "Saints," "believers," "brethren," "God's children," "servants of righteousness." To what kind of people did he send the letter which he wrote the church in Corinth, and the church in Ephesus, and the church in Philippi, and the church in Colosse? "Saints." There is not an epistle in the New Testament which does not imply throughout, that the persons addressed had all been received into churches, with the understanding that they were conscious partakers of divine life through Christ; and there is not the least intimation that they were first baptized in infancy, and in that way became members in part, till they were old enough to choose for themselves. Infant baptism is no more in the New Testament, than are prayers to the Virgin. Testimony to this effect has been given by learned men of all denominations, and in such quantity that the sun would set before it could be repeated. An apostolic church did not consist of believers and "their infant seed." It consisted only of those who professed to believe. A Baptist church, then, with this feature, also, can be found in the New Testament.

But how shall we account for the fact that almost throughout the Christian world, it is the practice to receive

to church membership others than believers? There are to-day tens of millions of human beings who were received, not by mistake, or through ignorance, but by deliberate purpose, while they were too young to distinguish Jesus Christ from Jupiter. Almost universal is the conviction that human beings are born into "the church," or if not born into it, may be baptized into it while they are infants. This is the conviction not only of the Roman Catholic and the Greek church, but of almost the entire Protestant world. In the Methodist Book of Discipline are these words: "We hold that all children, by virtue of the unconditional benefit of the atonement, are members of the kingdom of God, and therefore, graciously entitled to baptism." The Presbyterian Book of Government says: "A particular church consists of a number of professing Christians, with their offspring." The Presbyterian Directory for worship speaks of children as born within the pale of the visible church; and all baptized infant members of a Presbyterian church are admitted to the Lord's Supper on the simple condition that when they come to "years of discretion" they be "free from scandal, appear sober and steady," and have "sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body." The Prayer Book of the Protestant Episcopal church represents the infant as grafted into the church by baptism, and Dr. Philip Schaff, of the largest Protestant church in the world, the Lutheran, makes the astounding statement that "the apostles never demand full and formal regeneration before baptism," and the Lutheran church teaches that human beings become members of the church by birth. Thus, I repeat, nearly all the great Protestant denominations believe, as the Roman Catholics do, that others than believers may be members of "the church."

How came such a conviction into existence? I have not time to answer the question as it ought to be answered. It can only be stated as capable of most abundant proof, that the new plan began to be tried about the middle of the third century. It was at first opposed, but it was more and more widely adopted, till at length the people of almost all Western Asia, of much North of Africa, and of nearly all Europe, became incorporated into churches upon the principle that human beings are born into "the church" or baptized into it in infancy. So the church came to be the world baptized. The church members who gave evidence of regeneration were so few that they were but as drops in the ocean. That, briefly stated, is the origin of the mixed membership of the present day. Baptists are most conscientiously opposed to the entire system.

2. In the earlier part of the discourse, it was affirmed that a Baptist church has only two permanent officers—minister and deacon; and it has been often shown that these are the only permanent church officers of which the New Testament speaks. Neither the Gospels nor the Epistles speak of an officer answering to a modern patriarch, pope, cardinal, archbishop, bishop, presiding elder or ruling elder. A bishop, in the New Testament sense, was only a plain, simple minister. It was only another name for elder or overseer. He was not, like the bishops of later times, of higher rank than other ministers. He did not have the oversight of a large number of churches. All ministers were alike in rank, and deacons were not an inferior order of preachers, but only had charge of the temporal affairs of the church.

After the times of the apostles a change crept slowly over the churches. Officers were multiplied and even now, in this age of light, we are compelled to exclaim,—How unlike the apostolic age is the present! One body claiming to be the "church," is presided over by four patriarchs, which have under them one hundred and sixty-eight bishops, while the Greek church of Russia has sixty-five bishops, below each bishop are many priests, and

below each priest I know not how many inferiors. Another body which claims to be "the church," has, for its chief officer, one who arrogates the right to govern for Almighty God all the inhabitants of the earth. Still another which claims to be "the church," has for its head the reigning sovereign, who, like the head of the Romish church, may be notorious for impurity of life. Nearly the same want of simplicity characterizes the church of England as marks the church of Rome,—archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons, prebendaries and canons and priests and deacons and sub deacons abounding. Here, in this country, too, is at last a cardinal, swearing to persecute schismatics and heretics; here are archbishops, bishops, priests, preaching deacons, presiding elders and ruling elders. How can we doubt that the sooner the Christian world shall rid itself of this cumbersome and unscriptural machinery, and return to the simple system of the New Testament, the more spiritual the churches will become? The Lord helping us, our churches will do all in their power, kindly, but decidedly, to accomplish it.

3. The last fact stated under the first general division of the discourse was this, that a Baptist church has the popular form of government; that it is a little independent republic, choosing its own pastor, receiving whom it will, and excluding whom it will; that it does not allow a great central power, as that of pope, or bishop, general assembly, or general conference, to have one authoritative word in its internal affairs. Is such a church to be found in the New Testament?

We see no indication that an apostolic church was under any other than a popular form of government. Even the apostles showed remarkable deference to the rights of the people; and Peter had no more official authority than Paul or John. The power of the people was derived from Jesus Christ himself. "Tell it [your brother's fault] unto the church,"—not to the ruling elders, or to the presbytery, or to the quarterly conference, or to the bishop,—but to the church, and let the church decide. The employment of disciplinary power by the people is enjoined, also, by the Apostle Paul. The New Testament puts the power to elect officers and appoint delegates into the hands of the people. Anything like a higher power, whether of one man or many men, placed over the churches for the management of their concerns, is entirely foreign to the letter and spirit of the New Testament.

A large majority of all the churches in the world have lost the power which Christ gave them. They began to lose it within one hundred years after the death of the Apostle John. The power of the people waned in every succeeding century, till at length they had no power to adopt their own creed, to choose their own pastors, or to manage their own finances. Like the local Episcopal churches of our own day, they had no church meetings for reception or exclusion, or for the transaction of business.

If the people lost their power, who took it? The "clergy." Bishops, in the enlarged sense, came to vogue. Even common ministers were ambitious to be more unlike the people. In the New Testament warranted, and therefore attempting to model the church after the old, complicated, defunct system of the Jews, they called themselves priests, and as priests seemed to be useless without altars, they called the communion table the altar,—a word which we never allow ourselves to apply to any part of our houses of worship,—and as altars are useless without a sacrifice, they turned the simple, commemorative rite of the Lord's Supper into a sacrifice, affirming that whenever the Supper was administered, Jesus Christ was sacrificed, the bread being changed into His flesh, and the wine into His blood. To make themselves still more unlike the people, the priests laid aside their ordinary clothing whenever they preached, and arrayed their persons in showy robes. The priests

lorded it over the people, the bishops lorded it over the priests, and the devil lorded it over all.

This is the state affairs to-day in the larger part of the Christian world. We should be grateful that, in the reformation which Luther was the means of accomplishing, some parts of the people's power was restored. It is deeply to be regretted that so much was left undone. The Churches of many Protestant denominations have far less of the democratic element than the apostolic churches had. Ministers are still divided into three orders,—bishops, priests, and preaching deacons. These are all found in the Protestant Episcopal church, and bishops, presiding elders, travelling elders, and travelling deacons are found in the Methodist Episcopal church. The Presbyterian church has for each particular church a pastor and a few ruling elders. In these denominations the officers exercise a degree of power which our ministers and churches believe to be inconsistent with the New Testament. For example, the pastor and ruling elders of a Presbyterian church, constituting what is called the church session, have the power to receive members into the church, to try offenders, and to suspend or exclude them. As two ruling elders with the pastor is a quorum, it will be seen that three men can decide the important questions: Who shall be received? and, Who shall be ex-communicated? The ruling elder is chosen for life. Our Presbyterian brethren seem to us to have deprived the people of their rights. The church session, the presbytery, the synod, the general assembly, are four ecclesiastical courts, one above another, each exercising power which belongs to the members of the local church. The Presbyterian form of government is aristocratic, not democratic.

No local Methodist church has the right to choose its own pastor. All Methodist Episcopal churches must take such men for their religious teachers as the bishops see fit to appoint. Nor can the people choose their presiding elders. These are appointed by the bishops. The stewards are not chosen by the people, though it is the people's money which they are required to collect and expend. A member accused of immorality may be tried by five persons, not one of whom is of necessity a member of the local church with which the accused is connected, and three out of five may expel him. A quarterly conference, an annual conference, and the general conference, may each act as a judicial court. If a bishop decides a question of law, the annual conference over which he presides has no power to reverse his decision. The Methodist Episcopal form of government is, therefore, far from democratic or popular.

I have thus endeavoured, Christian brethren, to answer the question:—What is a Baptist church? The subject was not chosen, and has not, I hope been discussed in a controversial spirit. One hundred and fifty of you have but recently become members of this Baptist church, by the warmth of whose hospitality we already feel cheered amid the cool breezes of your ocean isle. If to such, these views can be of some service in stimulating to a careful study of God's Word, to the Author of the Word let all the praise be given. Hold fast the truths of the Bible, not as a mere creed, but as the utterance of divine love, intended to reveal to you God in Christ. Let not the finest grain of the precious gold be counted of too little value to be preserved and defended; and, like Paul, defend it not feebly, as if you were half ready to yield it, but with such positiveness of will, and such stoutness of arm, as shall prove you to be true spiritual descendants of the valiant apostles. But, while manifold be not illiberal, uncharitable, untruthful in your representations of the views entertained by others. Indulge in no personal prejudices against those children of God who are found in other communions. If you condemn high-churchism in others, be careful lest you show it in yourself.