What Baptists Believe.

A SERMON BY REV. T. E VASSAR, D.D.

Text. — Ephesians, 4th chapter, 5th verse. One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

This text has been selected for me by another whom I do not personally know, but who evidently is not a Baptist, and usually not an attendant on divine service here. His motive in asking me to preach from the passage is not apparent, and can only be surmised. The request however seems candid, and sincere, and I comply with it to-night, because it will give me the opportunity to show how far we as Baptists go with other divisions in the great army of God, and where we go apart, what unites us with honored brethren in the general household of faith, and what separates us. A number moreover are this hour to follow Christ in baptism, and in the congregation gathered to witness their good confession there doubtless are many not in sympathy with our views, or practices, and if we first may have for a little space their ears, they may look with kindlier eyes upon the rite.

First, then, we cordially agree with the great brotherhood of faithful men in recognizing Christ as head over all things to his church.

We say as emphatically as any other body of God's saints 'One Lord.' If there be one company of the Saviour's followers whose testimony has never wavered in declaring Jesus of Nazareth God manifest in the flesh, the only source of spiritual life, and the only hope of any soul living or dying, it is that company in which we march. To this, those who are outside of our ranks have again and again borne evidence. When along the shores of Massachusetts Bay the very churches founded by the Puritans denied the Lord that bought them, drove Him from His place in their sanctuaries as God's equal and everlasting Son, pulling Him down to the level of a creature, our few, and then feeble churches were left nearly alone to keep the old banner flying with the inspired inscription written on its folds, "There is none other Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." When in the city of Boston every Congregational church excepting the Old South, had surrendered to the enemy, and when evangelical views tottered even there, our churches stood like rocks amid a surging sea, and gave a solid footing for the old faith. In 1829 Lyman Beecher stood up in our First church, Boston, and frankly said, "You Baptists kept your light burning and shining when ours had gone out."

I say therefore we are thoroughly one with all who hold to the Kingship and the Priesthood of the Redeemer.

The Missouri, the Sweetwater, and the Yellow Stone, great rivers of our northwest, have not only a common destination, but a common source. When in the Mississippi they finally meet and mingle their separate tides, it is as old friends that they come together, and go to swell the fulness of the sea. Leagues and leagues away, where the Rocky Mountains cast their shadows, these streams took their rise. And took them very near together too. Cool springs gushing out of the same hills fed them. At little lakelets lying like sheets of silver amid the craggy heights they drew their supplies, and then began to sweep away. And when at last they form a union never to be broken it is as streams that got their start at a common fountain. And such is our relation to brother believers. Not only do we with them seek, and set toward the same heavenly home, but our life takes its rise with theirs in the Christ of Calvary. Let that song, "Unto Him that loved us," ring out on earth to-day as it shall roll through the skies in the near future, and no voices shall lead ours in the grand chorus.

And no less readily, and no less heartily than others, do we join in hailing this Saviour as the coming King. We keep company with all the redeemed in acknowledging Him as the Omega as well as Alpha, the last, as well as the first in our regards and hopes. Our life lies hidden with Him in the past, but our trust centres in Him for the future. Holy anticipation leaps across the ages, and sees in the hands once nailed to the cross, the sceptre of a pledged and irreversible dominion. The Winner of Pardon, the Render of the Grave, the Opener of Paradise, is to reoccupy His throne, Lord of earth's lords, enduring, overcoming, invincible.

Oblivion may engulf the record of our little lives, but we see His name rising higher and higher, more lustrous than noontide sun. So far we say with all the blood-washed, "One Lord."

And meantime, in the present, here and now, we recognize this Christ as the one Law-giver, and Leader, and Exemplar. We take nothing upon hearsay, or tradition. We walk in no ways simply because they were travelled by the fathers. On questions of duty we ask only, what does the Master command? His utterances and example are authorities from which there is no appeal. His voice, and his footsteps are to be followed, no matter whither they lead. His life is to be reproduced, far as those who are frail and faulty, may do it before men's eyes. When young artists are at their studies they are set before some master-piece, some grand creation of chisel or pencil, to copy it. If it is a bit of statuary, they follow every curve and line. To bring out of the cold marble something like that is the aim. Nay, perhaps not with marble, but with clay their first attempts are made. And so the renewed soul sits down to study and reproduce Him who being incarnate God was incarnate goodness. But alas, we too have only clay on which to work, and so it is but a marred copy of the Divine model that we mould. Yet we are struggling to pattern after it, and some day we know our poor clay copy shall grow into His image. "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness," cries the Psalmist, and the beloved disciple sends back the answering echo, "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

"One Lord." Run that watch-word down the line, O sacramental host of God's elect, and none shall greet it with a deeper amen than we.

Secondly, we cordially agree with neighboring churches in the other fundamental articles of Christian faith.

We hold as tenaciously as any others do or can to the Scriptures as a divine revelation, the very word of God, and as binding to the end of time.

We hold as tenaciously as any others do or can to the doctrine of deep, universal sinfulness, and deliverance therefrom, as I have already affirmed, only through atoning blood.

We hold as tenaciously as any do or can to a state of retribution or reward beyond this life, into one or the other of which all men pass at death, and in which they eternally remain. And these differences hover about all the debatable ground. At least a theological writer, second perhaps to no other in our land, has recently said "Christianity has but three distinctive truths, and they are these, pardon for the past, new life for the present, and immortality in a world to come."

On these foundation principles we with others build. Hence we join in endeavors of a union kind. We co-operate with Tract Societies, and Sunday-school Unions, and Young Men's Christian Associations, in their evangelical but undenominational work.

When any of the vital truths of our holy religion are assailed, our presses and pulpits speak in their defence. We are charged with being schismatics, sticklers over non-essentials, a disturbing and dividing faction in the great household of faith; but where we spend five minutes in pressing our distinctive views, we spend five hours in maintaining and defending those that we in common share. Where our denominational papers print a paragraph in advocacy of what is specially Baptistic, they print a column that would be acceptable in any religious sheet. Where our Sunday-schools have one lesson enforcing truth as we see it, they have a score enforcing truths which all hold.

There were nearly one hundred thousand converts welcomed to our churches in the United States during 1882. In all that number there was not one who when led to ask "What shall I do to be saved?" but was answered as the jailer at Philippi was by the apostle, and as any anxious inquirer is answered still by every gospel preacher.

When this year shall end, and the multitudes now seeking Christ in so many of our churches shall have been gathered in, we shall probably number not much less than two and a half millions of members; and there will not be one of the number who, so far as he understands them, will not readily subscribe to the cardinal doctrines presented in the creeds, and catechisms, and confessions of other evangelical sects. We hold then with others to the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the main features of faith as held by Christians of every name. So far we walk side by side with all the redeemed of God, standing shoulder to shoulder, keeping step with step.

Unhesitatingly we say, One Lord, and One Faith.

Now we come to the point clearly indicated in the text where we break ranks with comrades in the grand army, for—

Thirdly, we hold to one baptism, and only one.

Possibly some one listening to my words to-night, belonging to some other religious fold, may be ready to exclaim, "Well we too believe in only one baptism, all we hold in opposition to you is that there is more than one *mode*, or *form*, and we do not believe that the mode, or the form, is material to the rite."

To this we reply that the New Testament says nothing about modes or forms. It establishes a distinct ordinance which it calls baptism, and that particular act it enjoins on every avowed disciple of Christ. The only question is to ascertain what that act is. What it *was* in the gospel's immediate age is hardly a matter of dispute among the first Christian scholars of our day. Dean Stanley in an an article in the "Nineteenth Century," written but a little while before his death, says, "In the early age the scene of the transaction (baptism) was either some deep wayside spring or well, as for the Ethiopian, or some rushing river as the Jordan, or some vast reservoir as at Jericho or Jerusalem, whither as in the baths of Caracalla at Rome, the whole population resorted for swimming or washing. The water closed over the heads of the converts, and they rose into the light of heaven new and altered beings. Such was the Apostolic Baptism. It was not only a bath, but a plunge—an entire submersion in the deep water, a leap as into the rolling sea, or the rushing river. This was the part of the ceremony on which the Apostles laid so much stress. It seemed to them like the burial of the old former self, and the rising up again of the new self. For the first thirteen centuries the almost universal practice was that those who were baptized were plunged, submerged, immersed, into the water, which is the very meaning of the word baptize. Even in the church of England it is still observed in theory. Elizabeth and Edward the Sixth were both immersed, but in practice it gave way with the beginning of the seventeenth century. *The ancient usage has been gradually driven out of nearly the whole of Europe, though it had no doubt the sanction of the Apostles and their Master.*"

This frank avowal of a great authority in the established church of England, I have quoted at length that you may know what he regarded as the testimony of history. Neander, whose "Church History," and "Planting and Training of the Christian Church" have given his name a world-wide celebrity, says, "The practice of immersion was beyond doubt prevalent in the whole church." Dr. Philip Schaff in his history of the Apostolic Church, says, "Immersion was unquestionably the original form of baptism." John Calvin says, "Baptism was administered by John and Christ by plunging the whole body under water." Moses Stuart in referring to the practice of the early church, says, "It is a thing made out—the practice of immersion. *I cannot see how it is possible for any candid man who examines the subject to deny this.*" If you consult the Edinburgh Encyclopedia or the Encyclopedia Britannica you will find that it was not till 1643 that the Westminster Assembly of Divines voted to change the form of baptism, and even then the change was made by a bare majority of one. The vote stood twenty-four for retaining immersion, twenty-five for discontinuing it.

Now all this is the evidence of men who are our opponents, rather than our friends, and it would seem to settle beyond a peradventure what baptism meant in the gospel age, they themselves being the judges.

Well, if this was the act originally prescribed, why deviate from it now? Why talk about modes of baptism any more than about modes of repentance or faith? If we may change the rite, why may we not abolish it altogether? Some are going so far. Quite recently I saw it stated that some southern preacher had proposed to his church that it should dispense with water altogether in the administration of the ordinance. He argued that water was but a symbol, and suggested that hereafter the hand be simply laid on the head of infant, or adult, and the usual formula pronounced.

Now against everything like this we take our stand. We do it not in self-will, or out of a desire for controversy, but in loyalty to God's Word as we read it. When we say one baptism, however, we have in view not only the act, but also the subject. It is not simply immersion for which we contend, but the immersion of such and such only as are capable of making an intelligent profession of faith. We do not refuse children a place in our churches. We gladly admit them as soon as they give evidence of love to Christ and are old enough to avow it.

Till they are capable of making such a choice and voicing such a confession, we do not, we dare not give them any standing, any half way standing among God's people. We hold that no one can be religious by proxy. That faith is a personal voluntary exercise or act. We believe that our children are to be prayed for, instructed, counselled, but we bring them into no connection with the church till they seek it as avowedly renewed souls. In the New Testament we find no trace of infant baptism. The only baptism of which Scripture seems to speak is the baptism of believers.

Hear how frankly this is admitted by authorities such as these—none of them Baptists.

Dr. Wall says, "Among all the persons that are recorded as baptized by the Apostles there is no mention of any infants."

Richard Baxter says, "I conclude that all the examples of baptism in the Scriptures do mention the administration of it only to the professors of saving faith."

Erasmus in his notes on Rom. vi. 14, says, "It was not the custom for infants to be baptized."

Olshausen, the famous commentator, says, "There is altogether wanting any conclusive proof passage for the baptism of children in the Apostle's age."

Dr. Hanna, editor of the *North British Review*, says, "Scripture knows nothing of the baptism of infants."

Dr. Knapp says, "There is no example of infant baptism in the Scriptures."

Neander says, "It is *certain* Christ did not ordain infant baptism."

Dr. Leonard Woods, says, "The New Testament is silent respecting the subject of infant baptism."

Henry Ward Beecher, after devoting an entire sermon to the subject, says that all attempts to prove the scripturalness of infant baptism must be abandoned, and that those who practice it must claim nothing more for it than that it is a rite congenial with the spirit of our Christianity.

Can any wonder that in the light of such concessions we say, "One baptism," and that the baptism of the professed believer, "One baptism," and that the burial of this professed believer in the likeness of his Saviour's death and resurrection. We honestly believe this is what our "Book of Orders" teaches and requires. We dare not change what it commands. We have no right. It is not ours to legislate. It is ours to obey.

The argument against us sometimes takes this shape. "You Baptists presume to say that men as eminent for learning, and integrity, and piety, as John Hall, and Stephen H. Tyng, and Bishop Simpson, and Joseph Parker, are all wrong, and you are altogether right." We presume to say only this, first, that we judge no man. To their own Master these honored servants of God stand or fall; and secondly, we pin our faith to, and shape our course by no man great or small. We simply follow where God's plain orders seem to lead.

In other cases this is the objection which against us is raised—"You make a great ado about a little thing. You admit that a man may be truly pious, and go safely to heaven, without seeing as you see, or doing as you do; then why keep harping on what is of so little consequence?" To this we answer, call it little if you will, but it is something ordained by our Master's words and indorsed by His example, and we seek only to keep the ordinances as He gave them to us. It is not with us a question of convenience, it is not a question of taste, it is not a question of choice. It is only a question of obedience to what we consider our Lord's clearly revealed will.

So this is the position which this church takes.

It bows with others whom it gladly accounts brethren before a common Lord.

It holds with them the leading doctrines of Christian faith.

It rejoices with them in the advancement of a common Kingdom, and in the prospect of a common inheritance when this life ends.

But it maintains and defends its own peculiar principles, and for them is willing if need be to stand alone.

We make no apologies for our views or our practices, and beg no man's pardon for preaching them.

We make war on none who differ with us save as we do it by our steadfast adherence to God's commands.

We ask every candid inquirer to compare our practice with the teachings of Scripture, and invite him to come with us only when he is fully persuaded in his own mind. Charity toward fellow disciples we will not refuse to exercise, but loyalty to Christ we put first.

One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism—here we stand, here we must stand. Nothing shall hinder us from offering for fellow disciples of every name that old time prayer, "Peace be within thy walls," but nothing shall hinder us from proclaiming truths which they fail to see or fail to follow.

And now to any who have found pardon and peace in believing, and are in sympathy with the utterances of this hour, we send out the cordial invitation, "Come thou with us," and to any who have not yet accepted the gift of God which is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord, we cry—

"To-day the Saviour calls,
Yield to His Power,
O grieve Him not away,
'Tis mercy's hour."

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Fanny's Mistake.

BY MRS. HARRIET A. CHEEVER.

The bells were calling to the evening service of prayer, and the deacons were already on their way to the vestry.

"Come, Fanny," said Mrs. Berry, to a fair young girl of seventeen, who still sat sewing busily; "come, child, it's time for prayer meeting."

"Oh, I can't go to-night, ma," said Fanny, hardly stopping to look up. "If I don't finish this dress by Sunday, I shan't have anything fit to be seen in, and I might as well stay at home to-night, as to have to all day Sunday."

Fanny noticed that her mother made no reply, and vaguely wished she would say something. After a moment she added:—

"You don't blame me, do you, ma, for wanting to have a decent dress to wear to church?"

"Oh, no," said her mother; "I thought, however, your blue checked silk was quite decent."

"Yes, but think how forever I've worn it."

"Your white dress made last summer is of more recent date, I admit," answered her mother dryly.

"Yes, but you only expect to wear white once in a while," argued Fanny.

"Very well, daughter. I'm ready now, so good evening, dear. I'm sorry you feel unable to accompany me."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Fanny, as her mother left the room and the house. "I almost wish I'd gone to meeting. I know what that quiet way of mother's means. If I'd asked her in so many words if she thought 'twas wrong for me to stay at home to work on my dress, she'd only have said, 'You must be guided by your own conscience, Fanny dear; I've tried to teach you what was right as well as I could, now you must judge for yourself.'"

"Well," she continued, snipping off a thread with a jerk, "I judge for this once that a dress I need, and a dress I must have. Another meeting night I'll try to come up to time, but to-night it simply wasn't best."

And to all appearance she dismissed the subject from her mind.

When her mother returned, Fanny remarked pleasantly: "I'm sorry, ma, you had to come home alone" but her mother replied: "I didn't have to come alone. Miss Sharpley came along with me."

"I don't see," said Fanny, "how in the world Miss Sharpley can leave her dress-making to attend meeting as she does. I heard Mrs. Raynor tell her this morning she must be sure and send home a silk dress she was making for her, before to-morrow night, and it wasn't nearly done."

"Miss Sharpley said she would have to sit up till nearly midnight," returned Mrs. Berry, "but she felt she could lose her sleep better than she could do without her beloved meeting."

Nothing more was said on the subject. Fanny sewed on industriously until the clock struck ten, then she laid aside her work declaring herself too tired to take another stitch.

For more than an hour she lay broad awake, the unusual fatigue of having sewed steadily nearly all day and through the evening preventing her sleeping. Then she dropped off, and fancied herself trying to find the church vestry, that she might attend the evening service. But the church seemed a long way off, and it was growing dark and chilly. At length she saw the cheerful light gleaming from the windows, and tried to hurry towards them. But her progress was impeded by the weight of clothing with which she was cumbered, and gradually she became conscious that she wore her new dress, and its contrary folds would first fasten about her feet preventing her taking a step, then its weight would so oppress her she was ready to cry with vexation and fatigue. By slow, painful degrees she came near enough to see into the bright, warm vestry, and there sat her mother happily singing away, little Miss Sharpley at her side.

At the vestry door, a woman was struggling to enter, but there were two or three steps to ascend first, and try as she might, she could not get even on the first one. It proved to be Mrs Raynor, one of the wealthiest members of the congregation, and she was attired in the dressy silk poor little Miss Sharpley had been charged to finish before Sunday. The dress seemed now to be weighed down as if by iron bands. At length, tired and discouraged, the lady paused and seemed to be thinking intently. Suddenly she unfastened the rich new dress, underneath which appeared a plain but tasteful costume, and throwing the beautiful silk into the street, she stepped lightly into the vestry. The music of a song and a breath of genial air were wafted from the sheltered room to where Fanny stood cumbered and alone, as Mrs. Raynor entered.

"Can I give up my pretty new dress and cast it aside as Mrs. Raynor has done in order to find rest and shelter in the house of God?" Fanny asked herself the question sadly. She hesitated. It was hard for the young girl to give up the nice becoming attire; and she was not rich like Mrs. Raynor, who could have new clothing whenever she desired. Still she hesitated. Then the darkness began to lower still deeper, the air grew more chill, strange sounds were abroad, and in haste and fear she murmured, "Yes, yes, I'll give up everything else, if need be, to find safety, rest and peace in the courts of God's house."

Poor child! Her delay seemed fatal. She could not unfasten the dress. The spell of the unquiet sleeper held her bound, and the now hateful folds seemed enveloping her with a cruel, unyielding embrace. Her fear and helplessness increased until in desperation she cried out, "Lord, save me, I perish!"

And lo! she was instantly by her mother's side in the dear, familiar vestry; and with all the strange fantasy of a dream, Mrs. Raynor and little Miss Sharpley, her dressmaker, were singing from Rock of Ages,—

"Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;"

and when the minister announced that a collection would be taken up for the poor of the church, bags were passed around in which to receive the offerings, the outside of which were made from pieces of Mrs. Raynor's new silk, lined with parts of her own new dress.

The next day, Mrs. Berry noticed that Fanny seemed in no haste to resume her sewing, but the good lady was quite surprised when her blooming daughter proposed going to see a poor, bedridden old saint, and carrying her some supplies.

"I wanted to suggest your going," said her mother, "but supposed you would want to sew without interruption."

"Oh, I'm not so anxious about finishing my dress, after all," said Fannie; "and I only wish I'd gone to meeting last night. I won't neglect church service again for a matter of that kind."

As Fanny set deliberately out on her errand of mercy, her mother murmured affectionately: "It's just as our good minister once said: 'Teach the children faithfully and prayerfully, then leave them to God he knows how to answer your prayers and perfect your teachings.'"

Fannie wore her white dress to church the next day—the new one was not quite done; and she almost shuddered at sight of Mrs. Raynor in her new silk, but a glance at little Miss Sharpley's peaceful face reasured her.—*Zion's Herald.*

Little Opportunities.

Very few of us have opportunities to do great things, but we all may be kind and loving to those about us, and can never tell how far our kind words and loving acts may reach. *The Youth's Temperance Banner* gives an incident which proves that great good sometimes grows out of small actions.

Zoe Rodman, as she practiced her music day after day, noticed a tiny, poorly-clad child hanging around the gate.

"Who is it?" she asked; "and why does she come?"

"She is charmed, I think," replied her aunt, laughing. "Her name is Maggie Sherman, and her poor father is one of the victims of the drink," she added more soberly. "Poor little thing! it is too bad."

Zoe went to the door.

"Come in, little Maggie," she said kindly.

The child could hardly credit her senses. The beautiful young lady, who sang so like an angel, had spoken to her—had asked her to come in.

She entered shyly.

"Are you fond of music?" Zoe asked.

"O, yes," she answered; "I do love it so."

"And can you sing?"

"A little—some of the pretty songs you sing," said the child.

"I am glad to sing for you; won't you let me hear you sing?" said the beautiful young lady.

Little Maggie commenced with a trembling voice, for she felt like one in a dream; but as she sang on the music took possession of her, and she thrilled and warbled like a bird.

"Thank you," said Zoe. "Would you like to have me teach you to sing and play, Maggie?"

"O! O! would you? But I have no money."

"No; and I do not offer to teach you for money. Only come to me every day, and I will teach you what I can."

When Maggie Sherman a few years later became a noted singer and musician, and lifted her father's family to respectability and comfort, it was not generally known that all their happiness arose from the kindness of Zoa Rodman.

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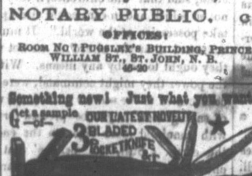

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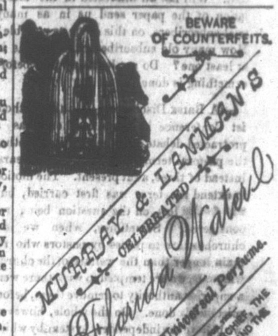

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