

An Old-Time Baptism.

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"This idea of church unity, you know, is no new thing. It isn't the child of this broad and liberal age, as many of us think. Even within my own memory, back in the days of sledge-hammer polemics and red-hot controversy, it was in the thought of men, and now and then some large hearted man made a step toward it without consulting anybody. In these pleasant 'afternoon' days that have come to me since I began writing '5' before my age, when I have leisure to think of things as they occur to me, I frequently find myself remembering those things which I have not forgotten. There is one page in her book of pictures which memory is very fond of showing me, and which I love to gaze upon. All the world knows who is Dr. Henry G. Weston, D. D., LL. D., president of Crozer Theological Seminary—a teacher of preachers, and especially Baptist preachers. But only the best people in the world—and a good many of them are in Heaven now—knew him when he was Mr. Weston pastor of the old First Baptist Church in Peoria, Ill. I don't know whether Dr. Weston would do it again, and then I don't know whether he would or not, and then again I'm not so sure that I know whether he would. To use a phrase that every student of Crozer will always remember—"That depends." All that I know is, that he did it once. And although it was much debated and discussed afterwards, yet nobody ever said "why" or "wherefore" to him about it. If you knew Mr. Weston about forty-five or fifty years ago, you may remember that he had a way, when he didn't propose to be questioned about something, of looking straight at his interrogator, right through him at something three or four thousand miles beyond him, without ever knowing he was there. This was very discouraging to a man who came charging at him holding in one hand a javelin shaped like an interrogati n point, and in the other a question barbed like a javelin.

"It seems to me that I have never seen but one man officiate at a baptism. Whenever I am in a church where the minister stands at the font and laves with the crystal drops the brow of the unconscious infant, or where he stands in a baptistry built in the pulpit platform in a country church in California, or in the dim shadows of the centuries that hide in the Baptistry at Florence, always I can see the lake at Peoria, the throng of witnesses of many denominations and one faith gathered upon the river bank. I see Mr. Weston standing waist deep in the rippling water, I see the tall figure and the kindly face—a face that children always loved, and to which they instinctively lifted their own faces for the kiss that was always ready for them—I hear the voice that has grown indelibly tender with the years that have softly scattered the snowflakes on his temples—hear it, as he stood at the close of the ordinance, the silver drops falling from his extended hands—

"'Lord, it is done as Thou hast commanded, and yet there is room!'

"Now, when I see a baptism like that, I go away calmly and perfectly satisfied that I have witnessed a baptism properly administered in Scriptural mode, in strict accordance with apostolic teaching and Baptist usage, in full compliance of letter and spirit with New Testament teaching. Otherwise, I am gravely apprehensive that it may be irregular, perhaps unscriptural, or possibly even not 'Baptistic,' and everybody knows what that is.

"Sometimes the baptisms were in the summer, as I have described. Sometimes in the autumn, when the hills were resplendent in their banners of green and gold and crimson. Sometimes the willows were just turning yellow with the first kiss of spring, and often, indeed, they were in the winter. And then the deacons, William Gregg, Albert Knowlton, Jacob Tapping, John Brooks, my grandfather, Robert Jones, and my father, would go down to the lake Saturday night and cut out a baptistry in the ice. Every now and then I observe that somebody back East views with horror an open air baptism in an ice-framed baptistry in December.

"Well, there is nothing new or even startling about that. There are yet living in this land many old saints who went down into those icy waters in Peoria Lake, forty years ago, who have assisted at the obsequies of many of the saints who stood on the shore, declaring that such an ordinance was simply murder. Mr. Weston stood in that great baptistry, when the earth was baked with frost, and the broken ice floated about him. Indeed, the winter was the great time of revivals; we had the most baptisms then. But never once was a hymn omitted; never was the service shortened. Of the other ministers of Peoria of that day who baptized their converts with sparkling drops of tempered water in comfortable churches, very few are living; indeed I cannot just now recall one. But Dr. Weston lives and preaches and teaches daily in the seminary, hale and vigorous in body and mind, and eighty-two years young. And mind you, in those rugged days, that strange, uncanny thing advertised in religious papers as 'baptismal pants' had not been invented. When a Baptist preacher stood in

the river in December, he got as wet and cold as water anywhere below freezing point could make him. This generation, simply because it plays golf without an umbrella, thinks it invented the 'strenuous life.'

"All the other churches flocked to our Sunday morning baptisms. After the close of the morning service, the processions filed down from the old two-story Methodist ark, on Jefferson street, from the colonial columned Presbyterian church on Madison, from the Congregational on Main—the old Congregational church, a nest of 'Free-soilers'; its bell was, later on, the mouth of loyalty and the voice of victory, and it rang out the news of every union victory during the war, exultant triumph at one end of the rope and Mark Aiken, the hottest abolitionist in the state at the other—and Dr. Reed's flock of Universalists marched down from their church on Fulton street. Everybody went to the baptizings. That was open air preaching of doctrinal sermons for you. Don't tell me people don't like doctrinal preaching; there wasn't a house in Illinois that could have held those Sunday morning congregations.

"Among the many warm-hearted Methodists who came down to the lake was Judge Hale: a man justly honored and esteemed by all good citizens; an upright, conscientious man; a pillar in the Methodist Church. But he was never quite satisfied about his baptism. Sometimes, on baptism mornings he would come to our church on Hamilton street to hear Mr. Watson preach. You must remember—I know you do—that people especially in the New West, were much given to controversial preaching and polemical conversation when our fathers were younger men than we are. The war over baptism, close communion, sanctification, and predestination raged hotly all along the line. Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Universalist, Congregationalist—went about with vigor down and lance in rest, and a Christian who wasn't more than ready to give a score of answers to every man that asked of him a reason of the hope that was in him, with no fear and far less meekness, wasn't considered much of a church member. He be a Baptist. Judge Hale was a shouting, fighting Methodist from plume to spur. But he did want to be baptized in that broad, deep baptistry that was eleven miles long and stretched from Peoria clear across to Woodford county, and was too big to be set up inside any meeting house or cathedral in the world.

"The Judge attended the baptisms winter and summer. He stood foremost among the Baptist worshippers; so close to the water that he got his feet wet. He sang the hymns; he reached out his strong warm hand to receive the candidates as Mr. Weston led them up out of the water; he held the shawls and wraps ready for them; he delighted to assist at the administration of the ordinance so far as he could.

"Well, one morning the scene and the season and the service were unusually impressive. Some children were among the converts, I think. The service was about to close. The last hymn had been sung—I'm not ashamed to own my Lord, or some other of the old-fashioned hymns which people used to sing most accurately when in a day and a country where hymn books were scarcer than dress suits. Mr. Weston for a moment looked straddlingly upon the throng of witnesses just bowing their heads to receive the benediction; his hands were half raised, when his eyes rested upon Judge Hale. He was standing close to the water's edge, as usual. The tears, welling up from his overcharged soul, to his eyes, were streaming down his face.

"Mr. Weston made an almost imperceptible gesture of invitation. Probably no one else saw it, but Judge Hale did. It was enough. Without a moment's hesitation, without even waiting to assume a baptismal robe, without pausing even to remove his watch, dropping his hat upon the ground, he strode, splashing—in his eagerness plunging into the water. The next instant he turned and faced the wondering multitude upon the shore; the minister was holding his clasped hands in one of his own, his other was resting upon the candidate's shoulder.

"There was an intonation of deep solemnity in the preacher's voice as he began: 'Upon a profession of your faith in Christ, my brother—he laid the man gently in the yielding waters that closed above him, with the easy grace born of great strength he lifted him out of the crystal grave, and led him a little way toward the shore where the exultant deacons received.

"Then the minister moved back to where the water closed above his waist; he extended his dripping hands in pastoral blessing upon the multitude bowing their heads before him, we heard him say, in the strong, even voice we loved to hear:

"'Lord, it is as Thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.'

"Judge Hale never became a Baptist further than his public acceptance of immersion as the only baptism that could satisfy his conscience; further than this he never faltered in loyalty to his own denomination; he lived and died a Methodist, and to-day a Methodist chapel, in his city of Peoria, called by his name, is a fitting monument to a noble Christian man.

"Well 'this thing was not done in a corner,' and of course in that day of disputatious tendencies, the inci-

dent was discussed for longer than nine days. Many wise heads shook over it gravely, and the fathers girded up their lithe and shrewy intellects and met in the shock of many a dialectic conflict concerning it. But somehow or other, at the end of all the discussions which the boy could not half understand, but which he delighted to hear, one thing came to his ears and his heart very plainly—and some old people who were young half a century ago can hear it to-day, as they heard it on that Sunday morning:

"Lord, it is done as Thou hast commanded."

"And I wonder, sometimes, if when Dr. Weston goes to Heaven, some angel won't meet him at the gate and say:

"'Judge Hale has been waiting for you ever so long. He has something he wants to tell you.'"

Virginia and North Carolina Letter.

Just now temperance legislation is coming to the front in Virginia and North Carolina. The ignorant negro vote has been eliminated and the people feel that they can now direct their attention to moral legislation rather than to the maintaining of white supremacy. Having lived in the South more than five years without taking any part in politics, but having had an opportunity of observing and of talking fully with the best people of both races, I venture the assertion that few people in Canada and in the Northern States would have submitted to the ignorant and incompetent and vicious negro domination which threatened the best of the Southern white people. Today, not to speak of thirty-seven years ago the great mass of the colored people have little or no capacity for governing either their families or their country. Some of them have told me out and out that their lives and the little property they have is safer in the hands of the best Southern Democrats than in the hands of the politicians of their own race. Freeing the slaves was a noble act on the part of the North, and most if not all of the best white people of the South are glad it was done, but enfranchising the ignorant and improvident and incompetent negro was, to say the least, a blunder of blunders. The white men of the South have suffered and do suffer greatly on account of this blunder, but the negro has suffered, does suffer and will suffer far more. It would have been exceedingly difficult in any case for two races so different to live peaceably in the same territory, but with the bad feeling that has grown up during the thirty-seven years of threatened negro domination and the strain that has been put on the conscience of even the best people to avert it, I regard the separation of the races as inevitable. I know that Dr. Pitt of the Religious Herald, and many others are more hopeful, but I must confess that this conviction has gradually forced itself upon me during the five years. If the separation is not inevitable a hundred years is none too long to undo the mischief of negro enfranchisement. Whatever one may think of the constitutionality of the amendments or the morality of setting up one standard for the majority of the white people and another for the majority of the blacks, these changes give the states a chance to forget the race issue and devote themselves to much needed reforms. The change may be temporary only but it is with us now, and temperance legislation is in the front.

Temperance sentiment is not nearly as strong here as it is in the Provinces, excepting Quebec and possibly British Columbia, but what we have is crystallized and centralized in each state. There is one organization in North Carolina and another in Virginia. Editor Bailey of the Biblical Recorder and Editor Oates of the North Carolina Baptist, with Bro J. T. Jenkins, my predecessor, at Morehead City, are in the forefront of the battle in the old North State. In the old Dominion Baptists are not quite so prominent in the fight, but they are at work. During the past few weeks petitions have been circulated and signed. I have ten in circulation in this neighborhood. There is no attempt to obtain legislation which public opinion will not uphold. State prohibition of the traffic seems to be out of the question at present, but the effort is to place the liquor men instead of the temperance people of a community on the defensive. An attempt is made to wipe out the traffic from all places without police protection, make the saloon keeper prove to the judge that the people of police protected communities want the saloon and that it will not be detrimental to the moral and material interests of the community. If the people in such communities are not prepared to prohibit the traffic altogether they can take their choice between the open saloon and the dispensary. All possible restrictions are placed on the traffic where it must exist. I am inclined to think that this is as good a plan of dealing with the traffic as has been tried. It seems idle to go forward much faster than public sentiment. The experience of the people of Maine and other states as well as your own experience with the Scott Act seems to me to point in this direction. In the Religious Herald for this very week it is stated that one of the members of the Second Church Richmond has given up the liquor business at the request of the church. There are a few more of our Baptist brethren, not many and they are be-