

## SOME FACTS ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

By Rev. Handley C. Mullen

I have found that many of our younger ministers as well as laymen, are not well posted on the early history of our denomination. It was impressed upon me that someone ought to come forward with at least a brief sketch. This I shall attempt to do. Later someone with a better pen than I possess will be writing a book of history, which needs to be done.

Another thing that has impelled me to write is the fact that I have noted quite a few incorrect and misleading statements that have found their way into print. These would make it essential that the truth be published, for the sake of our own people, if not for others. The hour is too late to arouse any contentions, or to bring to life any buried controversies, but facts must be told, no matter whom they strike. In the Maritime Baptist of August 8th, 1956, in an article entitled, "Union of the Baptists and Free Baptists", appeared the following: "There were legal matters to be ironed out. The fear that a dissenting group within the Conference might retain the title 'Free Baptist,' was removed when the dissenting group split off and called themselves Reform Baptist."

This will illustrate how easily misleading statements may get into the press, and explains what I said about the need that facts should be published.

The fact in this case is, that the union of Baptists and Free Baptists took place in St. John, N. B. as late as Oct. 10, 1905, while the organization of the Reformed Baptist Church took place on Nov. 2, 1888, just seventeen years previously. So whatever became of any dissenting group among the Free Baptists in 1905 they certainly did not split off and call themselves Reform Baptists.

Some writers of the past have seemingly preferred to leave the impression that the men who organized the Reformed Baptist church stubbornly left by their own choice but this was very far from the fact. I have heard it said that some of these men wept bitterly when the vote was taken that set them adrift.

I have before me the exceedingly interesting book, "Lights and Shadows of Eighty Years", which is the life story of the late Rev. J. N. Barnes, who was a Free Christian Baptist minister. Evidently, he was present at the Conference when the Holiness brethren were disfellowshipped, in 1888, and must surely have known the facts, but his memory must have badly failed him when in 1911 he wrote his life story. On page 41, Chapter 18, he records this: "The General Conference of 1888 was held with the church at Blissville, Sunbury County, (N.B.) The Holiness Movement came to a crisis at this session, and eight of our ministers left us: namely Revs. G. W. MacDonald, A. Kenny, B. Colpitts, W. Kinghorn, G. A. Hartley, B. Trafton, H. H. Cosman and W. B. Wiggins. Later on two more severed their connection and joined the movement. The first named of the group was one of my boys. I pled with him not to leave the denomination, but he felt that separation was the wiser thing to do, at that time. The Reformed Baptist Alliance was organized by these men. I have only this to say regarding the matter: It will be known at the great day of final accounting whether these men took the better and wiser course."

The fact is that only five men, namely, G. W. MacDonald, William Kinghorn, Bamford Colpitts, G. Bennett Trafton and George T. Hartley were disfellowshipped at this time. W. B. Wiggins had been previously dropped as a licentiate. Aaron Kinney had been dismissed previously from a F. C. Baptist conference, in Nova Scotia.

As for H. H. Cosman the facts are not known to the writer beyond the fact that he had been a Free Baptist,

but appears with the Reformed Baptists very soon after their organization.

Again, I would refer to "History of the Baptists of the Maritime Provinces" by Edward W. Saunders. On pages 406 and 407 he had this to say: "The holiness question was fraught with disturbances. The doctrine of Entire and Instantaneous Sanctification had been popularized by the Salvation Army, and was adopted by Rev. Aaron Kinney, who had pastored at Beaver River and Sandford churches in 1884, during a period of revival. He was a preacher of good revivalist gifts and boldness of address, but of meagre scholarship. In 1886 he pressed the new doctrine upon the churches in Kings and Queens Counties, and later at Beaver River contravened the Conference regulations, for which and his persistent teaching of the "second work," the Conference declared its lack of fellowship with him. He and his friends joined with a number of ministers and others in New Brunswick, who had been expelled from the F. C. Baptist Conference, and organized the Reformed Baptist Denomination. Not many people really fell in with "holiness" doctrine, so called, but their sympathy for a former pastor carried them into a real heresy by which both Free Baptist and Baptist churches suffered severely. It has been claimed that the Baptist name was retained by the Reformed Baptists only because in the event of Baptist union they would then be able to draw any dissatisfied Free Baptists to themselves and obtain recognition as Free Baptists from the United States body of that name."

There is so much that is fanciful about this that I shall not take space to deal with it only to comment that as early as 1886 it is not probable that anyone had thought of a new denomination let alone retaining the name Free Baptist or of seeking recognition by the Free Baptists of the United States. Moreover, the official name of that Body was "Free Will Baptist," anyway. When the question for a name for the new denomination came up several names were proposed, but on motion the name Reformed Baptist was chosen. This was because of their loyalty to the Baptist principles of immersion, a regenerated membership, and congregational polity. Perhaps, "Reorganized" would have been a better sounding word but in any case the word "Reformed" in this place does not convey such an idea as is conveyed when we speak of reforming a character. They may have been influenced by the fact that at that time there were Reformed Presbyterians (once a church in St. John), Reformed Episcopalians, Reformed Methodists, and also Dutch Reformed, so why not Reformed Baptists. Above, reference was made to Aaron Kinney with the implication that he might have gotten into the holiness "heresy" by way of the Salvation Army. In an old King's Highway I found this written by G. W. MacDonald: "August, 1884, Brother Aaron Kinney experienced entire sanctification during a holiness camp-meeting at Old Orchard, Maine."

Someone said many years ago that "Error will run around the world, while Truth is getting its boots on." I will site another instance. Quite a few years ago a delegation from the United Baptist body met a committee of our men at Beulah Camp to discuss a possible union. I was not on our committee but begged leave to go into the meeting. While Brother G. B. Trafton, who I believe was chairman, was on his feet addressing the meeting, he happened to mention the vote of the Free Baptist which had put him and others out of that body. Rev. H. R. Boyer, D. D., who had formerly been F. C. B. minister, but one of the younger men, and probably not present when the vote was taken, hearing what Brother Trafton said, leaning forward to catch every word, said, "What did you say, sir, disfellowshipped?" Mr. Trafton affirmed what he had said, whereupon Mr. Boyer produced his note-book and pencil, remarking, "I never heard that before."

(To be continued)

The King's Highway