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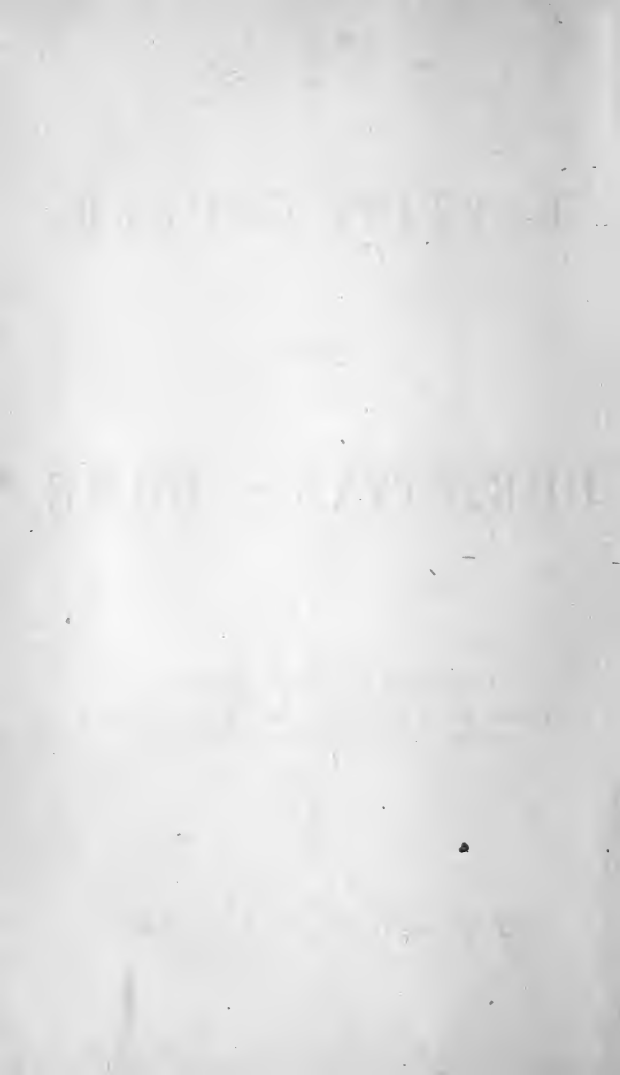
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BAPTIST CHURCH,

THE

CHRISTIAN'S HOME.

BY

ROBERT T. MIDDLEDITCH,

AUTHOR OF "A PEDO-BAPTIST CHURCH NO HOME FOR A  
BAPTIST," AND "THE WORLDS REVOLUTION."

NEW YORK:

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P R E F A C E.

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“WHAT BIGOTRY!” Such will, perhaps, be the instant exclamation of not a few, as the eye glances on the title page of this little volume. To some it may be a card of introduction, so really repulsive, that they will not permit themselves any farther acquaintance.

Many persons consider every one who contends earnestly for a principle, which they slight or deny, amenable to the accusation of bigotry; but men of proper discrimination will deem no one justly obnoxious on this score, for steadfastly maintaining doctrines and principles which have the sanction of the word of God. If in this work, anything is advocated, which is foreign to Scripture, no one will more readily acknowledge the justice of the charge of bigotry than the writer; but any views it presents, which the sacred volume sustains, even if treated by the mass of Christendom as of little importance, he trusts that regard for the Divine wisdom, which has given them a place in so holy a book, will forbid one word of apology, though, his course seems to necessitate the unpleasant alternative of a serious condemnation, of many of the excellent of the earth.

While all Baptists cheerfully admit that other evangelical denominations hold principles worthy of the widest acceptance, they would, nevertheless, be unfaithful to their trust, if while cordially conceding this they did not avow their conviction, that in connexion with all that is valuable and true, which may be found in other denominations, the very peculiarities which appear so undesirable to many, give their own an enviable superiority.

Some who sympathize with the Church principles maintained in this work, may inquire the reason of another publication on a subject on which valuable treatises are already before the public. The excellency of these works is cheer-

fully admitted. Those of Messrs. Crowell and Reynolds have done good, and will probably continue to do good, while this fulfills a far less useful ministry, and when no man shall see it more. Other works, very properly, have much to say on the Church in its constitution and its rights, in the present, the endeavor is made to exhibit the Church in its adaptation to the individual. While to the eye of the Romish priest man is made for the Church; to the view of one who reads the New Testament for himself, the church is made for the man.

The author has also been induced to prepare this volume from a belief of the truthfulness of the opinion which generally prevails, that Baptists, having been compelled to say so much in testifying to the Christian world on the importance of regard to the New Testament, with respect to an ordinance which they believe to be dangerously perverted, have not presented so clear and earnest a testimony concerning their Church principles as it behooves them.

Another consideration of a personal character has urged the writer to this imperfect performance. A former work entitled, "A Pede-baptist Church, No Home for a Baptist," has been honored with a sale of some thousands, since its issue by the American Baptist Publication Society. But in calling men from the pursuit of a home in one direction, the writer would not desire to intimate, even by the wording of a title, that there is "No Home" for them any where. He would neither have a Baptist, nor any other Christian without an ecclesiastical home, and, therefore, he has now attempted to delineate a spiritual house, which he believes is adapted for the home not only of every Baptist, but of all who loving our Lord Jesus in sincerity, are willing to give evidence of it by keeping His commandments.

RED BANK, N. J., September, 1853.



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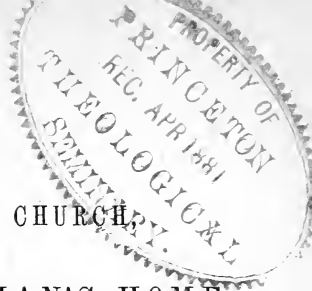
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A BAPTIST CHURCH

# THE CHRISTIAN'S HOME.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE FIRST WANT AND ITS DIFFICULTIES.

SOCIETY is a divine institution. In the dawn of existence we feel the necessity of its sympathies; and when the sun of life is going down, none can tell how much human forms and voices cheer the spirit as it meets the last enemy. Man is made for society. The mind deprived of association speedily sinks into vacancy and despair. Sorrows are more endurable, and joys yield a richer revenue of satisfaction, when others share them with us. In even the smallest affairs of life, Society contributes greatly to our comfort. He who returned, bearing the sheep that was lost, could not deposit his burden in the fold and indulge in quiet felicitations on the success of his search, but he "callet together his neighbors and friends."

With regard to matters of absorbing interest, the action of this social law is especially manifest. No sooner does a sentiment obtain great importance in our minds, than it prompts us to seek the company of others who share our conviction of its value. In accordance with this powerful impulse, the first want of which the regenerated man is conscious, is that of union with Christians. So has it ever been with those who have received the truth in Jesus. Primitive believers, immediately on their reception of the Gospel, were drawn "together." Their union did not arise from the mere prudential considerations of common danger, so much as from the identity of their religious convictions. They had all passed through similar processes of thought, and had arrived at the same persuasion. Their reception of Christianity not only separated them from an "untoward generation," but it made them one in emotions and desires, the most sacred and abiding. They all submitted to the same authority,—Jesus was their Head. They were members of His body, and consequently members one of another. Though the divine life existed in individual souls, they could not be solitary units. They were "added" together. "The power of the newly-awakened feeling of Christian fellowship, the feeling of the

common grace of redemption, outweighed all other personal and public feelings, and all other relations were subordinated to this one great relation.”\*

The fact that an instinct of our nature impels us to fellowship with other Christians, is not, however, sufficient for our guidance. It has been needful, sometimes, that principles indigenious to the human constitution be overcome in the cause of religion. A strong attachment to life is implanted in our nature, yet frequently believers have done well not to count their lives dear unto themselves. A stronger motive to fellowship presents itself to Christians, than any which springs from the yearning of their own natures. It is the will of their Lord. His followers “compained” together. They formed a holy society, and received from him peculiar manifestations of favor. So his Apostles, acting under His direction, regarded the disciples whom they made and baptized as incorporated in one. The epistles delivered by inspiration are, in general, addresses to churches. It is, therefore, evidently the will of Christ that Christians enter into these relationships.

That important grace of character, “Love to the brethren,” can have no suitable expression in those who refrain from a visible union with them.

\* Neander.

And, more than this, though an individual present to the world a living portraiture of moral excellence, yet if not publicly "with" the disciples of Christ, he fails to give that testimony, to the transforming influence of the Gospel, which fidelity to his Lord demands. The virtues of Christians, not avowedly such, have often afforded the world an excuse for despising the Church of God, when, had that course which is consistent with Christian obligation been taken, these persons would have added to the power of its influence, and the Saviour would have been "glorified in them."

But presuming that a disciple of the Saviour recognises his obligations to enter into the fellowship of a church, he may nevertheless find a difficulty in deciding what existing religious body he shall join. Can he find in all churches the same advantages for his spiritual welfare? Decidedly not. We are far from predicating that salvation can only be found in any one church on earth. On the contrary, it may be affirmed that there are thousands of churches which are alike true churches, and within which salvation may be obtained. Rome may proclaim her infallibility, and assure the inquirer that within her pale is safety, while all beside but hasten his career to perdition; and Episcopacy, as if it had caught her echo, may



claim the title, and appropriate all the promises which are addressed to "the Church," but we have yet to discover anything in scripture which leads us to the belief that salvation is the heritage of any sect exclusively. That there is no salvation out of the Church we admit, but what is that Church? It is not a church under the guidance of fallible men, but it is "the Church which Christ purchased with his own blood," composed of the good and the holy of all ages. Without *this* Church there can be no salvation, for it embraces every sinner who believes to the saving of the soul.

But it is not to be supposed that all organizations bearing the name of churches, are equally well adapted to nurture the spiritual life. A specious simile, which represent the Church as bearing the same relation to the spiritual life which the husk does to the kernel of grain, is often employed. But those who use it, seem to forget that lesson which the Apostle teaches, concerning all grain, that God "giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his *own* body;" and just as the wheat folded in the increments of a mummy, though retaining its vital principle, may remain for ages without germinating; so it is possible for human wisdom to practice on the Church, and make such additions to the natural husk that

there shall be no proper development of the Divine life. It has been well remarked that "our salvation does not depend on our adherence to any church, but our edification and comfort may." Well, likewise, does a distinguished writer, in referring to the prevalent disposition to make nothing of differences between religious bodies, declare that "such a spirit is a conspiracy against the throne of truth, and is the first step towards a complete abandonment of right sentiments."\*

The existence of a religious body is of itself the evidence that it claims an excellency which it does not deem others to possess. No one doubts that such is the claim of Rome, and the adherents of other denominations are not slow to testify of the superiority of their own communions. Presbyterians make no claim to the same exclusive authority for their churches, which are uttered by Romanists and some Episcopalians, yet, in general, they attach great importance to the character of their church government, and claim that in the solidity of ministerial education and faithfulness to orthodox principles, they have a great vantage ground. Methodism never tires of repeating the cry of her founder, "The best of all, God is with us." Such being the case with regard to others,

\* J. A. James.

it is no cause of wonder that the Baptist denomination is embalmed in the affections of tens of thousands in our land.

In the midst of voices which cry "Lo here" and "Lo there," how shall the inquirer decide where to seek the fellowship and privileges which his renewed nature craves? It is evident that some must be in error, for truth is always one. In religious as well as secular controversies he will discover imperfection in advocates. Victory, it is to be feared, has been often more cared for than Truth. Even in those matters where it is of the utmost importance, care has not always been taken to demonstrate the legitimacy of arguments, and the principle on which inferences have been drawn from them has been very open to objection. Much has also been taken for granted which ought first to have been proved.

The first idea of a thoughtful mind would be to seek in the Scriptures for guidance by which to form a judgment as to the Church with which it is best to unite. Various considerations present themselves, why we should expect to find in Scripture some principle by which churches are to be formed and regulated. The character on which a Christian society is based, and the government it adopts, has too much relation to the body of Christ,

promoting or retarding its growth, for us to be able to receive the opinion that the Holy Ghost has not given us a revelation of the model most agreeable to the Divine mind. The judgment of man has committed errors too egregious for any one, who gives the matter a serious consideration, to believe that he has wisdom to devise plans for the conservation of vital godliness, or for its advancement in its most beneficent forms in the earth. Beside all this, believers acknowledge "one King Jesus," who is "Head over all things," to the Church, and we, can scarcely conceive that the citizens of His kingdom, can, without organization or laws, discharge the duties of their honorable enfranchisement. Seeing it is "not of this world," there is especial necessity for an authoritative revelation for the guidance of its subjects.

In accordance, therefore, with this conviction of the necessity of a revelation to guide believers, in respect to the corporate existence Religion is to bear, Christians generally assume that an organization may be clearly traced in the New Testament. There are, however, exceptions. Some make the Church, if not altogether the offspring of expediency, in every way subject to it. This is the very last ground on which a Protestant church should rest. Romanism, by the authority which it

usurps for the Church, has made developments of expediency which render it evident that it tends to subordinate the most sacred principle to its rule. In general, men have come to the opinion that there is no revelation on the subject, by which Christians are now to be guided, only when the Bible has been examined in vain, and cannot be contorted, to give the evidence desired. "When they found that the witness would not speak in their favor, they endeavored to keep him out of court, lest he should speak against them."\*

The adherents of every form of church polity, who admit that the Scriptures contain a model for church organization, are anxious to identify it with their own. This is done alike by those who maintain Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism. Happy would it be if all were as anxious to know the truth, as they are to claim for the denomination of their affections this grand pre-eminence. But it is evident, that when a scriptural likeness is claimed for organizations so dissimilar in themselves, that there must be great defect in the mental vision of some. Many advocates resemble that naval commander who, mistaking a rock for a frigate, spent a night cannonading it, supposing that the frightful echoes of his

\* Carson. "Reasons for Leaving the Synod of Ulster."

own guns were the response of a valorous foe. The impetuosity of their partizanship gives utterance to their peculiarities, so repeatedly and vehemently, that they deem it certain that the sacred oracles yield them a response. Nevertheless, at times, there is evidence that the most confident discover that they cannot deduce from the New Testament all they desire. While professing to find within its pages a satisfactory attestation of the Divine authority of their ecclesiastical systems, yet they very gladly bring in evidence from other quarters which may support their cause.

*Jewish antiquity* has not unfrequently been explored for denominational purposes. In the ecclesiastical records of the New Testament, terms occur which are to be found in the institutions of Judaism, and, from the agreement of names, some have supposed a justification of like things under the Christian system which existed under the Levitical economy. Thus, as some find the term "elder" applied to an officer of a New Testament church, they have sought from the name to identify his powers with those which were possessed by the elder, according to the Jewish institution, and on this assumption have pleaded for a governmental power over the Christian commonwealth, which neither, in its character or extent, does the New

Testament sanction. There are others who, in their ecclesiastical systems, borrow titles from the Jewish institutions, which the New Testament nowhere authorizes. Thus we may find an "altar" and a "priest" in edifices set apart for Christian worship, names which are opposed to the spirit, and tend to obscure the finished character of the Christian dispensation. In most denominations, baptism, so called, is administered on principles drawn from the usage of Jewish circumcision. Both ordinances of the Christian dispensation are regarded as sequels to the circumcision and passover. So far from the teaching of our Lord, or his Apostles, affording sanction for these things, it is easy to find statements which are utterly condemnatory of such a line of argument. The Jewish dispensation was only a "shadow of good things to come," and they who would model a church by its guidance, turn from all that has life to a flat and uncertain outline. The genius of the two systems is widely different. The forms of Judaism were multiplied and cumbrous. Those of Christianity are simple and significant. The latter is the disembodied spirit of the old dispensation; why should it, when unclothed, be "clothed upon" with the gross appointments which it rejects?

But there are others who call on us to study

*Tradition* with the Bible. It is conceived that much which the Apostles taught, though not in the New Testament, may be found by the writings of early Christians. We are invited, therefore, to study the so called Fathers, if we desire to obtain correctness in our ecclesiastical system. Who are to be received, as embraced in this appellation, none are able to testify with certainty. The preponderance of favor is to those Christian writers who lived in the first three centuries, but we are not assured, even when we have received the teaching of all these, that there are not others of equal value and authority with which it becomes us to be acquainted, if we would be thoroughly supplied in our ecclesiastical garniture.

When we turn to these greatly lauded Fathers of the first three centuries, we find them very unanimous in reference to immersion in baptism, in which those who would have us give heed to their teaching, do not follow them. We also find the Lord's supper, when described by Justin, very much the same as it is represented by Luke or Paul. In many things, it may be cheerfully admitted, that the Fathers echo apostolic teaching. But while this can be said, it is useless to attempt concealment of the fact that their writings contain statements which Christians of every name acknow-



ledge erroneous; and, instead of harmony in their views of truth, they abound in contradictions with themselves and each other. In addition to all this, so many puerile and fanciful notions are discoverable in their works, that it is safe to affirm that no man, who believed a congregation possessed a knowledge of them, to any extent, would have the temerity to quote them as an authority for their guidance. From a work published a few years since, we will glean a few out of many paragraphs which may assist those who have little leisure to form an opinion of the esteem in which they should be held.\* The translation is that of Archbishop Wake.

In the writings of *Hermas*, which are classified as visions, commands and similitudes, we find narrations which cast into the shade all modern “developments” and “manifestations,” received by a mode which greatly resembles that by which the Founder of Mormonism professed to obtain his book. In his second vision, the heading of which is “Of his neglect in correcting his talkative wife,” &c., he gives a vision of occurrences, in connection with important revelations, made to him: “And when I arose from prayer, behold, I saw over against me the old woman whom I had seen the

\* Letters on the Writings of the Fathers of the First Two Centuries, London, 1844.

last year, walking and reading in a certain book. And she said to me, 'Canst thou tell these things to the elect of God?' I answered and said to her, 'Lady, I cannot retain so many things in my memory, but give me the book, and I will write them down.' 'Take it,' says she, 'and see that thou restore it again to me.' As soon as I had received it, I went aside to a certain place of the field, and transcribed every letter, for I found no *syllables*. And as soon as I had finished what was written in the book, the book was suddenly caught out of my hands, but by whom, I saw not. After fifteen days, when I had *fasted* and entreated the Lord with all earnestness, the knowledge of the writing was revealed unto me." And what is the revelation? First it concerns the wickedness of his children, and calls on him to "upbraid" them and his wife, with a description of their iniquities, and gives, as an exhortation, "Let her learn to refrain her tongue with which she calumniates," and then concludes with the solemn declaration that "the Lord hath sworn by his glory concerning his *elect*, having determined this very time, *that if any even now sin, he shall not be saved*. For the repentance of the righteous has its end; the days of repentance are fulfilled to all the saints; but to the heathen there is repentance, even unto the last

day." Such is his statement of the revelation. Few men, whose conjugal relations are embittered by a talkative wife, have thought of a special revelation from heaven, as the means of their deliverance from the evil.

When we turn to the writings of *Ignatius*, we find the following precept: "Let all reverence the deacons as Jesus Christ, and the bishop as the Father, and the presbyters as the sanhedrim of God and college of the Apostles. Without these, there is no church." Furthermore, the saints are represented "As being the stones of the temple of the Father, prepared for his building, and drawn up on high by the cross of Christ, as by an engine, using the Holy Ghost *as the rope*." With respect to martyrs, he states that, "Being supported by the grace of Christ, they despised all the torments of the world; by the sufferings of an hour, *redeeming themselves* from everlasting punishments." But though these and other errors are found in the epistles of Ignatius, the author from whom we quote, avers that there is "a more evangelical strain in them than in any of the works of the other Apostolical Fathers!"

Even *Justin Martyr* frequently passes beyond the bounds of sober sense, in his exposition and application of revelation. "Bread shall be given

him, water shall be sure," he regards as prophetic of the bread and cup in the Lord's supper. "The twelve bells appended to the dress of the high priest, signified and typified the twelve Apostles." This typology, of which several more instances might be given, exceeds that of the most visionary in our own times.

From Clement, Barnabas, Polycarp and Irenæus, we might, if our space would admit, add many paragraphs alike puerile. The extracts we have given, are abundantly sufficient to show whether it is safe for us to receive the writings of such men as authoritative expositions of christian institutes and doctrine.

Tradition is far from being reliable as a channel of truth. Our Lord Jesus had scarcely left the earth before it placed false constructions on his words. John xxi. 23. The supposition, that men who lived within the two or three centuries succeeding the Apostles are peculiarly qualified to direct us in matters of faith and practice, is altogether untenable. A man does not become rich because he is neighbor to a millionaire, or learned because he is in the vicinity of a college; nor is there any reason why, because any one has lived in the same or a following age to that of inspired men, that he should be regarded as having shared

in their divinely bestowed qualifications to set in order spiritual communities.

While some plead that no form of church organization is binding, and others, who profess to find in the New Testament a model for the guidance of Christians in all time, recur to Jewish institutions for its explication, or supplement it with the traditions of the Fathers; it is the glory of Baptists that they *act* on the principle of the sufficiency of the sacred record. To them Judaism has no authority, though it could be proved that the popular element was far more prominent in its institutions, than is agreeable to those who construct upon it a claim to exercise a power over the people of God, which has often known no limit but their endurance; and though from patristic lore they could cull as much, which would favor their principles, as those who are most earnest in demanding attention to the voice of human antiquity, they prefer to raise the cry, "To the law and to the testimony." They can there find all things necessary for faith and for guidance. So fully does the New Testament unfold to them the nature and constitution of a Church of Christ, that were it to fall, as a new book, into the hands of a community, they only ask that it be granted, that some shall be able to read its pages; and, with the belief that

the Divine Spirit will make that truth effectual to salvation, they hold that those converted by it may discover a plan of organization, in following which they can be as truly a Church of Christ as any in our own land.

To exhibit a church as found in the New Testament, will be our object in the chapter which follows. If we succeed in gathering from its pages church principles, all sufficient for the direction of Christians in their fellowship, it will be evident that any church, having the foundation of Infallible Wisdom, which, of necessity, inheres in a divinely inspired volume, must be, of right, the earthly home of Christian men.

## CHAPTER II.

### BAPTIST CHURCH PRINCIPLES.

THOSE who possess and value a translated Bible, generally regard a church as an organization for religious ends. Though the word may sometimes serve them as a convenient term for a building devoted to religious worship, yet they would not consider that this use conveys a correct sense of its meaning. To some, who connect the word with a material house, it also presents a mysterious and sacred authority, having power to decree rites and ceremonies, which, in some past age, instituted their ecclesiastical usages ; and now, as the representative of Christ on the earth, is, by the means of ministers, worship and sacraments, the channel of grace and hope. Those who entertain such ideas of the church, are either without the Scriptures, or they have been taught from their earliest years to yield unexamining acquiescence to the teaching which falls from priestly lips.

The Greek word, translated church, was prima-

rily used to denote a congregation or an assembly ; but by its use in the New Testament it is far from having that extended meaning, which it had previous to its appropriation to indicate a spiritual body. When our present version of the Scriptures was made, among other rules to “ be most carefully observed ” by the translators, the third read as follows : “ The old ecclesiastical words to be kept ; as the word church, not to be translated congregation.” This requirement, it is to be feared, was, in some measure, dictated by a desire so to obscure the term as to perpetuate the influence of the clerical order. While there have been times when it helped to enslave the minds of the people, yet the term congregation has now a sense peculiar to itself, so that it has ceased to be an equivalent for the term rendered church. In this country, through the moral power of Christians maintaining the institutions of the Gospel in their integrity, a correct understanding of the church so far prevails, that by the word congregation, one-fourth of the people would identify that part of an assembly at religious worship, who are only known as “ hearers of the word.” The reference which is enjoined regarding an offending brother, if rendered, “ if he will not hear thee, tell it to the *congregation*,” would now send a complainant to a different body to that



which is indicated, when he is told to "tell it to the CHURCH."

It is held by Baptists, that a church is only rightly constituted when its membership is founded on *personal piety*. That in this view they are correct is evident from the New Testament. Those who are recognized as properly in church relationship, are described in terms which indicate the possession of vital godliness. The additions made to that company of disciples at Jerusalem, whose protracted exercises of devotion gave evidence of their deep piety (Acts i. 14), were of those who "gladly received the word," and, as we afterwards read, "such as should be saved." If we seek information as to the views of the Apostles, we shall find, that of those of which we have account, the first church to the last they planted, was composed of persons who, so far as human judgment could avail to form a correct opinion, were individually the subjects of regenerating grace. The epistles to the churches recognize them as consisting of believers. Paul addresses his first epistle to Corinth, "to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." He describes them as the "temple of the living God," and urges upon them the duty of fleeing from the society and pollution of idolators. To them he presents the command, "Come

out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." The word in the original Greek which denotes a church, may thus be seen to have an admirable fitness for the use to which it is applied. It comes from a word which signifies to "call out."\* It can easily be seen, that a church of Jesus Christ is therefore, of necessity, a body of persons "called out" from the world; and only as they show that they give heed to this call, and "cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God," do they vindicate their claim to be recognized as a church.

Nor is the indispensableness of Christian character in the membership of churches maintained in one epistle alone. It is discoverable in all. The members are set forth as disciples, believers, saints and faithful brethren. They are described as regenerated persons. Rom. vi. 17. Eph. ii. 1. They are also represented as pursuing a spiritual course and fulfilling spiritual functions, for which only an experimental acquaintance with divine things could give them ability.

No other religious body has so long and consistently insisted upon the necessity of spiritual life for church membership, as that which embraces the churches which bear the Baptist name. The

† Ἐκκαλέω.

claim that the children of believers are members of the church, by reason of natural birth, Baptists have never granted. Two hundred years ago, Richard Baxter put forth his "Plea for Infant Church Membership" for their enlightenment, and not a few treatises have since been written with the same end. Pede-baptist Churches have made a great advance from their position in former times, though this dogma is still maintained and advocated.

But no one yet has been able to show, that Christians have authority to disregard the principles on which apostolic churches were constituted. In no matter can Baptists conceive the records of the New Testament unimportant, and to depart so thoroughly from their guidance, as to take a course which necessitates the acknowledgment, that piety is not, of right, requisite to a place in the church as the admission of members merely on the ground of birth indicates, is, to their view, a fearful departure from primitive precedents.

With other Christian bodies, Baptists hold that a church is composed of *baptized* persons. The New Testament supplies no evidence of a church which was not baptized. In our Lord's last directions to his disciples, if any regard is to be paid to the order in which His commands are delivered

to them, we cannot fail to deduce baptism as a necessary precedent to church privileges. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them—teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. It seems, from the wording of this commission, that our Saviour would give especial prominence to baptism. Other duties are grouped together with a comprehensive phrase "all things," while this is placed by itself as if a matter which our Lord would in nowise have slighted. In apostolic times this observance was never neglected. On the day of Pentecost, with the richest manifestation of Divine influence, and when baptism exposed the disciples to the most bitter persecution, the rite was administered to every believer. Whenever we find an extended account of the conversion of an individual or the formation of a Church, we find a narrative of a baptism. The apostolic epistles afford abundant evidence that primitive churches were composed of baptized persons. 1 Cor. i. 13. Col. ii. 12. The ancient baptismal fonts were always without the church edifices, that they might symbolize the fact of the necessity of baptism to an entrance to the church. Those who attended on the instructions of Christian teachers, but who had not been baptized, though treated with kind-

ness and sympathy, were spoken of always by names which implied, that they were yet in a state of non-existence in respect of a Christian profession.

It is common with Baptists to hold, that a church is altogether a *voluntary* organization. Membership in the primitive churches in no case arose from compulsion. Those possessed of authority were uniformly in opposition to Christianity, and were ready to employ power to "scatter," rather than to gather the disciples. Consequently, the church relations of believers sprang from their own willinghood, and were often formed at the utmost peril. "In every page of the record," remarks Dr. Wardlaw, "whether historical or epistolary, the church appears before us as a community, entirely *per se*, quite *unique* in its character, and completely independent in the means of its support and enlargement; independent, I mean, of all human aid without itself; a *voluntary society*, of which no one was a member otherwise than by free choice—by God's choice of him, and his choice of God." Nevertheless, by Baptists alone is this voluntary character of the church sustained. It is held by the denominations which practice infant baptism, and advocated by their theologians, that the children of church members are *born* members

of the church. Among Baptists the church is a voluntary society, not only theoretically but practically. They regard the subjects of Christ's kingdom as "born not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of the will of God;" and therefore they recognize none as citizens of Zion by natural birth. All who enter their churches must come as volunteers.

Contrary to nearly all other Christians, Baptists give to the church a *local* idea. The most prevalent view of the church is *geographical*, that is to say, all the Christians dwelling under one nationality, or in a certain extent of territory, and embracing like religious opinions, are regarded as forming a church. In accordance with this idea, we have "The Presbyterian Church in the United States," "The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States," "The Methodist Episcopal Church." These organizations have "Assemblies," "Conventions," or "Conferences," who decide matters which they deem most important, and exercise control over the ministry and congregations, which are embraced in their respective communions. An earthly church with such extent and authority cannot be found in the New Testament. The term church, as used in that grand directory, has not more than two senses as applied to believ-

ers. It denotes either a community of baptized individuals in one locality, who love the Saviour and seek to obey and imitate Him, or it is used to represent the whole family of the redeemed, who are or shall yet be in heaven or on earth. The Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles, afford proof of the meaning of the word. We read of the "Church at Jerusalem," Acts xv. 4., of "the Church of God which is at Corinth," 1 Cor. i. 2, of "the Church which is at Cenchrea." Rom. xvi. 1. Several societies of disciples had a coeval existence in the same country, but they nowhere composed one church. We do not read of the Church of Judea, but of the "churches." So again we read of the churches of Galatia. 1 Cor. xvi. 1. So also Paul writes to the saints at Rome: "The churches of Christ salute you." To this idea our Lord contributes illustration, when, under certain circumstances he directs a man who has cause of complaint, to "tell it to the church." It is evident that private complaints could not possibly be proclaimed to all the Christians in any country, and that our Lord, had in view the body with which both the parties were in constant intercourse. The plural term is also employed by our Lord:—"He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

The other sense in which the term church is used is more extended. Thus we read that Christ "loved the church and gave himself for it, \* \* \* that he might present it to himself a glorious church." Here the church overleaps territorial and denominational boundaries. It is more than an American or European church. It embraces the Saviour's people, of every age and dispensation. When we pass beyond the simple organization which has its one meeting place in a city, or which holds in spiritual relationship Christians of like views in one village or district, we have clear Scripture warrant to apply the term to believers, only as they constitute the general assembly and church of the First born, whose names are written in heaven.

"For the one Church is not the aggregate  
Of churches or of sects,  
But of the faithful, those whose happy state  
Each with the Head connects."

Each local organization is, of right, *independent* of all others. Such was the case in apostolic times. "The only intercourse between the churches of those days was, that of friendship, sympathy, Christian love, and kindness. There was much union, but it was of the proper kind. When one church could assist another by pecuniary aid, it



was promptly rendered ; when the members of one church left their own neighborhood and came into that of another, they were cordially welcomed ; when any church was called to special privation or suffering, the other churches deeply condoled and sympathized, as being members of the same body of Christ. But never did any church invade the rights and liberties of another ; neither was it supposed that a number of churches had any power to exercise dominion over the members of any one church." \* Such are the principles on which the intercommunion of Baptist churches is founded. Every church is what Gibbon says each society of the early Christians was, "a separate and independent republic." None have so good claim to honor concerning this ecclesiastical territory as Baptists ; but according to the apt illustration of an able writer, Pedo-baptists who arrived thither after them, have "by accident, like Amerigo Vespucci, left the name of Independents or Congregationalists associated chiefly with their sect." The generality of Congregational churches are not even now so Congregational as Baptist churches. In Connecticut, but a half century since, church independency was repudiated by one of the largest associations which bear the name of Congregation-

\* Fletcher.—History of Independency, p. 59.

alist. The Constitution of the churches in the State of Connecticut was then declared "*not Congregational,*" "particularly as it gives a decisive power to ecclesiastical councils and a consociation, consisting of ministers and messengers; or a lay representation from the churches, is possessed of substantially the same authority as a presbytery." Among Baptists, such "power" and "authority" in councils or associations is not known.

If a church is believed to sanction or hold heresy, or pursue any other course unwarranted by Scripture, churches can, if they deem it necessary, disclaim relationship with it; but neither they nor any representatives of theirs, can take any measures which have the least resemblance to the powers claimed by Presbyteries.

The utmost the relation of Baptist churches to each other admits of is unassuming, fraternal recommendations and advice. In matters of faith and government, it is utterly foreign to their principles to recognize any earthly authority. While they maintain the most desirable union for mutual helpfulness in their regulation, they are altogether uncontrolled by each other. Thus they present the grandest illustration of Montgomery's beautiful line—

"Distinct as the billows, yet one as the sea."

In the case of the removal of a member, so that it is no longer possible for him to assemble with the church in which he has held his membership, he can receive a letter of dismissal to the body with which it becomes most convenient for him to hold fellowship. "This is agreeable to the spirit of Paul's recommendation of Phœbe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea, to the disciples at Rome. Here is mutual confidence. One church presumes that an individual who has been walking in fellowship with a sister church, is thereby attested to be a proper member of the Christian family, and receives him accordingly. In the same manner, members of sister churches are admitted to occasional communion."\*

Here, then, is the Church in its *external aspect*. It is composed of believing and baptized men and women, able to assemble in one place, who are voluntarily associated together, and who maintain certain regulations in which they are independent of all supervision and authority. But the church is also to be identified by its *internal arrangements*. A company of baptized persons might form an association on these voluntary and independent principles, which neither they nor others would deem a church. A missionary society may be composed

\* Davidson.—Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament.

thus ; but it is not a *church*, though engaged in an object well pleasing to Christ. The mere fact that a company is composed of believers does not constitute a church, though a church cannot exist without believers. A church is founded for certain special objects, and it is only as these are in view that it can be recognized to have the character it claims. It is formed to promote the Kingdom of the Redeemer in the hearts of his people and in the world.

To accomplish the object of its existence, the church must, if it deserve its name, use certain means. It will have its seasons for worship and for the observance of the Lord's supper. Its members will seek each other's welfare in mutual watchfulness, exhortations and prayers, and when poverty demands relief, by pecuniary aid. They will promote the preaching of the Word of Life, both for their own good and for the conversion of souls. They are also called by their example, their prayers and their efforts, to seek that others may be made the subjects of like precious faith with themselves. In fine, their fellowship is formed and regulated by the laws which Christ, who is "Head over all things to the Church," has given for such an organization.

To the Church, Christ has given certain *powers*.

It necessarily requires officers for the fulfilment of the purposes of its existence. The New Testament makes clear to us their character and duties. Churches are to elect bishops and deacons; but the right of a body to be called a church is not to be decided by either their presence or absence. When churches are without pastors, they are "wanting" in completeness; (Titus i. 5.) but they are churches nevertheless. Those who cannot find a church without it, has three orders in its ministry—"prelates, priests and deacons,"—identify it by a different sign to that which the Apostles would sanction. At the first, "churches existed without elders for a considerable time, till Paul returning from preaching the Gospel in other places, appointed this class among them."\* Acts xiv. 13.

The office and duty of a *bishop* or *pastor* is clearly set forth in the New Testament. The Christian ministry is not a priesthood. No where in the New Testament is the Greek word which denotes a priest,† applied to any who have oversight in a Church of Christ in their official relations. This title is the heritage of all who are the subjects of "sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus;" and

\* Davidson.

† επηδς.

nothing in the New Testament gives the least warrant for its being restricted to an official class. A minister is to "warn," "rebuke," and "exhort." It is his province to "instruct." He is also to "rule" in the Church of God. But his authority is not of such a character that he may obey the counsels of his own wisdom. The duty of deacons is to serve the table of the Lord, by providing the needful elements, and by distributing them to the communicants. It is theirs to secure, as far as possible, all that is necessary for pastoral maintenance and for the wants of the poor. It may also be inferred, from the requirements which the Apostle lays down for those who are appointed to this office, that they are to be prepared to take a prominent part in whatever contributes to promote the general welfare of the church.

A church requires *rules* for its regulation. But, in contradistinction to others Baptists hold, that the precepts of Christ, and apostolic acts and directions are all sufficient for guidance. In its hands Christ has placed the duty of deciding every thing which relates to its interests ; but at the same time He has made rules for its direction. The church is empowered, in His name, to remove delinquents from its fellowship. But in this matter the charge must be distinctly proved, and the offence brought

within the meaning of the statutes He has given. The conduct of a brother may appear very foolish, and be to his fellow members a cause of severe mortification ; but if it cannot be proved that he has offended against the laws of Christ, the Church has no authority to exercise discipline. Nor does this principle tend to laxity. Let any one pass over the New Testament, and he will find a discipline provided for upwards of forty offences. The cases in which the church is to "admonish," "avoid," "cut off," "put away," "refuse," and "warn" offenders, are so numerous, that in all instances, in which it is necessary for the purity and moral power of the church that any be removed from its fellowship, Scripture supplies warrant for the procedure.

There are matters which are left in great measure to convenience and circumstance ; but every thing which is to be done is clearly represented. For instance, the church is to be distinguished for worship, but we have no direction as to the form of building used for its public assemblies. It may be in an "upper room," or in the "house" of one of the brethren. If worship is in the Church, a dilapidated barn is as acceptable as a gorgeous cathedral. Scripture gives us no ritual for our guidance, nor dress fashions for those who officiate ; but we have a rule, "Let all things be done in order."

The expenses of a church are to be provided on equitable principles, but no arbitrary scale is given by which we may exact contributions. There are observances which are positive and unalterable, but there is liberty in many matters of detail.

Such, then, are the church principles, which it has been the honor of Baptists to maintain throughout many generations. A voluntary society of baptized and converted men and women; associated for certain spiritual objects according to the will of Christ, and recognizing in their association His exclusive sovereignty, is a Church of the living God, irrespective of all external circumstances. To those who cannot conceive of a church without a pompous hierarchy, an arrogant priesthood and a formal ritual such a definition may appear sadly defective; but nevertheless, a body thus constituted may appropriate to itself every promise which Christ gives to any church on earth.

Such, then, being the church principles which it is believed Scripture presents, and by which Baptists endeavor to be guided, let us examine their tendency in relation to the rights, comfort, piety, usefulness and influence of Christians.



## CHAPTER III.

### RIGHTS.

THE liberties of Christian men are sacredly guarded in the New Testament. The Apostles carefully disclaimed any right of dominion over the faith of believers, and warned them against such a pretension in others. They seemed to be fully alive to the conviction that the association of Christians, though free and voluntary, might become an engine of oppression, and therefore they lift up a timely notice of warning. "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free." In accordance with this direction, every disciple owes it to himself and to his Lord, to exercise a careful examination with respect to every demand which he meets, when he assays to join himself to the Church.

It is believed that no demand is made by a Baptist church on those who would enter its fellowship which is unsanctioned by Scripture.

The requirement of an account of the *personal*

*religion* of an applicant, is both Scriptural and reasonable.

There are certain characters who are not to be retained in the church. As those who are guilty of various delinquencies are to be removed from its fellowship, it is evident that it must exercise care not to receive such. The Church is to be in opposition to "evil doers" of every description. Believers are "not to keep company if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one no not to eat." The same directions apply to the "slothful" and "busybodies." If such a character is inconsistent with membership, the Church must necessarily take cognizance of all who are admitted, to have certainty that they are free from such delinquencies: otherwise, instead of being a spiritual house, it will be the synagogue of Satan; and such will be the influence of evil, that it will be unable and unwilling to exercise a Scriptural discipline.

In offering himself to a church, an individual may be supposed to agree with its members in their views of doctrine and usages. But more is needed than assent to outward formulas. Many a man is intellectually with a denomination, who is far from possessing the qualifications of heart and life which

are requisite for its membership. Devotion and aptness for the object for which any society exists, is necessary to its membership. Regard must be paid to the qualifications possessed by those who would enter it. One well qualified for conducting an argument, lacking all taste and skill in melody, cannot possess the judgment and enthusiasm necessary for a musical society. Instead of giving aid, his attempts would tend to prevent the attainment of the purposes for which the association is formed. So it is with respect to the Church. As it exists for Christian ends, it is very evident that a Jew or a Turk could not promote them. As membership implies intelligent co-operation, an infant can no more be a member of a church than of a business firm. If the church is formed to aid and develop spiritual life, no unconverted person has those elements which are essential to real membership. A man can be of no service in the church, if he is not one with its members in what they have believed, in what they love and in what they seek. Furthermore, the church exists for fellowship. This it can not extend without knowing something of those who seek it. The love and sympathy essential to church fellowship, can only exist where there is reason to believe that there is union of faith, spirit and practice. The demand of personal religious experience

is therefore imperative. Baptist churches make no improper demand when requiring a credible profession of repentance and faith. They can not be wrong when they present moral conversion as paramount to every thing else. Here, then, they begin with the individual who seeks their fellowship. The first matter which concerns a candidate is not his knowledge of doctrine, but his experience of grace. If on this point satisfaction can not be obtained, to go farther is useless. Neither the intellect of an angel or the riches of Cræsus could supply the deficiency. When Paul assayed to join himself to the disciples at Jerusalem, he was not received until they had obtained credible evidence that he was a new man. In an age of persecution, few would join themselves to the church without a deep consciousness of spiritual things, and if even then the doors of fellowship were carefully guarded, it becomes even more necessary when frequently a religious profession conciliates respect and secures secular advantages.

To make known to a body of Christians a "reason for the hope that is in us," ought not to be thought burdensome. This we are required to "be ready" to give to "every man that asketh." To unbosom the emotions of the soul appears a difficult task, and those who are young in religious

experience fear, lest that which brings the choicest solace to their own souls, should seem valueless in the eyes of more advanced professors. Of nothing can it be more truly said,

“There is even a happiness  
That makes the heart afraid.”

But though many find this a fearful ordeal in anticipation, few come among Christians to make confession with the mouth unto salvation, who are not afterwards amazed at their own disquietude.

But while the requirement of moral conversion is never departed from in a Baptist church, an applicant for church privileges is not placed under any conditions not sanctioned by the Word of God. No one is taken into the church “*on trial*.” Whatever the advantages it may be thought this course of action secures, it is enough for those who follow the New Testament, that the Word of God gives no countenance to any measure, which would keep an individual from a full participation in church privileges a single hour after he has given the Saviour his confidence. When the Church has reason to believe that Jesus has received a penitent within the arms of his mercy, Christians have no right to refuse him their embrace, if he is willing to comply with the requirements which the Lord has

established. If there is a period when the privileges of a church are especially desirable, it is in the early days of Christian life. No church has a right to apply any test to piety which the Word of God does not sanction. The trial system is unreliable. A counterfeit of spiritual life can be maintained for any period of probation. An unconverted man can be as constant in his attendance on the means of grace, as moral in his deportment and as honest in the affairs of life, as a Christian man. Continuance in these things is therefore a sorry test by which to decide a man's eligibility to church privileges. It is when we seek for a higher life we best discern "between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not." This is generally as evident when a man professes conversion as in any other period of his career.

Those who are accustomed thus to delay the full reception of candidates into church privileges, in general decline administering baptism, in the case of any who have not received a water dedication in infancy, till their probation has expired. Thus disciples are prevented from an immediate compliance with the Saviour's will. That the admission of improper characters to ordinances is deplorable all will admit; but they are the subjects of a fearful temerity who, when they read the records of the

New Testament, and mark the immediate baptisms of the converts at Pentecost, and such cases as that of Saul, Cornelius and Lydia, depart from apostolic examples. The motive may be good, but it is only that lapse of time prevents men from realizing the true position of the matter, or they would see as much to deplore on this account in the irreligious life of those who are baptized in infancy, as in the case of any baptized in riper years. It is strange that those who readily sprinkle an infant, the character of whose course they cannot conjecture, should delay to administer baptism when there is reason to believe that spiritual life is commenced.

The church being satisfied of the piety of those who seek its fellowship, does not violate the rights of a Christian, when it claims agreement in fundamental points of doctrine, and in its principles of constitution.

There is no doubt, that in the endeavor to secure uniformity, the requirement for agreement has frequently been carried to an injurious length. In some religious communions, instead of the souls of members being allowed to expatiate in the infinite regions of truth, in accordance with the glorious liberty of the children of God, they are called upon to bind and contract their souls by looking at every

thing through the light of voluminous "confessions," and "*Books of Discipline.*" Two hundred years ago, it was the reproach of a Presbyterian opponent concerning Baptists, "They are a people very zealous of liberty, and most unwilling to be under the bondage of any other." In accordance with the love of liberty which they inherit, Baptists in this day, do not present cumbrous articles of faith as necessary to their fellowship. Those generally adopted by them are few in number, and relate to the fundamental truths of revelation.

A substantial agreement in the distinctive features of any ecclesiastical system is necessary to its membership. Of course an individual joining a Baptist church must agree with its principles of administration. A Presbyterian, opposed as he necessarily is to prelacy, can not, without sacrifice of principle, unite with a congregation which admits and is controlled by it. He must protest against it if he is consistent. If a Christian thinks that the government of the church belongs to the people, and that they do wrong to lodge it in a "church session" or "consistory," it is evident that his membership in a Presbyterian church is opposed to his principles. In the same way, an Episcopalian or a Presbyterian can not, if conscientious in his views, join a Congregational or Bap-



tist church, because its government is in the people, independently of all jurisdiction of officers of their own, or those of any other religious body. Thus much only, then, does a Baptist church claim of those who unite with it, that their opinions, ecclesiastically, are so far in agreement with its distinguishing principles, that they shall neither compromise their own consistency, nor be at war with the denomination with which they unite.

A church in demanding *baptism* on the part of those who would unite with it, does not infringe on Christian liberty. That baptism is an essential pre-requisite to church privileges, is held by Christians of every name. But it may be demanded by some whether *immersion* is imperative. If this observance can be proved to be a commandment of men, to insist on it is to infringe on Christian liberty. If it can be shown as the only fulfilment of the requirement of Christ, none have reason to complain.

The observance of immersion can be defended by the acknowledged signification of the original word, by Scripture, and ancient practice. The meaning of the Greek word which is used to indicate the ordinance in the New Testament is indisputable. It never means to sprinkle or pour when used in Scripture or any other ancient writing.

Every lexicon of note gives it a meaning by which it signifies either an immersion into an element, or a complete overwhelming with it. Here are definitions gathered from various lexicons.

*Βαπτίζω*. To immerse repeatedly into a liquid ; to submerge ; to soak thoroughly ; to saturate, hence to drench with wine, metaphorically to confound totally ; to dip in a vessel and draw.—*Donnegan's Lexicon, Philadelphia, 1852.*

—— To dip repeatedly, dip under ; mid bathe, hence to steep, wet ; to drench, to dip a vessel ; draw water. New Testament—to baptize.—*Drissler's, Liddell & Scott. New York, 1852.\**

—— To baptize, dip, immerse, wash, cleanse.—*Major's Schreveluis. London, 1836.*

—— To dip, immerse, submerge, plunge, sink, overwhelm. New Testament. To wash, to perform ablution, to cleanse, to baptize. *Dunbar's. Edinburgh, 1844.*

In some of these lexicons it will be seen, that a peculiar signification is given to the word in the New Testament. But yet the lexicographers who have adopted this course have not ventured to give it a meaning which sanctions the usage of Pedo-

\* This lexicon has also, “to pour upon ;” but the Editor has frankly confessed that he cannot find authority for it, and has engaged to withdraw it from subsequent editions.

baptist Christians. The propriety of attaching a different meaning to the word in the New Testament to what it has in other works, cannot be conceded. No man whose scholarship in the classics has secured him reputation among philologists will affirm, that the word employed in the New Testament can be rendered correctly in any of the Greek classics when it relates to the mode of an act, otherwise than by dip, or a word of similar import; and no good reason can be given for altering its signification in the sacred volume. When we read that "the common people" heard the Saviour "gladly," it is to be supposed that he used language in its general acceptation. The meaning of any writing can only be ascertained, by taking for granted that the words employed in it are to be understood with the sense given them in contemporaneous productions. Men, therefore, who feel authorized to give any word which the Lord employed an unusual sense, ought to prove themselves the subjects of a special inspiration.

With respect to *baptize*, evidence can be found in the sacred record itself, sufficient to satisfy any unprejudiced mind. The word immerse, or a word of like meaning, may be used in every case in which the term occurs in the divine Word, and will, as a substitute, do no violence to the meaning of the

text. But this can not be said of sprinkling, or pouring, or purifying. Let any one place "purify" in the stead of "baptize," and what is it but blasphemy to read that "Jesus was *purified* of John in Jordan?" Let any one substituting "sprinkling" read, "I have a sprinkling to be sprinkled with;" or let him read of being "buried in pouring," and his soul will loathe such miserable expedients of sectarianism. Both "sprinkle" and "pour" occur in our version, but they are in no case used as translations of the Greek word for baptize: they represent entirely different words.

There are passages in the New Testament which give sanction to immersion. "John was baptizing in Enon, near to Salim, because there was *much water* there." John iii. 23. Some ministers, who can manifest great indignation at new translations, invariably pause in reading this passage, to translate it "many waters," that is "many springs of water." When we turn to a passage in the last book which inspiration has given us, we find the same terms translated "many waters," in a connection in which the gloss of "many springs" would be contemptible. Rev. xvii. 1. In the passages in our common version of the Old Testament in which the phrase "many waters" occur, more than tiny springs and gentle rills are indi-

cated. Ps. xxix. 3. Isa. xvii. 13. Ezek. xix. 10. Therefore, there is no good reason why, to serve a purpose, even if translated "many waters," it should be understood in so limited a sense as "springs."

The figurative expression "buried in baptism," Col. ii. 12. Rom. vi. 34, has no propriety, if we do not understand that baptism was so administered as to resemble a burial. A host of scholars and theologians, not of the Baptist denomination, have understood it to refer to immersion. We need only mention such honored names as those of Luther, Calvin, Baxter, Whitby, Tillotson, Whitefield, Wesley and Doddridge; or in our own more immediate times, Tholuck, Neander, Chalmers and Stuart.

There is no passage in the New Testament which invalidates the idea, that immersion is an equivalent of the term used in the Greek. One passage (Mark vii. 4.) which relates to the washing of cups, pots, brazen vessels and tables, or as it is rendered in the margins "beds," it is known has been frequently adduced in opposition to immersion. The term translated "washing," being a cognate of *βαπτίζω*, it is argued that though it may mean to "cleanse," it can not represent "immerse."\*

\* The latest instance in which this sorry plea has come under our notice, is in an issue of the Presbyterian Board of

This finesse in exegesis may avail with those who cannot conceive of any bed save one of ticking and feathers ; but those who have any knowledge of the character of the beds referred to, must consider the argument a miserable subterfuge. In the East, "beds of feathers are altogether unknown, and the Orientals lie exceedingly hard. The more wealthy classes sleep on mattresses, stuffed with wool or cotton, and which are often no other than a quilt thickly padded."\* There is also, as Dr. Kitto suggests, evidence that a portable couch was anciently much in use. 1 Sam. xix. 15. Beds were also used as sofas in the day time. Ezek. xxiii. 41. There is little doubt that a species of portable bed must have been used, in the case in which the sick man for whom a miracle was sought, was let down through the roof. Mark ii. 4. There is, therefore, little reason to doubt that beds might be conveniently immersed, and the act tend greatly to comfort, in a climate in which insects of a troublesome character greatly abound. Any one who has much acquaintance with literature relating to eastern travel, will readily believe that it would

Publication, which, nevertheless, severely condemns Baptists for regarding such a passage as Rom. vi. 3, 4., as significant of the external act in baptism!

\* Kitto's Biblical Cyclopædia.

not be amiss, if all people were as punctilious in the matter of beds, as the Pharisees.

The various observances which are now called baptism, all of which some denominations, in their eager grasp for proselytes are willing to treat as equally good, can not be regarded as having any thing to do in proving the *meaning* of the word. An example may show this. Till within a few years, when the verb "sail" was used, with respect to a vessel, it was understood to refer to one driven forward by *wind*, and a person taking this mode of conveyance was said to "sail;" but, through the application of steam, the word is losing its exclusive application to a voyage of this character.

It is no uncommon thing now, to find in our newspapers the announcement, concerning a person prominently before the public eye, who is going to Europe, that he will *sail* in the next *steamship*. To us the language is perfectly plain. But should our world last some thousand years more, some genius, not very accurate in the chronology of discoveries, may argue, as he reads of the *sailing* of Christopher Columbus from Spain, that he employed steam on his voyage, because the term sailing is used to indicate any agency by which a vessel is impelled. Now, foolish as it would be to our view from the use which sail is now acquiring, for any

one to blunder into such assertions; yet the same folly is being perpetrated every day with respect to the institution of baptism. The prevalence of sprinkling, it is well known, is modern. The first instance on record dates A. D. 251, and it was not generally practiced for centuries. All antiquity is in favor of immersion, as reference to any work deemed authoritative will show. Nevertheless, there are those following the lead of fallible men, who have chosen to alter an institution of Christ, so that it is no longer like the primitive observance, who plead that sprinkling is the New Testament baptism, thus making the present perverted usage the criterion for deciding the meaning of the Greek term employed in the beginning of the Christian era.

Let those who value the testimony of antiquity see what can be drawn from its records. "In the primitive church, this [immersion or dipping] was undeniably the common mode of baptism. The utmost that can be said of sprinkling at that early period is, that it was, in case of necessity, permitted, as an exception to a general rule. This fact is so well established, that it were needless to adduce authorities for it."\* The testimony of Whitby, an Episcopalian, though often quoted, we may

\* Coleman's Antiquities of the Christian Church.



again put on record. "This immersion being religiously observed by *all Christians for thirteen centuries*, and the change of it into sprinkling, being without any allowance from the Author of this institution, it were to be wished that this custom might be again of general use."

The Greek church, which holds most extensive sway, having a literature of ages in the venerable languages in which holy men of God wrote the New Testament, has always practised immersion. Publications have been issued, professing to give representations from sculptures and other works of art, in which water is poured on the head of an individual, but this superfusion has never been regarded as baptism by those who have practised it. It has mostly prevailed in the Greek church, which "has uniformly retained the form of immersion as indispensable to the validity of the ordinance, and repeated the rite, whenever they have received to their communion, persons who had been previously baptized in another manner." \*

Christianity came to this country chiefly from Great Britain, where it is certain that immersion was the only baptism in general use till the Reformation.† There is evidence that sprinkling was

\* Coleman's Antiquities of the Christian Church.

† See Edinburgh Encyclopedia.

not ordinarily practiced, till after the return from Geneva of the Scotch worthies, who had fled thither from the persecution of Popery. These persons placed great confidence in the judgment of Calvin. At Geneva, a book had been issued under his authority, containing forms of prayer, and for the administration of the Sacraments. In this book, in the administration of baptism, it is directed that the minister "take water in his hand and lay it on the child's forehead." When these exiles returned to their own country in 1559, they established sprinkling, and from Scotland it found its way into England. Even yet, many of the fonts anciently employed for the immersion of children, may be found in the old parish churches in England, and one or two yet remain in Scotland.

Some have argued against immersion, on account of the inconvenience to which they suppose it must subject candidates with regard to raiment. But to this day, thousands of Greeks make pilgrimages to the Jordan, and immerse themselves in its waters. Strauss, describing this sight says, that they "plunged into the stream with holy impetuosity, the men and women being attired in white garments." If thousands can now bathe in the Jordan without inconvenience, there is no reason why any should deem it impossible in apostolic times.

Another objection is made to immersion, on account of the supposed hardship connected with its observance in cold climates. In the United States, at the coldest season of the year, Baptists observe this rite in open rivers, and do not find the commandment of the Lord grievous.

The Greek church, as we have said, always immerses. Even the tenderest babe is submitted to this form in open rivers, at all seasons. Let any one look at the field covered by this church, and then say what *climate* can possibly have to do with the matter. "The dominion of the Greek church extends over nearly seventy millions of souls. Her authority is acknowledged and her rights observed from the ice-girt monastery of Solovetsky, on the White Sea, along the shores of the Adriatic Gulf to the conical roofed churches of Abyssinia—from the mines of Siberia to the desert of Sinia—amidst the snows of Kamptschatka, and in the torrid clime of Southern India."

It is not the design of this work, to present any thing like a full statement of the arguments in favor of immersion. This, of itself, would require a volume. The duty has already been performed by able writers. Enough has been presented, to show that immersion is sustained by ample authority. It is evident, therefore, that when a Christian

church makes this requirement of those who seek its fellowship, it does not intrude upon the liberties which Christ gives to His people, but it is only fulfilling its trust as the "pillar and ground of truth."

The demands which a Baptist church makes upon persons, *after entering its membership*, are such, and such only, as can be proved *essential, according to the scriptural view of a church*.

The church exists for the accomplishment of certain ends. It is evident, therefore, that members should employ their abilities to forward them. The primary duty of a church member relates to the local body with which he holds ecclesiastical relationship. This ought to be regarded as his home. If it is, he will not be absent without good reason, nor ever unmindful of its interests.

In a Christian Church, the members may rightly expect each other to *cultivate and cherish piety*. In joining the Church, each member ought to be an addition of spiritual life. It is the individual religion of members, which lies at the root of every thing good in church membership. Without carefulness as to his own spirit, a member cannot awaken the emulation, or reciprocate the brotherly and unassuming superintendence which church fellowship demands.

Every individual who joins a church may be justly expected to *employ his gifts* to forward the purpose of a church organization. In the primitive churches, we find each one called on to exercise his gifts for the edifying of the body of Christ. If he had a faculty for song, liberty in prayer, aptness for exhortation, he was expected not to let it rust in him unused. "No individual can, without breaking faith with the church to which he has joined himself, stand aloof either from its worship, its communion, or its operations. The members of the church have a claim upon him, for all that his presence will contribute to the sanctity and enjoyment of their devotion, and for all that his cooperation will contribute to the efficiency of their agency; and he has no more right to defraud them of this, than a paid agent has to defraud his employer of his labor. It is true, that the one is only a moral contract, while the other is a legal one; but no member, it is to be presumed, will contend for the greater, or even equal cogency of the latter.\*

The Scriptures give unequivocal testimony as to what should be *the demeanor of church members toward each other*. The church association is to be founded on love. The church is a family. The

\* Allon. Scripture Illustrations of the Christian Church.

members compose a household of faith. It becomes them, therefore, to manifest regard for each other. They are to seek each other's welfare. Each one is to be tenderly alive to the reputation of his brother. No one is lightly and wantonly to injure the feelings of those with whom he is connected in this sacred relationship. Nor are any to cherish a disposition which shall readily take offence. Church members, of all persons, ought to be "slow to wrath." True religion is a thing of principles and deeds. Where there is any real cause of offence, even then the church member has obligations to act the Christian still. He is not to proclaim to the world, or even to the church, his brother's offence. Without previous mention of it to any, he is to go to his brother, and in the strictest privacy tell him his fault. He is to visit him, not to upbraid him; but with the pure and disinterested motive of gaining him back to consistency and right feeling. When this private remonstrance fails, then he may disclose the matter to others, but only to "one or two;" and only when this additional step is unsuccessful, is he at liberty to "tell it to the church;" and only when the offender refuses to hear the church, is he at liberty to regard him in any other light than a brother, bound to him by the holiest ties. Matt. xviii. 15, 17.

The Scriptures teach us that members should bring *pecuniary assistance* to the church. Poor believers are to receive temporal aid. Of this we find both precept and examples in the New Testament. 1 Cor. xvi. 1-3. Acts ii. 29, 30. The support of pastors is also a duty, especially devolving upon the members of the church. "Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." 1 Cor. ix. 14. "Let him that taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in ALL good things." Gal. vi. 6. So when pecuniary contributions will aid to give the knowledge of the Gospel to the destitute, Christ looks to His churches to be "ready to communicate." There is no appropriation of wealth for which we can find better authority, than that which it yields to the cause of the Saviour. It is as the churches of Christ with the divine blessing makes this "conscientious appropriation of money, the cross of Christ is to be set up on every hill and in every valley, till one jubilant shout, rising sweet yet loud, from every continent, and every island, from the east and the west, the north and the south, shall attest and celebrate the blessedness of Immanuel's universal reign." It is no wonder, therefore, that, according to the size of the New Testament, we find that so considerable a part of it has refer-

ence to the appropriation of riches to the Saviour's cause.

Any one who peruses the "Covenant" of a Baptist church, will find that it is limited to these Scriptural requirements. It imposes no obligation which Scripture does not authorize. While the members covenant together for the objects for which our Lord authorizes a church organization, they enforce no "rules" to secure their attainment. They endeavor to regard the apostolic precept. "Let all your things be done with charity." 1 Cor. xvi. 14. The church is to "work in love." Eph. v. 2. It is only as this sacred principle is felt upon the heart, that there will be any approximation to right ends. It is certain that a man may hold a standing in the church, while he is far from prosecuting as he ought his part of the obligations of fellowship. Nevertheless, a Scriptural church does not profess a right of compulsion in any case. It can only remind those of its members who neglect to fulfil their obligations, of their duties. "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty, only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." Gal. v. 13.

Being a spiritual society, formed for spiritual purposes, a church can only be governed by love. Compulsory regulations are unworthy of it. The



use of them is vain, for such instrumentalities never can secure the end desired. The church must recognize the freedom of all its members, while it becomes each individual to remember, that the voluntariness which the Gospel bestows is "voluntary *acting*, not *refusing* to act; voluntary *giving*, not *refusing* to give." As D'Aubigne remarks, "The church has no sword. In its very essence, it is a voluntary society. To use compulsion, in order to elicit an act of piety, is a contradiction. The church sets no value upon that which does not emanate from the free will of men. Her police, her tribunals, consist in that *lenis suasio*, that mild persuasion, the noblest of all sources of action, which, through deep conviction, secures, by rational and moral means, the consent of the will."

Christianity altogether repudiates every constraining power but the love of Christ. If love fails, the church has no other agency. The offender must, in love, be separated from its fellowship, and, with all his unfulfilled responsibilities, meet his controversy with its members at the judgment seat of Christ.

The principles on which members are *removable from fellowship* in a Baptist church, guarantees the rights of Christians.

No member is amenable to discipline, or can be

excluded from fellowship, who is not believed guilty of some action or course which the Scriptures condemn. Men may be excluded from the various pedo-baptist churches without any such authority. Consideration is had, not to the laws of Christ, but to the principles of a particular church. In the Protestant Episcopal church, both in England and America, discipline is seldom exercised with regard to private members. Tares are allowed to grow with the wheat in luxuriant freedom, and no hand is put forth to remove them. With regard to the trial of any one in clerical orders for heresy, Scripture has little to do with the decision; the offence is proved from the articles and liturgy. "Legal and secular acumen is employed, to eliminate from the forms themselves the true doctrine, assisted by such light as can be thrown on them from the writings of their framers or those of the ancient church. \* \* \* So in courts of Presbyterian judicature, the Westminster Confession and Catechism is the standard of decision, the criterion of judgment the condemning or absolving law. While in the great body of Methodists [in England,] the expository notes and sermons of John Wesley are the ultimate reference, sustained by an unscriptural and irresponsible tribunal, whose regulations have all the force of canons—the power to bind and loose—though

they be not the laws of the One Lawgiver in the Church, Christ Jesus.\*

In this country, Methodism does not define its requirements in the same way, yet agreement with John Wesley, if not a test in words, is in fact. Though all his views are not taught in the Articles of the Methodist Episcopal Church, yet, according to a work issued from its press,† “tradition comes in, usage and the influence and force of a common opinion,” for their being held and preached. According to the “Discipline” of this church, any one guilty of “inveighing against either our doctrines or discipline, \* \* \* “if he persist in such pernicious practices, he shall be expelled from the church.” So again, if preachers “hold or disseminate, publicly or privately, doctrines which are contrary to our Articles of Religion,” the “Discipline” says, “Let the same process be observed as in case of gross immorality.” Not one word is here said as to any appeal to Scripture. The Baptists have ever been honored to maintain “the great truth of the absolute dominion of Scripture over faith, and in the Church of God.” They have always contended for the unimpeachable wisdom of the great Founder of Zion; and have been satisfied that when

\* Underhill. Christian Review, Jan., 1852.

† Dixon's Tour in America.

a difficulty arises, in which it is clearly evident that a church can take no cognizance of it by His laws, that it may safely be let alone, without detriment to its welfare. Among the thousands of Baptist churches, but few cases of serious difficulty in government have occurred within the memory of any in the denomination; and wherever these have arisen, there is little doubt that they may be traced to the infringement of this principle. When churches have been satisfied to recognize no requisite for membership which our Lord has not made imperative, and nothing as an offence, for which He has not provided a discipline, their peace and progress has been "as a river." But an opposite course has always done violence to conscientious convictions. Happily those who, inexperienced in Scripture principles of church government, have sought to introduce subversive novelties, have seldom been able to carry out their designs. A membership well acquainted with the benefits of a sound anchorage in the fair havens which apostolic teachings indicate, will not readily trust the ark in the breakers of human legislation. The promise of ultimate "peace and safety," they know, can not be realized, until the law, by which actions have relation to results, no longer operates.

In the appointment of *officers* in a Baptist church,

the fullest exercise of the rights of membership is guaranteed.

The fact that the church is a voluntary society, seems to intimate its right of choice of its own officers. No one would suppose, from the New Testament, that those accustomed to listen to and support a spiritual teacher, should have nothing to say with respect to his appointment. When "the seven" were to be appointed, the Apostles called the people together to make an election. They did not, as lords over God's heritage, make a choice themselves. So far did popular rights prevail in apostolic times, that even when a contribution was raised for the necessitous, Paul informs us that the "brother" who carried it to its destination was "chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace." Among Presbyterians, a minister can only be settled in a congregation by the permission of a presbytery. With Episcopalians, the people have little to do with the election, and a bishop's sanction is indispensable. In the Methodist Church, a preacher takes charge of a congregation by the appointment of the bishop;—the people, according to the letter of the Discipline, have nothing to do with the appointment to any office, save in those States and Territories where the Legislature has secured them rights which the

Church denies.\* In some matters, usage may modify these enactments; but wherever they are un-repealed, the rights of Christian men are unsafe. The Methodist body has been highly honored of God in the extension of the knowledge of Christ; and those who are in its communion may be, in general, well satisfied with its polity; but it is questionable whether they will long remain satisfied, without any proper voice in its conference or in their own local affairs.

The *oversight* in a Baptist church is scriptural in its character and powers.

The apostolic epistles clearly set forth the officers which are to exist in the churches, and the duties which are annexed to them. "Obey them which have the rule over you." Heb. xiii. 17. We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. 2 Thes. v. 12, 13. The pastor is also presented as having "rule" (1 Tim. v. 17) in the church. The powers of the pastoral office, however, as made known in the Scripture, are not of the absolute and arbitrary character which many have represented. The ruling power of a pastor is to be exercised in subserviency to

\* Discipline. Sec. III. 2.

God's will. He "rules well," when, as president of the assemblies of the church, he gives a clear exhibition of the will of Christ in matters which call for their action. It belongs to him to announce what offences the Scriptures recognize, and what discipline they enjoin; but it is not his to pronounce any sentence which the body has not authorized. In some churches, official authority is greatly magnified, insomuch that it has all the powers which rightly belong to the whole membership. In churches having a Presbyterian constitution, the session, composed of the pastor and elders, have sole authority in the reception and discipline of members. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, even when the members of a whole society have decided on the innocence or guilt of an accused person, the minister in charge can take the case entirely out of their jurisdiction. So that at any time, persons may be retained in the membership of the church; or removed from it, irrespective of their will. Among Baptists, the self-government of the churches has ever been a prominent principle. They hold "the church to be, intentionally, a popular institution; and that whatever provision is made for order, officers and discipline, the whole power, under Christ, is in the people, and administered not *over* them, nor *for* them, but by themselves, convened in free assem-

bly." Discipline is evidently, in Scripture, not the act of officers, but of the whole body. The case of the trespasser who stubbornly persisted in his offence, was to be told to the church. It was the whole body of the church at Corinth, on whom the duty was laid of removing an offender. 1 Cor. v. 4-7. The same party was also required to act in cases of restoration. No person need enter a Baptist church, with the expectation that he may consider the opinions and counsels of its pastor unimportant; but at the same time, he may enter it with the assurance that the pastor alone, has not power to remove him from its privileges.

But there may be some who inquire what remedy an individual has if *wrongfully* excommunicated by the church. Churches being composed of those who, as individuals, are not incapable of error, they cannot be infallible in an associated capacity. They may, therefore, in some cases, make an erroneous judgment. Their own sober second thought is, in general, the best corrective in such a case. Yet, if they are not convinced of error, foreign interference is of no use. A court of review, if their polity admitted of such a body, might decide the excommunication of a member wrongful; but when it is the act of the members of the church generally, unless they can believe that they have acted con-



trary to the law of Christ in the case, it is impossible for him to be restored to fellowship; for they can not give love and sympathy to one whom they believe unworthy of it. Those persons have the poorest idea of church state, who think it possible to replace a man in its privileges, in any way akin to that which would give him a possession of property or estate. He may regain his seat at the communion table, but church fellowship is a thing of the affections. It is impalpable to mere law. It dies under compulsion.

There may arise cases, in which a member may become obnoxious to the majority of a church, who is nevertheless not guilty of any offence against the laws of Christ. If, in such circumstances, he is made a subject of discipline, he is not without remedy. He is not thereby cut off from the hope of church relationship in his own denomination. He will neither find it necessary, as opponents sometimes suggest, to pass through life without ecclesiastical privileges, or found a church for himself.\*

\* On one occasion, the writer heard the Rev. Dr. B——, in the course of a sermon before a newly organized Presbyterian Church, in showing the benefit of a court of appeal, in cases in which members consider themselves aggrieved, use this plea with great earnestness. But the good man, who so much deprecated institutions which compelled such a resort, had tried it himself, and was then occupying the desk in defiance of a

He has the alternative of an application to another church. The church to which he applies will not, of course, treat a solemn sentence, passed in the name of Christ, as a nullity, on his own representation. But if, after making careful investigation, it is satisfied of its injustice, it will not hesitate to receive him, and neighboring churches will approve its action; for only as a church is guided by the will of Christ, will its decisions be respected by kindred societies.

Such is the relationship of the members of the body of Christ, that if "one member suffer all the members suffer with him." They cannot, therefore, allow a member to lie under a sentence which "delivers him to Satan," and makes him "as a heathen man," while they believe that he is worthy of their love and communion. To do this, in the case of one of the least of the brethren of Christ, is to be guilty of like vice with those who, beholding a homeless stranger, "took him not in."

Within Baptist churches it is believed, that every right which a believer can claim is guaranteed. The sons of fathers, who were permitted to startle a world, by reviving and proclaiming the sentence of deposition. Neither presbytery or synod had given him the deliverance he desired, and, with others, he had organized new presbyteries and a new synod.

great doctrines of soul liberty, cannot submit to any yoke of bondage themselves, or impose it on others. While others laud the complex systems by which men *govern* them, their rejoicing is this, that they have learned to feel the force of the truth an Apostle taught. "Ye are bought with a price: BE NOT YE THE SERVANTS OF MEN."

## CHAPTER IV.

### COMFORT.

COMFORT in the Church! To how many might such an expression appear a mockery. The Church, so called, has, in not a few instances, tended more to the misery than to the happiness of man. Refusal to obey its behests has procured loss of property, reputation and life. The partisans of Popery and British prelacy have alike claimed that they were doing God service, in using, in the name of the Church, the faggot, the thumb-screw, and the boot. The same persecuting spirit has been manifested in times past in this country, by those who might have been expected to exercise more tolerance. To this hour, very generally in Europe, "the church," sometimes, even, bearing the name of Protestant, by the demands which it makes and the penalties it inflicts, proves itself the annoyance of true Christians. The reason of this disastrous influence may be discovered in the existence and maintenance of ecclesiastical systems, opposed in nearly all things to the churches of primitive times.

No church organization can promote the well-being and happiness of men, which is not, in its constitution, conformed to the Word of God.

In the previous chapter, we have exhibited the church principles of Baptists in relation to the rights of Christians. It is essential to comfort that these be preserved inviolate. Not less important is it for this end, that the church fulfil the object for which it is founded. Rights may be scrupulously regarded, and the individual, nevertheless, find himself in the midst of uncongenial influences.

A church should be a *fellowship* of Christians.

The churches, in apostolic times, were evidently voluntary societies, in which religion was aided by the consecration of the associative instinct of our nature. It has been well remarked, concerning one of these—"Here we see the *social* principle, putting forth its energies in a way of sacred fellowship, and with direct reference to religion. A new and holy brotherhood was set up, of which love to Christ and to each other for Christ's sake was the bond."\* The possession of these affections by all who enter into church relations, is of the utmost importance. Unless they are generally felt, there can be little happiness experienced by the most

\* J. A. James.

sincere disciples. Many regard church membership only as giving them the privilege of an approach to the Lord's table; and with this view, it may appear to some, that severe scrutiny concerning the spiritual character of members, is not very essential to Christian comfort. But important as is the privilege of celebrating the Lord's supper, it becomes the Christian to contemplate the church as existing for other ends, which ought not to be treated as trivial. "Nothing is more certain," remarks Robert Hall, "than that the communion of saints is by no means confined to one particular occasion, or limited to one transaction, such as that of assembling around the Lord's table. \* \* \* Its richest fruits are frequently reserved for private conference, like that in which the two disciples were engaged, in their way to Emmaus, when their hearts burned within them while the Lord opened to them the Scriptures. When they take sweet counsel together, as they go to the house of God in company, when they bear each other's burdens, weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice, say, have Christians no mutual fellowship?" For such ends a church exists, and for their accomplishment habitual sympathies are demanded, which cannot be found in any who are not renewed in the spirit of their minds.

Union with an association of persons bearing the name of church members, but not subjects of the gracious influences of the Divine Spirit, cannot contribute to the happiness of a real Christian. Such a body lacks the first requirement of a church. It is not a "spiritual house." Reverence and order may be conspicuous in its assemblies, but it cannot furnish a home for a soul born from above.

It is to be presumed, that all persons who are led by the Spirit of God, desire that purity in the membership of the denominations to which they belong, which shall secure a communion of saints. Comparisons have long been deemed "odious," and no comparisons are so justly obnoxious, as those which relate to the piety of church members of different denominations. Nevertheless, an examination of the ecclesiastical principles of various communions ought to be made. These either have a tendency to secure a pious membership, and thereby true Christian fellowship, or they have not.

With *Episcopalians*, admission to full church privileges is granted to those who have been confirmed. The requirements for this service are thus stated in the Book of Common Prayer: "The Church hath thought good to order, that none shall be confirmed, but such as can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments; and

can also answer to such other questions, as in the Short Catechism are contained." Beyond this, nothing can be demanded, but that the parties confirmed "renew the solemn promise and vow" made at their baptism. When the conditions of admission to a church are made thus, irrespective of personal character, it cannot be expected that its membership will constitute a communion of saints. That there are, and have been, among Episcopalians, persons very eminent for piety, none will deny; but the condition on which members are admitted, being that of *memory*, not of heart, and the absence of any discipline by which offenders are removed, forbid the hope that exalted piety will be common.

The *Presbyterians* acknowledge the Confession of Faith of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, as forming a material part of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in this country. According to this standard, the "visible church \* \* \* consists of all these throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children." Such a definition, it will be evident to the reader, scarcely excludes any, but the Jew and the Infidel.

In admitting members, there is reason to believe, that some branches of the Presbyterian family have made a great advance since this Confession was



framed. But not even yet, are all Presbyterians willing to act on principles which tend to secure a pure membership. The late Dr. Chalmers, whose name is justly venerated throughout Christendom, when presenting his views before the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, maintained, that it was "wrong, to say that *none but the pious*, should be admitted" to partake of the Sacraments; while for the decent regulation of the visible church, "it is well that the visibly profane or profligate are kept away." As to the duty of a minister, with regard to the "great majority of our species," who are "neither of the profligate or the pious," this eminent man held, that his business is "not to exclude them, but to warn them."\* A church regulated on these principles, can offer but few of the attractions which gave to primitive assemblies of Christians, so delightful a charm. There may be many communicants, but there will not be much Christian communion.

The larger bodies of Presbyterians in this country, make a nearer approach to the views of Baptists. Though they hold, with their trans-atlantic brethren, that "the visible church comprehends hypocrites and formalists, as well as those who are effectually called and regenerated;" yet they

\* Memoirs by Dr. Hanna. Vol. III. Appendix.

declare, that those whose province it is to receive members, should, "with great carefulness, endeavor to ascertain whether or not, the applicants for sealing ordinances furnish evidence of a gracious state of heart, of a correct Christian deportment, and of a competent knowledge of the great system of revealed truth." \*

But while these views are no doubt honestly entertained, men of careful discrimination have perceived obstacles in the way of the attainment of purity in church fellowship, in connection with Presbyterianism. According to Dr. Davidson, in his "Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament." "Presbyterians of the present time, particularly such as are unconnected with the state, allow that the members admitted into churches should be such as profess their knowledge and faith in Christ, together with their subjection to him in ordinances; or in other words, those who are true Christians in the judgment of charity. We fear, however, that though they admit in theory the scriptural qualifications of church members, they forget them in practice. Their system, however favorable it may seem to the scriptural standard on this vital point, has never secured holiness in the members to any

\* Exposition of the Confession of Faith; Explanatory note in the American edition.

considerable extent. As long as a palpable line of distinction is not drawn between the hearers composing a congregation; and while candidates for the ministry enter on their studies for the office, *without* giving evidence of personal holiness; this denomination cannot pretend to attain the character they admit to be so desirable." \*

In the several distinctive ecclesiastical bodies, adopting a Presbyterian government, doubtless diversity exists in principle, as to the conditions of admission to membership. But in any Presbyterian church, however spiritual its requirements, there cannot be that enlightened fellowship which characterized primitive Christian assemblies; for when persons are received into membership, owing to the privacy of examination, the great majority have no opportunity of gaining a knowledge of their spiritual history.

In the *Methodist* body, it is held that a religious society is "a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in the Lord, that they may help each other to work out their salvation." "There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these

societies, 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.' " \* When we turn to another section of the Discipline, we find the following presented in answer to the question, "How shall we prevent improper persons from insinuating themselves into the church?" "Let none be received into the Church until they are recommended by a leader, with whom they have met at least six months on trial, and have been baptized; and shall on examination by the minister in charge, before the church, give satisfactory assurances both of the correctness of their faith, and their willingness to observe and keep the rules of the church."

On the principles thus exhibited in the Discipline, it has been alleged that the requirements for Methodist church-membership are not such as bare unconverted men. In a Pedit-baptist periodical of high authority, it has been stated, that "Membership among the Methodists is more than ordinarily a doubtful index of conversion. Among the purest churches it is only an approximation to certainty; but Methodism makes *regular provision for the full admission to its fellowship of unconverted men in any numbers.*" \* It is well known, that persons who give no evidence of conversion are often allowed

\* Discipline.

to become "class members," and in some districts "seekers," are permitted to come to the Lord's table. It is not necessary for admission to "full membership," if the Discipline correctly exhibits the practice, that a man give evidence of a gracious state of heart. It is certainly not impossible for an unconverted man to fulfil a term of probation, and gain a theoretic "correctness of faith."

The godliness and abundant zeal of many members of the Methodist Church, however, give evidence that they are of the family of God; and it is scarcely to be credited, that persons who are accustomed to the earnest preaching of the Methodist pulpit, can be unacquainted with the necessity of the new birth for admission to heaven; and having this knowledge, it would be thought all must perceive the incongruity of membership in a church here, without the possession of a well grounded hope of a part, with the Church in glory. Nevertheless, it is certain, that without any infringement of Methodist Discipline, many may be brought into membership, who are destitute of the elements of character needed for Christian fellowship.

Hindrances to that purity of fellowship which is desirable, exist in all Pedo-baptist denomina-

\* Christian Witness. Issued by the Congregational Union of England and Wales.

tions. Those which most honorably approximate to the Scriptures, have in the dogma of Infant church membership, a stumbling-block. With an idea which attaches membership to *natural* descent, men are not likely to be distinguished for any great clearness of perception as to the spirituality, which of right, appertains to a Church of Christ. Beside this, the historical antecedents of the leading Pede-baptist Churches, are opposed to their insisting on piety, for admission to church membership. The Presbyterian and Episcopal churches are offshoots of national religious establishments in other countries; and the religious body, a branch of which exists here, as the Methodist Episcopal church, was regarded by its founder as still in connection with one of these original State Churches; and when declared separate, was greatly modeled by it. Now it will be found, that in any State church, even if regulations are made for purity in its fellowship, it cannot be obtained. What Hooker declared of one, is true of every State establishment of religion; "There is not any man of the Church of England, but the same man is also a member of the commonwealth; nor any member of the commonwealth which is not also of the Church of England."\*

\* Ecclesiastical Polity.

Whether it be in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, or the Episcopal Church of England, men notoriously destitute of Christian character cannot be prevented from coming to that table, which is called the Lord's. Churches, therefore, which bear the impress of these foreign state churches, and which, by reason of immigration are receiving ministers and members from them, only with the lapse of time, if ever, will throw off entirely the principles of membership which prevail in the bodies from which they spring. Every thing of a traditional character and ecclesiastical affinity is against their purity. There is cause for rejoicing if, in any case, despite a paternity from which they have received an heir-loom most pernicious to their healthy action; they have made efforts to obtain somewhat of the vitality of the churches of apostolic times. Happily New Testament principles have always been so repugnant to the rulers of this world, and are in their very nature so unfitted for the construction of a national church, that Baptists have never suffered from this vitiating alliance.

That purity in the membership of churches essential to constitute them Christian fellowships, which others, although believing most desirable, have conceived it chimerical to expect, Baptists have

steadily set themselves to obtain. "What every confession," Mr. Underhill remarks, "in harmony with Scripture, affirmed the church to be, the Baptists endeavored to realize. They would make theory a fact, and embody, as far as human infirmity could be overcome, the ideal in the actual." \* As in the New Testament, the church is set forth as composed of believers or saints, with them it has been a pre-eminent care to have churches conformed to the primitive pattern. Deceivers have sometimes crept in among them, even as they did into apostolic churches; but they have obtained entrance in opposition to their principle of incorporation; and when discovered, the disposition and power to remove such excrescences has seldom been found wanting. Though Presbyterians have understood the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. xiii. 24-30) as descriptive of the church,† and Episcopalians have regarded it as so far sanctioning a promiscuous membership, as to deprecate any attempt to remove the unworthy, on the ground which the parable presents, that in the effort the wheat may be rooted up, or in other words, good members, related to the delinquents, be offended and withdraw from "the church" Baptists have repudiated, as

\* Christian Review, Jan., 1852.

† Exposition of the Confession of Faith.



contrary to the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles, any idea which would sanction their remaining in mischievous luxuriance in the midst of God's husbandry. That there are tares in the *world*, and that we have no right to anticipate the Divine vengeance on them, they do not deny. It was their honor to maintain this, when priestly persecutors were very actively engaged in weeding nations and communities of those who, being opposed to their assumptions, they conceived it became them to remove from the earth. Not a few, holding the distinctive principles of the Baptist denominations, were treated as "tares." The honor now done their memory and that of other sufferers for conscience sake, shows to the world the wickedness and folly of a course which takes away human life to gratify ecclesiastical malignity.

The testimony of enemies might be given in proof of the purity of communion which Baptists have advocated and maintained. The persecutors of the Paulicans and Cathari, and other Baptist communities which existed previous to the Reformation, though to their own dishonor, bear witness to the Christian simplicity of doctrine and life which distinguished them. At and after the time of the Reformation, they bore still the same character. When, in 1536, the question of punishing,

capitally, the so-called heresy of ana-baptism was considered in a Diet convened for the purpose; the opinions of several jurists, reformers and Lutheran divines of Germany were presented. The substance of the opinions of one of these is given as follows:—

“The cause of the increase of ana-baptism is, that good laws and constitutions are not maintained, nor those who transgress against them punished. That adulteries, revellings and such like things are committed with impunity. That by this the Ana-baptists are *strengthened*.” In the law passed on this occasion, provision was made, that “wicked persons, adulterers, drunkards, gamblers, and such like, should be severely punished, that there may be no scandal;” and other measures were adopted, “designed for the removal of abuses, which seemed to give the Ana-baptists a pretext for schism.\* Thus did Baptists shame a dominant church, and show them the importance of a decent discipline. Nor has their subsequent testimony to the holiness which becomes God’s house been delivered in vain. The healthful operation of their practice has been cheerfully recognized by members of denominations, which, through its absence, have greatly suffered from heresy. Especially has this been admitted, with regard to their steadfastness in the

\* Dutch Martyrology.

period of the lamentable defections of the Pedo-baptist churches in New England. Their principle may not have yet so wide an appreciation, as regard for the honor of their Lord leads those who know its value to desire, but it is surely tending to universal acceptance.

Valuable as is the principle which guides Baptists in receiving members for the purity of their church membership, its excellence is even more apparent in the reality of the fellowship it secures. A conscript law may draw together the young men of an empire, and they may, by training, be brought to present an orderly and compact appearance; but their unity is artificial, and soon as the restraint of law is removed they disperse. A church constituted on scriptural principles, has that in itself which holds it together. It meets the demands of spiritual life. The members are not only brought into the same place, but their minds are occupied by the same object. With them the term fellowship has reality and insignificance. They are "baptized into one body."

"Heart leans to heart with one intense desire,  
To feel the living warmth of kindred fire."

They have, in the affinity to their faith and love, a bond of union, and in the noble purpose of a Christian life, personal sanctification and efforts for the

salvation of the race, all must admit they have objects so enlarged and grand, that they have the best preventive from dissensions.

Even away from home, when one Baptist meets another, the gratifying influence of the principle by which piety is made essential to church membership is often manifest. Members of some other denominations who exchange the courtesies of travel, finding that they belong to the same religious body, feel that they have a bond of relationship; but in many cases the discovery of piety is accidental. A member of the Episcopal church, who delights in the ministry of an evangelical pastor, may meet scores of Episcopalians who would not be able to enter into his spiritual emotions. But in general, Baptists can give each other the cordial greeting of Christian love. They have no fear of the awkward discovery of a difference of sentiment in the essentials of Christianity. Individual piety being the requirement of membership in the thousands of Baptist churches, those belonging to them have no need to repress their sympathies for a better acquaintance. It is not generally that Christian men, even though owning the same denominational name can, as strangers, greet each other with the freedom and affection, which distinguishes the members of this large family of churches.

The *unanimity* required on the part of the membership of a church in the reception of members, is promotive of comfort in the relation. There are churches in our land, in which members can be received, without any regard being paid to the objections of those who already belong to them. It is a principle among Baptists to seek that there be one mind in a church in the reception of members. In most of their churches, if only one member presents a Scriptural reason against a person being received into fellowship, it will suffice to prevent his admission. Of course, the church must be satisfied that the objection is valid, and in case of a pertinacious presentation of an objection, which is unscriptural and insufficient, the member who persists in it becomes himself amenable to discipline; for, instead of studying the things which make for peace, he seeks to create discord on unwarrantable grounds. There is every assurance for the comfort of a Christian, who enters a church guided by these principles. He unites with it by its own unanimous will, and he knows that none can be brought into communion with it, against whom he can present just cause of complaint.

The participation of the *whole membership* in the regulation of the church, it is believed, by giving all who desire, opportunity to express their views,

tends to the peace and happiness of Christians in their church relationship. Some perceive peculiar evils in this principle. It is opposed, on the supposition that the whole body of Christians are not, in general, so likely to come to a judicious decision as ministers, or a portion of the membership set apart for the purpose. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, it is incumbent on every candidate for the ministry to study a work, which teaches him that the Congregational system of church government involves the serious evil of "referring every decision to members and suffrages, and placing all that is good, and venerable, and influential among the members themselves, at the feet of a democracy." \* To the friends of a system which decides matters by its own wisdom, as present in its "Discipline," or "Minutes of Conference," there appears something very fearful in such a reference. If the thousands of Baptist churches were to adopt this course, none can tell what rules might prevail in different regions of country. But these churches disclaim all power to legislate. Their province is simply to carry out the laws which Christ has given. "All that is good and venerable," is not laid at their "feet;" but every matter is referred to Him who is "Head" over all things to the Church.

\* Watson's Theological Institutes.

The members claim for themselves neither right nor wisdom to decide. All they profess to do is, to enforce the laws of Christ.

The principle which gives to *all* the members this privilege is assailed by opponents. It is said that men and women, young and old, whether distinguished for wisdom or folly, caution or hastiness alike share authority. The membership of a Baptist Church, it is admitted, may sometimes include unlovely characters. There may be found within the circle a young man more distinguished for pertinacity than wisdom, or one more advanced, very anxious to have the pre-eminence, and such may even seek to control the body. But if due care is taken to have the church composed of "such as shall be saved," as far as man can judge, though there may be here and there a brother who lacks that genial disposition, which is desirable, the greater part will use power in a right spirit. In a church where Scriptural requirements are demanded for membership, "the youth and inexperience of some, are balanced by the knowledge and prudence of others, to whom the young disciple will naturally look, and by whose counsel he will be benefited. And then there are pastors, whose duty it is to explain the bearing of Scriptural principles on every particular case, who

are *over* the people in the Lord, and whose authority the latter are taught not to despise." \* There is the cheering reflection with regard to the decisions to which a Baptist Church comes, that it is an open business—a matter in which all have a right to express their views, and that there is nothing to call forth the indignation, which decisions matured in private by sessions and committees, so frequently awaken.

The taunt, that Baptists have no church government has been often uttered, and will no doubt be still reiterated. If it is to be understood, that it is necessary to government, that other parties, than those who are affected by it, should have chief authority, or if it is meant, that it is essential to church government, that there be a Conference or a Presbytery able to control and harass a congregation, when disposed to think for themselves, a million Baptists will readily proclaim, and glory in the fact, that they have no church government. But in all that is essential to the orderly regulation of Christ's house, they believe they possess in each independent society, a government equal to every exigency. While the principles of gravitation was undiscovered, many thought that a great and complex machinery must be employed to sus-

\* Davidson.



tain and guide the heavenly bodies. So many think that a Church of Christ cannot be held together without many checks and balances. Notwithstanding, let strangers walk around the Zion so dear to Baptist hearts, and they will find, that when proper care is used to gather into a church the material the Scriptures demand, in the same Scriptures it will find laws and regulations all sufficient for the order and felicity of its members.

In Baptist Churches, as well as in the various bodies which decide important questions in other communions, there will be *differences of opinion*. All men cannot be brought to look at a matter in the same light, nor to see a like propriety in a decision. Nevertheless, in a church whose whole membership is, as far as man can judge, truly converted, it may be hoped, that there will neither be a majority exercising an arbitrary domination, nor a minority indulging in factious complaints. The members may be expected to regard the \*Apostolic counsel, and act "with all lowliness and meekness, and long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." In matters of slight moment, it may be well that the vote of a majority should settle a question; but it is not so when a course is proposed which relates to the comfort of

Christians for years, and which may interfere with solemn conscientious convictions. Many instances will occur in which a majority, if under right influences, will not think of making their numerical strength decide a question. The preservation of Christian love is a consideration which, with those who feel its value, will out-balance any number of votes. In matters which are deemed essential to the welfare of the Church, if the majority has the mind of Christ, such deliberation and carefulness will be exercised, that even persons who do not approve a decision, will regard it with friendly feelings, and those who have carried it with unabated esteem.

The *independency* which each local Church possesses among Baptists, is favorable to the happiness of members. This, as before remarked, gives to every single church, the right, under Christ, of disposing of all matters which concern its peace and prosperity, without let or hindrance from any earthly power. None can intrude to compel them to a different course from that which they believe is in accordance with righteousness. At the same time, each church is preserved from entanglement in the troubles of other churches. In those ecclesiastical communions in which many congregations are united for the purpose of government, a difficulty

which occurs in one may impair the comfort of all. Each Baptist Church, by refusing to admit any control external to itself, or to participate in its exercise over others, secures thereby the comfort of its members.

That wisdom, which planted the primitive Churches, so entirely distinct in their regulation, is no where more clearly to be discerned than in the church history of our world. The pernicious consequences which flow from a false idea of unity, is manifest in all its records. In pursuit of unity in the Church, Romanism has raised its gigantic system to crush the liberties of true churches, and persecute men to the death who will not heed its authority. Protestant communions, while rejecting the authority of Rome, have sought the same end. They have, however, often found that they have mistaken their aim. Even these who are loudest in the advocacy of unity, are unwilling sometimes to try its practical effects. Perhaps a more notable instance of this was never supplied, than when measures were taken, in 1852, to obtain for the "Convocation of the Church of England" the exercise of its ancient legislative powers. The more pious of the ministry were filled with alarm. To their view, the movement was an augury of evil to themselves and their flocks. A journal, which is regarded as

their organ, declared, that to allow such an assembly, though be it remembered, composed of their own prelates and representatives selected by the clergy, was "opening a floodgate of evil." With regard to the results of the meetings of such assemblies, on a review of church history, it thus expressed itself:—"But the active, the important synods—what were they but great machines for enforcing unity, by expelling all opinions but one."\* No one acquainted with the history of ecclesiastical governing bodies can doubt the truth of this assertion. They always have and ever will be the means of trouble to the churches of Christ.

In this country it is evident, that alliances of congregations and ministers for government have not tended to promote peace. The "tie that binds" has not always been of a blessed character. It cannot be shown that Episcopal Conventions, Presbyterian Synods and Assemblies, or Methodist Conferences have been very useful examples to the world of harmony. Differences of opinion on trivial matters have acquired, through their means, a factious importance, which otherwise they would never have reached. Instead of making Jerusalem a "quiet habitation," the influence of these governing bodies has often been the reverse.

\* London Record.

It cannot be claimed that the results of the government adopted by Presbyterians, much as its friends praise it, has been very satisfactory. In the last twenty years, its advocates have been witnesses against the efficacy of their own system. Two bodies now claim to be the "Presbyterian Church in the United States," a proof of the insufficiency of the system, either for maintaining what its supporters hold to be truth, or preserving union among men of kindred principles. Two different companies claim to be the "Synod of the Associate Presbyterian Church," each deeming the other an usurper. The same may be said of the Covenanters or "Reformed Presbyterian Church." One body has declared the other schismatical, and has pronounced solemn sentence of deposition on its ministers. The Associate Reformed Presbyterians are so far divided, that their Synods do not meet for united deliberation, but constitute essentially separate churches. The Methodist Episcopal Church has not only known secessions at various times, but has been rent in twain within a few years. If no such thing has occurred to the Protestant Episcopal Church, any one familiar with its history and the debates of some of its Conventions, may be certain that it is not because it has "one mind and one heart," that this sect holds together.

The history of the past, proves that human device is inadequate for the regulation of denominations. It has not accomplished its end, but has caused dissensions which have divided good men, without hope of reconciliation; and by lawsuits, and book and newspaper controversies, has done serious injury to the interests of true religion.

Owing to the fact that assemblies of Baptists have no power over the congregations, they have peace. In their counsels there has been sometimes great diversity of opinion; but there has been no power and no desire, with those who have found themselves in opposition to each other, to enforce uniformity. In the deliberative bodies of other denominations, when artifice succeeds in carrying approval of a favorite scheme, it generally takes the shape of an enactment, to which all must submit, if their principles are maintained; but among Baptists strategy is useless, for there is no power to enforce any thing. That proposal or resolve which does not commend itself to the mind of a free people, never can be executed.

To the vision of those having little knowledge of the moral phenomena of the Baptist world, a difference of opinion in its assemblies betokens fearful results; but those acquainted with the operation of their simple economy always wait for the end

without disquietude. Nor do they err. The heavy clouds, in which others perceive such gloomy portents, speedily fall asunder and dissolve from view, while the old and familiar sky assumes its former appearance, and, as before, the pinnacles of their Zion are radiant with the splendors of a cloudless sun.

## CHAPTER V.

### PIETY.

ONE object which demands great regard, is the “edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”—Eph. iv. 12, 13. If such is the will of our Lord concerning his people, it is evident that the individual greatly errs, who allows himself to think or act as if all had been gained, when he became the subject of regenerating grace. His spiritual life is to be progressive. He is called to form a character in which shall be manifest the power and beauty of holiness.

According to a law of our nature, *association* has great influence on character; “Evil communications corrupt good manners,” while we find, that when attracted to others by virtuous qualities, their company tends to our own moral improvement. So is it with a church. A body consisting of money loving, proud, and prayerless men, can have



no such influence for good, as one of which piety is evidently a predominant characteristic. So much space has already been devoted to the exhibition of the requirements Baptist Churches present to candidates for their fellowship, that it is almost needless to remark, that in seeking evidences, which may permit them to regard all as the "children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus;" they have the best guaranty possible in a sinful world, for securing a society which shall be beneficial to personal religion. Genuine Christianity has its counterfeits, and these oftentimes bearing such correct resemblance to the original, that they are not always detected. With every precaution the church is permitted to use, the designing and the mistaken may sometimes be received to fellowship. Yet when a church, from a sense of regard to the will and honor of the Lord, endeavors to keep itself palpably distinct and separate from the world, and uses care and vigilance to guard itself from the entrance of those who would tarnish its character; it may be expected, in accordance with ordinary manifestations, that wisdom will be vouchsafed to its members to guide them in judgment.

*Correct views of Scripture truth* are essential to piety, and these will only be permanently maintained in churches, where scriptural qualifications

are demanded for membership. Piety and truth hold the closest relation. The truth gives birth to piety (1 Peter, i. 23,) and piety, like a true child, is to uphold truth. The Church is called the "pillar and ground of truth," but experience has given decisive proof, that this character is only maintained when vital piety exists in its membership. Wide aberrations from evangelical principles, have almost uniformly occurred in connection with loose principles of church fellowship; and as a consequence, but little evidence of spiritual life has been found. Wherever a knowledge of catechisms, and assent to human standards have been acknowledged as a sufficient title for membership, soul destroying heresies have entered. Calvin supposed that in his own Geneva, he had laid a strong and firm foundation for orthodoxy; yet those church edifices, where it was fondly hoped that the Gospel would be preached to the end of time, have long been devoted to the promulgation of Socinian errors. The preaching of faith in Christ, as God manifest in the flesh, would sound strangely to those who frequent the edifice, where of old, the Reformer proclaimed the truth. So uncommon had evangelical religion become, that in 1849, a French religious journal announced with regard to Geneva, "An Evangelical Free Church

is *at last* formed in this city." In England, the older Presbyterian Churches are in the hands of Unitarians. While in Ireland, there are whole Presbyteries, holding and propagating Socinianism. All these churches in the beginning, were placed on an orthodox basis, but owing to the requirement of little more than intellectual assent, they presented no barrier to error and spiritual declension.

The fearful defections from truth of Congregationalists in New England, it is well known, was owing to the practice of admitting members on the basis of the "Half-way Covenant." The Romanising tendencies which have manifested themselves in the German Reformed Church, have sprung up under a system which only demands acquaintance with catechisms, and profession of assent to standards of doctrine. The circumstances under which heresies have originated and spread, prove that intellectual acquiescence is but a poor substitute for a change of heart. Those who have come to a saving acquaintance with Christ, will not readily deny, disbelieve, or subvert saving verities, for in them is their hope. It is not so with members received without any tokens of saintship. They lack that inward experience which lends the most powerful aid for detecting and avoiding error. Possessing no love for the Gospel, they are not

concerned for its honor, and are filled with surprise when more spiritual professors are valiant for the truth. In the words of an eminent writer, such persons “shrink from realizing, even to themselves, the full extent and actual tendency of their aberrations and peculiarities; and cling, with a sort of desperate tenacity, to the familiar formulas and expressions of a sound scriptural creed; with the sort of infatuation with which one struggling in the river’s treacherous calm, above the rapids, might convulsively grasp some land mark as he is drifted past, fancying himself thereupon to be stationary and safe, while he is only carrying the sign post he has embraced, along with him into the perilous and eddying navigation of the torrent.” \* It is then in the stern maintenance of conversion as the ground work of membership, that there is the best reason to hope, that the Church relationship will foster piety.

In common with others, Baptists regard the *Christian ministry* as holding an important relation to the sanctification of the Church. \* Their principle of church membership is not forgotten, with regard to those who contemplate entering the sacred office. Consequently, they do not encourage young men to pursue studies with a view to the

\* Candlish.

pulpit, whom they have reason to believe are destitute of a well grounded hope of an interest in those truths the ministry is appointed to proclaim. They do not undervalue education in the ministry. On the contrary, they consider that "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed," must have good acquirements. The desire of the denomination for an educated ministry is manifest, by its sacrifices in founding and endowing collegiate and theological institutions. Nevertheless, they encourage none to prosecute study with the object of preaching, who do not give evidence of spiritual life. Pursuing this course, they may be expected to have a ministry spiritual in character, and profitable to souls. They are likely to be able ministers of the New Testament who have "received mercy." Those who first gave themselves to the Lord, will give themselves to study with a nobler, and more successful ambition, than those who only contemplate the ministry as a respectable profession. And who can present truth, in a manner which shall so well promote spiritual life, as he who for himself, lives a life of faith upon the Son of God? Whose ministry is likely to promote piety, as that of one

" Whose doctrine and whose life  
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof  
That he is honest in the sacred cause?"

But it may be asked, whether the ministers of Baptist Churches have the appropriate official qualifications for the edifying of the saints. They make no pretension to the "Apostolical succession" which some others profess; for no claim can be put forth for the ministry of a Christian church which is so untenable. An unbroken ministerial succession from the Apostles none can prove. To this fact, we have the candid testimony of Archbishop Whately; and another prelate of the English Church has remarked, that if such a succession could be deduced, it must be from the "most corrupt and abominable papal sources." Even Archbishop Lawd, when in controversy with Romanists, found it necessary to maintain, that the "succession which the Fathers meant, is not tied to place or person, but to the verity of doctrine."\*

As the doctrine of Apostolical succession is commonly presented, a standard of judgment of ministerial claims is advocated, which the Scriptures not only do not authorize but condemn. The faith of a minister, his blamelessness of life, and his gifts for converting and edifying men are not mat-

\* "Relation of the Conference between William Lawd, now Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, and Mr. Fisher, the Jesuit."—Quoted in Lectures of the Church of England Young Men's Society, 1851.

ters of inquiry. If a prelate's hand has been laid upon the head of any individual, and a prelate's voice has addressed him "Receive the Holy Ghost," his credentials as a minister of Christ are to be held indisputable!

Along with the profession of apostolical succession, error has been prolific, and immorality rife. The churches in which it is now claimed, that the ministry has descent from the Apostles, are not distinguished for the superiority of their spiritual guides. Where has falsehood been more bold, strategy more diabolical, or profligacy more common, than in the so called Apostolic Church of Rome? Where can we find superstitions more absurd and degrading than in the Greek Church? Or where has there ever been among Protestants, a system more distinguished for its greed of wealth, the pride and ostentation of its bishops, merchandise of souls, and ignorant and neglected flocks than in connection with the Church of England? With regard to those by whom this claim is put forth in this country, it can not be proved, that in the religious life which "adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour," in deadness to the world and heavenliness of mind and pursuit; that either the ministry which professes to have the "Succession," or the flocks who have the advantages of being under

their spiritual culture, present a more edifying example than those in other communions. Such a "succession" is therefore not essential to make men able ministers of the New Testament.

In addition to public preaching, the *devotional exercises* of the sanctuary, among Baptists it is believed, tend to edification. In common, with the generality of Protestant denominations, they have no settled forms of prayer. In their devotions there is nothing stereotyped. Much has been said in favor of prescribed forms. Episcopalians see peculiar beauty and attractions in the Liturgy of the Church of England, and to their view, those denominations are greatly wanting in the means of edification, who rely upon the lead of a minister who has no book for his guidance. It is not to be forgotten however, that with all the excellencies of the Prayer Book, there are important topics on which it is silent. Evils of fearful magnitude, for whose destruction Christian men should pray, and agencies of good, such for instance, as Sunday School instruction, Bible and Missionary organizations; objects which are dear to the hearts of the disciples of our Lord, are not only unspecified, but entirely overlooked. With the constant repetition of prayer in the same phraseology, the influence most to be sought may not be found, and



though uttered with great apparent heartiness, the action may be mechanical. It is certain, that with a service which admits of scarcely any change, and no additions by the minister who officiates, that many petitions and thanksgivings which circumstances could suggest, can not be offered. In such a case, devotion cannot have that freeness of exercise which is desirable.

The observance of Christian *ordinances* in Baptist Churches tends to promote spiritual life. The adaptation of symbolical ordinances to minister to the well-being of souls, is universally admitted by those accustomed to their use. But to accomplish this object, they must be kept in a scriptural manner. The impressiveness of a ceremonial is not sufficient authority for its observance. It may have this character, and yet be destructive to souls. A Scriptural presentation of symbols, is alone authorized or useful. Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, are the ordinances which our Lord has appointed for the observance of his disciples. The propriety of immersion as the external act in Baptism we have already shown, and we may therefore now rather consider it in its spiritual import. The act of Baptism is a most solemn profession. It is said, that a late distinguished statesman, when asked what he considered the most important

thought that ever occupied his mind, replied—“The most important thought that ever occupied my mind, was that of my individual responsibility to God.” It may be affirmed, that nothing so clearly expresses this “individual responsibility” as Baptism. Baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the believer acknowledges the Sacred Three who are officially connected with the salvation of souls, and professes his belief that he is reconciled to God by the blood of his Son, as applied by the Spirit. By this act he makes an intelligent and life long consecration of himself to the Triune God; he swears unto the Lord that he will keep his righteous judgments; professes that he has come into solemn and endearing relationship to the Saviour, that henceforth he will honor, imitate and obey Him, and testifies his readiness and desire to submit to the guidance and influences of the Holy Spirit.

The *completeness* of the Christian’s dedication is beautifully exhibited in the observance, according to primitive usage. There is a significancy in the act by which a believer is buried in baptism, which cannot belong to any other service, however solemn and devotional its observance. Burial testifies of death. He who is baptized is thereby declared to be dead. The world may no more expect him to

share its pursuits or heed its words. He has entered into new relations. He is separated from an "untoward generation." He belongs to the company of the "saved." The whole man, body soul and spirit, being submitted to baptism, evidences the entireness of the surrender he makes to the Lord. No reservation by which he can serve sin is admissible.\* As Christ died for his sins and was buried in the grave, so the believer buried with him in the water, testifies that he dies with him to the sin which caused his death, that he may no more serve sin. He is raised from the water, and his resurrection is the pledge, that he will walk in "newness of life." In this act likewise, he expresses his faith and hope. He is buried now with Christ, being planted in the likeness of his death, and he has the assurance that dying to the love and practice of sin, he shall be eventually raised in the likeness of his resurrection. As by Baptism, he puts on Christ he has the hope, that bearing his image on the earth, he shall wear that

\* When it was the usage to immerse infants in Scotland and in Ireland, a remarkable practice seems to have prevailed in some districts. *Campion*, in his "History of Ireland," (1633,) says: "In some corners of the land they used a sinful superstition, leaving the right arm of their infant males unchristened, (as they termed it,) to the end that it might give a more ungracious and deadly blow."

image in heaven. His body may be planted in the grave, but to him the baptismal resurrection is but the earnest of one more glorious, when he shall be enfranchised with a better existence—holy and joyous and immortal.

Baptism when observed scripturally conduces to good, because it takes place at the *right time*. An individual when made the subject of a saving change, is impressed with the duty of personal consecration to Christ. What means, so suitable, can he find for his avowal of this purpose, as that which baptism presents? It is a scriptural manifestation of discipleship. “As many of you as have been baptized unto Christ, have put on Christ.—Gal. iii. 27. Here is an act attributed to the baptized themselves. None could suppose that Christ could be put on independently of the intelligent action of those baptized; yet this is the course which many pursue, and the expectation is cherished, that those who unconsciously have been declared baptized, will recognize the transaction as their own. Such are taught that if the deed is not abjured, it remains in force, and binds them to corresponding duties. It is argued, that those who have been pronounced baptized in infancy, are no more free from the obligation of Baptism performed, when they could not know its import, than from

the obligations which come with life or reason. Even a child can perceive the fallaciousness of this defence. The life and reason which a man possesses comes from God, who has a right to do what He will, and exact what services He chooses. But to make a man responsible for a baptism, so called, it must be proved that God has imposed it. The consciousness of an individual testifies that he has life and reason, but it says nothing of baptism, and therefore he cannot feel any responsibility. A dedication, of which a man knows nothing, can not exert so salutary an influence as the solemn service in which, as a believer, he makes for himself his penitential, humble and confiding surrender to the Redeemer. "A thousand checks to sin and a thousand aids to godliness are that day assumed. Faith, hope and love are likely to be confirmed. Henceforth more bold in Christ's service and more decided in principle, he is likely to be more useful in the world; and in after life, how often must this deliberate act of self-dedication to God recur to his thoughts, to repel temptation and to strengthen every holy principle within him."\* If, then, symbolical observances are of use to nurture the spiritual life, nowhere are they so appropriate to this end as with administration.

\* Noel.

A Scriptural baptism is likely to prove profitable to those *already* in the church. The observances which other denominations call baptism have little tendency to produce good effects on the mind. The baptisms of infants have no likeness to those which prevailed in apostolic times. There is neither the faith or voluntariness of the candidate of primitive days, nor is there the "rejoicing" which was common to those who then received the sacred rite. Let any one see the ceremony of the so-called baptism of infants in the Roman Catholic church, and endeavor to discover, if he can, any thing which can minister to piety. Here is a late description of the service:—

"When a child is to be baptized, the persons who bring it, wait for the priest at the door of the church, who comes thither in his surplice and purple stole, attended by *his* clerks. He begins by questioning the godfathers whether they promise, in the child's name, to live and die in the true catholic and apostolic faith, and what name they would give the child. Then follows an exhortation to the sponsors, after which the priest, calling the child by its name, asks it as follows: "*What dost thou demand of the Church?*" The godfather answers, "*eternal life.*" The priest goes on: If you are desirous of obtaining eternal life, keep God's commandments; thou shalt love the Lord thy God, &c.

After which he breathes three times in the child's face, saying, "Come out of this child thou unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Ghost." This said, he makes the sign of the cross on the child's forehead and breast, saying, "*Receive the sign of the cross on thy forehead and in thy heart.*" Then taking off his cap, he repeats a short prayer, and laying his hand gently on the child's head, he repeats a second prayer; which ended, he blesses some salt, and, putting a *little of it* into the child's mouth, pronounces these words: "*Receive the salt of wisdom.*" All this is performed at the church door. The priest with the sponsors coming into the church and advancing towards the font, repeats the Apostle's creed and the Lord's prayer. Being come to the font, he exorcises the evil spirit again, and taking a little of *his own spittle*, with the thumb of his right hand, rubs it on the child's ears and nostrils, repeating, as he touches the right ear, the word "Ephphatha, be thou opened." Lastly they pull off the child's swaddling clothes, or strip it below the shoulders, during which the priest prepares the oil, &c. The sponsors then hold the child directly over the font, observing to turn it due east and west; whereupon the priest asks the child *whether he renounces the devil and all his works*, and the godfather having answered in the affirmative, the priest anoints the child between the shoulders in the form of a cross. Then taking some of the consecrated water, he pours part of it thrice on the child's head, at each perfusion calling on

one of the persons of the Holy Trinity. The ceremony concludes with an exhortation."

Let the reader go to those churches, where this observance for infants may be considered to have the most protestant face possible, and it seems an unmeaning mummery. Dr. Chalmers' Memoirs furnish an instance. Describing such a dedication in which he officiated, he says: "It was a very awkward affair—one vivacious boy was kicking, and sprawling, and laughing during the whole of my address." When the water was applied he writes, "The child, Alexander Robert—thought I was playing with it, and got up a great guffaw of a laugh, as the waters flowed down its cheeks."

Well might a traveller, as he contemplated one of the ancient baptismal fonts of Egypt remark, on the scenes "where the squalling imp often distracts the attention of the congregation, and is finally sprinkled instead of being immersed; the whole ceremony having been so much altered and pared down from its original symbolic form, that, were a Christian of the early ages to return upon the earth, he would be unable to recognize its meaning." \*

\* Hon. Robert Curzon. "Visit to Monasteries in the Levant."



Turning from such presentations of the initiatory rite of the disciples of Christ, let the reader contemplate the voluntary and intelligent baptism of a believer in Jesus. We believe that it is not the too partial vision of those whose church-life has been accustomed to its observance, which perceives in it peculiar appropriateness, and, by the powerful aid of the senses, carries a sanctifying impression to the soul. Even Christians who do not follow the practice have often confessed the deep solemnity its administration has wrought. This observance of the institution of the Lord has beauty and force even for the irreligious. It is impressive any where. The place of its administration may be a river,

“O’ercanopied by wild woods, fringed with rock,  
Where Nature’s sternest scenery darkly frowns,”

Or, an emblematic tomb may be found within an edifice devoted to worship. The administrator may not claim that there is any peculiar virtue either in himself or the water; the candidate may have neither riches nor honor; but wherever any one is found

“To be baptized as Jesus was,  
And buried with his Lord,”

the ordinance vindicates itself, and constrains the spectator to serious and earnest thought. To be-

lievers it brings to remembrance important seasons in the history of their souls. It tells them of the period when they avouched Christ to be their Leader and Commander. It reminds them of the entireness of the surrender they once professed. It shows those who tend to the world how decidedly they have professed to separate from it. It may even so convict them of past unfaithfulness as to lead them to a more deep sense of their obligations. Darkness must indeed have happened unto Israel, when baptism fails to impress and edify. All who realize the significant facts it symbolizes, must recognize the importance of living as men risen with Christ. And what institution should tend more to endurance in the Christian life, than an ordinance which, in proclaiming the doctrine of the Resurrection of the dead, testifies to believers of the approach of the period which shall perfect their salvation and felicity.

The observance of the *Lord's supper*, as maintained in Baptist churches, ministers to piety. The design of this ordinance, as presented in the New Testament, is to bring vividly to mind the mission, sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The simple elements, bread and wine, are to afford a lively representation of the body, in which the sins of those who believe were borne, and the blood

by which they are removed. It is an ordinance which belongs especially to Christians in their incorporated state. It was "received" by the Apostles from the Lord Jesus, and by them "delivered" to the churches they founded, and is to be observed when all can come together. 1 Cor. xi. 20. Its observance gives to the membership the opportunity of recognizing each other as members of one body, incorporated on principles of agreement.

Baptists regard this institution as a means of grace, but they in no way share the sentiments of those who regard it as an observance which, under any administration, can, by itself, take away sins or impart spiritual life. That it is highly beneficial to the promotion of the Christian life, is not denied; but it is only when the hearts of its recipients are changed by the Holy Spirit, that it can tend to quicken the affections, invigorate faith, and deepen spirituality. The power to do this is not inherent in the elements. "The whole of their design and benefit as to themselves, is to remind us of Christ, and their efficiency for this purpose is the work of Divine grace. They are nothing, however duly administered, apart from the mind of the receiver. They are truth in emblem, and as truth alone, thus presented to us, they do us any good: the Gospel is truth in significant words,

and the sacraments, as they are called, are truth in significant emblems.”

This Scriptural view of the ordinance, it is true, strips it of much of the attraction with which it is invested, under the administration of those who profess that Christ is mystically present in or with the elements employed ; but that view of the ordinance, which teaches us that its efficacy is to be found in the souls of those who partake, and that a right state of the affections and purpose of the soul is necessary, to cause the reception of the elements to promote the comfort, stability and strength of Christians, tends to remove them from vain confidences—to build themselves on a sure foundation. Such a view of the ordinance, as Mr. James remarks, “ may be too plain and simple for those who wish to exalt the ministry into a priesthood ; and it may be too intelligible and low for those persons who have a love for the mystic and the marvellous ; whose piety is rather a thing of the imagination than of the judgment, heart and conscience ; and who are more pleased with the alternate awe and ecstasy of superstition than with the intelligible and tranquil peace of simple faith. But for the spiritually minded Christian, who walks by faith, and desires to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,

its simplicity is, next to its Scriptural authority, its highest commendation."

The Lord's supper belongs especially to the Lord's day. The early disciples, Dr. Chalmers remarks, observed this ordinance on this day, "that when its touching symbols reminded them how Christ had died, the day on which they made use of those symbols should put the comfortable suggestion into their hearts, that rather He is risen again." To primitive Christians, the day which commemorated the Lord's resurrection had, from this observance, the peculiar title of the "day of bread."\* Greatly do they detract from the expressiveness of this sacrament, who, in their tenacity for sabbaths, forget the commemorative privileges which attach to the first day of the week.

With regard to the frequency of this observance, there are conflicting opinions among Christians, who alike delight to meet at the table of the Lord. In those communions where it only recurs two or three times in a year, it gives birth to a process of "preparation," which has too much of the character of the spasmodic in piety. The churches of the Baptist denomination have generally endeavored to avoid the evils which there is no doubt are engendered by a very occasional observance, and in

\* "Dies panis." Bingham.

whatever measure, the frequent recurrence of its observance tends to spiritual good, a Christian joining himself to a Baptist church is assured of as frequent opportunities of coming to the Lord's table, as in any of the denominations which generally prevail in our land.

“As oft” as this ordinance is observed in a scriptural manner, and with scriptural requisites in those who partake, it tends to promote piety. It leads the believer to contemplate his suffering Lord by the inlet of the senses;—the most ready means of a clear conception of the transactions of Calvary. Those who see in the bread and wine the emblems of the great fact which our Lord designed them to represent, and who remember His words, “This do in remembrance of me,” will find in the institution the most affecting motives to holiness of heart and life. If contrition, love, obedience, meekness and fortitude are elements of piety, there is no observance so likely to call them into exercise. And when we bear in mind that this observance connects the two advents of our Lord—the first with a body for sacrifice, and the second to receive to himself from quick and dead the glorious church which He has redeemed, it must be fitted for salutary results.

To some, the course pursued in the observance

of this ordinance in Baptist churches appears open to objection. It is alleged that it tends to foster an unamiable *sectarianism*. If this were true it would greatly hinder its benefits. Much has been written against a practice which maintains primitive views of church ordinances. Many, we are told, would be found in Baptist churches, if "close communion" did not prevail. Those who believe that, as a denomination, Baptists care greatly for the number of their adherents, must be convinced, that if their regulations keep many excellent persons without, their churches must have given considerable attention to a subject so disastrous to their increase, and can only perpetuate it because they think it imperative. In the practice of scriptural principles of communion at the Lord's table, Baptists act on the same grounds with the churches of other denominations. A Methodist writer observes,\* "The Baptists, in passing the sweeping sentence of disfranchisement upon all other Christian churches, have only acted upon a principle held in common with all other Christian churches, viz. : that baptism is essential to church membership, . . . they admit only those whom they deem baptized persons to the communion table. Of course, they must be their own judges as to what

\* Hibbard. Christian Baptism.

baptism is. *It is evident that, according to our views of baptism, we can admit them to our communion; but with their views of baptism, it is equally evident, they can never reciprocate the courtesy. And 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; i. e., it is determined by valid baptism."*

In the winter of 1852, a minister, seeking to gather a religious society in New York, which should make as little account of baptism, in relation to participation in the privileges of their fellowship, as the Society of Friends, delivered a course of printed lectures on this subject, presenting the arguments commonly employed by English open communionists. The Independent, a well known Congregational paper, in remarking on the controversy he sought to introduce, thus gave its opinion:

"To the question, 'Whom shall we admit to the Lord's table?'—the close-communion Baptists give precisely the same answer with the great body of those Presbyterians and Congregationalists who are so prone to reproach them with their close communion. Ask any professor in a Presbyterian theological seminary, Old School or



New School—ask any professor in the theological seminaries of New England, whether an unbaptized person may be admitted to communion; and what answer will you get? Put the same question to either of the General Assemblies, or to any General Association; and what answer will you get? Ask who shall be the judge when a candidate presents himself for communion, in whose case it is doubtful whether he has been really baptized? The Presbyterian tells you that the session must judge, with an appeal to the higher courts. The Congregationalist tells you that the church must judge. And certainly, if baptism as well as faith is an indispensable condition of church-membership, there is the same right to judge of the reality of the baptism, that there is to judge of the reality of the faith.”

The requirement of baptism is sanctioned by the usage, not only of all denominations in our country, but by Scripture. There are a few individuals in the land, who claim that the Lord's supper was instituted before Christian baptism, and that therefore unbaptized persons may be admitted to the table. But it is evident, even if the baptisms of John could be denuded of a Christian character, that seeing the disciples of Jesus baptized with his presence and sanction, (John iii. 23 : iv. 12,) that they must be hardly pushed for arguments who will deny that it was *Christian* baptism. These persons admit the

binding obligation of baptism; and it is difficult to conceive how they can agree with the Baptist churches of our land, in denying the validity of any act as baptism, which is not the immersion of a believer, and yet receive an individual to full church privileges, whom they have reason to believe never will submit to this ordinance, according to, what they regard, the clearly revealed will of the Saviour. Where can they find authority for countenancing the individual in a life-long neglect of obedience to a law of Christ? Have they a right to sanction his error, even if he is sincere in holding it? Or, are they justified in being partakers of another man's sin?

The position of Baptists on the question of communion in the Lord's supper, is readily disposed of with a candid mind. Those who occupy a foremost rank among Pedo-baptists, admit that the "language of Scripture regarding baptism, implies the spiritual act of faith in the recipients," and that "Baptism appears in the New Testament avowedly as the rite whereby *converts* were incorporated into the Christian society."\* There is, therefore, no bigotry in holding that only believers ought to be baptized; and, when it is held that immersion is necessary to the external act of baptism, abundant

\* North British Review

sanction can be presented from the highest classical authorities. The action of Baptists in relation to communion in the Lord's supper, is not meant or understood by them as invidious to the piety of the members of other churches. They simply act on the principle that, for the privileges of a Christian home, a man must present compliance with the outward requirements which the Lord makes. A foreigner can have the privileges of citizenship in the United States, but he must declare his intentions according to certain forms. It is not enough that he fulfils the terms of residence required, and is in his own mind resolved to give up his allegiance to all foreign powers; he must comply with the provisions of the statute for his case. The judge, in refusing an applicant who has not done this, does not thereby declare the person unfit for citizenship, but he gives his decision by the law. So is it with the church. Its course is to be directed by the New Testament. When no law or precedent can be adduced for receiving unbaptized persons to the Table, it must not admit them.

It is also evident that there needs to be some consonance of views. In the case of a Pedeo-baptist who desires ecclesiastical privileges in a Baptist Church, it is clear that between the church and the individual the agreement requisite to real action

and unreserved fellowship is wanting. The visible profession of Christianity which the one makes, the other rejects. And in many cases, each hold principles which the other would, on no account endorse. The church, while admitting the Christian character of the individual, does not exclude him from any privilege, in which he can unite with it on its own principles and usages. But when it respects the table of the Lord, he holds views relative to the pre-requisites to communion very opposite to those of the church. Satisfied of his integrity of principle, what shall that church do? Shall it take an action which seems to say that its distinctive principles are of little importance? It can hold no *material* communion with him. No! Such a course would stultify its testimony against practices which it believes opposed to scriptural teaching, and which, it farther believes, regard for the honor of its Lord and the purity of His churches forbid it to sanction. It may justly say, in the words of a Congregationalist, "We receive you heartily to all our *spiritual* privileges and sympathies; we admit you, in all that is *spiritual*, to a full brotherhood; we recognize your conscientiousness, and confess the possible misapprehension of ours; but in ecclesiastical things, you must stand aloof from us; if there be no church of your order near to you, you

must be contented to be ecclesiastically disfranchised, and to hold only spiritual communion with us.”

The *participation of members* in the regulation of their church fellowship, gives to a Baptist church very decided advantages for the promotion of piety. When applicants come before the church, to testify of the reason of the hope that is in them, detailing their convictions, their sorrows, their struggles, their victory, their faith, those who are already in the church have presented to them a means of personal examination. These occasions afford every member an opportunity to test his personal religion by the experience of others; and if not the subject of spiritual renewal, he must learn that others possess that of which he is destitute. In the same way, when the exclusion of a member becomes necessary, it is scarcely possible for any individual to avoid consideration as to his own claim to church privileges. In these things no small benefit accrues to piety.

With regard to the exclusion of a member from church fellowship—and fearful as the contemplation of such an event is, who can say that he shall not, at some time, occupy this sad position—the principle on which such an act takes place in a Baptist church, is adapted to the spiritual good of an

offender. He cannot say that "It is only the minister," or "It is a session composed of a few members," whom he may deem prejudiced against him, and whose act of censure calls up bitter animosities; but it is the deed of the church. It is because the punishment is "inflicted of many," that it has power. This, more than any thing else, shall give him sorrow, and cause him to seek restoration to his former privileges. The sinning member, having been "cut off" by their own act, the church must have a sense of responsibility concerning him. They cannot, if consistent believers themselves, forget to remember him in their prayers, or ever cease their efforts for his recovery to a consistent Christian life.

*Social meetings*, for spiritual ends, which are common in the Baptist denomination, are an useful agency for the culture of piety. These meetings bear various names in different parts of our land, sometimes having the prefix of "Conference," "Fellowship," or "Covenant." Whatever their name, they often afford a hallowed circle of acquaintance and spiritual profit. These assemblies admit of a free expression concerning the trials, hopes and desires of Christian life, that they who fear the Lord may speak, one to another, without restraint. Here there is full opportunity for be-

lievers to comfort themselves together and edify one another. The most advanced Christians can give each other a word of cheerful encouragement, and the young disciple, hearing the testimony and experience of those who have long been in the school of Christ, may gather important lessons. When such assemblies are frequent, and conducted with proper care, their influence on the piety of a membership is marked and gratifying. They will often find in such meetings the truthfulness of the homely remark of Dr. Ryland, "When a pump is dry, a pail of water thrown into it will fetch it again. If your soul is in a dry, cold frame, get a lively Christian to tell you his experience; the fire will probably catch from his heart to yours."

It is not denied that, in other communions there are admirable appliances for piety; yet, in no section of the body of Christ on earth is there so much which manifests the inseparableness of piety and church relationship, nor better agencies for its promotion, than in the Baptist denomination.

Let it be especially borne in mind that Baptist churches are under no regulation, which so bind them, that they cannot admit any and every instrumentality calculated to advance their spiritual good.

But, joining any church, active and hearty cooperation of the individual is necessary, if the re-

lation promotes piety. A Christian may expect too much from the union, and forget himself to use diligence and watchfulness. "The church," it has been well said, "can do nothing for him mechanically; it has no spiritual prerogatives—no mysterious influences; no corporate franchise to bestow upon him, as an effect of his mere outward membership. It has no rites to perform over him—no charms to mutter. Neither the church, nor the minister, nor the worship, nor the ordinances, can do any thing for a man, save exert a moral influence upon him. It can only help him in his own efforts after the divine life; it can only be a blessing to him through his own activity. In the church or out of it, every man must be his own priest, and come for himself directly to God. The church is only a means to help him. The prayer must be his own, although the church may inspire its fervor. The faith must be his own, although the church may encourage and strengthen it. The effort must be his own, although the church may stimulate and instruct it. And the holiness must be his own, although the church may incite and nurture it."



## CHAPTER VI.

### USEFULNESS.

THE subject of Divine grace is to be ready for every good word and work. It is the duty of the believer to subserve the spiritual interests of his fellow members. Writing to the church at Corinth, the Apostle inquires—"How is it, then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." Extraordinary gifts hath vanished away. The unknown tongue is no more heard. But there are gifts yet in the churches, which are to be exercised for edification, and exhortation, and comfort. In nearly every apostolic epistle, we find passages which enforce this obligation. In addressing the Christians at Rome, Paul writes: "Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another," Rom. 14, 19. Writing to the church at Corinth concerning their assemblies, he says: "Ye may all prophesy, one by one, that all may learn and all may be comforted." 1 Cor. xiv.

31. Again, when he writes concerning the church, he beautifully presents its relations for mutual advancement in spiritual things : “ The whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, *maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*” Eph. iv. 16. And in enforcing this duty, he writes : “ Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” (19.)

It is evident, that the obligations of Christians to seek each other's edification, still remains. Is there provision for the exercise of these mutual duties in the churches of our times? With an *Episcopal* administration, the free religious assemblies which such offices demand would be altogether uncanonical. While the people are called to join in the services, it is in parts prepared for them, and they can make no variation from the contents of the Prayer book. The Apostles suffered not a woman to speak in the churches; but they who claim to hold “succession” from them, place every man under a like restriction who has not been admitted to the ministry. None are permitted to speak, save in the words which the church supplies.

Among Presbyterians, although meetings may be held which would admit of such exercises, yet there is reason to believe that the fear of an infringement of the apostolic rule of decency and order, prevents general freedom in such engagements, and gives to their assemblies a chilling coldness. In Methodist churches, these things are matters of routine, tending, doubtless, to piety, but bearing, especially in the case of class meetings, too much of a compulsory character. Services admitting of mutual edification are common in Baptist churches; but while there is liberty and encouragement for every one to edify his brethren, no constraint is placed on any to fulfil this duty.

These apostolic engagements of the brethren, though not a distinctive denominational feature in the United States, are especially remarked concerning Baptists on the continent of Europe. A correspondent of a religious periodical,\* writing from Prussia, remarks: "The only really free churches we have are Baptists. Without belonging to them, I highly esteem and love them, as the only representatives of religious liberty, and as the only associations where the spiritual gifts of *laymen* are cultivated." There is a reason why Baptist churches have this characteristic. They admit of

\* London Christian Times.

nothing priestly in the ministry. Wherever a ministry assumes any thing of sacerdotal power, deep sleep as to personal duties rests upon the people; and when any token of active effort in the membership for each other's progress is manifest, earnest endeavors are made for the repression of such unauthorized proceedings.

Not only are Christians called to personal effort for each other's spiritual welfare, but it rests on them to make known to others the salvation of Christ. The "Great Commission," as it is generally called, was not delivered to Apostles alone. "From the Pentecost it is clear, that the grant was not made to the twelve Apostles, or to them and the seventy exclusively, for the number of the names together were about one hundred and twenty and not eighty-two." Acts i. 15. Moreover, "as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become sons of God, even to as many as believed in His name." John i. 12, 13. Jesus unites these, without excepting any part of His kingdom and operations upon earth, with those who should hereafter believe on Him through their word. John xvii. 20. At Pentecost, also, to all that were under conviction it is said: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, upon the name [authority] of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and

you shall receive the Holy Ghost, for the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts ii. 38. It is clear, therefore, that every believer that has been baptized into Christ, and every convert when baptized, had, with all the other believers in Christ, a share in the responsibility and work of this commission. The association of believers was commissioned, as forming one body, to proclaim with all its voices the joyful tidings of salvation through the mercy of Heaven. This was their Gospel of the kingdom, and to qualify the whole body for this work, the Holy Spirit was made to dwell in the midst of it."\* Well, then, does the writer from whom we quote remark: "God's believing people are his missionaries, and His Church is His missionary Society. The proclamation of His mercy is its business and privilege." Primitive believers, it is evident, regarded it as a privilege and obligation to make known the truth. The scattered members of the church at Jerusalem engaged in active efforts. After Paul and Barnabas had preached at Antioch, in Pisidia, "the Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region," doubtless by those converted under their labors. So, from the church at Thessalonica,

\* Stovel.

was the Word of the Lord "sounded out." The evidences may be found of active effort, not of ministers only but of whole churches.

Faulty must that ecclesiastical organization be, which does not tend to develop a missionary character in its members wherever their personal influence extends. The sense of individual responsibility is liable to be impaired by association, but there are churches which, instead of guarding against this, seem to think that the healthiness of a church is evidenced by the lack of activity in its membership. The clergy are regarded as having a succession from the Apostles, and consequently to constitute the only ambassadors to a rebellious world. Members under such auspices may, perhaps, venture to teach the young in a Sabbath-school, but they would fear to offer a prayer beside the dying. They can, without sense of wrong, teach the ignorant in the words of a catechism, but they would think it presumption to reason with them out of the Scriptures. They may invite the careless to "the church," but they would feel unauthorized to direct them to the Cross!

There are those who regard the Congregational system which Baptists adopt as very inadequate for *church extension*. It is often urged that, as each church is separate in its organization, there is

no authority by which they can be brought into united and general effort to extend the Gospel. That there is no *earthly* "authority" for this end is gladly admitted, but this does not necessarily imply that they do not regard the higher Authority, whose command is, "Go ye unto all the world, and preach the Gospel." The independency of churches does not prevent their junction in benevolence. Co-operation is possible, and while spirituality exists in the churches, the love of Christ will constrain them to join their endeavors. If the presence of Christ is possessed, churches, though separate in government, must form one living body, which, for effectiveness, can have no superior. When they cease to feel these beneficent influences their activity ceases. In the felicitous language of Dr. Williams, "Soon as the Spirit is grieved and goes forth, our polity is such, that the process of ecclesiastical disintegration at once commences. When the breath or earthly spirit goes out of a man, his body rots, and the members fall apart. When the fruit becomes decayed, its skin no longer holds the pulp, but it loses shape, and solidity, and cohesion. So is it in what we deem the polity of New Testament churches. As long as they remain spiritual and prayerful, our churches, with Christ in their hearts and Christ in their assemblies, have

on our system energy, and elasticity, and boundless enterprise, and yet perfect union. But when piety dies, the unity and power disappear, as they ought of right to do; for unity without piety makes the church a curse to the world. Other systems hold the ecclesiastical continuity and organization unbroken when the spirit and inward life has vanished. They galvanize the corpse of a Christian church into ghastly and murderous activity, after the breath of Divine life has quitted it."

While it is urged that the church is the agency for the world's evangelization, it is forgotten by those who insist most strongly on this fact, that their own action is inconsistent with their application of the term. With a geographical church, they have to use the same instrumentalities that the local church employs. Here we may again employ the instructive arguments of Dr. Williams: "Even those religious communions of our own day, who have held most tenaciously the doctrines that we repudiate, of a great, *visible* and earthly church, and that this visible church is the only competent missionary organization, have, we believe, found very little success in the attempt to reduce their own missionary theory into practice. Their ecclesiastical communion they cannot succeed in making into an efficient missionary organization. The most



efficient missionary institutions of Rome herself, perfect as is her ecclesiastical machinery, are not, in our own age at least, ecclesiastical organizations, but voluntary societies—the Lyons Society in France and the Leopold Foundation in Austria, appealing, each of them, to individual contributors, and receiving each what it may be able to solicit, not what it can assess and levy, from the nations.” The evangelical denominations in our own country repudiating church independency, have generally specific organizations for missionary purposes. The fact that they adopt the system of “Boards” and “Committees” for missions, proves that they have not the desideratum, for the want of which they censure their neighbors who adopt a congregational platform.

The past history of the denomination makes it evident, that Baptist churches have the true elements of progress. According to carefully prepared statistics, the denomination doubles its numbers in every twenty years. The number of its membership has been as follows at successive periods:—

|       |          |       |           |
|-------|----------|-------|-----------|
| 1792— | 70,017.  | 1832— | 384,859.  |
| 1812— | 189,345. | 1852— | 770,839.* |

\* American Baptist Register, 1853.

The machinery of Baptist churches may be ill fitted for advancement to the view of the members of other communions ; but facts prove that they have equal power with any to “overtake” the mass of population destitute of the Gospel. At the same time, it is the honor of Baptists to have been first in the organization of our modern missions for the heathen. In labors, none have been more abundant, nor have any done so much in effecting translations of the Scriptures.

These things we would not adduce to gratify denominational partiality, but it is well to show the disciple who desires to serve his generation, that he can find abundant facilities in connection with a Baptist church. Here, as elsewhere, fragments of power can be gathered up, and made to forward important ends for the honor of Christ. Nothing need be lost to the world, and Christian zeal is employed in extending exclusively Scriptural principles.

## CHAPTER VII.

### INFLUENCE.

INFLUENCE is a solemn, moral intrustment. Among Christians the importance of its right application is never disputed. The great evil is, that few give the effect of their own conduct a proper recognition; and therefore they allow themselves to follow courses which otherwise they would take with the greatest hesitation. Yet nothing is more certain than that every man exerts an influence, and that the influence of Christians is especially extensive and abiding. As each wave of the ocean receives somewhat of its form from that which preceded it, so each generation of Christian men is in a great measure fashioned by the course and conduct of those whom they follow. If important truths have been treated by those who have gone before them as of little account, they are likely to fall into the same error, and bequeath a like evil tendency to their successors. And to whatever extent, lack of attention to these truths tends to mar the beauty and power of Christ's Kingdom, they will

aid in perpetuating the deformity and weakness. If, on the contrary, they follow those who have been valiant for the truth, we may expect them to breathe the same lofty spirit.

“A false system,” Vinet wisely remarks, “must reckon among its accomplices all who spare it by their silence.” The Christian who unites with a denomination expresses, by this act, his adhesion to its principles; and, however erroneous any of them may be, he gives them the aid of his influence, and is an accomplice in their maintenance and diffusion. Some examination is certainly proper on the part of a believer, lest when his influence could be employed in upholding views of doctrine, church constitution and ordinances exclusively Scriptural, he should place himself in a position, in which his support may be given to opinions and practices which the Word of God does not sanction.

The Christian who unites with any Protestant Evangelical Church, gives his influence against many forms of error, and in favor of much positive truth; but with no desire to depreciate the services of other denominations in the defence and extension of Christianity, it may be shown that union with a Baptist church gives room for the employment of influence, in important particulars, for the honor of God and the best interests of souls, which can-

not be obtained in connection with other ecclesiastical bodies.

Erroneous representations of the *nature* of a Church of Christ, are frequently made, against which Christian influence ought to be employed. Many regard systems and organizations as the Church which in nearly all things are different from the New Testament idea. A number of persons who have attained official station in religion, associating together, have taken to themselves the name of the Church, and the people have been taught that to obey their injunctions is to "hear the Church," to have their services is to enjoy the mediation of the Church, to use the forms of worship they enjoin, and to receive the sacraments from their hands, affords the best assurance of being in a state of salvation. As a consequence of such views, the clergy of some sects have impressed the people with the belief, that to neglect their teachings or take that of others, not of their company, no matter how Scriptural their doctrine or holy their lives, is to contract the guilt of schism, which these wily ecclesiastics would persuade men, brings to its unhappy subjects a condemnation, heavier than does the commission of any of those offences which are explicitly pre-

sented in Scripture, as excluding men from the Kingdom of Heaven.

In preaching, it is easy to draw attractive pictures of what "the Church" does for her members, and their obligation to her for the provision she makes for their good, but all such ideas are the rantings of Romish superstition, and the purpose they serve is the exaltation of the Church of fallible, weak and powerless men, to eclipse the Cross of a Divine and Omnipotent Saviour. Men calling themselves "priests" may stand from Sabbath to Sabbath

"With patient hand retouching in the heart"

such pictures of the Church, but though their artistic skill causes her to assume

"A certain gracefulness

And pomp extern, which gives to her commands  
Authority,"

they lead their hearers to build on another foundation than that which Holy Scripture presents. According to the New Testament no church on earth has the functions of authority, mediation or salvation which such men assume. To employ influence therefore to oppose their arrogant claims and soul-deceiving doctrines, is highly important both from regard to the honor it renders, the wis-

dom and will of the Church's Head, and the bondage and delusion from which it serves to emancipate souls. The Baptist view which divests the Church of its territorial aspect, and presents each local body of Christians as a Church, and the baptized members of Christ, irrespective of ministers, as constituting it, lends the best aid for destroying the pretentious ideal of priestly arrogance.

It is common with some, to assure individuals that great and everlasting good will accrue to them if they *belong* to the Church. The language employed by Romanists, and even by some who bear the name of Protestants would lead men to believe that the mere fact of being acknowledged members of the Church, renders salvation certain. An ecclesiastical system, therefore, which brings most fully to view the relation of character to Church privileges is of great importance. Those persons who lead men to rely on the external privileges of Church relationship teach them that irrespective of a new birth unto righteousness, and without any visible spirituality, they may hope for heaven. It is no trivial opportunity of good which a Christian casts away, when he refuses to place himself where his influence can be employed to avert so terrible an infatuation from a single soul.

The *precautions* which Baptists are accustomed

to employ to prevent the introduction of such as can not in the judgment of charity be addressed as believers or saints, ought to have the countenance and support of all Christians from the tendency of such a practice to preserve persons from self-deception concerning their condition in the sight of God. The perilous consequences of the opposite course are sometimes known here, and how many cases will the Judgment of the Great Day bring to light! Many will at last say, "Lord, Lord open unto us," who must have the fearful repulse, "Verily I say unto you I know you not." In a recent periodical of the American Home Missionary Society, the following instance is given of the workings of the system which makes no investigation of candidates for Church fellowship as to the ground of their religious hopes:—

"One young lady united with us at our last communion, who has been an active disciple since her conversion last winter. She astonished us, at her examination, by saying that she professed religion *seven years ago* at the East, a few weeks before coming to live here. She had been religiously brought up, and being naturally of a grave disposition, her friends injudiciously urged her to apply for admission to the church. She says she had no apprehension that any thing more was



needed than an outward compliance with religious forms, and that she was received *without examination!* so that her pernicious error was not discovered.”

Without affirming that none who enter Baptist churches are destitute of piety, and with a belief that every *member* ought to bring himself to the closest personal scrutiny, lest he should find himself among those whose christianity is only in name, yet we may declare that with the inquiry made in Baptist churches, few such cases of self-deception can occur.

In respect to the *ordinances* of the Christian dispensation, the influence of a Christian in a Baptist church is of the most desirable character. There is little doubt that an erroneous view of the sacraments always has been and continues to be the most extensive means of misleading souls. This is especially true of baptism. The only true corrective is, that which Baptists have sought to maintain for ages, and which they are permitted to see advancing toward universal acknowledgment. The initiatory rite of the disciples of Christ, must be rescued from the improper uses to which it is now devoted by so many, and be restored to its appropriate place, as the solemn act of the individual believer testifying of his consecration, faith and

hope. Disingenuous opponents of the denomination, have frequently represented, that the chief thing for which Baptists are remarkable is immersion. Thus, Dr. Murray in a recent work in opposition to Romanism, among an enumeration of ideas of the visible Church says, "Others would confine the visible Church to those who enter it through *the ordinance* of baptism by immersion."\* Statements of this character are far from giving a correct view of the ideas which prevail among Baptists. The controversy between them and other denominations would continue, if immersion was henceforth universally observed. Immersion is the practice of the Greek Church, yet Baptist missionaries protest against infant baptism, with that communion as strongly as with those with whom sprinkling prevails.

The great cause of difference between them and others is, that they repudiate the notion by which, on the faith of others, unregenerate persons can be admitted to the church; contending that none have

\* Kirwan's "Romanism at Home, Letters to the Honorable Roger B. Taney." Perhaps it is not surprising that Doctor Murray gives this defective representation of the views which Baptists hold, when we consider that his early days were spent in the Church of Rome, which has always pursued this course against them.

a right to membership without evidence of piety, and that these can only rightly enter into church relationship by their own act.

Among all Pedeo-baptists, ideas are attached to baptism, which give it an importance which is subversive of the Gospel. If we turn to the Book of Common Prayer, the dogma of baptismal regeneration is enwoven throughout its service for the "baptism of infants." In writings most highly esteemed by many of the Episcopal communion, we find it unequivocally inculcated. Take a few sentences from Bishop Mants' Catechism :—

"Persons are said to be regenerate, or born again, only once.

Q. "And when do you say that is ?

A. "*When they are made Christians at their baptism.*

Q. "Does the church teach her members to pray for the grace of regeneration at any other time ?

A. "*By no means.*

Q. "Do you think this grace, which is given to persons at their baptism, a great blessing ?

A. "Certainly I do, and I heartily thank God, through Jesus Christ, that He has let me partake of that sacrament."

In grave treatises it is maintained, that "we are justified by Christ alone, in that He has purchased

the gift—by faith alone, in that faith asks for it—by baptism alone, for *baptism conveys it*.\*

In religious novels, we find the same pernicious views inculcated. In a novel of this class, of which Puseyism has been so prolific, edited by a clergyman of the Church of England, and republished here, the following paragraph may be found describing a so-called baptism :—

“ He then took him in his arms, sprinkled him with water, and marked on his forehead the sign of the cross ; and giving him back to his nurse, he declared him to be one of the society, or set of persons, who form what is called the church, and to whom God has promised His Kingdom. From that moment, continued Miss Harwood, your brother was made a Christian and an heir of glory such as we cannot imagine ; *The sins of his original evil nature were forgiven him, and a new spirit was planted in him.*” †

Nor are there wanting those who would take all consolation from the bereaved, if their dead have not received this ceremony. No matter what the piety of a man may have been, American Episcopacy refuses the use of her burial service for any unbaptized adult ; while its English prototype refuses it to all, whether adults or infants, who have not been baptized.

\* Oxford Tracts for the Times. † Amy Herbert, p. 28.

In the Articles of the Episcopal church, it is declared that "They that receive baptism rightly, are by it, as by an instrument, grafted into the church." And a recent Catechism on these Articles, published by a prominent Episcopal society, presents the following query among others concerning baptism: "Why do infants need to be grafted into the church? Because out of it there is no promise of salvation."\* Hence it is evidently held, that baptism engrafts infants into a church which has "promise of salvation," and that its omission leaves them, according to the common phraseology, to the "uncovenanted mercies" of God. The salvation of infants is thus represented to depend entirely on their having received baptism.†

\* Catechism on the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church. By the Rev. James Beaven, D. D. New-York. General Protestant Episcopal School Union. 1853.

† How strongly it is insisted, in some parts of the world, that baptism is essential to an infant's salvation, the following stanzas, circulated by an English Episcopal clergyman make evident. The piece, in all, has six verses, and bears the title of "A Baptist Mother's Lament for her Burnt Child, A True Tale:"—

"My little child is burnt to death,  
 Oh agony of woe!  
 He shrieked away his dying breath,  
 With burning on his brow.

Many persons holding the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, disclaim such a construction of the term as would make them answerable for the idea of regeneration, as commonly prevalent. Sir H. J. Fust, in giving judgment in a case, in which the English Bishop of Exeter refused to admit a minister to a living, because he did not come up to his views on the efficacy of baptism, stated that "it appeared to him that regeneration, as expressed in the baptismal service, did not imply such a total change of character as would almost amount to justification, and from which the person so regenerated could never fall; but it meant a change of

I saw him die—he called in vain  
*' Oh mother, quench the flame !*  
*Oh mother, mother ! ease my pain !*  
*My soul is burning with my frame !*

" I saw, with pain, the pastor's grief,  
 He loved my child full well ;  
 He argued for his soul's relief,  
 Forewarned of what befel.  
 I heeded not—I told him then,  
 (So much my child I prized,)  
 I'd rather die before all men,  
 Than have my child baptized.

" Oh, could I tell that he would cry,  
 ' My soul burns with my frame,'  
 I would not, could not, then deny  
 Christ's baptism was his claim."

relation, putting the party in a new situation, in which he was made 'a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.'"

What more any man needs than these three benefits, a humble student of the Bible would find it difficult to say. The endeavor is also made to draw a discriminating line between "regeneration" and "renewal;" but those who make this distinction give the Lord's supper great prominence as the instrumentality of renewal. The life given at the font is to be renewed at the altar. In the words of the Oxford divines, the Sacraments are "the instruments of inward life, according to the Lord's declaration—that baptism is a new birth, and that in the Eucharist we eat the living bread." These representations are clearly provable without foundation; nevertheless they are imbibed by many, to their everlasting overthrow. Who that desires to have a conscience void of offence, would dare to signify, by any act of his, an approbation of doctrines so pernicious? The Christian's duty concerning a teacher of false doctrine is set forth by an Apostle:—"Receive him not into your house; neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." 2 John, 10, 11. He who would not have this condemnation must be careful not to countenance perversions of evangelical truth.

It is only with Baptists that a believer can offer a consistent and thorough opposition to the erroneous estimate of external rites. None who adhere to infant baptism can give a clear definition of its nature and benefits. It is held by Presbyterians that "baptism is a sign and seal of engrafting into Christ, of remission of sins by His blood, and regeneration by His Spirit." The Articles of the Methodist Episcopal Church state, that "Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth." The members of these communions repudiate the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, yet these definitions, and the common plea that those who receive baptism are thereby brought into the privileges of the covenant of grace, force the conviction that they believe a mysterious and important efficacy attaches to this rite. With regard to the Methodist Episcopal Church, this is abundantly evident, if the "Doctrinal Tracts," issued from its press, are to be received as authority. In these tracts Mr. Wesley says: "The church declares, in the rubric, that it is certain, by God's word, that children who are *baptized*, dying before they commit actual sin, are saved." And furthermore he asserts, "If infants



are guilty of original sin, then they are proper subjects of baptism, seeing, in the ordinary way, *they cannot be saved* unless this be washed away in baptism." Here is the consolation which those who receive John Wesley's teaching as authority, may have over the dead bodies of unbaptized children.

The attempt to impress on the parents the supposed importance of infant baptism must, wherever successful, tend to superstition. The disquietude of many parents, when their children are drawing nigh unto death, if this practice has not been observed, evidences its hold upon their minds. It is to be presumed that ministers are not altogether free from it. Instances are not uncommon in which they administer baptism to dying babes. Testimony from those favorable to this practice confirm our opinion of its evil tendencies. A Presbyterian divine, writing of the "Lamentable Ignorance" which prevails, respecting "Infant Baptism," observes, "By some, the baptizing of infants seems to be regarded as an ecclesiastical ceremony, which is needful for sanctioning a name to the child; while others conceive and speak of it, as if it possessed some mysterious virtue for making young Christians. Such notions are not confined to the most illiterate persons of the visible Church. They have been promulgated by the advocates of

baptismal regeneration, and their influence has been extensively felt, even within the pale of the Presbyterian churches!" Let the reader also mark the testimony of an Episcopal clergyman in Delaware. "It is a melancholy fact, that many professors of faith in Christ, appear to build their hopes of future happiness, on the fact of having been admitted to the Church by baptism, at the period of their infancy, and thus delude themselves with the idea that they possess every title to the promises, and to every Christian privilege the Church has power to bestow."

These testimonies from individuals who favor and practice infant baptism show, that its observance detracts from the spirituality of religion. A consistent, whole-hearted protest against such perversions of Gospel institutions, may expose Baptist churches to much censure, but any Christian properly impressed with the delusion which infant sprinkling originates and fosters, would rather be taunted with "Close communion," long as he remains on the earth, than give it the remotest sanction. As Baptists do not administer baptism to regenerate, or knowingly baptize the *unregenerate*, and as their church order keeps them from implying any approbation of the practice, it is with them alone, a Christian can successfully exert his influ-

ence, against those uses of baptism, by which it is perverted from the design of its institution to the peril of immortal souls.

Those who endeavor to show that Baptists make too much of baptism, it is evident in the light of these facts, are most open to the charge. They who give to an outward rite such mysterious efficacy that a child cannot be allowed to enter the world without the application of water in the name of the Trinity, and who fear to have it die until it has received this, so called baptism, certainly attach more importance to it than they who only administer it to voluntary subjects, at their own request, and when they are believed to be the subjects of Divine grace. The very fact that Baptists give to religion a spiritual, rather than a sacramental character, makes them obnoxious to opponents. Thus in Germany a recent tourist remarks: "It is as denying the saving efficacy of sacraments, that the Baptists constitute in this region a religious body, at once, hard to be understood, and greatly to be feared. \* \* \* Even the evangelical ministers of the Lutheran Church, who acknowledge the piety of the Baptists, yet dread their increase, and publicly speak of them as the greatest enemies which the Church, that is, the ecclesiastical system has to encounter."

Many considerations might be presented, to show the propriety and importance of the course Baptists adopt. It is of importance with regard to the *spiritual interests* of our countrymen. To the most enlightened community, a spiritual church is essential to a proper conception of Christianity. The faithful preaching of the Truth needs to be enforced on the conscience, by its faithful exhibition in the lives of those who profess to be under its influence. If, while it is maintained that piety should characterize the membership of Christian churches, it is also declared, that persons belong to the church who are not known to be believers in Christ at all; but whose only title is that of being born of Christian parents, and made to undergo the outward ceremonial, we cannot give to the world a clear impression of the spirituality of religion. A right position with respect to the church and sacraments is especially of importance, when we consider the vast *immigration* of persons from countries of Europe, where false and mischievous views on these subjects prevail. National churches cause many who come hither to have a deep abhorrence of religion. They have never known it in its purifying and elevating power. Their state churches have claimed a right in them from the cradle, and if they remained within their reach, would assert

that claim till they went down into the grave. The ministers whom they have been accustomed to know, are such only for emolument and honor, and their care of the people arises, not from a desire to benefit them in spiritual things, but to enrich themselves in temporalities. They have known them ever forward in proclaiming the most slavish notions, and in palliating the invasions of popular rights. At the best, the preaching of a state church is, in general, but bare morality, combined with an exaltation of the Sacraments, altogether inconsistent with the simple exhibition of the Cross. For membership it makes no spiritual requirement, and if a man does not impugn the authority or refuse the teaching of its ministers, it has no controversy with him, however far his life may lie from the line of true Christian morals. It is evident that the religion which such organizations produce, cannot claim identity with that of the Bible. "Their natural and genuine product," Edward Miall remarks, "is a species of religion corresponding in all its main features with its instrumental cause—a religion not of power but of profession—an uninquiring, unreasoning, passive, uninfluential assent to a dogma, which leaves the heart just what it was, and very partially modifies the practice—a religion which never penetrates the inner man—

which is summed up in a decent attention to ecclesiastical rites, and which, in the majority of instances, does not reach so far as that, but begins and ends in a name." Men, therefore, coming to the United States from these countries, have either so distorted a view of religion, that they believe themselves Christians on the most slender foundation, or they regard all religious institutions as engines of oppression. To reach such minds, it is necessary that religion be exhibited from beginning to end in its voluntary and spiritual aspects. He who baptizes an infant pleads for that on which all state churches rests—a religion of compulsion and a religion of form. He declares an individual a member of the church, and under its authority without his consent; and so long as the prescribed outward observance has been fulfilled, all is done which he requires. Let the man who has seen religion, only as the poison which a state uses to lull and subdue men to its purposes, mark the voluntariness of Baptist churches, where none are baptized but on their own expressed desire, and which, as none are coerced into its membership, presents in every way a voluntary character: let him see a church, which has no ministers invested with power to send oppressive mandates to the several congregations, or enforce their decisions on

unwilling flocks ; and his reason cannot fail to perceive the difference of a true church from the spurious representatives, which have either seduced him to unthinking formalism, or driven him into scepticism and infidelity.

The Christian who unites with a Baptist Church gives his influence in support of principles, on which we can alone cherish the hope, that a *pure Christianity* can be manifested and perpetuated. Baptists pre-eminently acknowledge the authority of Scripture. While all evangelical denominations profess to receive the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice, there is in general a wide departure from the principle. Though it is argued, that Scripture is of the highest authority, yet there is a mode of dealing with it which does it the greatest injustice. While the Protestant Episcopal Church maintains, that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation," in general its ministers call their flocks to listen to the voice of tradition for an elucidation of its teaching. When the founder of Methodism desired to defend his views of Infant Baptism, he turned from Scripture to tradition. "The Church declares in the *rubric*, that it is certain that children who are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are saved." And on what he declares "plainly taught" in this

*rubric*, he builds up a solemn matter of faith. Presbyterians while holding the supremacy of the world, yet make their appeal, not to the plain teaching of that word, but to the inferences which they believe they can reasonably draw from it. Their favorite reference is the Old Testament. When Presbyterian church government is in question, its coincidence with Jewish institutions is generally the ground of defence. As New Testament proof of infant baptism is wanting, the appeal is to the circumcision of the Jews. Thus in an able paper to which we have before referred, while it is admitted that it is a "rite unknown to Scripture, and that it was probably unpracticed in the apostolic age," yet reason discovers its "legitimacy." "The precedent of circumcision, of itself alone, furnishes ample authority for the dedication of Christian infants to God, and their public incorporation into the Church of Christ." Here an usage is maintained, which is admitted, "unknown to Scripture," simply because it is believed, that it is supported by the deduction of human reason. The reason of a fallible man affords a supplement to inspiration and apostolic practice. The tendency of such a manner of dealing with sacred truth, can not be disguised. Once let a departure from the plain teaching of Scripture be sanctioned, with regard to



Christian doctrine, and there is no extent to which it may not be carried. It supplants what it should support. It turns institutions from their original import to be administered on principles which nullify the instructions of our Lord. It was stated in 1853, that the leading Romish periodicals in the United States, were edited by men who had belonged to Protestant communions. The transition of these persons to Romanism was only a natural sequence of the principle which regards usages, as proper and obligatory, for which no warrant can be found in Scripture. This opens the sluices of error, and it is no wonder that men receive the whole measure of so called "Catholic truth." An Oxford student, who had drank in the Church ideas of the Tractarians, truly expressed his difficulties in conversing with a Baptist concerning his Rome staid tendencies, when he exclaimed, "I must go to Rome, or come to you." A Baptist Church is more truly antipodal to the Romish communion than any other.

There is reason to believe that we are to know more of the virulence of papal controversy, and it becomes a Christian to occupy a position in which all his influence may be employed aright. The issue of the controversy gives little fear to those who love their Bibles. The remark has been

made, that the present "great words" and arrogant attempts of the Church of Rome, are "telling to the startled world, that the Ark of the Papacy is among the breakers," and it has been well observed, that in the "tremendous catastrophe," when this gigantic bark goes down, "our hope of escape is in keeping, as far as possible, from the foundering wreck." He who would follow this counsel must obey the great Baptist principle: "Touch not, taste not, handle not after the commandments and doctrines of men."

When we insist that Baptist principles are the great bulwarks of Evangelical religion, we are not making an empty assertion. History gives it a decisive confirmation. In the six centuries which preceded the consolidation of the Romish system, we have no difficulty in finding Baptist principles; and when Anti-Christ became "great in power," it was chiefly in the hearts of immersed believers that faith was found in the earth. A late eminent authoress, in a work intended to meet the fallacies of Romish and High Church writers, with regard to the perpetuity of the Church, endeavors to show that there has always been a church visible in the earth, apart from that of Rome.\* When she attempts to trace that church, it is "by

\* The Church Visible in all Ages. By Charlotte Elizabeth.

the stain of its martyrs' blood; by the light of its martyrs' fires." "The Paulicans," the "Cathari" or "Pavlikans," the "Albigenses" and the "Lollards" are exhibited as constituting a visible church during the ages of papal persecution. It is maintained that by these pure religion was kept alive. And who were they? If we make diligent examination, we find them condemned by all Popish writers for their repudiation of Romish doctrines. Nevertheless, the question arises, What denomination of this day did they most resemble? When we ask this question concerning the Paulicans, we find Mosheim saying, "It is evident they rejected the baptism of infants. They were not charged with any error concerning baptism." "They were," says Milner, "simply Scriptural in the use of the Sacraments: they disregarded relics and all the fashionable equipage of superstition; they knew no other mediator but the Lord Jesus Christ."\* If we ask of the Cathari? A document which Milner preserves in his history informs us: "They do not believe infant baptism to be a duty, alleging, that passage of the Gospel, 'Whosoever shall believe and be baptized shall be saved.'†

\* Milner's History of the Church of Christ. Cent. ix. Chap. 2.

† *Ibid.* Cent. 11. Chap. 3.

When we make inquiry concerning the ancient *Albigenses* or *Waldenses*, we find a variety of evidence which shows, that infant baptism had no place in their confessions of faith, and that they were obnoxious to their persecutors from the simplicity of their view of sacraments. With regard to the Lollards, there is evidence that they rejected infant baptism, believing it a needless ceremony.\* That in church government these early Christians maintained simple and Scriptural ideas of the church is easy of demonstration. It is therefore evident, that, by means of Baptists keeping the "way that some call heresy," pure Christianity was preserved in the earth; and by them alone could a Church of England writer trace "the church visible in all ages!" An English writer eloquently remarks: "Five hundred years before the Reformation, believers, baptized upon a profession of their faith, were witnesses for God, when darkness covered the so-called church, and gross darkness the people; their blood was the first shed in this land for the truth. The fifty thousand slaughtered saints, of the Valley of Piedmont, who kept the faith 'when all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,' and who yet cry against 'the church' from beneath the altar, were baptized believers,

\* London Encyclopedia.

upon whose general slaughter, night rested upon Europe. At the Reformation, and after the Reformation, baptized believers had to lay down their lives and to seal their testimony to the sole authority of Scripture, and the individual responsibility of man to God." Amid persecutions the most unsparing, and calumnies the most disheartening, God has kept Baptist churches in the earth; and when they have seemed, to the eye of a world lying in wickedness, unlikely to survive, they have spread abroad with a rapidity, and taken a hold which has filled opponents with wonder and dismay. Though death has passed upon churches, which were once full of the promise of spiritual life, they have existed and were never known more strong in an orthodox faith, or more earnest in seeking to extend the Gospel of Christ.

The extension of Baptist principles in the past, is to be ascribed to the inherent force of Divine truth. The Bible is still the only hope and best instrumentality for their successful propagation. One denomination cannot send forth its ministers, without seeing that they bear with them a "Prayer Book;" another would have all whom it commissions carry its "Confession" and "Catechisms;" and yet another places in the hands of its preachers a "Book of Doctrines and Discipline:" but those

who make the oracles of God their sole directory, can dispense with all aids of human invention. "A New Testament and a free country, will make Baptists any where."\*

Despotism and oppression have not prevented the progress of primitive principles. On the continent of Europe in late years, Baptists have increased in number daily, though exposed to incarceration, fines and banishment. In other lands, where, though free from persecution by the authority of legal enactment, they have encountered the scoff of the learned and the frown of the powerful, they have made sure progress. And the prospect before them is most exhilarating. The last half century has witnessed a remarkable approximation of Pedo-baptists to their principles. Their idea of the necessity of conversion for church membership is now popular in denominations in which it was once scorned. Dissatisfaction with infant baptism is widely spread and increasing. The ground on which it has been advocated is being abandoned. Its friends occupy their last defences, and, it is easy to perceive, are not very anxious to have their strength tested. The importance of more regard being paid to the will of the people, is felt in ecclesiastical organizations where clerical rule had been dominant. The Con-

gregational form of church government is better appreciated with Pedo-baptists. Churches are multiplying, who adopt this principle of organization. These things indicate movement in the right direction. It is evident that "Truth" is no longer "fallen in the street." She has arisen, and with the restless activities of this age, is making her way to the destruction of human institutions in religion; and though thousands, in their weakness, may do them homage, or, in their ignorance set themselves for their defence, their speedy overthrow is certain.

Rightly did Krummacher speak, when he uttered that sentence: "Ah, there's a future for Baptists." Their day of triumph is not yet—perhaps it is distant; but it will come. In common with others, in trying to meet the demands of the age, they may be tempted to forget the means by which the church is to be blessed and the world evangelized. Impressed with the changes which are occurring in all things, they may feel that it behooves them to have a more comely erection than the simple meeting-house in which their fathers worshipped, a ministry more marked for scholarly attainments than was common in former times, and choristers more skilled than have sometimes led the songs of Zion, and it is only as the Holy Spirit truly impresses them with the remembrance of the way in which God

hath led them to their present commanding position, they will be kept from reliance on human sources of power. But if that Divine Agent shall keep them firm in the belief, that the presence of Jesus, the faithful preaching of Gospel truth, the conversion of sinners, and the possession and exhibition of spiritual life, are the means and evidences of prosperity, they can know neither reflux nor delay in the tide of their progress.

God grant that the reader may have the charity, and humility, and holiness of a true Christian life, and that these may serve to give volume and power to the protest of Baptist churches against perversions of the ordinances our Lord has instituted, and infringements of the liberties He has bestowed.

THE END.





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