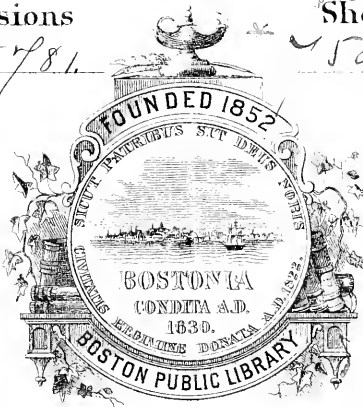


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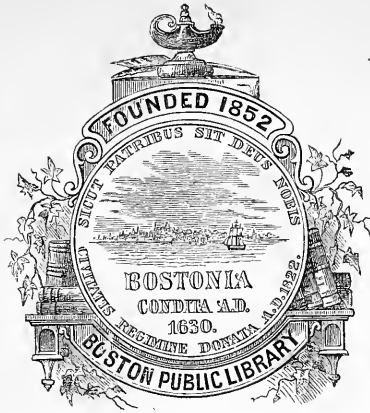
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THE PLACE OF BAPTISTS IN PROTESTANT CHRISTENDOM.

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

AT ITS NINTH ANNIVERSARY,

IN PROVIDENCE, R. I., MAY 30th, 1862,

BY

REV. GEORGE R. BLISS, D. D.,

PROF. OF LANGUAGES IN THE UNIVERSITY AT LEWISBURG, PA.

PHILADELPHIA :
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1862.

AN ADDRESS,

BY PROF. GEO. R. BLISS,

OF THE UNIVERSITY AT LEWISBURG, PA.

THE PLACE OF BAPTISTS IN PROTESTANT CHRISTEN- DOM.

The relation truly subsisting between our Baptist policy and the characteristic principle of Protestantism, is the theme to which I venture to call your attention at this time. A topic not so strictly suitable, perhaps, for the hearing of this society, as the one which I should have been glad to discuss had not Providence disturbed the leisure necessary for extended historical researches.

Yet I have named a subject not without intrinsic interest, as it seems to me, and worthy, if it were a proper occasion, of deliberate consideration. At a time when liveliest among all the agitations of Christendom, the battle of religious ideas is waging everywhere; when, in thoughtful minds, its turmoil ceases not even amid the uproar of that Titanic strife which racks our own convulsed land; when some of the dearest interests of humanity are involved in the struggle between

Scripture and tradition, between Christian and Church, between spiritual liberty and prescription, between the progress of God's kingdom in Church and State and a conservatism which is in truth retrogression, who can be content without ascertaining his own position in the mighty arena, and the responsibility which it infers? This we do summarily as Baptists, when we inquire after our exact relation to the principle of Protestantism which, since its introduction to the Christian world, has been the chief leaven of all the salutary fermentation of humanity.

It is not unlikely that to many that relation will appear so obvious as scarcely to require investigation. Even so, however, the practical bearings of it, its special proportion to our time and circumstances, might not be undeserving of thought. But how can the relation itself be palpable to most of us, when not only is the real nature of Protestantism in dispute among leading authorities, but when, also, some of them positively deny to us in any worthy sense a protestant character. When, for instance, so excellent a man as Dr. Philip Schaf, the able, learned, and pious professor at Mercersburg, Pa., expressly, in his book on Protestantism,* puts Baptists out of the circle of its proper exponents, among the "diseases" of Protestantism — allowing to "Anabaptism" with other "sects," only a partial and transient value, as indicative to the church (the true Protestant Church, whatever that may be) of some inconsistency or defect. Dr. Nevin and other writers — not to mention speakers — of the Mercersburg school, are still more exclusive; and, without stopping to point out other conspiring tendencies of antipathy to our policy, I would simply ask whether much which Baptists meet with at the hands of good men in various parts of the world, does not presume, for its justification, such a theory of our position. This I say not at all in the tone of deprecation or complaint, only let the principle of their opposition be distinctly seen and averred.

* "The Principle of Protestantism in relation to the present state of the Church." By PHILIP SCHAF, Ph. D. Translated from the German, with an Introduction, by JOHN W. NEVIN, D. D.

Indeed, many Baptists would, I suppose, just as vehemently repel the imputation of Protestantism (on the assumption of their prior and independent origin) as such churchly writers would forefend from them the honor. Yet not all of us, surely, would be willing to forego participation in the history, the achievements, the glory, or the responsibilities of the Protestant name. And this further illustrates the necessity of a careful investigation.

To determine, then, the relation between us and it, two courses are open to us. We may either examine critically the genetic principles of both members of the relation — the *comparanda*; or, we may notice the circumstances and order of their origin in historical fact. The former is the more satisfactory method, and we must, for want of time, now depend principally on that.

Here the chief difficulty will be to ascertain the very essence of Protestantism. How it was brought about is not doubtful. By what succession of experiences and deeds Martin Luther and others were conducted, early in the sixteenth century, from the gloom of Popish bondage to the light and liberty of evangelical truth, may be read in a thousand books. But this, although the precursor to Protestantism, and its actual occasion, was not Protestantism itself, and might, conceivably, have taken place without being followed by that particular result. Much confusion has originated, as I am obliged to think, from a habit of perplexing Protestantism with Reformation. Is not this an error of Dr. Schaf himself, who, after beginning, in the work before mentioned, to speak of the “principle of Protestantism,” proceeds to enucleate, as if it were the same thing, the “principle of the reformation”? This latter he correctly enough makes to be (in a two-fold aspect) *materially* the doctrine of free justification to the believing sinner before God for Christ’s sake, and *formally* the authority of the Scriptures as the source and measure of all saving truth. This is then tacitly assumed as an adequate description of Protestantism. Similar statements of its nature, equivalent in their purport and vitiated by the same fault, must be familiar to all. Indeed, such would, I suppose,

be quite generally accepted as *just definitions*, not of reformation, which they may be, but of Protestantism, which is really another thing. And as to any denominational consequences to follow, I see not why we should be suspicious of them more than others. But when we seek for the exact truth, this confounding of things which differ is not satisfactory, nor is it sustained by the teachings of the ablest recent writers of church history.*

Reformation may be thought of entirely apart from Protestantism. The former may be imagined to have gone on quietly and peaceably, its spirit to have been cherished, its doctrines to have been apprehended, its life to have been lived, as has been the case in many a devout heart throughout all ages. We may conceive it to have wrought like the leaven, in secret, or, if openly yet so gently, so patiently, so purely, that there should have been transformation at last without, at any time, a protest or a revolution. In short, the reformers *might* have proceeded as Protestant Churchmen think those among themselves desiring amendment ought to do, careful above all things that the body, called of Christ, should not be broken. But suppose them to prefer a different course. Suppose them unwilling, secretly or individually alone, to hold the great truth of gratuitous salvation through Christ, and of the autocracy of Scripture, and resolved on *publishing* their belief, exemplifying it in practice, and making it effective through organic association, through Church fellowship, in short; and suppose them to be met now by the assertion that however it might be with their particular truths, the power of the church was paramount, and that the church — the State too, if you please — forbade their procedure; then must they either yield, recant, suppress their cherished sentiments, and even obediently suffer the discipline of sacred mother church, or they must find a standing ground back of their primary and palpable doctrines, a first truth of church building, and *that* will be the principle of Protestantism.

Now to discover what that really is, it would seem to be a

* See, *e. g.*, Hase, History of the Christian Church, § 374, Am. Translation.

helpful thing to notice what the Reformers did in becoming Protestants. In their protest itself, which marks the transition, we should, reasonably, as D'Aubigne says we do, find "the principles that constitute the very essence of Protestantism."* What then do they here say? The occasion was, as will be remembered, when the second Diet of Speier, A. D. 1529, representing both Church and State, had decreed by a majority to qualify, not utterly abolish, the liberty, three years before conceded to each state, of administering religious affairs "as they might severally answer to God and their own conscience." Against this mere *toleration* of the reformed principles within the limits to which they had then spread, and within which they could not conveniently be suppressed, certain members of the Diet, unwilling to hamstring their new-found gospel, PROTESTED; and here is what, among other things, they say: "We protest and engage publicly before God and man, that our will, disposition, and meaning not otherwise stands nor is, than to seek only the honor of God Almighty, of his holy word, and the salvation also of our individual souls, and in this to do nothing else than what *our conscience* directs and teaches." Again: "We form no judgment on what concerns you, most dear lords, and are content to pray God daily, that he will bring us all to unity of faith in truth, charity, and holiness, through Jesus Christ, our throne of grace, and our only Mediator; but in what concerns ourselves, adhesion to your resolution . . . would be acting *against our conscience*, condemning a doctrine which we maintain to be Christian,"† etc. In "all dutiful and possible things" they profess cordial submissiveness to the emperor and the realm; "but these," say they, "are matters which pertain to and affect God's glory and the salvation of every one of our souls, in which, upon God's command, *for our conscience's sake*, we are pledged and bound, through baptism and otherwise, by his divine word, to regard him, our Lord and God, as King supreme and Lord of all lords." They

* History of the Reformation, Vol. IV. p. 69, Carter's Ed.

† This quotation is from D'Aubigne, Hist. of Ref., Vol. IV. p. 67.

reiterate "that in things concerning God's honor and the salvation of our souls, every one must stand and give account for himself before God, so that, in this matter, no one can excuse himself upon another's doing or decreeing more or less, and not be bound to act from other sound, well established reasons." They added, "we cannot, with *good conscience*, hold and fulfil the imperial edict in all points, since we could not at all answer for it before God to separate any one of high or low degree, by our joint resolution, from the doctrine which we, out of the evident intimation of God's eternal word, hold, undoubtingly, to be divine and Christian, and *against our own conscience* to force them under the edict in question." When advised to submit themselves, in the interpretation of Scripture, to the judgment of the "Church," they reply, that would answer well, if we were agreed what is the true, holy Christian Church. But since in regard to that there is not a little strife, and since there is no certain sermon or doctrine, but alone to abide by God's word, . . . and there to compare and explain one text of sacred Scripture by another, as also the same holy Scripture, in all points needful for the Christian man to know, is found in itself clean and pure to enlighten all darkness; we are minded with the gracious help of God to hold fast finally to this, that God's word alone, and the holy gospel in the Old and New Testaments contained, shall be preached purely and simply, and nothing contrary thereto; for on that as on the only truth and the right measure of all Christian doctrine and life can no man err or fail, and he who builds and abides thereon shall stand against all the gates of hell, while all human additions and vanity shall fall and not stand before God."*

* The above citations from the *Protestatio* of the Reformers at Speier (as incorporated and expanded in their *Instrumentum Appellationis*) are translated principally from the extracts given by Schenkel, in his article on Protestantism, in Herzog's theologische Real-Encyclopädie, Vol. XII. It was a matter of great surprise to me, considering the obvious importance of this document, to discover how rarely it is to be met with. Having searched in vain several considerable libraries, public and private, for the works commonly referred to, as containing it, I came unexpectedly on the contemporary German

There breathes the soul of Protestantism, whatever may have been the stages of experience by which the Reformers were brought to witness that good confession. Here they have taken ground, and manifestly the only ground on which they can maintain justification by faith, and whatever else they learn from God's Word, 'against prince, church, pope and devil. It is not any particular doctrine of their faith which here stands out. It is not even the sufficiency of Scripture for religious government and guidance, primarily, but that secondarily, and as complementary to the great cardinal principle of the right of conscience on which the whole system of Protestantism turns. THE SANCTITY OF THE CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE implying both its *inviolableness*, in religious concerns, before all earthly powers, civil or ecclesiastical, and its *obligation* to cherish and proclaim its convictions—that is the *primum mobile* of Protestantism.

In favor of this summary interpretation of the ever memorable protest of A. D. 1529, I might allege the authority of Dr. Merle,* at least against those who, like Dr. Schaf, relegate freedom of conscience to an inferior place in the scheme of Protestantism, of Hase† and others. But I refer with especial satisfaction to the support which I find in this view, the guidance, indeed, of Daniel Schenkel ‡ one of the most learned and ablest, as well as most pious and candid writers on the genius and fortunes of Protestantism. As I am indebted to his extracts for most of the quotations which I gave from the

translation of the Latin original in Walch's Edition of Luther's writings, where he gives matter pertaining to the second Diet of Speier. This I state as suggesting a query whether it is the oversight of the protest which has blinded many writers to the true character and relations of Protestantism, or a prejudice concerning the latter which has made it inconvenient to bring the protest too conspicuously into notice.

* Hist. of the Ref., Vol. IV., p. 69.

† History of the Christian Church, p. 338.

‡ For a brief sketch of this author see Dr. Schaf's Germany; its Universities Theology and Religion, p. 402. Two distinct works on the nature of Protestantism are ascribed to him, but I have seen only his article in the Real-Encyclopædie before referred to, which, as being his latest utterance, may be supposed to give his mature judgment in the matter.

Protest of the Reformers made the 19th of April, or their Appeal dated six days later, so I agree perfectly with him as to their significance. Schenkel's conclusion is, that "the deepest source of that protestation is the newly awakened consciousness of the *eternal rights of conscience*. Friends and foes," he says, "have indicated subjectivity as the most striking and characteristic feature of Protestantism. And it is indeed the right of the believing subject which opposes the objective institution, ecclesiastical and civil, and defends itself against it, when the latter with the form of law would control and limit faith Protestantism is therefore a great deed of Conscience. Its most general character is that of religion in the form of conscientious conviction, . . . in the form of freedom of conscience. That is its *formal* aspect. In whatever confession or church institution this freedom is not recognized, that is anti-protestant."

This principle, although plainly the only one on which there could ever be emancipation from the Romish hierarchy, is doubtless liable to abuse. It is abused whenever men destitute of the Christian spirit assume the guise and steal the terms of Protestantism, or when men of any character employ them in any other interest than to defend and to promote the whole truth of God. Protestantism is not mere protestation. It is the profession by the Christian soul of its untrammelled, simple, supreme devotion to that God whom the conscience recognizes, loves, adores.

Hence we may see the propriety and necessity of that other declaration, scarcely less prominent on the face of the great Protest, of absolute submission to the word of God. This might, at a superficial glance, seem inconsistent with the liberty which its authors primarily claim, a sort of *contradictio in adjecto*. But it is rather the necessary complement to that, an essential factor to the whole truth.

Christianly religious conscientiousness is, as we have seen, the *form* of Protestantism; but the *substance* of all vital religion is God in the soul.* In order to this God must

* See some thoughts in this and the following paragraph developed in an interesting way by Schenkel, as above quoted.

reveal himself to the soul. And since the Inspired Word comprehends, or presumes and supplements all other modes and results of divine revelation, *it* is the only full and sufficient apocalypse of God. Conscience, which is the eye of the soul towards divine things, accordingly hails God manifested in the Bible, and while brooking no other dictation, accepts these communications of Him as the very light of its life.

It has sometimes been represented that the Reformers, feeling the need of some solid fortress from which they could resist the attack of an infallible Papacy, luckily hit upon the dogma of the supremacy of Scripture—the Bible against the Church—the written Word against tradition. But I perceive no trace of contrivance or after-thought in their original declaration as Protestants. The imperial authority of Scripture is no dogma here ; it is a principle. It is not a principle distinct from and additional to that of freedom of conscience, so as to be restrictive of it ; but, as I before said, explicative rather, and necessary to fulfil it. It was as if they felt instinctively that there can be no genuine freedom except in absolute submission to the terms of created being. Conscience, as the soul's eye towards God and God's witness to the soul, is free, exists, indeed, only in Him ; that is, for this world, only in the most perfect manifestation which He has made of Himself to men ; that is, in the Sacred Scriptures. The two different aspects of the Protestant principle are, therefore, while standing towards each other *as* Protestant in the order above given, *only* aspects, the obverse and reverse of the same medal, opposite poles of one sphere, ends of a single chain, of which he who seizes the first is sure to draw the other after it. There is, there can be, no exclusive authority of the Bible where conscience is not free, and there is only the insanity of caprice, not freedom, where the Bible is rejected.

I would only add, before leaving this branch of my subject, that while I have found it convenient to dwell on the origin of Protestantism, as historically reported in Germany, and particularly as brought to light in its inaugural documents, the same view of its essence might be soundly established on other grounds, and in reference to any other country where it has ever arisen.

Now I am sure you would feel it a supererogatory task for me to attempt an elaborate proof that the fundamental principle of Protestantism is the fundamental principle of Baptist Christianity as such. Not only does every heart here leap up now to greet every word of that noble protestation which you have heard, adopting it as a principle, without reserve, qualification or addition, but we know that none holding our views in other respects ever could have failed to rejoice in such declarations. It would not, probably, make this conviction clearer to a single mind, if I were to show that every notable confession of a Baptist church or individual agrees in spirit with one of ancient time which happens to lie before me * and which calmly says that "Holy Scripture is the rule whereby saints, both in matters of faith and conversation, are to be regulated;" and, again, "that it is the will and mind of God (in these gospel times) that all men should have the free liberty of their own consciences, in matters of religion or worship, without the least oppression or persecution, as simply on that account." That noble specimen of soul liberty given by Roger Williams, here in Rhode Island, for ever honorable as the first open "shelter" on earth "for persons distressed of conscience," was only a symptom of the Baptist sentiment already prevailing, and might have been no marvel to the world, had Christians of that name been earlier in a position to determine the civil institutions of a land. Not clearer in our hearts, at this noon of the nineteenth century, shines the central axiom of every soul's right to worship and serve God untrammelled, than it shone to each Baptist confessor through the long night of persecution in centuries past.

To Roger Williams is rightly ascribed the glory of having first wrought out this principle *ad unguem*, and given definiteness as well as amplitude to the Baptist idea. But to *any* Baptist mind the only difficulty likely to have been felt with the original statement of the Protestants, would be on account of its want of breadth and completeness. It confines itself, formally, to the *Christian's* right of conscience, although the

* In Crosby's History of the Baptists, Vol. III., App. No. IV. p. 87. Lond. 1739.

universal franchise of the mind demonstrably lies latent in that; and while they nobly declare that their act was "not only in behalf of themselves, but also of their people, and of all who then or afterwards might believe in the word of God," we receive from it a shade of impression (perhaps wholly cast on it by their subsequent course) that they were indulging a sort of representative and legislative freedom of conscience to bind the people for whom they spoke. Still, they said all, if interpreted simply, which the case of the first Protestants required. The irresponsibility of conscience to any earthly tribunal was with them, as we may say, a happy instinct, aroused by their present exigency, but unaccounted for, and unheeded beyond that. With the Baptists it had not only been suggested by their like occasions, but long *thought out*, justified and followed through its bearings on the religious and civil interests of mankind. With the one it was, in short, and remained, a *principle* (alas! too soon forgotten); with the other, it had become a *doctrine* for the whole world.

So strictly is the generative principle of the Baptist polity identical with that of Protestantism that it is extremely doubtful whether, if the latter had been practically honored by the first reformers in different countries, the Baptists, as a distinct body in Christendom, would have ever been heard of. But those men, while asserting a truth which heralded a boundless development of divine knowledge and a perpetual amendment of ecclesiastical institutions, had no conscious aim further than to gain a defence for their momentary position. This accomplished, they immediately proceeded to establish themselves there for ever. Hase, representing the recent historians, says well, that so far were the first protestants from perceiving the true drift of their movement, "in the midst of the excitement of their internal and external conflicts of faith, that from the convent of Berg and the synod of Dordrecht, the Protestant Church appears only like a purified form of Catholicism. In various ways it practically represented itself as infallible, and even expressly claimed that there was no salvation out of itself."* Yet these churches, while professing

* Hist. of the Church, p. 438.

the spirituality of religion, the sanctity of church-membership, and the sole authority of the Bible, assumed to comprehend within themselves the whole people of their several countries, irrespective of age, character, or religious experience—a mass of ignorance and moral corruption which filled serious men even then with dismay, and made Luther, in particular, pronounce Germany worse than Sodom, mourning that he spoke the language. And when certain men, perceiving this inconsistency and iniquity, strove to reform the church-constitutions, or even to adapt their own practice more nearly to the acknowledged pattern of the New Testament, they were contemned, rebuked, persecuted, often slain, and every where sooner or later cast out. *Thus* arose the line of modern Baptists.*

Their divergence from the path of the first Protestant churches was, accordingly, not at all because of dissatisfaction with the originally avowed principles of the latter, but because they adhered too strictly to those principles in their application to Christian life and church polity. They perfectly agreed with all lovers of the gospel in regard to the justification of the sinner by faith alone through Christ. They might vary among themselves touching most of the distinc-

* This is not to deny the indisputable fact that there existed at different times during most of the Christian ages, among the so-called heretical sects, those who agreed in points more or less with Baptists now. But in judging whether they should be *called* Baptists (at times when all practised immersion) one ought to note precisely what distinguishes the regular Baptist among the various bodies now denying birthright church-membership. Otherwise he may be indanger of identifying us with "Christians," Campbellites, "Quakers," "Old School Baptists," and no man knows what, among the ancient sects.

At all events, I suppose that our existing Baptist organizations, so far as their origin is traceable, are pretty clearly due to conversions, in the way of a secondary Protestantism, from Romish or Pædobaptist principles. See, in illustration of this, a valuable article on Early Modern Baptists, in the January No. of the *Christ. Review* for 1862. I know not whether the research of our scholars has developed a single link of genealogical connection between our existing churches and the Anabaptists (for "Baptists," of course, there were nominally none) in Luther's time and earlier. And I am free to say that I consider curiosity in such "endless genealogies" so much in danger of misleading many in regard to the essentials of ecclesiastical legitimacy that even if a line of continuous derivation *could* be made out for us from the apostles, I had almost rather it *should* not.

tions between the Lutherans and the Reformed. They went beyond all these in maintaining, on Scriptural grounds, the independence of each Christian congregation, not only before the civil magistrate, but equally before any ecclesiastical power, the universal priesthood of believers, also, and the consequent impossibility of sacerdotal holiness or clerical preëminence in their eldership. As, however, several of these tenets were early shared also by the Independents, they can scarcely be named as characteristic of the Baptist system. Nor did the mode of the administration of baptism constitute at first so marked a peculiarity as since. This naturally occasioned less discussion when the apostolical and hereditary practice was still much in vogue—only obsolescent at the most. Indeed not all the better Anabaptists appear to have insisted on immersion, and many who did so, down even to our day, were not Baptists. But the real mark, the *differentia*, of modern Baptists among evangelical Christians was their steadfast denial of infant church-membership, or birth-right church-membership, on any account—demanding, rather, that evidence of that faith which all declared essential to Christianity should be afforded before the reception of Christian ordinances, or participation in church fellowship. This position they adopted, avowedly, because they were conscientiously shut up to it by the palpable requirements of God's word. And that *they* should, on this account, be compelled, against men, holding with the apostle that whatsoever in religion is not of faith is sin,* to cherish at the cost of fines, imprisonment, confiscation, exile, death in the most terrific forms, their belief of the invalidity of Christian ordinances to unbelieving subjects, is, after making all candid allowance, one of the most melancholy instances of the inconsistency and intolerance of poor human nature.

Let me call particular attention to the fact that in all this our predecessors broke with the other Reformers, not on grounds of doctrine, strictly so called, but of church constitution. Herein, also, appears their fidelity to the motives of

* See D'Aubigne, Vol. IV. rp. 71.

Protestantism. For although the Reformers meant it not so, what they were principally accomplishing was the demolition of that old church which, whatever had been its services to God's providence in other days, had now become the Bastile of captive souls. While directly concerned about great life-truths of morality and religion, they less clearly saw that it was more, much more, an ecclesiastical than a theological or doctrinal reformation which they had inaugurated. It was against the pretensions and practices of the church rather than the dogmas of the schools, that the old and precious article of gratuitous salvation had to be wrought out. But they saw this not, or saw it dimly. Unawares to themselves, their protestation at Speier was a death warrant, not only against the Papacy, but against every form of church such as they had the slightest idea of establishing. What possibility could there be of a state or a national church, an institute embracing the people of a country (to speak no longer of the world), and exercising control by any central authority over the faith, morality, discipline and liturgy of elementary congregations, when Christianity itself was a thing of free personal conviction, and nothing allowed to be obligatory but what was enjoined in the word of God.

It could not fail that in all Protestant communities, among the various puritanic tendencies sure to arise, some people should discover that the doctrine of justification by faith alone lies just as truly at the bottom of Scriptural church polity as of evangelical theology, and should demand that institutions and usages arrange themselves accordingly. Baptists did discover it, and it was not long before the magnates of Protestantism perceived that, to avoid an utter explosion of their nascent ecclesiastical systems, such as neither the apparent interest of powerful princes and states, nor, probably, the judgment of the Reformers themselves, would allow, they must rest these systems on new foundations, fortify them with additional assumptions, and guard them with a rigor more cruel than had defended the institution against which they rebelled. They were like the apprentice magician, who, after calling the water-sprite to his aid, was in danger

of being drowned in the blessing ; and having forgotten the disenchanting word, they thought only of violence. Then nothing was left for men of simpler views, but to protest. Baptists every where did protest. They also exhibited “ a great deed of conscience.” The fires of persecution through which they came forth, unextinguished by rivers of blood, still blaze for our brethren in Protestant Europe, and no where have the embers long ceased to glow.

So completely did the practice of Protestants belie the principle of their being, that it has almost been forgotten *as* their principle, and Roger Williams is often referred to as though the establishment of liberty of conscience had been theoretically as much his prerogative as it was in point of historical fact. No ancient pædobaptist confession which I have happened to meet with states this foundation principle. I have searched the “symbolical books” of the Lutherans in vain for even a clear implication of it. I do not think I should speak too strongly if I said that in such writings it is, in terms or by implication, often contradicted. But every Baptist creed either expressly declares or necessarily implies it as a first truth ; and I hope no general charge of practical inconsistency can be sustained against us.

And now we have come where it is possible to define the past and present position of our denomination in Protestant Christendom. To us it has been given in God’s providence to hold fast through much affliction the original principle of Protestantism when it was abandoned, and at some time persecuted, by Christians — papist and protestant alike — of every other name. We have *practically* signalized the supremacy of the Bible, by either rejecting all confessions and articles besides, or disallowing to them any authority, except for those who freely adopt them as consentaneous with the word of God. We have unflinchingly celebrated the sanctity of church membership by refusing it to any except those esteemed regenerate through the Holy Ghost. We have always held to the *autonomy* of each congregation under God, in appointing its officers, observing the ordinances, administering discipline, and doing whatever else a church of Christ

may scripturally do. And when otherwise, the true significance of Baptism might have been lost to the Christian world, we have steadfastly cherished Christ's own form of the rite which symbolizes not only the complete washing of the soul in regeneration, but the death to sin, the resurrection to holiness, the entrance on a new life, and heaven knows how much besides of vital truth. We have shown that these principles are compatible not only with the boundless spread but the unimpaired preservation of all the fundamental tenets of Protestant orthodoxy, and with an actual similarity of organization, doctrine, and usage throughout all our extended borders — a proper catholicity — affording most of the asserted benefits of church unity without its fetters and entanglements. We have seen these first principles of our profession triumphant over the flames, then cautiously approved by the foremost thinkers, statesmen, philanthropists, Christians of other communions, until now they seem almost in sight of recognition by all who truly wish Protestantism success. Outside of the Christian sphere, the Turks have measurably acknowledged the sacred rights of conscience, Siam also, and Madagascar, perhaps Japan, the Fiji Islands; and quite recently, out of pity, it may be, for the sacrifices of our own brethren, the genius of spiritual emancipation seems hovering over the Protestant churches of Scandinavia, and at last over the land of Luther himself. I am far, indeed, from supposing that we, as individuals of the present generation, have any ground of boasting over Christian brethren of other names. I admit that we have much to learn from them; but I think it due to the facts of our history to suggest whether, but for the leaven of Baptist sentiment and the light of Baptist example through these recent centuries, church and state would not still have remained fast married, and their brood of worldliness, hypocrisy, immorality, and persecution swarming thick in all Christian lands.

Are we not then Protestants, and fairly entitled to share in the glory of all that progress in the church, in the state, and in society, of which Protestantism is the symbol and the source? Why should our polity be classed among the “dis-

eases" of Protestantism? Only to Protestantism in a chill might the spirit in us seem to show a feverish forwardness. To those desiring to be somewhat less than Protestants, we may naturally appear somewhat more. For we are Protestants *of* the Protestants,—Protestants of the second or third power. *That* is our offence. "By protest on protestation," say some who too nearly confound Christianity with ecclesiasticism, "you destroy the unity of the church and rend the at body of Christ." But those who thus complain, allow the legitimacy of least two branches of Protestantism, vaguely denominated the Lutheran and the Reformed; and do not *they* divide the body? But what is of far more consequence is, that the same principle on which they justify their own existence, or that of either of them, justifies ours. Protestantism is a full warrant for conscientious adherence to Scriptural convictions, or it is nothing. And if difference of rites, ceremonies, or governments were damnable under such conditions (which the Augsburg Confession and the Apology rightly deny), then were the Reformation, or at least Protestantism, altogether condemned. Not only was Protestantism necessarily a division, but it was the perpetual bane of compulsory uniformity. Rothe, one of the profoundest of recent European theologians, ably maintains that the Reformation terminated forever the manifestation of Christianity to the world in the form of a church.* And I have no doubt that in the old, juristic sense of the word "Church," he is right. A church there could be never again after Rome was thrown down, but churches only, and *the* church without earthly organization, in whose glory apostles delighted, and a kingdom of God, not of this world. Nor does this doctrine rend the body of Christ. Every congregation is still supposed to possess the spirit of Christ, and to strive within itself after the realization of all that excellence which the apostles ascribe to the ideal church, enjoying meanwhile with others the fellowship of Christian labor and hope and comfort, each stimulat-

* For an interesting account of the man and of his ecclesiastical theory, see Schaf's Germany, &c., as before quoted.

ing the rest by its own fidelity, and ready to embrace the improvements exhibited by them. A better union, certainly, than any formal or constrained identity which could be imposed upon them! Nor is this "sectarian," because there is no normative corporation recognized of divine authority from which others can have parted. It is not necessarily "unhistorical," because every church may and must, reasonably, avail itself of all the lessons of history in applying the simple principles of the New Testament to its own edification and efficiency. If Baptist churches, more than any others, fail in either of these particulars, it is not from any scantiness in their principles, but from the imperfection of their members in knowledge or in grace. That our course is "unchurchly" must, I fear, be admitted, *in the sense* in which all Protestantism is so to Papists and Puseyites. The Protestant era, too, is becoming ever more and more so, as witness the widening fissures in the church of England, the rupture of the Scotch Kirk, the division of the Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, and I know not how many other religious corporations in this country; to say nothing of the fierce struggle of rival confessions in Europe; the Papacy itself meanwhile tottering to its final ruin, and all betokening further divisions and subdivisions until it be practically established that only Christian men should profess Christian fellowship, and that such *may* join themselves to each other in the Lord, as their mutual edification may require. When this common right is fully recognized, there will be no room for harmful divisions among those who hold the Head. The only emulation of churches will be in zeal to serve the one Master, and to promote the universal triumph of his truth. Then, if the Bible be the word of God, and sufficient for the uses of Christian men, the highest possible unity will be attained when such men, governed simply by that word, conform their usages and institutions to it alone. Then the Christian may be supposed to travel from the equator to the poles, finding himself at home wherever he finds Christians, and that which Schenkel puts as the Protestant church problem will be happily solved under the blessed bishopric of the invisible Head, namely "to incorpo-

rate the particular church into the one true church, and so to identify the church of the believing with the church of the baptized.”*

May I be allowed a word in conclusion, touching the *responsibilities* which our vanward position carries with it? Are we prepared for them? Can we as easily justify our present standing to ourselves as our past course to other professors of the same principles? Shall our future progress be worthy of our past precedence? Protestantism being a principle, is also a problem. Asserting absolute devotion to God's truth, it must inquire how that truth, in all its compass, is to be made effectual for the regeneration of the world. It thus involves a pledge of endless progress in the development of the evangelical theory, and in its living exemplification throughout the social and civil as well as the ecclesiastical relations of mankind. It is movement against stagnation, life against death; life which to continue must advance, which, if it does not grow, dwindles, stiffens, becomes petrified, and, as we may see in several ancient forms of Protestantism, a fossil. While we were decidedly before all others in the recognition of certain great truths of Christianity, and were *heartly* in their advocacy, so that they glowed in the hearts of our fathers like live coals, then their light went abroad and brightened the ends of the earth. But if the time has come, if the time ever does come, when either through the staleness and insipidity of those truths to us, or, because of their practical and substantial adoption by others, we cease to *stand out* as their challengers and champions—not having acquired, meanwhile, some other truths of like importance; if our peculiarities become to us or to our children, forms; our organizations, crystallizations of old truths and usages, however good; if free doctrinal inquiry be fettered or stagnate; if our baptism be retained by us because it is familiar and impressive, not because it is God's; if our ministry become a clergy, and our assemblies other than the scene of genuine Christian fellowship; then Protestantism will find other representatives, other defenders, and in the distant ages of her progress we shall be

* In his article on *die Kirche* in Herzog's Real-Encyclopädie.

left mummies of buried life among the Mennonites of other days, the old German Baptists, and other relics of defunct Protestantism.

It would be impossible to parry the force of such prognostics, if earnestly held out, by assuming that because we are right *so far*, therefore let Christianity make what progress she will, all must come around to our position at last. This would be to repeat the mistake of the lad who, when he looked upward from his father's door-stone, used profoundly to wonder that *he* had been born so exactly under the centre of that great overroofing sky. Doubtless we may rejoice in a relative correctness of present standing among the churches, if we ought not rather to say of tendency or direction. But who would wish to think this absolutely correct, beyond improvement, complete? When we remember how much that is defective or perverse we all find among ourselves—for here the heart knoweth its own bitterness—would it not be sad to believe that any of our churches, as such, had already attained, either were already perfect? Sad, indeed, if there were to be no clearer elucidation of religious mysteries than what we enjoy, no more worthy celebration of divine ordinances no more edifying fellowship and discipline, no more fruitful labors, through the far-stretching centuries of the kingdom *in sæcula sæculorum!* Enough, if we might stand prepared to contribute *our share* to the solution of those great life-problems which the age proposes to the churches! Enough, if, while holding fast whereto we have attained, guarding vigilantly our hereditary *peculium* of doctrine, we go forward in honorable rivalry with other Christians to gather harvests of yet undeveloped truth, and to distribute this bread of life among the famishing children of men! Enough? almost more than enough, if we might still further pioneer the way of the churches to that destined attainment where, with liberty of conscience which may ever occasion varieties of organization and “differences of administration,” there shall still (through the substantial agreement of all believers in faith and practice) be, and *be seen* to be, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism,” one flock within the same fold, under the One Shepherd.

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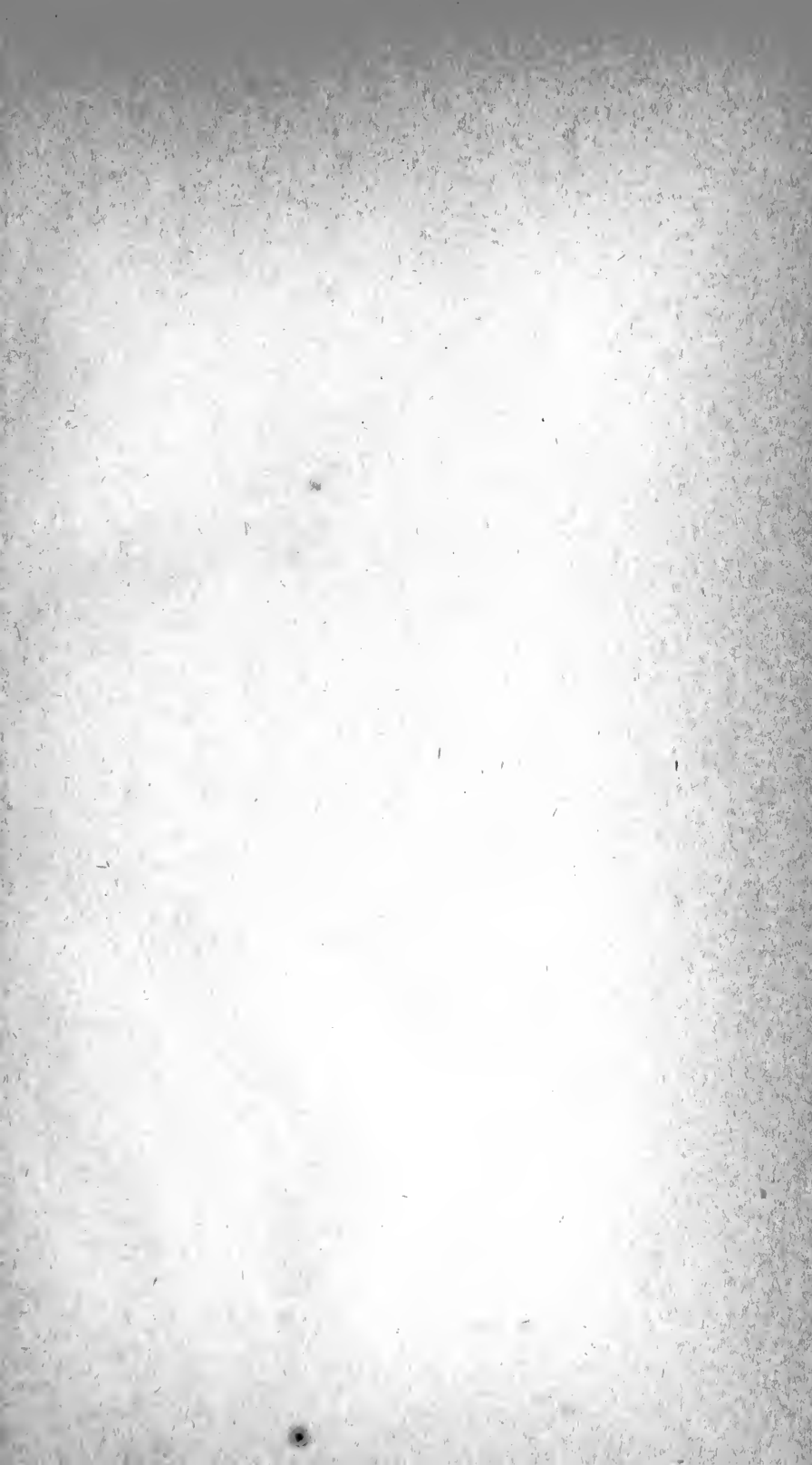
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