

OUR GLORIOUS HERITAGE

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A Baptist preacher, on one of his excursions in the “bookstores of the past,” picked up a well-used, discolored copy of *The Illustrated Book of all Religions from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time*. The book was published in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania by John E. Potter & Company in 1893. Such a book would hold the prospects of containing some jewels of thought. After securing the book for a few minutes, I hurried to a photocopier to retrieve some of those jewels (I ended up keeping the book for a few hours). The quotes below come entirely from this volume — not written by a Baptist, but by an author who, in the latter 1800's, wrote what the Baptists believed about themselves (title page stated “compiled from their own publications, and viewed from their own standpoint”). Enjoy this voice from the 1800's on OUR GLORIOUS HERITAGE!

“The constitution of the Baptist Church is widely different from the common denomination type. It is not of a sectarian character, but places the individuality and completeness of a church in each local society where the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are duly administered. It is in fact the congregational idea, not requiring the connection of each church with a central authority such as convention, synod, or bishop, but simply demanding conformity in principle and practice to the Baptist teaching. Whenever any church in county, town, or village holds to the practice of immersing believers only, that church is claimed to be Baptist in a proper sense. They do not require any formal or inseparable confederation of their churches; but they do insist upon spiritual and doctrinal unity, maintaining that there is but one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism.

“The congregation being regarded as the church, each band of believers meeting together is believed to be independent of all other churches in the right to manage its own affairs. The competence of each congregation to transact its own business in its own way embraces the right to bind and loose, with an authority from which there is no appeal but to God. Separation of the Church from the state is also a fundamental principle. Owing obedience to the State in matters purely civil and secular, and also claiming its protection in the exercise of all its rights, it remains in its spiritual character and relations wholly independent. The ministry is regarded as constituted of workers equal in dignity and office. The superiority of the apostles over the members of the early churches is acknowledged; but it is denied that this superiority could descend to others. In this view there are no successors to the apostles, and hence no orders in the ministry.

“Keeping in mind the congregational idea of

the Baptist Church, we are prepared to understand its history.

ANTIQUITY OF THE BAPTISTS

“The origin of the Baptists is claimed to have been in apostolic times. They claim no such continuity as is involved in apostolical succession. They do not assert that there has always been an organized or associated denomination, but that at all times and in all quarters of the Christian world there have been congregations and individual teachers who have strenuously upheld the immersion of believers.

“In all ages since the first, the Baptists have believed their denomination more ancient than themselves. The American Baptists deny that they owe their origin to Roger Williams. The English Baptist will not grant that John Smyth or Thomas Helwysse was their founder. The Welsh Baptists strenuously contend that they received their creed in the first century, from those who had obtained it direct from the apostles themselves. The Dutch Baptists trace their spiritual pedigree up to the same source. The German Baptists maintained that they were older than the Reformation, older than the corrupt hierarchy which it sought to reform. The Waldensian Baptists boasted an ancestry far older than Waldo, older than the most ancient of their predecessors in the vales of Piedmont. So, too, may we say of the Lollards, Henricians, Paterines, Paulicians, Donatists, and other ancient Baptists, that they claim an origin more ancient than that of the men or the circumstances from which they derived their particular appellations. If in any instance the stream of descent is lost to human eye, in ‘the remote depths of antiquity,’ they maintain that it ultimately reappears, and reveals its source in Christ and His apostles.

“From the fact that a traditional belief in regard to the antiquity of the Baptists has existed among them in every quarter of the world, it is to be inferred that the idea is not without foundation. For instance, the traditions of uncivilized tribes form a part of the material used by chronologists to ascertain the derivation and prehistoric connections. The traditions of antiquity among the Baptists on this same principle are claimed as an argument for their derivation from apostolic times.

“Some have charged that the origin of the Baptist churches is to be looked for at a much later date, and attempts have been made to identify them with the Anabaptists.

“It must be observed that the denomination of Baptists as at present existing regard the term Anabaptists as a term of reproach, because it seems to identify them with the Anabaptists of Munster, who were guilty of great excesses at the time of the Reformation in Germany, and adopted sentiments which they entirely disclaim. The only point in which there seems to be an agreement is that of the rejection of infant baptism. The Baptists only baptize those whom they conceive to have been unbaptized before, because they deny the validity of any baptism which is not practiced by immersion, and on a personal profession of faith in Christ.

“Take this brief comparison of the view of the Baptists with the Anabaptists, and it will be seen that to compare the two is against all reason. ‘The Munster Sect,’ says Dr. Brown, in his ‘Life and Times’ of the great Baptist leader, Menno, ‘was a handful of men resembling the modern Mormons. They claimed new revelations, not the Scriptures, as their guide in setting up their New Zion. Their leaders were the successors of the Prophets of Zwickau, in 1522. They had nothing in common with the Baptists, except the denial of infant baptism—for they held to a *worldly*, not a *spiritual* kingdom. At first, however, they were simple *enthusiasts*; persecution made them *fanatics*. Against the spirit, the word and example of Christ, says Menno, they drew *in their own defence* the sword, which Peter was commanded by his Lord to sheath. We italicize the words *in their own defence*, because the fact is commonly represented otherwise; and Menno’s impartial testimony shows how much of the guilt and horror

of the subsequent Munster tragedy *is* really chargeable on the measures of the persecutors, who (before they drew the sword in self-defence) had long inflicted on them the most cruel immolations, butcheries, and murders. The fanatical proceedings at Munster, in 1534, under John Bockhold, the prophet, polygamist, and bloody tyrant, shocked all men of common sense and decency; but none more than Menno.’ ‘I warned every man,’ says he, ‘against the Munster abominations in regard to a king, to polygamy, to a worldly kingdom, to the sword, etc., most faithfully.’

ENGLISH BAPTISTS

“The English Baptists look upon their origin as traceable to the early church in Wales. Some persons believe that Christianity was introduced into Britain about the year 63, by a Welsh Princess, Claudia, who had been converted at Rome under Paul’s ministry. There is good authority for regarding the body of the English Church as existing in Wales. The Britains, harassed by the Saxons, retired from their country into Wales, and there religion began to flourish. This Welsh Christianity seems to have been full of vigor, and to have had its institutions of learning at Bangor, and Caerleon. From the college, or as it might be called monastery, of Bangor, hundreds of efficient ministers went out. Although the name ‘Monks of Bangor’ was given to the persons connected with the college at Bangor, they never seem to have partaken of the nature of Romish monks. A pure and antedotal religion was encouraged among them.

“About the year 596, when Ethelbert was king of Kent, Augustine came to England, sent by Gregory VII, Bishop of Rome. Although Augustine made converts of the king and queen, and obtained a royal palace for his residence, his desire to extend his authority could not be satisfied until he had secured the allegiance of the Christians in Wales. Robert Fabian gives an account of the conference of the Welsh Christians with Augustine. Seven bishops of the Britons along with some of the wisest of the Bangor men went to meet him. While this deputation were on their way, they asked advise of a hermit by the way as to what they should do. In substance the hermit advised them to listen to Augustine if he was humble, and to reject his counsel if he seemed proud. Exactly what proofs of humility

they were to look for is not recorded. What they did find was a dignitary who remained seated during their consultation, which mightily displeased the representatives from Wales. As they refused to obey his general requirements, he asked them to grant him 3 points. It is not necessary for enumerated more than the second point, which regarded the baptism of children, 'that ye give Christendome to children.' The inference from this requirement, the Baptists claim to be, that the Christians in Wales were in the custom of refusing to baptize infants. No very friendly relations seem ever to have been possible between the Welsh believers and Augustine. Through persecutions said to have been warranted by him, the men of Bangor lost their house and witnessed the destruction of a glorious library. The followers of Augustine and adherents of the Bangor institution kept up the controversy for about a century afterward. Even in the baptism of Augustine there is found a trace of immersion. Camden tells us that the multitude who believed were not compelled, but went with faith into the water two and two, and in the name of the Trinity dipped one another. Bede's account of the first baptism in England is claimed as an exact counterpart of the histories of baptism in the East. During the first six centuries it is also claimed that there is no trace in the writings of Bede or Gildas of infant baptism.

"For some time the Baptist principles seem to have been enveloped in obscurity in England, but revived through the incoming of those persecuted Waldenes or Albigenses of the eleventh century who came to England as a place of refuge. They were so successful among all classes, that William the Conqueror became alarmed, and decreed, says Newton, 'that those who denied the Pope should not trade with his subjects.'

"Another colony of people, belonging to a numerous sect of fanatics, says Lingard, 'who infested the north of Italy, Gaul and Germany and who were called Puritans,' is said to have come into England. Usher calls them Waldenses, from Aquitain; Spelman calls them publicans (Paulicians), but says they were the same as the Waldenses. They gained ground, and spread themselves and their doctrines all over Europe. They labored to win souls to Christ, and were guided only by the Word of God. They rejected

all the Roman ceremonies, refused to baptize infants, and preached against the Pope. Thirty of these were put to death near Oxford. The remainder of them worshiped in private, until Henry II came to the throne, in 1158, when, from the mildness of his measures, they appeared again publicly. It was now discovered that these people had several houses of the Albigensian order in England. Infants, Hoveden tells us, were not baptized by them. The conflicts between the sovereigns of this kingdom and the archbishops, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, permitted the Baptists to propagate their sentiments very extensively, unmolested. The English Baptists every now and then received recruits from abroad, and at times these recruits proved to be most invigorating accessions. Walter Lollard, a Hollander, the same in sentiment as the leader of the Albigenses, Peter de Beuis, revived the Party in England by a visit. Mosheim chronicles him as a man remarkable of his eloquence and his writings. In 1400 the Lollards had so increased in their opposition to the established church, that a law was passed sentencing them to be burned to death. The first martyr under this law was Sir William Sawtre. Thus were Bible-men increased until they were said to number one hundred thousand. A book of the Lollards, entitled 'The Sum of the Scriptures,' was examined by the archbishop; he condemned the party who circulated it, for denying the baptism of the Church. Fourteen Mennonite brethren suffered death cheerfully; and the reproach of *Anabaptism* now supplanted that of the word Lollardism.

"The Anabaptist notions were so contrary to the mild spirit of Christianity that we cannot wonder that the Baptists were desirous to separate themselves from all connection with that odious sect. It has appeared to some a difficult task to separate the Baptists from the Anabaptists for some years after the Reformation in England. That many of those who were persecuted for Anabaptism during the reign of Elizabeth were pure Baptists is highly probable; but it must be acknowledged that among the opposers of infant baptism were sometimes found those who held opinions which the temporal authorities justly considered as incentives to anarchy. Towards the latter part of the reign of Elizabeth the powers of the Star Chamber and the High Commission had almost destroyed dissent; the Baptists fled the

country, and settled principally in Holland; and the existence of this sect then became more evident. At Amsterdam a Baptist church of English refugees was founded by Mr. Smyth, who had been a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, and having become attached to the Baptists, had seceded from the church. In the formation of this congregation by Smyth, we have the earliest evidence of the existence of regular Baptist churches, even though the previous prevalence of pure Baptist principles be acknowledged. Smyth died soon after these proceedings, somewhere about the year 1610, and was succeeded in his charge by Thomas Helwysse, who shortly after returned to England with his congregation, and settled in London. Their motive for leaving Holland is said to have been this — that they did not believe themselves justified in living abroad for the purpose of avoiding persecution. The severities exercised by King James the First, at this time, against the Puritans and Baptist, who were still considered Anabaptists, brought forth some writings in defence and explanation of the principles of the Baptists. From the return of the congregation formed at Amsterdam by Smyth and Helwysse, and their subsequent disclaimer of the false notions of the Anabaptists in a petition to the Parliament in 1620, we may date the public acknowledgment of the Baptists as distinct from the Anabaptists.

“The Act of Toleration exempting the dissenters from the effect of certain legal strictures and penalties (William and Mary), proved the opening up of an immense advance in the Baptist ranks. Since that time they have continued to gain ground rapidly.

UNITED STATES' BAPTISTS

“The history of the Baptists in the United States takes us back to the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers in the year 1620. According to Dr. Cotton Mather, some of the first planters among the New England Puritans were Baptists. It is a painful fact that the Pilgrim Fathers did not understand the great principle of religious liberty. The compulsory support of the ministry was the first care of a religious character established by the government of Massachusetts. Many disputes and discussions arose between the Baptists and their brethren concerning the support of the clergy and the union of State and Church. Some believe that

they can trace at this time efforts to organize independent Baptist churches, although these efforts proved futile. It was through this intolerance that Roger Williams was driven to found what is now known as Rhode Island, and to lay the foundation for the present prosperity of the Baptists in that State.

“Roger Williams was born in Wales about 1559, and obtained an Oxford education through the influence of Sir Edward Coke. He was ordained in the Church of England, but soon became a resolute dissenter. At the age of thirty-one he sailed, with his wife, to this country, December 1, 1630, arriving in Nantucket, February 5, 1631. He became assistant minister at Salem, but was driven from that post by the bigotry of the principles with which he came in contact. In March, 1639, he was baptized, and with two others formed the first Baptist church at Providence. There is a singular story of the attempt to organize a church at Weymouth, Massachusetts, where the organizers were arrested and fined for their intentions. Even such distinguished men as two professors at Cambridge were compelled to leave the colony on account of Baptist tendencies. Roger Williams met this difficulty of intolerance during his sojourn in England, where he procured a charter signed by the king granting full and entire freedom of conscience to the new colony.

“The Baptists in Virginia deserve a notice in this connection. In this colony, as in England, Baptists were the special aversion, and excited discriminating hostility. In 1549 a royal commission was issued by Edward VI, with Cranmer, Ridley, and others as members, specially condemning the ‘wicked opinions’ of the Baptists, commanding ‘search after all Anabaptists,’ etc., and in case of obstinate refusal to be reclaimed, imprisonment and delivery to the secular power. In Virginia, Baptists had leveled against them special statutes. In 1662 it was enacted — perhaps primarily against Quakers, potentially, however, against Baptist — that ‘whereas many schismatical persons, out of their averseness to the orthodox established religion, or out of the new-fangled conceits of their own heretical inventions, refuse to have their children baptized. Be it therefore enacted, that all persons that, in the contempt of the divine sacrament of baptism, shall refuse when they may carry their

child to a lawful minister in that county to have them baptized, shall be amerced two thousand pounds of tobacco; half to the informer, and half to the public.' Under the laws of the colony, citizens were disfranchised and banished, and members of the House of Burgesses were expelled for their religious opinions. Men and women were indicted, and fined for not going to church. The records of Middlesex Court show a number of presentments, trials, and convictions of such character in 1771, 1772, and 1773.

“Dr. Hawks, the historian of the Episcopal Church of Virginia, says, ‘No dissenters in Virginia experienced, for a time, harsher treatment than did the Baptist. They were beaten and imprisoned; and *cruelty taxed its ingenuity to devise new modes of punishment and annoyance.*’

“A brief recapitulation of what the Baptists of the Commonwealth — aided in many points by Quakers, Presbyterians, and other good citizens — accomplished, will place in a clear form ‘the connection of the Baptists with the religious history of the State, with special reference to their action in securing for themselves and the people generally perfect religious freedom.’

1. They obtained for dissenters the right to preach to the soldiers in the Revolutionary army without molestation or hindrance.
2. They secured the suspension and afterwards the repeal of the laws for the support of the Episcopal clergy by taxation.
3. They persevered until ministers of all denominations were placed on the same footing in reference to the celebration of the rites of matrimony.
4. After a long and doubtful struggle, they defeated all attempts to tax the people for the support of any religious denomination.
5. They secured the sale of the glebe lands, and the appropriation of the proceeds to public instead of private or ecclesiastical uses.
6. They overthrew the Establishment, severed all connection between the Episcopal Church and the civil government, and achieved the great New Testament principle of Voluntaryism as opposed to discriminations or coercion in religion.
7. They contributed, in no small degree to the incorporation into the Constitution of the United States of an amendment preventing

any possible union of Church and State.”

BAPTISTS AND LIBERTY

“This record of the Baptists movement would be incomplete without some mention of their connection with the establishment of the truest principles of liberty, both in England and America.

“An honorable part the Baptists bore in England, in connection with the efforts of the people for freedom. To their influence ‘Baxter explicitly attributes that event which caused a shuddering on every throne of Europe — the execution of Charles I.’ ‘To them also he traces the invasion of Scotland; in short, the chief events which hurried on the subversion of monarchy and the establishment of a republic. Cromwell's army, composed of intrepid, high-principled yeomanry, was deeply tinged with Baptist sentiments, and the Bible searchings that prevailed in their ranks made multitudes of them Baptists.’ Major-General Harrison, one of the most distinguished leaders, and long Cromwell's bosom friend; the Chancellor of Ireland under Cromwell, Colonel Lilburne; Overton, second in command in Scotland; and Okey and Alured; and Colonel Mason, the Governor of Jersey; and Penn, one of the Admirals of the English navy, but even better known as the father of the celebrated Quaker — were all Baptists.

BAPTISTS AND MISSIONS

“Nor have the Baptist confined themselves to the propagation of views distinctively theirs, and to labors for the building up of their own denomination. On the contrary, while doing far less than their duty, yet, as compared with other Christian denominations, they have done their full share in promoting Christian civilization and spreading the knowledge of Scriptural truth over the earth. Modern missions to the East were originated by Baptists. The first modern evangelical society for sending the Gospel to the heathen was organized by Baptists. The first modern missionaries to the heathen — Cary and Thomas — were Baptists. Joseph Hughes, who conceived the idea of giving the Bible to all nations, and who founded, nourished, and sustained the British and Foreign Bible Society, was a Baptist. A Baptist deacon divides with Robert Raikes the honor of originating the great Sunday-school movement. The earliest

translations of the Bible into heathen tongues were made by Baptists and they have rendered it into more tongues than any other people. The first Christian churches in India, Burma, and China were Baptists churches. In one word, the history of the world's progress for the past three-

quarters of a century cannot be written, without making mention of the sublime conceptions and heroic achievements of Cary, and Ryland, and Fuller, and Hughes, and Marshman, and Ward, and Judson, and Rice, and Kincaid, and Wade and others, kindred spirits and labors."

CANADIAN BAPTISTS

The above-quoted article did not deal with the spread of Baptists across North America. The heritage of Canadian Baptists goes back to 1752 when in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia Canada's first Baptist Church was established. During the first hundred years of growth 574 Baptist churches were started in the Maritimes! How? According to the research of others the reasons were fervent soulwinning and strong leadership. The Baptist cause spread westward eventually to reach the Pacific coast of our country.

Oh, what a story. Oh, what a heritage! But before we go paint a red box around the name "BAPTIST" on our church sign to indicate the swelling of our pride perhaps we should ponder these words...

“...Keep that which is committed to thy trust....”
I Timothy 6:20

Oh, what a responsibility. Oh, what an inheritance to carry forth! God help us.