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The Baptists and the Bible.

The following address was delivered by Dr. A. E. Dickinson of Richmond, Va., at the Centennial meeting of the Goshen Baptist Association, recently held at County Line Baptist church, Caroline county, Va.:

Baptists have always and everywhere been the champions of an open Bible. Others have maintained the supreme authority of the Bible, but Baptists have always and everywhere stood for something more than that. They are satisfied with nothing short of the sole authority of the sacred Scriptures. Our beliefs concerning God and duty must come from the Bible since there is nothing else to give us any light worth having on these great themes. And right here lies the fundamental principle upon which are based the doctrines that separate us from all other Christian communities. We put the Bible before everything else because it is what it claims to be, a full and sure revelation from God. Whatever may be one's theory of inspiration, if he believes that holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, he will wish to hear and heed what the Holy Ghost says. Right here is the starting point for every true Baptist. He has no pet ideas of his own about church organization. The ordinances of the gospel are nothing to him, except as they constitute a part of the only revelation God has given to man. It is because it is the Lord's baptism and the Lord's supper that we let them stand just as the Lord gave them in his own revealed word. We love our own children and all the dear little ones around us and seek for them the largest possible good. It is from no lack of prayerful interest in them that we withhold church membership from them until they give evidence of a new heart. The revealed word makes faith and repentance and a new heart prerequisites to baptism, and we dare not teach otherwise. We have no right to do it. And, besides the inspired volume closes with denunciations upon all who add to or take from its teachings. "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy-of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book, and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city and from the things which are written in this book." Thus speaks God to us in the last chapter of the last volume of the books which go to make up our Holy Bible.

THE APPARENT INCONVENIENCE OF THE BAP-

TIST IDEA.

In many particulars, the Baptist idea of church polity seems to fall short of what is most needed, when we come to the actual test with the material God has given us to work upon. From a human standpoint the most convenient arrangement for governing our churches would seem to be that used with such marvellous results by the Roman Catholics—just as from a human standpoint the most effective form of civil government would be a despotism. Instead of all the trials and tribulations we now have in nomnating and electing the man we would have to serve us, how much easier to let some one man and his children after him rule over us. That would save us from manifold inconveniences, especially about election times. And so, too, in administering the affairs of the churches of Jesus Christ. Instead of putting the care and responsibility of the government of the churches upon superior officers as they are called—Presiding Elders, Bishops, and the like, and leaving them to direct and control, Baptists leave every local church to control its own affairs, because, when we turn to the New Testament, we see nothing more plainly taught there than that such ought to be the case. Whatever may be the real or apparent evils of our Baptist church polity, the churches founded by the inspired apostles seem to have been of the same kind. Then the power to govern was lodged in each little local church. You will search the Divine record in value for great same kind. Then the power to govern was lodged in each little local church. You will search the Divine record in vain for great officials and privileged classes with special rights for interpreting the word of God and

spective sects and denominations, but they have no place in the New Testament church polity after which our Baptist way of doing things is modelled.

BY THEIR FRUITS YE SHALL KNOW THEM.

If the tree is to be judged by its fruit, we are not afraid of that test as to our church polity and that of others. Without any such human appliances as they have for unifying and directing their forces, the Baptists hold together very closely, and they are growing every day into more loving accord, as they work together for common interests affecting the glory of their great King.

To many this is a great mystery. They do not see how it is possible for a denomination numbering millions to be so solid and compact, without any authoritative standards or any ecclesiastical powers. Instead of falling to pieces like a rope of sand, these thousands of little republics, each separate and distinct and independent of every other, are as wide awake and effective in diffusing the gospel at home and abroad as are any of the great Pedobaptist denominations, with their strong Episcopal or Presbyterial gov-ernments. How is this? Why is this? The secret of it all is to be found in the theme now under consideration.

THE BAPTISTS AND THE BIBLE.

If others have a book, so have we, and it is our confession of faith, our discipline, our creed, our standard-and that book is the Bible. That book holds us together and makes us one people, one in faith and one in practice; and the more closely we follow its word of command-the more we regard it as our supreme and sole authority in all matters of faith and practice, the more we shall be drawn together and the more we shall be led of God in all the great work committed to us.

So far from looking to great ecclesiastics for guidance, Baptists have ever recognized the fact that heresy is most likely to develop its rankest forms among religious leaders, and they have ever sought to guard such tendencies by giving people an open Bible, and by encouraging them to form their own views of its teachings by sedulously searching for themselves its sacred

Baptists allow no doctrine which cannot be sustained from God's word; they countenance no custom contrary to its teachings. With them the word of God is not only supreme, but sole and alone in matters of faith and doctrine.

Here and there you may find a Baptist church with its articles of faith, but these are simply declarations of what such a church believes the Bible to teach, and no one claims for them any ecclesiastical authority whatever.

To the Bible the Baptist points as the sole and efficient source from which he draws his creed. He will not only point to the book, but he will give you the chapter and verse, and many chapters and verses, all of which unmistakably tell what he believes and why he believes it.

THE LOGIC OF OUR POSITION.

As illustrating the logic of our denominational positions, let me say that it is not a mere accident that Baptists have always been the promoters and champions of religious liberty. Believing as they do they were of necessity compelled to be the advocates of soul freedom. We might say they could not help it. That doctrine was wrapped up in the Baptist idea; that every man must repent for himself, believe for himself, and be baptized for himself, and that no man or devil or angel-no power on earth, in hell or in heaven-has any right to interfere with our own personal obligation to do what God in his word enjoins upon us. As effect follows cause, so the logic of the Baptist position compels us to be as we ever have been, the unwavering advocates of soul freedom.

And, right here, let me add that to refuse baptism to the infant and leave it to follow its own convictions, as it grows to years of accountability, follows as logically from our position in regard to soul freedom. To take an infant out of its mother's arms, and by mere physical force baptize it, without its knowledge or consent, is as antagonistic to our views of soul freedom as to inflict physical punishment upon the same infant after he has grown to years of maturity because he refuses to believe as we do.

Baptists believe that one must be called out of darkness into light by the power of God-must be bern again-and that prior to this mighty life giving change no one has any right to assume the name of a disciple. They believe that the blood comes before the water, and that faith and repentance and a new heart are essential to a proper observ-ance of the ordinances. The Baptists be-lieve this, and they are the only people on earth who do believe it.

As to what is baptism, and where it be-longs in the christian system, and the Lord's supper and its place, we point to our Lord's commission and to the practice of his apostles. If they made faith and baptism precede the supper we dare not invert the di vine order, or in any way deviate from it.

A PEDOBAPTIST'S REMARK.

for ruling over God's elect. The great ecclesiastics who rule and reign in splendor and power, hold a high place in their replatform is unique and one of the most striking that was ever put before any peo-ple. Your preachers, when they baptize, rarely do more than read from the New Testament a collection of verses bearing upon that subject, after which they give in the baptism of the candidate what seems to be an object lesson upon all they have read. And then, when you are asked about infant baptism, you generally content yourselves by challenging your Pedobaptist brother to produce in all the New Testament a single passage which either directly or indirectly teaches infant baptism—a challenge which has never been successfully met. Then, as to your church government, what can be more in keeping with our democratic way of doing things than is your way of leaving every church free and untrammelled to do just as it pleases? I repeat, it is a wender to me that millions more have not given in their allegiance to this Baptist platform."

In reply to that very apt and striking re-mark of an honored Pedobaptist brother, it may be said that the explanation of our fail-ure to grow and multiply as we should have done, is to be found in the fact that Baptists have not supported the Bible as strongly as the Bible has supported the Baptists. Our theory is right, and that is a great point gained. Theory underlies practice, and as long as the theory is good, we may hope that it will work its way into the life and character of those who maintain it. Baptists were a very feeble band when Neander, the great church historian, said of them, 'There is a great future for the Baptists." How wonderfully they have grown since the day upon which Neander uttered that prediction, and yet we have scarcely begun to reach up to the great things which the God of the Bible has placed before us. But thank God if our principles are in accord with his divine word, they will yet get a mightier hold upon us, who too feebly champion them, and upon the multitudes who now reject them. Like leaven they will leaven the whole lump, sending their quickening power into all sects and sections, the world over.

LEAVENING THE LUMP.

I do not say that all-good people will, in the coming ages, leave their respective denominations and come to us and wear the Baptist name. That may never come to pass, but a thing almost as desirable will, I doubt not, take place. Whatever is scriptural in our teachings will, in God's good time, be appropriated by others and be incorporated into their systems. Something like this has been going on for generations, and the good work has by no means ceased. Doctrines for which, in b tists endured stripes and imprisonment and death have become the possession of the christian world. They are not only held by others now, but believed so firmly that the bare suggestion that there ever was a time when they did not hold to these truths is repelled with more or less of feeling. This process will go on in the coming years, until the happy day shall dawn, when there will be no Baptist peculiar views, since such views will belong equally to all God's dear people.

And yet there may be then as now many denominational names. It is not the name Baptist for which we are contending, (that name you know was given us by our enemies), but for the things for which that name stands, and if others accept our doctrines we will not quarrel with them as to the name.

In politics, if a man votes as you do, you do not care very much whether he wears your party name or not. It is the vote you wish. The influence he may exert over others with whom, for the time being, he is associated may be more potential than if he were to come right over and wear the name of the party with which he casts his vote. He may do the better "missionary work." as the politicians sometimes designate such services, by lingering nominally at least with his old associates.

And thus, while Baptists would of course greatly prefer that all who take their doctrine should also take their name, and stand shoulder to shoulder with them, bearing the heat and burden of the day, still they must look with profound gratitude upon the great and ever growing multitudes in other communions who really are Baptists in every-thing except the name. They believe as we do as to immersion being the only Bible baptism. They reject as we do infant baptism, and hold as we do that no one has a right to the ordinances unless he comes as a penitent believer, and they are holding too with more or less tenacity other things which the world calls "Baptist peculiarities," as it once counted us heretics and schismatics for our peculiar views as to religious liberty.

THEORY AND PRACTICE.

While good comes from a true theory, evil and only evil is likely to flow from a false theory. It has been well said that no one can point out the precise period when the Roman Catholic corruptions began. They crept in very slyly one by one, and often grew out of natural, if not praiseworthy impulses, but with this came the widespread ruin which the Roman hierarchy has brought upon the human family. It was all wrapped up in the false theory with which it started, that the church had the right to change and modify the ordinances and teachings of the word of God.

And what better thing can we now hope from Pedobaptist denominations except as we influence them? If they have a right to

A few inquiries suggested by the subject in hand, may fitly close this address.

Are Baptists doing their part in printing

substitute sprinkling for baptism, and infants for penitent believers, and hierarchies for the New Testament form of church government, they have the right to make other sweeping changes until the blessed book itself is swept away. When once you begin to deviate from the strict teachings of the inspired word, who can tell what the end will be? How often even good people deceive themselves or are deceived by others with such declarations as these: "It does not matter so you are sincere," or that one thing is more convenient than something else-or that the strict observance of a Scriptural command is not essential to salvation and the like. And yet who would apply the same kind of reasoning to other things? We know well enough that sincerity in the man who takes the wrong medicine does not save him from its effects, and no loving child will be found obeying his parents simply from the fear of being disinherited.

A HOPEFUL INDICATION

One of the most encouraging indications of the progress of Baptist principles is to be found in the fact that our adversaries substantially concede almost all that we claim, only they think that we err in holding too firmly to the strict letter of God's word, and that we make it too much a matter of conscience to follow it literally and fully. Dr. Lyman Beecher wrote to his son Edward, whose conscience seems to have been a little troubled as to baptism, saying: "I have reason to believe that through excess of conscience many a man has been worried till he became a Baptist."

Some time since a tired Baptist preacher went off on a steam boat seeking rest and refreshment for body and mind. He met among the passengers an old Pedobaptist friend who was constantly worrying the tired preacher by attempts to draw him into discussing the baptismal question, but presently the Baptist turned upon him and with no little emphasis asked: "If this very moment it were revealed to you from heaven that you could never enter there without Scripture baptism, what would you do?" The Pedobaptist brother paused a moment and then replied: "I would beg the captain to haul in the boat that you might immerse me here and now." Of course that carried the whole point and made further discussion of the subject unnecessary. There are multitudes like him in Pedobaptist denominations who cannot rid themselves of the conviction that the baptism of the Baptists is the baptism of the New Testament.

Baptists stand for the ordinances as they were delivered, and attach to them no more importance than is given them by the inspired writers. If we emphasize them, it is ause Christ and his same thing. We follow in their footsteps. And besides, as we look over the history of the church, we find that wherever and whenever Baptists have failed of doing this, the most serious evils have come to the cause of

AN ILLUSTRATION FROM THE GOSHEN.

Of the truth of what I am saying, this old Goshen Association, whose Centennial we are now celebrating, affords many illustrations. We stand to day upon the very soil over which the Craigs and Waller and Webber and many more were hurried to gloomy dungeons, and in almost every instance the men who were foremost in those diabolical persecutions were the "Parish parsons." Often when the hearts of the sheriffs and other civil officers were moved with pity at the beautiful martyr spirit with which those old Baptist preachers went to jail and lingered there half starved, the parish preach ers would be clamoring for yet other and severer punishment, and why? You know why. It was because for long years Pedobaptism had enjoyed undisputed sway in all the counties covered by this Goshen Association, and it had worked out the same results here that it has wrought everywhere else under the same conditions. Almost the entire population had been brought into the church—brought in without the least regard to what the Bible teaches about such great matters. The church and the world had come to be one, and New Testament religion

had disappeared from the land. Then it was that God sent these brave Baptists, who rejoiced to suffer with their Lord. Much of the good that our Pedobaptist brethren are now doing is due largely to the faithful and persistent protest which we make to the evils inherent in their respective systems. We hold them back from the logical results of their teachings. We keep their errors from running to seed, and thus save them from the untold calamities which always and everywhere follow where such views are not thus antagonized. If to day Baptists were to abandon the field and give up the struggle, in a generation or two Pedobaptists would have brought into the church every child in the land, and once in, there they would remain, and soon the church and the State would be as much one here in America, as they are to day in other lands where Baptist principles are unknown, as much one as they were when the pioneers of this Association, sentenced to close con-finement, passed through the streets of Fredericksburg on their way to jail singing:

Broad is the road that leads to death, And thousands walk together there; But wisdom shows a narrow path, With here and there a traveller."

A FEW INQUIRIES.

and circulating the Bible? Freely we have received, freely we should give. The Bible has done everything for the Baptists, and yet it may be a question whether others, who believe in courts and councils and standards of one sort and another, along with

dards of one sort and another, along with
the Scriptures, are not outstripping us in
giving the gospel to the people?
Are Baptists adhering as strictly to scriptural order, in their denominational work,
as the logic of their position demands? Are
there not tendencies to distrust and abandon there not tendencies to distrust and abandon
the primitive church and its polity? Are
we not taken up too much with mere temporary expedients without caring much
whether they conform to Scripture principle
and precept? While our theory, that baptism and church membership are only for the regenerated, is all right, is not our practice of hurrying masses of those who afterwards prove to be not regenerated, through the forms of church membership, all wrong? Every such addition from the world lowers the standard of piety just as the placing of a block of ice in this room would lower the temperature. When loaded down with unconverted material there is nothing for a Baptist church to do but to die, and the sooner it dies the better. Others may and do grow without spiritual power. Their ecclesiastical machinery is so elaborate and so well adjusted that it will run about as well without vital godliness as with it. That is, so far as apparent growth and worldly influence are concerned. Rome and State churches everywhere are proving the same thing as are other sects which have virtually set aside the Bible.

Again, are Baptists who owe their exis-tence to the Bible and who are shorn of their power when it loses its authority, any more reverent in their interpretation of the sacred word than others, or any more earn-est in studying its truths and in imparting them in the home and in the school, and to all over whom their influence reaches? Lewis Craig, and others of your old Goshen Baptist brethren, were once arrested by the sheriff of Spottsylvania county, and when they came before the court the prosecuting attorney said: "May it please your worship, these men cannot meet a man upon the road, but they must ram a text of Scripture down his throat." That's the way the men who laid the foundations of this Association felt about the Bible. But I fear that not many of their descendants lay themselves liable to the charge brought against Lewis Craig and his colaborers

Are Baptists more than others expressing in their lives the principles of the Bible? Are they more loyal friends of righteousness, or sturdier fees of evil? Do the sweet humanities and charities of religion, of Bible

As Baptists grow in numbers, in wealth, in social power, are they not in great danger of forgetting the secret of their strength? Alas for us that so often our children turn away from the old faith, carrying all the treasures won for them by their Baptist fathers to others, where they may be used with the most telling effect against us. With the increase of culture and wealth, if we are wise, we shall strive more than ever for the humble zeal and quenchless fervor and abundant labors which characterized our Baptist fathers.

NEED OF WISE LEADERS.

If what has been claimed in this address is true, the Baptists ought to be the most wide awake, pushing, enterprising people in the world. We ought to prepare for the great multitudes that are sure to flow into our ranks. We shall need larger church buildings, and more of them. We shall need ten dollars for denominational schools and colleges where we now have ten cents. And our mission work at home and abroad should be enormously extended. To do all this we must have God given leaders. No people need leaders as the Baptists do. Never since Christ ascended to heaven has any Baptist cause failed of great prosperity which was in charge of wise and energetic leaders. But the God of the Bible is not likely to come down and work miracles for the Baptists.

If we put the wrong men in charge of our churches and schools and colleges and boards and papers, and then wait for them to die that we may fill their places with men better suited to lead in such matters, if we are too cowardly to assume our share of the responsibility needed to bring about desired changes and modifications, then there can be no Baptist progress. There is a man for every position, a God-made man. When he and the place meet, the victory is assured. No longer then can there be any question as to men and means for carrying forward the work. work. No people follow more magnificently than the Baptists if they have a sure enough leader, and no people hold back more stubbornly than they if they lack faith in those who undertake to lead them.

in those who undertake to lead them.

Finally, in this Centennial year of Foreig Missions, as we tell over and over the sto of Carey and Judson and Rice, let us be in mind that they and many more of the brightest lights among our Baptist worthis were won to our faith by the Bible. The Bible has made more Baptists than all oth books ever printed. As certain as we but upon "the impregnable rock," so certain shall this doctrine of ours win in the grafight. We need only to be faithful to a great trust to secure full and complete to umph for the Baptists and the Bible.

In the screet trials God often sweetest discoveries of himself.