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### Short Sketches of Some of the Baptist Pioneers of Eastern Carolina.

APPENDIX TO NUMBER SEVEN CONCLUDED.

The reader will please accept this as a continuation of appendix to number seven. I promised to write about one of the oldest churches in the State and one of the most useful and influential ministers of the olden time, whose long connection with the church as member and pastor has led me to consider the two together.

My search for data has been almost fruitless. The records I was most eager to find were destroyed by fire at the time the residence of Bro. Benjamin Oliver, deceased, was burned up a few years ago. The only sources of information left to me are the early records of Island Creek church, Duplin county, the old History of Burdick & Read, and a few old Associational minutes that have escaped destruction.

The records of Island Creek church, now in the keeping of John M. Wallace, one of the most faithful clerks in the State, run as far back as 1802, and show that that old church was at that time a branch of the old Muddy Creek church, in the same county. Muddy Creek was the outcome of the ministerial labors of Job Thigpen, who settled in that portion of Duplin in the year 1781. She was organized into a regular Baptist church of thirty members on the 25th of February, 1792, and received into the Kehukee Association the same year. In May, 1793, Job Thigpen was ordained to the pastorate of the church by Robert Nixon, John Dillahunty and Francis Oliver.

Island Creek and the parent body kept up fraternal correspondence until about 1830, when Muddy Creek went off with the Antimission party, while Island Creek continued with the great Baptist brotherhood. Among her early pastors were Job Thigpen and Hiram Stallings, the father of Rev. J. N. Stallings, President of High Point Female College. Elders Francis Oliver, Wm. Wells, Luther Rice, Wm. P. Biddle, Robert T. Daniel, Wm. J. Findley and many others have preached occasionally for this old church.

The old records of Island Creek have served the double purpose of preserving her own history and that of other churches, in part at least, with which she kept up correspondence. I learned, on examining the records, that the statement found in the records of Concord church, Duplin county, to the effect that that church was organized in 1825, is certainly incorrect. The Island Creek records speak of correspondence with Concord church as far back as 1807.

This brings to my mind the Wilmington church. A year or more ago, it was stated that the Wilmington church was organized about 1833. I had a minute of the Cape Fear Association, which showed that the Wilmington church was represented in that body in 1822. I have recently ascertained that the Wilmington church was in existence in 1811, for Benedict mentions her among the churches belonging to Cape Fear Association at that date.

But I started out to speak of a church much older than any of the foregoing.

On a commanding eminence in Duplin county, about five miles southeast of Mt. Olive, stands the church known as

#### BEAR MARSH BAPTIST CHURCH,

so called from the little stream near which it is located. It is the oldest Baptist church in this part of the State, excepting Wells' Chapel and Rowan, the former established in 1756, and the latter in 1759, and both located in Sampson county.

In the year 1768, John Nobles and Jeremiah Rhames (the same name probably that is now spelled Rhem), both ministers of the gospel and the latter pastor of Red Banks church, Pitt county, came into the Bear Marsh section, found a few Baptists—five males and five females—and organized them into a Baptist church on the 26th of February of that year, Rhame becoming their first pastor.

William Goodman succeeded Rhame in the pastorate, in which he continued from 1775 to his removal southward in 1781.

Goodman was followed by Charles Hines,

who served the church until May 17th, 1793, at which date Francis Oliver was ordained to the gospel ministry and installed as pastor of the church. He served the church until his death in 1808. But more of him hereafter.

From 1808 to the present time Bear Marsh has had several pastors, among whom were some of the ablest ministers in the denomination. Although her numerical strength and spiritual condition have been very fluctuating, she has never, so far as I can learn, ceased to maintain the ordinances of religion at any time since her constitution.

At one time in her early history, it is said, she had but seven members. In 1860 she had 299 members. Her present membership is about 130.

Her neat and commodious house of worship was destroyed by fire about 1832 or '33. In October, 1844, the Goshen Association met with Bear Marsh church in their new house. I find in the minutes of that session the following entry concerning Bear Marsh:

"It is cause of gratitude that information from this church leads to the soul-cheering conclusion that during the last year the Lord has continued to revive his gracious work amongst them; so that it may truly be said by them, 'Instead of bitterness we are made to enjoy great peace.' Their once beautiful house, it is true, was burned up; but God has enabled them to erect another on the ground thereof, in which we now have the happiness of taking sweet counsel together in an associational capacity. The Lord seems to favor this meeting with his presence, which is felt in an unusual degree. The builder of the new meeting-house is the first that has been received to membership since its erection."

The builder referred to was Mr. Giles Loftin, the father of Messrs. Giles T. Loftin and Joel Loftin (deceased), both of whom were members of Bear Marsh.

The new house mentioned was subsequently torn down and worked up in the larger and more costly building in which the brethren now worship.

At the session of 1834, the Association appointed on the committee of Arrangements brethren John Carr, Henry Swinson, Henry Moore, George Fennell and John Oliver (son of Francis Oliver). Wm. J. Findley was Moderator, and Geo. W. Huffham, Clerk. The ministers who preached on Sunday were Wm. J. Findley, George Fennell and Wm. P. Biddle. The large congregation seemed so much interested that preaching was continued on Monday. I mention these things because there are a few living witnesses of them who will read them with great pleasure.

Bear Marsh has held membership in five Associations—Kehukee, Neuse, Cape Fear, Goshen and Union (now called Eastern). Two of these were organized at Bear Marsh—the Neuse, in October, 1794, and the Cape Fear, in October, 1806. The Neuse began with twenty-five churches whose membership aggregated 1,663 souls. Among her prominent ministers were William Wells, William and Fleet Cooper, and Francis Oliver, who was several times chosen to preside over her deliberations. The Cape Fear began with fourteen churches whose membership reached 1,563.

Burdick & Read, in their History published in 1808, stated that the time of meeting at Bear Marsh was the third Sunday and Saturday before. The church still worships on these days, having never in all her existence changed the time, so far as I can learn.

Much more might be written about this venerable body; but I now wish to say something more of one of her leading ministers,

#### FRANCIS OLIVER.

who came from Virginia to Onslow county in this State in early life. He married soon after coming into North Carolina, and moved into Duplin county, settling upon a plantation near to Bear Marsh church, the same lands upon which his son, Benjamin Oliver, lived and died, and upon which his grandson, Joseph B. Oliver, now resides. I know not at what date Francis Oliver settled in Duplin, but it was several years before his ordination to the gospel ministry and his entrance upon the pastorate of Bear Marsh church, both of which took place May 17th, 1792. Burdick & Read state that he had, for some time prior to that date, been exercising his ministerial gifts, and they add that "the labors of Elder Oliver have been greatly blessed, and several branches gathered." One of the branches gathered under Elder Oliver's labors is the church called Pleasant Plains in Wayne county. This church still exists, but now affiliates with the anti-mission faction.

Nahunga is another branch gathered by Elder Oliver. This church, from her constitution till 1844, and perhaps for a longer period, worshipped at the meeting-house which stood near Cooper's Mill, about five miles from Kenansville, Duplin county. The Cape Fear Association met with this church in 1811. I am told that the church, several years ago, changed both her name and place of meeting. She is now known as Johnson's church, and her house of worship is one or two miles east of Warsaw. Her present membership is about 120.

Burdick & Read speak of other branches built up by brother Oliver, but does not specify them. Several colonies have gone out from the mother church during the last 130 years of her existence.

Francis Oliver served Bear Marsh church until his death in 1808. The minutes of the Cape Fear Association for the year 1808 contain an obituary notice of Elders Baker and Oliver, who had died during the year, in

which is expressed the high regard in which those ministerial brethren were held.

Elder Oliver was taken sick while in Georgia, whither he had gone on a visit to one of his sons. His sickness terminated in his death, and consequently he never returned to North Carolina.

Among the children he left behind him were John and Benjamin Oliver, the former born in 1790, and the latter in 1803.

I have been told that John Oliver was for many years clerk of Bear Marsh church, and although his home was several miles away, or about four miles from Kenansville, he was prompt and regular in his attendance upon the meetings of his church and faithful in the performance of his clerical and other Christian duties.

Among his children were two daughters, both of whom married Capt. John A. Bryan, and the first of whom is the mother of Robert T. Bryan, our noble, consecrated missionary to China.

Benjamin Oliver was, through the greater part of his life, a member and deacon of Bear Marsh church, which he dearly loved and faithfully served until his death in 1880. He was several times chosen Moderator of the Eastern Association and was chairman of the Executive Committee until a short time before his death, his age and infirmities having compelled him to desist from the arduous labors to which his official position subjected him.

John R. Oliver, one of his sons, having been educated at Wake Forest, entered the gospel ministry in early life, in which high calling he toiled to the best of his ability until his death in 1883. The writers of his obituary said of him, in the minutes of the Eastern Association for 1883: "Through life our brother was an invalid, and his afflictions were of such a character as almost to disqualify him for any duty in life; yet, after he entered the public ministry, he labored a great deal in the vineyard of the Lord. In fact, it was a surprise to many how he accomplished the amount of traveling and preaching that he did. Aside from his deep afflictions of body, which pressed heavily upon his mind, he was a man of fine qualities both of head and heart. He descended from a family that loved and feared the Lord; and professing the religion of Christ in his youth, he led a life of strict morality and integrity until the day of his death."

W. B. Oliver, son of J. F. Oliver and grandson of Benjamin Oliver, is the accomplished and eloquent pastor of the Fayetteville Baptist church. He is moving grandly forward in his high calling, and already stands abreast with the foremost Baptist ministers of the State.

From Francis Oliver, it will be seen, have sprung one grandson, J. R. Oliver, deceased, and two great-grandsons, R. T. Bryan and W. B. Oliver, who have filled and are filling the ministerial office. Being dead, therefore, he yet speaketh to the world, through his great-grandsons, the words of life and salvation. JNO. T. ALBRITTON.

Mt. Olive, N. C.

#### Am I Right or Wrong?

Bro. Editors.—I have been absent in meetings, and part of the time very unwell, which is cause of delay in replying to an article in the Recorder of March 19th.

When I asked the questions of February 19th, I had no intention of writing any more, but I really fear my good brother Cade will not be satisfied, and think it rude and disrespectful not to notice his article at all.

I must be permitted to say just here that no one has as yet given me satisfactory answers to my questions asked. The fact is, I do not consider them answered at all, but there is some consolation in knowing that the pessimism contained in them, if nothing else, was sufficient to put "one great mind" to thinking, and then to writing. And another thing: having been informed of the fact that what I have been doing and practicing for a long time is "for the worse," I have found it out in time to correct it, if necessary. Thanks for this much.

Allow me here to state that I should have made one exception in the reception of members into our churches of other denominations, i. e., that of our Primitive (or Hard-shell) brethren, on conditions that they enter with their whole heart into the Sabbath-school work, and give of their means for the support of the gospel. With this agreement on their part, I take them.

Again, the brother misunderstood my meaning as to the expression, "Not what change has taken place in the mind or heart of the applicant," &c. I had no reference to the "new birth," and I thought all Baptists would take it for granted he was a "believer," for we baptize none other. I meant what change might be on the subject of "baptism" in mind or heart of applicant. And even then, if he had become convinced immersion alone was baptism, what did he, at whose hands he had received the ordinance, believe? If I said one word against preachers or preaching, by young or old, I did it innocently, for the young preachers, specially of the present day, have no stronger friend than myself, and I am ever ready to the best of my ability to aid and God-speed them in their work. All who know me are doubtless ready to give their verdict thus. So I disclaim all intention to wrong in this way any minister.

I make no pretensions to infallibility, but there are some things I hold dear, and I just cannot help it—things that may be of little

consequence to others. I find even Baptists sometimes that claim and hold, for instance, that we make too much ado about the little "schisms" which occur among the disciples of Christ, and the word is, "let them alone, for we will all land at the same point at last." But I cannot help thinking if it be true that we have all started right, and may all come out right, we are travelling more like a herd of cattle through a lane than anything else. This is not like a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariot. This is not being all of one mind and one accord. This is not the peace and order of the gospel. I conceive a very great difference between an obedient and a disobedient Christian. The one like a sheep that remains near the fold, sustained by proper food, enjoying the shepherd's tender care, is kept fat and in a healthy condition; while the other is like a sheep that wanders far from the fold, through barren and unwholesome pastures, and amongst briars and thorns, at length, poor thing, it comes up weakly and lank, and almost dead, its wool all torn off, and its skin dreadfully mangled. There is, too, a spurious sort of liberality sometimes highly extolled by professors of religion, (sometimes Baptists), just like a number setting out on a journey. "Come," says one, (possibly with less means than any), "let us have but one pulse, all expenses be paid out of common stock." It would be illiberal to do otherwise. Thus, they with little fare as those with much. So in regard to religious things, in opinions, &c. Let all differences be waived, all commune together, and no matter what inconsistencies exist amongst them, they are chargeable to the whole; and they that have the least of truth on their side, and are most inconsistent in practice, are generally most clamorous for liberality. And as Baptists we have our all to surrender to this end, while other denominations have nothing at all, and I, for one, am not willing to do this, especially when I have to surrender the principle of truth as Baptists have and hold it. "Call me what you may," I am perfectly willing to go with other Christians so long as I do not have to compromise and sacrifice principle—the truth in Christ as we Baptists hold it. But when I am called on to do this for policy, or to pander to the wishes and views of others, please excuse me. It is too dear to me and cost too much to part with so very cheaply. And I am so constituted and settled in my views as to really question the acts of those who do. I cannot help it.

My good brother propounds ten questions in the Recorder of March 19th, to which I refer you. And I must confess that I fear I do not fully understand them. They somewhat surprise and startle me as coming from a "Baptist," and a highly cultivated "Baptist minister," at that. And in order to answer them as a "Baptist," it may be best for me to define what a "minister is." Who makes, qualifies, and sends him forth for his work? What is ordination, and what place does it occupy in the premises? What is baptism, and who is benefitted by it, and who is authorized to administer it? I fear this article will, from its length, weary the editors, readers, and may be Bro. Cade, but I cannot well avoid its length. I do not expect to trouble any of you on this line again, so please bear with me.

I understand a minister as one who has two important functions, i. e., to preach the gospel and administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The first is a prerogative peculiar to himself. In one sense it is true that all church members are in duty bound to tell to others all they know about Christ. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same," &c. But, while this is true, God in his wisdom has set apart a special body of men to the work of the ministry as preachers, (teachers.) Then a minister is one whose duty in part is to teach the word. I will admit that some few Baptist professors believe that any church member is authorized to administer the ordinances. But the great Baptist family with very general unanimity and consent hold that only ordained ministers, and they alone, are duly authorized to do so, and I can very safely say this has been the usage commonly and universally practiced by Baptists in this country for hundreds of years. I have never witnessed it done by others than those in Baptist churches. Then the answer we give to "Who is a minister?" is one who preaches the gospel and administers the ordinances. God, and not a presbytery, qualifies and gives authority to the minister. Men are not ordained that they may become preachers, but because they are already such. God calls them, bestows the gifts and qualifications, and rolls on their hearts the burden of souls, and really compels them to cry, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." Paul says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who hath enabled me for that he counted me faithful,"—"putting me into the ministry." The Baptist John received his authority from the God of heaven. Christ gave to his apostles the command to preach and baptize. We do not read that Christ bestowed this authority upon all who believed on him, but "certain chosen ones," not only the twelve, but other seventy and so on. Our opinion is that all ministers not thus made, are poorly made. Until recently I thought this was one thing that well-informed Baptists were agreed upon, that Baptist preachers held that they were the true expounders and administrators of the truth and ordinances as delivered to the saints.

What is ordination? What is it as to the ministry? We claim that it does not impart any grace, intellectual or spiritual

qualifications, no visible gift imparted by it. It is not designed to authorize one to preach. It is when proven to be preachers the presbytery lays hands on them, because they believe they are. Paul was called to be a preacher, and it was so announced to Ananias before his baptism. God bestows the gifts: A presbytery is necessary because we take it to keep, if possible, unworthy and incompetent men from entering the ministry, and to endorse the worthy and competent, so that they may be received with confidence by others who may be strangers. The presbytery, acting within proper Scriptural bounds and teaching, try to examine into the applicant's work of grace in the heart, his reasons for believing God has called him, his motives for the work, and his views of Scripture doctrine. If in all these they are satisfied, they then, in concert with the church, declare to all people whom it may concern that, in their judgment and opinion, God has called this man to minister in holy things. Thus they submit to writing and place in his hands as a testimony for him among strangers. Thus he is endorsed as one worthy to be received as a minister everywhere, and qualified to be the pastor of any church that may as such wish his services. And yet some doubt their own.

As to the subject of baptism, I believe there is no difference among Baptists. All hold it is a covering up, plunging under, complete immersion in water. There is, however, quite a difference in views entertained as to the validity of the administrator. We think it matters much as to by whom the rite is performed. And yet when we read and re-read Bro. Cade's position, we are forced to conclude that it is of no consequence as to who performs the act, if it is to a believer "right one time," whether even he be a believer himself or not, or has ever been baptized or not, just so the subject is put under the water. This is certainly a long way from the line I have been taught, and as I understand the word of God on the subject. I shall say more of this further on.

Answer to Bro. Cade's first question: We hold no baptism is mentioned in the Scripture but that performed by those directly commanded to preach the gospel, or commanded by and in accordance with God's direction.

2. Baptism is in obedience to God's command to believers, and is the answer of a good conscience toward God.

3. It might be; but not in this country where the facilities for churches, preachers (Baptist), and much water are so plentiful.

4. Yes; provided they were baptized before the commission of act disqualifying him.

5. Do not see how anything can be valid or not before it is done. No one holding and practicing three baptisms, however pious, can make it valid at all for me.

6. In the very same way that others and yourself know that you are ordained.

7. By the certificate of brethren in the ministry, given every one.

8. If such men as Drs. Mall, Gibson and Ivey's signatures to a fact is to be believed, I know I am ordained; and I take it they were and are men of Christ, and acted within Christ's teaching, and I trust Christ put me into the ministry.

9. I have known minds you could prove nothing to that they did not want to believe. To such I might fail to prove it, but to no reasonable mind would there be difficulty.

10. Taking it that you are a believer, I know of no such teaching by the Saviour as wait. Not what we may think, but what does he say to a believer?

My dear brother, if I have not answered your questions satisfactorily, I have done the very best I could, having never seen anything like them before. Neither did I ever expect such coming from a Baptist, for if I must be plain with you, I can see but very little of any consequence in them any way, answered or unanswered. But your closing remark certainly does "cap the climax." Are you a full-fledged Baptist? What did you ask those questions for? You certainly do not wish to split the grand old Baptist family, and form a new one, do you? I know you will not object to my asking questions.

My brother and brethren, there is something in this matter. My brother may allude to Philip and the Eunuch baptism, but this is no Philip and Eunuch case or country. Again, he may refer to Roger Williams and Ezekiel Holliman, and their baptism. But that has nothing to do with us, for Roger Williams baptism died with him any way. But I say there is something in this matter, and that of vital importance to us Baptists. "Administrator has nothing to do with it." This reminds me of an instance a brother called my attention to a few days since, which I refer to with all due reverence. The story was this: The son of a good Baptist parent, while off at school in a "Pedobaptist" meeting, was converted, but would not receive baptism "only by immersion." On his return home he told his father what he had done. "Well, John," said the father, "I had just as soon have been thrown from a log by a yellow dog into the water and call it baptism as to receive that of the hands of a man who believes in three ways of baptizing, and has never been baptized himself."

I am much like him. We cannot imagine that any denomination but the Baptist has such a thing as Christian baptism, and others may choose to be immersed, and will be done, but yet there are those