

Position of the Baptists in the History of American Culture

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POSITION OF THE BAPTISTS
IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN CULTURE.

Scholars in almost every department of learning now cultivated owe, perhaps, a greater debt to Johann Gottfried Herder than to any one besides.

He [says a recent writer] was the prophet of the German idea as it was shaped, developed, carried out, consolidated, and applied from 1775 to 1825 by Goethe to poetry, by Hegel to philosophy, by Niebuhr to history, by Savigny to jurisprudence, by F. A. Wolf to philology, by Wilhelm von Humboldt to linguistics, by Alexander von Humboldt to natural history, and finally by D. F. Strauss to theology. Herder was at once the originator and the head of that historical school which rules the intellectual world of the present day.¹

It was he who introduced the era of disenthralment from scholastical method and spirit, and infused life, blood, and energy, and even poetical inspiration into sciences that previously existed almost as fossils.

He developed, in an unhistorical period, the gifts and faculties of an essentially historical spirit; he possessed, to a wonderful extent, the power of transporting himself into the innermost spiritual life of the most varied epochs and nations; and herein consists his great importance. This clearness of vision for purely spiritual relationships, it must be admitted, beclouded, as a natural consequence, his perception and appreciation of the ruder forces of history, and hence, though armed with a microscopic sharp-sightedness in spying out the hidden secrets of national psychology, he was not so well able to follow the nations themselves when, with arms in their hands, they rushed to battle against each other.²

Thus the great master carried his own principle to an extreme; which, however, was happily corrected by his successors. Phil-

¹ North American Review, July 1872, page 104.

² Preussische Jahrbücher. Bd. xxix. Heft 2.

federative union among various Baptist bodies ; and that it requires me to express an opinion as to whether a federative union of any color would be feasible ? These might be entertaining topics ; they would perhaps be more attractive than the issue which I am disposed to believe has been submitted to my judgment. But the notion of a federative union is so new and unsettled that I can hardly believe the Committee expected it to be discussed on this occasion.

I fancy that the topic I have in charge relates to a union of all Baptist bodies in a single organization, with a single set of officials, and a single organ of opinion and authority in matters of faith and practice and propagandism. At any rate the query that I shall discuss is, whether an organic union of various Baptist bodies is feasible.

Let it be observed that the word "feasible" is employed. I am not required to express an opinion upon the question whether an organic union of various Baptist bodies is desirable. That issue is sometimes raised and hotly disputed. On this side all the evils of separation are duly arrayed and insisted upon ; on the other side the evils of consolidation are illustrated with glowing eloquence, from certain well-known examples that are widely familiar. This investigation, however, is not before us ; the question is whether an organic union of various Baptist bodies is feasible.

It would be useless to inquire whether a union of this color is feasible at the present moment ? Certainly not ; no preparations have been made for an immediate consummation ; the views of the great body of Baptist believers, whether in this country or other countries, have not yet been formed by discussion. The business is, comparatively speaking, new to the rank and file ; years of familiarity and perhaps of compromise would be required before even the initial step could be taken. Our associations in the faith have become so numerous that we should be compelled to move slowly. Is an organic union of various Baptist bodies feasible, in the sense that we might hope to accomplish it after years of consideration and exertion ? This is a full statement of the question I shall handle in the brief time at my disposal.

I shall not indulge in any decided statements ; the event of which we are treating belongs to the future ; and none of us is infallible to foretell coming events. No man is entitled to declare that an organic union of Baptist bodies can never be achieved ; just as little are we entitled to affirm that it can be achieved. The matter is one of probabilities ; we can hardly see the end from the beginning. Let us endeavor to weigh the probabilities of the case.

II. Discussion of the question.

I am disposed to conclude that a union of various Baptist bodies in a single organization is not feasible. In my humble judgment

the prospect of achieving such a result is not now sufficiently encouraging to justify earnest men in giving much labor to promote it. The reflections that have inclined me to embrace this conclusion will be briefly stated.

(a). The first of these relates to the deliverance of history; no kind of exertion that has ever been bestowed in the history of Christianity has been more unfruitful than the efforts to promote a reunion of bodies that had once become sharply separated. Here is not the place for minute details, but none will deny that labor of a high order has been expended on many different occasions. Prior to the Reformation, plans were often formed to unite the Eastern and Western Catholic Churches. At the Council of Florence it was fancied that these were at least successful. To this day the expressions of joy are both touching and amusing. The leaders were almost utter strangers to the temper of the people.

Likewise there were enterprises to comprehend different minor sects, but the success was not often commensurate. Since the Reformation these projects have sometimes been renewed, but the labor and solicitude employed have yielded surprisingly meager results. Attempts that have been made to unite different Protestant organizations have in general been crowned with little better success.

Therefore, I conclude that the deliverance of history is against the feasibility of the enterprise. Whether that conclusion is grateful or grievous to our feelings, I suppose it must still be allowed to stand firm. The leading instance of union upon an important scale is that of the Lutheran and Reformed bodies in Prussia and certain other sections of Germany. It was effected not by any initiative of ecclesiastical authorities, but by the decree of a temporal sovereign, and a candid survey of the movement will not afford great encouragement to the friends of organic union. Possibly it would have been fortunate if no such enterprise had been attempted.

We cannot afford to undertake a concern of so much magnitude as an organic union of various Baptist bodies without taking counsel with history. Its voice on this subject is clear and indubitable. Numerous sects have quitted the larger communions in different ages. The instances where these schisms have been cured by reunion with the parent stock have been few and far between. Commonly the smaller parties, having run their course, have ceased from lack of momentum, where they have not been crushed by violent means. In brief words, the experience of Christian men in past ages speaks loudly against the project to effect a union between different Baptist bodies. The labor that might be devoted to such an enterprise, if one may conclude from the light of history, would conduce more to the glory of God and the happiness of mankind,

ology, for example, till then recognized as the archetype of aimless and pedantic investigation, has become one of the most fruitful of the sciences, a worthy sister indeed of physiology, entering into the mysteries of the deepest processes of man's development, and revealing to him the secret growth of his own thought, and its original formation in sound and word and period. It has become, so to speak, a corner-stone of psychology, the ornament of philosophy, and an indispensable aid to the student of antiquities, and of the natural history of the human race. And these results have been achieved, as here, also in other fields of study, by a judicious employment of the scientific imagination, the invaluable secret of the preacher and poet of Weimar.

In no other department of literary labor has this discovery of Herder exerted a more widely acknowledged influence than in history. Since the publication of his "Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit," 1785-92, the methods and aims of historical investigation have been making steady advances, until within a few years. Droysen and his school claim to have raised this study to the dignity of a science.¹ It has ceased to be a mere catalogue of events; an ant-like heaping together of all odds and ends of detail in immense and wearisome folios. While these serve a valuable purpose as arsenals of materials, the investigator enters them now with a critical consciousness of the nature of his task, and exercises his judgment in choosing that which serves his purpose and neglecting that which is less characteristic and important. Having fixed what he considers the ground-traits of the period, the controlling ideas that accompany and give shape to its occurrences, he employs only a select number of the events that may have transpired therein to fill up the details of his picture. It often happens, in this way, that men who in their day filled a large space in the world's thought, are passed with unceremonious mention, whilst others are brought forward from seeming obscur-

¹ Grundriss der Historik, von Joh. Gustave Droysen. Leipzig, 1868. Cf. also, Grundzüge der Historik, von G. G. Gervinus. Leipzig, 1837.

ity into the open foreground as the authors of pregnant and suggestive measures, or the prophets of epoch-building principles.

It would have been impossible for any thinker, prior to the day of Herder, to have conceived and given expression to this all-moulding idea of "living organic development in opposition to mere inanimate mechanism, of synthesis as opposed to analysis, the whole individual to fragmentary labor, of *feri* to *facere*, and of spontaneous impulse to the strain of effort." That was an age when convention, pedantry and tyranny, were yielding their ancient thrones. The Americans were at the moment engaged in a struggle that fixed the attention of every class of society—poets, philosophers, statesmen, and peasants—and awakened the whole world to new conceptions of the dignity of human nature, the worth of individual character, and the right of intellectual freedom.¹ Among the mercurial French the effect of this was revolutionary and disorganizing; but among their neighbors across the Rhine it gave a healthful, wholesome, and long-wished-for stimulus to intellectual culture—though it must be granted that even the staid Teutons proved that they, as well as others, are capable of uncontrollable enthusiasm, by rushing pell-mell with the rest into countless absurdities. It was the *Sturm und Drang* Period; every man of culture, so delighted at finding that he was no longer a cipher, almost invariably came to the conclusion that he was, therefore, by nature a spiritual hero, or an incomparable genius, and, as a matter of course, superior to all considerations of propriety or expediency, or indeed of morality. But the quiet after-gain of all this extravagance was a great and decided advance. It was the harbinger of an age in which measures and not men are of the chiefest importance; in which the people everywhere either consciously or unconsciously assert themselves, and it is less important to learn what the monarch thinks about a given political issue, than to observe the views of his subjects concerning it. "Public opinion is the sixth great power in Eu-

¹ Schiller—Don Carlos, Act III, Scene X.

rope," is a remark attributed to Napoleon III. It is a truth characteristic of the mental phenomena of the times.

In the last analysis, therefore, we find that it is the people themselves who are—indirectly, it is true—the authors of Herder's idea. They had, in his day even, risen to such a height in the scale of power that it was felt that history to be adequate must delineate not so much the fetes of rulers in the ecstasies of triumph, or the deeds of great armies, as the silent, daily progress of private opinion, the advances of material prosperity, the moral and intellectual tendencies of principles from time to time maintained, the *Weltanschauung* of the masses, the details of physical geography, the implements of husbandry, branches of industry, social customs, and, in a word, all the varied factors of striking results. The conclusion lay not far away that if modern history has become virtually a history of culture the same might be true of ancient history; and it was the happy lot of Herder to draw this conclusion, and to impress upon the minds of his contemporaries a sense of its importance. Thus he produced a revolution in the learned world which has been fruitful of great results for good as well as evil—for if new points of view were furnished to investigation, the subjective element was also encouraged to push its demands to extremes that sometimes render results untrustworthy.

Bearing in mind these reflections it will be manifest that no agency is more powerful in shaping the opinions and giving direction to the spirit and temper of the masses than the religious sentiments they embrace and the ecclesiastical institutions they live under. Scholars are coming to a riper appreciation of this subject every day, and are recasting their labors to meet its demands.¹ It follows, therefore, that the chronicler of events in our country will always have a task of unusual difficulty; because here prevails the opposite of religious uniformity, and the duty will devolve upon him of studying closely the history, tenets,

¹ DeWette—*Archæologie*, p. 95, 4th edition.

and the genius of each considerable religious community, in order to determine intelligently how much they contribute to the formation of the national thought and the direction of the national destiny. He who shall fancy that these details are beneath his notice, though he will possibly furnish useful materials for the scientific investigator, can never achieve—at least so long as our mental development retains its present configuration—enduring appreciation and sympathy. For nations, as well as individuals are moulded by the conditions, intellectual, religious and material, that surround them, and it is not easy to comprehend the significance of events, if they are communicated without regard to their original setting. A man wandering through the museum will find innumerable antique fauns and satyrs whose form and proportions his eye readily takes in; but he cannot fully appreciate, nay, understand, what he beholds, unless he shall inquire at what point,—by the side of what fountains, or in what groves and bowers,—they were originally set up. In like manner, it is not reasonable to expect that a given section of history shall be understood, except these modifying features are brought to expression. Moreover, unusual attention is now being paid to the culture-historical worth of different churches, and the whole subject of ecclesiology is becoming the theme of more earnest and exact discussion.¹ It therefore becomes our duty to contribute as much as lies in our power towards a proper understanding of the position of the Baptists in regard to the moral, intellectual and social education of the multitudes who come under their tutelage, whether as members of their churches or more remotely affected by their doctrines and polity.

It is not intended here to enter, in any formal sense, the field of comparative symbolics, or to institute parallels between the workings of various religious tenets upon temper and spirit and conduct, so much as to indicate briefly the attitude of our own

¹ Cf. Kirche und Kirchen, Papstthum und Kirchenstaat. Historisch-politische Betrachtungen, von Dr. J. J. Iga. v. Döllinger, Stuttgart, 1872.

denomination, and the tendencies of its doctrines and practices, in these directions. Whenever allusions of this kind are necessary to a clear presentation of the subject in hand they will be employed, but not as matters of primary concern.

We are met on the threshold, as is usual in all evangelical symbols and systematized dogmatics, by the so-called "formal principle," viz., that "the Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience." Baptists are more than usually strenuous in the assertion of this principle, and the form and spirit in which they hold it are perhaps one of their peculiarities. They admit that "the temporal presence of Christ on earth is now supplied by the mission of the Paraclete," but claim at the same time that this "gift of the Holy Spirit is itself administered through the word proceeding from God, just as this in turn can only be morally and livingly appropriated and only in a divine way adopted through the Spirit of truth." Maintaining this reciprocal relation between the word and the Spirit, they deny that Christian cognition is derivable from any internal source. Unsuspicious and pious as the principle of "devout Christian consciousness," on which Schleiermacher builds so largely,¹ may appear, they cannot hesitate to demur, and to insist that to this important factor of correct judgment in religious things there be added the Revealed Word, which is "a lamp to our feet and a light to our path." There is nothing against which they interpose a more energetic protest than that species of subjectivity which in self-sufficient pietism emancipates itself from the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and which, in its ultimate analysis, is a form of infidelity. This sovereignty of the great Author of religion, as articulated in the divine Oracles, extends to all the departments of our mental constitution—to the intellect and emotions and will. No system of doctrines is regarded as authoritative unless it can bear the test of the canon. No usages are tolerated which contradict it in let-

¹ Glaubenslehre, §. 15.

ter and spirit. It is commonly offered as a reproach against them that they are too strict constructionists, too earnest sticklers for details, and for the binding force of positive commands. Nor are they in general less strict with regard to the dominion of Scripture truth over the *emotional* nature; for while they allow that enthusiasm is a concomitant of vital piety, they would have a care always that it be guided and controlled by the authoritative counsel of God. Self-complacent mysticism, whether manifesting itself as an "inner light," claiming independence of that which is alone "able to make us wise unto salvation," or as a disposition to consult private preferences in exegesis, and to foist personal and arbitrary opinions into the Word of God, is almost everywhere among the Baptists discouraged.

The high place which they assign to the Holy Scriptures, leads them to place the ministry of the word and the witness of the churches, in a certain sense, upon a lower plane of dignity than any other body of Christians. The Holy Spirit operates, it is true, through the proclamation of the gospel, but a condition of its operation is that this proclamation shall hold itself closely to the spirit and letter of the inspired writings. To them is assigned the first position. Accordingly Baptists have never considered the office of the ministry in any ceremonial sense—but only in a moral sense—a sacred office; nor are the utterances of the churches authoritative, except as their strict accord with the Scripture lends them this character. From this it will appear that in their theological system there is no place for tradition. The ministry are always to be subservient to the Oracles of God, as are also the churches; and the deliverances of the early councils and of the fathers are to be judged upon their own merits, and are of no binding force, except so far as their orthodoxy and internal weight may entitle them to consideration. Ecclesiastical history, viewed from this standing-point, changes its relationship to the kingdom of Christ, and descends virtually to the level of profane history, except that the theologian will always find it particularly to his

interest, as a source of unfailing entertainment and instruction, to consult the past records of the people of God. In the history of doctrines, too, he will find rich and profitable materials—a vast storehouse—but none of them are binding upon his conscience, except they speak as the oracles of God.

As a mass, the Baptists have been distinctly aware of these consequences of their position; and while rejecting extraneous authority, they have insisted so much the more pointedly on the careful and laborious study of the Scriptures themselves. And though their history in America, singularly like that of the apostolical churches of the first and second centuries, has been a period of struggles and missionary activity, they have still found time to devote a reasonable share of attention to the cultivation of the field of thought before them. The same revolutions which fostered the mysticism of George Fox affected them also; and formerly there was a tendency to seek after so-called spiritual meanings. But their loyalty to their “formal principle,” has long since put an end to this abuse, and forced them to adopt the grammatical method in exegesis. While others are striving about questions of genealogy, and weighing the testimony of the fathers, they devote themselves to the Greek article, and consider none of the details of a tedious text-criticism too minute for attention. The influence of the ideas set forth by Herder, mentioned in the outset, has happily forced them also to give due regard to the historical element, combining it with the philological, in order to produce a living picture of biblical scenes, events, and characters. Thus from seeking in all quarters for materials to elucidate and enforce the text, it became necessary very greatly to extend the bounds of observation and study, the practical effect of which has been to give them an honorable place among the cultivated classes. Their institutions of learning are among the most substantial; and having entered early upon the work of education, great numbers have fallen under their tutelage, and owe the foundations of their attainments and the enduring mould of their character largely to them.

But while emphasizing the normal authority of the Scriptures, and accepting it in their exegetical and homiletical productions, the Baptists of America have not as yet displayed that degree of activity in the systematical development of the Christian dogmas that could be desired. Several excellent manuals, evincing to a gratifying degree independent thought and scientific precision and skill, both in method and expression, have appeared; but much remains to be done. For the most part the denomination has employed the works of authors belonging to other communions; but though the excellences of these are gratefully acknowledged, many feel that it is a duty of their own scholars to provide for this want more fully than has hitherto been done; and with much reason, too; for the "material principle" of the Baptists, the fundamental doctrine of their systematized dogmatics, would be probably different from that of others.

The most important part of a theological system is the foundation upon which it rests. There must needs be a central principle, which is employed as a touchstone. This organizing centre is furnished to the Reformed Theology by the idea of a covenant, by which is meant a mutual relationship between God and man, which has its eternal foundation in God, and is thence developed in various historical phases. This Federal Theology once found, and finds still some of its most vigorous champions among Baptists, and for many years churches existed who made it a test of fellowship; nor do any, so far as I am aware, now array themselves in opposition to it. The Lutheran theology betrays the fact that it took its origin from polemical struggles by seeking its organizing centre in the doctrine of justification by faith. The Baptists being in different circumstances from those which determined the organization of these two systems, have never, as a whole, made either one of these two doctrines a *sine qua non*, to the partial ignoring of the other; but they have constantly sought to bring about a union of the two, and have happily in so far succeeded as to prevent any extensive schism in their churches. Nor

has this been effected by a superficial irenic, obliterating the points of distinction; but, on the other hand, they have sought to place the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth as the only Mediator between God and men, and the only Saviour of sinners, in the centre of their dogmatical system, as the organizing principle, and by this means to lead the two methods in question up to a higher unity. If the Federal Theology occupies a theo-central standing-point, and the Lutheran theology an anthro-po-central, that of the Baptists may be styled christo-central. They do not demur to the statement that the salvation of men has its eternal foundation in the electing decree of God, nor to the statement that Christianity presupposes human agency as well as divine grace; but it is thought that these and the other doctrines of the Christian system may be joined together in better architectural proportion by recognizing as the leading principle the fact that it was founded in time, and became an actual reality through the work of the God-man Jesus Christ. The three central Christian dogmas, predestination, christology, and eschatology, would be brought under better review from this point, especially as each one of these demands to be considered with reference to soteriology. If an increased number of Baptist scholars would devote themselves to this branch, adapting the methodology which the history of our churches suggests and almost prescribes, results very valuable to the denomination, as well as to theological science, might be achieved.

But leaving this topic, let us turn to the practical theology of the Baptists. Here we meet a simple but far-reaching and widely applicable principle, which is after all their most distinct peculiarity, for although other denominations have been driven by circumstances and the weight of opinion to approach more nearly to the Baptist position than formerly, they have only done so by a happy inconsistency with their other tenets. This principle constitutes the very crowning point of all Reformation theories. Without it no work of Reformation can be complete or consistent. In its statement and defense the American Baptists have produced

a deep and broad impression upon the American mind, an impression felt by all other churches, and apparent to the observer of the mental progress, the political habits, and, in fact, the genius of the whole nation. In its broadest generalization this principle is enounced by the declaration that the church of Christ is, in the highest possible sense, a spiritual organization; or, to employ more exact language, the Baptists would so explain the second note of the Council of Constantinople—that concerning the sanctity of the church—as to deny the right of membership to all except true believers in Christ, or such as make a credible profession of faith. And so tenaciously do they cling to this point, that in admitting candidates to the ordinance of baptism it is quite universally the custom to subject them to examination on the details of their christian experience, and to reject them if it prove unsatisfactory. The Protestant notes of a church are also interpreted among them in such a manner as to render it a contradiction to suppose that any others than the truly regenerated, are proper subjects of baptism, and entitled to a place in their midst. They claim that the sanctity of the Body of Christ is not corporate but personal, the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart being indispensable; that it must be experienced before any of the ordinances can be administered or any of the privileges of God's house enjoyed; that the churches are not, so to speak, a nursery designed to raise up the multitudes who enter it for the invisible kingdom, for these must already be members of the mystical body of Christ before they are eligible to a place in the visible kingdom. In former centuries false or exaggerated notions with regard to this idea led enthusiasts into lamentable and wicked extremes, which placed them in an attitude of revolution, and were the occasion of much reproach. Owing to these occurrences, the distinguishing principle of the practical theology of Baptists was then regarded almost universally with prejudice. But that state of things having long since passed away, almost all evangelical denominations have approached more or less nearly the once

rejected idea. A silent change has been going on, giving to every man's religion more of a personal character, and has begun to pervade all circles in this country, and to exert an influence very generally recognized on American ecclesiastical connections, and thereby upon American thought and development. In Europe, also, in consideration of the fact that the vast masses of the unregenerate in the churches are claiming the right of modifying or even abolishing the ancient confessions of faith, and of choosing teachers of their own liberal direction in thought, this idea is at present discussed and embraced by men who have heretofore always regarded it as destructive of the interests of both the state and the church. The influential *Protestantenverein*, with its watchwords of independance and abolishment of confessional tests, is forcing even Lutherans of the straightest sect to propose the free church system, and to prepare for its adoption.¹

But it is contended by many that it is impossible so to protect the purity of the church militant as that it shall consist only of those savingly converted to God; and hence the Baptist conceptions of the second note of the Council of Constantinople are too rigid. It is granted that instances may and do occur when unregenerate men enter the churches and retain the confidence of their religious associates for considerable seasons. But inasmuch as "every good tree bringeth forth good fruit," it is expected of every member to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance;" and unless these are in greater or less measure exhibited, it is concluded that the heart is not under the influence of divine grace, and recourse is had to firm and wholesome discipline to purge from the church its foreign elements, with which it had hitherto maintained only an external and not a real connection. In this holy walk of its members and in the exercise of discipline, a church both manifests and vindicates its sanctity. Internal and external piety are not *opera supererogationis*; they occupy, on the other hand, the position of

¹ Cf *Die Synodus und die Kirchenlehre*, von D. Chr. E. Luthardt, Leipzig, 1871, pp. 13, 14, and *Die Freie Lutherische Volkskirche*, von D. Th. Harnack, Erlangen, 1870

essentials. The figure of the apostle Peter in styling the persons whom he addressed "lively stones, built up a spiritual house," certainly implied that every person who claims membership in a church of Christ must enjoy the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit to some extent at least, and must evince it by a life of godly dealing.

If it be admissible to pause for some reflections with regard to the effect of this principle on society, it might be well to call attention to the peculiar attitude which it forces the church to assume towards the world, and *vice versa*. In no other civilized nation are the lines of distinction between the two drawn with anything like the same precision as here. Among Baptists, and others who adopt in some measure their theory, only those who have experienced the sanctifying operations of the Spirit are admitted to membership. This circumstance forces those who make pretensions to religion to lay upon themselves such restraints as comport with their voluntary declarations and vows. They feel the obligation to be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" and their sense of its importance is heightened every hour by the consciousness that they are closely observed from every quarter, now by those who wish to make their failings the pretext for reproach, and anon by others who look to their example as a theme of encouragement and hope. It may seem trivial to call attention to these matters of detail; but in practical life they are so often considered, and modify in so many ways the course of our lives, that it would be indefensible to neglect them. The criticism—friendly and unfriendly—of the private conduct of Christians; the never-failing impression that the world is expecting of them a course of life and manifestation of spirit that will commend the faith they profess, is a most profitable discipline, and its effects upon American Christianity and civilization it would be difficult to over-estimate.

Although the doctrine that only true believers are entitled to the ordinances and privileges of the Lord's house, draws a distinction between the church and the world, it does by no means

alienate the latter from the former, but rather renders the unbelieving more open to the appeals of the gospel. In those countries where birth gives every man title to church-membership, the Christian teacher has no right to separate his hearers into two classes, but he is compelled to recognize and treat them all as converted persons. This is felt by the more devout and evangelical, even among them, to be a hindrance to directness and earnestness of effort in the care of souls. But under the opposite system, the ungodly, being in no sense whatever members of the church, can urge no claims from the performance of any religious rites ; can encourage their hearts with no flattering hopes, and must apply to their individual cases each pungent warning or pointed instruction or affectionate entreaty which they who minister in the word of God may from time to time deliver. That sometimes a denunciatory and unkindly spirit is manifested by religious teachers in this regard is conceded with sorrow ; but extravagances of that nature soon correct themselves, and the Christian community are drawn more closely to the impenitent by reason of their deep interest in their spiritual well-being ; while the impenitent are in their turn affected and favorably impressed by expressions of unfeigned concern. Thus, through mutual action and reaction, salutary, often far-reaching, results are produced, which those can best appreciate who have given some attention to the evils of the opposite system.

The complement, or, better perhaps, the logical and necessary consequence, of the doctrine concerning the subjects of baptism is the rejection of the theory of corporate life, or sacramentalism in all its forms. In truth, the word sacrament has never held a place in the symbols of the Baptists, and as they become more conscious of its suspicious application they are expunging it from their ecclesiastical vocabulary, thus seeking to furnish in all their deliverances a thorough-going contradiction of the teachings of the Romish hierarchy. Moreover, the so-called sacraments of confirmation, penance, holy orders, matrimony, and extreme unc-

tion, are by them (in common with all evangelical denominations) refused the dignity of an equal place with baptism and the Lord's Supper—they holding the excessive multiplication of holy offices as one of the arts of priestcraft, and as amounting in the use made of them to an abridgment of that freedom in love to which Christians are called. For the skill with which the sacramental theory has been carried into practice; the minuteness with which all details have been elaborated and adapted to the natural realism of the human mind and heart; and its power to bind even the strongest with a hopeless spiritual bondage, are worthy of study, and excite our wonder.

But against no part of this theory of corporate life do the Baptists enter more earnest protests than against the baptism of infants. And this not only because—as is admitted by nearly all who lay claim to exact scholarship—there are no traces of such a practice to be found in the New Testament,¹ but because it is the contradictory opposite of their fundamental principle concerning believer's baptism, and the source of formalism in religious life, and superficiality of religious experience—the Pandora's box of evil to the church and to the cause of piety, and the main pillar of popery. By a painful despite to the doctrines of grace many truly evangelical Christians still maintain this abuse; but inasmuch as the practice can have no possible meaning—refine and distinguish as we may—unless a magical efficacy is attributed to the outward performance,² not a few of these, unwilling to give countenance to anything so contrary to reason, are adopting the suggestion of Schleiermacher, to defer the ordinance until a profession of faith shall have been made. Indeed this able author declares: “We (the Prussian establishment) would for our part consent to an ecclesiastical union with the Anabaptists, if they

¹ Consult especially Schleiermacher, *Glaubenslehre* § 138, 1, 2. “All traces of the Baptism of infants which some profess to find in the New Testament, must first be carried into it.” Schleiermacher gives himself some trouble in this connection to explain how this abuse originated in the early churches. Also, Hase *Dogmatik*, page 426. “It is a pious custom deeply founded in national and family life.”

² Luthardt, *Kompendium der Dogmatik*, § 72, p. 267.

would only refrain from denouncing the baptism of infants as invalid, even where the act is complemented by confirmation." But there is really no intermediate ground between the Baptist position and that of the Romish theology, and they dare not for death or life, compromise the truth of God on a point so vital. In former years the members of most of the other communions, yielding to their own sense of the incongruity between these two sets of principles, were permitting the custom to fall into decay. Let us hope that it may finally die out of mind, and that men will cease pretending to the ability to dictate the operations of that blessed Spirit which "divideth to every man severally as he will." ¹

A principle leading to results of this kind, where consistently held and fully believed, cannot fail to modify, nay mould, to a remarkable degree, the character, both private and social, of an entire community; to control their action and condition their history. Let us indicate some of the directions in which this influence would be most sensibly appreciated.

It fosters, perhaps more than any other idea, the sentiment of individuality; of personal independence. M. Guizot, with the eye of a practiced publicist, has devoted special attention to this point, and has with reason asserted that all individuality was, in the antique world, swallowed up in the state.

When you find liberty, in the ancient civilizations, it is political liberty, the liberty of the citizen. The sentiment of personality, of spontaneous action in his free development, was by the German barbarians introduced into the civilization of Europe. It was unknown to the Roman world, unknown to the Christian church, unknown to almost all the ancient civilizations. ²

The reason why this sentiment was so early stifled in the church, was not any felt inconsistency of it with the doctrines of religion, but the early adoption of the magical conceptions of the means of grace. Each one feeling dependant upon his connection with the church as the only hope of salvation; upon the ca-

¹ Cf. Zwinglius, de vera rel., page 200. ² Hist. of Civilization, Lect. 2.

price of its ministers for pardon and acceptance was already in the clutches of a despotism whose iron rule would admit of little that was peculiar to the individual. The soul was bred to superstition and degrading servility, and nothing that would break this bondage—not even the irruption of unsparing Gothic hordes—can be reckoned a calamity.

According to Baptists the exact counterpart of this doctrine is true. Salvation is entirely independent of the ordinances, and spiritual regeneration must invariably precede the administration of them. No priest intervenes between the supplicant and the divine Father of mercies; for the personal union already enjoyed, is too intimate for any medium of intercourse. Thus is produced a consciousness of personal dignity and worth that is most wholesome both to the Christian himself and to the society of which he is a member; for in proportion as the latter understands and appreciates the worth of the former, is a healthy and fruit-bringing connection originated. Nor has history ever shown that this increase of individualism ministers to democratic license. Contrariwise, indeed, the Baptists are notably conservative; a distinguished authority has declared that “naturally their paths are paths of freedom, pleasantness, and peace.”¹ The rights of man, intellectual, moral, and political, may be enjoyed and esteemed by men whose quiet life and profitable activity bespeak the citizen of widest public spirit, and of engaging devotion to unselfish ends. A statement to this effect would have been greeted once as disorganizing and anarchical by those who contemned the nature of their kind, and despise the vulgar herd. But that day is past, we trust forever, and with it the wiles of priestcraft, and the guardianship of tyrants. Society is now reached and elevated and ennobled in all its members by this most benign principle, and the majestic power of its own cohesion is far greater than the might of paltry kinglings.

It would be natural for those who reject the magical element in

¹ Bancroft, II, 459.

the ordinances to be affected by it in another direction, viz, in respect to the imagination. They would with the least difficulty achieve emancipation from the shackles of superstition, and might be expected from *a priori* grounds to take a foremost position among the iconoclasts of their day, being unappeasable opposers of imposition and sham in every range of thought and action. And to the observer of the distinctive features of Baptist culture, this is probably one of the most striking. They seek to "prove all things," to lay stress upon the substance, and allow due liberty in regard to form, except where positive commands intervene. No ceremonial sacredness is attributed to their houses of worship; their grave-yard is a cemetery, and not a *campo santo*; their ministers speak from a pulpit, and not from a "sacred desk;" they use no consecrated vessels or implements, nor do they lay bonds on intellectual and moral freedom by admitting, in any sense, that ordination is a sacrament; thus breaking up the monopoly of priestcraft, and destroying the strongholds of superstition and abjectness. This kind of philosophy could not fail to produce characters full of vigor, business capacity, and practical unadorned simplicity. It might foster the energies of a poetical imagination, but it is not likely that a great painter would spring from circles where the mysterious and obscure and awe-inspiring are vigorously investigated, and unsparingly judged. A parallel case is found in the earliest churches, where pictures and crosses were not known.¹ They were only introduced after spirituality had become so weak as to need external material supports. There needs not far to seek to discover that in this particular the Baptists—in union with others whose views are more or less in keeping—have impressed a peculiarity of their being ineffaceably upon the character of the American people. Some will esteem this a reproach, others an honor, according to the point of view occupied, but be that as it may, the evidences are everywhere abundant, that almost the whole body of our countrymen have shared with us in these results of our teachings. It is the origin of that self-confidence which invites

¹ Bingham, Ant. Chr. Church, B. VIII, Ch. vii.

to difficult enterprises, that restless activity which has produced an unparalleled prosperity, which is the wonder of the world, and of that utilitarianism that has too much robbed our lives of æsthetical culture and graces.

Once more: the rejection of sacramentalism and the earnest conviction that the sanctity of the church of Christ is to be found in the personal experience of each member, is especially likely to deepen the currents of religious life and feeling. Nothing is more evident than that the theory in question is based upon the natural disinclination of men to personal effort. In countries where the Romish system prevails, the masses leave their religious concerns in the hands of the priesthood, and, in most instances, take no individual interest in measures designed to promote the salvation of men, and foster a zeal commensurate with the demands of the Christian life. Or, if they bestir themselves to labor, the organization of their worship is so complicated, the spirit of devotion is so much cramped and pressed down by external ceremony, that the heart is seldom touched by a sentiment drawn from enlightened reflection. The Bible is hidden from the gaze of all but the initiated, and the multitudes are bidden to trust to the utterances of their superiors, and to dispense with the dangerous labor of private investigation. In Protestant countries, on the other hand, if there be less of blind submission to authority, there is far more of intelligent faith, earnest thought, and genuine devoutness. It must be admitted, alas, that this is sometimes expressed by extravagant and even offensive demonstrations, that fanaticism and enthusiasm have been known to usurp the rights of spiritual worship; but these evils, while they are deplored, are the tokens of the vital energies of faith dwelling among the people who only need guidance and enlightenment in order to offer acceptable and reasonable service. Moreover, there is no religious organization which can lay claim to entire freedom from these imperfections. Even those who oftenest reproach Dissenters, in respect to their proneness to extravagances, cannot endure a strict and candid

examination of their own history on this point, particularly in those rare seasons when devotion has gained the mastery over a dead formalism. The effect of these varied, deep, and burning emotions, founded as they are on individual appreciation of the most solemn truths that ever appeal to humanity, cannot be too closely remarked. If the sense of personal independence which this doctrine fosters should sometimes introduce a tendency to atomization, this increased force of moral suasion will check the mind, guide it to the right exercise of liberty, and raise the entire nature to higher planes of thought and desire and action. If it endows men with greater intellectual dignity, it sanctifies their enfranchisement at once to nobler and holier ends. It is, in a word, a new creation. The human mind being a unity, it is quite impossible to determine its spiritual functions to unwonted activity without, by the same means, exciting it to increased intellectual activity. The era of Queen Elizabeth, so memorable in English annals, was a time of almost unheard-of religious fervor. One might sometimes conclude that every peasant and shopman considered it the highest duty of his life to search out the subtlest distinctions of theology, and explore to their foundations the abstrusest questions between creeds, and to discuss their deeper and more hidden contradictions. In like manner, it is by no means questionable that the astonishing interest manifested by Americans in their churches, and the dogmas that they hold, is one of the secrets of our intellectual activity. Among our people the Baptists are, it is well known, prominent as respects the part which each individual bears in all ecclesiastical concerns; and, without arrogance, a reasonable share may be claimed for them in bringing about the intellectual vivacity that may be observed in all classes of society.

The next general deduction drawn from the fundamental principle of the practical theology above-mentioned, viz, the spirituality of the churches, and also from the spiritual nature of all true religion, is, that there ought to be preserved an entire separation

between the state and the church, or, in other words, that a state can only be termed Christian by virtue of the moral character and religious belief of its citizens. The propriety of this separation, however, is not maintained by them from a fanatical contempt for human means in the propagation of the gospel, and an ill-understood reliance on divine support, but because they believe that the union is unnatural, nay monstrous, contradicting both the Word of God and right reason.

The civil government has in its own name an indefeasible right to existence, and its foundation is as firmly laid in the social necessities of mankind, as in the Word of God. The magistrate, in the exercise of his office, is to be revered as the minister of God, and he is as truly engaged in the service of God as those who perform acts of benevolence or devotion. This position was taken and defended with much emphasis by Dr. Martin Luther, in the early stages of his career, although his later conduct contradicted very much the theory which he first embraced. It had, before his day, been urged for ages by those witnesses for the truth who dissented from the church of Rome; not that they believed as some have done, that all human Governments are as such despicable, but because they concluded that the sphere of the state is entirely distinct from that of the church.¹ In America, Roger Williams was probably the first to give abiding expression to this principle.

If it be then established that the Baptists of America, while opposing a union between the state and the church, are by nothing constrained to assume an unfriendly attitude toward the former, let us inquire what influence this separation (which in America is *almost entirely* due to them) is likely to exert upon society; or, in other words, what sort of an agency it proves in moulding the thought and the philosophy, and thereby the history, of our people.

It must be granted, in the outset, that when the separation is complete, the church and its ministers, as such, lose entirely their political position and political power. Their outward control of the

¹ See article on this subject IN BAPTIST QUARTERLY for January, 1872.

destinies of the state is at an end; the only weapons left to them are those “not carnal but spiritual:” their actions are no longer partly political and partly spiritual, but wholly the latter. To very many minds, the idea of a theocracy—although it is manifestly adapted only to men in the lowest stages of intellectual and spiritual culture, and belongs to the worn out institutions of a former and darker dispensation—still possesses irresistible charms. But to those who hold the substance as of more value than the shadow, it is no matter of regret that ecclesiastical institutions seem to decline in political importance; for they gain thereby a vast increase of historical importance. It is true that the churches cannot, as such, thrust themselves into the midst of the struggles of the hour, and “shape the whispers of thrones;” but this same intermeddling has always proved the most serious check of spiritual healthfulness and vigor. Where Lords Spiritual have the same rights in the legislative branch as Lords Temporal, and if each party is suspiciously watched, and anon superciliously overborne by the other, the wounds with which such a rivalry afflicts the interests of piety are incalculably grievous. Many, however, consider the bare suggestion of the idea here advanced as treason against the church of Christ. But the Baptists, in their advocacy of it, have been instigated by no quietistic theories, nor by any indifference to the truth; but, on the contrary, they cherish the earnest conviction that the best hopes of the cause of religion and of the world are founded upon the separation of the state from the church. The former, no longer responsible for unity of faith and worship, is relieved of the necessity of perpetrating, in its maintenance, crimes against all faith and virtue. The ambition of the ministers and standard-bearers of religion is thereby circumscribed to such limits as are wholesome for them, and beneficial to the cause of religion. The strivings after high ecclesiastical position and pitiful material gains, are to a degree discontinued, so that the Great Head of the church is less seldom dishonored by those who should be the exponents of Christian purity. An indifferent

spirit and a decline of vital piety may be often accounted for, in theocratic states, by occurrences of this kind.

Allusion may also be indulged to another very apparent but very practical question in this connection. It is the theory of all establishments to render the minister independent of the people whom he serves. Their opinion, whether favorable or unfavorable, does not affect his standing; the state having appointed him, is forced to claim a due respect for her authority, and private preferences must be surrendered. But is it not a mutual disadvantage for one who has the care of souls to be thus entirely above his people? He loses, thereby, a powerful and honorable incitement to self-culture; his character loses, as a consequence, by slow degrees its tension; his purposes possess no longer their ancient fixity; pastoral duties, and all others, become more and more irksome, until the man who gave promise of symmetrical and large expansion has dwindled to the proportions of a dwarf.

In connection with this stands the fact that no bonds of sympathy unite him to the people. He having been placed over them without regard to their wishes and tastes, it would do violence to human nature to suppose that in any real sense he could become the pastor of the flock. Thus a condition of alienation is very frequently produced, which prevents even well-meant efforts from accomplishing useful results.

I am aware that on the other side a condition of too entire dependence is likely to produce evils of a deplorable kind; but they are by no means so necessary or so general as under the opposite system. But our concern with these particular views of the subject goes no further at present than they are supposed to have a bearing upon the individual and social status of the people. No one observes with greater foreboding the decline of earnestness in religious convictions than those who possess a philosophical eye for the conditions of social progress. The politician at all conscious of the significance of such an act, would be quite as much alarmed by the issuance of another "Book of Sports" as would

the pious believer in our Lord Jesus Christ. But the union of the state and church is thought to be the *direct* occasion of much infidelity and impiety. It is a circumstance full of meaning that on the continent of Europe the advocates of republicanism are almost without exception the passionate opponents of Christianity. This results from the fact that the church and state, both occupying an ultra-conservative ground, in most instances give each other mutual support. That the political authorities should adopt any line of action which would not be immediately defended and advocated from the pulpits of the country, is well nigh inconceivable. It is extremely natural, therefore, for all those who are displeased with the government, whatever be the source of provocation, to turn against the church also, whose only mission seems to them to be the defense of measures which they regard as unreasonable or tyrannical. From this point to the total rejection of religion the way is not long. In this manner are thousands every year precipitated into impassioned infidelity. Widespread and perilous injury is done to the lower classes, from whom moral restraints are entirely removed; and even the existence of stable government is jeopardized. Nobody hates religion *per se*. It is only the hypocrisy and vindictive tyranny with which it allies itself in political organizations that men despise and contemn; but, unfortunately, this drives them so far away from the restraints of morality as to endanger, often, the very groundwork of social order.

But let us not pursue this subject any further than to add that under a theocracy it is quite impossible to maintain that degree of discipline which is indispensable to ecclesiastical purity, and which, be it well observed, is one of the notes of a church of Christ. The bounds of an established church are usually as wide as those of the state; and the certificates of baptism and confirmation are the title to citizenship. Now the higher classes of the people are of course among the most prominent supporters of religion, although it often befalls that their morals are loose,

their principles corrupt and unworthy, and their tempers inhumane. Men whose life was a scene of unvaried debauchery have been hailed as the “the eldest sons of the church,” and as the “defenders of the faith.” But these characters from the highest walks of life, are met, on the other hand, by many more from the lowest; and you shall see certain classes whose membership in the church must be proved in order to legalize crimes that society and nature hold in like abhorrence. But such evils are to be endured as composedly as possible, because excommunication or any other form of official censure is attended with civil disabilities, which render it difficult for the ecclesiastical authorities—whatever personal sentiments they may entertain—to do anything in vindication of the dignity of the Lord’s house.¹

The importance of these reflections ought not to be misunderstood. Bearing as they do upon the moral and political education of the largest classes of society, they have in many cases a world-historical significance. It is these quiet, hidden agencies that produce the most astonishing and solid results. “The German schoolmaster it was who conquered at Koniggraetz;” and we claim that the impression of Baptists upon the people of America, as one of the main causes preventing the adoption of any state religion, and thus of averting the evils indicated as inherent in them, is deep and widely felt, and consequently that their share in the development of our present culture is by no means inconsiderable.

But the ground-principle of our practical theology, taken in connection with the spiritual nature of religion, has led the Baptists from the beginning to become the champions of another doctrine; namely, of the rights of both the conscience and intellect. This position is a pendant of the preceding. While that asserts that the kingdom of Christ is not of this world, this declares that “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are

¹ Cf. Litton, Church of Christ, p. 353.

in anything contrary to his word, or not contained in it." In the gracious providence of God, the social station of the Baptists was always humble; and they have been exposed almost incessantly to unsparing persecutions. Dire necessity thus furnished them frequent occasions to define and emphasize this article of their faith. Owing to a most fortunate conjunction of circumstances in the state of Virginia, and in the United States, during the second half of the last century their sufferings and struggles were rewarded with results of almost incalculable importance. When we compass in thought the meaning and breadth of intellectual liberty, we shall wonder greatly that anything so comprehensive and benign, and so clear, radical, and bold in its demands upon society, should have emanated from a people so obscure; for their claims to the enunciation and untiring championship of this doctrine are superior to those of all others, although a most honorable mention is due to the labors of the founder of Maryland, in this connection, who in respect to *toleration* was far in advance of his times, and a brilliant exception to the long line of inquisitors and persecutors whom his church has produced. It will be observed, however, that the Baptists at no time demanded toleration simply, but always freedom of conscience. They perceived distinctly, with Paine and others, that "Toleration is not the opposite of intolerance, but is the counterfeit of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of *withholding* liberty of conscience, the other of *granting* it."¹ They are the only religious denomination who carried the principles of the Reformation to their logical results. Even the authors of the Reformation, although they liberated the mind, pretended to govern it by law. But those whom they treated contemptuously and cruelly alone fully understood the principles and effects of the movement. Luther opened the Bible to the masses; but with strange inconsistency, desired to enforce an iron uniformity. Our predecessors proclaimed the enfranchisement of mind, a principle

¹ Rights of Man, p. 58.

broad enough to embrace Protestant and Catholic, pietist and atheist, and "all sorts of consciences."

Many, it is true, unaware of the theoretical and practical difficulties that environ this subject, have spoken of religious freedom in a way more rhetorical than scientific. But while casuistical objections may be raised on every hand, and actual, burning questions sometimes arise, it will not be disputed by persons of moderate candor, that these are much more readily solved when the civil government approaches them from a merely political point of view, unshackled by religious or confessional considerations. Already, in speaking of the Baptist opposition to sacramentalism, we have found occasion to refer to some of the social and moral influences of the doctrine of intellectual and moral freedom, inasmuch as this latter is a natural consequence and development of the former. Allusion was had to advanced sentiments concerning personal independence, as also to the increase of intellectual and politico-economical activity. It deserves attentive consideration in this connection, that it was the matured conviction of Mr. James Madison, as well as many prominent men of the Revolution, that "if the church of England had been the established and general religion in all the northern colonies, as it was in Virginia, and uninterrupted harmony had prevailed throughout the continent, slavery and subjection would have been gradually insinuated among the American people." And it would be an error to conclude that this opinion was due to any narrow bigotry or prejudice, for he was himself a member of the Protestant Episcopal communion; but it was based upon the broad ground that, "union of religious sentiment begets a surprising confidence, and ecclesiastical establishments tend to great ignorance and corruption, all of which facilitate the execution of mischievous projects."¹ The doctrine of freedom of conscience, then, as shown by the testimony of distinguished actors in the scenes of the latter half of the eighteenth century, has already done our people a most important service during a dangerous crisis.

¹ Rives' Life of Madison, p. 43.

But, turning from this point to one which has not been previously touched upon, it may be remarked that this principle has favored the birth and development of a multitude of religious sects. This, although it may be regarded in certain highly conservative quarters as a great evil, is with much more reason considered as a blessing, both to the world and to the cause of pure and undefiled religion. The rights of the mind and conscience being freely acknowledged, there is seldom an occasion for the manifestation of fanaticism, and the interests of the different denominations being extremely varied, there is scarcely a remote possibility of a religious war. "The unfettered and spontaneous diversity of opinions, of sects, of parties, of interests, in both politics and religion, is the only practical security for the equal liberty of all, by the mutual vigilance and inspection they will exercise over each other, and the mutual forbearance they will finally learn to practice from an experience of that security."¹ Just observation will convince candid men that President Madison evinced wisdom and patriotism in nothing more conspicuously than in choosing this idea as the corner-stone of his political creed. In the United States, at least, we have had experience as to the workings of this system, and although many objections may be urged to it, it has put an end to persecution, and filled all hearts with repose.

This freedom of conscience is also useful to the cause of religion. Everything is open to criticism. No opinion, or creed, or system, is exempt. Theology must enter the lists with other sciences, and bravely defend herself against all comers. There is no longer a covert of defense under the wing of the civil power, whither she may flee in an hour of defeat and distress. She is forced to depend on her own resources; she asks no favors; enters into no entangling alliances; makes no compromises, and by the might of her own arms achieves respect for herself on the arena where giants in the republic of letters hold their high debates. And in her own panoply of light she wages the ancient feud, against

¹ Rives, p. 47.

error and heresy, with far greater dignity and success than when tyrants and despots raised their impure and wicked hands to fight the battle of the Lord.

There is only space to mention one other consequence of the fundamental principle of our practical theology. It is the perfect equality established between all the members of the body of Christ. None are admitted to church-membership except those who have been justified by faith. As such, they all occupy the same plane; they have places side by side at the table of communion; enjoy equal rights in the government of the church, and are equally burdened with the duties of the Christian life. In respect to this last—the active duties of religion—Baptists are accustomed to employ the apostolical phraseology concerning the priesthood of every true Christian. I Peter ii. 5, 9. Referring back to the organizing principle of their systematic theology, salvation from sin through Jesus of Nazareth, the only mediator between God and men, it will follow inevitably that none of those who were thus dependent upon free grace for their position among the people of God, can lay claim to any species of aristocracy above the rest. The theo-central principle of Calvinism is likewise equally levelling in its tendencies, but possesses, at the same time, an element far more stern, “invading the invisible world, and bringing down from the book of life the record of an enfranchisement decreed from all eternity by the King of kings,” and it produces, wherever it prevails, a noble ruggedness and honesty (although some times, alas, allied with narrowness) of character that has furnished humanity with many of its purest ornaments, and merits the homage of admiration.

This leveling of all meretricious distinctions is instanced moreover, in their views concerning the office-bearers of the churches. Whatever moral dignity they may attach to the station of the minister or deacon, it is to be understood in no case as giving them the right to “lord it over God’s heritage.” The ceremony of ordination, so far from being a sacrament, imparts no powers that

did not previously exist, is invariably the act of the church herself (by whomsoever performed), and may be revoked by her at her pleasure.

The essential priesthood of all Christians is also taught by them in such a form that it is made the first duty of each individual to labor personally in the service of the cause of religion. No substitute is admitted; an individual responsibility is enjoined. For the encouragement of the least of all the members, it is also taught that the priestly functions of even the humblest, are as acceptable as those of the highest, and that there is no distinction by reason of caste or office. That system which confines the functions of the priesthood to the ministry alone, is of the essence of popery, and a part of the theory of infallibility. By it the people are held under guardianship and bondage, and their energies, not coming into active exercise, are crippled and weakened. The other system is fitted to secure the labors of the whole Christian community, and presents to every one, without exception, the strongest motives to leave the state of passive, and enter that of active religious life.

The effect of this principle in political life is, as a matter of course, democratic; it may be styled a humanitarian principle; but we may question, as before remarked, whether the democracy which it inspires is altogether as stern, rugged, and restless, as that which results from the Federal Theology. It is certainly never as vindictive and radical in the day of unrestrained authority. It must be allowed, however, as if in contradiction of all theories, that it develops apathy in some rare cases, and a stupid egotism which reminds us but too painfully that even the most perfect systems fail at various points when the imperfect nature of man is a factor in the calculation.

The practical working of this equalizing idea in all the relationships of life, its agency in shaping the maxims and genius of the people is everywhere witnessed among the Baptists. Their example in this respect has also within late years proved con-

tagious, and the Methodist Episcopal and Protestant Episcopal Churches in America have been compelled to yield to the demands of the times, and admit those who stand below either of the so-called holy orders to a share in their ecclesiastical legislature. This inconsistency with their principles is more clearly appreciated by the latter communion as a body than by the former, which has heretofore maintained a closer sympathy with the great masses of the people. But in either case it must be recognized as a concession to the ideas of those who acknowledged no sacramental efficacy in the ceremony of ordination. But having discussed at sufficient length the bearing of the fundamental principle of their practical theology, together with its cognate truths, upon the culture of the American people, we will notice, in passing, another peculiarity that stands unconnected and apart in their ecclesiastical system, and which they justify by an appeal to the Word of God and the example of the apostolical churches. It is the independence of each single church of the dictation and government of all exterior ecclesiastical authority, and the sovereignty of such of their acts as do not violate the letter and spirit of the Scriptures. The question of the degrees of autonomy or centralization is not a new one. It was discussed already in the antique world, where the minor Greek states were jealous of the hegemony of Sparta and Athens respectively, and were constantly concerting plans by which to set bounds to prerogatives and fix the safeguards of their liberties. It is the theme of conflicting opinions at this day, in our own politics, and not less in European ;¹ and the question will probably never be considered as settled. There are two extremes between which institutions of all kinds can be grouped. But in constitutional governments the question, often variously modified, lies between what the Germans call Bundesstaat and Staatenbund ; between a federal

¹ Compare die Verfassung des deutschen Reiches in seineu Grundzügen und Verhältnissen zu deu Einzelstaaten. Von Lorenz Hauser. 1871. Das neue Reich und seine Verfassung Von Dr. Leopold Auerbach. 1871.

state and a confederation of states. Baptists, in their ecclesiastical connections, accept the latter as the ruling theory. Each single church is independent. No church is authorized to surrender her sovereignty to another body, or blameless if she submits to an invasion of her rights and prerogatives. The advantages of this plan are numerous and considerable; but in view of the former discussions we will lay emphasis only upon the single fact that it prevents the rapid spread of heresy and corruption. A barrier is raised at the door of every church against the questions and controversies that may prevail elsewhere, and incorrect opinions by being thus circumscribed often exhaust their power for evil on the field where they first sprung up. Demoralization and corruption are also more effectually resisted. Unchristian practices, that have gained the ascendancy, in one section, are discouraged and prevented in another. There is no central authority forcing all the separate organizations to adopt whatever may seem to it agreeable and becoming. In illustration of this, no one, for instance, can observe, without peculiar gratification, in connection with the history of American culture, that although the Baptists are one of the foremost denominations in the United States, their direct and palpable influence upon our political destinies—in controlling public elections, exciting agitation, or manipulating the legislative, judicial or executive authorities—is quite inappreciable and insignificant. There is nothing that furnishes to our own people, and to all friends of religion, a juster ground of pride and thankfulness. To mention a curious example: in the state of Georgia every eighth person is a Baptist, and yet it is utterly impossible to wield this large body as a mass for corrupt purposes, or so to unite them upon a civil issue as to make it desirable to ambitious demagogues to seek a place among them as a stepping-stone to preferment. God grant that we may never be ‘deprived of this boasting!’ Should we, as a religious body, in the future as in the past, succeed in keeping our good name untarnished by the foulness of party contact, our place in the

culture-history of America will continue to be a commanding and profitable example to the whole population. It is probably a consideration of the greatest practical importance to the preservation of a pure Christianity and to the sacredest interests of society.

In concluding our discussion of the position of Baptists in the history of American culture, we will venture a general reflection concerning the genius of the denomination and the policy to be observed by those having its interests in charge. It is evident to the most superficial that churches professing the principles above enumerated must be in all essential particulars popular; or, if you will, plebeian. Men of high position in the world, if their hearts are not filled with something of the generous fire that inflamed the tribunes of the people, will soon find that the leveling and humbling doctrines of the Baptists are inconvenient and probably distasteful to them. By the same ratio in which their aristocratic tastes increase is their broad sympathy for humanity and the fervor of their loyalty to truth likely to decline. But if, with a full consciousness of the meaning of our ecclesiastical institutions and of the genius of the system we teach, they preserve the freshness of their loyalty to truth, they are greatly blessed and strengthened in the act, and tread the path of duty with a firm unhesitating step. While it is refreshing and instructive to observe the lives of men of this kind, who—we say it with gratefulness to God—are not too rare among our people, we nevertheless find that it is among the yeoman class—strong-handed, simple-mannered, intelligent and virtuous—that Baptist principles are most readily welcomed and embraced, and most passionately loved and defended. It need not excite the wonder of those who know what a dread they have of too much legislation, that the large number of our communicants are found in rural districts and quiet villages, afar from great marts of commerce and corruption. And when they appear in the great centers of life you shall usually find them resembling one of the city churches of apostolic times in the respect, “that not many

wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." From the nature of the case, it is impossible for them to meet the conditions of a fashionable denomination. Their mission is too earnest and benign; the truth they hold is too broad and true; their spirit is too evangelical and their labors too practical. This is far better for the cause of pure Christianity, and for the interests of our country, a very large proportion of whose citizens—particularly of that sturdy class upon whom she leans most confidently in time of trial,—receive their education and the enduring impress of their character from these people. It would be extremely unfortunate for the Baptists themselves, and for our national progress, if they should degenerate to flippant panderers to corrupt and changeful tastes; should degrade themselves by striving after the honors of men more than the favor of God; or cease to lay a strong but kindly hand upon the moral character of the thousands whose development is committed to their charge.

And we may congratulate ourselves that there are agencies in constant, extensive, and necessary operation, which are, as if by Divine appointment, suited to preserve the purity of their faith and practice. They are reproached for nothing more frequently than their devotion to the letter of the divine commandments. In Europe, probably, more than in America, is their attitude with reference to the Word of God, as "the only certain authoritative rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience," persistently misrepresented. They are accused of neglecting the spiritual in favor of the formal, and resolving the whole of religion into the superficial observance of ceremonies. None are better persuaded of the injustice and falsehood of these allegations than Baptists, who emphasize the fact that the main distinction between themselves and all other religious bodies, is the absolute distinction they would see observed between the church and the world, and the absolute necessity of spiritual regeneration, in order to procure admission to the ordinances and privileges of the organized body of God's people. But while laying so much

greater stress than others upon the spiritual element, it is of equally vital consequence to emphasize the authority of the Scriptures, and the binding force of the gospel order, as therein taught. Otherwise there would be no barriers set against mystical subjectivity on the one hand, and rationalistic subjectivity on the other, either of which is a direct and blasphemous imputation of the authority of the King in Zion. Moved, then, by no capricious love of singularity, but rather by holy reverence for Divine authority and a just abhorrence of the sin of questioning it, the Baptists observe the original and only mode of baptism; and, as a necessary sequence of this, practice what is opprobriously stigmatized as "close communion."

Now the first of these ordinances long since lost the right of presentation in the saloons of fashionable circles. Persons, therefore, who contemplate entering upon ecclesiastical relations out of any of the numerous motives that are devoid of the proper moral earnestness, being met upon the threshold by the requirement to imitate the example of Jesus in submitting to immersion, are most likely to demur, and, going elsewhere, to seek out something more in consonance with their tastes. Leaving out of view, for the present, the arguments by which this is shown to be the only mode of baptism, and the obligation that binds us to yield implicit obedience to positive commands, this custom has doubtless been—as a matter of sound policy alone—of incalculable advantage to our churches, and it is likely in the future to yield them yet more important service. Charles II declared that "Calvinism was no religion for a gentleman," and turned away in disgust from the Presbyterians, averting from them, thereby, one of the greatest calamities that could possibly befall a religious community; since the church of Christ has always suffered more from the smiles and patronage of princes, than from the frowns and enmity of persecutors. It would be a sad day for Baptists should they ever become the most wealthy and powerful of the religious denominations of America, if they at the same time learned how to push their cause in the halls of legislation, and the drawing-rooms

of ministers of state : if they should become the leaders of those circles of society where flippancy is prevalent, and moral and intellectual earnestness are despised. They would forget full soon the simplicity of the gospel and single-eyed devotion to its tenets. The frailties of human nature would put in an appearance, and pride and luxury and all uncharitableness might usurp the place of stern virtue, unaffected humility, and broad and wholesome principles. Such, at least has been the history of other churches when blessed, or rather cursed, with an undue measure of outward prosperity and authority. It is, therefore, well for the Baptists, and for our who people also, that the first ordinance they administer to those seeking their communion, imposes upon the thoughtless and flippant a burden too heavy to bear.

The other practice—strict communion—is the logical sequence of the former. Notwithstanding the circumstance that this logical sequence is perceived and admitted by all persons of common intelligence, the usage of our people in this particular, is urged on every hand as a reproach, and the unlovely charge of bigotry is often alleged against them. I have no doubt that by this means many honest-minded persons, have conceived prejudices that have driven them entirely away from contact with us; but in most cases this charge is felt to be unfounded, and the odium which it excites among a certain class like that mentioned under the former head has ministered almost entirely to the advancement of the more solid interests of the denomination. And it is possible that we do not in general sufficiently appreciate the circumstance that while both of the counts in the charge made against Baptists, in respect to their practice in the case of the two ordinances, are entirely groundless, they minister, though silently, very largely to the maintenance of spiritual religion and gospel purity among them. If, in addition to this, the firmness of primitive discipline could be everywhere maintained, the friends of uncorrupted Christianity—whether from political or moral considerations—would have even greater reasons to be gratified.

It is well from time to time to examine from the standing point of the historian of culture, or of the philosophical politician, the nature of our ecclesiastical institutions, and the meaning of our principles, in order that we may arrive at steadier views concerning the mission of Baptists, and the methods which they should adopt. To young ministers, just entering upon their life-work, such a review ought to furnish some practical and guiding lessons. The people with whom your lot is cast, my brethren, have emancipated the intellect, and have opened the Bible to all. You will be called to move among men of active independent minds. Your principal claim to their respect and, as a consequence, your best prospect for usefulness will depend upon your intellectual and moral endowments and culture. They recognize the validity of no sacramental theory. You will therefore be surrounded by no halo of priestly sanctity. Hence it is imperatively necessary that you should employ diligence in arming yourself thoroughly for the duties before you. You will remember, too, that the pulpits of a people professing these leveling, humanitarian principles, these earnest gospel truths, are no fit theatre for over-cultivated, weak-thoughted intellectual exquisites, doling out diluted and harmless treatises on philosophy or æsthetics. Men of robust spirit are in demand, who, like our blessed Master, keep in sympathy with the common people, and are gladly heard by them: who, in connection with apostolic ruggedness and vigor, cultivate also apostolic gentleness and simplicity.

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