

History

of the Church of God

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PREFACE

A hundred or a thousand years hence the good or the evil opinions of human beings with reference to this book will not be of the slightest importance to me; while I shall be wholly interested in the approval or the disapproval of God. And, by reason of the entire uncertainty of the continuance of this mortal life, such may become the state of my feelings at any moment. Such indeed have been my feelings, I believe, to a great extent, in the preparation of this volume:

For the Preface, Introduction, and General History of the Church, no one but myself is responsible; while of the Kehukee and Primitive Baptist History in the latter part of this work, with very little exception, my father is the sole author.

It was the intention of the early members of the Kehukee Baptist Association to have its history written up and published at the close of each generation. The Association was organized A.D. 1765. The first history was written by Elders Lemuel Burkitt and Jesse Read, and published in 1803. The second history was written by Elder Joseph Biggs, and published in 1834. And my father, Elder Cushing Biggs Hassell, was in 1876 appointed by the Association to prepare the third history of the body, as well as a sketch of the History of the Church from the creation. After having written nearly all the Kehukee and special Primitive Baptist History, and the history of the Church from B.C. 4004 to A.D. 350, he passed from the scene of his earthly labors, April 11, 1880. I was appointed by the Association in October, 1880, to complete the work. Upon the examination of my father's manuscript I

found that the General History of the Church needed considerable and laborious revision, which he designed, but did not live to accomplish. I have made this revision to the best of my ability, and I have also brought forward the history from A.D. 350 to A.D. 1885.

My father traveled and preached extensively among the Old School or Primitive Baptists of nearly all parts of the United States from 1840 to 1880, and was cordially received by them everywhere; and if any one understood their views he must have done so. He was, and I am, the Moderator of the Kehukee, the oldest Primitive Baptist Association in America; and, while this book does not profess to be the organ of the Primitive Baptists, still I am satisfied that the views of my father and myself on spiritual subjects are, in general, substantially the same as those of the great majority of our brethren. In regard to the religious innovations of post-apostolic times, with reference both to doctrine and to practice, the words of the Lord in Proverbs 22:28, Jeremiah 1:17-19, 6:16, and Jude 3, have been especially and deeply impressed upon our minds.

For about two years I earnestly endeavored, by private correspondence and notices in our religious periodicals, to obtain complete lists of all the Old School or Primitive Baptist Churches and Elders in the United States; but so very few responded that the list is entirely too defective to be published. I have inserted in the history of the eighteenth century a list of all our churches of which I have been able to get any account, formed during that century. At the close of the Kehukee History is given the list of our associations in the United States, very much as left by my father.

The most eminent of modern church historians have zealously devoted from thirty to fifty years to the accomplishment of their labors. The present work has occupied the careful attention of my father and myself about nine years, he having employed upon it about three-and-a-half, and I about five-and-a-half years. As we have had comparatively so short a period for the survey of the history of the church for nearly six thousand years, we have been absolutely compelled to avail ourselves extensively of the best results of investigations made by other men, indicating our indebtedness by quotation marks, and frequently giving the authors' names. We have aimed,

not at a vain show of originality, but at utility; and we have freely laid under contribution the best stores of religious knowledge on earth. It would require not only great intellectual and spiritual ability, but a long lifetime spent diligently in the great libraries of Europe, to write the history of the church as it ought to be, but never has been written. My father and I have, in general, at points where the truth is assailed, purposely used the very language and the reluctant admissions of such as occupy the highest positions among the enemies of the truth, so as effectually to silence the gainsayings of those who defend error with less information and less ability. We have dwelt sorrowfully, but emphatically and solemnly, upon the extravagant Pharisaism and the extraordinary religious superficiality of the nineteenth century. The world presses into the nominal church, multitudes compass sea and land to make proselytes, while the unfelt horror of spiritual death reigns throughout almost the entire extent of the civilized as well as the uncivilized populations of the globe. But while gross darkness covers the rich, proud and corrupt Egypt of the world, as of old, the few poor, humble and despised Israel of God are blessed with divine light in their dwellings; and, to the spiritual mind, it is intensely interesting and edifying to observe the providential course and circumstances of that heavenly light as it comes down to us through the historical wilderness of the ages. Straight and narrow, high and holy, spiritual and divine is the mysterious path along which patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs, and all the dear people of God have been led by the Spirit and providence of the Most High. The infallible Scriptures, illuminated by the Divine Spirit in our hearts, alone can enable us to discover that heavenly path, and to walk therein, and find rest to our souls.

As is well known by those best acquainted with my conduct in accepting and carrying on the difficult and onerous task of revising and completing this work, and in arranging for its publication, I have not been influenced by motives of worldly gain, but, as I trust, by a desire to promote the cause of truth, even at a great sacrifice of my temporal interests; and I hope that I have been divinely enabled in the compilation of the history, to rise above worldly considerations, and, in the solemn light of eternity and the consciousness of my great responsibility, to set forth what I believe to be the truth. I have not tried to write a popular or salable book. I seek neither

the ephemeral applause nor the perishing riches of men; and I hope that the fear of God has been implanted in my heart, and delivered me from the fear of the face of clay soon to moulder into dust. I have not written for the purpose of either pleasing or displeasing men; but I have endeavored, like an impartial witness, to state plainly, calmly and essentially "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," whether men like it or not. If the truth please them, I shall be glad, for nothing else can make them free; if it displease them, I am not responsible. For the truth, however distasteful, I am not responsible; but for accurately reporting what I am satisfied is the truth, I am responsible to God. While it is impossible, as Macaulay says, for history to give the whole truth, the best historians exhibit such parts of the truth as most nearly produce the effect of the whole, and seek to discover and explain the principles interpenetrating and underlying the facts. Such has been my view of the true province and object of history; and this ideal I have endeavored, as best I could, to exemplify in the present work.

I have labored to set forth the truth in creation, in history, and in Scripture. There is but one God, and He is equally the God of nature, of providence, and of grace, as everywhere recognized by the sacred writers.; and it is disloyalty to Him to deny or contemn His work in either of these great domains. May He always, preserve me and my readers from such irreverence.

I lay no claim to inspiration or infallibility. I believe the Old and New Testament Scriptures to be absolutely the only inspired and infallible book in human literature; such is the fundamental doctrine of the Baptist Church and of the Protestant Reformation. By this divine standard I desire the present volume and every other creatural work to be finally tested—to be accepted if and when in accordance, and rejected if and when not in accordance, with the standard. "The best of the interpretations of the Bible are but the interpretations of fallible men." The right and duty of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures is also a fundamental Baptist and Protestant doctrine; such right I not only claim for myself, but I willingly allow to every other human being—only let each one remember and admit that no person and no set of persons now on earth are infallible. Papacy is equally offensive to reason and to faith. He who claims infallibility for himself or for any other

man since the Apostolic Age, ceases to that extent to be a Baptist, or a Protestant, or a follower of Christ, and renounces those precious principles of religious liberty, in defense of which have flowed rivers of the best blood on earth. A proper knowledge of genuine church history delivers us from the tyranny of both ancient and modern popes of every name, and directs us to the Bible as the only authoritative standard of faith and practice. Old School, Primitive, or Bible Baptists, should be the last people in the world to have a pope or popes among them. No book, no pamphlet, no periodical, no document of any kind, must be taken as a substitute for the Bible; and no author, no editor, no preacher, no teacher, no writer, and no body of men must be substituted for Christ, who is the only Prophet, Priest, and King of His people.

The great importance of church history is shown by the fact that it occupies two-thirds of the Bible. It has been called "the backbone and storehouse of theology, and the best commentary of christianity itself. Next to the Holy Scriptures, which are themselves chiefly a history and depository of divine revelation, there is no stronger proof of the continual presence of Christ with his people, no more thorough vindication of christianity, no richer source of spiritual wisdom and experience, no deeper incentive to virtue and piety, than the history of Christ's kingdom, as sublimely indicated by the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews."—Prof. P. Schaff.i[1]ii The history of the past gives us a more correct knowledge of the present, and a more correct judgment as to the future. The history of the people of God "eminently illustrates the laws of the divine administration, evinces the truth of prophecy by showing its fulfillment, and, in due subordination to the study of the Scriptures and of our own hearts, furnishes the best school of human nature, although commonly postponed to that of frivolous society and superficial worldly wisdom. It tends to elevate and enlarge our views beyond the petty bounds of personal, sectarian and local interests; to discourage bigotry, and moderate controversial bitterness, without impairing our attachment to the truth itself; and to suppress crude innovations and absurdities, both in theory and in practice, by showing that the same, in substance if not in form, have been canvassed and exploded centuries ago."—Prof. J.A. Alexander.

A feature distinguishing Christianity from all other religions is its unique historical character—the religion and history being inseparably and supernaturally blended during a period of 4,100 years; the very facts themselves being parables and symbols illustrating spiritual and eternal truths. In the midst of a depraved polytheistic world the God of the Universe, the God of History, the God of Grace, preserved for forty centuries the pure faith and worship of Himself, in the lines of Seth and Shem and Abraham, until, in accordance with His repeated promises and types recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures, He manifested His great and glorious salvation in the spotless life and atoning death and triumphant resurrection and ascension of His incarnate Son; and then, in accordance with His purposes and declarations from the beginning, He dispersed the descendants of Abraham, with their ancient prophetic Scriptures, and sent his servants with the Scriptures of the New Testament, showing the fulfillment of the Old, among all the Gentile nations of the earth, and to the latter also mercifully displayed His spiritual, holy and everlasting salvation. “Holy men of God foresaw and foretold that the Gentile nations would come to worship the God of Judah, the Jehovah of Zion, at a period when nothing in the possible horizon of the times could have afforded the faintest indication of the wonderful future. To their minds the future was not as it is to other men, for they spoke of the coming ages just as the ages indeed have come.”

“Christ,” says Prof. H.B. Smith, “is the center of God’s revelation and of man’s redemption; of Christian doctrine and of Christian history; of Christian sects and of each believer’s faith; yea, of the very history of this our earth, Jesus Christ is the full, the radiant, the only center—fitted to be such because He is the God-man and the Redeemer. Christ is the center of the Christian system, and the doctrine respecting Christ in the heart of Christian theology. Christianity gives us all that philosophy aims after, and in a more perfect form; it also gives us more than philosophy can give; and this more that it gives is what man most needs, and what reason alone could never divine. And therefore we conclude that it is not within the scope of the human mind to conceive a system more complete, richer in all blessings. The highest ideas and ends which reason can propound are really embraced, the deepest wants which man can know are truly satisfied, the sharpest

antagonisms which the mind can propose are declared to be reconciled in the ideas, the means, and the ends which are contained in that revelation which centers in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord."

May the God of all grace vouchsafe to bestow His all-important blessing upon these pages. Without Him neither writers nor readers can do anything acceptable in His holy sight. To his merciful, righteous and sovereign will, would I desire to commit myself, my labors, my natural and spiritual kindred, and all my fellow-creatures, both for time and for eternity.

--SYLVESTER HASSELL
--WILSON, N.C., February, 1886.

ENDNOTES:

iii[1]iv To such of my readers as may desire to pursue the study of church history, since the coming of Christ, beyond the limits of the present volume I believe that I am doing a real service to say that the most recent, accurate, impartial, thorough and satisfactory works on the subject with which I am familiar are the following by Prof. Philip Schaff, of New York: "History of the Christian Church" (4 volumes already published, A.D. 1-1073—to be followed by, others); "The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes" (3 vols.): and the "Schaff-Herzog Encyclopædia of Religious Knowledge" (3 vols.). As of especial interest and value to all loving students of the New Testament, I take sincere pleasure in recommending the first volume of his "History of the Christian Church," entitled "Apostolic Christianity A.D. 1-100," which may be purchased separately for \$4, from the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. For a study of the *original* authorities, J.C.L. Gieseler's Church History, in 8 vols., is indispensable to those acquainted with ancient and foreign languages.

These commendatory remarks are made after a careful study of the best church histories published in Europe and America; and, like all similar remarks in the present volume are entirely unsolicited on the part of the authors of the works recommended.

