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CHRISTIAN REVIEW.

VOL. XI.

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ARTICLE IV.

ADVANTAGES OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH POLITY.

An Historical Discourse, delivered at the celebration of the Second Centennial Anniversary of the First Baptist Church in Providence. By WILLIAM HAGUE. Providence: B. Cranston & Co.

A Discourse, delivered at the One Hundredth Anniversary of the organization of the Baldwin Place Baptist Church. By BARON STOW, Pastor. Boston: Gould, Kendall & Lincoln.

A Pure Christianity the World's Only Hope. By R. W. CUSHMAN, Pastor of Bowdoin Square Church, Boston. New York: Lewis Colby.

A Discourse, delivered at the dedication of the new Church Edifice of the Baptist Church and Society in Warren, R. I., May 8, 1845. By JOSIAH P. TUSTIN, Pastor. Providence: H. H. Brown.

A Discourse, delivered at the One Hundredth Anniversary of the organization of the First Baptist Church in North Stonington, Ct. By ALBERT G. PALMER. Boston: Gould, Kendall & Lincoln.

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A Discourse, embracing the History of the Baptist Church of Christ in Homer, N. Y., for about thirty years from its commencement. By REV. ALFRED BENNETT. Utica: Bennett, Backus & Hawley.

WE have placed this list of recent publications on the general subject of Church Polity at the head of this article, partly for the purpose of showing that the subject is receiving a large share of the attention of observing and reflecting minds among us at the present time. In the term, Church-Polity, we include all that relates to the

existence, the functions, and the organization of a Christian Church, according to the Scriptures, together with the principles by which the relations and intercourse of churches should be regulated.

The kingdom of Christ we understand to include all who obey Christ—all the truly good, wherever found. A church is an ideal representative or model of that kingdom. The first principle in the theory of a church of Christ is, that it be made of “lively stones, built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” None but the spiritually regenerated should be admitted. A church is a union of saints in holy covenant to maintain the worship, doctrines, ordinances, and discipline, of the New Testament. A covenant is from its nature voluntary; yet a church is by no means a mere voluntary society, in the ordinary modern acceptation of that term. As the desire to join a church is voluntary on the part of every candidate, so his reception or rejection is voluntary on the part of the church. As there can be no church in the scriptural sense, without a voluntary covenant, so it necessarily follows that the members of each church must judge and decide on the admission of members.

When a church is formed in accordance with these principles, it has the right to elect its ministry, send forth missionaries, preserve Christian discipline, expel offenders from its fellowship; in short, to perform all acts which properly belong to any ecclesiastical power or body on earth. It is independent of all earthly control, being accountable, collectively and individually, directly to Christ, the only Head of the church.

These principles are very simple, yet if universally adopted, would produce the greatest social and political revolution which the world has ever witnessed. The separation of civil from ecclesiastical affairs, would, in many countries, entirely change the form of government, and the aspects of society. The explosion of the mischievous theories of ecclesiastical catholicism, and of all the absurdities which have grown out of attempts to establish territorial churches, either universal, national, provincial, or diocesan, would effectually uproot many of the hoary errors with which priestcraft has enslaved the world. The abolition of ranks and orders of ministry,

and, above all, the overthrow of that climax of folly and wickedness, the doctrine of apostolic grace brought down through physical conductors, distilled from hands the most polluted, on heads the most empty, which surmounted hearts the most depraved, would constitute an illustrious era in the moral and spiritual history of our race. A spiritual, would be established for a worldly organization. A Church Polity drawn from the scriptures, would take the place of an arrangement of human invention.

This is not the place to exhibit the proof that the Baptist Church Polity is purely scriptural. In common with all Baptists we believe it to be so; if it is not, we would gladly unite with any honest, judicious effort, to conform it more exactly to the scriptural model. If it is scriptural in all its essential principles, it is of universal obligation. No additional argument, derived from the decisions of councils, the opinions of the Fathers, or church usages venerable by antiquity, can increase or diminish its authority. If the principles of our church order are from God, they are *therefore* the best that can be devised. We are bound to be governed by them, not simply because we perceive their superior utility compared with others, but because they are divinely revealed.

Nevertheless we are willing to submit them to the test of experience, to be judged by their fruits. If it can be shown that these principles from their nature cannot, and in actual practice do not, work well, in the hands of wise and good men, our confidence in their scriptural origin must be shaken. The opinions of men on all subjects are influenced by comparison as well as by investigation and induction; and we wish to show that our Church Polity, taught as we believe in the scriptures, does also *in practice*, commend itself to enlightened judgment.

It is no disparagement to these principles, that they have been perverted by ignorant or wicked men. The best forms of civil government have suffered the same reproach. Liberty has attractions for the bad as well as the good, for the reckless lovers of change, as well as for the wise and thoughtful. When Roger Williams proclaimed freedom to the human conscience, he attracted to

his standard those who ardently desired spiritual freedom, and those who hated all restraint. When David fled from the persecutions of Saul, some noble spirits rallied under his banner, fully resolved to share his fortunes or his fate. But another and a very different class came also. "Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him, and he became a captain over them." Yet this fact did not prove that the principles on which he acted were erroneous, nor shut from him the tokens of the divine favor.

Nor should it be forgotten that from the period when Christianity became a state religion, those who have held these principles have been unceasingly persecuted. They have been compelled, by unjust laws, to support religious institutions which they did not approve, in addition to their own. They have suffered the spoiling of their goods, fines, scourging, imprisonment, and death, in perhaps every country of nominal Christendom. In some of them they are still subject to the same evils. Their healthy increase has been obstructed by violence and contumely, their intelligence has been crushed, and fanaticism, which is always found among the persecuted, has been driven into their ranks.

We appeal, therefore, from partial and unfair inductions drawn from history written by our foes. By impartial history, if it can be found, we are willing that the fruits of our system should be tested. If its workings are to be compared with those of other systems of church polity, justice requires that the comparison be restricted to countries and times in which they have stood on equal ground. But where can such be found? Nowhere, unless in the United States, nor here but for a few years past. And for these few years their progress and their influence have been glorious, although they have, even here, been embarrassed and restrained by governments, and society, and institutions of learning, moulded by the influence of other systems.

The advantages of these principles may be shown, both from their nature, and their fruits. The first great purpose of religion—its doctrines, ordinances, church order, and government—is to convert, to enlighten, to sanctify, and to save men,—individual men. It is proper, there-

fore, that these principles should be tested, and their practical value ascertained, by their influence on the characters and prospects of individuals, by their general influence on society at large, and by their efficiency in promoting the kingdom of Christ and the salvation of the world.

I. The human race is divided into two classes—believers and unbelievers, regenerate and unregenerate, children of God and children of the wicked one, the heirs of heaven or of hell. The mission of Christianity is to translate sinners from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Any system of church polity is valuable so far as it is in harmony with this grand design, or as it is adapted to illustrate the doctrines and duties of religion, and to impress them on individual minds. There is a divine harmony established between the doctrines, the ordinances, and the social polity of the Christian religion, which is all important to its success. That this unity of moral influence is preserved in churches constituted according to the principles before advocated, may be shown,

1. Because this system, and this only, of all the forms of church government in existence, draws the line practically and distinctly, between converted and unconverted men. In other ecclesiastical communities, children are understood to be born into the church when they are born into the world, or to be initiated in infancy, by virtue of their parents' faith. The distinction between believers and unbelievers is thus confounded. These principles, on the contrary, practically recognize the great truth, that all alike are born in sin, and all need alike, repentance, faith, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, before they can sustain any relation to the church of Christ. They illustrate to all beholders the solemn truth that, except they are born of water and of the Spirit, they cannot enter into the kingdom of God; of which every church is an emblem. This church polity, from its very nature, proclaims to the world, "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "Repent and be baptized every one of you, for the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Can this be said of any other system? Is it not obvious that every system which declares churches to be territo-

rial, which claims ecclesiastical catholicism, or includes the children of believers, while yet unconverted, practically confounds these solemn truths? Common sense, as well as scripture, teaches that the church, the "household of God," is for sanctified persons, in distinction from the unbelieving world. But how often do we hear of persons who were "born in the church" of England or of Rome, yet giving no evidence of being "born again." Every Pædobaptist system confuses the distinction between the converted and the unconverted, by assuring both classes that they are *in* the church. Thus its moral influence over the latter class is lost. One system says, "believe and be baptized," the other, "believe, because you have been baptized"—one says, "turn from your sins to God that you may enter the church," the other, "turn, because you are in the church." Our principles, therefore, are in harmony with the teachings of scripture, by keeping before every unconverted person his true condition. The superiority of these principles is also shown,

2. In promoting a proper feeling of personal responsibility. Every church is formed of converts, all of whom have voluntarily taken the first steps in religion. Members are all volunteers, acting on their personal accountability to God, by the very terms of their profession. Could a church be coëxtensive with a nation, or a state, the feeling of responsibility would be lost in the mass. The individual would consider the church as responsible for him, rather than he for the church. And especially when his membership was not his voluntary act, but the act of his parents, or the accident of his birth, the ordinary incentives to individuality of feeling and action are removed. Moreover, this individual responsibility and the wide distribution of influence and power essential to these principles, strongly tend,

3. To promote religious knowledge among all the members. These principles admit, yea, they court and encourage, the freest theological inquiries and research. Baptists never have recognized any standard of truth and duty but the Bible,—the Bible in the hands of all the Christian people. Their cardinal principle is,—believe and practice all that is taught in the Bible—reject all else. Some churches have no written articles; those that have, make them very brief, comprehending only the elementary principles of

revealed truth, and use them only as a convenient way of setting forth their belief for general information. In the admission of church members, in choosing and consecrating the ministry, in constituting and organizing churches, they go to the scriptures alone for direction, that all may judge whether they do in truth keep the ordinances as they were delivered.

The ministry go directly to the scriptures, untrammelled by human creeds, with full liberty to preach all the truth which they find there revealed. It is by this freedom of theological inquiry that the Bible sheds a brighter and clearer light on every succeeding age. Encouraged by these principles, the giant intellect of Fuller scattered the hosts of error, and built on many a disputed field the impregnable fortresses of truth; the glowing spirit of Hall threw beauty and dignity before unknown, around the productions of the pulpit; the incomparable Carey led off the Christian world to new conquests of truth and love among the heathen.

To the freedom of individual conscience and the church independence which are peculiar to these principles, the world is deeply indebted for the advancement of theological knowledge. The objection that this freedom from human creeds is the parent of heresies, and leads to infidelity, is founded in error. Those spring from the depravity of the human heart, and must be overcome by the Spirit of God, working in the free spirits of his chosen servants. What but this freedom has enabled the New England mind to awaken the religious energies of the world, and to bring about a new era in theological research? * The men who have done most to unfold the

* The excellent John Robinson of Leyden, in his farewell address to the first Puritan company which sailed for New England, said, "I charge you before God and the blessed angels, to follow me no farther than you have seen me follow Christ; if God shall reveal any thing to you by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it as you were to receive any truth by my ministry; for I am verily persuaded that he hath more truth yet to break forth out of his holy word." Baptists, therefore, who have rejected one or two of the practices which those honored Puritans brought "out of such thick anti-Christian darkness," from which, Mr. Robinson said shortly after in the same address, they had "just emerged," may well plead this permission, yet retaining all the *principles* of the system, may lay equal claim to its peculiar honors. All that is liberal in the system of Congregationalism—all that encourages and fosters independence of thought or action, is embraced in the Baptist system, which rejects only what is destructive of true Congregationalism, as opening the door to disorder, heresy, and corruption.

deep things of God, have been circumscribed within no narrower bounds than the God of truth himself has set.

4. It is proper to notice the effects of these principles of church order on the *piety* of individual Christians. As a church below is an ideal model of the church above, striving to exhibit the symmetry of the heavenly pattern, to mirror on this unsightly world that perfection of beauty, in holiness, truth, and love, which adorns the glorified company of heaven, its great object is to train up its members to be "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." The piety of the new convert is in its infancy, and must attain the stature and vigor of manhood by nourishment and exercise. It is not nourishment alone, which is required for the growth of healthful piety, but constant, suitable, vigorous *exercise*, also. The young disciple needs the sincere milk of the word,—the more advanced in the divine life, strong meat,—but both need also that constant trial and exercise of love, faith, patience, brotherly kindness, and manly virtue, without which no one can attain "to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

That system of church polity which makes the interests of the church and of the Redeemer's kingdom the common concern of all, is best adapted to increase the piety of all. Every thing which is done in, or by the church, as a collective body, thus becomes a most salutary exercise of the religious affections. Does a young convert ask to be admitted to the fellowship of the church? He comes before the assembled body to relate his spiritual exercises. In the warmth of his early love he exclaims, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for *my* soul." If he is a genuine convert, each member of the church hears again the recital of his own spiritual history. Now he is melted to tears as he listens to a narrative which so forcibly recalls the darkness and despair of his own soul when the hand of God was heavy upon him, and his moisture was "turned into the drought of summer;" then he is filled with joy as he hears how, at the foot of the cross, the humbled sinner acknowledged his transgressions unto the Lord, who forgave the iniquity of his sin. And when the candidate has retired, that the church may, in the name of its Master, express or withhold its fellowship, what an occasion

for the exercise of Christian tenderness on the one hand, joined with unwavering fidelity to Christ and his cause on the other. Has a brother or a sister been overtaken in a fault? Oh what an appeal is now made—not to the ministry alone—not to an ecclesiastical court, but to his own brethren, whose faces are familiar to him, who have known his manner of life:—“*Ye which are spiritual* restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Or if the sad conviction is forced upon them that he should be put away, as unworthy a name and a place in Christ’s household, painful as the duty is, it may be made and often proves to be, a most salutary exercise of Christian faithfulness. Are contributions needed for the poor, or funds for the promotion of the kingdom of Christ? The appeal comes to all the individual members according to their ability, and in the same proportion the responsibility is divided. In short, the character of the church before the world, and in the sight of God, depends on the character and conduct of each individual member. If a pastor is to be chosen, it is a subject for careful, conscientious inquiry, reflection and prayer, with every member of the body. They can look to no Bishop nor Conference to appoint him, but to the Head of the church alone. In every effort to increase the piety, the zeal, or the knowledge of the church, it is the common cause of all; and by calling into exercise, tends to invigorate the piety of all.

5. The value of these principles may be further seen in their tendency to maintain salutary Christian discipline. The first object of discipline is to maintain an effective moral and spiritual influence over all the members of the church,—to invest all the doctrines and ordinances of Christ’s house with such dignity and moral power as offenders cannot trifle with, and as all will respect.

In order to possess this moral power over an offender, it must be the expression of the moral feeling of the community in which he resides. If a member should be censured or expelled from a church when the church did not believe him to be guilty, or that the fault did not justify the punishment, the act would have no good influence on him, nor on others. All corrective discipline is effective no farther than it is sustained by the sentiment of the church. When thus sustained, it possesses wonder-

ful power. Hence, as the final resort with an obstinate offender, the Lord Jesus directed, "Tell it to the church." If this failed, no further means were to be used. To the same terrible power the apostle alludes, (2 Cor. 2 : 6, 7,) when he says, "*Sufficient* to such a man, [one who had been excluded for the crime of incest, but had repented] is this *punishment* which was inflicted of MANY [the whole church,] so that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such an one should be *swallowed up* with overmuch sorrow." This was a punishment from which not even an apostle could absolve. He could advise and "beseech" its removal, which could be effected only by the tribunal that inflicted it.

But suppose the power of dealing with offenders to be taken from the church as a body, and given to the ministry, to a committee, a session, or a spiritual court; it is plain that a sentence inflicted by any such body would be powerless, if not sustained by the moral feeling of the church. We boldly affirm, that there neither is, nor can be, any thorough, salutary, corrective discipline, except where it is exercised substantially, in accordance with these principles.*

From these considerations respecting the influence of these principles in the formation of individual character, it is manifest that their tendency is to train up the most useful, active, and efficient Christians. They are individualized, they are made to feel their personal obligations, they find knowledge necessary, their piety is invigorated

* Although "comparisons are odious," when instituted for no good purpose, yet we trust we shall be pardoned for illustrating this point by an actual and well known case of discipline which occurred in the Presbyterian Church. A member of a particular church was arraigned by the "session," (a body of twelve men, to whom all matters of discipline in the church are committed, and who have, according to Presbyterian rules, the sole power of admission and exclusion) and was by the session excluded; he appealed to the "Presbytery," by whom the sentence of exclusion was confirmed; he appealed again to the "Synod," by whom it was again confirmed; he then made a final appeal to the "highest judicatory," from whose decision there can be no appeal—the "General Assembly," and they reversed all the previous decisions, and restored him to his standing in the church! In this case, it is said that the final decision was just what the church to which the accused belonged would have made at first, had they been allowed to act. But the result must have made the relations of the church and the session very unpleasant, and if the final decision had been contrary to the views of the church also, the thrusting back by the General Assembly of an excluded member into their fellowship must have been destructive of their peace. In fact, the Christian fellowship of the church would have been destroyed while such a state of things lasted.

by exercise, and they are thus prepared, as individuals, to be really and permanently useful. But as the efficiency of these principles in the general spread of the gospel is to be the third general topic of remark, we proceed to show,

II. The salutary influence of these principles of church polity on the public mind, and on the general interests of society. As “godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,” so that form of church polity, and the discipline which is according to godliness, is most favorable to all the interests of humanity.

These principles are, in their nature, the soul of civil and religious liberty. Wherever either is understood and enjoyed, in any part of the world, it may be historically traced to their influence. Political rulers have long known that the religious principles and practices of a people will sooner or later control their political relations. Hence tyrants have uniformly made use of the religion of the people, as the surest means of controlling them. It was not love of religion, but of worldly power, which led to its union with the state. No despot’s throne is so firm as his who has laid its foundations deep in the religious or the superstitious feelings of his subjects. Pagan rulers first discovered this truth, and have practised upon it to the present day. The Hebrew Commonwealth had a religious origin. From a patriarchal family, bound together by peculiar religious ties, customs, and divine promises, it grew up to be a nation. While it cannot prove the divine sanction of the union of church and state, it illustrates the inevitably evil tendencies of the system, and was finally overthrown and destroyed for its corruptions. The sovereigns of Christian nations, regardless alike of the plain teachings of the New Testament, the warnings of the Old, and the spiritual interests of the people, have also usurped the control of religion as a means of power and aggrandizement. It was a shrewd and sound maxim of the English monarch, “No bishop, no king.” Every one knows that the British government, with its aristocracy and pauperism, its unequal, oppressive laws, its profligacy and grinding taxation, its archbishops and bishops bloating with luxury, its starving curates, and ignorant, neglected peasantry, could not long exist, in its

present form, without the support of the church establishment.

Assuming, then, that men have by nature equal rights, that they have capacities for improvement and self-government, that a government of laws enacted and sustained by intelligent freemen in the fair and judicious use of the elective franchise, is best adapted to promote the interests of mankind, let us see in what manner these principles of church polity are adapted to promote, and have promoted, civil and religious liberty, and respect for human rights.

In a church formed and governed according to these principles, the sacredness of personal rights is most clearly illustrated. The true idea of personal equality is, in such a church, practically exhibited. It is seen to be, not a mere abstract equality which can be realized only by the destruction of the social order which nature has established, but one which well consists with disparity in age, in wisdom, in influence, in office, and with the respect, the deference, and the subordination thence required. A church being a purely executive body, every member knows that he is at the same time the subject, as well as the executor of its laws. It is not only his most solemn duty to Christ, but his dearest personal interest, to have its laws so executed that the rights of every member shall be as scrupulously respected as he would desire his own to be. Such a church is the living emblem of the best governed state, or nation, or the world of human beings; if they were prepared to enter into it. The object of all government is secured when the rights of all are fully guarded, and it is only in a church governed by these principles that the mode of attaining that end is clearly exemplified.

These principles, in action, foster the *love* of civil liberty. Religious forms, practices, and sanctions, are the first public exhibitions of government which are presented to the observation of the young. They see church government in operation long before they become capable of understanding the principles, or of observing the forms and operations of civil government. If they become accustomed to thralldom in the former, they will readily submit to it in the latter. But if they early imbibe the principles of soul freedom, they will never be the tools of tyrants. Or, if they from early childhood, become ac-

customed to reverence and obey an order of men as having special, exclusive claim to sacerdotal power and honor, they are prepared to submit to the claims of kings and tyrants, as to a superior order of beings, born to rule. But let them be accustomed to see a church, in the enjoyment of the noblest intellectual and spiritual freedom, all governed and governing by the laws of Christ, and they become the unchanging foes of oppression.

This single consideration is sufficient to explain the cause why Baptists have been so uniformly dreaded, hated, and persecuted by all tyrannical governments, and all corrupt religious establishments.* Their history is not blended with that of dynasties and political revolutions, and embalmed in the archives of nations. It is written with the blood of martyrs on the imperishable scroll of Heaven's remembrance. Not only through the dark ages was the blood of Cambrian, Albigenian, and Waldensian confessors poured out in Europe, but even to this land of religious freedom the sword of persecution followed these principles, till at last, so far as they relate to the rights and duties of civil government, they have been adopted by a mighty nation.

The influence of these principles is also powerful and salutary to promote correct views of civil liberty, and to restrain its excesses. The end of all government is best attained when each individual, family, and community governs itself. Whatever, therefore, promotes self-government, does most to secure the true objects of civil government. A church governed according to these principles, is the best school that can be imagined to teach self-government.

One of the most powerful safeguards of religion, of

* Rev. A. Maclay in a letter to the Christian Watchman, Nov. 20, 1840, gives the following facts relative to the state of morals and religion in the city of Hamburgh, where Lutheranism is the established religion.

“ There are probably not less than one or two hundred public houses opened for dancing on every Sabbath afternoon and evening. The theatres are also opened and frequented by all classes for purposes of carousal, and all kinds of immorality. There are five thousand prostitutes who are publicly licensed by the police, and who pay into the treasury a dollar per month for this license. A member of the Senate is always at the head of the police, this office being held by them in rotation. The clergy are paid out of the public treasury. Under the administration of one of the senators, the rule was adopted to refuse a license to any one to be a prostitute till she had received confirmation in the church,—the usual ceremony for admitting members.” It is not strange that *such* a church stirs up *such* a government to persecute Baptists !

liberty, and of civil government, is the inviolate sanctity of private judgment and individual conscience. Men will think wrong, and act wrong, in all matters, civil and religious, under whatever form of government or church polity they may live. Still, the human reason and conscience are God's arbiters and interpreters in this world, and the more free and extensive their enlightened action, the better for all the interests of society. Violence done to the human conscience, is treason against God and man. These principles lead the individual conscience directly to the word of God; commanding it there, and there only, to bow in implicit obedience. The creed and discipline of the church impose no restraints but such as are needful to guard its members from making shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. No human creed, in uninspired language, corroded with the rust of ages, is forced upon him, at the peril of being charged with forsaking the religion of his fathers, and of losing his standing in society. He is allowed to come, as his fathers did, to the fountain-head of truth, there to bow himself and drink freely from that life-giving, exhaustless spring.

When he has thus learned, as a member of the church, how to respect the rights and the feelings of others, while he labors to instruct them in the truth, he is prepared to discharge, in the best manner, his duties as a citizen. Liberty, he has learned, is liberty to act right—to subject unlawful passion and unjust desire to reason and conscience, and these to the authority of God.

It is a maxim of enlightened statesmen that general intelligence among the people is essential to the permanency of free civil institutions. A careful attention to the nature or to the history of these principles, will show that they are most efficacious in promoting general intelligence. This form of church government presents the strongest possible motive in behalf of general intelligence. Its existence depends upon it. The comfort and improvement of every member demands it. If Baptists were not the friends of all good learning, they would despise their birthright, and contradict their choicest principles.

In further proof of the same truth, the appeal may be made to their history—to the schools, the colleges, and the theological seminaries which have been founded and nurtured by their individual enterprise. And this they

have done, it must be remembered, in the infancy of their churches in a land of freedom, where they have but lately emerged from darkness and oppression. A comparison of the number of their higher schools of learning, with those religious establishments which have been organized during many centuries, which have been fostered and liberally endowed by governments, would be unjust. What they have done, affords fair promise of what they will yet do, if the principles which they profess are left to work out their inherent energies.

It is true that these principles have been nominally professed by persons who glory in ignorance; for, like all good things, they may be perverted and abused. Yet the history of Baptists shows that they have been the liberal friends and benefactors of learning. Where can be found a nobler instance of generous love of learning, of Christian liberality, than in the founding and endowing of Brown University, by the early Baptists of Rhode Island? Is not Harvard College—the oldest in America—indebted to the generosity and liberality of a Baptist for the greatest of its early benefactions? * If Baptists are not doing as much now, in proportion to their numbers, in the cause of liberal education, it is because their numbers have increased faster than it was possible to increase the means of education; and also because a multitude, attracted by the beauty and freedom of our church polity, have rushed to assume the *name* of Baptists, but neither understanding nor appreciating their principles, have only disgraced them.

A high state of public morals has been observed in those places where these principles of church order have prevailed. So far as this is true, of which all must judge for themselves, it may be accounted for by the natural workings of the system. Every church member not only becomes a philanthropist in spirit, by the terms of his profession, but is taught in the church those habits of

* It may be added that the first two Presidents of Harvard College, viz., the Rev. Henry Dunster and the Rev. Charles Chauncey were Baptists. They both, it appears, accepted the office from the purest motives, were laborious and benevolent, and made great sacrifices in behalf of the college. President Quincy says of them in his history of the college, that “for learning, talents, and fidelity, they have been surpassed by no one of their successors; they exceeded every one of them in sufferings, sacrifices, and privations; and their fate has been little known, and of consequence has had little sympathy.”

thought and action which best prepare him to promote morality and human improvement in all its branches. The mighty power of the various benevolent voluntary societies, has astonished every one. But who does not see that they are all the natural fruits and offshoots of the voluntary system in religion? *

The English are indebted for the freedom of their constitution to the influence of these principles. When by oppression and persecution they were transplanted to the wilds of America, the foundations of civil commonwealths were laid on the basis of constitutional freedom. The civil constitution of the pilgrims, which was the counterpart of their church polity, contained the elements of republican liberty. They practically recognized the principle that all political power originates with the people, a principle which must, wherever received, overthrow all tyrannical government, and this they derived from their church polity.

Yet the Puritans, even when they fled from persecution to this country for conscience' sake, understood not fully the principles of religious liberty. They in turn became persecutors, and Baptists were among the victims. It remained for Baptists to bring the true doctrine of religious liberty before the world, and by their writings, and their sufferings, to give success to its principles. While the great poet, Milton, who was a Baptist, was employing the energies of his matchless genius in teaching the Puritans of England the true principles of religious freedom, and by his powerful writings was scattering terror among the crowned heads of Europe, Roger Williams, his intimate friend and "harbinger," † in this cause, was toiling and suffering for the same principles in the wilds of

* Appeal may also be made on this point to the whole history of New England Congregationalism; for the principles of their church polity are substantially the same as those of Baptists. Where can civil institutions be found worthy to be compared with those of New England? Where are equal degrees of good order and general intelligence? What people have exceeded them in liberal devotion to the interests of learning? Where can be found such a public school system, for instance, as that of Massachusetts, where scarcely a native-born adult can be found who is not able to read and write? The Congregationalists have had greatly the advantage of the Baptists, by having first obtained a leading influence in the colonies, wielding for a time the entire control of the government, and having first established their colleges and schools. But it is easy to see that so far as their principles of church polity have contributed to this state of things, they are those which they hold in common with the Baptists.

† See Bancroft's Hist. U. S. vol. 1, p. 375; also Hague's Historical Discourse.

America. Almost at the same time, Bunyan, another Baptist, was suffering in England in defence of the same principles, and during his confinement of twelve years in Bedford jail, wrote that unrivalled work, the *Pilgrim's Progress*. Baptists taught the true doctrine of religious liberty to the Puritans; and it is remarkable that the principles which they were so much reviled and persecuted for maintaining, have been incorporated into the political constitution and laws of this mighty nation.*

Says the *Encyclopedia Americana*, (Art. Religious Liberty,) "This perfect religious liberty exists only in the United States, and, so far as we know, has never existed elsewhere. According to the constitution of the United States, (Art. vi.) 'no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.' 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.'"

But the chief value of any system of church polity consists in its adaptedness and efficiency for spreading the Gospel throughout the world, and bringing men to know and to embrace the only way of eternal life and salvation through Jesus Christ. It remains therefore to show,

III. The practical superiority of this church polity in promoting the universal triumph of Christianity.

The Christian religion was designed for the entire

* The following anecdote was communicated to the *Christian Watchman* several years ago, by the Rev. Dr. Fishback, of Lexington, Ky.:

"Mr. Editor.—The following circumstance which occurred in the state of Virginia, relative to Mr. Jefferson, was detailed to me by Elder Andrew Tribble, about six years ago, who since died when ninety-two or three years old. The facts may interest some of your readers. Andrew Tribble was the pastor of a small Baptist church, which held its monthly meetings at a short distance from Mr. Jefferson's house, eight or ten years before the American revolution. Mr. Jefferson attended the meetings of the church for several months in succession, and after one of them, asked Elder Tribble to go home and dine with him, with which he complied.

"Mr. Tribble asked Mr. Jefferson how he was pleased with their church government? Mr. Jefferson replied, that it had struck him with great force, and had interested him much; that he considered it the only form of *pure democracy* that then existed in the world, and had concluded that it would be *the best plan of government for the American colonies*. This was several years before the Declaration of Independence. To what extent this practical exhibition of religious liberty and equality, operated on Mr. Jefferson's mind, in forming his views and principles of religious and civil freedom, which were afterwards so ably exhibited, I will not say."

human race, all of whom need it, and it is in every respect adapted to the circumstances and wants of all. To the disciples of Christ the work is committed of preaching the gospel to every creature. What form of church polity is best adapted to fulfil this great commission? The true answer to this question will furnish the best practical test by which the comparative merits of different forms may be determined. Fruit is the end to be attained in the planting of churches. For, as of individual Christians, so of churches, "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear MUCH FRUIT; so shall ye be my disciples;"—or my churches.

That form of church polity will be found to embody the greatest proportion of active elements for moral influence, in which these four things unite, viz: 1. Where a church is composed wholly of *converts*, who unite with it as *volunteers*. 2. Where the line is most *distinctly drawn* between the *converted* and the *unconverted*. 3. Where spreading the gospel is made the common work of *all*, as the leading object in joining the church; and, 4. Where each church is permitted and encouraged, as a distinct independent body, to enlist the *voluntary* energies of *all* its members, to advance the cause of Christ in its own way; or, in other words, to be a *perfect candlestick* to shed forth the light of truth upon the world. All these conditions are violated by every theory of ecclesiastical catholicism, or of national, diocesan, or of geographical churches. The Pædobaptist scheme, in every form, virtually sets aside the principle of voluntary church membership, and abolishes the line of separation between the church and the world. The idea that the infant seed of believers sustain some peculiar relation to the church, in virtue of the faith and membership of their parents, forestalls voluntary discipleship, mingles up the sanctified and the unclean, and weakens the sense of personal obligation to spread the gospel. These conditions all unite in churches constituted and governed according to the principles here advocated, and in no other.

Churches constituted on these principles give scope to the voluntary energies of the entire body of disciples. They show to the world a sample of what they desire all men to become. Every one may know what *they* call the body of Christ. They have the opportunity to convince

the world, by experiment, how much better and happier is a community of Christians than of sinners. With a polity and government immeasurably superior to that which civil states have ever been prepared to adopt, they may illustrate the superior felicity and moral elevation which the human race would attain, if all were prepared, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, to govern themselves by the laws of Christ. Such a society of men, “not of the world,” but “chosen out of the world,” still living in the world, yet above it—a type of the heavenly state, is precisely what the unconverted world needs, as a living illustration of the practical value of that religion whose mission on earth is to redeem, to sanctify, and to save men, and to reform the world.

Nor are these energies, when concentrated in great public meetings, wasted in debates on questions of mere *church politics*. If Baptist churches see fit to unite their efforts for the salvation of the world, they meet by their pastors and elders, or delegates, in a voluntary union, for that single purpose. They have no laws or canons to enact, amend, or repeal, because each church takes the laws of Christ alone, as understood by itself, for its government. There are no preachers to be appointed or removed, because each church chooses its own. There are no cases of alleged delinquency to try, because each church attends to all such matters for itself. An association, convention or missionary union, having no control whatever over the doctrines, the fellowship, or the proceedings of any church, has nothing but the want of piety or of good sense in its members, to divert its entire energies from the great work of evangelizing the world. What can be a more glorious sight than a large assemblage of the pastors of well-governed and devoted churches, met together with their elders and wise men, not to settle disputes among themselves, nor among their churches, but to confer on the great subject of preaching the gospel to all mankind, in obedience to the last command of Christ?

The power of the ministry is greater for good, and less for evil, in churches governed by these principles. They put no limit, nor offer any check to the influence of a good man. A minister of eminently holy life, sound doctrine,

of powerful intellect, subduing eloquence, ardent zeal, and great power of labor, may extend his influence far and wide. Mere *official* eminence above other ministers could add nothing to his power of doing good; but on the contrary, might make him an object of envy, or of jealousy, or might expose him to be puffed up with pride. To be the successful and beloved pastor and preacher of one church, is as high an exaltation as is safe for any minister, and offers as much scope for usefulness as any one needs. But should a minister prove too fond of power, of show, or pleasure, or of worldly applause, or become heterodox,—if he should become a bad man, openly or secretly, he has no official eminence to sustain him while he might spread the taint of heterodoxy, or immorality, over a whole diocese.* Under a system of church government by which such a man cannot be deposed, nor tried, nor even presented for trial by the “clergy” and people of his charge, but only by the “House of Bishops,” a crafty man would render it very difficult, if not impossible, for his people to bring the necessary proof against him.†

* For examples of the continuance of notoriously intemperate and corrupt prelates in office long after their indecencies were publicly known, the recent cases of the deposed and suspended Bishops of the Episcopal dioceses of Pennsylvania and New York are sadly in point.

† Without designing to make any invidious comparisons, it may be proper to illustrate this point by reference to some other religious bodies. The “Protestant Episcopal Church” in this country holds a General Triennial Convention, and in each state there is an annual “Diocesan Convention.” In both cases there are three legislative bodies, and the concurrence of all is essential to any enactment, viz., the “House of Bishops,” the “House of Clerical,” and the “House of Lay Delegates.” The two latter may deliberate and vote together or separately, as they choose. At every meeting much time is spent in debating and voting on matters which any church of ordinary intelligence would regulate much better for itself. Questions as trifling as the dress of the clergy often occupy much time, while the work of evangelizing the world is scarcely mentioned.

Recently, a Bishop (prelate) was accused of improper and indecent behaviour. A court of Bishops was summoned from all parts of the United States to try him, when there were ministers enough in his own city far better qualified in all respects, for the duty. After several weeks he is found guilty and is sentenced to suspension from all the functions of his office for an indefinite period of time, and the court dissolves. The consequence is, that the diocese being without a Bishop, no “clergy” can be ordained, no persons can be “confirmed” or received to the communion, no prayer books can be printed, because it is necessary that they should receive the official sanction of the Bishop, and it is even maintained that the Bishop, while under sentence of suspension, cannot resign his office, that being an official act; and yet the court which suspended him is out of being, and cannot, if it would, remove the sentence! The Bishop, therefore, must remain perpetually suspended, and the diocese must suffer the consequences till relieved by his death, or till a new canon is enacted to remove

Churches, conformed to these principles do not often become apostate and corrupt. It is true that unconverted persons may be admitted into churches, and to baptism, even when the assembled body, with the help of the ministry, are the judges of application for admission. But it must be allowed that this plan affords the best safeguard against the intrusion of improper persons. All experience and history shows that a departure from this principle is sure to introduce corruption, and lead to general apostacy. The corruption of the Romish hierarchy is notorious. The English church establishment, though including many good men, holds a sad rivalry with her mother. The want of government patronage, and the influence of other religious bodies, prevents the Episcopal body in this country from going to the same extent. Even the Congregationalists of New England, with all their piety and orthodoxy, their virtue and intelligence, could not retain their purity and soundness in departing from this principle. The practice of introducing infants to some relation to the church, either involving membership or making it a matter of course, on the faith of their parents, in connection with the "Half-way Covenant," was the principal cause of the apostacy of many of their churches. Whereas, although Baptist churches have sometimes become extinct, like the seven churches in Asia, yet an existing apostate one can hardly be found.

But if these dangers exist where the temptations to vanity and ambition are small, and where the strictest measures to prevent the intrusion of improper persons are adopted, what must be the case where no such safeguards are provided? *—where motives to ambition and rivalry exist in the very structure of the body itself?—where even the ministry presents motives to ambition

the difficulty, if indeed an *ex post facto* law is admissible in such cases! In the meantime parties are formed, feelings embittered, and a numerous and wealthy body of professed disciples of Christ are doing nothing to send abroad the blessed gospel, but much to bring it into reproach at home.

* It was affirmed without contradiction not long since, in a leading Episcopal print, that in the "diocese" of New York, neither law nor usage recognized any other church, than the pewholders of their respective places of worship. They choose their clergy, and they, with the clergy, elect the Bishop, and these bodies together enact all the canons, perform all discipline, and decide questions relating to doctrine and practice! A church composed of believers does not exist, even in theory, nor a ministry chosen by believers!

and rivalry? * On the contrary, if the piety, the orthodoxy, the whole Christian experience and life of every candidate is freely and fully investigated in open church meeting, previous to baptism, the danger of improper admissions is much less.

But if the tendencies to corruption were equal, there is another consideration which should deter every friend of pure religion, or of human improvement in any sense, from lending his influence to sustain extensive religious establishments calling themselves churches, or “the church;” and that is, their great power for evil when they become corrupt. Who can compute the immense mischief—the blighting, deadening, damning influence of apostate Rome? Arrogating to her hierarchy of unscriptural orders, the title of “Catholic Apostolic Church,” and “only true church,” her deeds show her to be the “Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.” Her emissaries of falsehood are in every clime, tainting and poisoning the morals and religion of the people, and her resources for the propagation of iniquity seem absolutely exhaustless. Her funds are the price of indulgences for committing sin! The reading of God’s word she prohibits—where she has power, she commits it to the flames, and gives the people masses, written in an unknown tongue, in its stead! Wherever she has power, she enforces her iniquitous commands by the penalties of horrid tortures, by imprisonment, confiscation, and death! The whole story of her abominations can never be told.

What mischiefs would have been prevented, had that corrupt establishment long since been swept away! or rather, had it never come into being. And it could not, had the principles here advocated been faithfully adhered to. Or if an apostacy equally extensive had taken place among churches constituted according to these principles, it would not have cursed the earth with the continuance of a monster of iniquity and cruelty unparalleled in the annals of barbarism.

* The apostle declares, “He that desireth the office of a bishop desireth a good work.” Now if the word “bishop” means prelate, it is right for every minister to desire to be a prelate, and to use means to be one. If it means, as some Episcopal writers say, “the second grade of the ministry,” then *that* office is to be desired as a good work, and not that of a prelate. If it is right to have prelates, it is right for ministers to desire to be prelates; as did the ambitious disciples, in disputing who should be the greatest.

The divine beauty of the principles here advocated, which are as completely in harmony with all the interests of man, taught by the lessons of history, as they have elsewhere been proved to be with the teachings of inspiration, is seen in the fact, that, while they are most powerful for good, they are least potent for evil. They alone embody the true idea of a spiritual church; seeking none but spiritual members, using none but spiritual means, directed to no other than a spiritual end. Should spirituality die out of such a church, it becomes to all intents dead; and though the fumes of its decay may for a short time pollute the moral atmosphere around, yet it cannot live again as a persecuting beast of prey.

If it be objected that these principles do not afford sufficient scope and encouragement to genius and extensive learning; the reply is, that they offer but small encouragement to talents and purposes like those of Hildebrand, Cæsar Borgia, Loyola, Richelieu, Wolsey, and Laud. But the transcendent genius of Milton and of Bunyan, the far-reaching faith and unconquerable soul of Williams, the profound intellect of Fuller, the burning energy and iron diligence of Carey, the classic grace, the giant strength, and the resistless eloquence of Hall, were quickened, and nurtured, and trained, by long and devoted communion with these principles. They inspire genius only as allied to goodness. They encourage learning only that it may be consecrated to Christ. They foster not genius which burns but to consume, nor learning which only erects a monument to its own glory.*

The Baptists of England first turned the attention of Christians in Europe and America to the work of evan-

* Dr. Chalmers pays the following noble tribute to the Baptists of England:—

“Let it never be forgotten of the Particular Baptists of England, that they form the denomination of Fuller, and Carey, and Ryland, and Hall, and Foster; that they have originated among the greatest of all missionary enterprises; that they have enriched the Christian literature of our country with authorship of the most exalted piety, as well as of the first talent and the first eloquence; that they have waged a very noble and successful war with the hydra of Antinomianism; that perhaps there is not a more intellectual community of ministers in our islands, or who have put forth to their number a greater amount of mental power and mental activity in the defence and illustration of our common faith; and what is better than all the triumphs of genius or understanding, who by their zeal and fidelity and pastoral labor among the congregations which they have reared, have done more to swell the lists of genuine discipleship in the walks of private society—and thus both to uphold and to extend the living Christianity of our nation.”

gelizing the benighted millions of the East. They commenced it amid scorn, obloquy, and opposition. But they persevered till the Scriptures have been translated into fifty languages and dialects, till churches have been planted, prejudice subdued, the favor of governments secured, and many other bodies of Christians have entered into their labors. Their devotion and success find a parallel only in those of the apostles and the early churches. It is instructive to contrast their poverty and fewness, with the numbers, the wealth, and abundant resources of other religious bodies around them, in comparison with their achievements.

Not without good reasons, therefore, do Baptists maintain that the principles of church polity which they love and cherish are favorable to the development of the best order of individual character—to the highest culture and most luxuriant growth of the noblest graces of the mind and of the heart; that they are the most salutary and powerful to improve the civil and social condition of the human race, by fostering the love of liberty, restraining its excesses, and illustrating its real benefits by promoting general intelligence and self-government; that they are efficient in spreading throughout the earth the knowledge of Him by whom life and immortality are brought to light, in that gospel the effects of which are profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. These principles have no tendency to form a party, but, correctly applied, abolish all parties, and make every man who adopts them the equal, the friend, the helper of his fellow. Ours is no worldly establishment. Our principles find no interested or partizan advocates. They challenge the credence of the world, by their simplicity, their liberality, their purity, and their truth.