

Griffin's History

CHAPTER II.

A BRIEF NOTICE OF THE HISTORY OF THE EUROPEAN BAPTISTS.

Dr. Mosheim, a learned church historian, of the Luther— an order, and strongly prejudiced against the Baptist, thus writes concerning them: "The true origin of that sect which acquired the denomination of Anabaptists by their administering anew the rite of baptism to those who come over to their communion, and derived that of Mennonites from the famous man to whom they owe the greatest part of their present felicity, is hid in the remote depth of antiquity, and is, of consequence, extremely difficult to be ascertained." Here is a frank acknowledgment by a learned opponent of the Baptist that their origin was more than a century ago, "Hid in the remote depth of antiquity."

Again, the same historian says, "The modern Mennonites (Baptists) not only consider themselves as the descendants of the Waldenses, who were so grievously oppressed and persecuted by the despotic heads of the Roman church, but pretend, moreover, to be the purest offspring of these respectable sufferers, being equally adverse to all principles of rebellion on the one hand, and all suggestions of fanaticism on the other." The careful reader will here notice an allusion to an important fact, too often overlooked by others, that is, that Waldenses is a genuine term, similar to that of Protestant, of the present day—covering many sects, many creeds, and many rules of practice. To prove this conclusively, we will make a short quotation from the same author, bearing on this point, viz: "It must be carefully observed, that through all these projectors of a new, unspotted and perfect church, were comprehended under the general denomination of Anabaptists, on account of their opposing the baptism of infants, and their rebaptising such as had received that sacrament in a state of childhood in other churches, yet they were, from their origin, subdivided into various sects, which differed from each other in points of no small moment." It appears, then, from the testimony of Dr. Mosheim, that the Waldenses, previous to the Reformation, were divided into different denominations, and, that the Baptists, subsequent to the Reformation, were "subdivided into various sects which differed from each other in points of no small moment." And this testimony could be amply corroborated from other sources, were it necessary.

As Dr. Mosheim was a member of the Lutheran church, the eldest daughter of the Roman lady, and consequently not a friend to the Baptists, we will extract some more statements before he is dismissed from the stand, viz: "Before the rise of Luther and Calvin, (that is before the Reformation,) they lay concealed in almost all the countries of Europe, particularly in Bohemia, Moravia, Switzerland and Germany, many persons who adhered tenaciously to the following doctrine, which the Waldenses, Wickliffites and Hussites had maintained, some in a more disguised, and others in a more open and public manner, viz: "That the kingdom of Christ, or the visible church he had established upon earth, was an assembly of real and true saints, and ought, therefore, to be inaccessible to the wicked and unrighteous, and also exempt from all those institutions which human prudence suggests, to oppose the progress of iniquity, or to correct and reform transgressors." Again: "It is true, indeed, that many Anabaptists suffered death, not on account of their being considered as rebellious subjects, but merely because they were judged to be incurable heretics; for, in this century, the error of limiting the administration of baptism to adult persons only, and the practice of rebaptising such as had received that sacrament in a state of infancy, were looked upon as most flagitious and intolerable heresies."

When we consider that Dr. Mosheim is one of the most learned church historians, that has ever written on the subject, and, that he entertained no partiality in favor of the Baptists, we feel fully authorized to accept the foregoing as reliable testimony in their favor. By a careful examination and comparison of these extracts, it will be seen, that there was a sect in Europe, whose origin was hid in the remote depths of antiquity, who practiced Baptist principles, and hence, subsequent to the Reformation, acquired the denomination of Anabaptists—that they lay concealed in almost all European countries, particularly in Bohemia, Moravia, Switzerland and Germany—and that they adhered tenaciously to the following doctrine, viz: "That the kingdom of Christ, or the visible church he had established upon earth, was an assembly of true and real saints, and ought, therefore, to be inaccessible to the wicked and unrighteous, and also exempt from all those institutions which human prudence suggests, to oppose the progress of iniquity, or to correct and reform transgressors." And it will be also seen, that many Anabaptists suffered death, not on account of their being considered as rebellious subjects—for they were equally adverse to all principles of rebellion, on the one hand, and all suggestions of fanaticism on the other—but they were punished with death merely because they were judged to be incurable heretics.

The witness testifies that the Baptists were "subdivided into various sects, which differed from each other in points of no small moment." Hence the gross injustice

of applying the inconsistencies and bad conduct of some Baptists, indiscriminately, to all the sects bearing that name.

ENGLISH BAPTISTS.

The reformation having somewhat abated the spirit of persecution, and enlightened the minds of men, on the subject of religious rights, we find the Baptists organizing themselves into local churches, in the various countries of Southern and Western Europe. They were divided into two principal sects, especially in Great Britain, and were denominated Particular Baptists, and General Baptists. In the early part of the 16th century, churches were organized in and about London, of both denominations. They differed principally on points of doctrine. The General Baptists were Arminians, and the Particular Baptists were Predestinarians. The modern Missionary scheme was then unknown among the Baptists.

In 1689 a general assembly of the Particular Baptists of England and Wales, was held in London, for the purpose of forming a general Union, by setting forth the articles of faith upon which they were organized, which they honestly believed, to which they held privately and publicly, and according to which they acted. These articles of faith are divided into thirty— four chapters. They are in substance the same as those of the Primitive or Old School Baptists of this day. Hence, it is only necessary here to give a few extracts upon leading points of difference between them and the Arminian Baptists:

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"We, the Ministers and Messengers of, and concerned for upwards of one hundred baptized congregations in Wales, (denying Arminianism,) being met together in London, from the third of the seventh month to the eleventh of the same, 1689, to consider of some things that might be for the glory of God, and the good of these congregations, have thought meet (for the satisfaction of all other Christians that differ from us in the point of baptism,) to recommend to their perusal the Confession of our Faith, printed for, and sold by, John Marshall, at the Bible, in Grace Church street, which confession we own, as containing the doctrine of our faith and practice, and do desire that the members of our churches respectively do furnish themselves therewith."