

U N I O N C H A P E L,

DARJEELING.

No. I.

P L E A

FOR A BAPTISTERY.

CALCUTTA:

AT THE BAPTIST MISSION PRESS.

1871.

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The papers which follow are printed at my request, and by the consent of all parties whose names are appended thereunto.

My reasons for giving something like publicity to the subject of this correspondence may be expressed in the fewest words. A principle of "righteousness" is at stake. It shall be avowed now—for the thousandth time—and it shall be defended hereafter. I would my brethren of the Baptist churches in the land in no way misunderstood my action. And I would venture on cautioning those of my Baptist brethren, whose lot is cast in mofussil stations, against being led into any "*Union*" which does not *first define most clearly its principles of action*. A generous nature may sometimes be at fault, and that most unwittingly.

JOHN C. PAGE.

Darjeeling,
April 6th, 1871.

Minute by MAJOR MORTON, CAPTAIN JERDAN, *and*
J. H. DOYLE, Esq.

We, the undersigned members, come here in anticipation of a full meeting of the Chapel Building Committee, think it more preferable to record our views on the subject it was proposed to discuss, for the consideration of our colleagues, than to constitute ourselves a *quorum* of the said Committee.

In regard to the proposed baptistery, whilst we personally and individually see no objection to the construction of a baptistery, we are of opinion that it would be premature to construct such in the Union Chapel, at least at present. The question of baptism is just one of those non-essential points on which many Christian people differ. And we believe that a construction of a baptistery on the one hand, or the placing of a permanent font, on the other hand, might make many persons, belonging to the English and Baptist sections of the Church hold back from our chapel. We one and all aim at union, and we think it is inadvisable to take any step which would endanger the union we seek. We are perfectly satisfied that if a baptistery was constructed, a great number of our present English Church congregation would decline to attend even their own Church services in our Chapel. As occasion calls for either a font or a baptistery, we believe it would be the best plan to use a moveable one.

We submit for the consideration of our colleagues whether it would not be preferable, at some future date, to construct a separate baptistery if such was needed.

(Signed) MAJOR MORTON.
J. JERDAN.
J. H. DOYLE.

To Major MORTON, Captain JERDAN, and J. W. DOYLE, Esq.

GENTLEMEN,

I very much regret that you have recorded, and forwarded to us, the minute under your signature of the 10th instant. The following observations on that minute will put before you the cause or the grounds of that regret.

1. I am really at a loss to understand how you "came here" (Mr. Doyle's) "in anticipation of a full meeting of the Chapel Building Committee." That there ought to be a full meeting of the Committee, that there *should be* a full meeting,—was talked about by Major Morton and myself on Saturday the 8th. In the evening of the same day, I sent Mr. Müller a note in respect of this meeting. He and I both expected we should see all the members at the service on the following day, and then arrange all things. But three members of the Committee were absent. After the service, in speaking with Captain Jerdan, I "hoped he would be at the meeting," on Monday. His reply was, "You had better talk over the subjects privately with Major Morton first."

On Monday morning, Major Morton was kind enough to meet me in the bazar, to look at a spot of ground I wanted for a book-shop. We had other matters to attend to. Neither of us alluded to the subject of the baptistery, or the contemplated Committee meeting. By and bye, Captain Jerdan called at our house, and, in the first minutes of conversation, introduced the subject of the baptistery, the point of all being, again, that we had better talk over the whole matter quietly, before anything was brought into Committee. To this I consented, adding, that I was in no hurry to push matters, and could easily wait awhile. Thus rested the matter as I thought: for

First: No meeting was called in due form by our Secretary.

Second: Captain Jerdan, at least, saw the Secretary helpless on his couch.

Third: Captain Masson was sick in bed.

Fourth: I was persuaded to allow matters to stand over for the present. I, therefore, cannot help feeling, that some of us have, somehow, been misled; and I am surprised at your intimating that you *might* have acted as a *quorum*, but deemed it "more preferable" to put forth your views in the paper under consideration. I cannot see how, under the circumstances, you could have met in Committee, and constituted yourselves into a

quorum, without ignoring the laws which regulate Committees, and even the etiquette of society.

2. I submit that the course you suggest in respect of a baptistery is in violation of a *general principle*.

Churches or Chapels—*houses of prayer*—are erected for the service of God, i. e., for the observance of those ordinances of public worship which are enjoined in the New Testament. Therefore, as an indisputable consequence, means should be afforded in every place of worship, in order that “all (these) things be done decently and in order.” See 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

1. *Baptism* : Matt. xxviii. 19.
2. *The Lord's Supper* : 1 Cor. xi. 23, 24.
3. *The preaching, reading the word—hearing the gospel* : Rom. x. 15, 17. Eph. iv. 13. Mark iv. 24; xvi. 15.
4. *Prayer and praise*. Matt. vi. 6. 1 Cor. xiv. 15-19. Col. iii. 16. Eph. v. 19.

Baptism is as much an ordinance of Christ, and as much a public ordinance, and as much a means of grace, as are the other ordinances noted in the margin. May I be permitted to ask—How would you regard the action of that man who objected to the Bible being introduced in to a place of worship, because, it so happened (nothing more than *happened*) that he agreed not in all respects in the translation adopted, or liked not the size, the shape, the binding of the book? Or, what would you think of him who insisted that there should be no cup, no bread, no wine brought into *his* place of worship, because those things provided, differed from what he wanted in shape, quantity, or any other quality, while, as he judged, the mode of using the same happened to be not uniform in all Christian communities? “Exclude the Bible,” you would say, “and you exclude the ministry of the Word (in effect.) Deny entrance to the bread and wine, and you forbid the Lord's Supper (in effect).” “Forbid water,” we Baptists rejoin, “and you forbid baptism, as we deem baptism. Forbid a baptistery, and you forbid water, so far as *our* consciences require water.” Hence I lay down this position, and am quite prepared to defend it: *just so far as you fail to supply the means, or as you remove the means, for the observance of an ordinance, you do most assuredly OBSTRUCT the observance of that ordinance.*

You might escape the responsibility,—pardon my calling it the *guilt*, of such a course, by reference to two suggestions thrown out in your minute.

- (1.) “As occasions calls for either a font or baptistery, we believe it would be the best plan to use a moveable one.”
- Now, had you any acquaintance with the practice of *baptism* in the Baptist denomination,—of the pre-requisites to its accep-

tance or performance, of the manner in which it is administered, of the solemnity we attach to it, in its deep significance—and therefore of the strictness with which we insist on its being observed “in order,” you would not have written such words. A moveable baptistery is just an impracticability in a place of worship; and if such a thing were even created, it would be adjudged an utter absurdity. Already, as it is, we Baptists (I fancy regarded as some strange monstrosities in the Christian world) have our full share of opprobrium; and ignorance and bigotry have made our cross heavier than most people’s. We can hardly endure, for man’s pleasure, being made a laughing-stock unnecessarily. We endure the cross: but in no wise desire that you, as fellow Christians, should shun it.

“We submit,” you go on to say, “for the consideration of our colleagues, whether it would not be preferable at some future date to construct a separate baptistery, if such were needed.” Now, in respect of *separate baptisteries*, I am aware that, up to the middle of the third century, these were found in rivers, pools, baths, or even in the sea. The early Christians availed themselves of any piece of water *deep enough to admit of immersion*. We Baptists of the present day object not to baptize in rivers and tanks. Many hundreds of converts, indeed, have I thus led into the water. But,—(and herein is the crushing answer to your suggestion) where is the pool, or river, or water of any kind, *we want, in these hills?* Or why (and herein is the simple indignation of people who respect themselves as they respect you) are *we*, in this age of fastidious taste, and-carping criticism of all which agrees not with *little self*, to be forced to take, (it may be) our wives, sisters and daughters to some distant water, and there, in exposure and in discomfort, follow out the most solemn dictates of conscience? Would you allow your friends, to say nothing of ladies, to endure as much in the pleasures of a *picnic?* Have we no *souls?* And yet, I declare before heaven, that I would *endure* any wrong, rather than *do* the wrong you are inflicting on Baptists. I would submit to shame, rather than be the informed writer of the minute you have sent me.

(2.) You speak of “*constructing a separate baptistery*.” I know not if you refer to the practice of Christians from the middle of the *third* to the *sixth* century. During that period, baptisteries were *built*; but not within the “church.” They comprised more than the mere “bath.” In the *fourth* century, they rose to important dimensions. The reason was obvious. Right views of the solemnity of the ordinance, and a fitting sense of the decency of things, demanded a proper building wherein, though

before many witnesses, the converts might, unabashed, put on the Lord Jesus in baptism. Hence, by and bye, the whole structure, with its vast accommodation, was called a *baptistery*.

Now, I for one, have not the slightest objection to revert to the practice of this last named period, if you will drive us to it. But I maintain that the Chapel Fund should bear the expense of a fitting "separate baptistery." Still, I would rather improve with improving ages, and advocate having the baptistery *within the "church,"* as was the case in the *sixth* century. How soon such a baptistery may be needed, we know not; and little right have we to expect, that all people must always think as *we* do, or the Spirit of God teach all men only what *we* think truth. I freely accede to you the right to have a font, or any other thing you deem necessary, in order that you may, on behalf of friends or children, follow out the dictates of conscience. But I do earnestly protest against the intolerance which would hinder me and others obeying, (as we regard obedience) in God's own house, the last most solemn and imperative teachings of His beloved Son. Such intolerance I cannot impute to you. *You disavow it.* But I do unhesitatingly affirm, that if "*there are many persons, belonging to the English or Baptist sections of the church*" who, on account of the existence of baptistery or font in our chapel, "*would hold back from it,*"—such are essentially intolerant. And if "*there is a great number of our present English Church congregation who would decline to attend even their own church services in our chapel,*" because it contained a baptistery, such would prove themselves grossly bigoted. And I think it is high time to set our faces, as a flint, against intolerance and bigotry wherever, and whenever, they appear.

3. The course you have adopted is opposed to the principles of OUR UNION. These principles are indicated in the opening speech of our chairman at the public meeting of the 26th September last. "*Ample precedent, both in this country and at home for attempting an union of those who differ on admittedly immaterial points,*" is instanced.

(1.) In the action of the *Evangelical Alliance*. Now, that the representatives of the Alliance have often met in a place of worship which had a baptistery, I think will not be questioned. My papers are not at hand: but I need only refer to the fact, that not the least honoured ministers of the gospel in London itself are of the Baptist persuasion, and not the smallest or least thronged places of worship those in which Baptists meet.

(2.) In the action taken in commencing a chapel in Simla. A copy of the trust-deed of the proposed building (still in course of erection) was in our chairman's hands before the

public meeting. This paper has been circulated since the meeting. And, if I mistake not, you will find in it a conceding of *both baptistery and font*. I beg to remind you that this document passed through the criticism of the good men of Simla, from men "in position" to the members of our humble Chapel Building Committee. No one in Simla trembled at the idea of a baptistery. No one there would have been scared from the house of God because it had in it a baptistery.

Moreover, the principles alluded to, are *confirmed* by the last paper we, as a Committee, have put forth to the public. "The action of the Committee, they venture to affirm, was based upon a generous and large-hearted principle. * * * * * Its members were anxious to promote that union among others which they believe exists among themselves: an union which naturally predicates a *oneness of spirit* in the service of the one Great Lord, and as easily dispenses with *uniformity* in such service. By this the Committee mean, that the D. U. C. may be open to *all forms of Christian service*, provided it represent the true service of the heart, and be conducted with due observance of evangelical doctrine and practice." Excuse my asking whether you allow baptism to be an act of "service," an "observance of evangelical practice?" And, then, do you not ~~embarrassingly~~ ~~unwisely~~ dispense with *uniformity in such service*? If it is so, is not that action inconsistent with the principle of our union, which denies to Baptists a baptistery, and then, in the effort to render *inconsistency consistent*, forbids members of the Church of England having a font?

4. The course you have taken appears to me wrong, inasmuch as it is one of *expediency and not of principle*. Expediency in such matters never prospered. We can never do any good to our own souls, or to others, when we abandon an avowed principle of fairness and right, and stoop to accommodate ourselves to the ignorance, prejudice, bigotry, or intolerance of our neighbours. The apostle tried to be all things to all men, but *never at the sacrifice of truth*. In respect of the house of God—the *building*—let us still believe that *the silver is the Lord's and the gold His also*, (Haggai ii. 8); and let us continue to look to Him for aid. In respect of the *ordinances* of the house, let us trust more to them as *Divine* institutions, and more confidently leave them, with the Divine blessing, to accomplish their own purposes.

5. I think also that you have not done well in this matter, for another reason. You seek to conciliate men of no religion, and you cause offence to men of earnest religious feeling and decided religious views. Gentlemen, I was told by one of

yourselves, in support of the opinion you have now put forth, that the apostle said, "If meat (food) offend my brother, I will eat no flesh while the world is, so that I shall not offend my brother." Now, my friend surely will draw no analogy from the abstaining from eating flesh unto the neglecting the ordinance of baptism. Whilst our Lord most directly commands baptism—He nowhere, I apprehend, permits or forbids our eating flesh. The two things are widely separated, and to perceive this, let us simply ask ourselves, whether the apostle Paul for a moment hesitated about being baptized, because his brethren in the Jewish religion objected to it? Or, indeed, whether he would have drawn back from baptism, after the Lord had in His providence directed him "what he would do," (Acts ix) because certain brethren forbade him, or were offended by his zealous obedience? 1 Cor. viii. 13. Still my friend laid no stress on the word "*brother*," and so, I fancy, further misapplied the text. The sin of offending a "*weak brother*," is a sin against *Christ* (12.) The inference is (Matt. xxv. 34 &c.) that we must in no wise offend a *disciple of Christ*. As to the *world*, the whole of God's truth is an offence to it. I firmly believe that, in the sovereignty of God, the doctrine of the cross, in its mighty significance, was *intended to be* an offence to unregenerate minds. It was to be a test, a proof, ~~of faith and~~ ~~unbelief~~.

Gentlemen, I pray you, give us, Baptists, no offence. We cannot all say with you, "Baptism is just one of those non-essential points." Baptism, in our view of the ordinance, is the most explicit and most solemn act we can perform, or which we can observe, expressive of obedience to the Master's command, our death with Him unto sin, and our desire to live with Him in righteousness and true holiness. You may regard us as brethren who are "*weak*." For this very reason, as already pointed out, you should cause us no "*offence*." We are content to be thought "*weak*" in man's judgment. But, most solemnly would we remind you of Him who said—"Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness:" (every ordinance of righteousness?)

I remain, Gentlemen,

Yours very sincerely,

JOHN C. PAGE.

Darjeeling, May 12th, 1869.

he first time I have heard amongst Christians that b
 a non-essential point.—Baptism I believe to be a
 point.—The modes are different, according as peo
 interpretation of the Scripture: some believe th
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J. M.

1. May, 1869.

for both font and baptistery, and that they be built
 the Chapel.

Sd. J. MASSON.

