

## ARTICLE III.

## FIFTY YEARS OF BAPTIST HISTORY.

BY PROFESSOR HENRY CLAY VEDDER, D.D.

IN order to appreciate the Baptist history of the past fifty years, we must first of all gain as vivid and accurate a picture as we may of the state of the Baptist churches in America at the middle of this century. Naturally our first resort is to statistics, but we speedily discover that no really trustworthy figures are accessible.<sup>1</sup> The only statistics of the denomination for the year 1850 are taken from the Baptist Almanac for the following year, and are as follows:—

	CHURCHES	MINISTERS	MEMBERS
Northern.....	3,557	2,665	296,614
Southern.....	4,849	2,477	390,807
Total.....	8,406	5,142	686,807

These figures are open to much suspicion. In a table many times republished, which first appeared in the Baptist Year-Book for 1872, the following totals are given for the year 1851: churches, 9,552; ministers, 7,393; members, 770,839. So great an increase in a single year as is shown by a comparison of these figures, particularly in the number of churches and ministers, appears quite improbable. We may, however, take 700,000 as approximately the number of Baptists in the United States in 1850. The census of that year returned the total population as 23,191,876. There was then, therefore, one Baptist to about thirty-two

<sup>1</sup> Until 1868, when the Baptist Publication Society began issuing the Year-Book, nothing like official denominational statistics were known, and it is only in an accommodated sense that the Year-Book figures since that date may be called "official."

persons in the population—reckoning only those in full denominational fellowship. If we had included all the varieties of Baptists in our computation, the total number would become not fewer than 800,000 (the Baptist Almanac gives 815,212), and the proportion would be about one in twenty-nine of the population. This was a very marked increase from the year 1800, when the proportion is supposed to have been one Baptist to every fifty-three persons, or thereabouts. It is further to be noted, that, in making these comparisons, only actual reported members of Baptist churches are included. If we computed “adherents,” at the rate of three for each member, it would probably be true that in 1850 one person in each eleven of the population was a Baptist *in esse* or *in posse*.

But even if one could trust these numerical results as precisely accurate, they would give us a most inadequate idea of the condition of Baptists in 1850. We need to know many facts besides mere numbers. What was the measure of the piety and intelligence of these people? How did they compare in evangelistic and missionary zeal with other Christian bodies? Were they united in their efforts or disorganized by heresy and faction? The answer to such questions as these will go further to decide the strength of a denomination than an array of figures, however imposing. This is what some have meant by saying that a denomination must not only be counted but weighed.

Perhaps the most striking fact, as we survey the denomination in 1850, is, that it had just emerged from a period of prolonged and bitter controversies, which had resulted in a number of schisms. The greatest of these controversies was provoked by the question of slavery, and it naturally produced the most serious division. When American Baptists first formed their denominational societies, this question was in abeyance; there was good prospect that slavery would gradually be abolished in all the States, as

it had already disappeared in some. Northern and Southern Baptists, therefore, united on equal terms in establishing their great missionary organizations, and for some time continued to cooperate in them without challenge from either side. But gradually slavery became more profitable in the South and more aggressive politically; at the same time an active antislavery propaganda began in the North, and feeling in both sections became embittered. The old relations in the missionary societies rapidly became impossible, and in 1845 Northern and Southern Baptists parted company. The division was accomplished with as little hard-feeling as could reasonably have been expected, and in 1850 the denomination had recovered from the wrench and was probably stronger than ever. It cannot often be said of a schism that its effect was to promote peace and harmony, but of this schism that is the truth.

There had been several other schisms before 1850, however, of which this could not be said. The movement, begun about 1827 by Alexander Campbell and others, resulting in the establishment of the Disciple body, was most disastrous to the Baptist churches of the Central West and Southwest. This agitation was especially fitted to trouble those churches, not only because some of its prominent leaders had been Baptists, but because it avowed as its chief principle that which has always been professed by Baptist churches as their fundamental conviction: fidelity to the exact teaching of Scripture. "Back to the church of the apostles" was the war cry, and it was one to stir the heart of any Baptist. After sharp discussion, however, the majority of Baptist churches decided that the proposed doctrines and practices advocated as a new Reformation were not a returning to Christ and his apostles, but a departure from them; and they therefore proceeded to separate themselves from those who seemed to them to walk disorderly. In the process, a few entire associations, many churches,

and a large number of Baptist ministers went over bodily to the "Reformation," and nearly every church in the region indicated suffered distraction and loss.

In the Eastern States the churches were little disturbed by the Disciple movement, but they had troubles of their own. The teachings of William Miller, a Baptist layman of Northern New York, concerning the speedy coming of our Lord, led eventually to the founding of the Second Advent denomination, into which large numbers of Baptists were drawn. The excitement produced by Miller's repeated proclamation of the approaching end of all things mundane had a most unfavorable effect on the Baptist churches of the East in the "forties," and in 1850 the reaction to a more sober and healthy state of religious feeling was just beginning. Almost contemporaneous with this, in practically the same region, was the Anti-Masonic movement—at first a social and political agitation, then a strife invading and distracting the churches. During the height of this excitement in the "thirties," many Baptist churches were led to disfellowship all who would not renounce their connection with secret societies, and to refuse fellowship with other churches that hesitated to adopt their vigorous and rigorous discipline.

Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties, Baptists had continued to increase with wonderful rapidity in the "thirties" and "forties," far outstripping the growth of population (though that was then reckoned marvelous), and were surpassed in numerical increase by the Methodists alone of all American Christians. This growth was not due to immigration, as in the case of many religious bodies; nor to proselytism, as in the case of certain others; but to the making of converts among the native population. This work had been much promoted by a series of great revivals and the labors of a number of so-called "evangelists." These itinerant preachers were supposed to have great

skill in preaching to the unconverted; but that in which they really excelled was the art of persuading those under conviction of sin, yet still hesitating and undecided, to make a positive decision to seek thenceforth the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

As to the state of piety and intelligence among Baptists in 1850, it is not easy to speak in general terms that will be at once accurate and just. In intelligence, they may be conceded to have been inferior to some other denominations, notably to the Presbyterians, inferior to the standard that now obtains among themselves. It would be shame to them if it were not so. If all the educational advantages enjoyed by this generation have not set them above their fathers, then those fathers toiled and sacrificed in vain for unworthy children. The standard of piety was high among the Baptist churches of 1850. The fathers believed heartily in the fundamental Baptist principle of a regenerate church; and candidates for membership were subjected to a thorough and searching examination of the grounds of their belief that they had been born again. And in most cases, the fathers insisted strenuously that a profession of regeneration should be avouched by a godly walk and conversation. Discipline was not one of the lost arts among Baptist churches in the "fifties."

Most important of all—at any rate, most striking of all things that may be said of the Baptists of 1850—is the fact that they had unconsciously come to the beginning of a new order of things. Up to this time, or near it, Baptists had been the sect everywhere spoken against—the Ishmael among denominations, every man's hand against it, and to a certain extent its hand against every man. Before this, Baptists had everywhere been few in numbers, composed chiefly of what are contemptuously called "the common people," often persecuted, always despised, frequently unlearned. Now they had become the largest Protestant

body but one in the United States; they surpassed most other bodies in the scope and effectiveness of their missionary operations; they were rapidly increasing in wealth, intelligence, and social consequence. In a word, it was actually becoming respectable to be a Baptist. Only those who have carefully studied the beginnings of the denomination, in our own country and elsewhere, can fully comprehend how much that means. Some can remember communities where, since 1850, it was not *quite* respectable to be a Baptist—where to be a member of that denomination was to incur a social stigma of which most who live to-day have had no personal experience.

Fifty years of history—what have they brought forth for the Baptists of America? We are to consider the half-century most wonderful for the rapidity of its material development in the history of mankind, and the country in which this development has been unmatched elsewhere on the globe. To these five decades belongs almost wholly the growth of the mighty West, with its fourteen new commonwealths containing a greater population to-day than the whole United States could boast in 1810. Nor is the religious development of this vast region one whit less wonderful. How far have Baptists kept pace with both?

Again let us have recourse to statistics, as a beginning. The actual population of the United States in 1900 will not be known until about a year hence, when the results of the twelfth census have been tabulated. The most careful estimates, founded to some extent on the State enumerations, make the number of inhabitants about 75,000,000. The latest denominational statistics show that 4,181,686 persons were members of regular Baptist churches one year ago—or something like one Baptist to every eighteen or nineteen of the population. If we add those churches which, though not in full fellowship, may be fairly said to

hold and practice Baptist principles, the proportion is about one in sixteen. If we add "adherents,"—those connected with Baptist families, congregations, Sunday-schools,—one person in every seven or eight of the entire population may be reckoned a Baptist in sentiment.

In the way of numerical increase, what could be more gratifying to a religious body? The population has increased about three and one-third-fold during the last half-century, while, in the same time, Baptists have increased in numbers almost six-fold—nearly twice as fast as the population.

This is the counting; now for the weighing. Has the increase in piety, in intelligence, in wealth, in missionary zeal, kept pace with this growth of numbers? In many of these particulars, if not in all, it is possible to answer the question with an emphatic, Yes. It is, in truth, speaking soberly to say that the numerical increase of Baptists during the last fifty years is the least striking feature of their history. To present the subject with any approach to adequate fulness would require a volume; but it is possible, even within the limits of an article like this, to indicate the facts that warrant this assertion.

Consider then, in the first place, the progress in education made by the denomination in fifty years. In 1850 Baptists had in the East five institutions of collegiate grade: Brown University (1764), Waterville College (now Colby University, 1818), Madison University (chartered 1846, but founded in 1819), Columbian University (1821), and Lewisburg University (1846). Most of these names were prophecies, which have not yet been fulfilled; there was not then, anywhere in the United States, an institution that deserved the name of University. The combined buildings and endowments of the five institutions named would be considered in these days not too large a "plant" for one good academy. There were, in addition, two theo-

logical seminaries,—that at Hamilton (1817) and the Newton Theological Institution (1825). In the West and South there were sixteen other institutions<sup>1</sup> of nominally collegiate grade (several of which were not in reality above academic), all struggling to keep the breath of life within them, all practically unendowed. Possibly I have overlooked some institution that then had a name to live, but had little else, and soon ceased to have even that. There are no statistics of these schools, but it is hazarding little to say that the total invested funds of all would not have exceeded \$500,000. There was at this time no theological institution in the West, but a theological department was maintained at several of the colleges for the instruction of candidates for the Baptist ministry.<sup>2</sup>

The provision for academic education was even more scanty in 1850. It is true that of existing Baptist academies nine were established prior to that year, and that an unknown number had been begun and had come to an untimely end before that date, but in their beginnings at least most of these academies were private schools and are not at the middle of the century to be reckoned among denominational facilities for education.

The year 1850 marks the beginning of a really great work in the foundation and equipment of schools of learning by Baptists. The following decade saw the establishment of twenty-three colleges and two theological seminaries, beginning with the two institutions at Rochester. In the "sixties" three more seminaries were founded, thus completing the denominational provision for theological edu-

<sup>1</sup> These are: Baylor College and Baylor University (both 1845), Denison (1831), Franklin (1834), Georgetown (1829), Howard (1841), Kalamazoo (1833), Limestone (S. C. 1845), Mercer (1837), Richmond (1832), Shurtleff (1827), Southern Female College (two of same name, both Ala. 1842, 1843), Southwestern Baptist University (Tenn. 1845), Wake Forest (1843), William Jewell (1849).

<sup>2</sup> These have all been discontinued except the one at Shurtleff.

cation, but only eight colleges were added, three of which were schools for the freedmen established after the close of the Civil War. The last three decades have been the period of most rapid increase in educational facilities. The "seventies" saw the addition of fourteen colleges, of which six were for the freedmen; in the "eighties" twelve colleges were established, only one of which was for the colored race; and fifteen colleges have been added during the last ten years, including the greatest of all Baptist institutions,—the University of Chicago.

But here again weighing is no less necessary than counting, for the mere multiplying of institutions is not necessarily educational progress. It is not needful to deny, rather would one affirm, that good judgment has not always been characteristic of those who brought these schools into being. But whatever lack of wisdom Baptists have shown in the founding of denominational colleges, the one thing that is not shown is lack of appreciation of the value of higher education. And therefore, on the whole, a Baptist has no reason to be ashamed of the record. The zeal to found, has in most cases been followed by the zeal to endow, new institutions. Of the ninety-two schools of collegiate grade now existing, it is true that fifty-three are wholly without endowment; but on examination it proves that these are mainly of three classes: Schools very recently founded, schools for the freedmen, and Southern schools for young women—which last have always depended for support on the tuition fees received from their patrons, like the "seminaries" for young women in the North. All but about half a dozen of the unendowed colleges come under one of these heads.

But it is still true that the movement to secure adequate endowment for these institutions has been comparatively recent. The earliest educational statistics are found in the Baptist Year-Book for 1872. According to this table, there

were then nine theological schools (two of them departments in colleges), with endowments amounting to \$1,069,000 (an average of over \$150,000 each for the seminaries proper), and other property worth \$823,000. There were twenty-eight colleges, with a total endowment of \$2,317,954 (an average of less than \$100,000 each), and other property valued at \$2,664,000. There is no report of academic institutions, but such a report appears the following year (1873). Thirty-one institutions are named (some of which have since been transferred to the collegiate list), of which three had endowments aggregating but \$65,000, and the rest were utterly unendowed; the whole number reporting property valued at \$1,203,700.

The statistics for 1880 show an advance that is highly gratifying, but hardly surprising. There are now reported eight theological schools, with endowments of \$1,337,826, and property amounting to \$1,751,204; thirty-one colleges, with \$3,243,640 in endowments, and other property valued at \$7,336,074; forty-nine schools of academic grade, with \$422,235 endowment, and \$2,570,100 in other property. In the next decade the advance is yet more notable. In 1890 the tables show seven seminaries with endowments almost double those of 1872 (\$2,069,801), while the other property very little exceeded that reported in 1872 (\$946,134). This last rather surprising item proves, on analysis, to be due to more conservative estimates of the value of the property. For example, Newton reported buildings and other property to the value of \$400,000 in 1872, but in 1890 these are set down at only \$126,300. There are also tabulated returns from thirty-one colleges, with endowments of \$5,596,771, and other property worth \$4,831,800; thirty-two schools for women only, having \$668,577 in endowment, and \$2,071,038 in general property; 46 academies with \$758,600 endowments and \$1,860,918 in property; besides 17 schools for the freedmen and Indians, with

only nominal endowments, amounting in all to \$54,600, and other property valued at \$802,325.

But it is in the last ten years that the really surprising progress has been made. The endowment of the seminaries has reached \$2,586,065, and their other property is valued at \$2,244,051. Here the greatest increase has been in providing adequate material facilities, in buildings, libraries, etc. The Universities and colleges now report endowments of \$14,442,807, and other property to the amount of \$15,249,058. Even subtracting the large sums credited to the University of Chicago, it is found that both endowments and other property have been just about doubled during the past decade. The academies now have endowments of \$1,414,473, and other equipment worth \$3,414,473—sums miserably inadequate to their needs, it is true, but nevertheless marking an immense advance.

It would be less than just not to point out that a chief factor in this progress has been the agency of the American Baptist Education Society, organized in 1888, and the grants made through this society by a single Baptist, Mr. John D. Rockefeller. What he has given personally, and what his gifts have impelled others to contribute, together constitute the major part of the increased endowments of the past decade.

Altogether, American Baptists have to-day invested in their educational institutions the enormous sum of \$44,000,000, of which fully half is in productive endowments. And almost the whole of this is the accumulation of the last fifty years. But, not only has there been this great material development, the standard of education has also risen proportionally; educational ideals and educational methods are far higher than a generation ago,—so much higher that work that made a man a valedictorian when some of us were students would not insure his graduation to-day. In all that constitutes a liberal education, as well as profes-

sional and technical, Brown University in the East and the University of Chicago in the West must now be reckoned as standing among the very first American Universities. And Baptist colleges, attempting the less ambitious task of giving to young men only that course in the arts and sciences that is crowned by the baccalaureate degree, are to-day, as they have been from the first, fully abreast of the more famous institutions. Man for man, these colleges have always sent out graduates in every way as well equipped as those that have gone from the most renowned halls of learning; and in the hard push of life it has not often been their alumni who have gone to the wall.

How far have the people taken advantage of these facilities? This may be quickly answered. In 1872 there were in all Baptist schools 2,457 students; in 1873 there were also 4,247 academic students,—making a total of 6,704. In 1880 there were 9,524; in 1890 the number had risen to 20,541, while in 1900 it is reported as 38,020. Nothing can be more gratifying than to see the eagerness of the youth of this denomination, and outside of it, to take advantage of the increased facilities for education that have been provided.

If I have given so much space to educational development, it is because this is really the most impressive thing in the Baptist history of the past fifty years. It is time to give our attention to the advance in missionary zeal that has marked the same period. Let us first consider the progress of foreign missions, so far as it is marked by definite results. In 1850 there were in Baptist Asiatic missions 69 churches, with 7,521 members; by 1860 they had increased to 278 churches, with 15,614 members; in 1870 these had become 372 churches, and 18,740 members; in 1890 there were 743 churches and 75,844 members—a rate of increase seldom, if ever, paralleled in the history of the denomination; and for 1900 the figures are: churches 844, members

115,929. In recent years African missions have been added, with 12 churches and 1,925 members. This survey does not include missions to the nominally Christian lands of Europe. In 1850 there were in such missions 59 churches and 3,038 members, of which number 2,800 were in Germany, where ten times that number of Baptists are now reported (28,641). Since that time there have been many fluctuations in the fortunes of these missions, some having been abandoned altogether, others pursued fitfully, so that comparison by decades would be misleading without elaborate explanation of the figures. Suffice it to say, that in 1900 there are reported in connection with European Baptist missions 951 churches and 105,117 members.

If we consider the advance in the annual gifts of the denomination for this work, as a practical mark of increase in zeal, results are not greatly different. In 1850 the total receipts of the A. B. M. U. were \$87,537; in 1860 they had risen to \$132,426; in 1870 they were \$196,897, and in 1890, \$252,677. Then there was a great leap to \$415,144 in 1890, which has become \$626,844 in 1900.

In five decades, therefore, the members of these missionary churches have doubled nearly four times, and the income of the society has doubled three times. In the same period the supporters of the society have hardly doubled twice. The growth of the denomination in missionary zeal, and in the fruitfulness of its work, has far outstripped its progress in mere numbers. It is doubtless true that much more might have been accomplished, but the bitter reproaches of their denomination in which writers and speakers sometimes indulge might well be softened in view of these facts.

If now we turn to home missions, we meet the initial difficulty, that it is not possible to compute numerically the results of this work on the growth of the denomination, because the churches established by the agency of this

society have soon taken their places in the regular statistical column of the denomination, and have no longer been reckoned separately. We can for the most part only apply the financial tests, and assume a fairly constant rate of fruitfulness. In 1850 the total income of the American Baptist Home Mission Society was \$25,201; by 1860 it had nearly doubled (\$44,678); but after the Civil War a great advance was made, largely on account of the new interest felt in the freedmen's work, and the income became \$144,032. Since then a constant and large rate of increase has been maintained: in 1880 the income rose to \$217,093; by 1890 it became \$375,254, and in 1900 it is returned at \$461,801. In 1850 there were 110 laborers employed, a number that has gradually risen to 1,092. In the fifty years just closed, 4,605 churches have been organized by the agents of this society—nearly one-tenth of the net increase of Baptist churches in the whole United States during that period.

Thus far I have given facts relating only to the operations of our Northern Societies. Similar facts are not accessible regarding the work done by the Southern Baptist Convention. No statistics regarding foreign missions can be discovered by me prior to 1890, in which year there were 1,338 members reported, which have increased in a single decade to 5,347. The receipts of the Foreign Mission Board regularly increased up to 1890, when they reached \$149,584; since then there has been a decided falling-off every year (\$109,267 reported in 1900). The Home Mission Board reported contributions of \$16,200 in 1880, \$69,398 in 1890, and \$61,200 in 1900. Inasmuch as the work only began in 1850, and was not vigorously prosecuted before 1880, the ratio of increase in the missionary operations of the Southern churches shows an excess over that of the Northern societies.

Has the denomination increased in wealth as rapidly as in numbers during the half-century? We have inadequate

means of answering this question with the definiteness desirable, since facts of the sort required were not recorded until a comparatively late day. The first attempt to gather and tabulate the general financial statistics of the denomination was made in the Year-Book for 1880. A good measure of the increase of denominational wealth is the valuation of church property. In 1885 this was \$26,685,959; in 1890 the figures rose to \$58,162,367—part of which increase was doubtless due to the better gathering of the facts. In 1900 there is reported \$86,648,982. Another fair measure is the annual expenditure in maintaining public worship. This in 1885 was \$4,702,381; in 1890 it was \$6,900,266, and for 1900 the figures are \$9,622,066. Another measure of wealth, as well as of zeal, is the total contributions for missionary purposes: in 1885, \$661,166; in 1890, \$1,092,571; and in 1900, \$1,123,839. The totals of contributions for all purposes will be regarded by many as the most satisfactory test of relative ability to give. In 1885 these were \$6,579,872, in 1890 \$10,199,259; and in 1900 \$12,348,527. Allowing for the imperfect gathering of facts at first, it would appear that the property of the denomination has tripled within fifteen years, while its annual contributions for all purposes have more than doubled. In the same time the membership has increased about sixty per cent. Applying every practicable test, we come to the conclusion that the denomination has increased in wealth fully twice as fast as in numbers.

We can, by way of conclusion, only glance briefly at a few other evidences that the denominational progress of the last fifty years has not been only, or even chiefly, numerical. In nothing has there been a more striking advance than in work among the young. The Sunday-school work, whose beginnings are traceable to the first years of the century, has had its greatest development during the past fifty years, and in all its phases has far surpassed the most

optimistic forecast of a half-century ago. That which is called *par excellence* the young people's movement—the separate organization of young Christians in close connection with their churches, for better instruction and training—is almost wholly the growth of the past two decades. True, societies of young people, of varied forms, may be found here and there in Baptist churches, as in those of other denominations, even back of the “fifties.” There was nothing that may be called a “movement” until the organization of the first Christian Endeavor Society in 1881; and the success, immediate and overwhelming, of this particular form of society, showed that its founder had seized and made a new and practical application of certain valuable principles.

Among Baptists, as among certain other denominations, different opinions were held from the first regarding this society. Some desired an organization exclusively denominational, and others believed that some provision should be made for the instruction of Baptist young people in the distinctive principles of their churches, while still others were more than satisfied with the Christian Endeavor Society and its larger fellowships. In the “eighties” there was a controversy of increasing bitterness over this question which finally reached such proportions as to threaten a new schism. Finally a plan was devised that, beyond most compromises, satisfied all the disputants. The form of society to be adopted in any church was left to the discretion of the church itself,—the only possible way under the Baptist polity,—but all Baptist young people, however organized, or if organized, were invited to unite in a general organization known as the Baptist Young People's Union of America, which was duly constituted by a convention held in Chicago, in July, 1891. This society claims no authority over local bodies, and gives no official approval to any form of society, but recommends a system of

training in the Scriptures, in missions, and in denominational principles and history, to the benefits of which it welcomes all. There are now about 700,000 Baptist young people in affiliation with this union, and all controversy over the movement has vanished. The present importance of this work is known to be great, but few adequately appreciate its vast future possibilities.

Another element of progress is the settlement of controversies of long standing, to the great promotion of denominational peace and unity. The formation of the American Bible Union, in 1850, so far from proving a solution of the problem that had vexed Baptists from 1835 (when the American Bible Society refused further appropriations for correctly translated versions of the Scriptures), had rendered the problems yet more insoluble. No strife within the denomination has been so bitter, none has left scars so deep, as that which prevailed in the "fifties" and "sixties," and even later, over the English version of the New Testament. The Bible Convention of 1883 at Saratoga—on the whole the most representative and weighty gathering of Baptists ever held—consigned this controversy also to the limbo of things that have been, and no serious question has since risen to trouble and divide the denomination. The close of this half-century sees Baptists not only greater, richer, wiser, better organized, but more united, than at any previous time in their history.

It sees them also enjoying greatly improved relations with other denominations—convictions respected, distinctive principles better understood, and in cases not a few tacitly admitted or even accepted. Controversy has nearly disappeared, jealousy is less frequently manifested. Mutual respect, comity, coöperation, are the rule; and if the organic union of all Christians, of which some have prophesied, must be regarded by the sober-minded as "such stuff as dreams are made on," some form of federation in evangel-

istic and missionary effort is certainly one of the possibilities of the coming century.

Certain counter-currents ought not to be overlooked in this study of Baptist progress. The unity of the denomination in its doctrinal and practical teaching has been the boast of its members and the wonder of others. Apparently a rope of sand, each church independent of every other in theory, and to a great extent in practice, it has not been the inferior in coherence of bodies that have a strong centralized government. The reason of this is not far to seek: it has been the close adherence of the Baptist churches to their understanding of the teaching of the Scriptures, and their loyal acceptance of this teaching as the supreme authority in all matters of religion. It is not putting it too strongly to say that Baptists from the beginning of their separate history have been fully conscious that they had no justification for a separate existence except this loyalty to what they believed the Scriptures to teach, their conviction that the teaching of the Scriptures must be followed at all cost. But the last decades of the closing century have seen a very considerable weakening among them of this conviction, some important modifications of their understanding of what the Scriptures are and what they teach. If this weakening should become general, there cannot fail to be a great denominational disintegration. The historian can only record what has been and what is; to tell what shall be is the office of the prophet.

As has already been implied, there has been a decline in the discipline maintained among Baptist churches, as serious as it is great. In the majority of churches in the cities, exclusions are practically unknown except for some notorious wickedness. Even in cases of notorious wickedness, there is often complete immunity for the offender. Little serious attempt is made to exercise oversight of the lives of members, and to hold them to account-

ability for departures from even a moderate standard of Christian ethics. The place of exclusion has been taken by a new practice, called "dropping," by which is meant the simple erasure of a name from the roll of membership, no stigma of any kind attaching to the person so dropped, with no inquiry, no charges, and of course no examination or trial. This growing practice threatens to become universal in much less than another half-century, with results on the spiritual efficiency of the churches and the personal piety of their members that cannot fail to be most disastrous. Nothing can explain such disuse of discipline but a general weakening of moral fiber. This is an alarming phenomenon, and goes far to offset all that has been recorded of material and spiritual progress.

There has been a notable change in the character of preaching, and in the methods of church work, during the past fifty years. In these things, however, Baptists are in no way peculiar; they have but shared in the change that has come over American Christianity as a whole, and it is only the conservative that views all change with alarm who will see necessary evil in this change. One important result is, however, worthy of specific mention. Owing to the increasing infrequency of revivals, and the decline of the older evangelism, the majority of the converts are now received into the churches through the Sunday-school and the young people's society; the conversion of adults becomes with every decade increasingly rare. It is yet too soon to measure the effects of this great change upon denominational life and character.

Another striking result of the past fifty years has been the great development of the denominational societies. These, nominally the creatures and servants of the churches, have become in fact great independent corporations that control the churches, so far as their united efforts in missionary and educational enterprises are con-

cerned. The annual meetings of these societies are in theory composed of delegations from the supporting churches; in fact they are mass meetings composed of any who care to attend. The officials seldom have any trouble in directing such a meeting into any channel agreeable to them. The officials are men of high character and practical wisdom, and the affairs of the corporations have been most wisely managed; but the inevitable result of the system has been a growing estrangement of the churches from the societies and the work that they represent. Year by year the difficulty becomes greater, and just how it is to be surmounted is the greatest problem the Baptist denomination has at present to solve. A sentiment is growing in favor of the unification of Baptist societies into something resembling the old Triennial Convention, and the making of this Convention a strictly delegated body, so that all the denominational enterprises shall be one more, in fact and not in theory only, subordinated to the churches. Whether this sentiment will prevail is one of the questions that the Twentieth Century must be left to decide.

What manner of men ought they to be who enter upon the great opportunities of the Twentieth Century, the inheritors of such a history? What boundless possibilities of growth, of achievement, lie before them! How much Baptists may and should do to hasten the coming of the kingdom of God! How great will be their condemnation if, having this wealth of opportunity in their hands, they squander it selfishly, or slothfully fail to make of the ten talents intrusted to them other ten that they may present with joy to their Lord at his coming!