

Author

Fleming, Rev. P. H.

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W. W. Haley

THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

—
ANNUAL ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

N. C. & VA. CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE,

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— BY —

REV. F. H. FLEMING, PH. D.

May 1893

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RALEIGH, N. C.
THE CHRISTIAN SUN OFFICE.
1893.



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The Christian Church.

FIRST APPLICATION OF THE NAME CHRISTIAN.

Situated on the left bank of the Orontes, thirty miles from the Mediterranean Sea, three hundred from Jerusalem, about midway between Constantinople and Alexandria, was the city of Antioch. It was built by Seleucus Nicator, one of Alexander's greatest generals and successors, three hundred years before Christ. It was for a considerable time, nearly one thousand years, the capital of the Greek and Roman governors of Syria, and ranked in the palmy days of the Roman Empire as the third city in magnitude and prosperity. To this once opulent and commercial city came some of the disciples which were

scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen. It was about A. D. 33 that Stephen was stoned to death, and that great persecution raged against the church at Jerusalem, and that the disciples, apostles excepted, were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, and there were those of them that traveled as far as Phenice, and Cypress, and Antioch preaching the Word to none but Jews.

Among these scattered disciples were men of Cypress and Cyrene, "which when they were come to Antioch spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus." God blessed their preaching and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord. This must have been about A. D. 41. Ere long tidings of this great and good work reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch to see what was going on there. The church at Jerusalem was possibly alarmed

at the free admission of gentiles into the church, and so Barnabas was sent three hundred miles to enquire into the matter and report. He was the right man, not a narrow ecclesiastic, but large-hearted and tender. He reached Antioch, saw the good work among the Gentiles, was glad, "and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." We see in Barnabas the requisites of a true gospel minister. "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." He joined in the work at Anioch, "and much people was added unto the Lord." Barnabas feeling the need of some one else to aid him in the work, went to Tarsus to seek Saul, and having found him he brought him to Antioch. It was about A. D. 42 or 43 that Barnabas summoned Saul from his retirement at Tarsus, and lovingly together these holy men of God journeyed to Antioch, the Syrian capital—and for "a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught

much people." "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Acts 11 : 26.

ITS ORIGIN.

Here in Antioch the disciples received their new and distinctive name "CHRISTIANS." "That cosmopolitan name"—says Farrar—"which clothed a Hebrew conception in a Greek word ended by a Latin termination," The name Christian was given to the disciples of Christ in the first half of the first century, about the year A. D. 42 or 43. The place where the name was given was Antioch in Syria.

It is a question, by whom this beautiful and appropriate name was given to the disciples. There are those who think that the name was given by the disciples themselves; there are others who say that it must have been given by the inhabitants of Antioch; others that it was given by Saul and Barnabas; others that it was given by their enemies in ridicule; but let us see if we cannot find a more satisfactory answer. Before this time the followers of Christ were simply called among themselves, disciples, believers, saints, the church, or assembly; and by their enemies, Naz-

arenes and Galileans. Dr. Clark says, "They considered themselves as one family and hence the appellation of brethren was frequent among them. It was the design of God to make all who believed of one heart and one soul, that they might consider him as their Father and live like children of the same household. A Christian, therefore is the highest character which any human being can bear upon earth, and to receive it from God as those appear to have done—how glorious the title!" We find in Isa. 62:2 these words: "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord shall name," and in the same book, chapter 65:15, we hear the prophet say. "And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord God shall slay thee—and call his servants by another name."

We see here prophecies which say that the servants of the Lord God shall be called by another name, a new name which, the mouth of the Lord shall name, and if these prophecies are not fulfilled in the name "CHRISTIAN." Acts II:26, have they ever been fulfilled? Those of us who ac-

cept the name Christian are wont to believe that the mouth of the Lord hath named us Christians. There may be differences as by whom the name was given—and however that be—yet we know the name was given, and that it stands today above all other names. “And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”

DOCTRINE AND FELLOWSHIP.

Here we see a primitive church—Christ had only been from the earth ten years—and we know the name of this apostolic church, it was called after Christ, Christian; then the next step is to find out the doctrine and fellowship of this apostolic church.

We need but to observe the clearly mentioned characteristics of the early Christians to find out their belief. In Acts 2:42 we find, that “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Now the doctrine of the apostles is contained in this blessed Book—the Bible. The origin and the character of the Christian church is recorded by Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John, and a continuation of its early history and belief is found in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles.

The early Christians had no human creed. The doctrine and fellowship of apostles—the teaching of Jesus Christ was their rule of faith and practice. This primitive church had apostles, deacons, elders, and other workers in its fold; but the head was Christ. In Col. 1:18 we read: “and he is the head of the body, the church.” Those in primitive times who began to be called after the names of their favorite teachers were regarded as carnal and dealt with accordingly. Paul says in 1 Cor. 3:4, “For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”

In matters not essential to salvation the early church allowed, I think, the right of private judgment and the liberty of conscience. In Rom. 14:4 we read, “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth: Yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand”; and in Math. 15:9 we hear these words, “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines, the commandments of men,” and in Acts 5:29 we hear Peter and the other apostles saying, “We ought to obey God rather than man.”

SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY, PERSECUTION,
 HUMAN CREEDS, A PERIOD OF DARK-
 NESS ; THE REFORMATION.

The term Christian came into use in Apostolic days, as a designation for the followers of Christ ; and it must have been widely current in Europe and Asia before the close of the first century, Pliny the younger—who was governor of Pontus and Bithynia between the years 103 and 105 gives a very concise account of the Christians in his province, in a letter written to the emperor Trojan. Notwithstanding the violent opposition and the severe persecution of Christianity, it gained ground very rapidly. In the third century there were many Christians in the Roman Empire. They were in the senate, in the camp, in the palace, and in short, they were found almost everywhere. They were so numerous that Tertullian said, were they to have retired into another country, they would have left the Roman only a frightful solitude. During these years from A. D. 31 to A. D. 313 there were ten general persecutions of Christians. The first was under Nero thirty-one years after our Lord's ascension. The second under Domitian, in the year

95 and 40,000 Christians are thought to have suffered martyrdom. The third began under Trajan, in the year 100; the fourth was under Antonius; the fifth began in the year 127 under Severus; the sixth began with the reign of Maximimus, in 235; the seventh—one of the most dreadful—began in 250 under the emperor Decius; the eighth began under Valerian in 257; the ninth under Aurelian, in 274; and the tenth began in the nineteenth year of Diocletian A. D. 303, and lasted ten years. It is related that 17,000 Christians were slain in one month, and that in the province of Egypt alone, no less than 144,000 died by the violence of their persecutors, besides 700,000 that died from other causes. They were outlawed, their possessions were taken from them, and almost every means was devised to exterminate them. These were days of persecution but still the church with the Bible—the word of God—triumphed over almost the then pagan world. Since A. D. 325 the church has lost most of northern Africa, western Asia, and much of Europe. It is true she has gained in other quarters, but the land of Palestine, the Saviour's earthly home is under Mohammedan rule.

Had the church remained true as organized in name in doctrine, in fellowship, in character, in short had she remained faithful to Christ her head, in all things, the entire world in all probability would today bow in love to Jesus—all the kingdoms of this world would long ago have become the kingdoms of the Lord Jesus Christ. But after some three or four centuries, creeds came into the fold, and so did divisions. Reverses came, and light grew dim and darkened into blackness and night. Not only was the doctrine and fellowship of the apostles departed from—for some thousand years, about—till the days of the Reformation, 1517 A. D., when Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the Wittenburg cathedral door and so inaugurated the Reformation; and light began to dawn and to brighten into day—the very name Christian was lost or discarded for the names of favorite human teachers, or leaders, amid the blackness and night. It was a struggle back to truth and light, and I am not surprised that some error and darkness were retained by these early reformers. Grand, noble, and good men they were. They did a great work; but they labored in the twilight

of the coming dawn, and it is natural that the retreating darkness should leave a trace of its own existence and influence. They were steering back to the primitive moorings of the first Christian church, but noon had not dawned, it was only the morning hour of a brighter and happier day. And so we can see some mistakes that were made in the beginning of the renaissance. It was all right to give the people an open Bible—that is apostolic—but it was wrong to bind them to human creeds, and sectarian names. The early Christian church had no creed but the Bible, and her name was simply Christian. With this apostolic Christian church the Christians of today stand.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF TODAY AND ITS ORIGIN.

Let us enquire something concerning this peculiar people in this the nineteenth century who have no name but Christian; no human creeds, but take the Bible as their only rule of faith and practice; fellowshiping all Christians, acknowledging Christ as their only head; and allowing the right of private judgment and the liberty of conscience. This peculiar people of this day

known as Christians came into existence by the revival of the name Christian and the acceptance of the Bible as a sufficient rule of faith and practice. Such teaching made its reappearance near the close of the last century, after many years of suppression by councils, creeds, and confessions.

This peculiar people—known as Christians—have what may be termed their five cardinal principles :

“The LORD JESUS Christ is the only Head of the church.”

“The name CHRISTIAN is the only appellation needed or received by the church.”

“The HOLY BIBLE, or the Scriptures of the old and New Testament, is a sufficient rule of faith and practice.”

“CHRISTIAN CHARACTER, or vital piety, is a just and should be the only, test of fellowship, or of church membership.”

“THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT and the liberty of conscience is a right and a privilege that should be accorded to, and exercised by all.”

When men were struggling back to truth and light after the Dark Ages, many stopped before they reached the full dawn ; and they built up around them denominations with human creeds, confessions, dis-

ciplines, and names, which exclude some whom the MASTER includes. And that body of disciples which excluded any whom the Lord Jesus Christ receives is manifestly in the wrong. They ought to go far enough to include all that Christ includes. This no denomination does except this body of peculiar people—known as “Christians.”

Upon the Bible can stand all denominations, and upon it they must stand before the world is conquered for Christ. To the Bible and the Bible alone, the Christian Church clings, and pleads for the true Christian spirit—Love one to another, and labors for the union which Christ prays for in John 17:21-23. “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” This peculiar people, known as CHRISTIANS, which came into existence near the close of the

eighteenth century, by a revival of the name CHRISTIAN, and by the adopting of the Bible as their only rule of faith and practice were composed primarily of those who withdrew from three widely different denominations: the Methodist Episcopal in the South; the Baptist in the Northeast, and the Presbyterian in the West. It does not seem that those who withdrew from these organizations intended to organize a separate denomination. In tracing their lives we see them drifting gradually one to the other, and each and all struggling forward after truth and light. At last it came, and with it a new day for Protestantism. They cut loose from the mistakes which the early leaders of the Reformation made, and which other churches are making today in holding to human creeds, confessions, disciplines, and names which divide God's people, weaken their strength, and gender strife and controversy. They united, or came together, and thus the Christian church of today came into existence. But let us notice briefly the rise of the Christian church in each section, see something of its progress and tell something of its work.

THE CHURCH IN THE SOUTH.

To understand the rise of the Christian Church in the South we must know something of Methodist history. The church which we know as the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized as a society and known for some time as Methodist Society. The rules for the government of the Methodist Society were drawn up by Mr. Wesley in 1743; and the first Methodist Society in America was established in the city of New York in the year 1766. Prior to the Revolution the Methodist societies were considered a part of the Episcopal Church, and they were dependent upon the Church of England for the administration of the ordinances of the church. When the Revolutionary war had put an end to the dependence of the colonies upon England, the Methodist societies in the United States did not long remain dependent upon the Church of England for the administration of religious ordinances. In the year 1784 the Methodist societies of America organized into a church and at once severed their connection with the Church of England. From that time they became a distinct religious denomination;

and Mr. Asbury, their former Superintendent, became bishop.

The conference of 1784 decided that they would continue in obedience to Mr. Wesley during his life, but in 1787 the conference omitted that decision from their minutes, and also disregarded Mr. Wesley's desires in some instances. The first regular general conference of the Methodist church met in the city of Baltimore in 1792; and it was at this conference that a more arbitrary form of discipline was introduced, and it virtually led to a division of the conference. The main issue at stake was the power of the bishop. Up to this time each conference managed its own affairs, and the several annual conferences were considered as parts of the whole body. Nothing was thought binding upon all unless it was ratified by each of the several conferences. The conference of 1792 assembled in Baltimore on the first day of November. Every one it seems that attended came with the expectation of important business to be transacted.

They altered old and introduced new regulations. Dr. Coke and Bishop Asbury presided over the body. The entire Discipline of the church came up for review

and revision.

After they cut loose from the Church of England it became necessary for them to adopt a form of government. Some desired an Episcopal form of government; but others wished a congregational form. Here we see an issue which aided in bringing about the division of the Methodist conference of 1792.

On one side we see Francis Asbury, Thomas Coke and others; on the other side we see James O'Kelly and others. Mr. O'Kelly wished the right of appeal from the decision and appointment of the bishop, whenever a brother minister felt that he had been injured by such decision or appointment. The larger part of the Methodist church decided to adopt an Episcopal form of government and to grant no appeal from the bishop's decision. Mr. O'Kelly's resolution as given in Methodist History is as follows: "After the bishop appoints the preachers at the conference to their several circuits, if any one thinks himself injured by the appointment he shall have liberty to appeal to the conference and state his objections; and if the conference approve his objections, the bishop shall appoint him to another circuit."

This resolution elicited strong debate and was finally lost. Those who would not yield to such arbitrary measures as the bishop exercised would of necessity be compelled to leave the connection, which they voluntarily did. Mr. O'Kelly notified the body the next day after its decision in regard to the resolution, that he could no longer hold his seat among them. Mr. O'Kelly was popular; and had been presiding elder. He was a man of strength, and the conference, not wishing to lose him and his followers, sought to reconcile them, but in vain. It could not have been for personal reasons that Mr. O'Kelly urged the right of appeal from the bishop to the conference; for he had presided over a large district of the best circuits in the connection—See subject: O'Kelly, Appleton's Cyclopædia of American Biography.

Mr. O'Kelly and his adherents found not that spirit of liberality and reform in the Methodist church which they believed should permeate every religious organization; and so Mr. O'Kelly determined to withdraw and continue his work independent of them. He was followed by about twenty or thirty other ministers and a number of private members. After one or

two preliminary meetings, Mr. O'Kelly and his associates met in general conference in 1793 in Surry Co., Va., and adopted substantially the principles held now by the Christian Church, but they were known by the unscriptural name of "Republican Methodist." Aug. 4th, 1794, at a general conference in Surry Co., Va., they decided, at the suggestion of Rev. Rice Haggard, to be known as Christians.

THE CHURCH IN THE NORTHEAST.

Scarcely had the glorious victory of religious freedom in name and government been secured by the southern brethren, in their withdrawal from the Methodist church and in the adoption of the unsectarian name Christian, the Bible as their rule of faith and practice, and a government equal and just to all, that a glad voice of Christian liberty comes from Vermont.

Dr. Abner Jones of Hartland, Vt., a member of the Baptist church, became convinced that sectarian names and human creeds separated the followers of Christ and prevented them from wearing the badge by which Jesus says his followers should be known: "Love one for another."

He left the Baptist church and began to advocate the principles which he believed to be right. This was near the close of the 18th century, and in Sept., 1800, he gathered a church of about twenty-five members in Lyndon, Vermont; and in 1802 we find a church in Bradford, Vt., and in 1803 we find one at Piermont, N. H. The liberal Christian principles taught by Dr. Abner Jones soon began to attract attention, and ere long he was joined by other ministers from the Baptist church. Not only from the Baptist denomination from which Dr. Jones had withdrawn, but from the Freewill Baptist also. Among those who joined at this time was Elias Smith, a Baptist minister in Portsmouth, N. H., and not only did Mr. Smith unite, but the church under his care, also. From this seeming small beginning, the notes of religious freedom, and Bible Christianity unfettered, were soon heard in the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey, and Michigan, also in Canada, New Brunswick, and elsewhere.

THE CHURCH IN THE WEST.

Soon after James O'Kelly and his coadjutors, pleading for religious freedom, had

withdrawn from the Methodist church in the South; and about the same time that Dr. Abner Jones—believing that sectarian names and human creeds were wrong—withdrawed from the Baptist church in the Northeast; a great revival of religion broke out among the Presbyterians in Kentucky and Tennessee. During the years 1800 and 1801 in these sections partyism seemed for the time to be laid aside and the simple gospel truths were preached. The result was that hundreds were led to Christ. But an ecclesiastical storm was coming, and Barton W. Stone, McNemar, Thompson, Dunlavy, and Marshall, who had been the principal persons, through the blessings of God, in bringing about the wonderful revival were charged before the Presbytery on theological grounds, of arminianism and they were to be tried by the “Confession of Faith” alone. Having found this out they entered their protest against the action of the Synod and withdrew from its jurisdiction. Most of the late converts and many other members of the Presbyterian church went with these faithful men; they having seen the evil of human creeds, determined to adopt the Bible as their only creed—Jesus Christ

as their only head. For a while after they withdrew they continued a Presbyterian form of government. But in 1804 they resolved to let each church be independent and to believe and teach what the Bible teaches. They decided to be known as "Christians."

WAS IT THE HAND OF GOD?

Thus briefly I have noticed the rise of the Christian church, and who can read the mysterious—the wonderful—rise and not become convinced that the unerring hand of Providence guided in the adoption of a name and rule of faith and practice, upon which all followers of Christ can unite. There is something strikingly beautiful in the unity of the rise. The church sprang up in different sections of the United States, and the move of one, unknown to the other. They came from widely different denominations, and without concurrence, virtually adopted the same name, the same principles, and the same government. It seems to me that this converging of widely different lines upon Christ and the Bible can be accounted for in no other way, satisfactorily, but by divine interposition. Creeds and sectarian names

had torn asunder and divided God's people, but in this move we see them coming back together. There is something divinely beautiful in this to my mind and I think I see in it the hand of God. Beloved, stand to the Christian Church and follow the guiding hand of God, and all will be well.

When these three bodies became acquainted with each other it was seen that they occupied about the same ground, and they proposed in 1820 to hold a United States conference which conference met in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Several of these united conferences were held, but the travel being great and the attendance comparatively small from a distance, it was decided advisable to suspend holding U. S. conferences and to divide the territory up into local or state conferences. The last U. S. conference was held in New York in 1832. I have not time to trace the history of the church on up and through the days of civil strife to the present time. The church grew and prospered greatly. But the dark war days came, and sad days they were to North and South, East and West. But they are gone and brighter days have come to glad-

den each and every Christian. The outlook, dear brethren, is very hopeful. The Christian Church is not only the church for the present, but it is the church of the future. But you must work.

THE PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH.

Now in conclusion let me call your attention to a few things in brief, and then I am through. The Christian Church has had no division in it to the extent of a separate denomination. Can this be said of any other denomination that is almost a century old?

It is the most advanced church of today upon all questions of moral reform and simple Bible Christianity. It was the first to publish a religious newspaper. It was the first to open her college doors alike to male and female. She has five missionaries today in Japan with six native preachers and one theological student. Our first foreign missionaries, Rev. D. F. Jones and wife reached Japan in April, 1887, and they are still hard at work; and our last, Rev. A. D. Woodworth and wife and Miss C. Tena Penrod, sailed from San Francisco Sept. 27th, 1892, for Yokohama, Japan. They landed in Tokio the 15th of Oct. and have

entered upon their work. Bro. Rhodes and wife have returned from the foreign field. The contributions for the foreign work, that have gone into the mission treasury during the ten and a half months of 1892, to November 15th, amount to \$4.-659.69. We have five churches in Japan and a membership of 174. There are nine Sunday schools with an enrollment of 220, and an average of 117.

Some money for Home Missions has already reached us from Japan. In this work there are some twenty-five or thirty places, besides our churches, where services are conducted.

We have churches and conferences in the following states and countries :

Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Indian Ter., Iowa, Japan, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Ontario, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and there may be churches in some other states not named here. Nebraska, Washington, and Oklahoma are each calling for a home missionary.

There are in the Christian church about 1500 elders, about 1700 churches, and about 119,000 members, though we are placed by some as high as 180,000 members with 2,200 churches. There are 81 conferences; 10 colleges and schools of high grade; weekly papers 2; magazines 2, besides local papers.

Our Home Mission spirit is increasing, and there is much work to be done along this line.

Now is our opportunity.

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.”

To the work, one and all. “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth laborers into his harvest.” Luke 10:2.



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