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WHOLE No. 102

Notice.

We wish to extend our thanks to our friends who have responded to our call for payments, and have used the addressed envelopes we sent them. We hope many more will do likewise, and renew their subscriptions as others have done. We shall not be able to call all around among our patrons this fall as the cold weather is now setting in. But we hope this will make no difference, but that each one will favor us with their renewal and remittance before the year closes. We hope to begin the new year with the balance on the right side of our cash book. Dear subscriber, you can help us do so if you try. Our August numbers are all disposed of; but we can supply any new subscriber with Sept. numbers, and to the end of this year gratis, if they will send us fifty cents for the paper for next year.

We are now sending more envelopes in the papers, and hope that those to whom they are sent will use them by remitting the amounts due from each of them before this year closes. The time to which the last payments were made are marked on each subscribers paper, or on the wrapper, when sent in single package. If any mistakes are made please let us know.

Address Rev. J. H. Hughes, St. John (West), N. B.

The Baptist Congress.

Boston, November 18 20.

LAST week the Baptist Congress held one of its most successful sessions at the First Church, Boston. The exercises began on Tuesday afternoon, and closed with a banquet at the Copley Square Hotel on Thursday evening. The Congress has not been held in Boston since 1883, and it was pleasant to notice that many of those active in its work seventeen years ago are still with us in full health and vigor. Among these we may mention Rev. Drs. E. A. Woods, T. A. K. Gessler, Jesse B. Thomas and Cephas B. Crane.

Probably the purpose of the Congress will always be misconceived and misrepresented. Some people will persist in declaring that the Congress said this or that, or reached certain conclusions; whereas no vote is ever taken on any subject whatever. No one represents any one but himself, and the speaker is the only one who in any sense whatever, is responsible for his sentiments. The truth is that the Congress is simply a company of gentlemen, members of Baptist churches, who meet annually in different parts of the country for the free and courteous discussion of important questions in which they are interested.

The Congress organized with Dr. D. W. Abercrombie, Principal of Worcester Academy, as President, and Mr. W. A. Munroe and Dr. George E. Horr as Vice Presidents. The address of greeting was by Rev. Dr. George A. Gordon, pastor of the Old South Church, and the response was by Rev. Dr. Alvah Hovey. Both addresses were just what remarks upon such an occasion should be, cordial, fraternal and spiritual.

BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

The first topic formally discussed was perhaps the most inflammable and explosive of any on the program, and perhaps it will be necessary for the public to have the verbatim report of the discussion—soon to appear—to estimate correctly the position of the different speakers. Rev. Rufus P. Johnston, D. D., pastor of the Fifth Avenue Church, New York, opened by taking the radical position, that Baptism is not essential to church membership. In view of the general interest in Dr. Johnston's paper we publish in

another column an abstract of it, made by the author.

Rev. T. E. Bosfield, D. D., pastor of the Park Church, Utica, N. Y., taught a similar position by a different method of argumentation. He held that a church is not always and only a company of baptized believers. Baptism does not regenerate, nor help to regenerate; it is not essential to Christian character, and it is not what Jesus imposed it as an absolute essential. The most we can say is, that if not essential it is very desirable. "A visible body of believers must have some organization. What the organization shall be, what rites, ceremonies and method of government, are matters, however, which the times, the circumstances, and in some measure even the temperament and tastes of the Lord's people must decide."

Rev. A. J. Bonsall instructed the topic to mean: "Is immersion essential to membership in Baptist churches?" He held that if the question of admission to a universal Protestant church arose, Baptists would be justified in allowing the individual to decide as to what constitutes baptism. This would be nothing else than specific application of our principle of soul-liberty. A Catholic church must have ample room for divergent schools of thought, and a diversity of practice. The notion of a Catholic church into which each member would be received according to the form of baptism best expressing his conceptions of Christian truth is wholly conceivable. In present circumstances, however, here each individual may choose his own denomination, this idea need not be entertained, but in circumstances that can be imagined, this practice may be desirable and pre-emptory.

Rev. James Grant of Watertown, Mass., said in substance: From all recorded cases of baptism in the acts and all the allusion to baptism in the scriptures it seems clear that baptism was uniformly involved in membership in the primitive church. The immediate and spontaneous upspringing of this practice in the early church and the universality with which it was carried out, seem inexplicable except on the supposition that back of the church's action lay the authority and example of Jesus. Toward this primitive practice the modern church may assume one of three attitudes: (A.) She may assume that in all matters of polity she is bound by the practice of the early church, and so require that every applicant for membership must be baptized upon profession of faith; or, (B.) she may assume that in all matters of polity she is free to follow what she believes to be the present promptings of the spirit and insist upon baptism for membership or not, according to her discretion; or (C.) she may adopt an intermediate position. According to this third position, the modern church, adopts the polity of the primitive church, requiring all her members to be baptized; at the same time she makes provision for exceptional cases, not by claiming the right to set aside the new testament ordinance, but by falling back on the principles taught by Jesus, that ritual rules belong to the humbler order of divine commandment, and in all cases of conflict should yield to the higher claims of spiritual helpfulness and brotherly love.

When the subject was thrown open for general discussion Rev. Eric Lindh of Hope Valley, R. I., endorsed the general position of the previous speakers, but Rev. Frank B. Cressey of Westmouth, Mass., Rev. Robert Cameron, D. D., of Providence, R. I., and Rev. Thomas S. Barbour, D. D., Foreign Secretary of the Missionary Union, took the generally accepted position of the American churches. Dr. Barbour said in substance:

We have had notable frankness of speech this afternoon. I shall endeavor as frankly to express my personal conviction regarding the question under discussion. I have been greatly interested in the discussion because it has seemed to me to illustrate the irresistibility of tendencies. I suppose it is true that there are many honest minded men among Baptists who are convinced that the normal order of the two ordinances of the church is not necessarily to be strictly observed. Robert Hall once raised a question substantially this: "What right have

we to require as a condition of communion that which is not a condition of admission to heaven?" The question seems to have much force, but the analogous question is as forcible, "What right have we to require as a condition of admission to the Christian church that which is not required as a condition of admission to heaven?" The discussion this afternoon illustrates that the one question is as natural as the other. I think, too, it would surely be found in practice that we could not hold long to the position that while baptism is desirable for church membership, a single exception may be made in a case of physical incapacity. Why shall we regard baptism as essential for church membership for one having mental incapacity for baptism, that is for one who is convinced that baptism is not essential, or that an ordinance submitted to in infancy is all sufficient? Or why shall we require baptism in the case of one whose deep-sea preference is opposed to this ordinance? Indeed what right have we to require for church-membership anything to which any disciple of Christ is conscientiously opposed? What right have we to require acceptance of any form of church organization? I think there is no natural stopping-place in following out the thought that we must not impose upon another requirements for church-membership with which his convictions do not agree, until we reach the position of the Plymouth Brethren that we are to require no outward ordinance and no form of outward organization. To this position we must come if we are thinking of what we have a right to impose upon any fellow disciple. But if we ask if Christ has indicated His will, then the case is altered at once. Has Christ indicated His will concerning baptism, concerning a certain order which He would have observed in the Christian life—first, discipleship, then baptism, then formal recognition of discipleship in recognized membership in a Christian body? Has He not shown His will by His own example and by His last word uttered when He bade His disciples to preach His Gospel through the whole creation? Has He not illustrated it in the still more wonderful way by which it was His choice to reveal His will—the working of the divine Spirit in connection with the thought and decision of His followers as they went forth from Him to begin the work to which He had appointed them? As has been said this afternoon, the companions of Christ seem to have had no doubt that it was His will that His followers should be baptized. I think we have in the Acts of the Apostles not one recorded instance of conversion which is not also a recorded instance of baptism. Recall, for example, the three thousand at Pentecost, the Ethiopian eunuch, the Roman centurion and his friends, and Lydia and the jailor at Philippi. Now, if it be true that Christ has indicated His will in this beyond reasonable doubt, then in emphasizing baptism, we are not exalting a ceremony, we are exalting that which is dear as freedom of conscience and personal action. We are exalting that which is the very end and safeguard of freedom in belief and conduct—loyalty to One whose good, wise will is the rule of life for all His followers. We are to be left free in order that we may be loyal. "Call no man your master," allow no man to be the master of any, that Christ may be the master of all.

I would yield to none in fellowship for every follower of Christ. All His disciples are one in a unity that rises above and reaches below any formal distinction. But the church of Christ has a holy mission. Is it not most truly faithful to that mission when in the formal recognition of discipleship it preserves the order so clearly indicated as the will of Christ? Can we do for that larger, nobler church which we all hope is to be, a truer service than by preserving for it and securing to it this simple, divinely significant rite, honored by our Lord and commended by Him to the care of those who would bring on His kingdom?

I can conceive no difference comparable to that between a smooth and a rough sea, except that which is between a mind calmed by the love of God, and one torn up by the storms of earthly passion.—John Wesley.