

**THE CHURCH'S BROKEN
UNITY; ON ANABAPTISM,
THE INDEPENDENTS, AND
QUAKERISM**

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The church's broken unity; on anabaptism, the independents, and quakerism by W. J. E. Bennett

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W. J. E. BENNETT

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The Church's Broken Unity.

CHIEFLY REPRINTED FROM THE "OLD CHURCH PORCH."

ON

ANABAPTISM,

THE

INDEPENDENTS,

AND

QUAKERISM.

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ANABAPTISM:

OR,

THE SECT OF THOSE VULGARLY CALLED
BAPTISTS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE were, as described in the first volume, two great streams of schism bursting the barriers of the great river of CHRIST'S Holy Catholic Church. The one was classed under the general name of *Presbyterianism*, *i. e.*, the government of a community by Presbyters, exclusive of the episcopal office: the other was classed under the general name of *Congregationalism*, *i. e.*, the assembling together in congregations, which should be independent of each other. These two classes of religionists agree together so far as they reject the office and government of Bishops; but they differ in that the former maintains the necessity of union with each other in a joint corporate body, with com-

mon laws for the regulation of all; while the latter holds that no union is necessary further than in each separate congregation in each separate place. Both these principles seem to have taken their rise at the time of the Reformation, *i.e.*, about three hundred years ago, but quite irrespective of each other. They both seem the offspring of the same evil mother, and though differing in detail, yet manifest the same spirit. The Church and her teaching—the authority of ages, and the traditions of antiquity, are nothing in the eyes of men when once self-knowledge and self-seeking sway the judgment, and every man relies upon himself. The history into which we are about to enter, will clearly manifest this melancholy truth.

The meaning of the word "*Anabaptist*" is this—*one who baptizes a second time*. It is derived from two Greek words—*βαπτίζω*, to baptize, and *ανα*, which signifies "over again." Part of the sect now remaining in England prefer to take to themselves the name of Baptist, on account of the odious and disgraceful history which belongs to the original professors of their creed; but while the word "*Anabaptist*" has a distinct and proper reference to the opinions which it means to represent, the word "*Baptist*" would appear to convey the very contrary—for the latter would be equally applicable to the Church of England, the Church of Rome, the Wesleyans, the Independents, and indeed all other communities—for

all hold it necessary to baptize. Thus S. John is called "The Baptist," because he baptized; and we should be very unwilling to lose the idea that we were following the precept of our Lord, when He told us to go and "baptize all nations." Baptism is the distinctive badge and mark of *all* Christians. We are all Baptists. But the very point of distinction and cutting off from the great body of the Church in the sect I am now describing is, that they baptize *over again*—which no other Christians ever do. If one enters into this community already baptized as an infant, they baptize such an one over again, passing by and ignoring the fact of any other baptism than their own. Hence, Ana-baptist is the proper word by which they should be described, as marking the essence of their heresy.

The origin of the Anabaptists is very obscure. There seem to have been, even prior to the time of Luther, various opinions concerning Church government and Church doctrine, which were hidden and kept secret for want of power openly to manifest them, principally in Bohemia, Moravia, Switzerland, and Germany. When Luther took the lead, and boldly asserted the right of private judgment against the Bishop of Rome, and when the political circumstances of the Princes of Germany induced them to a great extent to take his side—then these other religious opinions found their vent; and there started up in various quarters, men of vigour and enthusiasm, who were

ready, as well as Luther himself, to dare all and to suffer all for the opinions which they held. Among these opinions was the one in question, namely that Infant Baptism was contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and that none should be baptized but adults, and following thereupon, the necessity of Adult Baptism and that alone—and following thereupon again, the necessity of *re*-baptizing all as adults, although previously baptized as infants. And among the several leaders who appeared in the shaping and guidance of this opinion, was one Menno—and from him the sect has generally been denominated Mennonites, as well as Anabaptists.

Whether the religious opinions of these men degenerated into political hostility to the established governments of their several countries; or whether the original movement of their minds was political, and they assumed the garb of religion to cover their ulterior designs of disaffection and rebellion, it would be difficult to say; but certain it is, that combined with the rise of Anabaptism is the history of perhaps the greatest and most furious of rebellious fanaticism which which is on record. The views which the first Anabaptists put forth were these;—they supposed that the time was come when God Himself would inspire the hearts of men and assume a kingdom of religion upon earth—that the Church was to be restored to its pristine power and purity—that CHRIST our LORD would reign alone, and govern

the nations of the earth; and the Divine power to work miracles would be conveyed to their leaders, for the purpose of bringing these glorious events to completion. In the year 1551, their principal chiefs were Thomas M \ddot{u} nzer, Mark St \ddot{a} bner, and Nicholas Storch. They gathered together great multitudes of people, inflamed them by public harangues, recounted to them prophetic visions, and disturbed all notions of the government both of Church and State by seditious discourses. They announced sudden destruction to all civil magistrates, proclaimed universal equality, and set up the standard of individual liberty, both in opinion and in act. Even the most moderate, and those who did in some degree reject the extreme fanaticism of the multitude, yet put forth the following tenets, which may be taken as a fair exposition of their more deliberate views, strangely mixing, as will be perceived, the political with the religious. They held—

1. That the Church of Christ ought to be free from all sin.

2. That a community of goods and union and equality should be introduced.

3. That all usury, tithes, and tributes, should be abolished.

4. That the baptism of infants was the invention of the devil.

5. That all Christians had a right to act as teachers.

6. That the Christian Church had no need of special Ministers or teachers.

7. That there was no need, under the reign of CHRIST, of any civil magistrates.

8. That God made known His Will by dreams and visions.

It would of course follow that persons embracing such tenets as these, and filled with religious excitement by unscrupulous leaders, would soon be guilty of violence in their propagation. Accordingly the first thing we hear of is, that MÜNZER and his associates having collected a large army from among the credulous populace throughout Suabia, Franconia, and Saxony, proclaimed war against all civil government, asserting that CHRIST alone should reign. It did not last for any length of time—MÜNZER, the firebrand of sedition, was put to death, and his rebellious army destroyed by the Elector of Saxony.

But the fanaticism spread and filled all Germany with blood. Some were put to death as rebels, some as heretics. The most horrid crimes were committed by men who joined the ranks of the religionists for no other purpose but their own wickedness; while, at the same time, many innocent persons suffered for the maintenance of mere religious opinions. In the year 1533, the Anabaptists of Holland attacked the city of Munster, in Westphalia, and there committed deeds that would almost appear incredible, were they not well attested as matters of history. John