

# America, You Owe the Baptists A Lot

Taken from the book entitled, "The People Called Baptist," 1925, McDaniel

Baptists have always been champions of civil and religious liberty. Roger Williams, who took ground in advance of his Puritan compeers on the subject of personal liberty, being banished from the colony of Massachusetts, went to the present site of Providence, Rhode Island, where he founded what is regarded by some as the first Baptist Church in America, and the first commonwealth on earth in which there was absolute civil and religious liberty. The framers of the Constitution of the United States caught the spirit of Roger Williams and as a result we have a country which has been the refuge of the persecuted and oppressed of all nations. Article VI, on religious liberty, in the American Constitution was introduced by the united effort of Baptists in 1789. The first amendment to the Constitution of the United States, guaranteeing freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the right to petition, was adopted largely through the activity of Baptists. They took the initiative in a letter to President Washington and a month later Madison, with Washington's approval, presented the amendment along with nine others.

John Clarke, highly educated in arts and in medicine, the most outright and upright, important and influential, American Baptist of the seventeenth century, did more than any one else to call the attention of the world to Puritan intolerance. He secured the Charter of 1643 which made Rhode Island a free democratic state with full provision for liberty of conscience, and he was the originator of the public free school system. He founded the Newport Church, which, for consistent and persistent devotion to Baptist principles, for completeness of organization and fervor in evangelism, deserves priority.

Sir Henry Havelock, the valiant British general and the deliverer of Lucknow, united with the Baptists of India and was baptized by one of Carey's fellow missionaries. In Cromwell's Irish garrisons there were twelve Baptist governors of cities, ten colonels, three lieutenant-colonels, ten majors and forty-three company officers. In the War of the Commonwealth in England and the War of the Revolution in the United States, Baptists were patriots.

Among the many Baptists who rendered military service in the Revolution, a few conspicuous names may be mentioned. Pastor M'Clanahan of Culpeper County, Virginia, raised a military company of Baptists and served on the field, both as captain and chaplain. Reverend David Barrow shouldered his musket and showed how fields were won. Colonel Jacob Houghton, grandfather of Spencer Cone, was in a Baptist meeting house when the news of the defeat at Lexington reached him. The services ended, he stood in the open before the building and spoke: "Men of New Jersey, the Red Coats are murdering our brethren in New England. Who follows me to Boston?" Every man stepped into line and answered, "I." General Scriven, when ordered by the British officer to give up Sunbury, near Savannah, sent back the answer, "Come and take it." Deacon Mills, of the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, commanded skilfully one thousand riflemen at the battle of Long Island and for his valor was made a brigadier general. Deacon Loxley, of the same church, commanded the artillery at the battle of Germantown with the rank of colonel. "He was always foremost when great guns were in question." Add to this galaxy John Hart, who signed the Declaration of Independence, and John Brown, whose fleet of privately-

owned vessels attacked the Gaspee which had entered Narragansett Bay to enforce British revenue customs. Lieutenant Duddington was wounded, the other officers and the crew left and the Gaspee was blown up. "This was the first British blood shed in the War of Independence." In their list of Tory sympathizers made up by Judge Curwen appear nine hundred and twenty-six names living in America, and a larger number were already exiled by Colonial Law, but there is not the name of one Baptist on the list. This is why President Washington, in his letter to the Baptists, could pay them the just tribute: "I recollect with satisfaction that the religious societies of which you are a member have been, throughout America, uniformly and almost unanimously the firm friends to civil liberty and the persevering promoters of our glorious Revolution." It explains how Thomas Jefferson could write to a Baptist Church, "We have acted together from the origin to the end of a memorable Revolution."

Baptists are renowned the world over for their loyalty. At the coronation of the late Czar at Moscow, May 15, 1895, fear filled all hearts, and it was not known who was loyal. Someone told a prominent officer that he could trust the Baptists. Many of them were therefore chosen, some of whom had just returned from exile and were drafted for this special service.

The patriotism of Baptists is illustrated by the case of William Turner, a member of the group of Baptists of Charlestown, Massachusetts. In 1670 Turner was in prison for his religious views. "Above thirty weeks," he says, "I have been lying in prison to the possible ruin of my body. I am ready to serve this country to the utmost of my ability, in all civil things. In faith and order God alone can satisfy a poor soul." When in 1676 the fortunes of the war with King Philip were turning against the settlers, the magistrates asked Turner to raise a company. He recruited a company mainly from the members of the First Baptist Church. At the Falls of the Connecticut he sprang a surprise upon the enemy which evoked the praise of even Increase Mather. Today the site of that battle bears the name "Turner's Falls" in memory of a notable episode in Baptist loyalty to civil government. William of Orange was sustained in the gloomiest hours of his struggles for the Dutch Republic by the sympathy and aid of the Baptists. He testified to their loyalty, industry and virtue.

Baptist loyalty to country met the test in the World War. State and General Conventions, without exception, rang true in patriotic resolutions. Our churches backed the war with their money and their members. Hundreds of ministers served in various capacities, some as military combatants. Patriotic fervor burned in the Theological Seminaries and their students enlisted in large numbers. Our sons went to war by the ten thousands, and they went with the benediction of the denomination upon their heads. Our daughters donned and adorned the Red Cross and alleviated human suffering. The soil of France is enriched with Baptist blood. America's name is made more glorious by Baptist devotion. And all of this was done in spite of certain governmental acts which we could not and did not approve.

Their place has ever been with the pioneers of humanity. On many a field of battle and blood, the banner of civil and religious liberty has been borne aloft by Baptist hands. To them the two things supremely worth while are Religion and Liberty. These are closely akin. They are essential to the highest good of man. Joined in one word, Religious-Liberty, the perpetuity of each is guaranteed. The draft of the League of Nations read by President Wilson to the Peace Conference provided freedom of conscience or religion to the colonies of Central Africa.

Baptists had, months before the war ended, petitioned that these rights be granted in every nation. We have come a long way from the days of oppression and have come through much tribulation. If our principles are now the possession, or aspiration, of all people who read and think, and our passionate love of liberty is the native air of this great land, and the growing sentiment of all lands, it is largely because these principles have been woven into the warp and woof of human thought by generations of heroic souls who held the Baptist faith.

Thomas Jefferson said to his neighbors, the members of the Baptist Church of Buck Mountain, in Albermarle, April 13, 1809: "We have contributed, each in the line allotted us, our endeavors to render its issue a permanent blessing to our country. That our social intercourse may, to the evening of our days, be cheered and cemented by witnessing the freedom and happiness for which we have labored, will be my constant prayer. Accept the offering of my affectionate esteem and respect." He wrote five letters to Baptist churches and associations.

George P. Fisher, professor at Yale, wrote: "A Baptist committee laid their complaints before the Massachusetts delegates in the first Continental Congress at Philadelphia. The support which the Baptists lent to the patriotic cause, and the proclamation of human rights which was made on every hand won a hearing for their demands and rendered them, after tedious delays, successful. In Virginia, Patrick Henry, Jefferson and Madison enlisted in their favor. In 1785, the statute of religious freedom was adopted, of which Jefferson deemed it a great honor to have been the author, by which intervention in matters of faith and worship was forbidden to the State. All denominations were thus put on a level, and none were taxed for the support of religion." "History of the Christian Church," page 560.

Parton, after mentioning the address from the Baptists to the Virginia Convention, August 16, 1775, petitioning that four Baptist ministers should be allowed to preach to Baptist soldiers, cites the Convention's resolution which both granted the request and conceded the principle: "*Resolved*, That it be an instruction to the commanding officers of regiments or troops to be raised that they permit dissenting clergymen to celebrate divine worship, and to preach to the soldiers, or exhort, from time to time, as the various operations of the military service may permit, for the ease of such scrupulous consciences as may not choose to attend divine worship as celebrated by the chaplain." He then adds a striking sentence "Thus began religious equality in Virginia." "Life of Thomas Jefferson," by Parton, page 174.

Leonard Woolsey Bacon, Congregationalist, discussing the establishment of the American principle of the non-interference of the State with religion and the equality of all religious communions before the law, concludes: "So far as this work was a work of intelligent conviction and religious faith, the chief honor of it must be given to the Baptists. Other sects, notably the Presbyterians, had been energetic and efficient in demanding their own liberties; the Friends and the Baptists agreed in demanding liberty of conscience and worship, and equality before the law, for all alike. But the active labor in this cause was mainly done by the Baptists. It is to their consistency and constancy in the warfare against the privileges of the powerful 'Standing Order' of New England, and of the moribund establishments of the South that we are chiefly indebted for the final triumph in this country of that principle of the separation of Church and State which is one of the largest contributions of the New World to civilization and to the church universal." "A History of American Christianity," page 221.

"In England, from the time of Henry VIII to William III, a full century and a half, the Baptists struggled to gain their footing and to secure liberty of conscience for all. From 1611 they issued appeal after appeal, addressed to the King, the Parliament, and the people, in behalf of 'soul liberty,' written with a breadth of view and force of argument hardly since exceeded. Yet, until the Quakers arose in 1660, the Baptists stood alone in its defense, amid universal opposition . . . Among the Baptists Christian freedom found its earliest, its staunchest, its most consistent, and its most disinterested champion. . . Not less powerful has been the influence of Baptists in the United States. . . . Persecuted themselves, they never persecuted others. . . . The paths of the Baptists are paths of freedom, pleasantness and peace." (Appleton's American Encyclopedia, Vol. II, page 293-f.)

Professor Masson in his life of Milton says of the Thomas Helwys' Church which came over from Amsterdam to England in 1611, and is "commonly regarded as the first English Baptist Church": "This obscure Baptist congregation seems to have become the depository for all England of the absolute principle of liberty of conscience, as distinct from the more stunted principle advocated by the general body of the Independents. . . . It was, in short, from this dingy little meeting-house somewhere in old London that there flashed out first in England the absolute doctrine of religious liberty."

The largest contribution of the New World to civilization was the principle of separation of Church and State. Historians ascribe to the Baptists the chief credit for the establishment of this principle in the United States. John Locke said: "The Baptists were the first propounders of an absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty." Chief Justice Story said: "In the code of laws established in Rhode Island we read for the first time since Constantine ascended the throne of the Caesars, the declaration that conscience should be free, and men should not be punished for worshiping God in the way they were persuaded he requires." We know that a large majority of the settlers of Maryland were Protestants; that what Cecilius Baltimore did was from expediency rather than principle; and that he was an immoral money-getter who never contributed a dollar to a church.

Since Catholics make so much out of the founding of Maryland, it should be remembered that twenty years before the occupation of Maryland the Baptists of England (1614) published a confession of faith in which they used this language: "We believe that the magistrate is not to meddle with religion or matters of conscience nor compel men to this or that form of religion, because Christ is the King and Lawgiver of the church and the conscience." Then, again, the Maryland adventure was purely mercenary. Mr. E. D. Neil, after the most painstaking and accurate study of the original sources of this part of colonial history, characterizes Cecilius, second Lord Baltimore, as "one whose whole life was passed in self-aggrandizement, first deserting Fattier White, then Charles I, and making friends of Puritans and republicans to secure the rentals of the province of Maryland, and never contributing a penny for a church or schoolhouse." Says Bacon: "Lord Baltimore may not have been a profound political philosopher nor a prophet of the coming era of religious liberty, but he was an adroit courtier, like his father before him, and he was a man of practical good sense engaged in an enormous land speculation in which his whole fortune was embarked, and he was not in the least disposed to allow his religious predilections to interfere with business."

Daniel Boone's brother, Squire Boone, and several members of the great pioneer's family were Baptists. William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, was the son of an English Baptist. General Madison, brother of President Madison, was a Baptist. Thomas Jefferson's favorite aunt, Mrs. Woodson, was a Baptist. Thomas, when young, loved to visit her home in Goochland County and to attend the Baptist church with her. This may be the foundation for the unsubstantiated tradition that he got his ideas of government from a Baptist church.

President Abraham Lincoln and President Jefferson Davis were both sons of Baptist deacons. Lincoln attributed all that he was to a Baptist mother. Davis devoted the ground where he was born in Fairview, Kentucky, as a site for a Baptist church and it is so used now. At the dedication of the building he delivered the address and stated that perhaps some people wondered why he, who was not a Baptist, should be so interested in that faith. He explained thus "My father, who was a better man than I am, was a Baptist." Henry Clay and President Arthur were the sons of Baptist preachers. General Sam Houston, the most picturesque figure of the Southwest, the conqueror of Santa Anna and the first president of the Republic of Texas, died a loyal Baptist.

William Jennings Bryan was the son of a Baptist father, and William Howard Taft is the grandson of Baptist grandparents. Major-General Tasker Bliss, one of the American Peace Commissioners to Versailles, is the son of a former professor in Rochester Theological Seminary. Major-General William Graves, who was the head of the American forces in Russia, is a Baptist and a graduate of Baylor University. Lieutenant Read, the first aviator to cross the Atlantic, was a member of the Baptist Church at Annapolis. Lieutenant Maynard, who won the flight across the American continent, was a Baptist preacher. Lloyd George, who piloted the British ship of state through the stormy seas of the world's worst war, says of himself: "I am a Baptist."

Mr. Davis, Secretary of Labor in President Coolidge's cabinet, is a Baptist. Charles Evans Hughes, who has rendered distinguished service as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Secretary of State, and is recognized as one of America's ablest lawyers and wisest statesmen, is the son of a Baptist minister and a member of a Baptist church. The lamented President Harding was a Baptist. He and Secretary Hughes, accompanied by President Chandler, of William and Mary, were going by automobile from Williamsburg to Yorktown. Dr. Chandler observed that the three were Baptists. Whereupon, President Harding remarked: "We are members of the freest of all the denominations."

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