



Holsinger's History of the
TUNKERS

AND

THE BRETHREN CHURCH

EMBRACING

THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN,
THE TUNKERS, THE SEVENTH-DAY GERMAN BAPTIST CHURCH,
THE GERMAN BAPTIST CHURCH, THE OLD GERMAN
BAPTISTS, AND THE BRETHREN CHURCH

INCLUDING

THEIR ORIGIN, DOCTRINE, BIOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE

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PREFACE

Forty-five years ago I became a member of the Church of the Brethren, as it was then known. Among those who did not belong to the same denomination, the members were called "Dunkards," especially among those who were not friendly to their cause. Besides these names I knew no other. I was then in full harmony with the teachings of the church as far as I knew, with a few exceptions. I was told that the gospel of Christ was our only creed and discipline. My father was a minister in the church, and his father was a minister. Hence, I had every opportunity of knowing the customs and practices as well as the sentiments of the church, and can safely say that, taking all together, I was in harmony with the average membership. With the gospel peculiarities of the church I was in full sympathy. Among those may be enumerated Faith, Repentance, Triune Immersion, Laying On of Hands, Feet-washing, Lord's Supper, Communion, Anointing, Salutation, Anti-war, Anti-slavery, Non-swearing, Non-conformity from all sinful fashions and customs. I set out to serve the Lord in good faith.

In a few things, however, I did not agree with the average membership of that day. For instance, I never could see that education was a dangerous thing, and had a great thirsting for more of it. I always preferred to hear a man preach who knew more than myself, which did not require anything uncommon. I was never much afraid of Sunday-schools, although I never had attended a Sunday-school regularly. I believed in plainness of attire, but never accepted the uniformity theory. I worked along without jarring with the congregations in which I lived or the officers under whom I served for more than fifteen years.

After I entered the publishing business and began to advocate advanced views, I came into contact with the dignitaries of the church, and met with much opposition. I labored to have removed from the brotherhood that which I believed to be error or superfluity. And I am happy to believe that my labors were not altogether without success. But in course of time certain leaders of the church determined that they would tolerate improvements no longer. Accordingly they began to bring complaints against me and my colleagues for introducing and advocating innovations, and enacted decisions of annual meeting intended to circumscribe the progressive element of the fraternity.

However, progressive sentiment had grown so rapidly that for several years it seemed that conference itself was being controlled by that element. When this was noticed by the conservative portion, they began to threaten withdrawing from the body, unless their favorite traditions were maintained. Progressive sentiment had advanced too far to permit conference to make all the retractions that the conservatives demanded,

and hence the disruption of the body began to be boldly talked of, and initiatory steps were taken. These threats and indications begat a third party from among the ultra conservatives, with a disposition to expel the progressive leaders from the body, thinking there were but few, and hoping thus to restore peace and harmony to the body.

In this condition things remained for several years, sharp discussions and bitter personalities being continued in the public prints and at the conferences. Meanwhile the church had made rapid advancement, building high schools, establishing Sunday'-schools, Sunday-school conventions, and publishing Sunday-school literature, supporting the ministry, organizing missionary boards, and adopting other progressive measures. This discouraged the old order members, and they withdrew and organized a separate denomination independent of annual meeting.

The annual meeting party then became more determined to free itself from the progressives, but knowing they had no just cause for expelling them, they manipulated the standing committee, and monopolized the annual meeting in such a way as to expel them without a trial. As such a course is contrary to all reason, justice, and Christianity, I hold that it was not done in fact, and therefore, I still claim to be a member of the Old Brethren Church which I joined forty-five years ago, having violated none of its cardinal principles, but desire to remain faithful to its creed, the gospel of Christ.

When first thinking of writing the history of the Brethren Church, in response to the request of many friends, I had in mind simply a narrative of the circumstances which led to the expulsion of the progressive element of the Tunker fraternity, and the reorganization and development of the Brethren Church. After mature consideration, it was found that reference to the Tunkers would of itself create an inquiry in the minds of many readers as to who they were and whence they came. The more thought given to the subject, the more it appeared like tracing the pedigree of a person or the lineage of a family. After pursuing this course of study, the title was changed to "Holsinger's History of the Tunkers and the Brethren Church." It also became evident that the Tunkers themselves must have had antecedents. That part of the work which is here denominated Prehistoric Period, was found most difficult. Fortunately, however, it is also least important. Doubtful things are always uncertain, and are augmented by antiquity. "There is no past so long as books shall live," and where there are no books, there is a past and a blank.

Much of my time has been devoted to the reading of German history. Brother D. L. Miller, of the Gospel Messenger, kindly loaned me three volumes of Max Goebel's *Geschichte des Christlichen Lebens*. While I do not regret the perusal of the work I confess to be not much the wiser, so far as Tunker history is concerned. Mr. Goebel, like myself,

HISTORY OF THE TUNKERS

CHAPTER I

PREHISTORIC

A feeling of opposition to the government of the mother country, and a sentiment favoring the independence of the colonies, prevailed among the early settlers of America long before the adoption of the Declaration of Independence; and so it may be said of the organization whose history we are about to record. There was much dissatisfaction with the prevailing churches, some, perhaps, more imaginary than real, but much of it, no doubt, too well founded.

Dissatisfaction with one's circumstances inspires him with a desire and hope for improvement, and such solicitude also discovers appropriate remedies. "Necessity is the mother of invention." We shall not attempt to account for all the discontent and complaint that existed among the laity of the churches, previous to and during the reformation; but the existence of such sentiments is a well-established fact in history. Nothing very good is likely to come from discontent alone; it simply irritates, and seldom provokes to love. It is a holy ambition for better things—a hungering and thirsting after righteousness—that is prolific of good results and the accomplishing of great things.

A steady rein restrains the steed, but too severe bits cause him to rear, and suggest breaking away. Firmness is a grace in government and good order, but severity is despotism, and breeds anarchy.

The study of the history of Christianity during the period dating from 1695 to 1750, in connection with that of the Brethren Church, is very interesting. The severity with which the clergy governed the churches of that day brought about a terrible reaction, resulting in strong opposition to almost every measure

advocated by them. The churches were regarded—and we fear justly, too—as being nothing more than worldly institutions maintained for the subservience of the clergy and dignitaries of the church, much as the national government is looked upon by anarchists of this time. The colleges and their faculties were denounced as broods of infamy; the synods, as schools of iniquity; and the pastors, as leeches, feeding upon the blood of the common people.

The importance of German church history to the student of the history of our own people will appear more apparent from the consideration that all previous preaching and practices had their influence, more or less, upon the minds and hearts of the people of that and future generations. We are all influenced to some extent by our environments. Especially was this so regarding points not claimed to be decided by positive revelation. By the study of the practices, principles, and teaching of their predecessors, we may learn how far they are an original church.

It is not essential to an orthodox denomination that her organization should date back to the apostolic age. It is only essential that she be established on the truth. The gospel of Christ is the truth. ("Thy word is truth.") The time and place are matters of indifference. But we do claim for the Tunker Church that all her sacred peculiar doctrines and practice may be traced all along the historical highway from Christ and His apostles down to the organization at Schwartzenau, in A.D. 1708. At times and in places the road abounds in rich findings of important data of the doings of the devotees of the religion of the Master, and at other points it is almost destitute of any well-beaten landmarks to indicate the travels of the fathers, by even the waysides. This would indicate that they did not always travel in "the middle of the road." Sometimes they may have attempted to take the byways and short cuts, and again they were, no doubt, driven into the wilderness by their persecutors. It is evident, however, that whenever they were permitted to travel unhindered, in the light of liberty and knowledge, they always left indications of having read the Gospel, and a disposition to obey it,

to the letter of the word. This goes a great way toward confirming ray oft-repeated assertion, that conscientious readers of God's Word, uninfluenced by fear or favor, with an intelligent understanding of the language in which they read the Bible, would declare the same doctrine, and practice the same ordinances in substantially the same manner. The different practices of the ordinances of the gospel, by the different denominations, do not obtain from any deficiency of clearness of statement in the Word so much as from the different coloring of glasses through which men read the Word. It can not be possible that the Bible, which is inspired of God, and was written by men filled with the Holy Spirit, should be so full of imperfections as to need correction by uninspired and irreligious persons of very ordinary mental endowment. If that were true, or possible to be true, it would put inspiration on a very cheap value indeed. The very fact that we accept a book or document as being inspired, places it beyond everything else in comparison to it in point of accuracy or truthfulness, on the subjects taught therein. Any assertion bearing the imprint of inspiration from God, is beyond human criticism; it needs no confirmation, and dare not be denied or doubted. It emanates from the highest authority known to men or angels. When it is accepted as such, it will be received and obeyed in like manner by all who so accept it, and who have the capability of understanding the truths taught, and the liberty of obeying what is enjoined. We may find some of the principles of Tunkerism among the followers of Christ from the days of Christ to the Reformation. Some of these we regard as of sufficient importance to be noticed herein.

THE WALDENSES.

The Waldenses were a people of whose organization we know but little. We are told that they were founded by Peter Waldo, at Lyons, about A. D. 1170, after whom they were named. Persecution drove them to the valley of Piedmont, in the thirteenth century, where they lived in retirement, and in the wilderness or groves; and another historian says on that account they were

called Waldenses, from "*Wald*," woods; "woods people" (Thall-ute). While they are not universally acknowledged as evangelical, they are declared to be scripturally devout and scrupulously pious.

We observe a striking similarity between the Waldenses and the Tunkers, and especially in the "Declaration of Principles" of the Progressive Brethren. For instance:—

They taught and required unconditional submission and obedience to the New Testament in all its requirements, which they acknowledged as the Word of God, and which took the place of the Old Testament, and most vigorously opposed the church creeds and professions of the ruling churches, that were simply the decisions of men, without scriptural authority. They opposed the Roman Catholic Church, which they regarded as the mother of harlots, and demanded a separation from that church, as well as from all who sympathized with her or recognized her as evangelical; opposed the usages of churches supplanting true inward gospel ethics and Christian discipline. They, therefore, required more than simple obedience to the outward ordinances of the church, as an evidence of gospel regeneration, and strove to attain to a genuine, inward, conscious, personal renewal through the Holy Spirit. They discriminated between that formal, nominal fellowship with the worldly church relationship, and fellowship with the separate people of God, who had withdrawn from all secular relation with the world and its votaries; and only such as had thus withdrawn from the world did they recognize as true Christians. They so vehemently opposed all ordinances of men, and so tenaciously advocated the gospel alone, that many of them had committed the greater part of the New Testament to memory. They taught prayer "in spirit and in truth," and discarded all unscriptural practices in connection with baptism and the communion, relating to mere form, such as clothing, ceremonials of the priests, calling on the saints, etc. It will be remembered by many at this day that the Brethren were referred to as "Gospelers," by the conservative papers, during the transitional state of the

church. It is also said of the Waldenses that they kept a careful notice of their poor, which duty was entrusted to the deaconship. They carefully observed the restrictions of the Saviour against taking oaths, and opposed all lascivious indulgence, such as dancing, which they called the "process of the devil." The saloon they named the "school of the devil."

THE BAPTISTS.

Max Goebel, in his "Geschichten des Geistlichen Lebens," speaking of the Baptists of the sixteenth century, says: "They represent an entirely distinct and separate people in their Christian lives. Although they were constantly persecuted, they could not be entirely subjugated. Their peculiarities—which separated them from the other sects of that period, 1600-1650—consisted mainly in the fact that they persistently demanded genuine repentance and regeneration through the Holy Spirit, of every individual, and that of his own free will and choice. They also required an entire separation from all other spiritual and worldly things, whether church or state, and uniting with the church of the truly regenerated, and to take upon himself a vow of abstinence from everything worldly or sinful through the Christian discipline of the church. They also taught the community of goods, at least a very liberal distribution of their spiritual and temporal possessions, and demanded a peaceable and non-resisting life. They did not only set forth these doctrines in their professions, as did the Lutherans, but enforced them in their system of church government. Their aim and purpose appeared to be to bring together into one bond of fellowship all truth-loving, believing, obedient, regenerated children of God, out of the great unregenerate mass of sinful humanity; these to represent the wise virgins ready to go forth to meet the Bridegroom at His coming.

They claim for their special work in the Reformation the restoring of the right of liberty of conscience to every believer in Christ, to work out his own salvation.

Their rejection and denunciation of infant baptism, and their

universal and public practice of immersion, and especially the baptism of those who had been sprinkled for baptism, exposed them to the contempt and scorn of the dominant sects of their age. They were, therefore, persecuted, and many of them suffered martyrdom.

Persecution and martyrdom were all the more readily effected upon them, inasmuch as the Baptists discarded all the other reformers and reformations, and ignored the authority of the government over them. History informs us that as early as 1517, before the Reformation, Baptists were executed in Germany.

However, I believe I have found in the Waldenses the most complete antitype of the Tunkers. Although it is not universally admitted that they were all and always immersionists, yet the best authorities admit them to have been Anabaptists. Von Braght gave many good authorities for that view, and among the Baptists of Germany in 1524 were many Waldenses who had removed into that domain. It is also claimed for them, by our German historian, that they did not regard infant baptism, and that they also did not claim for it the power of regeneration. That power they attributed alone to the influence of the Holy Spirit.

THE PIETISTS.

The Pietists were a class of religious reformers in Germany during the seventeenth century, who sought to revive declining piety in the Protestant churches. Among them were to be found men of all shades of religious opinions, which were at variance with the established churches. In this aggregation of persons holding widely differing views on almost all Christian duties, except those of devotion and piety, it was found difficult to collect a sufficient number who were of "one mind" to establish a congregation. As long as they kept prominently before themselves their specialty, and devoted themselves assiduously to the cultivation of their favorite virtue, they prospered greatly.

There appears to have been a special revival among the Pietists during the first several years of the seventeenth century. They held house-to-house meetings besides the regular services. At

these private gatherings the young converts presented themselves for prayers and instruction in the higher attainments of the Christian life. Unfortunately for them, their frequent assemblies attracted the notice of their enemies, and inflamed the spirit of jealousy, and persecution speedily followed. Many of them were driven from their homes in Switzerland, Wirtemberg, Hesse-Cassel, and other places. A number of these exiles found refuge at Witgenstein, under the government of a friendly count, through whose intercession liberty of conscience was granted. This leniency on the part of the local government had the effect of inducing a heavy immigration to the community, although the land was rough and the soil barren. Most of them settled at Schwarzenau, about three miles from Berlenberg. This influx of people greatly increased the population of the place, and gave it prominence among the towns of the province.

In their endeavors to administer wholesome discipline among themselves, the Pietists were again made to feel the necessity of better organization. They felt a desire to put into practice the instructions given in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go tell him his fault between thee and him alone," etc., but they could not agree upon any system of church government. Some of them did not want to be under any restraint, nor to submit to any discipline, no matter how salutary it might be. Others returned to the churches which they had left, while still others drifted into outright infidelity. This degeneracy and the discouragements which followed caused some of the more sincere among them to become all the more impressed with the importance of reviving primitive Christianity, by following the Saviour in all His commands and ordinances. They were especially convinced of the importance of faith and obedience to effect genuine reformation unto salvation. Their scriptural researches had also assured them that Christian baptism was an important ordinance, which was closely related to salvation, but which had often been lightly spoken of among the Pietists, to the great sorrow of those who truly loved the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

Our Saviour, during His presence among men, taught the people that His kingdom resembled a number of natural things, the nature of which they understood much better than they did the character of the religion which He came to establish; and to get the gist of His instructions it becomes us to study carefully the metaphors He makes use of, and to apply them intelligently. After prayerfully investigating the parables which refer to the subject named, I have arrived at the following conclusions:—

1. That the terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" do not always imply a visible or temporal organization.
2. That the two terms are practically the same, and may be used interchangeably.
3. That in most cases where they do apply to an organization they may be used to designate the church of Christ.

I. Let us now consider some of the cases where we think the phrase "kingdom of heaven" need not be understood as referring to the church of Christ or any other body of people.

(1) Matthew 13:33.' "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." In this case we understand the Saviour to teach that His religion was like leaven; that His doctrine in the hearts of men was like leaven in meal; that it works like leaven. Leaven continues its work until the entire lump has been leavened; and in like manner the religion of Christ will permeate the whole man until a new creature shall appear, as unlike the "former man" as is the beautiful, flaky bread, to the unsightly, lifeless lump of dough from which it came. Leaven works quietly; so does religion in the heart of men. "The wind listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." We may observe the results of the leaven, and so we shall know those who have been born of the Spirit. "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

(2) The parable of the hidden treasure and goodly pearl are of the same character. They serve to set before us the inestimable value of the salvation found in the religion of Christ. We must