

Historical Sketch of the Old School Baptist Church

Elder William J. Purington

April 23, 1882

Hopewell, New Jersey

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Delivered on the One Hundred and Sixty-Seventh Anniversary of the Old School Baptist Church of Hopewell, N. J., in their Meeting House, April 23d, 1882, by Elder William J. Purington.

The speaker announced for his text the following declarations of Scripture:

"Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance." - Psalm lxxxiii. 1- 4.

The speaker, in his prefatory remarks, stated that he had been in the ministry nearly thirty- three years, and during that time had mingled in "open worship" with many Baptist churches and associations, but had never felt such peculiar emotions as he did then, for he was about to show from the records of the church that we had not departed from the faith of our fathers, nor from the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner stone," as the popular or modern Missionary and Means Baptists had stated of us; and that he had no desire to trench upon the rights of any individual or organization, but should show forth from the church records and divine testimony that the church stood in 1882 upon precisely the same foundation that she did in 1715.

The Baptist Church at Hopewell, New Jersey, was organized at the residence of Joseph Stout, April 23rd, 1715, containing twelve members, five of whom were Stouts. And what were the principles upon which she was founded?

1. "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one." - I. John 5:7,8.

2. Jehovah is self-existent, and the first Cause of all subsequent causes, being under no law separate from the counsel of his own will, according to the following Scriptural declarations: "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand; for I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live forever." Deut. 32:39,40. Also, "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from

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ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." Isa. 46:10.

3. The total depravity of man in his natural state, according to the following texts: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Genesis 6:5. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." - Romans 5:12.

4. The doctrine of eternal, personal, unconditional election of all the members of the body of Christ, according to the following texts: "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." - John 17: 1,2. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." - Ephesians 1:3,4.

5. The doctrine of special and definite atonement, according to the following texts: "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep." - John 10:15. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word: that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." - Ephesians 5:25-27.

6. In order to worship God in spirit and in truth, there must of necessity be a spiritual birth, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." Jesus said unto Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Also, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." John 3:3,6,7.

7. We, as a church, believe in sovereign, efficacious and reigning grace, by which the redeemed vessels of mercy are called out of the darkness of nature into the marvelous light and liberty of the gospel, and by which they are kept through their earthly pilgrimage, and taken home to immortal glory. - John 6:37-39; 10:27-30. Christ's flesh and blood is their meat and drink. - John 6:53-57.

8. We believe in baptism by immersion, and that it is in deed and in truth for believers; and that our dear Redeemer set the example in the river Jordan. - Matthew 3:13-17.

Now, beloved brethren, sisters, and friends, you have heard announced in a condensed form our articles of faith or the principles enunciated when this church was organized, one hundred and sixty-seven years ago today; and, by the grace of God supporting us, we now intend to show that we stand, as a church, on those cardinal principles, unmoved by sophistry and unawed by fear.

Now we will appeal to our church record. "Until 1721 the church had no settled minister, but was

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supplied by Abel Morgan, John Burroughs, Joseph Wood and others for about five years; but in 1721 Thomas Simmons came and settled, and continued to preach the gospel in private houses, the church not having any public place. He remained about three years and then moved to Charleston, S. C. The church was again left destitute, until a Mr. Eglesfield was prevailed upon to attend one Sunday in a month, but was not ordained, which occasioned other ministers to visit the church frequently, and the church remained in this condition until 1728. Then application was made to the Baptist Church in Montgomery, Pa., and we obtained the services of Mr. Joseph Eaton once a month, which continued thus for about fifteen years, during which time many were added to the church. In 1742, Joseph Eaton becoming feeble, he informed us of a Mr. Thomas Davis, minister and member of the church at Great Valley, who visited us, and a call was given him to settle with us. He lived at Col. Joseph Stout's, which is now the residence of Mrs. Sarah Weart. Not long after his coming here, the members living near Bethlehem desired a letter of dismissal, to be incorporated into a church there, and it was granted them May 22, 1742; and Mr. Davis preached here about three years, and then resigned. On the 19th of June, 1747, at an appointed meeting for business, the church agreed to build a meeting house, and David Stout, Benjamin Stout, Benjamin Drake and Henry Oxley were chosen the managers. At this time there was a joyful prospect for the church, as matters seemed so harmonious, and soon many persons gave signs of deep interest; for the Lord seemed to own and bless his servants, especially a brother Miller, who attended more frequently than any other; and a happy check was put upon frolicking and gaming in the neighborhood. The lowering clouds which had appeared to threaten the overthrow of the church were blown away. The managers, above noticed, set about to build the meeting-house, on a lot of ground given by Mr. John Hart, commencing some time in August, 1747, and some time the following winter got it fit to hold meetings in; till then, meetings were held in private houses. In April, 1748, Mr. Isaac Eaton, from Pennsylvania, came and preached amongst us, and continued to visit us frequently until July following, when two messengers, John Stout and John Gano, were sent with a letter to the church at Southampton, Pa., that they might grant him leave to serve us more constantly for a season, which being granted, he came and preached amongst us; but not being ordained, Mr. Miller chiefly administered the ordinances until September 1748. Then the said Isaac Eaton got a letter of dismissal from the church at Southampton, and joined Hopewell Church October 30, 1748, and was ordained at Hopewell, by the unanimous call of the church, November 23rd, 1748, by the following named brethren: James Carman, Thomas Curtis, Benjamin Miller and Joshua Potts. Immediately Isaac Eaton was called to be our minister, and it was agreed that the sacrament should be administered once in every two months, or six times in the year. In 1749 a parsonage was purchased for our minister. In 1750 the church agreed that their business meetings should be quarterly, unless absolute necessity called for them oftener. John Gano was licensed by the church to preach, April 14, 1753. May 29th, 1754, was set to ordain John Gano, and Revs. Mr. Miller and Mr. Stelle being called to assist, a sermon was preached from I. Tim. 4:6, after which hands were laid on him, and he given the full authority of the church."

Remarks: - Here is the first place in our church record that the attribute belonging to Jehovah is applied to the creature man, "whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Isa. 2:22. It was not so recorded by our departed brother, Isaac Eaton, for the writing shows it to have been penned by another scribe; and it was dropped from our church record, for we are not give to man the attribute of Jehovah. The word is found only once in the Bible, and that is in the one hundred eleventh Psalm, and it there reads, "He sent redemption unto his people; he hath

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commanded his covenant forever: holy and reverend is his name." This awful and sublime word is from Hebrew yare, and signifies in English, to be feared, revered. The derivative word, reverence, is to be found thirteen times in the Scriptures, seven times in the Old Testament, and six times in the New Testament; neither do we as a church use the terms clergy and laity, but the New Testament terms, pastors and people, servants and churches, and our ministers are addressed by the apostolic title, Elders. - See I. Peter 5:1-3. In the Greek testament the term is presbuteros, in English, an Elder, also an aged person; and sixty-two times it is recorded in the New Testament having direct reference to the ministry or teachers. Also it is recorded having an inferior meaning; but the context shows its true meaning to any careful reader.

"May 15th, 1762, licensed Joseph Powell to preach and publicly travel abroad. In October 1769, a petition was forwarded to Governor William Franklin to obtain a charter for the church, to constitute her a body politic, and it was granted December 11th of the same year. December 17th, 1769, trustees were appointed. Isaac Eaton died the 4th day of July, 1772; therefore he was pastor of the church not quite twenty-four years. July 2d, 1772, the subject of calling David Jones to be our minister was debated some time, and then postponed. October 15th, 1774, the church voted for Benjamin Coles as our minister, and July 3d, 1775, Benjamin Coles was settled here as minister. The time he accepted the call is not stated, but the presumption is soon after he was called. July 23rd, 1775, Benjamin Coles and his wife became members of our church; but in 1779, so much dissatisfaction arose between Benjamin Coles and the members, that during that year his relation as pastor was to cease. November 3rd, 1779, a call was given to Samuel Jones to become our pastor; but February 19th, 1780, a letter was received informing us that Samuel Jones could not be obtained as our pastor, at which time Mr. Charles Thompson received the unanimous vote of our church to be our minister; but April 15th, 1780, received a letter that Mr. Thompson could not comply with our request. Then agreed to have Isaac Stott, Samuel Jones, William Vanhorn, John Pitman and Burges Allison as supplies, until we could obtain a minister of our own. Oliver Hart, having been driven from his home in Charleston, S. C., and being in Pennsylvania, was called to be the minister of the church, and accepted the call. February 14th, 1788, James Ewing had liberty given to him to speak on next meeting-day of the church. June 20th, 1789, James Ewing received a full license to preach when and where a door might be opened, and a certificate was given him by the clerk. May 4th, 1794, James Ewing was ordained to the work of the ministry by Oliver Hart and John Blackwell. Oliver Hart died December 31, 1795."

Remarks: - Oliver Hart was faithful to his dear Lord and Redeemer, and noted for his integrity and firmness. He was buried in the Southampton (Pa.) Baptist cemetery.

"March 10th, 1796, James Ewing was chosen minister of the church, as long as agreeable to both him and the church, by a plurality of votes, which office he accepted. A council was called to deliberate on the case, whether it would be proper for Mr. Ewing to continue another year as minister of the church, and the decision was that he remain another year. The ministers called to give the advice were Rune Runyon, William Vanhorn, Peter Wilson, and William Staughton. April 18th, 1781, a recommendation from the Philadelphia Association was deliberated upon, to set apart some Lord's day in June following, and that a sermon be delivered on the subject, and a collection be taken up in order to augment the fund for the education of pious young men for the ministry."

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Remarks: - Beloved brethren and sisters, and listening friends, then was the introduction of the entering wedge, or the sowing of the seeds of the briars and thorns, which in after years caused so much agitation in the church, and the final separation from the "work mongrel system." Notice, the association, and not the Hopewell Church, introduced the matter. The New Testament says nothing about literary attainments being necessary to qualify a man to preach the gospel, neither is there anything said against a learned man preaching the gospel, if called by the grace of God; for Saul of Tarsus, and Peter, the Galilean fisherman, were placed on an equal footing in the great and important matter of preaching the gospel. And Paul said of himself and his brethren, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." II. Cor. 3:5,6. This language shows that ministers of the gospel are God made teachers of the truth. Every called, faithful and true minister of Jesus Christ has to learn the force of the preceding quotation by painful and bitter experience; but they who have a smattering of education, mere sciolists, and have gone into the "business" of preaching in order to obtain a support easily, know nothing about the trials of God's called and true servants; and, beloved in the Lord, they who have not experienced these things cannot tell them, and we ought not to expect it of them.

August 20th, 1803, twenty-four members made a request to be organized into a church in the neighborhood of Harbourn town, which was unanimously granted. September 15th, 1804, Resolved, That in time to come, when the association may vote any money not relating to the funds, but their own proper business and in pursuit of general utility, this church will support their messengers in defraying the expenses so accruing. January 19th, 1805, James Ewing resigned the pastoral care of the church after the first day of April, 1806, and requested the church to take measures for the calling of another minister, and the safety of the farm. February 25th, 1805, agreed to give Thomas B. Montanye a call; and he visited us, but did not accept the call. Various other ministers also agreed to visit us, viz., Mr. Allison, Mr. White, and others. August 17th, 1805, a motion was made by Brother Richard Stout, by way of query, whether the church will appoint a day to collect money for the missionary fund; but the church concluded that they could not for the missionary fund nor the educational fund.

Remarks: - Brethren, honor to the good old Hopewell Church! for her firmness in that hour; and she still remains fixed in her principles. If the collection had been asked according to what Paul desired, how willingly the dear children of God would have contributed; for said he, "It hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints, which are at Jerusalem." - Romans 15:16. And in I. Corinthians 16:2, he tells us how it was to be done; therefore such collection was for no utopian object. Does such a resolution show, in the way it was disposed of, that the church as a body was bewitched then with the cry of "the horse leech's two daughters, crying, Give, give?" Proverbs 30:15. No! She stood against those carnal innovations like the rock Gibraltar and though millions upon millions of waves have dashed against its base, and thousands of times the vivid lightnings have "played" around its summit, and awful thunders reverberated over it, yet it stands unmoved. So may it be with this, to me, dear church, until the last rolling billow of time shall dash and break upon the shore of eternity, and the redeemed family of our God be gathered home to immortal glory.

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"October 19th, 1805, then it was unanimously agreed that Mr. White is our choice for pastor; but January 18th, 1806, Mr. White informed us that he felt it to be his duty to remain where he then was. March 15, 1806, a letter was written to William Bishop, asking him to supply our pulpit the ensuing year. May 17th, 1806, James Ewing died, who was pastor of this church from April 1st, 1796, to April 1st, 1805, a period of nine years. Under the ministry of Mr. Ewing, one hundred and fifty three persons were baptized and added to the church in about three years. October 18th, 1806, it was moved and seconded, that Mr. Boggs should be given a call to come and settle with us, but the motion was finally withdrawn. December 20th, 1806, a motion was made that Mr. Parkinson be invited to settle with us; on voting, a great majority was against it. Then it was moved and seconded that the church give Mr. Boggs a call to settle with us. On the question being put to a vote, seventeen persons voted for it, and three against it; but the three persons voting against it acknowledged that they had nothing against the man. A committee was then appointed to wait on Mr. Boggs, and inform him of the action of the church. On January 17th, 1807, the committee informed the church that they had waited on Mr. Boggs, and that he had accepted the call of the church, and produced his letter to that effect. April 18th, 1807, Mr. Bishop made a request that a letter of recommendation be given him by this church, as he was about to leave, which was granted, for he was only a supply, and not pastor. At the same church meeting Brother John Boggs presented a letter of dismissal from the Wilmington (Del.) Church, and was received as a member of this church.

"Elder John Boggs departed this life October 4, 1846. Elder Boggs was upwards of thirty-nine years pastor of this church. He commenced his pastoral labors here in the spring of 1807, and was removed by death on the 4th day of October, 1846. Through the course of his pastoral charge, during that period, the great Head of the church was pleased abundantly to own and bless his labors to the edification of the church in this place, and for the gathering into the visible fold of Christ many of God's children. He was steadfast in maintaining the sovereign, distinguishing grace of God; ever faithful to reprove, rebuke and exhort, with all long-suffering and patience; and living, as he did, especially during several years towards the close of his life, when many of the Baptist Churches around us departed from the truth, both in faith and practice, following human inventions, such as Missionary and Bible societies, Sunday schools, &c., for the conversion of sinners. But Elder Boggs continued to the end to stand aloof from all such antichristian institutions, and enjoyed to the last the entire confidence and fellowship of the Old School Baptist brethren and churches."

Thus, brethren and listening friends, the ministers who have supplied this church have been traced from 1715, the time of her organization, down to the death of Elder John Boggs in 1846, a period of about one hundred and thirty-one years; and since that time, although we have our church record still kept, there was no need of copying any of that, for there are many now present who personally know the trouble and sorrow we had to endure in the past forty years, on account of the cunningly devised fables, introduced into our denomination, and the falsehoods uttered against us by our enemies. This church and our sister church at Harbourtown are the only two left in this State that have not been torn asunder by the carnal delusions now promulgated.

We will now pay our respects to a certain Mercer County atlas published a few years ago. When parties were canvassing for that work, it was to be when published a correct account, in a condensed form, of interesting matters in the county. At length the atlas appeared, and how about

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Hopewell and Harbourtown Churches? Why they had become extinct, or nearly so, and had culminated or ended in the "Calvary Baptist Church." Was that a historical fact or a modern falsehood? Who made the bridge from Elder Boggs up to that period, about thirty-five years, leaving out Elder Curtis, with others, and Elder P. Hartwell, who was pastor twenty-five years? And such report was not only circulated far and near, but believed; and at the same time both of the churches were having their stated meetings and ordinances regularly, and this church numbered two hundred and eleven members. The wish, on the part of the compilers and publishers, was father to the thought, for not one had left this church and united with the so-called "Calvary Church." Brethren, I cannot believe that such dishonesty can prosper. I am glad that we have recorded in our church record the denunciation of such a gross falsehood. Mr. Cathcart, of Philadelphia, Pa., has just published a work, in which he states that we are reduced in our membership to 48,000, and 400 ministers. But it makes no difference as to the numbers; the truth of God should be our aim, and not numbers. According to the statement of the Means Baptists, we have been dying the past fifty years, but are not dead yet; and it seems that our death is too protracted to suit our enemies.

We will now notice an article published in August 1880, in a so called Baptist Family Magazine, and it reads thus:

"We take the liberty of laying before our readers part of an interesting letter from Rev. H. B. Garner, pastor at Hopewell, N. J. Speaking of the Magazine, he says: Particularly have I been interested in the diary of S. J., the local allusions to Hopewell, awakening interest, and stimulating appetite for more. I have been awaiting with unusual expectancy that portion of the diary which would refer to the author's school days at Rev. Isaac Eaton's Academy in this place. The first installment has come with the June number, and afforded much pleasure to me, and to the lovers of historic bits of ye olden time of this neighborhood. Am in hopes the diary will prove quite prolific, as well as interesting in facts, which will prove stronger than fiction to our Old School friends, who have usurped the place which belongs to the regular Baptists of today. History is not their forte, nor is it a welcome ally in the prosecution of their work. The facts of fifty and a hundred years ago are all against their present position, and it only needs the intelligent presentation of them to make the untenableness of some of their claims patent to the minds of the unprejudiced and thinking men among them. The old church, burying-ground, school-house and farms, are a constant reminder to me of the work of other days, when the denomination in its infancy was struggling under the leadership of Isaac Eaton, Abel Morgan, Benjamin Griffith, and later of Samuel Jones, John Gano, Morgan Edwrds, James Manning, Thomas Ustick, et al. And it is to be regretted that access to the records of those days are now out of our hands, and if existing at all, practically buried under the covering of Old School exclusivism."

While it does not seem of much consequence to engage the subalterns while the champions go free, yet, as our author has used some expressions having a direct bearing upon the Old School Baptist Church of Hopewell, they shall not pass this day without being noticed. No man should ever engage in a controversy unless he understand both sides of the question, for unless he does, he will cut the ligaments of his own argumentation; and every erroneous proposition always confutes itself, and every person in a false position is autokatakritos, or self-condemned.

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Brethren, what usurping have we done? Have we not maintained our church organization for this long period? Certainly we have. It seems according to our author, the farm, burying-ground, &c., are a reminder of other days." What is the meaning of the term "place?" The name Old School given us by our author's own denomination, or does it mean that we have property that they covet? It certainly means something. Hark, what sound is that? The grave-stones in our cemetery are talking to us, and listen to what they say: "About ten years ago, one day, when we were quietly and faithfully guarding the dust of the sleeping children of God, we heard this language: 'That parsonage farm, this brick church, and this cemetery, belong to us, and we ought to have them.' And immediately underneath us we heard, in deep and awful tones, a voice passing through the chambers of death, saying, 'The Lord forbid that our children should give our inheritance to any Ahab or Jezebel;' and such was the commotion that we did not know but that we should have to leave our places, and let the dead saints arise to rebuke such covetousness." Does it not appear strange, brethren, sisters, and friends, that those gravestones should have ears and tongues? Can we not say, Sleep on, dear saints and faithful ministers, Eaton, Boggs, Hartwell, and others, for by the grace of God we, your children, will contend for and defend the same glorious and immortal principles of truth that you did; for we know that this church was established on the foundation of the apostles and prophets before the bantling of Fullerism was born? As to the intelligent presentation of facts, &c., we are satisfied that this church and congregation would not suffer much by a comparison with the organization to which our author is united. As to the records being "buried under Old School exclusivism," they can go to the Philadelphia Association and obtain their records; but as to our church records, they are ours, and by the grace of God we intend to keep them. Brethren and sisters, be kind and courteous in all the relations of life; but as it regards your faith in Jesus Christ, never leave that, though you become odious in the eyes of carnal religion, for your dear Saviour was rejected, and a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

There can be nothing said about the argument on the text, for want of space, and it would make the article too lengthy. Suffice it to say, that each clause was elaborate, and the arrows of truth were not pointless, but sharp and barbed, and the indications were that they were not without effect.

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