

The Baptist History Series

Number 3



A History of New England Baptists

Volume 1 of 2

Isaac Backus

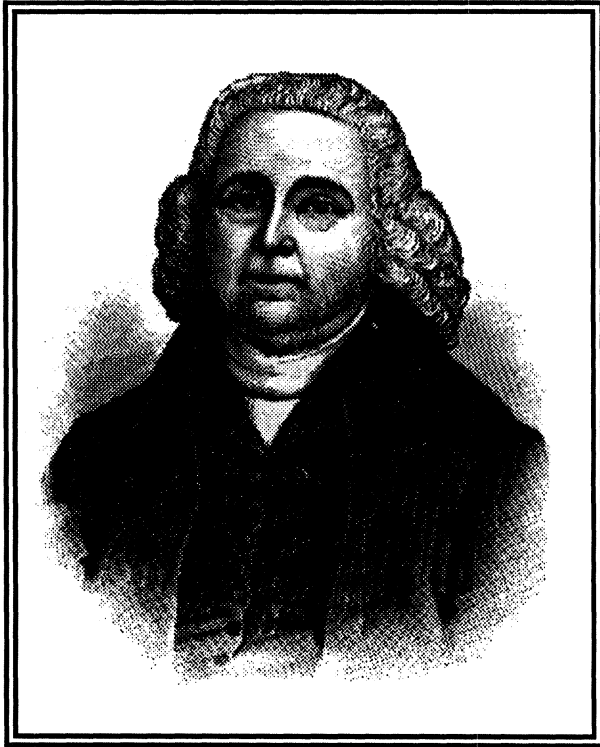
A
HISTORY OF NEW ENGLAND

WITH

Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians

CALLED

BAPTISTS



ISAAC BACKUS
1724-1806

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HISTORY OF NEW ENGLAND

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BAPTISTS.

BY

ISAAC BACKUS.

Second Edition, with Notes.

BY

DAVID WESTON.

VOLUME I.

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Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth.

-- Psalm 66:4

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THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM

lux lucet in tenebris

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

A historian who has been an actor in the events which he narrates, has peculiar advantages and disadvantages. He can write with more minuteness of detail, and with a fresher and more life-like coloring. He can write with more confidence, and, drawing from his own experience and observation, is in this respect more trustworthy. On the other hand, he is more liable to be warped by prejudice, to see only the excellences and none of the defects of those with whom he has been identified, and only the defects and none of the excellences of those to whom he has been opposed, to be a partizan rather than a judge, and to make his narration little more than the reflection of his personal opinions or his personal sympathy and affection, hostility and spite.

The Church History of Isaac Backus has all the above-named excellences. To a large extent he was an eye-witness of that which he describes ; and where not an eye-witness, he placed himself in closest possible connection with it by personal acquaintance with the actors, and by immediate and most diligent and thorough examination of records and other evidence. While it may be too much to say that he absolutely avoided the defects above named, yet his sound judgment, his natural candor and honesty and his elevated Christian principle, have made him as nearly free from them as perhaps any author who has written in similar circumstances.

In the early history of the Baptists of New England, this work has always been justly regarded as the standard of authority. The single edition hitherto published was exhausted many years ago, and as the work became rare, the need of its republication was deeply felt. The Backus Historical Society, at a meeting in June, 1869, decided to undertake the task of republication; of which decision, the edition now presented to the public is the result.

This edition is a reproduction of the original work in full, and with only the following changes:—1. Grammatical errors and a few of the more prominent rhetorical errors have been corrected. These corrections have been made with the smallest possible variation from the text, and, for the most part, affect only some verbal form. 2. The author's errata of the first edition are corrected in the body of the work according to his direction. 3. The orthography of the work has been made to conform more nearly to the present standard. 4. The citations of the work have been collated with the originals, except in a few instances where the latter could not be found; and in many cases, more explicit references, or references to current editions, have been made in brackets. Such editorial references to Winthrop's Journal are to the New Edition by James Savage, Boston, 1853; those to Hubbard, are to Hubbard's History of New England, Massachusetts Historical Society, 1815; those to Mather's Magnalia are to the First American Edition, Hartford, 1820; those to Prince's Chronology and Prince's Annals are to the edition published in Boston, 1826; those to Morton's Memorial are to the edition of the Congregational Board of Publication, Boston, 1855. Where the author refers to Vol. I or Vol. II of "Massachusetts History," he means Hutchinson's History of Massachusetts, and the editorial references are to the edition published at Salem, 1795. By "Massachusetts History, Vol. III," the author means not the continuation of Hutchinson's work by his grandson, but the work commonly known as "Hutchinson's Collection of Original Papers." Differences

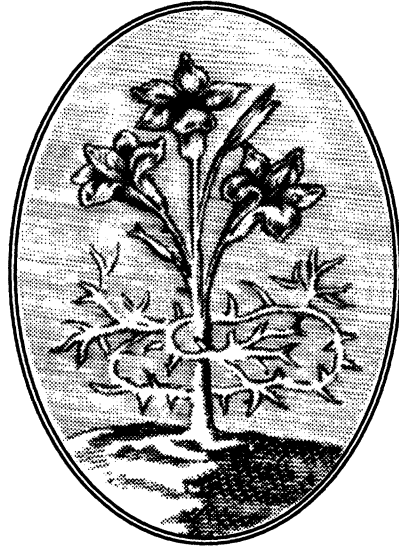
between the originals and their citation by the author have been noted in brackets. In the letter of Robert Mascall, found in Vol. I, pages 311 to 313 of the present edition, Mr. Backus indicated such changes, in supplying or omitting words, &c., as he felt at liberty to make; and in the Preface to Vol. I, he said, "I have as strictly kept to the true sense in all my quotations as in that, yet I have not thought it necessary to continue such marks in all." That which is contained in brackets in the above-named letter is from the author; in all other places, from the editor. 5. Editorial foot-notes have been added, amounting in all to about a hundred pages. These are marked "Ed.;" and where an editorial note is appended to one by the author, they are distinguished by marking the latter "B." 6. A full Index to both volumes is appended to Vol. II, in place of the brief and very defective indices and tables of contents of the original work. 7. All the longer quotations are distinguished from the author's own words by change of type; topical headings are affixed to each alternate page, and necessary changes are made in the title pages.—Thus the only liberty taken with the original text has been to correct a few errors of language, while all other changes are so marked as to be clearly distinguished as such.

The circumstances in which the work is issued have not been favorable to typographical accuracy. The editor has been at a distance from the printers; and in order that sufficient care and labor might be expended in preparing the work for the press, and yet secure its completion without so much delay as to disappoint subscribers, it has been needful to urge it through the press with more haste than would have been otherwise desirable. It is believed however, that typographical errors will not be found to any unusual extent.

The editor would express his grateful acknowledgments to S. F. Haven, Esq., and E. M. Barton, Esq., librarians of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass., for their kindness and courtesy in giving free access to the rare and

extensive archæological library under their charge, and for the aid which they have been always ready to lend in consulting it; to his venerable relative, Rev. Silas Hall, of Raynham, Mass., who placed at his disposal a large, carefully prepared and most valuable collection of manuscripts relating to the history of New England Baptists,—a collection which has added much to the value of other historical works before this, and in which much valuable material still remains untouched;—to the Rhode Island Historical Society, for permission to use the Diary of John Comer; to Reuben A. Guild, Esq., librarian of Brown University, for permission to use the Diary of Hezekiah Smith, and for other assistance; to Rev. C. E. Barrows, of Newport, R. I., and to William E. Clarke, of Conneaut, Oo., for valuable material used in foot-notes; and to Alden A. Howe, Esq., of Worcester, Mass., for preparing the Index.

WORCESTER, MASS., December 5, 1870.



Sicut liliū inter spinas sic amica mea inter filias

On The Cover: We use the symbol of the “lily among the thorns” from Song of Solomon 2:2 to represent the Baptist History Series. The Latin, *Sicut liliū inter spinas sic amica mea inter filias*, translates, “As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.”

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO VOLUME I.

History has been so often written and improved, either for party purposes, or mere amusement, that some serious persons have been ready to treat it as a thing foreign to religion, and of little service to mankind. Yet the same persons will readily own, that nothing teaches like experience; and what is true history but the experiences of those who have gone before us? of which perhaps none have been more remarkable, since the affairs of Canaan, than those of this country. And as the present contests about liberty and government are very great, they call loudly for all the light therein that can be gained from every quarter.

Mr. Rollin, in his ancient history, says, "The powers that be are ordained of God; but neither every use that is made of this power, nor every means for the attainment of it, are from God, though every power be of him. And when we see these governments degenerating, sometimes to violence, factions, despotic sway and tyranny, 'tis wholly to the passions of mankind that we must ascribe those irregularities which are directly opposite to the primitive institution of states; and which a superior wisdom afterwards reduces to order, always making them contribute to the execution of his designs, full of equity and justice. This scene highly deserves our attention and admiration. It is with a view of making the reader attentive to this object, that I think it incumbent on me to add to the account of facts and events what regards the manners and customs of nations; because these shew their genius and character, which we may call, in some measure, the soul of history."

Now it may well be supposed, that men who are striving for more power over others than belongs to them, will not nor cannot set either their own or their opponents' "genius and character" in their just light. And if it should be found, that nearly all the histories of this country which are much known, have been written by persons who thought themselves invested with power to act as lawgivers and judges for their neighbors, under the name either of orthodoxy, or of immediate power from heaven, the inference will be strong, that our affairs have never been set in so clear light as they ought

to be ; and if this is not indeed the case I am greatly mistaken ; of which the following account will enable the reader to judge for himself.

The greatest objection that I have heard against this design is, that we ought not to rake up the ashes of our good fathers, nor to rehearse those old controversies, which will tend to increase our present difficulties. But what is meant by this objection? To reveal secrets, or to repeat matters that have been well settled between persons or parties, is forbidden, and its effects are very pernicious ; but what is that to a history of public facts, and an examination of the principles and conduct, both of oppressors, and of the oppressed?

Men who are still fond of arbitrary power may make the above objection ; but a learned and ingenious pædobaptist that felt the effects of such power, lately said, “The Presbyterians, I confess, formerly copied too nearly the Episcopalians. The genuine principles of universal and impartial liberty were very little understood by any ; and all parties were too much involved in the guilt of intolerance and persecution. The dissenters in our times freely acknowledge this, and condemn the narrow principles of many of their predecessors ; having no objection to transmitting down to posterity, in their true colors, the acts of oppression and intolerance of which all sects have been guilty. Not indeed, as is sometimes done, with a view of encouraging such conduct in one party by the example of others ; but of exposing it alike in all, and preventing it wholly, if possible, in time to come.”¹ This is the great design of the ensuing work ; and such a work seems essentially necessary to that end. For as every one is orthodox to himself, they who have oppressed others, have always denied it. After our Baptist fathers in Boston, had been greatly injured for fifteen years, they published a vindication of their character ; but as to their sufferings, contented themselves with saying, “Some of us were oftentimes brought before councils and courts, threatened, fined, our estates taken away, imprisoned and banished.” A noted minister called their vindication a fallacious narrative, and said, “Errors lie in generals, a particular account might have been more satisfying.”² Here therefore are a great number of particulars with good vouchers to support them ; which shew that oppression on religious accounts was not of the first principles of New England, but was an intruder that came in afterward.

When I was requested by several gentlemen of note and others, to undertake this work, two great objections presented themselves to my mind against it ; namely, my great unfitness for it, and the difficulty of obtaining the necessary materials. But their importunity prevailed against the first, and divine providence has removed the other, by conveying into my hands a variety of authentic materials, much beyond what I conceived could have now been obtained in the world. Many of them I have taken

¹Furneaux's letter to Blackstone, p. 74.

²Willard's *Ne sutor*, p. 10.

from the ancient records of the colonies of Plymouth, Massachusetts, Providence and Rhode Island, as well as the records of the United Colonies; though I regret the want of better acquaintance with the two latter, before the first two hundred pages of our history were printed off. Many other records have also been serviceable; and I would now return my public thanks to the several gentlemen who are keepers of them, for the candid and kind treatment they have shown on this occasion. A great variety of other manuscripts have been serviceable to me, whereof Mr. Hubbard's History, and extracts from Governor Winthrop's Journal are not the least. It is to be noted, that only the word "Hubbard" in the following quotations refers to that history, in distinction from another valuable collection, of which take the following account:—Mr. Samuel Hubbard came over to Salem in 1633, in his youth; joined to Watertown church in 1635; but went the same year up to Windsor, [Conn.] where he soon married a church member that removed from Dorchester, and they settled at Weathersfield; till in May, 1639, they removed to Springfield, and he was one of the five men who first joined in founding that church. It was constituted under Connecticut government, but falling afterward into the Massachusetts, he removed in 1647 to Fairfield. Though he says, "God having enlightened both, but mostly my wife, into his holy ordinance of baptizing only visible believers; and being zealous for it, she was mostly struck at, and answered twice publicly, where I was also said to be as bad as she, and threatened with imprisonment to Hartford goal, if we did not renounce it or remove. That Scripture came into our minds, If they persecute you in one place, flee to another." Whereupon they removed to Newport, and joined to Elder Clarke's church there on November 3, 1648, where they lived to old age; from whence he repeatedly visited his suffering brethren at Boston, and had an extensive correspondence both in Europe and America; and he copied several hundred of his own and others' letters into a book, which I am now favored with; containing a fund of intelligence, from 1641 to 1688. The writings and papers also of our elders, Holmes, Comer, Callender and others, have been useful in this design. Though, for want of room, I have been forced to leave a great many valuable articles out of this volume, and to give but a sketch of things in latter times. However I propose by divine leave to preserve and digest them in the best manner I can, for the use of those who may come after us; and should be glad to obtain accounts of the rise, progress and present state of all our churches for the same end.

In the following work, Plymouth Register intends an account of their church from its beginning, written by our County Register, and annexed to Mr. Robbins's Ordination Sermon, 1760.¹ The History of Providence means what was published of that nature in their Gazette in 1765.² Perhaps the rest of my authorities are sufficiently described. So great a part

of this history is given in the words of others, that continued marks of quotation would have been tedious; therefore many passages only begin and end therewith.³ In the excellent letter you have in pages 311—313, I have marked the words which were necessarily supplied to complete the sense; but though I have as strictly kept to the true sense in all my quotations as in that, yet I have not thought it necessary to continue such marks in all. In the dates, where our fathers began the year with March, I have either plainly noted it, or else have begun the year with January, only have let the old style stand till it was altered here by law. Of the moneys, Mr. Prince says they were reckoned sterling till 1640. In 1652, when they first coined silver here, one pound of it was fifteen shillings sterling, and so it continued to 1690, when they began to make paper money, which gradually depreciated from six shillings to forty-five shillings for a Spanish milled dollar. In 1750 our currency was brought back to what it was a hundred years before, and that is our lawful money ever since. A dash [—] in a quotation signifies the omission of something there for brevity's sake;⁴ betwixt figures, it is to extend the reference from one number to the other.

Whoever considers the difficulty of compiling such a work with exactness, together with the confusion of the present times, and the author's distance from the press, will not be severe upon him for every imperfection that may be discovered therein; though he has named his principal vouchers on purpose to have his performance thoroughly examined, and every material mistake corrected. Sincerity and impartiality are allowed to be the most essential rules of history; how far they appear in this the reader will judge. Only the author must say, that he has acted under a full belief, that with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again; so that we cannot injure others in any case, without therein wronging our own souls. And to impress this great truth upon all minds, is the aim and earnest desire of their humble servant,

ISAAC BACKUS.

MIDDLEBOROUGH, July 9, 1777.

¹"An account of the church of Christ in Plymouth, the first church in New England, from its establishment unto the present day. By John Cotton, Esq., member of said church." This work was published in 1760. It is republished in the Massachusetts Historical Collections, Vol. IV, pp. 107—141.—ED.

²"This tract has been usually ascribed to the venerable Stephen Hopkins, who for eight years had been Governor of the colony, and served in that office one year after, but is better known as one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence." Introductory note to "An Account of Providence, R. I.," as republished in the Massachusetts Historical Collections, Second Series, Vol. IX.—ED.

³According to modern usage, this is the case with all the quotations in the present edition.—ED.

⁴In the present edition, such omissions are indicated by dots [...].—ED.

“A HISTORY of the Baptists should be understood in its objects and aims; and cleared, in the beginning, of misapprehension and perversion. It is not the history of a nationality, a race, an organization, but of people, *traced by their vital principles and gospel practices*. The unity to be exhibited and demonstrated was not brought about by force, by coercion of pains and penalties, by repressive and punitive Acts of Conformity; but by the recognition and adoption of a common authoritative and completely divine standard... the WORD OF GOD.”

Dr. J. L. M. Curry (1825-1903)

President of Howard College,
Professor of English & Philosophy at Richmond College,
Trustee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and
United States Ambassador to Spain

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