

MABEL CLEMENT

by

J. M. SALLEE

ECONOMY PRINTERS ASHLAND, KENTUCKY

CHAPTER SIX

Campbellite church not the church of CHRIST - Too young - Baptist churches have existed through all ages since CHRIST

The afternoon wore away, the noise of business was hushed, and night settled down on the little town.

At an early hour Arthur came in and called for Mabel. To her great joy he seemed as glad to see her as if she was not a Baptist. He apologized for not calling the evening before by saying he had been suddenly called off on legal business.

"But what does this mean?" he inquired as he observed Dr. Stanly and several others walk in. The servants had given out the report that Mabel would show her reasons for joining the Baptists to Dr. Stanly. Many got hold of the rumor and made it convenient to drop in to see the family till there were at least a dozen.

"It means," Mabel replied, "I am to be examined as to my reasons for joining the Baptists."

"What! Are they going to work on you so soon?"

This went unanswered as the crowd walked in and, after customary greetings, took seats. During the lull that followed a strange looking piece of humanity appeared at the door and began searching for a seat. He seated himself in a retired part of the room. He wore green spectacles, had a sharp keen visage, was very crooked and a perfect stranger. Evidently he was interested some way in the matter to be investigated. His dark, piercing eyes, weird appearance and his unexpected and abrupt entrance made him an object of more than ordinary curiosity.

For some time the audience sat in silence, looking first at the stranger and then at one another. Dr. Stanly broke the silence by saying: "Well, Miss Mabel, we have all heard of your joining the Baptists and would be pleased to have a friendly talk with you about the matter. Knowing your intelligence we believe you have reasons for leaving us and would like to become acquainted with them. Have you any objections to a friendly talk?"

"None whatever, Doctor," replied Mabel. "It will afford me great pleasure to converse in such a manner on this subject."

"Well, to be plain, what are your reasons for leaving the Christian church?"

"Pardon me, Doctor, but I cannot call your church or denomination the church of CHRIST," said Mabel.

"Mabel!" cried her mother in utter astonishment.

"Why not?" asked the Doctor, smiling.

"One reason is that it is too young," she replied. "CHRIST's kind of churches has existed over 1800 years; your kind began about 75 years ago under the leadership of Alexander Campbell."

"Doctor," said Arthur, "what have you to say about this? My understanding has been that we restored primitive Christianity, the true church had slipped from its foundation, apostatized and was never restored till the reformation under Mr. Campbell."

"That is correct," said the Doctor. "Christianity had become so corrupt and had so many things mixed up with it that it was not at all like it was in the beginning. Mr. Campbell wrought for the establishment of pure Gospel churches in the world. He called upon the people to return to the original Gospel and order of things; and the churches he founded were the first purely Gospel churches that had existed for centuries."

"But," objected Mabel, "CHRIST declared, **'I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'** (Matthew 16:18). This cannot mean less than that churches like the model church founded by our Saviour would exist through all future ages. Now it cannot be that there has ever been a time, since His first church was set up, that He has had no true churches in the world. If so, then the gates of Hell have prevailed. We conclude from CHRIST's own words that His cause has never failed and that there have been a succession of churches holding all the doctrines and practicing all the ordinances that are necessary to make true churches of CHRIST. The line of true churches still exists and will to the end of time."

"It is impossible," replied the Doctor, "to ever establish a theory so absurd. Take your own denomination - you cannot trace the name of Baptist back 300 years."

"Our claim," replied Mabel, "is that there have never ceased to be Baptists from the days of John the Baptist and JESUS down to the present time. Not the name Baptist. CHRIST's followers have been called by many names. They were called disciples first. The name Christian, which is now generally applied to the Saviour's people, occurs only three times in the Bible, and Peter is the only inspired writer we are sure ever applied this name to the disciples."

"Do you utterly discard the name then?" inquired the Doctor. "How then will you trace and prove a succession from CHRIST and the Apostles?"

"There is no great importance attached to a name," replied Mabel. "Most names which the Lord's people have worn for the last 1,800 years originated with some person, place, practice or circumstance. Many of them were given by our enemies as is probably true of the name Christian. It is not a name, but a set of principles and practices that the student of church history looks for. And what we maintain is that there have always been a people holding the leading principles now held by Baptists, a people that were Baptists in principle, practice and polity,

since the organization of the first Baptist church by our Saviour. J. Newton Brown in *Rel. Encyc.*, p. 188, says, speaking of Baptists: 'Christians of these sentiments have existed in every age.'

"Joseph Belcher, as quoted by Ray in *Baptist Succession*, says: 'It will be seen that Baptists claim the high antiquity of the commencement of the Christian church. They can trace a succession of those who have believed the same doctrine and administered the same ordinances directly up to the apostolic age.'" (*Baptist Succession*, pages 17 and 18).

"In his debate with Mr. McCalla, Alexander Campbell says: 'From the Apostolic age to the present time, the sentiments of Baptists and their practice of baptism have had a continued chain of advocates, and public monuments of their existence in every century can be produced.' This is strong testimony from a strong man who spoke not unadvisedly and who believed he could prove what he said."

"That is very strange language to come from the founder of the Christian church," said Arthur. 'I am puzzled to know why he started another line of churches, another denomination."

"Because all Christians had gone wrong doctrinally; there was not a church on earth that held faithfully the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel," said the Doctor.

"Then the Saviour's promise had failed," replied Mabel.

"How many denominations were there in the beginning?" asked Arthur.

"There was only one," replied the Doctor. "There should be only one now, and there would be only one if false teachers had not misled the people."

"It is clear to my mind," said Arthur, "that there should be but one denomination and that men must be to blame for all the rest. I cannot believe it to be the will of the Lord for all these conflicting denominations to be. He simply permits this state of things like He does many other evils. These schisms and divisions that distract Christendom must be unscriptural and must weaken the cause of CHRIST in the world. So I conclude no man ever had any Scriptural authority for originating a denomination in addition to the one CHRIST started."

"Of course," replied the Doctor, "an organization of Christian disciples, holding the doctrines of the New Testament and practicing His ordinances as CHRIST through the Scriptures delivered them unto us, must be a church of CHRIST."

"That seems plausible," responded Arthur; "but it seems CHRIST founded a church in His day and declared it would continue through all time; that the gates of Hell should never prevail against it. As has been stated this cannot mean less than that churches like the one He founded would obtain through the ages. Now it strikes me that Mr. Campbell ought to have hunted up these churches instead of founding another denomination. He was a great man, but like all others, he was imperfect and made a mistake here, for the Scriptures speak strongly against schisms and divisions."

At this the Doctor flushed and bit his lip in great perplexity. The spectacle man snickered, pulled

at his chair and appeared delighted.

"That argument is not sound," said the Doctor, "for it is impossible for any of the denominations now extant to prove they have continued from the days of the Apostles."

"But I must believe," replied Arthur, "that in some part of the world there is a sort of churches that has continued since the days of CHRIST. If I do not believe this, I am compelled to believe that CHRIST spake falsely and I dare not believe that."

"The true church began in the days of Abraham," said a Methodist in the congregation.

"How about that, Miss Clement?" inquired Arthur.

"GOD has always had a people in the world," she answered, "from the days of righteous Abel; but He never had a church during the first 4,000 years of the world's history such as He has had since the days of CHRIST. His churches now are composed of regenerate, spiritual people. To the Jewish church, so called, belonged all Jews, good and bad, righteous and unrighteous, regenerate and unregenerate. There was no line of demarcation purporting to show a distinction in Jewish character - separating the saved from the unsaved. But at the end of 4,000 years CHRIST came and called the saved to separate themselves from the unsaved. He organized them into a church, such as there had never been before. Hypocrites got into that first church; but it was composed of persons who claimed to be regenerate, and by baptism professed to be penitent believers in our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

"JESUS organized only one church, a model church, and the Apostles founded others built exactly like the pattern set by their Divine Master; that is, local congregations in each community where they labored. There was only one kind of churches; but men have organized hundreds of different kinds. There are said to be nearly 1,000 denominations, or sects, or churches, each claiming to be the church of CHRIST and modeled after the New Testament order. Mr. T. De Witt Talmage is represented as saying: 'There is as much difference in the sects as between light and darkness, as between Heaven and Hell.' Surely the present state of things is all wrong - an unmitigated evil."

"When were these churches founded, and who were their founders? Does history inform us?" inquired Arthur.

"Certainly," replied Mabel. "With your permission I will point very briefly to the origin of the largest denominations as it is revealed in history.

"The Roman Catholic Church is the oldest of these human organizations. Scripture foretold that there would be a great apostasy. (See I John 2:19). This began to develop about the middle of the third century. Corrupt elements crept into the churches till gradually the corrupt and the pure drifted apart and the corrupt formed an alliance with the state, or secular government about A. D. 312. The Church of Rome did not spring into existence all at once; it took the work of centuries to develop the great corrupt political. The Greek Church, after long struggle in the Church of Rome, became a distinct organization about A. D. 500. The Lutheran church was founded by Martin Luther, 1525 A. D. and bears his name. The Church of England has for its founder Henry VIII, KING of England. It is called in the United States the Episcopal church and originated A.

D. 1530. This church is the daughter of the Church of Rome, having come out of it. The Presbyterian church was established A. D. 1541 by John Calvin, a learned French Catholic, who repudiated the supremacy of the pope and established himself at Geneva in Switzerland. This is another daughter of the Church of Rome. The Congregational church was founded in the North of England by John Robinson, a great and good man, in the year 1602.

The Methodist church was started by a Mr. Morgan and John Wesley as a society. It seems they did not dream in 1729, or for many years afterward, of founding a church, but a society in the Episcopal church. But their society finally developed into the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was in 1784 it became independent of the Episcopal. It calls itself the Methodist Episcopal Church, because it came out of the Episcopal church and because its founders adopted the Episcopal form of church government. So it is the daughter of the Episcopal and granddaughter of the Church of Rome. The Doctor's church was established by Mr. Campbell in 1827. Secular and church history point out the origin of all churches except the Baptist; and I have been led to believe these are the true churches. Mr. William Slack, formerly a Presbyterian, in his *Reasons for becoming a Baptist*, says: "The King of Holland appointed Mr. Ypeig, professor of theology at Groningen, and L. J. Dermont, his chaplain, to prepare a history of the Dutch Reformed church. These learned historians, in writing their history, which appeared in four large volumes, devoted one chapter to the Baptists of Holland and Germany. They say: "We now see that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists, and in latter times Mennonites, were the original Waldenses, and who have long in the history of the church received the honor of that origin. On this account the Baptists may be considered as the only Christian community which has stood since the days of the Apostles, and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrines of the Gospel through all ages."

The Doctor had manifested much impatience during this statement of the origin of the churches and now exclaimed: "Nonsense! That bigoted, close-communication sect is no more the Christian church than the Church of Rome."

"Well, whether that is so or not," replied Arthur, who was after the truth, "I cannot say; but one thing I am certain of, the churches thus pointed out with their history all told cannot be truly Scriptural churches, because they are 1,500 years too young, besides differing so in faith and practice."

"All this argument is to no purpose," asserted the old Methodist; "it is a waste of time and ammunition. The various denominations are different branches of the church of CHRIST. There are true Christians in all of them and it does not matter where one belongs if his heart is right."

"Do the Scriptures teach that the church of CHRIST has branches?" inquired Arthur.

"They do not," replied Mabel. "Individual Christians are branches in CHRIST, the true vine. If the brother believes what he says, he ought to be as willing for one to join the Baptists as the Methodists. But he is not."

"Oh, yes, I am," replied the brother.

"It is hard to believe that," said an auditor.

"I am reminded," said Dr. Markham, who always saw the funny side of things, "of an old colored Methodist preacher who held a meeting, had some converts, and, at the close, said: 'Now you young folks hab gone and gib your hearts to de Lord and got your sins forgib'n; now you ought ter jine the church - some branch uv the church. It don't matter which branch you jine. Now I'll open the doors ub the churches while de singers sing. Ef you want ter jine the Methodist church, take dis seat; ef you want ter jine de Baptist, take dat: They sang and nobody came. The old man restated the matter, telling them they ought to jine some branch of the church, it did not matter which branch. Then they sang again, but no one came to join. The old preacher's patience broke down and he exclaimed: 'Why don't you jine? I know what you mean; you're goin' to sneak roun' and jine dat Baptist church! Dar'll be blood shed ober dis ting yet 'fore it's done wid!'"

This story created laughter and brought the branch theory into disrepute. The Methodist brother was silent. He knew he believed it did make a difference what denomination one joined but dared not again deny it.

Mr. Tibbs remarked: "If all the denominations are branches of the church of CHRIST, it is marvelous that they bear so many different kinds of fruit."

Arthur inquired: "Doctor, can you tell us the age of the Baptist church?"

The Doctor hesitated, stammered and said: "No, But I am sure it is no older than some of the rest. But this is not the way to find the true church - for there are true and false churches as well as true and false Christians. If we wish to find the church of CHRIST, let us find that organization that holds the truth and nothing but the truth, that takes the Bible and throws all creeds and confessions of faith to the moles and bats. I am sure the Baptists cannot be that church, for they discard one of the cardinal, vital truths of the Gospel."

The Doctor was chagrined and he grew warm, sarcastic and positive as he proceeded.

"What is the chief and vital error of the Baptists to which you allude, Doctor?" inquired Mabel.

"Why, they miss wholly the design of baptism," was the bold and emphatic reply.

"Suppose," said Mabel, "we let the truth or falsity of the churches we each represent be decided by discovering by a study of the Scriptures which holds the Scriptural design of baptism."

"Agreed," said the Doctor. "If we do not hold the Bible design of baptism, I will confess I do not belong to the church of CHRIST."

The Doctor smiled, cleared his throat, and moved up his chair nearer. Nothing was plainer to him than that his church was right here.

"It will be necessary then," said Mabel, "in the first place for you to state plainly the design of baptism as held by your church."

"Do not say my church; I have no church; say CHRIST's church." said the Doctor.

"Excuse me, Doctor, that would be yielding all the ground for which I contend. If I could do that,

believe the church organization to which you belong is the church of CHRIST, I would be compelled to come back to you, for yours differs so much from the one I have connected myself with, they cannot both be CHRIST's churches. As you object to my manner of speech, I hope you will not become offended if I call it by a name applied to it by others, i. e., Campbellite. I verily believe this the most appropriate, But I would not mind calling it the church of the Disciples. I do not think you have any right to monopolize the name Christian which belongs to all denominations in common. There is, however, really very little in a name. 'That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.' So I hope you will bear this name without offense during the discussion."

"Well," said the Doctor pleasantly, "you may use the word with the distinct understanding that I do not admit its appropriateness."

"I think," said Arthur, "it will be wise to adjourn this matter over to another night. We can't get through with it tonight; and I believe it will require several nights."

"Very well," added the Doctor, "besides others may wish to hear the discussion and we ought to give them an opportunity to hear."

The Doctor wished everybody to witness the dexterity with which he exploited his Scriptural views. Meeting was adjourned till the next evening.

~ end of chapter 6 ~
