

Transactions

of the

Baptist Historical Society.

Original Sin, Feetwashing, and the New Connexion.

THIS letter was from Daniel Dobel, of Cranbrook, Bishop or Messenger of the General Baptists in Kent since 1761, succeeding Thomas Harrison, of Sevenoaks, in that office, and being succeeded in 1783 by his son, Benjamin Dobel, both mentioned in this letter. It was sent to Gilbert Boyce, of Coningsby, Messenger in Lincolnshire since 1753. Boyce was 59 years old, and Dobel about the same age; they were the foremost men in their ancient Connexion.

The occasion of the letter was the publication at Boston of Boyce's "Serious Reply to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley in particular, and to the people called Methodists in general &c," a book of 197 octavo pages. Dobel refers to two publications of his own at Canterbury in 1742, one a twopenny 16 page tract, "The plea for Infants Baptism, impleaded: or, remarks on a piece, Intituled, A Plea for Infants &c," the other a sixpenny tract of 36 pages, "Water Baptism an Ordinance of the Gospel-Church, manifested, by the Doctrine and Practice of the inspired Apostles."

But if this is the occasion of the letter, the date of 1771 shows that something more serious was in the background, really even more serious than Dobel and Boyce yet realised. Their Assembly had long agreed that the practice of washing the feet of the saints, urged in Lincolnshire by Robert Wright in 1653, and in Kent by William Jeffery in 1659, should be left optional, as not specified in Hebrews vi. It had lately been discussing Original Sin, as to which Dobel pleads that there is no such thing, as sin is a matter of environment, not of heredity. The diversity

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of view, and the old-fashioned air of the Assembly, had just provoked a newcomer to head a secession from it, which we may suppose presented itself to these veterans somewhat thus:—

In 1763, Joseph Jefferies, of Gamston, had baptised a Methodist preacher aged 25 called Dan Taylor, whom he introduced to the Lincolnshire Association under Boyce. William Thompson, of Boston, went with him to Yorkshire, and baptised several of his converts forming them into a Church. Taylor next year heard of some Leicestershire preachers who had baptised one another nine years before, but failed to bring them into the Association. He was sent to the General Assembly two or three times, where he met Dobel and the leaders in the South. But he used the opportunity to organise a secession in 1769. This was consummated next year in one of the old General Baptist Churches at London, just when the Assembly was meeting; three Kentish Churches, three Essex, two London, two Lincolnshire Churches were led out, together with Taylor's new Church, while five Leicestershire Churches united. To define their position as against the Assembly, they agreed on Six Articles. (The copy sent to Dobel evidently differed from that printed by Adam Taylor, to which his criticisms are irrelevant. Which is the original is not evident.) The Assembly was so disturbed by the secession that it simply passed one resolution and adjourned:—"The case deliver'd by Mr. John Brittain and signed by others, was read and We are very sorry that any of our Brethren in Union with us in this Assembly established on the principles of general Redemption and on Hebrews 6. 1—2 should make any particular Sentements and Interpretations of Scripture a Plea for their Separation from us—We heartily wish for Union and Harmony and while we express our Determination not to make a Difference of private Opinion a Breach of brotherly love and affection we recommend the Complainants to a more deliberate Consideration of their present proposal and future Conduct, leaving them entirely at Liberty to judge and act for themselves."

If the minutes say little, the Messengers evidently acted in their visitations of the churches. The Assembly had been rent by secession before, and they felt their responsibility. The Church at Bessel's Green had split in 1769 and Dobel was trying to re-unite the seceders under John Stanger with the parent Church under Samuel Benge, as he mentions in a postscript. Now he and Boyce did their best to reclaim the erring churches, and were so successful that every single Church except that at Boston, under William Thompson, was soon re-united with the ancient Assembly. Young Taylor for some years continued to haunt its meetings,

and his presence there came to be remarked upon, as if he were trying to entice away its constituents. He did as a matter of fact win some by degrees, and he quite intercepted all accessions of evangelical Churches, which henceforth cast in their lot with the New Connexion. The influence of William Vidler, as shown in our first number, introduced several Unitarian Churches to the Assembly in after years.

The question of public singing, alluded to in a postscript, was discussed in one or two books between 1785 and 1787 by Boyce and Dan Taylor. Most of the books referred to are in the College Library at Nottingham.

The letter itself, which fills three pages of foolscap closely written, has been placed at our disposal by the kindness of the Rev. George Camp, of Epworth, former pastor of Coningsby, where a portrait of Boyce hangs in the vestry.

Dear Brother, I have read Your Book over twice, and some parts of it several times; and I think it is the most extensively usefull of it's kind that I have seen. Yet there are some things therein; which if you should think proper to have another Impression, I could wish you to alter: vis 1. that you would not use the word rantized so frequently, if at all, for it is looked upon by some as an unkind reflection; they not knowing it to be a Greek word: and is ready to give offence; and therefore—

2. That when you cite anothers words, you would put them in the small character, and not only comma it at the beginning and end; but also at the side. for some I find are trobled to distinguish their words from your's, and this would certainly make it more Intelligable to many readers.

3. That the Short Paragraph page 148. be much alter'd; or intirely left out: for some shew of an argument, may from thence be taken up against you. for if adults may be Baptized, altho ignorant of the great ends thereof; vis, the remission of sins; will not some be ready to say; that they may without the lesser; and so form a plausible argument in favour of

Baby Baptism. which I intreat you to consider of. Besides, if you had inserted the whole texts; which I think should have been done; viz, the words of Ananias to Saul. Acts 22: 16. which no doubt Ananias did to him; I say, if so, it can't well be supposed, that Saul was Ignorant of haveing his sins washed away, in the use of that ordinance: neither, will this hardly bare compareing, with what you say, with respect to the same case: about the middle of the 53 page. for I conclude, that Ananias not only hastened him by saying, and now why tarriest thou, Arise and be Baptized: But also, by his acquainting him, that in so doing, his sins should be washed away,—. And therefore, I can't see you had any just reason to say: 'Prehaps he neither knew, nor thought of his sins, being washed away at that time' [quotation underlined].—as page. 148.

I had once a contest with a Presbyterian, from the Press; who formed his argument in favour in Infant Baptism; from our Lords washing his diciples feet (which he said was as much a Baptism as the other) and Peter being at the same time, Ignorant of his master's design and end therein; and yet, our Lord washed his feet &c. And from hence, He argued in favour of Infants being proper Subjects of Baptism,— And to this Auther, I gave two Public Answers: Both which Bro: Jeffery, hath. The first I call'd, 'The Plea for Infant-Baptism, Impleaded. [title underlined]—The second, Infant Sprinking an unscriptural Doctrine, [title underlined]—And some time after the Publication, I discovered some things not so well expressed, as I could have wished: However, I should like, that you could have the reading of them.

And here my Brother, Permit me to make an application to you: tho I wish there be no Room; or Grounds for it. However, I frequently find you are Justly Arguing; that there ought to be a universal [underlined] obedience to our Lord in whatsoever he

hath Comanded; and not to a part only; but neither less nor more, than what is contained in the Holy Scriptures &c. And that ministers of the Gospel, are likewise to Preach accordingly.—But not to multiple words. Are You my Dear Brother, in the Practice of washing feet, agreeable to John ye 13.—for if you are not; how may your words be Retorted on you with advantage. For did not our Lord do this to his diciples, and therein give them an example [underlined], that they should do as he had done; and this likewise, He inforced on them; by saying; If I your Lord and Master have washed your feet; ye also ought [underlined] to wash one anothers feet.—Pray my Brother, pass another thought on this passage. And may the Divine Spirit of Grace, attend your Deliberation thereon. I have been in the conscientious Practice of it upward of forty years; and can't as yet se, that I could Justifie my self, to live in the neglect thereof. and my being in the Practice of it, hath been of no Small Advantage to me, in my dispute with the Quakers; and likewise, with the above mentioned Presbyterian: they not knowing, that I was in the Practice thereof, thought to have had great advantage of me on that account, in point of Argument: and I let them run out against me their full lenght,—and then I told them, that I had been in the religious practice of it, for many years, together with the Society of Christians, of which I was a member &c. and this put them to a great nonplus, for I returned, their arguments on them, agreeable to the different purposes, for which they had used them against me. The consequence of which was; that the Presbyterian Minister, was, by a vesterry of his Friends, called to an Account for what he had done, and blamed. and the Quakers became silent on that point.—So that herein, I not only discharged my conscience, in a way of obedience to my Lord; but I also find my self, better quallified to vindicate a universal

obedience to all his commands; than otherwise I could have been. Our well Beloved, Deceased, Brother Tho. Harrison, was one with me herein: and we have Journeyed out together on this account; But alas, He is gone; and for ought I know, I am alone as a Messenger on this point. O that I might receive an Answer to this from you; agreeable to the following excellent lines.

1. "I chearfully comply
 "with what my Lord doth say,
 "Let others ask a reason why,
 "My glory is t'obey.

2. "Jesus our Lord, before he took his leave
 "of his Diciples, unto them did give
 "commission, and authority to preach;
 "and all he taught them, they mankind must teach'
 ["must" doubly underlined]

And as to the fall; or, original Sin, and the Depravity of the Human Nature thereby; take my thought as follows. That Adam as he came out of the Hand of God, was not only Innocent, but good and pure; and the principle of God's neither creation, and that he was created a man; not an Infant; so that when it pleased God to cause him to live; he was at once an Inteligent, Rational being; of great understanding &c. and with respect to his Actions was a free Agent; vis, he had power to do; or, to refuse; as he should be disposed, in away of obedience; or, disobedience to God. And had power given him over the Animal Creation. And his being in the Image of God; I conclude consisted in his Noble reasoning powers, understanding, and great capacity; which his Creator indued him with. And in this State he was Happy; haveing Peace in himself, and intimacy, &c with his God.

But in the Image of God, as above expressed; I do not conceive Adam to be equal to the Divine being; No, far from it: but only, that he therein; did in some degree resemble his Creator. But by his Sin, he corrupted; or defiled himself, and his way before God; lost his Innocency, and purity; Incured the Divine displeasure, filled with Dread and fear; his Peace and happiness destroyed; and he overwhelmed with remose and shame. And likewise, himself and off-spring, exposed to Labour, Pains, Sickness and Death. Yet, I do not see that he lost the Image of God; unless, we take in the purity above mentioned, and if so, then indeed, he lost that part of his Creator, I imagine [two words interlined.]. tho, for my self, I am inclined to think; that the noble abilities of the mind, with which Adam was endowed at his Creation; is, that which strickly speaking, is to be understood by the Image of God Gen: 1. v, 26, 27. and with respect to this, I think the Scripture will bare me out, as. Gen: 9. v, 6, where by the Image of God, I take it to mean, the reason, and understanding with which Adam was endued with, at first: and as such is here made use of as an argument, why mankind should not shed mans Blood. But if by the fall, this Image is lost; how could an appeal to that Image, be a consistant argument then; to dissuade mankind from it. And it was because the Image of God was not lost; that I conceive it became so very crimalnal in Cain, to kill his Brother; and that his punishment, was reasonable and Just. Again, James ye 3: v, 9, where the Apostle declares, that men are made in the similitude of God; which is also, spoken in the present tense; and is not to be understood, of a bodily shape: no, but intends the excellent endowments of the Mind, in which man doth bare some likeness; or similitude to his Creator. which to me, sheweth, that mankind hath not lost, but still retains the Image of God; or, that which was so called

Gen: 1: v. 26. and it is to be observed, that here; Image and likeness; in this case are synonymous Terms [no omission, so in original] Likewise, 1. Cor: 11: v, 7 where St: Paul is speaking of Public worship; and given a reason why men should be uncouered, in the exercise thereof; says, forasmuch as he (that is, man) is [doubly underlined, next phrase singly underlined] the Image and Glory of God. which is as much; or, more, than was said of man, when he was first created. Tho by the Image of God in this tex; may be supposed by some, principlly to mean; Superiority & Dominion; Yet, then its implied, that man retains those abilities, and power, to exercise the same, agreeable as at the first Gen: 1: v, 28. Besides, it is very manifest, that man is [interlined] still possessed, with a Rational, and Intilgent mind &c. And notwithstanding the fall; was, and is, a proper subject of a Law; and as such was treated, by an Infinitely wise, and Good God: and if we may Judge by the Law; or Laws, which god hath since the fall: injoined on man; in which are contained, more prohibitions, and Injunctions; than we can find was ever given to Adam in Paradise; I say, if we consider this; we can't well draw an Argument from hence; of our depravety; or incapcity, by the fall, to obey God; no, but rather an Argument quite the reverse. Yet, I belive that as man comes up in life; he is under greater disadvantages, than was the state of Adam before he sinned. for when he was made to live; as I said before, He was a compleat man at once, and in the full possession, and exercise, of those Abilities, which doth so eminently, distinguish the Human-race; and in which state, he was free from those Bad examples, and corrupting vices, to which we are exposed in our childhood state, before our Rational, and reasoning powers, come to there proper exercise and strenght: And we being surrounded with bad axamples while in this state; they are apt to take hold

of us, more or less; viz, Taint and captivate the mind; even, to the soon contracting of bad habites. And on this account since the fall; men may be said [two words interlined] as they come up in life, to be Dead in trespases and [interlined] in sins. and herein it is, that our state is [interlined] far more difficul, than was Adams in is perfect state. But then, this state of weakness; or, disadvantage, is not criminal; nor, yet, the effects of the fall: no, [writing ends abruptly in the middle of a line, the words "turn over" are squeezed below, and a line is drawn across the page three inches from the foot, below which are three separate memoranda, placed here at the end] no, for this was by the wise apointment; or, order of God, before the fall. as Gen: 1: v, 28. and therefore not the effects of it. And it is our thus comeing into the world, and being beset with bad examples, difficulties, and temtations; that we become corrupted, and Depraved, as we advance to adult years. And it is worthy observation, that the Scriptures make not the least mention, of our Noble and Godlike Capacity; or powers of the mind &c. being Marr'd; or Depraved, by Adam's sin: No, tho they frequently do, on account of our own [interlined] Actual Transgressions.—

And I have no Notion, of Adams being our federal-Head; or, Representative, with respect to vertue, and vice: tho he was our Head or first Parent with respect to the Human-race. and he haveing sinned; he according to the sentence became Mortal; and thus Death by sin came into the world. and as in Adam all die; even so in Christ shall all be made alive. And by, or through Christ, (the Promised Seed of Blessing) all our Disadvantages by the fall, are made up, and through Grace; abundantly supplied. From hence, You may se my thoughts on this Point: and that the difference between us; is, that I do not make so much of it, as you seem to do. If I could

have seen; that our commencing Infants &c. had been the effects of the fall; I should then have very different Ideas of this case: But as it is not so; you have above my sentiment in this point, which hath so much perplexed the Christian world, and been the foundation of many errors. and my seeing things in this light; preserves me for that Intricacy; which many Friends labour under. However, I claim no authority, over the faith of my Brethren: But hence, I clearly see the great fitness, and Importance of Solomon's Advice, to Parents; viz, that they be careful, to train up children, in the way they should go.—and likewise, of St: Paul's to Christians; to bring up their Children, in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord.—But if I had thought that our mental Powers: &c had been depraved by the fall; I should have had but little hopes, of being much usefull to my children, in endeavouring to educate them: But should rather, have left [interlined] it to that being, who first endued man with the Noble Abilities, and Powers of the Mind. And, strictly speaking, I can't as yet see, why Adam's sin; should Deprave the Mind of his Posterity; any more than our sins should now Deprave the mind of our Children: For, had it been the natural effects of sin in Parents, to Deprave the mind of their off-spring; to what would the mind of the Human-race; been come to, by this time. And if it is not the natural effects of sin, thus to Deprave &c. it must then, one would think, be [interlined] by the appointment of God: but will such a supposition bare comparing [interlined] with the Divine Perfections: especially, when we consider that there was not the least hint; of any such Depravity, contained in the threatening. Gen: 2: 17. And as the threatening contained no intimation to Adam: that if he sinned; it would destroy: or deprave: his Posterity of the Image of their Creator; and as the Scriptures, speak of our still retaining that Image::

I say, these things considered; I can't see, there is any just grounds to conclude; that the Image of God in man; was, strictly speaking, lost by the fall.—However, let the above be as it will: It is sufficient for us as ministers; to consider that all capable to attend our ministry, are transgressors & mortal &c. and as such, need all the help, which Grace hath provided, and is exhibited, in and by the Gospel.—

I Rest with my Christian Respect to your self & spouse: and to all your Family. and likewise, to all Friends with you; and in particular, to all my young Brethren, in Christ. from your Friend & Brother in the Gospel of Christ

DANL DOBEL

febr ye 14: 1771

[The next four paragraphs are on the same page, irregularly dispersed. The other three paragraphs are on the third page, below the line.]

omitted, my wife joins with me in Christian Respects, to You; and the other part of your self; viz, your spouse &c. my son Ben: is in London, and I have ordered him to pay Mr. Jones.

Satterday ye 16.

two of our Deacons desired to see this, which caused me to miss one Post day.

providence permitting, I may some time send you my Scheme of Gospel Singing. but this must be left as yet, because I have other things to write to you.—

P.S. I have lately had a smart contest, with one of the Methodist ministers; whose name is Wolf [underlined], and we soon came to talk of your [~~crossed out~~,

and written again at once] Book: But he would not answer to any of your arguments, nor take any notice thereof. But I find they have got a Scheme, to render your Labour abortive, as that you have not wrote seriously; but that your Book abounds with sneers &c and therefore they will not take any Notice thereof: and endeavour this way, to prevent others.—he turned me to page 4. and the 3 line, and these words. “ This is bravely [underlined] said indeed Sir [no final quotes, but the whole phrase underlined, as well as the word “bravely”]. Query. whether the commas, are not wrong placed there. whether, it may not answer to have another Impression, and if you think well of it, then to alter those things, which I have took notice of; and of those short seemingly Pert turns, which the methodist make an Handle of: and then I think your work, will be unexceptionable: Thus my Brother, I have dealt with you in all plainness, as I think we ought to do, with each other. I could vent a great many, especially if it was alter’d as above.

S.P. The affair remaining as before Christmas, I can’t give you as yet, that information I thought about this time, to have done.

I thank you for sending me the Six Articles; and I think of them just as you do. and am surprised to think, that Bro: Thompson should once imagine that we could sign them &c. When you se him, do so much as ask him, what it is to be atone’d; and who it is, or was [these words smudged out, and a caret inserted, but no words substituted] that Christ atones.—if he will gives a direct answer to these, I should be glad to know what it was &c Prehaps in my nixt I may send you, a copy of the Letter I sent to the Church at Bed-sels Green, on account of which I was

publickly charged, with being a sower of Discord &c.

The Postage from Cranbrook to London is, 3d. from thence to your Post stage; or, Office; is 4d. so that is is 7d. where the Bag is oppened. and if you do not take the Letters from thence, you can't well avoid paying a penny more. we have had a great sickness, and Death amongst Friends; and I have been much taken up with vissinging, funeral sermons &c otherwise I had wrote before—

[Endorsed] Mr. Gilbert Boyce at Coningsby
near Horn-castle in
Lincolnshire

a single sheet