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## THE LIFE AND WORK OF WILLIAM HETH WHITSITT.

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Human progress has always moved along the highway of sacrifice. Persons, not things, individuals and not institutions must ever bear the brunt of all social and religious advancement. Progress is a hard bargainer. She exacts her price in toil and sweat and blood. The life of William H. Whitsitt exemplifies these truths. His place will always be a unique one in the history of Southern Baptists. In this altogether imperfect sketch of his life and work, we shall try to be sympathetic, discriminating and just.

Near the city of Nashville, in Davidson County, Tennessee, William Heth Whitsitt was born on November 25, 1841. He was accustomed to speak of himself as "a strenuous Baptist;" sometimes adding "I have been a Baptist for three generations." The Whitsitt lineage may be fairly well traced. The Whitsitts—or Whitesides, as they were called in their home-land—came into Amherst County, Virginia, from Ireland, apparently, by way of Pennsylvania, in the year 1741. The family was

of Scotch-Irish blood and in religion was Presbyterian. William Whitsitt, the immigrant, had a grandson, James Whitsitt, by name, who, in the great revival which swept over Virginia in 1785-92, was converted, and in 1789, connected himself with a little Baptist church organized in 1788, with a meeting-place on the Whitsitt farm.\* In the following year, young James Whitsitt, with uncommon zeal as a Christian, decided to remove from his Virginian home to Davidson County, Tennessee; and in due time, became one of the most notable of the Baptist pioneers in the region of the Cumberland Valley.† This remarkable man is said to have possessed unusual native ability, and strong reasoning powers; as a preacher he took great pains in preparation and at times manifested deep feeling and pathos. With all, he was an earnest friend of the early missionary undertakings of his day. A son of this sturdy pioneer preacher was Reuben Ewing Whitsitt. He and Dicey (McFarland) Whitsitt became the parents of the distinguished subject of this article.

Young William Whitsitt's father died when he was a lad of eleven years; and his mother became for a time the chief educative force in his life. The boy's first experience away from home came in his early 'teens. In Wilson County, Tennessee, about midway between Nashville and Lebanon, there lay the quiet little village of Mt. Juliet, the principal attraction of which was the Mt. Juliet High School, then a flourishing academy for boys and girls. Thither William Whitsitt was sent, under the oversight of relatives, the Williamsons, who resided near the village. Here the future professor began to lay well the foundations of his life-long habits of study. In the year 1857, he entered the Union University of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Of this modest educational seat, Doctor Whitsitt later wrote: "It was a small affair,

\*See Whitesides Baptist Church, Beale's *Simple's History of Baptists in Virginia*, also *Am. Historical Magazine and Tenn. Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. IX, 1904.

†*Art. James Whitsitt, Cathcart's Baptist Encyclopedia.*

in the bushes on the outskirts of Murfreesboro, but there was much good learning and good fellowship in that shabby house of three stories." From this institution he was graduated with distinction in 1861, before he had yet reached the age of twenty. A life-long friend, who knew him in the early school-days, says of him: "He was the readiest boy I ever knew in the recitation room. I do not believe he ever made a faulty recitation. I do not remember his ever failing in anything."

The Civil War having begun in the spring of the year of graduation, William Whitsitt enlisted as a private. One of the earliest of his experiences as a soldier may be given in his own words, since they reflect traits which characterized him throughout life: "Early on the morning of November 15, 1862, my colonel sent me an order to saddle up and report to the General. I groomed the horse that I considered superior to anything in the army, and with my shining, morning face and my new Confederate uniform, I saddled in haste and galloped up to see what General Forrest might want of me. I was very proud to receive his commands, and suspected that my large new parchment in the degree of Master of Arts at the poor little university in Murfreesboro, may have been the charm that won his regards. I put spurs to my horse. As I came in sight of him, in order to make a brave show, and stopping at the proper distance, I made what must have been to him a very ridiculous salute. He replied more slowly and then calling me forward, inquired my name, and whether I was acquainted with the region between Nashville and Franklin, remarking that he desired me to ride with him in the capacity of a guide. He complimented me on reporting to him promptly, remarking that if I had been five minutes later the whole army would have been delayed by my negligence." The young private was later promoted to a chaplaincy, and doubtless was quite as faithful in guiding his fellows in the way of Christ as he had been

in conducting his General along the highways of his native county. Doctor Whitsitt, even till his death, took a modest though very manifest pride in his military life, and frequently referred to it with evident enthusiasm. His confederates in arms have testified to his valor and fidelity as a soldier. While on a furlough, it would seem, he was ordained to the gospel ministry at the old Mill Creek Church, of which his grandfather had been pastor; of which he and his people were members, and which he himself was later to serve for a brief period, in 1865-66.

After nearly four years of military experience—about twelve months of which time were spent in Federal prisons, he having been twice captured—young Whitsitt decided to take up again his broken threads of study. In 1866, he entered the University of Virginia, (then as now, doubtless the strongest of the Southern state institutions, and undertook that famous *stiff ticket*, “Latin, Greek and Math.,”—with Moral Philosophy thrown in! The next year, Mr. Whitsitt entered the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, then located in Greenville, S. C., where he remained two sessions. Here he was regarded as a most diligent and even brilliant student and although he seldom gave himself to athletic sports with his fellows, and devoted but little time to social enjoyments, the entire student body admired him for his abilities, and the kindly disposition he showed towards all. At Greenville, his gifts were at once recognized by the faculty. It is said that Dr. Broadus was particularly fond of drawing him out in class-room discussions. His recitations were said to approach perfection. The two years from 1869 to 1871 were spent in study abroad, particularly in \*Leipsic and in Berlin. These years were well improved; for it gave him insight into the historical method of investigation, and confirmed habits of diligence and research. On the student’s return to his native land, he

\* Here the records show he matriculated with the famous professors, Luthardt, Curtius, Lipsius and Tischendorf.

accepted the care of the Baptist church at Albany, Georgia, in February, 1872. In the fall of that year, however, he entered upon the duties of professorship in Ecclesiastical History at the Seminary in Greenville, succeeding Doctor William Williams who had been transferred from this chair to that of Systematic Theology. Biblical Introduction was also assigned to the new professor. Later, however, on Dr. Manly's return to the Seminary in 1879, Dr. Whitsitt exchanged the latter subject for Polemical Theology. This he taught most successfully, till succeeded in this department by the distinguished teacher, Henry Herbert Harris, in the year 1895. Professor Whitsitt's special classes in the reading of theological works in the German language, in the History of Doctrine, and in his Historical Seminary, were popular with the students and highly profitable. It is in the special department of Church History that Doctor Whitsitt's reputation was made, and upon this it must chiefly rest. His distinguished abilities as scholar, teacher and preacher were not slow in being recognized. Mercer University conferred upon him the Degree of Doctor of Divinity in the year 1873. Three schools of learning, (William Jewell, Georgetown and Southwestern) honored him with the degree of Doctor of Laws in 1888.

As a student in his chosen department, Dr. Whitsitt was instructed in the patient, scientific methods of investigation, which characterize the best type of German scholarship. He therefore went to his task with untiring zeal and thoroughness, and came before his students with the freshness and enthusiasm of an original investigator. It has been affirmed that it was not easy for him at the first, accustomed to books through years of studious preparation, to give to his students easily and effectively the result of his studies, or to draw out their best thinking. But experience demonstrated that he had the qualities of a great teacher, giving himself freely to those

under his guidance, and treating them as friends and fellow-searchers after the truth. He continually furnished his pupils the example of painstaking labor in the search for facts, and set young men to thinking, by his originality, his keen insight and his unconventional methods of approach to truth. In the class-room therefore, Professor Whitsitt impressed himself deeply upon his students. A quiet, and sometimes abstracted manner helped to give the impression of fulness of wisdom. When he spoke, he *said something*. Since no mortal man could predict what that something would be, the students were kept continually on the alert. His lectures were full of *meaty* observations upon men and movements. Little *asides* which indicated at once close familiarity with his theme and ample mother-wit, were delightful characteristics of his style. Originality marked his modes of thought as well as of expression. A dry, unconscious humor enlivened class-room discussions. His students had confidence in him, because he impressed them as one who had not only patiently investigated his subject and obtained the facts, but had thought profoundly upon their meaning. He loved not only history, but the philosophy of history. In pointing out the significance of movements and of men, Doctor Whitsitt was at his best. With him history was philosophy teaching by example. He did not accept views of events simply because they were generally credited. In Baptist history he understood full well that few, if any, of the early historians had done the Baptists justice; their opponents from lack of sympathy, their friends for want of critical and sound historical method. Dr. Whitsitt advanced some opinions that were not held by other students in the same field. Boldness and independence were marked elements in his character as student and as teacher. In one of his encyclopedia articles, he gives, and doubtless justly, to Doctor Henry C. Vedder, in his *Short History of the Baptists*, the credit for first applying the scientific method to the writing of

Baptist history. But he himself had been using that method in his class-room lectures for many years. There was a quaintness about Dr. Whitsitt's style, both as lecturer and as writer that had a charm all its own. Unexpected turns of expression, the occasional use of an unusual word, or the common word in an uncommon sense, gave his style a freshness, and a character which sometimes approached the picturesque. These traits appeared in his preaching and in his occasional papers quite as much as in his lectures to students. Nor did his manner of speech appear to be a mannerism; still less a trick of rhetoric. The style was the man. The use of quaint and unusual words, in serious discussion, sometimes caused unpoetic minds, or those not familiar with the man, to misinterpret his meaning; but to many his utterances brought unfailing delight.

Dr. Whitsitt possessed keen literary appreciation. In his student days he had given much attention to the classics. Horace, Juvenal and Virgil were his frequent companions. He kept his heart alert on the affectional side by reading the poets of the heroic age and through fondness for the Romanticism of the closing days of the eighteenth century. The breadth of his taste for poetry may be discerned in the fact of his love for writers so separated in time and spirit as Horace, reclining at the table of Mæcenas, and Bobby Burns, barefoot in the furrows at Ayr. Among his choicest occasional lectures was that upon Robert Burns, which was frequently called for by students and societies of cultured people.

As a preacher, Dr. Whitsitt showed much of that same originality of thought and expression which marked his lectures. He had not the readiness in *extempore* speech which characterized many of his brethren, and so he preferred to read his formal discourses. These however, were always full of high thought and tender feeling; and while he was never a popular preacher in the ordinary sense, the more thoughtful people rejoiced to hear him.

The Seminary students were glad when it was announced that he would preach in one of the city pulpits. While the Seminary had in its faculty a number of men highly gifted as preachers yet a distinguished alumnus asserts: "I came to look upon him as the most fecund and the most fecundating man in the Seminary. His sermons moved me as did the sermons of no other member of the faculty, although they were read in the monotone all who heard him will recall." There were times when he produced an impression upon his hearers that was truly profound. A former \*colleague writing after a lapse of nearly forty years thus recalls a single occasion: "A sermon that he preached in Greenville on the words, 'Mighty to save' (Isa. 63:1) a description of situations selected from various periods of Jewish and Christian history, was a powerful exhibition of the inspiring influence of trust in God. His literary charm never disguised his seriousness of thought." He always delivered his message with a fervor which though not outwardly demonstrative, was always deep and unctious. For many years he taught a Bible class in the Walnut Street Church, Louisville, which was largely attended by men and women of the city and by interested students, who were glad to sit at his feet both on week-days and on Sundays.

Professor Whitsitt was not a man of affairs in the ordinary sense of that term. He had not cultivated men in the widely varied activities of life; and yet he was systematic and accurate in mastering administrative details. It was said of him that each year he would know the names, home addresses, and other such facts concerning the entire student body; and that he kept up with the locations and the labors of the alumni to an extent that was truly remarkable. His successful management, for a number of years, of the "Students' Fund," and his careful superintendency of New York Hall, (once the

\* Prof. Crawford H. Toy of Harvard University.



main building of the Seminary) gave evidence of practical skill. On the decease of John A. Broadus in 1895, the Trustees elected Dr. Whitsitt to the presidency of the Seminary. Under his administration the number of students reached the highest mark but one in the history of the institution having advanced continually, till an unfortunate and prolonged controversy (1896-99) began to hamper for a time the Seminary's peace. Both faculty and students were devotedly attached to their president; and their affection grew deeper in all the dark days of uncertainty and conflict. When the students spoke of "Uncle Billy" it was with proud affection. They admired the practical wisdom of Boyce. Their minds were quickened and their hearts stirred by the rich resourcefulness of Broadus. It was Dr. Whitsitt's inimitable personality, his genuine, kindly heart that led them captive.

As an investigator of facts, Dr. Whitsitt was independent to the point of boldness; and in maintaining his conclusions, firm to the last ditch. In matters of administrative policy he sometimes distrusted his judgment, and deferred to others. Because of his modesty and native cautiousness, some judged him timid. Because of his sincerity and openness of heart he could never seem at his best in the midst of more aggressive men. He was a master in times of peace; but for storms, he had no genius. It was strange indeed, that one of the most unassertive and peace-loving of men should have been one of the greatest of storm-centers in Southern Baptist life.

Carlyle made much of the historical significance of the individual life. With him history was biography writ large. Many others, like Lord Acton, affirm that if we would read history aright it is necessary to get behind individuals to the thought currents—the movements and counter-movements—that make and unmake men. The life and work of William H. Whitsitt cannot be properly judged, nor even understood, apart from forces which

had been at work among Southern Baptists for half a century. It is for this reason that a treatment of Doctor Whitsitt's life would be altogether incomplete, even unintelligible, without some reference to the unfortunate contention which bears his name.

It is possible that we are still too near the controversy to view it in its true perspective. Only Southern Baptists could appreciate its significance; and many of them doubtless, but partially. Christians elsewhere wondered what it all meant; and even when it was explained, they stood amazed that such fuel should have kindled so vast a conflagration. Strangely enough, while a part of the brotherhood seemed in the midst of a Titanic struggle, which was shaking them from the center to the circumference of their territory, it was a contest upon issues which appeared to the Baptists of the rest of the world to be of no practical interest whatever. This is all the more strange when it is remembered that the more aggressive party in the conflict sincerely believed that fundamental principles were at stake. Doctor Jesse B. Thomas, then Professor of Church History in Newton Theological Institution, in the midst of the now famous discussion, wrote:

“The historic question opened by Dr. Whitsitt seems to me perfectly legitimate and fairly entitled to candid investigation. I do not sympathize with, nor can I easily understand the expression of resentment because of a frank expression of opinion upon a matter of dry and remote fact, having, in the opinion of most Baptists no serious present significance. Baptists, of all people, are pledged by their own principles to encourage outspoken loyalty to conviction on all issues touching the truth of history as well as of Scripture. He who announces a conclusion which he knows to be novel, and suspects will be unpalatable, to his immediate constituents, is entitled to respect, as having shown the ‘courage of his convictions.’ He has virtually challenged criticism, and in-

voked research from which no harm can come, except to error.'\*"

In order to understand all the causes which were at work to produce the long and painful debate which finally terminated in Doctor Whitsitt's withdrawal from the Seminary, it is quite necessary to go further back than the period of Dr. Whitsitt's connection with that institution, or even of its founding; for it is quite clear to the student of events that Dr. Whitsitt was the occasion rather than the real cause of the unpleasant experience through which Southern Baptists passed a decade and a half ago.

The fact is, almost since the days of the apostles there have been two types of Christians: those who make much of the outward and historical connections, and those upon whom such things sit lightly, because of their emphasis upon the purely spiritual relationships. Rome has been the most conspicuous representative of the former tendency; while the independent bodies, among whom were our Baptist progenitors before the Reformation, are examples of the latter. Unfortunately, though perhaps not unnaturally, a like line of cleavage came to exist within the independent and reforming bodies. For example, among the English Baptists of the seventeenth century, these two distinct emphases were found; the one party\*\* setting much store by unbroken succession of baptismal administration from the apostles, the other† regarding such succession as quite immaterial, as related either to personal obedience, or to the existence of a true church of Christ. It will be recalled, too, that Roger Williams became imbued with the 'succession' doctrine and after a few months he left the Baptist fellowship because he concluded that the succession had become

\* The Western Recorder—republished in pamphlet, *Both Sides*, Louisville, 1897.

\*\* The "Old Men," led by Spillsburg.

† The "New Men," led by Kiffin.

hopelessly lost in the vicissitudes of the centuries; while others of his party apparently cared for none of these things. Among Southern Baptists these two styles of churchmanship had made their appearance. A New England contribution to the Baptists of the Southwest was Doctor J. R. Graves, who was born in Chester, Vermont, in the year 1820. He was a man of considerable intellectual ability, of some learning, and of unusual polemic skill. Through his journal, *The Tennessee Baptist*, by his books, and by eloquent platform utterances, Dr. Graves laid uncommon stress upon the strictest regularity of church order and of the administration of the Christian ordinances. The argument ran somewhat thus: Only those can be regarded as true ministers of the gospel who have, under God, been so authorized by a local church. A church is a body of baptized (immersed) believers. It therefore follows that no Pedo-Baptist organization is a church in the scriptural sense; hence no Pedo-Baptist body can give authority to preach. From this, it follows that Pedo-Baptist preachers can not be recognized as gospel ministers. Baptism administered by them, therefore, is not valid, since they themselves have not been baptized, nor have they any authority to baptize others. This position seemed logically to demand an unbroken succession of churches and of ordinance, that regularity might be preserved; and easily led also to a denial of the doctrine of the invisible, spiritual church. The Kingdom of God is composed, according to this view, of visible (Baptist) churches, rather than of all the saints of every age. The exponents of this view naturally felt the need for an unbroken succession of Baptist churches going back to the apostles; and supported their contention with vigorous arguments, mainly exegetical; although there were attempts made, more or less praiseworthy, in the domain of church history. This type of teaching came to be known as "Old Landmarkism;" and many Southern Baptists, notably in Tennes-

see, Kentucky and the Southwest were deeply impressed by it, having been educated in its tenets by such able champions as A. C. Dayton, J. M. Pendleton and J. R. Graves. The Seminary, though conciliatory, had never taken the side of Landmarkism.

In further explanation, it should be remarked that the beginnings of the Baptist cause in the South were the result of the labors of deeply pious, but for the most part, of unlettered men. Education and culture, however, had rapidly been leavening the lump. Yet there remained a considerable number of those who had never been thorough-going advocates of education, particularly of an educated ministry. These had never entertained great love for the Seminary, and some were not averse to any occasion for adverse criticism. It should also be remembered that the early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the interaction of forces, which, in the South, had not been entirely spent. Many Southern Baptists who had not gone with the primitive Baptist schism of 1835, but maintained nominal affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention, were never genuinely missionary in spirit. The Southern Seminary, from its establishment in 1859, became the most effective single agency for the spread of both the educational and the missionary impulse among Southern Baptists. It was intended to, and constantly sought to, serve the entire Southern Baptist brotherhood. Its founders, therefore, had adopted a policy of conciliation toward all classes, in order that it might the better be the servant and helper of all. During the days of Boyce, Broadus and Manly, criticism directed against the Seminary or its professors from any of these sources, had as a rule been kept within bounds, though often it was outspoken and severe; much diplomacy being necessary to prevent open breach from time to time. When Doctor Whitsitt was elected to the presidency in 1895, the last of the original faculty had passed away, and naturally, their masterful personal in-

fluence in a measure, passed with them. Besides, Dr. Whitsitt was no diplomat, and he had scant sympathy for the doctrines held dear by some of the brethren—notably those to which we have just adverted. Applying rigid methods to the study of Church History, he did not always find the facts in accordance with what these Baptists would have wished; and he made no apparent effort to apologize for the facts as he read them, nor to interpret them in the interest of any particular exegetical or ecclesiastical theory.

We now turn from historical causes to the occasion of the controversy. Here, it is necessary to go back to the year 1880. In this year Dr. Whitsitt, after months of careful investigation of English Baptist history from documentary sources, chiefly in the British Museum and the Bodleian Library, became deeply impressed with the fact that Baptist history had been treated most inadequately; and that Baptists themselves were signally lacking in information as to their own notable history. It became a conviction, which ripened into a passion, that Baptists should be induced to study their own past. He deliberately set to work to prod them into such an investigation. One of the methods he chose by which to accomplish this end proved a mistake; at least it was destined to play an important role in his subsequent experience. Knowing that the widely read religious journal, *The Independent*, of New York, through its editor, Dr. William Hayes Ward, took much interest in Church History; that the journal had a wide circulation among scholarly people and was denominationally independent, Dr. Whitsitt chose to prepare a few articles for that weekly upon some points in English Baptist history. The first contribution was a very brief \*review, or rather criticism, in a single paragraph, of three separate studies in the history of Baptism, by three distinguished Baptists

\* *The Independent*, June 24, 1880.

(Doctors Burrage, Cathcart and Potter) which had but recently appeared. At this period the editor of the *Congregationalist*, Dr. Henry M. Dexter, had also been writing articles which bore directly or indirectly upon English and American Baptists. Dr. Ward of *The Independent*, knowing (apparently from the aforementioned review of Burrage and others) that Dr. Whitsitt had fresh information upon the period under discussion, secured several articles from his pen.\* In these, it was maintained that there is no evidence that English Baptists practiced immersion, prior to the year 1641; and also that Roger Williams was probably sprinkled, and not immersed in 1639, as is generally believed. These articles appeared as editorials. Dr. Whitsitt's reasons for using this method of publishing his views may be found in the fact that he realized that if the author were known, criticism would be directed against himself and perhaps unjust criticism against the institution with which he was connected. He wished the questions involved to be considered upon their merits. He chose to put his views in the form of a challenge, as from an outsider, in order to incite Baptists to a profounder interest in the study of their own history. Both the criticism which he attempted to avoid and the deeper interest which he desired to arouse in Baptist history, eventually came to pass. Fifteen years or more elapsed however, before any notice of the points at issue was taken in the South. In the year 1895, Dr. Whitsitt prepared for Johnson's *Cyclopedia*, of whose staff he was a member, the article on the Baptists. Here, over his own signature, Dr. Whitsitt presented the same views of English Baptist history, and of the baptism of Roger Williams he had earlier expressed (though not over his own signature), in *The Independent*. Some months later, Doctor Henry M. King, then pastor of the First Baptist Church of Providence, the church founded by Williams, took occa-

\* *Ibid.*, Sept. 2, Sept. 9, Oct. 7, 1880.

sion, first through the weekly press,\* and then in a "Brief Account of the Origin and Early History of the First Baptist Church in Providence,"† to make a spirited reply to Whitsitt's theory concerning the baptism of Roger Williams. In the discussion which followed, Professor Whitsitt, in justice to himself, acknowledged the authorship of the Independent editorials; in this way establishing priority to Henry M. Dexter or to any other, in presenting the new discoveries in English and American Baptist history. Some of the Baptist papers of the South took the matter up, and began to criticise Doctor Whitsitt severely, not only for his views on these historical subjects, but for his method of promulgating them. Associations,—local and state bodies—as well as numerous individuals, were drawn into the dispute. Dr. Whitsitt rarely undertook any reply; but his critics were aggressive. Throughout the Southern Baptist Convention, leaders took sides, and frequently there was shown much depth of feeling, and here and there was engendered no little bitterness.

There were those who urged that the Seminary's president should resign. Associations passed resolutions of condemnation, and threatened the withholding of support from the institution. One may well hesitate to attempt an analysis of the controlling motives of all those who made protest; for what was true of some, was certainly not true of others. Of course, those who regarded historical continuity as essential to the Baptist position or to the integrity of Scripture, conceived that vital issues were involved. Others thought that no loyal denominationalist of the straightest sect—such as they conceived the president of their Seminary ought to be—could have brought forward facts, or alleged facts, which appeared to them so unfavorable to Baptist composure, and that too, in a tone, as it were, of an antagonist. It

\* *The Examiner*, Mar. 26, 1896.

† "The Mother Church," *Am. Bap. Pub. Soc.*, 1896.



was definitely declared that one would surely not undertake to prove things to be true, unless one *wished* them to be true. As a scientific historian, this line of argument naturally failed to impress Dr. Whitsitt, who had no particular reverence for myths, nor even for time-honored traditions, if the facts appeared to him to be against them. For him it was quite enough that the tenets of Baptists should find their sanction in the New Testament example and teaching, whatever might or might not have been true through the uncertain centuries of erratic historical practise. That Doctor Whitsitt did not regard a single Baptist principle as in any wise in jeopardy by his historical opinions may be seen by the following clear-cut statement from his pen: "This is purely a question of modern historical research. It does not affect any item of Baptist principle or practice. These are all established by the Bible. Our watchword for generations has been, 'The Bible and the Bible alone, the religion of Baptists.' It is now too late in the day to alter our views and set forth any new battle-cry. . . . . 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid!'"\* Dr. Whitsitt was never a foe to 'succession,' but held that it could not be historically proved, and that it was quite unnecessary that it should be. That he had no such hostility may be shown by an excerpt from the article 'Baptists' in Johnson's Universal Cyclopaedia. In discussing the attempt of certain English Baptists to secure 'valid' (historically unbroken), baptism, he wrote: "If the Rhynsburgers introduced immersion only in the year 1619, it might be claimed that their succession was a mere myth, and that Blount did not obtain what he went so far to seek. That question has been investigated in a special treatise by de Hoop Scheffer. . . in which he suggests that immersion had been fetched out of Poland to Rhynsburg by Joannes Geesteranus. From the Polish Anabaptists it might be traced back to Switz-

\* "A Question in Baptist History," p. 56.

erland and the Reformation. Hence the friends of succession are not so hardly bestead as might first appear. Their case is stronger than some are aware who oppose their claims.”

There were many who refused to make the issue with President Whitsitt either upon historical, or upon denominational grounds, but kept to the front what they regarded as grievous mistakes of practical judgment on his part. Some were even willing to remove the Seminary's president from office for the sake of peace, disregarding the issues involved. On the other hand there was a large number of noble and intelligent men who felt that to yield to this demand would be an intolerable blow to the principle of freedom for the teacher. Indeed, many conceived this to be really the paramount issue in the contest.

It may be affirmed that Doctor Whitsitt himself saw two principles involved. First, what we may term the *material* principle. That is, Should Southern Baptists reverse the historic position, and deny the doctrine of the church universal, invisible and spiritual, in the interest of the theory of a visible church *succession*? This doctrine of the invisible church was that with which the forefathers made reply to Rome's excommunications and anathemas; saying, “We belong to the church universal into which we enter by faith, and from which you cannot drive us by fire. The strongest, the essential, ties are spiritual, not formal; the important connections are internal, not historical.” Second, there was involved, as Dr. Whitsitt saw it, what may be termed a *formal* principle, namely, Shall a teacher be free to investigate, and to teach what he finds to be true; or shall history be decided by a show of hands, and facts be made to conform to doubtful ecclesiastical theories? To Doctor Whitsitt, these two issues were momentous, and for their right decision he was willing to stand—and if necessary, to fall. To those who opposed these two principles he was prepared like Paul, to give place, no, not for an hour.

For three years the Seminary trustees declined to remove the president from office. It must be said to their credit, though strong pressure was brought to bear, for three years, they refused to hamper a professor's freedom, so long as he kept within the teaching of the Scriptures and the Seminary Articles to which each instructor assents when he enters upon his duties. It was Doctor Whitsitt who took the initiative by sending in his resignation as president and as a professor—in the interest of peace. Even then a respectable minority were in favor of rejecting the resignation, in the interest of freedom of teaching. But Doctor Whitsitt was not skilled in the art of popular appeal. He had no fondness for ecclesiastical politics and therefore felt a great burden roll from his shoulders when his resignation was accepted, and his retirement became a fact in the spring of 1899.

We may now ask with propriety, What was Dr. Whitsitt's influence upon Southern Baptists, and what contribution did he make to their life?

We reply, he enabled them better to understand themselves. During the controversy they more clearly perceived, at once their strength and their weakness. They came out of it all more determined than ever to keep upon the main road, and to attend to the things best worth while. In so far as the opposition came from foes to organized missionary and educational progress, it was the more clearly seen that there could be no compromise. The great hosts of Southern Baptists became more determined than ever to lay aside divisive issues and press forward to the conquest of the Kingdom. They discovered that prosperity and progress lie along the road of good-will, of mutual respect and forbearance. Side issues can never again thrust themselves to the center of the stage. Southern Baptists have now grown too strong, and too knowing, again to countenance such a dispute, even if so able leadership could again be mustered for such an enterprise—which is itself quite improbable.

The type of thought from which much of the opposition drew its inspiration has passed, or is rapidly passing; for it fails to adjust itself to the progress of Christ's mind and spirit in modern life.

Thousands of Southern Baptists were made to see more clearly the difference between divine Scripture and human interpretations of it; between the divine in history and human interpretations of it; to see that the God of history and the God of the Bible can never be contradictory; but that *interpretations* of Scripture and the *interpretations* of events may very often conflict. They discern more distinctly than before, that the interpretation of a \*metaphor and the interpretation of a †date may both be fallible; but the truth in both fields is absolutely secure; that our little systems have their day, but God's Word and his works are not only sure, but harmonious. They know that it is not opinions concerning historic facts which make Baptists, and that these cannot unmake Baptists; that historical links do not authenticate, nor their absence destroy, a New Testament church.

Progress among any people seldom proceeds along the whole line with equal tread. Milton makes the tawny lion, in creation, struggle, "pawing to set free his hinder parts." That a body so numerous as Southern Baptists, should not discover its power in all its parts and resources at once, is not strange. This contest was a struggle to go forward on all fours. The Greeks had a proverb, *Τό πάθος ιατρός ἐστι*, "Suffering is a physician." Disease is nature's attempt to attain health, a kind of defensive reaction against harmful substances. Influences had come into the Baptist body that were incompatible with the historic Baptist genius and life. The Whitsitt controversy was a painful spasm to restore to the organism the equilibrium of health.

To Dr. Whitsitt must be given the credit of advancing through scientific methods the spirit of scholarly re-

\* e. g. Matt. 16:18.

† e. g. A. D., 1641.

search. The controversy itself caused many who had hitherto taken little interest in their denomination's history to study it. Some who had been interested before, investigated Baptist origins afresh; and a number of valuable articles and monographs appeared. It was a day of no little light as well as heat. The Scriptures were examined anew for fresh light upon the questions at issue. The doctrines of the Kingdom, of the church, visible and invisible, were carefully and laboriously scrutinized—from the *ἐκκλησία* of the Septuagint to “the church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.” The rock upon which Christ once built His church threatened to become a rock upon which his churches were now to be split. But the result of the protracted discussion, through the press and otherwise, was, we firmly believe, a somewhat clearer view of the truth, on the part of the masses of the Baptists. The path along which our people have come was seen in clear-light, and the road along which they must go, if they would journey safely, was made more sure. The result has been that Southern Baptists feel more secure in their solidarity than ever before in their history. Henceforth they can be franker in considering their problems, and can look one another more fully in the face.

The Seminary, too, emerged from the contest stronger and surer of itself than ever in its history. Its professors will continue to breathe such an atmosphere of freedom as consecrated learning must demand. The choice of Dr. Whitsitt's successors in the presidency and also in the chair of Church History—indeed, every selection since—has given evidence that the trustees and the convention mean that this honored school shall enjoy that type of liberty which Baptists have always prized, and in the exercise of which truth can alone flourish.

Much then, of Doctor Whitsitt's work will abide. As to the correctness of his interpretations of history, in many points we yet await further light. The preponder-

ance of authority is not with him in the matter of Roger Williams; upon the much discussed question of the English Baptists and 1641, however, the recognized scholarship of the day is with him in substantial agreement.

It remains for us to speak of the contribution of Dr. Whitsitt to the literature of his chosen subject. He was truly a diligent workman. The very large number of manuscripts which he left are a mute, but powerful witness to his untiring labor as student and investigator. One may well wonder why he published so little in comparison with the amount of scholarly work he performed. The answer may be found doubtless, in the fact that his researches were not of the sort to be popularly demanded; and to have published extensively would have required large financial means. Besides, much of his work was upon disputed points, and Dr. Whitsitt was not fond of controversy. Much that he did publish moreover, seemed destined to awaken sharp criticism.

His "Origin of the Disciples of Christ" which appeared in 1888, as "A contribution to the centennial of the birth of Alexander Campbell," raised a storm of protest from the Church of the Disciples and a vigorous reply was made, in a volume by George W. Longan, a Disciple. The tone of the volume on the "Origin of the Disciples" was altogether too polemical to carry the greatest weight as a contribution to history; its sub-title was cutting, and many besides the Disciples candidly thought that the author failed to establish his thesis; namely, that the Disciples of Christ were an "offshoot" of the Sandemanians of Scotland; though the Campbells' large indebtedness to that sect was clearly and unmistakably presented.

Among Dr. Whitsitt's other important treatises are "The Rise of Infant Baptism" (1878), "The History of Communion Among Baptists" (1880), "The Relation of Baptists to Culture" (Inaugural 1872); *Life and Times*

of Judge Caleb Wallace (1888), \**Annals of a Scotch-Irish Family—The Whitsitts of Nashville, Tenn.*” (1904), “Episode in Immersionist History (Presbyterian Quarterly 10, 1896), “A Question in Baptist History (1897), “The Genealogy of Jefferson Davis” (1908). Among his published addresses are that on the \*\*Fiftieth Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1895, and that before the Baptist Congress in London† on “National Primary Education,” 1905.

Among his unpublished manuscripts was a very extensive study of the Mormon Church, which he bequeathed to the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. He also left in manuscript a valuable discussion of “Baptist Principles,” which, it is hoped may even yet be published.

After Dr. Whitsitt’s retirement from the presidency of the Seminary in 1899, he spent a year in rest and study, and was elected to be James Thomas professor of philosophy in Richmond College, Virginia, succeeding the lamented William D. Thomas, in June, 1901. Dr. Whitsitt had long loved Virginia. Here had been the home of his ancestors, and here a part of his training for life had been received. Here he had earned many warm friendships. The Baptists of Virginia, during the disquieting years of discussion had been particularly sympathetic and loyal toward him and the Seminary. It seemed to him therefore a providential opportunity to continue the use of his gifts as a teacher and friend of young manhood, when this chair was offered him in Virginia. He entered upon his work at the College, with the same scrupulous fidelity that had characterized his life in the Seminary. Beginning at the age of sixty years, it would not be probable that he could enjoy the teaching of philosophy as he had loved the study of history. And

\* *Am. Historical Magazine and Tenn. Historical Society Quarterly*, Nashville, Vol. IX, 1904, pp. 58, 113, 231, 352.

\*\* “A Retrospect,” *The Southern Bap. Pulpit*, Phila., 1895.

† *Proceedings*, London, 1905.

yet his duties and his students were upon his heart. His personal interest in the student body is shown in that it was his custom to visit every young man in the College at least once during the session; and it is said, he never failed to be able to report promptly upon such students as were assigned to his kindly oversight—whether his younger colleagues were ready with their reports or not. Upon his resignation the students showed their high regard and affection by the hearty presentation to their retiring professor, of a handsome loving cup. In Sunday school and religious work in the Grove Avenue Church, Richmond, Doctor Whitsitt demonstrated his ardent, though unaffected piety, and endeared himself to a large circle of his fellow-Christians in Virginia. During his residence in that State he continued by his active personal influence and by occasional papers, to contribute to the preservation of Baptist history in which he had a life-long interest. It was he who has been credited with first making the suggestion in 1905, which issued in the Bunyan Memorial Window, lately dedicated in Westminster Abbey.

A smaller man might have become embittered and shown grievous disappointment in having the current of his life abruptly turned into a different channel. It was not so with Professor Whitsitt. Grieved and disappointed doubtless he was, but not one whit sour nor vindictive. Resigned in spirit, humble and gracious of soul, he continued to love his brethren and, to the end, was ready to serve. He prayed, and fervently believed that what had happened to him would turn out for the furtherance of the gospel. The writer of this sketch was casually thrown with him soon after the severance of his official relations with the Seminary. He remarked, "The day was never brighter for Southern Baptists. I have much faith in them. They have a noble future." He had caught the spirit of the Apostle who wrote: "Notwithstanding...every way Christ is preached and I there-



in do rejoice yea, and will rejoice." And it may be added that some of the kindest things said about him when life's day had closed, were generously penned, or spoken, by those who had, a decade before, opposed him zealously.

An account of Doctor Whitsitt's life would surely be incomplete, were no mention made of his devoted wife whose helpfulness and loyal comradeship were important factors in his labors. The woman of his heart was born, Miss Florence Wallace, of Woodford County, Kentucky, who became Mrs. Whitsitt on October 4, 1881. Though never of rugged health Mrs. Whitsitt was thoroughly sympathetic with her husband's life-tasks, lovingly supported him in all his labors, and tenderly soothed his last moments with her devoted care. A beloved son and fond daughter also survive him.

After Professor Whitsitt resigned the chair at Richmond College, in the spring of 1910, he felt, through failing health, that his work was done. He began calmly to set his house in order and look for the end. He planned the disposal of important historical papers; engaged his biographer, selected his monument, planned his funeral, left tender words of love, and yielded up his spirit. On January 20, 1911, he went to be with Him whom he loved with soulful passion, and whom he served with unflinching zeal and loyalty.

He was as gentle as a woman, as guileless as a Nathaniel, as devout as a Francis, but in matters of conscience and conviction, he was a Luther. When there was suggested to him the possibility of yielding upon a certain matter which he esteemed to be one of principle, he replied, "I'd die *dead* first." This was the man. Said he, in his last published paper, writing of Jefferson Davis, for whom he had great personal admiration, "He endured for many years a great burden. . . . of sorrow with manly dignity and courage. There was displayed the excellent religion of his fathers, finer, perhaps, than you and I possess." No, not finer than the writer of

those lines himself evinced; for he bore with patience and calm dignity the strange wrenching of his life from its chosen course. He carried his grief so patiently that few were aware he bore it. But love clasped grief and grief was drowned. His life was no anti-climax. The Christian graces were at their best in the closing years. Character is the standard of greatness; and he who in life, like the great Duke, had sought but "Duty's iron crown," already being offered, went to receive with rejoicing the crown of righteousness which the Righteous Judge has promised those that love Him.