

The Dissent and Nonconformity Series

Number 5



The History and Antiquities of the Dissenting Churches

Volume 1 of 4

Walter Wilson



Non dilexerunt animam suam usque ad mortem.

The Latin, *Non dilexerunt animam suam usque ad mortem*, translates, "... they loved not their lives unto the death." Revelation 12:11

On The Cover: *Massacres at Salzburg* took place in 1528 when Prince-Archbishop Cardinal Matthaus Lang of Salzburg issued mandates sending police in search of Anabaptists. Many were captured and killed. This engraving illustrates the sufferings and sacrifices these Dissenters endured when their government, in conjunction with established religion, attempted to coerce and impose uniformity of religious belief. Hence, this picture is a reminder of the cost of religious liberty and the ever-present need to maintain the separation of church and state. We use this art to represent our Dissent and Nonconformity Series.

THE
HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES
OF THE
Dissenting Churches

Vol. I

THE
HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES
OF THE
Dissenting Churches
AND
MEETING HOUSES,
IN
LONDON, WESTMINSTER, AND SOUTHWARK;
INCLUDING THE
LIVES OF THEIR MINISTERS,
FROM
THE RISE OF NONCONFORMITY TO THE PRESENT TIME.

WITH
AN APPENDIX
ON THE
ORIGIN, PROGRESS, AND PRESENT STATE
OF
CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY WALTER WILSON,
OF THE INNER TEMPLE.

VOL. I.

London:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR;
SOLD BY W. BUTTON AND SON, PATERNOSTER ROW;
T. WILLIAMS AND SON, STATIONERS' COURT; AND
J. CONDER, BUCKLESBURY.

1808.



he Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc.

NUMBER ONE IRON OAKS DRIVE • PARIS, ARKANSAS 72855

Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth.
-- *Psalms 60:4*

Reprinted in 2006

by

THE BAPTIST STANDARD BEARER, INC.

No. 1 Iron Oaks Drive
Paris, Arkansas 72855
(479) 963-3831



THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM

lux lucet in tenebris

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

ISBN# 1579786154

PREFACE.

WHEN an author appears before the bar of the public, he puts himself in a situation of great responsibility, which is increased in proportion as his facts or opinions are liable to be disputed. A writer of history should be, above all other people, an attentive observer of human nature. Facts derive their principal value from their application to character. Revolutions in empires may become important by an exhibition of the baser passions ; but they are only valuable in as much as they conduce to the welfare of the people. So, in the history of individuals, those traits of character are to be pointed out, and chiefly insisted upon, which are calculated to subserve the benefit of society. Perhaps no subject requires to be treated with so much judgment as ecclesiastical history ; and yet there is no branch of knowledge that has been more shamefully perverted to the baleful purposes of priestcraft and superstition. The history of the Church is any thing rather than a history of Christianity. Clothed in the venerable garb of antiquity, the grossest delusions have been imposed upon the understanding ; and the greatest crimes have been sheltered behind the presumed sacredness

of the clerical character. It is only of late years that the veil has been drawn aside, and that pretended saints have been shown in their true colours. In the hands of a skilful writer, endowed with judgment, and acquainted with the spirituality of religion, ecclesiastical history is a topic that might be treated upon with much interest, as affording a variety of incidents that are calculated both for amusement and instruction. Much has been done towards clearing away the rubbish of former writers by Mr. Milner; but a church-history of our own country, written upon really Christian principles, is still a *desideratum*.

It is quite natural that popish writers should bend the facts of ecclesiastical history to support the vast fabric of clerical dominion, so essential to the existence of their church; but that Protestant writers should have fallen into the same error is not a little extraordinary. Unfortunately, the subject has been handled principally by persons who have been more concerned to exalt the dignity of the priesthood than to promote the kingdom of Christ. Hence the insufferable pride, the sectarian bigotry, and the malicious representations of churchmen, when they are writing concerning those who do not belong to their communion. In support of these charges, we need only refer to the writings of Heylin, Collier, Wood, Echard, Kennett, and a thousand more that might be named, who, whatever may be their merits as valiant cham-

pions for the hierarchy, failed in the principal requisites as historians. It is the record of christian principles, not the prosperity of a sect, that constitutes the beauty of ecclesiastical history.

The attainment of truth is the only legitimate end of history. If destitute of this ingredient, it may delude mankind, but cannot instruct them; it may serve the interests of a party, but strikes at the foundation of religion and virtue. To arrive at truth, we must divest ourselves of sectarian prejudices, weigh well the opinions of others, and be diffident of our own judgment. True wisdom is always allied to modesty; and whilst it becomes us to be decided in our own opinions, a recollection of human fallibility will teach us a lesson of candour to others. As there is hardly any thing more destructive to the peace of society, so there is nothing more contemptible than bigotry. History is full of its evil consequences, and we heartily despise those narrow minds in which it was an inhabitant. In denouncing this disturber of the christian world, truth makes no distinction of sects. The mind of an Edwards was no less deformed than that of a Wood, and whilst we use their facts, we reject their opinions, and pity their bigotry.

A difference of opinion as to rites and ceremonies, and forms of worship, has been the source of endless divisions amongst Christians. But all the schisms that have taken place in the

church would have been as harmless as the picture drawn of them by the frightful mind of a non-juror, if Christians had cultivated the spirit of their religion, and aimed at a greater likeness to the temper of its founder. Unfortunately, every sect has seated itself by turns in the chair of infallibility, and imposed its peculiar dogmas with as much confidence as if they had descended from heaven with a strict commission to persecute all who would not embrace them. Uniformity has been the grand idol of ecclesiastics in all ages, and the civil power has assisted them to proclaim its worship. Till the period of the Reformation men bent their necks to the yoke in submissive silence; but the progress of knowledge, consequent upon that event, has burst the fetters; and, in spite of the most cruel persecutions, the mind has continued to assert its liberty.

The failure of every attempt to force opinion ought to be a sufficient lesson of its absurdity. Upon this point enlightened men of all sects are now pretty well agreed; but there is still a difference of opinion as to the propriety of exalting one sect, by civil distinctions, at the expence of another. If the sentiments advanced in the ensuing work be correct, civil establishments of religion are utterly incompatible with the nature of a christian church. How injurious they have been to the interests of religion and liberty is abundantly illustrated in the history of our own country. In the present day they may be deemed

needful for pageantry and other state purposes, but no one can, for a moment, identify them with the kingdom of Christ, which is declared to be "not of this world." Public opinion has already done much towards disarming them of power, and will probably, without any use of violence, effectuate their downfall. Did not experience warrant the conclusion, the nature of the thing would be sufficient to decide that civil governments may exist, and answer all the great purposes of society, without the patronage of any particular sect. I know that great pains have been taken to inculcate the idea that church and state are so closely interwoven, that they must live or fall together. This opinion, however, is at variance with our history; and I take it to be a libel upon our civil constitution to place its existence at the mercy of a few priests. In all states the civil power should be sufficiently strong to protect public morals, and to set the priesthood at defiance. The clergy can only be formidable in proportion as they are secularized and rendered independent of the people. In their proper station they will be useful instructors, and harmless members of society.

In offering the present work to the public, the author has no wish to kindle animosities: If he has made some free remarks upon men and things, they are such only as he apprehended to result from his facts. Liberal minds will have no desire to screen the characters, nor palliate the crimes of persecutors: This is by no means

necessary to the defence of the cause which they espoused. An Episcopalian or a Presbyterian may still maintain the divine right of his respective church, and so long as he argues with decency and temper, shall be attended to with respect; but when he outsteps the boundaries of good manners, and uses railing instead of arguments, he will be considered an unworthy advocate, and pitied for his bigotry. If any of my readers should think me mistaken in my conclusions, let them follow out their convictions, and I shall freely give them the same liberty of judgment that I have taken myself. Christians who cannot debate their differences without being angry, should leave the path of controversy, and confine themselves to the cultivation of the christian graces.

History is a branch of knowledge so admirably adapted both to delight and instruct, that it is no wonder enlightened people should consider it a necessary branch of education. Of the different classes into which it may be divided, none has been held in greater estimation than biography. Accordingly, numerous have been the tributes given in favour of this branch of study, and it has been cultivated with an ardour and success unknown at any former period. One of the first writers who gave a polish to this class of composition was Dr. Johnson, who possessed an almost unbounded controul over our language; and had his liberality been as comprehensive as the powers of his mind, he would

have been as much entitled to our esteem as he must be to our respect. Since his time, we have had a host of writers devoted to the same pursuit, and the public voice has borne witness to the interest and utility of their labours. If religion should be the principal study of man's life, as involving interests that affect his future destiny, christian biography must be a subject peculiarly interesting to our feelings. But this, like many other excellent things, is capable of being perverted. Prejudice on the one hand, and partiality on the other, have made sad havoc with the characters of men. To draw them with accuracy requires temper and judgment, and a thorough acquaintance with the motives as well as actions of individuals. A laboured panegyric is as useless as it is often untrue; but the faithful delineation of a life devoted to the cause of literature and religion, will furnish ample topics both for reflection and improvement.

The task which the author proposed to himself in the ensuing work was one of no common difficulty. To write concerning so great a variety of persons and opinions without giving offence to some, seemed a very hopeless undertaking; more especially as he was not at all disposed to countenance that temporizing spirit which, under the fair name of charity, so extensively prevails amongst the professors of religion. He can honestly say that truth has been the grand object of his inquiries, and if he has mistaken it

in any instance, he shall not be displeased with any candid attempts to set him right. As the work was not undertaken at the instance of any denomination, so no party is liable for the sentiments it avows. These, whether they be right or wrong, rest wholly with the author, who has neither disguised the truth, nor wilfully misrepresented it from fear or affection, towards any party or individual whatsoever.

The foundation of the present performance was laid many years ago, although without any view to publication till within a few weeks of its appearance. It originated in a perusal of Mr. Neal's life, drawn up by Dr. Toulmin, and prefixed to his edition of the *History of the Puritans*. Successive inquiries added to his stock of materials, till it reached the form and bulk, in which it is now presented to the public.

Upon the utility of such an undertaking, it will be unnecessary to enlarge. "I have often thought it a debt due to the churches, (says Dr. Latham,) as well as to the memory of those who have deserved well of them, if some faithful hand would discharge it, to transmit some account of those, who have devoted themselves to the cause and interest of the naked truth, or gospel, in that way wherein they could have no temptation from the rewards of this world : It would be only a proper continuation of Mr. Baxter's and Dr. Calamy's account of our ministers brought down to to the present time, and might serve some valua-

ble purposes in several respects ; nor could any unkind construction be justly put upon it, if from a sincere regard to the command of Christ, *not to call any one Master upon earth*, they modestly declined paying that deference, that hath been expected, to human authority in matters of religion. One would think it must recommend them to the esteem of an age, that pretends to such a strong sense of liberty; for the rights of conscience, though they have been forgotten in some late remonstrances on that head, have the best plea for it, and in the exercise of them, there is the most glorious enjoyment of it.”*

It is greatly to be lamented that the idea of a similar work did not occur to some person acquainted with the affairs of the Dissenters, at least half a century ago ; many facts might then have been recovered which are now buried in oblivion. That a task of so much consequence, seeming to require long experience, extensive information, and no mean influence, should have been undertaken by the present writer, may seem an act of singular temerity ; and he must confess, that could he have foreseen the difficulties he has experienced, and the little encouragement afforded by Dissenters to works of labour and research, he should have hesitated in entering upon so arduous an undertaking. A spirit of inquiry as to the distinguishing features of non-conformity, has, with the exception of the Bap-

* Dr. Latham's Sermon on the death of the Rev. Matthew Bradshaw, p. 33, 34.

tists, wholly fled from the different sects. The Presbyterians have either deserted to the world, or sunk under the influence of a lukewarm ministry; and the Independents have gone over in a body to the Methodists. Indifference and enthusiasm have thinned the ranks of the old stock, and those who remain behind are lost in the croud of modern religionists.

In the composition of the work, the author has adopted the topographical order, as best suited to his subject; and in ascertaining the limits of his divisions, has followed the best writers upon the history of London. After describing the situation of his places, he has given a particular account of the different revolutions that each has undergone, detailing the succession of pastors in each church, the variation in numbers, doctrinal sentiment, and such other particulars as were deemed necessary, or could be ascertained. The lives that follow the introductory matter, will be found, perhaps, not the least interesting part of the performance. In drawing them up, the author has paid a particular attention to facts, and as far as his materials would permit, has rendered them subservient to the cause of literature. There being a great sameness in character, he has usually compressed that part of biography, and in the application of its leading features has sometimes consulted his own judgment in preference to the indiscriminate adulation of partial or injudicious friends. To serious persons, christian biogra-

phy has always been a source of profitable amusement, and in this part of his work, the author trusts he has not neglected the great interests of religion. In order to this, he has not thought it necessary to make any sacrifice of principle, nor to compromise the leading features of nonconformity. The power of religion never shone in brighter lustre than it did in many of the worthies here recorded; and the talents they displayed in defending the great truths of Christianity, raised them to an equal eminence with their conforming brethren. If these excellent characters are to be construed by modern Dissenters into formalists and bigots, the author cannot expect a treatment much different, nor is he desirous of better company. The truth is, that bigotry and charity are terms but little understood, though artfully noised abroad till they delude the passions of the multitude.

As there is some appearance of novelty attached to this performance, persons unacquainted with Dissenters, may annex to it notions of singularity. But they should recollect that our ideas are comparative; and as the author writes for Dissenters, he expects the same latitude for them, that would be granted to an antiquarian in compiling any local history. The subject he has chosen, has been strangely passed over by all who have undertaken to write concerning the history of London. This can only be attributed to those sectarian prejudices

that always abound amongst national Christians; but it is high time that they should be laid aside, and that the human character should be estimated by a more accurate standard. The parochial churches, and other public buildings in the metropolis, have received ample illustration from the pen of the historian, and the pages of our biographies are crowded with the lives of churchmen. But no one has hitherto explored the sanctuaries of Dissenters, nor recorded the biography of their pastors. To supply this chasm the present undertaking was attempted; and it is presumed, that the facts recorded in these volumes will afford sufficient evidence that learning, talents, and piety, are not confined to any party or denomination of Christians.

It was an object with the author to make his work a repository of useful information. For this purpose, he has brought together a large collection of facts, for which, in all material cases, he has quoted his authorities. If he has sometimes descended to a minuteness more acceptable to the antiquarian than to the general reader, he has not forgotten the entertainment of the latter, for whose sake he has occasionally enlivened his pages with anecdote. In the course of his inquiries it will be found that he has brought to light many places which were scarcely known to be in existence, and has recorded the lives of many excellent persons, whose names are not to be found in any other publication. Some apology may, perhaps, be

deemed necessary for inserting so many of the ejected ministers, whose lives are to be met with in the Nonconformists' Memorial. But, as the work would not be complete without them, so it will be found that the accounts here inserted interfere very little with that performance, which he has but seldom consulted. The whole of such lives are re-written, most of them considerably enlarged from other sources, and some of them entirely new. Even in this view, therefore, the two works illustrate each other. But those worthies occupy only a small portion of these volumes. It is their successors whose lives the author has most laboured, and he hopes they will be found not altogether destitute of interest. That a work consisting almost wholly of facts and dates should be free from errors, is not to be expected: That they are so numerous the author greatly regrets, and must cast himself upon the reader's indulgence.

In the ensuing pages, the reader will meet with frequent references to places of which he will not find any account. To explain this, it is necessary to inform him, that the author designed, originally, to extend his work through the whole of the British metropolis, and the circumjacent villages; but finding that he could not comprise the whole in four volumes, he has restricted himself to those places that are within the cities of London and Westminster, and the Borough of Southwark. If those who feel interested in the performance, regret

that it is not extended to another volume, so as to include all the places they could wish, they must not blame the author, but those to whom it appertains to encourage such an undertaking. Posterity will, perhaps, think that it reflects no credit upon Dissenters of the present day that they can scarcely muster three hundred persons who feel interested in what concerns the affairs of their own churches. That the work is not better deserving their patronage is matter of regret to the author, who wishes it had fallen into abler hands.

For the facts upon which this history is founded, the author has had recourse to a variety of sources, both printed and manuscript, as well as to oral information. The valuable records belonging to the societies in White's-alley, Barbican, Devonshire-square, New-court, and Stepney, have afforded him many useful particulars relating to contemporary churches. That the Dissenters in general have not been more careful in preserving their records, and in noting down the transactions relating to their body seems very surprising, and argues a carelessness that merits censure. In the infancy of their societies they were more particular; but as their discipline relaxed, they grew remiss in the registry of events, and their early records having fallen into private hands are, in most cases, lost. Most of our old churches know little more of their history than what is derived from tradition; a defect which the present

work is intended to supply. Amongst the persons to whom he has been most indebted, he has to acknowledge his obligations, primarily, to the late Rev. Josiah Lewis, who took much pains in making similar collections, which he communicated to the author. For many useful facts relating to the General Baptists he has been indebted to the late venerable Mr. Stephen Lowdell, who also permitted him to examine some ancient manuscripts belonging to that denomination. That ornament to the Dissenters, the late Rev. Samuel Palmer, whose long standing, and extensive acquaintance, gave him great facilities for information, communicated to the author a number of facts, as also, a manuscript account of the Dissenters in London from 1695 to 1731, which has been of considerable use. His obligations are next due to Dr. Toulmin, of Birmingham; Dr. Rees and Dr. Winter, of London, for much collateral information; but there is no one from whom he has received more valuable communications as from Mr. Isaac James of Bristol, whose extensive researches into the history of Dissenters has, perhaps, never been exceeded. To Mr. Joseph Meen, of Biggleswade, he is indebted for the loan of a valuable manuscript; and to the Rev. G. Burder, R. Burnside, G. Greig, J. Martin, T. Tayler, T. Thomas, T. Morgan, J. Evans, S. Hacket, J. Stewart, and Mr. B. Coxhead, of London; the Rev. J. Philipps, of Clapham; B. Brook, of Tutbury; R. Frost, of Dunmow; T. P. Bull, of

Newport Pagnell; J. Jefferson, of Basingstoke; W. Kingsbury, of Southampton; J. Sutcliff, of Olney; J. Townsend, of Ealand; J. Barker, of Towcester; J. Hickman, of Wottesfield; Mr. James Conder, of Ipswich; Mr. J. Whittuck, of Bristol; also, to the late Rev. J. Barber, Dr. R. Young, and S. Girle, of London, for a variety of communications, too numerous to particularize, and to whom the author desires publicly to return his thanks. Also to the trustees of Dr. Williams's Library, Red Cross-street, for liberty to consult the valuable library of that institution, and to take engravings from the portraits deposited there.

To the patronage of the public, he now commits his labours with becoming deference, not insensible of many imperfections that attend them, but still not without hope that they will receive the approbation of the liberal and judicious of all denominations.

CAMDEN TOWN,
May 1, 1814.

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THE
HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES
OF THE
Dissenting Churches

Vol. I

The coalition of church and state (corpus Christianum) has continually had outspoken opponents since its inception in the 4th century under Constantine. All through the long medieval night of papal terror and up to the present day of accommodation and compromise, there has never been a time when the voice of dissent and nonconformity was not heard, protesting against established religion and coerced uniformity. The most prominent target of that protest has been the arrogant usurpation of Christ's Kingly Authority and Headship over His churches and the souls of men, whether that usurpation was Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, or any other. As it has been, so shall it ever be. This enduring testimony of dissent, this genuine Christian nonconformity arises as the inevitable response of the Christian soul to the internal witness of the Spirit toward the truth and supreme authority of God's Word. Consequently, the origin, nature and history of Christ's churches can never be adequately discerned or explained apart from some grasp of the Biblical Truths advocated and defended throughout the history of genuine Christian Dissent and Nonconformity. As Dr. J. S. Whale, former Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Mansfield College, Oxford University and President of Cheshunt College, Cambridge University, said, *"Dissent, not only from the centralized absolutism of Rome, but also from the State establishments of Protestantism in the Old World is an historic fact of enduring influence. To account for the tradition of liberty in the 'free world' of today without reference to dissent would be to read modern history with one eye shut."*

THE BAPTIST STANDARD BEARER, INC.

The Baptist Standard Bearer, Incorporated is a republication society organized in 1984, and is recognized as a nonprofit, tax-exempt charitable organization. It was founded for the primary purpose of republication and preservation of materials reflecting the Baptist heritage.

It is not affiliated with, or financially supported by any association, convention or particular denomination. It is financed by individual donations, foundation grants, bequeathed inheritances, annual society membership dues, but primarily by the sale of its own publications.

ISBN 1-57978-615-4



9 781579 786151