

# THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST IN ILLINOIS AND THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD SLAVERY.

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*N. S. HAYNES, Decatur, Ill., 1913*  
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## ***A Brief History of the Origin of the Restoration***<sup>1</sup>

The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed a widespread revolt against human authority, both Papal and Protestant, in religion. Many men in many places came to see that God alone can be Lord of the conscience. Everywhere these reformers, protesting against the creeds of councils and the dogmas of fallible men, appealed to the Bible alone. Everywhere their aim was the emancipation of the church from the bondage of human traditions and rule. This movement first focalized in the religious body known as the *Christian* denomination.<sup>2</sup> For many years they were called *New Lights* but since they have never recognized this name it is unfair to so designate them.

Minister James O'Kelly withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church during its first General Conference held in Baltimore in 1792. In his earlier years he was a classmate of Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry. He was a popular preacher and an old presiding elder from Virginia. He urged upon the conference the right of those preachers, who thought themselves injured by the appointment of the bishops, to appeal to the general body then in session. His appeal was in vain. Many individuals and local congregations, either in mass or in part, seceded with him. Appealing for popular favor to the public spirit of the time, they for a few years called themselves *Republican Methodists*.

At the close of the eighteenth century, Dr. Abner Jones resided at Hartland, Vt. He was a regular Baptist but he was especially averse to human creeds, which he regarded as walls separating the followers of our Lord. And sectarian names grieved him much. In those years when a man of God got a new thought he was compelled to get a new church to put it in. So Dr. Jones organized a

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<sup>1</sup> These headings have been added for this digital edition.

<sup>2</sup> This is otherwise known as the *Christian Connexion*, most of which, in 1923 (ten years after this lecture was given), merged with the Congregational Churches. In 1959, another merger took place, resulting in the United Christian Church. In each of these mergers, some of the congregations objected to the union, and so there are still splinter groups of the *Connexion* and the *Congregational Christian* churches.

church at Lyndon, Vt., in 1801<sup>3</sup> with twenty-five members, another church the next year<sup>4</sup> at Hanover, N.H., and a third at Pierpont, N.H., in 1803.

About that time Elias Smith, then a Baptist minister, was preaching with great success in Portsmouth, N.H. He fell in with Abner Jones and soon the church under his care was led to adopt the principles and position of the Christians.<sup>5</sup>

Barton W. Stone, a learned and eloquent minister, withdrew from the Presbyterian Church in 1804 and became very actively identified with the Christian denomination.

Thus there arose simultaneously in the East, South, and West congregations that wished to be known simply as *Christians*. These were remote from one another and without knowledge of one another's work. They urged the all-sufficiency of the scriptures as the rule of faith and life, the democracy of the local church, Christian character as the test of fellowship, and the name *Christian* to the exclusion of all denominational names.

Those years were particularly auspicious for the proclamation of such Christian truths. Beginning in the last days of the eighteenth century with the Presbyterians in Tennessee and Kentucky and continuing to near the close of 1801, there was a most extraordinary revival of religion. Cane Ridge, Ky., was its center—its circumference was almost the outer bounds of the nation. Its slogan was “the Bible Our Rule of Faith and Practice.” Many thousands turned to the Lord. Consecrated lives testified to the genuineness of their conversion. Its impressions were deep and its influences abiding.

That revival was the John the Baptist of the movement inaugurated within less than two decades thereafter by the Disciples of

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<sup>3</sup> The original lecture said 1802..

<sup>4</sup> The original lecture said “the same year,” which, because he mistakenly placed the founding of the church at Lyndon in 1802, meant the same thing. But, to make this accurate, we have changed the wording of the lecture to reflect the historical truth.

<sup>5</sup> Abner Jones had rejected all human names and advocated the use of only the name *Christian*. Elias Smith followed his lead. However, James O’Kelly, Rice Haggard, and others had also advocated this same exclusive name in other parts of the country prior to Jones.

Christ. This also had its beginning in various localities—East, West, and South. It came neither from the Biblical research nor thought of any one man. It was not accidental but Providential. Its members approached the Bible “with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily.”

It is believed by many that Alexander Campbell was the founder of the religious body known as the Disciples of Christ. This is a mistake, and the abundant and incontestable facts of history prove it to be such. It was at least a decade after the beginnings of this movement in various places that Mr. Campbell became the champion and later the most powerful advocate of those principles of Christian truth which differentiate the Disciples from all other religious bodies. This last fact was the occasion that led many uninformed people to call those with whom Mr. Campbell found himself to be in full accord “Campbellites.” But this, to the Disciples, has always been an offensive nickname. Now it is no longer in use except in some back precincts where the trees grow tall and the brush thick, and hence the light of intelligence is slow in penetrating.

### ***A Brief History of the Disciples in Illinois***

William Barney came into what is now Wabash County and settled about eight miles north of the site of Mount Carmel in 1808. His family then consisted of himself and wife and the following children: George, William, Richard, James, Betsy, Jane, Sarah, Clara and Ann. Shortly afterward Mr. Barney’s three sons-in-law with their wives and children also came. It is plain that this was a real Rooseveltian and patriotic family. Other settlers followed. Three forts for protection against the Indians in the locality were built.

Seth Gard came into this settlement in 1813. In 1814 he was a representative in the third territorial legislature and in 1818 was a member of the convention that framed the Constitution for the State. Evidently Mr. Gard was one of the leading citizens of that section. He, with Minister James Pool and others, on the 17th day of July, 1819, organized the Barney’s Prairie Christian Church. Seth Gard was elected elder and Joseph Wood, deacon. His grandson, O. H. Wood, now residing in that locality, has in his keeping the original book containing the record of his transaction. He is in

his sixty-eighth year, has been a member of the congregation over fifty years and affirms that from its beginning the Barney's Prairie Church has always stood on apostolic ground. This congregation has had an unbroken and useful life for ninety-six years.

Stephen England settled near the site of Cantrall, Sangamon County, in 1819. He was a native of Virginia but grew to manhood in Kentucky. He was a Baptist preacher but was acquainted with Barton W. Stone before coming to Illinois. Here he was never known as a Baptist minister. Shortly after settling here he invited the people to come to his cabin for public worship. That the people were soul-hungry is indicated by the fact that two women walked two miles to the meeting through prairie grass as high as their heads. On May 15, 1820, he constituted in his own house the first Church of Christ in Sangamon County. In all, there were nine members whose name have come down to us. From that date to this it has always been known as the Church of Christ or Antioch Christian Church. When the village of Cantrall was laid out in the sixties, the place of meeting was moved there and the local designation was changed from Antioch to Cantrall. In the fall of 1826 the Little Grove Church of Christ, located six miles east of Paris, was constituted by Minister Samuel McGee. Two sisters, Mrs. Mary Morrison and Mrs. Anna Fitzgerald, who had come from Kentucky, were the leaders in the formation of this congregation. From the first it was called "The Little Grove Church of Christ." It still lives.

Ebenezer Rhodes was born in Holland in 1780. He came to America, and in 1824 to McLean County, settling in Blooming Grove, five miles south of Bloomington. He was a Baptist preacher and married the first couple in that county. Reuben Carlock was a native of Overton County, Tenn. He came to Illinois in October, 1827, and settled in Dry Grove, five miles southwest of the site of the present town of Carlock. Minister William Brown, a Christian preacher, came to visit his friend, Reuben Carlock, in 1828. In August of that year Mr. Carlock yoked his ox team to his wagon and accompanied by some members of his family and his guest, preacher Brown, drove to the cabin of Ebenezer Rhodes for a three days' meeting. Then and there a little church was constituted. Whereupon the recognized leader, Ebenezer Rhodes, said, "And now, brethren, we must have some articles of faith." Then Reuben

Carlock, drawing a small copy of the New Testament from his pocket and holding it up said, "Brother Rhodes, this book has all the articles of faith we need." Mr. Rhodes at once and in full assurance answered, "That is true." Thereafter he was known as a Christian minister and continued to preach the gospel without the mixture of human traditions until his death in 1842. That little congregation was simply a church of Christ.

In 1815, "Christian Settlement" was founded in Lawrence County, seven miles northwest of Vincennes, Ind. It was made up of members of the Christian denomination. For ninety-eight years that country community has been remarkable for its industry, sobriety, thrift and high ideals. In 1828 the church there came fully to apostolic grounds.<sup>6</sup>

The first sermon ever preached in Hittle's Grove, near what became the town site of Armington, was by a Methodist minister named Walker, but he did not form a class. This and other public meetings for worship were held in the log cabin of Michael Hittle. After a time two women wished to be baptized and a Baptist minister, probably Ebenezer Rhodes, was sent for. Finding no church there to vote on the fitness of the candidates after deliberation it was decided to immerse them on the public confession of their faith in Christ. Thereupon a Baptist church was constituted with seven members. On January 11, 1829, this congregation was reorganized on the following basis: "We, the undersigned, do give ourselves to the Lord and to each other as a church of Jesus Christ to be governed by this word contained in the Old and New Testament." This agreement to constitute a church of Christ, was signed by seventeen persons. The church has had an unbroken life to the present time.

In 1829 a church was constituted in the southern part of Marion County. It was known as the Mt. Moriah Free Will Baptist Church. In 1837 its members dropped the words "Free Will Baptist" and substituted for them "Christian" and since then to this date it has been known as "The Mt. Moriah Christian Church."

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<sup>6</sup> This is another way of saying that they began preaching baptism as a necessary act of man in response to God's grace in order to receive forgiveness of sins—Acts 2:38.

From an old original record book the following is taken: "April 30, 1831, the Church of Christ on Cedar Fork of Henderson River, Warren County, was constituted upon the belief that the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, and the only rule of faith and practice, and are sufficient for the government of the church." The location was one and a half miles northwest of the present town of Cameron. This was probably the first church of Christ in the Military Tract. Some of its families became representative in that part of the State and elsewhere.

The second Sunday in July, 1831, Minister John B. Curl constituted the "Bear Creek" Church in Adams County and also the "Mill Creek" Church in the same county before the close of the year. Mr. Curl labored diligently through all that section of the State and three or four other congregations were formed about the same time.

Bushrod W. Henry was a native of Culpepper County, Virginia. He came to Illinois and settled in Shelbyville in 1830. He was then twenty-five years of age. He was a Baptist preacher and a man of superior mental endowments and magnificent personality. In July, 1831, he constituted the "First Baptist Church of Christ in Shelbyville." Within one year he was preaching clearly those Biblical truths commonly held and taught by the Disciples. In 1834 Mr. Henry, with those of like views with him, were summarily expelled from the Baptist church. Then the congregation in Shelbyville dropped the name "Baptist" and has since then been known as the Church of Christ. Mr. Henry has two sons living: Judge W. B. Henry, of Vandalia, and Minister J. O. Henry, of Findley. The latter is eighty-six years old. He was a comrade of Richard J. Oglesby in the 4th Ill. Infantry during the Mexican War. Ever afterward they were fast friends until "Uncle Dick" passed over the great divide. Mr. Henry clearly and positively affirms that his father was not assisted by anyone except his wife in reaching his conclusions on the teachings of the scriptures. That together, they, husband and wife, reverently and faithfully read themselves out [of the Baptist doctrines].

By 1832 there began to be some general unity of thought and action among the widely separated disciples in their efforts to restore the church after the New Testament pattern—in its teachings, its ordinances and its life; so in this year a number of local church-

es had their beginnings. Most of these still live and have been forceful factors in building society.

The church in Jacksonville had its beginning in that year. Several Christian families came to Morgan County from Kentucky in 1830 and 1831. Fourteen families of Disciples, then called *Reformers* by many, met together regularly that winter for public worship. In the summer of 1831 Josephus Hewett settled five miles east of Jacksonville. He was the first regular preacher of the Disciples in that section.

James Green and Harrison W. Osborne of the Christian Denomination were in that locality at that time. They preached in the courthouse and in schoolhouses as they had opportunity. In 1832 there were good-sized nuclei of Disciples and members of the Christian Denomination in and around Jacksonville. It was in this year that the scholarly and pious Barton W. Stone came from Kentucky into "the Far West" as Illinois was then called. The reputation of this good man had preceded him, for he was an active factor in the Cane Ridge revival in 1801<sup>7</sup> whose influences and glory became more enduring than the stars. Mr. Stone made a tour through the Prairie State preaching at Lawrenceville, Carrollton, Rushville, Springfield, Jacksonville, and other places. He believed in and labored for the union of all God's people. At Jacksonville he laid his strong but tender hand upon the two separated bodies and left them united in one. This was in October, 1832.

A similar result was effected at Carrollton a few days later. It may be properly noted here that the Disciples of Christ absorbed the larger part of the Christian Denomination, not only in Illinois but elsewhere. However, the latter body still lives. The appeal of both parties was to the Bible as the only recognized authority in religion, and in this way many of the latter concluded that the Disciples were nearer the divine standard than themselves.

The church at Winchester was formed December 1, 1832.

The old Union Church, located about ten miles west of Clinton, was constituted October 13, the second Sunday, 1832. It was formed with seventeen charter members under the spreading

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<sup>7</sup> The original lecture said 1800, which was either a mistake by the speaker, or a typo in the manuscript. Either way, we have corrected it here.



branches of a large white oak tree whose decaying stump marks the spot. This with the gravestones in the cemetery that grew around the house of worship are silent sentinels of faded joys and departed glory. Hughes Bowles was the leader there. He was a product of the Cane Ridge revival as were those associated with him in this beginning. His son, Walter P. Bowles, became the best known and most powerful preacher of his time in that section. He and Abraham Lincoln were familiar friends and long before the immortal emancipator dreamed of place and fame, he said to Mr. Bowles, "Walt, if I could preach like you I would rather do that than be president." The old Union Church served its community and generation for just fifty years to a day, and then, railroads coming and towns growing, it fell on sleep.

Joseph Hostetler was a great, strong man in his time. In his youth he became a member of the Tunker Church<sup>8</sup> and soon thereafter a preacher. With little help his own study of the Bible led him to the common, basic principles of the gospel. He came from Indiana to Illinois in 1832, and in November of that year organized the West Okaw Church of Christ. It was located about two miles west of the site of Lovington and became the mother of a number of congregations of like faith in that section. West Okaw still lives and flourishes in the Lovington church.

In the early thirties a number of families came from Christian County, Kentucky, to Illinois, and settled in Walnut Grove, now known as Eureka. In April, 1832, thirteen Disciples met in the log residence of John Oatman, which stood about one-half mile northeast of the railroad station now there, and organized a church. Since that time it has been known as the Christian Church or Church of Christ at Eureka, and has been one of the most forceful agencies in the entire State for truth and righteousness.

In 1833 churches of Christ were organized at Springfield, Lawrenceville, Decatur, Ursa, Mt. Pleasant, ten miles southeast of Carthage, Little Mackinaw ten miles south of Mackinaw town and elsewhere.

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<sup>8</sup> This is the German Brethren, or "Dunkards" as they were called. They believed in the necessity of baptism by immersion, making them very open to hearing the pleas of the Disciples.

This is less than a birdseye view of the beginnings of the Disciples of Christ in Illinois, but for this paper it must suffice. Across central Illinois and through most of the southern part they continued to grow. Every inch of ground they occupy today has been won by battle. They met opposition, often bitter, always determined, from the older religious bodies. Where we are now strong in numbers, intelligent and wealthy, and particularly “respectable,” we are quickly and cheerfully recognized as “orthodox” and welcomed into “the sisterhood of churches.” Without doubt with the changing times we have all changed with them and by Divine grace for the better.

### ***The Disciples' Attitude Towards Slavery in Illinois***

What was the attitude of the Disciples in Illinois toward slavery? By 1861 we had grown to number possibly about 20,000 in the State. In all the discussions upon the question of slavery that culminated in the Dred Scott decision—the deepest and the most damning nadir of our national annals—we were active participants. In the thirties, forties and fifties many Disciples came into Illinois from Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia. Some of these who settled in some of the border counties were pro-slavery, but the most of these immigrants came because of their aversion to the “peculiar institution.” For example, Ben Major, who came from Kentucky and settled in Walnut Grove in the early thirties, freed his slaves and sent his agent with them to New York City in 1834 to pay their passage to Liberia. Of those Disciples who came into Illinois during the three decades named from the states east of us, nearly all were anti-slavery except those from southern Indiana. In the early forties two colonies of Ohio people came to Illinois. Of these, Dr. J. P. Walters, now a resident of Fairfield, says: “The two colonies of Christians who came from Ohio and settled in Wayne County in earlier years were decidedly anti-slavery in their political convictions, there being abolitionists in each of the companies. These people were important factors in molding the political sentiment in this county in the years 1840 to 1861. The attitude of the Disciples of Christ during those years throughout this portion of the State was decidedly anti-slavery, but in border counties pro-slavery sentiment prevailed. In evidence of which, it is a fact that this county raised more than its quota of soldiers in every call for volunteers,

and that the prevailing religious convictions in quite a number of the military organizations in this part of the State was that of the Disciples of Christ.”

Edwards County, sometimes called “Little Britain” because so many English people settled there in the earlier years, was not only opposed to slavery but outlawed the liquor traffic fifty years ago. The preponderating religious influence in the county during that period has been that of the Disciples.

Hon. W. H. Johnson was a member of the House from White County in the General Assembly of 1882. The family to which he belongs has been noted for its intelligence and patriotism for one hundred and fifty years. He affirms that most of the Disciples in that part of Illinois in its formative period were opposed to slavery.

The Gale families came from Ohio into Lake County, the Mofett and Hawk families into Carroll County in the early years. These were all anti-slavery people.

The writer is indebted to Professor B. J. Radford, the Sage of Eureka, for the following:

*“Of the Disciples of Christ who came into Illinois up to 1861 the great majority were immigrants from Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia. They were pretty evenly divided between Henry Clay Whigs and Jackson Democrats—the Whigs predominating in the central and the Democrats in the southern portions of the State. The Clay Whigs leaned strongly toward abolitionism and many of them were supporters of the Liberian Colonization Society. The Democrats were mostly proslavery, or indifferent to the slavery question.*

*“In the breaking up and recasting of parties in the fifties, the Whigs in the Churches of Christ generally became Republicans and the Democrats followed Douglas. When Douglas was repudiated by the proslavery Democrats, the majority of his followers among the Disciples remained loyal, but a considerable minority supported Breckinridge, probably one-sixth of the voters in our churches in the State. When the Secession movement began, the patriotic course of Douglas rallied his followers almost unanimously to the defense of the Union. Many of them from our churches entered the military service and considerable per-*

*cent[age] of them came out Republicans. Not a few of the Breckinridge followers sympathized with the Secessionists, and some of them gave aid and comfort to the enemy. I believe that more than 90 percent of our people in the State were loyal, a good showing when we consider their antecedents."*

The following are the names of a few representative Disciples of Christ who were active in their anti-slavery views: Dr. W. P. Naramore, of Stephenson County; Ministers A. H. Trowbridge and H. D. Palmer, of Marshall; Ben Major, of Woodford; William T. Major, of McLean; John Johnson and Minister Geo. W. Minier, of Tazewell; J. W. Simpson and Col. J. W. Judy, of Menard; J. S. Anderson and Minister E. G. Rice, of Morgan; William B. King and William S. Pickrell, of Sangamon; John Chandler, of Douglas; George Redmon, of Edgar; Minister William Schooly, of Clay, and Dr. John Kossouth Ashley, of Wayne. These men were the peers in every way of their contemporaries in these several counties, intelligent, strong, active and forceful citizens; and they were only a few of a great host.

Many Democrats in the North held with Mr. Douglas to the doctrine of "popular sovereignty" but the attack on Fort Sumter, April 12, 1861, by Beauregard opened their eyes to see the real spirit and aim of the slaveocracy. They would let the black race suffer on but they could not see our flag shot into the dust. Then quickly indifference gave place to patriotic devotion to the Union, the preservation of whose integrity was then paramount to all things else. From a wide range of personal acquaintance and many sources of information the conclusion of the writer is that less than 2 percent of the Disciples of Christ in Illinois sympathized enough with the would-be Confederacy to even wish for its success.

It is proper to note here that a number of the great Protestant churches have been split in two by the question of slavery long before its climax was reached in the Civil War. But the Disciples of Christ went through that frightful shock without even a thought of division. Their common faith in the conquering Christ and the Catholic gospel subordinated life-long prejudices and flaming political passions to the interests of the Kingdom of God.