



CHANGES IN THE DOMESTIC AND RELIGIOUS LIFE IN MISSOURI DURING THE PAST ONE HUNDRED YEARS

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THE year 1776 marked the grandest epoch in American history. The year 1803 marks the second grand epoch in the history of our government. The Declaration of Independence and the purchase of the Louisiana Territory must always impress the student of national development as events of greatest prominence in American history. Both events were full of promise and prophecy and their effects will be felt during the centuries to come, and by generations yet unborn. Just after the Louisiana purchase and in 1804, the Territory of Missouri was, for purposes of local government, divided into four districts.

The first was the district of Cape Girardeau, embracing the territory between Tywappity Bottom and Apple Creek and furnishing a population of 1,470 souls; the second was Ste. Genevieve, embracing the territory between Apple Creek and Meramec river, and furnishing a population of 2,870 people; the third was the district of St. Louis, lying between the Meramec and Missouri rivers and affording a population of 2,780 people; the fourth was the district of St. Charles, lying between the Missouri and Mississippi rivers and furnishing a population of 1,550 persons.

Thus the aggregate population in 1804 was 8,670, scattered all the way from Tywappity Bottom on the south along the Mississippi as far up as Salt river on the north, and up the Missouri as far as the mouth of Femme Osage Creek.

But, if 1776 and 1803 were the grandest epochs in American national history, the year 1806 was the grandest epoch in Missouri Baptist history. It was then that the first Baptist church was organized west of the Mississippi river—a *Baptist church* organically in accord with the great principles of civil and religious liberty; a *Baptist church* in the very warp and woof of its constituent characteristics opposed to the horrors and blackened crimes of the Inquisition, and to all manner of civil and religious oppression; a *Baptist church* devoted to the advocacy of the great principles of the one God: Father, Son, and Spirit, of the plenary and authoritative inspiration of his word; of the total depravity of man and the consequent necessity of his regeneration by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit; of salvation by grace, of justification through faith, of perseverance through grace to glory, of independent congregational church government, of believers in immersion as the only baptism, of baptism as a prerequisite to communion, of a general judgment; and of eternal rewards and punishments. These grand

and infinitely important Bible principles are the great headlands of faith for the advocacy and establishment of which God called Baptist churches into existence in the days of the Apostles and for which he has kept them in existence ever since, and for the world-wide dissemination of which he blesses and encourages them to-day.

The subject assigned me for elucidation on this important occasion is, "The Changes that Have Occurred During the Last One Hundred Years in the Domestic and Religious Life in the State of Missouri."

Domestic life in the State of Missouri one hundred years ago was in a very crude and primitive state. The houses consisted of one room, about eighteen feet square, and one story high. The floors were constructed of rude puncheons made by splitting open large logs, turning the split side up and resting the ends of these puncheons upon sleepers, or large logs which reached from one side of the house to the other. The fireplace was about six feet in length and the hearth in front of it, consisting of large flat rocks, was the same length and about three feet wide. The logs that made the walls of the houses were sometimes hewed on both sides, but were often left round and with the bark on. The cracks between the logs were chinked with short pieces of split timber and then daubed with mud, or covered over with plaster. The roof was made of boards riven out of choice white oak timber. There was no ceiling between floor and roof.

The clothing for both men and women was made of the lint taken from the flax and hemp stalk. This was worn in summer, while for winter wear their garments were made of wool cut from the bodies of sheep.

Their shoes were coarse and clumsy articles made of leather tanned by a rude and tedious process.

Their mills were rude structures arid great distances apart.

Their school-houses were small, log structures, furnished with seats made by splitting open small logs, smoothing the split side as best the workman could with a broad-ax, then turning the smooth side up and fastening legs under the piece of timber so that it was held about two feet above the floor. Many a day has this writer spent on seats thus constructed. Sometimes when the teacher's back was turned the boys would crowd and push each other to and fro on these seats. This was what they called "*scrouging*" and as they "*scrouged*" each other first in one direction and then the other, they had to be careful about—about—splinters.

Each family owned one or two milk cows, three or four horses, about a dozen sheep, as many hogs, about twice as many geese, half a hundred chickens and a few turkeys. Such were their homes and their equipments for making a living.

The men of that day spent part of their time clearing away the forests, opening and fencing fields, planting, attending and harvesting their crops. And part of their time they spent in fishing and hunting. Very strong was the temptation to engage in these sports. The fresh waters were crowded with the greatest quantities of excellent fish. The immense forests, reaching out in all directions from their homes, were full of buffalo, deer, turkeys, pheasants, squirrels, and partridges. The swamps and sloughs, in the late autumn and early spring, were covered with ducks and geese, while on the open prairies the grouse, or prairie chickens were to be numbered by the tens of thousands. Also it must not be forgotten that the forests were infested by great numbers of wolves, bears and panthers, while the prairies, the swamps and the river-courses were constantly patrolled by great numbers of hawks and fierce eagles.

In those frontier families the children of the household numbered from four to fourteen, and the most of them, for part of the year, spent the day in school, while the father and the older boys spent the same time at work in the field or hunting in the forests. When night came on, the family all gathered around the great bright fire that burned upon the broad hearth-stones and related the doings, the hearings and the learnings of the day. The bear wounded and escaping in the dense forests; the panther shot in the tree and falling with a heavy thud to the ground; the deer killed and brought home for a venison feast; the turkey shot and flying across the creek and falling in a dense forest of willows

never to be found; the sayings of the school-teacher; the lessons that were badly gotten and poorly recited; the whipping received by one of the children and the praise bestowed by the teacher upon another; the visit paid by some neighbor living five miles away; the crazy loom and the broken spinning wheel—all came in as subjects of conversation, and, as they were discussed, the feelings of the various members of the family often warmed in tenderness and sympathy for each other. Occasionally both the father and the mother must administer rebuke for wrong or careless doing, and anon speak words of comfort and encouragement. Then at a late hour all would retire full of good humor and mutual affection.

Often neighbors living six and eight miles distant would visit each other, and, in the language of that day, "sit till bedtime." Then for a whole-souled, good-natured season of sociality—a delightful blending of hearts—exhibitions of unmistakable, mutual affection! The night, till well towards day, was spent in relating their religious experiences, or talking about churches and preachers, and school teachers, or, in detailing their hunts, mishaps and adventures. Not infrequently did some of them have stories embodying the most shocking and hideous exaggerations. Some of these stories have come to the knowledge of this writer and the giving of them will illustrate somewhat the domestic life of that day.

One of the pioneers related that he walked out one morning before day to find a milk cow which had failed to come up the night before. As he was passing down the branch bottom, listening carefully for the cow-bell, he felt something strike him up and down the face like a man's hair. He turned and looked and there was something swinging to and fro in the air like a black line. He followed it up with his eye and there in the top of a tall sycamore tree sat an old turkey gobbler and that was his beard hanging down that struck him in the face.

Another pioneer related that when a boy, his father sent him out to haul home a load of wood. It was raining when he started, continued raining on him all the way to the woods, and all the time he was putting the load on, and just as he got loaded it poured down rain in fearful torrents. He had gone two miles from home along a straight, level lane leading to the west. He had two horses hitched to a slide with rawhide traces. Just before he commenced loading his slide he turned the horses heads into the mouth of the lane looking towards home. When the slide was loaded he mounted the lead horse, and as the wind was blowing from the east he drew his hat down over his eyes to protect his face from the rain, and rode all the way home without looking back; and when he reached home and looked back the slide had not started—the rawhide traces had stretched *two miles*. He instantly leaped from the horse, untied the hame-strings, and dropped the hames over a stump that stood near the wood-pile. The next day the sun shone out warm and the wind blew gently, and the slide came pulling up as slow, and stopped in a few feet of the stump.

Amusing and startling as are those exaggerations, they have even been surpassed by some men of later days. A number of years ago when I lived in Clarksville on the banks of the Mississippi, a cluster of men were engaged in telling fish stories. One man related that he helped take a cat fish out of the river twenty feet long and weighing six hundred pounds. Another stated that he was one of a party that caught a fish forty feet long and weighing three tons. Yet another man declared he saw a fish in the river that looked as large as two acres of ground, and it took him fifteen minutes to pull his skiff around it so as to get across the stream. When they had each told his story a quaint looking, cross-eyed man who sat in silence and listened while they talked, suddenly spoke out and said, when he lived in Quincy, Illinois, he several times hung a fish that broke enormous hooks, and lines twice as large as his arm. At last he had a large hook made out of a long iron bar, eight inches in diameter, and tied to a rope larger than a man's body. Then he killed a large calf and baited the hook with its body. The next morning the fish was securely hung, but they had to use two enormous engines, several derricks with enormous blocks and tackles. With these they succeeded in lifting it out of the water and when they did so it was so large that the Mississippi river fell two feet all the way from St. Paul to St. Louis. Instantly the crowd roared out in a laugh, jumped to their feet and dispersed, instinctively allowing the premium to the cross-eyed man for manufacturing the biggest fish story of the day.

Great indeed have been the changes in domestic life since the beginning of the last century. Quite considerable have been these changes since my childhood days. When I was a boy, in company with five or six other boys, each having his own favorite dog following him, we roamed over the wild forests, along the banks of the streams, ran deer and foxes through the woods, caught coons, opossums, rabbits, squirrels, and sometimes had our olfactories sorely tried when our dogs rushed almost to our feet, caught and tore to pieces one of those sly creatures once described by a Dutchman as "vun kriter vot most so many as five hundred men could smell at once." Such sports are almost unknown now. The forests have been cleared away. Population has increased immensely. Wealth has augmented and all the conveniences of life have multiplied. The log-houses are gone and stately mansions and beautiful cottages two and three stories high occupy their places. Beautiful carpets and costly furniture adorn these luxurious homes. Magnificent school-buildings and great colleges dot the land and offer the best opportunities of intellectual expansion and extensive learning to the ambitious youth, while the steamboat and the railroad have long ago displaced the stagecoach and the clumsy roadcart. Fine buggies, beautiful surries, costly phaetons and splendid carriages have almost universally displaced horseback and lumber-wagon conveyances. The buggies and carriages will, in turn, be displaced by the bicycles, the automobiles and the trolley cars.

While, unquestionably, we live in better houses, wear finer clothes, eat at more luxurious tables, travel in faster, better vehicles and enjoy a thousand conveniences to which our fathers of a hundred years ago were strangers, what about improvement in character?—in morals?—in attendance at the house of God?—in the sincerity of religious worship? Alas; is not the great body of our people retrograding in the stern virtues, the rigid morality, the eager and faithful attendance upon religious worship, and the sincere, pious adoration of God that characterized the pioneers of 1806 and the years that followed? Here is indeed food for wholesome, prayerful and anxious reflection. The labors of Watts and Eli Whitney, in the invention of the steam engine and the cotton gin were at the bottom of all these marvelous changes in the social and domestic life of the past century. The steam engine called into active operation the steamboats, the railway trains, the circular saws, the great factories whose myriad looms and spinning wheels, buzzing and humming through the months and years, produce those wonderful cotton and woolen fabrics which, by the skillful use of dyestuffs and coloring material, furnish the myriad beauties in clothing and carpeting that render attractive the persons and homes of today.

But what of the changes in the *religious* life during the past one-hundred years? In the early part of the past century very much of the preaching was done in private houses and school-houses. Church buildings were few and these but the rudest structures, supplied with rough, uncomfortable seats. Frequently there was but a single Baptist church organization in a large county, and to this belonged members who lived many miles distant.

Take as a sample the old Bonne Femme church, located six miles south of Columbia in Boone county. This church was organized in 1819, and to it belonged members who lived thirty-five miles to the southeast and twenty miles northwest of the church-house. These members traveled on horseback along the deep paths of the wilderness, with the lapping branches of the trees matted with grapevines shutting out the sunshine for miles of the way. Yet it was the rarest circumstance for one of them to be absent from the Saturday church meeting. Through the whole month they looked forward with eager longing to the church-meeting day, made all their arrangements to go, *and went*, and when there, oh, the joyous shaking hands, the cordial welcome, the hearty greeting, the gladness, the joy, the sincere affection and delight beaming in the faces of all, told of the deep and tender love which each felt for all the others.

Certainly, whatever changes may have taken place in the last one hundred years, we have made no improvement over these godly people in obeying the commands, "love ye one another," and "forsake not the assembling of yourselves together."

The first three Baptist churches ever formed west of the Mississippi were Bethel with fifteen members; Tywappity, with ten members; and Fee Fee, with fourteen members.

The first three associations organized in the territory of the state were Bethel, organized in 1816, with six churches; Missouri (now St. Louis) Association, organized in 1817 with six churches and an aggregate membership of 142; Mt Pleasant Association organized in Howard county, in 1818, with five churches and an aggregate membership of 161.

The immense changes that have taken place in our religious interests during the past century can be appreciated when we consider that our associations now number 79, our churches 1,820, and our aggregate membership 160,000.

One hundred years ago we had not a single Baptist college, or Baptist school of any sort in all the territory of our great state. Now we have eight colleges and two academies and these attended annually by more than 1,200 students. Our church-houses are now found in every county in the state. The log structures have been removed and in their places have been erected neat and comfortable frame buildings, or massive structures of brick and stone, with all the conveniences and aesthetics of modern church architecture. The people who attend worship in Baptist churches and who are under Baptist influence now number at least 400,000. In view of these immense aggregates we naturally take a deep interest in noting the peculiar features of worship—the peculiar characteristics of the preaching and the preachers of the early part of the past century. With voices wholly untrained the worshippers uniformly sang what we now call old fashioned hymns: "Am I a Soldier of the Cross," "Show Pity, Lord, O Lord Forgive," "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," "I Will Arise and Go to Jesus," "Where Now is Good Old Daniel," were the hymns most familiar to them, and sung with indescribable relish and delight. They poured their souls in the song and their hearts went up in praise to God as they realized the truth of the sentiments they sang. Their prayers were frequently offered amid a profusion of tears, and members of the audience blended their groans and earnest amens with the utterances of the petitioner. The churches did not have protracted meetings then as now. Their members lived too far apart, were scattered over too wide an area of country to enable them to gather at one place twice or even once a day during a period of two weeks. But each of the churches held what they called "a yearly meeting." This was a four days meeting beginning on Friday and closing on Monday. As late as 1845 it was a prominent feature of associational work to arrange for these "yearly meetings" with the different churches. At least as many as three preachers were appointed by the association to visit each church at a specified time and hold a yearly meeting. To these yearly meetings the churches looked forward with great expectations and high hopes. When the time came they gathered from far and near and entered into the meeting with great enthusiasm. The preachers preached to win souls to Christ, and they won them. Their hearts were fearfully burdened with the awful responsibilities of the hour. They realized the worth and danger of immortal souls, and the appalling and vivid realities of eternity—of heaven and hell—pressed upon them, and gave an intensity of earnestness to their looks and tones of voice as they loudly and tearfully exhorted and besought men to be reconciled to God. Hence it was the rarest circumstance for a yearly meeting to close without a number of souls being converted and added to the church. It was often the case that the meeting closed on Monday with as many as *forty* baptisms. It should not be forgotten that it was the general custom for all of the preachers present to preach at each meeting. The length of each sermon was usually about an hour, and the people would sit on the rough benches without backs, for three consecutive hours and listen to as many discourses without any intermission between, and yet they would never seem to get wearied or think of complaining. Elder John M. Peck, in his reminiscences of Missouri, thus states: "On Saturday the 7th of November, I met the church in Bethel meeting-house. Elder William Street had preached before my arrival. The church sat in order and transacted business. I then preached from Isaiah 53:1, and Elder James P. Edwards followed me, preaching from John 14:6. The people tarried through all these exercises with apparent satisfaction." Here were three sermons on Saturday and, in addition, the transaction of church business! Yet the people were satisfied and enjoyed the exercises. Surely the trials and toils of pioneer life had imbued these people with a certain hardihood and endurance, and their meager sources of information and great hunger for the gospel had imparted to them a certain patience and longing for truth unknown to the people of our day and time.

The preachers of that day and their methods of preaching are interesting subjects of contemplation and afford a striking illustration of the changes that have taken place in religious life since their time.

The *child* is at the most interesting stage of his life between the ages of two and five years, and that because he is then *himself*, perfectly natural. He has learned none of the conventional usages of society. He knows no politeness. His acts and utterances are perfectly natural; hence always interesting. It was somewhat so with our pioneer preachers. They were nature's own children, unartificial, unpretentious, each developing himself along lines to him natural and desirable. Hence, they were always interesting, often impressive in their acts and utterances. Some of them, simply because it seemed to them best, walked to and fro in the pulpit and sung out their sermons giving vent to a grunt and a snub at the end of each sentence. About the year 1830, one of these preachers, Jabez Ham by name, was preaching at the house of the widow Hays in the eastern part of Callaway county. In those days they had only tallow candles to burn in their houses to give them light. When the candle would burn down till the wick protruded through the blaze, the light would grow very dim and the room become quite dark. Hence, snuffers were used to cut off the upper end of the wick and thus keep the blaze bright. Now, as Ham was preaching at the top of his voice in his sing-song style, he observed the room getting dark, and looking round to see the cause, he discovered that Robert Hays was sitting between him and the darkened candle, and so he thus spoke in the loudest tones: "Yes, and my brethren, and the Lord spake unto Moses saying, brother Bob I wish you would snuff that candle."

About the year 1838 another of the pioneer preachers, whose name was Pauley, preached at old Nashville in the western part of Boone county. He took for his text, "Peter's wife's mother lay sick of a fever." About three years afterward he went to the same place and, before something of the same congregation, took the same text. Now, it so happened that a man by the name of Zumwalt was there and heard the first sermon and was also there and heard him announce his text for the second sermon. When Pauley announced his text for the second sermon, "Peter's wife's mother lay sick of a fever," Zumwalt spoke out and said, "Why, Lord God, ain't she dead *yet* ? It is the longest fever ever I heard of not to kill."

In 1849 Dr. Jeter removed to Missouri and became pastor of one of our churches. It is related of him that he once preached in a country church and as soon as he commenced speaking, a woman in the congregation began weeping bitterly and continued to weep till the sermon was over and the congregation dismissed. Dr. Jeter then approached her, extending his hand cordially and said, "Madam, what is it that troubles you. Tell me and let me sympathize with you and comfort you." The woman replied, "O, my father gave me a little mule colt and I raised it by hand, and after awhile it died, and your voice reminds me so much of my poor mule that I could not keep from crying to save my life."

At a certain protracted meeting held about 1848 a large, rough hair-lip man was happily converted just at the close of a song. He instantly leaped out into the room and began shouting aloud. The congregation sat and gazed in silence at him. Presently he said, "Sing on brethren." They did not sing, but gazed at him as he continued shouting. Again he said, "Sing on brethren." The preacher said to him, "You sing my brother; you seem to be happier than anybody else." Instantly he dropped his head, seemed to think for a moment, then slapped himself on the legs, jumped up and down and sang aloud: "Sich a gitten up stairs I never did see, such a gitten up stairs."

Many, indeed, have been the changes in our great state since the sainted Thomas Johnston, the first Baptist preacher that ever set foot on the soil of this commonwealth, baptized in the waters of Randol's creek, Mrs. Ballou, the first person ever baptized in Missouri. Instead of the rude, clumsy structures, we now have our beautiful, comfortable church-houses. Instead of a few discordant, jarring voices, illy harmonized in song, we now have our fine organs and our well-trained choirs, furnishing fashionable music in modern songs.

Instead of the preacher clothed in tow-linen garments or wearing plain homewoven jeans, we have the minister dressed in broadcloth and each item of his attire cut to fit and fashioned to perfection. Instead of the sing-song sermon accompanied by many repetitions, butcheries of the king's English,

misconstructions and wrong interpretations, we have the educated clergyman presenting a learned discourse in polished language, and pronounced according to the most approved style of modern elocution.

But with all these improvements, apparently for the better, we are beset by certain insidious, lurking dangers against which we must ever guard with the utmost vigilance.

When Lewis and Clark made the report of their celebrated expedition to the headwaters of the Missouri and across the Rocky mountains, they stated that they saw near the mouth of the Yellowstone river immense herds of buffalo feeding upon the vast plains carpeted with grass. But while these buffalo seemed perfectly content and quiet, they were constantly surrounded and accompanied by great gangs of wolves, their ever-present, inveterate enemies, always ready and watching to pounce upon any weak and sick or failing ones and devour them while yet alive. So while we rejoice in these great changes and improvements, we are constantly beset by one lurking, treacherous peril. We are in danger of ignoring or neglecting the indispensable necessity of regeneration — of Christian experience—of deep-felt, genuine, vital religion; and in its place substituting formal profession — mere outward conformity to certain forms and ceremonies and ordinances — *formality* instead of *spirituality*. And there are not wanting in Baptist ranks some well-dressed, educated clergymen who, for the sake of personal popularity, fat salaries and big reports of large ingatherings, will countenance and encourage the abandonment of the *spiritual* and the acceptance of the *formal*. Against such a course we are bound by all the realities of eternity, by the sacred worth of immortal souls, by our solemn obligations to Christ and his truth, to guard with ceaseless, determined vigilance, and to expose with unfaltering fidelity to God and his word.