



HOME MISSIONS AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY IN MISSOURI

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GREAT and far-reaching results are often traceable to very obscure and seemingly insignificant causes.

The great fire, that, in 1871 swept over Chicago, leaving charred ruins where once stood massive buildings, the home of wealth and beauty, is traceable to a little blaze kindled by a lantern in a cowshed. The mighty avalanche that rolls irresistibly down the mountain side and overwhelms or sweeps away everything in reach was started by the sound of a voice or the crack of a whip, or the report of a gun or the detachment of a snow ball that destroyed the equilibrium on the steep slopes overhead, and thus set in motion the great engine of destruction.

As in material, so in moral movements, great grand, and glorious results are found springing from causes that seem to be wholly inadequate to produce them. The meditation, mediation and consecration of a cup-bearer to the king in a far away heathen court brought about a great reformation which placed thousands of Jews back in the land and city of David, and restored the temple and the work and worship of God.

The great Reformation of later years, which did so much to break the fetters of a false ecclesiasticism and shook the religious world from center to circumference had its origin in a Monk reading for himself a chained copy of the Word of God. The mighty Methodist brotherhood, with marvelous organization and with a loud amen that nearly shakes the earth, with a zeal and aggressiveness worthy of imitation, all are traceable to the zeal and piety of two brothers who were anxious to be better men, and to have others share with them the blessings of deeper personal piety. This is the history of all great and grand results. Things grow or develop from germ or seed that contain the essential properties and characteristics of the things which spring from them. Elements involved in the seed or germ, evolve in growth and development to marvelous proportions under favorable conditions.

As a people, as Missourians, we are living in a great day, and in a great state. We are seeing and hearing what our fathers never saw or heard, but without whose labors this day and this condition could not have been. Instead of "Poor old Missouri" we now have in print and hear from the rostrum, the forum and the pulpit, "Imperial Missouri."

What has brought us on and up and out into this large place, where we are to-day as a people and a state, taking front rank in everything that goes to make up a truly noble and powerful people? Many causes have operated, many influences have been at work, but that which has gone deeper into our life than any other, which has brought forth results not traceable to any other, is the presence and power of God's truth among us. All that we see in the way of asylums, homes, churches, charities, schools, laws, "lids," and other good things, are as traceable to the influence of God's truth in human life and activity as the bud, leaf, flower and fruit on the tree is traceable to the life that is in the tree.

We stand to-day at the head of this stream that has flowed for one hundred years through our state, with increasing depth, volume, and blessing. And as Baptists, with peculiar pride, yet with profound gratitude to God, we emphasize the fact that we were the pioneer sowers of the seed in this rich soil. The first Christians, other than Catholics, to set foot on Missouri soil were Baptists. The first preacher to invade the territory with the pure Gospel, was a Baptist preacher. The first scriptural Baptism administered in this state was at the hands of a Baptist preacher to a believer in Jesus Christ. The first church organized upon this field was a Baptist church, and the first meeting-house, not Catholic, built west of the Mississippi river, was a Baptist meeting-house built one hundred years ago on the spot where we stand to-day—the only scriptural plant between the "Father of Waters" and the Pacific coast. From this seed in this soil, with the season which God gave, great things have come.

In studying the conditions and the elements that contributed so largely to the success of this undertaking we behold that which a few years later called into existence our Home Mission Boards, which have done so much to foster weak churches and plant new churches where they were needed. The period we celebrate to-day was the period of the "individual initiative," under the constraining love of Christ, which antedates all Home Mission Boards more than a century. Missions is giving the Gospel to the lost, as medicine is giving a remedy to the sick, and Home Missions is the work going on at home carried on by home folks in the interest of the homeland. The few Baptists who entered this wilderness more than a century ago, loved God and loved men, and loved each other. They frequently met to sing and pray and worship. To these faithful but often discouraged souls the itinerant preacher sometimes came; Thomas Johnson, John Clark, David Green, James Keer, and Thomas R. Musick—the visits of these men from other and older states were like showers to the parched earth. Hope was revived, faith was quickened, love glowed, energy was aroused, churches were organized, and as people poured into the Territory the demand for workers and the great opportunities for winning souls appeared to lovers of Jesus, and men who had themselves, if nothing more, to invest in the Kingdom of God. This country was being stirred as never before on the question of missions through missionary movements in England led by William Carey. English Baptists were appealing to America to help them prosecute the work of foreign missions. In the providence of God, American Baptists were aroused by having unexpectedly come in possession of two foreign missionaries, who had been converted to Bible views concerning the church and the ordinances. The existence of two American Baptists, Judson and Rice upon the foreign field, started a flame that has burned with increasing heat until this hour. When Rice returned to this country to fan the flame of missionary zeal, his words like sparks fell into the heart of John M. Peck, and set it on fire, and he went out a burning light in the interest of missions. His ear caught the cry that was at that time coming from the great West and his eye caught a glimpse of the vast possibilities of the field. So, westward his heart turned and westward he turned his face and his feet. Under the appointment of the Philadelphia Board of Missions in July, 1817, he and James E. Welch, his college "chum" and brother in Christ, reached St. Louis, and began a work that will deepen and widen until Jesus comes again.

The first nine years were spent in searching the field, and wherever Baptist families were found, he called them together and preached to them. As he followed bridlepaths through Illinois and Missouri he saw the greatness of the field and the work in the West. With almost prophetic vision he saw the great future of this republic, and he saw that in order to provide preaching for the people who were seeking homes in the wilderness, there must be an organization that could undertake the evangelization of North America.

With this conviction growing upon him daily he began and kept up an agitation which resulted in a called convention in New York City in April, 1832, at which time was organized the American Baptist Home Mission Society, to promote the preaching of the Gospel in North America. To the strong appeals and arguments of John M. Peck and Jonathan Going, another pioneer missionary from Massachusetts, more than to any other earthly source we are indebted for the existence in our great brotherhood of this great evangelizing and constructive home missionary organization of American Baptists. When the delegates from five hundred churches met in New York and organized this society, it was Peck's head and heart that gave the outlines of the constitution adopted, he having conceived it in St. Louis and carried it with him to that convention. Thus it is seen that Missouri is the mother of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. When the Baptist Triennial Convention on the 17th of May, 1817, accepted and appointed John M. Peck, and J. E. Welch as missionaries to the Missouri Territory they did not know that they were putting into this soil seed that would bring results so marvelous. No better, wiser, or safer investment was ever made, than that made by this convention when it appropriated one thousand dollars to defray the expenses of these men to St. Louis, and to support the mission. The work of these men in Missouri and Illinois not only gave to Missouri Christians and churches, but American Home Mission Board, which with her offspring, the Home Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, has been the parent or foster parent of nearly every state mission board in the land. But let us not forget the fact that each line of work taken up and pushed by these boards was begun and carried on, in a limited way, many years before the boards were created.

In 1824 John M. Peck began the work of organizing Sunday-schools in Illinois and Missouri, a year in advance of the existence of the Sunday-school Union of Philadelphia, So, in Sunday-school work in the Mississippi valley, under the leadership of this Home Missionary Society, Missouri Baptists were pioneers. This is true also of Christian education and theological training. The first to start a theological seminary was this same planter and promoter, Peck. With only \$500 he founded a seminary which in less than three years had one hundred students. This seminary was afterwards merged into Shurtleff College, one of our great religious educational powers. He was also the founder of the first religious paper published in the West, which paper was very appropriately called the "Pioneer." As editor and publisher his work ran through twelve years, thus doing on a small scale that which our American Baptist Publication Society has more than three quarters of a century been doing on so large and ever enlarging scale.

We now see very clearly that in Baptist beginnings in Missouri, home missions were strongly in evidence. The pastors were home missionaries. The settled shepherd of one flock would make preaching tours through several counties in his own colony or state, preaching the Gospel almost every night in barns, private houses, school-houses or wherever the people could be assembled. Sometimes months were given to this evangelistic work. Many churches were founded, and scores of souls were converted by these unselfish Christlike fathers in the faith. The work of these individual laborers was often supplemented by churches and associations.

From this small beginning of one or two churches, with a membership of twenty-five in 1806, the Baptists have grown to 2,120 churches with a membership of 200,000 in one hundred years. This has come about through zeal and intense activity within and fellowship and helpfulness without. Since 1832, Missouri has shared in the blessings dispensed through the American Baptist Home Mission Society which, since its organization, not including this year, has received in contributions and legacies \$12,874,421.09, baptized 201,660, and organized 6,051 churches.

Another helpful agency has been the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, organized in 1845. It reported last year 12,630 baptisms, and 302 churches constituted. Both of these boards have found a fertile field in Missouri, and both have labored faithfully on the field. It would have been impossible for Missouri Baptists to have taken care of the people who poured into this state had they not received aid from these boards, but with these strong allies and with the blessing of God upon their labors, Missouri Baptists are to-day a strong force in a fertile field, with a history back of them of which they may be justly proud, and opportunities at hand, which if seized upon and rightly used will make their future more glorious than their past has been. We know what success means, and

what it takes to bring it about. Our history is a text-book on this question. It shows the supreme folly of some things and the profound wisdom of other things. It shows that much can be done by individuals and churches without the aid of boards; it shows that much more can be done with their assistance. Consecration, co-operation and concentration—these have a large place in our past and have helped to make it illustrious. They must enter the present and abide with us if we meet the demands made upon us by men and our Master.