



OLD BETHEL

BY REV. T. H. JENKINS.

I. Founding.



TO-DAY we stand on holy ground, made so by the deeds of heroic faith. The dust of those who founded and fostered our Baptist faith in this wilderness one hundred years ago is deposited in this cemetery. Methinks the angels are here standing guard over this holy city of the dead. Let us remove, as it were, our shoes from off our feet.

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." Abraham was called and went out not knowing whither he went; but God knew. Moses, ordered by Jehovah, marched up to the Red Sea and passed through on dry ground. Joshua compassed the city as he was ordered to do, and the walls of Jericho fell down. Those who have walked in God's ways have always been invincible.

In the year 1796 God called one of his servants, Thos. Bull by name, in his Kentucky home to go out to a new country. He went out, not knowing for what purpose he went. Others had crossed the Great River as fur-traders or in quest of silver and gold; but our Baptist brother came as a pioneer in the establishment of God's Kingdom in a foreign country. In the year above mentioned Bro. Bull pitched his tent somewhere near the place on which we stand today; and, Abraham-like, erected an altar to Jehovah Jireh. At one time, like Lot, he thought of making his home in the plains of Boise Brule bottom; but an overruling providence decreed that he should remain permanently in the hill country.

Again providence played a prominent part in acting through the selfish motives of the Catholic Spanish governors to make liberal grants of lands to American settlers in order that thereby any attempt of the English to colonize this country might be forestalled. Our Baptist pioneer came in for his share of these liberal grants of land and became the owner of the land upon which the first Baptist meeting-house west of the Mississippi river was erected; and upon which we assemble to-day to celebrate the centennial of the organization of the first permanent New Testament church in the Louisiana Territory.

Let us pause to see how God was working through the rulers of this world to promote and enlarge his Kingdom. The French explored the Louisiana Territory in the latter part of the seventeenth and settled it in the early part of the eighteenth century. As a result of the battle of Quebec, France ceded her American possessions in 1763 to Spain as a war indemnity. In 1800 in exchange for a proffered crown to the son-in-law of the Spanish King, the Louisiana Territory was receded to France. On Easter Sunday April 10,

1803, while Napoleon was attending the formal services of the Roman Cathedral of that day, his mind was on the precarious condition of his American possessions owing to a condition due to the proximity of a mighty British fleet in the Gulf of Mexico. There and then he decided to sell them to the United States.

President Jefferson and his cabinet, ignorant of Napoleon's plans, had decided to negotiate for the purchase of a portion of Louisiana. Thus, providence was working in the minds of two rationalistic rulers at the same time for the same purpose. "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." He can make the wrath of man praise him, and the purposes of man serve him. The selfish motives of Napoleon contributed directly to the doubling of the United States' domain, and indirectly to the establishment and development of distinctive American institutions. Without this national expansion of 1803 the United States would have been perhaps to-day a feeble republic east of the Mississippi, walled in, on the north by British domination, and on the west by a menacing French or Spanish empire. Let us give thanks to God because he made infidel France to contribute no little to the establishment and enlargement of a government founded upon Christian principles. Napoleon with his own hand wrote the article in the transfer contract which guaranteed religious as well as civil liberty to the inhabitants of the Louisiana Territory.

Next after Thos. Bull, in 1797, Enos Randol, another Baptist, came with his family of seven sons and three daughters and settled on what is known to-day as Randol creek. Soon the Englishes, Hitts, Sheppards and others joined the consecrated colony. Hitherto, pure Christianity had not found a home in these primeval forests. The settlers built their rude log cabins and in them the first religious exercises were had. Frequently the sympathizing Savior appeared in the midst of these humble worshipers assembled in their lowly homes, showering his peace and consolation in the hearts of his people.

In 1799 joy was brought to their hearts and homes by the appearance of an aged Baptist preacher, Thos. Johnson by name. As a missionary to the Indians he was at home in this frontier settlement. He doubtless came at his own expense and, perhaps, at the risk of his life. To the few settlers he preached the gospel, though it was in violation of the law of the Territory. His preaching was a great comfort to the faithful and the means of the conversion of others. He was no doubt, the administrator of the first scriptural baptism in the Territory. The place was Randol creek, and the candidate was Mrs. Agnes Ballou, who afterwards became a constituent member of Bethel church.

Six years passed by before another preacher came. In the year 1805 Eld. David Green, a native of Virginia, but then a resident of Kentucky, visited the Territory. He stopped first among the settlers of Tywappity Bottom, near the present site of Commerce, Scott county. There he found a few Baptists and organized them into a church of some eight or ten members. The same year he visited the Baptists in the vicinity of Cape Girardeau; and, after preaching to them, returned to Kentucky. The condition of his brethren in the Territory rested so heavily upon his mind that he could not remain in Kentucky. Accordingly the next spring he came with his family and located in this vicinity. With the assistance of Deacons Geo. Laurence and Henry Cockerham of Tywappity Bottom church, he organized Bethel church July 19, 1806. Brother Green and wife became charter members and he served them as their first pastor till his death, December 9, 1809. This pioneer preacher and organizer deserves more honor than Missouri Baptists have given him; and if his grave can be found a suitable monument should mark his resting place.

The Tywappity church does not seem to have been very vigorous at any time. Peck says: "This feeble body became extinct, but was reorganized in 1809, or another church occupied its place, to which Eld. Jas. P. Edwards ministered in 1817." It is last mentioned in 1824, when, with only eleven members, it entered the Capo Girardeau Association. Apart from its connection with the Association, its labors were local. It extended no arms and planted no churches; consequently left little, if any, history. For this reason *Bethel Church* is entitled to the ecclesiastical seniority of Missouri churches. The following persons were constituted into a regular Baptist church on the 19th day of July, in the year of our Lord, 1806, by Eld. David Green and deacons Geo. Laurence and Hy. Cockerham, namely:

David Green.

Leanna Green.

Thos. English.	Jane English.
Jno. Hitt.	Frances Hitt.
Thos. Bull.	Agnes Ballou.
Wm. Matthews.	Rebecca Randol.
Anderson Rogers.	Clara Abernathy.
Edward Spears.	Catherine Anderson.
William Smith.	

As Philippi was to the evangelization of Europe; as Serampore to India and Rangoon to Burmah; so Bethel is to the evangelization of this vast American west. From this church, either directly or indirectly, sprang the first churches that composed the Bethel Association which was constituted in 1816 at Bethel meeting-house.

There had been Baptists in the United States nearly two hundred years when Bethel was organized. Rhode Island had had a church one hundred and sixty-six years. Pennsylvania and Virginia had had associations nearly one hundred years before Missouri had a church. In 1806 there were less than 200,000 Baptists in the United States and less than fifty west of the Mississippi. Now there are nearly 200,000 Baptists in Missouri. At that time the American Baptists gave about \$6,000 to Carey's Foreign mission work. The first Baptists of the Louisiana Territory were Foreign Missionaries—they settled on a foreign field and soon engaged in mission work.

Founded upon the Apostles with Jesus Christ as her chief corner-stone, Bethel began the evangelization of the imperial west. Arms were extended fifty miles north, west and south. These arms soon became churches, which, in turn, banded themselves together in Bethel Association, the first west of the Mississippi.

This association was at first in hearty sympathy and co-operation with the organized foreign mission work of American Baptists. The same convention which supported Judson in Burmah sent Peck and Welch to Missouri. To the support of this divinely appointed work of worldwide evangelization Bethel church gave, in 1818, \$31.37, the largest missionary offering up to that time ever made west of the Mississippi.

For nearly forty years Bethel was an important factor in the Baptist history of Missouri: first, as leader in the Bethel Association; and later in the Cape Girardeau Association. Notwithstanding she finally drifted away on the anti-mission breakers, she had kindled such a missionary fire in the state that the combined forces of the world, the flesh and the devil have not been able to extinguish it. God grant that it may burn and shine brighter and brighter until the whole world shall have been illuminated with gospel truth.

II. DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE.

Bethel believed firmly in the following fundamental doctrines: (1) Man's total depravity and impotency to recover himself by his own ability; (2) justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness; (3) Regeneration by the operation of God's spirit; (4) the final perseverance of the saints in grace; (5) the independence of the church in matters of government; (6) church membership to belong to believers who are baptized by immersion, etc. From the first she was strongly Calvinistic in doctrine. As expressed in her third article of faith she believed, "that God made Adam and all mankind alike in him in a state of innocency and gave him a just and holy law to keep and power to have kept it, but left him liable to fall; as he did fall and all mankind fell in him under the condemnation of that law, having thereby lost all our doing power and not able in the least measure to do anything that will cause God to love or have compassion upon us."

Thos. Wright was excluded in 1808 for denying the Calvinistic principles. A few months later Lydia Wright was excluded "for holding the erroneous doctrine of falling from grace and for trying to lead others into the same error." At one time a man and his wife were excluded for the doctrine of man's

purity in his birth.

The membership consisted of males and females, whites and blacks, residents and transients. Over all these strict discipline was maintained. The church towered in her sovereign majesty over all. She was continually "citing" some one to appear before her tribunal. Thorough investigation was always made before a decision was reached. It was a common occurrence for some one to be excluded "for failing to hear the church." Even financial, judicial and legal matters were sometimes brought to the church conference for settlement. At one time a standing committee of three was appointed to judge cases of indebtedness. The brother failing to pay his just debts in due time was required to expose his property for sale; failing to do so he was dealt with by the church. When a member was excluded it was published the following Sabbath. Joseph Lockhard was excluded for unlawful marriage. Nov. 9, 1816, "Resolved, that Sister Hannah Edwards be allowed to wear gold ear-rings for the benefit of her eyes." Flora Bruckner, a black sister, was cited to give satisfaction to the church for shouting in time of public worship. She appeared at the next meeting and was forgiven. Later a query was propounded as follows: "If a member is constrained to shout will the church bear with it? Answer, yes." In 1822 Ezekiel Hill laid in a charge against himself for killing a deer on Sunday.

III. PREACHERS.

From 1806 to 1867 Bethel had seven pastors, namely: David Green, Wilson Thompson, Thos. Stephens, Thos. P. Green, Benj. Thompson, John Canterbury, and Joel J. Foster.

By order of the church seven preachers were ordained as follows: April 11, 1812, Wilson Thompson and Jas. P. Edwards; June 18, 1814, Thos. Donohoe and Jno. Farrar; July, 1820, James Williams and John K. Gile; and March 12, 1825, Benj. Thompson.

Two of Bethel's pastors deserve special and honorable mention, namely: Wilson Thompson for his evangelistic spirit, and Thos. P. Green for his missionary spirit; while Benj. Thompson needs to be held up in dishonor for his anti-mission spirit and as a warning to pastors today.

WILSON THOMPSON.—A great revival under the preaching of Wilson Thompson began in Bethel church in February following the New Madrid earthquake, which began the preceding December. This revival continued nearly two years and spread to several of Bethel's arms and other settlements sixty miles away. During the revival Thompson baptized four or five hundred subjects. Among the number was his uncle, Benj. Thompson, who later served Bethel as pastor for nearly thirty years.

Wilson visited monthly his appointments in Johnson's settlement twenty miles southwest; Caldwell's settlement on the St. Francis sixty miles west; and Saline settlement forty miles north, in doing which he traveled 240 miles. His labors did not extend over three or four years in the Territory, yet during that time he was a bright and shining light. He was a great soul-winner. He left the Territory and moved east. After laboring in Ohio and other states he departed this life at a ripe age in Wabash county, Indiana, May 1, 1865.

Thos. P. GREEN.—Perhaps no man has done more to build up Baptist work in southeast Missouri than did Thos. P. Green. He became Bethel's pastor in 1818. From the first he was an earnest advocate of the Sunday-school and mission work, even against considerable opposition from some preachers and churches. His pastorate extended through a critical period of Baptist history in Missouri. Under his leadership Bethel spoke out emphatically in favor of foreign missions even when the association took a backward step. He and his church kept in missionary fellowship with the foremost churches of America and of the world. In 1818, 1819 and 1820 Bethel led western Baptists in missionary zeal and offerings. Green was far in advance of his brethren and, while he was her pastor, Bethel was in advance of the association, on missions.

In 1828 Green joined Jno. M. Peck in establishing the "Western Pioneer" at Rock Springs, Illinois, the first Baptist paper in the West. In 1831 he acted as agent of the American Sunday-School Union and established schools and libraries in eight counties in Southeast Missouri. He became missionary under the American Baptist Home Mission Society soon after its formation. In 1834 he organized the first Baptist church of Cape Girardeau with nine members and became their first pastor.

Green was an extraordinary man. In general appearance he resembled the late Thos. H. Benton. Though limited in educational advantages, he made himself a scholar. His labors were signally blessed. He had power before an audience. In fighting out a permanent victory for missions through the stormy days of the bitter conflict with anti-missionism, he rendered his greatest service to his denomination. He was largely instrumental in saving the Southeast Baptists from Parkerism and death, and to the great work of evangelizing the nations. The Baptists of Southeast Missouri should honor themselves by erecting a suitable monument in Jackson cemetery at the grave of Thos. P. Green.

BENJ. THOMPSON.—This preacher was converted in the earthquake revival in 1812. He was ordained in 1825 by Elders Thos. Donohoe, Jas. Williams and Thos. P. Green, and became pastor of Bethel the following year. The fact, that Green, the missionary leader, was succeeded by an anti-mission pastor, indicates the trend of things in Bethel at that time. She had been strong against Arminianism, but now she becomes weak on missions. Benj. Thompson was connected with Bethel nearly a half century— 27 years of which he was their pastor. Inasmuch as he was the shepherd of the flock he must answer before the Great Shepherd for the way and ways in which he led the Lord's sheep.

Bethel lost prestige when she grieved away the missionary spirit. During Thompson's pastorate the records of the business meetings are frequently as follows: "The church met in conference; all in peace and no business." When a church ceases to engage in missionary work it has little business to attend to. About the same time and for the same reason three or four other churches in this county were reduced to tombstones and corner stones. Shame must rest on the heads of Benj. Thompson and his co-laborers because they led the churches of Jesus Christ into open disobedience against their King and Redeemer.

IV. MISSIONS.

In 1809 Bethel joined Red River Association in Kentucky and Tennessee and continued in that body till 1816, when Bethel Association, the first west of the Mississippi, was organized. In this organization Bethel church took the lead. The movement was inaugurated and perfected at Bethel meeting-house and was called Bethel in honor of the mother church.

In the early years Bethel contributed most liberally, and furnished most of the missionaries who labored in the Association. She extended arms in every direction and sent her pastors and laymen to organize churches as follows: Boise Brule and Barren, in Perry county; Saline in Ste. Genevieve county; Providence, near St. Michael (Fredericktown); St. Francois on Castor, within the present bounds of Wayne county; Turtle (or Turkey) Creek and Dry Creek in the present limits of Bollinger county; and Apple Creek, Big Bend, Hebron and Jackson in Cape Girardeau county.

In 1817 the Triennial Convention appointed Peck and Welch missionaries to the heathen in the Missouri Territory. The brethren in the east little dreamed that there was a Baptist church at that time in the heathen west which was discussing foreign missions. Before Peck's arrival in the west, Bethel church through her wide-awake missionary pastor, Thos. P. Green, was in the very forefront in world-wide missions. Landing at Ross' Point in 1817, Peck was surprised to find that he was in an association of seven churches. In 1818, four years after the organization of the first foreign mission board among American Baptists, Bethel church "ordered that the association correspond with the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions." Here was endorsement of a Board and instruction of messengers. She also had a monthly missionary prayer-meeting.

Beck visited Bethel in 1818 and says he found "more real friends and liberal contributors to missions in this church than in any other in the Territory." And when the association discontinued its correspondence with the foreign board, Bethel resolved to keep it up, and elected her pastor as her secretary. The mother church was ready in 1824 to go into the organization of a new association, namely, the Cape Girardeau, made necessary because of the lack of an aggressive missionary spirit in the old body.

But soon afterward Bethel selected a new leader who opposed missions. She remained more or less actively missionary till about 1830. From this time the anti-mission spirit developed till 1842 when non-

fellowship with all missionary people and churches was declared. Under pastor Thompson the old church was led into barren fields and beside turbulent waters. She drifted away and finally was wrecked upon the anti-mission breakers; but not until the missionary spirit had permeated the leading men and churches of the state.

Our fathers built well, but they made two mistakes: the first was in neglecting to found a denominational school for southeast Baptists. This was detrimental and contributed largely to the second mistake which was fatal, namely, opposition to missions. Had Bethel church proposed, at the organization of Bethel Association in 1816, the establishment of a Baptist school for Southeast Missouri; and had she led off vigorously in the movement, doubtless there would have been little, if any, fight over missions; and we would have been fifty years in advance of where we are to-day.