



THE BAPTIST TREND IN MISSOURI FOR ONE HUNDRED YEARS

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F a party of hunters could be said to have trend who go into a forest at different times and places, camping as advantage or necessity admonished, taking such game as they could by

any method known to the craft, yet by a sort of common method, crossing each other's paths frequently, meeting occasionally, going wherever fancy or favor led them—then might the early Baptists be said to have trend. The hunters might have general direction but it would not be apparent until they got through the woods. It is quite so with the bridlepaths made by our fathers a long while ago. We have journeyed a great distance, but what is the direction? Would a line drawn from the heart of Missouri Baptists through Old Bethel strike a New Testament church?

One hundred years is a long time, and many things have happened. But so little has been written, that one who would conduct a survey over the Baptist trail, may, by losing it, make utterly false deductions as to where a line would cross that zigzag path. For convenience let us divide the time into three periods:

1. *The Baptist Fathers*, 1806-1834.
2. *Organic Experiment*, 1835-1880.
3. *A quarter of a Century on the Way*, 1881-1906.

This division is handy because the second period begins with the organization of the General Association in 1835 and ends with the passing of a crisis which threatened the life of this general body. Before that time we can boast of but little order; since then we find but little confusion. Data concerning direction during the time has been gathered from characteristics of the leaders of the first period, from the movements of this general council during the second, and from men now living and familiar with Baptist affairs in different parts of the state for the third.

THE BAPTIST FATHERS, 1806-1834.

The early pioneers must be judged by the kind of leadership they followed more than the citizens of to-day, because the former were untouched by public sentiment, which frequently is blind to the faults

of men and to the claims of truth. Religious leaders were everything to the pioneers. They were not brilliant men but they led the people, moulding thought and habits more than our leading men do now. The majority of such men of our persuasion came out of the great revival in Kentucky and Tennessee of 1800-1805. The ardor of soul-winning was on them. Many of their friends had come to the western territory and there was room for the preacher.

His education consisted chiefly in a great religious experience, a speaking acquaintance with the Bible as a whole, an undying devotion to what in Hebrews is called "first principles." In a few cases there was respectable familiarity with the Philadelphia Confession and with literature in general. He was a man of one book, usually in advance of the people about him, and could lead them—certainly to Jesus which was his purpose.

He came first to Southeast Missouri, then to the St. Louis district, and later to the Boon's Lick settlement, now Howard county. The Baptists spread out from these three centers like the leaves of a fan. His preaching was simple and direct, bearing upon the doctrines of sin and salvation. He insisted on immediate results for he might not come that way again. The Word was his only and quite sufficient authority, the local church a divine institution, adequate to all the demands made on it, essential to soul-winning and the perpetuity of the ordinances. His knowledge of modern methods was as defective as his loyalty to what he believed was sincere.

There was comparatively little co-operation among Baptists in the state throughout this period. Splendid efforts were made to enlist the district associations in different common enterprises; but those honorable bodies felt that destitution in their several localities was too serious to be neglected and their resources too limited to be wisely divided. The people followed their leaders for whom they cherished a sort of innocent veneration; the preacher was intent upon saving men and housing the precious fruits of his labors into soul-saving companies. We need not go further than the preacher to find denominational trend.

Two distinct types of leadership appear among the fathers, one coming from the South, the other from the North. The former was doctrinal, the latter practical; both evangelistic. They were mutually corrective. Had there been no organizing genius the denomination would now be anti-missionary; had there been no doctrinaire the features of our face would be less prominent and not so well known. In Southeast and Middle Missouri the doctrinal prevailed; St. Louis was the spring of organic and aggressive movements. These men went everywhere preaching and organizing churches, impressing the people with such emphasis of Bible doctrine as they believed most imperative under the circumstances.

Both types of leadership were evangelistic; both had their following; but the doctrinal preacher had the majority. If it is safe to adopt the majority rule in this case and to infer the prevailing sentiment among a widely scattered people from the dominant spirit among their leaders, the Baptist trend among our churches from 1806-1834 was *evangelistic with a strong doctrinaire flavor*.

ORGANIC EXPERIMENT, 1835-1880.

The second period of our history begins in the smoke of ecclesiastical battle. The conflict was imminent, but not inevitable. Two clans of Baptists had grown up within the fold under the teaching of the fathers. They were not factions until a strong proposition was made to unite all forces under one name for better order in evangelistic procedure. This precipitated the solution; congenial souls flocked together. The two parties were about equal in numbers, 5,000 being in favor of organizing into a system that would reach all the churches and as many of the destitute places as their combined ability would permit, while 3,000 were against the system proposed.

On June 6, 1835, a constitution was adopted and the Central Society, now the General Association, set out on its journey of conquest. The opposition justified themselves on the ground that this was a man-made institution and would thwart the purposes of God and the efforts of the denomination in the spread of the Gospel. Those who favored the new method believed the time was ripe for the exercise of common sense both in preaching the Gospel and in procuring unity in faith and effort. Both parties were determined and after the organization of the society they parted company. The shock of this

disruption was felt in every quarter. Churches were divided, the majority by agreement holding church records and having choice of days for meeting. At this parting of the ways we must leave nearly one half of the brethren and come on with the superior force, for we are concerned with the great denomination as it now exists.

The promise of the Central Society was cooperation within the state in preaching the Gospel, or with doing in a better way what had been done from the beginning. The anti-system brethren ought not to have taken offense at this as the organization was of the simplest possible sort. They may have scented all that has followed since, and if they did we may forget their faults, for the present array of wheels within wheels is much more than "The System" contemplated and would have astonished its friends; besides this, Baptists have always shied at a machine, at least till they get used to it.

When once we were organized for the promotion of the Gospel within the state, other interests were pressed upon us and adopted into the family as it seemed wise. The first of these was home missions, followed many years later by foreign missions. However, many of our churches had contributed to this latter object before in a desultory manner, some as early as 1818. The Home Mission Society was organized in New York in 1832, a part of its plan being "a system of circuit preaching for the states of Missouri, Illinois and Indiana." It is but natural that this interest should early have found favor with us as it was co-operative; they came to help us do our work, under our direction. In 1844 the executive board of the General Association in commending the work of the Home Mission Society used a term that scared the brethren, "parent society." That the General Association should be the child of any society was a compromising and tantalizing implication, even if the facts about its organization strengthened that suspicion. It might be true, but our fathers didn't like to have it thrown up to them, and we have always felt that a board, a creature of the denomination, ought to have better manners than to insinuate either by attitude, expression, compliment or request that it is more than a child. In 1846 the association chose to associate with the Southern Baptist Convention, as auxiliary to it. In 1869, after the Civil War, the matter of affiliation was dropped, out of deference to brethren of Northern sympathies who wished for a united body of Baptists. This left an "open door" to boards both North and South through which their agents came appealing for the work they had in hand, at home and in foreign fields.

The Sunday-school work was pushed among Missouri Baptists very early. In 1817 Rev. T. P. Green began the enterprise in Southeast Missouri, continuing with varying success for many years, notably in the counties of New Madrid, Scott, Cape Girardeau, Perry, Madison, St. Francois, Wayne and Stoddard. This now fat and flourishing child knocked for admittance into the family at various intervals but not until 1845 was any attention paid to it, and then only polite recognition. In 1866 a committee of this body "hailed with delight the organization of the Sunday-School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and promised to sustain it with prayers, sympathy and means." In 1878 this work was put into the hands of a committee selected by this body and from that time we have directed its movements.

In 1848 the denomination ordered the publication of a paper, The Western Watchman, but within a year the plant was destroyed by fire and the newspaper business became a private enterprise.

As early as 1843 William Jewell College was born in the hearts of Missouri Baptists, seven years before a brick was laid. The denomination could not hope for respectable perpetuity in the state without schools and colleges, so William Jewell soon became the "first-born" of the family. In fact, it enjoys the distinction of being the first institution conceived and projected by Missouri Baptists, after the General Association. Stephens College for young ladies was adopted in 1870, twenty years later. It might appear that we were indifferent to the education of our daughters; but William Jewell had an eye on the ministry, and many institutions of learning under Baptist control grew up during this time, the majority of them for girls. There were twelve of these, each having more or less definite desires to shelter under the home-roof, but they have done little more than play with our children, and, alas! six of them are dead.

The purposes of our institutions kept heart and hand busy building, maintaining, correcting,

enlarging. It was not all building, however. The main purpose of the central convocation was not neglected for anything. The familiar doctrines of grace were proclaimed with such tremendous vigor and fiery eloquence that scores were saved and churches sprang up in a night. This was the era of religious debate, doctrinal convention, advanced and more intelligent Bible exegesis, when Baptists and others became familiar with what we stand for, and why. Evangelism became more effective and orderly, our conceptions of the field grew to include all nations. We were organized to preach and perpetuate the Gospel at home and abroad.

The half century began with 5,000 co-operating Baptists and ended with 80,000. These, however, were not always harmonious in sentiment or unanimous in action. The Civil War broke right through our churches, yet the breach was soon healed, and the close of the period was distinguished by another vigorous protest against organization—Baptists were still shying at machines—the market-wagons that carry the denomination's butter and eggs to town. The situation was almost identical with that of fifty years before; the attitude of the opposition an exact imitation of that assumed by the anti-system brethren. They deprecated, expostulated, protested and eventually departed, organizing "the Missionary Society of Missouri Baptists," with twenty members, on November 20, 1880. This society met the following year, but for some reason has disappeared—Flag and all—we hope for good.

Glancing at the whole period one cannot see much change in direction, although there has been great change in method, equipment, and effectiveness. A statement of the Baptist position in 1880 would differ but slightly from that of a half century before. There were still two parties, the aggressives and the conservatives, one reaching toward and planning for the future, the other doctrinaire and clinging to the past. But the majority was with the aggressive party so the denomination shifted away from the doctrinal to the practical. The Baptist trend might lie characterized as *orderly evangelism with a missionary tendency*.

A QUARTER OF A CENTURY ON THE WAY, 1880-1906.

This caption is not meant to insinuate that Missouri Baptists did not get started until 1880, or that they were not on the way before this time; but it does mean that there began with this period a general fellowship among the churches, and unity in common enterprises that have continued without interruption until now.

If the testimony of half a hundred ministers in different parts of the state is to be taken as evidence in this case, we are yielding to the witchery of a general down-grade movement which promises but little credit to the churches and less glory to Jesus our Captain. The tone of their evidence is decidedly pessimistic. But the prophet is apt to get discouraged as he must ever lift the people up to God and the greater his load the less apparent his success. His conscience has ever been alarmed at spiritual ob-tuseness; woe the day when it is not! Perhaps if my fourteen questions had been submitted to one hundred laymen instead of preachers, the testimony would have been more hopeful.

The evidence shows that less care is exercised in the reception of members than formerly, that modern methods gather many who know nothing of personal religion and are a decided contradiction to the Baptist contention for a converted church membership. The struggle is for members—to get them (to keep them as well, for discipline is a lost art, they say), bigness not fitness. This is a grave charge; if true it calls for complete and immediate readjustment, for Baptists cannot live without religion. Once "time and place" was a necessary ingredient of experience, mourners were "coming through" for years frequently, the back door stood open, while the front door was closed eleven months in the year. But when eighty per cent of the church comes through the Sunday-school, religious experience must lose some of the angularity of its features—less inquisition ought to attend better preparation. Do we yet practice regenerate church membership, is the question. Would a Baptist church receive any man who avowed no change of attitude toward the service of Christ? Certainly not.

Spirituality is decreasing among us, say they, and is indicated by lack of acquaintance with the

Church Covenant, the cessation of discipline, neglect of spiritual oversight by the deacons and by the indifference to "church fellowship." "Spirituality" is an ambiguous term. If they mean the Church Covenant is not so well known as an instrument of writing, the same may be said of the Philadelphia Confession, but the contents of both are better known, being taught in Sunday-schools, young people's meetings and prayer-meetings. There are fewer church trials and exclusions. Yes, the older brethren are becoming less critical. There can be little doubt, however, that this age has pulled the church down from some of her pious exercises. The pulpit has become a platform, the church building is open many days in the week and the recluse is told to get busy. Whether the change from letter to spirit and from inward joy to outward endeavor indicates a loss or gain in spirituality, is a mooted question.

The testimony shows that there has been a decline in doctrinal preaching. Here is meant distinctive, differential, denominational peculiarities. Yes, because the tribes round about us on the map are quite well aware of the limits of our territory and have felt the temper of our steel. The Sunday-school scholar learns much doctrine before he comes into the church and needs tuition in the service of Jesus more than in formal distinctions. Doctrinal preaching has not passed away—only the pugnacity of it. The truths taught by the Master and his disciples are more uniformly, intelligently and sweetly expounded than hitherto, and the pulpit is trying harder, succeeding better in leading God's people into the practice of the religion of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Another count in the indictment is that Baptists are becoming more liberal toward error, which is but another way of saying they are less tenacious of truth. There are more union meetings, pulpit affiliations, denominational courtesies—a Baptist preacher's library is filled with books from every whence. But is there evidence of yielding in any doctrine touching the trinity, the divinity of Christ, a converted church membership, believer's baptism, the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures or church policy? Baptist vindictiveness is becoming respectful toward the achievements of others. We may well thank God and the fathers that there is no indication of a denominational stampede across the ancient landmarks, that there is no heresy plant in the state and not one of great influence in our ranks set for the overthrow of Bible doctrines or Baptist institutions. "Liberal" is a term hatched in the same nest with "Higher Criticism" and has no place in our vocabulary unless we admit that our predecessors have been stingy with the truth.

The testimony of the fifty men shows that the denomination has better leadership than it has had, and they were not speaking of themselves. The pulpit has become a platform, but the preacher has not yielded his leadership to another or retrograded in ability, only he has come closer to the people. With better facilities for training men, greater demand for such men, the work of the churches growing more complex and prosperous every year; and with the preacher urging tremulously for better things, one is compelled to admit a superior leadership. The successful pastor is doing more for the people; he must be ready like a doctor, have executive ability like a college president, be confidential like a father confessor, an expert financier, an accomplished conversationalist, an entertaining speaker, blameless in personal morals, and, above all, a religious leader. For these very things he is equipped. The church without him, or with a bad one, has more pain in the region of the heart than ever before. The demand for good men is on the increase because the pastor has magnified his office and made himself indispensable to the gathering, shifting and application of religious forces. Add to this captain his lieutenant and you have a leadership equal to that of the standing army; a host of capable business men, Sunday-school superintendents, teachers, young people's workers, junior leaders, normal classes, young men's classes, the home department (and even the cradle roll), missionary societies, aid societies, mission boards, college trustees, boards of managers, editors, etc.—all these inspire our churches to more abundant and effective life.

There has been a decided change for the better in the matter of finances, both in method and liberality—the question carries two to one. Still there are many stingy men among us and many indifferent churches. Twenty-five years ago one column of figures was thought a sufficient exponent

of our contributions; now we have nine. The minutes of 1880 show a total of \$15,000; those of 1905, a total of \$233,000. The list of contributors is becoming larger every year. Baptists are giving heart and hand in genuine sympathy to the hungry as did the Disciples of old. We have not yet attained or become perfect, but we must thank God and take courage.

An examination of the evidence will show that we have departed from the methods of our fathers but not from their principles. Church doors are opened wider and more frequently; discipline is not inflicted for the same offenses; spiritual exercises have become more practical; the preaching of differentiating doctrines has been superseded by instruction and exhortation to the service of Christ; asperity toward other peoples has retired for politeness; leadership is better and supplies more abundant. There is no serious talk about union with any body except our own non-cooperating brethren and lost souls. We are getting closer to other denominations because they are coming closer to us. The pure flour of Gospel truth is as highly prized as ever though it has been put through a modern process, and it is certainly served in a greater variety of dishes which is sensible cuisinery.

Now let us take a hasty glance at this last period. The Baptist position in faith and practice has not changed and is more intelligently held by more people. The local church with its many departments is yet the seat of government. Our colleges, public and private, are full to overflowing. Our mission boards are sending out more men and money with better results. The spirit of harmony and fellowship is increasing. We are becoming better known at home and abroad. The leader is better equipped, the follower more willing. The season of organic experiment is passed. With hopeful faces and larger plans we turn to the future and humbly repeat the Scotchman's prayer: "Lord, keep me right; for if I ever get wrong I never will get right," The Baptist trend in Missouri to-day is, *world-wide evangelism with a purpose to love one another.*