

MAY 3 1961

W H E N T H E S O U T H E R N B A P T I S T C O N V E N T I O N
M E T I N M Y H O M E T O W N O F R U S S E L L V I L L E

B y W . C . T a y l o r

In May, 1861, one hundred years ago, the "War Between the States" ^{had been} formally launched. The Southern Baptist Convention held its eighth session, in Savannah, Ga., under the presidency of Dr. Richard Fuller, of Baltimore, and declared its loyalty to the Confederacy. The situation, however, was far from clarified then.

NINTH BIENNIAL SESSION, IN 1863, AT AUGUSTA, GA..

P. H. Mell, Pres.. "Delegates" there from Va., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga., Ala., Miss., and Tenn. The border States and those "beyond the river" could not get representatives there. The previous meeting had resolved a vote of thanks to Dr. Fuller and committees and citizens of the border States "for their Christian interest in the fortunes, and their manly and brave assertions of the rights of our Confederacy."

Now long and varied resolutions succeed that. One of these recommends that as "the Army is the most important field for the labor of the ministry", therefore "send missionaries and colporters" into its ranks. John A. Broadus presents a resolution urging parents to keep their children in schools. There was a great "Army Evangelization Mass Meeting" on Saturday night of the Convention in which Churches were urged to give their pastors a two months leave of absence, but continuing to pay their salaries, for them to labor among the soldiers. A resolution stated the "death of that great favorite of the people, the friend of God, Gen. Jackson" and Andrew Broadus, of Va., led in prayer in reference to this sad event. There was a special report on Army Missions, saying: "As

a great religious denomination we owe our brave defenders more than our sympathy and prayers. It is our privilege to cheer the painful monotony of the camp; to sustain its good order and discipline; to touch its courage with a purer and loftier inspiration; to foster the interests of public virtue and happiness, there so fearfully endangered; to prepare the souls so soon to be dismissed from the bloodstained field and crowded hospital to enter into the glorious and awful presence of their God..." Certainly so noble Christian sentiments in time of war have seldom been uttered.

continues

The citation ~~continues~~:" Our soldiers are already forming congregations that wait the minister's appearance..." "They are dying now -- many of them, the safeguard, the glory of the ~~Confederacy~~ the Convention federacy." The Government had supplied 500 Chaplains and urges others for "brigades, regiments, and companies that never hear the gospel".

We read further:"Resolved, 1st That the events of the ^{two} past ~~few~~ years have only confirmed the convictions expressed by this Convention at its last session, that the war which has been forced upon us is, on our part, just and necessary and have only strengthened our opposition to a reunion with the United States on any terms whatsoever; and while deploring the dreadful evils of the war, and earnestly desiring peace, we have no thought of yielding but will render a hearty support to the Confederate Government in all constitutional measures to secure our independence". They again lament the death of Stonewall Jackson("General Jackson") and recommend moral efforts along various lines. "The Board of Domestic and Indian Missions" prints the name of 26 men active in 8 States in "Army Missions".

There is not a hint in all these years, in their Minutes, that the institution of slavery even existed, much less

was the ideal for which they were fighting, or the issue at stake.

B.H. Carroll, himself a Confederate soldier, gave studies of the makeup and spirit of the Southern Confederacy, which have recently been published posthumously, and show how many of its leaders were as strongly against slavery as any abolitionist of the North. There is not a hint of the subject of slavery in these three meetings of the Convention in the Confederate States, but a vast loyalty to that defense of States Rights, STILL A CAUSE, not a pretext, of massive Southern unity in defense of UNITED STATES, not of THE UNITED STATE, such as many of our judges and legislators are trying to create.

1866 - THE RUSSELLVILLE, KY. MEETING OF THE CONVENTION

The War is lost and virtually over, except its tragic effects. The South is prostrate. Only from the Border States can come help and a meeting place. Dr. Richard Fuller writes of "blessed Kentucky" and its cooperation to keep alive our missionaries and mission work in the Orient when the Foreign Board could not get money to them. Now Kentucky has invited the Board of Domestic and Indian Missions to send its agents to Kentucky and replenish their barren storehouse of supplies. Agents come and visit our churches and collect \$10,000.00 in a few weeks time.

At Russellville, the Southern Baptist Convention came back into the United States. Its constitution had read, during the War: "We, the delegates from missionary societies, churches and other ~~religious~~ religious bodies, in various parts of the Southern States of North America, met in ~~the~~ Convention..." Now they change back to the original constitution. And there are "delegates" from Maryland, W. Va., Texas, Missouri, and Kentucky (which has more than half of the delegates). Among those present I note George C. Lorimer,

Walnut Street pastor, and J.C. Waller; my uncle, Judson S. Taylor, of Gasper River Association, Clean Keys of Lewisburg, S.P. Forgy of Allenville, James Small also of Allenville, J.S. Coleman and E.T. Williams of Beaver Dam, E.W. Pendleton of Bethel Church, along with J.B. Moody, and from Bethel Association O.H. Morrow, W.W. Gardner, W.G. Inman, J.W. Rust, etc., from Concord As., J.M. Frost, from Davis (our Davies?) Co. As., J.M. Peay, etc.; from Liberty As., N.G. Terry and among general representatives of the State organization, Lloyd Browning, J.M. Fort, W.E. Powers, J.H. Spencer, W.H. Dorris, M.F. Ham, and F.M. Welburne. Some of these I knew.

Always, in times of slavery and afterwards, they have special emphasis upon "Work Among the Colored People". That is why most religious Negroes are Baptists. Our people cared for their souls in times of slavery. They had great churches, after they preferred their own separate churches to belonging to our churches with their masters, and some of our greatest preachers were pastors of large colored churches till they could find proper leadership among a ministry of their own, and still our leaders were their brotherly counselors, when sought for to that end. At Russellville a committee was named to draft an address on "The Religious Instruction of the Colored People".

Report is given of the great work in the Army, "a prolific field of missionary endeavor". 78 missionaries were employed in the army and the salaries of 11 chaplains were supplemented.

The subject of future operations of the Foreign Board are discussed: "Where shall we begin retraction? Every spot is in the field assigned for our toil. Every station is covered by the promises. What soil is too sterile for the growth of the seed? What fortress is too strong for the victories of grace? What hovel is too poor to yield a jewel for Jesus? Where may Christians pause this

side of a complete harvest? Though few and poor as the fishermen of Galilee, our hearts, our hopes, our faith may and must encompass the world. Amid human exigencies and impossibilities, the voice of God urged: "Go Forward!" "'Tis His to open a passage through the deep waters: 'tis ours to march forward. Our God is our counsellor, His Word is our instructions, His promises are our capital..." "Resolved that our Board of Foreign Missions be instructed to preserve our missions now in operation, so far as they may find it practicable in the providence of God, and prepare for such future extension of operations as may seem desirable and possible." That, from people in a wrecked economy, under the heel of the conqueror, is an amazing faith. It is majestic literature, great in the annals of missionary loyalty and enthusiasm. Our Convention is to meet the next four years in cities like St. Louis, San Francisco, Kansas City and Atlantic City. If they could have the spirit there which their fathers had in tiny Russellville, we would enter the most glorious chapters in Baptist history every known under the Great Commission.

One more thing calls for mention. Though a defeated and prostrate minority, under the heel of the military conqueror, they fearlessly voiced the Baptist cry for religious freedom, ^{with} ~~and~~ no insolence from any powerful State, however mighty in war! Carpet-baggers and military exploiters of the recently freed slaves were already on the horizon in what was to be an awful period of RECONSTRUCTION in the South. Preachers faced arrogant authority of civil and military authorities not chosen by the people they governed. But these heroic Baptists protest all interference by military or public authorities in putting men in the ministry. The Convention speaks with an encouraging voice to those ministers who have submitted to

fines, emprisonments and other "pains and penalties". The Convention met in Russellville voiced its brave protest against the usurpation of the rights of conscience by civil rulers. And this was signed by such men as J. B. Jeter, S. L. Helm, A. P. Williams, S. Henderson, J. L. Burrows and J. P. Boyce.. Blessing, on their memory. We read of them, thank God and take courage!

W. C. Taylor