

# Griffin's History

## Chapter XII

### BAPTISTS IN MISSISSIPPI

Previous to 1785, a few families had immigrated from South Carolina, and settled near Natchez, which was then a Spanish province. Some of these were regular Baptists. Driven from their native State by the pressure of the Revolution, they sought a peaceful home in the wilderness, far away from the tumults of war. But even here, they soon found, that they had not passed the bounds of the great enemy of peace—"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;"—and here they suffered persecution, through the instrumentality of nominal Christians. Yea, those who professed to be followers of the "meek and lowly Jesus," became the instruments of Satan, to vent his bitter spite against the Regular Baptists. And what for? Was it for sedition against the civil authorities? No. Was it for immoral conduct? No. It was for nothing more nor less than what the Catholic priest was pleased to consider heresy in religion.

A regular Baptist Licentiate, in the year above mentioned "mounted the rostrum, and declared publicly to the surrounding country, the plan of salvation by grace; and preached the pure and gentle doctrine of the Gospel. Thus affairs moved on till 1793, when the high Priest, "like Demetrius of old, began to take the alarm, thinking that his craft was in danger, by the propagation and growth of such heretical principles." The Rev. Ecclesiastic commanded silence and implicit obedience to the Catholic religion. Finding his edict disregarded by the Baptists, he had recourse to the civil authority to suppress such heresy. Accordingly, "Richard Curtis (the Baptist Licentiate,) was denounced as an incorrigible heretic, with all his adherents; and consequently, if there were five subsequently found together, in a religious capacity, they should be put in confinement."

In 1794 said Curtis returned to South Carolina, where he was ordained to the ministry by the Regular Baptists. His preaching in the Natchez country had so aroused the resentment of the Catholics, that, during his absence, they seized several of his adherents and cast them into prison. "Elder Curtis now returned to his brethren and friends, fully authorized to fill the different functions of the Gospel, as a minister of Christ. This will bring us up to 1795 when the United States negotiated with Spain for this country. The negotiation being announced, and Popish fetters broken, there was nothing to fear from that quarter. In this same year Elder Curtis, acting the part of an under— shepherd, gathered the few

scattered sheep to the fold, when they were constituted into a church on the old regular predestinarian plan, by the name of "Salem Church, on Cole's creek," in Jefferson county.

Emigration now began to come in rapidly from South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee, among whom were many Regular Baptists, some of whom were ordained ministers. In 1797, New Hope church, on Second creek, near Natchez, was constituted, on the same principles of Salem church. In 1803 and '4, they were blessed with a "great revival in religion, under the preaching of Elder Thomas Mercer and others," which led to the constitution of other churches.

It will be necessary, here, to take some notice of Dr. James Mullen, a Baptist preacher, who moved into the territory about 1797. The Doctor preached and contended for the general atonement system, which was so contrary to regular Baptist doctrine, and the articles of faith, on which the Baptist churches in the territory had been constituted, that he was unable to obtain membership. He however, succeeded in drawing away from the churches some followers. But, after an unavailing effort for several years, not being able to realize his expectations, he left the territory, without ever constituting his adherents into a church.

The foregoing information was obtained principally from the writings of Joseph Erwin, who was born in Rowan County, North Carolina, in 1774, and emigrated to the vicinity of Natchez, in 1783. He was a member of the first Baptist church ever constituted in the Mississippi territory, and was a delegate for forming the first Association. He has been a member ever since, and is now living in Holmes county, and enjoying as good health as is usual for his age.

Before taking up the Associational minutes, we will give place to an extract from one of his letters, written in 1839, viz:

"When, alas, the enemy began to make inroads upon us by sending young theologians from the Academies as missionaries, who came in among us, and said we are of you; and the poor old Regulars not being always at their post, with unsuspecting simplicity received them into their arms, their bosoms, their pulpits, and dandled them on the knee; there being a train of them from the up country, all things appeared to go on well until those visitors had got well in the hearts and affections of the churches, and began to be looked up to as men of considerable weight and talent. Then it was that they began to vomit out their heterodoxical sentiments in all its multifarious forms. Campbellism was what they appeared to

advocate most strenuously, after they had gained weight and influence in the churches.

"And now, brethren, it is a fact, that churches which were in good standing, and apparently in good health, were torn to pieces, and have never regained their former standing. And not only churches, but associations; the Mississippi and Union, have been powerfully shook with these seeds of corruption; and though those men are gone, yet the fruits of their baneful and heterodoxical sentiments have been left behind, as a lasting memorial of their deception. And now, brethren, this reminds me of what the Apostle Paul saith, that 'After my departure wolves should enter in among them (the churches) not sparing the flock; but scattering,' &c, and leading or drawing away disciples after them.

"Well, another Babel or Castle built in the air, was the Mississippi Baptist State Convention; when and where all the churches belonging to the different Associations must annually send up their delegates, with their pecuniary remittances to support theological schools, for the purpose of educating young men in and for the ministry.

"After the same had progressed a little, and got so it looked like it might stand on its legs, its features and forms could be more minutely discovered. And then the old Regulars, or some of them, did not like its shapes. They saw the impropriety of such a line of conduct—that it was not congenial with or to the Gospel plan—believing that God called and qualified his ministers for and to the work. And now down comes the building to the ground, because it could not live without money. The Old School boys being now twice bit, began to be a little more on their guard, and to stand aloof to things which they did not understand.

"Well, from some part of the State in pours the general atonement doctrine, with its multifarious doctrines, that Christ tasted death for every man equally alike, that all mankind are in a salvable state. The old Regulars opposed that doctrine strenuously, believing it to be false when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary.

"The Missionary System with all its multifarious train, were pressed upon the churches. But the old Regulars cannot submit to such measures, not believing them to be Apostolic. My remarks turn particularly on the above mentioned Associations. There are others of recent date, where the isms prevail abundantly, with their gigantic strides.

"The Primitive Baptist Association to which I belong has closed her doors against the above train of speculative notions, or moneyed institutions of the day; and I

hope the day is not far distant, when all God's dear children will listen with attention to that solemn and pathetic invitation, 'Come out of her, my people.'"