

THEOPHILUS B. LARIMORE THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT FIGHT

Bro. T. B. Larimore was one of the great evangelists of the church from 1870-1925. He was loved and respected by all who knew him for his pleasant temperament and peaceable spirit. All change agents cite the example of Bro. T. B. Larimore as they seek to persuade conservative brethren to sit silently while they work to change the church and capture congregations, church buildings and schools. When a similar change movement swept through our brotherhood, following the Civil War, Bro. Larimore chose to devote himself to evangelism rather than taking a strong stand against those who were abandoning the restoration plea and corrupting the faith. He steadfastly refused to condemn their innovations or to break fellowship with those who were introducing instrumental music and missionary societies into the churches. Modern promoters of change usually fail to mention that he did have sufficient conviction to pitch his tent with the conservative brethren of the churches of Christ rather than with the progressives of the Disciples of Christ.

Bro. Larimore faced questions such as, "How should we worship in order to please God? Or are we allowed to tamper with the structure of Christ's sacred church?" Douglas Foster comments, "To Larimore those issues were not worth dividing the body of Christ" (**Will the Cycle Be Unbroken?** p. 157). This of course is what Bro. Foster wants his readers to conclude about the innovations of the change movement. He does not consider the possibility that Bro. Larimore was naive about what was actually happening to the church of his day...just as many are naive today. Perhaps Larimore's personality was such that he could not bring himself to confront those who were walking away from the ancient gospel standard. It is reasonable to ask if Bro. Larimore's actions reflected a proper spirit for a Christian soldier in the face of hostile enemies (I Tim.6:12)? God does command us to "Contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3). Like Paul we are to be set for the defense of gospel (Phil.1:16).

We must ask, if every member of the conservative churches had responded as did Larimore, what would have been the result? Would we even exist today? Would all have been swept into apostasy? Do our modern change agents think such would have been the preferable course? Is that what they want for today? Bro. Foster naively asserts, "if everyone had had T. B. Larimore's attitude, the problems would never have been blown up into divisive issues in the first place" (**Ibid.** p. 158). Either he doesn't know or chooses not to mention that the progressive brethren did not have that sweet, passive spirit. They were determined to have instruments in our churches and involve all in their Missionary Societies. They pushed their agenda and even resorted to stealth to gain control of congregations. If all of our brethren had stood by passively, all would have been swept away. The same is true today.

During the controversy, Bro. Larimore held a lengthy gospel meeting for the church in Sherman, Texas. Dr. Foster mentions that the progressives of the church in Sherman were meeting at separate times from the conservatives so they could worship with their instruments (**Ibid.** p.152). This is similar to the "alternative services" modern change agents use to get a foot hold in a conservative church. A year later he notes that the "pro-instrument faction withdrew to form what they called the First Christian Church" (**Ibid.**). If our change folks cannot take the property, we can expect them to eventually leave to be free to do as they wish.

In time of war every patriotic citizen does his part to help his nation through the conflict. Some produce food, others produce war materials. Some are warriors, some are medics. Some drive supply trucks, others fly bombers that rain death on the enemy. Some plan strategies, others process the paperwork. But all who do their part faithfully are good citizens who together served their nation. So it is in the church. While we do not fault Bro. Larimore's passive stand, but neither should we fault Tolbert Fanning, David Lipscomb, Jacob Creath, Jr., Benjamin Franklin or the other noble men who fought valiantly to save a remnant from the apostasy that confronted them. We are much indebted to them for the survival of the church and our existence today. JHW