

LARIMORE AND HIS BOYS

BY F.D. Srygley

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. All of it is worthy of note, and I found myself as you will see here writing too much of it as a summary. It was too hard to narrow down so much detail. I still go back to it and read my favorite sections to receive encouragement along life's way.

Preface—

Srygley's reasons for writing about Larimore are colorfully given in the Preface. He begins with Larimore's objections, Srygley's insistence, and Larimore's consent, and then convinces us to read it with the claim it is amusing, interesting, profitable, encouraging, motivating, and informative regarding the subject of missionary societies which was a hot topic in 1889.

The sub-title to the book is Smiles and Tears which aptly describes the content and reaction of all those who would read it. T.B. Larimore was only 46 when the book began to be written. The book begins in Chapter 1, "T. B. Larimore is now in his forty-sixth year, and for more than twenty years he has labored extensively and successfully in the Southern States as a general evangelist. He probably baptized more people than any other man of his age now living, and possibly he has established more churches of Disciples in the South than any other man of any age, living or dead. Srygley inserts portions of letters from preachers, business men and distinguished Christian women who extol the virtue of Larimore with their personal insights of his talents and faithfulness. But Srygley knew him best.

Chapter 2 convinces us just how well Srygley knew Larimore with the talent of a good writer who knows how to set the scene. He takes us through the rustic hill country of North Alabama, and describes it as it was in 1840 – 1868. Rugged mountains, narrow pieces of bottom land, rocky hills that were uncultivated, wild forests flowing with springs of pure water that fell in picturesque waterfalls. "The people were healthy but poor," "simple in customs, but honest of heart," uneducated yet "strong in practical sense."

After setting the scene we are introduced with humorous tales to the way of life among these people who survived the Civil War and struggled with poverty. Don't miss page 20 and the tale that begins "that was a great country for dogs."

P. 21 Srygley's own experience at Bill Sanderson's Mill

P. 22 The description of Rock Creek Church.

P.23 The post office

P. 24 John Taylor's donkey

P. 25 – 27 humorous tales that are amazingly true. The chapter ends with assurance that this was to give the reader an idea of the sort of country where Larimore began his ministry.

Chapter 3 introduces us to Larimore in the style of a novelist. A new preacher arrives at Rock Creek Church and we see him through the eyes of a small boy, Srygley. "The preacher turned

aside to speak to the little fellow, and to take him by the hand, and thus began a friendship that nothing but death can ever destroy.”

P. 29 We are regaled with the humorous account of Larimore’s first appearance at Rock Creek, and then Srygley addresses the character of Larimore. Throughout the book we are told of what a “good” man he was. Though I veer away from the word “good” to describe any man (cite: “Why call thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.” Matthew 19:17, Mark 10:18, and Luke 18:9). But, Srygley is attempting to convey his love for his friend who is faithful and true, humble and strong, patient and zealous.

We are reminded this is a non-fiction book with the many excerpts from letters of Larimore’s and his friends. Chapter 4 contains Larimore’s “first missionary journey.” Much humor is used in the telling, and we get the treat of meeting John Taylor, one of the first reformation preachers in that area. This chapter devotes most of its words to the friendship of John Taylor and ends with a douching reunion before his passing.

Though much of the book takes place in Northern Alabama Chapter V tells us Larimore was born in East Tennessee July 10, 1843. This chapter was almost never written. It took a lot of convincing on Srygley’s part to drag out the sad recollections of Larimore’s childhood. Poverty and an alcoholic father darken this part of his memory. We see the character of the man Larimore would become in the heart of this young boy. He worked beside a black slave in the field. He had horrifying nose bleeds that caused him to faint from blood loss as he plowed on despite the hemorrhaging. He was too weak to work in the brickyard and had to be carried off pale and bleeding. This chapter brings on our tears and when we read of his childhood and hardships.

Chapter 6 has the words of his mother, “if he ever used a profane, obscene, or indecent word, drank a drop of intoxicating liquor, or used tobacco in any way,” she does not know it. Page 61 tells of his love and honor for his mother with an incident regarding a dying milk cow that is truly touching. Another memory he shares of his mother is in chapter 7. It begins with a goose he caught when too small to hold one much less catch one.

Larimore always wanted to be an orator. His favorite pastime when a young man was to sit through court cases and observe the eloquence of the lawyers. His formal education began in 1859 when he was 16 at Mossy Creek Baptist College. It was there that he became interested in religion. It took him quite some time to sort out denominational creeds and backwoods superstitions before he saw the pure Gospel of Christ. After receiving his diploma he enlisted in the Confederate army.

Chapters 9 & 10 contain amazing glimpses into his experiences serving during the war. He served in the battles and skirmishes at—

Fishing Creek

Shiloh

Bain Bridge

Tuscumbia, Alabama

Chattanooga, Tennessee

Sequachie Valley, Tennessee

His clothing received holes where bullets came close but he was never wounded, and never had to fire a shot. He was captured after the close call at Sequachie Valley and given a choice of Federal prison or taking the “Non-Combatant Oath.” So he took the “Non-Combatant Oath” and ended his career as a soldier P. 76

QUOTATIONS:

Page 213 “My financial condition . . . The-longest-pole-knocks-the-persimmon”

Page 214 “If you can trust me for the preaching, I can certainly trust you for the pay”

Page 215 “Blessed are they that expect little for they shall not be disappointed.”

Page 253 in regard to friends... “Riches that never take wings are best.”

PROVIDENCE, PRAYER AND VOWS

Chapter 24

Remarkable incidents in his life regarding providence—

Train wreck in Tuscumbia, Alabama PROVIDENCE

Carriage wreck in Middle Tennessee PROVIDENCE

Sister Moore’s recovery PRAYER

Young lady in Florence, Alabama recovered PRAYER

From a letter Larimore wrote to Srygley—

“ . . . the hand of Providence is ever steadily on the helm is not a debatable question with me. My whole life proves it. The plotting of foes has as certainly tended to bless me as the love and devotion of friends.”

Chapter 15 - Mars Hill Bible School

Chapter 17 – Sketches of Mars Hill preachers (he names them, tells where they are from and their accomplishments)

Chapter 18 – sketches of other Mars Hill graduates that though not preachers had successful lives and honored the institution (12 sketches)

RELIGIOUS IGNORANCE

Chapter 28

Examples of the prevailing ignorance and superstition—

Page 274 Dream about swallowing a wagon believed to prove redemption

Page 274 Whoop, jump, clap their hands, shout, embrace, roll on the floor for hours, trance that lasted hours

Page 275 Ear-splitting screams saying inappropriate things like “Christmas gift!” They got the jerks, holy laugh or holy dance.

Page 276 One man in attempting to leave jumped over his horse 3 times in the effort to mount his horse.

Srygley witnessed a church of 300 under a brush arbor in the woods receive the “outpouring” of the Holy Ghost where they convulsed with side-splitting “holy laughter.” During these exercises the singers kept things lively singing and the preachers exhorted loudly. They sang without books and made up lyrics to encourage the fervor.

“Lord I want more religion! Yes I want more religion,

Lord I want more religion to help me on to thee”

And the repetitive:

“The devil is mad and I am glad oh glory, hallelujah!
The devil is mad and I am glad oh glory, hallelujah!”

Page 278 “One who has never witnessed such things can scarcely imagine the extent to which they were carried. All these things were gravely attributed to the Holy Ghost working on the hearts of the people.” “. . . they knew little and cared less about what the Bible said.”

Page 279 “. . . they looked upon you as their spiritual enemy, a religious fraud and a dangerous character. As well try to reason with a stark lunatic against his favorite hobby, as to try to reason with them against their fanaticism.”

“. . . this things they called ‘getting religion’ was faith, change of heart, repentance, conversion, regeneration, the work of the Holy Ghost and new birth. Hence, when a man rejected this, he was but a baptized infidel . . .”

Larimore and his boys suffered bitter persecution and fierce denunciation for insisting upon the Bible as the only authoritative guide in matters of religion. They spoke against the absurdities of the day and relied on the plain teaching of the New Testament. The whole religious world was against them. Today the tendency to rely on feelings continues though not to this radical extent, and there are still such people who oppose us and misrepresent us.

Chapter 29

He refers us to a book by T.C. Anderson, a biography of George Donnell that gives some graphic descriptions of revival scenes in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee. George Donnell was a Cumberland Presbyterian preacher. So was T.C. Anderson and they labored together in some of these revivals. The book was written in 1858 only 10 years before Larimore began to preach in North Alabama. They believe in this Holy Ghost religion. Anderson was President of the Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee, a believer in, and practice of such things under the influence of the “Holy Ghost.” The interesting point Srygley is making here is the origin of the “Holy Ghost Phenomenon.”

Anderson gives the history of Ireland and Scotland that resulted in the Scotch-Irish race who were all Protestants and principally Presbyterian.

They were persecuted by Irish Catholics and the government. Scotch-Irish preachers were silenced, some arrested, and a few executed. This caused the Scotch-Irish to immigrate to America where they settled in colonies in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. They were leaders in the great camp-meeting revivals called the “Great Awakening.” They introduced these exhibitions of the Holy Ghost.

Page 287 Anderson describes the Scotch-Irish people practicing the Holy Ghost swoon, convulsions, jerks, in Ireland in the year 1800!

“President Anderson shows that “the bodily exercises,” as he terms them, prevailed under the influence of the Holy Spirit in the revivals held by the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians in Ireland more than a hundred years before any thing of the kind was ever witnessed in America.”

Page 288 Anderson describes Irish Catholics as destitute of morality or civilization. Anderson passes from Ireland to America and describes the “bodily exercises” in Kentucky—

Fell down dead speechless for hours

Convulsing and spasmodic movements

Fell to the ground rolled

Some lay quiet others seemed to be in agony

Some groaned and moaned

Made faces as if in pain

Some fell prostrate all night

Page 291

At Shiloh, Tennessee the entire “neighborhood came together for prayer, and one fell prostrate, and were unable to rise until they were regenerated and raised to newness of life in Christ.”

Page 292

At Summer County, Tennessee on night the entire encampment fell prostrate and it looked like a “battle-field resounding with the groans and piteous wailings of the dying.”

Page 293

These camp-meetings originated with the Presbyterians in the year 1800. It was not long until they were adopted by other denominations.

Anderson describes them as “displays of divine power”

Page 293

“The jerks, falling down, swooning, trances and transports of rapturous joy, were as common in Carolina as in the Cumberland, and as they had been a century before in Ireland.” (Anderson)

Page 295

4,000 at one camp-meeting stood in sleet, then snow, then rain that lasted until 4 a.m.

Another had 262 wagons, 8 to 10 thousand people. They had to divide the assembly into 4 it was so large.

Another had 6 or 7 thousand with 5 simultaneously held services. The excitement was so loud the preachers sat down because they could not be heard.

Page 296

“In Carolina, intelligent, strong minded men fell suddenly and lay many hours powerless, as if stricken by lightning.”

“Dr. Samuel Doak, who was much prejudiced against the exercise, was subject to it; and that on one occasion, while in the pulpit, he was seized with a paroxysm, and jerked so violently as to throw his wig from his head into the congregation.

Page 298 from Srygley:

These strange bodily exercises were carried to such extremes that many of the more sober minded religious people protested against such absurdities. It never occurred to any of them that such things were purely nervous excitements, and that God operates in an entirely different manner upon the hearts of sinners. They all believed in what is now termed the abstract operation

of God upon the hearts of sinners; but some of them protested against these excesses on the ground of disorderly conduct in the worshippers.

This pretty much was the state of things in North Alabama when Larimore and his boys began to preach through that country. The excitement had somewhat abated, but Scripture intelligence had not perceptibly increased. Revivalists had succeeded in “calling God to order,” to some extent, but no progress had been made or attempted in teaching the people scriptures. People had ceased to jerk and dance, but they still shouted, clapped their hands, mourned, and occasionally laughed the holly laugh. They taught that God’s Spirit reached man’s heart through the understanding, that the Holy Spirit in conversion operates through the Word.

Page 302

“I have tried to describe *things as they were*, within the memory of people yet living.”

“The design of this book is to show that there has been a marked change in this country within the present century, especially in religious doctrine and customs.

Page 303

Until Larimore and his boys and “such men began an earnest fight against such excesses and absurdities, they were recognized everywhere as an essential part – almost the whole process and substance – of religion. One could accept them and be religious, or reject them and be irreligious. Those who first caught the idea that such excesses were abuses of religion and not essential parts of it as clearly as the sunbeams saw also, that they had a different origin than religion.”

Page 304

“The controversy was narrowed down to a well-defined issue concerning our authoritative guide in religious matters. Shall we follow our *feelings* or the *Word of God*.”

Srygley says, “That was the issue and upon that issue the battle was fought and won.” [Oh, that he was right for all time. Unfortunately men have fallen back into relying upon their feelings rather than the scriptures. They usually are not as extreme in their outward show when they “get religion” but they feel just as strongly that God communicates with them directly] Srygley goes on to say, “The religious world was asked to leave off following dreams, superstitions, intuitions, feelings and traditions in religious matters, and to be governed by the teaching of the New Testament.”

Vocabulary: absurd fancies and superstitions

The religious world followed feelings dreams impressions and superstitions.

Last page last 2 sentences,

“Where the Scriptures speak we speak, and where the Scriptures are silent we will be silent” is the principle or theological tool Srygley recommends at the end of the book. He says it is a simple thing but “my, what a weapon against religious error of every sort! It never goes off prematurely, hangs fire, or misses the mark! It is serviceable everywhere, and a sure dependence in every emergency. It will be a dark day for the Christian religion when preachers grow tired of using it.”

CHRONOLOGY

1843 -- Larimore was born in East Tennessee July 10th
1864 – July 10, 1864 Larimore was baptized
1866 – May 13th at Hopkinsville, Kentucky he gave his first sermon. It was from Luke 12:13-29.
In the fall he entered Franklin College near Nashville, TN to prepare for the ministry.
1867 – June 6th / Valedictorian of graduating class, Franklin college
Tolbert Fanning was his teacher there.
Chapter 13 gives his Valedictory Address in full
1868 – Summer preaching tour with John Taylor
1868 – August married Esther Gresham near Florence, Alabama
1868 – Fall – resumed teaching at Mountain Home.
Failed an attempt to start a church college with J.M. Pickens.
1869 – Taught 6 months at Mansell Kendrick’s School in West Tennessee.
1869 – Moved to Stantonville, Tennessee and preached several meetings there for 10 months.
1869 – Debated a Methodist, W.B. Blackburn to an immense audience.
EVANGELISTIC EFFORTS 1870 - 1875
1870 – Collierville, Tennessee, Meeting
1870 – Antioch in Lauderdale county Alabama, Meeting
1871 – January 1, 1871 – Opened Mars Hill Academy in Florence Alabama
1872 – Pocahontas, Tennessee, Meeting
1872 – Greenwood, Tennessee, Meeting
1872 – Jackson, Tennessee, Hired as minister
1873 – Landersville, Alabama, Meeting at Prospect congregation
1873 – 1875 Other meetings are listed:
Baldwin, Mississippi
Eureka, Mississippi
Saltillo, Mississippi
Memphis, Tennessee, Linden Street congregation
New Orleans, Louisiana
Congregations in Georgia
Congregations in Florida
Congregations around Florence Alabama
1875 – Started a paper in hopes it would finance establishing a university, but it sadly failed
It is no wonder he established so many congregations throughout the south. He had a magnificent talent for oratory, matchless endurance and perseverance and singleness of purpose.
City Preaching Chapter 21
“The great number of urgent appeals for his preaching which came from every part of the country, pressed greatly upon him.”
1885 – he made 2 important changes in his schedule...longer meetings and city congregations.
He was a very humble [person and related well to the people of rural areas, and up to now lacked the confidence to accept appointments in large, established churches where talented well known preachers that never used slang phrases, told anecdotes, or anything bordering remotely upon levity. His first such appointment was at—
Nashville, Tennessee – it lasted 30 days resulting in about 75 baptisms

This meeting opened him to a wider field of usefulness as an evangelist while his school, Mars Hill, declined. He finally closed the school and abandoned college work which is quite sad for it was an effort so close to his heart.

1887 South Nashville, Tennessee – it lasted 6 weeks resulting in 126 baptisms

“Crowds thronged the meeting house, and many were turned away for want of standing room in hearing of the sermons even in the streets and grounds out-side of the house. And yet there was nothing to interest the people but the simple gospel of Christ delivered in plain language and pathetic eloquence. There were no song services by trained choirs; no sensational themes nor theatrical performances indulged in by the preacher for the sake of notoriety; no after-meetings to excite Christians to frenzy or sinners to fear; no systematic visiting from house to house, nor distributing of flashy hand bills to advertise the meeting; no instrumental music nor street harangues to draw a crowd. Day after day and night after night vast crowds assembled to find a man of youthful appearance and modest manner sitting, silent and thoughtful, beside the pulpit. At exactly the time previously announced for preaching, he would ascend the pulpit, read a short lesson, pray, preach and earnest sermon and dismiss the audience. His face was always pale, his form erect, his voice deep and strong but melodious with a burden of love and earnestness. Such was the character of his second great meeting in Nashville.” Page 207

1888 – Fort Smith, Arkansas - it lasted 1 month and there were 50 baptisms

1888 – Louisville, Kentucky - it lasted 1 month and there were 75 baptisms

1888 – Sherman, Texas - it lasted 1 month and there were 50 baptisms

I JUST STOPPED TAKING NOTES . . . I realized I was almost copying the book! I hope my interest inspires you to read this excellent book. – sheila mcdade