

Early Work In Memphis

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Have you ever been curious about the “early work in Memphis,” who first preached here and what were the circumstances? In a book first printed in 1889 titled, *Larimore and his Boys*, written by F.D. Srygley about the life and labors of T.B. Larimore and those young preachers he influenced and helped train mention is made of Larimore’s visiting Memphis in 1874.

A preliminary word about T.B. Larimore might help develop appreciation for what he did when he came to Memphis at that distant point in the past. Srygley wrote of his general reputation at the time,

T.B. Larimore is now in his forty-sixth year, and for more than twenty years he has labored extensively [*sic*] and successfully in the Southern States as a general evangelist. He has 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, 7).

Srygley, one of Larimore’s “boys” and a great admirer of Larimore told of “his power in the pulpit,”

His power in the pulpit consists mainly in the plainness with which he states his propositions, and the pathos and persuasiveness with which he appeals to the hearts of the people in exhortation. The intellect readily approves the correctness of his doctrine, and the heart warmly responds to the tenderness of his appeal. If we add to these two powerful elements of strength as a preacher, his splendid ability as an orator and universal popularity as a man, his wonderful natural gifts and almost perfect educational accomplishments in the use of the English language, his strong faith in what he preaches and his deep piety touching what he believes, years of experience and observation in evangelistic work and a ready and accurate judgment touching human nature, and above all a keen sympathy for all mankind and a perfect familiarity with the teaching of the Bible—if we put all these things together, we have fairly summed up the elements of power in this distinguished evangelist (Srygley, 10-11).

Srygley tells us that Larimore “spent six months of each year preaching in protracted meetings, and rarely spent over a week in any place in one meeting” (Srygley, 184). A few years before coming to Memphis

In July of 1870 he went to Collierville, Tennessee, a flourishing little town twenty-five miles east of Memphis. We had a few members there, but no house in which to have a meeting. He began preaching in a little school house near town. His meeting resulted in eighty-one additions to the church, and immediately afterwards a suitable lot was secured in town and a good house erected on it. A large church was established, and has continued in good working order to this day. During that meeting a Methodist Quarterly conference was held in Collierville, and the eminent John B. McFerrin, of Nashville, Tennessee, was in attendance to deliver a series of his masterly sermons and lectures. But the beardless youth in the old school house near town was drawing immense audiences day and night while the scholarly doctors of divinity with well-trained choirs and comfortable pews could scarcely hold their best members in attendance upon the business meetings of the conference (Srygley, 184).

Then, at last, we learn from his biographer about what brought Larimore to Memphis and read a very complimentary response to his presentation while in Memphis by a noteworthy person.

By request, professor Larimore delivered an address before the Memphis and Shelby county Bible Society in the First Presbyterian church of Memphis, Tennessee, Sunday evening March 1, 1874 on “God and The Bible.” On receiving a copy of this address, Mrs. Alexander Campbell wrote: “I am so glad to see, my dear brother, that you were entirely absorbed in the grandeur of your theme. I notice that the large I did not stand out once before you; but the great I AM occupied your wonder, admiration, gratitude and love. ‘God and The Bible’ is the most exalted and loftiest theme that could engage the tongue of man or seraph. Your collation of truths in defence of the Bible and the God of the Bible can never be set aside or refuted by the strongest opposers, either Deistical or Atheistical, upon earth” (Srygley, 189-190).

References

Srygley, F.D. (1955), *Larimore and his Boys*, fifth ed. (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Pub. Co.).