

THE WAR &C.

[A Preacher's Circumstance in America's Civil War]

Covington, GA.

Dec. 20, 1866

DEAR BROTHER BEEBE: - Once more, after a period of nearly five years, I take my pen in hand to write you a few lines. I have long contemplated doing so, but the unsettled state of our national affairs with various considerations, has kept me from my purpose. My long silence, I presume, is not construed into an indifference or lack of interest in the Primitive or Old School Baptist cause which I still believe to be the cause of God and truth. Neither can I believe that you think I have forgotten you and your family. I often thought of you and the brethren and sisters in the North during the years of blood and carnage which have passed. I contemplate with satisfaction the acts of kindness shown by you and the Northern brethren towards Southern brethren and friends incarcerated in Northern prisons. Such acts of kindness would have been reciprocated, but no means nor opportunity presented, from the fact that no Old School Baptist was ever found, to my knowledge, in Southern prisons. This is significant of the fact that the O.S. Baptists at the North were not engaged in this unholy war, further that they were compelled by the law of the land. I would write something for publication in the SIGNS OF THE TIMES, but it seems I cannot express my thoughts, feelings and views in a justifiable manner for publication. I will, therefore, content myself by writing simply for your own perusal. I wish to renew my subscription to the SIGNS, but there is yet no postmaster at Covington, and I do not wish to risk the money until a letter can be regularly mailed at Covington.

I frequently see your son, Brother Wm. L. Beebe, who is now editor of a paper at Covington, called the *GEORGIA ENTERPRISE*, and published by James Delaney and James W. Anderson. I presume you are aware of this fact. The paper is having considerable encouragement. Your son and family

are in reasonable health after his severe affliction in the death of his only son. He was ordained to the work of the ministry by a regular presbytery at **Holly Spring church, where he and I are members**, on Friday the 22nd day of September last. The presbytery were Elders D.W. Patman, I. Hamby, Wm. D. Almand and myself. The same day two brethren were ordained deacons of the church. The season was one of peculiar interest. The brethren who were ordained deacons, were officers in the Confederate army, came home during the war on furlough, related their experiences to the church, were received and baptized by me. One of them, Brother Grant D. Heard, you may recollect. He was a prisoner at Johnson's Island, Lake Erie, and sent to you for help and you sent him money and the SIGNS OF THE TIMES. He was soon after exchanged and came home.

Perhaps you would like to know how I fared during the war and since. I have reason to thank God for His goodness to me and my family. I continued to supply churches and attend, what is called among Primitive Baptists, General or Union meetings and Associations until the summer of 1864. During that summer the close proximity of the Confederate and Federal armies, the booming of the artillery, the rapid flight of refugees indicated the near approach of danger. I was at a General meeting in Gwinnett County, when the armies were about Kennesaw Mountain. Your son and myself attended a General meeting in Henry County, twenty-two miles from Atlanta during the siege, and in less than one week before he was captured at Conyers, GA. I had often prayed, I hope in sincerity, that I might fall into the hands of God rather than into the hands of men, for I knew God was merciful and man was not, especially a vindictive foe. My prayer was answered. It was revealed to me, unworthy as I am, that I should not be harmed. The raiders in July were all around me, and I saw some of them in the distance, but none came to my house or were on the plantation, or did me or my family any harm. None of the Federal troops came to my house until after hostilities had ceased, and came then only as they were sent by one of my neighbors. They did no harm, only took some

provisions, and were a civil crowd. Some of them advised my servants, who were true as steel, to stay with me and obey me and their mistress. When Sherman's army passed through this section in two bodies in November, 1864, I saw the light of their camp fires north and south of me, but I was in a narrow space between them. At that time my little son was dangerously sick, so that my wife and I despaired of his recovery. We watched him day and night, and it pleased God to restore him to health. I was taken sick in December and confined to my house four weeks. I was also very sick last summer of a violent attack of bilious fever. My wife also has been sick, but at this time we are all well excepting measles among the servants.

I have seen the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, and I desire to adore and praise Him. During the war, with the exception of a few weeks, I ceased not to preach Christ, and baptized several of the Lord's children and quite a number since the war closed. I baptized seven white persons very recently. Several churches through this section are enjoying a refreshing from the presence of the Lord with considerable additions by baptism. The work continues with such union, peace and harmony in the churches and among the ministering brethren. This serves rather as an antidote for the terrible scenes of trial and distress the brethren and sisters here have been subjected to, and serves to strengthen their minds and fortify them against the sad and deplorable state of things existing in our public affairs.

During several months of the summer and autumn of 1864, when we were in constant alarm by the predatory excursions of a relentless foe, and by the thievish propensities of those who claimed to be friends, I had no idea of leaving home with the expectation of getting to any better place of safety. I saw from my own house the smoke of burning buildings set on fire by fiends in human shape. I was not frightened, though I knew not but my own buildings would soon be in flames by the same incendiaries. I felt remarkably calm and composed most of the time, and preached once a month, excepting when I was sick, for the church near me, testifying

salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. But those days have passed away with the smoke and din of war, yet the baneful consequences are still painfully felt.

All is in confusion here to almost every imaginable form and shape. No law, nor order regulating society further than the military edicts of army officers. The State is not allowed to be represented in the National Congress, and the people are kept in painful uncertainty as to their future prospects and arrangements. This, however, is only the condition which necessarily follows subjugation. The conquered have to submit to the conquerors in all cases. The will of an irresponsible majority in Congress, or elsewhere, is as despotic as the Czar of Russia, or the Emperor of Morocco. Nothing better can be expected. We must submit to our destiny. I counted the cost a long time ago, and am not disappointed. I am still buoyant in my expectations, and hopeful in my anticipations. I am no rebel, nor traitor, but can look any man in the face and solemnly affirm before God and man that I have ever been loyal to the government under which I lived. I consider it my duty to God rather than man in all cases, even when the laws of man come in conflict with the laws of God.

There has been no particular trouble worth mentioning in this section of country from the black population. My servants still remain with me, though I hope to get rid of them before long. The expense of their support exceeds the income. Out of twenty-nine of them, only eleven more than pay for their victuals, clothes, medical attendance, &c. I was formerly under obligation to support them, now I am free from that obligation. I am sorry for them, only I hope while they have their freedom I shall not lose my own. I know of no trouble of importance among the black members in any of the churches of our faith and order in this country. The political change in their condition does not seem to throw them from their proper orbit, or produce insubordination. I only know of two cases of insubordination, one of them in the church where I am a member, both of which resulted in their exclusion. The black members continue dutiful and obedient to the law of Christ. I have

lost altogether by the war about fifteen thousand dollars – a mere trifle for a rich man. I still have enough left for a comfortable support to myself and white family, in case what I have should not be taken from me by confiscation or by onerous taxes.

As I have not seen the SIGNS OF THE TIMES since last June, until within a few days, I know not whether you have published an obituary of my father's {Hezekiah Purington} death. He received two letters from me last winter by flag of truce, and also one I sent him the 5th of June last. He replied the 25th of the same month in ordinary health, and died the next Saturday, July 1st. He remarked at the close of the letter, "I hope to see you once more before I die, and hear you preach Christ and Him crucified." There was more than four years that I received no letter, nor particular information from him. He has gone to rest, I trust, free from the troubles and turmoil of this life. He will never return to me, but I must go to him. I miss the privilege I formerly enjoyed of writing to him and of hearing from him. His letters were always comforting and cheering to my mind. He always had a firm trust in the God of Providence and grace. I parted with him last in August, 1859. I have heard him say he experienced a hope in the mercy of God when he was fifteen years old, about the year 1801. He joined the Predestinarian or Old School Baptist church at Bowdoinham, Maine, in 1809, where he remained a member until his death. He was one of the deacons of the church as far back as I can remember. For firmness, integrity, and honesty of principle he was not excelled. He died in peace, an old man and full of years, and I revere his memory.

The last meeting of Yellow River Primitive Baptist Association at Harris Spring, in this County, in September last, was one of special interest. Twelve months before, the country was being laid waste by the ravages of war, but the scene had changed and the brethren met in peace. Some dear brethren and sisters who had lost nearly their all, assembled and worshipped God. The congregations were very large, orderly and attentive. The preaching was sound in doctrine, and I think profitable to the lovers of truth. I preached the

introductory sermon from Eph.4:15, "*But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.*" I trust the Lord was with us. The meeting of Oconee Association was equally as interesting with a full attendance. We sat together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and His fruit was sweet to our taste. His banner over us was love. The brethren and sisters in general, so far as I know, express the utmost cordiality of sentiment and esteem towards the brethren at the North. I hope it may continue. I trust the troubles through which we have passed and are passing will bind the brethren, North and South, together in stronger bonds, if possible, of endearment than formerly. I expect there are political differences existing, but those differences will not be introduced, I hope, as a barrier of Christian love and fellowship, unless the differences involve some fundamental principle of Scriptural faith and practice. The spirit that opposeth and exalteth itself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, has abolitionized the United States government and opened the way for the introduction of the *man of sin*, that wicked; in all his ramifying powers, and so controls the civil government of the land as to establish principles by law in open opposition to the cause of God and truth. The mystery of iniquity is working with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish. There was given to the first beast a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and power or permission also was given him of God to continue forty and two months, which, I presume, is twelve hundred and sixty years. And it was given him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and power was given him over all kindreds, tongues and nations. This power, unquestionably, was exercised under the Papal establishment of Rome. But it is said of the second beast that he exerciseth *all* the power of the first beast before him, and if so, he has power to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and to have dominion over kindreds, and tongues and nations. This power, as I understand it, is now exercised by those who rule and have dominion. When the wicked bear rule the people mourn. During these times of trouble, some of them of understanding shall fail to try them, to purge, and to make them white, even

to the time of the end of these tribulations; because it is yet for a time appointed. And the *man of sin* shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods, and *shall prosper* till the indignation be accomplished; for that that is determined shall be done. But God has universal dominion over all. "*God hath made all things for Himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.*" The wicked receive their good things in this life, and the righteous their evil things; but at death their conditions will be revealed. The faith and patience of the saints is tried to the utmost extent during these tribulations when they see the wicked prosper, and with an iron hand, so to speak, persecute and oppress the church. And to see some in whom confidence was reposed as brethren, fall or turn aside from Zion's way and walk no more therein, is calculated to try the saints and cause them to trust only in God. But they that are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, and are truly wise and righteous, shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

I have penned some of my thoughts and reflections which arise before my mind from the position I occupy in my views and cogitations. With the exception of a few months I have had as much liberty in preaching for the last five years as I ever had. Of late I have had the opportunity of witnessing the fruit of my labors in baptizing some of the sheep and lambs of Christ's flock. I have a great desire to journey north once more and visit the brethren, sisters and friends, but the probability at present is very small of doing so. If the way should open next spring for me to go I shall improve it. I am very well reconciled to my lot, and, having food and raiment, I desire to be content. It is difficult describing the state of things here, and no one can correctly form an idea, only by experience and observation. I wish to be kindly remembered to sister Beebe, your dear family, and all the dear brethren and sisters in general, and accept an expression of kind regard yourself.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,

Joseph L. Purington.