

FOUNDING AND LOCATION OF
WILLIAM JEWELL
COLLEGE.

BY L. M. LAWSON.

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At the request of the honored President of the Board of Trustees of William Jewell College, Richard E. Turner, of Saint Joseph, Missouri, the following events and circumstances are related by one who was a youthful witness of the greater part of them, and who has received the authentication of the remainder of them from the direct testimony of those who were themselves the principal participants in these important transactions. It is most probable that the remembrance of these deeds cannot be found in any other living repository, because most of the actors and their coetarians have passed away.

The legal existence of the institution began when on the 27th day of February, 1849, the Governor of Missouri approved the act of incorporation which constituted the persons named therein a body politic and corporate for the purpose of endowing and building up a college under the direction of the General Association of the Baptists of the State of Missouri. But as early as the year 1834 the subject of higher education began to be discussed and written about by prominent members of this enlightened and enterprising denomination in various parts of the state, and a voluminous correspondence is still in existence which evidences the rising interest in this important subject.

In a recent perusal of some of this quaint correspondence between the primitive promoters of this great educational enterprise, the writer has remarked the frequently recurring use of the word "Seminary," as descriptive and definitive of the school it was the intention of the Baptists to establish. It is worthy of

especial note that the significant etymology of this word was a happy forecast and an appropriate har-binger of the great work that has been accomplished. A seminary is a place where seed is sown for producing plants for transplantation. Felicitous metaphor has applied the word to an institution of learning, and appropriately and aptly to this great school, because it has become a spot where is sown the seeds of superior scholarship and of the principles of civil and religious liberty, so vividly illustrated in the history of the great denomination of Christians which has struggled and fought and suffered on all the great fields of thought. The seed here sown has germinated and fructified and multiplied an hundred fold, and by the free winds borne have been wafted to the remotest regions of our land and country, and have found a lodgment and a habitation under alien skies.

In the annals of a nation, a state or a community, there is nothing of so transcending importance as the history of the origin, the location, the establishment and growth of its eminent schools. The existence of a college gifted with a great, energetic and intrepid spirit, like that which informs the people of Missouri and the neighboring districts of the Mississippi Valley, diffuses an intellectual atmosphere which makes life better worth for every one who has the opportunity of breathing its invigorating influences. Immortal honors are due to those who conceived the work, who laid its foundations, who labored for its success, who made sacrifices for its completion, and who stimulated the pulses of the people to a common effort for the great achievement.

The inhabitants of the region which was destined to become the home of the seminary were a vigorous, manly, liberty-loving people, and their devotion to freedom, caused them to name their county after the great Western statesman whose father was a Virginian Baptist minister; and one of that heroic band who stood for religious liberty in the Old Dominion. The

early occupation of the son bestowed upon him the sportive appellation of "The Mill Boy of the Slashes," and his great service to the people won for him the title of the "Great Commoner." The sterling worth of this people and the vitalizing power of the principles which governed their public and private conduct made Clay County an eligible spot in which to plant a seminary of learning.

When the Baptists of Missouri determined to establish a college, and appointed the meeting of a convention at Boonville, on the 21st of August, 1849, to effect an organization and settle the place of its permanent abode, the friends of learning and education at Liberty committed to Gen. Alexander W. Doniphan the task of arousing the people of the county to the importance of making an effort to secure the location of the school in their county town and of obtaining the necessary subscriptions of money for that purpose. He responded to the call.

General Doniphan had but recently returned from Mexico, crowned with great military distinction, and had been everywhere greeted with the applauses of his admiring countrymen. He was at the zenith of his fame as a soldier, a lawyer and a statesman. Seldom has it been the lot of a great leader to unite in the same bright combination so rare, so happy and so delicate an assemblage of eminent qualities and qualifications as met in this brilliant man. His intellect was of passing power and force, incisive, serene, capacious and catholic, rapidly assimilative, luxuriantly fruitful. His memory was astonishing, and at the docile service of a nimble and agile intellectuality. His discernment resembled inspiration. His imagination was warm and vivid, his judgment clear, his energy surpassing. His mind had been enlarged by an unusually wide experience. In the world of literature and the world of life he was equally at home. His face and figure were such as sculptors love to dwell upon. His person was tall and commanding; his stature was

six feet and four inches; his features were of classic elegance, but eager, mobile, animated; his hair was of the richest auburn hue; his forehead was high and intellectual; his finely cut nose was a combination of Grecian and Roman significance; his lips indicated eloquence; his dark eyes were full of fire; grace and dignity blended themselves in his deportment; his mental character was so happily constituted that his powers so compatible with each other were tempered into an exquisite harmony. One faculty especially had been granted to him in the largest measure—the faculty of eloquent expression. There was a thrilling note of sincerity in his voice, vibrant with a vast store of feeling and compelling magnetism.

These superb powers he devoted to the task of awakening his fellow-citizens to an interest in higher education, and to inspiring an effort to secure the establishment of a college in the capital of their county. In making a series of brilliant addresses, he visited every part of the county, traversed every community, and presented a masterly, convincing argument for the cause of the college, and with unflagging zeal and tireless energy, he solicited the aid and support of the people in the great undertaking. Crowds poured forth to meet him, and joyful acclamations rent the air, similar to those which are evoked in times of great political excitement. The ambition of the people was stirred, their zeal was inflamed, and social, political and religious distinctions were submerged in the waves of the rising enthusiasm. With so powerful an advocate, with so grand a cause, and with so receptive a community, failure was hardly possible. The great effort was crowned with success and with a formidable subscription the delegates from Clay County were sent to the convention at Boonville.

Great interest in the enterprise had developed, and was manifest in other parts of the state. Lively competition sprang into life, and there was active and determined rivalry in the emulous contest. Marion

County, Callaway County, Boone County, Howard County, and Cooper County were represented by delegations composed of influential Baptists, and they bore with them important contributions to the capital fund for the foundation of the college. Cooper County, in which Boonville is situate, and where the convention was to be held, was making a special effort, and with the advantage of being the convention city, and the opportunity thus afforded for the exercise of the social amenities of its graceful hospitality, was exerting a powerful influence upon the assembling congress of the Baptists of the state. It was the center of a society which numbered among its members some of the most accomplished men and women of the time.

On the early morning of August 21st, 1849, a conference of the partisans of Boonville was held to consider and discuss the situation. It met in the counting room of Isaac Lionberger, an eminent and enlightened merchant, a devoted Baptist, and a relative of President Richard E. Turner, who was then a youthful resident of Cooper County. There were present, among others, the brilliant and versatile Tyre C. Harris, and notably the sturdy, stalwart, Jordon O'Bryan, who had journeyed from his country home to counsel, encourage and aid his friends with his presence and his advice. They gathered round a circular board, but where the O'Bryan sat was the head of the table. He was a great planter, a man of wide knowledge and practical wisdom, his acquaintance with affairs was large, his judgment was sound. He was a skillful and adroit politician, a man of the highest probity, a loyal Baptist and an enthusiastic advocate of the candidacy of Boonville for the location of the college. He had been a representative of his county, and a senator from his district in the State Legislature. His influence was potent. Senator O'Bryan inquired of his colleagues about the personnel of the several delegations which were in attendance upon the convention. The names of those from

Howard, Boone, Callaway and Marion Counties were given him. They were the eminent Baptists of the several localities. Confidence was expressed that a canvass of the lists indicated a condition favorable to the choice of Boonville. At last, Senator O'Bryan inquired if no one had come from Liberty? The reply was that Clay County had not evinced any great interest, that no Baptist people had come thence, that two distinguished gentlemen, not Baptists, had arrived, but that the Baptists of that locality were not in the contest. Besides, Liberty was a frontier town, on the verge of the vast desert which stretched a limitless waste and unbroken wilderness until it reached the shores of the Pacific (At this period, 1849, the noble cities and prosperous commonwealths that embellish the map of the regions west of the Missouri river were not only unborn and unnamed, but they were even undreamed of, save in the fecund brain of that illustrious statesman and precient geomancer, Thomas Jefferson, who forty-six years before, had bought from the Emperor of the French the vast domain of rivers and plains and mountains, and dedicated it to American enterprise and American freedom). Senator O'Bryan listened with patient urbanity, and asked who were the distinguished gentlemen who had arrived from Clay County. He was told they were Gen. Alexander W. Doniphan and Judge J. T. V. Thompson. A look of surprise and anxiety mantled the bright, genial face of Jordon O'Bryan. He spoke gently, but with emphasis and concern. Said he: "Gentlemen, you have trained your guns in the wrong direction. You have been wasting your ammunition and your energies. Liberty is the point for you to attack, the fortress you must take. Doniphan and Thompson have not come here for mere maneuver or dress-parade. There will be no mock tournament. I have served in the Legislature with both these men, and I know their character and abilities. Judge Thompson is a shrewd and prudent manager, and

Doniphan is no carpet knight. While he is chivalrous and fair and gallant, you will find him armed cap-a-pie and ready to do and dare for his cause. He is the greatest master of polemical controversy this state has ever seen. His vigilance provides for all contingencies, except those which no human foresight can foresee. You will do well to rouse yourselves to encounter a sturdier competition than any you have yet imagined." The startled conference heard these words with dismay and adjourned. The Knights of the Round Table dispersed to begin new labors for Boonville among the delegates from the other counties.

At the appointed hour, the convention assembled in the Baptist meeting house. The building was densely crowded, the organization was effected without delay.

When the credentials of the delegations were presented and passed upon, it was evident that the subscription of no single county was sufficient to constitute a majority of the total capital subscribed, and that the final result would depend upon concession, compromise, or a change of sentiment or opinion of some delegation. The sum subscribed by Clay County was the largest plurality.

After the formal and preliminary work of organization was completed the president of the convention announced that the nomination of the place for the home of the college was in order. There was a hush of expectancy, and there was hesitancy in every quarter. The friends of each place thought the proper policy at the beginning was masterly inactivity, and that some advantage might be gained by waiting for others to make the first move. All seemed to wish the beneficial influence of the final word.

The assembled multitude became impatient of the delay, and the members of the convention were restive and uneasy. Doniphan's quick perception saw that the time had come to take the hazard of decisive measures. He determined to hesitate no longer.

“He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not to put it to the touch
To win or lose it all.”

He had applied his powers of observation to the study of the peculiarities of every class of the great family of mankind—their humors, their prejudices and their passions, and to all these he knew how to appeal with exquisite propriety. He was a master of the rhetoric which casts a spell over deliberative bodies, as well as the rhetoric that stirs the masses to enthusiasm. With these formidable powers he had entered the convention at Boonville.

He rose and began the presentation of his place and people with the remark that as no one else appeared to want the college, he wished to make it clear to the convention that Liberty would take it with grateful thanks and would exert its best efforts to deserve the boon and to foster, sustain and upbuild the infant institution. Then followed a careful and discriminating eulogy of his constituency and the eligibility of Liberty as a proper place for planting a great seminary.

The entrant having been broken by Doniphan, the nomination of other places followed, with tasteful and appropriate commendations by the several speakers who presented their claims and their merits. At last came the offering of Boonville, which was gracefully and powerfully presented by her most eminent citizen, John G. Miller, whose career in Congress has shed luster upon the name of Missouri.

Just when the balloting was about to begin, Dr. William Jewell, of Columbia, Boone County, proposed to the convention an additional subscription of ten thousand dollars, to be paid in lands situated in Mercer, Sullivan and Grundy Counties, in the State of Missouri, the subscriber to have the corresponding number of votes on the question of the location of the college and the right to bestow a name upon the new

institution. This proposition was earnestly supported by the Boonville delegation and others, but was strongly opposed by General Doniphan and his allies. It was believed that Dr. Jewell was favorable to Boonville as the home of the college. Gen. Doniphan's opposition was most vigorous. He demonstrated the



Gen. Doniphan.

injustice of permitting the votes which represented an arbitrary valuation of unimproved and uncultivated land to weigh against the votes of subscriptions which represented available funds. He kindled in the breasts of his allies the same ardor that burned in his own. The justice of his contention was recognized, his ar-

guments availed with a majority of the convention, and the proposition of Dr. Jewell was rejected.

Then came the balloting upon the choice among the places in nomination. An *entente cordiale* had long existed between the Counties of Howard and Clay. The territory of the latter was formerly a part of Howard County, and there were close family connections between them. Clay County had the largest subscription in the list, and Howard County the smallest. Under the influence of Doniphan, and the ties of friendship and consanguinity that bound the peoples together, Howard County made common cause with Clay, and the two joined made an absolute majority for Liberty, and the location was determined. In recognition of this liberality, and in evidence of the reciprocal good will and kindness toward each other, the President of the Board of Trustees of the College was for a long series of years chosen from among the Baptists of Howard County.

The deliberations of the convention, the discussions and the balloting, had occupied the entire day. After the selection of Liberty, the meeting adjourned until the morrow at ten o'clock.

After a night of repose, Doniphan arose with mental inspiration fit and ready for the labors of the new day. The work of the convention was to be appropriately closed by naming the college.

Nothing is more useful, nothing is more necessary, in the conduct of public affairs, than a just discernment of the spirit of our fellow-men. This means that natural private sagacity which is conversant about individuals, and enables some men with penetrating eye to look as it were into the heads and hearts of others, and to discover in them the latent principles which constitute their true characters. This part of human wisdom is of use everywhere, and with it the combination of peculiar circumstances is improved to the best advantage. Doniphan knew Dr. Jewell, he knew that his whole soul was stirred by an honorable desire for

literary distinction, and that he aspired to enroll his name among those who have shaped the fortunes of great institutions, and guided the course of mighty destinies. He desired that his name should be entered in a great arena as a noble candidate contending for a noble prize. Doniphan determined to contribute to the gratification of this honorable ambition, and lay these lofty sentiments under contribution for the welfare and promotion of the new institution which had just been ushered into existence, and found a home on the Western confines of the State. Doniphan prepared a careful, appropriate and tasteful resolution, which recited the labors of Dr. Jewell in the cause of liberal culture, his devotion to the interests of enlightened civilization, and proposed that the new seminary of learning should be baptized with the name of "William Jewell College." This resolution, in an early hour of the day, Doniphan privately and confidentially carried to the Rev. William C. Ligon, with instructions to offer it to the convention as soon as the session opened. No man was better fitted for the delicate task than Mr. Ligon. His speech was effective, tender and devoted, courteous, decorous and sympathetic, and profoundly expressed the sentiments of the convention and the large assemblage.

The motion for the adoption of the resolution was seconded by General Doniphan in a manner of surpassing charm and excellence, and in a style wherein the graces of colloquy and the graces of rhetoric were harmoniously blended. At no period of his life was his genius seen to greater advantage. The resolution was unanimously adopted, and the name of William Jewell was indelibly stamped upon the educational destiny of the Baptists of Missouri.

Overwhelmed with the gratifying evidence of the devotion of his people and the honors that crowned his life, Dr. Jewell was barely able to make his acknowledgements in the articulate tones of spoken language, but he gave visible evidence of an eloquence richer

than the richest words. He then and there made the noble gift of the lands he had offered on the first day of the convention. His other benefactions absorbed one-third of his entire fortune, an instance of unrivalled liberality without antecedent example, and without subsequent imitation. He afterward went to Liberty to give his services in the superintendence of the erection of the first large building that crowned the hill. In the midst of his labors, during the canicular days of a Missourian summer, he was stricken with a fatal fever, and consummated his devotion with the princely sacrifice of his life.

Thus was founded this great school. Thus was established this great college. Thus was planted the great seminary whose seeds are destined to sow vast fields which shall ripen into abundant harvests.

The college entered upon a career of varying fortunes and vicissitudes, but in the darkest hour of the gloom that sometimes enveloped its destiny, it was upheld by the faithful hands of heroic men and devoted women. Other chroniclers will tell of the labors of Roland Hughes, Oliver Perry Moss, Elizabeth Trigg Thornton, Wade M. Jackson, Caroline Thornton Moss, and R. E. McDaniel. Everything that could be effected by a courage that rose superior to privation and reverses, by fidelity even to martyrdom, and by a fortitude which death could subdue only by extinguishment, these indomitable spirits have done, and their triumph is here.

Recurring to the story of its birth and baptism and the struggles of its infancy, it is difficult to realize the superb attainments in the arts of life and learning which this institution today presents, and in view of its immediate usefulness and influence, the impulse to cast its horoscope cannot be resisted. The progress of knowledge has given birth, of late years, to arts and sciences so many and so varied that a man of liberal enlightenment finds here ample occupation for his time and talents in the acquisition of such as are most at-



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tractive and most absorbing; and without a knowledge of these elegant and refined pursuits a man can scarcely pass muster in the informed circles of society. While there is no popular or royal road to the profound truths of learning and philosophy, the facilities for their acquisition are so great here that it is impossible to defend against the alluring invitation, especially in this new era of intellectual enterprise and vigor, and in this age distinguished above all others for the rapid development of the human faculties.

In a region of unsurpassed opulence, in a climate of unrivalled charm, salubrious and invigorating, midway between the oceans and in the heart of the continent, William Jewell College is dedicated to the high purpose of opening the youthful mind, purified and imaginative, to the influence of the moral affections, as well as the graceful humanities of enlarging the knowledge and increasing the power of the intellectual and physical man, of inculcating the lessons of gentle and ennobling virtue, of presenting lofty precepts and bright examples of liberality and magnanimity and pure taste, and of inducing men to love goodness, aspire to elegance, and improve at once the imagination, the understanding and the heart.

The great and increasing importance and the perennial growth of the institution is attracting a large share of the public interest. It has mounted to a high place among the eminent schools of the land, and there is none now to oppose the progress of its fame. There is reason to hope and believe that the riches of the harvest will correspond to the splendors of the present promise. Its position of proud distinction is a vindication of the sound and comprehensive views of the President of the Board of Trustees and its extension and its strength is a brilliant monument to the genius, the unrivalled common-sense and wisdom that has marked the twelve years of consecrated service rendered by Richard E. Turner in that important position. The enlightened plans and patriotic purposes that inform his

mind and heart and that of his worthy colleagues in the Board of Trustees united with the zeal, the wisdom and energy of Dr. J. E. Cook, as Trustee, Secretary of the Board, and Treasurer of William Jewell College, the learning and the magnetic influence of the distinguished President of the College, Dr. J. P. Greene, and the faculty that surround him, give assurance that its facilities and resources will be enlarged and widened until, growing older in years, but fresh in eternal youth, and immortal as the principles that gave it birth, it becomes so famed a seat of learning and influence as to induce to its portals ardent concourses of students, comparable in numbers to those which in former times flowed to Paris and Vienna, Padova, Upsal and Valencia.

The edifice in which were enacted the scenes which have been related still stands in Boonville. The very spot can be identified where the Rev. William C. Ligon stood to deliver his panegyric upon the life and character of William Jewell. The very seat can be indicated whence rose the tall form of Doniphan to pour the tide of his eloquence upon the ears of the intent assembly, as well as the place occupied by Dr. Jewell, when with faltering accents of sublime emotion, he expressed his gratitude for the action which was to make his name immortal. This was the inauguration of the first great enterprise which the writer of these lines has witnessed. He will never see another of so great import. The delegation returned to Liberty, they bore themselves with the dignity and moderation of considerate victors. Judge J. T. V. Thompson signalized his generosity by the gift of the land which is now crowned with noble edifices, fraught with the Orient spoil and the hoarded treasures of the learning of all ages. Doniphan went home, his brow adorned with that truly civic crown which far outshines the coronals of power and the laurels of conquest won upon ensanguined fields, and which can only be surpassed by those unfading garlands which await the champions of light and lib-

erty in the higher regions, in the loftier realms of mind and thought. Missouri does him appropriate honor.

“Her waters murmur of his name,
Her woods are peopled with his fame;
Her smallest rill, her mightiest river,
Roll, mingled with his fame, forever.”