

THE GOSPEL ADVOCATE.

T. FANNING AND W. LIPSCOMB, EDITORS.

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THE GOSPEL ADVOCATE.

With the hope of rendering some good service in the cause of truth, we very respectfully submit to our brethren and the public, the claims of "*The Gospel Advocate*." Whilst we sincerely rejoice that there are several able journals published by the brotherhood, we are happy in believing, "there still is room" for many more. Our first labor, therefore, will be directed to the subject of a more extended circulation of papers, periodicals, and books, devoted to the Christian religion, with the view of fostering in society a spirit of religious investigation. Convinced that the sources of spiritual light are exclusively confined

The Beginning of the *Gospel Advocate*

by Dennis Loyd

Seeing the Gospel Advocate's beginnings in the framework of other events and circumstances gives the modern reader a clearer perspective of the climate that called for the publication's being.

When the first issue of the *Gospel Advocate* appeared in July 1855, its birth occurred in the midst of a troubled but productive decade. Threats of war, debates over states' rights, challenges to and defenses of slavery all affected the minds of Christians north and south. To add to those national and regional concerns, Nashville was particularly threatened by the powerful influence of Jesse B. Ferguson, who had taken over the editorship of the *Christian Review* succeeding Tolbert Fanning, who had started the magazine in 1844. Ferguson assumed control in 1847 and changed the name to *The Christian Magazine*. He used its pages to promote his doctrine of spiritualism.

In that first issue of the *Gospel Advocate*, Fanning's opening sentence spelled out his concerns with false

teachers and false doctrine. "With the hope of rendering some good service in the course of truth, we very respectfully submit to our brethren and the public, the claim of 'Gospel Advocate' " (1). The drive to accept missionary societies was making great claims on the churches, and that crisis needed to be addressed in the new magazine. The majority of the articles in that inaugural issue were written by the co-editors, Fanning and William Lipscomb, the older brother of David Lipscomb. By my count, Fanning wrote 10 articles, and William Lipscomb wrote two with the remaining articles by others. Beginning with the first issue, Fanning began a series of articles on "First Principles" in which he stressed the Bible as the only authority in religion.

That first issue included several departments that would be recognized as parts of the *GA* over the years,

along with announcements that other departments were projected for future addition including Conversations, Education, Correspondence, Obituaries, Announcements, Queries and Book Reviews.

As for the name chosen for the magazine, Fanning wrote: "We see peculiar fitness in employing a name for our journal which offends no good man and expresses a labor worthy of the purest beings in existence" (3). He continued to stress that an emphasis would be on the presentation of the gospel and fulfilling the role of an advocate "defending the sayings and doings of Jesus Christ" (4).

A Remarkable Decade

What else was happening around this time? In the same year, 1855, Massachusetts became the first state to enforce integration of all races and

religions in public schools. In 1856, Central Park in New York City was first laid out to preserve a large tract of land where citizens could enjoy the beauty of nature. In that same year, New York and Chicago were linked by the first railroad to connect these two major cities. In 1857, the approaching Civil War was fueled by the Dred Scott Decision by the U.S. Supreme Court. And in 1859, John Brown led his raid on the arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Va., was arrested by Robert E. Lee, and was hanged.

The decade of the 1850s was a remarkable one for fine books, many of them masterpieces. In 1850 the following titles appeared: *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning; *In Memoriam* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson; and *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The next year saw the publication of *The House of the Seven Gables* by Hawthorne and *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville. In 1852, *The Blithedale Romance* by Hawthorne and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe were published. Charles Dickens was writing some of

his great novels – *Bleak House* in 1853 and *Hard Times* in 1854.

The year the *GA* began, 1855, was notable for other literary productions – Robert Browning's *Men and Women*, Tennyson's *Maud*, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*. The next year saw Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Ralph Waldo Emerson's *English Traits*. In 1857 another great magazine began – the *Atlantic Monthly*.

The decade came to an end with *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table* by Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., and *The Courtship of Miles Standish* by Longfellow in 1858, and *The Idylls of the King* by Tennyson, *A Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens, *Adam Bede* by George Eliot and *Origin of the Species* by Charles Darwin – all in 1859.

The Return of GA

These facts and names may not seem apropos to the founding of the *Gospel Advocate*, but seeing its beginnings in the framework of other events and circumstances gives the

modern reader a clearer perspective of the climate that called for its being. Unfortunately the 1855 beginning was soon followed by an abrupt ending. With the beginning of the Civil War, the magazine was forced to cease publication. A nation in the midst of war could not continue with all the institutions and services that preceded the conflict. James R. Wilburn in his biography of Tolbert Fanning, *The Hazard of the Die*, noted that the Confederacy was formed on Feb. 7, 1860. The *GA* continued for the remainder of the year, but in December, Fanning announced its termination. As Wilburn reported, "His parting words were, 'Brethren, we are one, and have but one work to perform'" (210).

With the *Gospel Advocate* back in publication in 1866, the editors appealed to the nation as a whole to return to the primary concern of all Christians – the unity of the church. They wrote, "We have no local or peculiar institutions to defend, and nothing new to set forth."

Ironically, the governor of Tennessee when the *Gospel Advocate* began was Andrew Johnson. When it resumed publication in 1866, the president of the United States was Andrew Johnson. The president when the magazine began was Franklin Pierce, and the Tennessee governor when it began again was William Brownlow, a Methodist preacher.

The year the *Gospel Advocate* started over, this time under William and David Lipscomb, was the year that Tennessee returned to the Union, the first state to make that move. Fanning continued to write a few articles in 1866, but soon the mantle shifted, and David Lipscomb began his long tenure as the editor, a tenure that ended in 1917. □

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