

JAMES MARION FROST: DEFENDER OF THE FAITH.

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James Marion Frost, doctor of divinity, for a quarter of a century was a defender of the faith; that is to say, of the faith he believed to be "the faith once for all delivered to the saints".

That faith or substance of doctrine, as he understood it, is evangelical and it is Baptist. It is American Baptist as distinguished from British Baptist, being that type of American Baptist orthodoxy dominant in the Southern States of his native land. In his own mind, always modestly but firmly held, defended and propagated, was the ineradicable conviction that the need of Christendom today is a return to the New Testament norm in deed and creed. That norm, as he was unalterably persuaded, is to be seen, at least as an ideal and aim, in any truly regenerated, properly organized, intelligent, consecrated, and efficient spiritual democracy known as a Baptist church, fraternally co-operating with like bodies of believers, for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The foregoing characterization, however regarded by others, formed through thirty years of fellowship with him, is that of loyalty and love. The proof of its fairness and accuracy is found in his own deliverances, vocal and written.

James Marion Frost definitely and determinedly was a denominationalist. Birth, breeding, education, environment, personal experience and preference, and all the forces, both human and divine, that make personality account for this fact. Constitutionally he was a religious conservative. With him, in all interpretations of Chris-

tianity as expressed in the New Testament, whatsoever is new is not true and whatsoever is true is not new. Naturally, therefore, he stood up and stood out, with charity for all but with apologies to none, for a clear-cut creed, authoritative, sufficient, and final, "no alterations in it, no additions to it, no subtractions from it".

Kentucky has been the "dark and bloody ground" of interdenominational strife. The subject of these lines was born in Kentucky. This occurred in the year 1849. He was converted and baptized in 1860, when only twelve years of age, and licensed to preach in 1868 at eighteen; he graduated at Georgetown College in 1871 and was ordained in the same year. Immediately he became pastor, serving from time to time through the years, churches as follows: Maysville, Ky.; Upper Street, Lexington, Ky.; the First Church, Staunton, Va.; that of Selma, Ala.; Leigh Street Church, Richmond, Va., and the First Church, Nashville, Tenn.

No opportunity was given Mr. Frost to pursue a theological course at a seminary. To the end of his life it was a source of regret to him, as he frequently declared that he had not enjoyed as a preparation for his life work a course of systematic study at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He became a trustee of that institution and was its loyal friend and a generous benefactor in providing, through the Sunday School Board, means for founding a chair of Sunday School Pedagogy. So far as in him lay, he urged all candidates for the ministry to add to college training a thorough course in theology. His appreciation and advocacy of theological education were all the more eager and earnest because he realized he had suffered loss by not undertaking it. It was difficult, if not quite impracticable, to repair this loss, in any satisfactory way, by judicious reading and reflection while burdened with the cares of a pastorate. It was only after he became secretary of the Sunday School Board that he was allowed the calm still air of sequestered study

which gave occasion for the books that came from his pen.

The defender of "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" in the Southern Baptist interpretation, became such in a normal way when put in charge of the only publishing house under the management of Southern Baptists, itself the child of his own brain. The polemic literature of the denomination was enriched by these productions of the pen of Dr. Frost: *Pedobaptism: Is it From Heaven or of Men? The Moral Dignity of Baptism, The Memorial Supper of Our Lord, The School of the Church, Our Church Life*. Besides, he compiled *Baptist Why and Why Not, An Experience of Grace, The Baptist Message, Christian Union, and Evangelism and Baptism*.

These books, written in a kindly spirit and simple style easy to understand, are everywhere accepted among Southern Baptists as suitable text-books for the youth of their people and as valuable aids to the indoctrination of the ministry and membership of the churches.

Right here, let it be stated for reasons that will appear, that the best contribution made by Dr. Frost to the Baptists of the South was himself. As a spiritual force he enveloped the brotherhood in their annual Conventions like the atmosphere. The heritage he left is a pure personality. Unselfish, he was far-seeing, fraternal, persisting not only in what he has written and in the publishing house which he founded and raised to a success most remarkable, but also in the hearts he touched and made tender, in the lives he molded and made strong, and in the *esprit du corps* he imparted to militant thousands. Possibly no man among us was more universally regarded as sage, saint, and seer. All his brethren believed his to be a stainless soul. On this account, he was the beloved John.

Baptists of a liberal school are to be found in the South. These, accepting what they maintain are the assured results of modern scientific methods of Bible study and

cherishing, with more or less consistency, views of cooperation with Christian bodies, other than Baptist, that Dr. Frost feared as disloyal if not suicidal, have never raised any question as to the sincerity of his motives or the sweetness of his temper or the transparent genuineness of his character. He was what he seemed to be, and he seemed to be what he was. The man on that account holds an assured place in the affections alike of literalist and liberal, the reactionary and the reforming groups in a brotherhood as diverse as the waves and as joined as the sea. Hence the assertion that Dr. Frost's supreme gift to his denomination was himself.

Dr. Frost, slow in his thinking processes, sober, dignified, self-restrained, courteous, even magnanimous to an adversary, was a constructive force. He fronted the future and built his denominational plans accordingly. Edification projected by him was along the lines of denominational solidarity, denominational expansion, denominational comity, denominational efficiency through denominational training, chiefly in denominational schools, in a denominational atmosphere and under denominational control. As a denominational statesman he aimed at nothing less than denominational supremacy, through spiritual means and methods, in the South, and through the South, of America and the world. So far as he was a seer, this was his vision—a redeemed and regenerated mankind conforming in teaching and practice to the Southern Baptist standards. The time was ripe, as he saw it, for a worthy Baptist world consciousness. That world consciousness should think in continents. It should plan for millenniums. It should aspire to promote the universal lordship of Jesus Christ. That lordship requires strict obedience to the New Testament in moral commands, evangelical commands, positive commands.

Albeit, this stupendous conception seemed to Dr. Frost infinitely removed from sectarianism. It was not bigotry. It was in no sense provincial or partisan, in his

judgment, but simply and solely a sacred deposit of truth, the faith once for all delivered to the saints and by them to be given to the world for the world's highest good, both here and hereafter. By every consideration of intellectual honesty as well as loyalty to Christ and supreme concern for the present and future well-being of his fellow-men, he felt he was and must be a Baptist, by which he meant a Christian of the original New Testament type, from core to cuticle, all the way up and all the way down. As far as he could do so, he felt it his duty to induce everyone else to be and to confess to being a Baptist. This is only saying that the good man, while never claiming infallibility for himself, was never hesitant in proclaiming the infallible and imperishable infallibility of God's Word, and that Word interpreted not infallibly, to be sure, but more nearly so than by anyone else by the acknowledged leaders of his Baptist brethren. His creed was to him as stable as the mountains and as shining as the stars. Of its ultimate triumph he had no doubt.

As much if not more than any other leader among us during the last half century, Dr. Frost solidified Southern Baptists in the matter of Sunday school materials and methods.

From the close of the Civil War up to 1891, the American Baptist Publication Society of Philadelphia was the one institution that expressed and promoted Baptist unity in this country. Its Sunday school lesson-papers and periodicals, written by Southern as well as Northern scholars, went into all Baptist churches South as well as North. This condition was quite pleasing to many leaders in both sections. It was destined not to last. Some things appearing in the Society's publications excited criticism, chiefly things showing differences between Northern and Southern Baptists in minor matters of ecclesiasticism and organization. These differences widened. Suspicion of Northern orthodoxy was aroused. Differences in politics, always causing friction between

the sections so soon after the Civil War, to some extent colored everything in the Southern mind. The South, in a word, gradually became unwilling to co-operate with a society that it no longer trusted as a safe expounder of the faith once for all given to the saints.

At such a crisis a leader was needed to champion Southern views. Dr. Frost brooded over the unhappy situation. For months he thought of nothing else. At last a vision from Heaven, as he believed, illumined his mind and pointed the way. It offered intellectual and credal independence on the part of the Southern churches. It meant a Southern Baptist Sunday School Board with its own publishing house and its own publications squaring its teachings in all particulars with the accepted standards of Southern Baptist orthodoxy, ecclesiasticism, traditions, and denominational administration of affairs.

That vision, beating in his blood, inspiring his mind, quickening all his energies, wholly engaging his time, and commanding his voice and pen for weeks and months, materialized. Dr. Frost captured the Southern Baptist Convention. Over the opposition of men justly esteemed among the very first in wisdom and piety, he carried out his dream. His imperial spirit embodied itself. An institution arose amid the shouts of his brethren from the Potomac to the Rio Grande and from the Ohio to the Gulf, which, through its culture of the rising generation, develops Southern Baptist consciousness and binds into unity all agencies for denominational expansion. This result is a monument to the splendid victory and constructive foresight and generalship of the one man whose name heads this article. It is a most astonishing achievement in the light of all the conditions of opposition overcome.

An uncompromising denominationalist by the nature of the case is a diplomat. A diplomat feels it to be his first duty to be loyal to the interests of his own country. To such a school of diplomacy Dr. Frost belonged. The

art of living together harmoniously on fraternal terms, wherein is no compromise of principle, he advocated for his own people and between them and all others within and without the fold of nominal Christianity. Living with others, not of his own communion, had its limitations. These he clearly marked out. No man was more pronounced than he in opposition to the slightest approach to any merger that would weaken the dogmatic denominational barriers his stalwart conscience had put up between Baptists and pedo-Baptists. Entangling alliances with bodies of divergent belief and practice, though evangelical and Protestant, he roundly condemned. Baptist isolation in all their educational and missionary activities he deemed best, not only for Baptists but for the Kingdom of God at large. Believing as he did that Baptist principles rightly understood and sanely and consistently and energetically applied are the hope of evangelical religion, he could not co-operate in an organized way with those unwilling to admit his claim.

The positive ordinances of the New Testament baptism and the Lord's Supper, as Baptists hold them, he interpreted in the highest spiritual way but without sacramentarian mysticism. With an enthusiasm unequaled in the opinion of many, he set them forth as the mold of doctrine indispensable to the perpetuity of the symbolism of the gospel. To sacrifice their original form by an iota of concession to Christian comity would be treason to the throne of his ascended and reigning King.

The subject of this sketch, described in a word though never calling himself such, was essentially a high churchman. No English high churchman could be more confident of the apostolicity of his church organization. On the other hand, no British Baptist of the present day with his eagerness for Protestant unification, and probably not all Northern Baptists, would altogether understand, much less appreciate, the stalwart type of churchmanship which Dr. Frost embodied. No Roman Catholic

is more surely convinced of the infallibility of the pope speaking *ex cathedra* than was Dr. Frost of the infallibility of his Baptist confession of faith, drawn directly, carefully, and prayerfully from the inerrant New Testament.

Defender of the faith he was and yet no controversialist. Affirmation was his method, not debate. Public discussions with dissenting brethren, within or without the brotherhood, was not to his taste. Because of his pacific spirit, his gentleness, his knightly courtesy, his fraternal fairness, he recoiled from wordy contentions quite likely to degenerate into struggle for victory and not for truth. Rather, he preferred the personal interview or group conference. His humility was deep and characteristic. It showed itself in his manner, bearing, facial expression, and tones of voice. The most reverent of men, he lived in an atmosphere of prayer. He practiced the presence of God. Always before interviews with others touching religious matters, with even a so-called secular bearing, he prayed. Whatever he accomplished was wrought, as he had no question, not by keenness of intellect on his part, but by reason of the illuminating and guiding presence of the Holy Spirit. A mystic he was in the best sense of the word, believing that God, who is Spirit, directly communicated with his own spirit touching things related to His spiritual Kingdom. Those who were privileged to enter into the inner sanctuary of his Christian experience never for a moment doubted that he did enjoy private interviews with his Saviour, as real and at times as ecstatic, as those which were bestowed on rare saints of all ages possessing discernment and receptiveness. Whatever may be the judgment of the future concerning the beliefs and policies of Dr. Frost as a denominational leader, there will never come a reversal of the conviction of his contemporaries that he was a good man, fearing God, loving Christ, and ardently desirous of being all and doing all in his power to advance the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.