T. T. EATON AND THE POLITICIZATION
OF BAPTIST ECCLESIOLOGY

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APPROVAL SHEET

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OF BAPTIST ECCLESIOLOGY

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For my family,

my Alma Maters,

the Baptist churches which I have known,

and the James P. Boyce Centennial Library
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PREFACE

I am greatly indebted to the patience and encouragement of Dr. Thomas J. Nettles, my faculty supervisor. This dissertation would not have been completed without the gracious support of Dr. C. Berry Driver, Seminary Librarian. When I set aside some time to work upon my dissertation, Chris J. Fenner, John T. Lowe, and Megan O’Neal dutifully attended to daily responsibilities in the Archives and Special Collections office. RuthAnne Irvin assisted me with bibliographic arrangement. A special thanks to Jason C. Fowler for encouraging me to write upon this subject. I received assistance on Eaton family genealogy from Maria Grigorieff, great-granddaughter of T. T. Eaton and member of the Eaton Families Association, which circulates *The “New” Eatonian* newsletter. The labor of present and past staff of the James P. Boyce Centennial Library has sown fertile soil for scholarship in service of the Kingdom of God.

Adam Garland Winters

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2016
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Thesis

This thesis demonstrates the denominational influence of Thomas Treadwell Eaton in the Southern Baptist Convention and his proficiency to leverage that influence through effecting political change in the relationship between Southern Baptist churches and the denomination. The term “ politicization” is employed as a neutral term, and it is not intended to connote positive or negative judgments. Rather, this dissertation demonstrates that Eaton used the channels of influence that he possessed to bring about identifiable changes in the direction of the Southern Baptist church networks to which he belonged in Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, and also at the Southern Baptist Convention’s national level.

The organizational structure and missionary scope of the Southern Baptist Convention was largely nonexistent in 1845—the year of Eaton’s birth—as the newly formed denomination struggled with its identity after breaking away from their Northern Baptist counterparts regarding the Triennial Convention’s refusal to appoint slaveholders as missionaries. Throughout Eaton’s life, he endeavored to motivate Southern Baptists to develop their own sense of denominational responsibility and become a global Christian force, one not dependent upon the societies long-favored by the Northern Baptists. By 1894, Southern and Northern Baptists reached a comity agreement at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, that cemented the Southern Baptist Convention as a denomination fully capable of sustaining itself and its institutions. At the forefront of this transformation was the leadership of T. T. Eaton. Throughout the Whitsitt controversy, he fought for his understanding of Baptist identity and to uphold the interests of the Baptist associations
who wanted the denomination’s seminary to respect their concerns. Though he lost much denominational goodwill on account of his perceived pugnaciousness and political manipulation throughout the Whitsitt controversy, Eaton’s legacy is one of a denominational organizer who spurred the maturation of its institutional structure. Few Southern Baptists have ever been able to achieve a comparable level of influence within the denomination that Eaton commanded around the turn of the twentieth century.

**Background**

This thesis provides an overview of how Eaton utilized political strategies over the course of his entire life. In contemporary Baptist history scholarship, Eaton has rarely received attention as a significant figure for his own contributions to the denominational consciousness beyond his adversarial role in the prolonged controversy with William Heth Whitsitt in the late 1890s. Three of the standard historical accounts of the controversy are Charles Basil Bugg’s doctoral dissertation “The Whitsitt Controversy: A Study in Denominational Conflict” (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972), Rosalie Beck’s dissertation “The Whitsitt Controversy: A Denomination in Crisis” (Baylor University, 1984), and James H. Slatton’s *W. H. Whitsitt: The Man and the Controversy* (Mercer University Press, 2009). Slatton’s work provides special insight for its inclusion of extensive extracts from Whitsitt’s private diary. Forthcoming dissertations and books will surely contribute to even richer understandings of the significance of this historical event.

The legacy of the Whitsitt controversy weighs heavily upon the narrative of this thesis, but the cohesive story of Eaton’s life reveals him to be significant to the development and success of the Southern Baptist Convention. Far from being a simple successor of Landmarkist champion James Robinson Graves, Eaton’s personal commitments to the familiar tenets of Landmarkism do not cohere with common stereotypes. Like many nineteenth-century Landmarkers, Eaton assumed the necessity of
church succession theory because he believed that the New Testament required its existence. Like the first generation of Landmarkists, Eaton placed great emphasis upon the autonomy of the local church. However, these beliefs were commonly held across the Southern Baptist Convention, even among those who did not pledge loyalty to Graves or his Landmark movement.

Throughout his ministry in Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky, Eaton became a champion of denominational unity and cooperation, a reputation that he largely sacrificed in his public stand against Whitsitt in the 1890s. Eaton held high standards for doctrinal orthodoxy and Baptist identity, and he used every facet of his influence to promote his vision for a strong, efficient denomination that could evangelize and disciple more people of diverse nations, races, genders, and ages. Each chapter of this dissertation concentrates on a particular era of Eaton’s life in which he made significant contributions to the political structure of the denomination, changing the way many Southern Baptist churches viewed their relationships with their denominational institutions.

**Methodology**

C. Ferris Jordan’s dissertation “Thomas Treadwell Eaton: Pastor, Editor, Controversialist, and Denominational Servant” (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965) has served as the lone dedicated study of the breadth of Eaton’s life and work. Though impressive in its scope and use of sources, Jordan’s dissertation lacks a comprehensive narrative beyond the fact that Eaton clearly possessed a great deal of influence within the denomination. Despite being an immensely informative overview of Eaton’s career, Jordan’s thesis evidences little sense of urgency in synthesizing the details into a cohesive whole.

Jordan’s dissertation remains a significant study due to the author’s diligence in primary source research through predominately microfilm archives. Unfortunately,
Jordan’s reliance of microfilm copies of the T. T. Eaton Papers makes for inconvenient source citation. Advances in research efficiency have been made possible due to the indexing of the T. T. Eaton Papers by the staff of the Archives and Special Collections of the James P. Boyce Centennial Library at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. The T. T. Eaton Papers contain a wealth of correspondence between Eaton and many denominational leaders, and the collection is now readily accessible for researchers. Supplementary manuscript materials have been gleaned from the James P. Boyce Papers, the John A. Broadus Papers, the A. T. Robertson Papers, the SBTS Reports of the President, and the William H. Whitsitt manuscript collection, collectively housed in the Archives and Special Collections of Southern Seminary. The microfilm copies of the William H. Whitsitt Papers also provide insight into denominational perceptions of Eaton’s political strategies employed during the Whitsitt controversy.

Eaton’s Western Recorder editorials achieved greater influence than any of his published books. Prior to his editorship of the Recorder, Eaton contributed various articles for the Baptist newspapers in the states where he pastored. Almost all of his editorials were unsigned, and on some occasions when Eaton was traveling out-of-town or especially busy, his sister Josephine Eaton Peck may have anonymously filled the editorial chair. A few associate editors were sometimes listed among the newspaper’s staff, and they might have contributed additional unsigned editorials. For the sake of bibliographic citation, all unsigned Western Recorder editorials are attributed to Eaton unless otherwise noted, on account of the fact that Eaton would have been accountable for all editorial content appearing in his newspaper.

Chapter 2 identifies the influences of Eaton’s formative years among Tennessee Baptists. Primary sources demonstrate that he became conversant within denominational circles in his early pastorates. Eaton became an avid supporter of denomination institutions for higher education and was an active participant in state
convention meetings, where he led the post–Civil War Baptists in the state to unify for
the purpose of supporting a Baptist university.

Chapter 3 follows Eaton to Petersburg, Virginia, where he served as pastor
between 1875 and 1881. In Virginia, Eaton’s close proximity to the Religious Herald
shaped his perception of how to publish a successful denominational newspaper, one that
welcomed sustained discussion on doctrine and polity. As a pastor and leader in
denominational causes, he was immensely successful in raising associational support for
foreign missions and religious education.

Chapter 4 examines Eaton’s first decade as a Baptist pastor in Louisville, with
particular emphasis upon his growing denominational leadership in the Long Run Baptist
Association. Through his participation at the Long Run’s annual meetings, Eaton
developed into the association’s leading voice. He led a surge of denominational giving
toward missionary causes and Southern Baptist ministries.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how Eaton worked to promote his vision for Baptist
identity through dissemination of religious literature and denominational leadership. By
becoming the editor of the Western Recorder and a partner in the Baptist Book Concern,
Eaton gained far-reaching publishing arms that extended the reach of his influence.
Eaton used the advantage of the press to promote the distinctive doctrines of Baptists and
to oppose heterodox theology, even at the risk of open controversy with other
denominational leaders. Most important, Eaton became a leading proponent in the
development of the Southern Baptist Convention’s denominational consciousness
through his support of the Sunday School Board and the 1894 Fortress Monroe comity
agreement.

Chapter 6 introduces the denominational controversy regarding William Heth
Whitsitt and chronicles Eaton’s efforts to oppose Whitsitt for undermining Baptist
identity. Emphasis is given to the Western Recorder editorial strategies, the publishing
output of the Baptist Book Concern, and the denominational parliamentary meetings that
collectively pressured Whitsitt to resign from the seminary presidency. Eaton’s interpretation of Baptist identity was inextricably linked to his belief in church succession theory.

Chapter 7 surveys Eaton’s career after the Whitsitt controversy until his death in 1907. During this period, Eaton continued to defend Baptist principles against the creeping influence of liberal theology and kept pressure upon the Southern Seminary faculty to respect denominational interests. Though now perceived by many as a divisive, anti-intellectual force in the denomination, Eaton remained actively involved in denominational causes. Chapter 8 serves as the conclusion, and chapter arguments are summarized to prove the thesis.

Scope and Limitations

This thesis does not aspire to be an exhaustive work on the Whitsitt controversy, the development of Landmarkism in Baptist life, or even the biography of T. T. Eaton. The scope of the study is limited to synthesizing demonstrable evidence of Eaton’s utilization of his political influence within the Southern Baptist Convention to motivate or effect organizational changes to some aspect of the denomination. To that end, a chronological narrative serves the thesis in demonstrating the political strategies employed in Eaton’s career from his formative years in Tennessee until his death in 1907.
CHAPTER 2
EATON AND TENNESSEE BAPTISTS

T. T. Eaton’s roots as a Tennessee Baptist laid the foundation for his long and eventful career in ministry and denominational work. Though the Landmark tradition was an especially strong influence throughout the state, Eaton was able to unify the diverse factions of Baptists for the purpose of greater denominational cooperation and effectiveness. Through his own correspondence with Southern Baptist leaders beyond the state’s boundaries, pathways soon opened for Eaton to take a more prominent role within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Baptist Upbringings

On November 16, 1845, Thomas Treadwell Eaton was born to Joseph Haywood Eaton (1812–1859) in Murfreesboro, a central city in the state of Tennessee that many of the great Landmark Baptists called home. J. H. Eaton was a titanic figure amongst Tennessee Baptists, displaying prominence in preaching, education, and denominational leadership. He graduated from Madison University in Hamilton, New York, in 1837, and he moved to Nashville to pursue a teaching career. While in Nashville, he joined the First Baptist Church under the pastorate of R. B. C. Howell. In 1840, he married Esther M. Treadwell—the granddaughter of Declaration of Independence signee Thomas Treadwell.¹ For five years after his 1843 ordination, J. H.

Eaton was the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, although Esther did not join the church’s membership until the following year.\textsuperscript{2}

Union University, also located in Murfreesboro, was chartered in 1842, and it began offering its first college-level courses in 1847. J. H. Eaton split his time between the pastorate and teaching classes at the university during its early years. In 1847, the Union University trustees elected Eaton as the institution’s first president.\textsuperscript{3} From his earliest days, young Thomas Treadwell Eaton knew his father as a preacher, university president, and Baptist statesman.

Joseph and Esther Eaton had five children between 1842 and 1850, although only two survived into adulthood. Thomas Treadwell’s older sister Josephine (July 23, 1843 – August 13, 1923) ultimately moved to Louisville, Kentucky, to aid her brother in editorial duties on the *Western Recorder* and played a substantial role in the denominational conflict concerning William H. Whitsitt in the 1890s. The three other Eaton siblings—Henry Davis, Wayland, and Mary—died in childhood, although Wayland survived long enough to travel with his mother and sister to New York after the onset of the Civil War.\textsuperscript{4}

\begin{center}
**Tennessee Roots: The Landmark Baptist Circle**
\end{center}

Even as an infant, Thomas Treadwell was already firmly entrenched in Tennessee Baptist life. He was a member of Union University’s first presidential family, and as such, spent his formative years in familiar circles of some of Tennessee’s most

\textsuperscript{2}Baggett, *So Great a Cloud of Witnesses*, 27.


\textsuperscript{4}I am indebted to Maria Grigorieff for genealogical information on the Eaton family lineage. Mrs. Grigorieff is the great-granddaughter of T. T. Eaton, through his daughter Maria, and a member of the Eaton Families Association, which circulates *The “New” Eatonian* newsletter.
influential Baptists. He recalled one of his earliest childhood memories as attending a
Baptist association meeting with his father and watching the proceedings with silent
curiosity. Significant to him was the recollection of staying in the home of an elderly
Baptist farmer who entertained ministerial guests who all brought with them a plethora of
anecdotes from their travels and experiences. Eaton was also greatly impressed to see a
meeting house full of preachers who sat in chairs as equals, talking amongst themselves.
“It increased my reverence for men generally to find that so many in the house could
preach; a gift, I had supposed, requiring that awful amount of wisdom only our pastor
possessed,” he recollected.5

Young Eaton became enthralled by the association’s most talkative messenger
who “preached as much as all the rest.” Eaton’s memories of this man, whose name he
apparently never learned, may have helped to inspire his own life’s trajectory:
Whenever any one else sat down, this brother sprang up at once and wished “to
make a few remarks”—on all occasions he was ready, on all subjects he had
something to say, and frequently interrupted others with, “One word, Bro.
Moderator, to explain my position.” I regarded him as worthy to take Solomon’s
place, and wondered if he was not one of the apostles yet alive to instruct the
brethren on all points. My report to my younger brother, on my return home, who
had shared my wonder as to an Association, was summed up briefly thus: “It is
eating good things, telling funny stories, and talking out in meeting; and I saw the
wisest man in the world, who could preach about everything and told them all what
to do.”7

Among the most prominent personalities who formed the social circle of the
Eaton family were two of the fathers of the Baptist Landmark movement, James
Robinson Graves and James Madison Pendleton. The Eaton family had close ties to
Nashville’s J. R. Graves, the noted Landmarker and longtime editor of the Tennessee
Baptist and its post–Civil War successor The Baptist. Graves began his newspaper career

5T. T. Eaton, “Introductory Sermon before the Portsmouth Association,” Religious Herald,
September 16, 1876.

6Ibid.

7Ibid.
as assistant editor in 1846 under R. B. C. Howell and succeeded him as the Tennessee paper’s sole editor in 1848.\(^8\) Under his editorship, Graves’s *Tennessee Baptist* became one of the most frequently read denominational newspapers in the American South, with subscriptions exceeding 10,000 before the Civil War and reaching over 8,000 after the war.\(^9\) Graves’s influence among the Baptists of middle Tennessee was widely acknowledged by those who experienced it firsthand. In his autobiography, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor William Owen Carver recalled his youth as a Baptist in middle Tennessee with particular emphasis on Graves’s power in that region:

> In Tennessee, we were under the powerful influence and actual domination of the peculiar type of ecclesiastical orthodoxy so powerfully advocated and developed under the influence of the unique personality of J. R. Graves.\(^10\)

More than any other single figure, Graves popularized Landmarkism among Southern Baptists through his influence as the editor of one of the denomination’s most widely-read newspapers. In the summer of 1851, Graves outlined the core tenets of Landmark ecclesiology at a Baptist mass-meeting in Cotton Grove, Tennessee. These tenets—originally submitted as queries to which Graves spoke at length—stated that Baptists could not recognize as true churches any such religious fellowship that did not conform to New Testament standards of local church governance. Neither could Baptists recognize the ministers of these “irregular and unscriptural bodies” (as Graves called them) as true gospel ministers, so Baptist churches should not invite such persons to preach in their pulpits. Furthermore, Graves argued that Baptists should not address other professing believers from these religious fellowships as true Christian brethren.\(^11\)

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Among many Tennessee Baptists, Graves’s “Cotton Grove Resolutions” found favor, as evidenced by the adoption of them by the Big Hatchie Association—the local association to which Graves later joined after he moved to Memphis—at their annual meeting in Bolivar the following month.¹²

Graves insisted upon the church succession theory of Baptist history, a belief that true churches (defined as those congregations which conformed to a pure biblical standard of church government and the administration of the ordinances of baptism and communion) had existed in an uninterrupted lineage from the New Testament era up until the present day. He perceived succession theory as essential to Baptist ecclesiology, for if neither true churches nor genuine gospel ministers existed in every generation, then there could be no true baptism.

Between 1857 and 1858, Graves communicated his views on church succession in a series of letters published in the Tennessee Baptist between himself and Presbyterian N. L. Rice of Cincinnati over the issues that divided their respective denominations. In his defense of successionism against Rice, Graves even declared the ministry and baptism of John the Baptist to be specifically Christian, rather than the culmination of the Old Testament dispensation. By implication, John the Baptist was the first Baptist and a visible Christian church existed prior to the event of Pentecost.¹³

In his 1880 publication Old Landmarkism: What Is It? Graves crystallized his stance on the doctrine of church succession:

My position is that Christ, in the very “days of John the Baptist,” did establish a visible kingdom on earth, and that this kingdom has never yet been “broken in pieces” or given to another class of subjects—has never for a day “been moved,” or ceased from the earth, and never will until Christ returns personally to reign over it; that the organization he first set up, which John called “the Bride,” and which Christ called his church, constituted that visible kingdom, and today all his true churches

¹²Tull, A History of Southern Baptist Landmarkism, 132.

on earth constitute it; and therefore, if his kingdom has stood unchanged, and will to the end, he must always have had true and uncorrupted churches, since his kingdom can not exist without true churches.\textsuperscript{14}

Graves’s influence among Tennessee Baptists came with his involvement in various controversies, including a public feud with R. B. C. Howell at the First Baptist Church of Nashville in 1857. Howell—who had first pastored the church during the 1830s and 1840s before serving as the Southern Baptist Convention’s second president—returned to Nashville from Richmond for a second pastorate in 1857, but he opposed Graves and his Landmarker constituency. Graves and Howell also differed in their missional strategies; Howell promoted the advantages of the Southern Baptist Publication Society in Charleston, whereas Graves advocated a Baptist union in Nashville operating directly under denominational control.\textsuperscript{15} This conflict forced a congregational split between the two men and their supporters, resulting in two factions each proclaiming themselves to be the “true” First Baptist Church of Nashville.\textsuperscript{16} Due to Graves’s status as a newspaper editor, the controversy became a public spectacle within the denomination that warranted attention from Baptist newspapers in other states.

During the 1850s, Graves joined Union University’s board of trustees. Graves had much influence among the Baptists of Tennessee, and he proved effective in raising money for the school to endow a theological chair. The trustees elected James Madison Pendleton—who had close ties with Graves and was a frequent contributor to the \textit{Tennessee Baptist}—to fill this chair in 1857.\textsuperscript{17} Pendleton also joined Graves as a joint editor on the newspaper in 1858, although Pendleton’s differences with Graves over


\textsuperscript{16}Patterson, \textit{James Robinson Graves}, 142.

\textsuperscript{17}Baggett, \textit{So Great a Cloud of Witnesses}, 31, 41.
slavery and secession (Pendleton favored gradual emancipation and sympathized with the Union against the Confederacy) led him to relocate north of Tennessee in 1862.¹⁸

Eaton’s high regard for the character of Pendleton might have been second only to his regard for his own father. Pendleton not only succeeded Joseph H. Eaton as faculty chairman and acting president over Union University, but he preached the elder Eaton’s funeral sermon as well. At the age of forty-six, J. H. Eaton died suddenly of paralysis on January 12, 1859. The next day, with J. H. Eaton’s body lying before him in the Baptist Meeting House of Murfreesboro, Pendleton delivered a eulogy drawn from Acts 7:59 for his deceased predecessor.¹⁹ In 1886, an elderly Pendleton also preached the funeral service for T. T. Eaton’s mother in Louisville.²⁰

Pendleton was also one of the foundational personalities in the Landmark movement, as he penned a series of articles for the *Tennessee Baptist* in 1854 arguing against the biblical validity of alien immersion and asserted that Pedobaptist societies were not true biblical churches and that their ministers were not gospel preachers, echoing Graves’s Cotton Grove Resolutions. Graves republished Pendleton’s articles into a pamphlet titled *An Old Landmark Re-set*, which solidified the name of the movement.²¹ Before Pendleton’s death in 1891, he estimated that the pamphlet had surpassed 40,000 printed copies.²²

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¹⁸Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 56.


Eaton maintained ties with Pendleton throughout his life, organizing a celebration for Pendleton’s fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1888 and even preaching his funeral sermon in 1891 by request. Eaton admired Pendleton’s writings and praised particularly his pamphlet *An Old Landmark Re-set* before a 1904 meeting of the Kentucky Baptist Historical Society, stating that “no one can deny the wonderful strength of the book. After thirty years’ discussion, Dr. N. M. Crawford, of Georgia, once President of Georgetown College, said that this book had never been answered.”

After associating himself with Graves in 1852, Pendleton repeatedly defended the Landmark tenet that Pedobaptist ministers should only be recognized as mere “preachers” rather than “gospel ministers” since they lacked the holy authority of the office that comes through connection with a true “gospel church.” Unlike Graves, however, Pendleton may have rejected the theory of Baptist successionism. According to James E. Tull, Pendleton differed from stricter Landmarkers like Graves in four details. Notably, Pendleton maintained belief in the doctrine of the universal church, refused to equate the kingdom of God with the aggregate of Baptist churches, believed that the theory of “nonintercommunion” was unimportant, and rejected the theory of church succession.

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27 Tull, *High-Church Baptists in the South*, 44.
When reviewing Graves’s book *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?* (1880), the elderly Pendleton praised his old partner’s clear and forcible language. However, Pendleton also remarked, “Bro. Graves brings some things into this Landmark discussion which, in my judgment, do not belong to it.” Pendleton’s primary criticism of the publication was Graves’s attempt to press the point that the practice of intercommunion among Baptist churches violated Landmark principles. Unlike Graves, Pendleton preferred to leave that question to an individual church’s own freedom to exercise Christian courtesy, although he also declared the entire question “too small a matter to make trouble.” Pendleton reaffirmed his conviction—which he also believed to be skillfully articulated in Graves’s book—that Pedobaptist congregations ought not to be called “churches in the scriptural sense of the word,” that immersions administered in such contexts were scripturally invalid, and that Baptists ought not to exchange pulpits with Pedobaptist ministers. Pendleton insisted that “this intercommunion topic has no natural connection with Landmarkism. . . . I hope that the churches will not be disturbed by the agitation of this question.” His review made no clear remark on the theory of church succession, as he limited his historical observations to the practices of seventeenth- and eighteen-century New England Baptists in opposing fraternization with Pedobaptists.

Pendleton’s position regarding the doctrine of the universal church became a matter of debate within the denomination after his death, on account of the fact that he

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29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.


made few direct statements on the subject. Speaking from his experience, T. T. Eaton believed Pendleton to be opposed to the concept, and he supported his belief with an appeal to the thirteenth article of Pendleton’s 1867 *Baptist Church Manual*, which only described a church as a visible, local congregation of baptized believers that rightly observed the ordinances.\(^{33}\) Furthermore, Eaton surely assumed Pendleton surely held to church succession theory, as he claimed he “never knew of an actual case” of a Landmarker who rejected the existence of church succession, even though he did not consider it necessary component of Landmarkism.\(^{34}\)

The decisive break between Pendleton and Graves came about when the latter published a series of pro-slavery articles written by Thorton Stringfellow in the pages of the *Tennessee Baptist* in early 1861. Over the three months that the Stringfellow articles ran, Pendleton did not contribute anything to the newspaper, and in July, Graves announced that the *Tennessee Baptist* would dispense with Pendleton’s services as associate editor due to “the financial embarrassment of the country.”\(^{35}\)

Union University suspended its operations in spring of 1861, and Pendleton’s opposition to the Confederate secession created a rift between him and many of the members at the Murfreesboro church where he was a pastor. Fearing some Southerners might seek violent retribution against him, Pendleton removed his family north to pastor the First Baptist Church in Hamilton, Ohio, in 1862. He eventually moved further north into Pennsylvania—where he held pastorates for eighteen years, managed the American Baptist Publication Society, and became instrumental in the founding of Crozer Theological Seminary.\(^{36}\) Later in his life, Pendleton retired to Kentucky and became a

\(^{33}\)T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, February 26, 1903.

\(^{34}\)T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, September 10, 1896.


\(^{36}\)Ibid., 62–63.
frequent contributor of columns on a variety of religious topics for the *Western Recorder*. He died in Bowling Green on March 5, 1891, after which T. T. Eaton preached the funeral from 2 Timothy 4:7: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.” William Heth Whitsitt also delivered a memorial address and tribute on behalf of Pendleton’s former students and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.\(^{37}\)

### Eaton’s Road to the Ministry

After the death of his father in 1859, T. T. Eaton transferred to Madison University in Hamilton, New York, to continue his education under the presidency of his uncle George Eaton. In 1861, the teenage Eaton returned to Tennessee to fight for the Confederacy in the Civil War.\(^{38}\) His military service entailed assignments as a headquarters scout for the Seventh Tennessee Calvary, and he interacted with both Thomas Jonathan “Stonewall” Jackson and Nathan Bedford Forrest. At some point, he even served in the same Confederate Calvary Corps as William Heth Whitsitt, a fellow Baptist whom he knew from Union University and the man with whom he would enter into bitter denominational conflict three decades later.\(^{39}\)

After the war, Eaton enrolled in Virginia’s Washington College—of which Robert E. Lee had assumed the presidency one year prior to his arrival—where he earned an A.B. degree in 1867.\(^{40}\) Lee aspired to lead students toward excellence in moral standards, encouraging them to cultivate a personal character that was both manly and

\(^{37}\)T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, March 19, 1891.


Christian. Under Lee’s presidency, Eaton apparently made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

From 1867 until 1872, Eaton taught mathematics and natural science at Union University. Eaton was ordained in 1870 and served as pastor of a Baptist church in Lebanon, Tennessee, from 1870 to 1872, although most of his tenure at this church appears to have been part-time. The year 1872 proved to be a pivotal one in Eaton’s life; he married Alice Roberts, resigned his professorship at Union, and ruminated over whether to accept a pastorate in Chattanooga. Chattanooga was not the only suitor for the young pastor, however, as churches in Columbia, Tennessee and Richmond, Virginia, also courted his services.

The invitation from First Baptist Church of Richmond came from the esteemed John Lansing Burrows, who was the pastor of the congregation between 1854 and 1874. In 1873, Burrows invited Eaton to fill his Richmond pulpit for a few months while he supervised the fundraising efforts for the Jubilee commemoration of the Baptist General Association of Virginia. Burrows extended this offer with the additional assurance that Eaton would likely be able to find a permanent settlement in Virginia, if he so desired.

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42 Ibid. Also, “Dr. Eaton as a Soldier.”
44 Crismon, “Eaton, Thomas Treadwell,” 385. In June of 1871, The Board of Domestic and Indian Missions for the Southern Baptist Convention urged him to commit to the Lebanon pastorate full-time with the promise of a pay raise. See M. T. Summer to Eaton June 15, 1871, T. T. Eaton Papers Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS.
45 D. C. Shelton to T. T. Eaton, September 9, 1872, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS; J. L. Burrows to T. T. Eaton, September 25, 1872, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS. The church of Columbia voted to make Eaton as its pastor, and J. L. Burrows invited Eaton to fill his Richmond pulpit for a few months while he was charged with superintending the fundraising efforts for the Jubilee year of the General Association.
46 J. L. Burrows to T. T. Eaton, October 10, 1872, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS.
Near the end of 1874, Burrows accepted a call to pastor the Broadway Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Circumstances never permitted the two men to work together in Virginia, but they would ultimately find themselves in close proximity at Louisville’s two greatest Baptist churches the following decade.

**The Chattanooga Pastorate and the Unification of Tennessee Baptists**

Ultimately, Eaton decided upon the First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, a decision that may have owed greatly to advice that he received from James Petrigu Boyce, to whom Eaton wrote “it was mainly through your influence that I came here.”

During his Chattanooga pastorate, Eaton maintained an active presence in Tennessee Baptist denominational leadership, and the state convention elected him as its president during its second annual meeting of April 9–12, 1875.

During the 1870s, Eaton made it his mission to unify the Baptists within the state toward greater organizational efficiency and effectiveness to promote Christian education.

During post-war Reconstruction, Tennessee Baptists were organized regionally, according to west, middle, and east divisions across the state. J. R. Graves had relocated in Memphis by 1867 and relaunched his newspaper publishing under the name *The Baptist*, still holding rigorously to his Landmarker ideals but perhaps making a better effort to avoid some of the political feuds that had torn rifts between Baptists in the prior two decades.

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47 T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, July 27, 1874, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 1, Folder 29, SBTS.

48 *Proceedings of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1875* (Memphis: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1875), 5.


As a result of the factionalism that divided Tennessee Baptists, their contributions toward larger missionary enterprises suffered throughout the 1870s. N. B. Williams, an agent of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Foreign Mission Board, remarked in a column published in *The Baptist*, “The influence of Tennessee Baptists has been much weakened at home and abroad by the lack of unity and aim and effort which has characterized their work.” Union University closed its doors in 1873 due to insurmountable financial debt in the wake of the Civil War, but Tennessee Baptists became eager to reestablish a denominational school in their state.

In 1874, representatives from the East Tennessee General Association, the General Association of Middle Tennessee and North Alabama, and the West Tennessee Baptist Convention assembled at a convention in Murfreesboro for the purpose of “establishing a more perfect union among the Baptists of Tennessee, by eliciting, combing, and directing the energies of the denomination throughout the State.” This union became the Tennessee Baptist Convention. Paramount in the newly constituted state convention’s agenda was the recommendation of “a well-endowed thoroughly equipped University.” To that end the representatives appointed a Committee of Location to select the most suitable location for the new school as well as the means of its endowment and the appointment of a trustee board to secure the establishment of the institution. The convention appointed Eaton, who dearly loved the old Union University over which his father had presided, as one of the nine men tasked with establishing Union’s spiritual successor.

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51 N. B. Williams, [untitled], *The Baptist*, August 18, 1877, 564; Wardin, *Tennessee Baptists*, 229.

52 *Proceedings of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1874* (Nashville: Republican Banner Office, 1874), 2.

53 Ibid., 4–5.

54 *Proceedings of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1874*, 7.
Eaton and his comrades on the Committee on Location agreed during a July meeting that the city of Jackson, Tennessee, should be the home of the new institution, the name of which would become the Southwestern Baptist University. On August 12, 1874, a called meeting of the Tennessee Baptist Convention elected a trustee board numbering thirty-five, a coalition that included Eaton. The Board of Trustees elected new teachers for Southwestern University, which opened its first session on September 14, 1874.

The following year’s annual meeting of the state convention held importance for the sustainment of the university, and Eaton expended personal effort to promote the 1875 meeting across the South. Eaton contributed a correspondent column to the most widely-circulated Southern Baptist newspapers, remarking that the Southwestern University would be critical to uniting the Tennessee Baptists into a strong convention of Christian influence:

This is perhaps, the most important Baptist meeting ever held on the soil of Tennessee. . . . Our Southwestern University, our mission work, the mustering into line of 104,000 Tennessee Baptists . . . must be considered. The Baptist denomination of Tennessee might be compared to a sleeping giant, whose head rests comfortably on the Alleghany Mountains and whose feet dip into the Mississippi. This giant must be waked up, and his vast strength made available in advancing the cause of Christ. With half an effort, provided the effort is a united one, we can make achievements which will astonish the world, dazzle ourselves and confound our enemies. Let there be a large gathering at Nashville from all parts of the State.

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55Proceedings of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1875 (Memphis: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1875), 31. The report of the Committee on Location stated, “But let us not forget that in building up the University we are laboring not for ourselves alone, but for the whole Baptist denomination of the Southwest.”

56Ibid., 22, 29–33. The Committee on Location’s report recommended thirty-five trustees, but the report on Education recorded in the 1875 proceedings of the Convention notes that thirty-six trustees were appointed. The original list of trustees from the August 12 meeting only includes thirty-five names.

57Ibid., 21–23, 31–33.

Largely through the visionary leadership of Eaton for a united Tennessee Baptist witness, churches across the state—which had been greatly divided over leadership personality conflicts and dispirited by the economic fallout of the Civil War—came together to lay the foundations for a new future. Tennessee Baptists united to create a new state convention and revitalize their university. Baptists in the state’s west, middle, and east regions rallied together in the name of mission work and education.

In Chattanooga, Eaton’s services to the denomination extended beyond the borders of Tennessee. In the 1870s, James P. Boyce, faculty chairman of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, took residence in Louisville, Kentucky, to pursue potential sources of endowment so as to relocate the seminary from Greenville, South Carolina, and secure its financial stability. Eaton contributed personally to the seminary’s economic need when funds permitted, and his position in the city allowed him to be an advocate for the school among potential benefactors. Chattanooga was one of the relocation options that Boyce and the seminary trustees strongly considered for the seminary along with Nashville, Memphis, Atlanta, and Louisville (where the institution finally settled).\(^59\) Of the five cities, some assumed that Chattanooga was Boyce’s preference, and Eaton’s move to the city was greatly influenced by his belief that the seminary might soon follow.\(^60\) Eaton loved the seminary and its faculty, and he long regretted that he never had opportunity to matriculate as a student during his time in Tennessee.\(^61\) Eaton and Boyce corresponded frequently during the former’s Chattanooga pastorate, as both men evidenced genuine concern for the other’s ministerial effectiveness and personal wellbeing.


\(^60\) T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, October 14, 1879, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 3, Folder 9, SBTS.

\(^61\) Ibid.
Correspondence files suggest that Eaton may have briefly wrestled not only with whether to change pastorates but also with his ministerial vocation. As finances became tight at his Chattanooga church, Eaton considered alternative career options. Writing to Boyce in March 1874, he informed him of damages to the city stemming from a recent flood, confiding that the resulting financial blow might force him to relocate again, perhaps to become a missionary. He requested that Boyce make an appeal to Louisville’s prominent Walnut Street Baptist Church for relief aid to Chattanooga Baptists:

I greatly fear that this flood because of the losses brethren have sustained in it—may make it necessary for me to leave. Last fall when the church got behind with me I wrote to the Home Mission Society in N. C. for help. . . . The reply I got was that the treasury was $40,000 in debt and they did not think anything could be done, but they sent me some printed questions to answer and a form of application &c. It was necessary that the church by vote certify to its poverty, its necessities, &c, and then it was extremely doubtful whether anything could be done. I did not want to publicly make the application unless there was some little prospect of success, so did not pursue that line any farther. . . . I am somewhat at a loss what to do, as I would rather not leave here yet a while, if I can stay. . . . Please ask the Walnut Street brethren whether they are willing to do anything for the flood sufferers here, and let me hear from you at your earliest convenience.  

Boyce apparently advised Eaton to remain at the Chattanooga church for five years, which greatly encouraged him to persevere at his post despite the obvious difficulties. Nevertheless, Eaton’s situation forced him to remain attentive to alternative ministry plans. Eaton also advised Boyce regarding the best men for pastorates at Louisville’s largest Baptist churches, Broadway and Walnut Street, a remarkable precursor to the direction his own career would take over the next decade:

62 T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, March 3, 1874, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 1, Folder 29, SBTS.

63 T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, July 27, 1874, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 1, Folder 29, SBTS.

64 T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, October 1, 1874, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 1, Folder 33, SBTS.
I see that Dr. [John Lansing] Burrows certainly goes to Broadway and hear that the Walnut St. folks are talking of calling Dr. T. G. Jones. According to my notion that ought to be exactly reversed—sending Dr. B. to Walnut St. and Dr. J. to Broadway, since Dr. B. is such a great man to visit his flock and Dr. J. does so little of it. I think if Dr. J. is called to Walnut St., he will go, but we would be sorry to lose him from Tenn. Who is to take Dr. B.’s place in Richmond will prove quite a perplexing question, I imagine.⁶⁵

In September 1874, Eaton’s financial situation in Chattanooga appeared more optimistic, as the church raised his annual salary to $1,500, an increase of fifty percent. This serendipitous arrangement ended in frustration, however, as Eaton informed Boyce in December that many of the generous workingmen who had subscribed to pay their pastor lost their employment due to financial panic in the city. Even under the economic strain, Eaton led the church to take up a humble benevolence collection on behalf of the seminary.⁶⁶ Returning the favor in March, Boyce forwarded a benevolence collection of $51.10 from Louisville’s Walnut Street Baptist Church to be used in relief of the Chattanooga Baptist flood sufferers, per Eaton’s request the previous summer.⁶⁷ At the end of the month, Eaton wrote to his old friend William Heth Whitsitt, former Tennessee Baptist who now served as professor at Southern Seminary, apologizing that his financially impoverished church was only able to raise eight dollars on behalf of the seminary, as opposed to the requested amount of twenty dollars.⁶⁸

Eaton gave serious consideration to full-time financial agency on behalf of Baptist institutions of higher education. Eaton received a letter dated May 8, 1875, from a confidant in Nashville urging him not to abandon his pastoral work for the position of

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⁶⁵T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, November 7, 1874, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 1, Folder 34, SBTS.

⁶⁶T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, December 29, 1874, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 1, Folder 35, SBTS.

⁶⁷T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, March 27, 1875, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 1, Folder 40, SBTS. Eaton also noted that he had received collections from the Baptists of Nashville and Hopkinsville, Kentucky, but nothing from Atlanta, much to his disappointment.

⁶⁸T. T. Eaton to William H. Whitsitt, March 31, 1875, John A. Broadus Papers, Box 6, Folder 6, SBTS.
agent of Southwestern University, a proposition that the confidant claimed to have heard. Eaton’s Nashville contact urged him to reject this career change because he was far more valuable to the Baptists as a preacher:

You have solemnly consecrated yourself to the work of the ministry, which an agency is not... you are in your formative state now, and I can say, without intending to flatter you, you give far more promise as to future development and usefulness than any man we have. With your power disciplined by daily Pastoral work, and severe study— your soul... sanctified by devotional exercises, prayer, and preaching— you may hope, when matured to be a real power in our land for much good. Souls may hear you by the thousands, as the means of bringing them to a knowledge of God in Christ Jesus.\(^69\)

Though entrenched in Tennessee Baptist life during his Chattanooga pastorate, Eaton’s services were coveted by Baptist churches in neighboring states. Less than one month after his election as the Tennessee Baptist Convention’s president, he received an opportunity to unite himself with the Baptists in Kentucky. The Pilgrimage Baptist Church in Lexington voted unanimously to elect Eaton as their pastor, in what could have resulted in Eaton’s first foray into Kentucky Baptist life.

Basil Manly, Jr., then-president of Georgetown College, encouraged Eaton to take the Lexington pastorate, noting the great potential of the location:

While I am not prepared to give you any advice as to the comparative claims of Lexington and Chattanooga, esteeming as I do your work in Chattanooga to be one of great importance and promise. I have no hesitation in speaking of Lexington as a very important and interesting field, and one to which you would be welcomed with great cordiality not only by that church, but by the brethren generally in that region.\(^70\)

In the early 1870s, there had existed only one Baptist church in Lexington, Kentucky. Aspiring to broaden its ministerial reach, Lexington’s First Baptist Church established a mission Sunday school in the city’s eastern ward which ultimately came to be constituted as an entirely new congregation under the name of Pilgrimage Baptist Church.

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\(^69\)[Unattributed] to T. T. Eaton, May 8, 1875, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS. This dated letter is incomplete and lacks the confidant’s signature.

\(^70\)Basil Manly, Jr. to T. T. Eaton, May 1, 1875, T. T. Eaton Papers Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS.
Church. The new congregation of less than one hundred members lacked a pastor, and it hoped that Eaton’s leadership would grow the church’s numbers and fortify its identity.\(^{71}\)

Despite the urging of Manly and the pastoral search committee at Pilgrimage, Eaton did not accept the pastorate in Lexington. Later that May, Eaton received a letter from the First Baptist Church of Petersburg, Virginia, announcing that the church had voted to call him as their pastor.\(^{72}\) The church’s pastorate had recently been vacated by W. E. Hatcher, and their acquaintance with Eaton appears to have come primarily through his contributions to the *Religious Herald*, as they had no personal interaction with him.\(^{73}\) Eaton accepted this invitation and moved to Virginia to pastor the Petersburg church, thus ending his career as a Tennessee Baptist, only about one month after presiding over the annual state convention. The May 27, 1875 issue of the *Religious Herald* marked the occasion of the church’s election of Eaton:

> The First Baptist church in Petersburg, on the last Lord’s day, with perfect unanimity, elected this popular minister, of Chattanooga, Tenn., to the pastorate. It is earnestly hoped that he will accept the appointment, so gracefully tendered, to one of the most desirable pulpits of the State. The church is large, harmonious and efficient, and situated in a numerous and flourishing Baptist population. Should he come to Petersburg, he will receive not only a cordial reception from the church, but from the ministers and brethren of the State generally.\(^{74}\)

Some Baptists in Chattanooga apparently accused Boyce of advising Eaton to leave for Virginia, on account of Eaton’s visit to Louisville before accepting the Petersburg pastorate. Eaton wrote Boyce to assure him such charges were without warrant:

> The people of Chattanooga have no right to charge my leaving to you. I distinctly stated several times that I got no advice from you one way or another, I stopped

\(^{71}\)T. B. Threlkeld, H. P. Perrin, and Saul Waide to T. T. Eaton, May 3, 1875, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS.

\(^{72}\)D. G. Potts to T. T. Eaton, May 22, 1875, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS.

\(^{73}\)D. G. Potts to T. T. Eaton, May 20, 1875, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS.

\(^{74}\)[Untitled], *Religious Herald*, May 27, 1875.
over a day in Louisville expressly to talk over the subject of my leaving with you, but failed to see you. From what I heard while in Ky., I got the impression that you favored my going. As a matter of fact I did tell the folks in C. the names of a good many leading brethren who advised me to remove, and your name was not among them. Their recollections were not clear, or they took for granted you advised me along with the others. It was a grave question with me and I was very slow in reaching a decision.  

Eaton’s relocation brought about the prospect of ministering in a more robustly Baptist context, within close proximity to other influential Baptist ministers like Jeremiah Bell Jeter, editor of the *Religious Herald* and the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Foreign Mission Board. In Chattanooga, Eaton struggled with sensations of being overwhelmed by Methodist efforts to dominate the region, isolated from the presence of other capable Baptist leaders to aid him. He confessed to Boyce, “I was anxious to have another Baptist preacher in Chattanooga, one who would preach for me when I was called away.”

Tennessee Baptists were sad to lose Eaton, as he was clearly a rising star within the denomination, possessing remarkable prowess as a preacher and Baptist statesman. William O. Buck of Humboldt, Tennessee, wrote of him soon after his departure from Chattanooga:

> I am glad the church has chosen so wisely, and I do not believe they will ever regret their decision, for, while there is no man in the State who stands better with the people at large, on account of his social qualities and accomplished manners, he has, at the same time, attained an honorable and distinguished position as a good preacher and a successful pastor. As a preacher, Bro. Eaton ranks deservedly high, and his popularity in that respect seems to consist in the happy facility with which he unites the didactic and the pathetic in his sermons . . . He is undoubtedly impetuous, vivacious and enthusiastic by nature, and that the blessing of salvation through Christ should intensify those qualities, is not to be wondered at by us, who have in some degree experienced the same effects. All who know Bro. Eaton will corroborate the truth of my declaration, that it is characteristic of him to do with all his heart and soul whatever he attempts, and he thus impresses those with whom he comes in contact that he recognizes the importance of the work, is fully in earnest in the matter, and always secures sympathy and cooperation.  

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75 T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, October 22, 1875, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 1, Folder 43, SBTS.

76 Ibid.

Although Eaton had only spent five years as a pastor in Tennessee churches, he made the most of his time in the Volunteer State. He had established his own reputation as a keen intellect, an adept denominational parliamentarian, and a powerful preacher among his Baptist brethren. He was a driving force behind the resurrection of a university for Tennessee Baptists. Most notably, Eaton had acquired numerous contacts with notable Southern Baptist leaders both inside and outside the state’s geographical borders. These connections would serve to increase his sphere of influence in years to come.

Southwestern University’s president George W. Jarman, who had previously served on the Union University faculty alongside Eaton in the early 1870s, wrote Eaton a lengthy letter in the summer of 1876 regarding the university’s progress after its relocation to Jackson, Tennessee. In the letter, Jarman communicated that the university’s recent commencement exercises had been extremely well attended by the Jackson community, as well as detailing some of the fervent discussions held by the university’s board of trustees—on which J. R. Graves still played an active role in his advancing age. Jarman praised Eaton as the parental figure who had birthed “the unification of the Baptists in Tennessee,” noting, “to you we are indebted for this result more than to any other person living or dead.”

Conclusion

In the cradle of Baptist Landmarkism, Eaton grew into maturity and influence among a diverse circle of Baptist leaders. Unifying the Baptists across Tennessee was a monumental feat, but for Eaton it was the first major step into becoming one of the denomination’s most influential statesmen. Despite his political successes at the state convention, Eaton had struggled to spur his fund-strapped Chattanooga church to

78 Baggett, So Great a Cloud of Witnesses, 83.
79 George W. Jarman to T. T. Eaton, June 5, 1876, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS.
significant financial giving to denominational causes. Virginia, however, offered exciting new opportunities to advance the Southern Baptist denomination.
CHAPTER 3
WITNESS IN VIRGINIA

During his years pastoring the Petersburg church, Eaton worked in close proximity to the publishing office of the Religious Herald, one of the denomination’s most influential newspapers that engaged in various controversies related to Baptist identity. Though Eaton played a largely passive role in the editorial battles, the context provided a precursor to his later career as a highly polemical newspaper editor. Furthermore, his connections with Virginia Baptists increased his efficiency in raising support for denominational foreign missions and religious education.

Ministry in Petersburg

Eaton’s years as a pastor in Petersburg, Virginia, were characterized by great success in fundraising for denominational causes. As a frequent participant in associational meetings, Eaton used the platform to promote his vision for a more unified coalition of churches. At the heart of his vision was his belief that literature was the means by which Baptists could most widely disseminate their distinctive views.

Pastoral Leadership

The church in Petersburg, Virginia, welcomed the Eaton family with great warmth, for which Eaton was delighted to commend them in a whimsical letter he submitted for publication in The Baptist:

Soon after coming to Petersburg, I felt it my duty to call attention to what seemed to me a departure from Baptist usages on the part of the brethren here, viz., that they sent flour, sugar, coffee, bacon, tea, pickles, preserves, etc., etc., to my store-room without my knowledge or consent. . . . Now here they have departed again—this time it is the ladies, and they have presented me with an elegant broadcloth suit and a brother has added a fine hat. Last Sunday by unanimous consent I was the finest dressed man in the congregation. Now unless this business
is stopped there is no telling to what length it may go. Why right here in this city, a Baptist (at least he calls himself so) gave Bro. Hutson pastor of Byrne Street church $1000 to help him buy a residence. That man is not a member of my church and so I do not feel so much responsibility in his case, but he is a member of the Byrne Street church and bears the Baptist name.

If Baptists over the land should catch the infection, only think what disastrous results would follow. Poverty and grace have been regarded as the two indispensable requisites for a preacher. If brethren act in this way they will destroy the force of poverty in moulding the preacher’s character, and will not the preachers become proud? What is there in the world so half bad as pride in a preacher? Then what will become of the time honored Baptist usage of starving out the preacher? It is really a serious matter, we should look it fairly in the face. Who can suggest a remedy?¹

Eaton’s complimentary words regarding the generosity of the Baptist witness in Petersburg were simultaneously laced with delight and satire. Throughout 1876, the Religious Herald of Virginia and The Baptist of Tennessee had engaged in fierce debate regarding what being a true Baptist entailed. This controversy, waged primarily between the editorial auspices of Jeremiah Bell Jeter and James Robinson Graves, revealed the great diversity of opinion that existed within the Southern Baptist Convention on the questions of Baptist origins, the validity of baptisms performed in non-Baptist churches, and the qualifications to be an administrator of the ordinances. Such evident divisions multiplied the challenges of organizing for cooperation at a national level, a fact known all too well by James P. Boyce, John Albert Broadus, and the men most invested in securing endowment for the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Therefore, when Eaton jested about departures from “time honored Baptist” traditions, he surely hoped that the charitable warmth which characterized his own church in Petersburg might inspire Baptists to hope for more conciliatory experiences.

Writing to John A. Broadus a few months after relocating from Chattanooga, Eaton communicated his delight in the Petersburg congregation’s attendance, attentiveness, and kindness. At a summer meeting in Russellville between the two men, Broadus advised the younger preacher to “work like five-hundred,” and Eaton reassured

him he had the motivation to do so. Eaton expressed his love for Southern Seminary, promising to send three collegiate men from his church to the seminary after their graduation. He further remarked, “Though it was never my privilege to be a student at the seminary, I allow no one to go beyond me in zeal on its behalf.” Eaton was especially delighted to have a brother of Crawford H. Toy, the seminary’s young Old Testament professor, among his congregants.

Eaton’s family in Petersburg included his widowed mother, while his only remaining sibling Josephine resided in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, at the residence of J. W. Rust, president of the Bethel Female College. Josephine hoped to reunite permanently with family in Virginia after completing her duties in Kentucky, and Eaton implored Broadus to find her a teaching position in Richmond or some other school near Petersburg. By the end of 1876, Josephine successfully reunited with the Eaton clan in Petersburg, perhaps with the help of Broadus’s influence.

In contrast to Eaton’s previous pastorate in Chattanooga—where money was in short supply for paying salaries and giving to benevolent causes—the Petersburg church was among the most prosperous and generous congregations of its local network of churches, the Virginia Portsmouth Baptist Association. According to the annual report published in the minutes of the Portsmouth Association’s 1875 meeting, the Petersburg church set its pastor’s salary at $1,800, 80 percent more than Eaton had earned during his

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2 T. T. Eaton to John A. Broadus, October 14, 1875, John A. Broadus Papers, Box 6, Folder 17, SBTS.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.; T. T. Eaton to John A. Broadus, March 29, 1876, John A. Broadus Papers, Box 6, Folder 28, SBTS.

6 T. T. Eaton to John A. Broadus, August 18, 1876, John A. Broadus Papers, Box 7, Folder 8, SBTS.
last year in Chattanooga. Eaton’s whimsical remark that the Petersburg Baptists aspired to “destroy the force of poverty in moulding the preacher’s character” was no exaggeration.

Encouraged by his church’s giving spirit, Eaton exhorted the congregation to be generous givers for denominational causes, notably the fledgling Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which was still located in Greenville, South Carolina, and striving desperately to secure an endowment. He also led the Petersburg church to become the top contributor to organized missionary work in the Portsmouth Association. According to the Association’s 1876 annual report—the first report composed after Eaton had accumulated a full year of experience—the Petersburg church increased its contributions to foreign missions by 540 percent, its contributions to domestic missions by 344 percent and its contributions to state missions by 43 percent over the previous year. The church’s reported expenditures totaled $4,725.65, the highest number among the Association’s 47 churches.

Petersburg’s generosity owed in part to the membership surge which occurred during Eaton’s first year at the church, which numbered 121 additions by baptism, 29 additions by letter, and three additions through restoration. When the church reported its annual membership to the Portsmouth Association, its membership counted 555 persons, 39 percent greater than the second largest church in the association. Eaton reported to Broadus in an April 6, 1876 letter, that he had witnessed 168 persons make professions of

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7 *Minutes of the Virginia Portsmouth Baptist Association, 1875* (Petersburg, VA: John B. Ege’s Printing House, 1875), 22.

8 Eaton, “Another Departure.”

9 T. T. Eaton to John A. Broadus, February 10, 1876, John A. Broadus Papers, Box 6, Folder 25, SBTS.

10 *Minutes of the Virginia Portsmouth Baptist Association, 1876* (Petersburg, VA: John B. Ege’s Printing House, 1876), 23–24.
faith at the Petersburg church since his arrival less than one year prior. According to one estimate published in the Religious Herald, Eaton averaged a ratio of one baptism for every week of his six-year Petersburg pastorate.

Eaton’s impressive church growth numbers were likely the result of a genuine religious revival in Petersburg, as he expressed a stern rebuke of membership inflation for the sake of vain numerical boasting. Eaton believed that the most distinctive of all Baptist principles was an insistence upon a regenerate church membership:

Only Baptists have uniformly and in all their history insisted upon regeneration as the prerequisite to church membership. They alone, through the ages, have kept this gospel lamp trimmed and burning, throwing its light over the darkness of the world. Others have at times stood by us; but, alas! Their receiving the unconverted into their churches by infant baptism has led them astray. There is not a useless doctrine in all Revelation: not one which is not needful to a true and complete evangelism; and the Baptists alone hold all these truths, and at the same time maintain the ordinances in their primitive simplicity and purity.

Eaton warned that a local church that might err in admitting unconverted persons into its membership would forfeit its evangelistic power. Furthermore, that congregation would become guilty of luring the sinner into false assurance, as no unsaved person should be able to spend time inside a Baptist church without experiencing the sensation of their guilt before God:

When I look over the churches and see how hungry they are for numbers, and how eager to make large reports, I am tempted to believe that statistics are an invention of the enemy. The worst place in the world for an unregenerated man, is inside a church. . . . The sinner, inside the church, if moral and innocent of intentional hypocrisy, feels that the recognition of the church in some way aids in his salvation. All appeals to the unconverted pass him by unheeded. . . . The power of the church is weakened.

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11 T. T. Eaton to John A. Broadus, April 6, 1876, John A. Broadus Papers, Box 6, Folder 29, SBTS.


14 Ibid.
Vision for Denominational Cooperation

As a budding denominational statesman, Eaton aspired to elevate the missionary contributions of the entire Portsmouth Association, and he featured prominently at the annual meetings, serving on a variety of its committees and engaging in discussion of the business proceedings. The Association selected Eaton to deliver the introductory sermon at its 1876 annual meeting in September. Eaton used 2 Corinthians 8:23 as his thematic text—possibly recommended to him by Broadus after he had composed the address—focusing especially upon “the messengers of the churches.” By his own admission, his address was not so much a sermon, but a manifesto as to the very purpose of associations, namely “what they ought to be and to do.” Eaton cast a vision for the Portsmouth Association to be one that accomplished more with deeds than idiosyncratic blustering:

Let us remember that the object of Associations is not that we may air our opinions. It is only the very ignorant who will esteem us wise because we talk much . . . An Association should be preeminently a business body, not a talking one, doing its duty, if it can learn what that duty is, with as few words and as much to the point as possible.

He spoke in defense of fundraising agents sent out by churches to raise money on behalf of the denomination’s missionary causes, noting that such roles had a biblical precedent:

It is a remarkable fact that we hear of no grumbling among the apostolic churches at the expenses. Several brethren went up with Paul to carry the offering to the churches to Jerusalem, yet none were found to complain of their traveling expenses. . . . Perhaps the reason was that those churches all gave as the Lord had

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15 Minutes of the Virginia Portsmouth Baptist Association, 1875, 13.

16 T. T. Eaton to John A. Broadus, August 18, 1876, John A. Broadus Papers, Box 7, Folder 8, SBTS.

17 Ibid.

18 T. T. Eaton, “Introductory Sermon before the Portsmouth Association,” Religious Herald, September 28, 1876. The original manuscript is preserved in the T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 11, Folder 55, SBTS.
prepared them, and busy with their own charities and collections, did not have the
time these non-giving churches have to keep an eye on the money of others.\textsuperscript{19}

Eaton called upon the messengers to be a people that celebrated bold plans of
action for organized missionary endeavors, rather than strict critics who would derail new
ideas:

Then there is the cold water pourer. Some brother, on fire with zeal for his Master,
suggests a plan of action. Instantly, the cold water pourer arises and proceeds to
show the difficulties in the way; but he neither sees the advantages nor suggests a
plan to overcome the obstacles. This is not his mission. According to him, failure
is stamped alike on the past, the present, and the future, and \textit{all} is vanity and
 vexation of spirit. . . . Whatever you do, brethren, do not go through life as a wet
blanket, clapping yourself on every fire, without waiting to see whether the flames
are doing harm or good . . . Get a little fire into your own hearts and be yourselves
enthusiastic. . . . So, if we will go and warm ourselves in the rays of the Sun of
Righteousness, we can impart warmth and comfort to our brethren as they labor for
Jesus.\textsuperscript{20}

Eaton had no illusions about the limits of resolutions in contributing to real
change, a lesson he learned from his time in Tennessee. He recalled one such meeting
soon after the Civil War, that saw a resolution adopted for a special collection after many
elloquent appeals delivered and many tears of compassion shed, yet only one quiet
messenger led his impoverished church to collect money toward the cause:

Perhaps something in the legal sounding of “whereases” and “therefore” gives him
the idea that they have all the law’s power. . . . The easiest thing in the world is to
offer, a series of resolutions, and the next easiest is to get them passed. No, I
mistake; there is one thing easier than either of these, and that is to forget all about
them so soon as they are passed.\textsuperscript{21}

Eaton encouraged churches to give freely, on account of the worthiness of the
cause of accomplishing work far too daunting for any single local congregation’s
resources:

Let us consider what is the work we, as an Association, should do. What devolves
on us in our collective capacity? Because we have not, nor desire to have, the
legislative power of Conference or Synod over the churches, is no reason that

\textsuperscript{19} Eaton, “Introductory Sermon before the Portsmouth Association.”

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
definite duties are not binding upon us, or that we can afford to spend our times in vague speech-making and useless resolving. First among these duties is to do what is beyond the power of individual churches; to bind, as it were, their strength together, so that none shall be lost. For little things, which separately are worthless, united become the great things which move the world. . . . There are many things which we as a denomination need, that no single church can secure.  

Among the causes worthy of denominational collaboration, Eaton mentioned: “newspapers of our faith,” “schools in which our children may be trained in what we regard truth,” and “institutions where those who are to preach the gospel may be thoroughly trained and furnished for their work, that they preach no false doctrine.” Regarding denominational schools and newspapers, Eaton outlined his vision that the best religious newspapers would aspire to combine the three virtues of doctrinal orthodoxy, goodness of spirit, and an intellectual point of view, never forgetting their purpose to serve “to the good of the churches, and not in the least considering the feelings or interests of any editor, or the town in which he sees fit to publish his paper.”

Primary among these virtues was doctrinal orthodoxy, of which Eaton said, “Nothing else can for a moment excuse error in doctrine. Our children must be trained in ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.’”

Speaking further of the spirit that should characterize the best newspapers, Eaton added that they should aspire to demonstrate a “goodness of spirit.” A denominational paper should, therefore, avoid an overly critical spirit that would serve an editor’s personal agenda more than the denomination’s good, being not censorious nor carping, priding itself on its own goodness and condemning others, and so breathing in every line bitterness, malignity, and, worse than all, conceit. . . . A paper which shall be frank and brave and discriminating, not imagining that it is lovely and Christ-like to gush over everything and find excuses for everybody, especially those who are high in position and influence; which shall

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22 Eaton, “Introductory Sermon before the Portsmouth Association.”

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.
allow no personal feeling to warp its judgment or cause it to look upon error with allowance; which shall ever keep in view the fact that, to be Christ-like, requires reverence for God’s word above all else, and whose watchword shall be, “He that justifieth the wicked and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord.” (Proverbs 17:15)\(^{26}\)

Though Eaton never named any specific offenders in his address, he lamented the trend of newspapers to feed the fires of controversy with little regard to illuminating the truth. He declared,

> Some papers can never get done with a dispute or a quarrel, but are “like a continual dripping on a very rainy day;” others varnish truth and error alike with their sentimental effusions, and declare that “altogether it is good.”\(^{27}\)

Orthodoxy and goodness of spirit should result in a newspaper that exhibited the best “intellectual point of view.” Eaton believed that the prevalence of periodical media made it the most influential medium to shape the reasoning and communication capacities of the populace. He likened it to food for the mind, and he encouraged the messengers to invest themselves in reading only the best sources, independent of local loyalties:

> Recommend and work for the best paper—best in doctrine, in spirit, and in ability, and do not get down your map to see if the town in which it is published is in your State; that feeling that every state must have its own paper, no matter how poor and watery, is beneath the dignity of Baptists.\(^{28}\)

Eaton believed Baptist associations played an essential role by which Baptist churches could understand each congregation’s needs and facilitate the means by which “the strong can aid the weak.”\(^{29}\) He understood the benefits that strong Baptist churches in well-cultivated fields could extend to congregations struggling for survival in regions hardly permeated by the denomination, having personally struggled pastoring an economically-pressed congregation in Chattanooga, where Methodist dominance

\(^{26}\)Eaton, “Introductory Sermon before the Portsmouth Association.”

\(^{27}\)Ibid.

\(^{28}\)Ibid.

\(^{29}\)Ibid.
overwhelmed Baptist influence. He likened America’s small struggling churches to the plight of persecution faced by their historical forbearers and international Baptists across the world:

One thing is certain of us as a denomination, if our churches “do not hang together, we shall all hang separately.” The world is but little fonder of Baptist truth now than it was eighteen hundred years ago. Men show the same cheerful alacrity in persecuting us, where we do not hang together and make them respect our strength.\(^{30}\)

He thought that associational guidance would benefit poorer churches by advising them not to undertake ambitious building projects that would stretch the congregations beyond their financial means. Eaton recounted with lament the frantic appeals that he had read in newspapers from churches pleading for contributions because their meeting-houses had encumbered them with insurmountable debts. Instead of churches soliciting through newspapers, delegates might take their concerns before a meeting of their local association, which could discuss the matters and even appoint some judicious brethren to investigate further. In cases determined by the messengers to be worthy needs, the association could recommend to its churches to aid the needy congregations through collections in cooperation with the denomination’s state mission board.

The involvement of a local association would provide greater accountability that designated money would be used wisely for the advancement of the Baptist mission. Eaton stated,

While we as an Association enlist the sympathy of our churches, and call forth their energies for the Home Mission cause, we must protect them by seeing to it that the most promising and inviting fields are occupied with all possible vigor, while Squashville and Pumpkintown are left to reap the reward of their folly.\(^{31}\)

\(^{30}\)Eaton, “Introductory Sermon before the Portsmouth Association."

\(^{31}\)Ibid.
Eaton also called associations to be diligent “to protect the churches from heresy” and “guard true churches from false ones.” The involvement of an association served a dual purpose of preventing the spread of error within the denomination and providing like-minded churches with confidence in each other’s orthodoxy:

And another thing we proclaim to the world; we believe in the widest freedom of conscience, the completest religious liberty . . . You are at liberty, so far as we are concerned, to believe what you please, and we are at liberty not to fellowship you.  

Eaton recounted two examples from personal experience in which convictions about orthodoxy trumped a nebulous definition of “soul liberty.” The first example concerned an individual who objected to Eaton that Baptists insist upon “close communion,” in which only church members who have first been genuinely baptized may participate in the Lord’s Supper. Eaton replied to the man:

You have a right to commune with everybody—very well, admit your right to do this. I will not interfere with your freedom of conscience. But, on the other hand, here are a large number of us whose consciences require us to belong to a church which places baptism before the Lord’s supper—have we not the right to form such a church, if we choose?

The second example owed to Eaton’s experience in a prior (though unnamed) association in which a young pastor of one of its thriving churches began advocating the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. The local association responded by appointing delegates to visit the church and persuade the preacher and congregation to turn from error. In the event the church refused to repent, the associational delegates carried with them the authority to revoke the preacher’s license and break fellowship with the congregation, on account of it being “no longer a church of our faith and order.”

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32 Eaton, “Introductory Sermon before the Portsmouth Association.”

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.
Ultimately, the preacher and the church were won back from the heresy due to the prompt action of the association.35

Eaton closed his address by focusing upon foreign missionary work as another duty to which a Baptist association must play a supporting role through liberal financial contributions. He lamented that nearly one-third of all Baptist churches in Virginia donated nothing to the cause of foreign missions, a problem Eaton believed owed to the simple cause that most congregations were unaware of the great need. The impetus for missions giving lay upon the shoulders of a congregation’s pastor, who must preach about missions, instruct his people in systematic giving, and make the affectionate case before the church that such giving is a Christian duty. An association’s challenge would be to “discover some way to rouse the pastors and give them boldness to declare the whole counsel of God.”36 Through the intervention of local associations, newspapers, and representative agents, ministers and churches could be educated as to the missionary needs.

Eaton’s lengthy sermon—the original manuscript totaling twenty-eight pages—delivered before the 1876 Portsmouth Association was an ambitious vision for cooperation among doctrinally like-minded Baptist churches. By cultivating strong ties between the churches, Baptists could hope to accomplish more for missions, education, and Christian orthodoxy than they could ever do alone. Not a man content to rest on the laurels of his eloquent speech, Eaton led his fellow ministers by example. He made his commitment to the Baptist cause evident through his transformative leadership in his local church, exponentially increasing its contributions to denominational ministries every year.

35Eaton, “Introductory Sermon before the Portsmouth Association.”

36Ibid.
Although he focused his efforts locally by exhorting his neighboring pastors and churches to follow his own church’s leadership, Eaton also kept an active presence at the Southern Baptist Convention’s annual meetings. He was well-connected with other denominational leaders and held positions on various committees, including the Foreign Mission Board’s “Committee on More Generous Giving,” of which he served as chairman. At the 1878 SBC meeting, Eaton presented the committee’s report, making recommendations for how Southern Baptists might increase awareness for financial giving toward foreign missions.

His report acknowledged the fact that the majority of Southern Baptist churches made no intentional contribution toward foreign missions, leaving the entirety of the work to a handful of especially benevolent congregations. Eaton argued that one should not presume that Southern Baptists were hypocritical false professors of religion, but rather that the good people of the denomination needed to have their minds and hearts presented with the needs of the missionary causes. On behalf of the committee, he offered five recommendations as to how the Foreign Mission Board could better communicate its needs to the churches. As he had emphasized to the Portsmouth Association two years earlier, the initial step should be to impart a greater sense of obligation to the pastors, “for it is chiefly through the ministers that our people must be reached.”

Other recommendations included the establishment of special seasons for missions-focused prayer and for churches to form Woman’s Missionary Societies and freely circulate the Foreign Mission Journal. Eaton also called upon church Sunday school workers to train children about denominational missionary work, through systematic instruction and taking regular collections. The report called upon the Foreign

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37 Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1878 (Nashville: Mayfield, Otley & Patton, 1878), 33.
Mission Board to appoint a traveling agent, in the tradition of Luther Rice, to rouse the denomination’s churches to greater interest and zeal for the cause.38

**Disseminating in Defense of the Faith**

In 1880, Eaton delivered an address at Saratoga, New York, titled, “Our Distinctive Principles as Baptists and Our Literature Necessary to a True and Complete Evangelism.” As suggested by the title, Eaton promoted the importance of the publishing enterprise as the means by which Baptists could most effectively disseminate the tenets of their faith. Publications provided a venue for Baptists to take the full gospel beyond their church walls and into the homes of people:

> We must have a literature which shall reach and teach the people in their homes. The only way ever discovered to keep weeds out of a field, is to plant a crop and cultivate it carefully. The world will read, and there is no more pressing duty before us than to see that men are furnished with a literature which shall teach the whole truth as we believe.39

Putting orthodox literature into the hands of ministers and laypersons was a necessary offensive strategy in guarding against the spread of doctrinal infidelity communicated in ungodly books:

> Let no one read a vile book, a false book, or a semi-infidel book. There are ministers who can tell you what the infidels of the day think, but who would be utterly blank if asked what was the subject of Zachariah’s prophecy. It seems very necessary for them to be “abreast of the times,” but by no means necessary for them to be familiar with their Bibles. . . . And till the end of time the one way to make men tremble is to strike straight at their consciences with law and gospel; so shall they be made to tremble before the law, and be melted into contrition by the story of the cross.40

Eaton commended the American Baptist Publication Society as the strategic venture that Baptists should empower to achieve the widest distribution of their literature.

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38*Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1878*, 33–34.

39Eaton, “Our Distinctive Principles as Baptists.”

40Ibid.
until another forty years, nineteenth-century Southern Baptists relied heavily upon the resources of the Society:

It is through this Society we must labor, building up and aiding it by every means in our power. . . . It is time for us to work, not simply by making speeches and passing resolutions, but by, first, giving more liberally to the Missionary Department, that the poor may be supplied with the truth, and those who are indifferent may be induced to read; and second, we must buy this literature ourselves, talk about it, and persuade others to buy also. We need to enlarge the operations of this Society that they may have more means to disseminate the literature that is written, and to employ the finest minds to write for them, and their books may be able, and more interesting than those which teach error, and so may command the attention by the talent shown in them, as well as deserve it by their faithfulness to truth.41

Eaton wrote an article titled “The Diffusion of Our Denominational Literature” for the March 1880 issue of *Ford’s Christian Repository*, in which he argued again that the broad circulation of doctrinal literature was the key means by which Baptists could most effectively disseminate their fundamental beliefs to the world. The Christian gospel should be communicated by both the spoken word and written word, and Baptist literature could reach mission fields that Baptist preaching alone could not:

Shall we rely on preaching alone? If by preaching is meant simply the pulpit labors of the ministry, I answer plainly, that is insufficient. It would not be sufficient even if we gave to public worship every Lord’s day—how much less when a majority of our people give only one day a month to the worship of God? . . . . This, however, is a reading age, and becoming more so every day, and herein the times have greatly changed. . . . But while the truth can never change, the methods of reaching the people vary with the times. . . . In these days of much reading, the Gospel must be printed as well as publically spoken, so shall it reach men seven days in the week instead of one, and so shall it occupy the ground to the exclusion of error.42

He believed that the responsibility for sustaining religious publishing houses falls upon religious people who are willing to give sacrificially. Genuinely religious persons could not trust the secular publishing houses to supply the literary need on account of the financial risk of trying to sell Christian truth to a depraved populace:

41 Eaton, “Our Distinctive Principles as Baptists.”

Another point to be considered is that the world is not hankering after Baptist literature. Truth has always been unpalatable to the world and always will be so till the carnal heart ceases to be at enmity with God. This is why religious publishing houses will fail unless sustained by the vigorous efforts of friends, while secular publishing houses, without friendly aid, can amass fortunes. These publish what the people want and will buy, while the religious houses, by their very nature, must publish what the people do not want, but what they need.  

Baptists should strive not only to produce books of orthodox truth, but they should also aspire to make those books worth reading. Eaton stated,

Yet we ought to strive to make the truth attractive, so far as we can do so rightly. If the medicine is bitter, the Great Physician has prescribed it, and we cannot alter it or mix it with other ingredients; but that is no reason the glass should be foul and the spoon unclean with which it is administered. The plain truth, unvarnished and unadulterated . . . should be put happily and expressed clearly. Dullness is not piety, nor is prosiness an evidence of sanctity.  

The task of writing good religious literature must fall to the denomination’s talented and earnest minds, and “the wealth and zeal of the denomination should print and circulate them.” Eaton commended again the value of the American Baptist Publication Society, but he concluded his article with a reminder that once books and periodicals are written and published, the hard of work of diffusing the literature must be carried forth by every Baptist “in every practicable way.” In order to ensure the broadest possible dissemination, Baptists must adopt an evangelistic attitude toward their literary output, buying and reading books for personal benefit, bringing the literature before the attention of their neighbors, and speaking to their home circles regarding the reading so that their families might be well-versed on the subjects.

In February 1879, Eaton’s Petersburg church took another important step in leading the efforts to disseminate religious periodicals across the state. At the urging of W. H. McIntosh, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board’s corresponding secretary,

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44Ibid., 189–90.
46Ibid., 191.
the women of the Petersburg church led the organization of a Central Committee on Woman’s Work in Virginia. This Central Committee dedicated itself toward organizing missionary societies and the cultivation of the missionary spirit across the state through the circulation of periodicals. Eaton called upon the ladies of every church in Virginia to communicate with the Central Committee.47

J. B. Jeter and the Religious Herald

In Virginia, Eaton’s involvement with the Religious Herald naturally increased, forming the foundation of his career in denominational newspaper work. Jeremiah Bell Jeter, one of the great luminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention, owned and edited the Religious Herald from 1865 until his death in February 1880, and he left a significant impact upon Eaton.48 Eaton’s decision to accept the Petersburg church pastorate owed in great part to the persuasiveness of Jeter, who sent him a letter urging him to succeed Hatcher; Eaton later eulogized at Jeter’s funeral that this letter “seemed to him like the voice of God.”49

Jeter co-edited the Religious Herald with Alfred Elijah Dickinson, and both Richard Fuller and John A. Broadus were listed among the paper’s associate editors. With Petersburg located less than thirty miles south of Richmond, Eaton had opportunity to frequent the office of the Religious Herald.50 Eaton had prior experience with religious newspaper publishing through his work on the short-lived Christian Herald published in Tuscumbia, Alabama, on which he was a business partner and corresponding

47“Woman’s Work for Missions,” Religious Herald, March 6, 1879.


50T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, July 14, 1876, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 1, Folder 61, SBTS.
editor from 1869 until its absorption into Georgia’s *Christian Index* in the early 1870s.\(^{51}\)

Endorsed by many Baptists of Middle Tennessee, the *Christian Herald* aspired to fill the gap left by the suspension of the *Tennessee Baptist*, though without the heavy doses of Landmark ideology promoted by J. R. Graves.\(^{52}\)

Both Eaton and Jeter were intimately involved in the work of denominational higher education. During his work among Virginia Baptists, Eaton served for four years as an officer with the Education Board of the Baptist General Association of Virginia (1877–1880), soliciting endowments and appealing to local churches to support ministerial education.\(^{53}\) During that same time, Jeter served as president of the board of trustees of the Seminary of Richmond College and the Richmond Female Institute, which provided another means by which the two men interacted within the Baptist denominational work.\(^{54}\) Like Eaton, Jeter also had great interest in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which relocated from Greenville, South Carolina, to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1877; Jeter succeeded the late Basil Manly, Sr. as president of its Board of Trustees in 1868, and he remained in that position until his own death.

Jeter modeled for Eaton the example of a prodigious denominational newspaper editor, regularly writing two to four columns for the *Religious Herald*’s weekly editions.\(^{55}\) Eaton praised Jeter in his 1880 memorial sermon, noting that “as a religious editor, he was *facile princeps*.”\(^{56}\) Jeter held a reputation as a denominational


\(^{54}\)Ibid., 25.


statesman and a competent debater, virtues which Eaton himself would seek to emulate throughout his own career.  

From Petersburg, Eaton contributed letters detailing the accomplishments and events of his church for the *Religious Herald*’s correspondence columns in addition to various musings and observations about religious life in America. Eaton sometimes contributed columns to the *Herald* on controversial subjects, but he limited his polemical attacks to targets outside the fold of the Southern Baptist Convention. He wrote against the evolutionary theory held by German professor Ernest Haeckel. In 1880, he submitted a series of articles contrasting Roman Catholic doctrine with biblical religion.

Jeter and Dickinson kept the *Religious Herald* relevant through the publication of many correspondent letters and editorials that spoke to the most important issues being considered throughout the Southern Baptist Convention’s churches. Often, the ideas expressed in the paper’s columns were controversial, thus demanding the attention of the most prominent personalities in the denomination. On June 22, 1876, Jeter published an editorial in the *Religious Herald* outlining his desire for Southern Seminary to merge with Crozer Seminary (established in 1868), and relocate to the campus of Columbian University in Washington, D. C., thus becoming a national seminary for all Baptists.

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Jeter’s “Singular Dream,” as he titled it, was presented from a future-tense perspective, which potentially could have given an unsuspecting reader the impression that a merger between Southern Seminary and Crozer was official. This editorial frustrated Boyce, who penned a reply for the *Western Recorder*, Kentucky’s most widely-circulated Baptist newspaper. Jeter’s vision for an elite Baptist seminary would have greatly benefited the Baptists along the east coast, but Boyce believed the seminary needed an identity and a location that would also benefit the Baptists of the southwest states. Boyce eventually secured a favorable arrangement with the Baptists of Kentucky and the seminary opened its first session in Louisville on September 1, 1877.

**Newspaper Controversies**

The *Religious Herald* was one of the most widely-circulated Baptist newspapers of the nineteenth century, and its editors welcomed discussion of controversial topics. Although Eaton restrained himself from extensive direct involvement in the various controversies, he would eventually revisit many of the same subjects after he became editor of the *Western Recorder*. As was common in nineteenth-century Baptist circles, many controversialists wrote under pseudonyms, including Eaton’s sister Josephine Peck.

**Landmarkism and the “Pike” Controversy**

Association with the *Religious Herald* provided Eaton with a close view of a controversy that began in 1876 over the question of Baptist origins. The *Herald* published articles by an anonymous contributor using the name “Pike,” who advocated for the validity of the practice of reciprocal baptism without requirement of a properly baptized administrator and that Baptists owed their origin to the English Separatist tradition rather than...

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62 T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, July 14, 1876, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 1, Folder 61, SBTS.
than the theory of church succession. "Pike" argued that the practice of believer’s baptism by immersion had been recovered by the seventeenth-century descendants of the English Separatist tradition after many centuries of wrong baptismal views had obscured the true mode.

In a May 1 article, "Pike" became especially polemical, declaring that Landmarkism had more in common with Roman Catholicism than historic Baptist principles. Defending the validity of baptisms performed by non-baptized administrators, "Pike" appealed to instances that included Roger Williams’s founding of America’s first Baptist church and the Philadelphia Baptist Association’s extension of fellowship to a former New Jersey Congregationalist church that had renounced infant baptism. "Pike" concluded:

And we see, moreover, that the genuine old Landmark Baptists—those who are true to the old-time faith of the Baptist denomination—are those who say with Helwys, and Spilsbury, and the rest of "the more judicious" of the early English Baptists—with the Philadelphia Association of 1757, which received the Wautage [New Jersey] church, and with those pioneer Baptists of the Southwest, who gave the right hand of fellowship to John Clark—that the validity of a baptism does not depend on the question whether the administrator was baptized. This doctrine that a baptism is not valid unless it has come down in a regular line from the apostles, is a new landmark for our denomination, not an ancient one. It is the doctrine of those Pedobaptists who tried to invalidate the baptism of Spilsbury and Tombes, and the rest of our Baptist fathers in England. The old-fashioned Baptists characterized it as "Anti-christ’s chief hold" and "the old Popish doctrine." Let every true Baptist, therefore, throw overboard the absurd idea, for it is nothing but bastard Pedobaptistry.

Jeter himself opposed the Landmarkist influence in Baptist life, sometimes directly challenging the theory of church successionism through the columns that he elected to run in the Herald. In addition to publishing the "Pike" articles, the Herald editors dedicated weekly columns to other contributors with scholarly credentials (who

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63 "Pike" [pseud.], "Other Historical Questions," Religious Herald, March 30, 1876.


65 "Pike" [pseud.], "Reciprocal Baptism," Religious Herald, May 4, 1876.
did not use pseudonyms) who detailed their own findings regarding the history of the
mode of baptism among the Anabaptists. Although the paper’s editorial positions upset
some Baptists more sympathetic to Landmark ideals, the editorial justification offered a
conciliatory tone:

We only desire to know what is true concerning the Baptists in past times. We
should be glad to trace them in regular succession, through the Dark Ages, to the
times of the apostles; but we have no pleasure in sham succession, supported by
ignorance or the perversion of history. We have, at best, but little confidence in
 uninspired history; but we are in favor of giving it a fair hearing. We believe . . .
that our fathers existed before the “modern sects”—that is, in the days of the
apostles—but they were not Landmarkers.

Jeter’s position—that a baptism could be valid independent of whether or not
the ordinance’s administrator himself had been previously baptized—is stated in the
editorial of the May 18, 1876 issue:

We do not deem this fact of great importance. John himself was not baptized. The
apostles might have been authorized to baptize, as was John, without being baptized
themselves. Of necessity the ordinance had a beginning. Whether it was
 commenced by one or more baptizers, under divine appointment, is a question of no
practical moment. Still, however, it is interesting to know that John, having
received it from heaven, administered it to the apostles, who were commissioned to
transmit it to all nations and to the end of time.

The publication of the articles of “Pike” provoked the ire of J. R. Graves, who
exchanged editorial rhetoric against the Herald through the pages of The Baptist.
Graves speculated that the true identity of “Pike” may have resided upon the faculty of
Southern Seminary—the most likely candidate being Church History professor William


Williams—although he published, with happy relief, James P. Boyce’s denial that “Pike” was anyone among the faculty.  

Because the *Herald* listed Broadus as an associate editor, Graves and other Landmarkers assumed that Broadus endorsed the arguments of “Pike,” along with the other editors. Wishing to avoid bringing unnecessary controversy upon Southern Seminary, Broadus publicly clarified that his editorial status owed to the desire of the other *Herald* editors that he attach his name to the paper some years prior to increase its prestige. Broadus, who had long contributed to the *Herald*, had consented on the condition that his initials always appear with his contributions, and that he should not be held accountable for anything the *Herald* might print apart from his involvement.

Graves’s old partner James Madison Pendleton lent his own statement to the controversy, opposing Pike’s claims in an article printed first in the *Herald* and later reprinted in *The Baptist* with Graves’s lauded introduction as a “most triumphant and crushing reply to ‘Pike’ of the *Herald*.” Pendleton asserted that the validity of a baptism comes from the authority of a church that administers it. Consequently, any person authorized by a local church to baptize converts remains himself subject to the authority of the church and its discipline should he be discovered to have been unworthy due to unrepentant sins.

Eaton, for his part, avoided making many public statements on the “Pike” controversy, although the questions that enticed the editorial sparring match between Jeter and Graves would eventually come to dominate his own legacy within two decades. Despite his physical proximity to Jeter, Eaton evidenced that he leaned more toward the

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71John A. Broadus, “Reply,” *The Baptist*, November 18, 1876.

Landmarkism championed by Graves and Pendleton. For a large portion of 1876, Graves printed a portion of his famous “Great Carrollton Debate” against the Methodist Jacob Ditzler on the front page of the *The Baptist*. Against Ditzler, Graves argued in favor of church successionism. Eaton wrote Graves a personal note—which the latter published in the December 23 issue of *The Baptist*—praising his handling of Ditzler’s arguments:

> I have been reading The Debate. Eld. Ditzler is the prince of dodgers; he does not meet a single one of your points; he dodges and throws his missiles [sic] at you sidewise and in the rear; he often presumes astonishingly on the ignorance of his audience. I am glad he fell into your hands; I do not think his gladiatorial career will last much longer; public discussion is something his theories cannot stand, and if he does not see it, his superiors will see it, and stop him ere long.\(^7^3\)

**The “E. T. R.” Sensation and the Crawford Toy Controversy**

Eaton’s public record during his Virginia pastorate suggests that he preferred to leverage his influence through his pastorate and associational connections rather than through contentious newspaper columns. Despite his close connections with Jeter and the office of the *Religious Herald*, he declined to throw his name into the major controversies that preoccupied the editors and readers of the newspapers. However, one other member of his family did not exercise the same restraint.

During Eaton’s tenure at the Petersburg church, an anonymous correspondent using the pseudonym “E. T. R.” began to contribute articles to the *Religious Herald*. Some articles were little more than musings while others proved controversial in the denomination. In 1878, the “E. T. R.” articles became a sensation as readers reacted to the articles and speculated as to the identity of the writer. Suspected to be a favored correspondent of the *Herald*’s co-editor A. E. Dickinson, the articles often appeared

under bold editorial headlines such as “E. T. R. Again!” Such bold introductions drew attention to the astonishing things that might follow from the mysterious author.74

“E. T. R.” had high standards of orthodoxy and proved a considerable provocateur on matters of religious practice, making charges that most contemporary revival hymns were “often but a mingling of blasphemy and nonsense.”75 E. T. R.’s Herald articles displayed a penchant for Calvinistic theology, Baptist distinctives, and a proud Southern identity.76 The author communicated disappointment that the majority of Baptist churches made too little effort to support the denomination’s foreign and domestic mission work:

Now, one of four things must be true of every Christian—I mean church member—who does not give to Foreign Missions. Either he is ignorant concerning heathendom; or he doesn’t think; or he does not believe the Bible; or he is insufferably mean. . . . If the church member is ignorant of the needs of the foreign field with its perishing thousands, that is the pastor’s fault, for it was his duty to instruct him.77

One of the controversial subjects addressed by “E. T. R.” was the outbreak of yellow fever in the lower Mississippi River Valley and the lack of Baptist pastoral involvement in the relief efforts.78 Such inactivity on the part of pastors to help those in dire need, “E. T. R.” asserted, amounted to cowardice and an embarrassment to true religion. “E. T. R.” received criticism from readers but stood resolute on the matter,

74See the E. T. R. articles in Religious Herald of July 11, September 26, and December 12 of 1878.


stating, “No man should ever enlist as a soldier who knows himself to be too great a coward to stand at his post in danger.”

The forceful rhetoric of the “E. T. R.” articles became a point of conversation in various letters submitted to the Herald’s editors. Speculation as to the author’s identity led to some rumors that “E. T. R.” was an unmarried woman, for which some Baptists might have thought newspaper pontification an improper hobby. “E. T. R.” responded to the allegations with evident irritation:

If I am not repressed by being told I’m a woman, surely I’m irrepressible. I have been writing for publication for twenty-five years (imagine an unmarried woman admitting that), and no writer before has ever supposed that my sex and condition in life were any concern of his or of the public’s. . . . who utters the words should be a matter of utmost indifference, except to ladies who have the monopoly of curiosity.

“E. T. R.” apparently took such offense at the gender speculations that an editorial comment (likely courtesy of Dickinson) declared that the anonymous author would cease submitting articles in early 1879:

Well, E. T. R. will appear but once more in our columns. . . . E. T. R.’s feelings are hurt, and therefore E. T. R. will, in our next issue, bid farewell to our readers, never more to appear before them. To be called “a woman,” a “strong-minded woman,” was a little too much for E. T. R. A Parthian arrow, next week, from E. T. R. will be the last of it.

The cumulative effect of Religious Herald readers’ backlash against “E. T. R.” eventually led to the anonymous author’s resignation from the repeated practice of submitting provocative columns. In one of E. T. R.’s last columns, the author sarcastically declared,

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82[J. B. Jeter?], “News and Notes,” Religious Herald, February 27, 1879.
I have been writing for the Herald for a year now, and the opinion of the readers—if I am to judge of the readers generally by the correspondence—seems to be that I am “cowardly, ill-tempered and strong-minded.” It is surely time I stopped writing while I have any character at all left. Let the offended souls rest in peace, E. T. R. will trouble their repose no longer; and with the disappearances of these initials from the Herald, all will be serene and lovely, and harmonious and reconstructed. 83

The most provocative of all the “E. T. R.” articles was titled “Honesty, False Teaching—&c.,” and it appeared in the Herald’s December 12, 1878, issue. In the column, “E. T. R.” dropped a bombshell that bore explosive repercussions throughout the denomination, alleging that some professors employed at Baptist seminaries were theologically heterodox:

I have heard—and, I am sorry to say, on authority I cannot question—that at least two Professors in Baptist theological institutes are far from being sound in doctrine. One does not believe in the inspiration of Moses, nor, indeed, of various other parts of Scripture. . . . The other Professor is a Universalist. Besides that, he does not believe in total depravity, thinks the Spirit was mistaken in declaring men “dead in trespasses and sin.” 84

The doctrine of biblical inspiration, “E. T. R.” asserted, should not be a question of debate for professors employed at Baptist schools. The only honorable course of action for the heterodox professors would be to resign their positions, leave the denomination, and join with some other fellowship where they might find sympathy in doctrine:

Now, in the belief of every denomination there are some things which are not settled, and which, therefore, the ministers are at liberty to differ about and yet remain honorably in their calling. Theological Professors may be Landmarkers or Anti-Landmarkers; they may believe in alien immersion or deny its validity; they may believe that the millennium is close at hand or far off. . . . On these and many other points, the denomination grants them the widest liberty compatible with sanity. But there are other questions which are not open, things which no honorable man can disbelieve and yet remain in the Baptist ministry. . . . If they concealed their views on inspiration and eternal punishment when they were appointed, they were dishonorable and treacherous to the highest degree. If they have changed their views since they were appointed—does not common honesty require them to resign


and let their places be filled by men who will teach what the denomination wishes taught and pays to have taught?\textsuperscript{85}

Some readers of the \textit{Herald}, including such notable luminaries as James Madison Pendleton, wrote letters to the editors criticizing the anonymous “E. T. R.” for making accusations against unnamed persons. “E. T. R.” responded with a justification for the anonymity:

The head and front of my offending seems to be that I do not give my name. It is a name unknown to fame which would carry no weight with it, therefore no good could be accomplished by giving it. . . . But if I write anonymously, I hope Bro. P. will do me the justice to notice that I attacked anonymously; when I mention a Professor’s name, I shall sign my own and also give my authority for any statements.\textsuperscript{86}

Although the “E. T. R.” article did not name the professors in question, John A. Broadus knew that Southern Seminary professor Crawford H. Toy was the man who held the liberal view of biblical inspiration. Toy’s view of biblical inspiration was no secret to the seminary’s faculty, which became aware of his doctrinal shift in the preceding years, but Broadus and James P. Boyce had wanted to handle the matter internally. They quietly hoped Toy might turn back toward orthodoxy before becoming entrenched in Darwinian evolutionism and biblical higher criticism. The publication of the “E. T. R.” column, however, thrust the matter into the public domain.\textsuperscript{87}

The day of the article’s publication, Broadus confided to Boyce that “E. T. R.” was, in fact, Eaton’s sister Josephine Peck, who had recently reunited with her family after moving from Kentucky. Josephine had recently wed widower Alonzo Peck—who was nearly thirty years her senior—on October 2, 1878. Referring to her as “Dickinson’s pet sensation,” Broadus informed Boyce that she had attacked Toy and that “an outburst


of inquiries” would likely be directed at the seminary. Broadus recommended that no seminary professor dare to answer Peck directly but that the best course of action might be for Toy himself to prepare a publication clarifying his views. Broadus expressed frustration at Josephine Peck’s character in bringing the accusations against Toy, remarking, “for she is not only unfair, but impudent and foolish.”

Broadus prepared Boyce for the probable result that Toy would need to stand before the seminary’s Board of Trustees at the May 1879 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention and submit his resignation for his views on inspiration:

I fear Toy will be obliged to go before the Board in May, and state what he holds and what he teaches. The point is not covered by our Articles of Belief, but his views differ widely from what is common among us, and it may be best, probably will be, that he should tell the Board so, and tender his resignation. If he cannot satisfy them he ought not to retain the position. If they are satisfied, we need not care for E. T. R. and Co. If he determines to pursue that course, a note from you to Dr. Jeter might stop the sensation for the present.

Toy had been among T. T. Eaton’s correspondents, and the two men appeared to hold one another in high personal regard. Sometime in 1878, Eaton wrote Toy a letter with questions about the morphology of biblical Hebrew. Toy—who was staying in Norfolk, Virginia, after recently attending a meeting of the Philadelphia Association—wrote back in August 1878, promising to send Eaton a copy of the association’s proceedings once available. Toy expressed his desire to attend the following year’s meeting at Newport, with the hope that he and Eaton might even attend together.

The Southern Seminary faculty had become aware of Toy’s concessions on the doctrine of biblical inspiration by the summer of 1876, and some of Toy’s most dedicated students began to show fruit that they had followed their teacher’s trajectory on the

88John A. Broadus to James P. Boyce, December 12, 1878, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 11, Folder 8, SBTS.

89Broadus to James P. Boyce, December 12, 1878.

90C. H. Toy to T. T. Eaton, August 7, 1878, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS.
matter. One seminary alumnus, William C. Lindsay, was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Columbia, South Carolina, and he promoted a deviant view of inspiration through articles published in *Working Christian* using the pseudonym “Senex.” Toy began to publish his views, albeit with caution and subtlety, through critical notes on the Old Testament written for the *Sunday School Times* in January 1878. Toy also advocated that the seminary hire his friend and peer Abraham Jaeger to the faculty. Boyce, however, rejected the effort because he deemed Jaeger’s view of inspiration deficient.92

Whether Eaton had advance knowledge of Toy’s view of inspiration before 1878 is uncertain, but the faculty hoped he could be of service in preserving the orthodoxy of its students. The seminary faculty invited Eaton to preach its 1876 introductory sermon at Greenville, South Carolina, with a hope that he would leave a positive impression on the students who were most influenced by Toy’s teaching. Decades later, William W. Landrum, a former student who left the seminary in 1874 apparently due to being “branded a heretic,” remarked critically to A. T. Robertson that Eaton’s presence seemed to him tantamount to the seminary trying to “club her own sons”:

I remember when Dr. Eaton (at the suggestion of the faculty, doubtless) preached the introductory sermon at Greenville. It was designed to stiffen the backbones of such men as Holmes, Eager, Smith (Richmond), Lindsay of Columbia, and our contemporaries.93

Although the actions of “E. T. R.” had forced the seminary’s hand in resolving the Toy controversy, it simply hastened the inevitable result. Toy submitted his resignation letter to the seminary’s Board of Trustees in May of 1879. The trustees


93William W. Landrum to A. T. Robertson, February 23, 1898, A. T. Robertson Papers, Box 1, Folder 33, SBTS; Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*, 125.
accepted the resignation, and Toy departed the seminary and the denomination, later joining the faculty of Harvard University.

In the aftermath of the Toy controversy, Eaton’s loyalty to Boyce and Southern Seminary remained strong. He continued to pay subscriptions to the school, and he encouraged financial giving to the institution at his own church and at the 1879 annual meeting of the Portsmouth Baptist Association.°⁴ According to the Portsmouth Association’s statistical tables for 1879, Eaton’s church contributed one hundred dollars toward the seminary that year, while the combined contributions from the other fifty-two churches in the association amounted to less than fifty dollars.°⁵ The seminary sent an agent on its behalf to the Portsmouth meeting, and Eaton ensured that he did not return empty-handed. He informed Boyce,

[R. H. Griffith] made a good speech—a little too long considering that the brethren were impatient to finish business that day—and closed by asking subscriptions. I followed him and succeeded in getting $50 out of one man.°⁶

The following year, Eaton’s church raised the bar even higher for seminary giving, contributing $330 toward the school. Eaton’s advocacy on behalf of the institution may have also yielded a fruitful harvest from the other churches in the Portsmouth Association, as they combined for an additional $221.18 directed toward the seminary’s endowment fund.°⁷ Eaton’s unwavering loyalty to the seminary was surely a comforting consolation to the faculty in the uncertain aftermath of the Toy controversy.

°⁴T. T. Eaton to James P. Boyce, October 14, 1879, James P. Boyce Papers, Box 3, Folder 9, SBTS.


°⁶Eaton to James P. Boyce, October 14, 1879.

°⁷Minutes of the Virginia Portsmouth Baptist Association, 1880 (Petersburg, VA: John B. Ege’s Printing House, 1880), 27.
Boyce respected Eaton’s dedication to the seminary—in contrast to other men who he believed sought to do the school harm. Boyce commended Eaton, “I am thoroughly satisfied that you intended nothing but good. . . . The trouble with me is that I have been for years (I know not why) surrounded by men who seem anxious to hurt the Seminary in every way.” Eaton confided to Boyce that he longed for the opportunity to minister in close proximity to the seminary campus:

I feel as much interest in the Seminary as if I had been one of its students and have ever regretted that I did not study there. . . . I have not ceased to hope that ere I grow old in the ministry, I would be within striking distance of its advantages.

Eaton would yet receive his opportunity to minister in the shadow of the seminary.

**Road to Kentucky**

Given the success of Eaton’s leadership at the Petersburg church, his reputation as one of the denomination’s rising stars continued to flourish. Other churches tried to entice him away to their own pastorates. In October 1878, a church in Edgefield, Tennessee (near Nashville), extended a pastoral call to him. Eaton wrestled with the decision on whether to leave the Petersburg pastorate, even going so far as to submit his resignation to the church, but he withdrew it in late December after reconsideration. When Charles Manly accepted a call to pastor the Greenville Baptist Church in South Carolina, his former church in Staunton, Virginia, elected Eaton as the pastoral successor

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98James P. Boyce to T. T. Eaton, July 18 1876, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, SBTS.

99Eaton to James P. Boyce, October 14, 1879.

100A. W. Webber to T. T. Eaton, October 23, 1878, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, SBTS; A. Tyler to T. T. Eaton, October 17, 1878, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, SBTS; W. C. Nelson to T. T. Eaton, October 18, 1878, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, SBTS.

in December 1879. Ultimately, Eaton elected to stay at Petersburg for a few more seasons.

Especially noteworthy was an attempt by some Tennessee Baptists, apparently led by Knoxville pastor George B. Eager, to take proprietary ownership of Chattanooga’s *American Baptist Reflector* newspaper and install Eaton the editor of what would have become the official denominational paper of the state. Eager wrote to Eaton in October 1879, proclaiming, “you are the man for the place. You can command the confidence and support of the denomination throughout the state and the whole South West as perhaps no other man could do.” A return to Chattanooga to edit the publication might have put Eaton in direct competition with J. R. Graves, who still continued to edit *The Baptist* out of Memphis. Eaton did not take the job, and the two Tennessee Baptist newspapers eventually united in 1889 to form the *Baptist and Reflector*. Eaton’s time as a newspaper editor was yet to come.

In April 1881, Eaton resigned from the Petersburg church after accepting the pastorate of the prestigious Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. The *Religious Herald* commended his years of service among the state’s Baptists:

Dr. Eaton had so greatly endeared himself to the Baptists of Petersburg, and was so closely identified with all of our denominational interests in Virginia, that we had hoped to have had the benefit of his wise counsel and active help through many years to come. . . . He has been most active in every local missionary and Christian enterprise, and by his well-directed efforts, has greatly increased the efficiency and usefulness of his own church, and has averaged one baptism a week during the entire time of his stay in that city.

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102 Charles Manly to T. T. Eaton, December 26, 1879, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, SBTS; Charles Manly to T. T. Eaton, December 31, 1879, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, SBTS.

103 George B. Eager to T. T. Eaton, October 28, 1879, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, SBTS.


Eaton delivered his farewell sermon to the Petersburg church on April 24, an occasion that was of such great local interest that several pastors of other denominations reportedly cancelled their own services in order that their congregants might be present at Eaton’s last message.106

By 1881, Louisville’s Walnut Street Baptist Church had become home to many of the city’s most influential Baptists, including some professors of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Eaton, who had long desired to be near the seminary, would enjoy a long tenure on the seminary’s Board of Trustees from 1882 until his death in 1907. In Louisville, Eaton’s legacy would become inextricably linked with one of the most contentious eras of the seminary’s history, on account of his influential role in the controversy involving its third president William H. Whitsitt.

Prospects were also optimistic for Eaton’s lone surviving sibling, Josephine Peck, who had played a pivotal, though largely anonymous, role in the doctrinal controversy surrounding Crawford H. Toy. Sometime after Josephine’s marriage to Alonzo Peck in the fall of 1878, the couple moved away from Virginia to New York along with Peck’s two adult daughters. The Eaton siblings would soon reunite in Louisville, where Josephine Peck proved to be a vivacious force in another denominational controversy involving the teachings of professors at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Alonzo Peck died in 1883, and at some point before 1886, the then widowed Josephine Peck moved to Louisville to reunite with her brother.107 In Louisville, she would become a vital but anonymous aid to her brother’s editorial work with the Western Recorder.


107I am indebted to Maria Grigorieff for genealogical information on the Eaton family lineage. Mrs. Grigorieff is the great-granddaughter of T. T. Eaton, through his daughter Maria, and a member of the Eaton Families Association, which circulates The “New” Eatonian newsletter.
Although his early years were spent largely in Tennessee and Virginia, Eaton would ultimately cement his legacy as a Kentucky Baptist through his quarter-century pastorate in Louisville. At Louisville’s Walnut Street Baptist Church, Eaton solidified his status as one of the most powerful preachers and leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention. In Kentucky, Eaton’s rising star blossomed into an established light within the denomination. Over the course of a decade, he would obtain a considerable position of local influence through his leadership at Walnut Street and the Long Run Baptist Association. Once his sister joined him in Louisville, their cooperative efforts would also make Kentucky’s Western Recorder one of the nation’s most influential and provocative denominational newspapers.

**Conclusion**

As a Baptist pastor in Virginia, Eaton experienced great success in raising his congregation’s percentage of monetary giving toward denominational missionary work. Furthermore, he encouraged the churches of his local association to greater financial giving toward the Southern Baptist Convention’s mission boards. Working near Richmond, Eaton came into close contact with the editorial staff of the Religious Herald, one of the denomination’s most influential newspapers. During his Virginia years, Eaton became convinced that the key to building Baptist identity would be through the disseminating of religious literature promoting the interests of the denomination. While he personally avoided explicit involvement in denominational controversies, his sister took a more active role by submitting newspaper columns under a pseudonymous name that contributed to the resignation of Crawford H. Toy for unorthodox teachings at Southern Seminary.
CHAPTER 4
EATON AND LOUISVILLE BAPTISTS:
THE FIRST DECADE

Eaton’s early years as a pastor in Louisville solidified his reputation as a forceful personality who rallied the Baptist churches of his local association to support the missionary causes of the Southern Baptist Convention. He led his own church to increase its financial giving by exponential degrees, which subsequently spurred the Long Run Baptist Association’s other churches to strive for greater goals. Eaton proved himself to be an outstanding leader who could influence others to follow his vision.

The Walnut Street Baptist Church

The Walnut Street Baptist Church formed as the result of merger between the first and second Baptist churches in Louisville. By 1881, the congregation boasted an impressive membership role that included many of Louisville’s most influential Baptists, including world-renowned chemist J. Lawrence Smith, publisher A. C. Caperton, and seminary professors John A. Broadus and Basil Manly, Jr. The church—then located on the northwest corner of Fourth and Walnut Street—had been without a pastor for over nine months when it called upon Eaton’s services, and Eaton stated in his acceptance letter that, after much prayer and the persuasion of Broadus, he considered it his duty to accept the congregation’s call. Eaton began his pastoral tenure in May of 1881.¹

Within a decade, Eaton’s leadership helped propel Walnut Street to become the largest and most influential Southern Baptist church in Louisville. In his first ten years at Walnut Street, he baptized 1,061 converts.\(^2\) Walnut Street’s numerical membership at the beginning of his pastorate was somewhere between 573 and 750 persons (depending on the report criteria), already earning it the distinction as Louisville’s largest white Baptist congregation.\(^3\) With Eaton behind the pulpit, the membership numbers surged to greater heights; by 1885, the church reported membership of over one thousand persons for the first time in its history and in September 1887, it had doubled once again, exceeding two thousand members.\(^4\) Even more impressive is that fact that Eaton’s pastorate saw a rapid and exponential growth of the membership in spite of the fact that 766 members transferred their membership into two of Walnut Street’s mission congregations, Parkland Baptist Church and Twenty-second and Walnut Street Baptist Church.\(^5\)

Eaton initiated a fundamental change in the congregation’s financial giving, instituting a plan of weekly giving in the form of individual envelopes as opposed to the congregation’s prior practice of pew renting and special offerings for projects. As membership increased, so too did the financial contributions. After little more than one year as pastor, Walnut Street’s reported annual gifts grew from $7,500 to more than $28,000.\(^6\)

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\(^3\)Ibid., 125, 131; *General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1881* (Cincinnati: Rob’t T. Morris, 1881), 30. Kimbrough cites a membership of 573 persons on August 21, 1881, but the financial tables published in the General Association annual minutes report 750 members. The discrepancy may be explained due to the fact that the association report including the combined membership of its mission churches, most notably the Twenty-second and Walnut Street church.

\(^4\)Kimbrough, *The History of the Walnut Street Baptist Church*, 131–33.


Perhaps even more impressive than the burgeoning membership and attendance at Walnut Street was the fact that the church thrived as the leading mission church planter and supporter throughout the city, which included such congregations as the Pilgrim Baptist Church, the Twenty-second and Walnut Mission, the “B” Street Mission (later called Third Avenue Baptist Church), the Glenview Mission, the Parkland Mission, the McFerran Memorial Baptist Church, the East Baptist Church, the Highland Baptist Church, the Eight Mile Mission, the Portland Avenue Baptist Church, and the Meadow Home Baptist Church.  

Eaton also mentored younger ministers and recruited them to assist him with the various facets of his own expanding ministerial work. In 1885, the Walnut Street Baptist Church ordained eighteen-year-old Calvin Miles Thompson to become its assistant pastor under Eaton. Thompson came to work heavily with the Third Avenue (“B” Street) mission church, earned two degrees from Southern Seminary, and briefly succeeded Eaton as editor of the *Western Recorder* after his death. In addition to Eaton and his pastoral assistants, the membership of Walnut Street boasted an abundance of ordained Baptist ministers due to its close ties to Southern Seminary. As such, the Walnut Street church played a prominent role in the examination and ordination of many ministerial candidates. Baptist statesman with whom Eaton formed close ties included Broadus, Manly, A. T. Robertson, J. M. Weaver, and W. P. Harvey who served together on presbyteries at Walnut Street and other churches to initiate younger men into the ministry.

7Kimbrough, *The History of the Walnut Street Baptist Church*, 124–43.


9T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, October 3, 1889.
By 1887, *The Lyceum*, a publication produced by the students of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, regarded Walnut Street as “perhaps the leading Baptist Church of the South.”\(^{10}\) Regarding Eaton’s ministry, in particular, *The Lyceum* showered it with praise:

> It is no reflection upon its past record to say that it is now, under the leadership of Dr. T. T. Eaton, in the midst of its greatest work and success. . . . The pastor’s fifth year has just closed, and the result is enough to make the humblest feel proud, and the proudest grateful. With the aid of three efficient assistants, five societies, and 1700 members who are contributing to the advancement of the cause, Dr. Eaton has, with in the last year, increased the Sunday School to 1290, received 435 members, and has raised $60,373.62 for church, denominational and charitable purposes.\(^{11}\)

Eaton’s early years at Walnut Street were a success by any conceivable standard of measurement. According to *The Lyceum*, the church’s membership had grown to a greater number by 1887 than had existed in all of Louisville’s Baptist congregations prior to Eaton’s arrival.\(^{12}\) Arguably more impressive was the perception that it had achieved genuine spiritual fraternity among its people in which the rich and poor regularly demonstrated spiritual equality in their fellowship:

> The church life is admirable. It is delightful to go there and see the poor and the rich, the high and the low, sitting side by side, seemingly unconscious that there is any difference. . . . It has often been noticed that the wealthiest members of this church are among its most pious;—a feature of great beauty not perceptible everywhere.\(^{13}\)

**Denominational Work**

Eaton immediately became an active leader in Kentucky Baptist denominational ministry. The 1881 annual meeting of the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky convened in May, the same month that Eaton finalized his

\(^{10}\) *The Lyceum* (Louisville: Chas T. Dearing, 1887), 20.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
acceptance of the Walnut Street pastorate and moved to Louisville. Within two weeks of his arrival, he accepted a nomination to serve upon the state association’s executive board, located in Louisville, alongside such denominational statesman as James Petigru Boyce, George W. Norton, John Lansing Burrows, Arthur Peter, and A. C. Caperton.\textsuperscript{14} During the meeting’s proceedings, Eaton was an active participant in discussions of reports presented by the various committees related to theological education and missionary work.\textsuperscript{15}

By the time of the 1881 annual meeting of the Long Run Baptist Association—the local association of Baptist congregations of Louisville and broader Jefferson County—in September, Eaton had only been at Walnut Street for about four months, yet he had already been elected chairman of the association’s committee on foreign missions and delivered its report.\textsuperscript{16} Eaton, in the committee report, encouraged Baptists in the Long Run Association to “respond liberally to the calls of our Foreign Mission Board,” with special commendation given to the convention board’s declination to send two appointed missionaries into field work.\textsuperscript{17} Though Eaton did not name the two men, Baptists were well aware of the reference. In April 1881, the Foreign Mission Board had appointed John Stout and T. P. Bell as Southern Baptist missionaries to China, but it reversed its decision two months later after James P. Boyce raised concerns about their soundness on the doctrine of biblical inspiration.\textsuperscript{18} In his address to the Long Run

\textsuperscript{14}General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1881 (Cincinnati: Rob’t T. Morris, 1881), 16.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 16–20.

\textsuperscript{16}Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1881 (Louisville: Caperton & Co. Publishers, 1881), 4–5.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 5.

Association, Eaton pointed to the Foreign Mission Board’s decision as “new proof that the interests committed to their care, may be safely trusted to their hands.”

Eaton’s influence among Kentucky Baptists grew on account of his continued involvement and leadership exhibited in the state convention and the local association. He was nominated to serve upon the various ministerial and governing committees of both bodies. On many occasions, Eaton served as chairman of these denominational committees with the duty of presenting their reports at the annual meetings.

**The Missions Surge of the Long Run Baptist Association**

The prominence of the Walnut Street pastorate placed Eaton in a key position of leadership amongst the other churches of Louisville and surrounding Jefferson County, united together in the Long Run Association of Baptists. Immediately after his arrival in Louisville, he took full advantage of that position of influence amongst the other churches. From 1881 until his death in 1907, Eaton enjoyed annual appointments to serve upon the Long Run’s various committees on foreign missions, the Orphan’s Home, schools and colleges, home missions, district missions, and state missions, as well as a number of specially appointed temporary committees. Often serving as committee chairman, Eaton also delivered many of the annual reports, engaged messengers in discussions about reports, and led the Association to adopt some bold new strategies for advancing its collective mission.

Eaton’s role on the missions committees regularly involved corresponding with representatives of the Southern Baptist Convention’s national entities—notably, the Home Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board. The correspondence was necessary for the committees to deliver an accurate report to Kentucky Baptist messengers regarding the annual progress of their national denomination. As evidenced

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19Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1881, 5.
by Eaton’s September 1881 report as chairman of the committee on Foreign Missions, the annual report held great influence in how local messengers and their respective churches perceived the effectiveness of the Southern Baptist Convention’s institutions.

Prior to Eaton’s arrival in Louisville, the Long Run Baptist Association already enjoyed leadership from Baptists like J. H. Spencer, who championed strict—though not necessarily Landmarkist—views of baptism and church membership. At the Association’s 1878 annual meeting, a committee presented a report on a query from Beechland Baptist Church—to which Spencer belonged—on the question: “Does this Association consider it expedient under any circumstances for Baptist Churches to receive alien immersions for baptism?” The majority report, offered by Spencer and A. C. Caperton of Walnut Street Baptist Church, asserted that it was absolutely inexpedient, while the minority report offered by Chestnut Street Baptist Church pastor’s J. M. Weaver proposed that the expediency of the question rested upon a case-by-case basis and that “the question should be answered practically by each church for itself.”20 The associational minutes simply state that “both reports were laid on the table” and the meeting adjourned.21

J. H. Spencer and A. C. Caperton proved to be important persons of contact throughout Eaton’s ministerial career in Kentucky. Spencer was a respected Kentucky Baptist historian working to complete his comprehensive history of Baptists in the state. Caperton had been the sole owner and editor of the Western Recorder, the highest circulated Baptist newspaper in Kentucky, since the early 1870s. As the creative force behind the paper, he aspired to make it into one of the best state circulars in the Southern Baptist Convention through enlarging its dimensions and employing paid contributors and field editors to broaden its appeal and influence; its contributors included James


21 Ibid.
Madison Pendleton. Furthermore, Caperton’s publishing house at 149 Fourth Street often served as a frequent distributor of the published accounts of the minutes of the Long Run Association’s annual meetings as well as Bibles, hymnals, and other denominational literature. Eaton eventually purchased the *Western Recorder* from Caperton in 1887, and succeeded him as editor.

At the Association’s 1882 annual meeting, Eaton delivered the introductory sermon, and he again presented the report on behalf of the committee on Foreign Missions. His report spoke highly of the denomination’s work, lauding the SBC Foreign Mission Board for riding the momentum of a worldwide missionary revival. He addressed the Board’s need for increased financial support:

Never before was there such interest in Foreign Missions as we see now, and never before has God more signally blessed the labors of the missionaries. But, while it is encouraging to see progress, it is still painful to observe how little is done in comparison with the greatness of the need. Large as is the amount of money raised by the Christians of the earth for missions, it is pitifully small compared to what is spent for vice.

Eaton’s report placed the impetus of responsibility upon the Association’s churches to increase their vigor for the foreign mission cause, even going so far as to chide the messengers for their churches’ general lack of effectiveness:

We are mortified, however, that of the 1,200 churches in Kentucky, only 400 of them contributed last year to Foreign Missions. We are pained to see that the statistical tables of this Association for last year show only eight of the twenty-five churches composing this Association as giving anything to this great cause. We are sure, however, that the table is inaccurate in this respect. That so many of the churches of so prominent an association as this should do nothing for Foreign Missions, should humble us in the dust. We would urge upon the delegates to see that no such shameful record shall face us next year.

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24 Ibid.
Having been a pastor in Virginia for six years, Eaton possessed familiarity with the various Baptist institutions in the state, which included the Foreign Mission Board, headquartered in Richmond. He encouraged the Long Run Association to circulate the Board’s official publication, the *Foreign Mission Journal*, as a means of becoming better acquainted and committed to the denomination’s foreign mission outreach. Furthermore, Eaton proposed a comprehensive strategy to increase the annual fundraising across the churches of the association:

> We recommend that a brother be selected at this meeting for each church, who will see that a collection is taken some time during the year for this great cause. We also recommend that the women of each church, who have not already done so, organize a missionary society, and co-operate with the State Central Committee.\(^{25}\)

Eaton closed his report with a call for Baptists to do whatever necessary to further the advance of the Gospel into China, Italy, Africa, Brazil, and Mexico:

> All that we who now live do for the salvation of the world must be done within a few short years, and whatsoever is done to save the many millions of heathen now alive must be done in the near future. There is no time to be lost. The command comes to us with the greatest urgency as well as with the highest authority, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”\(^{26}\)

Having finished his prepared remarks, Eaton continued to speak after the report during the ensuing discussion, praising the strategic advantages of the Southern Baptist mission statements in China, calling all Southern Baptists to raise their 1883 funding for foreign missions by 66 percent over the previous year, stating, “Don’t wait to convert everybody at home. The Apostles didn’t wait.”\(^{27}\) The association adopted the committee’s report and appointed Eaton and two others, J. M. Weaver and W. E. Powers, to a special committee that would subsequently appoint persons in each of the association’s churches to collect for foreign missions.\(^{28}\)

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\(^{25}\) *Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1882*, 5.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{27}\) Ibid.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
The report by the association’s committee on Home and Indian Missions followed, and it likewise emphasized the substantial need for increased giving toward the cause. Though Eaton was not a member of that committee, he suggested an insertion to the report—which Basil Manly moved to make official—that would provide a strategic plan for encouraging wider participation by the association’s churches:

1. That we recommend that a collection be taken in every church, and that every member of the church be solicited to contribute.
2. That we use our best endeavors to raise $1,200 in this Association this year.29

The messengers carried the motion to insert Eaton’s suggestion into the Home and Indian Missions report. Eaton’s enthusiastic leadership in missions support was bulwarked by his own example; that year his own congregation gave more toward the denomination’s mission boards than all the other churches of the association combined. According to the association’s 1882 statistical table, Walnut Street Baptist Church contributed $568.26 toward foreign missions and $263 for home missions during the year. Among the other twenty-three churches in the association, only Broadway Baptist Church gave a comparable amount—$222 for foreign missions and $233 for home missions. Walnut Street’s foreign missions contributions had increased by over 150 percent from the previous year (when Eaton had only been pastor for about four months) and over 350 percent from 1880 (the year before Eaton’s arrival).30

At the next year’s annual meeting, the Long Run Association’s reported contributions for denominational missions were not significantly improved, but Eaton and his church continued to be the association’s leader in giving. During the discussion that followed the report of the association’s committee on foreign missions, Walnut Street messengers J. H. Wright and Basil Manly called upon the association’s churches to

29Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1882, 6.

30Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1880, 12; Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1881, 13. The Long Run Association’s report states that the Walnut Street Baptist Church contributed $125.85 in 1880 and $222.63 in 1881.
raise $2,500 toward foreign missions. The proposed total was an ambitious goal, one which some messengers hesitated to approve, but general optimism prevailed and it passed. Ultimately, however, the Walnut Street congregation came to bear almost the full weight of the yoke.

By the time of the 1884 annual meeting of the Long Run Association, Walnut Street had once again increased its missions giving exponentially, contributing a staggering $2,160 toward foreign missions and $559.15 toward home missions. The church also contributed large amounts toward local ministries that year, including $800 toward the Louisville Orphan’s Home and $1,700 toward state missions. Walnut Street’s monumental foreign missions total was over 300 percent greater than the combined total reported by all the other churches of the association.

The minutes for the Long Run Association’s 1885 meeting show that Eaton served on four committees that year: Order of Exercises, Schools and Colleges, Foreign Missions, and Plan of General Association. His committee on Schools and Colleges commended the efforts of Georgetown College in meeting “the demands of Kentucky Baptists and the general public,” encouraging Baptists to contribute to the school’s endowment and elevate its status and influence. The report specifically commended the Georgetown Seminary as being “as high grade for the education of young women as can be found in this State, and enjoys exceptional advantages in its work.” Throughout the 1880s, Georgetown College—for which Eaton also served as a trustee—faced significant

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31 Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1883, 16.

32 Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1884, 17.

33 Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1885 (Louisville: Sherrill & Forsman, 1885), 5.

34 Ibid.
financial struggles on account of the general economic depression affecting the region, but the school had launched an endowment drive in 1883 hoping to raise $100,000.\textsuperscript{35}

The report encouraged significant discussion by the messengers, but all of it emphasized the favorable sentiment of the committee regarding the college’s importance to Kentucky Baptists. One messenger spoke to dispel a negative impression that some Baptists held about institutions of higher learning:

An erroneous impression prevailed that Georgetown College was built merely to give employment to professors engaged in that institution. It is not my institution but ours. People claim to be too poor to educate their sons and daughters, but dress them fine, live in good houses and drive fast horses. Colleges do not give men conceit—it’s innate. School is a good place to eradicate it.\textsuperscript{36}

Caperton heaped more praise upon the school and remarked, “Give your boys a collegiate education no matter what position in life you may expect them to occupy.”\textsuperscript{37}

Eaton, as had almost become customary by 1885, delivered the report on foreign missions, ending the address with another forceful call for churches to circulate the Foreign Mission Board’s official literature as a means to securing greater contributions:

Your committee . . . would urge the claims of Foreign Missions upon every member of every church. Let the \textit{Foreign Mission Journal} and the \textit{Heathen Helper}, be circulated in all our churches. Let the members and their children be taught the facts in relation to our mission work in Mexico, Brazil, Italy, Africa and China; for the ignorance on the subject is deplorable, and it is one of the reasons for the meager contributions to this cause.\textsuperscript{38}

Eaton’s frustrated tone expressed toward the Long Run Association’s “meager contributions” toward foreign missions was understandable, considering his own congregation routinely contributed more toward the cause than all the other churches

\textsuperscript{35}Robert Snyder, \textit{A History of Georgetown College} (Georgetown, KY: Georgetown College Press, 1979), 57, 61.

\textsuperscript{36}Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1885, 5.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 8.
combined. In 1885, Walnut Street’s reported contributions for foreign missions dipped for the first time in Eaton’s pastorate, totaling only $964.75 compared to its historic $2,160 from the prior year. Walnut Street’s giving still led the association’s churches, but no longer by so wide a margin as Broadway Baptist Church increased its foreign missions giving by nearly three-fold from 1884 to 1885, reporting an impressive total of $800. However, none of the other Long Run churches reported contributions of more than $75 toward the foreign mission effort, resulting in the association’s combined giving barely exceeding two thousand dollars almost entirely upon the generosity of two churches.  

Eaton’s report was enhanced by the presence of a Mexican student attending Southern Seminary, who spoke to the association regarding the characteristic “laziness” of his countrymen and likened the need for missionaries in the country to that of Macedonia in Acts 16:9, imploring the messengers that “the cry of the nineteenth century is ‘Come over into Mexico and help us.’” Eaton then provided a brief history of the work performed in Mexico by missionary W. D. Powell, who struggled against “the desperate efforts of an enraged [Catholic] priesthood.”

The report of the committee on Long Run Associational Missions followed, noting that “more than half of the territory within the bounds of the Long Run Association is destitute of Baptist preaching, and but little effort, outside of what has been made by the city churches, has been put forth to supply this destitution.” The committee recommended the appointment of a district board to ensure greater strategic mobilization of Baptist preachers throughout the region, meeting quarterly and raising

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39 Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1885, 12.

40 Ibid., 8.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.
funds to employ at least one regional missionary. Eaton was among the six men appointed to the district board, and he was quick to offer criticism of the previous year’s board’s general lack of energy for the work by their failure to “have at least one meeting during the entire year.”

Spirited discussion concerning the associational missions report continued among the messengers until being necessarily interrupted by John Broadus’s previously scheduled sermon. Even after Broadus finished his discourse on Philippians 3:12, discussion continued regarding the report; the association adjourned its morning session for dinner without the adoption of the report. At the resumption of business proceedings with the afternoon session, Eaton recanted his rebuke against the committee after public discussion between himself and two committee members. The minutes state that he “makes correction by stating that his former statement that the Board failed to meet last year was based on erroneous information, and he is happy to inform this body that the Board met three times.” The messengers finally adopted the committee report on Long Run Association missions.

The Committee on the Plan of General Association, one of the four committees on which Eaton sat at the 1885 annual meeting, presented a detailed strategic plan by which to encourage the Long Run churches to raise funds toward Southern Baptist ministries on a quarterly schedule. The committee’s plan, headlined by the names of J. W. Warder (Broadway Baptist Church) and Eaton, promoted the importance of funding Baptist foreign, domestic, state, and district mission endeavors as well as Sunday School and colportage work. Its goal called for the smaller associational churches outside of Louisville to raise a combined annual total of one thousand dollars, and asking the more prosperous Louisville churches such as Broadway and Walnut Street to raise $750 and

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43 Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1885, 8. Emphasis original to the source.

44 Ibid., 8–9.
Messengers praised the plan as a means to distribute funding evenly across the various denominational ministries without having to resort to the tired “agency system” in which designated individuals petitioned churches directly for financial support. Nearly forty years later, the Southern Baptist Convention’s Cooperative Program provided a more nationally-structured approach to achieving similar results.

Eaton’s frequent and fervent calls for Long Run Association’s churches to escalate their giving toward foreign missions received the most immediate attention from Broadway Baptist Church, the association’s second largest congregation. The association’s statistic tables for 1886 record that Broadway contributed $1,250 for foreign missions, the first time in the church’s history that it surpassed the milestone of $1,000 toward that end. Also notable is the fact that Broadway’s giving actually surpassed Walnut Street’s reported annual total of $1,015. Both churches substantially increased their missions giving in 1887, but Broadway’s total again edged out Walnut Street, $1,752.99 to $1,562.75. The two churches, both blessed with annually expanding membership and denominational influence throughout the decade, continued this trend of friendly competition of benevolence toward Southern Baptist missions.

**The Leading Voice of the Long Run Association**

Throughout his pastorate Walnut Street, Eaton continued his heavy personal involvement with the Long Run Association and remained an active participant in its annual meetings. Eaton succeeded J. W. Warder as the treasurer for the committee on

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47 Ibid., 17.

48 *Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1887* (Louisville: Sherrill & Forsman, 1887), 17.
Long Run Associational Missions and submitted his first report in that capacity at the 1886 annual meeting. Eaton often recommended amendments to the reports of various associational committees.

Eaton remained vigilant in advocating passionately on behalf of funding for the ministries most dear to his heart, notably foreign missions and the Baptist Orphan’s Home. At the 1887 Long Run annual meeting, the minutes note that Eaton followed the committee’s report with “a strong appeal” on behalf of its building funding, imploring the messengers, “If you won’t give to orphans, what will you give to?” Offering a special motion to the body, an immediate collection was taken for the fund totaling $38.49.49

Even as the Long Run Association took steps to encourage greater giving toward foreign missions, Eaton never ceased in his forceful appeals, which sometimes communicated the impression that churches needed to repent of slothfulness in their annual contributions. In his report presented to the 1888 meeting, he provided his usual updates on the progress of Baptist missionaries in Africa, China, Italy, Brazil, and Mexico, but emphasized the discrepancy between funded missionaries and American churches:

In our home field, there is one evangelical minister for every 800 population, while in the great Foreign field there is but one Missionary to every 40,000 souls. While the needs at home are great and sore, the needs in other lands are far greater. There are 500 times as many preachers in proportion at home than in heathen lands.50

In closing the report, Eaton added, “We need to wake up and cease playing at Missions. We must give dollars were we have heretofore given only cents.”51

Though Eaton’s advocacy for denominational foreign missions giving tended to leave the most lasting impressions at the annual meetings, he was also a committed

49Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1887, 11.


51Ibid.
advocate for missionary work within the state of Kentucky. The 1888 annual report of the association’s Committee on State Missions, presented by J. M. Weaver, called attention to the particular need for work in Kentucky’s eastern territory. It noted that the region had only two self-sustaining churches and twenty county towns which lacked a local Baptist church. Eaton joined Weaver and J. W. Warder in calling upon Long Run Baptists to give generously to the cause, making the case that Baptist support for soul-winning missions was an indicator of one’s commitment to biblical fidelity:

The Baptists claim to be governed by the Bible—that is their only rule of faith and practice. If it says, “Go down and come up out of the water” that’s what we must do—no dodging or twisting the word of God to suit our pride or pre-conceived notions. If it says, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,” that is what we must do either personally or by giving of our means. No dodging.\(^52\)

After Eaton acquired ownership of the *Western Recorder* from Caperton in 1887, he worked regularly with the Long Run Association’s Religious Literature committee, representing the newspaper and fielding subscriptions among the messengers. Eaton’s stewardship over the *Recorder* coincided well with the association’s emphasis upon broader awareness of the need for mission work at home and abroad. The association’s most dynamic voice for missions at the helm of the state’s most widely-circulated religious publication made for a natural means to educate local churches as to the progress and needs of its missionaries. Thus, the Long Run’s Religious Literature Committee encouraged all the association’s churches to get copies of the *Western Recorder* into as many homes as possible.\(^53\)

**Conclusion**

In less than ten years, Eaton succeeded in cementing himself as a leading voice among the churches of the Long Run Association of Baptists, capable of spurring the

\(^{52}\)Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1888, 12–13.

\(^{53}\)Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1888, 14.
many respected Baptist pastors, professors and luminaries of Louisville into greater cooperation for a common goal. His unique ability to cast a strategic vision for denominational advancement sometimes evoked confrontation, but his clear motivations had the effect of encouraging the church messengers to follow his lead at the annual meetings. With the platform of the printed word, however, Eaton would attain an even higher level of influence.
Eaton’s denominational influence began reaching its zenith once he assumed responsibility for editing the Western Recorder. Under his leadership, the Kentucky Baptist paper quickly became one of the elite religious newspapers in the denomination. Its wide circulation ensured Eaton’s voice would be heard on a variety of religious subjects. As the Southern Baptist Convention’s organizational structure became more efficient, Eaton had a greater opportunity to influence the thoughts of Baptists across the nation.

The Power of the Printed Word

As editor of the Western Recorder, Eaton used his influence to speak directly to Southern Baptists about matters of doctrine and denominational politics. Under his leadership, the Recorder became one of the most read papers in the Southern Baptist Convention. Eaton was aided in his editorial duties by his sister Josephine Peck, who answered readers’ questions using the pseudonym “Senex.”

Eaton Gains a Newspaper

Even considering all Eaton’s positions of influence among Kentucky Baptists, he acquired his greatest platform when he acquired the ownership and editorial control over the Western Recorder in 1887. As the leading Baptist newspaper in Kentucky, the Western Recorder had been in print under that name since 1851, and it claimed a heritage dating back to the 1820s under a variety of other names including The Baptist Register.
and The Baptist Banner.¹ When Eaton moved to Louisville in 1881, the Recorder was being printed weekly under the editorship of its proprietor A. C. Caperton, a Walnut Street congregant with whom Eaton worked closely throughout the early years of his pastorate.

Two years earlier, Eaton had already given serious consideration to becoming a religious newspaper editor, even at the cost of leaving his pastorate at Walnut Street Baptist Church. Eaton informed John A. Broadus in a November 1885 letter that a delegation of Tennessee Baptists had approached him in Nashville and urged him to become the editor of their proposed newspaper. This new paper, financially backed by Baptists from across the state, would supplant and absorb the Reflector—over which James Robinson Graves still maintained a share of ownership despite his declining health and dwindling financial resources—as the definitive Baptist periodical in Tennessee. For Eaton, this invitation held special appeal, as he desired to imitate the career of the Religious Herald’s late Jeremiah Bell Jeter:

I have long had the idea that I’d like to become an editor at about 60 years of age—should I live so long—and close my life as Dr. Jeter closed his. They are willing to do anything I say in the way of salary and details if I can be had, and they are anxious for me to say so soon as practicable. . . . Now I will take it as a great kindness if you will tell me what you think I ought to do. I want to do what is on the whole best for the cause.²

Eaton also confessed fatigue in his Louisville pastorate, noting that his rigorous duties left him sparse time to building up the Sunday School ministry or to dedicate study toward sermon preparation:

You know the situation in Louisville. I am not restless or dissatisfied in my work, though painfully conscious of how far I came short of the mark. There are but two things about my efficiency that have troubled me, the rest has been better than I had any right to expect. First, the Sunday School has not been what it ought to have


²T. T. Eaton to John A. Broadus, November 5, 1885, John A. Broadus Papers, Box 11, Folder 3, SBTS.
been, and I have not been able to make it so. Second, I need a larger house to live in. I have pretty well used up all my old sermon material, that is available, and need to study all I can. People run after me at my study in the church all the morning, so I cannot work satisfactorily. If my study was in my house, and I was at the church only during office hours, Mrs. Eaton could protect me while I worked. At the church I am defenseless for I cannot trust Mrs. S’s judgment as to whom I shall see, &c.

Ultimately, Eaton elected to remain in Louisville at his Walnut Street post, but his interest in denominational newspapers persisted. During his Virginia years, Eaton had held a church pastorate in close proximity to the Religious Herald’s headquarters and had evidenced his commitment to the vital role that the dissemination of religious literature must play in developing a robust denominational consciousness. His essay “The Diffusion of Denominational Literature,” published in an 1880 issue of Ford’s Christian Repository, was an early manifesto for Baptists aspiring to advance their core beliefs into every family’s home. Even in the midst of his Petersburg pastorate, Eaton’s services were already in demand to take over a denominational newspaper. When the opportunity to edit the Western Recorder finally presented itself in 1887, Eaton was prepared to seize the opportunity.

In October 1887, Caperton—after sixteen years of editorial labor—announced that he had sold his interest in the Western Recorder to business partners William Patrick Harvey and John B. McFerran. Eaton immediately became the paper’s chief editor, and Harvey handled all duties as the Recorder’s business manager. Over the course of his editorial career, Eaton received aid from a variety of assistant editors, the first being T. B. Craighead, who briefly held over from Caperton’s tenure. Caperton cited mounting debt and exhaustion as the primary reasons for selling the paper, but he expressed his satisfaction in the competence of paper’s new stewards. Caperton proclaimed, “we had

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3 Eaton to John A. Broadus, November 5, 1885.


5 A. C. Caperton, “A Change of Base,” Western Recorder, October 6, 1887.
found men who had the confidence of the denomination and the capital to make a paper that would meet the wants of the denomination.”

Harvey and McFerran—who together with Eaton constituted the newly incorporated Harvey, McFerran & Co.—were both dedicated Baptists, and their rescue of the Western Recorder ensured that Kentucky Baptists would continue to enjoy a weekly serial dedicated to the interests. McFerran was a longtime congregant of Walnut Street Baptist Church and one of its most financially generous members. During the first decade of Eaton’s pastorate, his contributions helped Walnut Street to endow a new Louisville church plant named in memory of his family. Harvey was an Irish immigrant who converted from his family’s Roman Catholicism and became a Baptist preacher across Kentucky. He served administrative duties related to the state convention, particularly in the realms of state missions and education. In his later years, he focused his financial resources to promote the cause of religious publishing, raising a $100,000 capital to organize the Baptist Book Concern.

Through their partnership with Eaton on the Western Recorder, Harvey and McFerran’s financial backing provided a high platform of influence for one of the most able and accomplished denominational statesman in Kentucky. Harvey accepted the full responsibilities of the paper’s business pursuits, and Eaton had final say over the content of the columns. Over the course of his first six years in Louisville, Eaton had become a dominant personality among Baptists of the state, earning a reputation as a bold and

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6 Caperton, “A Change of Base.”

7 “Notice of Incorporation,” Western Recorder, October 13, 1887.

8 Manual of the McFerran Memorial Baptist Church (Louisville; Charles T. Dearing, 1900), 3.

9 Ben M. Bogard, Pillars of Orthodoxy, or Defenders of the Faith (Fulton, KY: National Baptist Publishing House, 1901), 404–5.

outspoken leader within the denomination. Although he had always maintained close involvement with denominational newspapers throughout his ministries in Tennessee and Virginia, his editorship over the *Recorder* was Eaton’s first opportunity to set a direction for a widely-circulated religious periodical.

In the *Western Recorder*’s initial editorial from the new owners, the allied Baptists cast their vision for the publication to serve the denomination through keeping its people informed and edified with its printed content. They articulated their vision to make the *Recorder* into a force that would strengthen the denomination’s Christian effectiveness:

A rightly-conducted religious paper is a mighty factor for good. Particularly is this true with Baptists, free and independent as they are, recognizing no ecclesiastical authority above the local church, and having no hierarchy and no court to mold their opinions or control their actions. It shall be our conscientious aim to make the *Recorder* serve the best interests of our denomination and of the cause of Christ at larger. We will, so far as practicable, engaged the best talent on its columns, and introduce such improvements from time to time as we may be able. . . . At the same time we will endeavor to keep our readers informed concerning such events, religious and secular, as it will be helpful for them to know.¹¹

They declared their commitment to historic Christian orthodoxy, promising faithful continuity to the distinctive principles held by their religious forefathers throughout the prior eighteen centuries. Though the *Western Recorder* would defend and champion true doctrine, it promised to do so with a charitable spirit, evidenced by its new tagline “Faith, Hope, and Love, These Three,” referencing First Corinthians 13:13:

We have no new doctrines to advocate, no new principles to maintain. We believe that all religious doctrines not eighteen hundred years old are wrong. Firmly, constantly, and kindly we will advocate the doctrines of our common Christianity along with the distinctive principles of the old Baptist faith.¹²


¹²Ibid.
Vision for a Denominational Paper

One of Eaton’s earliest articulations of the ideal denominational newspaper came about in his introductory speech delivered before the 1876 annual meeting of the Portsmouth Baptist Association in Virginia. In the speech, he noted that the best religious newspapers would aspire to perpetuate the virtues of doctrinal orthodoxy, goodness of spirit, and an intellectual point of view, all directed “to the good of the churches.” Eaton further articulated his vision for a religious newspaper in a series of essays that included “The Function of a Religious Newspaper,” “Convention Ownership of Baptist Papers,” “The Denominational Paper as a Factor in Denominational Life,” and “The Denominational Paper and Missions.”

Even in Eaton’s lifetime, newspaper editors suffered from a negative public reputation as liars and rabble-rousers. The challenge of editing a religious newspaper, Eaton wrote, was to work from a fundamentally moral worldview to communicate the news essential to edifying the religion of the readers:

It must recognize that its aim is religion, and it must strive to make the world better. In giving news, it must so put the points as to make truth and virtue more attractive and error and vice more offensive to readers. Everything that happens is not news. Nowhere does an editor’s genius appear more manifest than in his discriminating between such happenings as are news and such as are not. There are many happenings which may be regarded as news which still should not be served up in a religious paper. Such happenings as can be used to advance sound morals, sound views of life and sound theology, should find place in a religious newspaper. . . . The great aim of a religious newspaper is to advance the cause of truth and righteousness, and that should be the controlling purpose in every column, every paragraph, and every line.

Eaton believed a paper’s integrity would reflect the character of its editor:

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Editors should have not only the courage of their convictions but, what is far rarer, they should have the courage to have convictions. And they should utter themselves in unmistakable terms, not in rancor as against an adversary, but in earnest devotion to the right and the true. Papers mould public sentiment and hence they should speak out clearly. The desire for popularity should not be allowed to prevent this.  

Advocating truth and righteousness may necessitate controversy and criticism, but Eaton insisted that true religious character should guide the nature of the discussion away from petty rivalry:

While the religious paper is a critic, it must be a kind one and a just one, never losing its temper and never raving. Its criticism should always have a practical aim. It should never praise simply for the sake of praising, and never censure for the sake of censuring. Its criticism should be friendly—that is to say, it should be designed to help, rather than to bust. Such things lower its dignity and mars its usefulness.

The religious newspaper, in its championing of truth and righteousness, has the capacity to function as a forum for the leaders and laymen of the denomination, a nexus where all could work together for the advancement of their shared beliefs:

While a religious paper is a medium of communication among the brotherhood, and, within the limits of good religious journalism, brethren should be allowed and encouraged to express their views freely, yet it is never to be forgotten that the paper exists for the benefit of its readers, rather than for the benefit of its writers. To inform the readers of the progress of the kingdom of Christ in the world; to instruct them in righteousness; to encourage them in local church work; in mission and educational and charitable work; to guard them against threatening errors and evils; to equip them for service in the Master’s vineyard—such are the functions of a religious newspaper.

Of all the services that Eaton knew a great religious newspaper could render to Southern Baptists, at the top of the list was promoting denominational missions, the cause for which he had long labored throughout his ministry. He proclaimed, “Outside the pulpit there is no single agency that can do as much for the extension of Christ’s kingdom

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17Ibid, 5.

18Ibid, 6.
as the denominational paper.” Eaton envisioned a strategy in which newspapers could advocate on behalf of the entire denominational spectrum of its missions network:

This mission field, for convenience, we divide into Foreign, Home, State, and District, though these divisions to some extent overlap; but the cause of missions is one, regardless of geography, and the field of missions includes all places of religious destitution. . . . Papers should not stress Foreign Missions so as to make the readers indifferent to State Missions, nor urge Home Missions so as to obscure Foreign Missions, nor press State Missions so as to blind people to the needs beyond the borders of their commonwealth.

The newspaper, by the nature of its format, could inform the widest number of readers in ways that mission board publications could not:

I believe that the denominational papers are the natural and proper media for reaching our people for missions and that none others are needed. Instead of the Foreign Mission Journal and the Home Mission Monthly, for example, I would have the Boards issue a limited number of simple bulletins of information, to be sent to editors, vice-presidents and other picked men, for use in the columns of the denominational papers. . . . The mission cause is not getting from the papers the help they are capable of rendering, and conversely the papers are not getting from the Boards the help they are capable of rendering.

Despite his enthusiasm for the cause, Eaton did not believe the newspaper editor ought to become a neutral advocate for the mission boards, but should engage the issues with a critical mind:

Within the limits of good religious journalism, the denominational paper should be open to the discussion of mission problems, to the criticism of mission policies and to the ventilation of mission methods. . . . Of course the criticisms should be friendly and never unfriendly. This does not mean the issue and eve sharp issue may not be taken with the Boards and with denominational leaders, for, since they are not infallible, how else can they be set right when they get wrong? The distinction between friendly and unfriendly criticism is easily recognized. Friendly criticism is designed to help, while unfriendly is designed to hurt.

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19 T. T. Eaton, “The Denominational Paper and Missions,” 8–9, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 4, Folder 7, SBTS.

20 Ibid., 2, 4.

21 Ibid, 7.

22 Ibid, 7–8.
Although Eaton continued to hold his preaching ministry at Walnut Street and his intimate involvement in Baptist denominational meetings, his editorial work on the weekly newspaper became his most effective means of communication. In the *Western Recorder*, Eaton gained the tallest platform from which to promote his vision for Southern Baptist thought and practice. His work as the paper’s editor, in turn, would come to define his legacy more than any of his other contributions to the denomination.

**Informing the Readership**

As *Western Recorder* editor, Eaton continued to include many of the same features and sections in the paper as had existed under Caperton’s tenure at the helm. Like most of its contemporary Baptist state newspapers, weekly issues of the *Recorder* featured news from Kentucky churches and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Sunday school curriculum, a sermon transcript (often by Charles Haddon Spurgeon or Alexander MacLaren), and domestic life features of a light and sometimes whimsical tone.  

Eaton’s belief in the importance of the wide dissemination of religious literature was echoed by respected Kentucky Baptist historian J. H. Spencer. Spencer reasoned that the neglect of pastors and churches in subscribing to Baptist periodicals was a direct cause of church paucity in giving to benevolent ministries, on account general ignorance of the denomination’s needs:

> It is a painful fact that a large proportion, if not a majority, of our preachers in the Southern States take no religious periodical of any kind. . . . More still, their destitution of these sources of intelligence renders them ignorant of the need for them. It can hardly be a matter of surprise that the benevolent enterprises of the churches languish for want of support. . . . Our greatest want in the South is more general information among the people. . . . We have much greater need of book agents than of authors. He who sells a book is a greater benefactor than the man who writes it. We need a revival in the book trade more than in authorship. There

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is a wide field for the exercise of Christian benevolence and patriotic philanthropy. Who will sell a good book or get a subscriber to a good paper?  

Eaton took seriously Spencer’s call to keep Baptist readers informed. He used the editorial columns to discuss issues that he believed most important to Baptist readers. Early in his editorial career, he took the offensive against the so-called “New Theology,” which had consumed many of the prominent Baptists of England with the notable exception of Spurgeon. Eaton declared heretical the various tenets of the New Theology—denial of plenary biblical inspiration, the supplanting of the authority of canonical revelation with personal consciousness, and notions of postmortem repentance.  

His admiration for Spurgeon always evident, Eaton exchanged letters with the great preacher of the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit regarding the nature of what came to be called “the Downgrade Controversy.” In November of 1887, Spurgeon wrote to Eaton explaining that the nature of his conflict with the British Baptist Union owed entirely to the fact that the Union had no creedal doctrinal foundation to guard against the encroaching liberalism from Baptist ministers adhering to the New Theology. He declared the Union to be too far gone to ever be reclaimed for orthodoxy:  

Others hope to purge and save the Union. All my best desires go with these; but I have no hope of it. Essentially there is no doctrinal basis to begin with, and many believe this to be a great beauty. “Down with creeds,” seems to be the watchword. . . . With no confession of faith, or avowal of principles, there is nothing to work upon; and I do not see the use of repairing a house which is built on the air.  

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26C. H. Spurgeon to T. T. Eaton, November 25, 1887, SBTS.
After Spurgeon left the Baptist Union, Eaton published Spurgeon’s own explanation in a February 23, 1888 issue of the *Western Recorder*. The accompanying editorial declared,

Baptists of America will be as much surprised as shocked to learn that a body calling itself Baptist in England persists in including Unitarians, Universalists, and even men who deny the Personality of the Holy Ghost and the inspiration of the Scriptures in their fellowship, and allow Spurgeon . . . to leave the body, rather to lose these New Theology men. . . Spurgeon has declared, again and again, that he is as strong a Baptist as ever, and has not the faintest thought of being anything but a Baptist. And Baptists of the South praise his action, and congratulate him and thank God for the stand he has taken.

Committed Baptist though he was, Eaton occasionally took opportunity to commend the faithfulness of other evangelicals. In early 1888, the most dynamic religious event in Louisville was the crusade of the famous evangelist Dwight L. Moody. Eaton chronicled the crusade across multiple issues of the *Western Recorder*. The *Recorder* even published one of his crusade sermons on the atonement doctrine, a special honor for a non-Baptist. Eaton, in an editorial, praised the evangelist despite his denominational differences:

Mr. Moody, unlike most evangelists, preaches evangelical repentance as well as faith. He magnifies the grace of God, and does not minify the guilt of sin. He does not attempt to slur at churches or at obedience to Christ’s commands, as “making no difference,” or as “non-essential,” etc. All that he says is on the right line, though he does not attempt to give any instruction as to points about which denominations differ. This he leaves to the preachers, and urges the converts to go forward in obedience to Christ’s commands.

Not all Baptists were entirely approving of Moody’s methods, as the ecumenical nature of his meetings promoted Christianity independent from a local church context. One letter published in the pages of the *Western Recorder* argued that the

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ecumenical climate of the meetings amounted to a failure to proclaim the full gospel, as commanded by the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16–20:

The meeting was faulty, to my mind, in some particulars. He who preaches must declare the whole counsel of God. Conviction, repentance, faith, confession, union with Christ’s church, baptism, Lord’s Supper, and then the general work of a follower of the Lord. How dare a called minister of the Lord Jesus Christ refuse to preach any of these plain truths taught by the Lord himself?31

The Baptist, still associated with the elderly J. R. Graves, found fault with Eaton’s commendation of Moody:

If [Moody] leaves points of difference to the preachers of the evangelical denominations, and sends his converts to them for further instruction, knowing one will be told to be sprinkled, another poured, and another immersed, how can our “T. T.” Editor call this “urging the converts to go forward in obedience to Christ’s commands?”32

In defense of his positive comments regarding Moody, Eaton simply appealed to the journalistic principle of honest news reporting:

We said, and say, that Mr. Moody did urge the converts to go forward in obedience to Christ’s commands. That he did this all who heard him can testify. . . . We have not sought to justify him or to apologize for him. We simply stated the factor for the information of our readers; that was all. . . . Why the Baptist should object to our telling our readers how Mr. Moody preached we are at a loss to imagine.33

Eaton reserved his full critique of the Moody meetings for the February 23 editorial, listing both its advantages and drawbacks. In addressing his perceptions of Moody’s shortcomings, he echoed Graves’s concerns that Moody’s calls for Christian obedience fell short of the biblical standard, stating,

While what Mr. Moody preached was good and true, yet he failed to tell the whole truth. He did not wish to touch upon points on which evangelical denominations differ . . . This is the one defect in Mr. Moody’s preaching. He is silent on subjects concerning which the Bible is not silent. This inevitably makes the impression that he regards these matters as of little or no importance, and so a spirit of “I’ll do as I please, no matter what my Lord says,” is fostered.34


33Ibid.

Eaton expressed concern that the example of so revered a leader as Moody would set a poor precedent for other ministers to imitate or else fear censure when trying to counsel the newly converted:

This silence of Mr. Moody imposes a like silence upon the preachers in the inquiry meeting. Of course, no preacher, who is fit for his calling, would enter an inquiry meeting with a spirit of controversy; but every minister is under orders to “preach the word” and that, too, “in season and out of season.” . . . Yet serious offense was given because a preacher was reported to have told an inquirer who asked what to do about being baptized. . . . We do not say that a minister should argue controverted points with an inquirer, but he should go to him with an open Bible, and be free to show him what God says of every duty required at his hands. To say this would do harm, is the same as saying that God made a mistake in putting certain things in His Word, and we are wiser than He, and so we will suppress them.  

Moreover, Eaton lamented that Moody’s indifference to address such matters might create an unfortunate stumbling block for new converts:

At the threshold of his Christian life the new convert’s chief lesson is the submission of his will to Christ’s will. Anything which leads him to think that strict obedience to Christ’s commands is a matter of indifference, does him a lasting injury. If Mr. Moody does not wish to discuss controverted points, he can read to his hearers the passages in the Bible which speak on these subjects, without comment, and can urge them to do just what these passages teach. We heartily wish he would do this.  

In spite of his stated criticisms, Eaton appreciated the work of Moody, thanked God for his coming to Louisville, and believed the meetings would yield more spiritual good than harm. His careful handling of the subject was in accordance with his own ideals about how a denominational newspaper should champion truth with a critical but fraternal spirit.  Though he shared many of the concerns raised by Baptists like Graves, Eaton chose to celebrate the contributions of Moody with genuine enthusiasm, holding his criticisms until the conclusion of the event. In publishing critical letters, he also

35 Eaton, “The Moody Meeting.”

36 Ibid.

proved himself a fair editor. Eaton took professional satisfaction in publishing the letters of critical correspondents, declaring, “There is not a newspaper in the land to our knowledge which does not allow its contributors to say things with which the editor does not exactly agree.”

Among Eaton’s new editorial responsibilities were to keep Kentucky Baptists abreast regarding news of other churches and local associations across the state. Eaton, who already had extensive annual involvement with the Long Run Association, frequented other associational meetings in Kentucky as a representative of the *Western Recorder*. These connections ensured strong channels of communication between Eaton and the Baptist churches throughout the state.

**Birth of a Controversialist**

Prior to his *Western Recorder* editorship, Eaton had avoided direct involvement in public controversies with other persons within the fold of the Southern Baptist Convention. Through his involvement with SBC-affiliated institutions and local associations, he had cultivated the reputation as a dynamic leader who could stir the passions of churches toward greater giving to denominational causes. Soon after taking editorial control over the *Recorder*, however, Eaton began to cultivate a new reputation as a controversialist. This turn ensured the relevance of his newspaper, but it also put a strain on the fraternal ties that Eaton had built throughout the denomination. Eaton’s entrance into the waters of controversy was not for the sake of selling newspaper subscriptions (although it surely helped keep his editorials popular), rather he began to press the issues he deemed most important to the maturity and sustainment of Southern Baptist identity.

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38T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, July 12, 1888.
Among the first intra-denominational controversies into which Eaton entered was a dispute concerning the views of James M. Stifler on the subject of baptismal regeneration. Stifler, a Baptist professor at Crozer Theological Seminary, composed the weekly lesson expositions that circulated in the Baptist Sunday School literature published by the American Baptist Publication Society in 1888. In the pages of the Western Recorder, Eaton charged Stifler with the propagation of a Campbellite understanding of baptism as salvific, and he extended his criticisms to include both the American Baptist Publication Society—specifically its corresponding secretary Benjamin Griffith—and the editors of the Religious Herald for endorsing content heterodox to Baptist principles.

The Western Recorder regularly featured a Sunday school section in its weekly editions, usually reprinting portions of the lessons with occasional editorial commentary published by either the American Baptist Publication Society or the Southern Baptist Convention’s Home Mission Board. Eaton’s editorial remarks in the June 7, 1888 issue, however, denounced Stifler’s notes on Matthew 28:16–20 as a Campbellite understanding of baptism. Stifler asserted, “Baptism rightly administrated unites with Christ.”

The Recorder responded with a censure of both the comment and the publisher, endorsing the Southern Baptist Kind Words series as the orthodox Sunday school alternative:

That is rank and unadulterated Campbellism. Baptism does not unite with Christ—it is to be administered only to those who by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit through faith have been already united to Christ. We have reason to thank God in earnest gratitude that he put it into the hearts of our Southern Baptist Convention to publish the Kind Words series of Sunday-school helps. We have too long and sore a battle with Campbellism to submit to having it taught to our children. Those who see the Philadelphia Baptist Teacher would do well to compare its comments in the

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40 The Baptist Teacher, June 1888, 270.
June number (page 270) with Dr. Broadus’ Commentary on Matthew (page 595). They will then be able to judge how far the Teacher is from the evangelical faith.\footnote{T. T. Eaton, “The Sunday-School,”\textit{Western Recorder}, June 7, 1888.}

Some Baptists, predominantly residents of the eastern seaboard states, rallied to Stifler’s defense. Of particular note was James Madison Pendleton, who responded to the \textit{Western Recorder} to express his disdain for what he perceived to be a misrepresentation of Stifler and a public spectacle:

\begin{quote}
This is a grievous charge, but the writer who makes it relies on garbled extracts in view of Dr. Stifler’s words, as follows: “Baptism is the expression and embodiment of faith in Christ.” . . . Hence, when [Stifler] refers to baptism as uniting to Christ, he means professed, external union symbolic of the internal, spiritual union created by faith. There is no Campbellism in this, but it is in accordance with what Baptists have ever believed and taught.

I take the liberty of saying that an anonymous charge that a brother, especially a professor in a theological seminary, is unsound in faith, is hardly consistent with Christian courtesy, and while it can do good, may do great harm. A private letter to Dr. Stifler would no doubt have called forth a satisfactory response.\footnote{J. M. Pendleton, “Dr. Stifler and Campbellism,”\textit{Western Recorder}, July 5, 1888.}
\end{quote}

The \textit{Western Recorder} refused to apologize, and it continued to place great scrutiny on the American Baptist Publication Society. In a July editorial regarding the proper interpretation of Matthew 16:18, Eaton countered Stifler’s interpretation that Peter himself was the fulfillment of Christ’s promise “upon this rock will I build my church.”\footnote{T. T. Eaton, [editorial],\textit{Western Recorder}, July 12, 1888.}

Eaton’s displeasure intensified a few months later with the publication of Stifler’s exegetical notes for the October Sunday school lessons concerning the book of Joshua.\footnote{Ibid.}

In an editorial, Eaton claimed that Stifler’s comments on Joshua 4:9 amounted to the Campbellite theory of baptismal regeneration:

\begin{quote}
In the \textit{Advanced Quarterly} for October, 1888 . . . we find on page 103, the following: “Those Twelve Stones: Twelve were left in the stream to be engulfed by the returning waters (Josh 4:9), and twelve others were erected out on the highest bank. Baptism leaves the old man in the pool of his immersion, whence a new man emerges on the other side.” Now, we doubt, whether any passage can be found in
\end{quote}
all Alexander Campbell’s writing that teaches baptismal regeneration more clearly than this.\(^{45}\)

Eaton lamented that the presence of Stifler’s teaching in literature widely disseminated across Baptist churches could lead many impressionable young people into heresy. He insisted his duty was to inform readers of the *Western Recorder* of the dangerous ramifications of the Society’s Sunday school curriculum:

That such language should be put into the hands of our Baptist youth as what they must receive as truth, is painful to contemplate. We have been a life-long friend to the American Baptist Publication Society, and expect to remain so through life; and we earnestly hope these misleading utterances in the series of Sunday-school helps sent out by that Society will be corrected. . . . We cannot be faithful to the churches in which the *Recorder* circulates without entering an earnest, solemn, and sad protest against such wrong teaching sent out by Baptists to Baptists to be taught to the Baptist youth.\(^{46}\)

A. E. Dickinson, the long-time editor of the *Religious Herald* who had assisted J. B. Jeter, defended Stifler against Eaton’s charges of Campbellite heresy, and thus began a feud between the two editors that lingered throughout the following year. Dickinson asserted that Eaton’s paper had erred in its assessment of Stifler simply because some Campbellite publications had approved of his statements on the subject. In a *Herald* editorial, Dickinson defended Stifler:

It seems to us utterly unfair to an esteemed Christian gentleman, an honored Professor in an excellent Baptist theological institution, to quote against him the utterances of those who, for their own reasons, were only too eager to join in the unrighteous crusade. . . . We have no doubt that they are now thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and we hope that hereafter, while they will still bravely defend the truth, they will at the same time not forget to deal fairly with their brethren.\(^{47}\)

Furthermore, Dickinson implied that the *Western Recorder*’s rush to judgment communicated that “there may sometimes dwell with notable ardor for orthodoxy a reprehensible and unbrotherly spirit.”\(^{48}\) Eaton defended his paper against Dickinson’s

\(^{45}\)T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, November 8, 1888.

\(^{46}\)Eaton, [editorial], November 8, 1888.


\(^{48}\)Ibid.
claim that the controversy owed its origin to a misreading of Stifler’s argument, taking the liberty to reprint selections of the text from the American Baptist Publication Society materials. Eaton argued that Dickinson was attempting to defend a position indefensible to any Baptist, and he lamented what he perceived to be doctrinal indifference of the Religious Herald editors:

We will give a liberal reward to Dr. Dickinson if he will frame a sentence that will declare the doctrine of baptismal regeneration any more distinctly. . . . It is too late in the day for the Herald to come to the defense of that paragraph. That, in the form it appeared, it teaches baptismal regeneration, nobody can deny; and that is just the form in which it went to the Baptist Sunday-schools of the land. Yet those who object to the teaching of Campbellism in Baptist Sunday-schools are, in the eyes of the Religious Herald, “self-appointed guardians of orthodoxy.” We will not say that the Herald is a self-appointed guardian of heresy.

We confess it is a matter of grave concern to us what sort of doctrine is taught to the youth in our Baptist Sunday-schools; and we are unwilling to believe that it is a matter of no concern to the Religious Herald. So far as we know nobody has made any attack upon Dr. Stifler or has charged him with being a heretic. To criticize an utterance of a paper is not making an attack on the editor.49

The Stifler controversy was one manifestation of the increasingly strained tensions between Southern Baptists and their northern brethren. Since their separation from the Triennial Convention in 1845, Southern Baptists had struggled to define denominational consensus that would distinguish their model of cooperation from the society structure prevalent among Baptists in the northern states. The fledgling Southern Baptist Convention had failed to establish a denominational publishing house, and thus it had long relied upon the resources of American Baptist Publication Society to disseminate much of their religious literature and Sunday school lessons.

Eaton himself had praised the American Baptist Publication Society in his 1880 lecture at Saratoga, New York, titled “Our Distinctive Principles as Baptists and Our Literature Necessary to a True and Complete Evangelism.” Though he had once endorsed the Society as the best option for promoting Baptist literature, by the end of the 1880s, Eaton’s focus had clearly shifted toward promoting the Southern Baptist

49T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, October 31, 1889.
institutions and away from the societal structure so prevalent among Northern Baptists. His lengthy engagement of the Stifler controversy evidenced the greater degree of trust Eaton placed in the orthodoxy of publications produced by the Southern Baptist Convention’s Home Mission Board.\textsuperscript{50} In 1887, the Home Mission Board began using the \textit{Kind Words} series—a publication that had originated under the SBC’s first attempt at a Sunday School Board—as the basis for providing Sunday school lessons to Southern Baptist churches.\textsuperscript{51} The timing of Eaton’s forceful attacks upon the American Baptist Publication Society’s commitment to Baptist identity coincided with the Southern Baptist Convention’s renewed commitment to printing literature for its own constituents. Eaton’s editorial crusade reflected the growing tensions of competitive missionary strategy between Baptists in the northern and southern states.

\textbf{Enter “Senex”}

In an August 1, 1889, issue of the \textit{Western Recorder}, Eaton introduced readers to “Senex,” a pseudonymous writer who would answer many of the theological questions submitted to the editor. Citing his own inability to answer the mounting pile of letters to the editor, Eaton announced that his new assistant correspondent would offer informed and orthodox responses to the questions readers might desire:

\begin{quote}
We have given up in despair the hope of getting time to answer the pertinent and sensible questions which brethren and sisters ask us from time to time. . . . Hence we have turned them over to an old writer who prefers to write under the \textit{nom de plume} of Senex. He is a Baptist in good standing and full fellowship; he has written for the papers for more than thirty years; he promises us to write nothing contrary to the Bible, the Philadelphia Confession of Faith and Dr. Boyce’s Theology so far as he understands them, and he agrees to take his pay in subscriptions to the \textit{Recorder}.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{52}T. T. Eaton, [editorial], \textit{Western Recorder}, August 1, 1889.
Eaton, with a whimsical tone, included a strategic disclaimer that Senex’s opinions should not be construed as the official positions of anyone officially associated with the *Western Recorder*:

We agree, on our part, with the above limitations, to let him say what he pleases, with the distinct understanding that we are not in the least responsible for his words. His opinions are his own, and not ours—neither the opinions of the *Recorder*, not the editors of the *Recorder* personally. We hope no one will say of his opinions, “The *Recorder* says so.” It will be a distinct and inexcusable misrepresentation. The *Recorder* does not say what any of its correspondents say. It is simply responsible for their being reputable persons, known to the paper. And as Senex has warned us that in answering some of the questions already received he must controvert the opinions of many, we announce in advance that we are in particular not responsible for any of his utterances.\(^{53}\)

Senex’s debut article was a front page article on the August 22 issue, concerning the distinctions between plenary and verbal aspects of biblical inspiration. Before addressing the doctrinal subject matter, however, Senex offered a rejoinder to Eaton’s August 1 editorial, countering with playful jabs at the editor’s plea of neutrality:

Well, of all the cool things ever written, commend me to your editorial announcing my engagement to answer some of the many questions asked the *Recorder*. Such a washing of hands and declaring “we are innocent of the sins of this guilty Senex, let him see to it!” It was not necessary to tell that your Editor-in-chief was absent, he would never have been guilty of such “cheek.” The readers must excuse the slang, it is the only expression which will do justice to the subject. I think I know to whom I was indebted for that delicate little attention, and propose to embrace the first opportunity to step on his pet corn in retaliation. Seriously, that editor had evidently been irritated by a few remaining idiots who persist in holding a newspaper responsible for all its correspondents say. . . . I hasten to confirm his words.\(^{54}\)

Senex’s provocations received a rare editorial interjection from Eaton, who remarked: “That is exactly it, and if Senex had read some of the letters we have received, he would have been irritated also.”\(^{55}\)

Turning attention to the question of biblical inspiration, Senex evidenced a learned familiarity with the subject, quoting from Augustus H. Strong’s articulation of the

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\(^{53}\)Eaton, [editorial], August 1, 1889.

\(^{54}\)Senex [pseud.], “Inspiration,” *Western Recorder*, August 22, 1889.

\(^{55}\)Ibid.
plenary view of inspiration, but ultimately favoring the theory of verbal inspiration “because I think the words of Scripture are utterly beyond the mental ability of the writers.”

Senex summated,

According to the verbal theory, the Spirit inspired the words; according to the plenary, He inspired the thought, but guarded the words from all possibility of error, and dictated them when it was necessary.

Charitably, Senex commended Strong’s plenary theory “as honouring to the Bible and to God as is the verbal theory” and clarified that despite the nuances of theories, “practically they amount to the same thing.” The concise and insightful treatment of the topic became the first of many such articles from the pen of Senex, but Eaton withheld the correspondent’s true identity from the Recorder’s readers.

Though veiled under the pen name of “Senex,” the author’s true identity was not a total mystery to Baptists closest to the Recorder’s headquarters. In his published memoirs, Southern Seminary Old Testament professor John R. Sampey confirmed that Eaton’s older sister, Josephine Peck, had been responsible for the content. As the only surviving sibling of T. T. Eaton, the widowed Josephine moved to Louisville sometime between 1883 and 1886 to be nearer to her brother and surviving family.

Previously in 1878, Peck had contributed a series of articles to the Religious Herald under the pseudonym “E. T. R.” The E. T. R. articles became a sensation that incited many letters to the paper’s editors with much speculation as to the mysterious author’s identity. The E. T. R. columns ceased in the spring of 1879, after some Herald correspondents and readers strongly criticized the writer for making claims about the orthodoxy of two unnamed Baptist professors (one of whom turned out to be Crawford H.
Toy). “E. T. R.” expressed particular offense regarding the popular speculation that the writer was a woman, and the insinuation that gender should affect the merits of the arguments employed in the columns.  

Josephine, now using the “Senex” designator, would later become an increasingly vivacious force in the denominational controversy that culminated in Whitsitt’s resignation from Southern Seminary. A thoroughly educated woman, with an obvious interest in theology and training in mathematics, Latin, and Greek, her tenacity with the pen provided the *Western Recorder* with another powerful personality. In spite of her prowess, she preferred to make her contributions anonymously, and Eaton remained happy to indulge her. Senex’s debut column and Eaton’s editorial introduction evidence a notable familiarity surely common among siblings who had long shared a living space. While Senex’s column implied that the editor was prone to absenteeism, Eaton twice made reference to the contributor’s advanced age, calling Senex “an old writer” and one who had “written for the papers for more than thirty years.”

Eaton’s consistent references to Senex with masculine pronouns are a curious editorial sleight of hand, but one that must be understood in light of his sister’s negative experience with the E. T. R. controversy a decade earlier. Even his editorial introduction of Senex to the *Recorder*’s readers appears to place unusual emphasis upon the gender-specific pronouns, including them with almost every clause. In what may have been the editor’s knowing glance of brotherly endearment, the final pronoun was uniquely italicized: “we are in particular not responsible for any of *his* utterances.”

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61 T. T. Eaton to John A. Broadus, October 14, 1875, John A. Broadus Papers, Box 6, Folder 17, SBTS.

62 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, August 1, 1889.

63 Eaton, [editorial], August 1, 1889.
The Senex column aided the busy Eaton by providing thorough and lively answers to questions to which he had neither the time nor interest to respond in full. In later years, during times that Eaton’s travel schedules would prevent him from regular editorial duties, his sister would edit the Recorder anonymously. Mrs. Peck embraced the advantages of anonymity and on occasion inserted some playful jabs at the absent-mindedness of the paper’s well-known editor:

What is the matter with the wastebasket of the Western Recorder? If it is too full, buy a larger one. A lack of room in said basket is the only way in which I can account for two questions being sent me. What do you suppose, Mr. Editor, I know about gapes in chickens? Was that meant as a sly hit in regard to the size of the city in which I live, intimating that we raise chickens where there ought to be sidewalks?⁶⁴

Regarding the poultry question, Eaton sheepishly admitted in an editorial insertion that the question should have been sent to the “Farm and Household editor.”⁶⁵

**Eaton and the Denominational Consciousness**

By virtue of the Western Recorder’s wide circulation across the denomination, Eaton exerted great influence on the Southern Baptist Convention through promoting his beliefs for how the denomination could organize more effectively to promote its distinctive Baptist witness. Combined with his involvement in the denominational parliamentary meetings, Eaton raised popular support for the establishment of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. His encouraged Southern Baptists to support their own denominational causes, so that they would no longer be dependent upon the Northern Baptist societies. This movement culminated in the 1894 Fortress Monroe Comity meeting, an event that solidified the Southern Baptist Convention’s status as a self-sustaining denomination.

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⁶⁴Senex [pseud.], “Answers to Questions,” Western Recorder, September 5, 1889.

⁶⁵Ibid.
Denominational Influence

Under the editorship of Eaton, the *Western Recorder* quickly became a religious newspaper second to none in its denominational influence. By the end of 1889, the *Recorder* claimed a guaranteed circulation of 12,000 copies.\(^66\) Its burgeoning success in the two years under the Eaton-Harvey partnership extended well beyond the borders of Kentucky. Even J. R. Graves, the dominant personality among Tennessee Baptists for nearly half a century, appeared to have been threatened with its wide reach when he complained about the presence of the *Recorder*’s agent A. B. Cabaniss at the 1889 meeting of the Cumberland Association in Tennessee. The *Recorder* wanted to avoid any open controversy with Graves and said as much in an editorial:

In reference to what Dr. Graves says about an agent of ours in Tennessee, we need say only that the reference must be to Bro. Cabaniss. He has by no means confined his labors in behalf of the *Western Recorder* to Tennessee, and at no time has he antagonized the Tennessee papers. Always and everywhere he has told the people to take their own State paper first, and then to take the *Western Recorder* besides. . . . And while the representatives of the *Baptist and Reflector* come to Kentucky to get subscribers, they can not reasonably object to our getting subscribers in Tennessee.\(^67\)

The *Western Recorder*’s subscriptions grew in large part due to the work of the agents like Cabaniss who traveled across Kentucky and even into other states to solicit the newspaper at Baptist state conventions and associational meetings. Eaton and Harvey also made a habit of keeping a personal presence at various meetings when their schedules permitted.\(^68\) On some occasions, Eaton even traveled to secure pledges on behalf of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.\(^69\) Baptist newspapers such as the

\(^{66}\)W. P. Harvey, “ Guaranteed Circulation of 12,000 Copies,” *Western Recorder*, October 24, 1889.

\(^{67}\)T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, September 12, 1889.


\(^{69}\)“The Tennessee Baptist Convention,” *Western Recorder*, October 24, 1889.
Recorder became an important source for information about denominational life since proceedings of associational meetings were often published in the weekly issues.

In 1890, Eaton and Harvey entered into another significant venture to promote the denomination’s interests through publishing. Along with a company of like-minded Baptist stockholders, they incorporated the Baptist Book Concern to print and distribute religious literature in Louisville. The business shared building accommodations with the Western Recorder, although the newspaper’s editors clarified “no organic connection” existed between the two publishers beyond their own interest as joint stockholders. This independence did not last long, however, as the Baptist Book Concern’s Board of Directors—with particular interest from John B. McFerran and Theodore Harris—bought the Western Recorder a few months after its incorporation. The Board hoped to use its combined financial resources to enlarge the reach of the paper’s influence. Its first publication was a tract by John A. Broadus titled “Ought Women to Speak in Mixed Assemblies?” in which the author answered the question negatively.

Eaton was able to use his editorial stature to promote other denominational causes of special importance to him, such as Sunday school literature. In 1889, the Southern Baptist Convention ratified a contract to publish the Kind Words series through the Home Mission Board, and requested that all denominational agencies promote the resource to Baptists across the South. Considering his public frustration with the content of the literature produced by the American Baptist Publication Society, it is

70T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, January 9, 1890; T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, January 30, 1890.

71“The Baptist Book Concern,” Western Recorder, February 27, 1890.

72“Statement from the Baptist Book Concern,” Western Recorder, May 8, 1890.

73“The Baptist Book Concern,” Western Recorder, July 3, 1890.

74T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, September 26, 1889.
unsurprising that he viewed the Southern Baptist Convention’s *Kind Words* series as a promising alternative. Eaton took opportunity to commend the series to Baptists who might be reluctant adopters:

Objection has been made to the *Kind Words* series on the ground that Paedobaptists were in the firm that did the printing, . . . There are comparatively few business firms composed wholly of Baptists. Yet it never occurred to anybody to object to the *Examiner*, the *Religious Herald*, or the *Western Recorder* because Paedobaptists had a hand in printing them. The objection is absurd. But those who have urged this objection have made it a reason for preferring the Philadelphia series. The objectors, however, get no sympathy from the American Baptist Publication Society, we are glad to see; for it is advertised that six prominent Paedobaptists have been engaged to write articles for the *Baptist Teacher* during 1890.\(^{75}\)

Eaton endorsed the series as the ideal weekly periodical for Baptist parents to share with children of various ages:

Every Baptist ought to take to his children of every age, from 3 to 21, the *Kind Words Weekly*. . . . Besides its other excellencies, it has a large amount of interesting information in regard to the work of the mission fields of Southern Baptists. Now surely every Baptist wishes above all things that his children should grow up to be not only Baptists, but missionary Baptists, and Baptists who will give as the Lord hath prospered them. By no one thing can any parent secure this desirable result so well as by taking *Kind Words Weekly* for his children.\(^{76}\)

As Southern Baptists rallied behind their denomination’s Home Mission Board as their primary source of educational literature, they also came to view the Board as the best means for evangelizing and educating the African-Americans across the South. Since the end of the Civil War, the American Baptist Home Mission Society had invested substantial financial resources—nearly two million dollars according to Eaton’s estimate—toward benefiting freed slaves in the Reconstructed South. Eaton, echoing the growing sentiment of his denomination, called for an end to Baptist reliance upon the Society to do missionary work that Southern Baptists had the means to accomplish more efficiently. In an 1890 editorial, he expressed his vision for new missionary focus toward African-Americans in the South:

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\(^{75}\)T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, December 19, 1889.

\(^{76}\)T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, October 10, 1889.
We heartily rejoice in all the good this great Society has done or shall do. But we believe with all our hearts that the work in the South can be done more satisfactorily and more efficiently by the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Had the American Baptist Home Mission Society spent one hundred million dollars in the South that fact would not change our convictions in the least. . . . While we thank God and honor the Home Mission Society for its work, especially among the negroes of the South, which work we were too poor and feeble to do; yet we believe the time is rapidly coming when Southern Baptists should relieve the Society of the work and free their hands to meet the great destitution in the North and West, especially among the foreign populations. Those needs are great and urgent, and they cannot be fully met so long as the Home Mission Society is obliged to consume so large a part of its resources in doing the work among the colored people of the South. Let the white people of the South realize their responsibility to the negroes, and let them come up like true servants of God to this great work.77

Despite genuine concern for the souls of African-Americans, many white Southern Baptists possessed a larger cultural concern for preserving civil order in the post-war South. Post-war Baptist efforts to aid and educate ex-slaves and black ministers were undergirded by the hope that African Americans could be made into better citizens.78 White Southerners in the Reconstruction era harbored great fear that freed slaves might organize to incite civil unrest or political upheaval. Furthermore, whites in the South suspected their counterparts in the North of encouraging blacks toward such ends. The racial tension between Southern and Northern Baptists came to a head in 1890, and precipitated a paradigm shift in the way Southern Baptists viewed their organization structure and missionary strategies.

The point of controversy between Baptists of the South and the North occurred when the American Baptist Publication Society, still under the direction of Benjamin Griffith, employed the services of three African-American ministers—William J. Simmons, E. K. Love, and Walter H. Brooks—to write Sunday school lessons for 1890.

77T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, February 6, 1890.
issues of the *Baptist Teacher*. The three men had attended a meeting in Indianapolis, and allegations circulated that some men delivered racially “incendiary speeches” at the gathering. Commenting on that particular controversy in his editorial columns, Eaton argued that the Society’s decision was a blatant disregard for the concerns of white Southern Baptists:

We wish to say just here and with emphasis, that we favor with all our heart encouraging the colored people to write, and where they are capable of writing good articles, let them be employed to do so. We object only to character, and not to color, in such things. And this is the feeling of more than “nine and a half tenths” of Southern Baptists. There is not a Baptist State convention in the South which has not gladly listened to speeches from colored brethren, and several times they have been welcomed to the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention. The objection made to the colored men in question was not at all based on their color, but on the fact that they had been making incendiary speeches. We have no idea that the managers of the Publication Society thought of this in engaging the services of these men; but let the facts come out, whatever they are.  

Other Southern Baptists expressed their great disappointment with the Philadelphia-based American Baptist Publication Society. Georgia preacher and former Confederate chaplain J. B. Hawthorne submitted a letter for publication in the *Western Recorder* that expressed his resentment to the Society’s disregard for the sovereignty of Southern affairs:

The Society has inflicted many wrongs upon Southern Baptists . . . The Baptists of the South are loyal to their own Convention. They cannot be bought off, nor frightened off, nor flattered off. At least “nine and one-half tenths” of them have determined that they will stand by the work of their own Boards against the Publication Society, or any other foreign institution. The Society in attempting to destroy the Sunday-School publications of our Convention has created a sentiment that will crystalize into a great Southern Baptist Publication Society. . . . The Baptists of the South will never abolish the *Kind Words* publications. They may, and perhaps ought to relieve the Home Board of the responsibility, but through that Board, or a new one, created for the purpose, the work will continue.  

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79 Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 70–73.

80 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, January 9, 1890.

Hawthorne further vocalized the concerns of many Southern Baptists that the publication of the *Baptist Teacher* articles could encourage the uprising of racial violence against whites in the South:

> The Baptists of the South are a self-respecting people. They will not tamely submit to insult—even from the American Baptist Publication Society. They will not allow negroes who malign them and threaten them with arson and assassination to write lessons for the Sunday-schools. They dared to rebuke the Publication Society for attempting to lionize three such negroes, and they are not sorry for it. The Baptists of the South desire to live in peace and Christian fellowship with their brethren of the North, and they believe that they are not inconsistent with this profession when they ask Northern Baptists to respect their rights and feelings.\(^8^2\)

Not every Baptist shared Hawthorne’s point of view on the controversy. James Madison Pendleton wrote to the *Recorder* to contest Hawthorne’s concerns that the three African-American ministers had advocated arson and assassination against white Southerners. For his part, he required proof before he would make any moral judgment against the ministers’ character:

> If these ministers advocate “arson and assassination” nobody will defend them; but if they do not and never did a most ample apology is due them from some of their white brethren. . . . Charges amount to nothing without proof. I call upon the *Western Recorder* of the South, and the *National Baptist* of the North to say whether there is proof. I wish justice done to every man; not because he is a white man or a black man, or a red man, but because he is a MAN.\(^8^3\)

Northern Baptist newspapers also defended the African-American ministers, calling into question the veracity that the men had made incendiary speeches. Eaton, however, believed the American Baptist Publication Society’s decisions not to publish the articles testified to the truth of the allegations:

> If the speeches of these colored men were not incendiary, then the Publication Society has done them a great injustice in dropping their names because of these objections. They should have been defended. The very fact that they have been dropped from the list in the face of the objections, is a concession that the objections were well founded.\(^8^4\)

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\(^8^2\)Hawthorne, “Dr. Hawthorne’s Response.”

\(^8^3\)J. M. Pendleton, “Arson and Assassination,” *Western Recorder*, February 20, 1890.

\(^8^4\)T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, January 23, 1890.
Griffith corresponded privately with Eaton to clarify the intention of the Society. He published a summary of Griffith’s response in the *Recorder*, noting that Griffith intended “no thought of unfriendliness to Southern white people” in employing the services of the African-American writers for consideration in the *Baptist Teacher*. Because notable Southern Baptists like Hawthorne expressed concern on account of perceived incendiary utterances on the part of the candidates, Griffith elected not to publish the articles in the *Teacher*, choosing instead to relegate them to tracts that would circulate in African-American contexts. Griffith assured Eaton that he spoke the sentiment for the majority of Northern Baptists. Though Eaton apparently found Griffith’s letter agreeable, he did not believe that Griffith’s charitability toward Southern interests was shared by most Northerners. He expressed his disappointment in an editorial:

> We would like to believe also that [Griffith] represents fully “nine and a half tenths” of the Baptists in the north. But in view of recent utterances of the *National Baptist*, the *Watchman*, the *Christian Inquirer*, and other Northern Baptist periodicals, we cannot believe that he does.  

The multiple controversies involving the American Baptist Publication Society exposed the widening rift between Northern and Southern Baptists. During the 1890s, Southern Baptists moved toward greater organization unity in order to ensure that the survival of institutions and publications that would reflect their majority interests. Interest in Sunday school literature became the key to establishing a denominational Sunday School Board, which took over publication duties of lesson plans from the Home Mission Board. At the 1890 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Fort Worth, Texas, James Madison Frost of Richmond, Virginia, presented six resolutions calling for

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85T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, January 16, 1890.

86T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, January 9, 1890.
its establishment. Eaton endorsed Frost’s proposals, arguing that it would be in the best interests of the *Kind Words* series.  

In justifying his support for Frost, Eaton insisted that the Sunday school literature was a strong tie which would ensure the unity and vitality of the Southern Baptist Convention:

> This Sunday-school series has been a source of increasing revenue to the Convention and promises to be a yet-greater source. Not only has the Home Board received a royalty of $1,000 a year, but the contributions of the churches have been greatly increased by the influence of this series. Compare the receipts of our Boards for the last four years with the receipts before. . . . If the Convention ought to continue to exist, and that is conceded, then whatever would weaken it should be avoided. This series has been, is, and will continue to be an increasing source of strength, even in spite of the opposition it has had.  

Frost’s resolutions became the foundation which birthed the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in 1891. The Convention also voted overwhelming to continue publishing the *Kind Words* series, much to Eaton’s delight. The rebirth of the denomination’s Sunday School Board assured Southern Baptists their own publishing arm and served as validation that the Southern Baptist Convention was learning how to operate as a unified and resourceful force.

The Southern Baptist Sunday School Board owed its successful establishment to the efforts of Eaton, Frost, and others who promoted a maturing denominational consciousness. The resolve of Southern Baptists to achieve greater independence from Northern Baptist societies grew out of their frustration that Southern social concerns were at risk in a period of rising racial tensions. As Southern Baptists looked toward the challenges awaiting them in the twentieth century, they placed greater support in their

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88 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, May 1, 1890.

own institutions, trusting them to represent the doctrines and concerns held by the denomination’s churches.

**Awakening of the Denominational Consciousness**

Thanks in large part to the efforts of prominent statesman like Eaton, the Southern Baptist Convention achieved noticeable progress toward unifying the missions of its institutions and publications. As it entered the 1890s, Southern Baptists were well on the path toward establishing an organized plan for denominational identity and effectiveness. Baptist historian Robert Baker referred to this phenomenon, so especially evident between the years of 1882 and 1894, as “the development of a denominational consciousness.”

As the denomination made great strides toward becoming a self-sustaining enterprise for advancing religious education and missionary outreach, Eaton remained at the forefront of the transformation. At the 1890 Southern Baptist Convention in Fort Worth, Texas, Eaton introduced a resolution proposing an inter-denominational conference on the subject of Christian union. His resolution recognized “the gravity of the problem of bringing different denominations to see alike on important subjects concerning which they now differ,” and resolved that “we respectfully propose to the general bodies of our brethren of other denominations to select representative scholars who shall consider and seek to determine just what is the teaching of the Bible on the leading points of difference and doctrine and polity between the denominations, in the hope that they can at least help to a better understanding of the issues.”

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91 *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1890* (Atlanta, GA: The Franklin Printing House, 1890), 22.
Eaton spoke on behalf of a committee of five, which included H. H. Harris, J. B. Hawthorne, B. H. Carroll, and T. H. Pritchard. And the committee urged that the results of the proposed conference be published in all denominational papers “so that the Christian public can be thoroughly informed . . . and that progress may be made toward true Christian union.” Speaking to Eaton’s motivations for advancing this cause, C. Ferris Jordan surmised,

The fact that Eaton offered a motion on Christian Union and the kind of leadership which he gave to the special committee indicate both his awareness of an ecumenical current abroad in his day and his conviction that union was possible only as all denominations accepted the teachings of the Scriptures on significant points of doctrine and polity. That Eaton would have equated his interpretation of Baptist beliefs and practices with the teachings of the Bible in any talks on Christian Union in which he may have participated is almost a certainty.

Denominational distinctiveness was a recurring theme in the *Western Recorder* under Eaton’s editorship. For instance, the front page of its May 1, 1890 issue featured pertinent columns on the subject by both J. M. Pendleton and Nashville pastor George A. Lofton. Lofton drew attention to the necessity that Baptists study their church’s Articles of Faith to ensure the congregation’s adherence to essential doctrinal particulars. Of special concern to him were the Calvinistic doctrines of grace, which would guard against incursions from Campbellite and Methodist errors:

> We are all sound perhaps as to the mode and subjects of baptism, as to the form of church government, church membership and the like, but when it comes to the doctrine of election and predestination, salvation solely by grace, the final perseverance of the saints and kindred subjects, many of our people stand, more or less, upon Arminian ground. . . . Let me say that the Baptist churches are built upon doctrine; and if they live they will have to exist on doctrine. . . . We have a creed, and we must either press it upon the world, or else it will be abandoned by the people.

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92 *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1890*, 22.


94 George A. Lofton, “What Do Baptists Believe?” *Western Recorder*, May 1, 1890.
Pendleton focused his attention upon an error perpetuated by evangelist D. L. Moody, who had apparently advised new converts: “Join that church where you can get most good and do most good.” Pendleton saw Moody’s nonsectarian advice as an unbiblical appeasement of selfish idiosyncrasy. Rather than appeal to the individual’s preferences for comfort, a Christian minister has a responsibility to instruct converts in obedience to Jesus Christ, the first step of which should be the ordinance of baptism.95

The widespread acclaim for popular evangelists like Moody—whose Louisville revival had received great attention in the pages of the Western Recorder—produced a spirit of ambivalence in many Baptists, who simultaneously applauded the public spiritual awakenings but apprehensively sensed an effort to forsake all denominational lines.96 Eaton promoted the importance of the Christian Union resolution as a means of making clear the biblical standards of cooperation:

Now the Baptists declare for union on the basis of Bible teaching, and propose that representative scholars seek to determine just what the teaching of the Bible is concerning the points of difference between the denominations. . . . The Bible is the recognized standard. It does not teach divergent doctrines. . . . When all Christians accept that faith and maintain it, there can, of course, be but one denomination. True Christian union, therefore, requires that all accept that faith and contend earnestly for it.97

Eaton declared that the impetus for further action lay with “our brethren of other denominations.”98 He insisted that Baptists demanded Christian union based upon an exclusive appeal to biblical authority rather than historic episcopates or ecclesiastical federations. Union upon any other basis would be “an intensely unchristian union.”99 By taking initiative in inviting an interdenominational forum as to the feasibility of unity,

95J. M. Pendleton, “Mr. Moody’s Position Untenable,” Western Recorder, May 1, 1890.
96J. L. Lloyd, “From Texas,” Western Recorder, May 15, 1890.
97T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, May 29, 1890.
98Ibid.
99Ibid.
Eaton hoped to protect Baptists against charges of stubborn uncooperativeness. Rather, he shifted the responsibility for action upon other evangelical denominations, promising that “If they really want Christian union, and are loyal to the Bible, now is their opportunity.”

Eaton reported that Northern Baptists echoed his call for an interdenominational forum at the 1890 meeting of the American Baptist Home Mission Society in Chicago. Eaton also published his reactions to negative response, such as a complaint against “Baptist exclusiveness” published in the Congregationalist newspaper. Once again, Eaton placed the blame for Christian disunity upon other denominations who ignored invitations to send representative scholars to a conference for the consideration biblical directives:

Our Paedobaptist brethren can cry, “Christian union, Christian union,” very freely when they have in mind Baptist exclusiveness; but when it comes to real business in the matter of Christian union they have nothing to say. The utterances of the representatives of more than three million Baptists in the United States, was kind, cordial and thoroughly practical; and yet not a Paedobaptist paper so far as we know—has had one word to say about it.

Eaton was especially critical of the pedobaptist denominations for refusing to respond to the Baptist resolutions passed at Fort Worth and Chicago, for which he made publication arrangements in the Christian Union. He lamented that “not a single Paedobaptist paper, so far as we know, has dared to express any opinion on these resolutions.” As 1890 drew to a close, he reported his disappointment that none of the major denominations had officially recognized his resolution at any of their general assemblies:

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100 Eaton, [editorial], May 29, 1890.

101 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder June 5, 1890; T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, September 18, 1890.

102 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, September 11, 1890.

103 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, September 25, 1890.
The Congregationalists have had their meeting but said nothing about Christian union. So far as we have seen, and we have been on the lookout, only two Pedobaptist papers—both Congregationalist—have even published the Baptist resolutions, and these two papers ventured no comment. . . . This is a most significant fact, and shows that Pedobaptists are unwilling to faithfully examine the Scripture foundation for their faith.104

The lone response to his union resolution came from the Disciples of Christ, which reportedly discussed the question at a convention.105 Eaton learned of the response through an extract in a weekly issue of the *Apostolic Guide*, wherein the Disciples’ convention had remarked that since the Baptist theory of conversion rested “fundamentally on the doctrine of total hereditary depravity,” the Disciples could permit no union with the Baptists. The Disciples argued that Baptists made faith a result of “miraculous regeneration,” rather than its cause and reduced baptismal fitness to an individual’s experientialism.106 Eaton responded that this was an unfair understanding of the Baptist position, noting that “saving faith is supernatural rather than miraculous, just as all spiritual life is supernatural” and that “with us baptism is not such much ‘because of the remission of sins’ as because of the command of Christ that those who believe should be baptized.”107 Though Eaton appreciated the attention from the Disciples’ publications, he concluded that the denomination had refused to make the Bible the basis of union by testing their soteriology views against Scripture. Eaton proclaimed:

> The farther this discussion of Christian union proceeds the more evident it becomes that “the Bible and the Bible only” is the religion of Baptists; and that they alone are willing to bring all their doctrines to the test of Scripture.108

Ultimately, Eaton’s efforts failed to result in the proposed outcome, providing him warrant to argue that the other denominations must consider Baptist preoccupation

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104 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, December 4, 1890.

105 Ibid.

106 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, December 18, 1890.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.
In lieu of his proposed evangelical conference, Eaton doubled down on the preeminence of Baptist principles. In one editorial, he took to task the Methodist luminary (and J. R. Graves’s former debate combatant) Jacob Ditzler. Ditzler had promised that he would donate the entirety of his personal library to “the Baptist College in Louisville,” if anyone could produce a Greek lexicon from the first five centuries that translated *baptizo* with a word equivalent to immersion. In this challenge, Eaton found plenty of fodder for editorial mockery:

> We suppose Dr. Ditzler meant the Baptist Theological Seminary. His not knowing the difference between a college and a theological seminary is on par with his ignorance on the baptismal question. And it seems that his library consists of some old antiquated lexicons which nobody thinks of using in these days, judging from his articles and reports of his speeches. . . . If Dr. Ditzler believes that *baptizo* means *sprinkle* or *pour* he can secure $1,000 cash for himself or for any object he will name by finding a single passage in the Greek language . . . where the word has any such meanings.¹⁰

### Pathway to the Fortress Monroe Agreement

Throughout the early 1890s, Southern Baptists made dynamic strides to solidify their denomination’s identity. The reestablishment of the Sunday School Board in 1891 proved to be a major landmark in moving the denomination away from dependence upon the American Baptist Publication Society to disseminate religious literature. Many Southern Baptists shared Eaton’s conviction that this was a necessary advancement. A. S. Worrell, a Southern Baptist of Clinton, Missouri, shared a letter in the *Western Recorder* calling for ABPS secretary Benjamin Griffith to acknowledge “the complete and rightful autonomy of the Baptist denomination South” by withdrawing

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¹¹T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, November 13, 1890.
every Society agent from the geographical region. Worrell called for the principle of “comity” to be respected by Baptists in the North and South in supplying religious literature for their own people. Other Baptists also wrote to the Recorder with open letters calling for Griffith to pull all ABPS agents out of the southern states.

Eaton stood alongside the Southern Baptists who objected to the presence of ABPS agents in the South. He affirmed the need for the Southern Baptist Convention to assume responsibility for distributing its own Sunday School material to the people in its geographic regions. Moreover, he believed the Southern Baptist Convention capable to subsume every form of religious service offered by the societies of Northern Baptists:

> It is said that the Publication Society is able, ready, willing, and waiting to do the work in its line which the Convention is now doing, and ready to allow Southern churches to be represented in its counsels, to give Southern Baptists a due share of the control of the Society’s affairs and to employ Southern men, etc., etc. Yes, and exactly the same is true of the Home Mission Society of New York and of the Missionary Union of Boston. . . . With the best wishes alike for the Publication Society, the Missionary Union and the Home Mission Society, we yet believe that the Convention ought to continue to exist, and we heartily advise all the churches in its territory to send their foreign mission money to our Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, their home mission money to our Home Board in Atlanta and to take the Kind Words series of Sunday-school helps for their Sunday-schools.

Eaton yearned to see Southern Baptists intensify their efforts to sustain their institutions and expand their influence. Taking numerical statistics from an issue of the 1891 American Baptist Year Book, Eaton brought attention to the fact that white Baptists in the South (1,344,500) outnumbered their counterparts in the North (786,000) by a ratio of nearly 2-to-1. Despite the general population of the North being three times greater

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112 Ibid.


114 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, February 12, 1891.

115 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, April 9, 1891.
than that of the South, the Baptist cause held a far greater percentage of influence. Eaton lamented that the religious institutions of the North boasted far greater financial support than the Southern Baptist equivalents. Furthermore, many Southern Baptist institutions owed their existence to large endowments of benevolent Northerners:

Nearly all our Southern colleges and universities are crippled for lack of funds, and much of what funds they have came from wealthy friends in the North. We have but one Theological Seminary, and a very considerable part of its equipment and endowment was supplied by the generosity of Baptists in the North.\textsuperscript{118}

From the 1891 \textit{Baptist Year Book} statistics on financial giving toward religious causes, Eaton estimated that the average contribution for each Baptist congregant in Kentucky amounted to only $1.49 per year.\textsuperscript{117} Eaton’s Walnut Street Baptist Church exhibited a much better average, leading the Long Run Baptist Association’s churches in annual contributions toward foreign, state, and district missionary causes for 1890, with an average of more than sixteen dollars contributed per each of its 1,564 members.\textsuperscript{118} Two years later, Walnut Street nearly doubled that total, contributing an average of almost twenty-nine dollars per member for a grand total of over fifty thousand dollars given toward Baptist causes.\textsuperscript{119}

Though Eaton regularly commended the generosity of Baptists for special offerings, he hoped that Southern Baptist churches might attain to consistently generous systematic giving to stabilize the vitality of the denomination’s mission boards. A funding strategy that was not dependent upon incessant appeals to emotions would allow for more ambitious accomplishments. Like most religious denominations in America, Southern Baptists reported a debt in their foreign missionary budgets for 1891. Eaton

\textsuperscript{116}Eaton, [editorial], April 9, 1891.

\textsuperscript{117}T. T. Eaton, [editorial], \textit{Western Recorder}, April 16, 1891.

\textsuperscript{118}Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1890 (Shelbyville, KY: Cozine & McReight, 1890), 14.

\textsuperscript{119}Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1892 (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1892), 18.
called upon state conventions to encourage the churches that missionary subscriptions ought to be a Christian duty:

The churches have come to the point where they must either change their methods or cease to call themselves missionary churches. The plea must be not the sufferings of the brethren, but our duty to God. It is for his glory that souls shall be redeemed. . . . The great excellence of the systematic giving which the General Association urges upon the churches of Kentucky is that it is addressed to the sense of duty, not to the emotions. . . . It asks Baptists to subscribe on the cards how much each will give during the year because it is their duty to support and is well pleasing to the God whom they love and worship.120

The General Association of Baptists in Kentucky was Eaton’s exemplary model for promoting a subscription system of giving throughout the churches. Eaton recommended that churches give early and often, and that each member exercise diligence in setting aside money to offer at every public gathering:

Our General Association is at work along the only line in which success is possible for steady support of missionary work. What it wishes the churches to do is to send to the State Board for cards and envelopes. . . . On those cards each writes what he will give per week or per month, if the church has only monthly preaching. Then the cards are gathered up by a deacon or the treasurer, and the envelopes distributed. And on every Sunday morning the well-known pink envelopes are put into the contribution boxes.121

He hoped to see this strategy become widespread practice in churches across the nation to support the various denominational boards:

And in other states let business men take control of this thing as they do of the preachers’ salaries, from a sense of duty and in the fear of God. . . . Let some one brother be put in charge of the collection for the separate Boards, if the collections are taken separately. . . . Let those in charge of the collection report, at the beginning, to the respective Boards how much has been subscribed and whether it is to be paid weekly, monthly, or quarterly, so that the Boards can know upon what they have to depend.122

Eaton established himself as a leading voice in the Southern Baptist Convention for greater denomination organization and effectiveness. On the other side of

120T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, July 23, 1891.

121T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, August 13, 1891.

122Eaton, [editorial], August 13, 1891.
the issue were Baptists like *Religious Herald* editor A. E. Dickinson, who still favored the societal methods and resisted denominational centralization due to concerns that the movement could jeopardize the autonomy and independence of the churches. Dickinson was among the more vocal critics of the establishment of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, and had often served as antagonist to Eaton in the columns of the *Religious Herald* over the earlier controversies involving the American Baptist Publication Society. Eaton declared Dickinson’s opposition to the Sunday School Board “absurd” and a logical inconsistency to oppose a Southern Baptist board in the name of “centralization” while still holding affinity for an American Baptist society. Eaton himself valued the autonomy of the local church, but he saw the establishment of the denominational boards as a means of supporting and enhancing the work of the local church, rather than centralizing ecclesiastical power.

In his advocacy on behalf of the future of the Southern Baptist Convention, Eaton deflected criticisms that the existence of the Convention should be viewed as a survival of sectionalism lingering from the departure of Southern Baptists from the Triennial Convention in 1845. Such criticisms came from some Baptists in the North like Thomas Armitage, who desired that Southern Baptists reunite and form a united Baptist Union in America, one which could jointly fund the various American Baptist societies. Eaton argued that his interest in Southern Baptist success owed entirely to the hope of greater efficiency in denominational work and the development of the local churches. Eaton explained that the expanse of the mission field demanded that Southern Baptists chart their own course:

> It is true the cause of the original division has passed away, but it by no means follows that the division itself should pass away. The conditions have greatly changed since 1844. The country has more than doubled in area in that period. The population has increased from 20,000,000 to 65,000,000. . . . Our Convention alone has already become so large that it is evident something must be done to reduce its

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123 T. T. Eaton, “Shall We Have a Sunday School Board?” *Western Recorder*, May 7, 1891.
size, or a division will follow. General bodies of Baptists must not get too far away from the churches. That as many general bodies as are consistent with thorough efficiency should be formed is according to the genius of Baptists, which is directly opposed to centralization.\textsuperscript{124}

To those Baptists who insisted upon the societal method as the preeminent means of funding missionary causes, Eaton countered that the older American Baptist societies failed to display the level of unity cherished by Armitage:

Not as a retort, but simply as a fact bearing upon the case, we mention that there is a lack of unity between the Publication Society, the Home Mission Society and the Missionary Union, although they hold their anniversaries together. This lack of unity was painfully manifested when Dr. Griffith offered a resolution in the meeting of the Publication Society inviting the officers of these other Societies and of our Convention to seats on the platform. No officer of these Societies responded.\textsuperscript{125}

For Eaton, Southern Baptists were better served to pursue plans of action which allowed greater voices of influence for the individual churches which comprised the denomination. On that point, the Southern Baptist Convention offered greater ministry potential to Baptists in the South than all of the Northern Baptist societies. Eaton insisted:

The efficiency of our denominational work and the development of our churches, the great aims to be sought, demand the existence of our Convention. No union is to be desired which is at the expense of efficiency. . . . Let there be, of course, the heartiest fraternity between all Baptists. This goes without saying, but in their organizations let them act solely with reference to the highest possible efficiency.\textsuperscript{126}

Eaton received some vindication that the convention-model served the interests of the local churches by an act which occurred at the 1891 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Birmingham, Alabama. During the proceedings, John A. Broadus called the Convention’s attention to the financial needs of South Side Baptist Church in the host city. The church was in progress of building a worship house, but fell into a perilous financial state after some of the chief subscribers died before paying. Eaton—

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\textsuperscript{124}T. T. Eaton, [editorial], \textit{Western Recorder}, May 29, 1891.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{125}Ibid.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{126}Ibid.
\end{flushright}
who also held office as one of the Convention’s four vice-presidents for the year—added his remarks in favor of assisting the congregation in need, and a voluntary contribution of $653.96 was collected toward that end. Eaton praised Broadus and the Convention’s generosity in the Western Recorder, noting that “In the circumstances it was a handsome, graceful and appropriate thing that the Convention . . . should hold out its helping hand to this church.”

Since the early era of Baptist missionary fundraising by the efforts Luther Rice and Adoniram Judson, some Baptists had been vocal critics of missionary salaries and administrative expenses. As the Southern Baptist Convention’s organizational structure grew throughout the 1890s, similar concerns were part of the denomination’s conversation. Eaton offered a rejoinder to the financial concerns by arguing that the Southern Baptist Convention’s organization provided a more reliable deterrent against excessive and irresponsible spending than the alternative offered by the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The expenses of the SBC Home Mission Board required express authorization of the Convention, and its administrative necessities totaled a considerably smaller amount than that of the ABHMS: $5,865.63 against $40,275.07. Consequently, Southern Baptists contributed $67,188.31 to the work of the Home Mission Board in 1891, a comparable total to the ABHMS for the same year. Eaton did not present the disparity as a criticism of the Society, but as an argument in favor of the responsible leadership and superior efficiency offered by the SBC Home Mission Board.

The American Baptist Publication Society’s 1892 Baptist Year Book supported Eaton’s insistence that Southern Baptists were the group best suited to advance the

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128 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, June 4, 1891.


130 Eaton, “The Expenses of our Mission Boards.”
Christian gospel. Of the 168,322 baptisms reported during 1892, southern states accounted for nearly 70 percent of the nation’s total. Eaton proclaimed the South to be “the Baptist stronghold of the world,” noting, “more than half of the Baptists of the earth live within the bounds of the Southern Baptist Convention.” He attributed much of the success to his conviction that Southern Baptists possessed a more orthodox doctrinal culture than their Northern and British counterparts. Determined to prove that Baptist churches were committed to right doctrine and holy living rather than boasting in numerical additions, Eaton also cited 42,464 excommunications among Baptist churches for the previous year, nearly one fourth the number of new baptisms.  

At the 1893 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, enthusiasm for organized denominational missionary work gained added momentum. Eaton chaired the “Centennial Committee,” and he delivered a lengthy address titled “Conscience in Missions: Centennial Address,” which was later published by the Baptist Book Concern. Eaton communicated his vision that organized and intentional giving to missionary causes would become as commonplace in Baptist churches as a pastor’s salary and that Baptists would rise to support the endeavor through dutiful tithing. In calling the messengers to action, he called for greater devotion to Jesus Christ, whom he deemed “the great first Baptist missionary. . . . infallibly inspired in his words and guided in his movements by the Holy Spirit.” Eaton desired for Baptists to cleanse materialism from their congregations just as Jesus cleansed the money changers from the Jerusalem temple:

This talk of money, money, money, in our churches and in our associations and conventions is a repetition of the old filling of the courts of the temple. . . . Because

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132 Ibid.
133 T. T. Eaton, Conscience in Missions: Centennial Address (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1893), 20.
we fail to give the Lord a tenth as a matter of course, all this talk about money takes up the time of our gatherings.”

Eaton’s committee report called upon Southern Baptists to raise $250,000 for the permanent enlargement of the Foreign and Home Mission Boards and to impress tithing as a Christian duty upon church members “who do little or nothing for missions.”

Presenting the report on behalf of an SBC committee on Home Missions, J. B. Gambrell of Mississippi called upon Southern Baptists to greater effectiveness in evangelizing mission fields beyond the safe confines of the local church and neighborhood. The address showed remarkable boldness in its emphasis upon welcoming the nearly seven million African-Americans within reach of a Southern Baptist congregation, noting “instead of a spirit of exclusion, let us face outward and send our men with our prayers and our money wherever Providence opens the way.” The Western Recorder’s summary of the address featured a more colorful picture than the official report published in the SBC annual, remarking “[Gambrell] ridiculed the Old South and their pride . . . He compared our fathers in the South to a wheelbarrow which would not fit with anything else and said the South should repent her exclusiveness and seclusion.”

Following discussion and the adoption of Gambrell’s report, J. M. McManaway delivered a report on behalf of a Home Missions committee on “The Colored People,” that likewise called upon Southern Baptists to cultivate “close fraternal relationships with the colored Baptists of the South . . . with a view to a wise encouragement and assistance of them to do themselves, in so far as may be possible, the

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134 Eaton, Conscience in Missions: Centennial Address, 23–24.


136 Ibid., 32.

137 “Southern Baptist Convention,” Western Recorder, May 18, 1893.
work needed among them.”\textsuperscript{138} With urgency, McManaway warned that the alienation of blacks from Southern Baptists would allow for the encroachment of Roman Catholics. W. H. McAlpine, an African-American missionary of the Home Mission Board, spoke to McManaway’s report, reportedly giving “a glowing account of the good which had been done and the prospects for the work.”\textsuperscript{139}

The question of geographical sovereignty for missionary field work became a matter which increasingly occupied the attention of Southern Baptists. In the previous years, Southern and Northern Baptists had struggled amongst themselves regarding who should distribute Sunday school material to churches and whether to continue funding societies or channel resources toward denominational boards. In the early 1890s, the question of African-American outreach became another point of discussion in missionary efficiency.

I. T. Tichenor, the corresponding secretary of the SBC Home Mission Board, championed the Board’s missionary effectiveness across the South since its relocation from Marion, Alabama, to Atlanta, Georgia. At the 1892 convention, he proclaimed that “there was not a missionary to the white people of the South who did not bear a commission from either the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, or one of our State Boards in alliance with it.”\textsuperscript{140} Tichenor pointed to this success as proof that the HMB had “won the confidence of the denomination” and justified its own “right to live.”\textsuperscript{141} The surge of support for the Home Mission Board and the Sunday School Board gave Southern Baptists renewed confidence to focus their efforts and resources on

\textsuperscript{138} Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1893, 32.

\textsuperscript{139} “Southern Baptist Convention,” Western Recorder, May 18, 1893.

\textsuperscript{140} Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1892 (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing House, 1892), xi.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
supporting denominational entities to reach the people of southern states, moving away from the societies favored by Northern Baptists.

When the Southern Baptist Convention met in Dallas, Texas, in May of 1894, Eaton once again stepped to the forefront with a resolution that would shape the future of the denomination. At the annual meeting, Eaton served as chairman of the Convention’s Committee on Resolutions, and he presented a resolution calling for a committee of Southern Baptists to confer with a similar committee appointed by the American Baptist Home Mission Society. This conference between the committees would work for “a more definite understanding in regard to the territorial limits” of their respective missionary work toward African Americans and all other ethnic groups across America. ¹⁴²

The American Baptist Home Mission Society agreed to the arrangement and met together at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, on September 12–13, 1894. Six Southern Baptists, including Eaton and Tichenor attended the committee representing the SBC, and they invited Virginia professor Noah K. Davis to accompany them during the discussions. Southern Baptists B. H. Carroll and A. J. S. Thomas had planned to accompany them, but were unable to attend. The American Baptist Home Mission Society was represented by eight men. The outcome of the conference clarified the work of each denomination, and it became a landmark moment in the development of the Southern Baptist Convention, one that clarified the denomination’s intention to become self-sufficient. J. L. Howard, of the Society, served as chairman, with O. F. Gregory and N. E. Wood representing each denomination in a secretarial capacity. The participants finalized the results of the conference for publication and a printed summary subsequently appeared in various Baptist serials, including the Baptist Home Mission Monthly and the Western Recorder.

The conference participants shared the sentiment that “the whole meeting was marked by Christian courtesy, unanimity of feeling, and an evident desire on the part of brethren from both sections to get closer together in their work for Christ.”\textsuperscript{143} The joint committee recommended that Home Mission Board and the Home Mission Society “direct their efforts to localities not already occupied by the other.”\textsuperscript{144} Pre-existing schools for African Americans would remain under the control of the American Baptist HMS, but local advisory committees associated with the Southern Baptist Convention would assume responsibility for promoting and supporting the schools. In this way, both sides hoped for greater cooperation and efficiency in mission work among African Americans.

\textit{The Baptist Home Mission Monthly} noted that “Dr. Eaton was confident that the proposed co-operation in educational work would open the way to financial aid—not much at first, more at length.”\textsuperscript{145} Eaton commended the conference’s cooperative spirit: “It was a most remarkable meeting and a most wonderful agreement. Every vote was unanimous. There was not a note of discord nor even of dissent.”\textsuperscript{146}

In a \textit{Western Recorder} editorial, Eaton proclaimed Fortress Monroe to be a great victory for the future work of the Southern Baptist Convention. Eaton gave thanks for what he perceived as favorable divine providence:

\begin{quote}
We thank God and congratulate the denomination on this agreement, which, it is believed, will eliminate all friction in our mission work. This is the most happy result of the movement we inaugurated at Dallas, and we hope the whole outcome
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[144]Ibid.
\item[145]“Special Notes on the Conference at Fortress Monroe,” \textit{The Baptist Home Mission Monthly} 16 (October 1894): 406.
\item[146]“A Patch of New Sky,” \textit{The Baptist Home Mission Monthly} 16 (October 1894): 409.
\end{footnotes}
will be in keeping with this happy beginning. . . . The way is at last open for us to do all we have it in our hearts to do for the Negroes of the South.\textsuperscript{147}

Keith Harper, a Southern Baptist historian, likened the Fortress Monroe comity agreement to a denominational equivalent to Appomattox:

This cadre of denominational elites framed the agreement that helped settle longstanding inter-regional differences. . . . Fortress Monroe marks a watershed moment for Baptists in America. If the Civil War had addressed the issue of “what is America” and “what kind of people culturally and politically” Americans would be, Fortress Monroe helped define those answers for Baptists.\textsuperscript{148}

Fortress Monroe fell short of setting a clear strategy for white Baptist relations with their black Baptist counterparts, largely on account of the fact that no African-American representative received an invitation to the conference. America’s black Baptists paralleled white Southern Baptists in favoring self-sustained institutions, evidenced by their organization of the American National Baptist Convention to oversee their own home mission and educational endeavors. While Fortress Monroe was a turning point in relations between Baptists in the North and South, it did little to advance relations between Baptists black and white.\textsuperscript{149} Nevertheless, the significance of the conference in shaping future relationships between Southern and Northern Baptists is undeniable. In the wake of the comity agreement, the Southern Baptist Convention clearly stood upon its own legs.

Conclusion

At Walnut Street Baptist Church, Eaton led his own congregation to give generously to denominational causes. By his direct denominational involvement through committee membership and engagement of the parliamentary process at convention and

\textsuperscript{147}T. T. Eaton, [editorial], \textit{Western Recorder}, September 20, 1894.


\textsuperscript{149}Ibid., 125–26.
associational meetings, Eaton’s voice became a constant presence at annual assemblies. Through his editorial influence with the *Western Recorder*—supplemented by the publishing arm of the Baptist Book Concern—Eaton was able to disseminate his concerns into the homes of Baptists in Kentucky and across the southern states.

As a newspaper editor, Eaton prioritized doctrinal distinctiveness of the Baptists compared to other denominations. He championed Christian orthodoxy against the challenges of the “New theology,” and commended evangelical doctrine wherever he saw it, even in non-Baptist sources like D. L. Moody. However, Eaton held unwavering commitment to pure New Testament ecclesiology, of which he believed the Baptists alone possessed. He invited dialogue with other denominational representatives so that the rubric of pure Christianity might be made clear.

Eaton engaged in editorial controversy with Northern Baptist societies, arguing that Sunday School literature produced by the American Baptist Publication Society violated the doctrinal and social interests of Southern Baptist churches. Eaton supported the establishment of a denominational Sunday School Board as a means to ensure the preservation and promotion of the interests of Southern Baptist churches. He continued to defend Baptist distinctives and encourage a stronger denominational identity among Southern Baptists.

The Fortress Monroe conference became a pivotal moment in both the development of the Home Mission Board and the entire Southern Baptist Convention. In 1894, the Southern Baptist Convention made a definitive break from the societies of Northern Baptists indicative of the maturity of its denominational consciousness. Robert A. Baker, commenting upon this era of growth between 1882 and 1894, credited Home Mission Board corresponding secretary I. T. Tichenor as the most significant personality in securing the denomination’s future.\(^\text{150}\) Complementing the leadership of SBC Board

employees like Tichenor was the dynamic influence of Eaton, whose efforts to influence Baptists to support their denominational entities reached culmination in 1894.

By the mid-1890s, Eaton had reached the peak of his influential standing among Southern Baptists at both the local and national level. He was able to leverage this influence with arguably unmatched success to unify his fellow Baptists toward cooperative endeavors. Though he remained a local church pastor and state newspaper editor, he wielded as much political influence as any other leader within the Southern Baptist Convention. If Eaton had died immediately following the Fortress Monroe resolutions, his legacy would have likely become defined as one of the key figures responsible for the development of the Southern Baptist denominational consciousness. Ultimately, however, his controversy with William Heth Whitsitt would not only occupy his attention for the remainder of the decade, but it would also change the historical narrative of his life and work.
CHAPTER 6
EATON AND THE WHITSITT CONTROVERSY

When the writings of Southern Seminary president William Heth Whitsitt challenged longstanding Baptist belief in the doctrine of church succession, a denominational controversy ensued that lasted three years. T. T. Eaton, who believed that church succession theory was essential to Baptist identity, challenged Whitsitt on both the historiographical and political fronts. Using his influence as pastor, trustee, editor, publisher, and parliamentary participant, Eaton led a sizeable number of Southern Baptists to pressure Whitsitt into resignation.

Eaton and Whitsitt

During their first decade together in Louisville, Eaton and Whitsitt shared much in common and grew into Southern Baptist leaders greatly revered among their peers. Whitsitt, however, harbored ambitions of challenging commonly accepted assumptions about Baptist history. During the 1890s, the relationship between the two men became increasingly strained, especially due to Whitsitt’s election to the presidency of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and their divergent opinions on how the denomination ought to relate to the Baptist Young People’s Union.

Whitsitt’s Discovery

Of all the congregants of Walnut Street Baptist Church under Eaton’s pastorate, Whitsitt is the most notable name associated with his historical legacy. In 1896, Eaton waged a very political public battle against Whitsitt over the question of Baptist identity. Prior to the controversy, both men shared experiences as friends, war veterans, and collaborators in both the local church and higher education.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary held its first session in Louisville in 1877 after relocating from its original location on the campus of Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. In 1879, the institution experienced its first ideological crisis that resulted in the resignation of Old Testament professor Crawford H. Toy from the faculty over his acceptance and advocating of Darwinian evolution and biblical higher criticism. Whitsitt had been a friend of Toy, and the two men were the first professors to be added to the faculty after the seminary’s four founders: James P. Boyce, John A. Broadus, William Williams, and Basil Manly, Jr. After the resignation of Toy, the seminary faculty consisted of only Boyce, Broadus, and Whitsitt, until Manly left the presidency of Georgetown College to reunite with the seminary and fill the void left by Toy. The circumstances of Toy’s departure embittered Whitsitt, who wrote in his diary that Boyce and Broadus had orchestrated events to ensure Toy’s departure.\(^1\)

Whitsitt suspected his senior faculty members might conspire to set a trap to convict him of heterodoxy as well. He marriage proposal to Boyce’s daughter Elizabeth met with rejection, which Toy suspected to stem from the influence of her father.\(^2\) Before Whitsitt traveled to London for a special study in 1880, Broadus requested him to provide a full statement of his views on biblical inspiration, an invitation that Whitsitt understood as a malicious trap.\(^3\) Furthermore, he had little respect for Manly’s acumen as an Old Testament scholar and believed that the elder professor took satisfaction in Toy’s departure.\(^4\)


\(^{2}\)Ibid., 85.

\(^{3}\)Ibid., 83–84.

\(^{4}\)Slatton, *W. H. Whitsitt*, 84.
When the seminary moved to Louisville, Whitsitt joined the Chestnut Street Baptist Church, but he soon moved his membership to the Walnut Street Baptist Church around the time of his marriage. Having met with rejection from Elizabeth Boyce, Whitsitt focused his pursuit upon his long-time friend Florence Wallace of Tennessee, and they wed on October 4, 1881. The Whitsitt couple joined Walnut Street on December 18, 1881, with the church receiving William Whitsitt by transfer of membership letter. Florence Whitsitt, who had been a Presbyterian prior to her marriage, joined the church upon her profession of faith and received baptism by Eaton the following Sunday night.  

Like Eaton, Whitsitt also came to exhibit extensive participation in Baptist denominational life, though not to the same degree of regularity as Eaton. Whitsitt often accompanied other fellow congregations to the annual meetings of the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky as a messenger from Walnut Street Baptist Church, in addition to service on various state ministry committees. Whitsitt was a frequent attender of the Long Run Baptist Association meetings as a messenger from Walnut Street, standing shoulder to shoulder with Eaton, Broadus, Manly, and A. C. Caperton, even moderating the 1891 Long Run annual meeting.

In nearly fifteen years as members of Walnut Street, the Whitsitt family practiced intensive dedication to the congregation’s ministries. The 1883 Walnut Street church manual listed the wives of Eaton and Whitsitt among the church’s Sunday school teachers. Whitsitt served on various committees alongside other prominent Baptists in the congregation such as Manly, Broadus, W. B. Caldwell, and Arthur Peter.  

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6 *Manual of the Walnut Street Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky* (Louisville: Walnut Street Baptist Church, 1883), 16.

7 Kimbrough, *The History of the Walnut Street Baptist Church*, 132–43.
In 1896, Whitsitt admitted that his personal “discovery” of English Baptist baptismal practice came about in 1877, while preparing his Baptist history lectures for the seminary’s autumn session. Whitsitt claimed he kept the discovery to himself until he had opportunity to travel to London’s British Museum three years later. Whitsitt desired to prove the genuineness of his discovery by an appeal to the historic pamphlets archived across the Atlantic.

On his academic sabbatical to London during the summer of 1880, Whitsitt busied himself with research in the British Museum, coming into first contact with the so-called “King George’s pamphlets,” named in honor of King George III, who had delivered the collection of publications apparently composed between 1640 and 1662. Upon discovery of the existence of these documents, Whitsitt sensed that he was sitting upon a goldmine of historical insights which most of the London Baptists had ignored. Between June and July, Whitsitt made regular daily visits to study the pamphlets with the aid of a copyist. In a letter to his future-wife Florence, Whitsitt admitted he had “become so much absorbed in my history that I am likely to forget what is wholesome for me.”

In August of 1880, Whitsitt also visited libraries in Cambridge and Oxford before departing for home on August 14. Fearing a potential denominational backlash that he might face by challenging prevailing assumptions about the practice of immersion in Baptist history, he chose to publish his findings anonymously in the pages of the Independent between June 24 and October 7 of the same year. The New York-based newspaper was a natural outlet for Whitsitt, since his former colleague Crawford Toy was

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8 W. H. Whitsitt, “Baptist History: Dr. Whitsitt Replies to H. M. K.,” The Examiner, April 23, 1896.

9 Slatton, W. H. Whitsitt, 93–97.

10 Ibid., 94.
serving as the *Independent*’s literary editor at the time.\(^{11}\) In the *Independent* articles, Whitsitt claimed that documentary evidence could not support any instances of immersion among English Baptists prior to 1641. Furthermore, he asserted that the 1639 baptism of Roger Williams, widely regarded as the first Baptist in America, would have been administered through some mode other than immersion.\(^{12}\)

Whitsitt eventually admitted to have written four such anonymous editorials for the *Independent*, which appeared in the June 24, September 2, September 9, and October 7 issues for 1880. In the June 24 article, Whitsitt anonymously declared, “the English Baptists never dreamed of the possibility of immersing an *adult person* as a religious ceremony before the year 1641.” Therefore, John Smith, John Spilsbury, William Kiffin, John Clarke and Roger Williams were all baptized by the mode of sprinkling.\(^{13}\) In his September 9 *Independent* article, Whitsitt used the phrase “invention of immersion” to describe the evolution of English Baptist beliefs about baptism in 1641.\(^{14}\) This particular choice of words would ultimately prove to haunt Whitsitt in the 1890s after Southern Baptists learned that he authored the anonymous articles.\(^{15}\)

While never committing his discovery to print using his own name until the 1890s, Whitsitt grew frustrated in silence. He believed that other Baptist historians like A. H. Newman and Henry Dexter had taken his ideas published in the *Independent* without giving him proper credit for the research. Dexter’s book *John Smith, the Se-Baptist* appeared in print in late 1881, and it argued for many of the same ideas advocated


\(^{13}\)[William H. Whitsitt?], *The Independent*, June 24, 1880.


anonymously by Whitsitt. As Baptist historians continued to discuss the matter in print, Whitsitt felt restrained to sit upon his research for fear of doing damage to his career at the seminary.\footnote{Gregory A. Wills, \textit{Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859–2009} (Oxford University Press, 2009), 195–96.}

On March 5, 1892, Whitsitt signed a contract to write all articles pertaining to Baptist studies for the \textit{Johnson's Universal Cyclopedia}, published by A. J. Johnson in New York, for a compensation of $500 in company common stock, of which Whitsitt remarked, “amounts to nothing.”\footnote{William H. Whitsitt, “Excerpts from the Diary of William Heth Whitsitt,” 7, SBTS.} Whitsitt submitted nearly forty articles in total, consisting of historical sketches of individuals and the historical development of both Baptists and Anabaptists. Unlike his 1880 \textit{Independent} articles, he attached his own name to these works, making clear his persuasions on the baptism of Roger Williams and the development of immersion among English Baptists in the seventeenth century.\footnote{Slatton, \textit{W. H. Whitsitt}, 162–63.} In his article titled “Baptists,” Whitsitt reiterated his conclusions about the 1641 introduction of immersion among English Baptists and that Roger Williams was likely baptized by sprinkling. \textit{Johnson’s Universal Cyclopedia} saw publication in eight volumes, the first of which appeared in 1893, and the series saw various reprintings throughout the 1890s. Whitsitt’s article on “Baptists” was included in the first volume, along with other articles ranging from the letter “A” to the subject of “Calculus.” However, Whitsitt’s articles were not widely read among Southern Baptists until his entry on “Baptists” became the subject of controversy in the spring of 1896. Once the writings finally came to the attention of Eaton and other Southern Baptists, the ensuing controversy came with great personal and political costs to both Eaton and Whitsitt.
Eaton, Whitsitt, and the Ties that Bound Them

Eaton and Whitsitt knew each another from their years as youth spent in Tennessee. In 1857, Whitsitt enrolled at Union University under the presidency of Eaton’s father, Joseph Haywood Eaton. As a Baptist youth, Whitsitt was inundated in the Landmark ideology popularized by J. R. Graves, who held great influence among the churches of middle Tennessee. Whitsitt especially admired James Madison Pendleton and the elder Eaton.\textsuperscript{19} Whitsitt even composed a historical sketch on the life and ancestry of Joseph H. Eaton, which he delivered for a commencement ceremony at Southwestern University in 1887.\textsuperscript{20} Whitsitt and Eaton knew each other well, particularly after their relocation to Louisville brought them back into immediate proximity. Though their early years together in Louisville were often characterized by respectful cooperation, by the mid-1890s, their friendship had disintegrated into spirited antagonism.

The program for the May 2, 1881 commencement of Southern Seminary lists Eaton as the deliverer of the ceremony’s opening prayer. Though Eaton was still in the early stages of finalizing his move to Kentucky that month, he quickly became an integral part of the seminary community. Eaton joined the institution’s Board of Trustees beginning with the 1882–1883 academic year, and he remained on the Board until his death in 1907.\textsuperscript{21} Additionally, he served as the Board’s secretary for the 1886–1887 and 1887–1888 sessions. A longtime supporter of the school and its founding professors, Eaton also attended lectures at the seminary in the early 1880s.

As a seminary trustee, Eaton had privilege to see the internal records on a yearly basis, and had an annual opportunity to recommend courses of action. In 1886,\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19}Slatton, W. H. Whitsitt, 21.

\textsuperscript{20}William H. Whitsitt, “The Life and Ancestry of Joseph Haywood Eaton,” SBTS.

\textsuperscript{21}Catalogue of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1882–1883 (Louisville: A. C. Caperton, 1883), 3.
Whitsitt convinced Eaton to intercede on his behalf with faculty chairman and treasurer James P. Boyce to raise his salary to the equivalency of the other faculty members. According to Whitsitt’s diary, Boyce rejected Eaton’s proposal at the May 1886 meeting of the seminary trustees, even threatening to resign—along with the older elder faculty members—if Whitsitt’s salary was raised. Furthermore, Boyce apparently chided Eaton for daring to write the other trustees in advance on the matter and for gaining financial data from the seminary clerk instead of approaching him personally. Neither Whitsitt nor Eaton pursued the matter further with Boyce.\(^{22}\)

After the death of Boyce on December 28, 1888, John A. Broadus succeeded him as president of the seminary. Eaton now held the distinction of being pastor to the man who was arguably the most influential Southern Baptist statesman of his generation. While reporting on behalf of the Long Run Association’s Schools and Colleges Committee, Eaton lamented the passing of Boyce but praised the seminary’s progress under Broadus:

> The death of Dr. Boyce was a great loss to our Theological Seminary; but the friends of the institution have rallied anew to Dr. Broadus, the new President, and the institution is more prosperous than ever. Through the munificence of Mrs. J. Lawrence Smith a building for the library has been provided for and through a like munificence of Mrs. G. W. Norton and Mrs. Wm. F. Norton, the building for lecture rooms and chapel is provided for conditioned upon the addition of $100,000 to the endowment. Of this about $60,000 has been secured.\(^{23}\)

> As noted by Eaton, the financial abundance and generosity of Sarah Julia Smith, the daughter of the Hon. James Guthrie who had been widowed since the death of J. Lawrence Smith in 1883, enabled the seminary to construct its first dedicated library. Smith was one of Eaton’s congregants at Walnut Street, where she and her husband had held long-term membership. Few individuals expressed as much benevolence toward the seminary as Mrs. Smith, who continued to make donations to the institution in the

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\(^{22}\) Slatton, W. H. Whitsitt, 117–19.

\(^{23}\) Minutes of the Long Run Association, 1889, 6.
form of large monetary sums and other unique gifts that included helping Eaton purchase an Egyptian mummy while touring Europe, Egypt, and Palestine in March of 1896.\textsuperscript{24}

The McFerran Memorial Baptist Church— one of Walnut Street's most prominent offspring— organized on January 23, 1890, and it was located at the corner of Louisville's Fourth Avenue and Oak Street. Eaton's acumen for fundraising secured a strong foundation for McFerran's constitution, and he encouraged many of Walnut Street's most prominent and wealthy members to join the roles of the church plant.\textsuperscript{25} McFerran's initial membership role was filled with fifty-seven persons from Walnut Street and an additional thirty-two persons from other Baptist congregations.\textsuperscript{26}

Some of the seminary's professors moved their memberships in order to help strengthen the roles at the new church. The seminary professors understood the importance of their involvement in the city's largest Baptist churches, both to provide leadership to the congregations and to promote the seminary's prestige across the city. Due to the death of Boyce, Broadway Baptist lacked a great seminary luminary, so Broadus encouraged Whitsitt to consider transferring his membership there. Whitsitt, however, was not willing to accommodate the request, as he had no interest in the call "to fill up holes" and believed his standing at Walnut Street too valuable to lose. In a diary entry dated January 18, 1890 he recorded his reservations:

Kerfoot and Sampey are about to cast in their lot at McFerran Memorial. Broadus is solicitous that I should quit Walnut Street and go to Broadway to supply the deficiency of Professors there. I shall stay where I am. I have something more dignified to do than to be going about to fill up holes for my colleagues which they had no business to leave open.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24} Regarding Julia Smith's generosity, see John R. Sampey, 	extit{Memoirs of John R. Sampey} (Nashville: Broadman, 1947), 74.

\textsuperscript{25} Manual of the McFerran Memorial Baptist Church (Louisville: Charles T. Dearing, 1900), 3–4.

\textsuperscript{26} T. T. Eaton, [editorial], 	extit{Western Recorder}, January 30, 1890.

\textsuperscript{27} William H. Whitsitt, "Excerpts from the Diary of William Heth Whitsitt," 7, SBTS.
When Eaton celebrated his ninth anniversary as the pastor of Walnut Street, Whitsitt recognized him with fraternal joviality. The church’s Sunday school class honored him with a presentation, and Whitsitt spoke to the significance. A record of the event was published in the *Western Recorder*:

Dr. Whitsitt, who spoke first, introduced his address by a reference to the fact that Horace, in his Art of Poetry, suggested that the writer of a poem should wait nine years before publishing it. The church had had Dr. Eaton as a poem pastor for nine years and now would publish him. Nine years ago the tie of pastor and people had been created, and the speaker was reminded that nine years ago another tie very important and interesting to him began to exist. Dr. Whitsitt said he appreciated this tie so much that if he could raise the money this summer he intended to signalize the fact by taking a bridal tour. A great bank of flowers adorned a table near by, and he informed us that it contained a cluster of nine rose buds, each representing a pastoral year, and he hoped that to these would be added year by year, until they should number fifty. He indulged in no fulsome eulogy, but spoke honestly and impressively what everybody felt to be true of Dr. Eaton and his work as pastor.²⁸

Eaton likewise held Whitsitt in high public regard. At the 1891 annual meeting of the Long Run Association, the messengers unanimously elected Whitsitt to the moderator’s chair. Remarking upon the occasion in a *Western Recorder* editorial, Eaton lauded his command of parliamentary procedure:

> We knew that Dr. Whitsitt had done well in everything he had ever undertaken, but we had never seen him as Moderator. He proved himself a true master of assemblies, giving perfect satisfaction in all respects.²⁹

Eaton had long esteemed the seminary and promoted it through fundraising efforts in the churches where he had been a pastor. He viewed its existence as a vital ligament in the Southern Baptist Convention’s organic structure, as the Convention had the authority to nominate candidates for the school’s trustee board. He pointed to its Abstract of Principles, the seminary’s creedal foundation, as the guarantee of its fidelity to the interests of the denomination:

> We are happy to say that the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has a very definite creed drawn up by Dr. Boyce, which every professor must sign and pledge

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himself to maintain or he cannot occupy his chair. Thus the denomination can know just what doctrines are to be taught to the students. Our Seminary also is organically connected with the Southern Baptist Convention. . . . The denomination must become unsound before the Seminary can become so, and the great and constantly increasing influence of the Seminary upon the churches is to keep them sound in faith. We can never be grateful enough to God for giving the denomination the wise and true men who laid the foundations and reared the superstructure of our noble Seminary. 

Despite Whitsitt’s praise of Eaton’s pastoral tenure, the professor grew increasingly frustrated by the company his pastor kept, particularly W. P. Harvey, whom Whitsitt suspected of financial imprudence if not unscrupulousness. In his diary, Whitsitt criticized Harvey’s “high style of living,” despite his reliance upon credit mortgage to finance the Baptist Book Concern. 31 On one occasion in July 1892, Harvey apparently encroached upon Whitsitt’s dignity by insisting that he fill the Walnut Street Baptist Church’s pulpit on a morning previously scheduled for Whitsitt. Harvey’s sermon, which Whitsitt described as a “blunderbuss,” argued for the succession of Baptist churches from the apostolic age until the present day. 32 Frustrated that ardent successionism had taken hold of the Walnut Street congregation, Whitsitt resigned himself to the conclusion that there was “no hope of correcting Baptist ignorance on Baptist history.” 33 Whitsitt quietly resolved not to “provoke any issue” but “bide my time,” at the risk that the congregation would surely rally against him for questioning the historical basis for successionism. 34

**Breaking Ties: The Baptist Young People’s Union Controversy**

During the 1890s, a pressing denominational question became how Baptist churches ought to relate to extra-ecclesiological religious societies. Most prominent

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30T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, October 29, 1891.


32Ibid., 163–64.

33Ibid., 164.

34Ibid.
among these societies were the Christian youth movements, which some alarmed Baptists feared might “rob the churches of the work which Christ has committed to them and to them alone.”35 In 1891, the Baptist Young People’s Movement formally organized as a national society, independent of the Southern Baptist Convention or any of its state and local associations. As the movement grew in popularity, many Southern Baptists remained hesitant to endorse it through local church sponsorship.

Eaton personally opposed local church endorsement of the Baptist Young People’s Union, on account of the fact that it was a society without accountability to the local church. Furthermore, he held concerns that the B.Y.P.U. encouraged women to speak and pray in mixed public assemblies. From Eaton’s viewpoint, an endorsement of the Union would risk undermining the authority of Scripture.36

Eaton’s sister Josephine Peck offered similar criticism of the Y.M.C.A. in one of her “Senex” columns. She commended the organization for its benevolent work that helped to keep young boys away from theatres, saloons, and other vices, but denounced the organization for trying to incorporate formally and attempt to infringe upon the responsibilities of churches. Senex stated,

They have not been content with being a benevolent society, they must need attempt to do the work of the churches, and make themselves a sort of church without the ordinances. They send out evangelists, hold meetings, send missionaries, and in many ways take upon themselves the work of the churches. Their evangelists are too much given to preaching what has come to be known as the “Y. M. C. A.” religion, which is a long way from Calvinism to say the least.37

Though Eaton was out of the country touring Europe for much of the summer of 1892, references to the controversy continued to appear in the columns of the Western Recorder. Eaton intended to lead the Walnut Street Baptist Church into taking a public

35“Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor,” Western Recorder, January 30, 1890.

36T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, September 22, 1891.

37Senex [pseud.], “Questions Answered,” Western Recorder, June 30, 1892.
position on the matter.\textsuperscript{38} His opposition antagonized some of his fellow congregants, including Whitsitt, who wrote in his diary, “I have not followed him in his crazy opposition to the Southern Baptist Young People’s Union.”\textsuperscript{39}

Whitsitt believed that Eaton would ruin his public reputation through his opposition to the B. Y. P. U., and he took a public stand against Eaton at Walnut Street in late 1893:

Last Sunday afternoon there was a meeting held by a Committee of which I was a member to fix the attitude of Walnut Street Church toward Societies of every kind. I was out and out opposed to the project of Eaton to commit the Church against the Young People’s movement. . . . I stood out almost alone, [and] I should have been overcome but for the timely aid of Broadus.\textsuperscript{40}

In May of 1893, the Southern Baptist Convention held its annual meeting in Nashville, where a specially-appointed committee reported to the messengers with a favorable assessment that local church sponsorship of a society could prove to be a great advantage in promoting “increased spirituality of our Baptist young people, their stimulation in Christian service, their instruction in Baptist doctrine and history, and their enlistment in all forms of missionary activities.” The committee recommended that any constituted society remain “strictly Baptist and denominational and be under the sole authority of the local church without interdenominational affiliation.”\textsuperscript{41}

In response to the Young People committee report, Eaton arose to state his conviction that any youth organization’s affiliations be absolutely limited to the authority of its own local church. He remarked, “Let each church that so desires have a meeting for young people with no earthly connection with anything or anybody except its own

\textsuperscript{38}C. Ferris Jordan, “Thomas Treadwell Eaton: Pastor, Editor, Controversialist, and Denominational Servant” (Th.D. diss, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965), 115.

\textsuperscript{39}Slatton, \textit{W. H. Whitsitt}, 175.

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 170.

church.” In sympathy with the local church emphasis was J. B. Hawthorne, who warned messengers that extra-ecclesiological organizations might condone practices unacceptable to Baptists, such as allowing women to speak to mixed assemblies. Ultimately, however, the convention adopted the original committee report.

Whitsitt received nomination to the committee to recommend a Southern Baptist response to the movement the following year, which included other Southern Baptist leaders such as Lansing Burrows, I. J. Van Ness, and Edgar Young Mullins. At the 1894 Southern Baptist Convention, Eaton and Whitsitt came into conflict due to their different views on the subject. The Committee on Young People’s Societies reported to the convention on its suggestions. Burrows presented the report, offering seven resolutions. The committee report recommended youth work to be under the direction of the local church, and it encouraged churches to organize “strictly denominational” societies, unions, or meetings “under the control and direction of the local churches.”

According to the Western Recorder’s summary, Burrows warned churches “unless we push this great work we will be left far behind.”

Lengthy discussion followed the report, and Eaton tried to amend the committee’s fourth resolution to emphasize the authority of the local church to an even greater degree by calling for the church societies to “have no outside allegiance.”

According to the Recorder summary, Eaton begged for the messengers’ patience to hear

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42 “Southern Baptist Convention,” Western Recorder, May 18, 1893.

43 Ibid.


46 “Southern Baptist Convention,” Western Recorder, May 17, 1894.

his reasoning on account of the fact “he had not made a speech during this Convention.”  

He proceeded to denounce extra-ecclesiological societies as decidedly unbiblical:

There is a society craze now-a-days. Many people say that whenever there is a need, organize a society. We do not need so many organizations. I have been charged with being an old foggy. I can do more for right than for speed. This is the Catholic idea. The New Testament gives us all the organization we need. The church is all we need. All the good there is in this movement is to keep it along Bible lines. We have in the old church all the work that is needed to be done. The trouble is that we run the age line in the church. There is great harm that comes from this. We do not need more harness, but more horse.

Arising to speak against Eaton’s amendment was the Sunday School Board’s J. M. Frost, who called for unanimity of the original report in the interests of reaching all classes of children, but Frost confessed he did “not like to oppose Bro. Eaton.” Other messengers echoed Frost’s sentiments that Young People’s Unions were critical to the future of Baptist outreach. Despite his pontificating, Eaton’s amendment failed to pass by a vote of 141 against 198. Thus, the convention adopted the committee’s original report. In an editorial explaining his substitute resolution, Eaton stated his concern that the original resolution might become misconstrued as an “endorsement of the whole movement.” He further expressed regret that the amendment vote occurred with less than half of the messengers present and that, had not sickness prevented B. H. Carroll from an opportunity to speak in favor of his amendment, he might have turned the political tide.

Discussion of the subject continued throughout the decade, and Eaton continued to emphasize the priority of the local church in organizing all youth work and

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49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., 37.


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warned that patronizing the B.Y.P.U. threatened to draw support away from other missionary boards with superior organization.\(^{53}\) Despite many critical editorials, a committee meeting in Atlanta resolved to organize a “Southern Baptist Young People’s Union” as an official auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention in 1895, and it officially constituted in 1897.\(^{54}\) Eventually, even the Walnut Street Baptist Church added a B.Y.P.U. program.

Before the Whitsitt controversy came to dominate his editorial attention, Eaton reserved much newspaper column space for continued discussion of youth societies. In 1896, the *Western Recorder* printed an article by Rev. Joseph Shackelford expressing concerns that such unions—even ones affiliated with the Young People’s Union Auxiliary of the Southern Baptist Convention—might weaken the unity of congregations by segregating the membership:

> This separating of the young members from the older, is taking away, to a great extent, the strength of the church, for the younger members are, or ought to be, the strength of the church in many things. . . . This is an admission that our young people are losing interest in the church, and that the doctrines and work of the church are insufficient to interest and retain its younger members. . . . I know that brethren who favor this enterprise will not admit this, but it seems to me it is a legitimate conclusion.\(^{55}\)

Eaton voiced concerns held by many Southern Baptists regarding the uneasiness against endorsing youth religious societies outside of the jurisdiction of the local church. However, some Baptists perceived his outspokenness on the subject as unnecessarily quarrelsome. With Eaton and Whitsitt (along with many other Southern Seminary professors) taking contrasting positions regarding openness to the societies, the


seeds of aggravation were sown which would bloom into outright conflict when Whitsitt challenged prevailing assumptions about Baptist history.

**The Fractured Friendship**

After the death of John A. Broadus in 1895, some Kentucky Baptists believed Eaton to be his potential successor as seminary president, and many believed Eaton coveted the position. In his *Memoirs*, John R. Sampey recalled a conversation between himself and Broadus about one year before the latter’s death in which he remarked with no elaboration, “My pastor would like to succeed me as President of the Seminary, but it would be a mistake.” Whatever the basis for Broadus’s unwillingness to bless Eaton’s ambitions, concerns about Eaton’s temperament had been raised by James P. Boyce as early as 1874, when he referred to Eaton as “too hifalutin” in regard to his prospects of success as a pastor of the First Baptist Church of Augusta, Georgia.

Considering the long friendship shared between Broadus and Eaton, Broadus’s simple comment need not necessarily imply a personal slight against his younger contemporary, but it may indicate that Broadus thought Eaton’s giftings to be better suited in other pursuits. In Eaton’s years editing the *Western Recorder*, he had widened his influence in the denomination, but this came with the side-effect of casting his reputation as a man ready to run toward controversy. Eaton’s vocal criticisms of the Baptist Young People’s Union in recent years had put him at odds with other Baptist leaders, and his election to the presidency of the sole denominationally-sponsored seminary would have risked isolating a sizeable percentage of Southern Baptists across the nation. Ultimately, the seminary’s Board of Trustees nominated only two persons for

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Broadus’s presidential successor: Whitsitt and theology professor F. H. Kerfoot, whom Eaton likely preferred for the office.\textsuperscript{58} Despite the brief statement he heard from Broadus, Sampey did not remember Eaton’s name ever appearing as a serious candidate for the presidency in any newspaper or trustee board meeting.\textsuperscript{59}

Whitsitt’s diary revealed a rivalry had formed between himself and Eaton for the seminary presidency. While Broadus struggled in his final months of life, Whitsitt wrote of his pastor:

Eaton is against me as a successor of Broadus in the Presidency of the Seminary. . . . He and Warder will give me trouble if it is in their power. . . . I have never quite given up hope that [Eaton] would finally vote for me. It might be compromising for him to do otherwise.’’\textsuperscript{60}

Eaton publically denied that he had ever held personal aspirations for the seminary presidency:

We have never had the slightest desire to be President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and we challenge any one to point to a single word or act of ours that can fairly bear such an interpretation.\textsuperscript{61}

Whitsitt, however, was fully convinced that Eaton had made every effort to wrestle the presidency from him. In a September 30, 1895 diary entry, Whitsitt recounted details from the trustee board meeting that resulted in his unanimous election:

I was elected President of the Seminary unanimously at the meeting of the Board of Trustees at Washington City on Thursday May 9 at about 11 P.M. I was also made financial agent in place of Kerfoot who resigned that office as a part of his campaign for the Presidency. . . . Eaton was also a candidate. His scheme was to defer the election one year and meanwhile to work his machinations. . . . Eaton’s motion to defer the election for one year was not seconded and so got no consideration.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{58}Slatton, \textit{W. H. Whitsitt}, 276–277; \textit{Memoirs of John R. Sampey}, 73.

\textsuperscript{59}\textit{Memoirs of John R. Sampey}, 80.

\textsuperscript{60}Slatton, \textit{W. H. Whitsitt}, 175.

\textsuperscript{61}T. T. Eaton, [editorial], \textit{Western Recorder}, September 10, 1896.

\textsuperscript{62}Whitsitt, ”Excerpts from the Diary of William Heth Whitsitt,” 8.
By the mid-1890s, a definite personal rift had formed between Eaton and Whitsitt. Whitsitt wrote of Eaton, following a February 1895 anniversary sermon preached at Walnut Street Baptist Church:

His usefulness is about over. [Eaton] preached a Hardshell sermon on contending earnestly for the faith. . . . If that shall represent the spirit and methods of his future operations it would be a mercy of the Lord for him to die now.  

Whitsitt’s festering resentment of Eaton and Harvey coincided with his chronic frustration of remaining silent regarding his historical discoveries in the British Museum. Though expected to lead Southern Baptists as a statesman and seminary president, Whitsitt was still a scholar at heart who yearned to make a lasting contribution to the field of Baptist history. On the subject of immersion, however, Whitsitt recognized the great personal cost that would result from his attempt to break long-cherished paradigms about the denomination’s history. The friendly ties that had bound Eaton and Whitsitt together for decades, albeit perhaps tenuously, had been strained by their disagreement on extra-ecclesiological youth societies. However, the controversy that ensued after Whitsitt’s views on Baptist history became a point of public discussion would signal a definitive end to any pretense of congeniality between them.

The Whitsitt Controversy

In the Whitsitt Controversy, Eaton explicitly demonstrated his propensity for leveraging the political processes inherent in the Southern Baptist Convention to build consensus against Whitsitt. His publishing connections allowed him to issue frequent statements regarding all facets of the controversy to a wide audience. He used his connections among other influential Kentucky Baptists to keep Whitsitt and his supporters on the defensive regarding Baptist history and denominational loyalty. His standing among Baptists provided him ample opportunity to shape the political debates

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63 Slatton, W. H. Whitsitt, 174–75.
that waged at the associational, state, and national levels of the denomination. Ultimately, Eaton’s efforts exhausted Whitsitt and his defenders when the seminary’s denominational support became threatened.

**Josephine Eaton Peck and the Western Recorder**

The public controversy over Whitsitt’s statements on Baptist history began when Henry Melville King, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Providence, Rhode Island, authored a critical review published in the March 26, 1896 issue of the New York Examiner regarding one of Whitsitt’s Johnson’s New Universal Cyclopedia articles. Whitsitt’s article on “Baptists” stated that English Anabaptists had practiced baptism by sprinkling or pouring until changing the mode to immersion in the early 1640s. Furthermore, Whitsitt claimed “no traces of believers’ immersion have yet been discovered in England between 1509 and 1641.” Perhaps more notably, American Baptist pioneer Roger Williams’s baptism ceremony was “most likely performed by sprinkling; the immersion of believers had not yet been restored in England; and there is no reason which renders it probable that Williams was in that regard in advance of the people with whom he now allied himself.” King, as pastor of the historic church founded by Roger Williams, took particular offense to the article, on account of Whitsitt’s statement on Williams’s baptism.

News regarding Whitsitt’s article spread quickly, as the popularity of Baptist church successionism was widely known even outside the denomination, and many

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67 Memoirs of John R. Sampey, 80–81.
people believed the theory to be the lynchpin of Baptists’ claim to be true New Testament churches. At the core of the controversy was the question of the means by which Roger Williams received his baptism in 1639. *The Central Methodist* of Cattlesburg, Kentucky, published a statement on Whitsitt’s alleged viewpoint along with the snide comment that “our Baptist brethren are getting their eyes open, and the fact that Roger Williams was baptized by sprinkling . . . knocks about the last prop from under them.”

T. T. Eaton spent much of the early months of 1896 leading an extended tour through Europe, Palestine, and the Orient. Accompanying him on the trip were many of the most prominent members of Walnut Street Baptist Church, including W. P. Harvey and Sarah Julia Smith. Eaton invited Whitsitt to preach twice in his absence at the Walnut Street pulpit, with monetary compensation.

Despite Eaton’s being out of the country for most of the spring of 1896, the *Western Recorder* gave extensive attention to the Whitsitt controversy. Many of the unsigned editorials were likely penned by Eaton’s sister Josephine Peck, who served on the newspaper’s staff uncredited and continued to answer weekly mail questions using the *nom de plume* of “Senex.” Most of the seminary faculty understood the extensive editorial involvement of Peck at the *Recorder*, even though her name never appeared on any column. John R. Sampey noted his *Memoirs* that “her trenchant pen filled the editorial columns, and guided the policy of the paper. . . . the thin disguise of a *nom de plume* could not hide from a discerning reader the face and form of the gifted woman who sat day by day in the editorial office.”

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preaching, pastoral visits, and traveling had intensified by 1896, his sister ensured the Recorder’s editorial direction remained in order.

The April 23 issue of the Recorder served to ignite the Whitsitt controversy among Kentucky Baptists, as Peck acknowledged the Johnson’s Cyclopaedia article with an anonymous editorial. A correspondent identified as “M. S. L.” wrote the Recorder asking if the Southern Seminary trustees might react against Whitsitt, who had authored the controversial article claiming Roger Williams was not baptized by immersion and that English Baptists did not practice immersion prior to 1641. Peck wrote emphatically that Whitsitt’s claims threatened the core of Baptist faith:

The Recorder very emphatically does not agree with Dr. Whitsitt. We believe—past all possibility of conviction to the contrary—that the Baptists adopted immersion in the year 30, and have been immersing ever since. To say that Baptists at any time had not adopted immersion seems on a part with saying that at some time Christians had not adopted belief in the existence of God. A man cannot be a Christian at all who does not believe in God, and a man is not a Baptist who does not believe in believers’ immersion. There may have been a time in the history of England in which there were no Baptists on that island. Certainly there were none there before the Christian religion was introduced. But whenever there was a Baptist he believed in the immersion of believers. 71

In a May 7 editorial, the questions of immersion and church succession came into clear focus. The Recorder, likely through the pen of Peck, rooted commitment to Baptist succession in the belief that the absence of immersed congregations would necessarily invalidate true communion and, by further implication, Jesus’s promise of the endurance of the true Church in the world. Even if Baptists could not trace succession, they ought to believe it:

We believe that Baptists have been immersing ever since, because we believe communion is a church ordinance, and that baptism must precede it. . . . Can we trace succession? No. It may never be traced till all his saints are gathered together in His Kingdom and talk over the past. . . . But while we cannot trace succession, and feel grateful to God that we cannot, in view of the danger of adhering to tradition instead of going straight to the New Testament, we believe as strongly as any one that there has been a Baptist succession because we believe that the Lord’s Supper is a church ordinance, and can only be rightly celebrated by immersed

believers, and that true churches shall thus show forth the Lord’s death till He comes.\footnote{T. T. Eaton, [editorial], \textit{Western Recorder}, May 7, 1896.}

On the question of Roger Williams, Peck insisted that he must have surely been immersed. Furthermore, she believed that historic Baptist concern for the succession of proper administrators exceeded the zeal of the contemporary Landmarkers:

Our Baptist fathers seem to have been great sticklers for what may be called “Apostolic succession.” In this they were stiffer than the staunchest Landmarker of to-day. Roger Williams showed what they felt when he feared there was no way to secure true baptism then on earth. It is said that in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century some of the Baptists in England heard that in Germany there were Baptists who had something new in the way of baptism. This must have referred to something in the line of “succession”—that these Germans could trace their baptism further back towards the Apostles than could the English Baptists. For immersion was no new thing in England. . . . The Westminster Assembly meeting in 1641 only lacked one vote of adopting immersion as well as sprinkling.\footnote{Ibid.}

Even in the infancy of the brewing controversy, Whitsitt sensed his seminary presidency would likely have a short tenure, writing in his diary on April 15, “Our days in the President’s House are likely to be few and full of trouble.”\footnote{Whitsitt, “Excerpts from the Diary of William Heth Whitsitt,” 9.} He had harbored bitterness against Eaton’s sister for years before the outbreak of the current controversy. In his diaries, Whitsitt recorded various instances of his disgust of the widowed Mrs. Peck.\footnote{Slatton, \textit{W. H. Whitsitt}, 157–58.} He referred to her as a “vicious old woman” who demonstrated “barbarian coarseness.”\footnote{Ibid.} Whitsitt was especially disappointed with her moral expectations upon seminary students, and Peck reported to professors (and at least once to the \textit{Christian Observer} students whom she overheard brag—possibly in jest—about theatre attendance and drunkenness. Whitsitt had no respect for her mental prowess, noting:

\begin{quote}
Logic is a curse to Mrs. P. . . . She syllogizes from her narrow premises with absolute confidence; her conclusions are always incontestable and infallible. The
\end{quote}

\footnote{Whitsitt, “Excerpts from the Diary of William Heth Whitsitt,” 9.}
logical disease, like leprosy, must be a horrible calamity: it disfigures Mrs. P. to amazement.\(^{77}\)

The April 23, 1896 issue of the *Western Recorder* featured an aggressive denunciation of Whitsitt’s claims courtesy of J. H. Spencer. Spencer did not have access to an actual copy of *Johnson’s Cyclopedia*, but he had read extracts from the March 26 issue of the *Examiner* and found Whitsitt’s position heretical. He mocked the scholarship of Whitsitt for claiming such a view, suggesting that any reputable historian would immediately dismiss the notion if not for Whitsitt’s public prominence as the president of Southern Seminary:

> I could but ask myself the question: Could the learned professor have been in mental equilibrium when he wrote the article? The utterances are too puerile in themselves to merit much attention from historians. But dignity and credence are accorded to them, in the popular mind, on account of their having been written by the professor of ecclesiastical history in the largest Baptist Theological Seminary in the world, and published in an able and popular encyclopedia. Such contravention of all authentic history, secular and ecclesiastical, would attract little attention if made by an ordinary scribbler.\(^{78}\)

Spencer’s article employed heavy doses of ridicule against Whitsitt’s position, and it also painted Whitsitt as disloyal to the denomination. He referenced King’s *Examiner* article, which suggested that Whitsitt relied heavily upon Congregationalist Henry M. Dexter, who had also argued that English Baptists introduced the practice of baptismal immersion. Spencer viewed Whitsitt’s use of non-Baptist sources as tantamount to denominational treason:

> So Dr. Whitsitt, one of the most amiable and candid of men, has allowed himself to be strangely led by this discredited Pedobaptist scribbler instead of following our accredited historians. And to what end? Only to afford small Pedobaptist scribblers and preachers some plausible excuse for gratifying their enmity against the Baptists by misrepresenting their denominational history. But unfortunately for truth, Dr. Whitsitt is not the only Baptist whose “broadmindedness” and “liberality” have led him to give readier credence to Pedobaptist fiction than Baptist facts. Now, as always, our most potent enemies are those of our own

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household. It was the army of Hellas that wasted Troy, but it was the enemies within the walls who opened the gates to the invaders. 79

John T. Christian, in a letter published in the Recorder, posited “three monumental mistakes” in Whitsitt’s encyclopedia article:

1. A historical mistake in that he has published as a fact what at best is only an opinion. . . 2. An official mistake in that as President of the Seminary he has hopelessly divided his constituency. 3. A personal mistake in that thousands of not very discriminating people will write him down as a heretic. And all of this without any compensation, historical, official, or personal. 80

Southern Seminary professor A. T. Robertson submitted a lengthy article in the Recorder defending Whitsitt and dismissing the controversy as unnecessary “excitement” driven by unfortunate “rash statements” from persons who had not even bothered to read Whitsitt carefully or investigate the historical documents which led Whitsitt to his conclusions. 81 Robertson affirmed his colleague’s commitment to immersion as the true New Testament baptism, and he suggested that the current controversy “does not involve the reality of Baptist succession.” 82 He emphasized that Whitsitt was simply reporting on his documentary findings in the British Museum’s pamphlets regarding the historical practice of early English Baptists, and he encouraged critics to wait patiently for Whitsitt’s extended discussion of the subject in a forthcoming publication. Perhaps in response to Robertson’s plea for careful reading of source material, the Western Recorder’s May 28 issue printed three columns of extracts from Whitsitt’s Johnson’s Encyclopedia article, as many Baptists (including T. T. Eaton) still had not seen the actual article. 83

79 Spencer, “Dr. Whitsitt on Baptist History,” 2.
81 A. T. Robertson, “Dr. Whitsitt and Early English Baptists,” Western Recorder, April 30, 1896.
82 Ibid.
The Return of Eaton

Whitsitt’s article aroused the attention of Eaton and his family. As noted by biographer C. Ferris Jordan, Eaton’s adult son Joseph H. Eaton wrote to him on May 11, 1896, with the charge, “It is now absolutely necessary that you take a decided stand.” Eaton’s return to Louisville on May 30, 1896 allowed him the opportunity to quell the controversy, if he would have wished. Southern Seminary professor John R. Sampey approached him soon after his return from the Palestine trip with a plea toward that end, but it fell upon deaf ears. In addition to his faculty status, Sampey also served as the seminary’s librarian, and when Eaton entered the seminary’s library to examine a book, Sampey made his appeal:

I greeted him warmly, and told him that I was especially glad that he was back home. I then referred to the war on Dr. Whitsitt, and suggested that he was the one man who could quiet the uproar; that he knew Dr. Whitsitt intimately, and that he was a sound Baptist; that a few lines from his pen in the Western Recorder would reassure the brethren.

According to Sampey’s Memoirs, Eaton’s reply was cold and detached from personal sentiment:

He replied that he saw no reason to interfere with the discussion. I made bold to press my appeal and said to him that some of us younger men were wondering whether he might not become a leader of Southern Baptists in the place of Dr. Broadus. He again repeated his purpose to let the discussion go on without intervening.

Sampey’s final appeal apparently only served to infuriate Eaton:

Then I spoke my mind, “If you let this war against your friend, whom you know to be a sound Baptist, continue in the Western Recorder, you will still be a leader, but only of the reactionary wing among Southern Baptists.” He gave his head a slight jerk and with a characteristic sniff through his nostrils, replied, “I do not see

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85 “Among the Churches,” Western Recorder, June 4, 1896.

86 Memoirs of John R. Sampey, 83.

87 Ibid.
it that way.” He turned and entered the stack room in search of the book. My appeal had failed, and the war went on.  

In his first Western Recorder editorial following his return from the foreign tour, Eaton formally engaged Whitsitt’s claims and expressed his astonishment that Whitsitt was defending a viewpoint at odds with Baptist principles:

It was a startling piece of information that came to us abroad that Dr. Whitsitt had made the “discovery” that “prior to 1641 the English Baptists were in the practice of sprinkling and pouring for baptism,” and then they “adopted immersion.” . . . We have loved Dr. Whitsitt for forty years, and we expect to love him forever; yet we profoundly regret that he should have taken the position he occupies in regard to early English Baptist history. While it does not attack the citadel of our faith, it does make against the cause he and we are alike anxious to advance. We hope he will re-examine his authorities and revise his conclusions.  

Eaton revealed that, in the course of his travels abroad earlier in the year, he had opportunity to visit the British Museum to consult some archival works which contradicted Whitsitt’s supposed discovery on the practice of immersion. Eaton devoted a few days of his group’s stay in London to examine the “King George’s pamphlets” cited in Whitsitt’s encyclopedia article. Eaton remarked that Spencer’s article against Whitsitt “had made quite a stir among our English brethren,” and that London’s W. H. King had already begun consulting the King George pamphlets in order to investigate Whitsitt’s research.  

King presented some materials he found most pertinent to Eaton for reference and publication in the Recorder, and Eaton asserted, “All the evidence we got hold of contradicts Dr. Whitsitt’s theory.”  

Eaton referenced a 1641 pamphlet by Edward Barber titled “A Small Treatise of Dipping,” wherein Eaton believed Barber “takes immersion for granted, and argues against infant baptism,” in contrast to Whitsitt’s claim that Barber authored the initial

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88 Memoirs of John R. Sampey, 83.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
argument for immersion among the Baptists. Eaton also cited the “Prayer Book of Edward VI” (1549) as a testament to the established practice of immersion and only allowed for baptism by affusion in cases of poor health. Eaton further appealed to Daniel Featly’s 1644 “The Dippers Dipt or the Anabaptists Ducked and Plunged Over Head and Ears at a Disputation in Southwark, London”—an assault against Baptists and Anabaptists—as evidence that immersion must have been a longstanding practice. If Baptists had only adopted immersion three years prior to Featly’s publication, he almost certainly would have charged the English sect with recent changes to established practices. Regarding Featly’s silence upon the supposed change, Eaton concluded there had been no such abrupt alteration of baptismal mode:

The whole treatise goes on the idea that they had been immersing all the time. . . . Throughout he never intimates that these people he opposes were anything else, or ever had been anything else, than “Dippers.” His book, bitter and venomous as it is, shows considerable research, and must have required some time for its preparation. Yet he writes less than three years after the change from sprinkling and pouring to immersion is claimed to have taken place, and had never heard of it, but writes entirely to the contrary.93

Discussion over Whitsitt’s views continued in the columns of the Recorder in the following months. Henry C. Vedder, Baptist historian and Crozer Theological Seminary professor, endorsed Whitsitt’s position and objected to John T. Christian’s quotations of his writings in a previous column. Christian offered his own reply and reiterated his contention that Whitsitt was unwarranted in his attempts to prove Roger Williams and the English Baptists must have practiced sprinkling prior to 1641.94

The editorial position of the Western Recorder, in response to criticism that it had not printed any further pieces from Whitsitt himself, was that “we have already

92 Eaton, “Dr. Whitsitt’s Theory.”

93 Ibid.

published Dr. Whitsitt’s views, as found in the Encyclopedia article, and our columns are crowded.” Eaton took the public position of paying respect to Whitsitt’s character, while showing no sympathy for his historical research or scholarly conclusions. He urged fellow Baptists to avoid undignified conduct in regard to the seminary president:

Let it be borne in mind that Dr. Whitsitt is not at all responsible for the sneers that are flung at those who differ with him; nor is anybody responsible for ugly things said except those who say them. It is entirely possible to be clear, positive and emphatic without being rude and insulting. . . . It is bad enough that this controversy has arisen, but let not the matter be made worse by our brethren’s losing any of their religion. Some of us have so little that we cannot afford to lose any. Dr. Whitsitt, whom we have ever delighted to honor, has made a mistake, a peculiarly unfortunate mistake, which we hope he will see and correct; but the matter will not be helped any by brethren’s making mistakes. In this connection, one mistake is enough.

Eaton’s forceful article put pressure upon Whitsitt to publish a more extensive report of his investigation of his British Museum research. As Whitsitt continued to prepare his fuller manuscript for publication, he and other Kentucky Baptists readied themselves for a likely conflict at the Kentucky state association meeting. In this first political confrontation, Whitsitt would acquit himself well, but it would only be the first of many such heated parliamentary contests over the next two years.

The First Parliamentary Contest

The General Association of Kentucky Baptists held its annual meeting in Bowling Green from June 20 to 22, and the supplementary Kentucky Baptist Ministers’ Meeting met during the previous two days. Walnut Street Baptist Church sent six messengers to the meeting, a group that included Eaton, Whitsitt, W. P. Harvey, and seminary professor H. H. Harris. Other notable messengers in attendance were John T.


96 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, June 18, 1896.


The messengers elected J. S. Coleman (of the Daviess County Association) as moderator by universal consent. In the first business session on Saturday, Eaton gifted the General Association with a gavel he acquired during his Palestine tour. The association did not entertain a morning sermon due to the amount of pressing business matters. 98 The “pressing business” concerned Whitsitt’s views on English Baptist history. Christian offered a resolution requesting Johnson’s Cyclopedia refrain from republishing Whitsitt’s article on baptism due to “the doubtfulness of its harmony with historic truth.” 99 Additionally, Christian offered to endorse the article if the veracity of Whitsitt’s claims could be proven. At the end of discussion, Eaton closed the morning session in prayer.

During the day’s afternoon session, Christian’s resolution became the subject of discussion. S. H. Ford—who had earlier in the proceedings reminisced fondly of his memories of J. R. Graves and J. M. Pendleton—favored the resolution. 100 Opposing the resolution was Carter Helm Jones of Louisville’s East Church, who argued that the resolution should be rejected in absence of evidence on hand. Eaton, attempting to honor the gracious spirit of his June 18 Western Recorder editorial, expressed his public regret regarding “unkind remarks and insinuations on either side of this question,” and he added

98 General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1896 (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1896), 10–11.


100 Ibid.
that Whitsitt “had really added to our knowledge of church history,” despite his conviction that he was mistaken on the history of immersion.\textsuperscript{101}

Whitsitt then quoted some historical sources in support of his position and proclaimed himself to be “as sound on Bible baptism as any one,” affirming that “the first Baptist church was constituted in A. D. 30.” Reiterating his opposition to infant baptism, Whitsitt claimed he stood with “the most enlightened historians of the age, and this was the cause of his offending.”\textsuperscript{102} According to Eaton, the convention voted 73 to 50 in favor of Christian’s resolutions, but the matter was reconsidered and Christian decided to withdraw his resolution.\textsuperscript{103} No record of the discussion appeared in General Association’s official record of the day’s proceedings.\textsuperscript{104}

Consistent with previous years, Eaton continued to exhibit his regular presence in the business sessions, presenting annual reports for the General Association’s committees on foreign missions and relations to state colleges. Eaton’s foreign missions report was supplemented by the Woman’s Missionary auxiliary, which featured the reading of a letter from Lottie Moon and an address from Eliza Broadus on the importance of early and regular financial giving to promote denominational missions and unity.\textsuperscript{105} Whitsitt, along with I. M. Wise and W. J. McGlothin, received appointment to the committee on Kentucky Baptist History for the following year.

Reports of the Bowling Green convention spread across the various Baptist newspapers, with many proclaiming the meeting to be a decisive victory for Whitsitt. J. W. Bailey of the \textit{Biblical Recorder} wrote Whitsitt rejoicing, “You vanquished Eaton and

\textsuperscript{101}Eaton, “The General Association.”

\textsuperscript{102}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{103}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{104}Slatton, \textit{W. H. Whitsitt}, 190.

\textsuperscript{105}\textit{General Association of Baptists in Kentucky}, 1896, 29.
Christian at Bowling Green.”106 Rumors persisted that Eaton and Harvey had endeavored to conspire against Whitsitt at Bowling Green, but the parliamentary outcome came as a relief to many Baptist friends of Whitsitt who wanted to avoid a prolonged controversy over the historical question.107 T. P. Bell and I. J. Van Ness, editors of the Christian Index, complemented Whitsitt on reports that “he riddles the Eatonites unmercifully.”108 R. H. Pitt, co-editor of the Religious Herald, wrote Whitsitt declaring, “the heathen are still raging” and encouraged him to publish his pamphlet to make his findings conclusive.109

Despite the inaction of the state convention and the confidence of Whitsitt’s supporters, reports of Eaton’s demise were greatly exaggerated. Eaton provided his editorial commentary on the state convention’s heated debate regarding Whitsitt. He highlighted the fact that the only Baptist to defend publicly the merits of Whitsitt’s writings was Whitsitt himself, but Eaton promised to “reserve most that we have to say” until Whitsitt published his full explanation in a forthcoming pamphlet.110 He assured readers that more critical interaction would have occurred during the convention’s proceedings, but “owing to the lack of time, those of us who would have replied [to Whitsitt’s oral defense] yielded, and allowed the vote to be taken.”111

He expressed sympathy for the mental and emotional distress that Whitsitt had endured in the previous months of controversy, but Eaton insisted upon the professor’s

111 Ibid.
error in claiming Baptists began immersing in 1641, that the first English Baptist church organized around 1610 or 1611, and that Roger Williams was baptized by sprinkling. He noted that the only two Baptist historians to whom Whitsitt appealed—Henry C. Vedder and Albert H. Newman—did not agree with Whitsitt’s encyclopedia article. Furthermore, Eaton insisted Whitsitt contradicted his own article in his Bowling Green convention comments when he assured the messengers that he believed the “first Baptist church” organized in the year 30.\textsuperscript{112}

Eaton continued to utilize the \textit{Western Recorder} to press against Whitsitt, and he allotted many columns to like-minded Baptists who contested the veracity of Whitsitt’s scholarship. John T. Christian remained the most vocal critic of Whitsitt’s claims. In the \textit{Western Recorder} of June 25—the same issue which featured the detailed account of the General Association proceedings—Christian’s column “A Chapter in American History” rebuked Whitsitt’s assertion that immersion was not introduced to Baptists in America until 1644 by Mark Lukar.\textsuperscript{113} Christian countered that “the original authorities” (to which he had access) gave “direct proof and reflect many side lights on the subject of immersion in England and America from 1600 to 1644.”\textsuperscript{114} He cited extracts from William Bradford’s \textit{Plymouth Plantation}, Joseph B. Felt’s \textit{Ecclesiastical History of New England}, William Gammell’s \textit{Life of Roger Williams}, and Benjamin Peirce’s \textit{History of Harvard University} as evidences for the presence of immersion in the New England colonies well before the baptism of Roger Williams. Christian concluded the totality of the older histories testified that “none of Dr. Whitsitt’s sprinkling theories will bear the light of historical investigation” and that even “if no other facts had been

\textsuperscript{112}Eaton, “The General Association.”


\textsuperscript{114}Ibid.
presented, these would prove that in every essential point Dr. Whitsitt’s theories were fables.\textsuperscript{115}

The \textit{Western Recorder} eventually published a statement from Whitsitt on the matter in its issue of July 9, in which Whitsitt insisted the precise time of the introduction of immersion among English Baptists was “purely a question of history.”\textsuperscript{116} Therefore, it would do nothing to undermine the core tenets of the Baptists’ faith that they were churches according to the New Testament pattern. Whitsitt affirmed his full commitment to the seminary’s Abstract of Principles, and he also affirmed that immersion was the biblical expectation for Christian baptism:

The rite of immersion was inaugurated in New Testament times by divine authority and made essential to baptism. It stands or falls with the New Testament. It does not stand upon the practice of Christian people in England before or since the year 1641.\textsuperscript{117}

Whitsitt also evidenced a degree of contrition for the means he had employed in publicizing his findings from the British Museum. He explained that he viewed his discovery as an interest primarily shared by “scholarly historians,” and that his decision to announce his research anonymously through the New York’s \textit{Independent}—“that undenominational journal”—was a “blunder of the head and not of the heart.”\textsuperscript{118} Eaton, in the issue’s editorial column, commended Whitsitt, saying, “We are specially that glad that he does not defend his course . . . but frankly admits his mistake” in coming “at his brethren concealed under the guise of a Pedobaptist editor, publishing his views as editorials in the \textit{Independent}.”\textsuperscript{119} Eaton further expressed his optimism that Whitsitt

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115}Christian, “A Chapter in American History.”
\item \textsuperscript{116}William H. Whitsitt, “Statement by Dr. Whitsitt,” \textit{Western Recorder}, July 9, 1896.
\item \textsuperscript{117}Whitsitt, “Statement by Dr. Whitsitt.”
\item \textsuperscript{118}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{119}T. T. Eaton, [editorial], \textit{Western Recorder}, July 9, 1896.
\end{itemize}
would maintain “his readiness to admit any other mistakes on his part that may be proved to be such.”¹²⁰

On the same page as Whitsitt’s statement was a forceful accusation from John T. Christian that Whitsitt had copied a quotation by seventeenth-century Fifth Monarchist Praise God Barebones from Henry Martyn Dexter’s 1881 book *The True Story of John Smyth, the Se-Baptist*—rather than the British Museum—for his encyclopedia article. Christian included excerpts from Dexter and Whitsitt in side-by-side columns for comparison, and concluded that Whitsitt had plagiarized the quotation without giving credit to Dexter. He snidely advised Whitsitt to “edit a new edition of Dr. Dexter’s book instead of writing one of his own, as he has revealed nothing that Dexter has not already said.”¹²¹ Whitsitt, of course, believed that Dexter had lifted his own ideas from his 1880 articles in *The Independent.*¹²²

In addition to Christian’s newest charge, the *Recorder* also included a column by Eaton’s British correspondent W. H. King that challenged the accuracy of Whitsitt’s citations from the pamphlets at the British Museum.¹²³ The Christian and King articles literally sandwiched Whitsitt’s own statement on the newspaper page of the July 9 issue. Eaton gave special editorial praise to King’s columns, asserting that “his continued investigations confirm the position we have taken,” and further promising that “[King] will pursue these investigations till he has exhausted the material in the British Museum.”¹²⁴

¹²⁰Eaton, [editorial], July 9, 1896.


¹²⁴T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, July 9, 1896.
In spite of all Whitsitt’s public statements avowing commitment to immersion and distinctive Baptist principles, the seminary president privately entertained less enthusiasm for the practice of immersion among Baptist churches. He believed Baptists placed selective importance upon the ordinances of baptism and communion while ignoring other New Testament church models. Whitsitt hoped that Baptists would eventually see their inconsistency and abandon all appeals to the Apostolic model. In an 1886 diary entry where he recorded his frank thoughts on winter revival services at Walnut Street Baptist Church conducted by F. D. Hale, Whitsitt expressed amusement that the great crowds in attendance threatened to elevate the respectability of Baptist citizenship, despite their socially insensitive insistence upon immersion and strict communion:

The crowd this evening filled aisles and gallery, and the Baptists must receive a position in the respect of citizens such as they have never held before. I am half disposed to look with better favor upon them, although I can perceive no good reason why they should retain either immersion or strict communion. Still they do retain them, and it would be destructive to say aught against either of them. The time is coming, far off perhaps, when both will be abolished. Both of them are according to the Apostolic model—at any rate immersion is beyond any question the Apostolic model—but so are foot washing, the holy kiss, the anointing of the sick with oil and numbers of other items that have fallen into disuse in deference to changes in time & season. Why hold to those when these are rejected?  

Whitsitt had perhaps publicly hinted at his waning support for strict communion that insisted upon believer’s baptism as a condition for participating in the Lord’s Supper in an 1879 address delivered at Walnut Street, less than two years before Eaton’s arrival. The discourse was published as a pamphlet through a New York printer under the title History of Communion among the Baptists, and it included a section positively titled “the Triumph of Loose Communion” (in reference to prevailing English Baptist practice). Whitsitt devoted considerably less attention to the history of communion among American Baptists, but confessed that “they have always been

125 Slatton, W. H. Whitsitt, 113.
practically united on the question of Communion, and let us hope that his harmony will not be disturbed.”

Whitsitt did encourage American Baptists to remain vigilant in holding fast to the practice:

> The security of our brethren in this country, as a general thing, has been so well established that there is reason to fear that, counting too much upon it, they have displayed a smaller amount of prudence and caution than the circumstances, when properly considered, would appear to demand.

Ironically, Whitsitt’s published statements again conflicted with his personal views recounted in his diary where he criticized Hale for promoting close communion during his 1886 Walnut Street revival services. Whitsitt dismissed such efforts as selective biblical literalism:

> I did not like it, but as a plea for close communion it was able and skillful. The main error lies in the preposterous literalism which holds fast to immersion, while neglecting many other customs of the apostolic church. The time must inevitably come when the Baptists shall give up the practice of immersion. They will surrender the practice of close communion before that date. To surrender close communion will be a prelude to the surrender of immersion. Neither of them is consistent with the other practices of Baptists; the sooner they can be abolished the better.

Eaton’s influence reached Baptists across the state of Kentucky and beyond through his editorial power with the *Western Recorder*. His alliances with respected Baptists W. P. Harvey and John T. Christian provided him with a network of persons who could devote the time to engaging Whitsitt point-by-point and ensure that their writings were distributed to many interested persons. Despite Whitsitt’s gifts as a scholar and speaker, neither he nor his supporters had comparable means of presenting himself in a consistently favorable light. Whitsitt had friends in the denomination’s various institutions, and many Southern Baptist newspaper editors in other states sympathized

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127 Ibid.

with him while seemingly harboring disdain for Eaton. Ultimately, Eaton’s preeminence among Kentucky Baptists would prove too forceful a juggernaut for the seminary’s president to impede.

**Whitsitt and Eaton Double Down**

As the controversy began to intensify, Whitsitt and his family left the Walnut Street Baptist Church, transferring their membership to McFerran Memorial Baptist Church on August 5. Their departure caused much concern among the Walnut Street congregation, and the severity of the controversy had become so public that even the *Courier-Journal*, Louisville’s leading secular newspaper, acknowledged it in its August 24, 1896 issue. For his part, Eaton intensified his efforts to win the favorable perception of his parishioners. One notable incident reported to Dick Hall by Walnut Street member Sally Neill Roach detailed that Eaton made a pastoral visit to her home to convince her of Baptist successionism, after she had expressed some doubts regarding its veracity. Roach remembered Eaton “paced the floor of my drawing-room like a caged lion, saying: ‘Mrs. Roach, it’s got to be, it’s got to be!’”

The August 6, 1896 *Western Recorder* featured one of Eaton’s clearest published statements defending Baptist successionism in response to a letter received from O. L. Hailey, the son-in-law of the late J. R. Graves. Hailey, commenting upon the Whitsitt controversy and its negative effects upon Southern Seminary, requested an answer to the question: “If every Baptist were taken from the world at once, could there ever be another Baptist church?” Eaton’s extensive editorial response denied that such


a possibility could ever happen, on account of the fact that it would invalidate the
scriptural promises of God:

We believe the Bible teaches Baptist doctrine and polity. Christ has promised that
He will be with His people unto the end of the world, that the gates of hell shall
never prevail against His church, and that he will never leave himself without a
witness to the important truths for which Baptists stand. To ask, therefore, what
would happen if Baptists ceased to exist, is, from our point of view, the same as
asking what would happen if God’s promise failed. That is equivalent to asking
what would happen if two and two made five. To our thinking, it is not a
supposable case, unless it be assumed either that the Bible is not the Word of God,
or that it does not teach Baptist doctrine. Believing as we do, that the Bible is the
Word of God, and that it does teach Baptist doctrine, we are bound to believe that
God’s promise has been fulfilled, and will be to the end.\footnote{T. T. Eaton, [editorial], \textit{Western Recorder}, August 6, 1896.}

By necessary inference, Eaton made the case for the reality of Baptist church
successionism, regardless of the presence or absence of documentary evidence to support
the historical lineage:

If there were not a scrap of documentary church history in existence, we would,
with the open Bible before us, believe none the less firmly that there have been
Baptists (by whatever name they may have been called) from the days of John the
Baptist until now. And in the study of accessible historical material we find as
much evidence of the continuity of the Baptists through the centuries since the
Apostles, as we could reasonably expect, in view of the conditions involved.\footnote{Ibid.}

Eaton preferred not to use the term “succession,” on account of its prevalence
in the Roman Catholic and Episcopalian traditions and its consequent saturation “with the
notions of sacramentalism [sic] and sacramentarianism.” Instead, he favored the alternative
terms of “continuity or perpetuity,” as a more accurate name for the concept.\footnote{Ibid.} Eaton
was clear to distinguish the necessity of the doctrine from its burden of proof, noting,
“God has promised the continuity of His people, but He has not promised a continuous
record of their existence—a point we should constantly bear in mind.”\footnote{Ibid.}
In a September 2, 1897 editorial, Eaton expressed befuddlement as to why so many Baptists seemed to hold contempt for the church succession theory:

We cannot understand how any Baptist can fail to believe it a good thing. Yet some brethren seem to regard it with great disfavor. They think universal belief in it would be a great calamity. . . . There is no earthly reason we can see why any Baptist should be active in opposing such a belief. What possible harm can come from a Baptist’s believing that there have in all ages since the Apostles been in the world advocates of the great principles for which Baptists stand?  

For Eaton, “Baptist succession” or “continuity” (as he preferred to say) was a belief that ought to be held universally among Baptists, regardless as to whether they identified with the Landmark tradition. Furthermore, comparisons between the theory and Roman Catholicism were unwarranted:

Some think that “Baptist succession” involves sacerdotalism, sacramentalism, high-churchism, &c., &c. This is a complete mistake. . . . If it be not at all “high-church” to think there were Baptists in the 17th century, how is it “high-church” to think that there were Baptists in the 7th century? It is as plain as noonday that if it be a good thing to have Baptists in the world in this century, it was equally good to have them in every century since John the Baptist. And the man who does not care about the existence of Baptists in the centuries past, is not likely to care about their existence in the centuries to come.  

Eaton and Whitsitt differed starkly in their presuppositions and methodologies. Whitsitt appealed to the absence of historical evidence in favor of immersion as proof that the practice was not introduced by the English Baptists until the 1640s. Eaton insisted that regardless of available evidence, the inspiration and authority of the Bible was at stake. Whitsitt had the support of his fellow seminary professors, various Baptist newspaper editors, and some of the most notable Baptist historians in America, who all advised the denomination to allow Whitsitt a fair hearing since the question was simply a matter of historical inquiry. Eaton, however, had the influence to frame the nature of the issue in the locales most immediate to the seminary. With each week’s issue of the *Western Recorder*, a new charge could be leveled against Whitsitt’s commitment to

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137 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, September 2, 1897.
138 Ibid.
Baptist orthodoxy, and old business did not quickly disappear as Eaton allowed extensive discussion in the paper’s editorial and letter columns.

On September 17, 1896, Whitsitt’s book *A Question in Baptist History* saw publication through Louisville’s Charles T. Dearing, as the American Baptist Publication Society declined to become involved in the controversy. In the book’s introduction, Whitsitt reiterated his earlier published statements that “the question does not relate to the origin of immersion,” but only to “whether the immersion of adult believers was practiced in England by the Anabaptists before the year 1641.” The book included an appendix on the baptism of Roger Williams at Providence, in which Whitsitt concluded “the weight of evidence appears to incline very clearly towards the view that Roger Williams was sprinkled and not immersed at Providence in 1639.”

In his book-length treatment of the subject, Whitsitt engaged with Christian’s criticisms that he had copied his research from the published writings of Henry Dexter. In the introduction, Whitsitt insisted that he and Dexter had reached their similar conclusions on the origin of immersion among English Baptists through independent primary source research. Whitsitt insisted that he had been the first to publish on the discovery, albeit it anonymously, as his last *Independent* article had appeared in September of 1880, over a year before Dexter’s book on John Smyth saw print.

Whitsitt supported his thesis on the 1641 introduction of immersion among English Baptists by appealing to a document designated as “the Kiffin manuscript.”

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140 William H. Whitsitt, *A Question in Baptist History: Whether the Anabaptists in England Practiced Immersion Before the Year 1641?* (Louisville: Chas T. Dearing, 1896), 5.

141 Ibid., 164.

142 Ibid., 7–8. Whitsitt eventually admitted to having written an additional anonymous article for the *Independent*’s October 7, 1880 issue.
While admitting “the name of the author is entirely unknown,” Whitsitt believed it a reliable historical witness of Baptist practices, remarking “no writer on Baptist history has ever rejected the authority of this manuscript, and down to a comparatively recent period none of its statements were subjected to criticism.”\textsuperscript{143} From passages excerpted from the Kiffin manuscript and the existing records of Henry Jessey’s church, Whitsitt concluded, “we have the unqualified assertion of the most important document in the history of Particular Baptists that prior to the year 1640 nobody at all had practiced in England the immersion of professed believers.”\textsuperscript{144}

Eaton and his constituents were quick to issue their own publication in response to Whitsitt. Immediate responses came from Eaton, Christian, and others in the form of editorials and articles printed in the weekly issues of the \textit{Western Recorder}.\textsuperscript{145} The publication of Whitsitt’s much anticipated book provided Eaton and his allies with a central target on which to focus their attacks upon Whitsitt’s argumentation and use of sources.

In February of 1897, the Baptist Book Concern published John T. Christian’s \textit{Did They Dip?} for which Eaton wrote a glowing introduction. In the introduction to Christian’s book, Eaton drew particular attention for Christian’s usage of primary sources that exceeded the citations of Henry Dexter’s \textit{John Smyth, Se-Baptist}:

\begin{quote}
I do not suppose there is a Baptist in the land who has anything like such an array of original documents on this subject as has Dr. Christian. In many cases he has the original editions, while in others he has official copies made at the British museum and elsewhere. He has examined more than forty books which Dr. Dexter does not
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{143}Whitsitt, \textit{A Question in Baptist History}, 80.

\textsuperscript{144}Ibid., 88.

mention in his bibliography of the subject, and which, it is reasonable to believe, Dr. Dexter never saw.  

Eaton also took opportunity to dismiss Whitsitt’s researched claims as not sufficiently thorough, noting “not an atom of evidence, or any pretense thereof, has been offered to show that any Anabaptist church in England practiced sprinkling or pouring before 1641.” Eaton insisted that Whitsitt’s entire argument rested upon a dubious source, “the negative testimony of a document (the so-called Kiffin, MS) written nobody knows when or where, or by whom, and first mentioned by Crosby in 1738.” Even if Whitsitt’s Kiffin manuscript could be trusted as genuine, it would only prove that its author did not know of pre-1641 immersions, a far cry from proving that the immersing practices did not exist. Christian also dismissed Whitsitt for placing his trust in the genuineness of the alleged Kiffin manuscript, remarking that “Dr. Whitsitt’s principal authority has no existence in fact. His whole book is founded upon this error.” Furthermore, he cited quotations from Kiffin’s “Brief Remonstrance” suggesting the existence of pre-Reformation Baptist congregations as evidence that “the voice of Kiffin himself is against any such interpretation of this manuscript, for he would not have contradicted himself.”

Eaton also submitted an article for the January 1897 issue of long-running religious quarterly Bibliotheca Sacra entitled “Did Baptists in England Immerse Prior to 1641?” In this article, later reprinted in pamphlet form, Eaton took issue with an October

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146T. T. Eaton, introduction to Did They Dip? by John T. Christian (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1897), 7.
147Ibid., 11.
148Ibid.
149Ibid.
150Christian, Did They Dip?, 152.
151Ibid., 158.
1896 article of the same serial authored by Benjamin B. Warfield that referenced Dexter’s *John Smyth, Se-Baptist* as evidence that seventeenth-century English Baptists invented the practice of immersion as essential to valid baptism. In his *Bibliotheca Sacra* article, Eaton did not reference the Whitsitt controversy and did not make a sustained argument in favor of church succession from the apostolic age. His goal was merely to disprove the Dexter (and by implication Whitsitt) thesis that immersion was not practiced in England prior to 1641.

Eaton argued that Dexter’s book had overlooked a multiple of evidence that the practice of immersion was widely familiar among English Christians in the 1640s. Eaton posited that the recognition of immersion as the valid mode of baptism in the 1644 London Baptist Confession would have been highly unlikely if the practice had only been introduced three years prior:

> It is admitted that at this time [1644] the Baptists were immersionists. Now if they began to immerse in 1641 and in 1644 the practice had become universal among them, we have the most remarkable change ever known in the history of the world. That a denomination as independent and scattered as the Baptists should, in so short a time, have completely changed their initiatory ordinance is little short of a miracle. That immersion was universal among them in 1644 proves they did not begin the practice in 1641.

Eaton proceeded to list sources which he believed evidenced the practice of immersion in England between the years of 1509 and 1641, similar to what he had already written in editorial columns of the *Western Recorder*. He believed that the testimony of these sources demolished the Dexter/Whitsitt thesis, declaring,

> Let it be borne in mind that positive evidence is not to be set aside by negative evidence. . . . Hence if any of the testimony I have cited be valid, the thesis falls to the ground, that immersion was not practiced in England previous to 1641. It is

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absolutely necessary to that thesis that all the evidence to the contrary be proved to be invalid.\textsuperscript{154}

Whitsitt had the sympathy and support of many fellow academics, but Eaton remained vocal in his own appeal to sources that he believed debunked the claims of Whitsitt, Dexter, and others who insisted documentary evidence did not support a pre-1641 date for the introduction of immersion. Eaton held to apostolic church succession theory because he believed it essential to biblical fidelity and Baptist identity, despite his own admission that available documentation could not prove the theory. However, in his engagements with his opponents on the subject, he generally limited his argumentation to sources that suggested a narrative contrary to the thesis of Whitsitt’s book.

**Walnut Street: The Second Parliamentary Contest**

Throughout the late summer and fall seasons of 1896, the various Baptist local associations across Kentucky convened for their annual meetings, and many passed resolutions denouncing Whitsitt’s theories on immersion and his chosen methods of expressing himself. The *Western Recorder* published many of these resolutions, some of which called for the seminary trustees to dismiss Whitsitt as president of the seminary.\textsuperscript{155} As expected, the first parliamentary gathering of the home association meeting in the home church of both Whitsitt and Eaton was far from harmonious. The 1896 meeting of the Long Run Baptist Association was held at the Walnut Street Baptist Church from September 2 to 3. Whitsitt attended as one of seven messengers from McFerran Memorial Baptist Church, along with pastor Carter Helm Jones, John R. Sampey, W. C.

\textsuperscript{154}Eaton, “Critical Note,” 167.

Jones, T. M. Swan, E. N. Woodruff, and J. T. Woodson. McFerran also came prepared with seven alternates in case any of its messengers would have been unable to attend. Eaton brought with him sixteen messengers from the Walnut Street Baptist Church, which included W. P. Harvey, Henry A. Vaughan, Arthur Peter, T. T. Martin, T. M. Martin, L. L. Parks, J. G. Caldwell, A. J. Ashburn, D. D. Taylor, M. Cary Peter, W. H. Newman, P. N. Clarke, S. Ragousky, Theodore Speiden, and William Harrison.\footnote{Minutes of the Long Run Association of Baptists, 1896, 6–7.}

The afternoon session of the first day opened with a resolution offered by Walnut Street’s M. Cary Peter regarding the controversy, extending full support of Whitsitt and Southern Seminary:

WHEREAS, prolonged discussion has been aroused concerning certain historical statements made by Dr. W. H. Whitsitt about the so-called early English Baptists before 1641; and whereas, he will have a complete discussion of that question in his book soon to appear wherein all perversions may be corrected; therefore be it—Resolved, That we believe our brethren in the Associations that we have passed resolutions condemning Dr. Whitsitt have been misguided as to the facts, and have unintentionally done great injustice to a brother whose devoted life, whose sound Baptist principles, whose scholarship, and whose careful investigation should protect him from too hasty judgment by his brethren, therefore be it further—Resolved, That the Baptists owe it to themselves to deal fairly with the facts and with Dr. Whitsitt, in order that this position may well be understood before he is judged. That we desire to convey to Dr. Whitsitt an expression of our confidence in him and strong conviction that he is preeminently suited to the high position that he occupies as the President of our great Theological Seminary, and that we pledge to him and to his associates our hearty co-operation in the work of training our young ministers. That we, being his home association and knowing his daily walk, and knowing the seminary from personal acquaintance and rejoicing to have it in our midst, urge Baptists everywhere to give it their loyal sympathy and support as it deserves.\footnote{Ibid., 8–9.}

Peter’s resolution received a second from M. P. Hunt, but Henry A. Vaughan—also from Walnut Street—offered a substitute resolution indirectly refuting Peter’s statement without directly mentioning Whitsitt:

Resolved, that we believe the Bible is the only and the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. We believe that the immersion of believers for baptism began about
the year 30 A. D., and that wherever there have been Baptists, this has been their practice.\textsuperscript{158}

J. M. Weaver, pastor of Chestnut Street Baptist Church spoke to oppose both Peter’s resolution and Vaughan’s substitute “and moved to lay the whole matter on the table.”\textsuperscript{159}

F. H. Kerfoot, Southern Seminary professor and messenger from Broadway Baptist Church, interjected to remind the association that parliamentary custom held that Peter, as the author of the original resolution, should be allowed the privilege of speaking on his resolution or having someone speak on its behalf, but the moderator W. E. Powers declared that Peter had failed to exercise his privilege to speak and moved for a vote on the question of tabling the matter. 62 messengers favored tabling the matter with 47 opposing.

Weaver further moved to expunge the entire matter from the association’s minutes. As the parliamentary proceedings began to descend into disorder, Sampey spoke—“amid many interruptions”—against Weaver’s motion to expunge, leading Weaver to withdraw it. In Sampey’s enthusiasm, he expressed his suspicion that long-suppressed opposition to the seminary had finally manifested itself with Whitsitt simply being a convenient target.\textsuperscript{160} As discussion impeded the progress of further business for the Wednesday afternoon session, Eaton moved that the State Missions committee’s report be made to special order at the next day’s morning session.\textsuperscript{161}

During the following day’s morning session, Eaton delivered the State Missions report following the report by the Committee on Schools and Colleges. Eaton’s report was immediately adopted but before consideration of the Schools and Colleges

\textsuperscript{158}Minutes of the Long Run Association of Baptists, 1896, 9.

\textsuperscript{159}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{160}“Long Run Association, Lively Meeting,” Western Recorder, September 10, 1896.

\textsuperscript{161}Minutes of the Long Run Association of Baptists, 1896, 9.
report could resume, Eaton moved to table the matter so that Kerfoot could read new resolutions pertaining to Whitsitt:

Whereas, many of our Associations have passed resolutions affecting the orthodoxy of our beloved brother, Dr. W. H. Whitsitt, and—Whereas, charges have been made affecting his Christian character and his fidelity to the Baptist denomination; and some have even gone so far as to advise his exclusion from church fellowship, with which Dr. Whitsitt has labored for so many years, and of which he is an honored member, desire to express to our brethren, generally the following convictions:

I. That we are not in a position to approve or reject Dr. Whitsitt’s views as expressed in his articles in the Independent and in Johnson’s Encyclopedia.

II. That we commend Dr. Whitsitt as a brother of high character, of remarkable piety and charity. And we believe him to be a sound and scriptural Baptist.

III. We testify, with gratitude to God, to the prosperity of our beloved seminary under the administration of Dr. Whitsitt, and we promise our loyal support to the seminary, and pray the continued blessings of God upon it.

Kerfoot’s resolutions served as a sufficient compromise regarding the association’s fervent discussion over the Whitsitt controversy from the previous day. John T. Christian moved that the Report of Schools and Colleges be tabled to settle the Whitsitt matter. Thus, Peter’s resolution and Vaughan’s substitute were taken off the table. Both men withdrew their resolutions, and Christian moved that the association adopt the Kerfoot resolution. Kerfoot’s motion passed with only two dissenting votes. Following the passage of the resolution, Sampey apologized for his previous day’s emphatic speech and the messengers joined together in a singing of “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.” Finally, Eaton moved that the Report on Schools and Colleges be taken from the table, and the association adopted it as well.

The Western Recorder printed its weekly issue on the second day of the Long Run’s meeting, with a reluctantly restrained indictment of Whitsitt courtesy of “Senex,” who wrote:

162 Minutes of the Long Run Association of Baptists, 1896, 13.

163 Ibid.
The Recorder has refused to allow me to say what I think should be done. It said I might tell what I knew about the questions at issue, but I must not suggest doing anything except changing the article in the Encyclopedia, as the General Association wished. The Recorder could not allow me to say what it had declined to publish from such noble men as J. H. Spencer and J. L. Smith. At first my wrath waxed hot. I could not see the use in the prohibition because I was confident the Associations would say in resolutions what I wished to say, and the Recorder, as the State paper and the organ of the Associations, could not, of course, refuse to publish their official actions. . . . It was possible the District Associations would follow the example of the General Association, and confine themselves to requesting a change in the Encyclopedia article. And if Dr. Whitsitt could be persuaded to make that change, it would be the best way to prevent harm and remedy the evil done.  

The “Senex” column also noted the chief injury to the seminary would be the fact that Baptist churches would lose faith in its reputation and raise a suspicious eye toward the graduates they might call as their pastors:

They will feel on their guard, and will watch their preacher, expecting him to say something contrary to Baptist faith. It is a serious matter when a church cannot meet a new pastor with hearty trust in him in every way. Such feeling of needing to watch him will cramp any pastor’s opportunity for good for years.  

In the same issue, the Western Recorder printed select letters to the editors, including a very critical piece from seminary professor C. S. Gardner regarding Eaton’s answer to Hailey:

Your answer to Bro. Hailey’s question makes still more evident what all the time has been apparent, that Dr. Whitsitt’s critics are aiming at making the acceptance of the theory of unbroken Baptist succession a test of orthodoxy for our Seminary. If it is not their intention, it is certainly the logical result of their contention if they should prove successful in their efforts. If Baptist continuity or succession is not a matter of fact or history, but of doctrine, as you contend, then all who do not accept the succession are heretics. . . . I, for one, wish to enter a very emphatic protest against the attempt to establish this new criterion of orthodoxy. Baptist continuity or succession, as a Bible doctrine, is based upon a very doubtful and improbable interpretation of one or two passages of Scripture. It is purely a theory of church history—that and nothing more—held to by one section of the denomination and not accepted by another section quite as respectable in intelligence, numbers and piety.  

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165 Senex [pseud.], “Questions Answered.”

Gardner posed the direct question to Eaton: “Does [the Editor] regard those who do not believe in Baptist continuity, or succession, as heretical?”

One week later, the September 10 issue of the *Western Recorder* featured a summation of the 1896 annual meeting of the Long Run Association, under the editorial description of “Lively Meeting.” Accompanying the associational report, was a lengthy article by W. H. King adorning the entire front page titled “The Silence of Baptists in Literature before 1641—The Alleged ‘Newness’ of Immersion,” which argued that the historical corpus of seventeenth century religious writings—among both Baptists and Baptist opponents—is silent regarding any change in the mode of baptism to immersion. Also included in the same issue was J. H. Spencer’s column “The Silent Millions,” which lamented the dangerous teaching that the seminary was instilling into the denomination’s young preachers.

Eaton’s editorial for the September 10 issue was an explanation of “Landmarkism,” for which he invoked J. M. Pendleton’s “An Old Land-mark Reset,” which argued against Baptist pulpit affiliation with Pedobaptist ministers on account such practice would endorse their ordination and authority to administer the church ordinances. Eaton preferred Pendleton’s narrow definition of the Landmark movement, focused solely upon pulpit affiliation and not equivalent with strict communion or church succession. In Eaton’s opinion, Pendleton’s book was a simple description of what most solid Baptists already believed regardless of whether they previously identified with the label; conversely, those who opposed Pendleton’s arguments came to be called “Anti-


Landmarkers” or “Pulpit Affiliationists.” The rejection of “alien immersion” could not be simplified as a Landmark distinctive, since many Anti-Landmark Baptists (among whom Eaton listed Spencer H. Cone and Richard Fuller) also opposed the practice. A genuine Baptist could reject alien immersion for a variety of reasons, including administrative authority, church succession, or a simple New Testament appeal to Christian faithfulness.¹⁷¹

Likewise, belief in church succession theory ought not to be a belief exclusive to Landmarkers. Both Landmarker and Anti-Landmarker might differ on the question of whether the succession of Baptist churches was necessary to the validity of Baptist church ordinances. Eaton insisted that a strict interpretation of Scripture ought not to reduce a Baptist to the Landmarker label:

The Landmarkers were strict in their interpretations of Scripture and in their practice, and there grew up a tendency to call strictness Landmarkism. Many persons have come to regard a Landmarker as one who rejects “alien immersion” and believers in “Baptist succession,” whereas a man might believe in both these points and not be a Landmarker.¹⁷² Eaton concluded, “We take it our position is well known, but we simply state the case in hope of clearing away some rubbish from the field, and relieving the confusion in some minds.”¹⁷³

In the following week’s Recorder, Eaton addressed the allegations that his opposition to Whitsitt was motivated by personal disenchantment. He insisted that his commitment was to discuss the merits of the question, not to play favorites with the personalities involved:

Our discussion of the matters at issue shall continue strictly on their merits, and we will utterly discard personalities. . . . With us it shall be what and not who. When

¹⁷¹T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, September 10, 1896.

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Ibid.
the case has been fully argued, and all the facts have been brought out, the denomination will decide, and we have no fear of the result.}\textsuperscript{174}

**The Controversy Turns Personal**

In his diary, Whitsitt recorded his hope that 1897 would prove a better year for him than the previous one, noting in a December 31, 1896 entry that “ever since the tempest burst upon me in April I have had a succession of trials.”\textsuperscript{175} Ultimately, 1897 would prove to be the year that Eaton successfully turned the tide of the denomination against Whitsitt at the local ecclesiological level. During the year, Whitsitt witnessed moments of optimism, but ultimately the weight of the denomination crushed any hope that the controversy would be resolved without his resignation from the seminary.

The March 18, 1897 issue of the *Western Recorder* published an article by John T. Christian which intensified the fervor of the controversy to an even greater degree. Christian explained that he had reviewed issues of the *Independent* between the years of 1880 and 1883, and suspected Whitsitt to have been the author of perhaps as many as fourteen articles examining the subject of baptism in England prior to 1641, far more than Whitsitt had been willing to admit publicly.\textsuperscript{176} Christian observed,

> These editorials with one exception, so resemble each other that they seemed to me to come from the same author. . . . Dr. Whitsitt last spring declared that he was the author of two of these editorials, and on account of the resemblance of the others to these two and to his other writings, the question came up in my mind whether he was not the author of them all.\textsuperscript{177}

Christian’s suggestions carried much weight in stirring suspicions about Whitsitt’s integrity, particularly because Whitsitt had been less than forthcoming in acknowledging his authorship of the June 24 and October 7 *Independent* articles in

\textsuperscript{174}T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, September 17, 1896.

\textsuperscript{175}Whitsitt, “Excerpts from the Diary of William Heth Whitsitt,” 9.

\textsuperscript{176}Bugg, “The Whitsitt Controversy,” 78.

\textsuperscript{177}John T. Christian, “Another Discovery,” *Western Recorder*, March 18, 1897.
addition to his prior admissions of writing the newspaper’s September 2 and September 9 articles.\textsuperscript{178} Christian wrote Whitsitt personally asking for a full disclosure. In a letter to Christian which the \textit{Recorder} published, Whitsitt insisted that the four articles were the only ones penned by him for the \textit{Independent} and his neglect in acknowledging them owed to forgetfulness due to the great lapse of time.\textsuperscript{179}

Joining Eaton in his struggle against Whitsitt was Jesse B. Thomas, Newton Theological Seminary professor, who endeavored to refute the arguments of Whitsitt’s \textit{Question in Baptist History} through a series of nine articles published in the \textit{Western Recorder}. These articles were subsequently collected into the booklet \textit{Both Sides: A Review of Dr. Whitsitt’s Question in Baptist History}, naturally published by the Baptist Book Concern to ensure wider dissemination.\textsuperscript{180} Also included in the \textit{Both Sides} publication were reprints of Whitsitt’s four \textit{Independent} articles and John T. Christian’s critical review of them in a chapter titled “Another Discovery.”

The 1897 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention convened in Wilmington, North Carolina, where the seminary trustees also held their annual board meeting. Though Eaton held seat on the Board of nearly sixty representatives, many trustees remained loyal to Whitsitt. Among Whitsitt’s most notable allies were William E. Hatcher and Charles Manly, who strategized to present the seminary president in the best light possible in hopes of stifling the anti-Whitsitt factions.\textsuperscript{181} At the advice of Hatcher, Whitsitt presented a written statement to both the trustees and the convention messengers acknowledging his various missteps in presenting his historical thesis that led to such division among Southern Baptists. In his statement, Whitsitt conveyed regret for

\textsuperscript{178} Bugg, “The Whitsitt Controversy,” 78–79.

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{180} Slatton, \textit{W. H. Whitsitt}, 227.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 225–29.
writing his 1880 *Independent* articles, communicated his desire to eliminate “offensive” content from his *Johnson’s Cyclopaedia* article, and pledged his loyalty to the seminary’s Abstract of Principles and Baptist identity. However, Whitsitt made no apology for his scholarly conviction on the historical question, and he made a peculiar admission that he had written his *Independent* articles “from a Pedobaptist standpoint with a view to stimulating historical inquiry.”

Although surely an attempt to reassure his fellow Baptists as to his sympathies for the denomination’s distinctive doctrines, Whitsitt’s opponents later seized upon his phrase as further evidence that Whitsitt was unfit to lead the seminary.

Whitsitt’s statement received a warm reception by most trustees and messengers, and even Eaton appeared encouraged by the Wilmington meeting, according to a positive statement attributed to him by the *Religious Herald*. By most accounts, the public outcry over Whitsitt’s writings appeared to be waning, but such assumptions underestimated the ferocity to which the controversy had stirred Kentucky Baptists. Eaton’s preoccupation with the subject ensured that it always remained at the forefront for the many subscribers of the *Western Recorder*.

The conciliatory tone of the Wilmington meeting gave some Baptists hope that the controversy would pass, but many also interpreted the meeting as a victory for Whitsitt and a blow against the prevalence of church succession theory in Southern Baptist life. Eaton and other Kentucky Baptists were unwilling to let their concerns disappear quietly. They openly worried that the outcome of the Wilmington meeting would cost Baptists their confidence in claiming to be New Testament churches. Many Southern Baptist pastors and laymen, frustrated with Whitsitt and the inaction of the seminary against him, wrote Eaton extensively encouraging him to press the fight. As

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182 William H. Whitsitt to the Board of Trustees, May 7, 1897, Reports of the President, Series 1, Box 2, SBTS; Slatton, *W. H. Whitsitt*, 232–33.

other Baptist state paper editors supported Whitsitt or tried to remain neutral on the controversy, Eaton fought all the more rigorously to defend Baptist faith as he understood it.

After the Wilmington convention, J. H. Spencer wrote Eaton to express his disappointment that the seminary trustees and the SBC failed to act against Whitsitt. Spencer—who would ultimately pass away before the end of the year—had expected the trustees to take decisive action against Whitsitt to regain the trust of the entire denomination. The fraternal spirit with which messengers esteemed Whitsitt in Wilmington befuddled Spencer:

I cannot see that the situation is changed. It does not appear to me that Dr. W’s statements have made the case any better. What he says with regard to his Pedobaptist proclivities is either evasive or insincere. His teaching in regard to the family’s taking precedence of the church has been a hobby with him for at least fifteen years; and he has not denied his teaching in his classroom to the effect that Pedobaptist organizations are churches of Christ equally with Baptist congregations. It is certain that he can never regain the confidence of those who disagree with these teachings. The good of the Seminary, as well as that of the denomination demands his resignation or removal. . . . Now it is our duty to pursue such course as will force action, if practicable.184

In perhaps the strangest strategy employed against Whitsitt, Eaton’s adult son Joseph H. Eaton, a Louisville attorney, circulated an article to four Methodist newspapers—including The Central Methodist of Catlettsburg, Kentucky—purporting to represent himself as a Louisville Methodist delighted that Baptists had forfeited their longstanding claim to apostolic succession. Identifying himself only as “W. N. Miller,” J. H. Eaton’s piece vainly appealed to Whitsitt’s claims as a reason for Methodists to rejoice in the defeat of Baptist exceptionalism. The article, entitled “Truth Triumphant,” became the subject of much discussion in the summer of 1897, and it confirmed the fears of many anti-Whitsitt Baptists who believed the denomination was at risk of forsaking its identity. He made sport of Whitsitt’s Wilmington admission that he had written his

184J. H. Spencer to T. T. Eaton, May 21, 1897, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, SBTS.
Independent articles “from a Pedobaptist standpoint.” With evident sarcasm, “W. N. Miller” closed the column with the request, “Please withhold my name and sign my initials only, as I don’t wish my Baptist friends to know I wrote the article.”

Eventually, however, Whitsitt’s allies traced the origin of the pseudonymous, satirical article back to Eaton’s son. When confronted by a group of five Louisville Baptist laymen on July 24 in the office of Judge J. T. O’Neal, J. H. Eaton confessed to authoring the article without regret, insisting he had to defend his father’s honor. J. H. Eaton subsequently submitted a brief letter to the group reiterating his refusal to back down, which was published in the Louisville Courier-Journal.

Whitsitt’s supporters naturally suspected that T. T. Eaton, W. P. Harvey, and John T. Christian had colluded together to smear Whitsitt’s reputation through the composition and disseminating the W. N. M. article. Though his son refused to recant or apologize, T. T. Eaton denied culpability in the scheme. Moreover, Eaton claimed “absolute ignorance” that his son had any involvement with the W. N. M. article until being notified by O’Neal’s committee.

In the August 5 Recorder, Eaton penned his first editorial commenting on his son’s involvement with the controversy, choosing to focus his ire upon the committee of five Whitsitt allies for daring to represent the interests of the seminary while conducting

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187 “W. N. M. Article . . . Written by Mr. J. H. Eaton,” Courier-Journal, July 30, 1897. Newspaper clipping contained in William H. Whitsitt, “Newspaper clippings concerning Dr. Whitsitt,” SBTS. The five Baptist laymen who discovered Eaton’s authorship of the article were M. C. Peter, John S. Long, C. C. Early, Trevor H. Whayne, and J. T. O’Neal.

188 Ibid.

189 Slatton, W. H. Whitsitt, 250.

private meetings and personal crusades. He took personal offense that the committee had dared to interrogate his “23-year-old boy” by threatening to humiliate him publicly.\textsuperscript{191}

The editorial also took opportunity to chide Whitsitt again for his Wilmington statement while simultaneously calling for Christian unity within the denomination:

\begin{quote}

The fact is, we do not approve of Baptists writing “from a Pedobaptist standpoint,” in Pedobaptist papers. And the higher the position of the Baptist who does it, the more do we disapprove it. It is but fair to bear in mind, however, that Dr. Whitsitt has admitted his “mistake” . . . We hope that with all the investigations of committees and others, and with all the discussion of the whole matter in all its relations and hearings, the brethren will remember that they are brethren, and will not inflame their differences by impugning each others’ motives.\textsuperscript{192}

Many of Eaton’s like-minded supporters applauded the younger Eaton for daring to verbalize and publicize what they already thought. The \textit{Texas Baptist Standard} commended J. H. Eaton for confessing to the authorship of his article “in about four weeks,” whereas Whitsitt took sixteen years before making his confession regarding his \textit{Independent} articles\textsuperscript{193} O. L. Hailey wrote Eaton to compliment his son’s actions:

\begin{quote}

I think J. H. Eaton has struck a blow in the right place that the W.’s will not escape nor recover from. . . . It seems to me that the time has come to show what would be the real status of the Baptists, supposing Dr. Whitsitt were right, and we descended from the Sprinklers.\textsuperscript{194}

J. H. Eaton later dropped the \textit{nom de plume} strategy and printed two pamphlets under his own name attacking Whitsitt, \textit{The Real Issues in the Whitsitt Case} and \textit{The Facts in the Case: Dr. Whitsitt’s Defense Examined}. In the pamphlets, he sought to vindicate himself from the critical statements levied by Whitsitt’s supporters who had pressured him over the W. N. M. article, charging that their real agenda was “a distinct attempt to draw off attention from the main question by injecting a personal element into
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{191}T. T. Eaton, [editorial], \textit{Western Recorder}, August 5, 1897.

\textsuperscript{192}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{193}[Excerpt from the Texas Baptist Standard], \textit{Western Recorder}, August 19, 1897.

\textsuperscript{194}O. L. Hailey to T. T. Eaton, October 14, 1897, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, SBTS.
He also denied that the opponents of Whitsitt were primarily motivated by a desire to advance the theory of church succession, positing instead that Whitsitt’s own scholarly unfitness and hostility toward a large part of the denomination had aggravated the problem. Furthermore, he charged Whitsitt with illegal activity in his position as seminary president by denying trustees access to institutional record books and student listings, alleging that

He attempts to deal with law as he deals with history. He feels that as he has manufactured history to suit his theories, he can manufacture law to suit his wishes. . . . If Southern Baptists are willing to retain Dr. Whitsitt as President of their Seminary, then he is just the sort of man they deserve to have at the head of their Seminary.”

In similar fashion to the writings by his father and John T. Christian, J. H. Eaton endeavored to skewer the historical methodology and doctrinal unsoundness of Whitsitt’s *A Question in Baptist History* as well as his early articles on immersion, suggesting that none of Whitsitt’s writings evidenced a love for his Baptist brethren. The younger Eaton professed, “It is with the President of our Seminary and not the man that I have dealt. I have written in the interest of truth, of the Baptists of the South, and of the Seminary.”

The incessant assaults of Eaton and his inner circle of confidants against Whitsitt, even in the aftermath of the 1897 Southern Baptist Convention at Wilmington, proved that there would be no quiet resolution to the controversy. Though the methods of Eaton and his supporters served to antagonize further the various realms of the denomination, they were effective in applying pressure upon Whitsitt and forcing his supporters to remain on the defensive. The fruits of Eaton’s labor would be seen in the

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198 Ibid., 27.
last half of 1897, as Baptist local associations began to meet and make their views public on Whitsitt’s relation to Southern Baptists.

**Baptists against the Seminary**

The 1897 meeting of the Kentucky General Association of Baptists at Georgetown proved to be a decisive blow against Whitsitt’s career at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, one which erased the optimism that the controversy might be resolved following the Wilmington SBC meeting. During the Monday afternoon business proceedings on June 21, messengers passed a resolution requesting that Kentucky’s seminary trustees pursue the retirement of Whitsitt from the institution on account of “his belief in his discovery . . . has been such to place him out of touch and harmony with the denomination.” The messengers voted 105 against 78 in favor of the resolution. Though the names responsible for each vote were recorded in the meeting’s minute book, Eaton apparently abstained, perhaps due to perceptions of conflicting interests.

Attending the 1897 state convention were seven members from Walnut Street Baptist Church, consisting of W. P. Harvey, J. Henry Burnett, Boyce Broadus, M. W. Sherrell, A. J. Ashburn, along with Eaton and his son Joseph. Broadus was the only Walnut Street messenger to vote against the resolution. The censuring of Whitsitt became a deeply emotional wound for the Walnut Street congregation, and the local church later passed a motion clarifying that its messengers to the General Association had voted as individuals and not as official emissaries of the congregation.200

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Although Eaton may have abstained from the actual vote, his involvement with the annual meeting had already been substantial. Two days prior to the Whitsitt resolution, Eaton presented a report on behalf of a committee that included John T. Christian and J. W. Weaver on denominational control of Baptist higher education institutions. He opened his report by stating,

We find that there is a growing conviction in the minds of Baptists generally that denominational institutions should be under denominational control. . . . It will give the best possible guarantee that the institutions will be true to the faith of their founders and will continue to fulfill the purposes of their establishment. It will greatly deepen and extend the interest of the churches in the institutions and strengthen the hold of our schools on our people."\(^\text{201}\)

Regarding Southern Seminary, Eaton’s report cautioned the state convention of taking any action that could jeopardize the financial interest of the seminary.

Whitsitt’s supporters suspected Eaton of shrewd political misdirection. J. S. Coleman offered a “supplementary report” that was apparently strong in its opposition to Whitsitt and the seminary.\(^\text{202}\) “Much discussion” continued over the subject in the Saturday afternoon business session.\(^\text{203}\) Considering the forthright opposition of Coleman’s resolution, Eaton’s relatively mild report was favored by messengers desiring a peaceful resolution to the controversy. Soon after the adoption of Eaton’s report, Coleman withdrew his anti-Whitsitt resolution so that the business could adjourn. Some of Whitsitt’s supporters, thinking the controversy settled, left Georgetown before the Monday business session when J. A. Booth presented the second anti-Whitsitt resolution which passed. In his biography on Whitsitt, James H. Slatton concluded, “Coleman was only the stalking horse!”\(^\text{204}\)

\(^{201}\) General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1897 (Mt. Sterling, KY: Advocate Publishing Company, 1897), 12.

\(^{202}\) “General Association,” Western Recorder, June 24, 1897.

\(^{203}\) Ibid.

\(^{204}\) Slatton, W. H. Whitsitt, 238.
Whitsitt’s supporters were vocal in their criticism of the state convention proceedings, but the tide had clearly turned in favor of Eaton. In the *Courier-Journal*, Carter Helm Jones of McFerran Memorial Church denounced the Kentucky General Association as a lot of “heresy hunters” who demonstrated “the inquisitorial spirit of the middle ages.” W. P. Harvey, commenting upon Jones’s comment in the *Western Recorder* simply remarked, “It is a good thing there is no law that compels a man who has made a mistake in moving into Kentucky to move out of it.”

John T. Christian also contributed a lengthy critical reply to Jones’s letter to the *Courier-Journal*’s editor, apologizing that Jones seemed to hold Kentuckians and their Baptist General Association in low regard but insisting, “State pride goes a long ways hereabouts, and really we do not take kindly to attacks of that character.”

Eaton’s editorial following the state meeting praised the Georgetown convention for having made “an important step forward in the direction of denominational control of denominational institutions” and encouraged other state conventions and associations to “take similar action.”

Echoing his own Georgetown report, Eaton emphasized the need for institutional trustees to be selected by “representative bodies of Baptists” as opposed to a general body making the decisions; “the churches should have a voice.” For Eaton, the outcome of the Kentucky convention was a victory of local church autonomy.

Other Baptist state conventions and local associations followed suit at their 1897 annual meetings, and the *Western Recorder* publicized the proceedings. The

205 W. P. Harvey, [untitled], *Western Recorder*, June 24, 1897.


207 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, July 1, 1897.

208 Ibid.
meetings at Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas all passed resolutions calling for Whitsitt’s retirement from his seminary presidency.\textsuperscript{209} For the second consecutive year, a deluge of Kentucky Baptist associations called for the dismissal of Whitsitt, endorsed the action of the Kentucky state convention, and even threatened to withhold contributions to the seminary.\textsuperscript{210} W. P. Harvey was a frequent guest at many of the Kentucky associations, acting as official representative of the \textit{Western Recorder}, and many associations commended the \textit{Recorder} and Eaton’s editorial work in their resolutions against Whitsitt.

The 1897 meeting of the Long Run Baptist Association convened on September 1 and 2 in Long Run, Kentucky, with Eaton and his constituents clearly in command. Eaton cast a successful motion to elect W. E. Powers as moderator, John T. Christian cast the successful motion to re-elect Thomas D. Osbourne as clerk, and W. P. Harvey preached its annual sermon.\textsuperscript{211} J. W. Porter of PeWee Valley Baptist Church delivered the anticipated resolution against Whitsitt, which not only called for Whitsitt’s resignation but affirmed “as long as he continues as President of the Seminary and Professor of Church History, the great mass of Southern Baptists will withhold from the institution their cooperation and support.”\textsuperscript{212} By a 73 to 36 advantage, the messengers adopted the resolution after fierce debate between Eaton, Sampey, Porter, Carter Helm


\textsuperscript{211} Minutes of the Long Run Association of Baptists, 1897, 7.

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 8.
Jones, and T. B. Hill. After the announcement of the votes, a point of order called for a counting of the ayes and nays, as Whitsitt’s supporters suspected some churches had sent illegal messengers. Powers exercised his moderator privilege to decline further appeals, and Eaton denied that any appeal was permissible. Powers did permit messengers the privilege of having their vote recorded by name, and Eaton requested that his non-vote be recorded on account of his seminary trustee status.²¹³

The cumulative effect of the Baptist churches pledging to drop financial support of the seminary at their associations and state conventions tightened the noose around Whitsitt’s neck. With the seminary’s student fund facing severe financial shortfalls for 1898, rumors of Whitsitt’s resignation carried increasingly more weight. As Whitsitt’s supporters dwindled against the wave of denominational opposition, a ray of hope came through the establishment of the Baptist Argus, a Louisville Baptist newspaper backed by Southern Seminary designed to rival the Western Recorder. The Argus arrived too late to stem the political tide against Whitsitt, but it would enjoy a lengthy run as the preferred mouthpiece of the seminary and the Baptist World Alliance before merging with the Recorder in 1919.²¹⁴

As Eaton led the Baptist forces of Kentucky against Whitsitt, B. H. Carroll (seminary trustee of First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas) likewise carried the day on the western front.²¹⁵ In an August 25, 1897 letter to Eaton, Carroll commended him for his forthright attitude displayed in his Western Recorder editorials against great personal opposition:

It does seem to me that you have been harshly judged about the Whitsitt matter, if your editorials are the true indices of your attitude. They seem to me to show that

²¹³Minutes of the Long Run Association of Baptists, 1897, 10.


²¹⁵Wills, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 215–18.
you have at all times had an equable dispassionate mind, and manifested remarkable patience under the various insinuations and harsh judgments that have been published against you from many sources. Not having an opportunity to talk with you privately, and judging you only by your editorials it does seem to me that your critics will have a big job in securing your condemnation by any proofs from the files of your paper. . . . If I had to decide the question, I would certainly say that your adversaries have gone far beyond you in impugning motives and in manifesting an irritable spirit.\textsuperscript{216}

When the seminary trustees met before the 1898 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention at Norfolk, Virginia, in May, Whitsitt’s supporters on the board still outnumbered his critics. Despite the best efforts of Eaton and Carroll and the presentation of dozens of association letters calling for their action against Whitsitt, the seminary trustees refused to terminate the seminary’s president. Both Eaton and Carroll had grown frustrated at the seminary’s uneven allotment of trustees, which generally favored the states on the eastern seaboard and allotted less representation to western states such as Texas (which had two trustees) and Arkansas (which had none).\textsuperscript{217} Eaton addressed the issue in his report delivered to the 1897 Kentucky General Association.\textsuperscript{218} In a May 5, 1898 editorial, Eaton insisted the seminary trustees ought to prove their loyalty to the churches from “six state bodies and over an hundred district association” that had called for Whitsitt’s resignation.\textsuperscript{219} If the trustees should ignore the demands of the churches, then a severing of ties between the denomination and the seminary would become a very real possibility, after which the SBC could elect trustees who would be accountable to the denomination.\textsuperscript{220}

\textsuperscript{216}B. H. Carroll to T. T. Eaton, August 25, 1897, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 28, SBTS.


\textsuperscript{218}General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1897, 12.

\textsuperscript{219}T. T. Eaton, [editorial], \textit{Western Recorder}, May 5, 1899.

\textsuperscript{220}Ibid.
Carroll’s frustration even spilled over onto the floor of the 1898 Southern Baptist Convention, when he presented a notice “in the interest of harmony” calling for the Convention to “exercise its evident right to divest itself of responsibility in the Seminary management by dissolving the slight and remote bond of connection.” His resolution would have the SBC messengers decline to nominate trustees to the seminary’s board and “leave the Institution to stand on its own merits.” Demonstrating his own political prowess, Carroll did not offer his resolution for an immediate vote, but only made the text public with a promise that he would present it at the 1899 SBC annual meeting. The Convention ordered a committee composed of representatives from each state to study the question of the denomination’s relation to the seminary and to report at the next year’s session. In the Recorder, Eaton praised Carroll’s notice as “a matter of intense practical interest” regarding the “unsatisfactory” arrangement of the seminary’s disproportionate trustee board.

**Vindication and Resignation**

The June 1898 meeting of the General Association of Kentucky Baptists at Hopkinsville signaled the impending end of Whitsitt’s presidency of the seminary. According to Whitsitt, a secret meeting on June 20 preceded the official proceedings that involved J. M. Frost, F. H. Kerfoot, and Georgetown College president A. C. Davidson. The group approached Southern Seminary’s A. T. Robertson and impressed upon him that Southern Baptists were tiring of Whitsitt, and that his resignation would be the only

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221 Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1898 (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1898), 23.

222 Ibid.

223 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, May 19, 1898.
way for him to retire with dignity and to hold the denomination together. Robertson became convinced that Whitsitt’s resignation would be necessary.²²⁴

Robertson’s estimation was surely confirmed by the action of the Kentucky General Association, which voted by a substantial 198 to 26 majority that no representative of Southern Seminary should make a report or appeal to the state convention, so long as Dr. Whitsitt remained connected with it.²²⁵ According to Eaton’s summation, three hours were allocated for debate on the question, but even he expressed surprise that the majority decision was so overwhelming.

In the course of a year, the Kentucky convention had progressed from a closely contested vote for Whitsitt’s resignation to a near consensus that the seminary was no longer welcome to appeal for financial contribution during its sessions. Eaton interpreted this as tough love on the seminary’s behalf:

This action must not be understood as opposition to the Seminary. These brethren believe that this action will promote the best interests of the institution. They believe a temporary separation is the best way to secure permanent union. They think the good of the Seminary requires the retirement of Dr. W., and this is the action, on their part, best calculated to secure this end.²²⁶

With his closest supporters wavering in their support, Whitsitt finally relented and tendered his resignation to Joshua Levering, the seminary’s trustee board president, on July 13, 1898. His retirement became effective when the seminary trustees met prior to the Southern Baptist Convention the following year, although many Baptists preferred the trustees would have convened an immediate meeting to finalize the transition.²²⁷ With the departure of Whitsitt, the seminary trustees elected Edgar Young Mullins as his presidential successor in 1899. F. H. Kerfoot, who had previously held aspirations of

²²⁴Slatton, W. H. Whitsitt, 276.

²²⁵T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, June 23, 1898.

²²⁶Ibid.

being elected seminary president in 1895, withdrew his name from consideration in 1899, so as to avoid potential controversy that he had conspired against Whitsitt. Kerfoot soon resigned from the seminary and moved to Atlanta, Georgia, to work with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, but he died on June 22, 1901.

For Eaton and his fellow combatants, victory brought a sense of vindication that Southern Baptists had spoken loudly and finally earned their due hearing. In 1899, John T. Christian released another book through the Baptist Book Concern titled *Baptist History Vindicated*, with Eaton once again providing the introduction, as he had previously done for Christian’s *Did They Dip?* (1897). In his book, Christian again argued from various sources that immersion was already familiar in England by the sixteenth century on account of the Anabaptists, and Whitsitt’s 1641 theory was based on unreliable evidence. Christian claimed to have found the 1624 will of Henry Jacob while studying abroad in London, which contradicted the statements of the manuscripts cited by Whitsitt. Eaton heartily approved of the book for having “clearly proved” Whitsitt’s “Kiffin manuscript” and “Jessey Records” to be “thoroughly unreliable” and abounding in “the grossest and most glaring mistakes.”

Following his resignation from the seminary, Whitsitt moved to Virginia to teach at Richmond College in 1901. He also made an additional research vacation to Europe in order to further his own scholarship on Baptist history without the burden of appeasing Southern Baptist political constituents. His rivalry with Eaton persisted, and the term “Landmark” became an increasingly common label to describe those who had opposed Whitsitt over the question of church succession.

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228F. H. Kerfoot to T. T. Eaton, May 12, 1899, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 12, SBTS.

229T. T. Eaton, introduction to *Baptist History Vindicated* by John T. Christian (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1899), v.

230Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*, 228.
In a tense exchange of correspondence in 1900, Eaton and Whitsitt shared their different impressions of the controversy that had consumed the attention of both men’s careers. Eaton maintained that he had dealt with Whitsitt fairly during the controversy:

The fact is that, during the whole unfortunate controversy, I have done nothing in reference to you which I would not have been perfectly willing that you should have done in reference to me, had our positions been reversed. If any one doubts this, I invite him to put me to the test. Can you say as much in regard to me?231

Whitsitt, on the hand, held no such sympathies, and dismissed Eaton’s fairness statement as one that “deserves no attention.”232 Whitsitt preferred to compare Eaton’s understanding of their “friendship” to the relationship between Joab and Amasa in 2 Samuel 20:9–10, in which Joab betrayed his brother with a kiss before gutting him with the sword.233 Eaton took offense to this charge, remarking that “it is one of the most serious charges one minister could bring against another.”234 Eaton pressed Whitsitt for further elaboration and justification, but when Whitsitt refused to indulge him and begged to be excused, Eaton warned, “I feel at perfect liberty to make any use of this correspondence that may seem to me fitting.”235

Conclusion

The resignation of William H. Whitsitt from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary resulted largely from the political pressure leveraged against him and the seminary by T. T. Eaton. In the years prior to the controversy, a personal and public

231T. T. Eaton to William H. Whitsitt, September 1, 1900, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 34, SBTS.

232William H. Whitsitt to T. T. Eaton, September 7, 1900, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 34, SBTS.

233William H. Whitsitt to T. T. Eaton, September 4, 1900, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 34, SBTS.

234T. T. Eaton to William H. Whitsitt, September 8, 1900, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 34, SBTS.

235T. T. Eaton to William H. Whitsitt, September 19, 1900, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 34, SBTS.
wedge grew between them due to various personal and political circumstances. In the first year of the controversy, Eaton used his influence over the *Western Recorder* and Baptist Book Concern to challenge Whitsitt’s historiography and reinforce the widespread Baptist belief that immersion was a familiar practice in England long before 1641. In the second year of the controversy, after the seminary’s trustees and the Southern Baptist Convention refused to censure Whitsitt for his views and methods, Eaton turned his efforts toward mobilizing Kentucky Baptists to stand against a viewpoint he deemed dangerous to Baptist identity. In the final year of the controversy, Eaton’s strategies finally yielded his desired goal of Whitsitt’s departure from the seminary’s faculty. For Eaton, the doctrine of church succession was a necessary component of the Baptist witness, but his crusade against Whitsitt also had the effect of creating a sharp division across the Southern Baptist Convention.
CHAPTER 7
EATON THE LOST LEADER

Eaton spent much of his last years striving to ensure that his efforts to purify the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary would not be in vain and fending off personal hostility and attacks against his own character in the aftermath of the Whitsitt Controversy. In his last decade of life, Eaton spent much ink defending his character and conduct, but he also made great effort to promote doctrinal orthodoxy against the “New Theology” of liberalism. He continued to be an active participant in the denomination’s parliamentary proceedings, but many Baptists came to perceive him as a pugnacious leader of the denomination’s Landmark fringe. Although he continued to pastor the prestigious Walnut Street Baptist Church and edit the Western Recorder until his sudden death on June 29, 1907, he made few positive contributions to the development of a denominational consciousness, relative to his pre-Whitsitt controversy accomplishments.

The Lingering Controversy

Even with the resignation of Whitsitt from the Southern Seminary faculty, Eaton was unable to put the controversy definitely behind him. In an extended statement published in the February 15, 1900 Western Recorder, he named the various forces antagonizing him for his role in forcing Whitsitt’s resignation. Notable among them were the secular newspapers of Louisville, the Courier Journal and the Louisville Times. Eaton wrote,

The hostility against me is active, and in several ways it has recently expressed itself. Individuals have denounced me and slanderous tales have been put in circulation concerning me. . . . What the next attack will be, I have no means of knowing. . . . But I propose to go right on doing my duty according to my light, and loving the
brethren. If any of the brethren refuse to love me—why I will try to get along as best I can without their love.¹

Against Whitsitt and his most devoted supporters, Eaton struggled mightily to defend the commonly-held belief that immersion had been the predominant means of baptism by seventeenth-century English Baptists and their generational antecedents. With the resignation of Whitsitt on account of mounting pressure within the denomination, Eaton achieved his immediate goal. This victory, however, came at great personal cost to his reputation as a statesman and leader within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Even years after the resignation of Whitsitt, Eaton could not escape falling back into the controversy. In late 1901, an anonymous article appeared in the New York Evening Post titled “The Virtues in Majorities,” which Eaton reprinted with permission in the December 26 issue of the Western Recorder.² The cryptic article evidenced details of someone intimately familiar with the campus of Southern Seminary, and its purpose was to exonerate Whitsitt while begrudging the competence of the late F. H. Kerfoot. According to Eaton, the Post managing editor claimed that the article came courtesy of a member of the seminary’s board of trustees, a claim he thought improbable.³ Eaton suspected Whitsitt to be the obvious suspect responsible for the composition, and sent a letter to every seminary trustee asking for his denial of responsibility in the article.⁴

In a Western Recorder editorial, Eaton listed clues he believed pointed to Whitsitt as the person responsible for mocking Kerfoot and the Baptists who had opposed him during the controversy. Eaton observed the anonymous author was “quite familiar with the city of Richmond,” “belongs to that small class who speak of Dr. Whitsitt as


²“The Virtue in Majorities,” Western Recorder, December 26, 1901.


⁴Ibid.
‘Wm. Heth Whitsitt’, ‘charges the opponents of Dr. W. with believing [no one is saved without baptism],’ and ‘very bitter at Dr. Kerfoot and determined to pursue him.’ Eaton believed these characteristics to be true of Whitsitt.

Eaton took particular offense at the allegation that the Baptists who opposed Whitsitt believed the efficacy of salvation depended upon baptism, especially a baptismal line of succession from the Apostles. Eaton protested that such an allegation was an irresponsible untruth:

There is not a Baptist church in the South, ‘Hardshell’ or any other sort, whose articles of faith do not contradict that idea; not a Baptist preacher in the South who does not vigorously oppose that idea, and not an intelligent Baptist layman in the South who does not reject the idea. And the man who told this falsehood to the editor of the Post must have known it was false when he told it.

Finally, Eaton observed the ironic coincidence that the anonymous article had been published through a New York source:

It is a coincidence in regard to the controversy, that the first attack made on what was commonly believed among us, came in the guise of editorials in a New York paper; and now this attack comes in the guise of an editorial in a New York paper. Eaton evidenced growing annoyance with every revisiting of the Whitsitt controversy, insisting ‘The Whitsitt controversy ought to have ended in May, 1899 . . . And it is sad to think that any brethren are still bitter in their feelings toward others who differed with them in that controversy.’

Other newspapers from Richmond, Baltimore, and other cities picked up Eaton’s insinuation, proclaiming it to be another extension of his cruelty toward Whitsitt. In the aftermath of the Whitsitt controversy, almost any statement or action attempted by Eaton carried heavy scrutiny and suspicion of an ulterior motive. In his efforts to safeguard his definition of Baptist identity, he nearly splintered the

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denomination over what came to be perceived as a uniquely Landmark concern. No longer would his legacy be remembered as a key figure in the creation of a united and efficient Southern Baptist denomination, a cause for which he had labored his entire ministerial career. In Eaton’s estimation, the prevailing definition of Landmarkism entailed common beliefs held by most nineteenth-century Baptists, including James P. Boyce. Eaton bemoaned what he perceived to be a broadening of the definition of Landmarkism in order to marginalize beliefs he believed to be distinctively Baptist:

Dr. Boyce was what is now called a Landmarker, although he was not what was called one, twenty years ago. Then, a Landmarker was one who believed that Pedobaptist ministers should not be invited to occupy Baptist pulpits, and Dr. Boyce did not believe that. Today, a Landmarker is one who rejects “alien immersion” and believes that Baptists have existed since the days of John the Baptist, and Dr. Boyce did both of these. He was not a Landmarker according to the definition of 1879, but he was a Landmarker, according to the definition of 1899.  

Eaton continued to serve upon the Convention’s committees on foreign missionary work, but one incident from the 1900 annual meeting in Hot Springs, Arkansas, might indicate how divisive a figure Eaton had become in the aftermath of the Whitsitt controversy. In the course of the convention proceedings, Eaton made a seemingly innocent motion to suspend the rules to allow a Syrian Christian to speak to the messengers. For reasons unrecorded, the messengers divided upon the question, bringing the matter to a vote that ultimately went in Eaton’s favor and allowed the Syrian guest to address the body.  

Eaton also continued to advocate doctrines he considered critical to Baptist heritage and identity, ones that increasingly became associated as the position of the denomination’s radical Landmark wing. In the Western Recorder, Eaton argued that the Bible did not support the idea of a “universal, invisible church.” Commenting upon


11Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1900 (Nashville: Marshal & Bruce Company, 1900), 13.
Ephesians 5:23, Eaton argued the Greek word *ecclesia* “always means a body of people called out and called together. . . . the meaning is a local assembly.” Eaton protested that this interpretation was not an incursion into Baptist ecclesiology due to the influence of James Robinson Graves, as others had alleged. He appealed to the Philadelphia and 1644 London Confessions as evidence, and singled out James Madison Pendleton and John A. Broadus as individual advocates that the “church” should always be understood as a local, visible assembly. Eaton asserted that in his fourteen years as Broadus’s pastor he “never got from Dr. Broadus the slightest hint that he believed there was any such thing as the ‘universal invisible church’.” Eaton also referenced Broadus’s *Commentary on Matthew*, selecting excerpts from his discussion of the church in Matthew 16:18, and concluding:

Wherever there is a church Dr. Broadus holds there is an assembly, and that is our position exactly, and it flatly contradicts the doctrine of “the universal, invisible church,” which affirms that this alleged church is not an assembly at all, but scattered all over the earth.

Eaton commended Norfolk, Virginia’s J. J. Taylor, whom he later recommended for president of Georgetown College, for taking a public stand against the universal church doctrine. Like Taylor, Eaton believed one who professed belief in the universal church doctrine would also logically dismiss baptism as a prerequisite for local church membership. Eaton proclaimed, “Baptist doctrine is a complete system—break it at any point and it all comes to pieces. The sooner all Baptists learn this, the better for them and for our world.”

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12 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, December 18, 1902.
14 Eaton, “Ridiculous Claim.”
15 Ibid.
16 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, January 1, 1903.
The Seminary Watchman

Edgar Young Mullins, Whitsitt’s successor to the seminary presidency, proved himself to be more a match for Eaton than his predecessor. Though Eaton may have hoped to draw Mullins into open debate on the subjects of baptism and ecclesiology, Mullins showed prudent restraint against Eaton’s attempts to provoke him. An erudite and articulate scholar himself, Mullins did not follow in Whitsitt’s missteps that played into Eaton’s favor.

With a sense of vigilance, Eaton kept pressure on Mullins and the seminary faculty to prove themselves worthy of the trust placed upon them by the denomination. In 1903, Mullins and his editorial allies at the Baptist Argus chose to respond regarding the doctrine of the universal, invisible church. Preceding Mullins’s engagement was Eaton’s reprinting of some Religious Herald articles by J. J. Taylor arguing that the invisible church doctrine was responsible for the heretical doctrine of church membership without baptism. Both Eaton and Mullins understood Taylor to be suggesting some seminary faculty members entertained similar beliefs. The Baptist Argus editors defended the doctrine of the universal-invisible church, arguing that the doctrine had precedent among Baptist forefathers.

The Argus countered Eaton and Taylor by contending that belief in the universal church was scriptural, ingrained into the seminary’s Abstract of Principles and an established Baptist doctrine it proudly supported. An Argus editorial proclaimed that


18 Ibid., 55–56.


20 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, February 12, 1903; “End of the Chapter,” The Baptist Argus, February 19, 1903.

“Dr. Graves began the innovation so far as our reading goes” of denying the existence of the universal spiritual church. Eaton accused the *Argus* of logical inconsistency in trying to argue that immersion was non-essential for membership in the universal-invisible church, but necessary for membership in a local church. William J. McGlothlin, who replaced Whitsitt as the seminary’s church history professor, argued through the *Argus* that *ecclesia* in the New Testament referred less to a local assembly but rather to “the Christian community.”

The relationship between Eaton and most of the Southern Seminary faculty remained cool throughout the last decade of his life. Nevertheless, Eaton took offense at accusations that he was “no friend of the seminary,” as seminary missiology professor William Owen Carver was once rumored to have uttered. In 1906, Eaton learned that Carver presented a paper at a Baltimore pastor’s conference entertaining notions of Baptist pulpit exchanges, open communion, and exchange of membership letters with Campbellite Disciples of Christ, and he addressed the situation in the pages of the *Western Recorder*, much to the chagrin of Carver. Mullins issued a charitable statement on the subject of Christian union that called upon Baptists to cultivate a brotherly spirit with other Christians without compromising distinctive Baptist

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22“*What the Fathers Say Once More,*” *The Baptist Argus*, February 5, 1903.

23T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, March 26, 1903.

24T. T. Eaton, [editorial], *Western Recorder*, April 16, 1903.

25T. T. Eaton to W. O. Carver, October 15, 1903, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 27, SBTS.

26W. O. Carver to T. T. Eaton, December 29, 1906, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 27, SBTS; Charles H. Dodd to W. O. Carver [copy to T. T. Eaton], December 8, 1906, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 27, SBTS; W. O. Carver to T. T. Eaton, January 2, 1907, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 27, SBTS; T. T. Eaton to W. O. Carver, January 5, 1907, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 27, SBTS; T. T. Eaton to W. O. Carver, February 2, 1907, T. T. Eaton papers, Box 1, Folder 27, SBTS; Mark R. Wilson, *William Owen Carver’s Controversies in the Baptist South* (Macon, GA: Macon University Press, 2010), 30–32.
This controversy also raised questions about the seminary faculty’s position on alien immersion, which eventually led Mullins to draft a statement about his personal view of the subject that he disseminated for publication in all denominational papers.\(^{28}\)

Though the seminary publicly distanced itself from any doctrine particularly associated with Landmarkism, Eaton held greater influence among the trustees of Georgetown College, leading the school to appoint J. J. Taylor as its president by a one-vote margin in 1903.\(^{29}\) Three years earlier, Taylor had become the focus of some controversy when being considered as a pastoral candidate to the First Baptist Church of Nashville, Tennessee, on account of his alleged sympathies with J. R. Graves. A letter circulated among some newspapers that some editors attributed to W. H. Whitsitt, declaring Taylor a disciple of Graves and unfit to lead the Kentucky Baptist college. The alleged letter was privately addressed to Nashville Baptist Morton B. Howell and claimed that Taylor’s pastorate at Nashville would dishonor the legacy of Morton’s father R. B. C. Howell.\(^{30}\)

Eaton inquired of Howell to confirm the details, but Howell passed along the letter to Whitsitt.\(^{31}\) The perturbed Whitsitt denied his involvement, accused Eaton of still pursuing him “with unabated ferocity, notwithstanding my retirement from official life,” and declared such suspicious “unworthy of any Christian minister.”\(^{32}\) Eaton assured


\(^{29}\)Ellis, *A Man of Books and a Man of the People*, 56.

\(^{30}\)[William H. Whitsitt?] to Morton B. Howell, May 3, 1899, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 34, SBTS.

\(^{31}\)T. T. Eaton to Morton B. Howell, April 3, 1900, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 34, SBTS.

\(^{32}\)William H. Whitsitt to T. T. Eaton, August 31, 1900, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 34. SBTS.
Whitsitt that his desire was to avoid publishing an unverified rumor as truth and receive “an explanation which would put you in a better light before the public.”

**The Fallen Warrior**

Among Eaton’s last major published writings was his 1906 book *Faith and the Faith*, published through the Baptist Book Concern. Rather than being a reactionary work against some current controversy, the book served as a treatise affirming the atonement of Christ, the inerrancy of Scripture, and the guilt of sinners. Paramount among Eaton’s concerns was the creeping influence of the liberal “New Theology” that denied the distinctive doctrines of Christianity and robbed the gospel of its salvific efficacy. Eaton believed that such theological deviations not only forsook scriptural fidelity, but lacked the spiritual power to accomplish any meaningful earthly good:

> The record of what the orthodox faith has done in the world is open to all. It has stood the test. Now let the new theology be put to a practical test. Let a mission be opened in the slums of New York where the new doctrine shall be preached, and let it be seen whether the work of the Jerry McCauley Mission can be surpassed. . . . When practical tests show that preaching the new theology produces better results than have been produced by preaching orthodoxy, then, and not till then, should these gentlemen have the face to ask us to give up orthodoxy and to accept the new theology. The fact is, the new theology is no match for total depravity.

James Madison Frost, longtime correspondence secretary of the SBC Sunday School Board, praised it as a courageous stand for orthodoxy in an era in which “academic freedom” threatened to excuse a number of doctrinal errors. Frost, who also sensed the dangers of encroaching liberal theology in religious institutions, confided to Eaton that controversy must be a necessary occurrence in order to define truth clearly:

> You have rendered the cause of truth a real service. . . . Your book is timely . . . It is enough to make the heart sick to see what things are advocated in the name of

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33T. T. Eaton to William H. Whitsitt, September 1, 1900, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 34, SBTS.


“liberty in teaching,” and then excused in the name of “academic freedom.” I almost wish sometimes that we could have a vigorous conflict concerning the great doctrines. It would sift and separate and help to definiteness and a better understanding. . . . But we would want every man to stand under his real colors and let it be known where he might be found. No one wishes to go into a fight with a man who is considered comrade and brother, but who when the fight is hottest cuts for his heart and cuts from behind. Honesty in speaking is as important and noble as freedom of thought.  

In a similar vein, B. H. Carroll submitted a glowing review of the book, admitting that he read the book three times between one week intervals and calling it “one of the most valuable contributions to religious literature and life issued by a press in the last one hundred years.”

Echoing concerns held by Frost and Eaton about the “new theology,” Carroll declared Eaton’s book “worth more than the thousand best volumes ever written by the destructive higher critics. . . . Cold must be the heart of the Christian that will not throb with intenser beat as he reads the book.”

Eaton’s *Faith and the Faith* even received praise from unlikely sources beyond his like-minded Baptists. Herbert Whiting Virgin, who served in an administrative position with the Baptist Young People’s Union of Missouri, claimed that he had ordered one hundred copies to share with new converts.

Princeton’s B. B. Warfield found the book “sound and sane and well fitted to do much good in these confused and confusing days in which our lot is cast.”

Near the time of his death, Eaton’s *Western Recorder* editorials focused upon the advancement of the Baptist cause in the world. He took pleasure in recounting the statistical information in the 1906 *Baptist Year Book* regarding contributions for missionary causes and baptisms, which averaged 729 for each day of the year.

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36 J. M. Frost to T. T. Eaton, March 27, 1906, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 27, SBTS.

37 B. H. Carroll, “Faith and the Faith,” [undated], T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 28, SBTS.

38 Ibid.

39 Herbert Whiting Virgin to T. T. Eaton, June 12, 1906, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 16, SBTS.

40 B. B. Warfield to T. T. Eaton, June 20, 1906, T. T. Eaton Papers, Box 1, Folder 16, SBTS.
observed, “While 729 people are baptized into our Baptist churches for every day in the year, there is no danger of Baptists’ dying out.” Eaton contended that jubilation over denomination gains should be tempered by even higher expectations because Baptists stood for the cause of biblical truth:

Gratifying as is the progress the Baptists are making in the world, it is but little compared with what ought to be; seeing they hold the truth, the world is open to them and the present generation is rapidly passing away.

On the hotly debated subject of Christian union, Eaton echoed his editorial sentiments from nearly two decades prior in wishing for denominational unity to be based upon mutually shared doctrinal convictions. In addition to the Baptist–Campbellite relations addressed by Mullins and Carver, Eaton even extended his high standards to Baptist churches of Calvinistic and Arminian understandings of soteriology. Eaton considered the Calvinistic “doctrines of grace” (election, predestination, final perseverance of the saints, etc.) to be characteristic of sound Baptist faith just as strict communion characterized faithful Baptist practice. Commenting upon an ecclesiological union between Baptist and Free Will Baptist churches, Eaton stated his conviction that such a union should only occur when the more rigorous doctrinal standards prevail, although his experience taught that the opposite was more often the case:

We hope this case will prove the exception to the rule that it is always the more orthodox body which has lowered its standards. According to experience it would be found that Free Willers stood squarely and manfully to their Arminianism and their open communion, and the Baptists are the ones who have backslidden from “the faith.”

Eaton never returned home after attending the 1907 General Association of Kentucky Baptists in Mayfield. After the annual meeting, Eaton preached an evening service at a Fulton, Kentucky, congregation. Early the next morning on June 29, 1907,

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41 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, May 16, 1907.

42 Ibid.

43 T. T. Eaton, [editorial], Western Recorder, May 23, 1907.
Eaton became ill at the train station, slipped into unconsciousness, and died that afternoon. His last words, according to his traveling companion, were “Are there any Baptists here?” Eaton’s widowed sister Josephine Peck was particularly devastated by his death, reportedly lamenting “I have lost my all!” upon hearing the tragic news. The Walnut Street Baptist Church hosted Eaton’s funeral the following week, which included participation by J. M. Weaver, W. P. Harvey, Lansing Burrows, C. M. Thompson, and others. Weaver became the Western Recorder’s interim editorial replacement until Thompson assumed the duties for the next two years. In 1909, a memorial statue was erected above Eaton’s grave in Louisville’s Cave Hill cemetery funded by over five hundred donors, including E. Y. Mullins and John R. Sampey.

Henry Alford Porter succeeded Eaton at pastor of Walnut Street Baptist Church, and he memorialized Eaton at a December 22, 1907 service. Porter referred to the departed Eaton as “A Lost Leader,” which was a most fitting description of his career in more ways than one. Porter likened Eaton to Moses, calling him “one of the most versatile of men. He was a leader, and he was a teacher, and great as each.” In the name of harmony, John R. Sampey once pleaded with Eaton to become a beloved senior denominational statesman in the vein of John A. Broadus, but Eaton chose to defend his beliefs through conflict with a temperament that many found unbecoming of a man in his position. Ultimately, statesmen like Mullins and Sampey led the denomination into an

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44[editorial], Western Recorder, July 4, 1907; “In Memoriam,” Star-Banner, July 1907, 2.
45“The Funeral,” Western Recorder, July 18, 1907.
46“Ceremonies Attending the Unveiling of the Statue of Thomas Treadwell Eaton, Souvenir Program,” SBTS.
47Henry Alford Porter, A Lost Leader, Thomas Treadwell Eaton: Memorial Sermon (Louisville: Walnut Street Baptist Church, 1908).
era of great advances in the twentieth century, one which progressively diverged from the brand of orthodoxy championed by Eaton. Baptists who adhered to the conception of ecclesiological identity represented by Eaton became labeled as “Landmarkers,” anti-intellectuals who were perceived to be at odds with denominational unity and missionary progress. In this way, Eaton, like Moses, was denied entrance into his Promised Land.

Soon after Eaton’s death, the trustees of Southwestern University in Jackson, Tennessee, rendered a tribute to him and the legacy of his family. Effective September 17, 1907, Southwestern changed its name back to Union University, permanently identifying the Baptist school’s continuity with the Murfreesboro institution where Joseph Haywood Eaton served as president and where Thomas Treadwell Eaton served as a faculty member. Perhaps no other Tennessee Baptist did more to preserve the institution’s heritage after its post–Civil War closure than T. T. Eaton. In a state divided starkly by geographical and ideological border lines, he labored to unite the various Tennessee factions into a new state convention, one capable of supporting a denominational university. Though Eaton’s involvement in the Whitsitt controversy had eroded much of his reputation as denominational statesman, the existence of Union University stood as a testament to his long career as an architect of denominational consciousness, one who mastered the political aspect of the Baptist ecclesiological tradition in order to build a stronger union.\(^49\)

**Conclusion**

In his late years, Eaton could never escape the shadow of the Whitsitt controversy. Whereas, his early career evidenced a steady trajectory of expanding influence within the denomination, the controversy made him into a divisive personality. Eaton never apologized for his role in the controversy, insisting that he had labored to

\(^{49}\text{James Alex Baggett, *So Great a Cloud of Witnesses, Union University, 1823–2000* (Jackson, TN: Union University Press, 2000), 83.}\)
defend historic Baptist identity in the interests of Southern Baptists. Eaton endeavored to hold accountable the administration and faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to the concerns of the churches of the denomination. He sought to preserve and promote orthodox theology against the attacks of theological liberalism, though death cut short his labors.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

Throughout his ministerial career, Thomas Treadwell Eaton utilized the political processes inherent in the Baptist denominational polity to mobilize Southern Baptists into unified action. His efforts were successful, as evidenced by the Southern Baptist Convention’s ability to sustain a greater level of organizational effectiveness by the 1890s. Eaton was not content merely to unite the denomination for pragmatic effectiveness, but he desired its work to be motivated by doctrinal orthodoxy and a distinctively Baptist understanding of ecclesiology. When Eaton sensed the denominational identity threatened by views he considered heterodox, he endeavored to rally Baptist churches to oppose such deviations. His interpretation of Baptist orthodoxy, as well as the methods he employed to defend it, eventually branded him as a pugilistic schismatic who was beholden to an outdated, anti-intellectual faction of the denomination.

As a Tennessee Baptist minister, Eaton took an active role in denominational meetings to promote denominationally-supported institutions. He evidenced great support for Baptist institutions of higher education, promoting the interests of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the churches where he served as pastor by encouraging financial giving toward the fledgling school. In addition to his brief stint upon the Union University faculty, he was a leader in uniting Tennessee Baptists into a state-wide convention for the purpose of sustaining a state university. Although he had intimate acquaintance with respected leaders in the Landmark movement, Eaton’s career was characterized by promotion of missions, institutions, and denominational unity.

As a Baptist pastor in Virginia, Eaton experienced great success in raising his congregation’s percentage of monetary giving toward mission work. Furthermore, he
encouraged the churches of his local association to greater financial giving toward the
Southern Baptist Convention’s mission boards. Working near Richmond, Eaton came
into close contact with the editorial staff of the Religious Herald, one of the
denomination’s most influential newspapers. During his Virginia years, Eaton became
convinced that the key to building Baptist identity would be through the disseminating of
religious literature promoting the interests of the denomination. While he personally
avoided explicit involvement in denominational controversies, his sister took a more
active role by submitting newspaper columns under a pseudonymous name that
contributed to the resignation of Crawford H. Toy for unorthodox teachings at Southern
Seminary.

Eaton’s first decade among Louisville Baptists coincided with a dramatic rise
of denominational giving among the churches of the Long Run Baptist Association.
Leading this surge of interest was Eaton’s Walnut Street Baptist Church, which
exponentially increased its contributions to state and denominational causes on account
of Eaton’s arrival. Eaton became a regular leading voice in the association’s annual
meetings, emphasizing the need for wide participation in denominational causes.

Eaton’s career saw a major development when he became the editor of the
Western Recorder, thanks to a financial partnership with W. P. Harvey that also saw the
establishment of the Baptist Book Concern publishing house. The outlet for printing
provided him the means to disseminate his views on subjects he thought most important
to denominational progress and Baptist identity. He used his editorial privilege to
promote the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board as a trustworthy alternative to the
Northern Baptist societies, which he suspected did not fully respect the interests of
Baptists in southern states. Most notably, Eaton became a leading figure representing
Southern Baptists in the Fortress Monroe Comity, an agreement that served to solidify the
SBC denominational consciousness in the late nineteenth century.
The Whitsitt controversy preoccupied Eaton throughout the last years of the nineteenth century, motivating him to take definitive a public stand in support of Baptist church succession theory. Believing church succession essential to Baptist identity and biblical fidelity, Eaton used the full weight of his influence as pastor, publisher, editor, seminary trustee, and parliamentary participant to pressure Whitsitt to resign from the presidency of Southern Seminary. His efforts were widely appreciated by the majority of the local Baptist associations in Kentucky and in sympathy with the wishes of many other Southern Baptists across the denomination.

Eaton’s prominence in the Whitsitt controversy also branded him, in the eyes of many Baptists, as a divisive figure who catered only to the intellectually stagnant interests of the so-called “Landmark” faction. In his efforts to encourage greater engagement of Baptist churches with their denominational institutions, Eaton’s own conception of Baptist identity became a point of political division. In his last decade of life, Eaton defended himself and his allies against criticism and displayed an increasing concern that the doctrinal teaching of Southern Seminary should respect the interests of Southern Baptists who had spoken loudly against Whitsitt. A champion of doctrinal orthodoxy until the end, he served as a harbinger against encroachments of the liberal “New Theology” and labored to justify his interpretation of historic Baptist distinctives until his death.

Eaton’s legacy is far more significant to the development of the Southern Baptist Convention than as a simple foil to William Heth Whitsitt. Throughout the development of his career, he demonstrated an understanding of how to utilize the denomination’s political structure in order to advance a more robust and effective Baptist ecclesiology. The ironic result is that his efforts may have actually contributed to the marginalization of some beliefs he considered essential Baptist distinctives, thus politicizing Baptist ecclesiology itself.
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ABSTRACT
T. T. EATON AND THE POLITICIZATION OF BAPTIST ECCLESIOLOGY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
Chair: Dr. Thomas J. Nettles

Chapter 1 is the introduction, which proposes that Thomas Treadwell Eaton achieved great influence in the Southern Baptist Convention and utilized that influence to effect political change in the relationship between Southern Baptist churches and the denomination.

Chapter 2 traces the influences of Eaton’s formative years among Tennessee Baptists. Eaton became an avid supporter of denomination institutions for higher education and was an active participant in state convention meetings, where he led the Baptists in the state to unify for the purpose of supporting a university.

Chapter 3 follows Eaton to Virginia where he pastored between 1875 and 1881, and became intimately familiar with the political influence of denominational newspapers. As a pastor and leader in denominational causes, he was immensely successful in raising associational support for foreign missions and religious education.

Chapter 4 surveys Eaton’s first decade as a Baptist pastor in Louisville. Particular emphasis is given to his growing denominational leadership in the Long Run Baptist Association and his contributions to the surge of denominational giving towards missionary causes and Southern Baptist ministries.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how Eaton worked to promote his vision for Baptist identity through literature dissemination and denominational leadership. Eaton used the advantage of the denominational press to promote the distinctive doctrines of Baptists
and to oppose heterodox theology. Most importantly, Eaton became a leading proponent in the development of the Southern Baptist Convention’s denominational consciousness through his support of the Sunday School Board and the 1894 Fortress Monroe Comity.

Chapter 6 introduces the Whitsitt controversy and demonstrates Eaton’s efforts to oppose Whitsitt for undermining Baptist identity. Emphasis is given to the Western Recorder editorial strategies, the publishing output of the Baptist Book Concern, and the denominational parliamentary meetings that collectively pressured Whitsitt to resign from the seminary presidency.

Chapter 7 examines Eaton’s career after the Whitsitt controversy; though perceived by many as a divisive force, he continued to defend Baptist principles against the creeping influence of liberal theology and kept pressure upon the Southern Seminary faculty to respect denominational interests. Eaton remained actively involved in denominational causes. Chapter 8 is the conclusion.
VITA

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B.A., Union University, 2005
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PUBLICATIONS

ORGANIZATIONS
Academy of Certified Archivists
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Research Assistant, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 2006-2009
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