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Centennial Addresses

SYNOD OF NORTH CAROLINA



*Delivered at Alamance Church, Greens-
boro, N. C., October 7, 1913*

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THE PERSONNEL OF THE SYNOD DURING THE LAST 25 YEARS OF THE FIRST HALF CENTURY, FROM 1838 TO 1863

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Fathers, Brethren and Christian Friends:

By an arrangement with Dr. D. I. Craig, I am to speak of the Personnel of the Synod During the Last 25 Years of the First Half Century, or from 1838 to 1863. During this period I have some personal acquaintance with some of the more prominent persons of the Synod. In the time allotted me, the notice of individuals must be brief and some may be omitted who have rendered important service. When contemplated, grand natural objects exert a profound influence upon the human soul. The mighty ocean with its vast expanse, swelling tides and tossing billows, awaken in the mind of man emotions of wonder and of adoration for the infinite Creator. The azure vault of heaven, with its splendid garniture of suns and stars, kindles in the soul the feelings of grandeur and sublimity. The mountain peaks, "rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun", piercing the clouds and dominating earth's vast and varied landscapes, arouse in the beholder emotions of beauty, awe and admiration. But if such be the effects of contemplating the grand objects of nature, should not the soul be moved to admiration and imitation by considering the excellent characters and noble deeds of our brethren and friends who have passed from the earth. Longfellow has truthfully sung:

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.
Footprints which perhaps another
Sailing o'er life's troubled main
Some forlorn and shipwrecked brother
Seeing may take heart again."

In considering the notable personalities of this period we desire to group them as evangelists, educators, elders and preachers.

I. Observe the Evangelists.

At this period of the Synod's history, evangelists proper, that is, ministers without stated charge, and preaching the Gospel in destitute regions, were comparatively few. Synodical evangelization was not born until 1881, and did not reach maturity and efficiency until 1888. Yet

the three original Presbyteries had a few missionaries and missionary pastors. The Rev. Charles Phillips, D. D., and the Rev. Calvin Wiley, who never had regular charges, traveled extensively and preached the Gospel with power in many places for twenty years before they were ordained ministers. The Rev. Nelson Mebane, of Orange Presbytery, was a laborious evangelist in Texas during his early ministry. The speaker has good reason to remember him, as he was the first person who called his attention in boyhood to personal religion. Of a cheerful, genial disposition, he could talk to old or young upon the subject of religion, with the ease and naturalness that he would show in conversing upon any worldly topic. In his youth the speaker, with deep interest, has heard brother Mebane instruct and entertain Orange Presbytery by relating during the "free conversation on the subject of religion", his adventures and experiences as an evangelist in Texas. During the war many pastors were sent by their Presbyteries to preach in the Army of Northern Virginia and through them multitudes of our brave, self-sacrificing soldiers, who laid down their lives for their country, heard Christ's saving gospel.

II. But Education Must Now Claim Our Attention.

Presbyterianism has ever been associated with education. They confer lasting benefits upon society, the church and the state, who instruct and train the young. Some have done this, as presidents or professors of colleges. Gov. David Swain, long president of the University of North Carolina, was noted for his administrative ability, his extensive learning, and his skill in imparting knowledge. Dr. Hall Morrison, the first president of Davidson College, retired from office early on account of ill health, but left his impress upon the institution as well as upon his own family, some of whom became allied to the most distinguished men in our land. Dr. Drury Lacy was also president of Davidson College, a man of literary culture, of biblical knowledge, a forcible preacher, of genial disposition, of great simplicity of character well adapted to winning the young.

We might mention other men who were excellent professors in these institutions if time permitted. But we must refer to some teachers of classical and high schools. Among these Mr. William Bingham and his two sons, Col. Wm. Bingham and Major Robert Bingham, hold a high place. William Bingham conducted for many years a successful school founded by his father and he was noted for his ability to manage boys, maintain discipline, and to impart valuable knowledge. His son, Col. William Bingham, was an instructor of scholarly attainments, an author of classical text-books, and a man of winning manners. His son, Major Robert Bingham, still survives, at an advanced age, and now conducts near Asheville, a flourishing school that maintains, untarnished, the reputation won during the century. Another educator of marked ability and service was Rev. Alexander Wilson, D. D. He presided over "Caldwell Institute" at Hillsboro, N. C., under the care of Orange Presbytery, for years and there taught many youths and young men. When this institution closed he successfully conducted his own classical school at Melville, in Alamance County.

A third eminent teacher of boys was Mr. Ralph Graves, who maintained a well patronized school in Granville County, and was afterwards associated with Mr. Horner in Oxford, N. C. Dr. Robert Burwell and his gifted wife and son, Mr. John B. Burwell, did important educational work for our young women in Hillsboro, Charlotte and Raleigh, during many years. They not only informed their minds and trained their hearts, but imparted to them those social accomplishments which made them queens of homes and attractive members of society. At Hillsboro during a series of years the Misses Nash and Kollock conducted an education for young girls and women that developed the mind and trained the moral feelings, and directed the soul to its religious obligations, so as to render them ornaments to social life and efficient workers for Christ's kingdom.

Another important class of educators is to be found among our editors, writers and teachers of common and mission schools. About 1857 Rev. George McNeill, of Fayetteville, N. C., founded the North Carolina Presbyterian. This Synodical religious paper, now called *The Presbyterian Standard*, has exerted and still exerts a powerful influence upon the intelligence and pious development of our church and commonwealth. It has been said: "We take no note of time but by its loss". The same may be affirmed of our church paper. At the close of the war, when the paper was suspended for a few months, because its office was destroyed by the Federal army, Orange Presbytery had to meet two successive weeks to get a quorum, because there was no church organ to give the needful notice. Rev. George McNeill, who founded this paper, was an editor of sound judgment and a writer of racy, condensed and pungent articles. His brother, Rev. James McNeill, the Rev. Willis Miller and his talented wife who wrote prose and poetry over the name of "Luola", did excellent work on the paper. The Rev. James McNeill, going into the army as a colonel of cavalry, after gallant service, died in battle and was succeeded by the Rev. Jno. M. Sherwood as editor. He afterwards, as proprietor and editor, conducted the paper with manifest ability and marked success until 1872. During the period we are considering, and subsequently, Mrs. Cornelia Spencer, of Chapel Hill, was a frequent contributor to the North Carolina Presbyterian, and furnished articles containing wit and wisdom, and well calculated to educate thoughtful persons. Another woman of rare gifts did much for the religious education of our people. This was Mrs. E. A. McRae, of Centre Church, Fayetteville Presbytery. She possessed intelligence schools and Sabbath schools and mission schools in the western part of the State, and as the organizer and quickener of mission societies, she had few equals and no superior among the women of her generation. In her Presbytery and at her own expense, she visited more than 60 congregations to found and invigorate women's mission societies. Her labors extended outside her own Presbytery and beyond the period we are now considering.

Among the educators of this Synod the Rev. Calvin Wiley should not be forgotten. For many years he was superintendent of the common school system of the state, and did much laborious and self-sacrificing work in promoting their efficiency. He was an author of pronounced

ability, a writer of many articles of chaste diction and approved excellence, and a preacher—orthodox, forcible and impressive. North Carolina would not only do homage to sterling worth, but honor herself by rearing to him a monument.

But evangelists and educators in different departments of effort have not been the only efficient servitors of our Synod and State. A third class of workers have rendered efficient service.

III. Many ruling elders have been conspicuous for their acquirements, zeal and labors. Only a few can be specially mentioned. They may be classified as business, cultured, beneficent and spiritually minded elders. Among business elders may be named Mr. Jesse Lindsay, of Greensboro, N. C. He was a man of sound judgment and diligent application, having talent for secular business. But his business ability he was willing to consecrate to Christ and the church. For years he was the punctual, faithful and accurate treasurer of Orange Presbytery. Another elder of this class was the honorable Abraham Venable, of Granville County. He was an able lawyer, a genial companion, a fluent speaker, a member of Congress for years, and a man of extensive and varied knowledge. But he was a diligent student and expounder of the Bible and as conspicuous in church courts as in state tribunals or the councils of the nation. He often preached to the colored people and led acceptably the devotions of all classes. Still another eminent business elder was Mr. Jas. S. Amis, of Oxford, N. C. He was a lawyer, an intelligent political leader, a wise legislator, a well-informed Presbyterian, a devout Christian, and an active ruler in the house of God.

But some elders have been noted for their culture as well as for their piety. One of these was Mr. Bartholomew Fulier, of Fayetteville, N. C. He was a well-read lawyer, a judicious counselor, an efficient editor, and a man of varied literary tastes and acquirements. Yet an earnest follower of Christ, he desired to make his gifts and attainments subservient to the Lord's kingdom. One of the most cultivated ruling elders in this Synod was Mr. Marcellus Lanier, of Oxford, N. C. Learned in law, he would have graced the Supreme Court of the State. A forcible advocate, he habitually won his cases. A diligent student, he constantly added to his store of knowledge. He was conversant with Latin, Greek, German, and had some knowledge of Hebrew. He probably read the Scriptures in more languages than any other layman in the State. Nor was his a mere cursory reading. He studied critically the text that he might interpret it aright. Yet he was willing to devote the treasures of his learning to the service of Christ.

Some ruling elders have not been remarkable for business talent or broad culture, yet on account of personal goodness and sympathetic beneficence, have led very useful lives. One of these was Mr. Nicholas M. Lewis, of Milton, N. C. He was not distinguished for extraordinary business capacity, nor very liberal culture, nor extensive learning. But like Barnabas, he was a good man with a benevolent heart and leading a beneficent life. He was kind, sympathetic, and helpful to his fellowmen, and especially to the young. He had large means, and having no children of his own, he was the father of the village. To him parents confidently and gladly committed their children for care and

guidance. In many exercises, in hunting parties, in fishing excursions, in social gatherings, in the Sabbath school, in prayer meetings, and in the sanctuary, his example and influence were important factors in moulding the characters and guiding the conduct of children and youth. Few men in the community in which he lived did more for elevating the moral standards and promoting the enjoyment of children and youth, of young men and women.

But another class of elders claim attention and exert a blessed influence. They may be termed "spiritually minded" elders, or those who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. They attract attention by putting religion manifestly first in their lives. We shall mention only one elder of this class. This was Judge Jesse G. Shepherd, of Fayetteville, N. C. He possessed legal lore, social position and generous culture. He had the confidence and esteem of all classes in his community. An irreligious man in the town once was about to affirm: "A man cannot be a lawyer and a Christian", but checked himself and said, "No, I will not assert that, for Judge Shepherd is a lawyer and a Christian." He would not advocate an unjust cause. He was as prominent in church courts as in those of the state and would always go to judicatories, even when it demanded self-sacrifice, when sent by his session. He was an influential member of the Assembly at Augusta, Ga., that constituted the Southern Church. Nor was he less disposed to serve as a ruling elder in his own home church and in a private circle than in public and conspicuous stations. As clerk of the session, as counselor respecting religious interests, and as a visitor in his work of his congregation, he was eminently faithful and efficient. Without any prompting from the pastor, he would visit the aged, the infirm, the sick, the distressed, the bereaved, and the needy. He would expound to them the Scriptures, counsel them, pray with them and give them needful help. His visits were eagerly expected and left behind them, like the sunshine, a treasured benediction. Such was the character and life of a heavenly-minded man, who made earthly employments subordinate and tributary to Christian service.

IV. And now we can but briefly mention a few preachers of conspicuous gifts and labors.

Father Daniel Penick, of Rocky River Church, was long a noted member of this Synod. He was for years known for his orthodoxy, his fervent devotion and his meek, quiet Christian spirit. Dr. Arnold Miller, of Charlotte, was celebrated for his learning, his pastoral tenderness and sympathy and preaching power. Dr. W. A. Wood, of Statesville, was highly esteemed for his scholarship, his brotherly spirit, and his edifying sermons. Dr. Jethro Rumble, of Salisbury, was for many years a beloved pastor, a forcible preacher, and a wise counselor, who in many stations commanded the confidence and loving admiration of the church.

Dr. John A. Gretter, of Greeusboro, N. C., who, as a boy, I knew slightly, was deemed an able and excellent preacher. Dr. Jacob Henry Smith, of the same church, with whom I was intimately associated for

years, was a man of varied gifts and attainments. He possessed unusually ripe and regularly-nurtured scholarship, and was a very diligent and successful sermonizer. He was a faithful pastor and father, and one of the best legacies he left to the church was a number of gifted and well-trained sons. The Rev. N. H. Harding, D. D., was one of the first preachers known to the speaker. He was a man of varied acquirements, of deep spirituality, of dauntless courage, of ardent devotion, of sympathy with the young, of impressive pulpit power, and of such elevated character as to command the reverence of his community. The Rev. Jacob Doll, as clerk of Orange Presbytery, and of the Synod, was a notable figure in this body for a number of years. He was a sound, instructive preacher, a genial companion, and a diligent student for years. He was noted for the accuracy with which he kept his records, and for his ability as a presbyter and presiding officer. He would transact more business in half a day than most men would in a whole one. The Rev. S. A. Stanfield was also a man of excellent gifts and attainments. He had sound judgment in practical affairs. He was a good Biblical scholar. He was an effective gospel preacher, analyzing and arranging his subject in a logical manner. He was happy in employing familiar illustrations, and his preaching appealed to common sense business men. The Rev. John M. Sherwood, of Fayetteville, N. C., was a very capable preacher, pastor and editor. Though he edited the North Carolina Presbyterian in his later years, yet he never ceased to preach the Gospel in churches in the surrounding country, and was ever popular and in demand. Father Hector McLean, of Fayetteville Presbytery, was a revered and honored member of that body, and a faithful and laborious preacher, until the infirmities of age did not allow him to toil. Dr. Neill McKay, of the same Presbytery, was a man of acute mind, a sound preacher, an able debater, and an active member of church judicatories. Rev. J. P. McPherson was for many years the stated clerk of Fayetteville Presbytery and very diligent and accurate in performing his duties. As a preacher he was scriptural, faithful and forcible in the preparation and delivery of sermons. Dr. David Fairley had a long, laborious and fruitful ministry. For about fifty years he was the active pastor of many country churches. He was attractive in his manners and popular among all classes, and especially to young people. Yet he did not suppress or compromise Christian principles and doctrines. He prepared his sermons with great care and delivered them with energy and unction. He was habitually an edifying preacher, heard with gladness by those to whom he most often published Gospel tidings. The fruits of his ministry were multiplied and apparent in every congregation in which he labored. They are found in converts made, in believers confirmed and matured, and in young men led to be heralds of the cross. One of his own sons is proclaiming the Gospel which his father taught, and he once wrote me that "he had brought into the ministry 16 young men". But one of the most impressive preachers of this Synod known to my boyhood, was Dr. James Phillips, of Chapel Hill. He was a man of rare pulpit power, and many of his sermons linger in my memory after the lapse of more than half a century. He studied his theme profoundly, he arranged it with clearness

and logical accuracy and he wrote his sermons in chaste and elegant diction. He delivered his discourses with a tenderness, a pathos and a spiritual power that swayed the mind and touched the heart. The stranger at first might mark the contortions of features that intense feeling caused, but soon he would be so gripped by the speaker's subject and earnestness as to forget everything else. I once heard him preach a sermon from the words, "Ought not Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory" His theme was "Christ's Glory, the Fruit of His Passion", and to this day I can remember the thrill produced by his grand thoughts and impassioned words. On another occasion I heard him preach from the text, "Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich." As he portrayed Christ's riches before incarnation, the depth of poverty into which He descended for our sakes, and the riches of saints attained through Jesus' poverty, the minds and hearts of the congregation were profoundly stirred. The speaker himself manifested the deepest emotion and strong men bowed their heads and wept. My hearers, men like these have borne their testimony and passed from the earth. They have left with us their record; their names are registered in the Lamb's Book of Life, and they have joined "the General Assembly and church of the first born whose names are written in Heaven". Shall we not imitate their example and emulate their deeds?