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Presbyterians In Educational Work In North Carolina Since 1813

Address at the Centennial Celebration of the Synod of North Carolins, in
Alamance Church, Guilford County, October 7. 1913.

NOTICE

BY C. ALPHONSO SMITH,

Poe Professor of English in the University of Virginia.

With the sincere regards of

C. Alphonso Smith.

In Exchange
Univ. of North Carolina
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No one can read the history of North Carolina without conceding to Presbyterians both priority and primacy in education. Indeed those who are not Presbyterians have paid tribute to Presbyterian influence in education more unreservedly than have Presbyterians themselves. Dr. Kemp P. Battle*, a distinguished Episcopalian, says that the Scotch-Irish, another name for Presbyterians, gave to North Carolina not only many of its leaders in peace and war—the Grahams and Jacksons and Johnstons and Brevards and Alexanders and Mebanes and hosts of others, “but, above all, most of its faithful and zealous instructors of youth, such as Dr. David Caldwell, of Guilford, and Dr. Joseph Caldwell, of the University, Dr. David Ker** and Mr. Charles Wilson Harris†, the first professors in the University, and that progenitor of a line of able and cultured teachers and founder of a school eminent for nearly a century for its widespread and multiform usefulness, William Bingham‡, *the first.*”

Dr. Charles Lee Raper§, a Methodist and dean of the graduate department in the University of North Carolina, after mention-

**History of the University of North Carolina* (1907) I, 38.

**Dr. David Ker (1758-1805) was not only the first professor to be called to the University but as “presiding professor” he was the first executive or president. He had been a Presbyterian preacher and teacher in Fayetteville.

†Mr. Charles Wilson Harris (died 1801), professor of mathematics at the University was the second professor called to the new institution. He organized the first literary society at the University, was for a time “presiding professor,” and suggested the name of his friend and fellow-Princetonian, Joseph Caldwell, to succeed himself in the chair of mathematics.

‡He had preached and taught in Wilmington before coming to the University as professor of Latin in 1801. He resigned in 1805 to become the founder of Bingham School. Of his son, William James Bingham (1802-1866), father of William Bingham, the author, and of Major Robert Bingham, the present distinguished principal of Bingham School, Mr. Walter P. Williamson says (in *Our Living and Our Dead*, II, p. 372): “I venture to say he was the means of putting more teachers upon the rostrum, more professional men into the various professions, more preachers in the pulpit, and more missionaries into the field than any ten other men in the State.”

§*The Church and Private Schools of North Carolina* (1898), p. 31.

That low man goes on adding one to one,
 His hundred's soon hit:
 This high man, aiming at a million,
 Misses an unit.

Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot,
 Clouds form,
 Lightnings are loosed,
 Stars come and go.

Lofty designs must close in like effects:
 Loftily lying,
 Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
 Living and dying."

IV. WILLIAM JOSEPH MARTIN (1830-1896).

Dr. Mitchell was succeeded by William J. Martin. He was a native of Virginia, had been a graduate student of the University of Virginia, and for three years had served with distinguished success as professor of natural philosophy and chemistry at Washington College, now Washington and Jefferson College, Washington, Pennsylvania. He succeeded at once in securing a large appropriation for laboratory work at the University of North Carolina and thus put the study of chemistry upon a higher and more scientific plane than it had before occupied. On September 21, 1861, after drilling the students in military tactics, he resigned his chair and entered the Confederate Army. After serving as Captain of the Twenty-eighth North Carolina Infantry he was made Lieutenant-Colonel of the Eleventh, the famous "Bethel Regiment." After the Battle of Gettysburg he was made Colonel. Four times wounded his commission as General had just been signed when the surrender at Appomattox gave him again to the cause of education. After serving two years longer at Chapel Hill, he founded the Columbian High School at Columbia, Tennessee, was elected professor of chemistry at Davidson College in 1869, and arrived at his new post in 1870. Here his life work began and here his fame as a teacher and moulder of men was established.

Davidson College had opened its doors in 1837. No more favorable place for a Presbyterian college could have been found in the entire South. Not far from its site had flourished such classical schools as Crowfield, Sugar Creek, Queen's Museum,

Zion-Parnassus, Providence, Rocky River, Poplar Tent, and Bethany, all under Presbyterian control. Though founded long after the Revolutionary War, Davidson College gathered up and conserved the best traditions of that heroic age and took its name from General William Davidson, a noted Revolutionary soldier, on whose broad acres the college was built and whose heroic death at Cowan's Ford had hallowed both his name and his estate. Among the presidents of Davidson College who have passed to their reward may be mentioned Dr. Robert Hall Morrison, Dr. Samuel Williamson, Dr. Drury Lacy, Dr. J. L. Kirkpatrick, and Dr. George Wilson McPhail. When Colonel Martin came to Davidson it already counted on its honor-roll of professors such men as General D. H. Hill, soldier and litterateur, Washington C. Kerr, who as State geologist continued the work of Elisha Mitchell, Dr. Charles Phillips, who helped Dr. Kemp P. Battle and Mrs. Spencer to lift the University out of the chaos of Reconstruction, and many others who had given the institution high rank throughout the South, a rank more than maintained from that day to this.

Colonel Martin's professorship, lasting from 1869 to 1896, is still the longest in the history of Davidson. From 1880 to 1884 it was my privilege to know him in his class room and in his home, and of all the college professors under whom it has been my lot to sit, my heart and head yield first place to William J. Martin. As a teacher it was not his scholarship that made the deepest impression, though his scholarship was ample and constantly renewed. It was first of all his ability to distinguish with lightning rapidity between the essential and the non-essential. He pierced instantly to the centre of a subject and expounded it from the centre outward, not from the circumference inward. His philosophy seemed to be, "Take care of the centre and the circumference will take care of itself." In his presence I felt a new reverence for nuclear fact and nuclear truth. Chemistry did not seem to be an end in itself but rather one of the windows through which Nature peered to let us know how she looked and how she acted.

It has always seemed to me that with but little additional training Colonel Martin would have made a great teacher of

history, literature, sociology, or anything else, not because his range was wide but because his vision was central and unerring. His method was essentially that of the soldier,—he captured the outworks only as an incident in his march to the citadel. Prescott tells us that the secret of the brilliant victory won by Cortes over the Aztecs at the Battle of Otumba was that the Spanish commander, disregarding the two hundred thousand Aztec soldiers that stood in front of his little band, ordered his men to strike straight for the person of the commander-in-chief. "There is our mark"! said he. "Follow and support me!" That was Colonel Martin's method and it is a method as applicable to the study of literature as to the study of chemistry, to the conduct of life as to the attainment of learning. But I am sure that I speak for all those who knew Colonel Martin when I say that the man was greater than the professor. He taught chemistry professionally, he impressed manhood unconsciously. We were predisposed to admire him, for we knew that this prompt and resilient figure had come to us, like Little Giffen of Tennessee,

"Out of the focal and foremost fire,
Out of the hospital walls as dire."

I never heard him allude even remotely to the war, but the sulphurous fumes in his laboratory spoke to my imagination of battle, and the imperial figure that moved amid them was always that of the Confederate soldier, the "gentleman unafraid."

It has been said that higher education in the South was retarded shortly after the war because so many Confederate soldiers became teachers, the implication being that the four years given to battle might more profitably have been given to books. The charge rests on a curious misconception of what higher education means. If it means bookishness, the charge has much to support it. But if it means manhood, self-reliance, disciplined conduct, instant obedience to authority, the ability to ally oneself for life or death with a great cause, then I know no breed of men to whom the South owes more than to her soldier teachers, her Robert E. Lee, her D. H. Hill, her Robert Bingham, her William J. Martin.