



OLD PAXTANG CHURCH.

HISTORY  
OF THE  
SESQUI-CENTENNIAL  
OF  
PAXTANG CHURCH

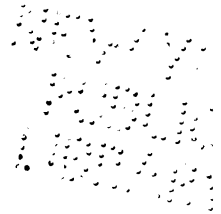
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MATHIAS WILSON McALARNEY.

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**ADDRESS OF REV. NATHAN GRIER PARKE.**

## CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY PRESBY- TERIAN PREACHERS.

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I would very much prefer to speak to you this afternoon looking into your faces, but I am afraid. Daniel Dougherty tells us that on one occasion, when making his maiden speech in the city of Philadelphia, he lost himself, or lost his subject, and fainted and was carried off—the best thing he could do. Now I do not want to faint, and I therefore, have, as a security for not making an entire failure, some manuscript in my hand.

In the arrangement of subjects to be presented on this occasion, it has fallen to my lot to speak of “the characteristics of the early preacher,” of whom it is assumed I must know something, having “come down from a former generation.” But as a matter of fact, Mr. Elder, the second pastor of the Paxtang church, and his ministerial associates were in advance of me about a hundred years. I know something of them and of their times as do all who know anything of the history of Pennsylvania. They made their mark on the times in which they lived, and some of them had no little to do with making the times. Still I am not sure but the “committee on the programme” made a mistake in asking me to speak of these worthies who

are not here to-day to speak for themselves. My disposition is to glorify the present rather than the past. Solomon, whom we still give credit for some wisdom, tells us that they make a mistake who say "the former times were better than these," and on this subject I am heartily in accord with Solomon. We believe the age in which we live is socially, politically, educationally, and religiously the best age in the history of the world. And we believe further, that in our estimate of the times that are past, and the men that figured in them, we must make allowance for the "enchantment that distance lends." We do not suppose that the Scotch-Irish preachers who were the Presbyterian pastors in this part of Pennsylvania a hundred and fifty years ago were superior to the Presbyterian pastors of 1890. Neither do we suppose that the elders associated with the ancient worthies were superior to the Presbyterian elders of 1890, including the President of the United States and the Governor of the Keystone State. These optimistic views of the age in which we live will not prevent us, we trust, from doing justice to the early preachers.

1. It is conceded by all who knew them that they did love to have their own way, which they honestly believed was the right way. If they were not autocratic they leaned that way. And, belonging, as they did, to the church "militant," they did not hesitate to contend earnestly for the faith that was according to

the Westminster Confession. As they did not all think alike on some subjects, they not unfrequently had "lively times" in their ecclesiastic meetings. One of them is represented as praying in Presbytery that "the Lord would keep them right, for he knew they were very determined" and difficult to change when once they set their heads.

With them orthodoxy was their doxie and hetrodoxy was your doxie. If alive to-day, they would be opposed to revision. As the result possibly of the law of heredity, their successors in office in this part of Pennsylvania are like them in this regard. They are not clammering for revision. The degenerate sons of noble sires in New York and the northern part of Pennsylvania are the men who vote for revision.

2. They did not believe in the doctrine of falling from grace, but some of them, we are sorry to say, practiced it. And under the circumstances in which they were placed, we are not surprised at this. God does not promise to keep those who go in the way of temptation. But in every house where they entered, the bottle, not a "little brown jug," but elegant decanters, were set out, and they were invited and expected to drink. At weddings and funerals and at all social gatherings, preachers and elders, and deacons were expected to take a sup of good brandy. And it was good, no doubt, as compared with what is now sold for "good brandy." A minister on the Eastern Shore of Mary-

land, a hundred years ago, was tried and condemned by his Presbytery, not for making brandy, but for making brandy that was so poor it would freeze. In my father's cellar, when I was a boy, there were several barrels of brandy, and he took his brandy as regularly as he took his coffee, and he was a preacher. The wonder to me is not that occasionally a preacher fell from grace, but that there were any sober men among them.

3. These early preachers did not preach "twenty minute sermons." Sermons two hours long were not uncommon among them. The people went early to church, taking their children and their dinners with them, and they reached home in time to milk the cows, and eat a bowl of bread and milk before it was dark, except on sacramental occasions.

4. These early preachers were frugal men; from principle or from necessity, possibly from both. Yet they probably lived as well as most of their people—preachers generally do. They rode on horse-back, and that exercise gave them appetites for plain food. Their salaries did not tempt them to luxurious living. In my own father's family I know a good deal of time was lost in the morning picking the bones out of smoked herring, but it was in a measure made up at supper—there were no bones in the mush and milk. Living in this frugal manner, these early preachers escaped bronchitis, lived to a good old age, taught their

children economy, and were able to send their boys to college. And thus they furnished the country with its lawyers and judges and politicians and statesmen.

5. Apparently these men never tired in their work. We do not read that they ever asked for vacations in which to rest. Their congregations usually supplied them with a few acres of land on which they recreated in plowing and sowing and reaping and cutting briars and picking stones. They were not afraid of working with their hands. This kind of recreation was very much less expensive than summering in the mountains or by the seaside, and possibly as helpful.

6. These preachers had very much less help in their work than the preachers of to-day. Sunday-schools, societies of Christian Endeavor, W. C. T. U.'s, and Y. M. C. A.'s they knew nothing of. They visited their congregations personally. They trained the parents and the children in the catechism. They preached the truth intelligently, simply, earnestly, and fearlessly. And many of them, in addition to their pastoral work, superintended the secular education of the young men of their congregations. There may have been Aarons and Hurs who held up their hands by their prayers, but they did not do it by active church work.

7. These early preachers were thoroughly educated men. And as educators made their power felt on the side of civil and religious liberty. Most of them had their diplomas from representative universities in Great



Britain, and their families became training schools for young men who were preparing for college. They established academies that grew into flourishing colleges. The Old Log college of Bucks county, as is well known, was the seed from which the university of Princeton grew. The Puritan, and the Dutch, and the Scotch-Irish preachers of a hundred and fifty years ago, were the founders of many of our great universities. They grew out of a demand for an educated ministry. They so preached as to inspire our people with a love of education, and with a love of liberty. All that Macauley and Choate have said of these men who came to these shores "to find a church without a bishop, and a State without a king" was truthfully said. Washington acknowledged their help in the Revolutionary war. The patriotism of the pastor of this church is a matter of history, and he was only one of many. There were no doubt Tories among the preachers when the colonies were struggling for liberty against the mother country. There is a black sheep in every flock, but they were not found among the Presbyterian preachers who resolved to hang together or hang separately.

8. There was not much that was emotional in their religion. Their preaching was not sensational and their theology was not effete. In their view, religion was largely a matter of training, and they regarded their work as largely in this line. They aimed to promote family religion, and in this they were suc-

cessful. They secured family worship in the home, reverence for parents, the observance of the Sabbath and knowledge of our formulas of Christian faith. While they preached the truth intelligently and persuasively, they did not hesitate to declare the whole counsel of God, although it involved the duty of telling men of the wrath and curse of God pronounced against sin. In the pulpit they only feared God. Under their preaching and teaching, God's people were built up in their most holy faith, and sinners were converted to God. They did not preach much science, but they did preach the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, and under their preaching men and women grew up, who, under God, were able to lay the foundations of the civil and religious institutions that are the glory of our land. If we may judge trees by their fruit, the religion of these early preachers, was a good kind. There is no discounting religion that develops such Christians.

9. We believe these preachers, while called to endure "hardness as good soldiers," had a good time. They were happy in their work, fully as much so as the preachers of this age, possibly more so. They were not installed on wheels, with notice to be ready at any time to move. They took their vows at their installation as our young people take their wives—until separated by death. They did not have luxurious homes and fat salaries and elegant churches, but they had that which glorified the home—the presence of God—

intelligent Christian homes. They were sustained in their work. Their people respected them and loved them, and made them welcome to their homes, and looked up to them as Job's friends in the days of his prosperity looked up to him. When sent as delegates to the General Assembly, they were not provided for at the hotels. They were hospitably entertained in private homes, where nothing was esteemed too good for them. And the testimony that comes from these homes is that, in entertaining these preachers, they not unfrequently entertained angels unawares.

I have not felt called on in presenting this subject to speak of the wives of the early preachers, for whom I have a profound respect. Allow me, in conclusion, briefly to refer to them. They showed faith and courage and good judgment when they consented to take the position of preacher's wives, without much coaxing or persuasion, and when they engaged to love, honor, and obey their husbands, they lived up to their engagements. They were for the most part keepers at home, and in the absence of their husbands they looked after the children, and the chickens, and the cow, and other things. They seldom penned poems, but they often "penned pigs." They rarely made music on pianos, but they often made music on spinning wheels. Their hands were not remarkable for *softness*, and whiteness, and smallness, but they had brain, and muscle, and loving hearts, and good

common sense, and these they bequeathed by the law of heredity to their children.

They did not often appear on the public platform as speakers or as presidents of benevolent societies, but they were careful that their husbands should "appear well in the gates." It is related of one of the early preachers, who was a little absent-minded, that on one occasion he left home to attend Presbytery, with the charge from his wife, to put on a clean shirt every day until he returned; and so he did, but he did not remember to take any off—the result was, his coat was a little tight when he came home. Men who serve the public as preachers and Congressmen have not much time for their children, and if their children amount to anything, it is because they have faithful mothers.

We honor our fathers to-day, and very many of us certainly some of us, have special reason to honor our mothers, whose loving Christian care has been to us a perpetual benediction. May God's richest blessings rest on the mothers of the land, whose quiet influence, next to that of the church, has made it what it is. We can construct scales that will weigh a single hair—you cannot construct scales that weigh a flood of light. [Loud applause.]

Moderator STEWART. You have had the pleasure of looking into the faces of some of those who have descended from the early Paxtang preachers. I now give you the pleasure of looking at a sermon which

was preached by the Rev. John Elder in Paxtang, December 31, 1738. It was his ordination sermon. I am not disposed to question the accuracy of the statement of Dr. Parke, that those old preachers preached two hours. They were able to do it. But this sermon was no doubt preached within half an hour. These pages you see (holding them up) are small, and there are only twelve of them,—and I read by the watch one of them in three minutes; and the handwriting was not familiar to me either; so it must have been preached in less than half an hour. I do not understand why. Perhaps the Presbytery was present, and thought they would not care to have a long sermon. The pastors were present and did not care for too much preaching.\*

We are present to-day to hear—and it will be a pleasure—about the country church, as well as the early ministers, who were to a very large extent missionary pastors. It is therefore with great pleasure that I give place to the Governor of this Commonwealth,—and, what is more to the point to-day, an elder in the Presbyterian church; and, what is perhaps more to the audience to-day, a trustee of the Paxtang congregation. Governor, elder, and trustee, James A. Beaver, will now address us upon the “Importance of the Country Church.” [The Governor was greeted with hearty applause.]

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\*This sermon is printed in the Appendix.