

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

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OF THE

FOUNDER, AND PRINCIPAL ALUMNI

OF THE

LOG COLLEGE.

TOGETHER WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE REVIVALS  
OF RELIGION, UNDER THEIR MINISTRY.

COLLECTED AND EDITED

BY

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MEMOIR OF REV. JOHN ROWLAND.

Mr. Rowland received by the New Brunswick Presbytery, at its first meeting in violation of the rule of Synod—His trials—Speedy licensure—Accepts a call to Maidenhead and Hopewell—Great revival—His letter to Mr. Prince—Removal to Pennsylvania—Revival at New Providence—Close of life unknown.

OF Mr. Rowland nothing is known prior to the time when he was taken under the care of the New Brunswick presbytery, at its first meeting in August, 1738. It is certain, indeed, that he was an alumnus of the Log College, where probably he received the principal part of his education.

In receiving him under their care, the presbytery deliberately violated a standing rule of the synod, which required, that every candidate, before being taken on trials by any presbytery, should submit himself to an examination on his classical and scientific attainments, to a committee of the synod. This rule the presbytery of New Brunswick believed to be arbitrary, and an undue infringement on the rights of presbyteries; and therefore determined to disregard it. This was undoubtedly a rash and dis-

orderly proceeding. Even if their opinion about the rights of presbyteries had been correct, they should first have remonstrated against the synod's rule, and endeavoured to have it repealed. But the members of this new presbytery having been the principal supporters of the Log College, considered the rule of the synod as particularly directed against that institution; and on this account were disposed to resist it. Hence arose the violent dissension between this presbytery and the synod, which issued in a division of the body into two parts, the Old and the New Side; of which an account has already been given.

At this first meeting of the New Brunswick presbytery, the following ministers and elders were present, viz., Gilbert Tennent, John Cross, William Tennent, Eleazer Wales, and Samuel Blair. The elders were James McCoy, John Henry, William Moor, Robert Cunningham, and Thomas Davis. As none, in the minutes, are marked as absent, it would seem that this first meeting of the presbytery set an example deserving the imitation of their successors. All the ministers were in their place; and an equal number of ruling elders; so that there was no delinquency on their part. The first business, after they were regularly constituted, was, the receiving of Mr. John Rowland as a candidate under their care. And in regard to the rule of synod, after much discussion they adopted the following resolution.

“That in point of conscience, they were not restrained from using the liberty and power, which presbyteries all along have hitherto enjoyed; but that it was their duty to take the said Mr. Rowland on trials, for which conclusion they conceive they have many weighty and sufficient reasons.”

The presbytery then proceeded to the examination of Mr. Rowland, “on the several parts of learning, and on his experience of a work of converting grace in his soul, which he sustained to their satisfaction.”

The trials of Mr. Rowland were carried through as rapidly as was consistent with the usage in such cases. The presbytery met again on the 1st day of September of the same year, when he read a Latin exegesis, and a sermon on Ps. lxxxvii. 5. With these trials the presbytery expressed themselves well pleased; and assigned him as the subject of a popular sermon, Rom. iii. 24, and adjourned to meet the following week, at Freehold, when Mr. Rowland preached at the opening of the presbytery, who having taken the sermon under consideration, it was highly and unanimously approved.

The candidate having now gone through all the prescribed trials, after adopting the Westminster Confession of Faith as the confession of his faith, was licensed to preach the gospel of Christ. His licensure took place exactly one month after he was taken under the care of the presbytery. There is no

reason to lead us to conclude that Mr. Rowland was deficient in the qualifications requisite for the office of the ministry. From the record it appears, that the presbytery were well satisfied with all the parts of his trials; and it is known that he was a popular and an awakening preacher, and that his ministry was attended with much success.

As might have been expected, this act of the presbytery brought down upon them the censure of the synod; and the presbytery not being disposed to submit to a rule which they considered arbitrary and inconsistent with their rights, things grew worse and worse, until the parties separated. Before this event, however, the synod absolutely refused to consider Mr. Rowland as a member of their body. They did not deny that he was a minister of the gospel, but alleged, that having been brought in contrary to their rules, he could not be recognised as a member. It appears from Mr. Rowland's letter to the Rev. Mr. Prince of Boston, that on the very day of his being licensed to preach the gospel, an application was made to the presbytery for his services, by the united congregations of Maidenhead (Lawrence) and Hopewell (Pennington). And it was not long after this, that he was artfully personated by Tom Bell, when he was absent on a preaching tour in Maryland, in company with the Rev. William Tennent. On his return, as has been related in the life of Mr. William Tennent, he was

indicted for horse-stealing and robbery, was cleared by the testimony of Mr. Tennent and two others, who swore that he was, at the time, in a distant part of the country. But the impression on the public mind was so strong, that he was the person seen by many in the possession of the stolen horse, that the three witnesses, including Mr. Tennent, were indicted for perjury, and one of them actually suffered the penalty of the law for this crime. How wonderfully Mr. Tennent was delivered from an ignominious punishment, may be seen in the memoir which we have published of this extraordinary man. p. 194

Mr. Rowland accepted the invitation of the congregations before mentioned, and his labours among them were attended with an extraordinary blessing, in a great revival of religion, in both these congregations. But as Mr. Rowland himself has given a narrative of this work of grace, in a letter to the Rev. Mr. Prince of Boston, we think it most expedient to publish his own account, in his own words.

The letter is as follows :

“REV. SIR,

“In answer to yours, &c.—I was sent forth to preach the gospel of Christ, by the presbytery of New Brunswick, on September 7th, 1738, on which day the congregation of Maidenhead and Hopewell, put in a supplication for me to the presbytery; and accordingly I complied therewith. In process of time, we had the privilege of Maidenhead meeting-house, and my people built a meeting-house in Hopewell; but, before this, we were constrained to keep our meetings in barns in both towns; and, though we thus ap-

peared as poor despised creatures, yet the congregation that attended my ministry, was so numerous, that the largest barns among us were chosen to worship God in. It was some discouragement to me at first, that I and my people had no better places for divine worship; but at that time I thought on these things, which proved some support to me, viz., that our Lord and Saviour was born in a mean place, and likewise preached in the ship, and on the mountain, as well as in the synagogues, and that it had been the frequent lot of his people, to betake themselves to worship him in places attended with many inconveniences. There is another town lying contiguous to Hopewell, which is called Amwell; the people there were something numerous likewise; and having none to labour among them in the word, they petitioned for a part of my time, viz., one Sabbath in three; and it was granted unto them; so that my labours among these three towns, for the most part of the time that I lived in the Jerseys, were equally divided. There was a small number in Hopewell and Maidenhead, truly acquainted with vital religion, as far as I could judge, before I came among them, and they seemed so earnest in prayer, night and day, to have the gospel in power among them, as if they would take no denial. But of them who became my congregation in Amwell, there were but very few that knew the Lord Jesus when I came among them; yet, in many ways, they were a very agreeable people; so that I was much encouraged to labour among them.

“The subjects which I chiefly insisted on for about six months, were conviction and conversion; and usually I made choice of the most rousing and awakening texts, to set forth the nature of these doctrines; and I have reason to hope, that the Lord began to accompany his word in a measure from the very first. Some began to be convinced that they were in the way to misery, and unacquainted with the way to the kingdom of Heaven. But then, let it be observed, that but one or two were taken with convictions at a time, or under one sermon: for many months together\* their

\* “Let none suppose that because I speak of convictions being still carried on, that I mean that sinners must be convinced to some

convictions were still increased, and the number of the convinced was still multiplied. I commonly preached in the night as well as in the day, and frequently on week days also; so that they had hardly any opportunity to cast their convictions out of their thoughts, the Lord continuing to cooperate with his word. The frequent opportunities which I took to examine them were made very beneficial, through the divine blessing, to preserve their convictions alive until the time of grace, of which I shall speak afterwards. The attention of all, in general, was awakened; fathers, mothers, and the youth; some negroes, also, seemed very earnest after the word, and were convinced thereby of their sin and misery, and that Christ they must have, or perish for ever.

“The people of God were much enlivened to see poor sinners convinced of the perishing nature of their state, and their absolute need of Christ: their supplications to God were mostly bent for the conversion of sinners, and their conversation, whenever they met together, as far as I observed it, (and frequent opportunities I had to observe it) savoured exceedingly of the things of God; so that I cannot say that I ever saw those pious people given to wordliness in their conversation, or to lightness and vanity in their discourses. Great was the love they bore to one another, and sweet was the peace which subsisted among themselves; so that I was not interrupted from my work by making up differences among them.

“In the month of May, 1739, I began to think that the most inviting and encouraging subjects would be the most agreeable to convinced souls; and accordingly I began with these words, John xi. 28, 29. ‘The master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him.’ The discourse upon this subject was brought home, through the divine influence, upon the souls of many. Solemn weeping, and deep concern, ap-

high degree before they can be converted: I only mean, that this was the way which the Lord observed in carrying on his work, to keep sinners for a long time under conviction, before he manifested his love to them.

peared through the congregation : I had hopes that the hearts of some had been knit close to Jesus our Lord, which afterwards appeared to be so ; of which more hereafter. I was still encouraged to go on, in inviting convinced sinners to come and embrace the person and purchase of the dear Lord Jesus. Then I made choice of that word in Matthew xxii. 4. ‘And all things are ready ; come unto the marriage.’ This was also blessed to poor convinced souls ; they were brought under a full persuasion that Jesus, the Son of God, was ready and willing to embrace them with his everlasting favour, and to pardon their sins and transgressions ; but then they found more of their own hardness, and had a clearer view of their own unwillingness to come unto the Lord Jesus Christ, which increased their mourning and sorrow, and made them press forwards with more living earnestness in search after Jesus Christ. A variety of other engaging subjects I made use of for a considerable time, to press them to a full closure with Jesus Christ. At length, by frequent converse among them, and enquiring strictly into the nature of the views they had of Christ, and the outgoings of their souls after him, and their willingness to be ruled by Jesus Christ in their whole hearts and lives, I could not but be favourable in my thoughts of such, as persons favoured of the Lord.

“I find, by reading what accounts I kept by me of the blessed work of grace which hath been in these towns, that there was much good done by visiting, by which means I found out many that had been touched, of whom I had not well heard how it was with them, which gave me an opportunity to offer such things unto them, as might tend to fix these beginnings in their souls, and increase them. So likewise many were convinced of their lost state by nature. By particular examinations, I found likewise, that private examination of persons, as to their state and condition, is an excellent mean to lay them open to conviction under the public word ; and thus were some convinced in these towns.

“The divine influence of the Spirit of God was very evidently afforded with his word, though not in every opportunity, yet in several, until May, 1740, in which time many

more were added unto the Lord's people. Some of these opportunities, for clearness sake, I shall mention. One was in October 6th, 1739, in a night meeting; but the people not having been warned with sufficient care, there met but about fifteen persons, eleven of whom were deeply convinced of their misery, and some of them cried out so very awfully, that I was constrained to conclude. After sermon I took an opportunity to enquire of those persons, what was the real cause of their crying out in such a manner. Some of whom answered me, 'that they saw hell opening before them, and themselves ready to fall into it.' Others answered me, 'that they were struck with such a sense of their sinfulness, that they were afraid the Lord would never have mercy on them.' Another of these opportunities was on December 30th, 1739. As to myself, I felt exceeding poor in the frame of my soul; so that I thought I might well say, as in the words of the text I preached on that day, Isa. xl. 6, 'What shall I cry?' But the Lord was pleased to manifest his grace and power exceedingly through the whole service. The people of God were much enlarged in love, to see that whatever gracious word was sent with power into their hearts, was sent from God; for the man knoweth not what to cry, without being guided by the word and Spirit. Some hardened creatures, who thought not much of religion, as if there was no reality in it, were deeply convinced of the truth, reality, and beauty of religion. Others, who knew not well which way to walk, or what to choose, opposers I cannot call them, though they had not joined with our side; such, I say, as far as we could judge the tree by the fruit, were also convinced and converted under that discourse. Many youths also were wrought upon; so that I cannot say truly, that any remained untouched. Some of these persons were pleased to tell me, 'that they never would forget this day, in which God had been so gracious unto them.' As to backsliders from convictions, who were not converted, I shall afterwards speak of them. The night of the same day being spent in public worship (viz. the first part thereof), was attended with the same divine influence. Another of these opportunities was in April 6th, 1740, in Maidenhead. The

subject that was insisted on, was the GOSPEL-NET, from Matt. xiii. Many who were not acquainted with the spiritual nature of the gospel in the least degree, as far as I found, were greatly bowed down, and brought to own that it was the Lord's work which was carried on. The people, in general, through the whole assembly, seemed as if they were humbled before the Lord, which afterwards proved itself to be so. Without controversy, many of these slipped out of the net as fast as they could; yet many, blessed be God, were held in it by almighty power.

“I come next to speak of the times of most remarkable power that I witnessed in these towns. It begun on this wise; there had been a week day's meeting in Maidenhead, on July 24th, 1740. Worship seemed to be attended with much warmth of affection, which gave much encouragement to the minister again; for lukewarmness at this time had prevailed very much among the people; and the affections of some were much removed from others of their fellow members; neither did they seem to have such a thirst for the word of God as formerly. Things had come to this pass in about two months; but how astonishing is it to consider what sweet methods the Lord observed to remove them! for, as the people were passing homewards through the town after worship, some inclined to stop at one of the Christian houses; and the stopping of some occasioned others to stop till the number was about forty; and when they were all set in the house, that the time might be profitably spent, the first part of the fiftieth psalm was sung, which seemed to be performed with unusual quickening. When singing was over, the same verses were explained at some length, and the Spirit of the Lord was pleased to work by it upon all that were present, as far as we could discern by the outward man, and much converse that was spent among them all in particular. In about an hour afterwards, the love of God's people that were present, was uncommonly inflamed to Jesus Christ, their views of his majesty and glory were much enlarged, their longings after him much stirred up, and their fear of him graciously increased; their zeal for God's glory was kindled anew, and their concern for the cause of God seemed to receive much growth; and as to the unconverted that were present, we could not find otherwise, but that they had received very clear discoveries of their undone state by nature. This was followed with the mighty power of God, in a sermon next evening to a large congregation in the same town. And, in Amwell,

July 27th, and in Maidenhead again on August 3d, God was pleased to magnify his grace in visiting many poor sinners. In these opportunities he opened their eyes to see themselves without Christ, and without hope in the world; their convictions were attended with great horror and trembling, and loud weeping, which I supposed could not be stopped so easily as some do imagine; for I observed that many did continue crying in the most doleful manner along the road, in their way home; and it was not in the power of man to prevail with them to refrain; for the word of the Lord remained like fire upon their hearts. Furthermore, the Lord was pleased to add many more to my people, who used not to walk with them, who still continue in communion with them, of whom I hope it may be said, that they are growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The seed of the word was dropped into the hearts of others, who bore not much regard to the doctrine of the new-birth which was preached among us, and did not spring up visibly until near three years after.

“As to the issue of these convictions which I have last mentioned, I think it must be owned, that many of them were followed with a sound conversion, or else we must give up speaking any thing as to any grace in this life. Many backslided, and became stiff-necked again, though I must say that I have not seen such backslidings in these towns, as I have seen in many others; the instances are but few in them in comparison to what I have seen in most other places that I have been acquainted with. One great mean to prevent backsliding from convictions in Amwell, was this: when the husband was taken, the wife was also taken, or when the wife was visited, the husband was also; so that they were ever stirring up each other. Many such instances are in the town of Amwell, upon which account that congregation appears to me peculiarly beautiful; and, as to Maidenhead and Hopewell, I believe that one great mean that the Lord used there to prevent backsliding, was the care and diligence of some of the Christian people in conversing with the convinced; for several of the Christians were so engaged in deep concern for the work of God, that they could not rest satisfied until they had reason to hope, that the souls that were convinced from one time to another, were also brought through to sound conversion.

“Respecting the nature of this work which I have been speaking of, it will appear yet more distinct, by giving some account of their experiences. And, first, I would speak something more of their convictions; they can give a very different account of sin, both original,

and actual; their views of heart corruption, their distance from God, and their having lived so long without him, were very clear and affecting; their hardness and unbelief, their ignorance and blindness pressed very close upon them; their need of Christ, and his Spirit, was such, in their apprehension, that there was no rest nor contentment to be taken in any thing here below, until they did obtain an interest in Jesus Christ, and receive his Spirit to purify and sanctify their hearts. There are a few among them, whose convictions were not attended with any considerable degree of horror; they were very watchful over themselves lest they should receive false comfort, and so rest in ungrounded hopes; their hunger after Jesus Christ, his righteousness, and all his fulness, was very earnest, and their experience of it very clear; therefore they wanted the word preached often, and they would sit under it with great affection, waiting on the Lord. Their views of the Lord Jesus, in his person, nature and offices, were very clear, and their acquaintance with the actings of their faith on him, together with the out-going of their souls in love towards him. They can give a satisfying account of those things according to the holy scriptures. Their experience of a saving closure with Jesus Christ, and the sweet manifestations they had of him at the time of spiritual marriage, were very glorious, and their affections have been often stirred afresh towards Jesus Christ, in meditating on, and speaking of their espousals. They are careful to maintain a holy communion with God in the general course of their lives. I have seen some of them in considerable agonies when they have been under the hidings of God's face; so that they could take no rest by any means, until the gracious Lord would be pleased to shine again upon them with the light of his countenance. They are properly diligent in the things of this life; yet they are ready to attend on the word of God on any opportunity that offers to them on week days.

“They still continue zealous for God and his truth; their walk is steady in the ways of God, and not unconstant and uneven. And, that I may conclude with Hopewell and Maidenhead, I would say, that Jesus Christ has gathered for himself a blessed flock there; and, however they may be vilified and scorned by those who have their portion in this life, yet I hope no less, but that they are precious with God, and shall be satisfied with the pleasures of his right hand forevermore. Amen.

After some time, Mr. Rowland removed from New Jersey into Pennsylvania, where he had charge of a congregation in what is called "the Great Valley," and also of Providence, near to Norristown. Much of his time, however, seems to have been spent in itinerating, and preaching from place to place, during the great awakening with which the churches were then visited.

The only account which we have of Mr. Rowland's labours and success in Pennsylvania, are given by himself in his narrative sent to Mr. Prince.

"In the year 174\*" says he, "I came and lived in Charlestown, Pennsylvania, and have continued according to the order of the Presbytery, preaching among them, and the people of New Providence. But as my ministry has been chiefly successful at the latter place, since I came into these parts, I shall only speak of what I have observed of the work of God, in New Providence.

"The people of this place, before I came, were but an ignorant sort of people, unacquainted with religion, both as to principle and practice; and though they would pretend, some to be of one denomination, and some of another; yet a vain name was all. Looseness prevailed much in the place, and there was not one to speak to another in a suitable manner, neither of the vileness, deformity, and unprofitableness of the ways of sin; nor of the glory, and excellency, and profitableness of the ways of

God. I know not that any of them observed family prayer, or even asked a blessing on their food. This was the case among them, as they told me at several times, and again since I began to write this narrative. The conviction and conversion of the people of New Providence occurred within about two months of one another. It was the time of my travelling among them that the Lord chose to bless for their ingathering to Jesus Christ; and since I have laboured statedly among them, it has been as much my endeavour to build up those who were called into the fellowship of God, as to convince sinners of their misery, and to this end, my labours were blessed again among them throughout the year 174\*. As to their conviction and conversion unto God, I may say, they are capable to give a scriptural account of these things. I forbear to speak of many extraordinary appearances, such as some scores crying out at one instant; and of others falling down and fainting.

“These people are still increasing and blessed be the Lord, they are endeavouring to walk in communion with God, and with one another. And for this end, they meet in society, in the meeting house, two or three hours at a time, for prayer and praise; and they find this an excellent means to prepare them for the holy Sabbath. They are careful to maintain the worship of God in their families, and to use all agreeable [proper] means to increase their own knowledge in the things of God.

“I choose to say no more, though I may truly say, that what I have spoken of the glorious work of God in this place, and in the towns of Amwell, Hopewell, and Maidenhead, is but a very little to what I might have said.”

There is one circumstance connected with this revival in New Providence, which in a peculiar manner interests the writer. His own grandfather, then residing on the Schuylkill above Norristown, was a subject of this revival, and a member of this church; although he was awakened under the preaching of Mr. Whitefield.

Though Mr. Rowland filled a considerable space in the church, while he lived, as he was a boanerges in denouncing the terrors of the law against impenitent sinners, insomuch that he acquired among the irreligious, the title so often given to faithful preachers, “the hell-fire Rowland,” yet no word or memorial of the close of his life remains. He seems not to have been married, and to have died early.

Here, we may remark, that none of the distinguished ministers of that period, except William Tennent, sen., reached the age of seventy; and some of the most able and successful among them, did not even arrive at the age of forty. Among these we reckon Samuel Blair, Samuel Davies, Wm. Robinson, and John Rowland. These men may be said to have lived fast. They did much for their Lord, in a short time. Being burn-

ing as well as shining lights, they were themselves consumed, while they gave light to others. Oh that a race of ministers, like-minded, burning with a consuming zeal, might be raised up among us!