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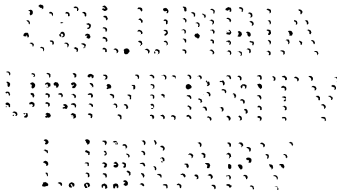
SELECTED FROM MY PAPERS

DURING A MINISTRY OF FORTY-FIVE YEARS

IN MISSISSIPPI, LOUISIANA AND TEXAS.

BY

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You see before you the last elder of that band—standing as an isthmus between the present and the past, the last connecting link. It is to me a crushing thought.

On this occasion, and it may be my last opportunity, I desire to return my humble and heartfelt thanks to the pastor, elders, and members of this church for all the kindness I have ever received at their hands.

And now I want to declare that it is my wish to die in the service of this honored church; and that my children and children's children may die in the same faith. I stand here—a brand snatched from the burning. And when I die let it be inscribed on my coffin over my heart, "It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I—I—I—am chief!"

The congregation then sang,

"I love thy Kingdom, Lord."

Dr. Smith then read the following historical paper :

( THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN  
THE SOUTHWEST.

The history of our Church in New Orleans, belongs to the history of the Church in the Southwest. We shall better appreciate the significance of the chapter which concludes our work, if we glance at the more general movement of which it forms such an important part. To do this, we must go back into the past more than a quarter of a century before our work in the city was organized; even to the times when the tide of our immigration was first turned in this direction.

The settlement of the Southwest was much encouraged by the policy of the British Government. At the close of the French war of 1763, she obtained the

Natchez country and East and West Florida. West Florida was attached to the Natchez country, and settlers were attracted by liberal grants of land.

One result—unfortunately—of our war of the Revolution was, that this country was ceded back to Spain. The Natchez country thus became a Spanish Province, and continued to be for twenty years. By the Spanish authorities Protestant worship was decreed to be a criminal offense. Intolerant laws were enacted and remorselessly enforced. Three quarters of a century ago Presbyterians at Natchez could not worship God without a sentinel at the door to warn them of danger. Persons detected in this crime were arrested, thrown into a filthy prison until they gave bonds not to repeat the offense, and were threatened if detected in repeating this offense to be sent to the mines of Mexico. Many were imprisoned. Among those imprisoned for holding prayer-meetings was John Bolls, a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church, from North Carolina, who had served in the Revolutionary war.

John Bolls was not destined to slavery in the mines of Mexico, for this distressing state of things at length came to an end. On the night of March 29, 1798, the Spanish commandant evacuated the post. Next morning the American flag floated from the walls of Fort St. Rosalie, and religious liberty found shelter beneath its folds.

It would be hard to enumerate the various routes by which you may gain access to the Southwest now, but in the year A. D. 1800, the best known land route was a bridle path. The Natchez trace was an Indian trail from Nashville, which could be traveled only on horseback or on foot. It passed through tangled forests and swamps, through warlike Indian tribes, and was infested by bands of lawless desperadoes, more dreaded than the

Indians themselves. Along this friendless path came Hall, Montgomery, and Bowman, missionaries sent from the Synod of the Carolinas. Amidst the perils of this adventurous journey they found, at Pontotoc, Joseph Bullen, missionary to the Indians, sent there by the New York Missionary Society in 1797, and after meeting this sympathizing laborer they entered again on their perilous journey, evaded death and outstripped starvation, and, finally, reached Natchez, the field of their future labors. These were the pioneers of our Church in the Southwest.

At that time there were about seven thousand Americans in the province. From many of these the missionaries met a cordial reception. With Natchez as their headquarters, they entered on their work, and visited the settlements, and established preaching places; gathering up the scattered Presbyterians and forming them into communities, soon to grow up into organized churches. In a year or two they returned home. But Joseph Bullen, the Indian missionary, took up the work they had begun. Coming southward in 1803, he preached with great acceptability to these congregations. And in A. D. 1804, it was his privilege to organize the first Presbyterian church established in the Southwest. It was well named Bethel. It has survived, too, the many changes that have intervened, and is existing still.

For years afterwards, the Synod of the Carolinas continued to send missionaries to this field, and other churches were organized from time to time. At length the need of Presbyterial jurisdiction came to be felt. At that time the general jurisdiction of this region was vested in the Synod of Kentucky. Ten years after the first church was organized, the Synod of Kentucky was overtured to establish the *Presbytery of Mississippi*, which was done A. D. 1815. And the name of John

Bolls stands first on the list of its ruling elders, as the representative of the first church organized in the Southwest.

In the year 1818, the honored name of Sylvester Larned was added to the list of its members. And in 1823 the Presbyterian Church in New Orleans was placed upon its roll, and two important streams of influence coalesced, to form thereafter but one current of moral energy.

The *Presbytery of Mississippi*, when organized, formed part of the Synod of Kentucky. The movement of population, and the expansion of our church, involved certain changes in its subsequent relations. In 1817, it was associated with the Synod of Tennessee. In 1826, we find it placed upon the roll of the Synod of West Tennessee. But in 1829, in connection with other Presbyteries, which appear to have been set off from its territory, it was erected into a Synod, called the *Synod of Mississippi and South Alabama*. In 1835, three Presbyteries were set off from this growing Synod to form the *Synod of Alabama*, and from that time it is known as the *Synod of Mississippi*. God so prospered this Synod, that in 1847 it became necessary to divide it again, and four more Presbyteries were set off to form the *Synod of Memphis*. And in 1851, three more of its Presbyteries were erected into the *Synod of Texas*. And in 1852, out of the territory ceded to the Synod of Memphis, there was formed still another Synod, the *Synod of Arkansas*.

In the light of this interesting record, the unity of sentiment and harmony of purpose which have hitherto prevailed among us in the Southwest, cannot seem surprising. Our membership is largely drawn by descent from the Presbyterian stock of the best of the older communities; bound together by strong ecclesiastical fam-

ily-ties; linked together in common interests, and laboring shoulder to shoulder in a common cause; we constitute, to a large extent, a homogeneous Presbyterianism, whose moral influence, if combined and wisely directed, must prove a permanent benefit to the world.

The piety of those formative times was bold and aggressive. For many years, while the country as yet was new, camp-meetings were annually held at some central point, easy of access to a wide region of country. To these points people from long distances would come, to spend a week or two in waiting on God, and seeking his face. Immense assemblies would congregate in these cathedrals of the wilderness, and great religious revivals were often the result. The utmost decorum prevailed on such occasions, and unbounded hospitality made all comers welcome. It was not unusual for the Presbyteries to convene at these meetings. And on one occasion, as we told, a meeting of the Synod was held.

The style of doing the work of the Gospel was adapted to the needs of the times. And the work was blessed. These meetings were not discontinued until facilities for public worship became more abundant, when the necessity for them had accordingly passed away.

The spirit of the Synod, also, was a missionary spirit. With such men as Montgomery, Smylie, Kingsbury, Alfred Wright, Moore, and Chase, men of apostolic zeal, amongst its members, it could not be otherwise. Such men prosecuted their missionary work under its jurisdiction. After the manner of the Synod of the Carolinas, it sent out its evangelists into the broad domain of Texas, as soon as the Republic was established. And we find it overturing the Assembly to consider the question of sending missionaries to Mexico and Oregon. It never shrunk from the call to press the evangelistic work in any direction. So that, in the course of time,

there has passed under its jurisdiction a territory which stretches from Georgia to the Rio Grande, and which reaches northward far enough to include the State of Arkansas, and the Indian nation.

*Texas* will have a religious history of its own, and it will be characteristic, as it ought to be. It will be found that it was born in battle—the offspring of that struggle for constitutional liberty which planted Travis, Bonham, and Crockett, with their little band of heroes, in the path of the ferocious army of Santa Anna. The massacre of the Alamo, in 1836, was undoubtedly the Thermopylæ of civil and religious liberty for the far Southwest.

That form of Christianity will best succeed among its diversified and scattered communities which most clearly enunciates the simple principles of the Gospel, and best illustrates the power of vital godliness. In these respects, it seems to us, our Church in that State has a great work before it. So we find one little band borrowing the use of a blacksmith's shop to inaugurate public worship, then and there laying the foundations of an important and influential church. Elsewhere we see some Scotch-Irish elder assembling his neighbors in his house for prayer-meetings, and laying the foundations of another church. And again, we find the unconverted son of pious parents appalled by the surrounding destitutions, feeling that the responsibility for the continuance of this spiritual ignorance rests on his own conscience, essaying to meet it by establishing Sabbath-schools and Bible-classes; and carrying them on, to the best of his ability, until such time as it may please God to relieve him from the duty, which God so mysteriously laid upon him. In so far as our people courageously accept these allotments of Providence, they represent a form of Christianity full of vital force



and growth, and set forth, by pure principles and a consistent, earnest activity, that blessed Gospel which in all possible emergencies is the one thing needful for man. No one can tell how much, and in how many instances, the Gospel has been, and still is, proclaimed in our sister State through such unpretending but noble instruments. The coming years will rejoice in the harvest, but the names of those who planted for it, it must be left for eternity to disclose.

It becomes us, also, to refer with gratitude to the results of our work, as a Church, among the Indian tribes of the Southwest. It is a much greater work than is generally known. There is far more piety and Christian character, and a far greater knowledge and appreciation of Christian truth, among the tribes brought into contact with the institutions of Christianity than is believed by the uninformed. In the bounds of the Creek nation, the Baptists report twenty-four ordained Indian preachers, some of whom are well known Creek and Seminole chiefs. The Methodist Church South can claim a similar record. From the times of Joseph Bullen, the Indian missionary and founder of the First Presbyterian Church in the Southwest, until to-day, our church has evinced a deep and constant interest in the welfare of those tribes. Perhaps the most important mission work among them is conducted by the Southern Presbyterian Church. And what is the result of these various labors? It is this. They have printing-presses, newspapers, and books; they have preachers of their own race—men of culture, piety, and moral power; and, in proportion to their population, the people of the Indian nation have more schools, more churches, attend more largely religious worship, and contribute more money for religious purposes than the people of any Territory in the United States.

It is a strange mistake to suppose that the nature of the Indian cannot be brought under the power of the principles of the Gospel. At a Bible Anniversary in one of our Western cities not long since, one of those Indian chiefs stepped forward, and with intense feeling, said, "When I come from among my people and visit the cities, I hear white men debating, whether it is of any use to send the Gospel to the heathen? Some seem to think that it is of no use; that the Gospel cannot convert the heathen. *It is of use* to send the Gospel to the heathen. I and my people were heathen; we believed in all its silly and degrading superstitions; we worshiped we knew not what; we knew of no future for the soul; we were without God and without hope. But now the true light shines among us. We know and love God, and we live in hope of a happy home beyond the grave. This is what the Gospel has done for us. Let no man doubt that the Gospel has power to convert the heathen! I was a heathen, and it converted me."

Who shall gainsay such testimony to the work which it has pleased God to accomplish, by those who have preceded us in this field?

Our Church in the Southwest may not boast of having achieved all that it aimed to achieve. Perhaps a sense of comparative failure and shortcoming has attended its most successful enterprises. Nevertheless, there is much to gratify a Christian heart in the contrast between its present efficiency and its humble origin. There is no great interval between the extensive religious liberty and influence which we enjoy to-day, and that Spanish prison at Natchez—and the connection is not hard to trace. It is only another illustration of God's fidelity in rewarding the devotedness of his servants. John Bolls' prayer-meeting led him to a Spanish prison seventy-five years ago; and slavery in the mines

of Mexico seemed to be the inevitable result of them. But where duty to God is concerned, the apparent result is often vastly different from the actual result. Could he have looked through the bars of his prison on the field of religious activity, of which that prison was destined to be the center—could his eye have pierced the veil of three-quarters of a century, he would have seen this wide territory covered with a goodly family of five Synods, twenty Presbyteries, and nearly six hundred churches; together with all the multiform kinds of moral, benevolent, and religious enterprises which they represent or sustain.

The history of the world does not often produce, in such a limited period, and from such a despised beginning, a more glorious result.

Yet this was not merely the work of one man, nor is it the mere development of any one line or form of effort. Many a worker wrought in that field—each in his own sphere, at his own work, in his own way—known or unknown, scattered or united, organized or unorganized—but each and all for the Lord. And by the mysterious control of an Almighty hand, all things, whether good or evil, or the work of friend or foe, were ruled and overruled, and made to combine and co-operate to accomplish his gracious purpose.

The future may have great things in store for us, but it can teach us no better than the past has taught us, that great lesson that fidelity to God is not lost—neither is it to be held as of little moment, though it be obscure and seemingly unimportant. However trivial it may seem, each particular and individual movement must live till it obeys the laws of a divine attraction, and combines with a greater, which shall lead it on till it co-operate even with the greatest.

We may be as insignificant as the raindrop on the

mountain side; yet that drop must not perish till it blends with others, and compels the rivulet to spring into being. And the rivulets can find no rest, until they make to bound forth into life the growing river, wealth-bearing and life-producing. Nor can the rivers return or cease, till they have mingled their mighty burdens on the bosom of the deep. And so the act of fidelity and the prayer of faith; the godly life and the preached word; prayer-meetings and Sunday-schools will join and conjoin, and operate and co-operate, increase and multiply, overleap all restraints, and in their ebb and flow bear down and continue to bear down all opposing forces. Out of the feeble will come the strong, and from the bosom of patience shall leap forth might; till the grace of God shall sweep over society like the tides of the ocean in their strength; till the knowledge of God shall fill and cover the earth; till the time shall come, when rejoicing angels shall declare, "It is finished," "The kingdoms of this world have become the empire of our God."

Dr. T. R. Markham, and Rev. R. Q. Mallard delivered addresses admirably illustrating the aggressive movement of the Church, through the two arms of her service, the pastorship, and the pulpit; the one urging home the Gospel to the heart of the individual, in personal intercourse; the other, in the stated systematic presentation of truth to the masses.

The audience then rose and sung

"All hail the power of Jesus' name."

The benediction was then pronounced by Rev. W. Flinn.