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ADDRESSES DELIVERED

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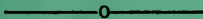
Sesquicentennial Celebration

—of—

CONCORD PRESBYTERY

BETHPAGE CHURCH

October 16, 1945



“Through Four Eras of Concord’s History”
REV. T. H. SPENCE, JR., Ph.D., S.T.D.

“Presbyterianism And Human Freedom”
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Curator, Historical Foundation

Montreat, N. C.

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Davidson, N. C.

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Through Four Eras of Concord's History

The Formative Years 1740-1795

REV. T. H. SPENCE, Jr., Ph.D. S.T.D.

In the graying twilight of a November day in the year 1944, an old man in a much older mansion, near the banks of the Susquehanna River in the City of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, motioned his visitor to a convenient window and pointed out the site of Harris Ferry, slightly down the stream. "You are from Carolina," he said, "and it was there that many Scotch-Irish crossed the River on their way to settle in your state."

From the counties of Pennsylvania, especially Lancaster and York, the twice-transplanted Scots had moved down through Virginia's Valley of the Stars to find a home for themselves and their children's children even unto this late generation in the lands lying between the waters of the Yadkin and the reaches of the Catawba, where the movement appears to have reached considerable proportions by 1740.

These pilgrims from Pennsylvania, desiring the ministrations of the Gospel for their households, naturally turned back to the land of their sojourn and to the Synod of Philadelphia. To the meeting of that Synod, May 24th, 1744, was presented "A representation from many people of North Carolina. . . . showing their desolate condition, and requesting the Synod to take their estate into consideration."¹ This constitutes the earliest record of a series of such appeals to be made by the people of the Piedmont, for while no section of the State is specified, the Rev. John Thomson, who later settled in the region between the two rivers, was appointed to "correspond" with the petitioners. Then, too, the East Carolina Presbyterians were of Scotch affinity, whose ecclesiastical ties were with that original homeland of them all.

By the middle of the Eighteenth Century, Presbyterian congregations were forming in upstate North Carolina. Basing his inference upon "A Remonstrance, to the N. C. Pres.² which is to sit in April, 1773," a document still in existence as late as 1870, Professor E. F. Rockwell concludes that Fourth

Creek (now Statesville First) dates from about 1751.³

While there exists a dearth of documentary materials bearing upon the early chronology of Concord, there are certain dates which may be fixed with exactitude. "a congregation belonging to ye Lower meetinghouse, between the Atking River and ye Catabo Do., adhering to a minister licensed from a Presbytery belonging to the old Synod of Philadelphia" represented the grantee in a deed dated January 17, 1753, which is preserved in the Rowan County court house at Salisbury.⁴ This congregation is now known as Thyatira, after a period of designation as Cathey's Meeting-house.

The Diary of William Richardson, submitted as his report of a journey as representative of the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Indians, is now in the New York Public Library. This journal records the installation of Alexander Craighead as pastor at Rocky River as having been conducted by Richardson on Monday, November 6, 1758.⁵

Elihu Spencer and Alexander McWhorter were commissioned by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, in 1764, to visit the congregations of what was to become Concord, being authorized to "form societies, help them in adjusting their bounds, ordain elders, administer sealing ordinances, instruct the people in discipline, and finally direct them in . . . what manner they shall proceed to obtain the stated ministry."⁶ Although the ensuing entry in Synod's minutes of 1765 is succinct, "Messrs. Spencer and McWhorter fulfilled their mission to the southward," it reveals that this Paul and Barnabas of a new world returned to their colonial Antioch with their task accomplished, although McWhorter, like the Great Apostle, suffered from an infirmity of the flesh while on his journeys.⁷

3

Rockwell, E. F.—*Ms. History of Fourth Creek Church*, pp. 4, 6-7.

4

Record of Deeds, Rowan County, Book I, p. 46.

5

p. 8.

6

Records of the Presbyterian Church, pp. 339-40.

7

Sprague, William B.—*Annals of the American Pulpit*, Vol. III. New York. 1860. p. 209.

¹ *Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*. Philadelphia, 1904. p. 175.

² Evidently Orange.

The lack of a settled ministry was the persistent problem of the pre-Revolutionary period. As noted, Alexander Craighead was inducted at Rocky River in 1758, but he had known difficult times, both in Pennsylvania, where his entanglements were with Indians as well as with the civil government and the church, and in Virginia, where, in the words of Richardson, his future son-in-law, he had "been twice driven from his congregations."⁸ To such a one, the wilds of Carolina may have beckoned as a haven of refuge. Many calls, as evidenced by the Minutes of the Synod, however, fell upon reluctant ears, and the Presbyterians of the Piedmont were long without regular ministers. The apprehension with which this region was regarded by clergymen from a distance is illustrated by the traditional story of Elihu Spencer's failure to take charge of the Fourth Creek and Thyatira congregations, even after he had supposedly agreed to such an arrangement. It is said that when wagons sent to move his family and belongings arrived in New Jersey, about 1764, he reconsidered his resolve when those accompanying the wagons declined to give assurance that his wife would be restored to her friends in the North in event of his early death.⁹

An extant list of the churches of Orange Presbytery of about 1774 is found in *Aitken's General American Register* of that year. Rocky River and Poplar Tent were served by Rev. Hezekiah James Balch. Described as vacancies in the Concord portion of Orange were:

Hitchcock Creek on Pedee
 Bryan's Settlement
 Mulberry Fields
 Salisbury
 Cathy's Settlement
 Fourth Creek
 Center Congregation
 Coddle Creek
 Hopewell
 Steel Creek
 New Providence
 Quaker Meadows
 Waker's Settlement
 Wilson's Settlement, on Catawba
 Goshen
 Sugar Creek.¹⁰

About the time of the Revolution, the situation was perceptibly changed, at least four, and possibly five, ministers being installed over nine churches dur-

⁸ Diary and Journal of William Richardson, p. 7.

⁹ Rockwell, E. F.—*Ms. History of Fourth Creek Church*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰ *Aitken's General American Register, and the Gentleman's and Tradesman's Complete Annual Account book and Calendar, etc.* (Philadelphia, Joseph Cruickshank for R. Aitken, 1774), pp. 188-89.

ing the years 1777-80.¹¹ As a result of these accessions, the churches of the Concord area of Orange Presbytery were served by six resident pastors in the spring of 1784.¹² A new era had arrived in the history of Presbyterianism. An itinerant ministry had been succeeded by men who were to spend their days with their congregations, to die among the people whom they served, and to be laid to rest near the graves of those whom they had pointed to Him Who is the Resurrection and the Life. Not only the Scotch-Irish, but the Presbyterian clergy had come to stay.

The first division of Orange Presbytery, which had been set off from Hanover in 1770, was effected through the erection of the Presbytery of South Carolina in 1784. Eleven years later, the western portion of North Carolina was separated from Orange under the name of Concord. When this court was erected by the Synod of the Carolinas, meeting in New Providence Church, October 2, 1795, it was specified that its members were to assemble at Centre on the last Tuesday of March, 1796. A proviso was later inserted, however, which authorized a pro-re-nata meeting if "an object now in view" should require it;¹³ and so, strangely enough, Concord Presbytery first convened in a called meeting. This session was held at Bethpage Church on December 24, 1795, when Revs. Samuel E. McCorkle, James Hall, Samuel C. Caldwell, Joseph D. Kilpatrick, and John Carrigan, together with Ruling Elder James Gibson, met in response to a call issued by Rev. James Wallis, the appointed convener, who was prevented from attending by illness. The six other clerical members assigned to membership in the Presbytery, James McRee, David Barr, Lewis F. Wilson, Humphrey Hunter, Alexander Caldwell, and John M. Wilson, were also absent.

The licensure of Candidate James Gillespie proved to be the object in view. Samuel E. McCorkle, who was for some years the only Doctor of Divinity in the Presbytery, was elected Moderator and James Hall chosen as Clerk, whereupon, on that far Christmas eve, Mr. Gillespie was licensed to echo the song of the heavenly host in proclaiming good tidings of great joy to all people. The business of the day was consummated at the home of Mr. Gibson, to which Presbytery had repaired for the evening session.

While the act of Synod in erecting

¹¹ Caruthers, E. W.—*A Sketch of the Life and Character of the Rev. David Caldwell, D.D.*, Greensborough, N. C. 1842. pp. 196-97.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 250, footnote.

¹³ *MS. Records of the Synod of the Carolinas*, I, pp. 166-68.

the Presbytery of Concord ordered that Orange Presbytery "be divided by a line running along the Yadkin River"¹⁴ no hint was given as to what churches would fall to the west of that stream, though Jersey Settlement, to the east, was assigned to Concord for the sake of convenience.¹⁵

The Minutes of the General Assembly of 1797, however, supply this deficiency in the form of a catalogue of churches and ministers of the Presbytery, bearing the attest of Samuel McCorkle, as Stated Clerk of the Synod of the Carolinas. For reasons that become apparent upon an examination of the Concord Records, this may be treated as substantially that of the churches comprising Concord at the time of organization. The ministers and their charges follow:

Samuel E. McCorkle
Thyatira
James Hall
Bethany
James McRee
Steele Creek
David Barr
Philadelphia
James Wallis
New Providence
Samuel Caldwell
Sugar Creek and Hopewell
J. D. Kilpatrick
Third Creek and Unity (R)
Lewis F. Wilson
Fourth Creek and Concord
Humphrey Hunter
Goshen and Unity (L)
Alexander Caldwell
Rocky River and Poplar Tent
John M. Wilson
Quaker Meadows and Morganton
John Carrigan
Ramah and Bethpage

The vacancies:
Centre
Jersey Settlement
Joppa
Mineral Spring
Chestnut Spring
Swannanoa
Long Creek
Great Plain of French Broad
Little Britain
Mountain Creek
Pleasant Garden
Salem
Knobb Creek
Smyrna
Moriah¹⁶

Certain of the six licentiates then

under the care of Presbytery assisted in supplying vacant congregations. Aside from such provision, however, nineteen of the thirty-four churches enumerated enjoyed the services of regularly ordained ministers of the gospel.

EVANGELISM, EDUCATION AND EFFORTS AT EXPANSION, 1796-1860

The evangelistic efforts, generally prevalent about the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, were manifest in several forms in the Presbytery. James Hall had already begun his repeated preaching missions, nine pages of the Minutes of the Synod of 1794 being devoted to his report of a tour of the Carolinas, during the course of which he rode 950 miles, preached 27 times, and received eight pounds, fifteen shillings, in currency by way of remuneration.¹⁷ *A Brief History of the Mississippi Territory* is a poorly printed literary relic of a journey into the region described, which was written by Hall and published at Salisbury in 1801.

The organization of Back Creek Church from a portion of the Thyatira constituency was the result of a difference of attitude toward the revival movement. Thirty-five petitioners presented a copy of minutes taken of debates previously held in Thyatira Church, together with a request for separation, to Presbytery on March 14, 1805. The court expressed the hope that the matter might be settled in some other manner than by division and delayed action until the next meeting of Presbytery.¹⁸ When other members of Thyatira informed the Presbytery, at its fall meeting, that they were not anxious, under the conditions, for the return of those who had withdrawn, the petitioners were recognized as a separate church, with the understanding that they "do not build their house of worship nearer to Thyatira Church than about five miles."¹⁹

A series of irregularities, following in the wake of the revivals, occurred in the churches of Knobb's Creek, Long Creek, and Olney. As described in the Records of Presbytery these manifestations were those of "persons giving up to enthusiastic impulses of the mind, as immediate revelations from God, and consequently doing things under the pretext of divine direction, very disorderly; such as laying on of hands to communicate the Holy Ghost; young couples marrying by immediate divine

¹⁴ Ibid., I., p. 166.

¹⁵ Ibid., I., pp. 166-68.

¹⁶ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Philadelphia, 1789-1820*, p. 120.

¹⁷ MS. Records of the Synod of the Carolinas, I., pp. 125-34.

¹⁸ MS. Records of Concord Presbytery, I., p. 187-88.

¹⁹ Ibid., I., pp. 195-97.

direction. . . . Laymen administering and people receiving the holy ordinances both of Baptism and the Lord's Supper."²⁰ After the meeting of two committees of Presbytery with the congregations concerned, on November 28, 1804, and June 5, 1807, and the suspension of a number of persons involved in the excesses, peace and order were ultimately restored.²¹

In the year 1810 Concord Presbytery moved to combat horse racing, reputedly flourishing within its bounds; and began the action against Rev. W. C. Davis which was to result in his deposition from the ministry of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., and the organization of the Independent Presbyterian Church. Davis, formerly a member of Concord, was assigned to that Presbytery upon the dissolution of the First Presbytery of South Carolina. This latter body had shown a marked disinclination to discipline him for unorthodox doctrine, even though such action had been urged by the Second Presbytery of South Carolina and at least suggested by the Synod. Thereupon, Synod dissolved the First Presbytery and confidently committed Davis to the care and anticipated processes of Concord.

This court condemned the peculiar doctrines of his *Gospel Plan*, published in 1809²² and, after a series of citations, deposed its author from the ministry on October 4, 1811.²³ The Independent Presbyterian Church which, in the meantime, had been organized by Davis and his supporters, was essentially congregational, since the local session was regarded as the presbytery. This body was received into the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America in 1863.

Concord Presbytery supplied the General Assembly of the undivided Presbyterian Church with the only Moderator to be furnished by this Presbytery when Rev. James Hall was elected to that high office in 1803.

In 1824 two new presbyteries were formed within the Synod of North Carolina: Bethel, which was transferred to the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia in 1828; and Mecklenburg, which represented an idea whose time had not yet come by more than two score years.

Comprising the counties of Cabarrus and Mecklenburg and including a small section west of the Catawba River, Mecklenburg Presbytery had eight ministers at the time of erection, and listed

twelve churches with 1921 members, in addition to three congregations for which no statistics were given, in 1825.²⁴ This early Mecklenburg, however, like Noah's dove, found scant rest for the sole of her foot in those troublous times, and ere long returned to that ark from whence she had flown, when the Synod of 1827 dissolved the Presbytery and assigned its churches and ministers to Concord.²⁵

Morganton Presbytery was the second venture in expansion initiated by Concord. Erected in 1835, it comprehended nine counties in western North Carolina. Four ministers constituted its original clerical membership and nineteen churches contributed to the Commissioners Fund in 1836.²⁶ The Records of the Presbytery are steeped in discouragement. The land was large; the workers few; and the results, all too meager. Divided by the Old and New School controversy of 1838, unsuccessful in obtaining reinforcements through the transfer of portions of Concord, it was dissolved by the Synod of North Carolina, meeting at Danville, Va., in 1840, and "all its unfinished business, as well as its members, churches and territory thrown into the hands of the Presbytery of Concord."²⁷

Eyes were lifted toward far fields, white unto the harvest, in the early Thirties. Presbytery, in the fall of 1833, ordained its first minister for foreign service, Thomas P. Johnston, who later went as a missionary to Turkey.²⁸ A. E. Wilson, M. D., was received as a candidate at the same meeting,²⁹ and when word came of his death at Cape Palmas, Western Africa, which occurred on October 13, 1841, it was recorded by Presbytery that he had "devoted the best of his days to the best of all causes."³⁰ In 1834, the blessing of the court was bestowed upon Daniel Lindley, as he left a brief but brilliant pastorate at Rocky River to devote forty-three thrilling years to work among the Zulus in South Africa.

Although the projected Western College of the 1820's never matriculated a student, Concord Presbytery, in 1837, opened Davidson College for the education of men; and, in 1856, Concord Female College, at Statesville, began its sessions.

²⁴ *Minutes, General Assembly, 1825, p. 370.*

²⁵ MS. Records, Concord Presbytery, II., p. 122.

²⁶ MS. Records, Morganton Presbytery, pp. 4, 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²⁸ MS. Records, Concord Presbytery, III., p. 59.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, III., pp. 60-61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, IV., p. 310.

A sense of archival appreciation, occasioned by the Fiftieth Anniversary of its founding, led the Presbytery to procure a trunk for the preservation of its records in 1847. This chest, covered with cowhide and generously, and not altogether unartistically, decorated in brass-headed tacks, was secured at a cost of \$3.00, although its real worth was fixed at twice that figure.³¹

On December 2, 1847, the distinguished but not yet venerable Robert Hall Morrison was officially rebuked by Presbytery for having "retired without leave",³² while two years later a protest was voiced against "placing young men, without experience in the pastoral office," as professors in Princeton Theological Seminary.³³

In the summer of 1853, Daniel Baker, who exercised great evangelistic endowments in conjunction with activity as financial agent for Austin College, held services in eleven of the Presbytery's churches. At Davidson, the seat of Concord's youthful college, he secured nearly \$300 for the Texas institution and, far better, was able to report that about thirty persons, including nineteen students, had accepted Christ as their Saviour.³⁴ Altogether, more than six hundred people were converted under his preaching, one hundred and three of this number being residents of the Providence community. That the Presbytery was substantially edified by these ministrations is indicated by the reception of 795 members on profession during the year, as compared with 303 in the preceding one.³⁵

Rocky River was the largest of the antebellum churches. In 1860 it reported a membership of 616, 176 of whom were coloured. Under the leadership of John M. Wilson, 1801-31; Daniel Lindley, 1832-34; and Daniel A. Penick, 1836-70, this people grew both in numbers and in Christian repute during the days before the War.

THE WAR AND ITS SEQUEL, 1861-1896

After the outbreak of hostilities, plans were laid, on July 10, 1861, for participation in the setting up of a general assembly by the Church in the South.³⁶ In the following May, Presbytery took steps to have certain of its members act

³¹ Ibid., V., pp. 35-36.

³² Ibid., V., p. 233.

³³ Ibid., V., p. 403.

³⁴ Baker, William M.—*The Life and Labours of the Rev. Daniel Baker, D.D.* Philadelphia, 3rd ed., p. 477-78.

³⁵ *Minutes General Assembly*, 1854, p. 144; 1853, p. 559.

³⁶

as chaplains with the Confederate army.³⁷ At the October meeting the recently formed Bible Society of the Confederate States was commended.³⁸

Concord supplied the General Assembly with its moderator in 1862, in the person of Rev. J. L. Kirkpatrick, President of Davidson College, and with its place of meeting in 1864, in the town of Charlotte. No meeting of Presbytery was held in April, 1865, due to "the active military operations" prevailing at the time.³⁹ In the fall, action was taken with a view to the care of colored church members in their altered condition and patience enjoined in dealing with them,⁴⁰ while the General Assembly was overturned to adopt the denominational title of *The Presbyterian Church of the Southern States*.⁴¹ Seven members, thereupon, presented a protest against the Presbytery's affiliation with a southern ecclesiastical organization.⁴² The answer to this paper, prepared in the name of the Presbytery by Revs. J. L. Kirkpatrick and Daniel A. Penick, constitutes a notable exception to the general rule that such replies are less able than the documents which they purport to answer.⁴³

An exemplary forbearance was exercised by Presbytery during 1865-66, when it was discovered that several of its ministers were engaged in irregular activities, and that at least two of them, were confessedly in the employ of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.⁴⁴ A communication from Steele Creek, presented to the fall meeting of 1865, projected an almost Shakesperian note of comedy relief into an otherwise serious case, when the Congregation complained that its pastor, Rev. Samuel Carothers Alexander, had publicly charged that, during 1863, he had been paid "scarcely enough to feed his horse, and if God had not provided for him better than his Congregation, he would have long since been dead from starvation."⁴⁵

A rival Concord Presbytery was organized at Reems Creek Church, in March, 1867, under the leadership of Revs. J. C. Carson, J. C. Stewart, and L. L. Stewart, who had previously been suspended by the Presbytery. Profess-

MS. Records, Concord Presbytery, VI., p. 714-15.

³⁷ Ibid., VI., pp. 830-31

³⁸ Ibid., VI., p. 838.

³⁹ Ibid., VII., p. 184.

⁴⁰ Ibid., VII., p. 223.

⁴¹ Ibid., VII., p. 237.

⁴² Ibid., VII., pp. 237-38.

⁴³ Ibid., VII., pp. 238-42.

⁴⁴ Ibid., VII., pp. 275-76, 317-18, 331, 364.

⁴⁵ Ibid., VII., p. 190.

ing allegiance to the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, this group elected commissioners to the Northern Assembly.⁴⁶ The latter court recognized the body as the legitimate Concord Presbytery and carried that name on its roll until the general reorganization of 1870. Four ministers, H. C. Atwater in addition to those named above, were associated with the protesting Presbytery in 1870. The only statistics published for that year indicated a total of 71 members in three of the five congregations listed.⁴⁷

The dark decade of the Sixties was brought to a refreshing close with the erection of a second Mecklenburg Presbytery by the Synod of 1869. This time the stakes held, and the daughter of Concord thus constituted has grown until it is now the largest of all the presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Its original bounds included seventeen counties, save that portion of Mecklenburg which insured the retention of Davidson College by Concord, thirty-eight churches, twenty-three ministers, and five candidates.⁴⁸ At the bidding of Synod, the new court met in the parlour of Mrs. Robert Pierson, in the town of Morganton where Synod was in session. Thus this elect lady found herself in an even more enviable position than that of Philemon, in that she had, not only a church, but a presbytery in her house.

Drs. E. F. Rockwell and Jethro Rumble made worthy and permanent contributions to the history of the churches of Concord, during the latter half of the century. A number of sketches of these congregations by the former were read, occasionally on the installment plan, at various meetings of Presbytery, while Dr. Rumble has left the fruits of his work in the columns of the *North Carolina Presbyterian* and in his *History of Rowan County*.

Concord's Centennial was celebrated at the spring meeting of 1896, held at Centre Church, the exercises taking place on April 2nd. A large representation from Mecklenburg Presbytery was seated in a body, as the Moderators of both Presbyteries were presented with gavels made from the early building in which the Centre congregation had worshipped. Rev. R. S. Arrowood and Rev. J. L. Williamson, of Mecklenburg, read sketches of the original clerical members of the Presbytery. Col. William L. Davidson gave personal reminiscences of old Centre; and a chronological roll

of ministers of Concord, 205 in number, was read by Rev. W. R. McLelland, after which an historical sketch of Presbytery was presented by its author, Rev. J. A. Ramsay. The proceedings were concluded by the delivery of an address entitled "The Present Outlook," by Rev. R. P. Smith. Although the Presbytery's purpose to publish these various papers in a suitable volume never materialized, all the materials, with the exception of a copy of the closing address, have been preserved in the Historical Foundation.

GRACE AND GROWTH, 1897-1945

The Presbytery experienced a gratifying growth between the years 1895 and 1905, as the communicant membership rose from 5,016 to 6,904, an increase of more than 37 per cent. The town of Concord was especially blessed during the decade. At its beginning, the First Church enrolled 288 members. By 1905, the churches of Cannonville (now Concord Second), McKinnon; and Westminster (now Bayless Memorial) had been organized; and the number of Presbyterians had risen to a total of 960, an increase of 672, or more than one-third of the Presbytery's gain for the period.

In another rising industrial center, the First Church of Mooresville multiplied its numbers from 43 to 286. The Waldensian Church was received in 1896 with 95 members, and by 1905 reported 142. While many rural congregations were faring none too well, Back Creek gained 64 members to reach a total of 140.

When the mountain synod of Appalachia was organized in 1915, Concord ceded the four counties, of Mitchell, Avery, Watauga, and Yancey, including 22 organized churches, to the new body.⁴⁹ In 1923, Davie and Yadkin counties were contributed toward the constitution of Winston-Salem Presbytery. In the same year the County of Cabarrus was, in accord with its obvious geographical propinquity, transferred to Mecklenburg Presbytery. This, however, did not prove a popular move—not in Cabarrus, at any rate—since ten of its thirteen churches joined Concord Presbytery in an effectual petition to the Synod of 1924 for the restoration of that county to the parent body.

Within a brief compass of years, two educational leaders of the Presbytery were honored by election to the moderatorship of the General Assembly. This estimable office was held by President W. J. Martin, of Davidson College, in 1914; and by Dr. Walter L. Lingle, in 1920. Thus, of the four moder-

⁴⁶ *Southern Presbyterian*, May 30, 1867, p. 3.

⁴⁷ *Minutes of the General Assembly, U. S. A. 1870*, pp. 223-24.

⁴⁸ *Minutes of the Synod of North Carolina, 1869*, p. 377.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1916, p. 520.

ators of the Assembly from Concord, three have also served as president of Davidson.

Characterized by the organization of no less than five churches in the general vicinity of Kannapolis, the years 1935-45 have constituted an era of modest growth in membership. These new churches, with the dates of their organization, are

Flow-Harris	1936
Kannapolis Second	1940
Immanuel	1941
Kirkwood	1942
Royal Oaks	1943

Since 1935, the membership of the Presbytery has grown from 11,603 to 13,702.

The autumnal night encompassed the shores of the Susquehanna, beside which for all but two centuries, John Harris, the Yorkshire ferryman, had slept beneath the branches of one or another of a succession of his beloved mulberry trees. Beyond the mists which hung along that river, far to the South, past the Potomac, and the James, and the Dan—yes, and the Yadkin, lay the original territory of Concord, now tenanted by that Presbytery and those of Mecklenburg, Kings Mountain, and Asheville—four bodies, which, with that portion of Holston once pertaining to Concord, numbered more than forty-eight thousand communicants.

The few settlers in the wilderness had, by the grace of God, become a mighty people.



Presbyterianism and Human Freedom

REV. W. L. LINGLE, D.D., L.L.D.

Human freedom is one of our most precious possessions, and yet I am quite sure that we of this generation have never fully appreciated it. We just began to appreciate it a few years ago when we discovered that somebody was trying to take it away from us. We have not fully appreciated it because we have never fully realized at what great cost our forefathers purchased it—cost in blood and tears and prayers.

Here in America a number of groups and agencies had a part in achieving our civil and religious liberty, but no group contributed more than, or even as much as, the Presbyterians. What is it that has made Presbyterians such strong champions of human freedom? No doubt it has been a combination of elements, but the two greatest are these, their beliefs concerning God and their beliefs concerning government.

I

Of course all Christians and all denominations believe in God, but different people and even different denominations have different conceptions of God. Presbyterians believe in a sovereign God to whom they owe supreme and absolute obedience. The Sovereignty of God is the central doctrine of the Presbyterian system of doctrine. It is the central sum from which all other doctrines proceed and around which they revolve. You see this not only in our Confession of Faith, but even in the Catechism which was intended for children.

The Anglican Catechism which the Westminster Shorter Catechism was supposed to supersede begins with this question: "What is your name?" It is child centered. The Shorter Catechism begins with this question and answer: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." The Shorter Catechism is God centered. This is further illustrated by the third and fourth questions. "What do the Scriptures principally teach? The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man." "What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." There you have the greatest definition of God that was ever formulated by mortal man. It was the product of prayer. When the conception of God set forth in these questions and ans-

wers and in other places in the Catechism and Confession of Faith gets hold of the heart and mind, it does something to the character and convictions of men and women.

With this conception of God, Presbyterians have written into their Confession of Faith: "God alone is Lord of the conscience and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His Word."

That Presbyterian doctrine cuts squarely across the teachings of totalitarian dictators, which is that the individual owes his supreme loyalty to the state. Men who hold this doctrine about God and the human conscience will never submit to tyranny in any form. They will die first, and many thousands have died. Presbyterians who hold to these views will have no fear of what man may do. Let me give you a few illustrious examples.

John Knox, the Scottish reformer and the founder of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, suffered many things for the sake of the Gospel. His life was often in danger. At the burial of John Knox, Regent Morton, gazing thoughtfully into the open grave, said: "There lies one who never feared the face of man." He never feared the face of man because he loved and feared God.

Andrew Mellville was successor to John Knox and the great leader of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. He had many a conflict with King James VI of Scotland, who afterwards became James I of England and Scotland. James was a Stuart and believed in the divine right of Kings. He was as much of a dictator at heart as Hitler.

In one of his conflicts with James, Andrew Mellville defied him in a way that makes ones blood tingle even at this late day. He took hold of the king's sleeve, called him "God's silly vassal" and addressed him thus:

"Sir, as divers times before I have told you, there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James, the head of the commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject James the Sixth is, and of whose Kingdom he is not king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member. Sir, those whom Christ has called and commanded to watch over His Church, have power and au-

thority from Him to govern His spiritual kingdom, both jointly and severally . . . We will give to you your place, and give you all due obedience; but again I say that you are not the head of the Church; you cannot give us that eternal life which we seek for even in this world; and you cannot deprive us of it."

Samuel Rutherford of Scotland was a great preacher and a great saint. Incidentally, I may say that he was a member of the Westminster Assembly which made our Confession of Faith and Shorter Catechism. When Charles II, the grandson of James I, came to the throne, there began a terrible persecution of the Puritans of England and the Presbyterians of Scotland which extended over more than twenty-five years. Thousands died for the sake of their religion. Samuel Rutherford's books were burned and his life was in constant danger. Finally when the officers came to summon him before the judges to answer for his life, they found him on his death bed. The old saint said to the officers:

"Tell them that I have received a summons already to appear before a superior Judge and judicatory and I behoove to answer my first summons; and ere your day arrives, I will be where few kings and great folks come."

These and thousands of others like them were the lineal and spiritual ancestors of the Scotch and Scotch-Irish who lived in the original bounds of Concord Presbytery and other parts of the country. They had no fear of man, or of kings, because they loved and feared a sovereign God to whom they gave their supreme and absolute allegiance. These ancestors may not have had as full a conception of human freedom as we have today, but nevertheless they were battling for their own freedom and for yours and mine.

II

Let us now come to the Presbyterian belief concerning government. That belief is implicit in the very name we bear. I wonder whether we all know where we got the name "Presbyterian" and what it means. We got it out of the Bible. That may strike you as a bit strange. You have been reading your Bible all these years and you do not recall having seen the word "Presbyterian" in it. But we must remember that the Bible was not originally written in English. The New Testament was originally written in Greek. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and translated into Greek a century or two before Christ. When

we look into the Greek Bible we find a word occurring frequently, both in the New Testament and in the Old, which when pronounced in Greek, sounds very much like the English word, "Presbyterian." It is from that Greek word, which means an elder, that we get our name "Presbyterian." Literally speaking, a Presbyterian Church is a church governed by elders. If we may elaborate that definition a little: A Presbyterian Church is a church with a representative form of government by elders elected by the people. Thus the Presbyterian Church had a government of the people, for the people, and by the people, long before President Lincoln uttered those oft-quoted words.

We think of John Calvin as the father and organizer of modern Presbyterianism. Let us go back to his day and trace the progress of Presbyterianism across the centuries, observing as we go the contribution of Presbyterianism to human freedom here and there.

When John Calvin began his life work in Geneva in 1536, Henry VIII was king of England; Francis I was king of France; Charles V was king of Spain and the Netherlands, and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire; and Paul III was Pope of Rome. All these were absolute monarchs and claimed to rule by the divine right of kings. We would call these dictators today. Representative government and human freedom had practically perished out of the earth and even out of the church.

It was in such a world that John Calvin began his life work. He began with the fundamental principle that he would go back to the Bible for everything relating to the Church. . . for doctrine, government, worship, life, and everything. First of all he expounded the Bible to the people in their own tongue as nobody else had done for centuries. The first sermon that he delivered created a great sensation. Crowds gathered around him insisting that he preach again the following day. What was it about this young preacher of twenty-seven that created such a sensation? Dr. Philip Schaff tells us: "Calvin began his labors in Geneva by a course of expository lectures on the Epistles of Paul and other books of the New Testament. . . He had the rare gift of teaching and the people were hungry for instruction."

He continued to do that kind of preaching all the rest of his life. Such preaching is in itself a contribution to human freedom. A paragraph from Thomas Carlyle comes to me:

"The period of the Reformation was a judgment day for Europe, when all the nations were presented with an open Bible and all the emancipa-

tion of heart and intellect which an open Bible involves."

I dare say that nobody has ever done more than John Calvin to open up the Bible for the people. In this connection remember the words of the Lord Jesus how He said: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

When John Calvin went back to the New Testament for Church government he did not find any popes, cardinals, archbishops, or any such thing. Instead he found a church with a simple form of representative government by elders. John Calvin determined to have a church like that in Geneva. That may all sound simple enough now, but it was a revolutionary idea then and had dynamite in it. Just here it may be well to pause and say that John Calvin, four hundred years ago, did not have as full a conception of human freedom as we have today, but he released ideas and doctrines which have made a large contribution to human freedom.

John Calvin's New Testament ideal of having a church with representative government by elders elected by the people spread like wildfire. In less than twenty-five years there were more than two thousand churches of this kind organized in France alone. This Presbyterian idea of a Church with a representative form of government passed over into the Netherlands, then into Scotland, England and into far away America. In after years it went forth into Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the uttermost parts of the earth. The spread of Presbyterianism, with its representative form of government, has been so great that some statisticians say that it is the largest Protestant Church in the world. I doubt that, but we can safely say that it is found in more lands and languages than any other Protestant Church in the world. In other words, it is the most cosmopolitan Protestant church in all the world.

While all this was happening something was taking place which has a tremendous bearing upon human freedom. Men who enjoyed the blessings of representative, self-government in the church began to ask why they might not have this kind of government in the state. One of the first results of this was that the Presbyterians of France, known as Huguenots, under the leadership of Coligny and others, began to fight for their civil and religious liberty. They lost and were massacred or driven out of their native land, but one cannot help wondering what a different country France would be today if the Huguenots had won.

The Presbyterians of the Netherlands,

under the leadership of William of Orange, made a heroic struggle for liberty and won. The result was the establishment of the Dutch Republic in 1578. It was really a Presbyterian republic with representative self-government. Run over your history and see if you can think of any other republic in the world in 1578.

The Presbyterians of Scotland and the Calvinistic Puritans of England battled with the tyrannical kings of England and Scotland for more than a hundred years for their civil and religious liberty, until James II, the last of the Stuarts, was driven from the throne in 1688, and the act of Toleration was passed. Samuel Rawson Gardiner, the English historian, in speaking of the English Constitution, says: "It is beyond all question the work of Presbyterians."

And now, as a transition from Europe to America, let me quote a striking paragraph from an address by Rufus Choate, the distinguished American statesman and jurist. It reads thus:

"In the reign of Mary (Bloody Mary of England), from 1553 to 1558, a thousand learned Englishmen fled from the state at home to the happier states of continental Protestantism. Of these, great numbers went to Geneva (when John Calvin was at the height of his influence.) I ascribe to that five years in Geneva an influence which changed the face of the world. I seem to myself to trace to it an influence on the English character, a new theology, a new politics, another tone of character, the opening of another era in time and history. I seem to myself to trace to it the great civil war in England, the republican constitution formed in the cabin of the Mayflower, the theology of Jonathan Edwards, the battle of Bunker Hill, the independence of America."

That brings us to the battle for freedom in our own beloved America. Let us glance for a moment at the main body of people who settled colonial America. For the most part they were Calvinistic Puritans from England, Dutch Presbyterians from Holland, Huguenots from France, Calvinists from Switzerland and the Palatinate, Presbyterians from Scotland, and more Presbyterians from the north of Ireland, known as Scotch-Irish, although they did not have a drop of Irish blood in their veins. When the American Declaration of Independence was made in 1767, there were approximately 3,000,000 people in the thirteen colonies. Of these about 1,000,000 were of Scotch and Scotch-Irish descent. Another 1,000,000 were descendants of other Presbyterian and

Calvanistic groups which I have just mentioned. In other words, two-thirds of the population had a Presbyterian or Calvinistic background. They came to America with their ideas of representative self-government, the sovereignty of God, human dignity, an open Bible, and Christian Education. Most of them came seeking civil and religious liberty. However, it must be said that many of them were seeking these blessings for themselves but not for all mankind. They had not yet reached the conception of human freedom as we think of it today. They were to grow in that grace. Now let us look at some of the specific contributions which these Presbyterians and Calvinists made to human freedom in America.

1. To begin with, practically all Presbyterian ministers from Maine to Georgia, in private and in their pulpits, in season and out of season, stood for civil and religious liberty. For illustration take men like Francis Makemie, Samuel Davies, John Witherspoon, David Caldwell, and Alexander Craighead. I have in my library a long printed sermon by Dr. David Caldwell on the text: "The Slothful Shall Be Under Tribute." It is a clarion call to the people to rise up and do battle for their liberties. It is well to remember that Patrick Henry was brought up under the ministry of Samuel Davies. Coming closer home, it was the preaching of Alexander Craighead that prepared the ground for the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence.

2. Presbyterians and Calvinists were leaders in the movement for American independence, which in its final analysis was a movement for civil and religious liberty. For illustration of this I need only cite you the action of the Mecklenburg Presbyterians. While there may have been no other formal declarations of independence, Presbyterians in other parts of the country were protesting against tyranny and standing for liberty. For example the Scotch-Irish in southwest Virginia met in convention on January 20, 1775, and prepared a strong address to the Continental Congress in behalf of liberty. The address closed with these words:

"These are our real, though unpolished sentiments of liberty and loyalty, and in them we are resolved to live and die."

3. The 2,000,000 Presbyterians and Calvinists bore the brunt of the Revolutionary war, which was a war for civil and religious liberty. It may not be known to all of you that there was no religious liberty in some of

the colonies prior to the Revolutionary War.

Bancroft, the historian, has summed up the relationship of Presbyterians to the American Revolution in this striking paragraph:

"The Revolution of 1776, as far as it was affected by religion, was a Presbyterian measure. It was the natural outgrowth of principles which the Presbyterianism of the old world planted in her sons, the English Puritans, the Scotch Covenanters, the French Huguenots, the Dutch Calvinists, and the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of Ulster."

4. Presbyterians and Calvinists led the movement for religious freedom in Virginia. The Anglican Church was the established church in Virginia for a hundred and fifty years, other denominations were tolerated but they had no religious freedom. Thomas Jefferson usually gets all the credit for religious freedom in Virginia. The epitaph on his tomb at Monticello, which I understand he wrote, reads as follows:

"Here lies buried Thomas Jefferson, Author of the Declaration of Independence, of the statute of religious freedom, and father of the University of Virginia."

All honor to Thomas Jefferson for the noble way in which he wrote the statute of religious liberty. But the credit for the movement which resulted in the framing of this act does not belong to Thomas Jefferson. He was not a great crusader. No politician ever kept his ear closer to the ground. Let us hear Dr. Charles A. Beard, the distinguished American historian, on this point. Dr. Beard writes:

"The truth seems to be that Jefferson himself was more an agent of popular forces than a creator, and was prodded into leadership and action by spontaneous and widespread outbursts of democratic fervor among the plain people."

(*Beard's History, vol. 11:942*)

Jefferson throws some light on this point. Listen to this from his pen:

"The Republican Legislature (in Virginia) which met in 1776 was crowded with petitions to abolish the spiritual tyranny . . . Although a majority of our citizens were dissenters, the majority of the Legislators were Anglican Churchmen."

In another place in his works he

wrote that in 1776 two-thirds of the people living in Virginia were dissenters. Many of these dissenters were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians living in the valley of Virginia only a few miles west of Jefferson's home at Monticello, within his own constituency. These Presbyterians, through their Presbytery, were sending one memorial after another to the Legislature of Virginia, pleading for religious liberty. If you want to see some of the noblest documents in the history of American Presbyterianism, turn to the minutes of Hanover Presbytery for that period and read some of their memorials to the Virginia legislature. To use Dr. Beard's word, these Virginia Presbyterians were constantly "prodding" Jefferson and others with action in behalf of religious liberty.

5. Presbyterians and Calvinists exerted a tremendous influence upon the makers of the Constitution of the United States, which is our Magna Charta of civil and religious liberty and human freedom in general. The resemblance between the constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church has often been noted by speakers and writers.

The late Dr. Walter W. Moore, President of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, used to enjoy telling a story concerning this resemblance. Back in the horse and buggy days a United States Senator was travelling through North Carolina on a political campaign. One night he was a guest in the home of a Presbyterian elder of Scottish descent in the region of Fayetteville. He found in the guest room a Presbyterian Confession of Faith and Book of Church Government bound together in one volume. When the Senator, who was not a Presbyterian, came down to breakfast next morning he told how he had remained up until the wee small hours of the night reading that very interesting volume. He then expressed surprise that the Presbyterians should have modeled their constitution so closely after the Constitution of the United States. It did not take an intelligent elder long to remind the Senator that our Confession of Faith and Book of Government were written more than a hundred and fifty years before the Constitution of the United States.

Some ardent Presbyterians like to think that the makers of the Constitution of the United States patterned some of its features after the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church. That position could hardly be substantiated.

However, it should not seem strange that there should be a resemblance when we remember that two-thirds of the population of the people in the colonies that formed the United States were of Presbyterian or Calvinistic background, who had been trained in representative self-government in the church with its several courts. The ideas and ideals of the majority of the people would certainly find some sort of expression in the constitution which was framed by their chosen representatives. There is an even more tangible reason for the resemblance.

James Madison is generally regarded as the Father of the Constitution of the United States. Although James Madison was not a Presbyterian, he was educated under Presbyterian tutelage. He was prepared for college by Donald Robertson, a Scottish Presbyterian school teacher. Instead of going to William and Mary for his college course he went to Princeton. There he sat at the feet of its distinguished president, Dr. John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister, direct from Scotland. He liked it so well that he went back to Princeton after his graduation and took an extra year under Dr. Witherspoon.

Remember that Dr. Witherspoon was a Presbyterian, and believed in representative government. Not only so, but he was signer of the Declaration of Independence. Keep in mind also that when some members of the Continental Congress, on July 4, 1776, began to waver and were not sure whether they should sign the Declaration of Independence it was Dr. John Witherspoon who jumped into the breach and made that stirring address of which this paragraph was a part:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men, a nick of time. We perceive it now before us. To hesitate is to consent to our own slavery. That noble instrument upon your table, which insures immortality to its author, should be subscribed this very morning by every pen in this house. He that will not respond to its accents and strain every nerve to carry into effect its provisions is not worthy the name of freeman."

It was impossible for James Madison to spend several years at the feet of a man like that without imbibing some of his ideas and ideals. And then a very interesting coincidence took place in after years, or was it a coincidence? While James Madison and his committee were in Philadelphia preparing the Constitution for the United States, John Witherspoon and his committee of Presbyterians were also in Philadelphia preparing for the organization of the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of

America. You may be sure that there was many a heart to heart talk during those days between Dr. John Witherspoon and James Madison, his distinguished pupil. Thus the Constitution of the United States, our Magna Charta of liberty and freedom, was probably influenced more by the instruction which James Madison had under John Witherspoon and the conferences that he had with him than historians have yet dreamed of.

It will be seen from this rather sketchy survey, covering several centuries, that Presbyterians have made a large contribution toward the achievement of the freedom, the civil and religious liberty which we enjoy today. This freedom was purchased at a great

price in blood and tears and prayers. Let us not despise or neglect this noble heritage which we have received from God's heroes of faith who have gone before. On the contrary, let us resolve, by the grace of God, that we will let no man, nor group of men, at home or abroad, take it away from us. At the same time, let us resolve that, by the Grace of God, we will preserve and transmit to future generations this precious heritage of freedom unimpaired.

In view of the world situation today, who knows but that our Presbyterianism with its doctrines of divine sovereignty, human free - agency and representative self - government, has come to the Kingdom for just such a time as this.



