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Old Baptist Preachers of Virginia.

BY R. RYLAND.

Another Omnibus.

When one gets to writing, his ideas multiply upon him, and he is apt to be more prolix than he intended. Such has been my late experience.

Thornion Stringfellow was the co-worker with Wm. F. Broadbent, Cumberland George, B. Grimley and others in the Piedmont region of Virginia. But he was a man of more intellectual strength and of less activity and usefulness than any of them. I once had an appointment on a week-day at one of his churches, and on account of an error in estimating the distance, I rode very hard to reach the place in time and began the exercises at 12 o'clock. During the sermon Mr. Stringfellow came in and took his seat. It was a part of my discourse, already prepared, to condemn late arrivals at the house of God as interruptions of public worship and evidences of indifference on the part of the individuals. Seeing him come in so late, I questioned the expediency of introducing the remark, lest he might suspect it as intended for him personally and might take offence. Courage—I might say rashness—however, prevailed over prudence, and I did not withhold the hazardous expression. I afterwards explained to him the predicament in which his tardiness had placed me, and smiling, he said, "I thought the remark was meant for me, but as I deserved it, I determined to take it and try to improve." I went home with him that afternoon, and enjoyed a pleasant interview with him and his cultured family. He possessed rare conversational talent and I drew him out on a great variety of topics in which preachers are supposed to be interested. His mind was stored with the treasures of knowledge and experience. Still he was not devoted to the ministry in a degree corresponding to his opportunity. So impressed was my mind on this point, that on reaching home, I wrote him a kind and faithful letter and warned him of the danger of hiding his light under a bushel. He received the admonition very gracefully, but I did not hear of any marked improvement. Men of large gifts and wide attainments are surely placed under heavier responsibilities than ordinary mortals. We must not judge, but we may counsel. "To whom much is given," &c.

Mr. Stringfellow afterwards wrote and published an able treatise on the subject of domestic slavery, as that topic was then exciting the anxious attention of the public mind. The whole matter having since been disposed of by the arbitrament of war, I need not say more of it than this passing allusion.

Edwin Baptist, of Powhatan, graduated from Hampden Sidney College and consecrated his early life to the gospel ministry. When the age of revivals and protracted meetings began, he was eminently useful both as a pastor and evangelist. I heard him preach only twice. His style leaned towards the ornate and flowery, rather than the didactic and convincing. God calls to his service gifts as diversified as are the dispositions and tastes of the classes to be won, and every herald should employ that particular qualification which God has given him. His own voice and gestures and diction are the best for him to use. Mr. Baptist possessed more wealth than ordinary preachers, but he was not diverted from his Master's work either by its acquisition, management or expenditure. He finished his course with joy and had not a spot on his garments.

Bernard Grimley was one of nature's noblemen. He sprang into public notice and high appreciation as a God-made and God-given workman, on whom schools and colleges had exerted no controlling agency. He enjoyed only a common English education, and yet, hearing him frequently, I never detected an instance of bad grammar, vulgar pronunciation or bungling structure of sentences. With a style of oratory neat, earnest and powerful, and with an influence only for good exerted for many years among country congregations, he secured, in his advanced age, the epithet of "the old man eloquent." He was poor in this world's goods, but rich in faith and the grace of the Holy Spirit. Of sandy hair and a forehead defaced by a rude scar received in childhood, he was by no means beautiful in countenance. Dr. Jeter, always fond of a little dry humor, once introduced him to a large company of ministers at the Convention in Baltimore, saying in his shrill voice, "Brethren, this is Brother Bernard Grimley, supposed to be the noblest Baptist preacher in Virginia!"

How often have I been humbled under the preaching of this servant of Jesus in contrasting my poor abilities, after many early advantages, with his, who had none! God be praised for raising up such men, to prove that he is able to take care of his own cause! Still exceptions to a rule do not show that wise training is of no utility to moderate men and even to men of lofty genius. He left a preacher soon.

Littleberry W. Allen was raised up in the Four-Mile-Creek church below Richmond. He was first heard of as a militia colonel, and this title adhered to his name, as do all titles, through life. Next he was a door-keeper to the Senate of Virginia, given to making and mending pens in the days of goose-quills, and perhaps of copying resolutions, or drawing them for members. He then became a preacher, of little experience, but of strong self-assertion. After some skirmishing as a pastor, he was chosen as an agent for collecting funds for Richmond College in its struggles for life. Strange to say, this employment brought him into notoriety among the churches. He had a general acquaintance with men of the world, a good personal presence, dressed neatly and was quite affable and conciliating. As a preacher, he was below mediocrity, but zealous, brave and confident of success. He hit grammar, logic and rhetoric and even theology some hard licks, but all in a good humor and with the best intentions. His perseverance was phenomenal. He adopted a method wholly original, and it was crowned with rich results. Selecting a church in a secluded region and in a destitute condition, he would hold with it a protracted meeting and say not a word about college or money. His memory of names was such that after one introduction, he could recognize each man, woman and child in the neighborhood and talk with all as old acquaintances. This art gave him an immense advantage. Of what avail are fine sermons, if the preacher wounds the self-esteem of people by forgetting their names after frequent interviews? And then only one in a hundred can perceive defects in grammar, logic, or theology. They all can see and feel enthusiasm, and so they fell in love with Mr. Allen and a revival begins. Baptizing fifty persons, he introduces his College business, gets a handsome subscription, receives an urgent call to visit some other church and departs with the best wishes of the brethren and strong omens of future success. He thus improved his talents, revived a drooping church and did a fine business for the College. It is success that makes success. At the breaking out of the late civil war, Mr. Allen formed an independent company of cavalry, planned his own campaigns and did his own fighting. I am not skilled in military tactics sufficiently to know just how he did this, or to say to what extent he was serviceable to the Confederate cause. One of the Federal generals sent him thanks for hanging on the rear of his marching corps and preventing his soldiers from straggling. It was those straggling marauders that did so much harm to life and property, and if Mr. Allen kept them in check, he was serviceable to both classes of belligerents. At the close of the war, he returned to the arts of peace and died as a soldier of the cross of Christ.

James D. Coleman belonged to a family long distinguished in Virginia for teaching. His father taught many years. Frederick Coleman succeeded his father with even greater reputation; and his nephew, Lewis Miner Coleman, was the professor of Latin at the University of Virginia when the war commenced. James D. was a ripe scholar and a high-minded gentleman. He gained an honorable standing in the Goshen Association as the pastor of several growing churches, and died at his post in the meridian of his usefulness. I happened to be present at the burial of the godly wife of L. W. Allen, and he preached an able discourse on the resurrection of the dead. I had heard him previously with great pleasure in the First African church of Richmond. It is very refreshing to see a man of wealth and culture placing himself squarely among the messengers of peace and giving himself heartily to the cause of Christ.

Archibald B. Smith was a pupil of promise with me at the Columbian College, and I think he graduated at Brown University and Newton Seminary. He began his career with fair prospects of success, but during his preliminary studies, he had married a young woman who was not a helpmeet for him. She was good in her way, but not in the way that God prescribes. The husband is to love his wife as he loves himself and as Christ loved the church, but at the same time he is to be the head of his wife, and Mr. Smith, from some cause, failed to maintain this relation. He was too easy. A mother in Israel among his Lynchburg members undertook to lecture his wife for hindering him in his pastoral duties, and she received this defence: "I have tried to make Mr. Smith angry and I cannot do it, and I have a contempt for a man that cannot be made angry." Finding his usefulness impaired in Lynchburg mostly by her oddities, he visited his native Georgia and received a flattering call, which he accepted, resigning at the same time his Lynchburg charge. But when he came back to arrange for moving to Georgia, she vowed she would not go, not she! and the poor fellow was thrown out of a place! He afterwards found some country churches near Richmond and spent an active life

among them, but he looked cowed and depressed. She was a constant thorn in his flesh. Having invited some brethren to tea with him one evening, he requested her to furnish a "light supper" for them, but when they were invited to the repast, they found the table loaded with lighted lamps and not a mouthful of food! A lesson to young preachers! Don't marry while at school; don't marry without due acquaintance, and do all the courting yourselves. After the decease of this woman, the Lord gave Bro. Smith a second wife that proved to be a rich treasure to him. His countenance brightened up and he spent the calm evening of his days in the holy duties of the pastorate. He was a good minister of Jesus Christ, but did not occupy the high position to which his thorough education and his blameless life fairly entitled him. No man unhappily married can rise superior to his heart-trouble and be fully himself. He had a son that was ordained to the ministry, but he preceded his father to the tomb.

Poindester P. Smith, who gave the initials P. S. to Doctor Henson of Chicago, was an active pastor in one of the upper counties of the State, but like his friend just described, was unfortunately mated. He, however, was more buoyant in spirit, and worked away his perturbations by long trips of pastoral service or by immersing himself in the cares of protracted meetings. So much was he from home, that to a stranger who called one day at his house to see him on business his wife said naively, "Mr. Smith don't live here—he lives in Buckingham" (a field he was evangelizing). I heard him preach a sermon at an Association which was especially adapted to win souls to Jesus. In the private circle he could introduce spiritual topics in a playful manner and then give a serious turn to the conversation. He baptized hundreds of converts and was released from toil in comparatively early life. Report said that his widow married a Presbyterian minister who reformed her refractory manners by quite an original remedy. When she got into her tantrums, he would fall on his knees and pray loud and long prayers till she was tranquilized. She declared that she could not stand that! Prayer certainly has some strange effects.

William A. Baynham was one of the loveliest spirits I ever was acquainted with. Nourished in the lap of refinement, he was educated mainly at the University of Virginia, and afterwards graduated as a doctor of medicine. But becoming a disciple of Jesus, he spent his long life and his ample means in advancing the cause of truth. Having been disappointed in some love engagement in his early manhood, he never afterwards made any adventures in that line. But his genial temper and his good breeding would have adorned and blessed any domestic circle. He was an instructive preacher and a tender pastor, but he accomplished more by the unutilized purity of his character than by the brilliancy of his genius. His churches were in Essex and lower Caroline, and he died in his buggy while on his way to see a sick family. At an advanced age he was gathered in the year 1888 to his fathers in honor and peace. No name on the catalogue of Baptist ministers in Virginia is suggestive of such pure and lovely associations as is the name of Baynham. After all, what is more precious in the eyes of God than simple goodness? Knowledge, power, wealth, office, noble birth all pale in the august presence of goodness!

There is a large number of preachers whom I knew with more or less intimacy in Virginia, but their history would be so much a repetition of what I have written of late, that the reader would accuse me of tautology. I will, therefore, simply give their names with an occasional word and close the paper.

Wm. C. Ligon and James D. McAllister, both pastors of the First church in Lynchburg during my residence there, were good men and true.

Elijah W. Roach, pastor in Charlotte county simultaneously with Clopton and Jeter, was a plain, unvarnished, excellent man.

James Leftwich and George W. Leftwich were sons of Wm. Leftwich, of Bedford, and worthy of their father.

Geo. W. Harris, pastor and teacher in Upperville, before the war, a chaplain in the Confederate army, wounded while taking a disabled soldier from the battle field, removed to Kentucky after the war and died at Shelbyville in 1871 while pastor of the Baptist church.

Dr. Wm. H. Kirk, of the Northern Neck, was a zealous and effective shepherd of the fold of Jesus. He uniformly attended the sessions of the General Association, but rarely occupied the floor in debate.

Charles Lewis, of Caroline, was a most devoted and holy man. He seemed to agonize for the conversion of sinners. I was once thrown with him in a series of meetings and he said amen so often and so loudly during my prayers, that I had to ask him to desist. I love the hearty amen at the close of a petition, but during its progress it produces distraction of mind and chills my devotions. For the same reason I can seldom enjoy the leading in public prayer among the Methodist friends, because they break in upon the train of my thoughts while addressing the mercy seat. Habit is second nature!

Absalom C. Dempsey, of Fincastle, came down and preached a good sermon for me at Lynchburg, though his manner was extremely modest. We rode together to an appointment, and I was amused with the tricks he had taught his horse. He looked around to his rider while eating an apple, and seemed to say, "Give me a bite," and he always got it. At a certain signal he would turn his mouth playfully towards me and threaten to bite me. Bro. Dempsey was a simple-hearted Christian.

Brother William (?) Duncan labored in Amherst up to about 1830, and removed to Missouri. At the baptism of a young man of his congregation, he used substantially this language: "In by gone days I knew and labored with this boy's father, a godly minister of the word. He often told me he doubted his piety because he had long prayed for his children and not one of them had been converted. But," continued the administrator, "this is the last of his six children whom I have baptized since his death." Verily God heareth prayer, though the answer is sometimes delayed.

John L. Dagg would have been described more at length but for his having lived so short a period in his native State. Soon after he assumed the duties of the ministry, he was preaching in a private house one evening when the floor gave way and the whole crowd fell into the basement. His lower limbs never regained their normal strength after this fall. He preached in a sitting posture for several years from Sansom Street pulpit while pastor in Philadelphia. On his way to or from that city, he called at the Columbian College and preached in the chapel from James 3:13, dwelling on the "meekness of wisdom." Threatened with the loss of vision, he was confined to a dark room for some time. He removed to Georgia and occupied high positions in the literary world. He published a treatise on theology which is of great depth and value. While I was teaching, he sent me for examination a work on English Grammar in which were advanced some original ideas on the syntax of our language. It was already printed, but I never heard whether he pushed the circulation. Its chief objection was the change in the terminology of our grammar. Dr. Dagg died lately at an advanced age, loved and venerated by all.

Dr. Christian, of Middlesex, G. W. Trice, and John Byrd, of King and Queen, were amiable, faithful preachers.

In my next, I will call up some of the first "Seminary boys."

Baptists and Religious Liberty.—No. 3.

BY ELDER J. J. LANDSELL.

The people who settled this country were of different religious faiths. The dominant party of New England were Puritans, a part of whose creed was to "remove, according to his place and calling, all false worship, and all the monuments of idolatry." The civil magistrate occupied one place, and it was not long before the power of civil authority was brought to bear on such as differed in religious faith from the dominant party. As early as 1644 a law was passed by the General Court banishing those who "refused to countenance infant baptism and the use of secular force in religious things." This law embraced Baptists and Quakers. Under the persecuting laws of Massachusetts, one of the most remarkable cases of persecution was Obadiah Holmes, a Baptist preacher, who went with two other Baptists from Rhode Island to visit, in 1651, an aged brother at Lynn, who had been whipped for being a Baptist. While holding religious services at this brother's house on the Sabbath, they were arrested and fined and imprisoned. The others were in a short time released, but Mr. Holmes was retained, to be more severely punished as a public example. He was sentenced to be whipped in Boston in September, 1651, and so barbarously was the sentence executed that for days and weeks he could take no rest, but as he lay upon his knees and elbows, not being able to suffer any part of his body to touch the bed whereon he lay. The sentence pronounced on him contained these words: "You did take upon you to preach and baptize; that you did baptize such as were baptized before, and thereby did necessarily deny the baptism before administered to be baptism; and did also deny the lawfulness of baptizing infants." (See "Story of the Baptists," p. 206. A Quaker, Nicholas Upsal, an old and feeble man, about this time, was fined, imprisoned, and finally banished from Massachusetts, for speaking against the law forbidding the bringing of Quakers into the jurisdiction, and found refuge with an Indian prince, who took good care of him, and said: "What a God have the English, who deal so with one another about their God." (See Hughes & Breckinridge's Debate, p. 409.) When Roger Williams embraced Baptist views he was banished, and found a resting place in Rhode Island.

The first charter of the Colony of Virginia was granted by James I, 1606. The law in regard to religion provided, that "if they shall find within the said colonies and plantations any person or persons so seeking to withdraw any of the subjects of us, our heirs or successors, or any people of these lands or territories within the precincts aforesaid, they shall, with all diligence, him or them so offending, cause to

be apprehended, arrested and imprisoned, until he shall fully and thoroughly reform himself; or otherwise, when cause so requireth, that he shall with all convenient speed, be sent into our realm of England, here to receive condign punishment for his or their said offense or offenses." (See Howell's "Early Baptists of Virginia," p. 87.)

In 1611 a law was passed requiring every man and woman, then present or thereafter to arrive in the colony, to submit to an examination by the Episcopal minister, to the end that he might ascertain whether he or she was sound in the faith; that is, the faith of the Episcopal Church, and in default of this, the minister was to notify the Governor, or the chief officers of that town or fort wherein the offending parties resided, and for the first refusal the offender was to be whipped; for the second, whipped twice, and for the third, to be whipped every day until an acknowledgment was made and forgiveness asked. (See same, p. 88.)

In 1623 the law was enacted for building a house or room in every settlement for worship. In 1643 it was required by law that "all ministers shall be conformable to the Orders and Constitution of the Church of England; that no others shall be permitted to teach or preach publicly or privately," and that "the Governor and Council shall take care that all non-conformists depart the colony with all conveniency." (See same, pp. 41, 42.)

In 1661-'62 a law was enacted, punishing with a fine of two thousand pounds of tobacco any person refusing to have his child baptized by an Episcopal preacher. (Ibid, pp. 45, 46.)

All this looks like fixing up things to make people Episcopalians by force. The "Act of Toleration" was passed by the British Parliament during the first year of the reign of William and Mary, but was not recognized by the Virginia Legislature for ten years after (1699). That act is properly named, "Act of Toleration," for it only tolerated Protestants who were not Episcopalians by exempting them from certain penalties, and allowing them limited privileges. The act was not one of religious liberty. But even in this small gain, no doubt the Legislature was in advance of the clergy, for when was it ever known that the clergy of a State Church went forward in the work of freeing the mind and purse from the shackles of religious tyranny? The clergy have always been prime movers in forging the chains of religious oppression; they have relinquished their hold on the public purse most reluctantly, and when the people, by their own struggling energies, have released themselves from religious tax, the walls of the clergy have been the loudest and longest. It is doubtful whether they have entirely died out of Virginia to this day, where "the church" was more snugly entrenched in State support than, perhaps, in any other State. But the time came for a strike to be made for religious liberty as well as civil freedom, and the Baptists who were among the first and foremost in the latter, took the lead, and bore the burden of the struggle in the former.

Rev. J. S. Reynoldson.

Dear Recorder:—I have read with intense interest the sketch of J. S. Reynoldson, given by the venerable Robert Ryland. I note that Dr. Ryland says that after Reynoldson had apprenticed himself to an English sea captain, he left this captain on a voyage to America, and enlisted on an American vessel, and that it is not known whether he left the English vessel lawfully or unlawfully.

The late James L. Graves, of Yanceyville, N. C., used to tell this story about Reynoldson. Mr. Graves had spent seventeen years in Brazil, and on his way home had stopped at the Bermuda Islands. While he was at dinner in the hotel a young sailor came in who was evidently trying to escape from somebody, and Mr. Graves made way at the table, pushed him under it, drew the overlapping cloth down so as, if possible, to conceal him, and also took his plate and held it in his lap. An officer and men came in search of the runaway, but did not find him, and went out, and so Reynoldson escaped. This is the story I have often heard from a prominent citizen of this place, a native of Caswell county, and he has recently repeated it to me.

My informant adds, that long afterwards, when Reynoldson went to Yanceyville to preach, Mr. Graves, who was remarkable for the accuracy of his memory, said, when he saw Reynoldson in the pulpit: "Why, I know that man," and he told of the occurrence at Bermuda to some who were near him. They doubted the statement of the much-traveled man. After services were over, Mr. Graves went up to Reynoldson, and a conversation confirmed the statement made by him, and of course an unusual hand-shaking occurred.

Can there be any mistake about this matter? Did any one ever hear from Reynoldson the account of his transfer from the English to the American vessel? It seems a strange story. A man from a far-away inland village of one of the States, while in a British port, suddenly takes a notion to conceal from the British officers a young runaway sailor, and that sailor becomes a preacher, under whose ministry four thousand people are said to have been converted. J. T. A.

Danville, Va., July 29, 1889.