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Sketches of Pioneer Baptist Preachers in North Carolina.

BY JOHN W. MOORE, STATE HISTORIAN.

MEMOIR VI.—REV. MARTIN ROSS.

CHAPTER TWO.

The Rev. Martin Ross did not at once leap to that leadership and control of religious affairs, as was seen in his great friend and temporary, Lemuel Burkitt. His early opportunity for social and literary culture was inferior to that youth's, reared in the superior wealth and refinement of Chocoma county. It was thus several years after Martin Ross had begun his career as a minister of the gospel before we find any mention of him in the history of the Kehukee Association. But this modest and proper place on his part in assuming a leading part among the preachers and laymen of so great a body only enhanced his power, when after years of patient observation and preparation he made known the mighty resources of his mind and soul in the great Baptist conclave. Burkitt saw with much delight that here was a debater as skillful as himself in all the sources of synthetic and analytic treatment of the most exalted and abstruse problems of theology. He further recognized in the flowing and magnetic elocution, the so serious tones, the pleading eyes and sympathetic bodily movements, elements of power that surpassed even his own resources in such respects. That another great religious leader had come to share his honors and influence gave the true man of God never a tinge of jealousy or uneasiness. He loved the cause to which he had devoted his life so deeply for any such sinful and unmanly feelings to find lodgment in his heart. He and Martin Ross, on the contrary, became rival yokemates in the same great lines of development and progress for the Baptist people. In all the efforts for advance and higher living among the Lord's people these two were ever found with interlocking shields pressing resistlessly on against the advocates of discord and delay. Mr. Ross, the other Baptist preachers of his day and generation, was largely given to making preaching excursions in the different outlying sections of country, that were still near enough to enable him to reach home in time for his regular appointments at Skewarkey. Some of these trips were doubly blessed. Both the missionary and the people were the better for his visitations. To the comparatively rich and cultured denizens of the counties lying between Chocoma river and the Atlantic, Martin Ross seemed a gift from heaven. They always heard him gladly, and hundreds found the pearl of great price under his ministry. Many of the wealthiest and exclusive families that had looked with disdain on Baptist preachers and their doctrines were at last seen humbling themselves before the Lord and casting their future lots with their despised neighbors.

In such a community Mr. Ross found that the Baptists were quite a different people from the gloomy and iron clad fatalists he was vainly seeking to lead into a more loving and gracious estimate of their Creator. While fully agreeing with the old Baptist tenet as to predestination as a necessary part of God's foreknowledge, he yet remembered the fulness of our Lord's offers of mercy to every one who would come and drink of the waters of life. He could not set down as unmeaning so many of those gracious and unlimited offers of the Master, simply because the Apostle Paul, in the course of his argument, had asserted that God, from the beginning of the world, had foreseen who would be saved. It seems a monstrous perversion of the whole tenor of our Saviour's career of loving benefactions and continual forgiveness of injuries and sins, that he should in advance decree the damnation of the least of his creatures. But it was all in vain that Martin Ross reminded his Skewarkey people of the fact that free will was left to every human creature, and it was thus the fault of the negligent and not that of God that men found no mercy at his hands. This church, with those at Kehukee and the Falls of Tar River, were the centres of the baleful hyper-Calvinistic fatalism. They rolled this doctrine as a sweet morsel under their tongues, and felt much of the old Pharisee sentiment of contempt for all who were not numbered among the elect of God.

It must have been a painful task for Mr. Ross to sunder his pastoral ties with the people he had known from infancy, and who had bestowed on him so many touching marks of their love and confidence. He had found peace and been baptized in this very fold. These people had been swift to perceive and encourage his gifts as a young preacher. His stern but faithful father had died in the same fold in 1801. But with all these things to sadden him, Martin Ross felt in his soul that his work was to lie elsewhere in the future. Influences beyond his or any other human sagacity had tied up and circumscribed his influence in such a way at Skewarkey that he was forced to the conclusion that some new man should take the place he held. It was thus that the great preacher at last freed himself of the last incumbency upon his soaring spirit. Passing over the broad waters that divided old Albatraz from the more western settlements, he went to the church at Yeoplin. It was almost like entering upon a new and higher stage of existence. The strong man in all his genius and power felt how much stronger he grew with a multitude of sympathetic souls sharing in his glorious aspirations for a day of better things among the Baptist people.

Burkitt and his allies had done great things for the churches, but there was still pressing need for advance along other lines. Not a letter or a delegate had ever been seen at the Kehukee from Sandy Creek or any of the Associations that once formed a part of her constituency. There was not even the semblance of fraternity, much less any concert of action, between the great bodies of Baptists thus enrolled in separate and almost hostile camps. With that keen, natural sagacity, which was one of Martin Ross's leading features of mind, he selected the recent extension of missionary work to foreign fields as the lever to lift the discordant divisions of his people into unity and fellowship, though all Christendom was ringing with conflicting comments upon the great work undertaken by Dr. William Carey. Though a great impulse was pervading myriads of Christian souls in different lands, as yet no man had gone from America to aid the brave and godly Englishman who, in despite of so many opposing influences, had yet begun the work of saving the souls of men and women "sitting in the region and shadow of death." While all Baptist traditions and records showed how, in spite of the most cruel and bloody laws to the contrary, the old preachers had passed from land to land, and though often imprisoned and burnt at the stake, these heralds of the Cross were still found faithfully prosecuting the work. In America there were not only the heathen Indians but many outlying settlements in the wilderness to tax the best energies and resources of a poor people in the work of their evangelization. As so much was yet to be done at home in America, the other dusky and almond-eyed races swarming on the opposite side of the world, had not entered at all in the matter of their convictions of duty. But the Lord was opening the eyes and hearts of his people to the fact of the universal brotherhood of mankind, and Martin Ross was the first man in North Carolina to urge upon his people their duty in helping to send the gospel even to the far-off Asiatic multitudes.

It was thus that we find in the session of the Kehukee Association in 1803 that the matter was brought to an open issue by the following query offered by the Rev. Martin Ross, "Is not the Kehukee Association, with all her numerous and respectable friends, called on in Providence, in some way to step forward in support of that missionary spirit which the great God is so wonderfully reviving amongst the different denominations of good men in various parts of the world?" Let it be remembered that Martin Ross, born and reared in the darkest haunts of fatalism, was yet the man to take such ground nine years before Judson and Rice had started to India. Of course, so important and exciting a matter was bound, under all the rules and precedents of old Kehukee, to undergo many ordeals before reaching anything like approval from the Association. Mr. Moderator, the Rev. Jesse Read, referred the whole matter to a very select committee, including the leading ministers of the body, with instructions to report at the next annual meeting their impressions on the subject.

This was the beginning of a great work in Baptist circles in North Carolina. Its first effect was a prodigious stirring up of the dry bones in the congregations beyond the Roanoke. Here was another step in advance proposed as to the Lord's work, and that was enough to set all the old-fashioned conservatives in solid opposition. The Association, held at Meherrin in 1804, not only answered the query in the affirmative, but appointed delegates to meet others invited from Portsmouth and Newse Associations at Cashie church in Bertie. There was inaugurated the movement which, long afterwards, resulted in the formation of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention. As was eminently proper, Mr. Ross was chosen to preach the introductory sermon at the Cashie Convention.

This memorable body convened on the third Sunday in June, 1805, and Revs. Lemuel Burkitt, Martin Ross, Aaron Spivey, Jesse Read and John McCabe were Kehukee's representatives on the occasion. The Convention proceeded to formulate plans for

the establishment of regular contributions for Home and Foreign Missions, but made no formal report to the Kehukee Association of the results of their labors. This grew out of the fact that when the year 1806 came, the Chowan Association had been formed, and to this far more sympathetic organization the leaders in the work belonged. Elder Biggs, in his continuation of Burkitt's history, says no report ever reached old Kehukee. This may be true, but we yet know her churches sent up funds repeatedly for missionary purposes to the General Meeting of Correspondence, year after year, until their final adumbration in 1827.

The debate in the old historic church at Meherrin must have been one of the most inspiring ever heard in this country. With Ross, Burkitt and George Outlaw to uphold the cause of missions was to insure a glowing and exhaustive presentation of the reasons that had led to the introduction of the query. It is not astonishing that with such advocates the stolid and inert tide waiters on the other side of the question should have but little to say. They were in fact, as a class, men of very few words on any occasion. If they could be induced to listen to argument and entreaty, it was to very little purpose. To reason and Scripture, to eloquence and persuasion, they simply opposed the *vis inertia* of their moveless natures.

But whatever of grief Martin Ross may have felt in the want of sympathy of such people with things so dear and momentous to him, he was largely compensated in the spirit so opposite to all this evinced by the churches of the new Chowan Association. Unanimity and enthusiasm were accompaniments of every appeal to their souls for longer interest in the extension of Christ's kingdom of this world. The zeal and devotion which have all along marked and ennobled the record of this great Christian body, led the people to accept the plain letter of our Lord's latest command without ever a doubt as to their duty in the premises. Christ had told his people assembled on Mount Olivet to witness his ascension, that beginning at Jerusalem they should preach the gospel to all nations. Mr. Ross had only aroused and fastened their attention on a plain matter of duty. Like Carey and Fuller in England, the preachers even had to be reasoned with before seeing the full weight of fealty they owed in the matter. The torpor and forgetfulness of God's people in this great responsibility they owed the heathen was passing away like a nightmare of the past, and nations were making ready to begin the new crusade against the stocks and stones of the swarming millions of the far-off East. The car of Juggernaut might still roll on in its deadly course over the crushed bodies of his dupes, but the days of such fatal delusions were numbered. Deliverance long delayed was coming at last.

Ordination of Deacons.

THE MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF OUR BAPTIST FOREFATHERS.

Dear Recorder:—We have recently increased the number of our church deacons to seven. We have a church membership of about four hundred and fifty, and have had all along but four deacons. For several reasons it has seemed to be desirable to increase this number to seven; therefore, the increase. Finding that the church—deacons and all the people—were ignorant of the privilege or duty of ordaining deacons, it being simply their custom to elect deacons as they elected trustees, for a term of years, and then do no more with reference to the matter, and believing it to be wise and beneficial to ordain the deacons and give them a charge in sight of all the people, I read up carefully on the subject of the manners and customs of our Baptist forefathers, and herewith submit to the Recorder the result of my study. It is interesting to study manners and customs, people and institutions. They all have a history; some, like the roots of beautiful plants and flowers, running farther back than others. The deaconate in the Christian church has an interesting history which no one can study without being profited. It seems to have a close connection with God's peculiar love for the poor and needy.

Dr. Lightfoot, a distinguished church historian, thinks and says: "This office of deacons, to whom the care and charge of the poor was entrusted, was transferred from the Jewish to the Christian church; for there belonged to every synagogue three deacons to whom that charge belonged."

It is impossible to say for certain as to the exact time when this office came into existence. Historians differ as to that matter. But the prevailing opinion at this time seems to be that it came into existence first in the Christian church at the time referred to in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, "in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations." Then it was that in the midst of these high-seas of church disturbances that the apostles, "the twelve apostles called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, 'It is not reason that we should leave the word of God to serve tables, therefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.'" There may have been deacons in existence before this in that church. Some think so; but where the record reads as if there were none

at the time, and this was the first call of the kind that had been made, and the fact that for several hundred years thereafter "the ancient church did not venture in consequence of the number here specified to go beyond seven deacons," would seem to confirm the belief that this was the first appointment of men to this office in the Christian church. It is impossible to speak with authority as to the reason for the designation of seven as the number. We know that seven was considered among the Hebrews a sacred number, and signified completion. Contrasting this with the fact that the old Jewish church had but three deacons, it would seem that the number carried with it the suggestion that God's work of organization for his church was then in the Christian church complete. One commentator consulted on this subject says, "Let him that has confidence enough venture a reason" for the appointment of just seven. Certainly we know that the Christian church is in advance of the old Jewish church, though some of the customs of the Jewish church were by the apostles retained in the Christian church. Such for instance as the using of water as an emblem of regeneration and moral cleansing, and such as the custom of laying on of hands and the public reading and explaining of the Scriptures. The custom of laying on of hands existed in the days of Moses, as we see by reference to Numbers 27: 18-23, Deut. 34: 9. It was a formal way of setting apart those who in the church were assigned specific duties.

Dr. Hackett, a learned and distinguished commentator, says, "The imposition of hands as practiced in appointing persons" to an office was a symbol of the importation of the gifts and graces which they needed to qualify them for the office. It was of the nature of a prayer that God would bestow the necessary gifts, rather than "pledge that they were actually conferred." This custom was observed by Christ and his apostles, as you may see by reference to Matt. 19: 13, Acts 6: 6, Acts 8: 19, 1 Tim. 4: 14, 2 Tim. 1: 6. It was also observed by the churches after the age of the apostles, and is still observed in the Southern States in the ordination of deacons and ministers. But it is not observed in the North in the case of deacons. Why, I cannot tell.

Dr. Strong, President of Rochester Theological Seminary in New York, and Dr. Hovey of Newton, both favor the ordination of deacons, as well as pastors, in their works on systematic theology. The ordination of deacons has the same authority in the word of God that the ordination of ministers has, and there is just as much need to give them a charge in the sight of all the people, and remember them in special prayer. It is, therefore, as it seems to me, inconsistent and unwise not to ordain deacons. The service, when properly conducted, is well calculated to impress the deacons and others with a deep sense of their dependence upon God for help in their work. The service can, however, be conducted in such a light and careless way as to be a mere farce. I once witnessed such an ordination service in North Carolina. The minister who assisted the pastor and took the lead seemed to have no sense at all of the solemnity of the service or of the occasion. Yet he was an eloquent and learned D. D. It is better not to have an ordination than to have it thus conducted.

An investigation of this matter of laying on of hands disclosed the fact that our Baptist forefathers once observed the custom of laying on of hands in case of all who came into the church in a kind of confirmation service like that of the Episcopal church.

In the Philadelphia Confession of Faith put forth by our Baptist forefathers in the year of 1742 they said: "We believe that laying on of hands, with prayer, upon baptized believers, as such, is an ordinance of Christ, and ought to be submitted unto by all such persons that are admitted to partake of the Lord's Supper, and that the end of this ordinance is not for the extraordinary gifts of the spirit, and the influences thereof, but to confirm, strengthen and comfort them in Christ Jesus; it being ratified and established by the extraordinary gifts of the spirit in the primitive times, to abide in the church, as meeting together on the first day of the week was, Acts 2: 1, that being the day of worship, a Christian Sabbath, under the gospel; and as preaching the word was, Acts 10: 1, and as baptism was, Matt. 3: 16, and prayer was, Acts 4: 31, and singing Psalms, etc., was, Acts 16: 25, 26, so this laying on of hands was, Acts 8: 17-19, for as the whole gospel was confirmed by signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost in general, so every ordinance in like manner conferred in particular."

I mention this ancient or primitive custom of our Baptist people for the instruction of our younger people in our own Baptist history, and that they may speak intelligently when they speak in admiration of Baptist simplicity in worship.

Now, as to this Philadelphia Confession of Faith, let me here say that it was adopted by the churches of the middle States and by many in New England. Dr. Armitage, in "History of the Baptist," says this Confession became the basis on which almost all the associations of this country were formed. If any Baptist pastor, therefore, feels that he would like more form or ceremony in church services, and many of our best pastors do feel that way, he has a perfect right to have responsive reading of the Scriptures, singing of Psalms and laying on of hands in confirmation of all disciples and in ordination of deacons if the church he serves is

like-minded with respect to the matter. Every Baptist church is independent of all others, and in such matters can do as it pleases and no man can say them nay.

On this subject in a foot-note in the Baptist edition of the Comprehensive Commentary, I find this wise suggestion (by Scott): "The right of confirmation as practiced by many Christian churches has often been and still is spoken of as a continuation of the apostolical (see Acts 8: 17) imposition of hands, for the confirmation of new converts, by the Holy Spirit thus given. But it is far from evident that this was done universally by the apostles, or by those who immediately succeeded them. As, however, miraculous powers, rather than sanctifying grace, were thus conferred; and unless miraculous powers were now connected with that rite, the parallel must wholly fail. How far something of this kind, properly regulated and conducted, may be rendered subservient to the edification of young persons, is another question; but to advance this observance into a sacrament, or even above a sacrament, (as it certainly is advanced, when the Holy Spirit is supposed to be conferred by imposition of hands, and by using words in prayer like those of Peter and John) puts the subject in a very different light. Doubtless it was at first thus magnified in order to exalt the episcopal order to whom the administration of it was confined, as if they were entrusted with apostolical authority; but if miracles are out of the question, so to follow the apostles in faith, humility, diligence, in "preaching in season, out of season," in piety and self-denial, is the only Scriptural or adequate method of magnifying other episcopal or clerical office. Assuredly, as this matter is very often conducted, it must be allowed to be an evil, and it ought either to be attended in another manner or not at all."

These seem to be sound and sensible words. In this same Comprehensive Commentary, (Baptist edition), in a foot-note, I find this statement:

"The apostles seem to have laid down a rule that, after being baptized and catechized, the proselytes should have the imposition of hands, accompanied with prayer, in order to their receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Hence in Heb. 6: 3 we find mention made first of baptism, then of instructing, and finally of imposition of hands, the last in the primitive ages only, being done by the apostles; in process of time other teachers obtained this power." (Keim.)

The uses of imposition of hands in the Old Testament are three: 1, as a ceremony in prayer; 2, in paternal benediction; 3, in creating offices. And in proportionable to them many more in the New; 1, for curing diseases; 2, for absolution of penitents; 3, in blessing the infants, (brought to Jesus, that he might lay his hands on them and pray. Bapt. Ed.); 4, ordination of officers of the church; (5, when, as here (Acts 8: 17) spiritual gifts were communicated. Bapt. Ed.)

Bro. Editor, it seems to me that the only consistent position to take on this whole question is that given by Dr. Hackett, who says that the laying on of hands was simply a symbol of the importation of the gifts and graces which were needed, and in the nature of a prayer that they might be received. If we take this view of the matter it could be as consistently used in confirmation services as in ordinations. Why not?

It is both wicked and foolish to say that every man who favors a little more form or ceremony in church services than is common in Baptist churches will have to leave the denomination to get what he wants. Baptist churches are free and independent, and hence it comes to pass that the order of service is not the same even now in all Baptist churches. It would shock some of our friends in North Carolina to go into some of the large city churches of our denomination in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and other places, and see the Baptist preachers preaching in long silk gowns and singing Psalms, and having their congregations stand in prayer. In some sections, I am told, that they have a special service for small children and infants. "It is what we might call a dry consecration. Infants are brought in and the ministers lay their hands on them and pray in imitation of the Saviour's putting his hands on little children and blessing them. The custom cannot be said to be anti-Scriptural. And does not the prayer of a righteous man avail much? This "dry consecration" is vastly better than "infant baptism," which is anti-Scriptural and subversive of the truth concerning baptism. Yet this "dry consecration" might afford great comfort to the heart of many fond parents who would like to have their little ones thus formally dedicated to God by prayer and the laying on of hands. Baptists and the truth of God certainly has nothing to fear from such a ceremony. And the same might be said of a form of confirmation service, if the laying on of hands should be explained as Dr. Hackett explains it in his commentary on Acts 6. The reasons which the churches in the North give for not ordaining deacons in some cases are the same as they give in the South for not laying on hands in a confirmation service. They say it is not of vital importance, and nowhere commanded in the New Testament, and may be misleading to some people, and therefore they do not ordain deacons, and may after awhile on the same ground and with equal propriety refuse to ordain even ministers by laying on hands.

It is that not equally true of the change

[CONTINUED TO THE FOURTH PAGE.]