

MEMOIR OF REV. R. A. OWEN

Rev. Robert Alexander Owen, son of Thomas Pinkney, and Jane Rogers Owen, was born in Macon county, North Carolina, near the town of Franklin, August 25, 1853, and died in Johnson City, Tennessee, April 29, 1929, at the age of 75 years, 7 months, and 25 days. He was a member of the Holston Conference 51 years and 6 months. The exact date of his licensing cannot be accurately stated, but it is certain he was a local preacher something like two or more years before he entered the itinerant ranks, for it is certain he served one year as a local supply before he applied for admission in the traveling connection. While traveling the Clinton charge, 1921-22, a store room in which was stored all of his household effects was burned, and it is known that some valuable papers were destroyed by the fire, and all his credentials, it is believed, were burned. If my memory does not fail me, he traveled the North Haywood circuit as a supply the year before he joined the conference. I know that he traveled that year, but cannot be certain whether it was the North Haywood circuit or the Pigeon river circuit. But the records show that he was recommended to the Annual Conference from the North Haywood Circuit. Perhaps at that time the Pigeon river appointment was a part of the North Haywood circuit.

He was married to Miss Elizabeth Sherrill, of Webster, N. C., Nov. 11, 1891. To this union were born seven children. They are in the order of their birth as follows: Elizabeth Sherrill, who died at the age of 12 years; Hettie Enloe, who died at the age of 20; Melvin, Mrs. Frank St. John, now living in Great Neck Long Island, N. Y.; James Trent, now living in East Las Vegas, New Mexico; Robert Alexander, Jr., who died at the age of 22 months; Jennie Rhea, who died at the age of 25 years; Sara Jackson, unmarried, and living in New York City. His wife died October 9, 1912, and four years later again he married, September 14, 1916, to Miss Ella Roberta Broyles, of Johnson City, Tenn., who for a little more than 13 years has proved herself to be a faithful helpmate and a worthy companion. She still survives to honor his memory.

Robert A. Owen was admitted on trial in the Holston Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, at Cleveland, Tenn., October, 1877, and served in the active ranks of the Methodist Itinerancy for fifty consecutive years. At the session of the Conference held at Magnolia Avenue

Church, Knoxville, Tenn., October, 1927, he asked for, and was granted the superannuate relation, which he held one year and six months. If we count the year he served as a supply, and the year and a half he was a superannuate, then out of a life of 75 years, seven months, and twenty-five days he was a preacher of the gospel for 52 years and six months, or for all his life except 25 years and about two months. Few men have a higher record in years of service.

In the 59 years of his active ministry he served the following appointments: Charleston and Robbinsville, Murphy, Webster, Waynesville, Macon and Murphy again. All these in what is now the territory of the Western North Carolina Conference. Then Mossy Creek, Strawberry Plains Sequachie District, Sweetwater, Leadmines, Princeton, Pearisburg, Rogersville, Morristown, Erwin, Bluffcity, Pennington Gap, Cedar Bluff, Clinton, and Radford. All these appointments, except Sequachie District and Radford, the last appointment he served, were circuits. The highest salary he ever received was \$900, and that on the Sequachie District where it required nearly half of it to pay his traveling expenses. His average salary for fifty years was \$634. How he managed to live, raise a family of seven children, educate them, sending some of them to college, and keep out of debt is nothing more than marvelous. Yet there are in Holston scores of men who are doing the same sort of thing today. Be it said of his honor he left no debts unpaid.

When it comes to praising such a man several things must be taken into consideration. His moral worth, his preaching ability, and his pastoral work must all be taken account of to find his real ability. In this manner I shall endeavor to measure the real value of the subject of this memoir.

First of all, Robert Alexander Owen was a good man. It has been my privilege to know him from the days of his boyhood to the days of his death, and I do not hesitate to say I never knew a better, cleaner man. When he was sixteen years old he was made a class leader, and from then to the day of his death he held official relation to the church, and in all that time there is not a stain on his good name, nor a kink in his character. He was clean in his speech because he was clean in his soul. He hated hypocrisy and insincerity, and in his own experience he was always more than he professed. With such a clean moral fibre running through his whole life he could be nothing

less than good. He was an Israelite in whom there was no guile. These statements are not fulsome praise of one who knew him well and long, but the honest truth. And so I set it down as the highest encomium of his character that from his youth he was possessed of a quality of goodness, not of earth, but of heavenly origin.

As a preacher he was not above the ordinary. He was sometimes even prosy. He read the Bible and Methodist theology and knew both so far as books are concerned, but had no systematic knowledge of either. Indeed I doubt if he ever thought of systematizing his knowledge, and yet he possessed a well trained mind. His mind was under such control, that when he put his attention to the reading of a book, nothing confused him. Men could talk all around him without, for a moment, distracting him from the subject in hand. In preaching he was never confused, nor did he give himself an opportunity for the injection of a new idea while discussing a theme. What he had prepared he said with clearness till he had finished. Consequently his sermons never grew very much, nor did he ever much improve in the preparation and delivery of sermons. I think he preached as well at thirty years as he did at fifty. He had little emotion, and almost no imagination at all. There were in his preaching no flights of oratory, and no sprightly epigrammatic expressions, nor were there any depressions or confusion of thought. As a result he averaged well with himself. His style was expository in every sermon he preached. He was not a great revivalist, though he received into the church about 1200 members in the course of his ministry. But he always left his charge in good condition for his successor, and I think the records will show that his successors generally enjoyed seasons of more than ordinary refreshing from the presence of the Lord, due very largely to his careful instruction and sound gospel preaching.

Brother Owen excelled as a pastor! Among the many pastors I have known in a rather long life, and with somewhat careful observation, I think I can safely say I never knew one who surpassed him in that field. After all I think this is the highest praise that can be given to any member of the gospel. He was the most practical and methodical pastor I have ever known. There was no haphazard in his pastorate that did not receive his most careful attention. He knew by name all his members and the names

of their children as well. Every interest of the church received his most watchful attention, and he was always ready to answer any question as to the condition of his charge. I have been twice his presiding elder and speak advisedly of his work as a pastor. He was always prepared to answer at his quarterly conferences, and to give accurately any information as to the condition of his charge.

So true was this that the holding of his quarterly conferences was merely the recordation of facts. The sick and the poor received sympathetic attention, and when he visited them they felt instinctively that a friend and brother had come. There were many who went before him as a preacher, but few that excelled him as a pastor. It was under his (Continued on page seven)

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