

FAMILY HISTORY

Genealogical, Historical and Biographical

OF THE

Simonton and Related Families

BY

WILLIAM SIMONTON



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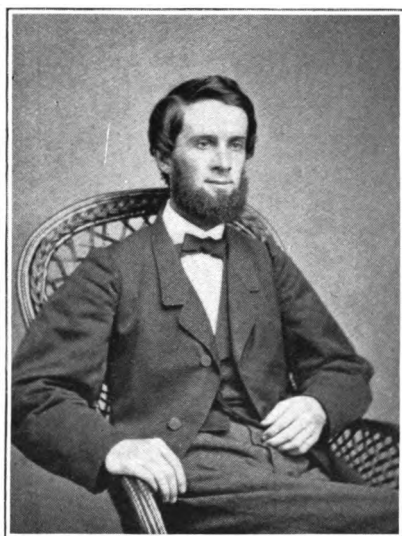
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ASHBEL GREEN SIMONTON

Ashbel Green Simonton (1833-1867), youngest son of Dr. William and Martha (Snodgrass) Simonton, was born Jan. 20th, 1833, and baptized June 14th, of the same year. His studies, preparatory to entering the College of New Jersey, were pursued in Harrisburg, Pa. Having taken a full course, he was graduated in 1852. In the autumn of this year he took charge of an Academy for boys in Mississippi, and taught with success for 18 months. He returned to Harrisburg in July, 1854, and became a student of law.

During a season of special religious interest in the following winter, he was graciously led to the acceptance of Christ as his personal Saviour, and on the 5th day of May, 1855, united with the Presbyterian church,* in Harrisburg, Pa. On the evening of the day of his first communion (May 6th) he made a solemn record in writing of his covenant engagements and of the responsibilities

*Rev. William R. Dewitt, pastor.



Rev. Ashbel G. Simonton.

henceforth to devolve upon him as a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

Within two weeks after this solemn transaction, he began the study of Hebrew, with a view of entering the Theological Seminary at Princeton at its next session. This he did early in September.

At an early stage of his theological course, he was led to think seriously of consecrating his life to the foreign missionary service. He attended the students' weekly missionary prayer-meeting, with a deepening interest in this great enterprise. With reference to the privations and self-denial to be endured by those who go to a foreign field, he reasoned thus: "To leave one's home, friends and country may seem hard, and will be, without doubt; but who knows that by consulting his own comfort, even for this life, he can secure it? 'He that will save his life, shall lose it.' The only safety is in implicit submission to the purposes of God. Under His guidance, the place of danger is the place of safety, and without His presence we can be safe nowhere."

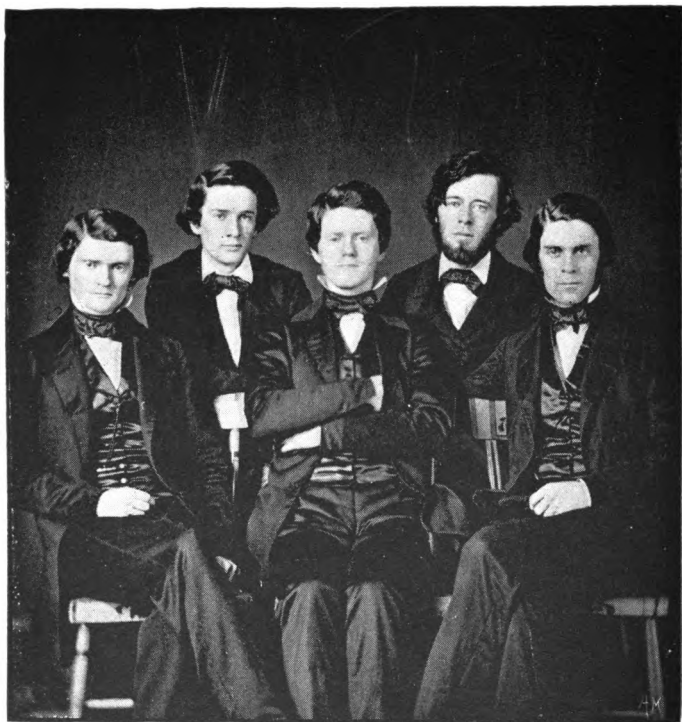
He spent his first Seminary vacation in Iowa, as a colporteur of the Presbyterian Board of Publication.

In October, 1856, he attended the annual meeting of the American B. C. F. Missions at Newark, N. J., with great enjoyment and profit. The addresses, discussions and hearty songs of praise, "but especially the missionary prayer-meetings,

held every morning for one hour," interested him profoundly, and greatly intensified his missionary ardor. He, however, purposely reserved his ultimate decision as to his personal duty, until near the end of his theological course.

He was licensed by the Presbytery of Carlisle, April 14th, 1858, a few weeks prior to his graduation at the Theological Seminary. His first sermons were full of promise for the future. Several churches in which he preached sought his services. Efforts were indeed made to dissuade him from going abroad, on the ground of ability to achieve eminence in this country. "But none of these things moved him." Having obtained the cheerful consent of his friends, and especially of his mother, he determined to devote his life to foreign missionary work. This decision reached, all previous perplexity of mind was relieved. Thus he wrote: "It seemed to me that whenever my face was set to go abroad, I enjoyed peace of mind; and whenever I turned to the home field with desire to remain, I was made uneasy, under the fear that I was seeking not the will of God, but my own ease."

He applied to the Board for appointment to a Foreign field, in October, 1858, mentioning Brazil as the country in which he was most interested, but leaving the decision of the question to the judgment of the Board. The latter decided to send him to Brazil, but reserved the right to



James Ashbel G. John William
 Thomas

THE SIMONTON BROTHERS.

designate him to another field in case the way was not clear to begin operations there.

The time fixed for his departure was May, 1859. Meanwhile he spent two months in New York, in the study of the Portuguese language, and in lecturing on Brazil, as opportunity offered.

He was ordained by the Presbytery of Carlisle, April 14th, 1859, at Harrisburg. He preached from the words: "Come over into Macedonia and help us." The sermon was published in the Presbyterian Magazine. The ordination discourse was preached by his uncle, the Rev. William D. Snodgrass, D. D., from Rev. 14: 6, and the charge was delivered by the Rev. Thomas Creigh, D. D. The whole service was solemn and deeply impressive.

He sailed from Baltimore, Md., for Rio de Janeiro, June 18th, 1859, in the merchant ship "Banshee," Captain Kane. His mother* and

*Brother John, in writing of the Scotch-Irish in Pennsylvania, pays tribute to his own mother in language that may have been suggested in part by this incident.

"One of the daughters of Martha Davis Snodgrass was the mother of five sons. She was a model Scotch-Irish mother. By her industry and economy and wise discretion she assisted very much each of her five sons in obtaining a college education * * She had an earnest desire that one or more of her sons might enter the ministry. This desire was gratified, her eldest becoming a minister. Her youngest son was in accordance with her wish, baptised by the name of a distinguished divine of the Presbyterian church at that time (the Rev. Ashbel Green, D. D.), and in giving him that name she gave outward expression to the wish laid up in her heart that this son, also, should become a devoted and useful minister of the church. When he grew up, his own inclination and sense of duty accorded with her wish, and when the time came she gave him up, with her prayers, though not without tears, to the foreign missionary work, in which he laid down his life, after a very efficient service

brother John saw him on board, and united with him in a parting prayer in his state-room.

While denied the privilege of holding any public service on board, he formed the sailors into a Bible class, and gave them familiar instruction, on Sabbath afternoons. Some of them received their first impressions of Divine truth from him.

The voyage was greatly enjoyed. July 12th, he wrote: "I know of nothing possessing for me such interest—even fascination—as a night watch on deck at sea."

He landed at Rio de Janeiro Aug. 12th, after a voyage of 56 days. His first act was to review the Lord's mercies, and to consecrate himself anew to His service. He was kindly received by the American merchants and others to whom he had letters, and by resident English families. A few Christian hearts gave him a very cordial welcome, and did him good service in procuring for him suitable accommodations.

For some months he preached occasionally for the English-speaking people, and held frequent services on shipboard for the benefit of the seamen visiting the port. But as his great object was to give the gospel to the natives of Brazil, the acquisition of the Portuguese language engaged his chief attention.

of about nine years. Her husband, long an elder in Derry church, was Dr. William Simonton; and so long as the writer lives, he will thank God that he was permitted to call her his mother."

J. W. S.

That he might be able to report to the Board at home the social and religious condition and needs of the people, he spent three months in exploring the province of Sao Paulo, returning well satisfied that the way was prepared for extensive preliminary work in that province, no less than in the city of Rio.

He began a Bible class, May 19th, 1861, in Portuguese. A week day evening service soon followed, and was regularly maintained until January, 1862, when a church was organized, and the Lord's Supper administered for the first time, the services being conducted in both English and Portuguese.

As his brother-in-law, the Rev. Alexander L. Blackford, who, with his wife, had landed in Rio, July 25th, 1860, was now able to conduct religious services in Portuguese, Mr. Simonton left the newly organized church in his care, and visited his friends in the United States. He was especially anxious to see his mother once more, but arrived too late* to have this anticipated pleasure.

*His eager anticipations, followed by the anguish of his heart, appear in two letters of the time, to his mother and to his sister in St. Paul.

Bark "Henrietta,"

Off the Coast of New Jersey, May 6, 1862.

My Dear Mother: By the good Providence of God, I have been brought safely in sight of my native land again. I determined to hasten my visit home—and sailed from Rio on the 16th of March. I have been 50 days on the ocean. To-night, or to-morrow, we hope to get into New York harbor.

7 a. m. May 7th.

We are at anchor, and I am waiting to go ashore. I will let brothers John and William know of my arrival as soon as possible, and learn from them of the welfare of the fam-

She had passed away before he could reach her bedside.

During the year spent in this visit he made the acquaintance of Miss Helen Murdock of Baltimore, Md., to whom he was married, March 19th, 1863. He also visited the Portuguese colonies in Illinois, and presented the cause of missions in various churches.

He sailed with his wife for Rio, May 23rd, 1863, and landed July 16th. On resuming his work, he was greatly cheered by a largely increased attendance at the church services, rendering even increased accommodations necessary.

The first anniversary of his marriage closed "a year of blessing almost unmixed." But this was soon followed by an occasion of overwhelming sorrow. This was the death of his wife, June 28th, 1864, leaving an infant daughter only seven days old. Only those who are called to endure a like ordeal of affliction, under like circumstances, un-

ily (in St. Paul, Minn.). A greeting to all, in hope of seeing you soon.

Your affectionate son,

A. G. SIMONTON.

New York, May 7, 1862.

My Dear Sister: This morning I landed, after a 51 days' passage from Rio, and immediately put in the office letters to St. Paul. * * Now I know the truth. Dr. J. C. Lowrie (of the Mission Board in N. Y.) has informed me that I am too late. I do not realize it, even now. I had painful misgivings, but was not prepared for this * * The hope of seeing my dear Mother in the land of the living is gone, and I am yet bewildered. I will go on to visit you all. It will be a joy, but very different from what I had anticipated. Yet, God is good. I have just risen from my knees, and feel better that I have poured out my prayers and my tears before Him.

Your loving brother,

GREEN.

derstand what such a bereavement means. To him, as a missionary in a foreign land, it was an incalculable loss. He experienced that sense of loneliness, disappointment, desolation and giving way of incentive, natural to one in his situation; but yet was enabled to bear the sore trial with meekness, and humble resignation to his heavenly Father's will. This is evident from his own words: "Thanks to Him who died and rose again for the firm belief that these natural feelings, so wholly rebellious against what has happened, do not tell the whole truth—that there is balm even for such wounds as these! Heaven is the home of the believer; it is my home. All that is dearest to me is there: father, mother, sisters, wife—*Jesus* is there."

Care for his motherless child now occupied his thoughts. As seemed natural, he first offered her to the grandparents, who resided in Baltimore, Md., provided they would arrange to have her conveyed to them by a competent nurse. This offer having been declined, he gave her to his sister and brother-in-law, Mrs. and Mr. Blackford, who accepted the trust reposed in them, and cared for the child until she was four years of age, when she was brought to the United States.

The lesson drawn from the loss of his wife, from the necessary breaking up of his home, and separation from his child, was that of more unreserved consecration to his Master's service. In this he

found a measure of relief, while the success of his labors afforded him occasion for unceasing gratitude.

The establishment of a new agency for the dissemination of the truth was now undertaken. This was the issue of a semi-monthly paper entitled: *The Evangelical Press (Imprensa Evangelica)*, of which he was Editor, Superintendent and chief contributor, for nearly two years. These labors, in addition to preaching three times a week in Portuguese, and generally once in English, made heavy demands upon his time and strength. They were, however, cheerfully performed, and continued to be with him a favorite method of diffusing the truth, and of attracting the attention of thinking Brazilians to the errors of Roman Catholicism.

On the reception of the news of Lee's surrender, of the suppression of the great rebellion, and of the assassination of President Lincoln, the American residents in Rio requested him to preach a sermon suitable to the occasion. He consented; and with only one day for preparation, he wrote a discourse which he delivered, May 21st, 1865, to the largest assembly of his countrymen he had so far seen in Rio. It was founded upon Psalm 46:1-3, and gave such general satisfaction that a copy of it was asked for publication.

After his wife's death, in 1864, changes in his domestic arrangements became necessary. To be

near his church, he took a house in the heart of the city. But some of his friends, deeming the location undesirable on the score of health, demurred to it. His reply was: "Foreign merchants reside in that part of the city for trade; foreign missionaries ought to be equally self-denying." Here for a time he continued his labors, with absorbing zeal. But ere long it became evident that he was overtaxing his energies, so he was obliged to desist. Thereupon he determined to make his annual visit to Sao Paulo, to see his child,* earlier than usual. As four hours of the journey were by water, he hoped that sea-sickness would relieve his bilious system. But the calmness of the sea disappointed him. He was far from well when he arrived at the house of his brother-in-law and sister, but felt assured that rest and a change of climate would restore him. Failing to improve, the best physician within reach was called in, and prescribed for him, but without any favorable effect. After three days, the physician was recalled, and found him in a high fever, with other alarming symptoms. A consulting physician was called, but all medical skill proved to be in vain. Intervals of comparative quiet and ease were afforded him, but there was no arrest of his disease. He grew

*A cute little article, entitled "Spectacles for the Near-sighted," in "Woman's Work for Woman," of May, 1900, bears testimony to the deep interest in Foreign Missions, and clear discrimination of their claims, possessed by this only child of Rev. A. G. Simonton—now come to woman's estate—Helen M. Simonton.

worse from day to day, and was much of the time unconscious. Everything that human love and skill could suggest to save his valuable life, was freely contributed. Much fervent prayer—public, secret and at his bed-side—was offered for his recovery; and when hope of this result was quenched, “for a peaceful and speedy death, if such were the Lord’s will.” All the tender ministries that loving and beloved kindred and Christian friends could bring to bear upon him, for his comfort and support, were promptly and cheerfully performed. But higher counsels and purposes had sway. The prayer of the great Intercessor, who is always heard, saying: “Father, I will that he be with Me where I am, that he may behold My glory,” prevailed over all supplications of earthly origin and intent. He passed within the veil on the morning of Dec. 9th, 1867, and entered into his rest.

The law of Brazil required interment within 24 hours after death. His remains were, accordingly, buried in the afternoon of the day on which he died. After services in Portuguese, a large procession of friends, English, American and members of the mission church, proceeded to the Protestant cemetery overlooking the city of Sao Paulo, and there they tenderly committed the corruptible body to the tomb, in hope of a glorious resurrection. *“No fitter resting-place for that temple of the Holy Ghost, whose presence on thy soil, O Brazil! was a blessing; whose burial in it is a*

bereavement”—is the language of a fellow missionary, who knew him well, and loved him dearly—the *Rev. George W. Chamberlain, D. D.*

Helen (Murdock) Simonton, wife of brother Ashbel Green Simonton, was a daughter of Mr. William F. Murdock, of Baltimore, Md. Their marriage took place, March 19th, 1863, the ceremony being performed by her pastor, the Rev. John C. Backus, D. D., to whom we are indebted for the substance of the following notice, written soon after her decease:

“Born of Christian parents, who dedicated her to God in baptism, she gave early indications of sweetness of disposition and tenderness of conscience, with decided talent. Enjoying the best opportunities of education, her character was favorably developed, under judicious culture. Soon after leaving school, she united with the First Presbyterian church in Baltimore, and from that time became a decided Christian, taking an active part in every means of getting and doing good, in Sabbath school, tract visitation, and every labor of love open to Christians in that city. . . . With her beloved husband she left the endearments of her happy home, to serve her Divine Master as a missionary in Brazil. Possessed of a cultivated mind, a sound judgment, a tender, loving heart, with simple faith, deep humility, and unselfish zeal, she was eminently fitted to be an invaluable help-

meet in the missionary field. Her extreme modesty made her seem, at first, retiring and diffident; yet it lent a delicate refinement to her manners, and gave her unusual facility in winning the confidence and affection of all with whom she had intercourse. Having made rapid progress in the language, for which her previous training had prepared her, she was becoming qualified for great usefulness in a most inviting field, when she was called suddenly away, leaving an infant daughter barely one week old. This sorrowful event occurred, June 28th, 1864. The summons, however, found her not unprepared. She calmly said: 'I am ready to go; Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Such removals may seem to us a dark mystery, but God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. Having consecrated herself unreservedly on the altar of missionary service, her Saviour was pleased to say: 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you;' and the missionary field became the stepping-stone to the higher employments and facilities of the heavenly service."