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THE EARLY LIFE OF BENJAMIN MOSBY SMITH*

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Some years ago, President Lacy of the Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, referred to the subject of this sketch as the man who "saved Union Seminary in her hour of desperate need." The early life and education of Dr. Smith, therefore, must necessarily be of interest to all those who have been connected with the Seminary and with the Presbyterian Church of the South. In addition, the early experience of a highly intelligent boy and young man in the pursuit of his education during one of the most important periods of our cultural development should appeal to the attention of that great number of people who feel an interest in the history of American life and thought.

Towards the end of his long and busy career, but before his

*The first in a series of articles on Dr. Benjamin M. Smith, Professor of Oriental Literature in Union Seminary, 1854-1889. The writer of this sketch, a grandson of Dr. Smith, has been enabled to write it as a result of the collection and preservation of Dr. Smith's papers, so far as they have been available, by his daughter, Mrs. A. J. McKelway, Sr., who originally suggested the preparation of the article and has furnished to the writer a great deal of assistance in the form of information and criticism. Mrs. McKelway is desirous of obtaining from readers of the REVIEW the loan of any material in their possession relating to the life of Dr. Smith, for use in the preparation of the other articles in the series. Her address is 2701 Park Road, N. W., Washington, D. C.—F. R. F.

mental powers had begun to fail, Dr. Smith wrote for the information of his children and grandchildren, a narrative of his life up to the time of his entering Union Seminary as a student. The author of this sketch, who is one of those for whom Dr. Smith's account was written, has used it as his chief source of information but has been able to supplement it at certain points by other manuscripts and by printed material.

Benjamin Mosby Smith was born June 30, 1811. His father, Josiah Smith, was the owner of a plantation known as Montrose, of which Mrs. Terhune, a first cousin of Dr. Smith, published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* for October, 1920, a description based on the reflections of visits made during her girlhood. "Marion Harland," as Mrs. Terhune was known to her readers, may have seen Montrose through the golden mist of early recollections as a little grander than it really was, but the accuracy of her memory, even in old age, was such that her account is for the most part entirely dependable.

Montrose had been acquired by Dr. Smith's grandfather, William Smith, in 1742. He and his wife became Presbyterians through the influence of the Rev. Samuel Davies and were accustomed to attend one of his churches about fifty miles distant. "They went on horseback, often fording James River, and sometimes each taking a child or two on horseback with them." All of their children and grandchildren appear to have become Presbyterians. "Among my grandfather's descendants and their immediate connections by marriage," continues Dr. Smith, "there have been thirteen [Presbyterian] ministers . . . I never knew any other than the Presbyterian Church."

Josiah Smith was described by the historian, Dr. William Henry Foote, as "a true Christian, a guileless, upright man." His wife, née Judith Michaux Mosby, was a daughter of Colonel Littleberry Mosby, an officer in the Revolutionary War. On her mother's side she was descended from one of the group of Huguenot families originally settled in the vicinity of Manakintown, a few miles west of Richmond on the James. According to Marion Harland, Mrs. Smith's French blood was evident in her features and in her deep black hair. As will appear in the

course of this narrative, she combined to a remarkable extent the qualities of saintliness, fortitude and efficiency. The eldest daughter of the house, Mary, was a young woman of superior intellect and character and exercised a strong influence on her young brother. Benjamin—or Ben, as he was generally known—had two younger sisters, Emily and Elizabeth, and two brothers, William and Josiah.

The influence of religion permeated the daily life of Montrose. Nearby stood the church of Mt. Carmel, the only Presbyterian Church in the vicinity. The members of the household, including the house servants, gathered about the family altar morning and evening. On these occasions there was a simple service consisting of the reading of a chapter from the Bible, the singing of a familiar hymn, and a prayer. This custom was continued in his own household throughout Dr. Smith's life. In the treatment of the Negroes there was manifest a high sense of obligation to promote their physical, moral and religious welfare. Most of them were taught to read and many to write. On Sunday nights a Bible class for them was held in the basement of the residence, conducted after Mr. Smith's death by Mrs. Smith or one of her older children, generally the eldest daughter Mary. On week nights there were prayer meetings and Bible readings under the superintendence of one of the older women slaves.

It was one of the gracious customs of the old Virginia plantations before the railway age to welcome travellers for an overnight sojourn or for a longer visit. As might be expected, an especial welcome was extended at Montrose to ministers of the Presbyterian Church, many of whom were related to the Smiths; and a large number of the most eminent leaders of the Church in Virginia and the Carolinas had at one time or another been guests at this plantation.

One of these occasional visitors played so large a part in Dr. Smith's development that a brief account of his earlier life and relations with the Smith family is of especial interest at this point. John Holt Rice, whose service to Union Seminary is gratefully recognized to this day, had early conceived the de-

sire to obtain an education. In spite of great difficulties he had been able to attend Liberty Hall (afterwards Washington College) and an Academy in New London, Virginia. He served as a tutor in Hampden-Sydney College from 1797 to 1799, spending portions of his college vacations at Montrose, since he was warmly attached to Mr. and Mrs. Smith. In 1799 he became the teacher of a school at Willington, the home of Major Morton, whose wife was Mr. Smith's sister. The pupils consisted of the daughters of the Mortons and of some of their friends. In a short time, as Rice's biographer and personal friend, President Maxwell of Hampden-Sydney College, records, "the interest which he had felt from the first in one of his pupils (the good major's eldest daughter) had gradually ripened into a warmer sentiment." In spite of the fact that the young lady, Anne (or Nancy) Morton, was only fifteen, her parents were inclined to favor the match. But Anne "had been accustomed to look up to (Mr. Rice) with a respect bordering upon reverence . . . and could not bring herself, all at once, to see him in the softer light in which he now desired to be viewed." Consequently he decided to leave Willington, and "accepting the kind invitation of his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Smith of Montrose, he repaired to this house to pursue his studies for the medical profession, under the direction of Dr. Samuel Wilson of Powhatan. Here he found himself in the bosom of a pious and amiable family who warmly esteemed him, and, consoling himself as well as he could with that true philosophy which he had learned, he applied himself to his books with as much diligence as the state of mind could permit."

In a few years Anne Morton's reluctance to accept his suit was overcome. They were married in 1802, and Mr. Rice began a career of great usefulness in the ministry, which he had entered after abandoning his original plan to become a physician. In 1812 he organized the First Presbyterian Church in Richmond. He edited two religious periodicals and organized a publishing house. As he was active in the movement to establish a school of theology at Hampden-Sydney, he was accustomed to make frequent trips between that village and Richmond. This journey can now be made in two hours, but then could scarcely be

accomplished in one day. Accordingly Dr. Rice would generally spend a night in the course of his journey with his dear friends and relatives at Montrose.

Another visitor, and for a time resident at Montrose, was the Rev. Conrad Speece. Of mingled German and Alsatian parentage, he became in early manhood a tutor at Liberty Hall and afterwards at Hampden-Sydney College. He had then entered the Presbyterian ministry, but his doubts having been awakened on the subject of infant baptism, he became a Baptist, though later he was induced by President Alexander of Hampden-Sydney to re-join the Presbyterian Church. From 1806 to 1812 he served several churches in the vicinity of Montrose, and, as he remained a life-long bachelor, he lived in the household of Mr. and Mrs. Smith throughout that period. He then took charge of a church in Augusta County but appears to have remained on terms of close friendship with the Smith family. "He was a man," writes Alfred James Morrison, "of great fluency and propriety of speech; in conversation excellent, full of a droll humor. He wrote much but was better as a talker than as a writer." He was noted "for the extraordinary ability with which he would discuss the most difficult themes in theology and make the people understand them or think they understood them." He was highly regarded by his associates at Hampden-Sydney, Rice and Alexander. The esteem felt for him in the Church was shown by the fact that he was five times chosen moderator of the Synod of Virginia.

"Mr. Speece," writes Dr. Smith, "had a great fondness for children and as soon as I was old enough used to amuse me by trotting me on his knee and predicting that one day I would go to Congress and wear short breeches with silver knee buckles and moonshine stockings." On one of his visits to Mr. Speece's room, the child tumbled down the steps and was picked up by a young man, a visitor at the house, who later became a Presbyterian minister in North Carolina. These contacts may have accounted for Ben's addiction to preaching sermons to his young companions and conducting the funerals of dead turkeys and chickens. Ben's education, as the narrative shows, was now beginning:

"How I learned letters and to spell and read I do not know. My father had set out in life a teacher, and after family cares called for a more lucrative business, continued as his children grew up to have a teacher for his own and his neighbors' children. The first with whom I had any relations was a Mr. Robert H. Nelson. I was however only an amateur scholar—never attending over a few hours, as I pleased. But my Mother and oldest sister, Mary, I suppose taught me. I have very dim recollections of my father. I remember his . . . coming home from Petersburg and giving me a book called 'Frank.' It was in two volumes of which one is still somewhere among my books; and, as he gave it to me when I was about 7 years old as a reward for my having learned to read, I suppose the efforts of my dear Mother and sister, the two best friends of my childhood, youth and early manhood, must have proved very successful. My sister was especially attached to me and encouraged any disposition to learn which I manifested. Though not fully educated, she was fond of reading and took great pleasure in interesting me in books at a very early age."

"The most sad and impressive event of my life," continues the narrative, "was the death of my honored father." The widow was left in a precarious financial situation. Her husband had contracted large debts, which he would undoubtedly have been able to pay if he had lived, since he was industrious and thrifty. But it happened that his death occurred at the beginning of the year (1819) in which the country was afflicted by the first of the severe financial panics of the nineteenth century, and the business problems confronting the inexperienced widow were extremely difficult for her to surmount.

"Often," says her son, "have I seen her sit with her eyes filling with tears when the Sheriff would come to notify her of a suit instituted against her. In my childish solicitude I would almost imagine that the Sheriff had come to take her to jail, as in those days imprisonment for debt was not uncommon . . . Two things then impressed me with convictions and feelings which I have never lost—one, the evils of debt and the other, the tender feeling for aged widows."

After this hard year had passed, however, Mrs. Smith showed great ability and success in discharging the responsibilities which had fallen upon her. In spite of the ill-health which seems to have afflicted so large a proportion of the women of gentility

during this period, she displayed extraordinary industry in supervising the operation of the plantation. No detail seemed too unimportant to escape her scrutiny, and by systematic use of padlocks she checked the inclination of the Negroes to indulge in the petty thievery which seemed to them scarcely if at all blameworthy. Thus "by wise management," says Marion Harland, "she relieved the estate from embarrassment, brought up and educated her six children, and established a reputation for intelligence, refinement and piety that is yet fragrant in the minds of those who recollect Montrose in its palmy days."

One of her most difficult problems in the early years of her widowhood was the education of her children. The school established by her husband was continued after his death. It was attended by Ben and his two brothers, Josiah and William, by three step-children of his uncle Ben Mosby and by several other neighbors' children. But at the end of the session the teacher, Mr. Nelson, left for the Southwest and a new school, "opened" as Dr. Smith later records, "in a house in the northwest corner of Cousin Patty Smith's yard," was hardly a success, the teacher being caned by the brother of one of the pupils who had been given a whipping, a performance which "excited if it did not please the scholars." Then a prospective divinity student of Andover Seminary taught the children until the end of 1821. He seems not to have been especially efficient. But Mrs. Smith and her family became much attached to him and she thought of sending Ben with him to attend Phillips Andover, an idea which was abandoned apparently because of want of means.

Mrs. Smith then employed two teachers in succession, the second of whom appears to have been successful. He established also a Sunday School, which at that time was an innovation in Virginia. Then Ben with his brother Josiah (or "Joe") and several other boys of the neighborhood were sent to board with a gentleman who had established a school in his house a short distance from Montrose, the teacher being the Mr. Nelson who had conducted the first school attended by Ben.

"The year passed pleasantly and though we had but few religious privileges and no Presbyterian preaching or Sunday School I do not

think we derived any special evil influences from our surroundings. My first visit home . . . the approach to the house, the joyful surprise of my tender Mother and sister and brother, the two too short days' visit,—are all as vividly before me now after 57 years have passed. We studied little besides Latin, in which Mr. Nelson seemed determined to ground us. I was now in my twelfth year and the taste for books and learning was beginning to develop. One boy had a reading book for history and when he said his lesson I was too much interested to attend to anything else and picked up a good deal of the history of the United States. At home my Mother and sister Mary had cultivated my disposition to learn and I had pretty well gone over such books as *Parents' Assistant*, and *Looking Glass Manners and Customs*, and by my sister's persuasions tried to read Rollin."

Ben, his brother Joe and several other boys were now sent to a school taught by a Mr. Egan, who had been educated for the Roman Catholic priesthood and who was an efficient teacher of Latin, using the traditional method of severe floggings to encourage proper application on the part of delinquent students. Mr. Egan also instituted customs which were characteristic of American schools at this period and to some extent counterbalanced the poverty of their curricula and the shallowness of their intellectual achievement. On Fridays he required each of his students in turn to give a declamation. In the beginning this was little to young Ben's liking.

"When the arrangement was announced, I went home very bravely, declaring in Ma's presence that I would not speak. She quietly said, 'Well, you will get a whipping when you come home if you don't.' Sister helped me select a speech and commit it. I think it was in the *Columbian Orator* on the powers of imagination. When I was called up I took my stand where two benches cornered and my knees fairly shook the benches, but I went through and the scare of merely confronting an audience to declaim was all scared out of me. That afternoon was one of the crises in my life."

Mr. Egan's training in public speaking extended beyond mere declamation. After the close of the first term he arranged for his pupils to present an "exhibition."

"There was at Cross Roads," writes Dr. Smith, "a large wagon-maker's shop which my father built with the expectation of renting

it. It was now unused. Mr. Egan interested the boys in fitting it up, the neighbors all helped and we had a great day. Charles Mosby, two or three years older than I, wrote a speech and spoke it. Here was another crisis: I was desirous of doing likewise. His example and his general conduct had a decidedly good influence on me."

Mr. Egan was now employed by Ex-Governor Giles to teach a school on his plantation at Powhatan Court House, and many of the Smith boys' friends went to this school. But Governor Giles was "understood to be sceptical if not an infidel," and consequently Mrs. Smith was unwilling to send her sons where they would be under his influence. They were then sent to a school opened by a neighboring minister in his residence. But this gentleman had apparently not kept up the studies which he had pursued at college and his students "made but little improvement."

This was the end of Ben's experiments in the education afforded by the "old field schools" of Virginia. His experiences, compared with what he later learned of the contemporary school systems of other countries, especially those of Germany, must undoubtedly have contributed to his keen perception of the defects in the "system," if it can be called such, of his native State, and aroused his determination to bring about those improvements in education which he advocated so frequently during later life.

Ben Smith's religious education and development during this early period of his life were more satisfactory than his secular schooling. Here the principal formative influence was that of his home. He treasured solemn memories of his father's last days. At this sad period, Ben, then eight years old, with his younger sisters had been sent to his Uncle's house. When he returned, he was taken to his father's bedside.

"I remember," wrote his son long afterward, "how he reached out his hand and laying it on my head said, 'God bless my runaway boy.' That hand after the lapse of sixty-two years seems to press on my head still."

Another memory of these days was the calm fortitude and Christian faith shown by his mother. It was from her and from

his older sister Mary that the younger children of the family received most of their religious instruction, in the form of the reading and explanation of sermons, the memorizing and reciting of texts and hymns, together with talks on religion which Mrs. Smith gave to her children as they grew older. In addition, the Smith children received instruction at the newly established Sunday School, where they learned "the catechism of Mr. Mines." The Shorter Catechism was not taught because of the small number of Presbyterians among the patrons of the Sunday School, and Ben never learned it at all in his boyhood.

It was in his tenth year that the child began "to feel some concern about religion." At thirteen he "had many serious thoughts and often would go into a grape summer house and read and sing and try to pray." He was much affected by sermons he had read and by some things in Doddridge's *Rise and Progress*. But he had as yet "no well-fixed religious views."

After young Ben's return from school in the summer of 1825, at the age of fourteen, he was determined to continue his education. Hence he arranged shelves for his books in the bedclothes closet and had an old desk in the passage on the stairs when he was accustomed to study. At this time Dr. Rice made one of his accustomed over-night visits to Montrose. In the morning, he called Ben and his brother Joe into the dining room and made some inquiries into their studies. He then offered to take one or both of them into his family and arrange to have preparation for college given to them by a recent graduate of Hampden-Sydney College, Francis Bartlett, who was living with Dr. Rice without payment of board and attending the newly established Union Seminary. The only compensation asked from Mrs. Smith was that her dining-room servant, Wilson, should, in accordance with a common custom in slavery times, be hired out to serve in Dr. Rice's home. This offer was declined by Joe, the elder boy, who had always shown more interest in horses and farm work than in studies. He remained at Montrose, became an efficient farmer, the chief support of his mother in the management of the plantation and a charming gentleman, as depicted in Marion Harland's *Judith*, where he appears as "Uncle Archie."

Ben, however, accepted Dr. Rice's offer with enthusiasm and forthwith set to work at home to accomplish as much as possible in his education before going to Hampden-Sydney at the beginning of the winter term on November 1. With the help of a young student who happened to be spending the summer at Montrose, he carried on his study of Greek and Arithmetic. In the case of the latter, "the single rule of three" proved to be beyond the capacity of the tutor to explain and of the scholar to understand. But Ben persevered in Greek and made a good deal of progress.

The time now came to start for Hampden-Sydney. It was learned that several neighborhood boys were to go to college in a carriage, with a saddle horse belonging to one of them. They offered to take Ben along.

"It was arranged that the carriage which was to start from Powhatan Court House on the next Sunday morning would take me up and my small trunk of a few clothes and books, at the Cross Roads. The trunk was taken over and I walked through with Brother Joe. My dear Mother had taken me, the evening before, to her private room and kneeling down and putting her hand on my head had prayed for me and committed me to God. That morning . . . Brother Joe and I set out. Some pigeons I had raised flew after me and lighted just before and as we came up flew and lighted farther on, so keeping me company for a half mile. My mammy, Aunt Jenny, interpreted this as a good sign. It was certainly very curious. Ma did not like my travelling Sunday but she had no means of sending me except by stage and that would cost at least \$5, and she had not over a few dollars to give me for necessary uses at College. . . . My companions were none of them rude, wild boys and rather sympathised with me on thus leaving home for the first time to go so far and stay so long. Nothing remarkable occurred on the way, but I was on the horse on the road from Farmville and so impatient that three miles before getting to College I thought I saw tracks which I supposed to be those of college boys. . . . We stopped at King's Old Tavern and took supper. After supper we walked up to college. Our entrance was speedily welcomed by the shouts of the acquaintances of my companions, to whom the little boy in his roundabout jacket was duly introduced."

Hampden-Sydney College had at this period passed through many vicissitudes. At first known as Prince Edward Academy,

it had been established as a college in 1783 by a group of Presbyterians and Anglicans who opposed the aggressive and intolerant systems which had prevailed in Virginia during the Colonial years. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, according to Dr. Foote, writing in 1849, "it rose to a degree of popularity and usefulness as a Log College, both in the theological and the literary department, which has never been surpassed in the most palmy of succeeding years." After this period, however, it fell into a very low state, from which it was rescued by the vigorous labors of Alexander, Rice and Speece. "Here," says Foote, "were associated three young men bound together by strong bonds of friendship through life, stimulated by and stimulating in their turn each other's progress, and each exercising an influence on the Virginia Synod and felt throughout the Presbyterian Church."

The College soon lost the services of all of these instructors. It flourished for a time under the leadership of the Rev. Moses Hoge, but in his later years he failed to receive the necessary support from the public and the Church, and the college again fell behind. But in 1821 Jonathan P. Cushing, a New Englander, already for several years a teacher in the college, became President and an era of reconstruction began. New instructors were obtained, most of them from New England. The building known as New College was begun and when Ben Smith arrived seniors were already lodged there.

The physical plant of Hampden-Sydney at this period, aside from New College, is thus described by Dr. Smith:

"Our walk brought us first to a house of one story, supplied with passage and attics. This was the President's house, standing on the edge of the orchard opposite the baseball grounds. In the yard was a brick house, built by President Cushing for his own use. A little outside of these premises was a two-story house, with one room and a passage on each story called the library. This building contained about five hundred volumes and was also occupied by one of the professors as a study. Directly south of this house was the Old College, a three-story building of brick, having four rooms on each story and with the steps almost worn out. A little way west of south was the Steward's Hall, a one story wooden structure. On a path leading northwest to the spring was a small house with a shed called 'The Fort' used as a dormitory by two students."

The morning after his arrival, Ben called on Dr. Rice, President Cushing and the rest of the faculty. After taking an examination, he was astonished to learn from the President that he might enter the college at once without spending a year in preparatory work. Dr. Cushing furthermore lent him the money to pay for his matriculation. Thus at the age of fourteen Ben found himself a full-fledged member of one of the most eminent of the "freshwater colleges" which were then multiplying with marvelous rapidity throughout the length and breadth of the young Republic.

The youthful freshman shared a room with young Bartlett just over Dr. Rice's study "in that part of the former Seminary building which was later assigned to Dr. Alexander." Several other Seminary students lived in an adjoining building. A few days after Ben had gone to Hampden-Sydney his mother sent up his baggage, together with Wilson, who had been hired to Dr. Rice. His other expenses were met through "hardships of self-denial" on the part of his mother and sisters. The boy did his part in supporting himself. He and his roommate, Bartlett, made their own beds, cut up wood, carried it to their room, made their fires and carried up water from a nearby spring. Ben seems to have been unaccustomed to these chores, and his "first and last" fit of crying was occasioned by his failure to make a fire properly at his first attempt.

In starting on his college career the young boy was surrounded by most excellent influences. Between Dr. Rice, the founder of Union Seminary, and the future Dr. Smith, who was to revive it during the most perilous time of its existence, there was a close and affectionate relationship. Dr. Rice had now entered upon the last period of his busy and useful life. During his active and successful career as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Richmond, he had been elected president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton), but this offer he had declined. In the meantime Rev. Moses Hoge had established the school of theology at Hampden-Sydney in which Dr. Rice had long been interested and for which he had raised the necessary funds. But with Mr. Hoge's death in 1820 its activities had been sus-

pended. In 1824, however, Dr. Rice was inaugurated as Professor of Theology and when Ben Smith entered college the Seminary was in operation and the building to house it was already under construction across "the rolling road," later to be known as Via Sacra.

Of his relations with Dr. Rice during his college career, Dr. Smith says:

"Dr. Rice was a quiet man, never talked with me specially but was kind and I knew from his letters to Ma that he was deeply interested in my success." "Dr. Rice," remarks Dr. Smith in another place, "was a silent man but cousin N. (Mrs. Rice) a great talker. I was quiet at table and learned a great deal from Dr. Rice's occasional remarks and the conversation of the company."

There was indeed much for him to learn from Dr. Rice, and there is little doubt but that the remarkable similarity between certain of the basic ideas and convictions of the two men is due in part to the young student's association with the older man during this period. Dr. Rice was a close student of the thought and culture of his day, for he believed that the Christian leader should be deeply grounded in philosophy, in history, in literature and above all in science. It was his conviction that Christianity should apply to all human problems and embrace "every duty, in every situation in life." He was a strong believer in the necessity of public education, supporting Jefferson's scheme for a system of state schools in Virginia with a university at its head. He insisted, however, on provision for religious training in the university, proposing that each of the various sects establish a chair in the institution so that students might take courses in any religious system which they might prefer. Like many other eminent Virginians of his generation, he was opposed on principle to the institution of slavery, and advocated a policy of gradual emancipation, though he believed that the Church as such should not take part in controversies over this question. He was interested in the development of the Negroes, taught many of them to read, and endeavored to promote their religious welfare. In his theological views he held firmly to the standards of his own Church, and he opposed the tendencies towards laxity

which were then so strong in New England. The vigorous protests made by him and some of his colleagues in the ministry against the appointment of the eminent but highly unorthodox scholar, Dr. Thomas Cooper, to a professorship in the University of Virginia aroused the ire of Jefferson and led him to denounce the Virginia Presbyterians in unmeasured terms. Yet Dr. Rice deplored sectarian bitterness and hoped that in all controversies the ministers of religion should "manifest the meekness and gentleness of Christ."

Ben Smith remained in close relationship with his family at Montrose. At Christmas time in 1825, his brother Joe came for him "with a led horse" to take him home for the holidays. The boys rode to Colonel Penick's at Sandy Ford on the Appomattox, where they spent the night, and went on the next day, which was intensely cold, to Montrose. At Christmas time in those days, Dr. Smith observes, there was little in the nature of a celebration, such as was customary in his own home in later days. There was merely afforded an opportunity for association, which he greatly enjoyed, with his mother, sisters and brothers. Doubtless other Christmas holidays were passed in a similar manner.

Throughout his college career his elder sister Mary continued through "her excellent letters" to give the advice and counsel which had already played so large a part in his development. Unfortunately only two of these letters have been preserved. In one of these, dated March 29, 1825, five months after he had entered college, his sister first tells him bits of family news, and then proceeds:

"Mama says you are a darling boy for letting us hear so often from you. Continue to do so. We love Cousin Nancy [Mrs. Rice] and I will write to her. Tell her I shall begin to be jealous, as I think you seem to love her almost as though she were your sister Mary. Oh, we long to see your dear face . . . Wilson's [the slave boy's] friends are all well. His Aunt Becky at Dr. Crump's is much better. Washington is married, tell him. I am in a 'terrible' hurry—farewell. Be sure to hold up your head and hold your shoulders back. Tell Brother Jesse to show you how to knock your elbows together and do it every day for my sake, till you come home. We

are going to make you a very big cake in May. Once more, farewell."

In another letter, dated April 5, 1825, his sister warned him against too great absorption in worldly pursuits. "I wish," she continued, "that you could or would talk to Dr. Rice or Mr. Goodrich about your anxiety on the subject of religion . . . I know Dr. Rice loves you and I think he could give good advice."

Ben formed valuable friendships with several of the students. His roommate, Bartlett, a theological student, was a great source of help and encouragement. An older cousin, Charles Mosby, took Ben, still a child in years, under his especial charge. Mosby was evidently a young man of ability. After leaving Hampden-Sydney he became the first graduate of the School of Law in the University of Virginia. He practised law in Lynchburg, served in the State legislature for several terms and became a member of the Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia. Another of the older students with whom Ben was intimate was P. E. Bishop, almost twice his age and his colleague in the "Dialogue" of the Literary Societies in 1826. A friendship with another of the students, Thomas D. Mutter, began through his loan to Ben, when the latter took part in the aforesaid "Dialogue," of a blue tail coat, with "trimmings of bits of blue ribbon about three inches long across the breast from button-hole to button." One of his college friends, Landon Garland, was to have a very distinguished career. Upon his graduation, he became a professor in Washington College (afterwards Washington and Lee University), Professor and later President at Randolph-Macon College, Professor at the University of Alabama and afterwards President until the virtual destruction of this institution in 1865. He then became Professor in the University of Mississippi, and in 1875 Chancellor of the new Vanderbilt University.

It would be expected that Ben Smith, with the training in declamation which he had received at school, would take a great interest in the activities of the literary societies at college. And this was in fact the case.

"I joined the Union Society," he relates, "because cousin Charles Mosby belonged to it. His popularity at once made me friends. I was not requested to speak in debate the first meeting after joining but Charles advised me to try. The question was, 'Would it have been better if Napoleon Bonaparte had never lived?' Several of the class whose names preceded mine in the alphabetical order, availed themselves of the privilege of declaiming. When called, I arose with a dead silence of surprise. I had learned at Mr. Egan's school to declaim, but never before undertook to speak my own composition. I had no speech prepared, but I was determined to say something and trembling with the confusion of my position, I managed to say, 'I think Bonaparte was a very bad man,' I sat down. I have never been scared since. I at once took a lively interest in the Society and when the time came for elections of representatives to speak at the Exhibition, as it was called, at the close of the Winter session, which ended the latter part of April, I was chosen from the Freshman class. P. E. Bishop was chosen by the Philanthropic Society and we were directed to prepare and speak a dialogue . . . The Exhibition passed off well and got great credit. Our Dialogue was on the question of the origin of the Indians of N. America . . . I cannot recall the positions taken by each of us or the scope of the whole."

In his junior year, Ben became President of the Society and made several public speeches, one of these in connection with the celebration of the Fourth of July. In the same year he acted in a tragedy written by his friend Garland. In his senior year, he represented his Society at the Exhibition of 1829 by writing a comedy "which was acted with much *eclat*," and a copy of which is still in existence. The prologue, written by his friend and former roommate, Francis Bartlett, was spoken by young Smith. The costume he wore on this occasion was of a peculiar character. For several years, the South had been becoming increasingly hostile towards the protective tariff, which had been raised by successive Acts culminating in the Tariff of Abominations of 1828. The agitation had become so serious that South Carolina had already begun to plan secession. For this measure Calhoun succeeded in procuring the substitution of nullification,—a policy which was actually put into effect in 1832. The Hampden-Sydney students in 1829 were determined to fight the tariff in a practical way.

"They resolved as anti-tariff men not to dress in broadcloth—because a heavy duty was on it—but adopted a uniform of Virginia

cloth, the coat and pants of one kind and on the left breast the figure of the 47th proposition of Euclid, 'The square of the hypotenuse equals the square of the other two sides,' was made with black cord. I spoke my prologue dressed in that uniform."

The great applause which greeted the production of young Smith's play increased the standing of the author in the college and his influence among the students. "In my own Society," he says, "I enjoyed . . . great power. No measure that I proposed could easily be put down. All these things were calculated to excite the vanity of seventeen."

Another extra-curriculum activity of young Smith's which illustrates an interesting tendency in academic life not only at Hampden-Sydney but also in American colleges generally is only briefly mentioned in his narrative of his early life. The literary societies of this period not only afforded practical training in public speaking and encouraged the study of public questions. They also established libraries which supplemented, and sometimes surpassed in real value, the meager collections of books which the colleges themselves maintained for the use of their students. While at Hampden-Sydney Ben Smith had already developed that interest in libraries which he was to display during the long period of his professorship at the Seminary. He records that during his junior year, in spite of the pressure of his other activities, he spent much time and hard labor in arranging and cataloguing the Library of the Union Society according to the same system as that he later employed in connection with the Library of the Seminary. This project had been opposed by many members of the Society. But when it had been accomplished there was general approval of the results.

With the unconquerable energy of youth, Ben Smith carried on his academic work with as much success as he met with in his extra-curriculum pursuits. In spite of his limited preparation for college, he passed the freshman year with the highest marks, and thereafter maintained excellent standing. At the final examinations in his senior year he obtained first honors with Landon Garland, and the two friends were appointed to speak the Commencement orations, Garland having the Valedictory and Smith the

Philosophical. At the latter's speech his family was in attendance, and the successful close of his college career was noted with satisfaction by Dr. Rice and brought him to the favorable attention of the Directors of the Seminary.

It does not appear, however, that he had yet decided to enter the ministry. During his junior year he was "brought with many others under serious conviction."

"I went before the session and was received, but, I have always felt, on inadequate impressions, as my hope for years was very feeble and my course of life not decidedly Christian. To anticipate—I became much more satisfied while living with Mr. Penick while teaching in Milton, North Carolina, from 1830 to 1831."

During his years at college Ben Smith had some opportunities to widen his social contacts. In the summer of 1827, Mrs. Rice had

"some lady friends from Richmond, a Miss B (?), an elderly maiden lady, and her nieces, Misses Pleasants, who became quite belles. They went with Brother Joe and myself to Montrose and spent a night on their way to R. and he and I rode with them a few miles on their starting."

Two years later Ben's social education was furthered by an experience which was in some respects characteristic of the antebellum south.

"During the summer (of 1829), I went to Charlottesville in Uncle Morton's double gig for cousin Mary Morton, who had been visiting the family of Rev. Mr. Borman a few miles N. W. of Charlottesville. I was for the first time thus introduced into general society. We were detained for several days by great rains early in August at a Mr. Winn's and I became quite used to company. On our way back, stopping to feed the horses at a sort of tavern this side James River, opposite the village of Warren, while I went in to see after my horse, the ladies of the town began to question cousin Mary as to who we were and whither going. She saw they suspected us to be a run-away couple and on my return told me. So we hurried away and I suppose the inquisitive females never thought anything else than that we were on our way to North Carolina."

With the completion of Ben Smith's college education, it would seem best to draw this part of the narrative to a close. He was to spend several fruitful years in the profession of teaching, then to attend the new Union Seminary at Hampden-Sydney and finally to complete his theological education in Germany. But these years form a second period of his development and might better be treated separately from the story of his childhood and early youth which has formed the theme of this article.

HIGHLIGHTS IN THE HISTORY OF MONTGOMERY PRESBYTERY, VIRGINIA* (1843-1943)

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I. ORGANIZATION AND TERRITORY

Montgomery Presbytery met in its first session Nov. 10, 1843, one hundred years ago, with five "bishops" (as the record called the ministers), and three ruling elders in attendance. They met in the schoolhouse of a man who was not a Presbyterian, Jacob Ammon by name, and in Newcastle, where there were only two or three Presbyterians. Newcastle was probably chosen because it was a central point and perhaps more accessible than any other. The opening sermon was preached by Rev. John D. Ewing on Zech 4:10: "Who hath despised the day of small things?" The five "bishops" present were John D. Ewing, who was elected moderator; Urias Powers, Stephen F. Cocke, Henry H. Payne and Samuel D. Campbell. The three ruling elders were Matt Wilson, Thomas Lackey and Frederick Johnston. In addition to the five ministers present there were seven others on the roll: Alex McEwen, John H. Wallace, George W. Leyburn, Nicholas

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