

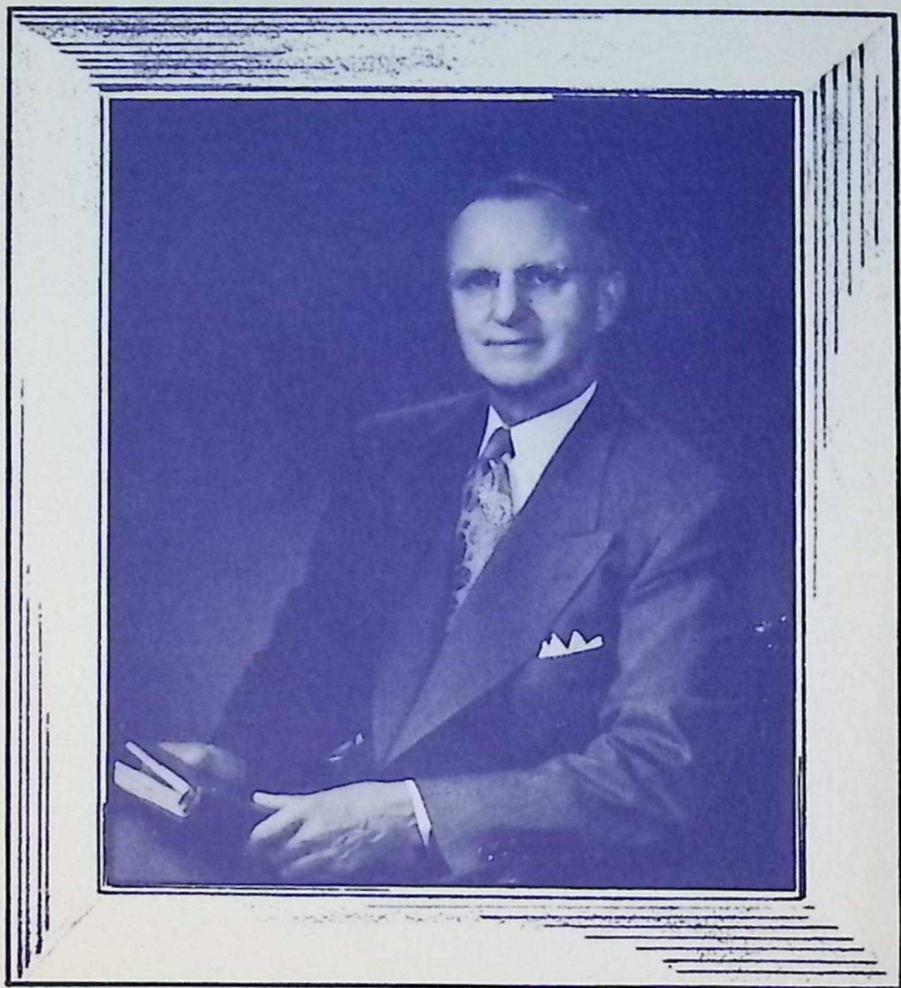
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In Tribute



ALEXANDER RAMSAY BATCHELOR  
1891 - 1955



10/25/63

ON January 8, 1955, the soul of Alex R. Batchelor slipped quietly away from the scene of his earthly labors to join the great company of the redeemed in the presence of our Lord. We cannot now fully understand the Providence which took him from our midst at a time when our Church's need for his leadership was still so great, but we bow in glad submission to the will of Him "who doeth all things well." Certainly we can see clearly the hand of Providence in calling and preparing this man for his task as Secretary of Negro Work in the Presbyterian Church, U. S., and in using him so abundantly during the brief but crowded years which he devoted to the responsibilities of that office. The development of our Negro Work to its present position was the crowning achievement of his life, and the one for which he will be remembered longest. Even so, it was but a fitting climax to an intensely full and useful ministry, in which his earlier years of faithful service constituted a worthy prelude for that which was to be.

Dr. Batchelor was born in Geneva, New York, on August 6, 1891, of Scottish parents who had moved to the United States only a few years earlier. He was reared in a truly Christian home, and was trained by his parents in the finest traditions of the Presbyterian Church. He was one of the four children of that home who grew to maturity, having two brothers and one sister. Early in his life he made his own confession of faith in the Christ whose covenant had been claimed for him in infancy, and united with the Presbyterian Church of Geneva.

After graduating from high school he took a brief course in poultry raising at Cornell University and later went to manage a poultry farm near Pittsburgh, Pa. He was greatly influenced at this period of his life and through all his career by an older brother, who was a Christian business man and an elder in the Presbyterian Church. He was also blessed by his contacts with the owner of the farm which he managed, Mr. Alex. Fraser, who was himself a devoted Christian. It was Mr. Fraser who encouraged the younger man to attend a Missionary Conference for young people conducted on the campus of Westminster (United Presbyterian) College at New Wilmington, Pa. There

Andrew Ross  
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Alex. first became conscious of a clear call to the work of the Gospel ministry and turned his face steadfastly toward his appointed task. Mr. Fraser had visited Columbia, S. C., on various occasions and had become a friend of Dr. Thornton Whaling, who was at that time the President of Columbia Theological Seminary. It was because of these contacts that he encouraged his young friend to seek his education in the South, and thus became the human instrumentality for giving him to that branch of the Presbyterian Church in which his entire ministry was spent. Dr. Batchelor was quickly at home in his new environment and no man loved the South better or came to understand its problems and its needs more fully than did this adopted son, who came to it as the gift of Scotland and of the Northern section of the United States.

Before entering upon his education for the ministry Alex. spent a year as a soldier in the army of his country during World War I. During most of this time he was stationed at Camp Lee in Virginia where he soon became Chaplain's Assistant and found ample opportunity to witness to his faith. His literary training was taken at Presbyterian College, Clinton, S. C., where he graduated with the Bachelor of Arts Degree, and his Bachelor of Divinity was earned at Columbia Theological Seminary — then located on its old campus in Columbia, S. C. The loyalty, which was such a characteristic quality of the man, was manifested to the end of his life in the devotion which he gave to these, his Alma Maters, and in the faithfulness with which he sought to promote their highest interests. After entering the pastorate he continued his studies at the University of South Carolina, where he received his Master of Arts Degree in the field of Psychology. In 1951 Presbyterian College recognized the ability and service of its distinguished son by awarding him the well merited honorary degree, Doctor of Divinity.

While still in Pittsburgh, Dr. Batchelor had met and had fallen in love with Miss Jean Boone of Cannonsburg, Pa. Significantly their acquaintance began in connection with the work of a Mission Chapel where she was serving as pianist, when he first began to take a part



in its services of worship. On June 27, 1922, while he was still a student in the seminary, the two were married and entered upon a rarely beautiful and useful life together as servants of their common Lord and Saviour. In Mrs. Batchelor God provided Alex. with a true helpmeet, and one who, by her own radiant Christian faith and devotion, was to be a tower of strength to him in all his work, but especially in his labors for the Negro people. Without her unfailing sympathy, encouragement and support, it would not have been possible for him to have succeeded so well or accomplished so much.

The Batchelor home was blessed by the presence of two lovely daughters, Effie Jean (Mrs. R. Murphy Williams, Jr., of Wilson, N. C.) and Mary Lavinia (Mrs. David J. Seel of Korea). The former is the mistress of a Presbyterian manse and the latter a missionary of her Church on the foreign field. Thus, at home and abroad, the children of this union are carrying on in a manner worthy of their heritage, and are making their own significant contributions to the work of the Kingdom.

As a young married couple, Dr. and Mrs. Batchelor had hoped and planned to go as missionaries to Africa, but that door was closed to them by Providence. Instead of being missionaries to the people of Africa, God had willed for them that they should become bearers of His Gospel to that race in America.

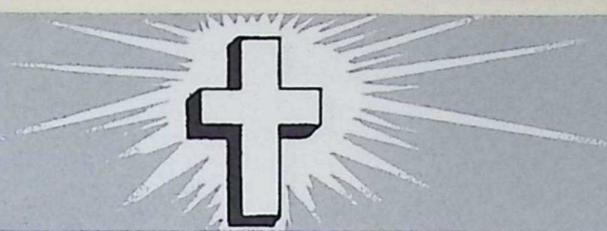
Dr. Batchelor could never have served so well in the development of Negro churches had he himself not been a pastor. Even before his graduation from seminary he had begun to serve the church at Whitmire, S. C., where he was pastor from 1923 to 1927. From the latter year until 1933 he was student pastor of the First Presbyterian Church at Gainesville, Florida, where his contacts with life at the University of Florida were to prepare him more fully for the large contribution which he made later to the life of Stillman College. After a year as stated supply of the Roebuck and Second Presbyterian Churches of Spartanburg, S. C., he accepted a call to the Presbyterian Church of Marion, N. C., where he was pastor from 1934 to 1938. In this pastorate he organized and became leader of a Boy Scout



Troop, and it was characteristic of him that he set himself the task of passing all the tests required for the boys until he himself became an Eagle Scout. In all of his churches he was a careful student and an effective preacher of the Word, a diligent and beloved pastor, and a faithful member of the Church Courts.

In 1938 Dr. Batchelor received an urgent call to become Regional Director of Religious Education for the Synods of Alabama and Tennessee. In leaving the pastorate he and Mrs. Batchelor took a step which was contrary to what they would have chosen for themselves, for their heart was in the work of the local church, but which they came to see clearly as the leading of God's Spirit. After three years in Alabama and Tennessee, Dr. Batchelor was called to the same work in the Synod of Florida where he labored until 1943. In each of these Synods he made a large contribution to the growing Religious Education Program of our Church. He was then called to become a member of the staff of the Executive Committee of Religious Education in Richmond as Director of Sunday School Administration for our entire Assembly. Here, too, his work was of the highest order. He continued to make warm friendships and one who knew him well says that "he brought to the staff of the Committee the glow of a radiance which lingers still and blesses those who served with him." His accomplishments in these years were of tremendous significance in themselves. They were also preparing him further to project a program of youth work and adult education for our Negro churches. At the same time he was making churchwide contacts which were to be invaluable to him in his later years. Few individuals have had a richer and more varied experience, or one which could have fitted a man so well for the difficult and delicate task which he was called upon to perform in the office which was soon to be his.

Dr. Batchelor's election as Secretary of our Assembly's new Committee on Negro Work in 1947 came after long and prayerful deliberation on the part of that Committee. Events were soon to indicate how definitely the guidance of the Spirit of God had been granted, both in their choice of a man and in his decision to accept their call.



Few men have been called to a more difficult task or one which, from a human viewpoint, was less inviting. The Negro Work of our Assembly was at a discouragingly low ebb, and there were many who felt that Southern Presbyterians should entirely abandon their efforts in this area in order to concentrate on more productive fields. The fears of these individuals seemed to be all too well justified when, at the end of his first year in office, our Church had fallen far short of providing even the pitifully inadequate amount of financial support which had been asked of it. In addition to maintaining the central office, visiting the discouraged and weak churches of Snedecor Memorial Synod, and seeking to rally support for the work, Dr. Batchelor had been compelled to serve during most of the year as Acting-President of Stillman College. A man of lesser faith would have been ready to abandon the task as hopeless, but not this man. He knew whom he had believed, and went through the darkest days undismayed. His faith was well expressed in words which he quoted to more than one friend:

“He would not have taught me to trust in His Name,  
And brought me thus far, to put me to shame.”

Nor was he put to shame.

When the Committee on Negro Work called Dr. Batchelor to head its work in 1947 it established certain goals which he gladly accepted. A brief statement of these objectives reads as follows: “Providing an annual support fund of \$100,000; organizing new Negro churches; providing a better-paid and better-trained Negro ministry; setting up a church and manse erection fund; organizing institutional missions into churches; securing a full-time Regional Director for Snedecor Memorial Synod; providing educational scholarships for Negro Youth; publicity for Negro Work in the whole Church; development of Stillman College into a four-year A-grade school; having Stillman put under a Board elected by and responsible to the General Assembly; organizing a strong Department of Religion at Stillman; carrying through a one-million dollar campaign for Negro Work.” Within seven years all of these goals had been reached and



in many instances far exceeded. The record is one to fill us with amazement and with gratitude.

For two years Dr. Batchelor was Secretary of the Committee on Negro Work and then, after the re-organization of our Assembly Agencies, for five years the Secretary of the Division of Negro Work in the Board of Church Extension. As he himself pointed out in his book, *Jacob's Ladder*, which was itself an important contribution to the life and thought of our Church, the existence of that committee as an independent entity for a time served to dramatize and emphasize the work for which it was created in the beginning, while its later inclusion in a larger entity gave it a stability and a strength which it could hardly have had alone. Under both plans the program remained the same and was carried forward with unbroken continuity.

We are still too close to events of the recent past to evaluate Dr. Batchelor's work with full understanding of its meaning or of its far-reaching consequences. Only eternity will reveal its true significance, but we believe that Dr. Vernon S. Broyles is right in saying that no work of a more permanent and significant nature has been done in the Church of our day. Certainly far more has already been accomplished than most of us dreamed was possible even a few short years ago. Largely through the vision, the planning, and the patient, persistent efforts of this man, the whole attitude of our Assembly has been transformed and a new spirit animates its ministry to Negroes. A broad and effective strategy for Negro Work has been developed, our Negro ministers and congregations have been given a new sense of dignity and of hope, Stillman College has been revitalized, and the conscience of our people as a whole has been stirred. The success of the campaign for \$2,000,000 has opened the way for the creation of a worthy four-year college at Tuscaloosa and for the erection of many needed church buildings. Surveys conducted across the length and breadth of our Assembly have revealed the need and opportunity for the organization of new Negro churches, the support of white congregations, presbyteries, and synods has been secured, and new and able Negro ministers have been enlisted. Everywhere the work goes forward.



Alex. Batchelor has laid well the foundations upon which a great structure may be built. It is for us to carry on the work.

The achievements of these years have been possible only because of the blessing of God upon the work. The hour for advance in Negro Work had come, and irresistible forces were in operation. God's Will is the only explanation of what we have seen taking place in our midst, but it was God's Will to work through this man whom He had called and equipped for the task. Alex. Batchelor was a man with a mission. His supreme qualification for the work lay in his love for his Saviour, but next to that was his love for his fellow-man. He was no impractical idealist, nor was he concerned primarily for social reform — though no one believed more firmly than did he in the necessity for justice and righteousness in all human relationships. He recognized that human society cannot be transformed overnight, and that the real solution to our problems in racial relationships, as in other matters, will come only as human hearts are changed and through Christian Education. He was concerned not primarily about the color of a man's skin, but about the relationship of that man's heart to God. He saw both races in our Southland as in equal need of the Grace of God. He believed with all his heart in the tremendous potentialities of the Negro Race and longed to claim that people for Christ. Because he truly saw all believers in Christ as his brothers, and treated them as such, he was able to win the confidence and the affection of Negro and Caucasian alike, and to bring the two closer together in sympathy and understanding. It has been said that he probably never made an enemy among white people for this cause which he so dearly loved and to which he dedicated the full measure of his strength. At the same time he was able to win and to hold the friendship and the trust of Negroes as few members of the white race ever have — and as only a true Christian could. A recent memorial issue of *The Tiger's Paw* — the student publication of Stillman College — contains sincere and deeply moving tributes to him from Negro students, teachers, and ministers as well as from Christian leaders of his own race. In them we find a real measure of the greatness of the man.



During the last three years of his life Dr. Batchelor was weakened by disease and his physical activities were necessarily limited. The patience, the courage, and the cheer with which he bore great bodily suffering were an inspiration and a blessing to all who knew him. In spite of difficulties he continued his work through his writing, his planning, his wise counsel to his fellow-workers, and his prayers. In his own opinion, and in that of those associated with him, these years were in many respects the most fruitful of his career. Surely with the Apostle Paul he must often in these days have heard his Master speaking in words which had meant much to him throughout all his ministry and which he had loved to quote: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

To know this man was to love him. He was a noble gentleman, a true friend, a devoted husband and father, a loyal churchman, an humble and dedicated servant of Christ. He was a man of remarkable tact but also of great courage; a man of quiet humor and irrepressible good cheer but of profound faith and of deep spiritual understanding. Dr. Batchelor was a faithful and effective preacher and educator, an able administrator, and a true statesman in the field of race relations and of ecclesiastical strategy. Yet it is probable that his greatest and most enduring contribution to the work of the Kingdom was made through personal encounter and by the outreach of his spirit to countless individual men and women with whom he came in contact. The clearest evidence for the validity of our faith is found in such a life as his.

As we pay tribute to him we would record our profound gratitude to the One who made him what he was and who gave him to us and to our Church. "There was a man sent from God whose name was"—Alexander Ramsay Batchelor. Let us dedicate ourselves afresh to the carrying on of that work for which he was sent.

*Prepared by Dr. J. McDowell Richards*

