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THE RISE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW SCHOOL IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. A. TO THE REUNION OF 1869

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PART II *

The entire period of the history of the Presbyterian Church, of which the rise and the development of the New School is a part, illustrates in general the five phases of a cycle: revival, increase, disagreement, division, reunion. These phases are relatively definite. Each contains elements of the other. Without being arbitrary in the matter of setting beginnings, the period from 1830 to 1837 is the period of disagreement. This disagreement culminated in the division of 1837. Only those events will be considered which relate to the further development of the New School. Beginning in 1830, the two parties, already inchoate in the Church, grew apace. Such a setting of party lines is a deceptive phenomenon. It seemed sudden; it was really rooted in decades of past events. In fact, that the elements of division were deep-rooted is attested by the suddenness of their fury in the years following 1830.

In the midst of unprecedented advance in the Church, in numbers and activity, the signs of approaching danger became apparent. The Assembly, unequal to the tasks devolving upon

* For Part I, see the preceding issue of this JOURNAL (Sept., 1928).

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE ALUMNI OF THE LOG COLLEGE: CHARLES McKNIGHT¹

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The greatest single influence for the establishment of the Presbyterian Church in the American Colonies came from the Log College of William Tennent. An expression of this far-reaching influence was given recently in the erection of the Log College Memorial on the site where stood the rude schoolhouse of logs. It was unveiled on October 5, 1927. Upon it are engraved in bronze the names of fifty-one institutions of this country that trace back their beginnings to this place.²

It was only for a brief day, as the lives of institutions are ordinarily measured, that this school did its work. But coming at a time when there was a dearth of schools of any sort whatsoever, it filled a most important niche, doing a work that counted mightily in advancing the kingdom of God in the colonies. William Tennent was a master teacher, and withal he was a deeply spiritual man. He had the happy faculty of imparting his knowledge and his spirit to all who came into contact with him.

When Mr. Tennent announced his plan for supplying preachers for the clamoring shepherdless congregations, his brethren of the Synod of Philadelphia were stoutly opposed on the ground that he would lower the educational standards of the Presbyterian Church. They dubbed his school "The Log College." So bitter did the opposition become that in 1741 the great schism took place.³ The Presbytery of New Brunswick

¹ This article is a continuation of "The Story of the Log College," in this JOURNAL, Vol. xii, pp. 487-511. It is also a continuation of "The History of the Presbytery of New Brunswick," commenced in Vol. vi, and continuing at intervals to date.

² JOURNAL, Vol. xii, pp. 509 f.

³ *Records of the Presbyterian Church*, p. 155 ff.

and those who sympathized with the Log College method stood together, while the Synod of Philadelphia held to their contention that Mr. Tennent's program was destructive.

The Log College began in 1726, as Mr. Tennent became the pastor of Neshaminy Church, and it continued until his death, June 6, 1746. Some claim that the school was conducted by Charles Beatty, Mr. Tennent's successor as pastor of Neshaminy Church, but however this may be, it was not for long.

No catalogue was kept, for there was no time for such details. Not until nearly a hundred years after the death of Mr. Tennent was any attempt made to tell the story of the Log College. On August 8, 1838, the Presbytery of New Brunswick, in session in New Brunswick, in the church where just one hundred years before the Presbytery held its first meeting, celebrated their centennial.⁴ Rev. Archibald Alexander, D.D., gave the address, taking for his text, "Your fathers, where are they? and the shepherds, do they live forever?" (Zechariah 1:5). Immediately after the conclusion, Presbytery requested that it be published. Dr. Alexander requested that he be permitted to expand the address to include the complete story of the Log College and its relation to the Presbytery. He dedicated the volume to the Presbytery.⁵ The history of the first hundred years of the Presbytery was closely related to the work of the men who had studied under Mr. Tennent.

In *The Log College* Dr. Alexander gives sketches of the alumni, after giving an account of the founder. Ten of the alumni are thus described: the four sons of Mr. Tennent, Gilbert, William, John, and Charles; Samuel and John Blair; Samuel Finley; William Robinson; John Rowland; and Charles Beatty. Brief reference is also made to two others: Mr. Campbell (John) and Mr. Lawrence (Daniel),⁶ making twelve in all.

The Log College has long been out of print. It is a volume of 369 pages.

⁴ Ms. Records of Presbytery of New Brunswick, 1838.

⁵ *Biographical Sketches of the Founder and Principal Alumni of the Log College, collected and edited by A. Alexander, D.D.*, Princeton, N. J., 1845, pp. 3 and 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

In 1857 Rev. Richard Webster published his history of the Presbyterian Church, in which he gives biographical sketches of two hundred Presbyterian ministers. Among these he included seventeen Log College alumni, the twelve listed by Dr. Alexander, and five others, as follows: Hamilton Bell, John Roan, William Dean, David Alexander, and James McCrea.⁷

A third roll of the Log College alumni was given by the Rev. D. K. Turner in his History of Neshaminy Presbyterian Church of Warwick.⁸ To the list there given are to be added the names of alumni given by the author in his address at the Log College Celebration held September 5, 1889,⁹ making the total number seventeen, the same as in Webster.

One more alumnus, Charles McKnight, is to be added to this list, making the total number eighteen. The authorities for adding this name are the following: First, Mr. Thomas Little, formerly an elder in the Shrewsbury Church, of which Mr. McKnight was pastor at the time of his death, published biographical sketches of the pastors of this church, including Charles McKnight.¹⁰ The second authority is the late Rev. Frank R. Symmes, who for years made a careful study of Presbyterian Church history in Monmouth County. The third authority is that of "Memoirs of the Presbyterian Church of Neshaminy," published in this JOURNAL,¹¹ the probable author being Rev. Nathanael Irwin, a pastor of Neshaminy Church. This article includes Charles McKnight in the roll of the alumni of the Log College.

Of these eighteen names there may be doubts in two cases. It may be that other alumni may be found. After a time it would be most appropriate to place their names upon the monument recently erected on the site of the Log College.

It is proposed to write biographical sketches of the alumni of the Log College. After the expiration of nearly a hundred

⁷ *A History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, by Rev. Richard Webster, Philadelphia, 1857.

⁸ *History of Neshaminy Presbyterian Church of Warwick, 1726-1876*, by Rev. D. K. Turner, Philadelphia, 1876.

⁹ *Cf. The Presbytery of the Log College*, by Rev. Thomas Murphy, D.D., Philadelphia, 1889, pp. 417 ff.

¹⁰ JOURNAL, Vol. viii, pp. 57 f.

¹¹ JOURNAL, Vol. ii, pp. 221 ff.

years since Dr. Alexander made the first attempt, it is reasonable to infer that additional data will be found.

The alumni of the Log College were noted for at least three things. In the first place, they were preachers of the Word. Theirs was a living gospel, and the people listened to them gladly. They were itinerants, almost exclusively. The Presbytery of New Brunswick from the outset made it a rule to give all applying congregations some preaching. This was the case even when the calls came from afar. Pastors of churches were required to leave their own congregations in order that all congregations might have some preaching. These evangelists traveled all over the colony and reached into the regions beyond, and everywhere they found the people hungry for the Word, and they delivered their message as dying men to dying men. In the second place, as they had sat at the feet of a marvelous teacher, they too, as opportunity offered, taught in their parishes. Samuel Blair and Samuel Finley stand out as the most notable examples of this work. Their activities in this direction were more important, because farther reaching, than was their preaching. In the third place, the Log College alumni stood for the independence of the colonies, although many of them had passed on to their heavenly reward before the beginning of the struggle for independence began. The crisis in Washington's battles for the independence of the colonies took place in the bounds of this Presbytery and in some of the parishes served by Log College ministers. In this series of articles on the Log College alumni these features of their work will be emphasized.

Commencing with some of the men about whom less has been written, we turn first to the name of Charles McKnight.

Authorities differ as to the family from which Charles McKnight descended. The *General Catalogue of Princeton University*, following the *History of New York City*, edited by M. J. Lamb, makes him the son of the Rev. John McKnight, an Irish divine of great eminence, whose father was one of the defenders of Londonderry in the memorable siege of that city. Mr. Thomas Little, a descendant of John Little, one of the founders of Shrewsbury Church, took great interest in the

church of his ancestors. Six generations of the Little family are interred in the church yard. In a series of articles published in this JOURNAL, Mr. Little tells the story of the pastors and supplies of Shrewsbury Church, and among them is Charles McKnight, who was pastor of Shrewsbury, Middletown Point, and Shark River at the time of his death. According to Mr. Little, Charles McKnight was born in the north of Ireland about 1720, and according to the same authority he probably came from the same vicinity as Samuel and John Blair. "While yet a child, he came with his parents, Malcolm and Catherine McKnight, to this country. His father was a tailor by trade and settled in Penn's Neck, Salem County, New Jersey, where he owned some property. His death occurred between August 22 and September 5, 1741, the dates of the drawing and the probating of the will. Charles was the oldest son. A clause in Malcolm McKnight's will develops the hitherto unnoted fact that Rev. Charles McKnight was a graduate of the 'Log College': 'Only allowing my son Charles to take the money he has had since he went to Tennents in the first part pay of his share.' He was probably, therefore, one of the 'several gracious youths' Whitefield saw on the occasion of his visit to the Log College, nearly ready for the ministry."¹⁸

In the minutes of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, meeting in Philadelphia, June 24, 1741, there is the following minute:

Mr. Charles McKnight, having applied to the Presbytery in order to be taken under probationary trials as a candidate for the Gospel Ministry, the Presbytery having examined his skill in the languages, philosophy, and divinity, also his Christian experiences, and judging him fit to be taken on trials, do accordingly order for him the following pieces of trial, viz.: for an exegesis *An Christus pro omnibus sit antitutron*; and for a sermon the 2nd Psalm, and all to be delivered at New Brunswick the Monday following the first Sabbath in August, next.¹⁹

He was unable, through illness, to attend the meeting of Presbytery on August 3, 1741. There was a meeting of Pres-

¹⁸ JOURNAL, Vol. viii, p. 57 f.

¹⁹ Ms. Minutes Presbytery of New Brunswick, *in loco*.

bytery later in the month and also one in October, but these are not recorded. At one of these meetings Mr. McKnight was licensed, because at the next meeting after these dates, May 29, 1742, his name appears among those appointed to supply vacant pulpits: "Stated Island and Basking Ridge, alternately his whole time." Sometimes Amboy was included in his circuit. In the latter part of that year a call was extended to him from Amboy and Stated Island, "which he took under consideration."¹⁴ But there is no record that he gave an answer. And soon after this Presbytery began assigning him to Cranbury and Allentown, and on May 24, 1744, a call was renewed to him from Allentown and Cranbury, there being no record of the previous call. Upon being asked as to his willingness to accept, he replied in the affirmative. Presbytery thereupon assigned him parts of trial for ordination, and appointed July 18, 1744, at Allentown, as the time and place. William Tennent, Jr., Charles Beatty, Eleazar Wales, and James McCrea were appointed the committee "to receive the trials, and if they have clearness, to proceed the next day to ordain Mr. McKnight to the Gospel Ministry there, and that Mr. Tennent preside in the whole affair."¹⁵

At the meeting of Presbytery held at Maidenhead, September 11, 1744, the committee upon the ordination of Mr. McKnight reported as follows:

Allentown, July 19, 1744, the committee met according to appointment, except Mr. McRea, and having heard Mr. McKnight preach a sermon upon Romans 3:28, and his exegesis upon the question, *An Infantes fidelium sint baptizandi*, both to good satisfaction, and there being no objection in the way, they proceeded after a sermon preached by Mr. William Tennent from I Peter 6:23, with fasting and prayer and imposition of hands to set him apart to the sacred work of the Gospel Ministry, and it was done accordingly. Concluded with prayer.¹⁶

Mr. McKnight was the first pastor of Cranbury. That congregation had entered into relation with the Church of England

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

a few years before, which had not proved satisfactory, and Presbytery had advised them to dissolve this relation and start anew for themselves. Following these instructions, they had organized, and now Mr. McKnight was their first pastor. He lived in Cranbury. After some time a difference of opinion arose as to the minister's dwelling place, and the matter came to Presbytery. A committee was appointed to confer with the two churches. They met on October 12, 1748. After hearing the case, the committee advised that Allentown be allowed to seek a pastor for themselves. Both parties were agreed to this arrangement, but no action was taken for some time. At the meeting of Presbytery in Kingston, October 26, 1756,¹⁷ with Mr. McKnight as moderator, he asked Presbytery to dissolve his pastoral relation with Cranbury. Cranbury offered no objections, and Presbytery granted the request. When the matter of providing supplies for Cranbury arose, Presbytery appointed Mr. McKnight to supply "such as he can." Thus he was given Allentown as his sole charge. Two years later, Bordentown was given one-fourth of his time. Thus for twenty years Mr. McKnight ministered in Allentown. During this time he had frequently supplied at Shrewsbury and Middletown Point. Finally, in 1767, he received and accepted a call from Middletown Point (Matawan) and Shrewsbury.¹⁸ During his ministry in the Cranbury-Allentown parishes he had come into intimate relations with David Brainerd, the apostle to the Indians. In coming from New England, Brainerd had stopped at Cranbury, lodging with Mr. McKnight, whom he described in his journal as a "serious minister."¹⁹ Dr. George Swain,²⁰ in a historical discourse on Allentown Church, which he served for many years, describes the intercourse of the two ministers as most cordial. Mr. McKnight was always ready to aid the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ At the same time he had a call to Trenton. When Mr. Kirkpatrick left Trenton, the congregation applied for supplies, "and in particular for the Rev. Mr. McKnight in case of his mission from his present charge which they inform us, they have heard is probable." This is a quotation of the minute of Presbytery, quoted in John Hall's *History of the Presbyterian Church of Trenton*, p. 121.

¹⁹ *The Life of David Brainerd*, by President Edwards, p. 132.

²⁰ *Historical Discourse on Allentown Presbyterian Church*, by Rev. George Swain, D.D., p. 13.

missionary. Later, when Brainerd entered upon the project of building Bethel, near Cranbury, for his converted Indians and providing them a church building of their own, the Allentown congregation assisted in every way. Sprague²¹ intimates that one reason for giving up one of his parishes was his failing health. In his early days Mr. McKnight was a regular attendant at Synod, but beginning with 1763 he seldom attended; only in 1766 and 1771.

As the war came on, serious complications arose in the Presbytery. In a letter quoted in Lamb's *History of New York*, Mrs. McKnight writes to a friend regarding the situation in the summer of 1776: "Our coach stands before our door every night and the horses harnessed ready to make our escape if we have time."²² There was a temptation for some not to be outspoken regarding the colonial cause; for late that year it looked very much as if Washington were fighting a losing cause. But there was no mincing of matters in Mr. McKnight's pulpits, who declared: "God would take care of their liberty if they took care of the redcoats." A meeting of Presbytery had been appointed for Shrewsbury, December, 1776. The records say, "This could not be fulfilled as the enemy were on the march through the state."²³

Mr. McKnight was at the battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777, and stood by the side of General Mercer when the latter was mortally wounded. He himself received a saber wound on the head.²⁴ The *General Catalogue of Princeton University* lists him as a chaplain. In June, 1777, while conducting a service at Middletown Point (Matawan), he was surprised by a detachment of British troops under Lieutenant Moody and was taken prisoner. His church was burned and he was placed on a prison ship in New York harbor,²⁵ where he was confined till near the close of that year. When they saw he was about to die, he was released. He breathed his last January 1, 1778. Heady makes the following entry:

²¹ *Annals of the American Pulpit*, Vol. iii, p. 115.

²² *History of the City of New York*, edited by M. J. Lamb.

²³ Ms. Minutes of the Presbytery, *in loco*.

²⁴ *History of Princeton*, by Hageman, Vol. i, p. 144.

²⁵ *Early Presbyterians in Monmouth County*, by James Steen.

Rev. Charles McKnight, of Shrewsbury, on account of his devotion to the cause of liberty, and the gallant conduct of his patriot sons on the field of battle, was thrown into prison and treated with a brutality that would disgrace a savage. His constitution broke down under it and after his release he died, another victim laid upon the altar of his country.²⁶

There is some doubt as to his resting place, for while he has a memorial in Trinity churchyard, lower Broadway, New York, it is not certain that his body rests there.

The monument is inscribed as follows:

To the memory of the
REV. CHARLES McKNIGHT,
for many years a beloved Pastor of the
Presbyterian Church
in Monmouth County, New Jersey.
He departed this life
January 1st, 1778.

Also

To the memory of his Son,
RICHARD McKNIGHT,
Captain in the
American Army of the Revolution.²⁷

Mr. McKnight preached the funeral sermon of his friend William Tennent, the pastor of Freehold (Old Tennent) Church, who died March 8, 1777, with whom he had been intimately associated ever since Log College days. One by one those with whom he had been associated had gone on to meet their Lord—William Tennent, Sr., Gilbert Tennent, Samuel Blair, John Rowland, and James McCrea, some of them many years before. And it was not long before the call was to come for him (Jan. 1, 1778). His last years were thus filled with sadness. The last time he was in Presbytery was October 10, 1775. Although there were four meetings in 1776, he was marked absent each time. And there were three meetings in 1777, and he was absent from all; a good portion of the time he was languishing in his prison ship. In the days of his strength he had been a faithful presbyter.

²⁶ *Chaplains and Clergy of the Revolution*, by Heady, p. 70.

²⁷ *JOURNAL*, Vol. viii, p. 60.

He married Elizabeth Stevens, of Monmouth County. He had two sons. Of these, the elder, Richard, was a captain in the army, was taken prisoner at his home at Tinton Falls, June 9, 1779, and died "a prison ship martyr." He shares with his father the memorial stone in Trinity churchyard. The second son was Charles McKnight, Jr., who graduated in the Class of 1771, College of New Jersey. He also did service in the Revolution. He was surgeon of the Pennsylvania Battery of the Flying Camp, July to December, 1776. He was Surgeon General of the Hospital, Middle Department, in 1778. In the third place, he was Chief Hospital Physician, October 16, 1780, to January 3, 1782. After the war he followed his profession in New York City. He died November 11, 1791.²²

From 1757 until his death Charles McKnight was a Trustee of the College of New Jersey, during the formative period of this institution, that had grown out of the Log College. It was fitting that one who had received his education in this pioneer school of higher learning should have a part in the early development of the College of New Jersey, which was to become a mighty factor in the promotion of higher education in this country. To these duties Charles McKnight no doubt gave during that twenty years some of the most earnest service of his busy life. How much he wrought thereby for the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God will not be known in this world.

In 1766, in company with William Tennent and Dr. Nathaniel Scudder, he established an academy in Freehold.²³

Such is an outline of the life of one of the young men whom William Tennent sent forth from his school in Neshaminy to spend and be spent as preachers of the Word, as friends of Christian education, and as ardent supporters of the colonial cause. One can imagine his Lord saying to him as he entered Heaven: "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

²² *General Catalogue, Princeton University.*

²³ *New York Journal*, December 24, 1766, No. 1251.