

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA

HISTORICAL PAPERS

No. 3.—1892

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2. NOTES ON WASHINGTON ACADEMY AND WASHINGTON COLLEGE: PREPARED IN 1873, AT THE REQUEST OF THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION. BY HON. SIDNEY S. BAXTER.
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PREFACE.

This number contains the valuable address of Col. Bolivar Christian on "The Scotch-Irish Settlers in the Valley of Virginia," now nearly out of print; Notes on Washington Academy and Washington College, by the Hon. Sidney S. Baxter; Memorial Tributes to the Rev. George A. Baxter, D. D.; and a continuation of Sketches of Trustees.

In preparing these Sketches we have been greatly aided by the Rev. William Brown, D. D., Mrs. S. C. P. Miller, Judge William P. Houston, and William H. Ruffner, LL. D. These will be continued in succeeding numbers.

We hope to publish in the next number a continuation of Dr. Ruffner's history of the institution by his son Dr. William Henry Ruffner.

WILLIAM McLAUGHLIN,
WILLIAM A. GLASGOW,
HENRY ALEXANDER WHITE,
Committee.

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY,
February, 1892.

piety ; "mighty in the scriptures ;" mighty in the knowledge of "the faith once delivered to the saints ;" mighty in the history of the Church ; mighty in sound wisdom and discretion ; mighty in that noble, comprehensive character given by the pen of inspiration to a minister of old—"he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith," and through his instrumentality "much people was added to the Lord."

And yet, notwithstanding his greatness, he was as simple as a child, and as easy of access as one altogether unconscious of any merit. He was confiding in his friendship, sincere in his professions, and always charitable and forgiving. His humility was real, his life unostentatious, and his frame of mind devout. "He was a burning and a shining light."

The decease of this inestimable man called forth testimonials of respect from various institutions and ecclesiastical bodies with which he was connected. His death was a sad stroke to many a sorrowing and smitten heart. He was greatly beloved and universally lamented.

Such is a feeble outline of the character of the Rev. George A. Baxter, D. D. Thousands will attest its truth. The writer speaks what he knows, and testifies what he has seen and heard.

From the *Central Presbyterian*. By REV. WILLIAM BROWN, D. D.

REV. GEORGE A. BAXTER, D. D.

[The reminiscence found below, in which this venerated name is prominent, was published under the head of Editorial Correspondence in the *Central Presbyterian* in 1865. It was, however, just after the resuscitation of the paper, and when the mails of the country were not open to half its readers. On this account the writer has the more willingly complied with numerous requests for the republication of the article. Some unessential changes have been made. The scene referred to was so extraordinary as almost unavoidably to awaken a suspicion that the description is overdrawn ; especially when the age of the writer at the time is called to mind. It is only natural to think that the account gives the impressions then received by a highly excited youthful mind, but that it is really, though undesignedly, an exaggeration. But the statement

which the Rev. Dr. Plumer has been so kind as to furnish will be a satisfactory safeguard upon that point. His letter we here subjoin :]

COLUMBIA, S. C., *October 24th*, 1867.

Rev. WM. BROWN, D. D.:

My Dear Brother,—When you first published your recollections of a meeting near Strickler's Spring, in Virginia, I was very much impressed with its accuracy. I have recently read it over again, and I am satisfied that I could not alter a sentence to make it more truthful, as far as it goes. You have given us the central figure and actor. If it were right I could add to the sketch others. You yourself were then a little boy. You sat near me, and I could hardly look at the preacher without seeing you. I read your emotions as distinctly as I ever read those of any person. At no great distance sat your excellent mother, and near to her that wonderfully experienced Christian, the mother of Rev. Wm. G. Campbell. A little further on was a group of College boys, who had come there without any serious purpose. But they were awed into solemnity.

I earnestly request you to republish the account of that solemn scene. Those who have read it will be glad to read it again. Those who have never read it will be glad to peruse it for the first time.

Very fraternally yours,

WM. S. PLUMER.

A REMINISCENCE OF EARLY LIFE.

On Saturday, August 25, an unexpected providence led my way over the North mountain to the Rockbridge Alum Springs, whence, after spending only a few hours at this famous fountain of health, my course was down Dunlap's Creek¹ until within sight of Goshen Depot, on the Covington and Ohio railroad. Here, making a sudden turn to the right, I was in a little while involved in the depths of Strickler's Gap. After many travels through the mountain passes of Virginia, I must say that none of them makes so deep an impression upon me as this. That through the Blue Ridge, along the noble

¹ Bratton's Run.

James, exceeds it in some respects ; chiefly because you have there the sight of a great river—here only one of its branches. But, taking into account the extreme narrowness of the defile, the stupenous mountains and crags almost hanging over you, and of course the great depth of the gorges in view, the sudden, surprising turns of the road, the wonderful bendings and interlappings of the ridges, suggesting a doubt whether a way can be found to get through—I do not hesitate to place it before all I have ever visited. It is truly a scene of wildness and grandeur which the beholder cannot soon forget. The effect on the present occasion was the greater, because my ride of six miles on horseback through these deep, silent shades was alone, and during the last hours of a calm and hot day in summer. For as I emerged into the great valley at Strickler's Springs, and turned to catch a side view of the old familiar Jump close to my left, the last rays of sunlight were leaving its lofty peak. It was an admonition to hasten on my journey. But suddenly a reminiscence of years long gone by seized and bound me as if by some magic power, and for a time entirely banished the thought of everything else. And well it might be so ; for was I not standing on holy ground? The North river, after so long threading its doubtful way from head-springs hid behind interminable mountains, just here suddenly breaks through the last, the one forming the western boundary of our wide, and fertile, and beautiful Valley of Virginia—in its whole length and breadth surely one of the very loveliest upon earth. Now, as if freed from long, oppressive struggles, and “rejoicing as a strong man to run a race,” it strikes its course south and obliquely across the Valley, for about thirty miles, till swelled by many tributaries its waters are mingled with the James as it enters its magnificent highway through the Blue Ridge. It was here at this spot immediately on the right of the road—on this beautiful grassy level where it suddenly touches the mountain, which rises abruptly and so high that it seems almost to hang over us—it was here that I witnessed more than forty years ago a scene which some of the people of Rockbridge yet speak of, and which certainly was one of memorable interest. Never can it be forgotten “while I have any being.” As no account of it has ever been published, I will attempt a description ; conscious, however, that it is a very inadequate one.

The time to which I refer was about the year 1822, and the day was one on which the communion of the Lord's Supper was to be administered; interesting services and largely attended, having been held for some days preceding. The Sabbath was one of loveliness such as the climate of Virginia often gives in September, especially among the mountains. The assembly was immense. Carriages were then rarely to be met with, and the multitudes came entirely on horseback and on foot. They had poured over from Kerr's Creek and down Walker's Creek and Hays Creek; they had come down through Strickler's Gap, from the Pastures and other places behind the mountains; they had gathered from Lexington, from Timber Ridge, from Fairfield and from New Providence. It was a time of uncommon religious awakening over the country, the hearts of the people were deeply moved by "power from on high," and not only the utmost good order, but the utmost solemnity also, was to be marked even by a casual observer. The church on the river, now called Bethesda, was at that time without a house of worship, but was then and for many years after under the care of the Rev. Andrew B. Davidson. Whether on the present occasion he preached in the morning I cannot now certainly recollect, but he conducted most of the communion services in his usual fervid and impressive manner. A very large number were admitted to the church upon profession of their faith, and sat down for the first time at the table of the Lord. In the great congregation of that day might be seen the newly convicted sinner, the stricken penitent, the rejoicing convert, and the riper joy of older Christians—all mingled together, and making it a communion season long to be remembered. Surely it was a scene for angels as well as men to look upon!

When the morning services were about closing, it was announced from the stand that Dr. Baxter would preach in the afternoon. After a short intermission the singing of a hymn was the signal for the congregation to assemble again; which was done promptly—it might even be said eagerly. No one seemed to have departed; hardly a straggler could be seen. Many there were negroes, to whom a suitable place was assigned; and it may be proper to mention here that during this revival a very large number of them were added to the various churches around. Altogether it was a

wonderful assembly. From the preachers' stand in the grove to the foot of the mountain, and as it had been in the forenoon, seated on the rocks for twenty or thirty yards up its steep side, there was a dense mass of human faces, upon which one all absorbing interest was depicted. What a responsibility to stand forth as the ambassador of Christ to such a crowd, and beseech men to be reconciled unto God !

The worship before the sermon seemed peculiarly edifying, and well suited to give a right direction to the feelings of the people. Dr. Baxter gave out the 17th Psalm—a favorite one with him. It contains these striking verses :

“What sinners value I resign ;
Lord, 'tis enough that thou art mine :
I shall behold thy blissful face,
And stand complete in righteousness.

This life's a dream, an empty show ;
But the bright world to which I go
Hath joys substantial and sincere ;
When shall I wake and find me there ?

My flesh shall slumber in the ground,
Till the last trumpet's joyful sound ;
Then burst the chains with sweet surprise,
And in my Saviour's image rise.

O glorious hour ! O blest abode !
I shall be near and like my God :
And flesh and sin no more control
The sacred pleasures of the soul.”

Had it been but yesterday I could hardly call to mind more vividly the tone of voice, and at times the quivering lip, and the whole countenance with which these verses were read. As they were heard that day, sung by almost unnumbered voices to the tune of “Old Hundred,” “the sound was as the noise of many waters.” When it was ended, Dr. Baxter gave out for his text that striking passage in Isaiah lvii, 20, 21 : “But the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” He was then in the very prime of life, his mighty powers of intellect in their full maturity, and his religious sympathies, always quick and tender,

were now overflowing ; for his heart was all aglow with the revival pervading the country. I was then only a little boy eleven years old ; but having recently united with the Church, my interest was intensely excited, and I can remember distinctly to this day the general outline of the discourse.

He first stated briefly but with great clearness and force, who were meant by the wicked ; that it included all who were alienated from God. He next demonstrated from the nature of his moral government, and the constitution he had given to man, the absolute impossibility of such persons enjoying any true peace. This position he confirmed by reciting the confessions of Rousseau, Voltaire and Hume, together with some striking cases coming under his own observation.

He then turned with a most searching appeal to those of his hearers still unreconciled to God, asking whether their consciences did not often testify that they had never found the happiness they craved. Here the emotions of the preacher, which at various points of the discourse he had with much effort controlled, became almost overpowering. His benignant face was bathed in tears ; for like Paul, and Whitfield, and others of the same spirit, he often thus besought men. It was, in fact, sometimes with great difficulty and after a considerable pause he could find utterance. Under this appeal the whole congregation was deeply moved, and many of the stout hearted were melted like wax. His own feelings, though still under intense action, at length found vent, and were more calm. With unspeakable solemnity he next pointed the class he was addressing to the future. If they had been like the troubled sea in the past, what could they expect in a dying hour, and a day of judgment ! Here he recited Jeremiah xii, 5 : " If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses ? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan ? " If in this world of mercy, said he, a sense of guilt, and apprehensions of the wrath of God, make you sometimes so unhappy, how will it be in that hour when mercy is departing forever ? when such a sense of avenging justice shall seize upon you as will *completely reverse the very instincts of nature itself ?*

In illustration of this last point, he added—"Suppose, as you are seated here this moment, you should see the heavens above suddenly gathering blackness, and feel the earth, under some mysterious power, trembling beneath your feet; and you who are seated upon the mountain should feel it shaking to its foundation; and looking up to its top, we should see it nodding to its fall. What would nature dictate? We should all flee in horror from the fated spot. But how completely will all this feeling be reversed to the impenitent at the last day! O, you will then say to the mountains and to the rocks, '*Fall on us*, and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?'"¹

This was the substance, and in the most material parts the language used. I do not think it possible to convey to others an adequate idea of the impression immediately produced. The effect was indescribable. Something, however, may be gathered from a simple statement of what I witnessed. I was sitting with other boys close by Dr. Baxter, on the edge of the platform, and facing the vast assembly. From the very beginning of his sermon their attention had been riveted. It had increased with every step in the preacher's advance, until a more complete absorption in the subject, and consequently forgetfulness of everything else, can hardly be imagined. The emotion of the crowd now reached its climax, and an amazing one it was. I have since beheld many assemblies deeply wrought upon under a sense of eternal things, but never a scene to be compared to this. Many sitting below and on the mountain side at once rose up, and I can testify that I saw a number of persons turn to see if the mountain was not really about to fall. Indeed, so wrapt was my whole soul in the subject, that I also for a moment looked up in apprehension of such a catastrophe. The concluding hymn I had often heard before, but never with such an awful view of the last judgment.

"That awful day will surely come,
The appointed hour makes haste,
When I must stand before my Judge,
And pass the solemn test."

¹ It was probably from early habit that Dr. Baxter, though usually quite accurate in this respect, gave the words "tremble" and "wrath" the pronunciation of *trimble* and *wroth*.

Among all the instances noticed in history, where a whole multitude were swayed like a forest before some mighty wind, I doubt whether there is a more remarkable one than this. When Demosthenes

“Wielded at will that fierce democracy,
Shook the arsenal, and fulminated over Greece,”

his hearers in a pitch of excitement cried out, “Let us go to meet Philip!” But what was this compared with the cry of burdened sinners, “What must we do to be saved?”—compared with even one lost son saying, “I will arise and go to my father!” The warfare in a single heart is more tremendous in its whole nature and results than “every battle of the warrior with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood.” The eternal salvation of one soul outweighs all the interests of time.

It is true that the power on the hearts of the people during this memorable day was divine; but the Holy Spirit of God commonly uses means suited to the end designed. It was so here. If the universal judgment of the most competent men who knew him may decide, Dr. Baxter had endowments of mind, and powers as a preacher, surpassed by none, and equalled by few of his great cotemporaries. Of his piety, exceeding modesty and great worth, it were superfluous to say anything. Many can still call to mind his majestic presence, his kindling eye, and a head molded so grandly as to “give the world assurance of a man.” His theme, too, on the occasion of which I speak, was exactly suited to his cast of thought, and his sonorous voice rang through the grove and along the mountain like the sound of a deep-toned trumpet. When with all this you consider the place, the great congregation, and the great religious awakening over the country, it may be understood in some measure how well suited these agencies and circumstances were to bring on this awful impression, and carry on the work of mercy and salvation. Still it was not the less divine. “There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” Certainly I must ever remember the scene here imperfectly presented as one of the most interesting of my life. I have ventured the sketch, believing it will be a reminiscence not without interest to many, and especially, because it recalls a memorable

incident in the life of a great and good man so much loved and revered.

Passing out from the shadow of the mountain, and riding in the last twilight of evening down the river to the Rockbridge Baths, the reflection was a natural one : Where are now the people gathered together on that communion Sabbath ? A few remain until the present time ; concerning most, the wind hath passed over them and they are gone—long since have they joined the still greater congregation of the dead, and passed to their judgment before God. The voice of those who on that day preached the unsearchable riches of Christ, is hushed. In fact, of all the ministers then in the Presbytery of Lexington, I can think of but three who are now among the living ; the Rev. John McElhenny, D. D., the Rev. John D. Ewing, and the Rev. James Morrison—old pilgrims, each leaning thoughtfully on his staff at the banks of Jordan.

Dear old Rockbridge ! a place where any might be thankful he was born. With a scenery so bold and charming as hardly to allow a sister in the family to vie with her ; with a region where indeed the Lord most plentifully “sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills ;” with a people who from the first filled it with sanctuaries and schools ; the home of Graham, and Alexander, and Baxter, and Ruffner, and McDowell and Stonewall Jackson—the great and the good ; and of multitudes unknown to fame, “whose record is on high”—may blessings be forever upon thee !

And may the days soon return when among all our afflicted but not forsaken churches the word of the Lord, as in the days of old, shall “have free course and be glorified.” “Return, O Lord, how long ? And let it repent thee concerning thy servants. Oh satisfy us early with thy mercy ; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”
