



BUCKINGHAM PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BERLIN, MARYLAND. THIS BUILDING WAS ERECTED IN 1905 OF HOLMESBURG GRANITE. IT IS NEW, BUT HOUSES A CONGREGATION DATING BACK TO 1683. IT IS THE OLDEST CHURCH IN WORCESTER COUNTY, MARYLAND, NORTH OF SNOW HILL, BEING PLANTED HERE BY REV. FRANCIS MAKEMIE A GREAT MANY YEARS BEFORE THE FOUNDING OF OLD ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH. THIS IS THE FIFTH BUILDING OF BUCKINGHAM CONGREGATION. WORSHIP SERVICES HAVE BEEN HELD BY THIS CONGREGATION FOR TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY-TWO YEARS, COMFORTING AND HELPING COUNTLESS NUMBERS THROUGH THIS LONG PERIOD.

OLD BUCKINGHAM BY THE SEA
on the
EASTERN SHORE OF MARYLAND

BY
I. MARSHALL PAGE

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HIGHEST" "THE LITTLE SOUL WINNER"**

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*Throwing a new light on the founding of the
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in the
United States of America.*

*"Mr. Page has made a real contribution in
the field of early American Presbyterianism.
His painstaking researches have been rewarded
by new and important discoveries relating to
the labors of Francis Makemie. It is a work
that is not only authentic history, but reads
like a romance."*

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Thomas C. Pears, Jr., *Manager*
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

LOAN STACK

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BERLIN, MD.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MAN WHO FOUND FRANCIS MAKEMIE'S GRAVE

No history of Buckingham Presbyterian Church would be complete unless it told the story of the most illustrious son Buckingham has ever produced. The name of the one who holds this high honor is Littleton Purnell Bowen, preacher, poet, historian, leader of men, fosterer of public welfare and author of many books.

It may well be said that no history of the Eastern Shore would be complete without mentioning him, and the best historians of this section quote freely from his "Days of Makemie" or from things he has said in other writings.

Littleton P. Bowen was born June 5, 1833, and lived to the advanced age of ninety-nine years, ten months and three days, passing to the heavenly reward on April 8, 1933. He lacked only fifty-eight days of being one hundred years old, and many people were hoping that he would reach that age, but He that doeth all things well had better things in store for this great hero.

Dr. Bowen was a Presbyterian pastor and the writer regrets that he did not serve Buckingham as pastor, but truly no pastor ever loved Buckingham so well and so long as did Dr. Bowen. When he felt that he had completed his life's work he moved back to Berlin that he might spend his last days in Buckingham church and while here, waiting for that last summons to come up higher, he wrote these characteristic words: "I was born in Buckingham, baptized in Buckingham, took my first Communion in Buckingham, was licensed to preach in

Buckingham, was ordained a minister in Buckingham, found a model preacher's wife in Buckingham, and have come back to die in the bosom of Old Buckingham."

The old brick church was standing when he was born and his home was on a farm just back of the Trappe, on Trappe creek, and many hundreds of times did he walk to the beloved church from his home. His father was Robert Fleming Bowen and his mother was Andasia Ironshire Franklin Bowen. He was descended on his father's side from Rhoda Fassitt Bowen, daughter of Captain William Fassitt, the first known elder of Buckingham church, so that the blood of this great old hero flowed in his veins. Mr. Calvin B. Taylor, Robert Bowen and all the Trappe family of Bowens are descendants of Captain Fassitt.

He was aided in securing his education by the Fund left by Colonel John Postley and is perhaps the first, or among the first, to avail themselves of this fund. When Dr. Isaac W. K. Handy came to the pastorate of Buckingham, Littleton Bowen was only five years of age. The writer has been told that he would go to the manse down on the Snow Hill road and sit on Dr. Handy's knee to recite the catechism to him. He never forgot Dr. Handy and as long as the doctor lived L. P. Bowen kept in touch with him by correspondence. He has left in writing the statement that Dr. Handy secured for him his first job. Sitting there on Dr. Handy's knee, when he had recited his catechism, the good pastor told the boy about the early days of Buckingham. He told him Makemie founded the church and when little Lit became a man and a writer he told every one that Makemie founded Buckingham and he told them aright, for Dr. Handy had all the records, and he knew.

People so often say to the writer: "If only Dr. Bowen could have talked with you he could have told you everything about the history of Buckingham." Or they

say, Dr. Bowen was a great historian and he loved Buckingham so much, it seems so strange that he never wrote her history." The answer to these questions is a very simple one. Dr. Bowen wrote down the sum and substance of all he knew about Buckingham in a historic statement which is kept among the Buckingham archives in the Calvin B. Taylor Bank in Berlin, Md. The information which it contains may be found in an article entitled, "A Visit to Makemieland" in "The Presbyterian" under date of January 3, 1929, written by Mr. Harry Pringle Ford just after a visit to Dr. Bowen, who gave him this information.

Dr. Bowen was not a student of Buckingham. He was a student of Francis Makemie, and Mrs. Helen Parker Schmerber quotes him as saying, when asked about old Buckingham, "I don't know, child; I was looking for Makemie." The fact is he never felt the urgent need of writing a history of Buckingham and therefore never conducted a research into her past.

Young Bowen went to Lewes, Delaware, at the early age of eighteen and taught school, then he went to Apalachicola, Florida, and taught school for four years, then returned and studied law under Judge Franklin in Snow Hill. He was admitted to the bar and had one case. He plead just one case, for he knew that God had called him into the ministry and he determined that he would give his all to that call. His early studies had been well done in the old Buckingham Academy and, with the experience of teaching at Lewes, Delaware, and in Florida, he was ready to begin his course in theology, so he went to Kentucky and entered the theological seminary at Danville and had that grand prince of teachers, Dr. Robert Breckinridge, and surely Saul of Tarsus never leaned on the words of Gamaliel more than did this young Eastern Shoreman on the words of Dr. Breckinridge. He then entered Princeton Seminary and graduated from there

in the class of 1862. His first pastorate was Milford, Delaware, where he preached four years, remaining until 1866. He was sent as a commissioner to the General Assembly in St. Louis and received a call to the church at Palmyra, Missouri. In 1871 he married Miss Ellen Powell, of Berlin, Maryland, and they went as bride and groom to the Big Creek Church at Rensslear, Missouri. He served this charge four years and then removed to Paris, Missouri, and spent his time as an Evangelist until 1878, when he was called back to the Eastern Shore of Maryland as pastor at Pocomoke City, of the Pitts Creek Church, Rehoboth and Beaver Dam Churches. In 1880 he was called to the pastorate of the church in Marshall, Missouri, where he remained eleven years, till 1891. Then for four years he again served as evangelist with Marshall as his headquarters. In 1895 he was called to Monroe, Louisiana, and served the church there as stated supply for five years. It was while serving the Monroe church that he wrote the beautiful book, "The Daughter of the Covenant." It was here also, in this beautiful Monroe, fragrant with the honeysuckles and Louisiana flowers fanned by the beautiful humming birds, that some of his most delightful writings came from his brilliant mind. It was also here that he faced a great sorrow, for Mrs. Bowen was called home and he (while his daughter Lilian remained in Louisiana) took her remains to the cemetery which he had named, in Marshall, Missouri, and where he had made the dedicatory prayer in 1886. Marshall was dear to him. He had planned the theme and named the cemetery, Ridge Park, and while there had written, "Idyl of Ridge Park." While pastor here in Marshall he had been granted the D.D. degree by Westminster College of Fulton, Missouri. In 1900 he and his daughter moved back to Marshall and resided there for eight years, but in 1908 he was again called to the Eastern Shore as pastor of Mother Rehoboth Church

and resided in Pocomoke City. Here he could go on with his investigations and follow out the dream of his life, for he was a student of Makemie. He served Rehoboth for four years and then moved back to his beloved Berlin and spent the last twenty-one years of his life in peace and happiness.

But the great thing of his life was not to be found in the service of a teacher or a preacher in the ordinary way. The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America owes a great debt of gratitude to Dr. Littleton Purnell Bowen, a debt which it has not paid. And if they should erect to his memory a monument as tall as his beloved pines of the Eastern Shore, it would not be too much.

He is not only the man who found Makemie's grave, for in a true and noble sense, he is the man who found Francis Makemie. He spent tedious years of toil searching the court records of Accomac County, Virginia, Worcester and Somerset Counties in Maryland. He found the reward of his search in three different avenues. He found the desk—the only known piece of movable property which had belonged to Francis Makemie—in the hands of a stranger and devotee of another faith. This marvelous heirloom, handed down from Makemie to his daughter, Madam Anne Holden, she had given to her beloved pastor, Dr. Samuel McMaster. Dr. Bowen rescued this priceless treasure at his own expense and used it as a convenience and an inspiration while he wrote the great book, "The Days of Makemie." Then he presented it to the Union Theological Seminary of Richmond, Virginia, where they keep it in a fireproof room and guard it as with their lives. Thousands of dollars would not be sufficient to secure this desk from its present and worthy guardians.

Our great denomination owes Dr. Bowen a debt of gratitude because, in his unending search, he found the grave of Makemie under the stench and desecration of a

cow-pound, and he never rested until he saw the land purchased and the sacred resting place redeemed and dignified by a monument costing many hundreds of dollars. Every Presbyterian who can, should make the pilgrimage to Accomac County on the Eastern Shore of Virginia and find his way to Makemie Park and there look upon this wonderful monument, crowned by the figure of the founder of our Church in these United States, and there in that sacred spot before God pledge himself to newer and nobler deeds for the faith we love.

Dr. Littleton P. Bowen should be known as far as Presbyterianism in these United States is known, for he not only found a desk that had belonged to the great Makemie, nor stopped at finding the sacred spot where rest the mortal remains of the man who planted our Church in this Republic, but he pressed on with untiring zeal, and Littleton P. Bowen is the man who found Makemie, found him after he had slept for more than a hundred and fifty years. He found the man and revealed him to us.

What did the Presbyterian people in America know about Makemie except that he was hailed as the father and founder of organized Presbyterianism, and that he had been persecuted by one Lord Cornbury in New York because he dared to preach righteousness. And to those who have never heard of Dr. Bowen, nor read his work, what do you know about Rev. Francis Makemie more than these few bare facts? Dr. Bowen found Makemie and revealed him. He has made the youth from Donegal to come, a breathing, living soul from the Presbytery of Laggan in answer to the call of Colonel William Stevens. He has shown him founding these early churches, all now more than two hundred and fifty years old—Rehoboth, Snow Hill, Buckingham, Manokin, Wicomico, Pitts Creek and (the once existing) Rockawalkin.

Let the story of Dr. Bowen be told to the Presbyterian youth in summer conferences and by Presbyterian fire-sides. Let us tell how he toiled over dusty court records and searched in forgotten cemeteries, and how he talked with aged folk, both white and black, in order that we, the Presbyterians of America might know our Founder.

This man, Littleton Purnell Bowen, has done the outstanding piece of work in our church in the last century, and a monument should be erected in our National Capital, or in some other accessible spot, to commemorate the accomplishment of his years of research.

Dr. Bowen felt it keenly that we should ignore our worthy and honored dead. He never asked for honor. He worked without pay. No one could have paid him, for the things he did were too grand and fine to be measured in terms of money.

Colonel Postley's grave was desecrated and the stately pines of the old plantation were cut away and the plow had leveled his grave but Dr. Bowen, who had stirred the action to rescue Makemie's grave, encouraged the school children to place a monument at Colonel Postley's grave. Why should not a grateful church remember and memorialize Dr. Bowen, for the good he has done is monumental.

Dr. Bowen was no mere rhymer, he was a poet. When Pocomoke City was looking for a pastor the old Doctor was ninety-nine years old, and he twits them with the following lines:

“What's the matter with predestination,
That it cannot get a pastor,
Why not try to stir its pegs,
Getting on a little faster?
If they find they can't agree,
Why under heaven not call me?”

Twice I lived in Pocomoke,
Behaving myself right well;
Giving them prodigious sermons,
Preaching heaven and preaching hell;
Whether in winter cold or summer heat,
Makemie himself could not half beat.

And lo, they hunt creation over,
Testing every look and feature,
North and South and East and West,
Ransacking for a preacher,
And here I am fitting to a T,
And never once they think of me.

Yes, a hundred years
And still no tie to sever,
And loving the girls delightfully,
And just as well as ever;
While in place of former mates
The manse another mistress waits.

Pity they're not good looking,
This rush of candidates;
Fail to adorn the pulpit,
From ever so many states;
But none to measure up to me,
As handsome still as I can be.

Wonder if my good friends, the Methodists,
Might my perfections see,
And with their better judgment
Might set their traps for me,
And all John Wesley's skill employ,
To capture old John Calvin's boy."

Dr. Bowen retired when he was in his eightieth year and came to Berlin where he lived long enough to wear out three typewriters, and his daughter had purchased him the fourth one when he was ninety-nine years old.

He wrote essays for school boys and girls and found a warm place in all hearts, both adult and children. He could write a poem on any theme at any time. He wrote appropriate poems on birthday occasions or any other occasion.

Here is a sample of the flow of his typewriter when he was ninety-nine years old, which he quaintly styles,

“Methuselah Rhyming”

God made this world in beauty,
 And His work's been good to me,
 His stars, His rainbows and His flowers,
 And His songbird's ministry;
 But leading all there sweetly blends,
 My treasure of a thousand friends.
 Mine's been a happy life,
 More sunshine far than cloud;
 Ninety-nine congenial years,
 And through them all I'm proud,
 That through them all in bright array,
 These friends have gladdened all the way.
 You see I've loved the children,
 Who have about me hung;
 I'm sure that their caresses,
 Have helped to keep me young;
 With better than wine they filled my cup,
 From little babies clear on up.
 Now I start upon my hundredth year,
 As frisky as can be,
 And all the world is smiling,
 Folks good and kind to me;
 I send them love without a flaw,
 From Worcester's sry Methuselah.

Dr. Raymond Pearl, of Johns Hopkins, once asked
 Dr. Bowen, “To what do you attribute your old age?”

Dr. Bowen said, "First I refuse to worry. Second, I am in love with God's great outdoors. Third, I will not impose on my stomach. Fourth, I always look on the bright side of things, and Fifth, I have boycotted all doctors and their miserable drugs." Dr. Pearl wrote back: "Dr. Bowen, you ought to live forever."

No wonder the children all loved him. He was a blessing to every one he met. People who knew him well say that you could not talk to him without feeling better. He had the faculty of making you feel that he was interested in you and in all that concerned you. He loved the minister who was serving as pastor of old Buckingham, Rev. J. Russell Verbrycke.

Dr. Bowen came peacefully to his end April 8, 1933, and it was fitting that he should have services held for him in the two churches he loved the most, Buckingham in Maryland, and his beloved "Old Rock Church" in Marshall, Missouri, and then to be borne to the cemetery he had named and to rest there beside his beloved wife in "Ridge Park" at Marshall, Missouri.

Just as this book goes to press, Roland Trader, a fine young man of our Buckingham congregation, has raised a fund for building a memorial arch at the entrance of old Buckingham cemetery to the memory of Dr. Bowen, and although he was laid to rest in the West, loving hearts will long cherish his memory here on his beloved Eastern Shore.