

“The Dead of the Synod of Georgia.”

NECROLOGY:

OR

MEMORIALS OF DECEASED MINISTERS,

WHO HAVE DIED DURING THE FIRST
TWENTY YEARS AFTER ITS
ORGANIZATION.

PREPARED IN OBEDIENCE TO THE ORDER OF THE SYNOD.

WITH A

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

BY

JOHN S. WILSON, D. D.,

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The memory of the just is blessed.—Prov. x: 7.

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REV. SAMUEL JONES CASSELS.

SAMUEL JONES CASSELS was born on the 24th of February, 1806. Liberty county, Georgia, (which is so celebrated in our annals for the number of ministers which it has given to the Church,) was the place of his nativity. He was the subject of strong religious impressions at the early age of twelve years. These never wore off, and five years after, he made a public profession of religion, and connected himself with the Midway Congregational Church.

His attention was soon directed to the ministry; and in January of the following year, under the care of the Educational Society of Liberty county, he commenced his preparation for College in the Grammar School at Athens. So great was his aptness for learning, and his ardor and energy in pursuing his studies, that in the short space of eleven months, he had finished his preparatory course, and was admitted, after examination, as a student of Franklin College. He graduated August 6, 1828, with the highest academical honors that the College could bestow.

During his collegiate course, he labored with untiring zeal and great success for the salvation of his fellow-students. The College, before his entrance into it, was notorious for its dissipation, irreligion, and immorality, and for the disorderly conduct of the students. The President, (the venerable Dr. Waddel,) as a remedy for these evils, which seemed beyond the reach of ordinary discipline, advised the Trustees to offer publicly to educate, at the expense of the State, several young men having the ministry in view, hoping that their example and influence would, like salt cast into the mass tending to corruption, correct the evil. The Trustees

* MSS. Rev. J. B. Ross, Dr. John Leyburn, T. Q. Cassels.

adopted the suggestion, and our brother was among the first who entered the College under this arrangement. The result showed the wisdom of the President's advice. The College, during brother Cassels' connection with it, and greatly through his zealous instrumentality, was visited with two powerful revivals of religion. In the first, out of the one hundred students then in attendance on its instructions, fifty made a profession of religion; and in the second, fifty more, connected with the institution, were added to the Church.

His energy and industry are exhibited in the fact, that while pursuing his collegiate course, he studied Theology under Dr. Waddel; and a few days after his graduation, he was examined and licensed to preach the gospel by Hopewell Presbytery. After his licensure, he was engaged in teaching an academy in Bath, Richmond county, and there acquired much distinction as an instructor of youth. But the school did not prevent him from laboring abundantly and earnestly in the destitute neighborhoods around Bath.

He was ordained in Augusta on the 17th of February, 1829; was called to the Church in Washington, Wilkes county, Georgia, in October, 1831, and removed thither the following January, and was installed in November of the same year. Toward the latter part of 1836, he received a call to Macon, and removed thence; and in November of the following year, was installed pastor of the Presbyterian Church in that city.

His next pastoral charge was in Norfolk, Virginia, where he continued until the spring of 1846, when he was compelled to resign it, on account of ill health. He then removed to the city of Savannah, Georgia, and opened a school, and was prospered. He was elected Principal of the Chatham Academy, which position he continued to occupy until the time of his death.

Our brother was an *eloquent, acceptable*, and remarkably successful preacher of the gospel. He preached much at

camp-meetings and in revivals, in the upper part of the State of Georgia, during the first years of his ministry; was engaged as a chief laborer in the extensive religious excitement in and about Princeton, N. J., in 1841, and also, a few months after, in a great awakening in the Churches of East Hanover Presbytery, Virginia, during which some seventy or more additions were made to his own pastoral charge.

He was at length prevented, by the frequent recurrence of hemorrhage and the loss of his voice, from preaching; but continued, to within two weeks of his death, (though extremely weak and emaciated, and suffering at times dreadfully from his disease,) to labor with his pen. Under the signature of "*Paul the Prisoner*," he spoke weekly to the readers of the *Southern Presbyterian*; wrote articles for the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, and tracts, which have been, or soon will be, published.

As a preacher, brother Cassels was remarkable for his *extempore* powers; for the vividness of his conceptions of truth, his clear and simple manner of arrangement, and the lucid way in which he presented truth to the minds of the people; for his felicity of illustration; for the tender solicitude which he manifested for his hearers, and for the animation of his delivery. He was moved and melted down by the great truths he stood up to proclaim, and he moved and melted down those who heard him.

His death illustrated the power of religion he had so long professed. During his long and protracted sickness, he bore his sufferings with patience and submission to the will of God, grew rapidly in meetness for his great change, and was inwardly supported in a surprising manner by Divine grace. He acknowledged God's wisdom and mercy in causing him to pass through the furnace of affliction. To the last, he retained his clearness of mind and confidence of hope. Not a cloud cast its shadow over his soul during his passage through the dark valley. With affectionate solicitude, he

commended his afflicted partner and children to his friends around him, for support and comfort. Whenever his extreme exhaustion would permit, he was engaged in bearing testimony to the wonderful grace and condescension of God towards him, and in speaking lovingly a word of encouragement and exhortation to friends gathered around. As the effusion on his lungs mounted higher and higher, lessening more and more the space for vital air, he whispered, "The change is coming," and calmly folded his hands across his breast and died. May each of those who shall read this short sketch, live as well, as usefully, and die as serenely and happily as our dear departed and sainted brother.

J. B. R.

"His funeral, held in the city of Savannah, was numerously and most respectably attended. The next day, his remains were brought for interment to Midway graveyard. That was the Church at whose altar he dedicated himself to the Lord, and in its cemetery he desired to rest until the last trumpet shall sound. This wish he expressed in a sentiment he sent to be read at our late county centennial celebration: 'Liberty county—the place of my first and second birth; to be the place of my third.'"

"His piety was unquestionable, his talents extraordinary, and his industry and energy not less striking. The writer remembers, some ten years ago, to have seen a letter from the venerable Dr. Alexander, of Princeton, (where brother Cassels was then laboring in a revival of religion,) in which he gave it as his opinion, that as an effective gospel preacher, brother Cassels scarcely had his equal in the Presbyterian Church.

"He died June 15, 1853. The day before he died, this text, Psalms xvii: 15—'As for me, I will behold thee in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness'—was the topic of an interesting and instructive conversation with a brother minister. He spoke in humble tone,

but in an elevated strain, of his approaching conformity to Christ. This hope of the heart, which had been so long his sustaining principle, and had given decision to his character, clearness to his understanding, comfort in sorrow, encouragement in imperfection, now held steadfast to the end."

From Thomas Q. Cassels.

McINTOSH, LIBERTY COUNTY, April 26, 1864.

Dr. J. S. Wilson—My Dear Sir: I have had sickness in my family ever since I received your letter, asking information respecting my deceased brother, Rev. S. J. Cassels. * * *

My brother, by his mother's side of the family, (who was a Miss Jones,) was a regular descendant of the Puritans. His ancestors came originally from Dorchester, Massachusetts, to Dorchester, South Carolina, and from thence to St. John's Parish, now Liberty county. His grandmother was a Miss Baker. She was a sister of the late Dr. Daniel Baker's father. His connections are numerous in this county. Judge Alfred Iverson, of Columbus, is also a near kinsman, his mother and the Judge's having been sisters. His father was a Carolinian, a descendant of the Huguenots—Mrs. Robert Toombs and the Rev. John E. DuBose, of Tallahassee, Fla., are the only relations that we know on the paternal side. From early youth he was impressed with a deep reverence for divine things. His fondness for the Bible was very remarkable, having read it entirely through three times by the time he was ten years old. He was taken by his uncle, Mr. Samuel Jones, (after whom he was named,) when about fifteen or sixteen years of age, and sent to school. When he reached his seventeenth year, he became a clerk in a store in Sunbury. While thus engaged, he studied Latin under the Rev. Adam Holmes, of the Baptist denomination. In 1822, he left Sunbury and went to Athens, Ga., and lived for some time in the family of Dr. Waddel, and attended the Grammar School in connection with the University of Georgia.

From the Rev. John Leyburn, D. D.

RICHMOND, July 27, 1864.

Reverend and Dear Sir:—Your note of the 20th ultimo, asking my recollections of the late Rev. Samuel J. Cassels as a preacher, should have been responded to sooner, but for various unavoidable hindrances.

My first acquaintance with Mr. Cassels was in the autumn of 1843, soon after his settlement in Norfolk, when he came to assist me in a series of meetings during a revival in my Church in Petersburg. He remained with us on that occasion some two weeks, and then, and very often afterwards, I had the opportunity of hearing him preach. Indeed, we became very intimate, and often exchanged visits, and labored together.

I had formed high expectations of his preaching powers, from accounts I had seen and heard of the extraordinary impression he had made upon the professors, students, and community at Princeton, N. J., during a visit to that place not long before. These expectations were not disappointed. As a preacher in revivals, I have rarely, if ever, heard his equal. His facility in preparation was almost marvellous. It seemed to cost him no effort to strike out appropriate and admirable views of thought. His plans were ingenious and original, and they were filled out with fine material, and often irradiated with passages of singular beauty. Indeed, when warmed by a revival atmosphere, and under the stimulus of continuous preaching, his mind fairly flashed with brilliancy.

Most of the sermons preached during the meetings at Petersburg, were composed on the morning of the day they were delivered, and usually, in a great part, before he left his bed. He had a great fondness for the allegorical; and I can never forget a sermon of this character on the *Straight Gate*. Faith and Repentance were his gate-posts. His vivid pictures rendered the gate almost visible, whilst his expositions of doctrine and duty showed that he was not simply dealing in the fanciful, but availing himself of a striking and ingenious method for inculcating and enforcing truth. His discourse from the text, "His blood be on us and on our children," I thought, perhaps, the most powerful and thrilling pulpit effort I had ever listened to. This was one of the sermons I had heard of his having preached with effect at Princeton.

Mr. Cassels' manner was not, as is usually called, oratorical. He had nothing of the *oro rotundo*, nor the elegant roll of sonorous sentences. His language was simple, chaste, and admirably chosen, so as to bring out his thoughts distinctly and clearly. There was no mere verbiage. His sentences were, for the most part, short and pithy, and often came, with the sharpness and precision of a rifle-shot, directly to the conscience. Always earnest, but never boisterous or declamatory, it was impossible to listen to him without feeling that his own heart was deeply moved by the thoughts he was endeavoring to impress upon others. At times, indeed, his manner was characterized by an indescribable tenderness. This was especially the case when holding up the Saviour to the ruined sinner. Then his soul seemed to be melted with love for his Redeemer, and for the perishing. I have never heard a preacher of whom it was more eminently true, that Christ and his cross was all his theme. Indeed, he perhaps gave this too literal an interpretation, dwelling almost entirely on the work and claims of our Saviour, to the exclusion somewhat of the obligations and penalties of God's offended law. His voice was not of the full, rich, sonorous description, nor had the clear, clarion ring. Sometimes it was almost husky; but, tuned by his gushing, tender, yearning spirit, it not unfrequently gave out notes of exquisite pathos, which even now I can recall.

Amidst the animating scenes of a revival our brother threw himself into his work with a relish and cheerfulness and an absorption which could not be surpassed. He was then completely a man of one idea. Everything else seemed to be forgotten, and morning, noon and night, in the house of God, in the prayer meeting, visiting from house to house, or in the retirement of the home circle, that one subject was always in his thoughts and on his lips. Well do I remember how that somewhat rugged visage used to light up until suffused with joy—how his eye sparkled—how he would start up in his chair—and how the laugh of exhilaration would burst forth, as he heard or talked of the various cases and characters whose mental exercises, struggles and triumphs were the prominent events of those happy days.

It is greatly to be regretted that our lamented brother has left no adequate memorial of his remarkable pulpit powers. At his decease, he requested that his manuscripts should be placed in my hands, and I fondly hoped that it was to be my privilege to present to the Church a collection of his sermons, which would prove a rich and enduring treasure. But what was my disappointment on looking over his papers, to find that they consisted chiefly of the products of his earlier ministry, and of serial didactic discourses. Neither in matter nor style did they resemble what had given such delight to his Virginia auditors. I do not doubt that that portion of his life from the time of his visit to Princeton to his leaving Virginia, with broken-down health, was his halcyon day as a preacher. The continuous revivals called out the powers of his mind and heart under circumstances which seemed almost to invest him with new gifts. But of these rich, glowing, scriptural, gospel sermons, well nigh nothing remains. None of them were reduced to writing, not even that noble one from, "His blood be upon us, and upon our children." However well matured in his own mind, they were extemporaneous as to their delivery, and alas! have died with him.

It is not surprising that his consuming zeal, restless energy, and almost entire disregard of himself, should have resulted in the breaking down of his health. As to the last mentioned particular, he was almost reckless. He had naturally a fine constitution, and, as the event proved, presumed too much upon it. When I used to remonstrate with him about not taking better care of himself, he would sometimes laughingly say, that Dr. Olin had once remarked "it was very hard to raise a man in the part of the country he (Mr. Cassels) came from, but when you had raised him, it was very hard to kill him."

But though his days seemed unduly shortened, he did a noble work. His pastorate at Norfolk was instrumental in adding largely to that Church, and in greatly edifying those already in it, whilst in the Churches of Richmond and Petersburg, and elsewhere in the Synod of Virginia, his preaching was attended with the happiest results.

I have spoken, as you perceive, only of the Virginia portion of our beloved brother's life. Of his labors in your own State, you are better informed. I saw him in Savannah after disease had made sad inroads on his fine constitution. His spirit still shone with undimmed lustre. But though the spirit was more than willing, the flesh was too weak to permit his longer engaging in those labors for his Master in which he so much delighted. His work as a minister in Christ's Church was done, and in faith and joyful hope he was waiting for that rest into which he was so soon to enter, and whither his works will long continue to follow him.

Yours fraternally,

JOHN LEYBURN.