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THE MYSTICAL PERFECTIONISM OF THOMAS COGSWELL UPHAM.

I. UPHAM AND HIS SECOND CONVERSION.

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A great deal of the perfectionism which vexed the American churches through the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century was mystically colored. There is no difficulty in accounting for this. The embarrassment rather is to select out of numerous accounts which suggest themselves, the particular one which was really determining in each case. In some instances no doubt the mysticism was self-generated. A doctrine essentially mystical spontaneously presented itself to the inflamed minds of fanatics, as the basis of their pretension to peculiar holiness. The assumption of possession by the Divine Spirit is made with great ease. Even the West African savages make it. Nineteenth century Americans, however, did not live in the isolation of West African savages. They could not escape from the currents of religious sentiment which came flowing down to them through the years, even if they would. We easily underestimate the force and persistency of religious tradition, especially among what we call the submerged classes; and very especially if the tradition be in any degree fanatical and if it has been distilled into the blood through the experience of some form of persecution. The English sectaries of the seventeenth century were still living beneath the skins of many nineteenth century Americans; and there could be found inheritances even from radical mediaeval sects, no doubt, if any one should dig deeply enough for them. Nevertheless, it was

JOHN THOMSON: PRESBYTERIAN PIONEER

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The arrival of Gov. Alexander Spotswood in Virginia (June, 1710), marks one of the important dates of colonial history. An era of unprecedented growth and development was now ushered in. The long nightmare of poverty, injustice and civil strife which had cursed the colony from the first day at Cape Henry had passed forever.¹ The new governor was a young man of thirty-four, but he was a veteran of Marlborough's campaign and a favorite of Queen Anne. He justified the high hopes of his admirers.² He was the most popular of all our royal governors, save Botetourt, and the ablest executive, without exception.³

It was Spotswood's good fortune to come after the Indian peril had passed. The spreading plantations of Tidewater were now as secure as the farms of England. The painted savages had at last retired sullenly behind the lofty, mountain barrier.⁴

At the dawn of the Eighteenth Century there were 80,000 people in Virginia, seated wholly along the sinuous, tidal rivers that make into the land from Chesapeake Bay. In 1717 population had leaped to 100,000, and in 1750 the number climbed to 285,000. In less than two generations there was a growth of 350 per cent, and the area covered by the settlements showed an even greater relative increase.⁵ Beyond the falls of the Potomac, Rappahannock, James and Nottaway lay the largest area of fertile and unoccupied land, secure from Indian outrage, to be found in all America. Nor was this

¹Virginia Under the Stuarts, T. J. Wertenbaker.

²Appleton's Cyclopaedia of Amer. Biography.

³Virginia, John Esten Cooke.

⁴History of Virginia, Charles C. Campbell.

⁵Virginia Counties, Morgan P. Robinson.

all, for the long hunters told of vast and rich lands that lay beyond the Blue Wall, of rivers with French names, of boundless plains, of inland seas, and of French soldiers, trappers, hunters, monks and traders forever journeying back and forth in their canoes from Quebec to Louisiana.⁷

In 1716 Spotswood made a picturesque journey over the Blue Ridge into the valley beyond. He called the river he discovered the "Euphrates," but the long hunters had known it for years by the Indian name, "Shenandoah," "Beautiful Daughter of the Stars."⁸

Ten years later (1726) the first log cabin was built in the Valley by a Welshman from Pennsylvania, Morgan Morgan. He was soon followed by increasing multitudes of Germans and Scotch-Irish.⁹

Since 1704 Ulstermen had been seeking the colonies in great numbers. Petty English officials made life unendurable with the Test Act, and restraints upon trade, and extortionate taxation; especially in County Antrim. "In the years which followed the Antrim evictions 30,000 Protestants left Ulster for a land where there was no legal robbery and where those who sowed the seed could reap the harvest."¹⁰ From 1729 to 1750 it is estimated that 12,000 came annually from Ulster to America.¹¹

Philadelphia was the favorite port of debarkation. The Pennsylvania authorities encouraged settlements of Scotch-Irish along the western and southern borders of that colony as an insurance against the Indians and the Catholics of Maryland.¹² The richest lands along the Susquehanna were soon patented, and Joist Hite led the first colony across the narrow neck of the Baltimore grant to the Fairfax lands of Virginia. He settled on the Opequon above Winchester.¹³

⁷First Explorations, Alvord and Bldgood.

⁸R. A. Brock, Letters of Spotswood.

⁹F. L. Hawks, History of Prot. Episcopal Church in Virginia.

¹⁰James Anthony Froude.

¹¹W. W. Henry, "Scotch-Irish of the South."

¹²Ellis and Evans, History of Lancaster Co., Pennsylvania.

¹³Sam'l Kercheval, History of the Valley.

See Howe's Virginia, R. R. Howison's History of Virginia and Graham's Planting of Presbyterianism in the Northern Neck.

The first meeting-house south of the Potomac and west of the Ridge was probably built at Tuscarora, near Martinsburg, West Virginia. This log cabin was the mother church of Southern Presbyterianism.⁷ As one stands on the portal of the present stone church at Tuscarora the Valley of the Potomac falls away and in the dim distance the western slope of the Blue Ridge mounts upon the horizon. On a clear day the observatory at Pen-Mar is plainly visible. The pioneers at Tuscarora were still within sight of their Pennsylvania brethren.

The economic expansion of Virginia was most flattering, but the spiritual condition of the people was appalling. Religion was well nigh extinct as a vital force. In Eastern Virginia the Established Church was confessedly inadequate. Long settled communities were entirely without the benefits of clergy. Churches were few; clergymen were scarcer than the churches, and many of them bore reputations that were not above reproach. The noble apostles of early Virginia like Hunt and Whittaker had left no successors.¹

There should by all means have been a bishop in Virginia. But whenever it was suggested the Burgesses would not hear of it. They feared, and not without reason, that a bishop would be but another excuse for ruinous taxation. Yet an Episcopate without a bishop is like a body without a head.²

West of the Blue Ridge conditions were worse than in the east, though with more excuse. Not until 1740 did the first pastor arrive and for many years after the destitutions were acute.

The first clergyman to penetrate the western wilderness was Rev. Samuel Gelston, whom Donegal Presbytery sent to Opequon in 1736. His visit was brief, but it shows that Donegal Presbytery had an interest in the Virginia pioneers who had so recently left their borders.³

When Presbytery met the following year (September 2,

⁷This statement is disputed, but it is upheld by excellent authority—

¹History of the Church in Virginia.

²F. L. Hawks.

³Graham, Planting of Presbyterianism in Northern Neck.

1737), a petition pleading for ministers was received from the Scotch-Irish settlement at Beverley Manor, near Staunton, then in Orange county. The petition was drawn and presented by John Caldwell, the maternal grandfather of John C. Calhoun.⁴

Presbytery received the petition hospitably, and there was certainly one member of the court who heard Caldwell's appeal with keen and sympathetic interest—Rev. John Thomson. He promptly proposed that a member of Presbytery be sent to the "back parts of Virginia." Presbytery heartily agreed and appointed John Thomson to make the long and hazardous journey. But the following winter was unusually severe and "provender was scarce," so the Presbytery at the next meeting excused him.⁵

But Thomson was in earnest and the following winter (1738) he travelled up the Shenandoah, crossed the Ridge at Rock Fish Gap into Piedmont Virginia, and crossed the James to the tobacco fields of the Southside. Caldwell was now promoting a Scotch-Irish colony along Cub Creek in the back parts of Brunswick and Amelia counties, which had recently been organized from the vast boundaries of Prince George.¹ No doubt the movements of the pioneer clergyman were directed by the influential layman.

John Thomson, the first missionary in Southern Presbyterian history (save only the Makemie group), was a native of Ireland. He was educated at the University of Edinburgh and graduated with the degrees of M. A. and D. V. M. He came to New York (1715) with his wife and infant child.²

The Presbytery, to whom he presented his credentials, recommended him to the congregation at Lewes, Delaware, and they presented a call for his services through their commissioner, William Shackland, the following year (1716). He was soon ordained and installed (1717). The prospects at this little village, that straggled away into the marshes behind Cape Henlopen, were far from flattering. "The Presbyterians and Churchmen had attempted to do something, but the people

⁴Waddell History of Augusta Co.

⁵Rd. Webster, "History of Presbyterian Church in America."

¹Brunswick in 1732; Amelia in 1735: Robinson.

²Explication of Shorter Catechism by John Thomson.

being poor and the pension small they gave out for want of pay." Nevertheless, John Thomson held on for twelve years and such success crowned his efforts that a brick church was built (1723). He was forced to resign at last (1729) for "want of support."³

Thomson first became prominent in the synod by bringing forward a resolution (1727) advocating the adoption of the Westminster standards as the creed of the Presbyterian Church in America. Our church previously had no creed. The same discussion in Ireland had led to an unfortunate schism. The Adopting Act was bitterly opposed by some of the most influential members of synod. Especially were the New England clergymen hostile. The venerable and influential Jedediah Andrews was opposed to the Adopting Act, as "tending toward schism." After two years of discussion the Act was passed and from that day to this the Presbyterian Church in America has retained its creed practically without change.⁴

After leaving Lewes Thomson preached for a time at Newcastle, Del.,⁵ and then accepted a call to Middle Octarora, Lancaster county, Pa. This was a small church composed of poor Scotch-Irish immigrants recently arrived.⁶ It was organized in 1727. Thomson's pastorate there was brief and full of trouble, and he soon moved across Lancaster county to Chestnut Level (1732). While at Lewes, Thomson became a charter member of New Castle Presbytery. While at Chestnut Level he became a charter member of Donegal Presbytery. He was also a charter member of synod, organized in 1717, immediately after his installation at Lewes.

Thomson's financial embarrassments had now become so distressing that Donegal Presbytery ordered a collection taken in all the churches for his relief (1733). He placed upon record his appreciation of same, and in later years he took collections for the benefit of the pastors of struggling Virginia churches.⁷

³Webster.

⁴E. H. Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church.

⁵Samuel Davies was at this time a child of five.

⁶Ellis and Evans.

⁷W. H. Foote, Sketches of Virginia.

Meantime synod was considering the condition of the Scotch-Irish pioneers in the Shenandoah Valley. Rev. James Anderson, one of the most influential ministers in synod, perhaps the most influential, a strong friend of Thomson and a protagonist with him for the Adopting Act, was appointed by synod to visit Gov. Gooch in behalf of their upland brethren. Gooch received Anderson politely and made a discreet reply, which synod chose to consider eminently satisfactory.² While on this visit to Virginia Anderson visited Col. John Lewis and preached the first sermon in Augusta county.³

It was evidently the intention of the fathers that Anderson should be a second Makemie. He was ordained by Irvine Presbytery as an evangelist to Virginia (1708), the year of Makemie's death. The young man arrived at Hobbs Hole⁴ the following spring, but did not like the prospects. Now in all fairness it must be said that the country around Hobbs' Hole is much more charming than the painfully homely name would suggest. Anderson was a valuable man. Nine years after Lord Cornbury had Makemie in jail for preaching in a private house in New York, Anderson was using the City Hall for public worship (1717). He left New York for Donegal, Pa., where he was pastor when he made his famous visit to Virginia. He died soon after (1740), one of the most respected of our early pastors.⁵

Gelston and Anderson were but transitory visitors, not so John Thomson. As a result of his first visit Opequon invited him to become their pastor. He asked presbytery to release him from his pastorate at Chestnut Level, that he might move to Virginia—possibly to accept the Opequon call; or, more probably, that he might do a larger evangelistic work in the South. Presbytery declined his request, but spent a whole day discussing the spiritual condition of Virginia; and especially the urgent appeals that had come from Beverley Manor. "Mr. Thomson expressed his willingness, in some degree, to be of service to that people if the Lord should be pleased to call

²Thos. C. Johnson, *Virginia Presbyterianism and Religious Liberty*.

³Waddell.

⁴Now Tappahannock, Va.

⁵Alfred Nevin, *Presbyterian Encyclopaedia*.

him thereto, and if other difficulties in the way be surmounted. Presbytery looked upon him as a very fit person for the great undertaking."¹

It was at this meeting of presbytery that John Thomson introduced to presbytery our first candidate for the gospel ministry—Alexander McDowell. He was a young Ulsterman whom Thomson had discovered during his first missionary journey. McDowell was licensed the following year (1740), and ordained as an evangelist to Virginia. Presbytery placed him over North Mountain, James River, Rockfish Gap, Joy Creek, Bush Mountain, South Branch of Potomac and the Marsh (Maryland)—rather a small parish for a young and inexperienced preacher! McDowell spent his life chiefly in Delaware, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.²

Just what the "other difficulties" may have been we do not know, but they were not insurmountable for John Thomson promptly returned to Virginia. The abounding success that followed him wherever he went, his ability to cope with the difficulties of frontier life, his long and arduous labors as missionary, evangelist, pastor, author, educator and presbyter make him a conspicuous figure of colonial days. It is to regret that his name and fame have become obscured. It is now too late to secure a detailed account of his many activities.³

There is no record that he preached at Tuscarora. But it is unlikely that he omitted that historic church. He preached at "Salem Chapel," now Cook Creek Church, in Rockingham county.¹ He visited Beverley Manor, and they urged him to become their pastor. But Thomson felt the call of distant regions and so he pointed his friends there to his protegee, John Craig. Accordingly Robert Doak and Donald Dennison declared to Donegal Presbytery (September, 1740) in the name of the congregation of Shenandoah their adherence to a call made to Mr. Craig.²

¹Webster.

²Gillett.

³Even Alfred Nevin spells his name incorrectly.

¹Manual, Cook Creek Church, S. B. Hannah.

²See Waddell, Foote, Webster and Nevin, but these authorities do not agree as to dates. Waddell is probably the most accurate.

John Craig was born in County Antrim, Ireland, (1709). He, too, was educated at Edinburgh. He came to America and landed at New Castle, Delaware, (August 17, 1734). He presented his credentials, but there had arisen in the little synod strong and determined opposition to the reception of the young Scotch-Irish preachers that were constantly coming to America looking for "livings." This was the nascent New Side platform. John Craig, an educated young man of 25, found no church open to him, but he found a home at Chestnut Level with John Thomson, the Old Side champion. Here he spent three valuable years teaching school and awaiting his chance to preach the Gospel to a sin-driven world.

The Presbyterian system has always been distressingly awkward in supplying its vacant churches. The most casual perusal of these lines shows the weakness of the colonial church. Vast populations are pleading piteously for the Water of Life—numbers of fine Scotch and Irish lads, well educated in the Scotch universities, eager to go into active service and reap the over-ripened harvest of souls are asking only a modest "living." Yet despite the brainy and experienced men who sat in presbyteries and synod, supply and demand could not be made to articulate. If one is disposed to criticize the fathers for a lack of common sense he should not be hasty, for exactly the same condition (with far less excuse), exists in the Presbyterian Church to this good day. We have come a long way and advanced not a step!

John Craig was licensed in 1738. Two more years passed. Still no pulpit for patient John Craig. There is, perhaps, one extenuating circumstance. The record nowhere intimates that Craig was filling Thomson's pulpit while Thomson was engaged in his long missionary tours. One might be permitted to suggest that such was the case. If so, John Craig was a pastor, at least by proxy.

When, therefore, the hungry sheep of Beverley Manor asked for a pastor it was natural that Thomson should recommend to them the fine, young Ulsterman at Chestnut Level. Craig was ordained (September 3, 1740, or thereabout), lived, labored, married, built the Old Stone Church at Augusta, organized the equally famous Tinking Spring, and died just before the Revo-

lution (April 22, 1774), after a pastorate of thirty-four years. John Craig takes rank as the first pastor of the Southern Presbyterian Church (save the Makemie group, which had ceased to exist in Virginia).

When Thomson had thus provided for his friends at Beverley Manor, far better than he could have guessed, he journeyed to the smiling valleys of Piedmont Virginia. Five years previously one Michael Woods, father of a numerous and distinguished progeny, had arrived from Ireland and settled on an immense grant at Woods' Gap.¹ To these Presbyterians Thomson suggested Rev. Samuel Black as a likely young preacher. Black was preaching to a small and poverty-stricken congregation of Ulster immigrants at the Brandywine. But the Old Side-New Side controversy had begun to rage in his little congregation. Some liked Black, but the New Side party declared that he was neither evangelical nor aggressive. It must be confessed that Black was not of the calibre of either Thomson or Craig. He came to Woods' Gap and continued until 1759. He died in 1770.² It was not every man who could cope with frontier life. It takes a positive character to deal with Presbyterians—a more positive character to deal with Virginia Presbyterians—a most positive character to deal with Scotch-Irish, Virginia Presbyterians; and a most emphatically positive character to deal with Scotch-Irish Presbyterians living on the frontiers of Virginia in the middle of the Eighteenth Century. The lambs of his flock were much too wild for Samuel Black.

From the shadow of the mighty mountains Thomson turned to the tobacco plantations of the Southside. Cub Creek and Buffalo enjoyed his ministry. These tobacco lands were but sparsely settled; indeed, they are but sparsely settled at this day. But they had attracted a very superior class of immigrants, both from the lower plantations and from abroad. To them Thomson introduced his son-in-law, Richard Sankey,¹ Zanke² or Sanckey.³ Sankey's story runneth with the others.

¹ Foote.

² Webster.

¹ A. J. Morrison, Board of Trustees, Hampden-Sidney College.

² W. H. Foote.

³ E. H. Gillett.

Born in Ireland, educated at Edinburgh, migrated to the colonies, member of Donegal Presbytery, Old Side leader, and pastor for a while at Carlisle, Pa. After Braddock's defeat many of his former Pennsylvania friends followed Sankey to this section of Virginia and their children may still be found along the Buffalo and other valleys of Prince Edward and adjoining counties.⁴

In his later years Sankey became an ardent advocate of a college in Prince Edward, and when Hanover presbytery finally established Hampden-Sidney he was one of the charter trustees.

The schism of 1741 found Thomson in the saddle. The New Side leaders were particularly bitter against Thomson, Craig, Black and Sankey. Thomson had preached a sermon on "Conviction and Assurance" that Gilbert Tennent had declared to be unsound and "no better than Moravian in doctrine." And Brother Gilbert had preached a furious sermon on "Unconverted Ministry" which aroused the ire of the Conservatives. Some declared that he had John Thomson in mind, as a fearful example! That sermon was printed by Benjamin Franklin in his print shop in Philadelphia, and its faded pages may still be read in the Congressional Library at Washington. These were indeed dark and troubled days, as the Old Side protest truly put it, "dreadful convulsions have already seized the infant church. She is in danger of expiring outright."⁵ It is a pleasure to add that six years later Tennent quoted Thomson at length and most favorably. The breach between these two noble men was healed.

Thomson's intense and practical interest in education was manifested when he brought forward a resolution for the establishment of a church school (1739). Like many another good plan this died in the hands of a committee. After the schism it was resurrected (1743) and a school was established at New London, Pa., to the support of which the churches made annual contributions—an ancient plan to which the church has again returned. This was in the best sense a free school, education without fees being given in languages, philos-

⁴Webster.

⁵The Protest was probably written by Thomson.

ophy and divinity. Rev. Alex. McDowell was, for a time, the headmaster of this school.¹

In the later years of his life Thomson made his home with Richard Sankey in Prince Edward county. Here he established a school for the young men of the "back parts of Virginia." It attained large success.² Some of the lads rode thirty miles to attend, others built cabins and cooked their own food in their eagerness to learn. In a rough way this school might be called a forerunner of Hampden-Sidney College, as the log school at Neshaminy was a forerunner of Princeton.

The financial embarrassments of Thomson's early days had now passed. He patented a large boundary of land which he called "Cork," a name very Irish, if not very Presbyterian. For six generations this plantation was held by the descendants of Thomson. It is now the property of Edward Shorter in Prince Edward county.³

Not until 1744 was Thomson formally released from his pastorate at Chestnut Level; and even after his removal to Virginia that congregatoin tried to secure his return. This same year (1744) a petition was received from "many people" in the Scotch-Irish districts of North Carolina, pleading their spiritual destitutions, and begging that some one be appointed to correspond with them.⁴ Thomson had sufficient experience with frontier life to know that the Carolina folk needed more than letters, so he went to them promptly. From his first visit the growing church of Carolina was much upon his heart. He made a second tour (1749), during which he met a young Scotchman, aged twenty-three, who was serving as a clerk in Virginia, but who felt impelled to preach the Gospel. The young man's name was Henry Patillo.¹ Thomson encouraged him and suggested that he finish his education in Pennsylvania. Patillo actually started for the northern colony but was detained by a serious illness. At the psychological moment he

¹E. H. Gillett.

²Rev. Vernon I'Anson, a direct descendant of Thomson.

³I'Anson.

⁴W. H. Foote's Sketches of North Carolina.

¹W. H. Foote.

met that other young giant, Samuel Davies, who was preaching on the Roanoke river. The discovery of Henry Patillo and the encouragement he gave him to devote his life to active ministry was one of the most potent influences for good in all Thomson's long and useful life.

This same year (1749), Thomson published "An Explication of the Shorter Catechism." It is a neat volume of some 200 pages bound in pasteboard and leather. There is not much original work in the "Explication," but the Foreword is very suggestive. The author laments the decay of religion, especially in the "back parts of Virginia." The "Explication" was published at Williamsburg by the famous Virginia printer, William Parks. It takes rank as the first book written by a Presbyterian in the South. It laid the foundation for the great and growing literature of our Church.²

Before he came South Thomson had written a book on the "Government of the Church," a tract on "Adoption of the Standards of the Church of Scotland," and an "Examination of the New Brunswick Apology." There was also the famous sermon on "Conviction and Assurance." In later years he put forth a volume of sermons called the "Orphan's Legacy."

The synod of 1750 was enlivened by the appeal of a broken-hearted young woman. A young man, and a Presbyterian young man at that, had promised to marry her, and then, for shame! he changed his mind. But she was Scotch, and so was for holding him to it with characteristic tenacity. They agreed to lay their quarrel before synod. Consider what a precedent! If all the whispered vows, the broken promises, the wounded affections of all Presbyterian men and maids were laid before the Synod of Virginia, ah, I fear me, synod would never adjourn! But consider how interesting the docket would be! Synod heard the complaint gravely and decided that the scamp should be censured. They appointed Brother Thomson to do

²Dr. Craighead wrote "The only known copy of this book is now in the possession of Rev. B. M. Smith, professor at Hampden-Sidney." There are at least two other copies. One is in the Congressional Library at Washington, the other is owned by the writer.

³Dr. P'Anson.

so. This our stern hero did. The youth took his medicine bravely—but he never married the maid.¹

There were many happy indications that the Old Side and the New Side were approaching reunion. Samuel Davies, the brilliant and popular New Light in Hanover county, spoke in the highest terms of his veteran neighbor. "Thomson," he wrote, "acknowledged that the Revival had done much good in Hanover and rejoiced in the prosperity of religion."² Just before his death John Thomson made a long journey to Philadelphia to help heal the unfortunate breach. But it was not given him to see it.

On a visit to North Carolina (1753) he died and was buried in the graveyard of Centre Church, near Mooresville, where he awaits the call of the Angel of the Resurrection.³

¹Lexington (Va.) News, quoted by Presbyterian of South—October, 1916.

²Davies letter to Bellamy.

³So all the authorities except Dr. Alexander who wrote, "He Lies in the Buffalo Church-yard without a Stone." The History of Centre Church says, "It is worthy of notice that Rev. John Thomson, the first missionary in these parts died two years before McAdden passed and and repassed within two miles of his grave. McAdden occupied several of his stations but never alludes to him."—B. S. Templeton.