

MINUTES

OF THE

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-NINTH ANNUAL SESSION

OF THE

South Carolina Annual
Conference

OF THE

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH

HELD IN DILLON, SOUTH CAROLINA
DECEMBER 3-7, 1924

EDITED AND PUBLISHED FOR THE CONFERENCE BY
WM. V. DIBBLE AND W. A. BECKHAM

Southern Christian Advocate Print

BISHOP JAMES ATKINS, D.D.

"God buries His workmen, but carries on His work."

This familiar epigram has a remarkable illustration in connection with the story before us. For several years Rev. Wellborn Davies Kirkland, D.D., was editor of the Southern Christian Advocate. His brilliant editorial ability manifested in that position attracted the attention of the Church at large. It was not surprising, therefore, that at the General Conference of 1894 he was elected Sunday School Editor of our Church. There was a general feeling of gratification and great things were expected. The high hopes inspired by this election, however, were doomed to early disappointment, for in the spring of 1896 Doctor Kirkland was called to his eternal reward.

In June of that year the Book Committee elected Rev. James Atkins, D.D., to the position made vacant by the death of Doctor Kirkland. Doctor Atkins was reelected to the position by the General Conference of 1898 and also by the General Conference of 1902. He was elected Bishop by the General Conference of 1906.

James Atkins was born in Knox county, Tennessee, about eleven miles from the present city of Knoxville, April 18, 1850. His father, Dr. James Atkins, was born in South Carolina and was a man of unusual ability. He was for many years a leader in the Holston Conference. The following tribute is found in Dr. R. N. Price's "Holston Methodism:" "James Atkins, Sr., father of Bishop Atkins, was a remarkable man. His scholarship was accurate and his elocution almost perfect. He was greatly above mediocrity as a preacher—argumentative, fluent, impassioned. Emotional himself, he usually produced emotion, if not positive excitement, in his congregations. He was a great revivalist."

After thirty-four years of service in the Holston Conference, he was transferred to the Baltimore Conference, and later on to the Little Rock Conference, and later still to the Florida Conference, rendering acceptable service in all fields to which he was assigned.

Bishop Atkins' mother, whose maiden name was Jackson, belonged to a family of great prominence and influence. From all accounts, she must have been a woman of unusual ability and excellent Christian character.

The son of such excellent parentage and surrounded with such wholesome influence, young James Atkins entered life with high ideals and holy purposes. Considering the vantage ground from which he moved, his splendid career was not at all surprising. Most of his boyhood days were spent on a farm near Riceville, McMinn county, Tennessee. Here he obtained his early educational training at the Riceville Academy. In 1866 Dr. James Atkins moved with his family to Emory, Virginia, where he remained for three years. During this period James Atkins, Jr., was a student at Emory and Henry College. Of his experience here he wrote in his Journal: "My progress at College was moderate. If I had been as fond of science, philosophy and the languages as I was of certain objects of social interest in the community, I might have become distinguished in letters."

It was during his stay at Emory that young Atkins was converted, the revival in which he entered into this gracious experience being conducted by Rev. John Boring, who, though a man of family, was then a student in the College.

Owing to his father's financial embarrassment, James Atkins, Jr., was compelled to abandon his College career temporarily and go out to work for his own support. He spent a few months as teacher in a rural school in East Tennessee. In the Autumn of 1870 he was elected principal of Blue Springs Academy, six miles South of Cleveland, Tennessee. On October 31 of that year the quarterly conference of Cleveland charge, of which his father was pastor, granted him license to preach. A few weeks later he was appointed junior preacher under Rev. W. H. Pyott on the Cleveland circuit. The Academy of which he was principal, being located within the bounds of this charge, he was able to fill both positions. In the Autumn of 1871 he returned to Emory and Henry in order to complete his collegiate education. Among his fellow-students were Dr. S. A. Steel and Dr. S. H. Werlein, both of whom testify to his brilliance as a student and generosity and fidelity as a friend.

Sometime after leaving college he received from Emory and Henry the degree of Master of Arts and in 1890 Trinity College conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

He was admitted on trial in the Holston Conference in the Autumn of 1872. On September 14, 1876, during the second year as pastor at Ashville, Doctor Atkins was married to Miss Ella M. Branner, a most admirable and attractive woman. Of this union four children were born: Mary Lyons, Love Branner, James and Hilliard. Mary Lyons, who is said to have been a very bright and beautiful girl, died at the early age of thirteen years. The second daughter, Love Branner, whose noble Christian character and loyal devotion furnished a perpetual source of joy and comfort to her father, is the wife of our present General Sunday School Secretary, Dr. John W. Shackford. The two sons are in business at Waynesville, N. C., and are active members of the church and are highly respected citizens.

Bishop Atkins was a strong, clear and logical preacher, though his style was not attractive to the frivolous and thoughtless multitude.

Dr. E. B. Chappell, the present editor of our Sunday School literature, has the following to say of the preaching of Bishop Atkins: "He was argumentative and expository rather than prophetic. Those who were intimate with him in private life knew that he was deeply emotional. He was readily moved to tears by any touching story or incident. But he seldom showed emotion in public utterance. He seemed to think that if he could make truth clear to his hearers, the desired spiritual impression would follow as a natural consequence. Accordingly his method was generally that of clear analysis and logical presentation rather than emotional appeal. Of course, however, this is to be taken as a general statement to which there were many exceptions. There were times when his logic was shot through with a spiritual fervor that made it glow like fire in a furnace, but even then he was still the teacher with a truth

to make clear rather than the orator concerned primarily for emotional results."

Bishop Atkins was endowed with an unusual capacity for leadership. He had the prophetic vision, and coupled with this was a living faith in God and in the reality and ultimate triumph of spiritual forces. This happy combination produced a conquering optimism that made success possible. At times he was such a daring dreamer that even his friends distrusted his judgment, fearing he would plunge the Church into impossible enterprises. The outcome, however, usually justified the effort. He dreamed of a great Methodist educational institution in Texas, and the Southern Methodist University at Dallas with its two thousand students and its valuable equipment is the realization. He dreamed many years ago of the establishment of an institution in the mountains of North Carolina that would afford a Summer resort where Southern Methodists might combine wholesome recreation, Christian fellowship, and religious education. The Summer Assembly at Lake Junaluska is the realization of this dream.

Bishop Atkins was a leader in the great Centenary Movement, and to him we owe that remarkable sentence that gripped the minds and hearts of Southern Methodists so at the launching of this great enterprise: "When two million Methodist advance upon their knees upon any task it shall be done."

Doubtless the greatest service Bishop Atkins rendered the Church was in the field of religious education. For ten successive years he was President of Asheville Female College. In 1889 he was called to the Presidency of his Alma Mater, Emory and Henry College, serving in this capacity for four years; after which he returned to the Asheville Female College where he served until his election as Sunday School Editor. To this field of Christian Education as presented in the great Sunday school work of our Church Doctor Atkins brought the happy combination of vision and task. Only this combination can bring the larger success; for the vision without the task makes one a visionary; and the task without the vision makes life a drudgery. Doctor Atkins' Administration as Sunday School Editor produced a great forward movement in this Department of our Church. He sought the best equipped men in America to put in charge of the Teacher-Training Work, and found such a man in the late Dr. H. M. Hamill. As a result the Southern Methodist Church became a leader in this vital interest.

Dr. Atkins' book, "The Kingdom in the Cradle," marked an epoch in Sunday school activity. A few years before the appearance of this book, Horace Bushnell, in his volume entitled "Christian Nurture," had taken an extreme position on educational evangelism when he said: "The child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself to be otherwise." The older view was that the child needed to be soundly converted as did adults and that this was to be a cataclysmic process.

Perhaps the truth lies in the happy medium. The child needs conversion, but child conversion is not the same as adult conversion. Psychology is giving a new view of childhood. The child is born into the world a bundle of instincts and impulses, tendencies and powers, and these are destined to play an important part in the child's development.

He comes to us bearing the marks of a great past, and containing limitless possibilities of good and evil. These instincts and impulses soon develop into spiritual hunger. Now religious education takes this child and seeks to stimulate the good and eliminate the bad, and by a process of instruction and guidance, always under the supernatural factor of Divine Grace, it strives to make religion function as an integral part of the growing individual.

Bishop Atkins presided at two sessions of the South Carolina Conference—the one held in Florence beginning November 29, 1916; and the one held in Bishopville beginning November 21, 1917. His fairness and courtesy made him an admirable presiding officer. His wise head and quiet demeanor enabled him to transact much business in a limited time and with little noise and confusion. He never took advantage of his exalted position to hurt any brother, however humble the brother might be.

Bishop Atkins was twice married. As noted above he was married on September 14, 1876, to Miss Ella M. Branner, who died August 3, 1916. His second marriage was on June 7, 1921, to Miss Eva Rhodes.

There is a peculiar pathos connected with the last days of Bishop Atkins. He was in failing health when he went to his last round of Conferences. Members of the North Arkansas and the Little Rock Conferences testify to the fine Christian spirit manifested by the Bishop in his last visits to them. On Sunday evening, December 2, 1923, he performed his last act of public service by reading the appointments of the Little Rock Conference. Soon after this he was stricken with paralysis, remaining unconscious until 10:30 p. m. on Wednesday, December 5, when he quietly slipped away to the Eternal Home.

The funeral services were held at Waynesville, N. C., on Friday, December 7, 1923. The services were conducted by Bishop W. A. Candler, D.D., LL.D., assisted by Rev. J. T. Mangum, Dr. George R. Stuart, Dr. E. B. Chappell, J. R. Pepper and R. S. Howie.

An immense concourse of people attended the funeral, filling all available space in the church and Sunday school room and also the church yard.

"He fails who climbs to power and place
Up the pathway of disgrace.
He fails not who makes truth his cause,
Nor bends to win the crowd's applause.
He fails not, who stakes his all
Upon the right, and dares to fall;—
What though the living bless or blame,
For him the long success of fame."

WATSON B. DUNCAN.

ROBERT WALTER BARBER

May 3, 1847-March 25, 1924 mark the earthly pathway of Robert Walter Barber, a man of God and one greatly beloved among us.

Brother Barber was the son of William G. Barber and Alice Cloud Barber in whose veins was a mingling of English, Scotch and French blood. Here was a home like the home of one in the long ago of whose parents it was said "Both of them were righteous." Some one has said of his home "This was the kind that made for honesty and obedience to the highest and best." Made up of six boys and one girl it can easily be believed that here was a place brim full of life and energy and of these happy days the object of this sketch, who was the youngest of the household, enjoyed speaking more than of any other feature of his early life. His parents were true members of the church and regular in their attendance and under these strong, helpful Christian surroundings young Robert grew to early manhood.

He was born and reared in Chester county near the village of Wellridge, about twelve miles from the town of Chester and in his early boyhood connected himself with the Methodist church.

He was well in his "teens" when the civil war came on and called his father and several of his brothers into service. The last six months of the war found this mere boy on duty as guardsman in the town of Florence. In spite of the hardships that were everywhere experienced in those days young Barber entered Wofford College and pressed forward to graduation. These college days were great days with him and with great delight he afterward looked back to them. His interest in education never failed, showing itself in the fact that he was a student to the last and was always interested in the intellectual welfare of the young. When quite sick in 1896, while pastor at Branchville, he said that one reason he hoped to get well was that he might live to see his children all educated. During his senior year at Wofford he heard and answered the call to preach and was granted license by the East Chester circuit, Rev. Sidi H. Browne being the presiding elder, August 26, 1871.

Before entering the Conference he taught a year, 1872, in the Williamston Female College—now changed to the Lander College—and then during his first year as a member of the Conference he was again professor in the same institution. During the days of his professorship in the Williamston Female College there was in one of the classes a splendid young woman who bore the name of Mamie A. Hill, the daughter of Maj. C. B. Hill of Greenville. When she completed her Sophomore year she and the young preacher were happily married by Rev. J. K. McCain, December 23, 1874 and for thirty-eight years moved together here and there according to the law of our church proving themselves a blessing to the communities in which the church placed them.

Some of his fields of labor were as follows: Pickens circuit, Cokesbury station, Cane Creek circuit, Rock Hill, Orangeburg, North Laurens circuit, Seneca circuit, Westminster circuit, Manning Station, Brightsville circuit, Little Rock circuit, Branchville circuit, Williamston, Tim-