

Journal

OF THE

North Carolina Annual Conference

SOUTHEASTERN JURISDICTION

OF

The Methodist Church

Edited for the Conference by

W. CARLETON WILSON

Saint James Methodist Church

Tarboro, N. C.

HAY STREET METHODIST CHURCH

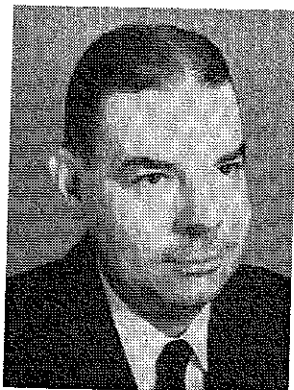
FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

June 27-30, 1955

SEYMOUR ESMOND MERCER

1906-1954

The earthly pilgrimage of Seymour Esmond Mercer began in a parsonage in Red Springs, N. C., November 1, 1906, and ended in a parsonage at Zebulon, N. C., November 22, 1954. He filled to the full these forty-eight years with rich living,



faithful preaching, loving service, and a shining example of unusual fortitude and sunniness in the midst of almost constant physical suffering. Never strong physically, being a victim of rheumatoid arthritis since five years of age, yet he toiled courageously and redemptively without murmur or complaint. Indeed, rarely, if ever, has it been given unto us to witness in a life more of consecration and determination to live and serve than that possessed by our friend and brother.

S. E., as he was known to his friends, received a good ministerial heritage at birth. His father, the Reverend Saul Erastus Mercer, a leading member of our Conference, who died in 1928, served as a pastor, college president, and presiding elder. His mother, Mrs. Ethel Waldo Thompson Mercer, who died in 1924, was a person of rare Christian graces and many labors of love, though a total invalid for fourteen years before her death. His maternal grandfather, the Reverend J. E. Thompson, was an honored member of our Conference for a long number of years. Other kinsmen have been, or are now, members of our Conference. In every manner, S. E. enhanced the splendid preaching heritage that was his!

He was licensed to preach on July 2, 1925, by the Durham District Conference, held at Fletcher's Chapel. He was admitted on trial in Edenton Street Methodist Church, Raleigh, in 1927, where his father was admitted on trial thirty years before. He was ordained a deacon in 1929 and an elder in 1931. During the twenty-seven years of his ministry, he served four pastoral charges, as follows: Elm City, 1927-1931; Stantonsburg, 1931-1936; Franklinton, 1936-1949; Zebulon-Wendell, 1949-1954. He had just begun his sixth year on the Zebulon-Wendell charge when a heart attack closed his earthly labors.

He was a good gospel preacher. His messages were of high quality, illustrated largely from the Bible, and Christ-centered. He did not waste time in the pulpit reviewing current events or in a running account of mundane chitchat. With clarity, forcefulness, and earnestness, he proclaimed the good news of God in Christ. His preaching was for a verdict—for all to accept Christ—and many there were who responded. He spoke truth in love. He denounced social evils. He was a positive foe to the degrading liquor traffic. With unusual winsomeness and attractiveness, he called sinners to repentance. His preparation was both of the heart and mind, and his hearers knew they were receiving fresh news from God.

He was an excellent pastor. His loving pastoral care greatly endeared him to his people. Though he experienced difficulty in getting in and out of his car, and up and down steps, he visited faithfully and consistently in every home of his congregations. By day and by night, he gave himself without reserve to the arduous but rewarding labors of pastoral visiting. He wanted to be with his people in all their experiences. He loved little children and neglected not the aged. Because he was a good shepherd to all, multitudes now call him blessed.

He was an efficient administrator of church affairs. Under his leadership, all Kingdom causes prospered. He gave personal and careful attention to the entire program of the church. Reports from his charges were uniformly good. He left every charge he served stronger in every way than when he went to the charge—new buildings were erected, physical properties were renovated, indebtedness was liquidated, memberships were increased, sinners were converted, and believers were strengthened in their faith and service. He labored faithfully in the fields white unto harvest; and

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of S. E. On July 2, 1925, by the Durham District Conference, he was admitted on trial in Edenton Street Methodist Church, his father was admitted on trial thirty years before. He became an elder in 1931. During the twenty-seven years of his pastoral charges, as follows: Elm City, 1927-1931; Zebulon, 1936-1949; Zebulon-Wendell, 1949-1954. He was in charge of the Zebulon-Wendell charge when a heart attack

struck him. His messages were of high quality, illustrated by pictures. He did not waste time in the pulpit review of the account of mundane chitchat. With clarity, forcefulness, and the good news of God in Christ. His preaching was Christ—and many there were who responded. He dealt with the social evils. He was a positive foe to the degradingness and attractiveness, he called sinners to repentance of the heart and mind, and his hearers knew the will of God.

His loving pastoral care greatly endeared him to his flock. He was usually in getting in and out of his car, and up and down stairs consistently in every home of his congregations. He was always without reserve to the arduous but rewarding duty of being with his people in all their experiences, and he did not get the aged. Because he was a good shepherd

and not just of church affairs. Under his leadership, all things were done with the personal and careful attention to the entire church. His charges were uniformly good. He left every task better than when he went to the charge—new buildings were renovated, indebtedness was liquidated, churches were converted, and believers were strengthened faithfully in the fields white unto harvest; and

at the end, when he reported his stewardship to the Lord of the harvest, he went rejoicing with his arms filled with precious sheaves.

The close friendship that S. E. and the writer sustained for each other is well known in our Conference, a friendship that stemmed from college days at Duke University—from which institution he received an A.B. degree in 1928. We were roommates in college and many times at Annual Conference sessions. We preached for each other in revival meetings and shared in each other's joys and sorrows. For over thirty years we had delightful companionship in the ministry and understanding comradeship of the heart. There were very few times, if any, during all those years that he was free of physical pain, but I never heard him complain about his infirmity or question that life was good. He always met the world with a smile, though he wore a hair shirt of suffering next to his soul. When he would get up or down, or climb or descend steps, which required the bending of joints with accompanying pain, he would always hum or whistle a tune of some great hymn, rather than give vocal expression of suffering. Even the children noticed this fact; and when one asked him why he did thus, he replied, "Sonny, it is easier to whistle than it is to grunt." What a philosophy and stewardship of suffering!

He was numbered among those who allow God to use their sufferings to His glory, their enrichment, and the inspiration of others. Their soul temples daily rise to the music of eternity. Each one of these sings,

"I will hew great windows for my soul,
Channels of splendour, portals of release;
Out of earth's prison walls will I hew them,
That my thundering soul may push through them;
Through stratas of human strife and passion
I will tunnel a way, I will carve and fashion
With the might of my soul's intensity
Windows fronting immensity,
Towering out of Time.
I will breathe the air of another clime,
That my spirit's pain may cease.
That the being of me have room to grow,
That my eyes may meet God's eyes and know,
I will hew great windows, wonderful windows,
measureless windows, for my soul."

On March 16, 1935, he married Miss Ruth Stanton of Stantonburg, N. C., who survives him. She was a most capable and devoted companion in the work of the ministry, an unfailing source of inspiration, and a tower of strength to him as he worked under large physical handicaps.

In addition to his widow, he is survived by two brothers, Almon E., of West Jefferson, N. C., and Linwood E., of Washington, N. C.; a sister, Mrs. J. W. Applewhite, Jr., of Stantonburg, N. C.; and his stepmother, Mrs. Grace Crouch Mercer, Johnson City, Tenn.

Funeral services were held on November 24, 2:00 p.m., at the Zebulon Methodist Church by the writer and the Reverend E. C. Durham, with interment following at Stantonburg, N. C. Hundreds of friends, including many of his brethren in the Conference, were present for the services.

The fellowship of our Conference is better; and the lives of its members are richer because he lived, labored, and loved in our midst—and he did all of these things well. It is quite probable that we shall not know his like again. Doubtless, God could make a more heroic spirit; but it is doubtful that He ever has. My dear friend of the years, with whom I have shared many banquets of the soul, your choice spirit now having been released from the frail body that housed it, I bid you a Christian's good night in the faith and trust that we shall greet each other again in God's morning.

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