JOURNAL

OF THE

North Alabama Conference

OF

THE METHODIST CHURCH

FOURTH SESSION

OCTOBER 28 TO NOVEMBER 1, 1942
HELD AT
CENTRAL METHODIST CHURCH
DECATUR, ALABAMA

BISHOP J. LLOYD DECELL, D.D., LL.D., President FOSTER K. GAMBLE, Secretary

Including

SPECIAL SESSION, JUNE 23, 1942

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Editorial Committee

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Rev. W. L. Spearman

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Many a man, by virtue of his skill as a writer, could excell me in writing this life-sketch of the late Rev. W. L. Spearman. But if I have been invited to write this memoir because of my knowledge of the man, because of my sincere appreciation of his character, because of my high regard for him as a Gospel minister, or because of the large estimate I place upon the results of his labors in our Lord's vineyard, then I lay humble claim to some right to pen these words.

I want, first of all, to state some of the salient biographical facts of his life. He was born June 15th, 1880, at Westover, Shelby County, Alabama, the son of J. M. and Eliza Sullivan Spearman. At the age of twenty years he joined the Methodist Protestant Church, and, four years later (1904), he was licensed to preach in this communion.

That same year marked another important date in Brother Spearman's life, for on April 24th, 1904, he married Miss Ada Sewell. Subsequent events have proved that neither he nor she erred in judgment in the choice of life's helpmeet. For thirty-eight years, lacking less than a month, they walked life's marital way together, bound by the tender yet strong ties of love and loyalty. More times than I can now recall I have heard him speak of the faithful and efficient service that Mrs. Spearman gave to him in his ministry.

Their union was blessed—and I use the word "blessed" advisedly and deliberately—with eight children, who, with Mrs. Spearman, survive him. They are: Mrs. Claude Hart, of Birmingham; Mrs. M. R. Boucher, of Altoona; Mrs. Fred Royal, of Fairfax; Mrs. D. B. Jordan, of Ashland; Mrs. Annelle Spearman, of Dadeville; C. E. Spearman, of Ashland; S. R. Spearman, of Centre, and W. L. Spearman, Jr., of Birmingham.

For a number of years Brother Spearman taught school, which doubtless accounts, at least in large measure, for the accuracy and precision, and for the attention given to important details, that so characterized his Christian ministry.

In 1918, at the session of the annual conference held at Bessemer, Alabama, he transferred his membership from the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church to the North Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and thenceforth he gave himself with unquestioned loyalty to Episcopal Methodism. He served, and served well, the following appointments: Pettusville-Boyd's Chapel, 1918-1919; Austinville, 1919-1921; Rogersville, 1921-22; Florence, North Wood Avenue, 1922-1924; Bethlehem, Jefferson County, 1924-1925; Tuscaloosa, Brandon Memorial, 1925-1927; Lanett, 1927-1929; Cherokee, 1929-1931; Ashland, 1931-1933; Camp Hill, 1933-1934; Huffman, 1934-1935; Moulton, 1935-1936; Decatur, Ninth Street, 1936-1940; Jones Memorial, 1940-1941; Gordo, 1941 until his death in 1942.

During his Decatur pastorate he suffered a very serious illness, during which his family and friends almost despaired of his life. But, to their surprise and delight, he did rally, and in a few weeks he resumed his work. And for W. L. Spearman, "resuming his work" meant putting everything he had in it. It was his nature. He might have been with us today had he not thrown himself so whole-heartedly into his work. But he disliked half-heartedness in others too much to let it find a place in his own life and ministry.

On the 29th of March, 1942, while serving his first year at Gordo, Alabama, he laid down life's tools, and joined the redeemed in that world about which he had preached to others, and for which he had made diligent preparation himself to go.

For twenty years, since the conference of 1922, I have known Brother Spearman, but for much of these two decades it was just a "conference acquaintance." Even so, his personality impressed me no little. I found him to be unvaryingly courteous, brotherly, genial, and withal manly, and my estimate of him constantly increased.

Finally, in November, 1936, our lines fell together, and for me, they fell together in pleasant places. For four years we lived and labored together in

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together, and for me, they fell ve lived and labored together in the cultured little city of Decatur, he as pastor of our Ninth Street Church, and I as the district superintendent. During these four years I really came to know the man. I studied him. I found him to be a true Christian gentleman, with the emphasis on both Christian and gentleman.

He had a remarkable four-year pastorate at Ninth Street, Decatur. Again and again I was stirred by the accomplishments of him and his people there. Under his leadership the parsonage debt was paid and the parsonage re-furnished; the church debt was paid, and the church re-decorated, inside and out; all financial obligations were paid in full every year; salaries and benevolences increased almost annually; gracious revival meetings were held each year; love gifts were presented the pastor and his family from time to time by his appreciative people; large congregations attended his services; and in every phase of the work he was a wise and consecrated spiritual leader.

At the end of his fourth year at Ninth Street we naturally and rightly discussed his appointment for the next year. Unselfishness characterized him in these discussions. This is not to say that he was indifferent to his appointment; he was not. Like any other preacher he was interested in where he and his family should live during their next pastorate, but in it all he was as unselfish as any man I have known. He desired to live where he could serve most acceptably.

As a Methodist minister he was co-operative with the general program of the Church. His Church could always count on him to do his work well. No phase of the Church's work ever lagged under his devoted ministry. I was always impressed with the evident pleasure that he got out of doing his work well. He got a spiritual thrill out of the ministry. No man enjoyed more bringing good reports to quarterly, district and annual conferences, and few men have ever brought up better reports from the charges he served. Because he was a studious and diligent preacher, a faithful and loving pastor, and a wise and alert minister and leader, it was not difficult to get his people to give him the kind of co-operation that resulted in good reports—and good reports mean progress for the Kingdom.

Brother Spearman was a good father. There is an old saying that a man is known by the company he keeps. It may rightly be said that a father is known by the family he rears. This puts Brother Spearman in the ranks of the well-nigh ideal father. He had great pride in his children, and rightly so. He was ambitious for them, and by dint of sheer sacrifice, in which his good wife loyally and joyfully shared, he gave these children the best of college advantages, and in every way fitted them for useful and important places in life—which places they are filling acceptably.

I could go on and on, and still not encroach upon good taste in too fulsome praise of this faithful servant of Jesus Christ. But I desist. Let me sum up what I have said in these words: He was a good man, a devoted father, a wise counsellor, a true friend, a strong preacher, a helpful pastor—a faithful and efficient minister of Jesus Christ. He leaves behind a record of service of which his family is proud, for which his Church is grateful, and because of which his Master will be able to say: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

God bless his widow and children and make them to continue to walk in the path he so dutifully trod, and which he so faithfully laid out for them.

His friend and brother, M. E. LAZENBY.

Rev. Richard Thomas Tyler, D.D.

Mine is an easy task. It is not difficult to write words of approbation and commendation of one whom we love and appreciate.

Richard Thomas Tyler was born of noble, God-fearing parents, who knew and loved the doctrine of our Holy Christianity. He was born March 10th, 1874, joined the North Alabama Conference in November, 1896, graduated from the Southern University in June, 1902, married Dora Garner of Huntsville, Alabama, October 31st, 1905, and entered into heavenly rest September 25th, 1942.