

THE MINUTES

—OF THE—

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL SESSION

—OF THE—

CENTRAL ALABAMA CONFERENCE,

—OF THE—

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH,

—HELD IN—

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REV. ARAD S. LAKIN, D. D.

ARAD S. LAKIN was born in Delaware county, New York, in the year 1810. His parents were pioneers in the then unsettled wilderness. So the hardiness and endurance inherited from the robust parentage was cultivated by hardy toil. Powerfully converted at the age of eighteen, he began immediately to study for the ministry, and was admitted to the New York (now New York East) Conference in 1835. With his library in his saddlebags and the forest for his school room, he laid the foundation for the superstructure which he afterward built, by constant and judicious study. Astronomy was his delight and recreation, and his knowledge of Bible Lands was so exact and minute that it was difficult for travelers to believe that he had not been over the ground in person. So singularly artless and earnest was he, that up to middle life he was known as the boy preacher—this before the term had become a hackneyed one.

In 1837 he was married to Miss Achsah Newton, the Christian teacher who had given him his first impetus toward a higher education. She was a woman of marked intellectual ability as well as of the profoundest piety, and in all the years of toil and privation incident to an itinerant's life, she was as he often said, his inspiration and his right hand in all church work. He traveled in the New York Conference twenty years, six of which were spent in New York City. In 1855, he, with his family, moved to the West and was assigned pastoral work in Indiana, by Bishop Ames.

When the war of the rebellion broke out, his whole being arose to the loftiest heights of patriotism. After rallying all the men that he could to the defense of their country, he enlisted as a private, but was immediately appointed to the chaplaincy of the 39th regiment Indiana Volunteers, which he served with such devotion and heroism that the officers and men presented him with an elegant sword as a testimonial of their appreciation. He always bore arms and was always at the front of action until the Government order prohibiting chaplains from going into battle. Yet whenever there was a break, or threatened rout in the ranks, "the old Chaplain" was invariably called to rally the men and his "Steady boys, steady," "Come boys, follow me," will be remembered by many a gray-haired veteran of to-day. When an order of such unusual danger was to be delivered that the commander would detail no orderly, but called for volunteers for what seemed almost certain death, the Chaplain invariably responded, and his firm, commanding figure and unflinching bravery elicited encomiums from friend and foe. His time of service expired in November, 1864, but he asked and obtained permission to go with Sherman "to the Sea."

On his return he joined the Cincinnati Conference and when an appeal for a ministry came up from the loyal Methodists of the South, who, in the bitterness of civil conflict, had been denied church privileges and were wandering, as they said, "as sheep without shepherds," A. S. Lakin was one of two men sent to reorganize the old church in Alabama. His co-laborer remained but a few months and the entire work then devolved upon him. The hardships and dangers of those years can never be told. Traveling on horseback over lonely mountain roads, fording rivers, swimming his horse through streams swollen by heavy rains; living on corn pone with, but often without bacon, drinking corn and rye coffee from tin cups, and sleeping on the floor of mountain cabins with his saddlebags for a pillow and his lone blanket for cover, in fact sharing to the full the lot of those to whom he ministered.

As it was the loyalists of the South who had been put out of the churches; and who had called for a ministry, and as Northern men had been sent for that purpose—there being so few on the ground with courage sufficient to face both social ostracism and personal danger—the church work necessarily assumed a political cast to the prejudiced Southern eye, though nothing could have been further from the thoughts of the faithful pastors and people.

So political hate was added to church rivalry and the leader became the target for such misrepresentation and persecution as has rarely fallen to the lot of man. Not only were his motives and acts maligned, but his life was sought by the rougher element, which was always ready to execute the verdict of social and political leaders. In those dangerous days of reconstruction his churches were burned, his ministers beaten, driven off and some killed, the roads to his meetings were frequently picketed, and a guide sent by faithful friends would meet and lead him around some by-path to a place of safety. Men attended church service armed, as in colonial days, for the defence of their families. He was fired upon on lonely roads, and often slept in the forests and caves, so as not to bring danger upon the homes of faithful friends. Some of the perils of those dark days are on record in his testimony before the Congressional Committee of Investigation, but the half was never told.

He had organized the work, and when his members begged him to remain, his reply was, "I will stand by you, my children, or I will fall with you." The church offered him a position in the North until the danger was past, but he stood at his post. When asked at one time how it was that his life had been preserved through so many dangers, he gave this characteristic response: "I have always believed a man immortal until his work is done."

After times had become more quiet he was nominated for the U. S. Marshalship of Northern Alabama, when the position was worth ten thousand dollars per year. Friends everywhere urged his acceptance, on the ground that he was now advanced in years; that the meagre salary received from the church would not provide for his old age, that when he had laid aside a modest sum for that purpose he could re-enter the ministerial work, that it was a duty he owed his family, with other arguments too numerous to men-

tion, but he never wavered a moment, never even considered the subject, but promptly telegraphed a firm but courteous refusal. In speaking of it afterward he said, "I have given my life to God and the church, and I cannot appropriate any portion of it to my own profit or honor."

The results of his labor are now apparent in two Conferences—one white and one colored—consisting of hundreds of ministers and thousands of members.

In 1883 his wife, who had been crippled by an accident fifteen years before, and was, consequently, unable to accompany him in any of his work, passed on to her reward, and in 1885 his only daughter and her family moved to Missouri. Two years later, after much solicitation and with great reluctance, the Bishops were prevailed upon to transfer him to the Missouri Conference. He was at once appointed to Rock Port, filling the unexpired term of a transferred pastor and was re-appointed the following year by petition of the membership and congregation. The next year he requested a circuit, thinking that driving over the country would be beneficial to his health which had failed rapidly from the first of his residence in the North. In the early summer the beginning of the end was apparent in a severe illness from which he never entirely recovered, though he filled most of his appointments afterward, even facing the cold and storm of recent winter weather, long after he was unfit for any kind of duty.

His last illness covered but two days and was attended with but little pain. He had been suffering from a cold and cough for some time, and had grown quite weak, but was still going about. On Monday evening he was taken with rigors, followed by fever and extreme prostration. By Wednesday noon it was seen that he was very ill, but no one apprehended immediate danger. Not until five o'clock, when he was almost beyond the power of utterance, did the family suspect that the end was so near. He was asked then if he realized his condition, and he answered that he did. He was asked if he was ready to go, and he replied, "Perfectly." A brother minister asked if he knew he was nearing death. With a supreme effort he said: "I know—that I am—nearing—my heavenly home." And these were his last connected words. He tried to leave a message for an absent member of the family, also for his churches and Sabbath-schools, but they could not be understood. At seven o'clock and fifteen minutes, on Wednesday evening, January 22d, he ceased to breathe, and the great heart no longer responded to the heart of the world. He passed away without a struggle and looked as if asleep.

His remains were brought to Huntsville, Ala., and interred, and here he sleeps by the side of his wife awaiting the judgement call.