

MINUTES

OF THE

SEVENTY-SIXTH SESSION

OF THE

VIRGINIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

OF THE

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IV.

TRIBUTE TO REV. WM. A. SMITH, D.D.

The Committee appointed to prepare a paper which shall express the sentiments of this Conference in regard to the death of Rev. WM. A. SMITH, D.D., report a sketch of his life, and the following resolutions in honor of his memory:

On the list of our dead for the year now closing, with grief and veneration we place the name of WILLIAM ANDREW SMITH. We know that his work and fame are not the exclusive property of this Conference, but belong to the whole M. E. Church, South, of which he was so eminent a minister, if we should not rather say to American Methodism. It is also true that his name has appeared the three past years on the minutes not of the Virginia, but of the St. Louis Conference. Yet living, he was ours, and now that he is dead, we claim him, in a special sense. His large heart embraced the entire Church, his wise counsels guarded and fostered her general interests, his great abilities shed lustre upon her name: and it is meet that Bishops and Conferences should do him honor. Let the West cherish his memory on account of his two years of faithful pastoral labor in the city of St. Louis, and of that great and lasting work to which he devoted his extraordinary powers during the last year of his life—the establishment of Central University on a deep and broad foundation, not less by the awakening of a profounder interest on the subject of education hallowed by religion among the ministry and people, than by the collection of funds for an endowment. But in the bounds of our Conference he was born, raised, converted; of this body he was a member more than forty years; of our history he is a large, essential, illustrious part; to us he gave his love and service from youth to old age, and we are glad to acknowledge the debt of gratitude and affection we owe him; among us he died, and in the beautiful cemetery of Hollywood in Richmond his dust reposes, awaiting the resurrection morn. To some of us he was a brother dearly beloved, to more of us an honored father: if others loved him, we yet more.

WM. A. SMITH was born in Fredericksburg, Va., Nov. 29, 1802. His mother was a consistent member of the Methodist Church, and in death prayed that her son might live to preach the glorious gospel. His father was a man of honorable character and position. Both died when he was of a tender age. For a time the orphan boy had rough usage; but he was afterwards adopted and raised by Mr. Russell Hill, a friend of his father, and a worthy merchant of Petersburg. When seventeen years old, he was converted, and joined the M. E. Church. He had received a good English education, and had commenced the study of the classics; but feeling that he was called of God to the ministry, and not being able to attend college as he desired, he studied privately one year at the house of his uncle, Mr. Porter, in Orange county, and taught school two or three years in Madison. In 1824 he travelled the Gloucester circuit under the Presiding Elder; in February, 1825, he was admitted on trial into the Virginia Conference. In 1833, while agent for Randolph Macon College, then in its infancy, he met with a fearful accident: the carriage which he was driving upset and fell on him, breaking his right thigh and dislocating his left hip, and badly laming him for life. He was a delegate to the General Conference of the M. E. Church every session from 1832 to 1844, and occupied a high position in that great council as an adviser and debater. In the memorable appeal case of Harding, and in the yet more important extra-judicial trial of Bishop Andrew, which led to the division of the Church, he won a reputation wide as the United States, and inferior to that of no minister of any denomination, for

the highest deliberative and forensic eloquence. He was a member of the Louisville Convention which organized the M. E. Church, South, and of all the General Conferences of this Church to the date of his death. He commanded universal respect and confidence among his brethren by the sincerity of his zeal, the wisdom of his counsels, and the power of his reasoning. His impress will long remain on the legislation and institutions of Southern Methodism. In 1846 he was called from the regular pastorate, by the urgency of the trustees of Randolph Macon College, sanctioned by the Virginia Conference, to the Presidency of this institution. He was selected for that place because his courage, energy and strength of intellect seemed indispensable not only to the prosperity, but even to the saving of this noble institution. Twenty years of his life were consecrated to this cause—years of self-sacrifice, of unremitting toil, of courageous battling with difficulties and victory over them; of hope where others desponded, of faith where others doubted, of resolution where others wavered. He was diligent in his study, diligent in his lecture-room, diligent in travel through Virginia and North Carolina to collect money and to arouse interest in behalf of the College. The number of students steadily increased, the standard of scholarship was elevated, and through the joint efforts of Dr. Smith and the agents of the College, an endowment-fund of \$100,000 was raised. Then came the terrible war which emptied those classic halls, and swept away the funds which had been gathered with so much toil. Yet not in vain had he labored. Scores of ministers, hundreds of pious young men, educated under his care, moulded by his influence, are this day in their several spheres carrying on the same grand work to which he was devoted, and have learned, from his teachings and example, never to surrender, never to despair of Randolph Macon.

We have not spoken of Dr. SMITH as a preacher and pastor. He soon rose to eminence in the ministry, and stood with the foremost in the pulpit and pastorate for faithfulness, ability and success. He had a deep, distinct, happy, constant experience of the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus. His zeal for the cause of religion was pure, steady, consuming. He was fully consecrated to the work of the ministry. The doctrines and polity of our Church had no stronger, nobler expounder and champion than he. His sermons were "logic on fire"—grand and solid discussions of the leading truths of the gospel, animated with deep emotion. Thousands were converted under his ministry; many of them became preachers of the Word, in our own and in other denominations; the churches he served were ever edified and trained, not less by his pastoral fidelity than by his luminous discourses.

As a man, he was of marked character. Who, that ever saw him, could forget that bold, frank, noble face and forehead, which revealed at a glance the lofty attributes of his intellect, the loftier attributes of his heart? Cunning and deceit he knew not; to fear he was a stranger; his convictions he was ever ready to avow and maintain. Yet, with all his courage and indomitable energy of will, he had a tender, sympathetic heart, and much of a child-like spirit, simple, unselfish, trustful, easy to be entreated.

In the Fall of 1866 he was transferred to the St. Louis Conference. In the Summer of 1869 he visited Virginia to build up his shattered constitution. He suffered severely with chronic dysentery, complicated with other disorders, and grew worse each succeeding month, until he breathed his last March 1, 1870, in the city of Richmond. He retained the clearness of his faculties, and delighted to speak of the great themes of christianity, especially that saying of John, "God is love." He told us that from the day he gave his heart to God in youth, that self-surrender had never been recalled, and his trust in Christ had never wavered. He compared his state of mind to a lake embosomed in a deep forest, whose peaceful surface the rough winds could not reach.

We offer for adoption by the Conference the following resolutions:

1. Resolved, That in the death of Rev. Wm. A. SMITH, D.D., not only has the Church lost a bright and shining light, but this Conference is called to mourn the loss of an honored father, who for many years was to us a strong tower of defense and an able leader in every good enterprise,

2. Resolved, That we glorify God in the exalted character, the abundant labors, the enduring fruits of usefulness, and the happy death of Dr. SMITH; and that we will cherish his memory, and teach our children to hold him in honor.

3. Resolved, That we convey to his widow and children the assurance of our deep sympathy in their bereavement, and of our prayers that the blessing of Providence and the comfort of the Holy Spirit may be richly vouchsafed to them in their hour of need.

4. Resolved, That Rev. J. E. Edwards and Asa Snyder be appointed a committee to procure a suitable monument and have it placed over the grave of Dr. SMITH, and that they be authorized to receive contributions to defray the expenses of the same.

LEROY M. LEE,
J. C. GRANBERY,
D'ARCY PAUL.

