

Historical Sermon

--of the--

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

--IN--

ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA,

--By The Pastor--

Reverend W. J. McCormick,

--on the 25th--

ANNIVERSARY OF HIS MINISTRY HERE

----

Delivered on the 1st Sabbath

--of--

January, 1883,

In The

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

Gainesville, Florida,

-----

Gainesville, Florida

H. H. McCreary, Printer

-----  
1883

*passed away  
June 29 1883*

"Come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord Our God."

Passing away from any reference to the primary object of the prophet here, we at once proceed to note its special application to us on this the 25th anniversary of our ministry in this State, county and town. "Come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God," in our midst, so as to recall, on this auspicious day, His goodness to our beloved Church. Let us thus "walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces: that ye may tell it to the generation following." A writer has well said, that it is refreshing to hear a man talk who knows whereof he speaks. If this be so, then we hope to give you such a history of our Church here as may both interest and instruct you; since we are tolerably conversant with the facts.

And when we think how soon this primary history of Zion here may be forgotten, the duty of spreading it out before you now, becomes more apparent. As a part then of God's sacramental host in this delightful land, we would thus publicly declare how good God has been to us; how, amid much opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil, we have been--as a Church--both sweetly chastened and graciously blest.

It is thus we will have our Church history--during its formative period--put on record: so that when we pass away, it may be easy for our successors to complete it to any given period.

In obedience to the expressed desire of many, and not from any selfish or egotistical motive, we are called upon, in discharging this duty, to speak--

1. Of that culture, or preparatory training, which the Master, in his wise providence, enabled your first Pastor to obtain, so as to fit him for his sacred mission in this frontier State. We would briefly here say, that from the retirement of a rural, yet scholastic life, first in Canada--where our pious parents had settled on their emigration from Ireland--and then near Ogdensburg, New York, we were, in the providence of God, called in the spring of 1846 to come South and prepare for the gospel ministry. For years--even when in our teens--it was impressed upon us, that this was to be our life-work. Through the instrumentality of the late Rev. Dr. Thomas Smythe, our relative and pastor, we were sent to Oglethorpe University, Ga., then under the Presidency of that accomplished scholar and divine, Dr. Samuel K. Talmage. After graduating there in the class of 1850, we immediately entered the "School of the Prophets" in Columbia, S. C., and graduated there in 1853. The same spring, April, we were licensed to preach the gospel by the Harmony Presbytery at the Indiantown Church, Williamsburg County, the Rev. Dr. A. W. Miller, now of Charleston, being Moderator. This much, at your instance, we say, that you may know how God put me into the ministry; then into a rural pastorate; and all to fit us for these many years of happy toil here.

2. 11. We come, in this record of the Lord's work, to trace the successive steps which he called upon us to make: until our hearts and hands were united in this good work here. Whilst we were pleasantly and actively engaged in our first pastorate--the Lord, in mercy, blessing graciously our labors there--we were, (in the summer of 1857, unexpectedly invited by the late Dr. W. H. Stringfellow--a saint now of blessed memory--representing a few Presbyterian families at Kanapaha, to come and visit Florida, with a view to settlement. Believing, as we have ever done, in the permanency of the pastoral relation, our consent to such a change could not be given



2

then. But that noble servant of his Master, full of zeal for the church, and full of love for those he represented, would not be put off in that way. Believing that we would be a fit instrumentality, under God, for the Home Mission work of this needy field, he followed me up to my home, and so pressed this work upon me as to make me promise to pay them a long visit that coming winter. The hand of God was in this: but, as yet, we knew it not. So happily were we located amongst that never-to-be-forgotten people, that we courted no change. Never can we forget the Doctor's last visit to me, October 13th, 1857, when he so tenderly and so earnestly urged me to heed this Macedonian cry. In obedience to that promise, (having secured the ministerial services of that grand old preacher, the Rev. Mr. Boggs, father of Professor W. E. Boggs, D. D., of our Theo. Seminary, during my absence, we journeyed thitherward, and on the 1st Sabbath of January, 1858, we preached our first sermon in this county, and our second here, in yonder Court House, that same Sabbath evening. We repeated similar services the following Sabbath in the same order, and on the third Sabbath of that month we commenced this work at Micanopy. At all those places we met large and attentive audiences. It was the infancy of things here then. Still, the general intelligence of the people we met, the wide destitution of our particular Church, and the delightful climate here: all left impressions on our mind of a lasting character. Over and above all, the loud Macedonian cry, emphasized by this visit, kept ringing in my ears. We spent most of that winter and spring here, thus beginning a work which we were so soon to resume. On our return home, providential circumstances, too numerous here to mention, but chiefly the failure of my health; all entered in as elements to make us yield assent to the repeated invitations from this direction to return, and to sever the tie that bound us to our FIRST flock. On the first day of Jan., 1859, we resumed the mission work just where we had left it. Now we brought our family with us, determined to stay. In the fall of that year, November, we united with the Presbytery of Florida at Jacksonville, during the sessions of the Synod of Georgia. Right here it will be proper to state, in speaking of the history of our God-honored Zion in this County, Alachua, that the very first Presbyterian minister, according to the record before us, was the Rev. S. F. Halliday; then, the Rev. Mr. McEwen; then, the Rev. Joseph Brown; then, the Rev. Messrs. Hamilton, and Milliken; and then, the Rev. Mr. Thompson: all temporary missionaries or supplies. No one had ever cast his lot here PERMANENTLY, until God, as you have heard, drove us hither. You discover, however, in this statement, that Presbytery was AWAY THEN, before ANY of its present members were enrolled, looking after your spiritual welfare, and long before your Pastor's settlement among you.

III. We come now, in this anniversary record of God's dealings toward us, to notice the PERMANENT missionary and PASTORAL work we were called upon to do. Everything, of course, was in its primitive estate. A formative period, at once, commenced. Our missionary toils, during that tentative time, were MAINLY centered at the three places already mentioned; yet we often preached at Fernandina, Ocala, Archer, Flemington, Orange Creek, and other destitute places. Domestic Missionary Work was emphatically the rule then; albeit we kept steadily in view the formation of an active pastorate. Whilst thus engaged we visited often Nassau, Columbia, Hamilton, Putnam, Orange, Marion, Volusia, Sumter, Levy and other Counties, in fact, exploring much of what is called East and South Florida. The history, however, we are now contemplating refers to our own County, in whose then infant and small capital, Gainesville, we at once permanently located, and where, until now, our home has been. Let us now review, in order, this work at the three points already mentioned. A.--Kanapaha, near the station now known as Arredondo--for there were no railroads here when we began our mission here--



as you have heard, was the prime mover in this needed enterprise. Do you wonder then at our attachment for that little Church? That band, before an organization was perfected, promised for three years one hundred dollars per month; also to build a church and to purchase a parsonage. Nor did they fail, so that whenever THIS was a mission field, its minister was free from worldly cares and avocations. We could and did give ourselves up to this work. At once, however, this place, Gainesville, and Micanopy, sought and obtained the privilege of uniting in our support for half our time. Kanapaha soon erected its church, where it now stands, purchased, in conjunction with friends here, a parsonage, and saw that the stipend was regularly and fully paid. Was there ever just such a self-sustaining mission field in our hands? On the third Sabbath of April, 1859, we held our first service there. Up to that time we had been worshipping in a Baptist Church. Two weeks from that date it was solemnly dedicated to God. It was truly a day of small things to us, yet we felt happy in knowing that the ark of God, with its public mercy seat, was placed in our midst. In the fall of that same year a Church was organized by myself, as a Committee of one appointed by Presbytery, consisting of twelve members and two Elders, viz: Dr. W. H. Stringfellow and Mr. Joseph A. Scott. Since then Major J. E. Murray, Capt. J. D. Young, all South Carolinians, and Mr. Edgar C. Waples, of Delaware, have been added to its session. This Church never had any Deacons, for want of material, and hence the Elders also attend to the financial matters. Thus this Church began and continued its existence; sending out in time a new hive to organize the Gainesville Church. The daughter is larger than the mother; yet she still lives a blessing to that community, and a proof of God's tender care over his trusting children. B.--In close connection with this organization, we cannot but remark--even although it deviates from the track marked out--that in January, 1869, we found an opening presented to us--through the late Mr. John Fleming, another of God's sainted ones--at Wacahoota. It was so that we could step into it, and there--in this County too--another Church was, in due time, organized; having fifteen members, with three Elders, viz: Messrs. Fleming, King, and Quarterman: the first from South Carolina and the other two from Georgia. Since then, Mr. Spencer, now of Brunswick, Ga., Mr. John T. Fleming--elected in place of his deceased father--and Mr. Andrus, from New Jersey, were added to its session. The Organizing Committee then was, Rev. Dr. Donald Frazer, and your Pastor. Soon, however, death and removal wrought great changes; until now that Church is removed bodily to Archer; having, until last fall, the Rev. Dr. A. A. Duncan: our immediate predecessor, however, being the Rev. Samuel Donnelly. C.--At Micanopy we found a feeble organization, the very first of our Denomination in the County, having been brought into existence by a committee appointed by the Presbytery, consisting of Rev. Messrs. W. H. Hamilton and Joseph Milliken. The organization took place in the old Masonic Hall, January 23rd, 1854. There were seventeen members enrolled, with two Elders, viz: Dr. James A. Stewart, formerly an Elder in Tennessee, his native State, and Mr. Horace Merry, of New Jersey. The latter was ordained and both were installed. Since then, at different times, Dr. Lucius Montgomery, of Missouri; Dr. J. H. McIlvaine, of Delaware; Mr. Jacob Winecoff, of North Carolina; Judge G. W. Means, of South Carolina, and Capt. B. W. Powell, of the same State, were added to this session. It has had as Deacons, Capt. Powell, Mr. Thos. McCredie, of Scotland; Mr. John A. Simonton, and Mr. David Miller, of South Carolina. The three last constitute its present Board of Deacons. A petition was sent up to Presbytery, and by it accepted, to hold its Fall Sessions, 1854, amongst them. Accordingly that body essayed to meet there, but owing to the want of public conveyances and high waters, no quorum appeared. Rev. Drs. J. H. Myers and Donald Auld reached there with Candidate Fleming, nephew of Rev. S. F. Halliday. No business could be transacted, and that young man was not licensed to preach



until the Spring Session. Be it remembered, just here, that he was the only native Floridian that ever entered the Presbyterian ministry. But to return. Micanopy, albeit sorry that no Court of Christ could then assemble amongst them, had nevertheless great reason for thankfulness: since those Brethren preached day and night to them--Dr. Auld remaining longest with them--and God's blessing vitalized their messages to the sanctification of believers and the conversion of unbelievers. It was a blessed time for that feeble Church. So stirred up were all, that with great enthusiasm they invited Dr. Auld to become their Pastor. He could not accept, nor did they ever get one, until our lot, as you have heard, was cast amongst them. On our first arrival in January, 1858, again in January, 1859, we found them in a low spiritual estate, almost disheartened about securing a minister, and on the verge of despair touching their continued ecclesiastical existence. How could it be otherwise--as human nature, even in its sanctified estate, here is--when they never enjoyed a regular shepherds care. The wonder is, that they survived those long years of destitution. Ah! their Chief Shepherd kept them together and alive; thus fitting them all the better for his wise purposes towards them. We once heard a brother minister, Rev. Wm. Banks, say, on the floor of the old Bethel Presbytery, of a seemingly dying Church: "Moderator, it is a hard matter to kill a Presbyterian Church. Let us hold it as a Mission Station, feeble as it now is, send it supplies, and wait God's blessing." That good advice was heeded, and to-day it is living, active and vigorous. Micanopy passed through a similar experience; thus giving emphasis to that grand and stirring statement of that now departed servant of Christ. The goodly training of Scotch-Irish and South Carolinian Presbyterian parentage could not soon be forgotten. With no itching ears did they cleave to the Church of their godly fathers. A firmness of purpose, born from above, made them love the very dust of their Zion. Like Israel of old, they wept when they remembered her estate, and sent up their earnest cries to God for help. And whilst they hung their harps upon the willows, their solemn resolve was, not to forget Jerusalem, preferring her prosperity above their chief joy. Hence, when their God was pleased to send us there, we were received gladly. Never can we forget the genuine enthusiasm of that afflicted congregation, as they and their friends flocked in crowds to the Sanctuary on that bright and beautiful third Sabbath of January, 1859, to greet the Missionary who had now come to break unto them stately the bread of life. Nor have they ever, during this quarter of a century, abated their ardor or their interest in his sacred work. We thought, however, that memorable Sabbath, as we looked over that vast Congregation, that good fruit would soon appear; that souls, out of Christ, would at once come in, but we found that Florida, like all new States, was a HARD MORAL SOIL, and that building up Christian Churches here was a herculean task. But we cannot dwell longer on these minutiae of historical detail, however much we desire, however much we desire to do it, and hence we rapidly pass on. In course of time--the Lord crowning these efforts with a measure of success--we were chosen Pastor, a relation still in existence. Revivals have been enjoyed there under the labors of Drs. J. H. Dubose and Nall, and from time to time young men and maidens quietly gave themselves to God. To-day that Church is vigorous, with its full complement of officers, and worshipping in their own new Sanctuary.

D.--And now we come to notice the rise and progress of this Church ( Gainesville ), as we develop this history. You have already heard that Kanapaha most cheerfully yielded the services of her own chosen minister once a month to this town. Very soon the people here began to tire worshipping in a Court House, and to talk about erecting a Church. What feeling became



intensified, as new recruits were added to our number, both by letter and on profession. In this move Kanapaha generously aided, a fact that should never be forgotten by this Church. Other Presbyterians, both in this State and in our Old Synod of South Carolina, gave sums amounting to over \$1,200, to aid in that enterprise. Every dollar expended in this edifice came from our OWN CHURCH PEOPLE. On our return from our annual vacation in the Fall of 1859, with these sums in hand--for we went forth then on a begging tour--this people began to carry out their cherished desire. On Wednesday, October 2d, it was agreed by Major Bailey, Col. Ingram and Elder J. A. Scott--an extemporized Building Committee--to proceed at once to the erection of this Sanctuary. Observe: this place was, as yet, a part of the Kanapaha Church, all the Presbyterians HERE holding their membership out THERE. So rapidly did that energetic Committee push this work, that on the 1st day of December, 1859, it was raised, and early in 1860 it was dedicated to God. That same Fall the Presbytery of Florida met here, its first visit to Gainesville, leaving, as usual, good impressions behind. At once this branch of the Kanapaha Church, commenced its Sabbath School, its weekly prayer-meeting, and its regular monthly ministerial services. Other Christian names were invited to hold their services here, as this then and for years was the only Church building in Town. Hence, the Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians worshipped thus here, for the most part, until they built for themselves. Our feelings on entering this house of God can be better imagined than described. Up to this period we had been worshipping where ALL sorts of assemblages convened; but now our families and friends could enjoy the precious privilege of hearing the gospel, unmixed with things that tend to weaken devotion. Indeed, the contrast was so great, that we almost felt as if we were in Eden's bowers, smelling the fragrance of God's breath, and beholding the tints of the bow in the clouds. ALL then seemed to realize that THIS was indeed God's House, and that we were adoring His name. But this prosperous and hopeful state of things was sadly interrupted. The late Civil War almost swept our usual worshippers away. We too were in the field, preaching Jesus to our soldiers, and, after health failed there, were refugees in South Carolina. Thus this WHOLE mission enterprise, so auspiciously begun, was completely, and for years absolutely, paralyzed. And this was the experience of this entire mission field. We were left "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted," far more so than under the pestilence of 1871. During that trying period, the Rev. Jas. Little, now of Bowmansville, Canada, preached for a time here; until he too felt constrained to go forth and preach Jesus to the warriors in the tented field. Nor were all such labors in vain, as we well know. God was pleased, by his Spirit, to crown them with marked success, as the annals of heaven will yet reveal to the praise and glory of redeeming love. Not until the Fall of 1864 did we get back again to our loved but now desolate field of labor. The missionary work had to be commenced anew. However, with chastened yet glad hearts, we as a people, heard that bell summon us once more to the house of God. Together we went to work, administer and people, to try and build up our waste places. For two years we lived by teaching in the State Seminary as Principal. But, so soon as the people so far recovered from their financial embarrassments as to be able, in part, to support the gospel, we resigned that office in favor of Dr. W. S. Dudley, and for six months longer only taught there three hours each day. At the expiration of that session, we retired, feeling that two such grand missions could not be performed well or acceptably by any one man under ordinary circumstances, and besides, the Master had laid upon us the special duty of preaching His gospel. Up to this time, June, 1866, no Presbyterian Church was organized here. Soon, owing to God's blessing, that special step was needed. In answer to a petition sent up to Presbytery that Fall, a



6

Committee met here on the 23rd of March, 1867, to organize the few Presbyterians here into a separate Congregation. The members were Rev. A. Baker, of Fernandina, and myself. Thirteen persons were enrolled, with two Elders, viz: Dr. W. S. Dudley, formerly an Elder in the Orangeburg Church, S. C., and Mr. Joseph Spencer, a native of Liberty County, Ga. The latter was ordained and both were installed. Thus this Church began its distinct ecclesiastical existence, and was enrolled the following April as a component part of the Presbytery of Florida.) Since then it has had for Ruling Elders, Mr. J. B. Brown and Mr. J. D. Matheson, from South Carolina; Mr. Samuel W. Wilson and the brothers Lackey, from Virginia; Mr. William Bryant, from Brooklyn, N. Y., now Pastor of the Argyle Presbyterian Church, Washington County, N. Y.; Prof. Edwin P. Cater, of South Carolina; Mr. John C. Eastman, of New York City; Capt. C. A. Sheldon, of Alabama, and Dr. J. A. Vidal, of South Carolina. It has had for Deacons, Mr. J. D. Matheson, Mr. Henry Young, Mr. J. C. Eastman and Mr. Phillip Miller. From time to time souls were added to the church, until from a very little band it has become proportionable STRONG in members, means and influence; is amongst the largest churches in our Presbytery. Recently, 1882, we had several excellent families moved here, who soon cast lots with us, two of whom, Dr. Vidal and Capt. Sheldon, are now members of Session. They, with Prof. Cater, Mr. Eastman and Mr. Matheson, constitute that present Court of Christ. Death and removal, particularly the latter, have operated seriously against our rapid increase. This is always the case in a new State, and we were no exception to the general rule. We were, in due time, chosen Pastor, and in conjunction with Micanopy and Kanapaha, was solemnly inducted in the Spring of 1869 to that particular office here by the Rev. Messrs. J. Little, W. H. Crane and A. Baker, as ordered by the Presbytery. Thus the foundations of this Church and Pastorate were laid, and God has honored all with His divine blessings from time to time. Slowly, but surely, the spiritual superstructure goes up to the praise and glory of His matchless grace. The great sympathy and potent help of our Lord are with us, and in His good time our Zion will be greatly enlarged. We stand, therefore, in an expectant posture, waiting at His gates, surrounded by those whose daily prayer to God is: "Thy kingdom come."

A few reflections, and we close: 1st, we observe that Christian life amongst us needs a larger share of the Spirit's influences to make it more like that enjoyed in heaven. THERE every heart beats strongly and harmoniously with Christ's. Nothing enters into their service of a defiling character. So also should it be here, as far as in us lies, since the nearer we live to Christ the more by far will Zion prosper. True piety in any church, as one has it, is not the result of ACTIVITY, alone; but also of knowledge, of reflection, and of assimilation. Knowledge is needed to compass aright the duties we owe to each other as Pastor and people, so that the vows made in the days of our ecclesiastical espousals may be faithfully kept. Reflection too is needed to systematize all our toils, interests, and prayers, so that every part of the grand mission intrusted to us for a time, shall receive its due attention, and thus in the general prosperity of the whole. Assimilation is ever wanting to make us more of one heart and mind in all the interests of Zion. Now, when all these appear and act, A MODEL PASTORATE is the result. Its energies work to a purpose, even the glory of God in the everlasting good of perishing souls. As then we enter upon the duties and privileges of a new year, and, at least, BEGIN another quarter of a century's work, we do beseech you to WORK thus, so as to insure the Master's gracious benediction. And to this, on this memorable day,



7

we do trustingly invoke the presence and power of the Holy Ghost upon you.

Second, we learn, from this history, how unstable all things earthly are. The stream of time is hurrying us on to the ocean of eternity. Change! change! change! is stamped upon everything mortal. It has done and is still doing its work amongst us. When we look over this congregation and think of the many faces we once saw here, who have ended their earthly career, our hearts are saddened. But see! our God has sent many others to take their places, and thus keep up His Church. All this, however, but impresses the thoughtful mind with the fact: that we are fast passing away; and that the places that once knew us, shall know us no more for ever. Oh! how this significant thought should stir us up to duty--ALLO OF US--as well as to danger, so as to see to it that the great end of our existence is met.

"Up to thy Master's work,  
For thou art sworn to do his bidding,  
'Till the hand of death strike off thine armor."

Third, we observe finally, that the duty of following Christ in adversity or prosperity, in sickness or in health, amid calamities or blessings, is ever imperative. Be loyal to His will. This truth crops out in every part of God's dealings towards us. It is recorded in the annals of Austria, that when General Melas was pressed on all sides by a formidable foe, he sent a message to the commander-in-chief, Suwarrow, asking if he should retire from the contest. The reply, written hurriedly on a slip of paper, was, "FORWARD!" That immortalized that word. But it was immortalized long before, when God ordered Moses to "go forward" notwithstanding the almost insurmountable obstacles in the way. That message too of Austria's chieftain inspired the army. Confident that it meant liberty or death, Melas renewed the struggle and victory perched upon his shoulders. To us the Great Captain of our salvation sends this same message, bidding us close up our thinned ranks and renew the conflict, assured of victory. FORWARD!! then, is still our battle cry. Forward to the active discharge of every incumbent Christian duty, let what will be sacrificed. Do you know that our moral growth often advances more rapidly in adversity? Death, removal, and even financial crashes, all of which we have severely experienced, should but stimulate us to greater zeal in our Redeemer's service. Our true wealth, as a Church, lies not in gold or silver: but in fervent piety, genuine prayer, and an unconquerable faith: all aglow with burning zeal for Christ and, His Crown-rights.

Finally, to you of this particular pastorate, let me again say, forward in devising liberal things for Zion. You have acted so GENEROUSLY the past year, and God will reward you for it. That is stock that will pay you better than any banking company of earth. In view then of God's gracious dealings towards you in the PAST and PRESENT, we entreat you to go wherever your Master calls; to do whatever He, in His word, demands; and to live as He set us the example.

We have THUS tried "to declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God."

And now, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." AMEN