

NAME

ELS. N. W. Wilson

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Record

Chapel Hill 1863

See

File No.

(Over)

Wilson, Norvell Winsboro, 1834-1878.

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2957

SHC Norvell Winsboro Wilson (1834-1878) Papers, 1842-1901. 50 items including 7 vols.

Intermittent diary, 1862-1878 recording pastoral visits, Baptist conventions, social news, and cash accts. of a Baptist preacher in Chapel Hill and Hillsborough, N. C., 1861-1867...; a scrapbook of clippings relating to Wilson's career and writings; and misc. family letters.

THE REV. N. W. WILSON, D.D., AND
THE YELLOW FEVER.

A hero of faith and a martyr to duty, this good man fell at his post, as pastor of the Coliseum Baptist church, New Orleans, on Friday, the 6th of September, a victim of Yellow Fever. I knew him well, and loved and honored him most sincerely, and I write these lines under a sense of personal bereavement.

I am not sure that I shall be able to give the facts of his life with accuracy, but as well as I can recall them, Dr. Wilson was born in Virginia, in the Valley, I think, of a Lutheran or a German Reformed family. He became a Baptist from principle, and after a careful examination, by the light of the Bible, of the points of difference between a Baptist and all other churches, and was baptized by the Rev. J. B. Hardwick, D.D. He married into the Betts family of Halifax, Va., distinguished through several generations for their fidelity to Baptist principles, and settled as a pastor of the Chapel Hill and Hillsboro Baptist churches in 1858.

The high appreciation in which he was held by the University, as well as the citizens, was shown in his unanimous selection to deliver the address of welcome to President Buchanan and his Cabinet when, in 1859, they attended the Commencement at Chapel Hill. The occasion was a memorable one, and the manner in which the young pastor acquitted himself of this delicate duty, won for him at once a State reputation as a brilliant orator.

After the close of the war, he was called to Farmville, Va., and thence, in a short time, to the charge of the Grace Street Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., which, for twenty years had enjoyed the ministry of Dr. J. B. Jeter, one of our wisest and ablest pastors. No minister in Richmond of any denomination was more esteemed as a preacher, or drew larger congregations than Dr. Wilson.

After a few years of service in this responsible position, he removed to New Orleans, where he has closed a useful and distinguished career by an act of sublime devotion to the interests of his people, which will render his memory precious through all time. He preferred to die rather than desert his post, imitating in this respect the example of another North Carolina pastor, John Lamb Pritchard, who died the last victim of yellow fever in Wilmington, N. C. in 1862.

Dr. Wilson did not enjoy the advantages of a liberal education in his youth, but the natural vigor of his mind, and the energy and diligence with which he applied himself to many departments of generous culture in after years, amply compensated for the limited privileges of his boyhood. He was a discriminating, accurate and bold thinker; his style was almost a model in its clearness, vigor and nervous energy, and he was beyond question a great preacher. Mrs. Gov. Graham pronounced him the finest preacher she ever heard, and the venerable Dr. Jeter declared his pulpit efforts wonderful.

He was, I presume, about forty-five years old. He leaves a wife and seven children, who are still in New Orleans. I have heard that it is proposed to hold a special memorial service in honor of him in Richmond, and that the pastors have resolved to undertake the support of his family and the education of his children. It would be a beautiful and honorable thing in the Richmond Baptists to do so.

And now alas! alas! what shall I say of the fell destroyer, which has slain my beloved friend and is killing the people by the hundreds and thousands? Forty or fifty days it must yet run, and so rapid are its advances that it threatens to spread over all the South-West. To-day the telegram informs us that Dr. Sylvanus Landrum, of Memphis, is sick, being stricken down while nursing his dying son, Herbert, and that his wife is also sick. Dr. Landrum has seen the yellow fever many times in Savannah, Ga., but in a letter to the Georgia INDEX, he says he has never seen it in so malignant a form as it has assumed in Memphis. God help those poor stricken, and smitten and afflicted people!

There are two things we can do. First, we can imitate the good Gov. Bishop of Ohio, who has called on all christian people in that State to spend this day, Sept. 13th, in their places of worship, in prayer to Almighty God to interpose for the deliverance of those wretched people. We can all cry to God for our suffering fellow countrymen. And secondly, we can send them relief, to some extent, by contributing of our means. Not only are the sick to be nursed and nourished, and the dead to be buried, but the physicians and nurses are to be fed, medicine and blankets to be provided, and

He served as President of the Louisiana Baptist Convention three years, and as Moderator of Grand Cane Association for six years. He also had charge of the Depository of the Sunday-school Convention, and did much to aid in the dissemination of Sunday-school literature. President Tucker was a man of fine executive abilities. He had a clear head, a sound judgment and a kind heart. He was not a fluent speaker, but the subject-matter of his discourses was so superior that the hearer forgot his defective delivery, and was carried along by the force of his logic and the aptness of his illustrations. As a man he was noted for his unwavering integrity; as a teacher, for his excellent discipline, and the thoroughness of his instruction; and as a preacher, for his zeal and faithfulness.

✓ NORVEL W. WILSON, D. D.—One of the most eloquent ministers of the South, late pastor of Coliseum Place Church, New Orleans, was born in Franklin, Pendleton County, Va., October 20th, 1834. He made a profession of religion when about fourteen years of age. His thoughts soon turned to the ministry. His parents were pious Methodists, but owing to what his youthful mind considered their inconsistency in the treatment of their infant membership, he discarded the doctrine of the Methodist Church and joined the Moravians, one of the leading denominations of the Valley.

He enjoyed the advantage of a first-class classical school until he was eighteen years of age, when he went into business that he might secure funds to complete his education. An extract from his diary will give some insight into his feelings at this time:

"At eighteen years of age, poor and inexperienced, I found myself two hundred miles from home in mid-winter, without a single acquaintance, attempting to establish business, which, should it fail, would leave me without the means to carry me back to home and friends. Everything was unpropitious, except that I had determined to succeed, and united with resolution, earnest prayer and continued effort. Amid many discouragements God owned and prospered my labors. But while bearing away the spoils my heart was set upon them, instead of becoming more devoted to the Giver. On, on, for four years I pursued the glittering, delusive wealth, waiting only to say: 'Soul take thine ease' * * * Like Jonah I ran from God until the billows ran over me. From the deep of distress he heard my cry and entrusted me once again with a message to my dying fellow-men. It was to say: 'Who is sufficient for these things?' It availed nought to plead: 'I am a man of unclean lips' or 'stammering tongue.' From the caverns of my own heart the answer was always ready. Sometimes it strikes me sadly as an echo from the grave: 'Woe! woe is me! if I preach not the Gospel.'"

In the autumn of 1857 his heart was retouched, and in studying to know "the way of the Lord more perfectly," he was led, in spite of his early prejudices, to become a Baptist. He then knew but little of the people with whom he had cast his lot. He had heard but one preach in his early life. But with his convictions of duty drawn from the Bible, he could become nothing else. In alluding to his baptism, a correspondent of the *Religious Herald* wrote: "I have met with few young men superior to him in intellect. He is a good scholar, a finished orator, and

if he enters the ministry, will take a high stand in this or any other State."

He felt called to preach; not back to school. After preaching and traveling as a colporteur for nearly a year, he was ordained in Pittsylvania County, Va., August 11, 1858. He immediately took charge of two or three country churches, which he served very successfully till January, 1861, when he accepted a call to the Baptist church at Chapel Hill, N. C., the seat of the university. In the following June he was married to Miss Betts, of Virginia. Speaking of his pastorate in Chapel Hill, a recent correspondent of *The Observer* (Raleigh, N. C.) says: "Dr. Wilson first became known as a preacher of rare excellence in North Carolina at Chapel Hill. * * * The late President (Ex-Governor) Swain used to say that he was a man of extraordinary power." His labors in Chapel Hill were greatly blessed, and he made a fine impression for the Baptist denomination, not only on the community, but among professors and students who attended very regularly upon his ministry.

In August, 1867, he felt it to be his duty to accept a call which had been extended him from the Baptist church at Farmdale, Va. Here he had two years of sunshine and success. A loving, united church, ready for every good word and work, helped him in a glorious work for the Master. But he was not allowed to remain here long. A wider field was opened. In April, 1870, he was called to the Grace Street Baptist Church, Richmond, Va., as the successor of the venerable and distinguished Dr. J. B. Jeter, who had filled the pulpit seventeen years. In this new field his labors were wonderfully blessed. Among some resolutions published on the occasion

of his resignation, after a pastorate of nearly five years, this appears:

"In thus consenting to sever the relation which for nearly five years has bound us together as pastor and people, we feel it due, alike to him, to ourselves and to the cause, to testify that he has proven an able, faithful and laborious preacher, as attested by the fact that very large and interested congregations have listened to the 386 sermons and 139 lectures, which he has delivered from our pulpit; that his labors have been greatly blessed, as proven by the fact that he has baptized 162, and that 100 others have professed conversion in connection with his ministry; that during his pastorate the church has contributed in the aggregate about \$40,000 to church and benevolent objects, and that progress has been made in every department of our work."

Dr. Jeter, in editorially noticing his resignation in the *Religious Herald*, said: "We have rarely known a pastorate attended with more manifest tokens of the divine approbation; or a ministry more acceptable to the crowds who attended it. Dr. Wilson is a preacher of rare endowments. * * * The freshness, originality and vivacity of his sermons, we have never known excelled. He never repeats his own thoughts, or runs in old ruts, or ever crosses his tracks without reminding his hearers of it. His preaching is eminently Scriptural. All his discourses are drawn from the word of God. * * * We have heard him preach almost constantly for several years, and we never listened to him without interest and instruction."

About the same time a correspondent of the *Index and Baptist* wrote: "A preacher is rarely so much

loved and admired as Dr. Wilson has been in Richmond, throughout his pastorate. He has probably the largest congregations in the city, which is easily understood by those who are acquainted with the style and power of his preaching. * * * He speaks with the utmost naturalness and earnestness, goes right to the heart of his subject, is always fresh and vigorous in thought, has a fine voice and manner, is sometimes grandly eloquent, always evangelical, and thoroughly a Baptist, and last, next for first, he knows when to stop."

In the fall of 1875, he accepted a call to the Coliseum Place Baptist Church, New Orleans. He knew the difficulties of this field, but he felt that God was leading him, and to Him he trusted all his way. His labors in this pastorate, though perhaps not as manifest in results as at Richmond, were not without good fruit. He accomplished all that any man could accomplish under the difficulties that surrounded him. While his efforts were especially directed at building up the cause in New Orleans, his work was not confined here. He lent a helping hand to the mission work, which was conducted under the labors of Rev. J. B. Hamberlin, along the line of the New Orleans and Mobile Railroad. He led the Coliseum Church to unite in the Coast Association, composed of the churches in the railroad towns and the cities of New Orleans and Mobile. In May, 1878, he was elected Moderator of the Coast Association, and filled the office well.

With that true heroism, which recognizes the principle that no man liveth for himself, when the terrible scourge that ravaged the South in 1878, fell upon the city of his home, although he had a large family

wholly dependent upon his labors for support, to whom his life was everything in a temporal point of view, he hesitated not to lay his life as sacrifice upon the altar of humanity. Up to the time he was stricken down, he was incessant in his ministrations to the suffering. He yielded up his valuable life, a victim to yellow fever, September 6, 1878, in the 44th year of his age.

The Southwestern Presbyterian (New Orleans), September 12, speaks of his death as "the first break in the ranks of the Protestant ministry in New Orleans," and adds, "During his three years' stay in New Orleans, he had endeared himself to his congregation, and won the respect of his brethren of all evangelical denominations. He was a man of learning and ability, genial in temper, kind and affectionate, but an unobtrusive and spiritual-minded Christian."

In an editorial notice in the *Biblical Recorder*, Dr. Pritchard, a personal friend, says: "He was a discriminating, accurate and bold thinker; his style was almost a model in its clearness, vigor and nervous energy; and he was beyond question a great preacher."

His funeral was largely attended, the celebrated Dr. Palmer leading the memorial services, and other Protestant ministers participating. A memorial service was also held in the Grace Street Church (Richmond), his former charge, in which many of the leading ministers in Virginia took part.

S. M. NORRIS—An active Sunday-school worker, residing at Kingston, La. He was born in Edgefield District, S. C., November, 1813. He removed to

MARRIED

On the 13th of June, at the residence of Capt. William S. Betts, by Rev. William Slate, Rev. N. W. Wilson, of Chapel Hill, N. C., to Miss Sallie F. Betts of Black Walnut, VA.

RELIGIOUS HERALD, June 20, 1861, p. 25:5

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