

sent to Ruth Mearns

BIOGRAPHICAL

Elder Oldoon Potter

Born in Surry County, North Carolina, July 4, 1798.

I have no distinct knowledge of my family further back than my grandfather, who was born in England, and moved to this country before the Revolutionary war. In his infancy he was taken into the English church; but when he came to years of maturity he joined the Regular Baptists. I remember hearing him say that his "god-father" failed to do what he promised; he promised to raise him up in the ways of holiness, but failed to do it. My grandmother's first name was Judah and she, too, was born in England; but I do not know whether they were married before or after they moved to the United States. They first settled in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. I remember hearing him speak of his minister; of Elders Leland Joshua Carter, Lee and Easton. The last was 80 years old or more when I could first remember. He was a Regular Baptist minister before the Revolutionary War, and told of being imprisoned and whipped on account of his religious sentiments, and I saw the scars on his back made by the whip. He said he had felt as happy while preaching in prison as he ever did at any time. I often heard grandfather talk of the Revolutionary War, and one thing I remember with pride, and that is, there was not a single Regular Baptist ever known to be on the Tory side. They were, without a single exception, friends to the colonies, as far as I have ever heard.

Grandfather raised seven sons and three daughters, my father being the sixth child. Father was sixteen years old the year that Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, and thus ended the Revolutionary war. He had four older brothers who went through the war. Two of them, however, were killed; the other two were with Washington, and I suppose, were present when Cornwallis surrendered. I often heard these two uncles, named Moses and Lewis, speak of their hardships during the war. The oldest remained in Virginia, and the youngest went to North Carolina, and lived there till he died. One settled in Kentucky, and Benjamin and my father came to Indiana. Benjamin settled in Orange County, and was the last person that old Brother Johnathan Jones baptized, and they were both very old at the time.

Father settled near Bedford about the year of 1832, and only lived a short time afterward, and died near the age of seventy. When I went to see him last, he told me he was going to die, saying: "I have lived out my three-score and ten years, and am now about to leave this world; I am prepared to go; my Master has called for me and I am willing to go."

My mother's name was Martha Phipps, and was of Welch descent. She joined the Baptist Church when I was about four years old and was baptized by Elder Abraham Mitchell in Mitchell's river, North Carolina. Father was a member of the Regular Baptists before I can remember. Although I was so young, I can well remember seeing mother baptized. I remember that I was out of humor with Elder Mitchell on account of it. Mother lived twenty-six years after father died, making her home principally with me and brother Benjamin. In her dotage she seemed to think much about religion, and often related her experience of grace. She, too, was willing to die and went as willingly as anyone I ever knew.

Father raised six boys and four girls. They were all living when mother died. My three oldest brothers were in the War of 1812. I was too young to take part in that war. The two oldest, Benjamin and William, first joined a rifle company in North Carolina, and went to join Gen. Jackson in his war with the Creek Indians. They were present at the battle at the "Horse Shoe." They also went with Jackson to reduce the French fort at Pensacola. While there, their time for which they volunteered expired, and nearly all their company came home; but they volunteered again, and went with Jackson to New Orleans, and were in the battle there. Stephen volunteered later, and was not in any battle.

My oldest brother Benjamin, finally settled in Missouri (Jackson County) and during the last war he was foully murdered by what was known as the "Horse guard". He and four other men were shot and laid in a heap, he having four balls shot through him. His sympathies were known to be with the South. He had two sons in the rebel army, and on this account, no doubt, he was murdered. I felt very much irrevocably to this affair for a long while, but have become fully resigned, knowing that God will ultimately vindicate the right. William settled in Virginia, lived and died there; he joined the Regular Baptists here, and was baptized by Elder Wm. Davis. Stephen finally settled in Missouri and died there. John and Lewis settled and died in Lawrence County, Indiana.

My oldest sister married Samuel McBride, and settled in Davis County, Indiana, near Washington. Mary married Moses Hodge, and settled near Bedford, where she is still living, being a widow. Her husband has been dead some years. Frances married Isaac Hedges, and settled in Lawrence County. They are both dead, some time ago. Martha married Nathan Jackson, and is now living in Lawrence County, on Salt Creek.

I was born July 4, 1798, in Surry County, North Carolina. Father was only a common liver, and my opportunities for education were very poor. When I was eight years old, I was sent to school awhile. My school books were Dillworth's spelling-book and the New Testament. I went about six months at that time. I learned to write at home. After I was grown, I went three months to school to my brother in Virginia. During that time I studied arithmetic all the time; the text book I used was Pike's arithmetic. This was all the schooling I ever got. Father was a farmer, and of course, I was raised to work on the farm. He also followed stilling from my first recollection until I left home, and during my boyhood we all had access to his whiskey and brandy at all times; yet I never knew one of the family drunk while we stayed with father. In that time everybody kept spirits, and used them when and as they pleased, and yet there was very little drunkenness among the people. I have never been drunk in my life. I have always understood the Bible to condemn drunkenness, but I have not understood it to require total abstinence. With regard to the use of whiskey, I have through life kept as clear a conscience as any man.

Father was strict in his discipline with the family. I suppose I was, perhaps, as bad a boy as he raised. I loved frolics, and indulged in profanity; yet I ever had a regard for old people, and treated them with respect. I was accustomed to hear the Regular Baptists preach from my childhood, and I supposed I believed their doctrine. They preached then as they do now - total depravity and the recovery wholly of God. I now know that I did not believe what they preached for I thought

the change necessary could be accomplished by me at will; I supposed I could repent and turn to God at any time it suited me, and with this view of the subject, I felt a tolerable degree of security in my youthful days. At times the subject of death and the future would come up in my mind in a way to fill me with uneasiness, and I would vow to do better, but would relapse into a state of indifference on the subject. When I was about twenty-two years of age, I was away from home at work, and got word that Sister Polley had joined the church, and was to be baptized at the next meeting. With an oath, I declared that she must go no further with that matter and I went home determined to put a stop to her course. She had been a companion for me in our frolics, etc., and I felt unwilling to let her leave me. When I reached home, I saw that there was a marked change in her features, and felt discouraged. I asked her to take a walk with me, during which I urged her to give up her religion and remain with me. I urged that she was too young; that our youthful pleasures would be at an end, etc. She said but little, but let me know that if "I would not go with her, she would have to go alone". Her last words left an impression on my mind that remained for some time; yet it wore away. Sometime afterwards we had arranged to have a dance at Mr. Franklin's, and while plowing a few days before this event, my mind was led to reflect on God and religion, and the nature of sin, and I saw, as I never had seen it, the character of God; and the fact that I was subject to him came up before me. These thoughts dampened my interest in the dance, but when the time came I went to it, but had no heart in it; and when I was invited to take part in it, refused, assigning as a reason that I was sick. I told them that I must go home, and I went home, and have never been at a dance since. I felt the need of a Saviour, and formed a resolution to "get religion." I broke off from all profanity and wickedness outwardly, and betook myself to prayer. In this way I expected to find relief, for there was a sense of guilt and ruin in my heart. I had failed to understand the inward corruption of my nature, and the real need of a new birth I had not understood, nor had I yet understood the need of a Mediator, and the importance of imputed righteousness. I learned that my works and prayers did not reach the case. I saw more or less sin in all that I did, and I gradually learned that I needed something more than reformation. As my attention was turned to my own heart, I saw there an evil fountain which I felt sure must be purified; that fountain defiled my best works, and I gradually learned that I was utterly destitute of righteousness, and I could now see what they meant by total depravity. I looked on my case as a wretched one, and I regarded my condemnation as just, and had I been the judge I should have condemned myself. As I compared myself with God's word, "Sin revived and I died" to all hope of salvation in that way, and I understood no other. As I returned with my father from meeting one night, just us two alone, I stopped and told him that I was ruined; that I saw no way for my escape. I told him that my sins were a permanent barrier between me and God. I never shall forget the terrible gloom that was upon me that night; I was ready even to expect God to destroy me at once. I asked father to pray for me, and he knelt down and prayed; but still I felt miserable and unsaved. We went on home, us two alone, and I went to bed, but could not sleep, so terrible was my sense of sin. About midnight I got up and left the house, with no particular place in view, and I went a quarter or a mile or more, and fell on my face and tried to pray, and I thought of the words, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" in a moment I felt sure that those words applied to me, and my sense of ruin and guilt was gone, and I was happy; all nature looked bright and good to me, and I rejoiced in the sweet assurance that Christ was mine.

After this event, I ~~was~~

After this event, I became concerned about joining the church, and although I had never questioned but what the Regular Baptists were the true church, yet I devoted much time to reading the Testament, comparing their doctrine with the Scriptures. I felt anxious to serve the Lord, but I wanted to serve Him in His way, and finally became convinced that they were the true church and decided to offer myself to them. The church there was called Mitchell's River, and they had no pastor at that time. I then sent for Elder Thomas Cliphant, who was then a young man, and he came and preached to the people and on the third Saturday in September, 1823, I offered myself to the church and told them my experience, and was received for baptism. I was baptized next day by Elder Thomas Cliphant. I think I experienced the rest that God has promised to them that obey Him. I have often wished that all the dear lambs of God would follow Christ in His ordinances. How sad it is for His people to live away from His house, and thus deprive themselves of their true happiness. Should these lines ever come under the notice of any one who has a hope in Christ, I would exhort you to do your whole duty; put on the whole armor of God; leave the world, and go to God's people and live with them. How precious is God's cause, and how willing we should be to defend it and keep His Commandments.

After I joined the church I soon found my mind impressed with the duty of publicly speaking on the subject of religion. I reviled God's mercy to me, and the goodness of God revealed in the gospel, and I felt a deep interest in the church and its welfare, but felt unwilling to engage in the task. This sense of duty on the one side, and an unwillingness on the other to perform it, gave me a great deal of trouble. I knew that I was uneducated and was not gifted in speech, and greatly feared I would injure the cause I loved so dearly; I also had the pride of human nature which dreads the scoffs of men and the ridicule and censure that would surely follow if I engaged in this work. This conflict of mind continued with me to such a degree that I became miserable; my very life was a burden, and my parents became very uneasy about me; they feared that I would lose my mind. I could not work, my sleep was disturbed, and my appetite for food was impaired. I concluded that I would leave that country, hoping that I would be relieved from this matter, and I went to Virginia on horse-back, a distance of one hundred miles; but this gave me no relief; I still found this sense of duty weighing my feelings as heavily as ever. I was not content to stay but a little while, and returned home with the same gloomy feelings. The members of the church were in the habit of meeting every week for mutual edification, and on such occasions someone or more would offer prayer, and some would talk, giving their feelings in regard to religion; and others would read a portion of Scripture and offer some comments on it. I attended these meetings. On one occasion, when we were met at Leonard Roy's, I opened meeting by singing and prayer. I had become convinced that I could not be happy in any other way; in fact, I had become willing to bear all the reproach that could be heaped upon me. Soon after my return from Virginia, I was lying on my bed thinking on this matter, when the Saviour's words to Peter occurred to my mind, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" and again, "Feed my sheep." At this time I became fully resigned to obey the Lord in this thing, but I soon felt again unresigned; my weakness and ignorance seemed to make it impossible; but the words of Christ occurred to me, "All power, both in heaven and in earth, is given into my hands; go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." While reflecting on this passage, particularly the first last parts of it, I became fully resigned to my duty, and felt willing to depend wholly on the Lord.

The church began to discuss the subject of my ordination, and occasionally they spoke to me about it, but I objected and opposed being ordained for some time, but eventually yielded to the wish of the church and was ordained by the following presbytery, to-wit; Elds. Thos. Douglas, Drowry Centor and Pleasant Cochran, and Deacons Leonard Roy, John Marsh and Drowry Hodges. This was in September, 1824. The prayer was offered by Pleasant Cochran, and the charge was delivered by Drowry Centor.

Our church was a part of the Yadkin Association and at the time we corresponded with the Mayo Mountain District and New River Associations. There was, at this time, a general revival in all the Associations.

After my ordination I began to study the doctrine of the Scriptures, with a view to teaching it to others. We did not, at that time, have any opposition of any amount, save from the Methodists, who considered our sentiments too hard, and felt called on to oppose us on this account. Our churches were well established in the doctrine of salvation by grace; the doctrine of election, special redemption, effectual calling and final perseverance were well understood and defended by our people, and they were greatly blessed in maintaining these principles.

I am not able to say just how these Associations originated, but I feel sure that they all directly and indirectly, descended from the Philadelphia Association. It is a matter of history that the Kehukee Association, in North Carolina, which still exists as regular Baptists, was formed by ministers from the Philadelphia Association about the year 1754. The Kehukee Association was regarded as a mother Association, and was at that time in direct correspondence with the Mayo Association. To give the reader a just idea of the doctrine of the Baptists at that time, I will give the 5th, 6th and 7th Articles of Faith of the Kehukee Association:

5th. "We believe that God, before the foundation of the world, for a purpose of his own glory, did elect a certain number of men and angels to eternal life, and that this election is eternal, particular and unconditional on the creatures' part.

6th. "We also believe that it is utterly out of the power of men, as fallen creatures, to keep the laws of God properly, repent of their sins truly, or believe in Christ, except they be drawn by the Holy Ghost.

7th. "We believe that in God's own appointed time and way (by means which he has ordained), that the elect shall be called, justified, pardoned and sanctified, and that it is impossible they can refuse the call, but shall be made willing by living grace, to receive the offers of mercy."

I am not prepared to give the Articles of Faith of any other Association there, but I know they were the same in substance as the above. The Philadelphia Association was the first Association organized in the United States. It was organized in 1707. In the year 1742, this Association adopted the London Confession of Faith, which was so called because it was first adopted in London, in 1689, by over one hundred congregations, now nearly two hundred years ago. This Confession of Faith is mentioned by Bolcher as set forth the doctrine generally believed by the Baptists. Although Bolcher was a Missionary Baptist, he was constrained to admit that the Baptists generally believed the sentiment of this Confession of Faith. I doubt very much whether one half of the Missionary Baptists believe the Articles, but in order for the Missionary Baptists to show a connection with the Baptists of Europe, they are compelled to recognize the "Philadelphia Confession." The reader that desires to know what the Baptists believed to centuries ago would be interested to read this Confession of Faith, (to be found in Hassell's Church History. -R) especially as the churches that adopted it first may be truly regarded as the "Mother Associations," and I am sure that it was substantially the doctrine of all Baptists of Virginia and North Carolina above named, at the time I first joined the Association here ministers, speaking of their Articles, say that they need ex

sound, but with their explanation they are very unsound. I have admired the Philadelphia Confession, because it is in such plain language that it can't be tortured to agree with Arminian sentiments. (To be found in Hassell's Church History, and omitted here on account of space.-R)

There was a young lady by the name of Tabitha Hodges, daughter of Bartholomew Hodges who lived in that community, who was baptized in our church a short time before my ordination. I became interested in her, and in the fall of 1825 we were married. We lived together until her death, which occurred August 28, 1860. The day of my ordination I was called to the care of Mitchell River Church, and one month later was requested to take the care of Cove Spring Church, and was soon requested to take the care of Rearing River Church about thirty miles away, and still later, took the care of Franklin Church. We were poor, and the churches were poor and we lived on rented land and had to work hard to make a living, yet we had plenty to eat and wear; our brethren helped us some, and we all got along well. Nothing unusual occurred among our churches for some three or four years, when the "Missionary" spirit began to be manifest in that country. The first Missionary Baptist I ever saw or heard of was Robert T. Daniel. He came into our part of the country about 1828. He was a very smart man, and a fine talker. Upon his first visit he made a favorable impression on our people. He urged me to unite with him in the enterprise; flattered me with the idea that I had an excellent gift; that it was unnecessary for me to live hard and poor, and work on the farm as I was doing; he said he was getting \$1,000.00 per year for his preaching, and that if he could not get that for his preaching he would quit it, and go to something else that would make it. This kind of talk disgusted me; I felt that I must preach; there was a necessity in the case that forbid me quitting. The New Testament account of the apostles forbid the idea that they could so easily quit their ministry. I was convinced that this spirit was not of God; I felt willing to depend on God entirely for my support, and thought it unwise and sinful to fix a price on our preaching. It seemed to me a want of confidence in God, who had promised to be with us "Always, even unto the end of the world". My opinion of the missionary move had never changed. I determined to risk God's plan of circulating the gospel, and have all through life pursued the course I then adopted. I have found my God faithful to his promises, and I have never passed the hat, nor had it done; I have never begged the people for money or aid of any kind, and yet I have had plenty all through life; my children all have plenty, and are doing well in this world's goods. I am now living with my daughter Rachel, who married James Stone. I have a good home there, and many of my brethren would willingly, if I needed it, take me to their homes and care for me as long as I live. If I was young again, and just starting in the ministry I would disdain the Missionary plan. I now know that God will care for the man who honestly and faithfully does his duty as a minister, and there is no need of having the promise of men or churches to aid us; God's promise is sufficient.

While I had the care of Rearing River Church, which was thirty miles away, I became impressed in mind that I ought to preach at a place some twelve miles from the church. I always passed it in going to Rearing River. I knew no one there, nor did I know anything of the sentiments of the people there, but still I felt, every time I passed there, that I ought to preach there, and on two occasions I stopped at a house in that neighborhood and had some talk with the people. They were not members of any church, but I found that they were Christian people, and were anxious to have preaching there. We had an appointment published there, which was well attended. They finally went to Rearing River and joined, and afterwards an arm was extended to that place from Rearing River. Franklin Church secured the labors of another minister, and I took the care of the arm, and we soon constituted a church there, which prospered greatly. That church, Mt. Pleasant, still exists. I suppose there were fifty members in it when I left that country, (H.C.)

In the spring of 1831 my folks moved to this State (Indiana), and I felt constrained to come with father and settled in Lawrence County, in the woods, where I was compelled to do much hard work to clear up our land and build a house and out-buildings. I first joined Salt Creek Church which soon dissolved, and from there I went to Indian Creek Church for membership. The first time I ever attended White River Association was in the fall of 1831. It was composed of twenty-two churches, and a membership of 682. There was a trouble in the Association in regard to the reception of alien baptism in Vernal Church. This difficulty resulted in dropping connection with that church. The churches here had been tried sorely with the doctrine of A. Campbell, and in some churches there had been division and there was much prejudice in this country on that subject when I came here. It was very common then for someone to criticize my preaching as soon as it was done. Campbell's followers were ever ready to raise objection to our preaching. One thing I then observed with regard to "Campbellism" was that it utterly ignored experimental religion, and in their books and papers and also their conversation, they were accustomed to ridicule the old-fashioned experimental religion. I plainly saw that no intelligent person could consistently accept their view and believe in experimental religion. Their view of the design of baptism were such that no person could be saved without it, so Mr. Campbell taught. I knew that if this were true, that there was no salvation to heathens, nor to persons who had been sprinkled. They taught that men must not only be immersed, but that they must be immersed with their view of its design. I saw that this view of the subject necessitated its advocates to deny that any person can be saved unless he be immersed with their views of immersion. It also made it necessary for them to deny salvation to heathens or persons outside of Bible teaching. To avoid this consequence, they were compelled to allow that there were two plans of salvation, one suited to the infants, heathens, etc., the other to the people under Bible teaching. This view was very repulsive to me, and very far from what I had understood the Bible to teach. I noticed, too, that it was suited to catch the mass. It made the new birth an easy thing. "Being born again" was an easy affair. Evangelical faith had no more significance than our opinions respecting other things. Preaching was performed at a price, and "for filthy lucre's sake." The true works of Christianity, it seemed to me, were discarded. There was a certain worldly cast about the conversation of its members, even when talking about religion, that was unpleasant to me. I became fully convinced that it was of the world that God was not in it, and that it was unscriptural and unreasonable; that it tended to unite the church and world. This was the opinion I first formed of Campbellism; I am now of the same opinion. It has been greatly multiplied in numbers.

I remained on the farm I first settled for Twenty-seven years. We had eleven children born to us; two died in infancy; the others all lived to be grown and married but one. Gideon, our youngest, died before he was married; he died in 1865. Sarah died in Illinois and left a family of five children. John was drowned in Martin County, in White River. William died February, 1873, so that my wife and six of my children are dead. I had the care of Indian Creek Church first in 1835. The church was blessed with considerable property. I also had the care of Salem church. I was the first man that ever preached a Baptist sermon in the neighborhood of Salem church, after which an arm was established there, which resulted in the organization of a church there. We were blessed with considerable revival there. Still later, I took the care of Guthrie Creek and Gilgal; also Spring Creek. These churches were the principal places of my ministerial labors for the twenty seven years that I lived in Lawrence County.

There was a spirit of exhortation among the churches in those days. The brethren often met together and talked to each other about religion; some would engage in prayer and others would read a part of Scripture, and the brethren would mutually help and strengthen each other. I am sorry that these practices have been abandoned. It was not uncommon to give an opportunity for persons to be prayed for. Old Bro. Thomas Cliphart frequently when he saw an interest among the people, would invite those who desired the prayers of the church to come forward and give their hands. Whether this was right or not, I will not now decide, but we felt that it was right, and were greatly blessed in our churches.

I am persuaded that there are two extremes, and we are liable to go to either. The church ought to manifest an interest in the religious welfare of the people. When we do, those who are seriously exercised will look to us for instruction; they will come to us for a home. Brethren should watch for persons who are interested, talk to them, and invite them to our meetings; make them feel that we are concerned for their welfare. In this we used to gain influence among the people, and were a blessing to the communities where we met.

From Lawrence County I moved into Owen County, and first settled on the farm of Elder J. H. Cliphart, Sr., on the West river. I remained in that neighborhood as long as my wife lived, and some three years later, when we broke up housekeeping, and have been staying with Rachel Stone, my daughter, ever since.

My wife's death occurred in August, in the year 1860. She was fully reconciled to her death and told me not to weep for her, that I would soon follow her. About this time I united with Friendship church, and am still a member of that church.

A series of difficulties began in the White River Association about the year 1860, which grew worse and worse until the division, which occurred in 1865. I was chosen Moderator of the Association in 1863, and have served as Moderator ever since, except two years, being absent. I shall not attempt to give a detailed account of the unhappy division of our Association. Since then our numbers are few, but we retained all our correspondence, and have enjoyed the visits and preaching of scores of good preachers from every direction. We now have twelve churches, and about four hundred members. We need more ministering brethren among us. I greatly desire that all our brethren and sisters would pray to God to supply our need in this particular.

My labors are done. I will be 89 years old July 4, 1867, if I live till then. (Written in ink - "He lived to be 96 years old"). I am not able to travel and preach as I used to do, but I still love the cause as well as I ever did. The doctrine of grace is my solace now in my old age, and I can recommend it to the brethren as the only ground of a sinner's hope. I shall soon be beyond the reach of sorrow, division and death, where I hope to join the company of the dear ones gone before, and enjoy an eternal rest from all my labors and cares. I realize that I am but a speck in God's creation, yet I look up to the dear Redeemer with hope that in the great events of the last day I shall be rescued from destruction, and brought off a conqueror through Him that loved me and gave himself for me. And now, dear ones, whom I labored, I bid you farewell till we meet in eternal glory. May God help you to bear up amid the trials of life.

GIDEON POTTER