

Hon. Walter Lowrie

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John D. Wells

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BY THE

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HON. WALTER LOWRIE.

THE beloved man whose name stands at the head of this sketch, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, December 10th, 1784. In the year 1792 his parents came to this country, and after a short sojourn in Huntingdon county, settled in Butler county, Pennsylvania. Bringing with them their knowledge and love of the truth, their family altar, instruction, and discipline, and their thorough Presbyterianism, they helped to give tone and character to the civil and religious institutions of that part of their adopted State. Western Pennsylvania remains to this day a stronghold of Presbyterianism.

Walter felt the quiet and powerful influence of home culture. Most of his early secular instruction was received from the lips of his parents. By them, too, he was made acquainted with the truths of God's Word and the Standards of our Church. In return for this Christian nurture, he gave himself, till early manhood, to the toil of a farmer under his father's direction, learning some great practical lessons, which turned to excellent account at later periods of his life.

After his conversion, which occurred when he was eighteen years old, he entered upon a course of study, with the ministry in view. Under the instruction of the

Rev. John McPherrin, he pursued the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages with great diligence and success. Inured to toil from boyhood, having good health, a strong body, and a mind of fine texture and firm grasp, he made light of difficulties that few comparatively would have overcome. He was borne forward, too, by a fervent desire to preach the gospel. It became clear, however, after a while, that God was preparing him for a different work. Barriers were thrown and kept in his way, until, with no change in his high estimate of the sacred office to which he had aspired, and hoping to resume his studies, he laid them aside and entered upon the duties of secular life.

In 1811 he was elected to the Senate of Pennsylvania, and after serving the State seven years in this office, he was sent to the Senate of the United States.

At the expiration of his term of service, in 1824, he was made Secretary of the Senate, and held the office twelve years. Owing to the peculiarly delicate nature of this office, and the responsibility connected with it, it did not change incumbents with successive administrations. Mr. Lowrie's predecessors enjoyed its honours and emoluments for life, and he might have done the same.

Indeed he was earnestly solicited by members of the Senate, without reference to party distinctions, to retain the office. But his purpose was taken and nothing could move him. A call louder than that of his peers in the State had come to him—the call he believed of the Head of the Church, to take charge of the Foreign Missionary work, to which, as a denomination, we were then setting our hand.

He was elected Corresponding Secretary of the Western Foreign Missionary Society in 1836. This office he

accepted, passing under the care of the General Assembly, when the Board of Foreign Missions was constituted in 1837. He continued in the faithful discharge of its varied duties, until, disabled by the infirmities of old age, he laid it down in 1868. He had not drawn his salary for several years before that date, and would not retain even the office, after he felt himself no longer able to discharge its duties.

Mr. Lowrie's public life as a statesman can be reviewed only in an extended memoir, which I hope we shall have in due season; still I cannot pass it without two or three suggestive statements.

It covered a period of twenty-five years, from 1811 to 1836. He was twenty-seven years old when he entered the Senate of Pennsylvania, and fifty-two when he left the Senate of the United States. For a quarter of a century, therefore, he was the associate of public men, the peer of great men—and was recognized by them and his constituents as himself a great man. Dr. Paxton, in his Funeral Address, published in the *Foreign Missionary* last month, tells us that "Webster, Clay, Calhoun, Randolph, Benton, and many others scarcely less illustrious, were members of the Senate" at that time, and adds: "Among these distinguished Senators, Walter Lowrie occupied a position of honourable prominence. His great integrity won their confidence, whilst his peculiar sagacity and practical judgment led them to seek his advice, and rely upon his opinions. I am informed by one who was present at that time, that he was regarded by the Senators who knew him best, as an authority upon all questions of political history and constitutional law."

Mr. Lowrie's Christian character was tried, and at last purified and ennobled, while he remained in contact with influences that prove fatal to so many public men pro-

fessing godliness. He impressed himself strongly upon other Christian men, and even upon those in high places who were not religious. But he escaped the perils of his position only through the constant and powerful influence of his home, the communion of saints, and the grace of God shed on him abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It should be stated, too, that during the eighteen years of his connection with the Senate of the United States, he was receiving a special providential training for the work to which God was about to call him. One might as well deny a plan of God in the case of Moses, as of Mr. Lowrie. The Jewish lawgiver was forty years in the family and court of Pharaoh, forty in the land of Midian, and forty at the head of the tribes; the last third of his life embracing the years and the work, for which the other two-thirds were a constant preparation. A similar division exists in the fewer years of Mr. Lowrie's life; and I have no doubt that all the years prior to his connection with the Senate of his own State, and all that he spent in discharging the duties of a statesman, were in fact, and were meant to be, preparatory, in many ways, to his great work in connection with the cause of missions.

It is certain that our work among the Indian tribes, encompassed with so many difficulties, and requiring correspondence and personal influence with the Department of Indian Affairs at Washington, could not have been successfully carried forward, without a very intimate knowledge of at least that Department of the Government. It was not in vain, therefore, that Mr. Lowrie, while in the Senate, was a member of the Committee on Indian Affairs, and profoundly interested in the fate and the evangelization of the tribes.

So, too, he co-operated with good men at Washington in the management of the American Colonization Society.

and let his large Christian sympathies flow out towards the black man in this country, and on the continent of Africa.

With India he was brought into living connection, while still Secretary of the Senate, by the departure of his eldest son, the Rev. John C. Lowrie, to the northern provinces of that vast country.

And by a strange providence he was led to give his heart to the Chinese people, before God called him to give two of his sons, the Rev. Walter M. Lowrie and the Rev. Reuben Lowrie, as missionaries to the same people; the first to meet the death of a martyr, and the second to sink under the climate and his severe labours. Of these two sons it may be said with perfect truth, that they were among the ablest and most consecrated men ever sent by the Church to the Foreign field.

For some time, I do not know how long, Mr. Lowrie pursued the study of the Chinese language, rising two hours earlier than usual, not to interfere with his duties as Secretary of the Senate. In this way he prepared himself in some measure, before he knew the plan of God for his future life, for the work of founding and conducting missions, at the very heart of the pagan world.

It is but little that can be said in this sketch of Mr. Lowrie's work, as Corresponding Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions. The acceptance of the office involved great self-denial, and many sacrifices; and this was the charm by which the office secured its incumbent. So he himself declared. For a lucrative office, he chose one that never supported his family. He abandoned a beautiful home with ample grounds, for a dwelling in the city and the confinement of an office. At the age of fifty-two he relinquished a post of honour, with the duties of which he had become perfectly familiar, and which

were comparatively easy, to put his hand to a work which no one understood, which one of the strongest men in our Church, to whom its oversight was offered, declined to undertake, and in doing which, for more than thirty years, Mr. Lowrie found no rest from toil and care and responsibility. It was work in the office; in the market place; at the seat of Government; in the Church; and among our Indian tribes. He had valuable counsellors and willing hands to help him, but it was his habit to think of everything. He was immensely and minutely practical, and even when office duties had become so heavy that help was necessary, and his own natural strength was somewhat abated, he held his mind in contact with all questions of policy, and most of the plans and estimates for prosecuting and enlarging the work.

Few persons, probably, can appreciate the delicacy, the difficulty, and the importance of the work done in the office by a Corresponding Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions. He is in contact with the missionaries and the heathen, on the one hand; and on the other, with the kindred of the missionaries; with many pastors and churches; with the entire church for which he acts; and with missionary societies of other branches of the Christian church. He is cut off from the intimate and endeared relationships to families and churches that pastors enjoy. He is the servant of all men. He is liable to frequent interruptions, and he has no prospect of reward, till his work ceases, and he enters into rest.

Mr. Lowrie was pre-eminently qualified for hard work at the table, and among the details of office work. His mind was calm and judicial. It had possession of great principles, discovered by broad inquiry, and the patient study of particulars relating to his work, or found clearly revealed in the Word of God. For this reason his letters

to missionaries and missions, on matters of vital importance, were often so direct and simple, as to have the appearance—at least to those not familiar with the full details of the matters under consideration—of being common-place. Just as the ablest sermons, that treat of difficult subjects with seeming ease, are thought to be wanting in depth and power, by those who do not know at what a cost of labour such results are reached.

The same habits of mind revealed themselves in the deliberations of the Executive Committee and the Board. Quietly and earnestly, but in a few words, and with great decision, Mr. Lowrie expressed his opinions. He was not afraid to be in a minority and even alone, because his convictions were so strong. And rarely did he fail to fasten his own convictions upon other minds.

I have alluded to his work in the market place. For a number of years supplies of food and clothing, with household utensils and farming implements, were forwarded from New York, and other cities, to our Indian Missions in the West and Southwest. This imposed an immense amount of labour on the office of our Board in Centre street; and in this labour Mr. Lowrie bore his part. He reckoned nothing little, or beneath his personal attention and toil, that could minister to the welfare of the missionaries and those under their care, or in any way help the cause of Christ.

His visits to Washington, on business connected with the missions among the Indians, if not frequent from year to year, were in the aggregate very numerous. They always taxed his strength severely, and often called into requisition all the experience and influence he had acquired during his long and intimate association with the Government.

The labours of Mr. Lowrie, in the Church, for many

years, were very arduous and effective. He called upon people at their houses, to secure contributions for various purposes connected with the work of missions. He attended monthly concerts, visited Theological Seminaries, Presbyteries and Synods, and went to the General Assembly, always bearing the great cause of Foreign Missions on his heart. Many will remember his tender and persuasive addresses. Perfectly familiar with all the details of the work, the wants of the heathen, the feeble responses of the Church to calls for men and money to evangelize the world, and knowing well the ability of the Church to do all that the providence of God required, and the claims of Jesus upon his blood-bought people, he made his statements and appeals, with such force and melting tenderness, as to call forth many tears, and produce deep and lasting impressions. The saving of a little child from heathenism; the conversion of an Indian, African, Hindoo, or Chinaman; the establishment of a new mission, or the enlarging of an old one, was, in his view, a matter of vast moment and sacred interest. He wondered that Christian men especially, and pastors of churches, could disparage the missionary papers, that were constantly reporting such things. With great simplicity, and often in tears, he related incidents connected with the progress of missions, and relied upon them to impress others as they did himself.

The visits of Mr. Lowrie to the Indian tribes in our country, were among the most arduous and important of all his official labours. It was the writer's privilege to accompany him in the spring of 1847 to Spencer Academy, then a flourishing school, under the care of our Board, among the Choctaw Indians, about ten miles from the Red River, and a hundred and twenty-five southwest from Fort Smith in Arkansas. By day and night for

two months, in all sorts of conveyances and apartments, I held delightful fellowship with him as a son with a father. He was then sixty-three years old. From pretty full notes of travel taken at the time, it would be easy to give a very definite idea of the hardships he endured, the labour he performed, and the varied interests he sought to promote. He never spared himself. From the 29th day of March, to the 21st of April, with few interruptions, we were making our way by rail, by stage, and by steamer, to Fort Smith at the head of navigation on the Arkansas River.

Under date of Saturday, April 3d, while we were at Cincinnati, I find this record, which gives a hint, at least, in regard to one object of his visit: "Accompanied Mr. T—— and Mr. Lowrie, to various places, shops of artisans of different kinds. Mr. Lowrie is looking at grist mills, corn shellers, steam engines, and a carding, spinning and weaving machine, with the view of purchasing some or all of them for use among the Indians."

On the 21st of April, we took horse at Fort Smith, and, passing immediately into the Indian Territory, pursued our solitary way towards Spencer Academy. The path led us across beautiful rolling prairies, over rugged hills, and through bridgeless streams. At night we slept in Indian houses, and partook of their coarse but plentiful fare. Our midday lunch, consisting generally of a little bacon and some corn dodgers, was eaten beside a cool spring, or clear brook, where we tethered our horses, and rested a while, enjoying the perfect solitude, and holding Christian communion never to be forgotten. Mr. Lowrie's whole being was open to impressions from nature. He was perfectly at home among the lilies of the field, the trees of the forest, the running streams, and the everlasting hills. He knew the names of most of the birds,

and was delighted when once we came suddenly upon some deer feeding in an oak grove. He noticed every change in soil and in geological formations, and would readily dismount to secure a new fossil. He was quick to perceive the points of beauty in a landscape, and the glories of the sky. And often his heart was too full for silence, and burst out in words of sacred song, or scripture, and in ascriptions of praise. But nothing stirred him so deeply as living contact with the Indians themselves, many of whom we saw in making our horseback journey through their country. His heart was melted to tenderness for them. At Spencer Academy he was employed almost without rest from Saturday, the day of our arrival, until Thursday following, in arranging family matters; projecting improvements on the buildings and the farm; revising accounts; hearing the recitation of the scholars; conducting and enjoying religious worship on the Sabbath; and conferring with the chiefs and leading men of the Choctaw Nation.

I should be glad, if the space devoted to this sketch would allow me to give an account of the last two nights of our return journey, for the purpose of showing to what discomforts and perils Mr. Lowrie willingly submitted in the prosecution of his great work. He endured hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. From thirty to fifty miles in the saddle, several days in succession, will try the strength of men who have not reached their sixty-third birthday.

At Fort Smith, on Monday, May 3d, 1847, Mr. Lowrie and myself parted company; he to pursue his lonely way to the Creek, Iowa, and Omaha Missions, and I to return home. I conclude this notice of the journey, by a short extract from my journal.

“This morning Mr. Lowrie took an early start on his

long and solitary horseback journey. The Rev. Mr. Marshal (from Van Buren) and myself, accompanied him to the flat boat, and saw him safely over the Arkansas River, and mounted on his 'Charley.' He waved his hat, and passed on to do his important work, cheerfully sustaining many privations and hardships. He goes first to the Creek Mission, thence across the country to Independence on the Missouri River, and thence, by water, if possible, (but if not, on horseback), to Council Bluff and the Iowa and Omaha Missions."

This was only one of several visits made by Mr. Lowrie to the Indian missions. The result of his personal agency in behalf of the tribes under our care, and the abundance of his labours, with the greatness of his perils and hardships, can never be known till the Master himself reveals them, as fruits of his love and devotion.

I think of Mr. Lowrie habitually, as one to whom the sacred description of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, applies without any qualification or abatement—"A man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." It pleased God to give him a large nature, and a peculiar providential training for the work he loved so well. But in addition to this, by early revealing to him the plague of his heart, and placing him in circumstances where his own strength was felt to be perfect weakness, as a defence against worldly influences, He led him to ask until he obtained, in large measure, that most precious gift, "Faith, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The infinite objects of the Christian hope were as real to him as the ground on which he walked. The unseen things of the Kingdom of Heaven had a demonstrated existence to his soul, that made them vastly more precious and influential than all the objects of sense. This was in part the secret of his superiority to the world,

and the consecration of himself, his children, and his possessions, to Christ and his cause.

But it is not without design that Stephen is described as a man "full of the Holy Ghost," as well as of faith; and this part of the description has its equal meaning in reference to Mr. Lowrie. His thoughts, affections, and purposes were controlled by Him. He was a living temple of the living God. A Person of the Godhead occupied his whole spirit and soul and body, and moved him by the Holy Scriptures, by the precious ordinances of God's house, by sacred providences, and by his own still small voice, as clear sometimes to the consecrated soul as the human voice to the ear, to keep back nothing from his Redeemer and Master, to spend and be spent for him; to forsake all that he had, and not to count his life dear unto him, that he might win and glorify Christ. He called Him his *Master*. He delighted in his service. It was perfect liberty to him to have every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. No doubt he had his faults, but I do not know what they were, unless we must reckon it a fault to be blunt and outspoken against evil, to denounce selfishness that sacrifices the precious interests of Christ's cause to personal ease and emolument, and to hate falsehood and pretence.

It was Mr. Lowrie's faith, wrought and maintained by the Holy Ghost, that gave to the prophecies and promises of scripture, relating to the spread and triumph of the gospel in the whole world, so much power over his heart and life. Really believing that as many as sin without law, shall also perish without law, he believed that in the last days the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it:—that Jesus Christ is a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of

Israel; that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved; that for this reason he must be preached among all nations, and the presence and power of his Spirit invoked in behalf of all, till the wilderness and solitary places of the earth rejoice and blossom as the rose.

In this faith he lived and died, leaving to the Church a legacy of toil and consecration and prayer, which she may well prize.

Happy in his second marriage as in his first, blessed in his children and children's children, and also in his work, he came to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season. Carlyle celebrates "The sumless worth of a man," and Bayne in his "*Christian Life*," with more Christian views, dwells upon the theme. Surely none but God can make such a man, as we know Mr. Lowrie was and is, and to him let all the glory be given. His face was the index of his character, the mirror of his soul; and as we recall it now, or gaze upon its most faithful representation in Ritchie's engraving, we can only be thankful that we knew and loved him—and that now he rests from his labours, and his works do follow him.



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