

LIFE

OF

Rev. James Needham,

The Oldest Methodist Preacher

REV. J. P. RODGERS

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REV. JAMES NEEDHAM

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The Oldest Methodist Preacher

BY THE

REV. J. P. RODGERS,

Of the Western North Carolina Conference

26043

PILOT MOUNTAIN, N. C. :

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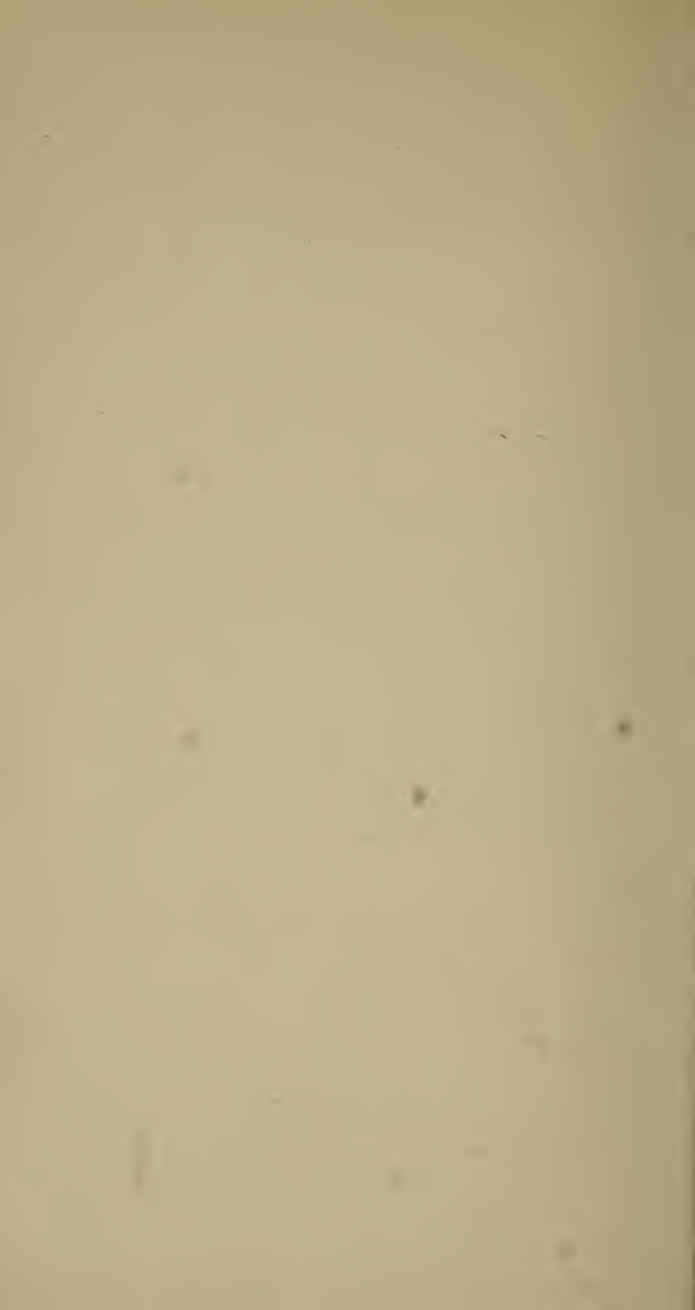
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TO LOTTIE LORENA BURRAGE,
MY FAITHFUL AND EFFICIENT HELPMET;

TO ANNIE BURRAGE RODGERS,
OUR PRECIOUS BABE IN HEAVEN;

TO JAMES BARR RODGERS,
OUR PRESENT JOY AND FUTURE HOPE.

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PREFACE

If Father Needham had died forty years ago, his life would have deserved a permanent record as a valuable contribution to the early history of Methodism in North Carolina. The value of a biography is largely determined by the usefulness of the life and by the faithfulness of the biographer in reproducing that life on the printed page. If justice were done to this life, instead of this booklet, a large and valuable volume would now be issued from the press.

I have gathered suggestions from biography and facts from children and friends, but much I remember as he told it to me while we labored together. If I had expected to write this sketch, I could have known much more.

With limited information and time, I give to the public this little book, and it is hoped that it will serve to keep fresh in the minds of many friends a few remarkable facts of this remarkable man of God.

J. P. RODGERS.

PILOT MOUNTAIN, N. C.



THE LIFE OF
REV. JAMES NEEDHAM,
The Oldest Methodist Preacher.

MAY 26, 1799—APRIL 1st, 1899.

Bishop Pierce says of his father, Rev. Lovick Pierce, D. D., that he "inaugurated the longest term of effective service in the annals of Methodism," when he preached his first sermon on his first charge. If the words "effective service" may be applied to the work of a faithful local preacher who began at conversion in September, 1820, and continued without interruption until he delivered his last powerful message March 12, 1899, a few days before his death, then this is true of Rev. James Needham whose labors as a preacher of righteousness have surpassed Dr. Pierce's in length. A life of seventy-eight and a half years as an effective preacher and soul winner! What a career as an ambassador of Jesus Christ! What a herald! John the Baptist for only a few months, but this man of God for nearly eighty years! What multitudes will rise at the judgment to call him blessed!

Methodism in the Piedmont section of North Carolina has had in him a veritable pioneer with all the essential qualifications for success in his unique work. Many churches were organized by him that are now large and prosperous. Take out of the history of North Carolina Methodism the life of Father Needham (for that is the name he was called) and who can estimate the loss? The value of a life so busy and so abounding in the work of the Lord can not be measured by the standards of earth. He planted the cross and his labors abide.

Rev. James Needham was born in Randolph County, N. C., about seven miles from Trinity, May 26, 1799. His parents, Jesse and Sarah Needham, had moved there from Pasquotank County. He began life where books were scarce and schools were few and inferior. There was little in his early life to inspire him to seek literary improvement and the highest attainments. The poorest boy of to-day has greater advantages and opportunities for mental training. It was only by the exercise of an iron will and by persistence in self-culture that success was possible to the boy who had in him the material of which men are made.

In all the country districts of Piedmont North Carolina, society was in its primitive and undeveloped state, more or less "ignorant, rude and vicious." There was little to stir the mind and encourage ambition. Life had in it much of the treadmill process and usually desired as its goal to "eat, drink and be merry." It was a day when men were skilled with the plow, the gig and the gun. He who could tell the most thrilling stories of adventures and exploits was sure of the most attentive hearers and the highest esteem.

Professor Drummond has much to say about environment as one of the master-influences affecting man, but Father Needham gathered up a good store of information despite his unfavorable surroundings. He read history and standard works on theology, but most of all the Word of God, the first book he ever purchased.

Religious matters were very much in keeping with the intellectual status of the country. There was then much preaching against what was called "will-worship." Father Needham delayed seeking the salvation of his soul because of the pressure brought to bear upon him by the strong opposition to seeking religion at "the mourn-

ers' bench" and to all revival work.

In the fall of 1820, desiring deliverance from his sins, he attended a camp meeting at Pleasant Garden, Guilford County. At first, failing to keep his promise to the Lord to go to the altar, the Spirit seemed to leave him in a condition of despair. But finally the Spirit returned in his convicting power, he went to the altar and was most "powerfully" converted. Powerful conversions at that time were not uncommon. The gospel with New Testament faith and power was preached by men who felt that power in their own lives, and the multitudes stood amazed at the signs and wonders that accompanied their labors. His was not a conversion of dry eyes after the quick and improved process. He returned home and in reply to the question, "What's the news?" said, "Good news! Good news! I've got religion!" His friends began to cry and leave the house. He called them back and told them he wanted to pray for them.

At once he joined the Methodist Church, the Church of his pious parents, who had dedicated him to the Lord by baptism in infancy. He began to call his companions to Christ as they met together in class meeting. A great

revival began in which hundreds of souls were converted. He began his spiritual life in a revival and revival fires burned wherever he labored throughout his long and eventful life.

Though he began calling sinners to repentance as soon as he was converted, he was not licensed to exhort until sometime in the year 1821. He was licensed to preach three or four years later, Rev. Lewis Skidmore being Presiding Elder, at a conference held at Leaksville, Va. He was ordained Deacon by Bishop Andrew in Raleigh, N. C., at the last Virginia Conference held in that city, and was ordained Elder in Greensboro, N. C., four years later by Bishop Morris. The records containing dates were destroyed by Federal soldiers.

He always had an unshaken faith in his conversion. To be sure, he had his periods of peculiar trial, but he never lost his first love, nor did his title to the heavenly mansion ever cease to be clear. Possibly no one ever had clearer and more unmistakable evidences of his sonship than Father James Needham, and no one ever had a more thoroughgoing conversion, nor a conversion that marked the beginning of a more abundant peace and a more even overflow of real joy.

Father Needham belonged to the original stock of Methodists. He was pre-eminently a Christian, but a Christian formed in a Methodist mold. John Wesley never had a follower that was more loyal and consistent. The rules and usages of the Methodist Church were conformed to by him, not in any servile sense, but in the spirit of love for and faith in the Church of his choice.

Though he was a genuine and an enthusiastic Methodist, he always manifested the sweetest and most catholic spirit toward the brethren of other communions. He shunned controversies and engaged in them only a few times, and then only when it became necessary to defend the doctrines of the Church he had promised to serve. He loved "the brethren," and with him that included all Christians.

He loved the Methodist Church. Its theology appealed to his common sense and sound judgment. He adapted himself to the methods of his Church, and had great faith in its mission in the world. He deplored its corruptions, but never became disheartened or despondent. To the last he prayed daily for the evangelization of the world and expected his own Church to be one of the great forces under God in bringing

about that happy day when the gospel of Jesus Christ will be declared among all the nations of the earth. How earnestly he prayed for the heathen!

EQUIPMENT FOR SERVICE.

As before said, Father Needham's early life was very much cramped and his opportunities for mental improvement very much limited. No high school course or college curriculum was within his reach. Yet he, in his zeal for the greatest usefulness in his Master's service, came to have a well-disciplined and well-balanced mind despite his lack of academic and collegiate training. He gathered largely from history and from some of the Church's standard authors; but far above all other books did he prize the Book of books. He was pre-eminently a man of one Book, and in him that great Book had the heartiest response to its teachings. His supreme delight was "in the law of the Lord," and in His Word did he literally "meditate day and night." His leaf and fruit did not fail even in old age.

He did not have the learning of the schools nor any of their acquired or conferred degrees; but he had a very accurate and minute knowledge of

God's Word, and when he preached he obeyed the apostolic injunction, "Preach the word." His mind was stored with the words of divine truth, and he could repeat large portions of it with remarkable accuracy years after his eyes became too dim to read the printed page; and his soul was saturated with the spirit of the Word and continued to absorb it daily. For him it never lost its freshness, nor did the passing years cool the ardor of his love for its commands and promises. He beheld "wondrous things" out of God's law.

But better than all else he had the unction from above, the anointing of the Holy Ghost, the first and greatest requisite of every successful preacher; and the anointing was upon him from the very beginning of his ministry and followed him all along his remarkable life of sacrifice for his Lord. Thousands who preceded him to the grave and to the glory world, and many who still remain, have given their testimony to the manifestation of this power in that they yielded to the Spirit that operated through the word declared by him. God spoke through him.

He was not eloquent in the sense that the word is usually understood.

At times some of his words were not even heard distinctly. But he had that oratory that surpasses that of the platform speaker. He had the power that moved the people toward a better life and toward God. If the results can be considered the test, he was eloquent.

The elements of his power and efficiency as a preacher of righteousness were: Remarkable familiarity with the Word of God and implicit faith in its all-sufficiency as the revelation of God to man, common sense and sound judgment, earnestness and faithfulness to the truth, and lastly, the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Such effects followed his preaching that the people came to believe that his work was of God. Hundreds and thousands who heard his call to sinners came crying for mercy, and they sought and found.

He preached expecting results. In the summer of 1897, he assisted his pastor, the writer, in a meeting at Beulah Church, Surry County. The meeting had taken deep hold on the people and penitents were earnestly seeking salvation. As he preached on the Prodigal son and described his homeward journey, he saw in his mind the return of the seekers to their Father's house, and a number of them returned that

hour and were embraced in their Father's arms. It was a day of God's power seen in the return of his prodigal children and felt in the hearts of his sons and daughters.

But just a day or two before this service he wept because of the seeming barrenness of results and the hardness of the hearts of the impenitent. He literally wept over sinners as Christ did over Jerusalem. So Christlike were his sympathies for the unsaved and his yearnings for their salvation.

His preaching was thoroughly orthodox. His interpretations of the Word were sound and Scriptural. He had well grounded opinions even on controverted points and passages of Scripture, and was able to give the reasons for the views he held and defend himself against theologians of the highest rank in the Church.

On one occasion the case of Jephthah's daughter came up for discussion by a number of preachers at a District Conference. Father Needham said that Jephthah did not sacrifice his daughter. The other preachers affirmed that he did. Dr. W., the scholarly Presiding Elder, was called in and he demanded the reasons for his belief. Father Needham asked,

“Why did God drive out and destroy the Canaanites?” The Doctor replied that it was because of human sacrifices. He then asked him, “What was the law of a vow?” He did not answer, and Father Needham replied that the law of a vow required that an unlawful object brought for sacrifice must be taken before the priest and valued, whether good or bad, and a lawful sacrifice was offered instead. The Doctor replied, “I give it up. I give it up.”

He was regarded as a powerful and effective dispenser of God’s Word, but he stands highest in the estimation of the people, and his memory will be longest cherished by the multitudes, as a man of prayer. To say that he was mighty in prayer and gifted in prayer is to use well worn expressions, but they can be applied to him with all their force and import. He prayed—and such prayers he uttered! His whole soul, voice and body were brought into service. His prayers not only were praised and believed in by men, but were approved and answered by God. Surely God never bowed his ear lower to hear the prayer of any of earth’s saints than he did to hear Father Needham’s. He prayed for mourn-

ers and they ceased to mourn, were comforted and praised God. He prayed for the sick and suffering and their diseases were stayed and their health was speedily restored. He prayed for rain, with a sky as clear and rainless as that above Elijah on Carmel, and in an hour the thirsty earth was drinking the descending rain. He prayed with and for his family evening and morning and they all became Christians in answer to his prayers.

In 1897, at Laurel Bluff Church, Surry County, he was helping his pastor in a protracted meeting. On the 21st of September at the night service, the altar was filled with penitents. Deep feeling and widespread interest were manifested in the congregation. Prayer was called for and Father Needham led. How he prayed! Who that heard that prayer can ever forget that hour? Heaven and earth seemed to be closer together. How he plead with God for those mourning souls! About fourteen of them professed saving faith in Christ and went to their homes rejoicing in the Lord.

Also for the sick as well as for the sinner were his prayers sought and did they avail. Though he had skill as a physician and practiced for years, he

had greater faith in the skill of the Great Physician.

His son Jesse was very sick with fever. The doctor had given up the case. He became very much disturbed about his call to preach. He thought he was going to die and was alarmed about the condition of his soul. He asked his father to pray for him. After a most earnest and powerful prayer, hope revived and he began at once to recover and rapidly improved from that hour.

A granddaughter's husband, Rev. Jesse Ashburn of the Primitive Baptist Church, was very sick and his skilled physician said that patients in his condition always died. He sent for Father Needham and three other ministers. Prayer was offered at night. Before day the suffering man called up the preachers to pray for him. While they were on their knees the pains all left him. He got up that morning, ate his breakfast and walked about to the surprise of his physician and others.

In time of drought his prayers were heard and answered.

In 1881, a meeting to pray for rain was appointed at New Hope Church. After the opening services, Father Needham made some remarks. At

this time in the service some of the doubters looked about for signs of rain, but saw none. He called the congregation to prayer and asked all to kneel. No prayer in a long life of prayer was offered in greater earnestness. Before the congregation arose from its knees, it thundered. He arose and told the people to hurry to their homes, or they would be caught in the rain. A good rain came and some were not yet at their homes when it began to fall. On that day some who had been skeptical as to the efficacy of prayer learned to believe that God hears and answers prayer.

HIS WORK AS A PASTOR.

Father Needham never became a member of the Annual Conference, but after moving to Surry County, N. C., April, 1842, he labored as a supply for as many as seventeen years. If he had spent his life in the itinerancy he would have served more charges and more people would have learned to know him, but great would have been the loss to the local ranks of the ministry. If some local preachers have brought injury to their own rank by laboring sparingly and ineffectively, he has done exceptional honor to that large class of ministers who usually

labor "without money and without price."

Rev. Dr. P. L. Groome, of the Baltimore Conference, says that Father Needham organized Blue Ridge Mission and served it three years. He labored two years on Fisher's River Mission which was joined to the Blue Ridge Mission. Later he spent two years on this work. He served Patrick and Sauratown Mission when it extended to the Chowan District. He traveled one year on each of the following charges: Stokes, Forsyth, Surry, Yadkin. Surry Circuit had twenty-eight appointments. He traveled the Sauratown and Pilot Mountain Mission during the war.

REVIVAL AND CAMP MEETING PREACHER.

After Father Needham's conversion he attended class meeting the first opportunity. In his turn he arose and said that he had something to say. He told the congregation that he had religion, that he was happy, and if there were any who wanted religion, if they would come forward and kneel, he would pray for them. They came and there a gracious revival began that was thorough and far-reaching in its influence.

Dr. Groome says that Father Needham was instrumental in forming the society at Jamestown, where he preached his first sermon and where he labored in a great revival. At the close of his first sermon he called for penitents and many came. Among these were a son and daughter of a minister of another Church. He called on the preacher to pray for the mourners, but he abruptly replied, "Pray for them yourself."

Also at Muir's Chapel he had a gracious revival and organized a church. This might be said of many churches in Surry, Stokes, Forsyth, Yadkin and other counties, where his labors preceded revivals and where revivals preceded the organization of churches.

He has been known all along during his long term of effective service as a revivalist. He was not acquainted with many of the plans and schemes operated by some of the latter day revivalists, but powerful religious awakenings occurred in the charges he served and wherever he labored with others. He never fell in with the modern method of relating anecdotes and persisted in saying that this is not preaching the gospel. His language was pure and he made no strange performances in the pulpit. In his revival

work he resorted to no questionable methods to gain attention and draw large crowds. He honored the Spirit and the Word of God, and the results of his work were not superficial, but deep and permanent.

Even during his last two years his labors in revival work were remarkably blessed. He assisted his pastor in eighteen protracted meetings and gracious results followed. He usually preached at the day services but always attended and took an active part in the night services. Over rough roads, through heat and cold, day and night, he traveled, suffering for sinners and the Church. At times he would preach until his physical strength almost failed him. His life and labors were a standing rebuke to those who without the best excuses stay away from the house of God. Nearly a hundred years old and attending and laboring in the night services of meetings week after week! Surely no pastor ever had more faithful and self-sacrificing help in revival work.

During the month of February, 1898, he and his pastor assisted Rev. H. K. Boyer, the pastor of Mt. Airy Station, in revival services. The Mt. Airy correspondent to the *Wilmington Star* writes:

“Rev. James Needham, of Surry County, a local minister of the Methodist Church, preached a great sermon from Acts 17:30 to a large congregation in the Central Methodist Church here to-day. Brother Needham will be 99 years old on May 26th, and has been a minister of the gospel for more than seventy-five years, having preached to five generations. He is one of the most remarkable men in this country. Physically he is quite active for one of his age, and his mental faculties are clear and vigorous. He is here attending a revival meeting, and is loved and honored by every one who knows him. He is indeed a father in Israel, and in listening to him one almost imagines that he is hearing a voice from the great beyond.”

In the day of camp meetings he was in the front rank as an effective camp meeting preacher. In these great gatherings his labors were eminently blessed. He assisted in eighty-two camp meetings, and in each meeting there were from twenty-five to two hundred and fifty professions. Some of the leading camp grounds of years ago were established by him. On different occasions in these meetings where he labored, the interest became

so great that half of the night would pass away before the multitudes would retire to their tents.

If we are to take the Bible standard of measurement, "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever," who can have any adequate conception of the blessedness of such a life? With such real and remarkable conceptions of heaven as he had, who can wonder that his labors were so faithful and abundant, despite the sad lack of almost all remuneration for his services?

If the Church could come to have a clearer conception of the vast amount of service rendered by Father Needham during his incessant labors for nearly a century, it could understand better how he came to stand above so many of his fellows in character and influence. He might be called a prodigy, but he is not so much a prodigy as a product. When his life is multiplied by the tens of thousands of acts of service rendered to his Lord, there is no cause to wonder why all his acquaintances revered him, and those who knew him best almost paid him homage. Behind him was such a record, scores of years of holy living and faithful service, that produced in all

classes a sense of reverence and respect accorded to very few of God's saints.

After all that might be said about his abundant labors for his Master, it seems that the best contribution that he has given to his Church and to his Country is his character based on a spotless life. It is believed that there is not a man among his acquaintances sufficiently abandoned to evil to say aught against the life and character of Father Needham. No man could point to him and show a single blemish in his long Christian life. To those who never knew him, some of these statements may seem extravagant and exaggerated; but to those who knew him best, they will not be too strong, nor will they fully express to the world the esteem in which he was held by his friends. How highly favored were his thousands of friends to have before them in this perverse and sinful generation a life so pure and spotless! North Carolina Methodism is to be congratulated in being permitted to lay claim to such a life, long, holy, devotional, faithful and effective. He may never have a tall marble shaft at his grave; but as long as the Church cherishes the memory of its pioneers

and retains the records of their labors, the name of Father James Needham will not be forgotten. Who can estimate the value of what he said, what he did and what he was ?

Mr. Beecher said, "The business of life is to know how to get along with our fellow-men." Dr. Hillis says, "Skill in getting on with men is the test of perfect manhood." Few men have done so much good in the world as Father Needham while producing so little friction, while arousing so little antagonism. He has taken advanced steps in the art of right living.

REMARKABLE FACTS AND VISIONS.

While a young man Father Needham was instrumental in organizing a Library Association at Ebenezer Church about seven miles from the place where Trinity College was afterwards located. He framed the constitution and by-laws of this society. With the assessments levied upon and collected from the members, he was able to secure a good library. This good collection of books had the effect of creating much interest in reading and in the subject of education. The influence of this li-

brary was wide-spread throughout the surrounding section and made it possible for success in the school work, and for the school to begin out of which Trinity College grew. He laid the foundation for Trinity College. He builded greater than he knew and greater than the Church has yet given him due honor for.

Father Needham knew Dr. Braxton Craven when the Doctor was but a boy. Soon after Dr. Craven was licensed to preach, he attended one of Father Needham's services, and there the young preacher preached for him his first sermon from the text: "And Abraham said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren." Father Needham said that he preached well.

Father Needham was a native of the county of Naomi Wise. He made the coffin in which her sixteen-year-old daughter was buried. He knew the facts upon which Dr. Craven based his thrilling story, "Naomi Wise; or, the Wrongs of a Beautiful Girl."

In his early life, Father Needham went to his church early one Sabbath. He took a seat on a root under a large

tree. No one else had come, and it was entirely still about him. Suddenly a voice said to him, "Get up from there." Startled, he quickly arose. He looked all around for the speaker, but saw no one. Then he cast his eyes up the tree. At that moment a large limb broke off and fell upon the very spot where he had sat.

After his conversion Father Needham had some doubts as to his call to preach. One night he dreamed that he was at Ebenezer Church in Randolph County. He was standing near the pulpit, and at the eastern end of the church a great wall stood. He saw come from behind this wall a large serpent about seventy feet long. It crawled in at the door and down toward him. As it came near it raised its head as if to strike him in the face. Then he said, "I command thee in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, depart from here." It dropped its head and turned toward the door and returned to the wall.

Then he looked up in the church and saw a silver trumpet. A voice told him to take that trumpet to the door and sound it toward the west as long as he had strength. He did so. He looked out and saw the people coming in such a thick mass that they looked

like a dark cloud. In a few moments the house was filled with people who came from the west, the north and the south. He never again doubted his call to preach, nor did he ever preach a sermon east of that church.

Many years ago he had a remarkable vision of heaven. In this great mansion there were several stories. In one corner of this great structure there were fearful signs of decay, and he was told that this represented the Catholic Church. As he moved along from place to place, he found that there was no law of gravitation to overcome and that he could move along at will without effort. As he ascended from story to story, more and more did he see things that were not lawful for man to utter. At last he came to the upper story and looked out over the battlements of heaven down upon the moving masses of toiling, suffering, sinful men, and in an outburst of pity for the inhabitants of earth his eyes were suffused with tears and he awoke.

Not many years ago he was taken violently ill. It was thought that he could not live. While asleep he dreamed that he approached the gate of heaven and knocked for admittance. The keeper of the gate told him that on the

inside was a harp for him, but that one string was wanting on it and that he could not yet be admitted. He then prayed that he might return to earth and finish his work that the missing string might be supplied. He awoke and told his friends that he would recover and that they might retire to their beds for rest and sleep. At once he began to improve and soon recovered to spend a few more years of great usefulness in perfecting the golden harp of heaven.

HOME LIFE.

In 1820, in March before his conversion in September, Father Needham was married to Hannah Frazier. To them were born ten children,—Mary, Chrisenberry, John, Asbury, Jesse, James, William, Sarah, Margaret and one that died in infancy. The nine all professed religion before they became grown. Jesse and William became faithful ministers of the gospel. Asbury, James, William and Sarah still survive. William has two sons, Revs. Zachariah J. Needham and J. Bibb Needham, who are members of the Pacific Conference, and a daughter, Addie, the wife of Rev. Jesse A. Ashburn of the Primitive Baptist Church. Sarah, the wife of John

H. Boyles, Pilot Mountain, N. C., has a son, Rev. I. Sebert Boyles, who is pastor of the Baptist church at Williamsburg, Va. Another granddaughter is the wife of Rev. Mr. West, an itinerant minister in Kentucky. Still others are filling places of honor and trust and are not unmindful of the great value of a godly ancestry. The number of children, grandchildren and great grandchildren is very large.

His wife was a consecrated Christian worker, and very familiar with the Word of God. Her pastor, Rev. N. E. Coltrane of the North Carolina Conference, wrote of her:

“Died, in Surry county, N. C., July 6, 1880, Hannah Needham, wife of Rev. James Needham. Sister Needham was born in Randolph County, N. C., Nov. 7, 1801, was married to James Needham in 1820, professed religion at a class meeting at Old Ebenezer, April 13, 1822. She was the mother of ten children. One of these died while an infant, three died in Christian faith, and six are still living. These with about sixty grandchildren and great grandchildren are left to mourn their loss.

“Sister Needham suffered very great affliction for a little over forty years, but for the last ninety days she com-

plained of but little or no pain, but gradually declined till her death. She was a devoted Christian, and her end was one of great peace. Previous to her death, her mind was clear and she expressed herself freely, said she was ready to die.

“Assisted by Bro. Foy, I preached her funeral at New Hope, July 7, to a large congregation. The text was from Rev. 14:13, a text she had chosen. She has gone home to rest from her labors. Sweet will be the rest after her protracted affliction.

“Bro. Needham has been a local preacher for more than half a century, has traveled as a supply for many years, is now in his eighty-second year, and preaches about twice a week. May he have the sympathy and prayers of the Church in this sore bereavement. God bless him and all his family and bring them at last to the haven of eternal rest.”

The home life of Father Needham is worthy of careful study. He ruled his own household well, and without resorting to the more violent modes of correction. The rod of correction was displaced by that correction that came from his exemplary life and from the power of his love toward his children

and of his love toward his God. The spirit of the man pervaded the inner circle of his family, and they never grossly violated his law of love. Possibly he was honored and revered by no one more than by his own children. They "almost worshipped" him.

If the commitment of children to parents is their greatest trust, and if the training of them is their highest duty, then Father Needham's name deserves honorable mention, even if he had not directly blessed the world by his own labors; since he has produced good fruit by the proper training of his children that have been and are a blessing to the world. Like Abraham he believed God and his promises and he trained his children and showed them the better way by precept and by example. His life is not lost to his offspring, and through his offspring it is not lost to the world.

He was very influential for good in the homes of his children. A grandson, Rev. Z. J. Needham, writes: "At times he had more power in prayer than any man I ever knew. The last evening he was at father's before we, my wife, child, brother and I, left home for California, he prayed with unusual ef-

fect. Such words of mighty pleading for each of us cannot fail to bear fruit in the lives of those for whom they were uttered. I am certain I never knew any one that seemed to have so much faith in God and such direct fellowship with the Spirit."

"FELL ON SLEEP."

The same peace that filled his soul through life did not fail him when his spirit took its flight to heaven. Witnesses testify that a short time before he died he seemed to arouse, looked upward and a heavenly light, brighter than the light of the lamp, lighted up his face. His son William said that just before he died he bowed his head as if thinking of Christ when he bowed his head on the cross and yielded up the ghost. He died without a struggle. La grippe had seized him a few days after preaching his last sermon at Pilot Mountain, N. C., March 12, but he suffered little pain. He was anxious with his thousands of friends to see his hundred years completed, but his anniversary was celebrated in heaven with his many friends and beneficiaries that had gone on before.

On Easter Sabbath evening his body

was carried to New Hope Church. To a very large congregation, Dr. W. S. Creasy, of the Western North Carolina Conference, preached a pathetic and powerful sermon from the text: "For David after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers." By the side of his wife he was laid to rest at New Hope Church near Ararat station, Surry County, to await a glorious resurrection.

TRIBUTES BY THE PRESS AND OTHERS.

From Mr. T. J. Lowry, Editor *News*,
Mt. Airy, N. C.:

“Father Needham is dead!

“His work is finished; his last exhortation has been heard; his last prayer on earth for dying sinners has been uttered; his lips are cold and still!

“He has gone to be with God—to await your coming—our coming—to meet with his loved ones on the other shore!

“Will we forget him? Will we disappoint him?

“The announcement on our streets Saturday that Father Needham had passed away that morning at his home, at 1 o'clock, brought sadness to many hearts.

“He would have been one hundred years old on the 26th of next month.

“He was ill only a few days and said to those about him soon after he took sick that he thought he would get up again.

“‘Father Needham,’ as he was familiarly known, was actively engaged in

ministerial work for more than seventy, perhaps seventy-five, years. While he was never a member of the Methodist Conference he served as supply pastor many years. His last sermon was preached in Pilot Mountain, Sunday, March 12, 1899, from the text, if we mistake not: 'And whosoever will let him take the water of life freely.' Mr. Rodgers informs us that he had accepted an invitation to preach the annual sermon at Trinity Academy, in Pilot Mountain, the day he reached the century mark. Last year he assisted Rev. J. P. Rodgers and Rev. H. K. Boyer in revival meetings and preached many powerful sermons.

"No man in Western North Carolina was more universally esteemed—none more faithful to God.

"Father Needham leaves several children, a number of grand and great grandchildren.

"The funeral services were held Sunday, April 2nd, at New Hope, near Ararat station. A large number of sorrowing relatives and neighbors and friends attended the services, which were conducted by Dr. Creasy, of Winston.

"The *News* extends its sympathy to the family of the deceased."

Rev. W. S. Creasy, D. D., writes:

“There is no name in Piedmont North Carolina that is more of a household one than that of Rev. James Needham, a local elder, familiarly known as Father Needham. The very name has been synonymous with piety, consecration, and fidelity to the Church of his choice and the cause of Christ. He doubtless wielded a greater influence for Christ in the section where he lived than any man who has ever been among the people. He was a forcible, instructive and deeply spiritual preacher. This is proved by the hundreds who now live, who were brought to the Savior through him, and will be by thousands who have entered into rest, because of this holy man’s teaching and life.

“His labors have been truly remarkable as to the long time the Master permitted him to engage in his loved employ. If he had lived to see the 26th of next month or just 55 days longer he would have celebrated his one hundredth birthday, which he expected to do by preaching at Pilot Mountain. It was a great disappointment to thousands of his friends and admirers that he was taken before that day. But the Lord knows and does that which is best.

“He had been a preacher for nearly eighty years. He was never in the itinerant ministry, but served as a supply on different charges from time to time as much as seventeen years. He was abundant in labors at all times, was a great helper to all the preachers with whom he came in contact. He almost ceased to labor and live at the same time.

“He attended the quarterly meeting of his circuit on the 2nd Sunday in March, preached a strong and helpful sermon at night, from the text: ‘Who-soever will, let him take the water of life freely.’ This was his last sermon. He contracted some cold which developed into la grippe and he gradually grew weaker, until the morning of April 1st, at 1 o’clock he sweetly fell asleep and went into the presence of that Savior whom he loved so well and served so long. One of his last sayings was: ‘I have been all my life trying to show and tell people how to live; I will now show them how to die.’ He gave every expression of peace and joy while he could talk, and then by sign and look, indicated all was well.

“The funeral was preached by the writer at New Hope Church, near

where he lived, to a congregation of 1500 persons, and then we laid him to rest beside his wife, with the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection. It was a scene never to be forgotten as the great throng, young and old, passed by looking upon the face of one they loved so well, which was attested by flowing tears. He has left us but his works follow him, and will doubtless show wonders in the better land.

“The writer has known Father Needham for a number of years, and owes him much for advice, sympathy and prayer. I recall one instance specially, when we were engaged in a meeting and the power and glory of God were being manifested in an unusual degree, he caught me in his arms, and exclaimed: ‘Bro. Creasy and myself have made a new covenant to meet each other in heaven.’ May God help me to keep my part of it. When I was recommended by the Church for license to preach, he laid his hand on my head and gave me his benediction, which has followed me in power and sweetness all these years.

“He was fond of relating the incidents connected with his work in the early days of his ministry. Many of them humorous, others sad, and some

startling to us at this day. He had a rich experience, he thought, and talked about the glories of heaven by day, and frequently dreamed of them at night. He has given us some vivid pictures of heaven, as he has seen it in his dreams. He has gone to look upon his King in his beauty, and the glory which surrounds him, with a clear and loving sight.

“He enjoyed his visit to our conference at Winston very much indeed, and it was a source of joy to him, the few days of life he had left, that he had met the brethren and joined in their worship. Peace to his ashes. God help us to meet him in heaven.”

From Rev. H. M. Blair, Presiding Elder of the Mt. Airy District, in *Church and Home*:

“The announcement that Rev. James Needham, the oldest Methodist preacher in North Carolina, and perhaps in the whole Methodist Church, had died at his home in Surry County on Saturday morning, April 1st, was a great sorrow to his thousands of friends.

“‘Father Needham’ was born in Randolph County, this State, May 26th, 1799. His parents were both members

of the Methodist Church, and dedicated him to God by baptism when in infancy. They started with him to the State of Ohio when he was only four or five years old, but his mother was taken ill on the way, and they stopped at a place near where the Laurel Bluff cotton mills now stand, near Mt. Airy, and were detained so long that the removal west was abandoned, and they remained in that vicinity for some years, and then returned to their former neighborhood in Randolph County. Many years later, however, his father did remove with a portion of his family to Ohio.

“His last sermon was preached at Pilot Mountain, March 12th, this being the occasion of the 2nd quarterly meeting for his charge. He occupied the evening hour, and preached a sermon of great spiritual power and unction from the text, ‘And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.’ No text could have been more appropriate, and it was apparent through the fifty minutes of its delivery that his soul was on fire with solicitude for the salvation of sinners. His appeals were heart-searching and tender.

“In many respects this was a remarkable man. Unlike most old men, he

never dropped behind in the march of progress, nor did he lose sympathy with the younger generations. As he was never by disease or infirmity compelled to desist from his loved employ of preaching the gospel, so he never grew sour or discontented with the changed conditions and methods of the more modern days. Religion, spiritual and fervent, founded upon the experience of a vital change by the regeneration of the heart through faith in the blood of Christ, was what he contended for all through his long life, and a better example of the truth of this teaching was never given in any life. He literally lived what he taught.

“There is one point in his experience which it may be well to give special attention, since it bears specially upon a question which, at the present time, is agitating the Church, and in some places causing division and strife. We have reference to the fact that he claimed to have obtained at once, in the moment of his justification, not only a sense of pardon, but likewise that deep and abiding evidence of the renewal of his nature which forever settled him, and made it entirely unnecessary for him to seek, in this sense, a second blessing. While he testified

that he sought and obtained many a blessing, yet there was no time when he had any reason to feel that the first work was not complete and full. So, speaking out of his experience, while he believed with all his heart in the great doctrine of the sanctification of believers, he did not believe in the absolute necessity of a specific second work in order to attain to this. No one who was well acquainted with 'Father Needham' could ever doubt that he experienced and exemplified in the most emphatic sense a sanctified life. His life was 'hid with Christ in God.'

"Perhaps, after all, such an experience and life may help in the solution of this vexed and much-vexing question. May it not be true that some enter into the full-orbed life of a perfect faith and love from the beginning; while others, with a poorer conception of the possibilities of divine grace, must come into the fullness of the blessing after a revision of the former notions of the Divine purpose in grace? One is not likely to be saved any further than he believes it possible to be saved. 'Father Needham' believed it possible in the beginning to be saved from all sin, and thus he was saved, his whole

long life testifying to the truth of this salvation, although he never made any public boast of it, so far as the writer knows.

“His ministry was one of power, but never one of contention, and he always preached as one sent to proclaim glad tidings and to publish peace. He constantly proclaimed liberty to the captive, and endeavored to bind up the broken-hearted, and to comfort those that mourned. He rests from his labors, and his works follow him!”

Rev. S. H. Helsabeck writes:

“*My Dear Brother Rodgers:*—I am glad you have undertaken to write a biography of Father James Needham. I wish to say that I have known him more than fifty years and he certainly was one of the best and most useful local preachers I have ever known. He read and studied the Bible closely and his sermons were always full of God’s Word, and as a result he always had a hearing on the part of the people. He had faith in the gospel and looked for immediate fruits and was not disappointed. And the day of eternity alone can reveal the number of souls converted under his ministry. I was with him in

many meetings and know the things whereof I testify are true.

“He was also a good thinker and when he reached his conclusions he had the courage of his convictions, and on all proper occasions was ready to defend them.

“He was a great lover of his Church and her doctrines, while at the same time his large heart took in all of God’s people, so that he truly believed in the ‘holy catholic Church’ and in the ‘fellowship of the saints.’

“He was one of the *humblest men* I ever knew. His piety was deep, uniform and constant. Whoever knew him to speak an unkind word? Whoever saw him out of good temper?

“He was an all-round man—remarkable in many ways and retained a sound and bright mind to the last. And having for near a hundred years showed the people ‘how a Christian lives,’ in meeting his latest foe he showed ‘how a Christian dies.’

“Take him all in all, his long term of ministerial service and the usefulness of his ministry, I never expect to see his like again.

“Though dead the stream of his influence will flow on forever.

“ ‘Servant of God, well done!
Rest from thy loved employ.’ ”

Rev. A. M. Long writes:

“Rev. James Needham, ‘Father Needham,’ as he was usually called, was no ordinary man. He was indeed a father in our Methodist Israel in the Northwestern counties of North Carolina. He lived almost a hundred years, born in 1799, died in 1899. He gave a large number of the years he lived to the service of the Church to which he belonged and to the preaching of the everlasting gospel of the Son of God; and sinners by the hundreds were brought to Christ by his ministry.

“As a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, he came as near making full proof of his ministry as any preacher in his day. He supplied several missions and circuits and was a faithful and efficient pastor.

“I first met him in 1874, and first heard him preach the same year. Upon my first acquaintance with him, I formed a mental picture which I often compared with that of my future acquaintance with him and found that I was correct in my first mental view.

“Father Needham’s religion was broad, deep and wide enough to take in all mankind. He surely believed and by his life said:

'There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea.'

He was devoted to his religious duties and to his beloved work, the preaching of the unsearchable riches of Christ. He was 'mighty in the Scriptures'; his sermons were strong and well delivered, and in a style all his own; he was large and well rounded as a preacher and as a man; and his

'Life was so gentle and the elements
So mixed in him that nature might stand up
And say to all the world, "This was a man."'

"Father Needham is gone to a great reward. Near Easter Sabbath in 1899 he died, but as sure as God's sun shines he still lives. His life's work is done; his mission on earth was a noble one; our heritage is his blessed memory; all should emulate his virtues. Surely

'The actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.'

"By the removal of Rev. James Needham, this aged Christian father, to glory and heaven, God teaches us all how to estimate great and good men and reproves us for our depreciation of their talents and virtues.

"This aged servant of God has gone to that blessed home of which he fre-

quently talked as if he had already been there. 'Sphered in light and throned in love, companion of saint and seraphs, he enjoys a sinless and sorrowless eternity.'

'Where age has no power o'er the fadeless
frame,
Where the eye is fire and the heart is flame.' "

Rev. W. W. Bays, D. D., Presiding Elder of the Statesville District, writes:

"I first met dear old Father Needham at Mount Airy last winter was a year ago.

"I was to go to Mount Airy to preach and lecture; and just before going I learned of him through the *Charlotte Observer* for the first time I think—that he was assisting in a protracted meeting in Mount Airy—a man in his 99th year actually assisting in a revival! It struck me as something wonderful, and I had a great curiosity to meet him.

"When I arrived at Mount Airy I met him sure enough, in a revival, and preaching, for he preached the night I arrived there, Saturday night, though I arrived too late to hear him.

"I preached on Sunday morning and Sunday night, and Father Needham was present at both services; and at night he was called on to pray; and I

was astonished at the strength and compass of his voice. I am sure he could have been heard a hundred yards!

“I lectured on ‘Woman’ on Monday night, and Father Needham was there; and I think no one in the audience enjoyed the lecture more than he. He laughed and shook all over at the amusing parts, took in the main points, and mentioned some of them to me at Winston, last Conference.

“At Mt. Airy I was with him a good deal, and was surprised at the acuteness of his mind, his views regarding certain texts—some of them quite original—though, of course, views he had entertained in the past—for he lived largely in the past, as all people do. He told me the story of his conversion—his going to camp meeting, the agony of his repentance, the blessedness of his believing, and the joy of his conversion. It seemed so Methodist—aye, almost so Pentecostal, to hear him tell what happened about eighty years before!

“I heard him preach at Winston, at Conference—the first, last and only time I ever heard him. It seemed like a voice from the dead in some respects, but I was astonished at the volume of his voice. I think most peo-

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