

LC 577

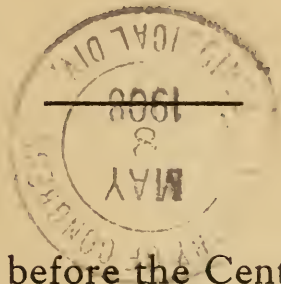
T5

1908

Hollinger Corp.  
pH 8.5

LC 577  
015

# Some Educational History of Alabama Methodism



Address delivered before the Centenary Celebration  
of the Methodist Church, Wetumpka, Ala-  
bama, Rev. C. S. Talley, Pastor.  
April the thirtieth, 1908

---

BY WILLIAM HOLCOMBE THOMAS

---

Montgomery :  
THE PARAGON PRESS  
1908

LC 577

T5

# SOME EDUCATIONAL HISTORY OF ALABAMA METHODISM

---

BY WILLIAM HOLCOMBE THOMAS.

---

The history of the education of a people is the history of its civilization. Its civilization is measured by its intellectual, moral and religious life.

The casual observer has marked the intellectual and moral evolution of mankind as he progressed from the barbaric state. Long did man find himself coming to higher ground, not suspecting how he was driven by an inner consciousness demanding that his needs be known and strength tried in relation to the aggregate experience, or by how much he was led on by the faith and hope of the "social mind." Looking back on his progress from the hill-tops, he comes the more to realize how the sensual was subordinated to the intellectual, and how the intellectual appealed to and grew into the spiritual. If, in the journey of any people, the moral should not be the gleam beyond the physical—should not keep apace with the intellectual, it is because that people have looked too much to the material for hope and let go the faith in the spiritual.

## VIEW POINT OF HISTORY.

Intelligence, virtue and industry give man power over himself, and therefore of all things; we must then agree with Bishop Spalding in the statement that education makes him intelligent, virtuous and industrious. When the law of progress is known it will be but the finding out the "interdependence of all things; God revealing himself as his work is unfolded in the mind or heart of man,"

and in the course of nature. This process of “unity of development that is worldwide,” is said to have been the controlling idea of the nineteenth century. To know anything, then, is to know how it came to be what it is: to know the facts of its process or growth.

## ALABAMA AS A MISSIONARY FIELD.

If, then, whatever the view point it is that of history, how important does the educational history of our Church become! How it must stir Methodists to renewed effort,—how pointing to higher ground, it rolls back the limitations of former horizons, if we but wisely trust a day’s journey and press on!

Let us then take a bird’s-eye-view of the eariler educational activities of the Methodists in Alabama, for they are but chapters in the history of the Methodist Church and a factor in the history of nearly 2,000,000 people. From an early date our church has regarded educational effort one of the most potent agencies, and to that end has given the might of her influence. The recital of the story of this phase of Methodist activity in Alabama can but be a revelation and an inspiration; making us proud of our educational history and a powerful reason for renewed vigor in meeting our new duties in respect to educational advancement.

In May, 1803, one claiming to be a Methodist was preaching to the settlers in the Tombigbee and the Tensaw country, and his fidelity for the work and sincerity of his claim is attested by the following sentence on page 164 of Mr. Dow’s journal: “A collection was offered me, but I did not feel free to accept it; and I left the settlement, procured some corn and had not a cent left.”

On January 2, 1808, Bishop Asbury at Charleston, S. C., called for volunteers to an appointment as a part of the Oconee district and Matthew P. Sturdivant volunteered, was elected to the eldership as a Bigbee Missionary to a

section of the country 70 or 80 miles along the Tombigbee river. The Presiding Elder, Josiah Randle, could hardly be expected to have visited Bigbee in his "rounds," nor did any other elder of that district cross the wilderness to look after the work of faithful Matthew Sturdivant. Dr. Lovic Pierce was the Presiding Elder for that district in 1809, and he said, "I did not go; that Los Angeles would be a neighborhood place now compared with Tombigbee then."

### QUESTION OF SLAVERY THEN RAISED.

Dr. West, commenting on the early work of the church, says that there was not a time from the taking in of the first member in 1809 to 1865 that the Methodist Church in Alabama did not under her ministry have slaves as members of her communion.

The Tennessee, Mississippi and South Carolina Conference in 1819 furnished preachers for Alabama, and when they were to be sent out they were first found to be "satisfactory in their views of slavery;" their views were developed at a later date.

In October (of that year) the Rev. Dudley Hargrove became an historic character by being declined election by three votes because he held slaves. And a resolution was passed by the Tennessee Conference "to fix the principle that no man, even in those States where the law does not admit of emancipation, shall be admitted on trial, etc.—if it is understood that he is the owner of a slave or slaves." A little more than 62 years thereafter his son, the Rev. Robert K. Hargrove, was ordained Bishop in the City of Nashville, where his father was by the Tennessee Conference, refused the order of deacon.

### ALABAMA.

It may not be out of place, by way of locating geo

graphic extent, and the settings of early Methodist labors, to say that the political history of Alabama begun in 1787 when South Carolina ceded to the United States a strip of land about twelve miles wide off the north boundary of the present State, which, by the act of Congress, March 7, 1804, was made a part of the Mississippi territory. Then the Mobile District, embracing the territory acquired from Spain and France lying east of Pearl river, west of the Perdido and south of the 31 degree of latitude, was by the act of March 14, 1812, made a part of the same territory. Five years later (March 3, 1817), was approved the act creating the Alabama territory and locating its seat of government at the town of St. Stephens. The act for the admission of Alabama as a State of the Union upon the same footing with other States and providing among other things for the election of "representatives" to form a Constitution to "meet at the town of Huntsville on the first Monday in June, 1819, was approved on March 3, 1819. This convention on the 2nd day of August thereafter, formed a Constitution and State government in conformity to the principles of the articles of compact between the original States and the people and States in the territory northwest of the Ohio river, so far as the same had been extended to the territory of Alabama by the articles of agreement between the United States and the State of Georgia. Which action being duly reported to Congress, by resolution was approved Dec. 14, 1819, Alabama was declared a State of the Union.

#### 1818-1828.

December, 1819, Andrew Moore opened a school near Brown's Spring, which is now in the City of Birmingham.

The Montgomery Republican, a newspaper published at Montgomery, and afterwards changed in name to the



Alabama Journal, announced in its issue of February 17, 1821: "We are about to begin preparations for erecting a place of public worship." In the early part of 1823 an address was set forth to the people by Dr. Moses Andrew, a local preacher of the Methodist Episcopal Church, at that time living in Montgomery, and William Sayre, a Presbyterian, declaring that "Montgomery is becoming conspicuous for its advantages, and is already respectable for its size and population," and "there is not a house of worship among us," and setting out a document for subscription with sums attached to be paid for erecting a house of worship at Montgomery, which should be "open to all orthodox ministers," and not "being exclusively to any denomination of Christians."

July 10, 1823, at a citizens' meeting, a framed house 48 feet long by 24 feet wide for religious worship was planned, and in 1825 was completed; and this house and the court house were used for passing or visiting preachers until the latter part of 1829. Of course Montgomery was not without casual preaching by those of the different denominations. The first preacher doing organized work there was a Methodist by the name of James King, who organized a Methodist society in 1819, before other denominations had done so.

In the "Family Visitor and Telegram," a paper published at Richmond to 1828, is a letter from some Alabama Missionary as follows:

"The town of Montgomery, situated on the river Alabama, in Alabama, contains about 1,200 inhabitants, of which five or six only are professors of religion. They have a meeting house, which is not yet finished, though commenced several years ago. They have no regular preaching, sometimes none at all for five or six weeks together. The Bible is seldom seen or used by the inhabitants, except in courts of justice, where it is used by way of business, as if a sight of the holy book would operate as a charm to bind the conscience, while its

truths and sanctions are unknown and unheeded. As to religion or morality there is little of either in the place. These facts are derived from a source on which we may rely with confidence. The condition of this town is an index of the moral state of many places in the south and west, where the people perish because there is no vision."

I give more in detail this condition in Montgomery not to expose the early neglects of my home city, but as it may give some idea of the moral status of the country at the time when the first academy and college of the Methodist Church were respectively located on Monte Sano and on LeGrange mountains. The rapid growth of the church is evidenced by the fact that when the Alabama Conference was organized in 1832 there were at work in the State about 65 itinerant preachers and about 1,200 Methodists.

The Tuscumbia Sunday School Union, auxiliary to the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was organized in 1828. A meeting held for the purpose at Huntsville, April 26, 1828, organized the Huntsville Sunday School and the Huntsville Bible Tract Society.

## METHODIST ACADEMIES.

To the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Pittsburg, Pa., May, 1828, was reported an academy at that time in course of erection at Tuscaloosa, Ala., which was finished September, 1829, and called the Sims Female Academy. This antedated by one year the academy at Monte Sano (at Huntsville), unfortunately we have no prospectus to judge the grade of the work to be done there as has been preserved of the Monte Sano Academy, the character of which we shall presently show.

## FIRST COLLEGE IN ALABAMA.

The beginning of the work of an advanced education

in Alabama under the auspices of the Methodist Church come in the founding of LeGrange College in Franklin County, Alabama, on a proposition from the Tennessee Conference to the Mississippi Conference, January 10, 1829. The commissioners to locate the college commended their selection of site in the following words:

“The secluded position of the college seems in no small degree to sanction the hope that the enticements to dissipation and idleness, which are too frequently observed to assemble themselves in the vicinity of institutions of this kind will not dare to exhibit themselves here.”

The college had preparatory department, “Steward Hall,” dormitories, and a building for a deaf and dumb asylum that was not opened for lack of funds.

Dr. West, commenting on this action of our church, says: “In founding a college in Alabama the Methodists were in advance of the State, and of all churches, and of all denominations of Christians. The first college opened and chartered in the State of Alabama was the LaGrange College. At the time it opened its halls and went to teaching as a college, and at the time it was chartered by the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Alabama as a college, there was no other school opened in the State having the grade of a college.

One would naturally suppose that a college founded by a denomination of Christians, and which college was to continue under the auspices of such denomination, had been founded for giving instruction in Christian doctrines, for inculcating religious tenets, but the founders of LaGrange College, extraordinary as it may seem, by constitutional provision, as has already been seen, prohibited the inculcation of religious doctrines at that institution, and they commended the inhibition as a meritorious provision, giving to the school a supreme excellence. Nothing was to be taught but literature and science. The founders of that college did not wish to establish a theological institution; they were uncompro-

misgivingly opposed to theological schools, theological departments and theological chairs. However, it must not be inferred that these noble men and women were opposed to a school of a religious character and whose influence would advance the cause of Christianity. LaGrange College was founded to furnish an institution where the youths of the church and the country could be educated without hazard to their morals and principles from evil associations and false sentiments."

It was from this college that Bishop Joshua Soule received his degree of doctor of laws July 4, 1850. After 25 years of varied experience (January, 1855), the doors of the college halls on that sublime and consecrated spot were closed forever, and the institution was opened at Florence, where it took the name of the Florence Wesleyan University. The institution did a great work for the generation it touched.

#### OTHER EDUCATIONAL WORK.

The Monte Sano Female Academy was established about September, 1830; the grade of its work is best told in its prospectus as follows: "It is proposed to teach in this institution botany, natural and moral philosophy, the elements of geography, chemistry and astronomy." A year later the Tuscaloosa Tract Society was organized.

1839 was the centenary year of Methodism and a meeting was appointed by official action of the Alabama Conference to provide a school of higher education, and to collect money from the Methodists at large for that purpose. The result of this celebration was the establishment of "Centenary Institute" in the neighborhood of Valley Creek in Dallas County, that was incorporated by act of Legislature, January 2, 1841, and in 1843 under Rev. A. H. Mitchell the school opened with between 60 and 70 pupils of both sexes. The name was changed to "Summerfield" in 1845, for it was thought the old name

was not suggestive of a high and healthful locality. This institute conferred the degree of doctor of divinity on several ministers.

In the autumn of 1843, by authority of the Tennessee Conference, "Female Institute" of Athens was opened for girls under trustees named in the act of incorporation, and has long been a center of culture and wide influence, and is now under the wise guidance of President Moore, doing a good work.

The Alabama Conference, January, 1849, took the Oak Bowery Female Institute under its control; located as it was in one of the influential agricultural sections of East Alabama, it flourished to the breaking down just after the war. May the speaker be permitted to acknowledge that he holds the buildings of the "Oak Bowery Female Institute" in loving memory, for it was there his mother received her education, and there today is to be found in the old building an old-time heavy desk, where as a small school boy he cut the first two initials of his name. May God bless dear old deserted "Oak Bowery school house!"

The Bascom Female Institute was located in 1852 near Huntsville in temporary quarters, and did good work to the time of its interruption by the Civil War. That same year the "Ministerial Education Society" to help young preachers to secure an education, where they were worthy, was organized.

During the session of the Alabama Conference at Tuscaloosa December, 1853, a communication from the trustees of a proposed female college at Tuskegee, Ala., was received and referred to the committee of education, and on Feb. 2, 1854, the act of its incorporation was approved. In the beautiful village of Tuskegee, that college has now grown, under the management of Dr. John Massey, beyond the capacity of its building. When relocated, as we hope, as the Woman's College at Montgomery,

we bespeak for it a future of which the whole State will be proud.

The Talladega Conference Institute, a female high school, was projected by the Conference December, 1854, and about that time the Masonic School was given the Methodist Conference much encumbered with debt, which they were unable to clear, and in 1858 the Conference handed the school over to the State of Alabama. Since then it has been used as the School of Deaf Mutes and Blind.

In 1856 the Southern University was established at Greensboro, (incorporated by the act of the General Assembly of Alabama, January 25, 1856), where it has done a noble work, sending untold blessings to the manhood of the State and many into an educated ministry.

What I have here spoken of the educational efforts of our church I believe to be in substance what I said on this subject at the recent Alabama Conference, with no intention of embarrassing any college or educational interest of the church. I would not detract from the glory of any effort or institution. I would not place an obstacle in the path of any prospect. I would only encourage every honest endeavor and educational outlook. And in all kindness may I say I was then only trying to briefly recount the past educational activities of our church without offensive contrast and to suggest the possible widening horizon of the future, as it may come within the vision of the individual member and the church.

The people at Auburn had originated the memorial to the Conference for a college. Being unsuccessful when the location was secured for Greensboro, they moved forward with their plan for a college and just seven days after the granting of a charter to the Southern University the General Assembly of Alabama incorporated the "East Alabama Male College," (February 1, 1856.) Being surrendered to the State by our church it has be-

come the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, one of the strongest institutions of learning in the South.

Tuscaloosa, LaGrange, Summerfield, Athens, Oak Bowerly, Huntsville, Tuskegee, Florence, Greensboro and Auburn were the educational centers in Alabama under the auspices of Methodism to the close of the Civil War. Of course other influences in the State have fought valiantly for the cause of education, but we of the Methodist faith may look with no ordinary pride on the part our church has taken for an educated citizenship.

This monograph, as imperfect as it may be, would be sadly lacking did I not acknowledge the service of Dr. Anson West for his "History of Methodism in Alabama," and to say that it was his untiring effort that contributed much to the establishment of the North Alabama Conference College at Owenton, a suburb of Birmingham. The Annual Conference in 1906 changed its name to the Birmingham College; and under a wise management the future hath for it much in store.

### DAWN OF A NEW DAY.

I trust we have come to the dawn of a new day in the educational interests of our church. A casual reader of history will see the tendency of our times is to the larger centers of interest and influences. If, when the selection of a college site was made at Valley Creek, it had been New Philadelphia (Montgomery) or that of lonely LaGrange mountain had been at Brown's Spring (Birmingham) who can doubt but that the course of its history would have been different.

If our educational interests are to be consolidated and relocated we must have regard for the tendencies of a more advanced period and demands differing from those of former years. We can but rejoice that the opportunity for educational work in the years that are gone were embraced by our church, yet we of this generation must

heed the teachings of history and build our colleges not for a locality and a quarter of a century, but for the interests of the whole church and for a period of more than 1,000 years.

In considering the demands as well of opportunities of the future, it will be well to note that in her oration before the Congress of Arts and Sciences, President Thomas, for the last quarter of a century the President of Bryn Mawr College,—urged to a four years' course of highest intellectual attainment, and speaking from the standpoint of the county at large, said: "Colleges will multiply in the future as in the past, and the more there are of them the better. It is impossible, and highly undesirable if it were possible, to concentrate the youth of our vast country into a few large colleges. Each college creates its own supply of students, and two-thirds of the students of all our colleges, large and small come from within a radius of one hundred miles. As each student can, as a rule, attend but one college, each such college must be educationally as perfect as possible."

With an appreciation of the past, may we not at least ask of the future a Woman's College that will keep apace with the growth of the Church, the State and the demand for a higher education; that will hold to the safe and sane, yet give the clever and learned; that while reverencing traditions will not allow prejudice to despise duties or obscure visions; that will make wifely women of our daughters and not send them back manly women; that will give them the moral uplift of the wood and field as of the Sunday School and prayer meeting; that will give them the religion of the playground as of the Church-house; that will fill their lives with the large-views and still not make drunk with visions of emancipation from a sacred motherhood.





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 019 598 255 7



