

Life and Sayings of Sam P. Jones:

A Minister of the Gospel

The Only Authorized and Authentic Work

By his wife
Assisted by
Rev. Walt Holcomb, a
Co-worker of Mr. Jones

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CHAPTER TWO

HIS ANCESTRY

In tracing Mr. Jones's ancestry, we begin as far back as August 16, 1805. To Rev. and Mrs. John Jones, of Abbeville District, South Carolina, was born a son, whom they named Samuel G. Jones. Both parents died when the boy was four years old. He was then taken into the home of an uncle, where he remained until he was seventeen. Leaving South Carolina, he came to Elbert County, Georgia, where he was apprenticed to a tanner for a term of two or three years. At the expiration of this time he married Miss Elizabeth Ann Edwards, a daughter of Rev. Robert L. Edwards. She was for a number of years a member of the South Carolina Conference, and later of the Georgia Conference.

He was married in -his nineteenth year, and his wife was in her sixteenth year. They lived together happily fifty-one years. They reared eleven children; nine sons and two daughters.

Remaining in Elbert County for a few years after his marriage, Mr. Jones then removed to Heard County, Georgia, and from there to Chambers County, Alabama, and later in life he returned to Georgia and settled at Cartersville, where he died at the advanced age of ninety years. He was converted and joined the Methodist church at the age of sixteen and was licensed to preach at thirty-three.

For many years he had served the church as class-leader, Sunday school superintendent, steward and exhorter. After he was licensed to preach, he was ordained deacon in 1843 by Bishop Soule, and elder in 1848 by Bishop Capers.

From the time he was licensed to preach until his death, he was an honored and an acceptable local preacher in the Methodist church. In twenty-eight years he only missed three appointments, often walking nine miles to preach after a hard week's work.

He was a rather peculiar combination of manly and noble characteristics. He stood strongly for his convictions. His common sense was unusual.

He was an old-time preacher. His preaching was notable for its directness, clearness and simplicity.

He was of Scotch-Irish descent, and had much quaint humor. To be with grandfather Jones and hear him talk was to feel a holy inspiration, and to be impelled towards a better Christian life. His conversation was on high and holy things, showing a remarkable memory and a clear conception of the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, of which his life had been a shining illustration.

In Mr. Jones we find some of the characteristics of his grandfather. Much of the wit and humor in the grandfather, also the directness, clearness and simplicity, were reproduced in the grandson. Here we have some of the strongest elements of Mr. Jones's success. Mr. Jones visited his grandfather on his fiftieth anniversary, and speaks of him in the following way:

“Six years ago, I got a letter from my old grandfather Jones, who lived across two counties from us, and he wanted me to come and visit him. The letter said: ‘You and your wife and children must come to see us; your grandmother and I have lived happily together for fifty years, and now we are going to celebrate our golden wedding.’

“I didn't intend going, but I thought over it and concluded to go, and we went. After we had finished dinner, grandfather formed all of us around him in a circle and told us this story: Away back when he was sixteen years old, in the southern part of Georgia, he was bound out until he was twenty-one; while he was trudging away at his work, the little village was stirred up one day by some Methodists coming through holding a revival meeting, and he, like everyone else, went to hear the preaching, but not like everyone else, he was converted to God, and was baptized; a few years afterward he was ordained and has preached the gospel ever since.

“There are fifty-two members in our family, of these twenty-two have crossed over on the other side, sixteen were infants; and, with God as my surety, I know they are in heaven, the other six died happy (and one of these was my father).

“There are thirty left, and all but one are in the church and on the straight and narrow path that leads to heaven; but that one, oh, I have wept over that brother; I have shed tears of bitter anguish; I have prayed for him and with him, and at last he surrendered to the power greater than he, and is to-day a powerful minister of the gospel. Then the old man said, with tears in his eyes, that he didn't care whether he stayed down here with his thirty children and grandchildren, or went up yonder with the twenty-two to wait for us all.”

Grandfather Jones was also in the habit of having a birthday celebration, which came on the fifteenth day of August. He would have his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and friends present. These were occasions of great grace, more like a revival meeting than a mere social gathering. The day was filled with songs, prayer, sermons and exhortations, and an exchange of Christian experiences.

The deep religious experience of grandfather, and his earnest solicitude for the salvation of his children and grandchildren was lived over in Mr. Jones. No man ever loved his home better and had keener interest for the welfare of his children.

At the different anniversaries in our home and the great annual tabernacle meetings, our home was more like a prayer-meeting or revival than anything else. Some of the rarest and richest religious experiences of life have transpired in our home during these gatherings.

As we have seen, Mr. Jones's grandmother, on his father's side, was a daughter of Rev. Robert L. Edwards. Mr. Edwards was one of the pioneer preachers of Georgia. He was a giant in his day. He preached with unusual unction and was rather unique in his ministry. While the gift of wit and humor was not so pronounced, he was, nevertheless, witty and humorous when he wished to be. He had a burning zeal for the salvation of souls, and was quick to see an opportunity for preaching the Word of God. He was admitted on trial by the South Carolina Conference, at Sparta, Georgia, in December, 1806. After serving as an itinerant preacher for five years, he located in December, 1811. He was readmitted into the South Carolina Conference, at Milledgeville, Georgia, in December, 1814, and remained in connection with that and the Georgia Conference until his death in 1849.

The Conference Minutes say of him: "As a preacher of the gospel he was one of the most remarkable men that ever labored in the Southern States. His preaching abilities were good; especially did he excel in the talent for extemporaneous preaching. Upon the spur of the moment he could deliver a discourse, marked not only with good sense and fervency but with system of thought and power upon the hearers. He was distinguished for his skill in planning and conducting meetings in which the conversion of souls was the special object. Nor was he ever satisfied with efforts which did not result in this end. At camp-meetings he would often preach from tent to tent with powerful and blessed effects."

Rev. James D. Anthony, who heard him preach several times during the year 1847, describes a service held at the old Warsaw Campground, in the autumn of that year, in the following words:

"All the preachers had left the tent and were on their way to the arbor. Father Edwards, who always believed in being on hand in due time, was leading the procession. He halted, and turned, facing us, saying: 'Stop, brethren, stop! Tell me who is to preach to-night.'

'Brother David Williamson,' someone replied.

Then, facing Brother Williamson, he said: 'Brother Williamson, what are you going to preach about?'

Williamson replied, 'I thought I would take a text in Isaiah 48:18: **'Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.'**

'Pooh, pooh,' exclaimed Brother Edwards, 'That won't do at all. Give 'em salvation, brother, give 'em salvation. I tell you, you must give 'em salvation.'

“Brother Williamson was not a man who could shoot without taking a rest, so he preached on **‘Peace as a River.’** It was a very pretty, smooth sermon of about thirty minutes. When he had finished, old Brother Dunnagan, an exhorter, arose to conclude the services. He eulogized the sermon in beautiful language, and began to talk about the ‘assize’ in England, and the vast numbers that attended on such occasions.

“Brother Edwards was seated in the altar. He rose up, groaned in spirit, struck a bee-line for the pulpit, and placed his right hand on the exhorter’s breast, at the same time saying: ‘Brother, I don’t care anything about the ‘assize of England.’ These people are sinners, sir, big sinners, on their way to death. And if you won’t tell them where they are going, sit down and let me tell them.’

“‘I was going on,’ explained the exhorter, ‘to tell them about the great assize of the general judgment day; but, my brother, I will give place to you. I know you can do better than I can; and he took his seat. Mr. Edwards made an earnest exhortation, and when he invited the unsaved to the altar, they came in crowds. This moved the church, and the meeting lasted all night. Cries, mingled with shouts of converts, and the happy hallelujahs of Christians continued to be heard until the sun, full-orbed, rode up into the heavens.”

At another time he ran across a crowd waiting for a horse-race to come off. He passed a few words with them, and finally decided to preach, provided they would listen. Seeing that he had nearly an hour before the races, he took his stand on the porch of a little store, sang a hymn, knelt down and prayed, and preached a powerful sermon. They asked him to stay with them and preach that night. The people were so impressed with his preaching that they urged him to remain several days. The result was a wonderful revival and a church organized. Thus he went from place to place preaching.

He possessed great physical courage. It is told of him that after preaching a very pointed and direct sermon a rowdy fellow waited for him to whip him and kill him if he did not retract some of his utterances. Mr. Edwards was riding home when this fellow met him in the road. He spoke to him, demanding that he take back the things to which he objected. This the preacher refused to do, whereupon he struck Mr. Edwards, and the preacher returned the blow, but he finally got the sinner on his knees and prayed him into the deepest conviction. The man went home and retired, but his agony of conviction was so intense that his family, becoming alarmed, sent for his pastor; he came and prayed with him and led him to the Saviour.

These incidents may help to account for some of the qualities in Mr. Jones. He was possessed with such a consuming desire for the salvation of the lost, and was always ready anywhere to preach to sinners, and was possessed with such dauntless courage.

He used to say, “Fighting is the first instinct of a bulldog, and the last resort of a gentleman; yet you cannot have a moral courage without physical courage as a basis.”

Those who knew Mr. Edwards very well and who heard Mr. Jones preach used to say: “There is a streak of the great-grandfather running through him, breaking out here and there.”

His father, Capt. John J. Jones, was a man of many parts. He was a lawyer by profession but a business man in every sense of the word. In his law practice and business transactions, he made money but spent it freely. He did an immense business, and was always in a good financial condition.

Early in his life he was sheriff of the county in which he lived, and took a lively interest in politics, but never held any other office. He believed in office-holding for his friends.

His Christian life began very early, as he joined the church when young, but it was not until his later years that he became such a devoted Christian. He always felt that he was called to the ministry, but unlike his son, conferred with “**flesh and blood.**” He didn’t feel that the ministry offered sufficient financial inducement for his support, and put off preaching until he could make enough money to feel sure of the necessaries of life. Thus he turned to the legal profession, and became a lawyer of note, distinguishing himself for his intelligence, integrity, justice, social qualities, and piety.

As a speaker he was wonderfully gifted, exercising great power over a jury. At one moment he would have an audience angry because of his invectives and sarcasm; and, the next moment roaring with laughter.

He was the soul of honor. In all of his trades and transactions he never took the advantage of any one.

Some of these strongest elements in Captain Jones were in his son, for instance, his honesty, his ability to make money, his great generosity, his power over an audience, and the earnestness of his Christian life.

His mother was a kind, painstaking, sweet-spirited woman. She possessed rare gifts and graces. She was intelligent and refined. Her sweet, noble nature was of the finest type. Her Christian life was exemplary. When Mr. Jones was nine years old, she passed away. He remembered her, and always referred to her as “My Precious Mother.”

He never forgot the hour when his father took him and the other children into the parlor, and as a little boy, he walked up to her casket and kissed her sweet lips cold in death, though at that time he was too young to realize the enormity of his loss. She sleeps in the old cemetery at Oak Bowery, Alabama.

Ten years ago, Mr. Jones went to his mother’s grave and to the old home of his childhood and preached to the people who knew him in his boyhood days. In speaking of that visit, he wrote the following to the Atlanta Journal:

“One incident on my trip brought up memories that are sacred to me. I drove from Opelika, Ala., out eight miles to the little old village of Oak Bowery, Ala., where I was born. I had not looked upon the little village in forty-one years. Only a few houses remain, and while I was only nine years old when I last saw the village, yet I could identify and call the names of the people who lived in those houses.

The house where I was born has either been destroyed by fire or moved away, but I knew the acre of ground on which I was born. I drove over to the old cemetery, just out of town, where my sainted mother has been sleeping in the dust for forty-three years, and as I looked upon her tombstone and grave the memories they awakened I shall never forget.

Memory carried me back to childhood's hours. I thought of my mother as she was to me, a little boy, kind, and loving, beautiful mother! Lying near by her was my sister, who died when but five years old. Then I thought of my father, who sleeps in the old cemetery at Cartersville. Then I wondered how long it would be before I should take my place by their side. I was so glad as I looked upon the grave of my mother, and felt that were I to take the casket from the ground and remove its rusty lid, that perhaps, while I could take the bones of my mother up in my hand, yet my Bible whispered to me in that silent hour, saying:

'This corruption shall put on incorruption. This mortality shall be swallowed up by immortality.'

"I may not again look upon the tomb of my mother. Mother's body is all that lies beneath the tomb. She lives and reigns above, with the light and life dancing in her eyes and the glow of immortal life upon her cheeks. A mother — a good mother — is immortal in the memory of her children."

Mr. Jones descended from good and religious ancestry. There was noble blood on both sides of the family. There were no better born or better bred people than his. He came from a lineage of ministers. His great-grandfather on his mother's side and his grandfather on his father's side were Methodist ministers. He had four uncles who were licensed preachers: Rev. Robert Jones, Rev. William Jones, Rev. Parks Jones and Dr. J. H. Jones.

Not only did he come from a preaching ancestry, but from Methodist lineage. He frequently said: "I am a Methodist just like I am a Jones, and, if it is a sin to be either, it is a sin that is visited upon the children from their parents." And also, he said: "Don't find fault with me for being a Methodist, for my family have been Methodists, clear back to Adam, for Adam was a Methodist — for didn't he fall?"

He was proud of his ancestry and often said: "There is only one thing which either man or devil has ever said of me that hurt me, and that has stabbed me to the heart. When some little editor or man wanted to be more than usually vicious, he said: 'Sam Jones is ill-bred . . .' It's a lie. It's a lie! God never made a sweeter, purer woman than my sainted mother, or a grander, nobler, Christian character than that of my father. No, I am not ill-bred, as pure blood flows through my veins as through any living man."

One of the most cultured and thoughtful men of Georgia gives this fitting picture of his early life:

"I am quite familiar with some facts in his biography, and I have reasons to remember that section of Alabama with peculiar vividness.

“Its physical conformation, soil and climate early attracted attention, and the families that settled around Oak Bowery and Lafayette brought with them the inter-blended blood of Georgia, Virginia and Kentucky. Thirty-five or forty years ago, I knew many of the old population, and especially the Methodist families. The pioneers had even then become the patriarchs, and a finer race of people I never saw. The pictures of their saintliness, their tender home life and kind neighborliness, the absence of city conventionalisms and the freedom of rural manliness, were very beautiful to me in those days, and more attractive now in the mellowing light of later years.

“How far these homelike forms of loveliness and easy habits of Christian intercourse affected the young Sam, I cannot say; but I can say that it was a fine tonic and atmosphere for a boy to breathe in his early days. Purity, fervor and buoyancy abounded in the atmosphere of these hills, where the great oaks and hickories were symbols of the health and vigor of Mr. Jones’s ancestry. No doubt the roll and sweep of the uplands and their wooded forests were felt in his hereditary blood, but the blood itself is unmistakable. The grandmother, the mother, the father of Sam, were people of marked character; and we may well believe that in such instances heredity is among the surest and best of Providential laws. I have no doubt that Sam Jones is a large debtor to his ancestral blood. Blood dies, but blood manages somehow to get into character and never quite dies.”

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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