

**William Ramsey Hemphill,  
Rev.**

**1806 - 1876**

# THE ABBEVILLE MEDIUM

Wednesday, August 2, 1876

Rev. W. R. Hemphill, D. D.

This well known and highly esteemed minister, departed this life at his residence in Due West, Abbeville county, S.C., on the morning of Friday July 28, aged 70 years, 4 months and fourteen days. The deceased had been going out and in among us for some time with a somewhat impaired health but was still able to preach and to write up to within a few days of his death. In the absence of the editor of *The Associate Reformed Presbyterian* he had taken charge of its publication, and under his supervision one or two numbers had appeared. The first intimation of his illness outside of his immediate family was made on Sabbath morning, July 23, when he failed to make his appearance in the pulpit at Due West, to fill an appointment imposed upon him by the pastor who was absent. That illness growing out of a diseased state of the urinary organs, soon became so alarming that six physicians were called in, whose skill availed to the alleviation of his disease, but not to its removal. Nearly all hope on the part of his physicians and friends was lost on Thursday morning when a severe chill so depressed the forces of his system that he could not be rallied again. He was scarcely aware of the state of his extreme depression and nearness of death until he was so informed by his friends. He invited conversation of some ministerial brethren present and supplemented their remarks with some of his own, expressing the hope that through the mercy of God in Christ he would obtain an inheritance among the saints. He testified in those his last hours to the importance of men being well prepared for death, alluding to the terribleness of the situation of those who expecting to be saved, are finally debarred an entrance into the Kingdom; and to the desirableness of the condition of those with whom it will be well in the end.



W. R. HEMPHILL, D. D.

The subject of this notice was the son of the Rev. John Hemphill, D. D., who took a conspicuous part in the affairs of the Associated Reformed Church during the first quarter of the present century, being known, not only in the South, but in the general Synod at the North, as a man of fine judgement and of much theological learning. His opinion carried great weight with it.

**Dr. Hemphill, jr., was born March 14, 1806, in Hopewell, Chester county, S.C., in about as evangelical a community as we ever knew, in a neighborhood of about as rigid morals as we ever associated with, in and orthodox atmosphere as we ever breathed, and therefore the lot of his inheritance was a good one. Away back in the earlier day of the century the moral status of Hopewell under the ministry of the elder Hemphill, was many degrees above mediocrity. That congregation was "the straitest of the sect." The plumb line and the level of a tolerably rigid discipline prevailed and to the credit of the people it may be said the authorities were sustained in enforcing the rules of the church.**

**Such were the birth and early surroundings of the subject of this notice. Nor were their influence lost upon him. At the age of 17, as he informed us a few hours before his death, he was admitted to the communion of the Church, being examined on that occasion by the Rev. William Blackstocks, who happened to be present as an assistant to his father. It seems he was kept back several years from his educational pursuits in consequence of a mercantile business into which he was drawn by a brother who established a store in Providence, Mecklenburg county, N.C. But his brother dying and the business being uncongenial to him, he took up, perhaps resumed, the classics, and made such progress that in the fall of 1831 he repaired to Jefferson College, Pa., and was admitted into the Junior Class. Jefferson College, under the presidency of the Rev. Matthew Brown D.D., was popular in those days and attracted scores of students from Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, the District of Columbia and Maryland. The sectional spirit that has so seriously damaged the union since that, was then in its partially developed state.**

**Mr. Hemphill graduated on the 4th of October, 1833, and repaired to Erie, Pa., where he had some relations, and there engaged in teaching for a time. Having accomplished an object by that business he turned his attention to theology and entered the Seminary at Allegheny, under the direction of the Western Synod of the Associated Reformed Church, with Dr. John T. Pressly for its principal professor. Attaching himself to one of the presbyteries about Pittsburg, he, during the theological course, delivered the customary trials, in which he was sustained, but when the time came for his licensure, the presbytery refused to license him on the ground that he was suspected to be not quite orthodox on the subject of slavery. He then returned South and was licensed by the First Presbytery June 1836. Having received appointments, he entered the field with so much animation and vigor that few of the probationary and young settled ministers could keep pace with him. He cut right and left, pushed forward at a rate that soon brought him fully up to others who had been longer in the ministry. Saul's armor seemed not to fit him so badly, and the result was he soon found himself in the heat of the conflict. Though not constitutionally controversial, yet it seemed to be his lot to have much of the polemical on hand, especially in the earlier part of his history. He shunned not to declare what appeared to him to be the whole counsel of God, but in doing so, he was exposed to a sort of cross fire or to the balls of "sharp shooters."**

**The next event in chronological order was his marriage on the 10th May, 1837, with Miss Hannah Smith Lind, daughter of the Rev. John Lind who was for a long time Pastor of the Associated Reformed church at Greencastle, Pa.**

Nearly simultaneously with this was his settlement at Cedar Springs and Long Cane, being ordained and installed there as pastor in June 1837, by the Second Presbytery. This was an important charge and it required an efficient ministry to meet its demands. He had a high standard before him in his predecessors - Dr. Clark, the Rev. Mr. Porter and Dr. John T. Pressly - nevertheless he aspired to its attainment. Nor did he fall much short of the mark, if any at all, during those ten years of his pastorate, in which in our judgement, he did more to lay down or build the foundation, the buttresses of his ministerial fame. During the years alluded to, he laid himself out, studied hard, preached with all his might, spared neither body nor mind, and soon convinced the people that all he had of the physical, or intellectual or otherwise was theirs.

But in 1848 he was called by the Synod to the professorship of Latin in Erskine College, to fill the place occupied by Mr. David McCaw, who had resigned. He took charge of that professorship immediately after his election and remained until the college was temporarily broken up by the war.

Near the end of the year 1871, he removed to New Hope, Madison county, Kentucky, where he remained some three or four years, preaching and traveling among the churches. Like Paul and Barnabas, he went among the churches in the regions round about to see how they did, exhorting and comforting them.

But the climate of Kentucky being too rigorous for the delicate constitution of himself and family, he returned South and settled in his old quarters, Due West - apparently influenced by a resolution similar to that of Ruth in reference to Naomi: "Where thou goest I will go, where thou lodgest I will lodge, thy people shall be my people and thy God my God, where thou diest I will die and there will be buried." The last at least has turned out to be his destiny.

We have directed attention to him as a student, as a pastor and as a professor. Let us view him in another sphere - *an agent*, a most disagreeable and thankless occupation, but a service which the interest of the Church and of educational institutions most imperatively require at times to be performed. This service did Dr. Hemphill render on divers occasions, in 1851 in reference to the object of getting assistance to pay Lindsay Hall - in 1853 to raise the Old Endowment - since the war to get up the Five Year Endowment and more recently the \$100,000 Endowment. How much talking, how much reasoning with people, how much speech making - how many objections and how many unreasonable and hard things have to be listened to - how much traveling in bad weather, over bad roads, and by inconvenient modes of locomotion - what protracted periods of absence from home with numerous other ills - have to be submitted to and to be put up with, by the minister who occupies the unenviable position of an agent - a man whom most of the people don't want to see, and one whose absence is about as agreeable as his presence. This service requiring many years and thousands of miles of travel did our deceased friend render the Church and the College with a skill perseverance, self-denial and long suffering which few men possess or if they do they are not willing to exercise them.

He is more widely known as a *writer*. If the articles which he published in *The Christian Magazine of the South*, the *Charleston Observer*, the *Due West Telescope*, *The Associate*

*Reformed Presbyterian*, *The Abbeville Medium*, *The Christian Instructor* and in some other papers North and South, were collected together they would make several volumes. They are on a variety of subjects; Agriculture, politics, trade, literature, temperance, secret societies, incidents of travel and theology.

The characteristics of his style are humor and piquancy. He was a very frequent contributor to the periodicals. No matter whether he was at home or abroad; whether he was in the city or in the country; whether he was well or sick, provided he was not just down in bed; whether the times were hard or whether they were good, his pen must furnish its accustomed contributions. Among the first signatures looked for by many of the readers of *The Associate Reformed Presbyterian* on the reception of its weekly issues was that of "H." He was somewhat of a polemic. He indulged occasionally in the controversial, sometime on psalmody, at others on secret societies, at others with those who were unsound on the temperance question, and on other topics. About the years 1843 and 1844 he was drawn into a newspaper controversy in the columns of the *Charleston Observer* with *Charlestonensis* (Dr. Thomas Smyth) on the subject of psalmody. The fire was kept up with spirit on both sides for some time, neither party willing to admit that he had been beaten. The authorities ancient and modern were ransacked and collated in support of their respective theories.

By the way, it would be doing our deceased friend injustice not to say of him that *he was true to the principles of his Church*. Whatever he believed he had the courage to avow and to defend. He was among the last to be charged with indifference or opposition to the several articles of faith which he, in his ordination vows, had promised to maintain. In the day of rebukes when our church threatened to go down and when some of her members seemed to be indifferent as to the results, there was no difficulty in ascertaining his precise whereabouts on the controverted questions. Everybody knew where he stood. The doctrines in question might be unpopular; but their unpopularity did not change his mind. He went by a higher standard.

He was *liberal*. Such were his sympathies with the suffering, that he gave as long as he had anything to give. He did not judge of money by the commercial standard. As he freely received, so he freely gave. There were no miser's coffers about his house, no "safes" into which the owner himself could not enter if he should happen to forget how he locked it the last time.

He was *a law abiding minister*. If the church said unto him go, he went; if it said do this or do that, he did it. If he was ordered to Florida to preach, he would go if it cost him a ride of 450 miles horseback. If he was told to go out upon the disagreeable business to which reference has been made - to beg for the College - or anything else he arose and went without gainsaying.

Who of us can claim such a conscientiousness? Who of us can say to the church authorities, "we have at no time transgressed thy commandment?"

It remains for us to say in concluding this hastily prepared sketch, that the funeral took place at 10 o'clock on Saturday morning, July the 29th, at Due West in the presence of a

**Large concourse of people. The circumstances were impressive. The bells of the College and of the Church were tolled. An appropriate sermon was preached by the pastor, Rev. Wm. L. Pressly, and an address commemorative in its character, was delivered by Dr. Grier.**

**The deceased leaves as his immediate family, a widow venerable for years and for piety, a married daughter in the far West, three sons actively engaged in three several professional pursuits; one a lawyer, one an editor, and another a minister of the Gospel.**

**\*\*\* Mrs. Hannah Smith Hemphill \*\*\***

**Mrs. Hannah S. Hemphill died at the home of her son Robert R. Hemphill in this city (Abbeville, SC) at 6 o'clock Friday afternoon October 4th 2895, at the venerable age of eighty seven years six months and some days.**

**The deceased was a daughter of Rev. John Lind and was a born in Greencastle, Franklin county, Pennsylvania. Her father, when she was a child, removed to Hagerstown, Maryland, about seven miles from Greencastle, and was pastor of the Seceder church at that place until his death. She was educated in New York city at a noted school conducted by her aunt Phoebe Smith and was for a time an inmate of the home of the celebrated Rev. Dr. John M. Mason, a fast friend of her father.**

**In early life she lost both father and mother and emigrated with her uncle Matthew Lind to Mansfield, Ohio, when it was substantially a frontier.**

**She was active an vigorous until a few years before her death. She was a woman of the Scotch-Irish type - a keeper at home, reserved even to reticence, slow to make new acquaintance, with strong, earnest convictions.**