

THE
LIFE AND LABORS

-OF-

MAJOR W. E. PENN,
"THE TEXAS EVANGELIST,"

TOGETHER WITH KINDLY CONTRIBUTIONS

FROM

MANY FRIENDS.

Hear ye Him - Matt.xvii:5.

1896

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To

THE MEMORY. ..

of the

Many thousands of converts who, under my ministry, were

moved by the Holy Spirit, heard the word of the

Lord, and turned to the living God in

honest and sincere repentance,

THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

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PREFACE.

MY BRETHREN and friends have so repeatedly requested me to leave a record of my life work in a more enduring form than the notices of the papers and the fading tablets of memory, and these requests have been so urgent, I have undertaken to yield to their solicitation.

The work was begun several times, but because it seemed a hard and arduous task was given up, I promising myself that at "some more convenient season" I would attend to it.

Having kept no journal, I found that many of the incidents of interest were growing less vivid in my mind, and fearing they might become entirely obliterated, I was spurred on to complete my task. I have necessarily left out nearly all of my work for the last few years.

If anything said in this book shall be of comfort or help to the children of our Master; or should be used by the Holy Spirit to awaken poor dead sinners to a realization of their awful condition, and cause

them to hear His voice and live) I shall be more than repaid for my toil.

I hope that no one will do me the injustice to think that in writing this book I have sought to exalt myself; nothing could be further from my heart's desire. I humbly realize that if any good has been accomplished through my life it is all of God's grace ; He is the giver of all good: I know I shall bless and praise Him throughout eternity for the ,wonderful way in which He magnified His name through the work He did in and through me, who am one of the weal{-est of His servants. To Him be all the glory now and evermore. Amen.

W. E. PENN.

INTRODUCTION.

The prosperity of the Baptists in the United States, and especially in the South, is due in a large measure to their early and continued custom of holding protracted meetings. It will be found on investigation, that very many, perhaps '1 large majority, of our present membership would refer their conversion to such a meeting held by some pastor or evangelist. The prevailing custom was for two or three pastors to unite in such meetings held with their churches, or in destitute places. Sometimes these meetings were conducted by missionary evangelists. These are good methods still, and should never be abandoned. But there were also evangelists, such as Knapp, Earle, Teasdale, and others, who gave their lives mostly or altogether to this work, and whose labors have been crowned with blessing and success. In the last twenty-five years evangelistic work has become more common: it has been taken up by some who were out of other work, and whose lack of essential qualifications for it has brought this method of labor into some disrepute among both pastors and churches

and has also led to some unwise and indiscriminate criticism on the whole system. But it has been a part of the Divine plan from the beginning, and has proven to be of very great value in modern times.

In these days of intellectual activity, and of general dissemination of knowledge among all classes, when every child has fin opportunity of mental culture and Bible training, to be a successful evangelist requires that one shall share largely in the advantages of cnl-
ture if he is to hope for a reasonable degree of emi-
nence in his calling. And if he has succeeded in
attaining to eminence among laborers in this line of
Christian activity without a great share in such cul-
ture, reveals the fact that he js jn possession of a
..power that marks hjm as a great man.

In the line of modern popular evangelism many
great men have wrought and earned distinction; but if
success under all disadvantages js the measure of real
merit, Major W. E. Penn-whose autobiography js here
introduced-is the peer, if not the superior, of any
whose names might be mentioned. He laid no claim
to the advantages of special literary training; he did
not avail himself in his work of the help that might
have been rendered by such singers as accompanied
other evangelists, true, be was a very fine bass
singer himself, and often sang the gospel into hard

and obdurate hearts, and also was aided much of the time by good vocalists; but he did not seek out such as had a national fame that he thereby might draw crowds to hear him, but rather depended on the drawing power of the gospel.

Many evangelists secure large audiences by working in union work, some of whom would find that if they conducted their work within denominational lines their following would be greatly diminished. Major Pen~ was a Baptist, and did all his work in the interest of truth, as he (together with all Baptists) understood the Bible to teach. This, of course, has rendered him unpopular to a great extent, with all other denominations. Certainly loyalty to truth and to Christ and His approval are more to be esteemed than the honor of men. But had he gone out under the glow of that sympathy that comes from favoring all without giving denominational preference to any, he would probably stand pre-eminent among modern evangelists in all that the world counts success.

But instead of looking for popular favor among men, he started out alone and labored among the Baptists in the villages and country places of Texas. In a brief period he gathered hundreds and thousands to the groves, the camp grounds, or under the great tent where his meetings were conducted. At these meet-

ings scores and fifties, and sometimes hundreds, professed conversion and were baptized. Even where he made the briefest stay and had the smallest congregations, always some were led to Christ. Most of our strongest churches in Texas to-day owe their upward start and much of their prosperity to meetings held by this servant of the Most High. But though his success was so phenomenal and God honored him to a degree that is wonderful to know, yet he did not receive the hearty support and co-operation of all his brethren; but some stood aloof from him because he did not have the credentials of a regularly ordained minister.

At length appeals from towns and cities beyond the borders of Texas, chiefly in the South and West, came and were heeded. He was also induced to visit some Baptist churches in Scotland and some in England. His limited commission to preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, was much more in the way of great gatherings and great apparent success on the other side of the water than in the United States. The Baptists there (with some exceptions) have never fully appreciated the strength of their own position, and have allowed themselves to be treated as a people whose very existence needed some apology to their stronger and more

self-respected neighbors. A man on strong denominational lines could hardly hope to command the sympathy and co-operation of such a people, and so the odds were against success. However, the Lord honored His own truth even under such circumstances, and many were converted. Wherever he went on either hemisphere his work has gone on with such undiminished power and success. that the question has often been asked, ". What is the secret of his power ?" , The power behind and above all the disadvantages under which he labored probably lies in many things, but we may sum them up in two, viz : Common sense and abiding faith in God. Governed by his common sense and better judgment, Major Penn started out with new, original and superior methods in the conduct of his meetings. He conducted them himself; he allowed no confusion in his services; he invited persons interested, willing to become interested, indifferent, infidel or atheistic, to occupy seats in front reserved and designated for that purpose. He permits no one to go after others in the congregation to bring them forward) and permits no one to speak to those who occupy these seats. He sometimes speaks of those on these seats as his Bible .class for special instruction. Songs, prayers and short talks (the latter only by himself) make up the

services before and after a longer talk or sermon from some text of scripture. His invitations, however varied, were only two-one to take the front or reserved seats, and the other, given generally towards the close of each service, was to make a public profession of faith by giving him the' hand; this only of those who, having found peace and acceptance with God and the pardon of sin through faith in Jesus Christ, had never confessed it. His invitations are always clear and understood; no one is left in doubt as to who are the invited ones and to what they are invited.

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Many preachers, and even evangelists, so mix their invitations as to confuse the hearer; he only invited one class at a time, and never said a word while others were singing. He not only believes that all things should be done decently and in order, but acted along this line exclusively. Another strong point is his entire control of the situation, being always ready to meet every emergency. His thorough acquaintance with human nature, his natural wit and tact to hedge against the wiles of Satan, would be set down by many as his strongest element of success. His mode of baptizing is controlled by the same deliberate common sense as other things. It would be worth while for any pastor who is not very

skillful in this work\; to get him to hold a meeting, or take even a long trip himself, just to see and learn how to administer this ordinance with skill and appropriate grace; for to baptize awkwardly is to put the Lord's ordinance at a disadvantage before men. He administered it as a burial. His formula is: " I bury you with Christ in baptism." I have seen him lead men larger and taller than himself down into the water, and with the head of the candidate resting on his arm, I have seen him laid beneath the yielding wave as gently as a mother lays her sleeping babe: upon its couch to rest, and as quietly raised from the liquid grave " to walk in newness of life." Beautiful symbol of the burial and resurrection of our Lord ! And he was never happier than when administering this beautiful ordinance. It is often said Major Penn looks after everything just as he should, and as anybody must who will succeed. It is said of Spurgeon, when he was quite a young man, that, having to preach in a large house without ventilation, the first thing he did was to go or send a man to knock out glass enough to give fresh air, and the next morning paid for the damage. The master of assemblies must be master of the situation and act wisely and promptly about everything. Some pastors, and perhaps some other people, have thought that Major Penn was rather

tyrannical and abrupt; but the man who goes out as an evangelist and does not take the reins in his own hand and hold them firmly will soon have failure written on his trailing standard. But behind and above all this there has been still another application of common sense of a higher order. He has had strong and abiding faith in God and his heaven-appointed mission. His faith to many in several instances has looked like foolish presumption; he made some astounding predictions which nothing but their fulfillment could have justified. But the omnipotence of faith is only limited by the omnipotence of God. When God raises up an instrument for a great work He gives him faith for its accomplishment; if the man refuses to accept it he is a failure from the beginning. This intelligent, implicit faith in God underlies all efficiency. If it be but as a grain of mustard seed it gives power to the sermon and song and omnipotence to prayer. Major Penn was ambitious for souls, and could not be satisfied without success. He was of a quick temperament, with the elasticity of steel and not the unbending qualities of iron. He was dogmatic, and hence severe in rebuke and terrible in denunciation, and had conviction and courage to maintain him. His imagination made real the terrors of the lost and the joys of the saved. He

was largely endowed with that mysterious, indescribable something, sometimes called magnetism, in public speakers—a dangerous thing in the possession of bad men, but a great blessing when controlled by the grace of God and used for His glory among men. He was a natural musician, and from his large frame rolled forth a strong musical basso, scarcely equaled by one in a million. He has turned his native talent for music and Poetry into the channel of his work in later years. His song books, HARVEST BELLS, are very popular and highly prized by all lovers of song. He is author of both words and music of many of the very best and sweetest songs in his books. With this introduction to a man for whom nature and grace have done wonderful things, the reader can take the following pages from his own pen and trace the lines of a marvelous life, and perhaps, in some respects, the most marvelous work of the century. The biography before you is worthy of the most careful study of all those whose calling makes them messengers of the same gospel of God. The Christian and lover of truth will thank God for it, and it is hoped thousands will sing the glad song of the redeemed in glory, saved through its instrumentality.

J. B. LINK,
AUSTIN, TEXAS.

CHAPTER I.

BOYHOOD EXPLOITS.

In a quiet and picturesque spot near the village of Old Jefferson, in Rutherford County, Tenn., stood the cottage which to me was more than all the palaces of earth, for it was here I was born, August 11th, 1832.

My father, George Douglas Penn, was a son of George Penn and Elizabeth Douglas, and my mother, Telitha Patterson, was a daughter of Joshua Clay and Sallie Jennings- all born and brought up in the State of Virginia, the Penns in Patrick County, the Clays in Halifax. My grandparents moved to Tennessee before my parents were grown. When I was about two years old, my father and mother moved to what was then caned the Western District of Tennessee, and settled in Gibson County, within less than a mile of the present location of the town of Humboldt. This was caned Davy Crocket' s Beat and was sparsely settled at the time. My father was a farmer and stock raiser; he brought the first Durham cattle, blooded horses, Berkshire hogs,

Saxony and other improved sheep into the country, for which he paid most exorbitant prices, at least so the people of that day thought; My mother, with the help of a negro woman, spun and wove all the cloth for the family, besides quite an amount to sell ; some of it was very fine and brought the highest prices; she usually sold it. to merchants or bartered it for goods. When I was about ten years old, my father sent me to an Old Field school held in a log house in the woods. Here I learned to read and write, and 'v hat the boys called " to chaw tobacker." I had taken a few lessons in chewing tobacco before I started to school. My father knew this, and, being very temperate in all things, was bitterly opposed to this evil habit, and instructed the teacher. to watch me closely, and if found guilty of this offense, to give me a good sound whipping, after the manner of the old field school teachers, who knew so well how to administer the rod to the disobedient urchin. These schools lasted only three months each year .

When I was a small boy it was my business on returning from school to go to a pasture, about three-fourths of a mile, and turn the cows out to come home. One evening I lost a good deal of time playing on the way and got home about night, then I had to go all along;1 in the dark. As it was getting

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a little cool I took my coat on my arm to put on when I should need it; I set out at full speed and was soon at the gap where I found the cows anxiously waiting for me. I threw the gap open, and while they were coming out I put on my coat, I put up the fence and tried to overtake the cows, thinking they would be better company than none. The first long jump I made I distinctly heard chains rattle behind me and was very much alarmed~ for I had heard the negroes say that the devil carried chains for bad boys. Then I remembered the many bad things I had said and done and was sure it was the devil I heard. This greatly accelerated my speed ; I overtook the cows and passed them. I came to the branch that I generally crossed on a log, but this time I went right through the water, mud and all. "Then I got home I fell in the door, my mother said, "My son, what is the matter? " and helped me in and asked .about my muddy condition. I told her of my narrow escape, and how the devil had chased me with his chains. She comforted me as only a mother can, and took off my muddy coat and threw it out on the back porch; as it fell on the floor the chains rattled again. She went out and examined it, and found two or three pieces of trace chains in one of the pockets. Mother had a hearty laugh, but I, ashamed

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of myself, got off to bed as soon as possible, and was in fine condition to enjoy a good rest and sleep.

Oh! those negro tales, how many memories they awaken and what morals may be pointed with them.

One day, when I was about six years old, my father found that his work could not go on without nails, and he couldn't have them; whereupon he put me on a pony that I had been learning to ride around the place, and sent me to Trenton, the county seat, ten miles off, to procure them. There was only one road and the pony knew the way, but everybody said I was a very brave boy to undertake the trip. Boys of that day were of some use to their parents.

In my boyhood days I never heard of any kind of a clock but the Seth Thomas, of which all the machinery was wood except one or two wheels, which were of brass. About every twelve or eighteen months my father's clock would cease to run, and then we had no timepiece until a clock tinker came along and set it going again. I heard him tell my father that all it needed was oiling. About a year after that the clock took another rest. One Sunday my father and mother went to church, about ten miles away, and left me to take care of every thing at home; I knew that they would not get back before night, as they were always invited to take dinner with

some of the brethren. As I was, for the day, the head of the house, I felt my importance, and was casting about in my mind what I should do first. My eyes fell on the old clock, and I thought it would be a good thing for me to take it down and clean it out and set it to running; I proceeded, and laid it on the table just as the peddler always did, took off the face, took out all the wheels, brushed them nicely with the clothes brush, and the only thing now to be done was to oil the wheels. Not being well acquainted with the oils, it occurred to me that tallow was the only thing that I had on hand that would answer the purpose; so I melted a good large piece and got a children feather and put it on the wheels while the tallow was hot and gave them a thorough oiling. Then I tried to put the wheels back in the clock and arrange them as I found them. It is useless to say that I failed, though I did manage to get all the machinery inside, and put on the face and put it back in its place. There was no more happiness for me that day, nor for the days and weeks that passed before the clock cleaner came again. There was a skeleton in the closet for me. Every time the dog barked I would look out to see if it were he who would reveal my dread secret. I knew that whenever he did come that, the date would be left on my back with a goodly

number of well-dried switch marks. The days and weeks dragged heavily by; at last the long dreaded clock cleaner came, this time, as usual, about dinner time. He always enjoyed my mother's dinners, I did too, but he spoiled this one for me. After dinner was over he said to my father, I see your clock is not running, I must get to work on it. I went out in the yard, tried to get out of hearing, but very soon I heard my father's can. I knew what it meant, and went at once. Oh! how he scolded, but the clock repairer at once became my friend, and said, " Oh, I can clean it and put it back all right, as good as it ever was, and free of charge, if you will not whip the boy. " Oh, how I loved that man; I blacked his boots and rubbed his horses until they shined like they had been oiled. I have never had any inclination from that day to this to repair clocks.

I made a good hand at the plow when eight years old, and helped to make every crop from that time until I was sixteen. At that age I was very fond of the company of the girls, and was considered quite a ladies' man. I was still wearing home-made jeans suits, and I imagined that the boys who wore " store clothes," as we then called them, " outshined " me with the girls. So I purposed to tell my father all about it, and appeal to a father's pride for his son ,

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and I knew he would go to town and buy me a suit that would outshine them all ; but to my surprise and mortification, and also to my lasting advantage, he simply said, " My son, you had better get your horse and go to plowing." I thought that a dark hour in my life. I had filled my mouth with arguments. I would say so many things to touch father's loving heart; I was sure of success. I thought of the show I would make with my fine clothes, and how I would walk over some of the boys who had been rather in the lead because they wore " store clothes." Disappointed and discouraged, I went to the field to plow as directed, but saying to myself, " It will not always be so; in five years I will be twenty-one, and then I'll be free and I'll be my own man and I'll work for myself and buy my own clothes." All day these thoughts were revolving in my mind as I followed the plow over the rough turned soil. At last the thought came to me that I might form a co-partnership with Peter (one of the negro boys on the farm with whom I had been raised) in burning charcoal for the blacksmith's use, and in that way make money enough to buy the much desired fine clothes. As soon as I had the opportunity I made the proposition to Peter, painting in glowing terms our prospects for making money. He soon fell

