

Biography of Aaron Whitney Leland

Aaron Whitney Leland, the youngest son of the Rev. John Leland, pastor of the Congregational Church in Peru, Berkshire County, Mass., was born on the 1st of October, 1787, and died on the 2nd of November, 1871, having lived to the advanced age of more than 84 years. He was a lineal descendent of Henry Leland, "the old Puritan", the founder of the family this side of the Atlantic, who was one of the earlier of "the Pilgrim Fathers". And tho he died like the patriarch, "an old man and full of years", he did not differ in this from those of the family who preceded him.

Aaron prepared for college at the Lenox Academy in Lenox, Mass. He entered Williams College, Williamstown, Mass., at the age of 17 in Sept. 1804. He graduated four years later on September 7, 1808. Some of the subjects studied by the young Leland were, Latin, Greek, Rhetoric, Elocution History, Geography, Political Science, Math, Astronomy, and Physics. In the commencement program he is listed as presenting an original poem "On the Comparative Misery and Happiness of Life", and as taking part in two dialogues which were presented by five students.

Within the same month that he graduated, Aaron left the North and sailed for Charleston, S.C. Within four weeks after reaching Charleston, he was elected classical teacher in the Mount Pleasant Academy within sight of the city, a very advantageous situation, affording not only useful and profitable employment, but leisure and facilities for pursuing the study of his future profession. In May of the following year he married Eliza, the eldest daughter of Hon. James Hibben of Mount Pleasant and Christ Church Parish, by whom he became the father of six sons and four daughters. As a wedding present Aaron and Eliza were presented with a large lot and house in the village of Mount Pleasant by Capt. Hibben. In this home all of their children were born.

At what precise date his mind became impressed with the claim of the gospel ministry we are not informed. But during the third semi-annual session of Harmony Presbytery, in April, 1811, he was taken under the care of that Presbytery, passed the usual examination and trials, and, on the 6th day of the same month, was licensed to preach the gospel as a probationer. In this capacity as licentiate he served the vacant churches of the Presbytery for one year with great acceptance, and on the 2nd day of May, 1812, was ordained as an evangelist. But so great was the favor with which his first efforts in the ministry were received, that he was soon called to the pastorate of the First Presbyterian Church in the city of Charleston — usually called the Scotch Church — and was installed pastor of the same in 1813 and served until 1821. He was, therefore, at the time of his death, the oldest Presbyterian minister of the two synods of South Carolina and Georgia, which at the time of his licensure were still component parts of the more extended Synod of the Carolinas. It was sixty years since he was licensed to preach the gospel, more than 52 of which were spent in the active duties of his sacred office.

In 1814 he received the honorary degree of A.M. from Brown University, and in 1815, at the early age of twenty-eight, was honored with the degree of Doctor of Divinity by the South Carolina College. For several years he was pastor of the church on James Island, in which a powerful revival of religion took place under his ministry. In that church he preached the eloquent sermons published in the "Southern Preacher", in which he vindicated evangelical religion from the charge of fanaticism.

In 1833 he was called from the pastoral work and installed Professor of Theology in the Theological Seminary in Columbia, which position he filled with great fidelity and eminent satisfaction to the friends of that institution till 1856 - a period of twentythree years. During the first three years of his connection with the Seminary, he also ministered to the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia as its stated supply. He was a member of the General Assembly in 1837 and voted for the dissolution of the Plan of Union in that memorable year. He presided over the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church as its Moderator in 1850. In view of his advancing years, and the increased labors incident to his chair, he was then, with his own hearty approval, transferred to the Professorship of Sacred Rhetoric and Pastoral Theology, for which his taste, culture, and long experience eminently fitted him. To the duties of this chair he devoted himself with unflagging zeal till disabled by a stroke of paralysis in October, 1863. On the 11th day of that month, while entering a store on the public street, he was suddenly stricken prostrate with paralysis, and for a time lay insensible. So soon as consciousness returned he was borne, or rather "assisted", to his own home. But, punctual to his engagements, nothing could deter him from attempting to meet his duties at the Seminary. It was his turn that week to preside in the religious services of evening worship; and though the distance was considerable, he reached the Seminary with faltering and uncertain steps. "Before any of his colleagues could anticipate him, at the appointed signal which



Obituary of Eliza Hibben Leland

Southern Presbyterian, Charleston, S.C. Saturday, January 17, 1857

Departed this life, in Columbia, S.C., on 29th of December, 1856. Mrs. Eliza Hibben Leland, wife of the Rev. A.W. Leland, D.D., in the 65th year of her age.

Mrs. Leland was born in Christ Church Parish, near Charleston, on the 17th Oct., 1792. She was the daughter of James and Sarah Hibben, most worthy and estimable persons who having served God in their day and generation, and passed a life distinguished by piety and the offices of charity, went down to their graves honoured by the community in which they had lived, and lamented by the recipients of their bounty, freely and ungrudgingly bestowed. Of them it may truly be said that their works did follow them. Their children have risen up and called them blessed, and even to this day, the recollection of the sleeping saints mingle with the most cherished reminiscences of the olden time.

The noble virtues which graced their lives seemed to have been all inherited by their daughter. From early youth she displayed those lovely traits which marked her mature life and beautifully adorned her age. Not very long after her marriage, Mrs. Leland removed with her husband from her native parish to James Island, where he exercised his ministry, and where she won the love of all who knew her. The fragrance of her memory still lingers about the place; and although for many years subsequently she resided in a distant community, her death is sincerely lamented there by the surviving friends of her early years.

The latter part of her life was passed in Columbia in the quiet discharge of her appropriate duties. She walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord as blamelessly as one may walk, who is subject to the infirmities of human nature, and has not yet arrived at the perfection of the heavenly state. Her life was a practical exposition of the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel; one of those loving arguments for the reality of the Christian religion which no skepticism has ever met, and in the presence of which the confidence of infidelity itself is shaken. The holiness of the Gospel, a holiness which no earthly system of philosophy and no human education ever produced, was the pervading state of her soul; and the fruits of holiness hung in golden clusters about her character and illustrated it in the eyes of all beholders. To her the Name of Jesus was the symbol of all that is lovely and all that is glorious. Her love of Christ was not a mere sentiment; it was a passion. His name was as ointment poured forth, which perfumed and enriched the smallest offices of life. Seldom did she pen a letter or a note in which there was not "aliquid Christi," a sweet savour of Christ, which hallowed her counsels, and imparted the spirit of His religion and the dignity of His Name to the minutest details of domestic life. She has gone to behold Him "whom having not seen she loved;" to "look upon that head which was crowned with thorns, and that face which was spit upon for her."

Another conspicuous feature of her character, was a faith in the special Providence of God and in the promises of the everlasting Covenant, which no vicissitudes of life, no shocks of affliction, and no tempest of cares could shake. It rendered her calm when others were disturbed. And hence she was enabled to maintain a tranquil equanimity amid all the changes of her earthly circumstances. She seemed to lean with the most perfect repose upon that "righteous, omnipotent hand," which had upheld and guided her through all her pilgrimage. Thus, though subject to often infirmities and sicknesses of body, she became a stay for others; a pillar of support, and a minister of consolation to her family and friends. She has received the end of her faith, and now enjoys the rest which remaineth for the people of God; but alas, the pillar of support has crumbled to dust, the staff of strength is broken, the ministering angel is gone; and naught of her remains, but the precious legacy of her example, the fadeless memory of her love, and the mute and touching memorials of a departed wife and mother.

But the element of character, which chiefly distinguished her, was her unselfish and untiring devotion to the interests and comfort of others, especially her family and friends, and as a consequent, a most fervent spirit of intercessory prayer. In serving others, she seemed to forget herself. It mattered little that she was sick, if others were well; if her rest was broken, that theirs might be enjoyed; the midnight hour was frequently passed while she toiled for their comfort; and how often did she prevent the dawning light that the stranger who had lodged within her gates, or the friend who had slept under her roof, might be refreshed for early travel, and receive her parting words of kindness and affection. The poor and friendless student for the ministry was ever welcome to her hospitable board and fireside, and received from her the sympathy of a mother and a friend. The needy and the destitute found her door open to them and her hand of charity extended for their relief. Her domestics were treated rather as children than servants, as is attested by the fact that she contracted her last illness from exposure and fatigue undergone while nursing one of them in sickness. But who may describe the watchful assiduity, the exhaustless patience, and the tender and yearning affection, with which she ever ministered to the temporal and spiritual wants of her beloved husband and children? "In all their affliction she



assembled the students, he entered the pulpit stand, commenced as usual by invoking the presence of God, read, as he believed, a portion of the Psalms of David, gave out a hymn, united in singing it, and then, with the tones and countenance of one wrestling like Jacob with the angel of the covenant, engaged in prayer. But in all this, though there were the usual modulation of the voice, the usual rhythm of the hymn, the wrestling earnestness of the suppliant, not an intelligible word was spoken. To all but himself it was an unmeaning jargon. The mysterious connexion between the thought and its audible sign was broken. And yet it was most solemn and impressive; for it was the mysterious intercourse of the soul with its God, in an act of direct spiritual worship". And so through eight long years of almost suspended intercourse with his fellow-men, did he maintain unimpaired his life-long habits of religious study, meditation, and worship. The word of God was his constant companion. Large portions of it he had committed to memory, as also an almost incredible number of our hymns of praise. And thus, during these years of infirmity and suffering, his days were passed chiefly in holy employment, till God took him to his rest.

The wife of his youth and mother of his children was eminently endowed by nature and by grace with all those qualities and virtues which constitute the true wife, the devoted and faithful mother, and the noble and useful Christian woman. Her memory will be "as ointment poured forth", shedding its fragrance over the sweetest and most sacred recollections of those whose happiness it was to know her friendship and share her hospitality. Some years after her death he became united in marriage (Dec. 21st, 1859) to Miss Clara Blight, a native of England, and a lady of rare and varied accomplishments, who, with unwearied care and constant devotion, watched over him during those years of infirmity and sickness to which allusion has been made.

Dr. Leland was magnificently endowed with natural gifts, both mental and physical. In manly beauty, dignity, and grace, he was the admiration, in his youth and early manhood, of all who knew him; and with a mind vigorous and strong, and well stored with knowledge, and an imagination vivid and powerful, coupled with a heart susceptible of the most intense emotion, he could attract and impress all who came within the charmed sphere of his influence. His majestic form, courtly manners, a voice which was harmony itself, and a style cultivated and fervid, made an impression on those who heard him not soon to be forgotten. As a reader of the Scriptures and sacred song in public worship, he surpassed in excellence all whom we have ever heard. "He could win the attention and charm the hearers as he read the sacred page with that fitting modulation and emphasis which interpreted it as he read, ere he opened his lips to set forth in his own often eloquent and persuasive words the truth of God."

Dr. Leland's chief excellence as a pastor consisted in his earnest and faithful preaching of the gospel, in his deep sympathy for the afflicted, and his eminent success in presenting to their minds the rich consolations of divine grace. At certain seasons he would become intensely moved for the salvation of souls; and at such times his appeals to the unconverted would seem irresistible. At other seasons he would appear in his peculiar and gifted character, as "one that comforteth the mourners". There were also times when he himself came near to "the mount that might be touched", and wrote bitter things against himself, heeding not for the moment that "blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel". But these seasons were few and of short duration; in his happy moments, which were many, he was the most genial and engaging of men.

Among his personal characteristics, which, indeed, "were known and read of all men", a few may be briefly mentioned. **First.** System and order were to him indispensable in all things; nothing could atone for their neglect. **Secondly.** Punctuality characterized him in all things. It was the law of his life. This trait was strikingly illustrated by the fact that families living between his residence and the Seminary were in the habit of regulating their time-pieces by his passing and re-passing.

In certain frames of mind, or from constitutional idiosyncrasy, Dr. Leland would sometimes remain as silent as a tombstone, when all around were in earnest conversation. On one such occasion, when an attempt was made to rally him, his characteristic reply was: "Well, — I never knew anybody to get into trouble from saying *too little*." On another occasion, while suffering severely from the then prevailing epidemic, "Tyler Grip" (as it was called), and comforted (?) by the declaration of his wife, that "the worst of the wretched epidemic was that it differed from most others, in returning upon you after you are cured," he quaintly replied: "Well, —, there is one comfort; you can't have it but *once at a time*." Thus he would find consolation where there was apparently none. Another marked characteristic was the inflexibility of his rules in domestic government, especially as related to "worldly amusements", and the strict observance of the Sabbath. In these, particularly in the last, he gave marked evidence of his ingrained Puritan education.

Dr. Leland exhibited great devotion and untiring activity in behalf of the material interests of the Seminary he loved so well. Many of his vacations, in his earlier connexion with the institution, were spent in gathering funds for its endowment. These he obtained more from individual contributions than from general collections. And it is not too much to say that the soul financial basis of the Seminary, prior to the war, was due, in a good degree, to his efforts in this way.

There was also something remarkable in the uniform and vigorous health enjoyed by Dr. Leland, with scarcely an interruption, prior to his 1863 stroke, for more than half a century of ministerial and professional duties. On leaving, with fixed determination to make the South his permanent home, it was predicted, and with every probability of correctness, that his sanguine and plethoric habit would ensure an early death, and yet by the providence of God, he has not only outlived two generations, but has enjoyed a degree of uniform and vigorous health that for more than fifty years he has not been prevented by sickness from attending the services of the sanctuary more than seven or eight Sabbaths. The same regularity which so marked his discharge of public duties as to have passed into a proverb, was no less manifest in his domestic habits and arrangements. Rigidly and scrupulously temperate in the use of the good things of this life, he has been sustained by his powerful constitution far beyond the allotted term of human existence.

It may be useful to add, that such a continuance of good health in so sickly a climate, while it should be ascribed to the good pleasure of Him to whom all things are possible, — the Sovereign Disposer of life and death, — may also be traced, instrumentally,

Continued from page 3

was afflicted," and all their joys were enhanced by the fact that she shared them. It was such a love as this, which formed the source of appeal from which a covenant-keeping God has drawn, in order to illustrate His own unchanging affection for His people. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" For her children, a numerous family of whom she was permitted to raise to mature life, her intercessions were incessant and importunate. Indeed, as one observed of her, hers was a life of intercession; and God heard her prayers. All of them, save one, she had seen connect themselves with the church of Christ. For him, her youngest son absent in a distant state, she continued to wrestle in prayer; and her joy seemed to be full, when she received the tidings that he had experienced a hope in Christ and that he had determined to unite himself to His people. Upon reading the letter conveying this cheering intelligence, she touchingly remarked, "now my work is done." And singularly enough, in a few days after, having replied as was fitting to this letter, she was seized with the illness which terminated her earthly labours.

The record of her last moments is a brief one. When first attacked with the fatal disease (pneumonia) and while suffering intensely, she remarked to one of her children who was with her, that she must prepare herself for the worst, as she did not expect to rise again. Shortly after she lapsed into a state of insensibility, which lasted until she expired. George Shitefield once said, that God often extorts in a dying hour that testimony to His grace which was not fully yielded in life, but that one who had lived faithfully, could afford to die silent. In her case, no necessity existed for a dying testimony. Her whole life had been an illustration of the vital power of the religion of Jesus. As to her to live was Christ, so death in any form was gain. Thus, too, she was mercifully spared the pain of witnessing the passionate and irrepressible grief that broke forth at her bedside, and the distress which sometimes results from the last desperate efforts of the adversary, to mar the peace and cloud the prospects of the dying saint.

It had been her uniform custom to spend the closing moments of the old year and the opening hour of the new, in intercession for each of her children, whom she carried by name to the throne of the heavenly grace. On the last night of the year just past, her mortal remains attended by the loved ones for whom at that season she was accustomed to pray, were brought to her native parish for interment. The reflection was sad and affecting, that a mother's prayers were not then anticipating the issues of the coming year; but it was a matter of devout thanks giving, to believe that she had just entered upon an eternity of praise.

Her body was taken to the town of Mt. Pleasant, where she had passed her early days. The funeral service was attended by the friends of her youth; and her remains, accompanied by her family and some of her friends, were borne to the burial ground about seven miles from the town, called "Cook's Field", ["Copahee"] There, according to her own wish, beside the graves of her beloved parents, remote from the bustle of life, in the silent forest, and amid the tears of her kindred, her precious dust was committed to its final resting place. Fit spot for the last sleep of the saint, whose life had been gentleness and whose end was peace! No rude foot will tread upon her grave, the morning and the evening dew will fall upon it, and the sweet voices of nature in this still retreat will hymn her gently requiem. Many bodies of Christ's dear people there rest in death—a goodly company. The sacred spot has been further signalized and hallowed by receiving the dust of this noble and excellent mother in Israel; and not the least among those who shall there rise at the sound of the Archangel's trumpet, and the call of the descending Savior, will stand the glorified form of our departed friend.

It was truly affecting to see her venerable partner, who, like Abraham bearing the body of his illustrious wife to the field of Machpelah, had come with his dead to this quiet spot to discharge, for her the last mournful offices of affection. The light of his dwelling has been extinguished, and the prop of his age has been withdrawn, and the noble heart that had beat with ineffable love for him and his children is still; but may He who has promised that He will be with His people when they "pass through the waters," and "walk through the fire," and that "even to hoar hairs," he "will carry them," graciously comfort and sustain him under this sore and heavy trial!



Continued from page 4

to the practice of rigid temperance. On landing in Carolina, forty years ago, A. W. L. entered into a solemn covenant with himself, to drink nothing but water, and that covenant has been kept inviolate. He, therefore practiced *total abstinence* nearly a score of years before the name was invented, and practically adopted the principles of the temperance reform, long before the trumpet-tongued alarm of Beecher had disturbed the deathful slumbers of the world. However the fact may be, as to the efficacy of this peculiar habit in preserving the health and life of the subject of this memoir, it is his own settled conviction, that if he had continued to be what is called a *moderate drinker* of intoxicating liquors, he would have been in his grave thirty years ago.

Well and faithfully did he fill up the days of his allotted time on earth. Whether as a pastor or as a theological Professor, he was devoted to the duties of his calling, and sought to magnify his office by a life of holy consecration to the service of God. As a shock fully ripe, he was gathered into the garner.