

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 THREE

HIS EARLY DAYS

Mr. Jones was born in Chambers County, Alabama, October 16, 1847. When he was nine years old, his family moved to Cartersville, Bartow County, Georgia, where he was reared, and resided at the time of his death. At his mother's death, the family consisted of the father, an older brother, a sister, and a younger brother. The children went to the home of their grandfather, Samuel G. Jones.

His grandmother exerted a wonderful influence upon his young mind. She was one of the holiest women that ever lived. Her spirituality was remarkable. She read the Bible through thirty-seven times, on her knees. She was wonderfully gifted in prayer, and spent much time in secret prayer having a time and place set apart for this devotion daily. This made a great impression on her children and grandchildren, and Mr. Jones was greatly impressed by her angelic face as he saw it upturned towards heaven.

She would go to the church dressed in the old-fashioned way, wearing heavy shoes, and, when the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her she would give vent to her feelings by shouting the praises of God. As she would walk up and down the aisle clapping her hands, she moved as lightly and gently as if she were not touching the earth. Her wonderful example of piety, prayerfulness and study of God's Word made an abiding impression upon Mr. Jones; and, no doubt, helped to lay the fundamental principles of a deeply pious, earnest and consecrated life.

In 1858, Captain Jones was married to Miss Jennie Skinner, and moved to Cartersville, Georgia. As a stepmother, she was kind and good to the children, and did all that she could to instill further into their minds the principles of virtue and honesty. Thus guided and controlled by her love, and strengthened and supported by a father's counsel, Mr. Jones was protected and saved from evil influences.

In the home he was always obedient, having the utmost reverence for his father and strong devotion for his stepmother.

There was nothing very extraordinary in his boyhood days, except that he was always very bright and full of life. He was witty and humorous, even as a child. In school he was so full of mischief and fun that he was constantly playing pranks and jokes on some one.

While Mr. Jones studied very little during his boyhood days, he never failed to recite his lessons creditably. His mind was so alert that it didn't take him long to get ready for a recitation. This left him free to play and to tease the other boys.

One of the great events of those early school days was the Friday afternoon speeches. It was the custom of the teacher to select the speeches for the boys, but Mr. Jones would never allow him to select his, but would make his own selections, and the school was greatly surprised at his speeches. The other boys would have to go to the woods, study and practice their pieces for a week or more, but Mr. Jones would select his speech on Friday and commit it to memory, and be ready for that afternoon. His style of address was not boy oratory, but he spoke in an easy, conversational style. He would create great interest when he arose to speak, and would invariably bring down the house, and the school would always cheer him.

While in school at Oak Bowery, Alabama, to W. F. Slaton, afterwards Major Slaton, superintendent of the Atlanta public schools, as a mere child, perhaps the age of five, he was even then a leader.

When the night came for the older boys to hold their commencement exercises, they begged Mr. Slaton to let "Sam Jones," as he was called by them, take some part. Finally Mr. Slaton agreed and himself wrote a parody on the even then trite:

"You would scarce expect one of my age
To speak in public on the stage."

He had committed these lines to memory, but when the time came for the delivery of this speech, he was fast asleep. By the application of a wet towel on the young orator's face, he was quickly awakened. Professor Slaton carried him in his arms and stood him on the table on the stage, and there he made his speech. The last two lines were:

"In coming years and thundering tones
The world shall hear of Sam P. Jones."

He recited the speech in his peculiar way and was encored, and recited it again, and then several times before the audience became satisfied. The other speeches were made by young men who were as old as their teacher. The contrast was so great that it added special delight to the audience.

How true the prophesy. If there was ever a man who literally shook the world with his preaching, it was he. For months after the delivery of that little speech, he kept his little companions and himself in candy, for everywhere he went, he was asked to repeat it, and name his price in candy.

The faithful tutorship of Professor Slaton was worth much to him, as it laid the groundwork of education before he was seven years of age. Like many wonderful preachers, and great lawyers and professional men, he built upon the foundation laid, which is, after all, the safest and best education to be had.

Mr. Charlie Jones, a brother, in speaking of those early school days, says: "Sam was a most lovable boy. He was the most attractive personality to me in my youth, and he remains the most attractive person to me in all the world, of all the men I have known or read of, and he was my brother true and tried for nearly fifty-three years.

"In my youth, I loved to follow him wherever he went, whether on hunting or fishing expeditions, as on such occasions he was always joined by other genial spirits of our home town. He was always the 'wit and the clown' of our party. Those were the brightest and best days of my life. At school he would often dispel the tedium of study, and have both pupils and teachers in an uproar by doing the unexpected and funny thing. When the teacher would catch him in some of his pranks and begin to reprimand him, with great dignity and serenity of manner for his misconduct, Sam would look at him with a twinkle in his eye, and a smile that would bring an answering smile from the teacher, which dispelled all of his dignity to the extent that he could but order him back to his seat amid the laughter of the school, and thus it was at home and in school, he could always dispel a frown of disapproval from our father's or the teacher's faces with some droll word or act, which never failed to put them in good humor, and make them love him all the more.

"When we would have our boyhood disagreements, and sometimes come to blows, it always ended by Sam putting a nice pocketknife or a piece of money in the latch of the gate as he left the lot or yard, before me, and then he would hide nearby and watch me find it, when he would look at me with moistened eyes and merry laughter as we made up and became better friends than ever."

When the war broke out between the States in 1861, Captain John Jones hurried to Virginia to join Lee, joining the ranks of the Southern Confederacy, leaving his second son, Sam, to remain with his stepmother and the younger children to assist her in caring for the home, but when it was known that Sherman was making his way towards Atlanta and would soon be in this part of the State, acting upon the advice of her husband, his stepmother decided to refugee to South Georgia, feeling that they would be safer there.

At this time Captain Jones had a lively stable in Cartersville and his son Sam was sent out to take the horses to a place of safety, and he was expected to come back and go with his mother. But Mrs. Jones had to go earlier than she expected, hearing of the approach of Sherman, and expecting to meet Sam, she started on her trip south, but he had decided to come home another way and in doing this he missed her. He came on to Cartersville, where he found the old black woman, Mammy Viney, whom he, as well as all the family, loved very much, in the home.

After spending a few days at home with her he decided to go north, as Sherman had already taken possession of the town and surrounding country. Here he lost sight of his mother and did not know where to communicate with her for several months.

He made his way to Nashville, and while there he realized that he had no means and no employment, and was at a loss to know just what course to pursue. At this time the Sixth Kentucky raiment was at this place, en route to Louisville, Kentucky, to be mustered out of service, as they had served four years in the Federal service. Most of this regiment was made up of boys from Henry County, Kentucky, and among them were two young men, neighbors of my father's, Captain Webb Owens and Lieutenant Dupuy.

They were much attracted to this young man and he opened his heart and told them his story, and of his separation from his family. They very cordially invited him to go home with them and remain until he could get in communication with his family. He decided to go with these new friends and remain until he could hear from his father and be able to return to his Georgia home.

At the close of the war, he got into communication with his father, and returned to Cartersville. He then took up his studies which had been laid aside on account of the war.

In his eighteenth or nineteenth year, he entered the excellent school of ex-Congressman W. H. Felton and his intelligent wife. Under the tutorship of Dr. and Mrs. Felton he made excellent progress.

In speaking of him, Mrs. Felton says: "I first knew Sam when a boy. I recall his fine physique. He never had an ounce of surplus flesh in his life, and always had a springy step; and those beautiful, bright eyes, with a merry twinkle — that were so fascinating in those early days. He was the life of any gathering, and had an "independence of spirit and disregard for conventionalities that was apparent the first time I saw him."

"Later on, when he entered our school, he was full of life and spirit, and his original way of illustrating things or talking about events, even then was a force in the town. He never copied after anybody. Whether he took a pride in his originality, or otherwise, the fact was discovered then that Sam Jones was a unique personality. Although he was mischievous, he could be relied upon to do what he said he would do, and in that early period of his life no one who was closely associated with him failed to understand and appreciate the tenderness of his nature. The nearer you got to him, the better you understood that peculiar trait of his nature, which grew and expanded, and developed until he passed from earth."

After leaving this school he went to Euharlee, Ga., and continued his studies under the leadership of the late Professor Ronald Johnson. He was in line for a collegiate education, which his father intended giving him, but it was at this place his health completely broke down, and on account of this he was forced to relinquish his hope of obtaining a college education. He suffered from the worst form of nervous dyspepsia; and, in his sufferings, with his health wrecked, with sleepless nights and restless days, he became discouraged and despondent and sought relief in drink. Here is where he began his dissipation.

At times his suffering was so intense that he would take a drink, believing that it was the only thing that would save his life. Soon the habit was firmly fixed; with his health gone, and disappointed because his education could not be finished, he went deeper and deeper into intemperance.

Having reached the point in a young man's life where it is so much easier to drift on with the tide than to heed the warnings of loved ones, he soon became a slave to liquor.

It was in this great nervous state, with his health almost gone that he began to study law. After one year's study, he was admitted to the Bar and began to practice law. Judge Milner, of our town, said to Captain Jones, in speaking of his son: "You have reared the brightest boy ever admitted to the Georgia Bar."

Soon the speeches that he made at the Bar became the talk of the town. They were bright, spicy, thoughtful and powerful. His words were simply irresistible. Had he continued the practice of law, his name might have gone down in history by the side of Robert Toombs and Alexander Stephens, Georgia's most able and noted lawyers. But, thank God, in following the path of his lowly Master, he has the honor of being so like his Lord, which is far greater than ranking as a statesman.

The new associations growing out of his legal profession made it easy for him to continue his dissipation. The success that he met with also helped to ruin him. The suppers, banquets and social gatherings caused him to plunge deeper into dissipation, until finally he lost grip upon his practice and abandoned it altogether.

Many people are under the impression that Mr. Jones was an habitual and constant drunkard, but this is not true. He never reached such a point in his dissipation. Some have also believed that his dissipation covered a period of many years, when in fact this sad period of his life was of but five or six years' duration. Others have thought that the sins that accompany drink had a strong hold upon him. He was remarkably free from such sins.

Rev. Parks Jones, his uncle, says: "I was with him more or less from our school days until his conversion. He was at our home, and I was at his. I never heard him swear an oath or use a profane expression in my life. I don't say that he didn't, but I never heard him. I never saw him drunk or in a drunken crowd. The nearest I ever came to seeing him drunk was the year that he was converted.

"He was down on the corner of a street in Cartersville and walked off towards a barroom. His father noticing him called in pitiful tones: 'Sam! Sam!' That attracted my attention, but he did not hear him, or if he did, he paid no attention to his father's trembling voice."

To him in after-years the sin of drunkenness was so hateful and enormous that he never forgave himself for his dissipation. With such conception of the heinousness of drink he was compelled to speak out in fearful denunciation of it, in his own life, as well as the lives of others.

The world while hearing him failed to see, as he did, the hideousness of drinking, and got the impression that he was a constant, habitual and wicked drunkard. He was never anything but good at heart, and it was physical weakness that made him dissipate.

As to my sympathy, prayers and devotion to him in those sad years I shall let him speak:

“In November, 1868, at the age of twenty-one, only one month after my admission to the Bar, I was married to Miss Laura McElwain, of Henry County, Kentucky. I brought her to my Cartersville home, and continued in the practice of law with rich promise of success; but notwithstanding the remonstrances of my good wife, notwithstanding her tears and pleadings, I continued my social drinking, often returning home intoxicated. The habit of drink was gradually established, and all the ambitions and vital forces of my life were being undermined by the fearful appetite, which was stronger than the tears of my wife, the advice of my friends and the dictates of my own better judgment.

“My faithful wife, with a courage born of despair, with a strong faith in God and with a bright hope for better days, clung to me in the darkest hours of our married life, and never ceased her efforts or surrendered her faith in the promises of God until the day had dawned, and she realized that God is not slack concerning His promises. Though her tears and prayers often moved me, and though I promised time and again to give up drink, yet in spite of myself and every effort to stop me, I continued in my dissipated life until the month of August, 1872.”

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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