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B. C. Goodpasture

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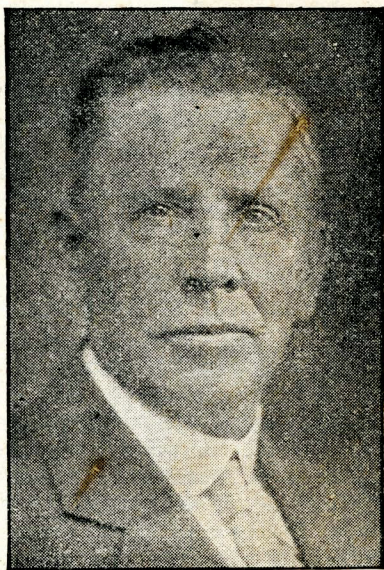
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HENRY LEO BOLES

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



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HENRY LEO BOLES: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The subject of this sketch was born near Gainesboro, in Jackson County, Tenn., February 22, 1874; and died February 7, 1946. If he had lived two weeks longer, he would have been seventy-two. His parents were Henry Jefferson and Sarah Smith Boles. His paternal grandmother was a daughter of "Raccoon" John Smith, and his mother was a great-niece of Smith. His father and mother, therefore, were distant cousins. Consequently, a double portion of the pioneer spirit fell upon him. There is a tragic story concerning the family of "Raccoon" John Smith. On moving to the vicinity of Huntsville, Ala., early in the nineteenth century, Smith sought for an ideal location for his home. While he was away from their temporary home looking for better land, and while his wife for a brief time had gone to minister to a dying neighbor, his house caught on fire and two of his children were burned to death. Two children were rescued from the fire, but his poor wife was so shocked from this terrible loss that she soon died. One of the little girls rescued on that fateful night was the paternal grandmother of Brother Boles. Thus he sprang from stock that had been tried in the fiery furnace of tribulation and sorrow.

His father was a preacher of the gospel and belonged to that sturdy type of gospel preachers who loved the truth and preached it in humility, love, and earnestness for the salvation of souls. His home was the home of the preachers who came into that community; hence, his son, Leo, grew up in a "preacher environment." He listened with interest to the discussion of tenets of faith and problems of the church at the time. His father was married three times, and was the father of eighteen children. He never saw all his children at home at the same time. H. Leo was the third of six children born to the first marriage. When he was five years of age, his father moved from Jackson to White County, Tenn. Ten years later the Boles family moved to Seven Springs, in De Kalb County, about seven miles south of Smithville, Tenn. Young Boles and his brothers began to work on the farm at an early age. In this way they helped to support the large family, and thus gave their father more time for meeting work. Brother Boles was baptized by W. T. Kidwell in a meeting at Olive church of Christ, in De Kalb County, September 27, 1895.

Brother Boles married Miss Cynthia Cantrell in 1894, when he was twenty years of age. To this union a son, Cleo, was born on July 14, 1895. The young wife and mother lived only three or four days after the son was born. A sister of Brother Boles took "little Cleo" and cared for him until his father was in a position to take him. Cleo grew up in the Nashville Bible School (later David Lipscomb College), and was graduated from that

institution on May 18, 1916. Three years later he was graduated from the dental department of Vanderbilt University. On November 29, 1918, he was married to Miss Lemma Peery, of Hohenwald, Tenn. Cleo was always frail of body and uncertain of health. On May 22, 1922, he died of tuberculosis at Hohenwald.

Brother Boles was married to Miss Ida Mae Meiser, of McMinnville, Tenn., on September 23, 1906. To this marriage one son, Leo Lipscomb, was born. Leo Lipscomb was educated at David Lipscomb College, Vanderbilt University, and George Peabody College. From the last-named institution he received his Ph.D in 1941. At present he is teaching in Miami Beach (Fla.) High School.

Sister Boles was a devoted wife and helpmeet to Brother Boles through all the years of their married life. He frequently attributed his ability to accomplish so much to the encouragement and inspiration of his wife. Remembrance of these forty years of love, labor, sacrifice, and accomplishment must be a source of satisfaction and comfort to Sister Boles in these hours of bereavement and loneliness.

AS STUDENT

The public schools of White and De Kalb Counties furnished Brother Boles his earliest opportunities to begin an education. The duration of these schools, however, was not more than three or four months in the year. In 1892 he entered Shorter College, at Mechanicsville, which was located near Short Mountain, in Cannon County, Tenn. This was not a "college" as that term is now used; it was about the equivalent of a high school. This school was operated by L. P. Evans, a noted educator of that day. He remained there one year. It was the first time that he had been away from home. He and his brother, J. Smith Boles, roomed together and did their own cooking and housekeeping. It was here that he made his first public talk in a small debating society. For the next two years circumstances were such that he had to stay at home and work on the farm, except for teaching as an assistant for a few months in the fall. For this work he received eight dollars a month. This experience was very valuable to him and encouraged him to study and devote his life to teaching. He next entered Dibrell College, which is now Dibrell High School, in Warren County, Tenn. This school furnished him the best educational opportunities he had up to that time. Here he took an active part in the debating society, and was soon recognized as one of the ablest debaters in the school.

In January, 1898, he entered Burritt College, Spencer, Tenn., then under the able presidency of the lamented W. N. Billingsley. When he came to make arrangements to enter Burritt, he sought some kind of work to help pay

his expenses. Immediately preceding him into the presence of Professor Billingsley was another young man who was seeking work of a preferred kind. To him Professor Billingsley said: "Young man, what can I do for you?" The young man replied: "I would like to go to school; and if you will let me build fires in your office to help pay my expenses, I will go." After a few more questions, this young man was asked to have a seat in the hall. Brother Boles was called in. The same question, "Young man, what do you desire?" was addressed to him. He answered: "Brother Billingsley, I desire an education, and I am willing to do anything to get it. If you have *any* kind of work that I can do—it matters not what it is—I will do it to help pay my expenses." Brother Billingsley was quick to recognize a worthy young man. He said: "Brother Boles, you may build fires in my office."

Brother Boles never feared hard work. He was even more determined in the presence of obstacles. Once while at Burritt he was on a Friday-afternoon program to deliver a declamation. In the midst of his speech his memory failed him. He went back to the beginning and came down through the declamation, only to forget at the same place the second time. He was undaunted. He went back to the beginning the third time. This time he came through without a bobble. The applause was tremendous. His will was inflexible. He seldom failed to do what he set out to do. He was graduated from Burritt College on June 3, 1900. On commencement day he delivered an oration on the subject, "The Decline of Myths and the Rise of Science."

After teaching four years in Tennessee and Texas, he entered Nashville Bible School on October 12, 1903. From this institution he was graduated in the spring of 1906. He received his M.A. degree from Vanderbilt University in 1920. But he did not quit studying when he quit going to school. He was a diligent and systematic student as long as he lived. It could be said of him, as John Richard Green, historian of the English people, said of himself: "He died learning."

AS TEACHER

H. Leo Boles was preëminently a teacher. His work as teacher began when he served as an assistant in the public schools of De Kalb County, Tenn. Here is what one of his teachers said of him under date of November 7, 1892: "The bearer, Mr. Leo Boles, has been a pupil and an assistant in my school at New Bildad, and as a pupil he has been studious, polite, and logical; and as an assistant he has proved himself possessed of tact, learning, enthusiasm, and a high degree of patience. I cheerfully recommend him to a position as teacher in our public schools. Very respectfully, F. J. Potter." "Tact, learning, en-

thusiasm, and a high degree of patience"—and he a lad of eighteen! "Childhood shows manhood, as morning shows the day." Who, in later years, ever sat at his feet as student without being impressed greatly with these high qualities which his teacher discovered in him while he was a mere boy?

In the fall of 1906 he became a member of the faculty of David Lipscomb College (then Nashville Bible School). While doing regular work as teacher, he took two lessons daily in the Bible under the lamented David Lipscomb. For seven years he taught philosophy and mathematics. But on becoming president of David Lipscomb College in 1913, he began to give more and more of his time to teaching the Bible. It was a rare treat to attend his classes in logic, ethics, and evidences of Christianity. As a teacher of the Bible we have not seen his superior. It would be difficult to find his equal. He taught his students the *Bible*—not merely some course related to the book, but the book itself. His students were taught to oppose all modernism, speculation, and denominationalism. They were encouraged to preach for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. He condemned professionalism among preachers without reservation. His students were taught to suffer hardship as good soldiers of the cross. Sweet-spirited "sissyism" and empty generalities had no place in his teaching. About fifteen hundred young preachers received instruction in his classes, besides hundreds of students who never became preachers. It may be that his greatest work was done during the years that he served as teacher and president of David Lipscomb College. He was president from 1913 to 1920 and from 1923 to 1932. As teacher, president, and member of the board of trustees, he was associated with the college for almost a third of a century

AS PREACHER

Mention has already been made of the fact that Brother Boles' father was a preacher. When he was seventeen, his father suffered an impairment of his vision which rendered him unable to read for about two years. He selected Leo to read to him; the other boys were sent to the field to work, while this son remained at the house to read to his father. This developed him into a good reader and created in him a desire for knowledge. Since his time during these years was spent in reading the Bible and religious books, this served him well as a preparation for preaching in later years. On his fortieth anniversary as a preacher Brother Boles wrote:

FORTY YEARS AS A GOSPEL PREACHER (June 7, 1903—June 6, 1943)

With my father, whom I still honor, I drove from his home in horse and buggy to Stony Point, De Kalb County, Tenn., Saturday afternoon, June 6, 1903. The next morning at 11 the people assembled to hear my father preach. After he had read a portion of Deut. 28 and commented

on it, he led the people in prayer. Praying for "the speaker that he might speak so as to please God," my father then announced: "My son, H. Leo Boles, who has just returned from Texas, where he has been engaged in teaching, will now preach for us." I had prepared to speak on "The Human Side of Salvation." I spoke forty minutes. I was not frightened, but spoke rapidly. I knew what I was going to say, and I said it.

It now has been forty years since I preached that sermon! When my father prayed for me that I "might speak so as to please God" on that occasion, I said, "Amen!" in heart and vowed that I would always so speak. During these forty years I have preached thousands of sermons, and I have always prayed that I might please God in preaching. I have not preached a sermon that I did not so pray. I am not so sure that I have always pleased him in preaching—I am sure that I have not knowingly preached any error.

As I now write these thoughts on the fortieth anniversary of my first sermon, I cannot recall any other petition of my father's prayer, but this one, "that the speaker speak so as to please God," has lingered with me and has been a rich blessing through these forty years. In the secrecy of my own soul I continue to pray as I step into the pulpit to preach that I may "speak so as to please God," and so may I ever speak to please God and not man.

As in other respects, Brother Boles never quit growing as a preacher. He was always fresh and instructive in his preaching. He was calm, deliberate, severely logical, and always scriptural. In later life he exercised a heart power which was not noticeable in his early years as preacher. Usually as preachers grow older they have fewer additions in their meetings. This was not true of Brother Boles. During the last fourteen years of his life he did his best work as a preacher. Larger crowds heard him and larger numbers obeyed the gospel. A Boles meeting was a tonic for any church. He was clear in his understanding of the Bible and fearless in his presentation of it. He drew the line between truth and error so clearly that all who desired could see it. He read the Epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus every week to keep fresh in his mind the work of a preacher.

He did much preaching in weak places and for small congregations. As a young preacher, he did not seek to bury himself in some large congregation. He went out into the hard places. In 1904 he held six meetings, with one hundred fifty-three additions, and received for the six meetings \$168.63. He did better in 1905. He held twelve meetings, with one hundred seventy additions, and received \$229.15. Support from these meetings, however, did not represent his entire income for those years. But they are typical of the type of work he did as a young preacher. Such work served him well as a preparation for his instruction of young preachers in years to follow.

AS WRITER

Not since the days of Alexander Campbell has one in the church been a more voluminous writer. For almost forty years Brother Boles wrote for the Gospel Advocate

as contributor, editor, and staff writer. In the Bible-school literature he has written the "Annual Lesson Commentary," the "Adult Quarterly," and served as editor of the entire series. Some of the ablest volumes now available to the student of the Bible have come from his versatile pen. His "Commentary on Matthew" and the one on Acts are now the best ones on the subjects, supplanting those on the same books by McGarvey. They are much fuller in treatment than those of McGarvey. His "Commentary on Luke" is a classic. His book on the Holy Spirit, now out of print, is the ablest work on the subject. The "Boles-Boll Debate" on premillennialism has proved to be the source book for all subsequent discussions of the question. So far as we know, it was the first and last debate R. H. Boll ever held on the subject. And in the "Boles-Clubb Discussion" one will find an array of evidence against the unscriptural use of instrumental music in the worship not found elsewhere. His "Biographical Sketches of Gospel Preachers" has rescued from oblivion many worthy men who labored in out-of-the-way places and revealed many little-known facts about well-known preachers. Besides these, he has written many tracts and pamphlets. He leaves several unpublished manuscripts, which, by his request and by the grace of God, the present writer hopes to see published.

CONCLUSION

It was this writer's privilege to meet H. Leo Boles first in 1903, during a meeting conducted by the late J. D. Gunn, at Flat Creek, in Overton County, Tenn. The writer was a small boy at that time. Yet he remembers distinctly how Brother Gunn, at a night service, announced that "young Brother Boles," who was attended by his father, "would lead the prayer after the Scripture reading." When Brother Gunn finished reading the text announced, "young Brother Boles" quietly said: "Father, will you lead the prayer?" Years later Brother Boles explained to the writer: "I had not been preaching long, and did not feel able to lead the prayer that night." This is the only time this writer ever knew of his asking to be relieved of a responsibility. The next morning after the service mentioned, the writer and two other little boys were gathering chestnuts by the side of the road when Brother Boles and his father came along. "Young Brother Boles" counted out ten chestnuts to the writer, ten to the older of the other boys, and twenty to the younger of the other two boys. He explained: "This little boy is a cripple. He does not have a fair chance like you boys." This is a fair illustration of his innate and cultivated sense of justice and fairness. He always considered all the facts in the case, then rendered his decision. This is one reason why "his boys" (students) continued to seek his advice as long as he lived. Outside his immediate family, perhaps, no one was more inti-

mately associated with him than the writer. Certainly no one ever counseled with him more frequently or profitably. Outside his family, no one will miss him more. From his friendship and example we shall gather resolution and strength to carry on. We shall not easily forget one lesson that he taught or surrender one inch of ground that he won. His passing leaves a broad gap in our ranks, but a host of "his boys" will rally to "stand in the breach." To us from falling hands he passes the torch; be ours to hold it high. It was the writer's sad privilege to stand by while the mighty soul of his great teacher and friend took flight. As he lingered by, he was haunted by the thrilling words of Elisha uttered at the going away of Elijah: "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" (2 Kings 2: 12.) That morning of February 7 the chariots of the Lord swept low and his servant was gone. He was not, for God took him.

"Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" Know ye not that one of the tallest and noblest cedars in all Lebanon is fallen and the whole brotherhood has been shocked and saddened and impoverished by its resounding crash? "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph."

"Fallen, as sets the sun at eve,
To rise in splendor where
His kindred luminaries shine,
Their heaven of bliss to share.
Beyond the stormy battlefield
He reigns in triumph now,
Sweeping a harp of wondrous song,
With glory on his brow." B. C. G.