

He Preached Holiness and now Walks the Palace of the Sky

A profile of Benson Ellison Lane Timmons by his brother Thomas Holmes Timmons

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Rev. Benson Ellison Lane Timmons was born in Coweta County, Georgia, June 22, 1845. He was the sixth son of Rev. William and Mary Butler Timmons. He inherited a magnificent physique from his ancestors on both sides. Our mother's maiden name was Cato; she was born and reared in the State of South Carolina. The stock was stately and strong, not only in body but in intellect and character.

The family on our father's side came from Rev. William Turner, a Scotch Presbyterian minister who came to America in 1640 and settled in Maryland on the Eastern Shore. It is said of him that he was richly endowed and that he was an eloquent minister who came preaching the gospel of salvation. My paternal grandfather whose name was Abijah Timmons was a Virginian. He was tall and handsome and was an ardent Methodist, given to hospitality. It was said of him that he could be heard a mile away as he prayed with his family in the morning. He never allowed anything to interfere with his religion. My father was very much like him.

I hope I will not be considered immodest in giving some few historical facts as I have done in the little sketch of my dear brother. There is not an effective preacher of this name now in Georgia. There are several in the Western States who are local preachers, and some evangelists. I have only two brothers living and they are both invalids. I feel lonely.

Our paternal grandmother was Sabra Turner who was born more than one hundred and fifty years ago. One of the old members of the family once said that "Sabra Turner gave more preachers and members to the Methodist Church than any woman that ever lived in this country." There is no better blood than that which flowed in my brother's veins. I never knew him to do a little or mean thing. One of the honored members of the North Georgia Conference who knew nothing of his ancestry, but who was with him in the great war between the States and has been intimate with him since that stormy period, says: "He was a noble man by nature, and grace polished and refined him 'till he was worthy to be classed among the best." A prominent citizen of Atlanta, who knew him from his boyhood, in a letter to me, says: "I regarded him as one of the purest men in all the Church. I believe that he could withstand reverses better than any man I ever knew. He had more faith, and more trust and more of the mind that was in Christ than any man I ever knew. It is strange that such a man should be taken as he was, but it was God's will and He doeth all things right."

He was converted when he was yet a lad, but his conviction was deep and pungent and his translation from the darkest of sin to the beautiful light of the gospel was distinct and marvelous. In his early days he was fond of books, and read some of the best authors, not only on religious themes, but on science and philosophy. Some authors of skeptical and atheistic trend fell into his hands before he was twenty years old and at one time he had a strange temptation even to doubt his conviction of sin and his conversion to Christ. Well do I remember the days and even months through which he passed. We were alone in a room at the old home when victory over these dark suggestions came to him. That was a joyous moment and his face grew bright as if an angel had spoken to him.

I had been in the Confederate army more than a year when he enlisted. His noble bearing and his unsophisticated face secured for him at once the admiration and confidence of his comrades. He maintained his Christian character in camps, on the march, on the battlefield and as a prisoner of war at Camp Chase, Ohio. One who was with him there says he spent his time in doing religious work, in praying or in reading his Bible. He returned home from this horrible prison in 1865. In 1866 he went to Atlanta and through the matchless kindness of Rev. Dr. A. G. Haygood he was afforded the best opportunities for study and preparation to join the Annual Conference. No man ever had a clearer conviction of his call to preach the gospel, but he felt his insufficiency and wept and trembled under a

sense of responsibility to God and man. He was for several years a member of the South Georgia Conference and while in that conference was a student in the Collingsworth Institute, located at Talbotton, Ga., about one year. He was transferred to the North Georgia Conference in the fall of 1870. He was a student in Emory College two and a half years and was a member of the Phi Delta Theta Fraternity and Few Society.

He was married to Miss Lucy C. Menephee the 8th of January 1875. She was a born lady of the Old South and was highly educated. She was a thoroughly consecrated woman and was of great assistance to him in his ministerial work. She died suddenly December, 1886. At the expiration of one year he was happily married to Mrs. Maggie Wofford, the widow Gen. Wm. T. Wofford, of Cartersville, Ga. She was a born lady of England. For twenty years this remarkable woman and ideal Christian has been a strong and firm helper, noble wife and my brother's best friend and counselor. Six children (three daughters and three sons) came to bless the first union, and three sons were born of the second marriage. Two of the first children died in girlhood. The surviving children are noble, educated and refined and give promise of high standing in society and usefulness in the Church.

My brother was said by some to have been the best and sweetest singer in the North Georgia Conference. A gentleman said to me that he had never heard him sing but once, but had never forgotten the thrill and sweetness of his voice. His home life was distinguished for consideration, music, love, prayer and refinement. He was a close student and a careful reader. His reading was not confined to religion, but he plunged deep into the realm of poetry and philosophy and, read the best authors on evolution and scientific subjects. Had he been willing to turn from the cardinal principles and fundamental doctrines of religion (as some others have done) and had sought recognition by dealing in metaphysics and philosophy he could have made the people wonder at his erudition. But his sense of responsibility to Almighty God and his generation would allow of no such digression.

In the pulpit he was natural, earnest and easy. His aim was not to display the eloquent, the elegant graces of oratory, but in a sincere and dignified manner to urge home eternal verities upon the minds and consciences of his hearers. Some of his sermons could not be excelled. Dr. Heidt never said a truer thing than when at his funeral in Atlanta he said: "Benson Timmons made his religion the principal thing and was wise to win souls." He was a firm believer in the doctrine and experience of perfect love. He did not only profess it, he possessed it. His very presence furnished a restful atmosphere.

My brother was not a fanatic. Some months ago he said to me: "If the great leaders of the Church would take hold of what is called the Holiness Movement (not by way of antagonism), but in a conservative and judicious manner, and give it direction so as not to annihilate enthusiasm but simply to check fanaticism, it would result in the greatest religious awakening that the world has ever seen."

He fixed no limitations on sin, as to its progress and consequences in this world nor in the world to come; neither did he give a definition to Holiness that placed a limit to the work of grace in the heart and life or put an end to probation. He knew the doctrines of the Methodist Church and of the Bible and was unswervingly loyal to both. This man was universally popular in every place where he served as pastor and preacher. He filled many important stations and was capable of filling the best. He served well and faithfully and God placed his seal upon him and his work everywhere he went.

The unbounded love that was shown him by the presence and tears of the people in whose service he died would most gladly have been shared by the thousands to whom he had ministered in Georgia and elsewhere. He was active, diligent, faithful and happy up to the momentous hour of his departure. It was nearly midnight when he came in from his field of toil. He was weary, but he was in a Heavenly mood. He and his family little dreamed that the angels were already in the room, that the chariot and horses were standing and ready to take him in and sweep up through the shadows and beyond the stars to "the golden light that knows no evening." How gladly would we all have been present to witness the ascension, but the Good Father in Heaven willed it otherwise.