

**PERSONAL
REMINISCENCES OF
LYMAN BEECHER**

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Personal Reminiscences of Lyman Beecher by James C. White

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BY
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PERSONAL REMINISCENCES
" "
LYMAN BEECHER.

PART FIRST.

PREFATORY.

THESE personal reminiscences of Lyman Beecher, D. D., refer, first to his life in Boston, Mass., from 1825 to 1832, and, secondly, to his residence at Lane Seminary, Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1840 to 1850. The author was a convert under Dr. Beecher's preaching in Boston, and is an Alumnus of Lane Theological Seminary. So far as he knows, these incidents are not to be found in any publication of the present day. They were presented in an address before the "Cincinnati Club" of the Alumni and Faculty of Lane, at the Seminary, March 1880.

They are now written out for publication by the author, and completed on his seventy-sixth birthday, October 12th, 1882.

HANOVER STREET CHURCH.

My first acquaintance with Lyman Beecher was in the year 1825, in Boston. A new and spacious church edifice of stone had been erected on Hanover Street. In the base-

ment story were the headquarters of the American Board and of the American Tract Society. I was then a clerk in a dry goods store near by, and also resided in that part of the city. A church had been organized in 1822, with but thirty-seven members, and had not at this time a settled pastor.

I was a member of the society when Dr. Beecher was first invited to preach to this church for two Sabbaths, as a candidate for our pulpit. He was then settled in Litchfield, Conn., but looking for some opening where he could better provide for his family, for he was in straitened financial circumstances. Well known as he was as a preacher of pre-eminent ability, his salary of eight hundred dollars was insufficient for the support of his family. His only other pastoral change at East Hampton, L. I., had been made for the same reason. Dr. Beecher accepted the invitation of the Hanover Street Church and society for two Sabbaths, and improved the occasion to make a visit to Portland, Me., with his second wife, who was a Miss Porter, formerly of that city. The arrangement was made for them to come in their own conveyance by land, and for him to preach in Boston one Sabbath, both going and coming on their journey.

FIRST GLIMPSE OF LYMAN BEECHER.

My first glimpse of the noted preacher, whose fame had reached our ears, was had one autumnal Sabbath morning as he rode up to the door of our new and elegant church, with his wife, in a poor country chaise covered with white cotton cloth. The horse and the minister were both alike very unattractive as well as the chaise.

We lads were watching for his coming in front of the church, where also stood the Committee of Reception prepared to extend their welcome and to introduce him to the people and the pulpit. I can now vividly remember my own feelings at the time, and the looks of those

in waiting, which seemed to say: "Well, we are sold this time!" We took our places in church with an unmistakable air of grim disappointment. Dr. Beecher opened the exercises and went into his work with a will and with such an unceremonious freedom that our Boston sense of propriety stood abashed! Soon, however, the fire began to burn, the truth began to pinch, and the audience began to rally from their dependent wonderment, and to look around as if saying, "What's the matter?" We all saw then and there that the new candidate for Boston honors was master of the situation. The old horse and chaise were forgotten, and the three sermons of that day were the topic of conversation for the week, and prepared the way for the second Sabbath on his return from Portland. The same cut-and-thrust style of preaching was repeated, which, while it shocked all our notions of pulpit etiquette, made it a foregone conclusion that this was the man for the new enterprise. It must be remembered that he had now reached the so-called dead line of fifty.

BOSTON IN 1825.

The orthodox Congregational churches of Boston at this time were just entering a new era of spiritual life, and in their devotion and enthusiasm, great anxiety was manifest in regard to the new minister for the new Hanover Street Church.

From the very beginning of Lyman Beecher's labors in Boston a most remarkable revival of religion commenced in this church, which continued almost without interruption for four years, and until the church building was burned down in 1830. This house was the headquarters of a new phase of a living and aggressive orthodoxy and also of missionary and tract operations. When it caught fire, public sentiment showed itself by a marked indifference among the firemen to subdue the flames. The destruction was complete.

The characteristics of this revival under Mr. Beecher's preaching are worthy of note. We had the ordinary preaching services of the Sabbath, morning, afternoon, and evening; the weekly lecture on Tuesday evening, regular Friday evening prayer-meeting, regular inquiry meeting, and special meetings for prayer. There was no outside aid of an evangelist or layman, but an increased and more earnest effort on the part of the membership in closest sympathy with their pastor. He often said, "Brethren, it is my business to draw the bow, yours to see where the arrow strikes and to bring in the wounded." In addition to the services I have mentioned, we had two regular sessions of Sunday-school each Sabbath, which the pastor seldom attended.

The church was very small at first, but every member was a prayerful worker, and they carried their pastor as really as he carried them. Their co-operation was perfect.

REVIVAL FRUITS.

I united with the church by profession of faith September 1826, during the first year of Dr. Beecher's labors, together with a company of about sixty. At the previous communion there were about seventy-five received. These new recruits were mainly young men and maidens, the majority being young men. They were a superior class, and they all entered at once with enthusiasm upon the work of the church. So far as my knowledge goes, they never turned back or became idlers in the vineyard. There were fifteen present at the pastor's first inquiry meeting. He was unwilling to call such a meeting without assurance of there being at least fifteen who would attend. At the second meeting the number was twenty, at the third thirty-five, and at the fourth three hundred! Deacon Lambert thought that the people had mistaken the notice for a preaching service. But the pastor was enthusiastic and replied, "No they haven't, it's the finger of God!" And so it was found to be.

Soon after this, in the second year of his ministry, two new churches, colonies from Hanover Street, organized Salem Church at the North End, on Salem Street, and Pine Street Church at the South End of Boston. This movement marked a new era of great interest in the orthodox movement in Boston. Dr. Beecher was aroused to an unusual degree of spiritual power. He appeared as one of the old Puritan fathers risen from the dead. His residence was on Copp's Hill, No. 18 Sheafe Street, and near by his house reposed the dust of "The Mathers." Oftentimes as he came to the weekly prayer-meeting and lecture there was in him a mighty uplifting of passionate emotion, both in his prayers and sermons, a tender but grand upheaval and on-moving power which was like the rolling of a tidal wave on the beach of the sea. Sometimes in his prayers I have heard him say, "Come, Lord Jesus! here are the bones of the fathers, here the crown was torn from thy brow, here behold thy scattered flock upon the mountains! Come, O good Shepherd, gather them to thy fold, for they stumble in the darkness of error!"

CHURCH EXTENSION.

One of the fundamental ideas of Lyman Beecher for extending the kingdom of Christ, was that of church colonization. He would often compare an overgrown church to a large hive of bees, that consumed all the honey, leaving none for a new colony. "So then, *swarm early and often*," he would say, "and thus keep the old bees a-working!"

I well remember the original meeting which had reference to the question of forming a new church from the new Hanover Street one. The pastor was all ablaze. A vote was about to be taken on the question. Mounting a chair he cried out in clarion tones, "I move we organize two, one for the North End and one for the South End!" The motion was seconded and carried with enthusiasm,