

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF NATHANIEL
BOUTON, D.D.: FORMER PASTOR OF THE
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH OF CONCORD, AND LATE
STATE HISTORIAN OF NEW HAMPSHIRE;
ALSO, TRIBUTES TO HIS MEMORY**

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Autobiography of Nathaniel Bouton, D.D.: Former Pastor of the First Congregational Church of Concord, and Late State Historian of New Hampshire; Also, Tributes to His Memory by Henry E. Parker & John Bell Bouton

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HENRY E. PARKER & JOHN BELL BOUTON

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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FORMER PASTOR OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF
CONCORD, AND LATE STATE HISTORIAN OF
NEW HAMPSHIRE:

ALSO,

TRIBUTES TO HIS MEMORY

BY

PROF. HENRY F. PARKER, D.D., E. E. CUMMINGS, D.D.,
AND REV. F. D. AYER.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

My father, of his own accord, would never have written a line of autobiography to be published either before or after his death. He shrank from disclosures of himself. In his sermons and addresses no reference to his personal history or private feelings and tastes can be found. His family know about him but little more than they saw for themselves, except, when with his younger children, in moods of playfulness, he would recall some incident of his boyish days for their amusement. He was always reserved upon the subject of his early life. This reticence sprang from no wish to conceal anything in his past; it was all honorable to him, and will bear the light it now receives; but boasting was abhorrent to his nature, and he never sought to pose before others as a model man. He was not in the habit of quoting his own experience as an infallible guide for his children or anybody else. He had little faith in the power of mere words, but he believed in the force of good example, and that he set before us continually. His daily life among us was our best lesson.

The accompanying "brief narrative," as he called it, was written at the request of his children. As his useful and honorable career neared its close, they were desirous to know more of its beginning. Though prepared exclusively for his descendants, it has been thought proper to make this autobiography public, in the belief that his many friends would be pleased to read it, and that some who did not know him personally might find the record instructive. It inculcates the virtues of an unswerving faith in Providence, of devotion to duty, of the strenuous application of all one's powers and faculties to a definite object in life. My father always deemed himself a child of Providence. He adduces many facts in this Memoir which confirmed him in that opinion. In gratitude to the guiding hand of a higher Power which he ever recognized, he dedicated himself to the ministry. He considered his unstinted pastoral labors in Concord only inadequate payment of the great debt he owed to God. Her children now know, as they never knew before, why he lavished his bodily and mental resources on the parish for forty-two years; why, in comparison with the First Congregational Church of Concord, all else was secondary. It was only a partial discharge of the obligation that rested on him.

It follows from what has been said, that his home and family life did

not occupy the first place in his thoughts. Though an affectionate husband and kind father, and fitted by nature, more than most men, to appreciate tranquil happiness in the domestic circle, he sought in it not an end but a means. He reversed the common rule. He did not toil in order to earn the rest at home made doubly sweet by his exertions; but he took a sparing amount of relaxation with his family for the purpose of gathering fresh strength, to be spent in parochial duties. His habit of early rising and retiring, his careful diet, his regular exercise, were all preparatives for the appointed work. He aimed to make his sermons better and all his labors more effective by keeping his body healthy and his mind bright. So it happened that, during the most active years of his life, his faculties were never quite unbent at home. Signs of his mental pre-occupation were always visible.

Notwithstanding the paramount claims upon his time and abilities as pastor, he was far from neglecting any real duty to his household. His ideas of the parental relation were perhaps more of the antique type than those now prevalent. While he loved his children and made every sacrifice in his power for their good, he was never foolishly indulgent to them. His paternal administration was firm but strictly just. His children found in him a wise and faithful adviser and the truest of friends. His anxiety for their welfare and happiness never abated. Long after the little flock had been widely scattered, his love and thoughtfulness followed them constantly. In his frequent letters to them, and particularly in those he wrote to each child on his or her birth-day, my father never omitted the prayerful wish that was dear to his heart. He chiefly desired for his children that they should lead useful lives, serving God in whatever station they might be placed. He would never have sought for them, any more than for himself, earthly riches or honors apart from those highest objects of existence.

His habitual subordination of all other interests to those of his people led to an act of great self-denial in 1866. He had modestly formed the opinion that he was getting too old-fashioned for his pulpit. Though still vigorous in body and mind, he imagined that he was preaching with less power and satisfaction to his hearers than formerly. He therefore determined to resign his pastorate, and to do this without asking or expecting from the church a pension or any provision whatever for his declining years. At his age (67) it seemed rash to quit voluntarily a position in which he had passed the best part of his life, and trust simply to the watch and care of Providence. He had no certainty of support from any source for the future, but he did not hesitate to execute his decision. Firmly convinced that he was best serving his Divine Master by making way for a younger and fresher man, he severed his pastoral connection with the First Congregational Church. Fortunately he was not kept long waiting for the active employment his mind required. In the office of State Historian, expressly created for him by Act of the Legislature of New

Hampshire, approved by Governor Smyth, he found profitable use for most of his time as editor of the *Provincial Records*. He had cultivated historical studies with much delight in moments of leisure for many years previous, and was peculiarly fitted for the task before him. He passed in this new sphere of usefulness eleven contented years. The ten volumes of *Provincial Records* (four-fifths in his own handwriting) which he collated, edited and published in that time, form an enduring monument of his industry, fidelity and painstaking care. During this period he preached as acceptably as ever in many communities which desired his occasional services. For seven years after he withdrew from his long pastorate, about two-thirds of his Sabbaths were thus occupied.

The completion of the *Provincial Records* left my father without those regular pursuits which seemed indispensable to his well-being. He who was never known to be sick when his energies were taxed to the utmost, fell ill not long after the cessation of his absorbing work. For a time he seemed to keep up his health and spirits by the composition of the autobiography. That duty performed, and nothing else offering itself as a ready vent for his zeal to be up and doing, he quickly succumbed to the forced inaction. After a life of incessant toil, he could not sit down to repose. The disease that mastered him has its name in medical science. The physicians spoke of it as the result of, or allied with, a general decay of the bodily powers. But I think he would have lived longer had there been more hard work for him to do.

This autobiography was left without any instructions to the editor. Only such personal and private matters have been omitted as have no direct bearing on the formation of my father's character and are not essential to a full understanding and appreciation of his life-work. Every word has been preserved that would bring into high relief the spiritual and moral lineaments of the man. Some interesting passages have been left out because they appear fully enough in the touching and admirable memorial discourse of Professor Parker, which is bound up in this volume. That review and estimate of my father's life and services, with the beautiful and pathetic tributes of Rev. Dr. Cummings and Rev. Mr. Ayer, who knew him long and well, fitly supplement the autobiography. They leave to filial love and reverence the desire to say no more, but to rest satisfied with these presentations of one who, as Head of the Family, Pastor and Public Servant, was ever just and faithful and true.

New York, December, 1878.

J. B. B.

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