

**The Southern Baptist Theological
Seminary**

**Recollections of the
First Year
1859 - 1860**

**An Address Delivered Before
the Seminary, at Louisville,
Kentucky, Founders Day,
January 11th, 1911**

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NOTE.

The Seminary was opened in Greenville, S. C., October, 1859. It was removed to Louisville, Kentucky, September, 1877

The Personnel of the First Class

By Charles H. Ryland, D. D.

I HAVE BEEN requested by the president and faculty of the Seminary to address you on this "Founders' Day" upon the personnel of the first year's class, of which I was a member. When the request came I felt obliged to remind my distinguished friend, the president, that he had laid upon me a very difficult task—that he had perhaps forgotten the sentiment:

"The mill will never grind
With the water that is past."

When one stands at the end of fifty years he finds that the past is growing shadowy, even as the face of a friend may not be certainly recalled after a half-century of separation. So the every-day occurrences of school life that have not been recounted during the time begin to fade from the memory. Of course the main facts of one's life can be recalled, but those charming *little* things, those "trifles and tricks of color" which would brighten the picture and give it life, have to a large extent been lost.

When I called the attention of our president to these difficulties, he generously said: "Well, do the best you can with the theme I suggest, and widen it to suit yourself." It was this wider liberty that tempted me to consent to appear before you to-day.

In the outset I must confess to you that I have not the same confidence in "reminiscence" I once had. In my youth it had a strange charm for me. I regarded it as the most delightful of all history. I had, however, one day a rude awakening. I was in a great Baptist assemblage, when an old and honored minister recited a thrilling personal incident. It was well told. It took. I was greatly impressed, until a contemporary of the speaker said, aside, to a friend, "*Brother B. has told that story until he believes it!*" I overheard the

remark, and it sobered my enthusiasm. Many a time since I have felt that a good story-teller needs to chasten his imagination—to be cautious. His hearers need to be more so. Let me assure you, however, that in the recital which I shall attempt there will be no “calling of spirits from the vasty deep.” I shall only hope to bring to light for the first time, perhaps, bits of history which may interest you. If they can be garnished and made more vivid by personal incidents, such as have been experienced by many others, I shall be glad.

It is a very difficult matter for the young men to whom I speak to-day to go back, even in imagination, over the years and try to conceive of the time when there was *no Baptist Seminary in the South*, and when it was a much-mooted question whether it was wise to establish one for the Southern Baptists. There were many questionings, many misgivings. There was much talk about the risk of turning loose, upon a spiritual work, machine-made preachers. The experiment had been made elsewhere and had been watched with anxiety. Success had not always followed the efforts of those who had tried the seminary plan of furnishing a school-trained ministry for the churches of the world. There was great fear lest the Holy Spirit's power and work would be lessened, if not defeated, by such a process.

But the spirit of life, enlightenment, and progress was abroad, and while all anxieties could not be removed, while the difficulties of those disposed to question the policy had to be respected, still the sentiment in favor of a Seminary widened, and there came to be quite a large proportion of our best leaders who felt that the founding of such a school could not be safely postponed.

“The men of mind are mountains,
And their heads are sunned
Long ere the rest of the world.”

Well do I remember, as of personal interest to me, the discussions at the Rappahannock and other District Associations in Virginia, when the best, wisest and most influential of our leading brethren “locked horns” as the Seminary question was debated. It was well, for thus the intelligent convictions of the Virginia Baptists and their unity on this question—

which abides—were secured. When the Seminary was launched there was practical unanimity among our people. Virginia furnished two of the professors and ten of the twenty-six matriculates.

Prominent among the objections urged against sending their men away to be educated was the fear on the part of many that the young men would not return to their native State. Dr. John A. Broadus felt obliged to meet this objection. He wrote an article for the Religious Herald, saying: "If the friends of a young brother going to Greenville should fear lest he become in any way alienated from the Old Dominion, I think that Brother Manly and I can promise, with the full consent and help of our colleagues, to return him safe and sound, without damage to his Virginia patriotism, pride and principles." He felt also that it was worth while to caution the brethren against expecting too much of the Seminary, and said (quoting the remark of a University professor): "It is very useful to go to Germany, gentlemen, but it ought to be remembered that if a man does not carry brains with him to Germany, he will not bring brains away from Germany."

That sentiment will no doubt go ringing down the centuries.

THE FACULTY.

It wrung the hearts of Virginia Baptists to give up the peerless Broadus. He was looked upon as the most promising of the rising men of Virginia, and many shook their heads at the idea of his "shutting himself up in a school-room," as they expressed it.

Basil Manly, Jr., though an imported product, had, as pastor of the First Baptist church in Richmond and subsequently as president of the Richmond Female Institute, become so enrooted in the confidence and affections of the people that to surrender h'im, too, involved a great sacrifice. As Dr. James P. Boyce traveled and wrote back and forth from Greenville to Richmond, and from Greenville to Charlottesville, there was a good deal of criticism of his purpose to rob the State of two commanding characters for a cause of doubtful utility. Those who have read the history know much of the struggle that Broadus had as to his duty. To Manly it was far easier, as he was returning to his own South Carolina.

It was largely the wisdom and will of James P. Boyce that had won the consent of the brethren to try the Seminary, and from the first it was evident that he was the man to guide its destiny. When the official leadership of the great work was conferred upon him, the "Greenville Patriot" said in an editorial: "The institution owes its existence and its establishment to his untiring and judicious efforts." And Dr. Basil Manly, Sr., in an address before the Southern Baptist Convention, alluding to Dr. Boyce, declared: "I would rather have the honor of having effected the establishment of this institution than to be elected to the office of President of the United States."

The least known of the members of the faculty at the outset was Dr. William Williams. But if least known to the great Baptist public at the time of his installation, he soon became, I had almost said, the best loved of them all. He was a great preacher and an exceedingly clear and discriminating lecturer. A student said of him: "He is a beautiful illustration of the words, 'If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light.'" I can never forget the peculiar intonation of his voice when, in speaking to his class in the lecture-room, he would invariably address them as "My brethren."

Broadus and Williams were easily the greatest preachers of the faculty. Many and impassioned were the discussions held by the students in the vain effort to decide the supremacy. I can best explain our dilemma by relating an incident. Soon after the Seminary session opened Dr. Richard Furman, pastor of the First Baptist church in Greenville, had a protracted illness, and Professors Broadus and Williams were secured to fill the pulpit alternately morning and night. Witt, of Virginia, my room-mate and a devoted admirer of both men, was greatly puzzled to decide which he liked the better. One Sunday night, after hearing Broadus in the morning and Williams at night, he came bursting into our room, and cried, "Oh, Ryland, *they beat each other every time.*"

Perhaps the most delightful feature of that first session was the intimacy between the faculty and the students. The faculty felt that they were feeling their way over an unmaped course, and while certain of their main bearings, they were anxious that every detail should work toward success.

The students, with devotion to their leaders, were yet a bit uncertain as to what would come of it all. This situation brought teacher and pupil together in the most confidential relationship. Every man of the student body felt that he was under the eye of the professor and close to the heart of a brother beloved.

When the Virginia delegation arrived at the Greenville station Dr. Manly was there to greet us, and when, in his hearty way, he said, "I am glad to see you, my Virginia brethren," and took us to his home and entertained us until we found our boarding places, he but revealed a hospitality and a fraternal regard which marked every home and every act of these noble men.

One of the youngest of the students, barely nineteen years old, a lonely stranger, hundreds of miles from home, relates an experience on the opening day of this first session which made the beginning of his Seminary life, as he expressed it, "a rosy dawn." It was rather late in the afternoon of that first day, when the last assembly broke up, and he, with other students, was leaving the building, that Dr. Broadus came to his side, and with a winning smile, proposed a walk. The young man was quite overwhelmed by the invitation, but there was nothing to do but accept, and they started off together. The professor put his arm in that of the student as if they had been chums for years, and began talking easily and familiarly. They walked and talked for an hour, and by the end of the interview the great professor had lodged himself in the warmest corner of that young man's heart. In rehearsing the incident, the student said: "Why, I have told him my whole life, my family, my bringing up, the schools I attended, the college where I graduated, my hopes and my ambitions; he has found me out to the very bottom." That, no doubt, was the great teacher's purpose, to manifest brotherly sympathy and to give courage and strength. Dr. Broadus wished to *know* the men he had to teach, and he did know them. No doubt many other students had similar experiences.

One morning, soon after the session opened, quite a number of Dr. Boyce's class in Systematic Theology, which was the first to meet, were late in reporting. He said, somewhat reproachfully, "You are a little late, young gentlemen." Our

spokesman replied, "We confess it, Dr. Boyce, but no disrespect is meant. We had to wait for breakfast, and at last came to you without having had anything to eat." His reply was, "You have done right, young gentlemen," and left the room. We knew not for what purpose at the time, but when the recitation was over, he invited us into an adjoining room, and had there spread before us a delightful meal, which he had ordered from his own abundant table.

One of the men of the class tells what he designates as the richest incident of the first session. Dr. Boyce approached the student, perhaps about the second month of the session, and said, "I have been watching you lately, and it seems to me that you cannot be feeling well." The young man confessed that he was suffering from that foe to hard study, indigestion, incident, he supposed, to close confinement. The good president said to him, "Now, look here, I think that can be cured. There are two young ladies at my house who ride horseback every afternoon; suppose you come and let me furnish you a horse, and you take the place of their groom for a month." The young man was greatly surprised, but managed to stammer out his thanks and acceptance, and for a whole month, when the afternoon work was over, he acted as escort for two handsome and accomplished young women. The old boys haven't stopped telling yet how the fortunate fellow confessed when it was all over that his dyspepsia was cured, but he had a serious case of *heart trouble*.

Mr. President, I have no doubt your thundering three hundred are growing green with envy at this recital, but they must remember that the men that enjoyed these privileges were strictly "*First Class*" men.

THE STUDENT BODY.

There was naturally some anxiety about the number of students on the trial trip of the newly launched enterprise. Would the young preachers avail themselves of a Seminary course? If so, how many? Whence would they come? Before the end of July, 1859, Dr. Manly wrote Dr. Broadus: "It is time we had published something of our plans. I have been waiting for Brother Boyce to attend to it, but if we do not look out, we shall assemble there with as many teachers as scholars." Not long afterward Dr. Broadus wrote to Pres-

ident Boyce: "Hurry up, my good fellow, whatever you are going to publish, so that the Seminary course may take a more distinct form in the eyes of the people, or else I am considerably afraid there will be four Doctors of Divinity met together on the first of October to teach—*each other*."

But a kind Providence relieved their fears, and when the session's enrollment was made up Dr. Boyce declared that upon examination he found the matriculates to be a much larger number than had attended the first session of any other theological school in America.

The first lecture was delivered on Tuesday, October 4, 1859. It was before the Old Testament English class. I have the notes of this lecture at home, with a list of the students. I shall never forget the interest that centered in this first lecture, happily delivered by Dr. Basil Manly, the professor in that department.

An old writer said of Cromwell: "He hath beat up his drums clean through the Old Testament. You may learn the genealogy of our Saviour by the names of his regiments. The muster-master has no other list than the first chapter of Matthew." In attempting to be muster-master for these men of '59 I could go further—and as many of them have passed to their reward, reverently lift my hat and say: "Their names are written in heaven."

If you should desire an estimate of some of them you can find a tribute in Dr. Broadus' Life of James P. Boyce. It is more appropriate that I should draw upon a testimonial by one of our own number, J. A. Chambliss. He writes: "The men of '59 were mostly from rural districts of the South. But this does not mean a school of rustics. The most of the refinement and culture for which the South was noted in those days was found in country homes, where the sons and daughters began their education under tutors and governesses, or, in good private schools, and then went off to college. The proportion of college men and women in the South before the Civil War was much greater than in the North. The majority of the first students in the Seminary were college men—a number of them distinguished graduates—and nearly all of them were from families of gentle folk."

To this graceful tribute let me add in detail some further

facts. A diary which I kept at the time recalls that on the first day of November there were eighteen matriculates. The number increased to a total enrollment of twenty-six for the session. Of these ten were from Virginia, three from North Carolina, nine from South Carolina, one from Florida, two from Alabama, and one from Missouri. Not one from Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas or Arkansas; not one from any city, except one from Norfolk, Va.

Of the men from Virginia, two were appointees to the Foreign Mission field. They were Crawford H. Toy and John William Jones. They were to open a mission in Japan. At the General Association held in Staunton in June, 1860, C. H. Toy, on his return from Greenville, was introduced to the Association, and gave the reasons which induced him to devote himself to the Foreign Mission work, and also the reasons that led him to choose Japan as the field of his future labors. He said in the address that all young ministers ought to become missionaries to the heathen unless they could show good reason to the contrary. He predicted that the Japanese would become a great commercial people and assimilate their manners and habits to those of Western nations. As is well known, these young men were thwarted in their purpose to become missionaries by the breaking out of the Civil War in 1861. I refer to them, especially, as embodying in that day, when it was not as easy to be a missionary as now, the courage of their convictions and heroism of the highest Christian service. The Seminary received them as exponents of that spirit which the founders of the Seminary and its professors desired from the first to enthrone in the school—that spirit of missions which, from the beginning, has been regnant within these walls, and which, I believe, will continue throughout its history—to the glory of God.

Of other Virginians, Boatwright, Shipman, Hilary E. Hatcher, and Ryland were Richmond College men; and T. B. Shepherd came from Columbian College. I would not make invidious distinctions, but it was understood among us that so far as the Virginia contingent was concerned, Reuben Baker Boatwright, a quiet, conscientious, laborious student, was "our theologian"; Hilary E. Hatcher, because of accurate scholarship, "our Greek"; W. J. Shipman, beautiful in spirit and faithful in all work, "our John"; T. Benton Shepherd,

"our preacher." The shining light and strongest spiritual force was James Daniel Witt, who entered the Seminary, recently afflicted by the death of his lovely wife, and addressed himself to his work aflame with Christian zeal. He died during the first vacation. His was one of the sweetest and noblest characters I have ever known.

The most versatile student and the most attractive man and preacher of that first year's class was J. A. Chambliss, of Howard College, Alabama. He was the orator of the Andrew Fuller Society at the first commencement in 1860, and had the honor of being the first full graduate.

I recall R. H. Marsh, of North Carolina, the most cultured and vigorous of the men from that State, exhibiting then those traits of character which have made him a trusted leader among his brethren. He was the orator of the Andrew Fuller Society in May, 1861.

I recall also Broome, of Florida, a choice spirit; Figh, of Alabama, a college graduate, a man full of love and zeal, and W. L. Curry, of South Carolina, a son of Princeton, and a close student.

The Trans-Mississippi country was represented by George Washington Hyde, of Missouri, graduate of the University of that State. He brought into the Seminary qualities of personal worth and a genial spirit, with a fidelity to duty which endeared him to all. He was the second full graduate.

But I find it impossible to make a portraiture of all of these, my comrades. Their lineaments will not come back to me from "the silent shore of memory." Of the entire band, however, several things were notably true.

Taking them collectively, the men of fifty-nine and sixty were careful of two things: First, to leave undone nothing that would promote and broaden their mental equipment; second, to neglect nothing which might intensify their religious activity. The professors of that day, as now, placed a premium on diligence in study. Coincident with the opening of school duties, under the teachers who believed in a high standard, there arose in the student body ambition to high scholarship. Hyde said: "I never knew how to be real busy till I came here—this whole place is a veritable bee-hive." So while the regnant spirit was hard study, there was also an intense desire to catch and cultivate the spirit of him who

“went about doing good.” Let me particularize. In the way of personal improvement leading to effectiveness in the pulpit, perhaps the most direct agency was the establishment of a debating society, named after the great and good Andrew Fuller. The professors were honorary members of the Society, and each week we had to handle in free debate both literary and theological questions. Your speaker has among his treasures notes of an address made by him, by appointment, on the subject of “Religious Liberty,” and he recalls a memorable discussion of the “Landmark Question”—even from the beginning was the “Landmark Question”—and it has continued with us. But, young brethren, we found in those early Seminary days we could have thundering debates on a question without division; let me repeat, *without division*. So be it forever more!

In religious work our student body excelled. Very soon after our coming together the town was dotted with cottage prayer-meetings, conducted by the students. Revivals and conversions followed. Sunday-schools sprang into being. At first the spirit of our men was somewhat resented as an innovation. On more than one occasion a student with his handful of tracts and his offer to hold prayer in the family was refused an entrance into the house. But this did not continue. The feelings of the people softened, and when the work was understood it became popular. A safeguard was thrown around this phase of Seminary work by the fact that it was directed by the student organization which followed the men, received and discussed their reports, and assumed responsibility. Prominent in this work from house to house was the beloved Witt, the evangel of the class. Dr. Boyce became so interested that he offered to build a chapel among the more destitute of the town. Nor was this missionary work confined to the town of Greenville. It overflowed into the country districts. Sunday after Sunday our men climbed the red hills of the county of Greenville and sang and prayed and preached as they went. As an example, if you will pardon a personal incident, during the second session my roommate, J. A. Chambliss, and I walked every Sunday several miles to old Berea church to conduct a Sunday-school. Hyde was the superintendent of a great negro Sunday-school, held every Sunday afternoon in the Baptist church. A number of other students were teachers. The recital of these simple

facts may seem trivial to some, but I understand that I am invited to tell the inside history of the first session, and I am sure these things serve to show the birth of the Seminary spirit, that masterful spirit of missions, which I have said dominates this Institution, and which, should it die out, would relegate our precious heritage to the condition of those schools which have had a tragic end, illustrating the words of the Apostle, "The body without the spirit is dead."

The public estimate of this session's work of the Seminary was voiced by the "Religious Herald," which said: "During their spare moments most of the students were busy with their tracts and looking after the various Sunday-schools under their management. This is fine work; it keeps the heart warm." A business letter from the Rev. James B. Taylor, Secretary of Foreign Missions, April, 1860, recounting impressions during a visit of voluntary inspection, said: "I recognized several beloved brethren from the Old Dominion. One of these, with his young wife and little child, domiciled in a small plain cottage, living without a servant, and on plain fare, was bending all his energies to those investigations which are preparing him to become a workman needing not to be ashamed. Some of the students are meditating the preaching of the gospel to the heathen as the great work of life." A correspondent of the press said: "The student body is bound together by a common faith, a common hope, and a common object in life. The exercises of the Literary Society, of the Missionary Society, of the Sabbath Conference, the students' prayer-meetings, and the services of the Greenville church, with labors among the destitute of the town and the surrounding country, are moulding and inspiring influences which must tell for good." And last, but not least, Professor John A. Broadus, in response to an inquiry about the first year's work, said: "This has been a place for growth in piety as well as knowledge."

If it may be allowed, I pause here for a personal word. My place in the student body was unique. I had never preached. With a desire for several years to be a preacher, I felt that I could never meet my own ideal of the great office. Yet, quite strangely, perhaps, I had a persistent wish to attend the Seminary as a student. In my perplexity I sought Dr. Broadus at his home, "Locust Grove," near Charlottesville. He had been a guest in my father's home, had conducted a protracted meet-

ing in our church at Bruington, and I felt that he would sympathize with me and give me the best advice. He received me with great cordiality and listened patiently to my story. After a full conference, when I arose to go, he said to me: "I think you should go with us to Greenville. If you never preach, if you are only a Sunday-school teacher or superintendent, a year's study of the Bible will help you wonderfully." My mind was made up. And it came to pass as I studied the way opened. Duty seemed clearer. I went the first session, the nail was driven; the second, and it was clinched. I never regretted the step, and I have always been obliged to that great teacher for his helpful advice, and to the Seminary for taking me in.

Impelled by this experience, I venture to inquire whether it is wise to put the limitation of a *distinct purpose to preach* upon our students? Why should not the Seminary be also a great Bible school for teachers and superintendents and godly laymen? The calling of laymen to conduct great Bible classes, the opening of mission fields to various classes of laborers, make it plain to me that there is a great and growing need for Bible instruction for many besides those who have a distinct call to preach. The Seminary has wisely opened its doors to admit women for training. Why not wider yet for laymen? I lift my voice for a great Bible school, free as possible to preachers—with fees, if necessary, to others; but open wide to all properly qualified Christian men who desire a fuller knowledge of the word of God.

Returning from this digression, let me say that I am conscious that the attempt I have made to call the roll of the men who led the van of the subsequent regiments which have gone marching forth to do battle for righteousness and truth in the name of our God, is imperfectly done. I could wish they were here to answer for themselves, but most of them "rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." I believe they were *good* men. Duty, "stern daughter of the voice of God," has been their watchword. On widely scattered fields, without self-seeking, they have not only held forth the word of life, but "allured to brighter worlds and led the way."

Those who have passed to their reward and those who, though living, are yet unable to be present in person, are

with us in spirit. I represent them and bring their lifetime love and loyalty and lay them afresh on the altar of devotion to Alma Mater.

“Lo, where in days of old
Came brows of black or gold,
Come now the gray;
Yet like the laurel tree
Our mother’s brow we see
Freshen eternally
From day to day.”

“We greet her growing fame,
We greet the men who name
Her mother now;
With mind, with heart, with hand
For her best weal we stand,
And faithless him we brand
Who shames her brow.”

We are told that the old church-house—the birth chamber of this “School of the Prophets”—has been swept away by the march of industrial events. Not one stone is left upon another. The town of Greenville is stretching its arms on either side of the little river, by whose waterfalls we gathered on moonlight evenings. Time has swept on, and the loved professors of that great period are in their graves. The large majority of the twenty-six who sat at their feet have joined the “Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.” To the few of that first class who are left impressions of early days of Seminary life in Greenville remain ineffaceable. I do not believe there is one who does not say with Wordsworth:

“The thought of these past years in me
Doth breed perpetual benediction.”

THE FIRST COMMENCEMENT.

I think you will agree with me that the chronicles of no session of a school are complete without at least a brief account of its “Commencement.” The closing of session ’59-’60 was a notable event. Was not the child of many prayers a year old, and should not its friends meet to celebrate the event? They came, and hearty were the congratulations. It

was the 26th of May. The Hall was tastefully decorated by the fair daughters of Greenville. A large audience was present. The First Baptist church choir rendered inspiring anthems. J. A. Chambliss, representing the student body, spoke for the Andrew Fuller Society. A reporter told the press that "without any of the florid declamation so common on such occasions, the young orator presented us with a chaste and beautiful address, handling his subject, 'Andrew Fuller and His Times,' with great skill, and throwing around it an interest that few speakers of riper years could have surpassed." On Lord's Day morning, the 27th, the gifted Tichenor, of Montgomery, Alabama, preached an able, impressive sermon, and at night President Samson, of Columbian College, D. C., followed in one of his happiest efforts before "The Society for Missionary Inquiry." But the culmination was reached on Monday, the 28th, when, after words of tender counsel from the venerable Basil Manly, Sr., on the theme, "I have set watchmen upon the walls," the diplomas were delivered, and Professor Manly's hymn sung for the first time. President Boyce came forward to speak the parting words. Dr. Richard Fuller said of Dr. Boyce: "The Lord gave him a great body to hold his great heart." But it looked that day as if the significance of the occasion had produced a tide of emotion that no boundaries could confine. The Seminary was a reality. It had passed a successful season. He could present it to his brethren a living thing. As he voiced in broken words his gratitude to God, eyes unused to weeping were full of tears, and the audience rose and sang with great feeling, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Oh! men of the present, you can never know the pathos and the joy of that First Commencement Day!

Mr. President, in closing my address, I offer to you and this assemblage this sentiment:

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IS MONUMENTAL.

As it stands to-day in its vigorous life it is a monument to its founders. Read its history and you can trace its progress in the faith, hope and sacrifice of men of whom the world was not worthy. But more—it is not only a monument to the devotion and faith of the saints, but to the gracious watch-care and leadership of our God, our Fathers' God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—the King in Zion.

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