THE LIFE AND WORK OF DR. JAMES C. FURMAN

Editor's Note: The address that follows was delivered by Hon. S. E. McFadden, '93, on the occasion of the first Founders' Day, held at Furman University, December 4, 1920.

In Plutarch's "Lives of the Ancient Greeks and Romans", he tells us that Lysias, a writer of speeches, once wrote a defence for a man who was to be tried before an Athenian tribunal. The defendant memorized his speech, but long before the day set for the trial he became thoroughly dissatisfied and disgusted with it—so much so, that he went to the author in despair, saying: "I was delighted with your speech the first time I read it; but I liked it less the second time; still less the third time; and now it seems to be no speech and no defence at all." "My good fellow", replied Lysias, "you must remember that the Judges will hear it only once." This suggestion of Lysias affords me the best encouragement and chiefest comfort in respect to what I shall say this morning.

Had James C. Furman lived his life and played his part on the world's stage in New England instead of in South Carolina, at this end of one generation after his death, at least one biography and many sketches and reminiscences of his life would have long since found their way into print. But the Southern people, though doers of deeds and makers of history, are not historians or biographers. In New England they do things differently. From the early Colonists to this day, they all kept, and still keep, their commonplace books, diaries, and personal memoranda. Every man

and woman is a prospective historian, a biographer, or an autobiographer. They spread it on thick, and modesty and reticence are relegated to the rear. With them every rivulet is a river; every fisticuff an engagement; every skirmish a battle; each battle a campaign; and every incident an epoch. Their geese are all swans, and their recording angels neither slumber nor sleep. Their extremes and excesses in this regard, are, however, every whit as pardonable and excusable as has been, and still is, our inexcusable indifference and neglect in the same matter; and, measuring my words, I do not hesitate to say that it is to the lasting discredit, if not disgrace, of the people of South Carolina, in general, and of the Baptists of South Carolina, in particular, that a full and authoritative biography of James C. Furman, now dead these thirty years, has not long since been published, thus rendering the facts of his long, useful, and illustrious life accessible to the people of South Carolina, and especially to the people of that great denomination of which he was the unquestioned intellectual, educational, and spiritual leader, towering like Saul among his brethren, for nigh unto half a century.

James Clement Furman was born in the City of Charleston, on the fifth day of December, 1809. It was the same year that in England ushered into life William E. Gladstone, the Christian statesman; Charles Darwin, the scientist and author of the theory of Evolution; and Alfred Tennyson, the poet laureate; the same year that in America witnessed the birth of the brilliant and ill-starred Edgar Allan Poe; the scintillating essayist, poet, and physician, Oliver Wendell Holmes; and the obscure backwoodsman, country lawyer, and great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln.

Great men, like joys and sorrows, come in droves and battalions.

Somewhere, Doctor Holmes says that to live long, to achieve fame, and to make a name for himself, a man must be careful in the choice of his ancestors. Newell Dwight Hillis in his book, "The Value of Man to Society," says that a man's physical, intellectual, and spiritual stock in trade is in a great measure inherited; that nature invests the grandsire's ability, and compounds it for the grandson; that the measure of greatness in a man is determined by the intellectual streams and moral tides flowing down from the ancestral hills and emptying into his mind and soul. Horace Mann believed that the foreheads of the Irish peasantry were lowered an inch or more, when their government made it a capital offense to be a teacher of children. James C. Furman chose his ancestry and environment wisely. He was born of a distinguished father and of a mother of marked mental endowment and personal charm. His father was a soldier of the Revolution, a man of national fame as patriot and preacher. The young man was reared in most delightful and enviable surroundings,—moral, social, and intellectual. There was then, as there is now, no city superior to Charleston in wealth, and in the refinement—education and culture which wealth, properly applied—brings in its train. He was educated at the College of Charleston, a small but well-endowed institution, with as able a faculty as any Southern institution could boast, with the possible exception of the University of Virginia. His early inclination, perhaps inherited from his father, was to the study and practice of medicine, and what a physician he would have made! But his conversion under the preaching

of Dr. Basil Manly, Sr. wrought a complete change in his life plans, and he immediately began to prepare to follow in the footsteps of his father as a preacher of the Gospel. He was licensed to preach in his nineteenth year. Entering, as the twelfth student, the Furman Theological Institution in March 1830, he was ordained to the Gospel ministry by the First Baptist Church of Charleston in 1832, preaching for that church for a short period thereafter. Then he and several of his fellow theological students engaged for a time in evangelistic work in the Northern counties of the State, where his reputation as "the boy preacher" had preceded him; their work was rewarded with marked success in that section, extending, in fact, to Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. He began his real career as preacher and pastor with the celebrated Welsh Neck Church at Society Hill, in Darlington County, and his pastorate there and with the old First Church of Charleston occupied the entire period of his exclusive ministerial work prior to his entrance upon his work as Educator and University founder and builder. The ten years or more spent by him with the two churches named—perhaps the two richest, most refined, most cultured, and devout charges in the State—were years of study, of growth and advancement, of widening and broadening vision, of insight and influence, and doubtless contributed more than anything else towards preparing him for the prominent and predominant part that he was to play as educational leader, as President of Baptist state conventions, as President of and professor in the University he founded, as trustee of the Theological Seminary, as Associate Editor of his denominational paper, and as the representative Baptist of his State for forty

years or more. But it is his work at and for Furman University that this occasion celebrates and commemorates. The nucleus of this institution was a proposed theological seminary, first located in "the high hills of South Carolina," then removed for a short term of years to Fairfield County, this State; but finally established in the then town, but now good City of Greenville. The Seminary was first established here as the Furman Theological Institution, but, owing to the general lack of educational preparation of the theological students, it was found absolutely necessary to establish a literary and classical college as a "feeder" to the Seminary. Out of this necessity grew the separation of the Seminary and Doctor Furman; the beginnings of Furman University; the coexistence of the two institutions for a number of years at Greenville; the removal of the Seminary to Louisville, Kentucky; the struggles of the infant University for its very existence for many years; and the heroic efforts of Doctor Judson and Doctor Furman, each of them for his entire life. These great and good men have long since passed to their reward, but their works have followed them; and if it be true that the spirits of the good and great are hovering round about us; if it be true, as we verily believe it to be, that the saints in high Heaven above keep watch and ward over their loved ones left behind on earth—institutions as well as individuals—I doubt not that they are this day rejoicing with us at the magnificent growth and marvellous success of this institution for which they worked so hard and wrought so well, and that each one felicitates and congratulates the other, saying truly "finis opus coronat." But it is not the history of the founding and growth of the institution so much

as the character and caliber of the man whose name it bears and with whom we have to do today. When I was a student at the University and for many years thereafter, the two-room cottage where Dr. Furman and Dr. Judson taught in the year of 1852 was still on the campus. It should never be removed, but should remain as a memorial and a pious shrine for all the sons of Furman. Someone has said that an institution is the lengthened and projected shadow of a man. President Garfield made Williams College famous when he explained his idea of a college as Mark Hopkins at *one* end of a *log* and a student at the *other*. If that constituted a college, a building with James Clement Furman teaching in one end thereof, and Charles Hallette Judson teaching in the other would put to shame and eclipse all the colleges of America. No two men afforded a more striking contrast than these two; and no two ever supplemented and complemented each other better. Dr. Furman was of medium height, not over five feet eight inches tall, very slender and frail looking. I feel sure that he never weighed over 125 pounds in his life, and when I knew him in his last days, I doubt his weighing a hundred pounds. He had a magnificent head that would have been the joy of a phrenologist. It was the longest and broadest head combined I ever saw on a human being, as fine in shape as ever was portrayed by the painter's brush or the sculptor's chisel. He had the hand of a gentleman to the manner born, with the long tapering fingers of an artist. It was the most beautiful man's hand I ever beheld. The expression of his face was one of great gentleness, kindness, and benignity. The intellectual expression was almost a composite photograph of Ralph Waldo Emerson and of

Cardinal Newman; but it was that of the seer rather than that of the mystic. His voice, while not of great volume, was clear and penetrating, his enunciation distinct, his pronunciation of words perfect. His tone was musical and appealing. His speech, both in manner and matter was, at his will, full alike of pathos, persuasion, and power. Had he possessed the physical constitution, the powerful lungs, and commanding appearance of many men, greatly his inferiors in intellect, information, and character, he would have led the whole Southern church, as he undoubtedly led it in South Carolina. In him were united and combined the persuasive eloquence of the orator, the artist's love of beauty, the poet's divine afflatus, the scholar's passion for truth, the patriot's love of country, and the Christian's devotion to his Lord and Master. In his latter days he appeared as "a venerable man, come down from a former generation". As a preacher he was pleading, persuasive, appealing, convincing, soul-stirring, and heart-wooing. As a teacher, he was the master of his subjects, moral and mental philosophy; while his lectures and dissertations were informing, inspiring, and instructive. He did not *compel* his students to learn, but those who sat under him in pursuit of learning attained their quest. He was a most entertaining and instructive conversationalist; his mind was encyclopaedic, and, the applied sciences alone excepted, he seemed to have taken all knowledge as his province. He was conversant with the best of English and classic literature, a student of history and biography, of men and things. But it was because of his *character* that he possessed and exercised his greatest influence with his students and his fellowmen. He was the most saintly, Godly,

and Christlike man I ever knew, or hope to know in this life. The people of South Carolina will never fully recognize and appreciate the debt of gratitude they owe to three men in this Piedmont section: James C. Furman, James H. Carlisle of Wofford College, and William M. Grier of Erskine College. While the State was impregnated with the free thinking and skepticism of Thomas Jefferson at the University of Virginia and of Thomas Cooper at the South Carolina College (influences, which happily, long since have ceased to exist and to be felt), these three men and their institutions did more to counteract irreligion and skepticism among the young men of this State than all other men, measures, and institutions combined.

Dr. Furman was a representative citizen of this commonwealth, taking a keen interest and doing a man's active part in affairs of city, community, state, and church. Born and bred as he was in Charleston, the hot-bed of the Confederacy, living in his young manhood in the low country, he early imbibed the doctrine of States' Rights, and found in his Bible amplest support for the establishment and maintenance of slavery.

Dr. Furman believed in the Constitution of the United States, in its sanction of slavery, expressed and implied, in States' Rights, and in the doctrine of Secession as the logical corollary thereof. South Carolina followed Mr. Calhoun implicitly in these matters, and he, in turn, sat at the feet of the Virginia Gamaliel, John Randolph of Roanoke, whose political character and doctrines Whittier delineated in poetic phrase as being:

"Too honest and too proud to feign
A love he never cherished,
Beyond Virginia's border line
His patriotism perished.
While others praised in distant skies
Our eagle's dusky pinion,
He only saw the mountain bird
Stoop o'er the Old Dominion."

When the sectional fight waxed fiercer and fiercer, Dr. Furman had left the low country, and had been for a number of years the most prominent and influential citizen of Greenville in matters educational and religious. Greenville adjoined the mountain section of North Carolina; many citizens of the town came from the mountains, where there were no Negroes and hence no slaves. Therefore the doctrine of States' Rights, when invoked to justify secession by the slave states, found no fertile soil for its growth and propagation in this community. The Union party was ably represented and led by Hon. B. F. Perry, an able and honest lawyer, a masterful man and a consummate politician. An aristocrat by birth and breeding, he was a democrat in his intercourse with and his leadership of his fellowmen. It is estimated that those in favor of secession were outnumbered three or four to one by the Unionists. Major Easley was the leader of the Secessionists, but the head and front of the movement became Doctor Furman, who left his President's office and his class rooms for the forum, the platform, and the stump. The contest between him and (afterwards) Governor Perry was a battle royal, and from the standpoint of physical contrast, their joint debates must have borne a striking resemblance to those

between Alexander H. Stephens and Robert Toombs in Georgia. But the four men were intellectual and oratorical giants each and all,—regardless of physical stature. Dr. Boyce of the Seminary was an active Unionist, and it is supposed that Dr. Broadus leaned in the same direction. The efforts of Dr. Furman soon began to have visible effect in changing the political complexion of the community and entire section. He always had "a place in the picture near the flashing of the guns", and stumped the county from center to circumference. Probably the greatest speech of his life was made at the County Court House the night before the election, the result of which was a foregone conclusion from that hour; later he was sent at the head of the Greenville delegation to the Secession Convention at Columbia, where he received a flattering vote for the Presidency of that body. Many of us, his old students, have rejoiced at the recollection of having sat at the feet of such a man among men in his civic relations with, and his eminence among, his fellow citizens. After the cause was lost, he accepted the result with resignation, prudence, firmness, and courage, and set himself to the effort to recoup his fallen personal fortunes, and to the supreme struggle to save the Institution, which meant more than life to him. Throughout those eleven fearful years of Negro and radical and alien domination, from 1865 to 1876, during the odious and unspeakable orgies of ex-slaves, degenerate and traitorous whites, led by the scalawag and the carpet-bagger, in the midst of that veritable Slough of Despond, he with blood embittered and soul unsoured, was a Nestor in the councils of the decent white people of the State, and was like "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land". He always took

the active, not passive, interest of a good citizen in all moral questions, from a civic as well as a religious standpoint. From his Associate Editor's chair, from the pulpit and at the ballot box firmly and fearlessly he dealt with the social evil, the gambling evil, and "the Demon Rum". And yet the forces of evil respected him, if they did not revere him. During the dark and strenuous times of Reconstruction, when men walked the streets at their peril at nights, and virtuous women scarce dared to walk them by day, there is no record of discourtesy, much less of insult and abuse, offered Dr. Furman by Negro, by scalawag, carpetbagger, gambler, or barkeeper. Perhaps, with regard to him in this connection, the words of Tennyson in reference to Arthur Henry Hallam (though not in their exact meaning) may not be inappropriate:

"And thus he bore without abuse
The grand old name of gentleman,
Defamed by every charlatan,
And soiled by all ignoble use."

But if South Carolina was "on the rocks", Furman University was faring little if any better in those post-bellum times. The State was impoverished; the State institutions were either closed or in the hands of Negro professors, attended by Negro students. The young men returned from the war were clamoring for education, which their fathers were unable to afford them. In 1866 the students numbered 140; in 1867 only forty-five were enrolled; in 1868 only twenty-seven, and no Commencement was held. Then it was that "all seemed lost save honor". Dr. Furman had a flattering offer outside of the State, and a most desirable one

from a personal and financial standpoint to re-enter the ministry. His friends counselled surrender; well-minded ones advised him that, as the Institution was sinking, it would be wise for him to save himself. Then it was that the innate gallantry, lion-hearted courage and heroism of the man asserted itself. His reply to all these selfish suggestions may be termed the sea captain's motto and rallying cry, when his ship threatens to go down into the deep: "Man the life boats! Women and children first! Cowards of the crew, rats, skulkers, and deserters next in turn! But I stay here! He who dallies is a dastard; he who doubts is damned!" The exact words of Doctor Furman were: "I will nail my colors to the mast of the Old Ship, and if she goes down, I will go with her!"

But the ship did not go down. For many years it was tossed by adverse winds and treacherous tides. The details are tedious and tearsome. Suffice it to say that it weathered the storm, and to the unspeakable joy of the Captain's heart, before it ceased to beat, the winds seemed more propitious, the sea became calm, and the sailing became smoother, and the prospects of a safe voyage on a much wider and more extended journey loomed brighter and brighter before his fading vision. Today marks the inauguration of Founders' Day—of James C. Furman's Day—at the Institution he loved so well and to which he gave the labors and love of his mature manhood and of his ripe old age. It is said that Mary of England was so grieved at the loss of the port of Calais that she said that the word "Calais" would be found carved on her heart in letters of blood. The Emperor Napoleon said that upon his heart would be found the word "France." These were the vain vaporings of bloody rulers and tyrants;

but we students and lovers of that man of God, that nature's nobleman, James C. Furman, know that in his heart of hearts, next to his love for his Lord and his Master and his love for his fellowman, came his love for Furman University.

He loved it living; he loves it dead.
We love him living, we love him dead.

"The monarch may forget the crown
That on his head so late hath been;
The bridegroom may forget the bride
That was his own but yester e'en;
The mother may forget the babe
That smiled so sweetly on her knee.
But forget thee ne'er will I, Glencairn,
And all that thou hast done for me."