

# REMARKS



ON A

PARAGRAPH IN THE REV. DOCTOR DAVIDSON'S HISTORY OF  
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN KENTUCKY,

IN REFERENCE

TO THE CHARACTER OF THE LATE

MR. JOHN LYLE,

RULING ELDER

IN THE TIMBERRIDGE CHURCH, VIRGINIA,

BY REV. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D.D.

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Princeton, N. J. :

PRINTED BY JOHN T. ROBINSON.

1848.

*Wm. Jas. McDowell  
with respect of 10 cts*

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*Remarks on a paragraph in the Rev. Doctor Davidson's History of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky.*

IN the 117th page of Dr. Davidson's valuable History of the Presbyterian church in Kentucky, unmerited obloquy is cast on the memory of Mr. John Lyle, the elder; who is represented as indulging a very unchristian spirit, and pursuing an unnatural severity towards his son John, when he formed the purpose of preparing for the holy ministry. The descendants and other friends of the elder John Lyle have felt aggrieved on account of this reflection on a man whom they have always heard spoken of with respect and veneration. They have therefore felt it to be a sacred duty to vindicate from undeserved reproach, the character of a man, whose reputation for consistent and fervent piety was maintained for nearly half a century without a blot. And as I am one among the few persons who were intimately acquainted with Mr. Lyle, who still survive, I have been requested to express my opinion respecting his general character, and also respecting the particular charge which is here alleged against him; which I feel to be an incumbent duty; as I have always considered myself under real obligations to this excellent man for his wise and pious counsels when I was young, and first entered on a religious life.

The friends of Mr. Lyle, senior, after correspondence with Dr. Davidson, are fully convinced that the paragraph referred to was penned with no unfriendly feelings towards the family; and that he was misled by information, which he supposed was authentic. And it is fully believed that when a new edition of his valuable work is called for, that he will either expunge or alter the paragraph, by which, unintentionally, he has done injustice to one of the most excellent of the earth.

Elder John Lyle, as he was commonly called, to distinguish him from others of the same name, was in my opinion, a man of eminent piety. In the period succeeding the war of the revolution, vital piety had sunk very low in the valley of Virginia. Most professors seemed to have little of the genuine spirit of religion; and fell into undue conformity to the world, and its fashions and amusements. But during this time of general declension, John Lyle and his wife stood forth as shining examples of vital godliness, and holy living. By many, no doubt they



were thought to be "righteous overmuch"; but their zeal for God, and fidelity in maintaining his cause, served as a testimony, that there was a reality in religion; and that they were pursuing a truly Christian and consistent course.

When the revival occurred in the year 1789 it was like life from the dead, to this pious couple. They greatly rejoiced in the progress of this gracious visitation of God to his desolate church, and were animated with renewed zeal in the service of God; and had the pleasure of seeing two of their own sons brought under the converting influence of the divine Spirit. One of these, their first born, and a very promising young man, was called away just when he was preparing to enter the ministry. The second son John, was possessed of excellent mental endowments, fully equal to his brothers; but he did not possess the same advantages of person and manners. Mr. Lyle had made great exertion to give his oldest son a liberal education; and had never thought that it was in his power to extend the same advantage to any other of his sons. But when John embraced religion, his views were uncommonly clear, and his religious feelings very ardent. From the first he enjoyed assurance of the divine favour; and was led to entertain a strong persuasion that God had called him to the work of the ministry. People of the world thought that he was enthusiastic, but his feelings, though strong, were scriptural. His father, at first hesitated—not on account of any mental or bodily defects—but merely because he did not see how he was to get the means of support, through so long a course of study as would be necessary to enter the ministry in the Presbyterian church. What conversation passed between the father and son, on this subject, I do not pretend to know; but I am well assured from the character of the former, that whatever he said or did, was dictated by piety and prudence. And as soon as he found that the purpose of his son was fixed, he made no farther opposition; but encouraged and assisted him as much as his circumstance would permit. It may be remarked, however, that the mother of young Lyle, from the beginning was in favour of his going forward; and being strong in faith as well as ardent in zeal, said "If God had called him to the work, He would provide the means for his education." I am persuaded that no "bitterness" or unfriendly feelings were ever entertained, by the father toward his son; and no one I believe, rejoiced more in the success of his son, both in preparing for the ministry, and in his efficient and successful exercise of the sacred office, than the father.

As a faithful and efficient elder of the Presbyterian church, I have never known his superior, if I have his equal. He had

furnished his mind by diligent reading, with knowledge in all branches of theology; and was especially thoroughly conversant with the most judicious and spiritual authors on experimental religion.

A. ALEXANDER.

The following letters have been written to contradict the erroneous statement in Doctor Davidson's History, by the surviving children of elder John Lyle; but before these are inserted it will be proper to insert the offensive paragraph from Dr. Davidson's History. The writer had just before, been speaking of Andrew Lyle, his oldest son, in the most laudatory terms, when he introduced John, of whom his description is by no means accurate, as will appear from the letters of his surviving brothers and sister.

"John, on the contrary, had been, from his birth, a feeble child, and had received, in his infancy, accidental injuries which affected his appearance; and being very taciturn and reserved, none gave him credit for even ordinary intellect. His lengthened visage, his ungainly form, and his awkward gait, made him the butt of ridicule in the family, the school, and the neighborhood. His father could not bear the idea of his entering the ministry; and never spoke of it without bitterness, as destined to disgrace the family by a certain failure. He offered to leave him his farm on condition of renouncing his intention; but in case of persistence, he refused to extend the least aid; and true to his word, even after the death of his promising son Andrew, he never gave him so much as a shilling. John inherited all his father's pertinacity, and resolved to achieve his object by his own exertions. He taught a country school, and thus procured the means of a liberal education at Liberty Hall. While in college, he was much persecuted by the looser sort of students, who were addicted to gambling, and hated piety; but his courage and firmness at last secured his peace."

PARIS, KY., June 16, 1847.

The Rev. Dr. DAVIDSON,

Dear Sir: In your "History of Presbyterianism, in Kentucky," on page 117, I find the following extracts relative to my grandfather and uncle Lyle. . . .

I believe from information in my possession, derived from Dr. Alexander, of Princeton, and my father of this vicinity, that the above extract casts an unjust imputation upon the memory of my grandfather, whom I have been taught from my youth to regard as a man of public spirit, of just and honourable principles, and of devoted piety.

As your work will be regarded in the light of history, I beg to know on what authorities, you base your statements, whether from uncle's diary and papers, or from other sources of information?

I desire a full avowal of your authorities, as I feel interested in knowing and *having* known the truth on this family subject.

A speedy answer will very much oblige,

Very respectfully,

W. C. LYLE.

NEW BRUNSWICK, June 28, 1847.

Sir: Permit me to assure you that nothing has been further from my thoughts than to cast unjust imputations on any one, or to wound the feeling of any relative, in the publications I have made. Surely in this case you will exonerate me, when I inform you, that I received my materials, for the notice of your uncle's biography, from his widow and John his son, residing in the Walnut Hill congregation, whom I visited for the purpose. I still have in my hands the MS. notes, which I took down from their lips. Such is the authority on which I made my statements, and they knew the purpose for which I desired information.

Very respectfully,

Yours, &c.

R. DAVIDSON.

W. C. LYLE, Esq.

My father, John Lyle, of Rockbridge county, Va., was in limited circumstances. He owned no slaves, and his farm had to be cultivated by his sons—and it was as much as I and a little brother could do to make the two ends of the year to meet. My father was an officer of the church, and being engaged in other public business, laboured but little on the farm, but spent a great portion of his time in visiting the different congregations in the county, and attending to other business. He educated his eldest son, Andrew, for the ministry, but was not able to give another son, an education, in justice to himself and family. Brother John, never laboured on the farm, but was always treated as a *son* and *brother*. After he had obtained such an education as qualified him to teach school, he by that means paid his way and succeeded in preparing himself to enter Lexington Presbytery. During all this time, he lived a part of the time at home, and when engaged in teaching, came frequently home to see the family and to enjoy their society.

I lived during the time at my father's and managed his farm



for him, until some time after brother John left for Kentucky. I do not recollect, and I defy any one to prove that in all this time he was treated "with bitterness," or opposed in his studies or wishes by my father. It was his constant wish to see all his children pious and doing well. He considered the office of the ministry the most important ever bestowed upon any human being, and was therefore far from throwing obstacles in his way, or treating him with roughness or inhumanity.

I never knew until I saw it in print, that brother's personal appearance, "made him the butt of ridicule in the family, the school, and the neighborhood"—nor did I ever hear of my father's offering him his farm, on condition of his renunciation of his purpose to enter the ministry.

After brother John's removal to Kentucky, he twice visited his parents in Virginia, and they made him presents, while there, and sent others to him.

After brother John married, and engaged in preaching and teaching, his circumstances were favorable, and my father thought, I suppose, for I had removed to Kentucky—he could not do better than to divide his small patrimony among his other children—leaving his farm to brother William, who remained at home and supported his parents, in their old age, and requiring him to pay small legacies to his other children. He did this, no doubt, without having the least dislike to brother John.

JOEL R. LYLE.

Near Paris, Dec. 1847.

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TIPTON, Iowa, Aug. 25, 1847.

Dear Nephew:—I received your letter, containing extracts from Dr. Davidson's "History of Presbyterianism in Kentucky," in which are several statements that have no foundation in truth.

That brother John received in his infancy, accidental injuries, which affected his appearance, is not true, nor is it that there was anything in his appearance, so ridiculous as to excite the ridicule "of the family, the school and the neighborhood." He was naturally taciturn, and reserved, and when he was about 17 years old, became very deaf and could not take part in conversation, except it was in a louder voice, than common, and being for this reason sometimes silent, it might be supposed by those not well acquainted with him, that he was very reserved in his manners.

The writer states that father could not bear the idea of brother John's entering the ministry, and never spoke of it without bitterness, and that he offered him his farm if he would renounce his intention, and if he persisted, would not give him a shilling—every word of which is false.

I never heard my father say any thing against his obtaining an education for the ministry, and I know he aided him as far as his means would permit, for he was a farmer, of but moderate circumstances. He was willing to do what he could, and furnished all his clothing, and paid his board while at Liberty Hall. I think, brother paid the most of his tuition after the first, by teaching a class not as far advanced as himself. The reason father gave for not leaving him anything in his will, was that he had expended in his education as much as he could leave to his other children.

Though young at the time, I believe the above to be correct. Your father will perhaps know more of some of the statements, and if wrong can correct mine.

Yours, &c.

WM. R. LYLE.

In a letter addressed by Mrs. Martha McCutchen, to her nephew at Princeton, N. J., bearing date of November the 24th, 1847, in relation to her father, Elder John Lyle, she writes thus.

"He was very often sent to Presbyteries, and Synods, and once to the General Assembly. That was a great hindrance to his success in his worldly business. When Andrew was sixteen he was sent to a classical school, and father paid his board and tuition, for four years, which was as much as he was able to do. Andrew then commenced teaching school, to enable him to finish his education. About this time John embraced religion, and received the impression that he had a call to preach the gospel, and I have no doubt it was the case. But how could he be spared, and how was the money to be raised to pay for his education? I have no recollection of father's opposing him, but I have no doubt he felt unable to do much for him. But I remember of hearing mother say, that she thought that if he had a call to the ministry, there would be some way provided.

"John came twice to see us after he settled in Kentucky. He was then in very good circumstances and did not need assistance. Father had four other children to provide for, which accounts for his leaving him nothing at his death.

"As to his being the butt of ridicule in the family, it is entirely false. I believe he was ridiculed by some of the people of the neighborhood. And some of his relations were very much opposed to his receiving an education.

"I have now given you a statement of the facts as near as I can recollect them. You can make what use you think proper of them."