

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Review & Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_rande_01.php

DR. BENAHAH HARVEY CARROLL.

By PRESIDENT S. P. BROOKS, Baylor University.

On December 27, 1843, in Carroll County, Mississippi, there was born a child destined to grow into a remarkable man, judged by any standard. It was the subject of this sketch. He was one of twelve children. His father was a Baptist preacher, as were two of his brothers and three of his cousins.

When this lad had grown to fifteen years of age, the family moved to Texas where his career began, ending in death November 11, 1914. He was educated in Baylor University, from which institution he received the degree of Master of Arts. For his scholarship and eminent public services, the University of Tennessee conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity; and Keatchie College, Doctor of Laws.

B. H. Carroll even as a youth read what could be had in the new country to which he had come, drawing his own conclusions therefrom. In college he did his work easily, but was given to pursuing courses that suited his fancy. He was without doubt throughout his life an omniverous reader.

Most of what he read or heard he could use to good advantage in class-room debate or public oratory. When the War of Secession came on he stood valiantly for the Union, the Stars and Stripes. As a school-boy he spoke from a dry-goods box before a throng of mad zealots. His address* was as a flame of fire in eloquence and as a ponderous trip-hammer in logic. It showed the folly and predicted the failure of the secession of the South. It closed with the famous poem of Cutter, paraphrasing the words of Henry Clay in his Bunker Hill Oration:

* Sermons by B. H. Carroll, p. viii., ed. by J. B. Cranfill. Published by American Baptist Publication Society, 1895.

“You ask me when I’d rend the scroll our fathers’ names
are written o’er,
When I could see our flag unroll its mingled stars and
stripes no more;
When with a worse than felon hand or felon counsels
I would sever
The union of this glorious land, I answer, Never, never.”

Like thousands of other young men of the South, he doubted the wisdom of Secession. However, he never deserted his own people when the call to arms came. Being in the army and fighting faithfully did not stop his individual thinking. At any time he was ready for a battle of words whose meaning no one could doubt.

Quoting liberally in the next two paragraphs from the life sketch above, it is found that soon after entering soldier life he made an address to his comrades on “The Delusion of the South,” wherein he showed that (1) the Confederates could not win easily; (2) the Union soldiers were not cowards; (3) the Northern Democrats would not help the South; and (4) that Europe would not intervene.

In a Louisiana campfire debate, after the fall of Vicksburg, he spoke on the negative side of the subject “We’ll Whip ’Em Yet.” In another such debate he took the negative of the subject: “Resolved, That Confederate Success is More to Be Dreaded Than Their Defeat.” He said: “Mr. President, I base all my argument on one compound proposition. If we are defeated, the war is ended; but if we succeed, war is perpetual. The perpetuity of war in case of our success inevitably follows from four causes, namely: (1) The Mississippi and its tributaries; (2) the interminable artificial boundary between the North and South; (3) the protection of slavery under such conditions; (4) the rope of sand binding the Confederate States.”

In his thirteenth year, after some mechanical questions and answers by the preacher following a revival, he was induced to join the church and was baptized. Soon he doubted his conversion and became a pronounced infidel.* He, himself, says that he was never converted until after the war, while yet a crippled soldier on crutches, under the faithful preaching of a Methodist minister. His radical change of life was the surprise and joy of the community. At once he began to preach. He was for a short time pastor of country churches. In 1871, he was called to the pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas. This church grew to be notable under his ministry. As pastors grow churches, so churches grow pastors. This relation continued till 1899.

Baylor University students, of whom I was one, during this period were greatly influenced by his colossal personality and preaching. He swept the gamut of human activities and matched them with Biblical experiences. There was "My Infidelity and What Became of it," then "The Death of Spurgeon," and then "I Magnify Mine Office," and so on till some of us students were so wrought upon that we often wrongly thought him superhuman.

In 1887, Texas entered upon a contest for a Constitutional amendment of the prohibition of the liquor traffic. Dr. Carroll was selected Chairman of the State Executive Committee. He led grandly, opposing all comers in debate, from a United States Senator, up or down. The people followed nobly. While the Amendment was defeated, impressions were made that helped later to make Texas almost dry by local option. It will yet help to put her in the dry column.

In the early nineties, Baptists of Texas were beset with critics of Mission Boards and methods of work. No man got into the breech with more heroism, and no man did more to route the enemy through reason and religion, than Dr. B. H. Carroll.

* Sermon: "My Infidelity and What Became of It."

As Texas became settled by people from everywhere, some real estate and corner lot schools, called Christian and Baptist, sprang up wherever a misguided citizenship would allow. Some by apparent accident were schools that ought to be, while others chartered with the best of motives died with sheer inanition. All of the survivors were in debt. There was no headship or clearing house of information about schools. Baylor University at Waco and Baylor College for Women at Belton, suffered as attention and loyalty of Baptists were directed elsewhere. Dr. Carroll saw the trouble and hurried to the relief. In 1899, he resigned his pastorate at Waco and became Secretary of the Texas Baptist Education Commission. This educational leadership was not new to him, for on leave of absence from his church, in 1892, he with the then young preacher, Geo. W. Truett, afterwards an A. B. graduate from Baylor, went the State over for Baptist money to pay a crushing debt on the University.

One cannot discuss the life and works of Dr. Carroll without considering the evolution of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

For all the years of the life of Baylor University, Dr. William Cary Crane and Dr. R. C. Burleson, its presidents, had lectured now and then on the Bible. From 1893-95, Dr. Carroll, though pastor, is scheduled as lecturer in "The Department of Bible Teaching" out of school hours, for which no credits were given toward graduation. From 1895-99, while yet pastor at Waco, he is scheduled in the catalogue of Baylor as "Principal of the Bible Department." It was during this period that one of Baylor's most scholarly sons, John S. Tanner, returned from his professional studies in the Seminary at Louisville and the University of Chicago, to become a Bible teacher in Baylor University. His heart was aflame with desire to help educate young preachers. He promoted the Baylor University Summer Bible

School from 1897-00, going on to his eternal reward before the summer of 1901. The enrollment in this Summer Bible School had reached two hundred.

Dr. Carroll stimulated by the work of the young professor was gripped with the further possibilities of Bible teaching in Baylor. Even while in the field as Secretary of the Education Commission, he retained his catalogue connection with the University and was called "Principal of the Bible School." From 1902-05, he was called "Dean of the Bible School," giving all his time to his class lectures and studies, being paid a full salary by the institution.

In the summer of 1905, there developed in his own mind a vision of a Seminary for the Southwest. The Texas Baptist State Convention yielded to his judgment and there was born the "Baylor University Theological Seminary," of which he was Dean. This relation continued till 1907, the degree students in Theology receiving their diplomas from the University.

After discussion an agreement was reached by the State Convention, in 1907, that the Baylor Seminary should have a separate charter existence with a different habitat. The name was changed to The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Dr. Carroll was elected its first president. The new institution remained in the buildings of Baylor University at Waco till 1910, when it moved to its own plant in Fort Worth.

Dr. Carroll was tall as the proverbial Indian. His beard was long, reaching, when he stood, to the third button on his vest. He never entered a crowd, a car or a building without attracting attention. He could not help it. As he walked the streets it was with imperial dignity, rarely stopping or being stopped. His deafness made it difficult to talk to him and often people reluctantly let him go by without a word.

He was an aristocrat. If he had been of royal blood, sitting or moving among his subjects, he would have

ruled with master strokes and absolute assurance. His personality would have shut out all kinglets. Having been a just man his rule would have been righteous and his laws benevolent. In this way his masterful decrees would have won his subjects to him, and it is not doubted that at his clarion call they would have fought valiantly for his cause wherever or whenever he directed.

He acted not on impulse, but on judgment. He counted his judgments as convictions and his convictions as the voice of God. Having God's voice on his side, as he thought, one could not argue with him with any hope of convincing him of any error. Notwithstanding this, he was a Baptist in religion and a Democrat in politics. Therefore, on principle he yielded to majorities, yet continued to hold to the rightfulness of his own views and to the fact that time would prove their correctness.

As much as it may seem a contradiction to what has been said above about his lofty independence in thought and carriage, it can be said truthfully that he was one of the most approachable men. No student, or church member, or citizen in distress, or person, however humble, ever appealed for audience in vain. He was ready to lay down his books or matters of great weight in order, *e. g.*, to help a student struggling with an oration or debate. Moreover, it was never done impatiently nor yet in a perfunctory manner. It is doubted that any searcher for help ever left his study without praise for his kindness and a distinct joy in having discovered such a genuine comradeship.

He could do only one thing at a time. When he was pastor, preaching and church work occupied his time and mind. It was to him the best way to serve the Master. When he was Education Secretary, cultured citizenship trained in Christian schools towered above everything else in his thinking. For a time he was obsessed with the importance of education. When he began to teach the Bible, particularly to preachers, all

other things not germane to this work paled into insignificance. Of course, he did not doubt the efficacy of other forms of Christian activity than those he was doing. It merely meant that the work must be done by others. If emergencies should arise, then he would promptly get into the lead of thinking and of hardship and of service. He never dodged following his convictions.

He was not a really great teacher. This statement will astonish those who did not know him, and certainly will some who did know him. He was a great lecturer, not a quiz master. He taught best from the lecture platform or the single student in private conversation. Some of the students did his work; others worked the same who were faithful. His method of printed questions, to be answered out of class, made this possible. He was over-trustful of the originality of some. His own great soul never dreamed that any student of his could or would ever rely for answers on the work of others. The greatness of the man as a preacher caused most of the members of his classes to take notice of all that he said, and they did his assignments with a feeling that what he said could not be wrong and that whoever doubted it was a heretic. Of course, it is not here contended that he was small in the class-room. Indeed he was not small anywhere. He was simply not great as a teacher in comparison to his record as a preacher, whose pre-eminence time will not dim.

This sketch closes as it began: He was a remarkable man judged by any standard.