

THE LIFE
OF
REV. JAMES O'KELLY
AND
THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN
CHURCH IN THE SOUTH

BY
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SUFFOLK, VIRGINIA

1910
EDWARDS & BROUGHTON PRINTING COMPANY
RALEIGH, N. C.

*Presented by
L. O. Kelly
Sept 1891*

L.O.

28976
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BOOKSTACKS OFFICE

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INTRODUCTION

Biography is the most interesting and instructive form of history because it illumines the page with personal motives, and incidents.

The author of this "Life of James O'Kelly," W. E. MacClenny, has rendered valuable service to his church and future generations by gathering from many sources, by painstaking and expensive research, a large fund of information and weaving it into a literary fabric that will endure.

Much of the information will be new to most readers and a juster interpretation of history than anything before written. It removes from the fair name of this great reformer the aspersions cast upon him in the heat and excitement of the times that colored men's feelings and language. The calmer feelings and words of Coke and Asbury toward the close of their lives make amends for any injustice of earlier years when debate and ambition controlled their attitude toward O'Kelly.

The author's statement, "that he began to gather this information and then decided to give it to others," contains the growth and output of generous investigation. Those who improve their own minds and hearts become benefactors in the line of their tastes and efforts. In this field of research the author has scanned many a dusty page, turned over many a heap of rubbish, consulted many a record and many relatives and friends of this unique man, and his unique church, and he has thus brought into one small volume a mass of facts, cast light upon them, and thus made a contribution not only to the true history of the Christian Church, but the his-

the counties on the North Carolina line. The tradition in the O'Kelly family is that he and his wife, Miss Elizabeth Meeks, came from Virginia, and *lived* in the same neighborhood before their marriage. The maternal name of Meeks is still preserved occasionally among the descendants.

"Notwithstanding the fact that tradition assigns Mecklenburg County, Virginia, as the place of his nativity, yet there are facts that can not be doubted which point to Wake County, North Carolina, quite as strongly perhaps, which I will briefly state, and the facts themselves will appear more fully hereafter, viz: 1st. He was a resident of North Carolina through the Revolutionary period; 2a, he stood his draft repeatedly, and once put in a substitute, and once served on post himself" (We will say in passing, however, that we have not been able to find his name on the rosters of the ten North Carolina regiments that served in that war. The name of Patrick O'Kelly alone appears in the Revolutionary records of North Carolina for 1777, and his name was omitted in September, 1778. This we gleaned from the *North Carolina State Papers*, edited by Judge Walter Clark); "3d, his ministerial labors were entirely in North Carolina during the Revolution; 4th, to prove his devotion to Whiggery in his *Apology* he continually alludes to his early life, and also his adventures in the Revolution, and to distinguished persons in North Carolina. He never spoke well of England nor anything English."

Until a few years ago it was commonly believed that Rev. James O'Kelly was a schoolmate of Patrick Henry

and Thomas Jefferson, an affirmation formerly often made from pulpit and press. However, it is to be doubted if he attended college in America, as his name does not appear in the register of matriculates in William and Mary, Princeton, or Harvard. He did not attend Christ's College, Cambridge, England, where the Wesleys were educated.*

After a most careful investigation and much research, the writer is of the opinion that James O'Kelly was born in Ireland, and spent the early part of his life in that country.

In Burke's *Landed Gentry of England and Ireland* (1868),† we find a sketch of the lineage of the O'Kelly family of Ireland. From this we learn that Cellach, Chief of Hy Many, and fourteenth in the descent from Main Mor, was the progenitor from whom the O'Kellys derive their surname. The annals of the family go back as far as 960 A. D., and they were represented in 1863 by Dennis H. Kelly, Esq., of Castle Kelly, County Rosecommon, Ireland. (In some instances the "O'" has been dropped, while in others it is still retained.)

Diarmaid O'Kelly, who is stated to have been Prince of Hy Many for sixty years, was the father of Conchobhar Moennaighe O'Kelly, stated to have been Prince, or Arch Chief, of Hy Many for forty years, and, according to *The Annals of the Four Masters*, he built O'Kelly's Church at Clanmoenoise in the year 1167.

* From letters of officers of these institutions in the writer's possession.

† A copy in the Carnegie Library, Norfolk, Virginia.

Another member of the family in prominence from 1861 to 1870 was Cornelius Joseph O'Kelly, Esq., of Gallagher Castle, County Galway, Ireland. He was magistrate for the County of Galway, and High Sheriff in 1861. Later he was Lord, Manor of Gallagher, and Count of the Holy Roman Empire.

Ralph O'Kelly is mentioned as Archbishop of Cashell, Ireland, and also as the author of a book of common law, and of one, or, as some say, seven books of *Familiar Letters*, and other works, none of which are now extant.

William O'Kelly, of Athlone, was chief of Hy Many, and after King Edward's accession to the Crown, his Majesty, by letter to the L. D. St. Ledger, dated at Greenwich, 7th April, 1547, directed that "in respect of his faithful and diligent service, done to his father and himself, he would be one of his Privy Council. In which year the Castle of Athlone, at his Motion and Instigation, being repaired and garrisoned by order of the Council, the Charge thereof was committed to him, which he most effectually performed, notwithstanding the opposition of Dominick O'Kelly, and other powerful chiefs in Connaught. Letters of protection were granted MacMurrough, O'Kelly, and O'MeLaglin."

From the above it is evident that the subject of our sketch was a man of high birth on his paternal side, the family having been identified with the vicinity of Gallagher for ages.

On his maternal side it was equally as good, and several members of the family took Holy Orders. In Betham's *Baronetage of England With General Tables*, Vol. 3, page 124, mention is made of William O'Kelly

of the Chetewode family, and on page 126, under twenty-one of the family line we find "James, who went to Virginia." (This James O'Kelly we have all right to believe was the subject of our sketch, although it has no infallible proof.) Thus we gather that he was a grandson of John Chetewode, who was related to John Leech, of Mapwich.*

John Chetewode, James O'Kelly's maternal grandfather, took Holy Orders and was a Doctor of Divinity, and one of his descendants was later a minister and stationed near Cork, Ireland, while another was a Captain in the Thirty-third regiment, in recent years.

From the above it is seen that James O'Kelly's ancestors on one side were church builders, and on the other side, preachers, or priests, as they were called. We learn that he was connected with some of the best families of both England and Ireland. Among these may be mentioned the Drewrys, the Knightlys, the Shutes, and others.

In view of the above facts, and the early traditions of the Christians, we come to this conclusion: James O'Kelly was born and educated in Ireland, came to America in early life, seems to have settled near Moring's Post-office, in Surry County, Virginia, and lived there for some time before he moved to North Carolina. Rev. W. G. Clements, Morrisville, North Carolina, relates the following: "It has been my pleasure to talk with Mr. Moring, Mr. J. J. Jinks, and Rev. Chastine Allen. All these had heard O'Kelly preach and Rev.

* A copy of Betham's work in the North Carolina State Library.

Chastine Allen rode and preached with O'Kelly, and *these all* said that he moved from Surry County, Virginia, to Chatham County, North Carolina. There is a tradition that James O'Kelly, when a young man, worked his way to this country from Ireland on a ship and soon settled in Virginia."

While living in Virginia it is likely that he made the acquaintance of Mr. Henry and Mr. Jefferson. Here, too, he doubtless met Elizabeth Meeks, his future wife. The Meeks family first settled near Jamestown, Virginia, in the early days of the colony, and later began to move southward. It seems that the Meekses and the O'Kellys have been neighbors for some time, for J. T. Meeks, now of Concord, North Carolina, but a native of Banks County, Georgia, relates that his grandparents came from Virginia, and that his grandfather, on his mother's side, was named Milton O'Kelly, and we are confident that these are some of the same family. A few years ago there was a record of the Meeks family, from the time of settlement in Virginia to that date, in possession of one of the descendants in Banks County, Georgia.*

As to James O'Kelly's educational advantages, history seems to be almost silent. If he was born in Ireland, as facts indicate, he may have attended Trinity College, Dublin. At any rate, from his work, in later life, we are led to believe that he was educated for his time, and was perhaps a good Greek scholar, and in ad-

* This is further confirmed by the fact that Revs. John P. O'Kelly, James O'Kelly, and Francis D. O'Kelly were members of the Georgia and Alabama Conference, in 1851. They seem to have lived in Baldwin County, Georgia.

dition to this, was of powerful natural ability. He says in Chapter 28 of his *Apology*, while speaking of Bishop Asbury's educational advantages, "while he (Asbury) was an utter stranger to a classical education, being like me born of poor parentage." This shows that Mr. O'Kelly did not regard himself as a good scholar. His work, *Letters from Heaven Consulted*, published in Hillsborough, North Carolina, in 1822, is spoken of in the following way by critics: "The literary ability of this is very fair."

There is evidence in some parts of his *Apology* that he had a fair knowledge of the Greek and the Latin languages, and that he was very well versed in general history.

Tradition tells that in his early life he was a great champion fighter and fiddler. As the Irish are particularly fond of fighting, we think it quite probable, that James O'Kelly, like Philip Embury, one of the Irishmen (Robert Strawbridge being the other), who became the first local Methodist preachers in America, grew up without much thought of religion, and in his early days enjoyed all the sports of such a life.

"As to the date of his marriage to Elizabeth Meeks, who through his long and checkered life shared his joys and divided his sorrows, we have no definite information. Tradition is dumb, except that they knew each other long before marriage. Certain it is they were married not very late in life; Mr. O'Kelly being under twenty-five and she under twenty. This would put the date of their marriage about 1760.*"

* This is from Maj. York's sketch.

To this union two sons were born, John and William. As John's name is mentioned first in the will of his father we presume that he was the older. Again, as only two sons were mentioned in the will we presume that these were all the children he had. William O'Kelly was born April 29th, 1763. To the influence of his son, his father perhaps owes his prominence to-day. He was named William O'Kelly, after his grandfather O'Kelly.

When the Methodist preachers came into the Cedar Creek country, Elizabeth O'Kelly, his wife, was at once converted and joined the society. His son, William O'Kelly, then only twelve years old, likewise was converted and joined, and was instrumental in his father's conversion. He felt even at that young age that he ought to preach. He conversed with his father who dissuaded him from it, alleging his great youth, and that he might in the heat and ardor of youth fall from such a high station. William desisted, went up into the New Hope valley in Chatham County, to a Methodist preaching place somewhere on the hill where Mr. Thomas J. Herndon now resides, married Miss Mary E. Merritt, a Methodist lady, March 27, 1787, and settled there. William did not become a preacher, but he did become a state representative, and went from Chatham County to the North Carolina Legislature as early as 1805, and was there in 1812, 1814, 1815, and 1816. In 1818 he was State Senator from his district.

In the summer of 1774 (?) James O'Kelly turned his attention to religious matters, and was soon converted. In regard to this we quote the following from his own account:

"My first mental alarm was not through the blessed means of preaching; but by the kind illuminations of the invisible Holy Spirit. I saw by this Divine light, that I was without God and destitute of any reasonable hope in my present state.

"Now being moved by faith through fear, I attempted to flee the wrath to come, and seek a place of refuge!

"But, O, what violent opposition did I meet with! After many sorrowful months I formed one resolution, with a low cadence of voice, and fearful apprehension, I ventured like Queen Esther who approached the king's presence, at the risk of her life, so I ventured in a way of prayer, to speak to the Almighty! With the Bible in my hand, I besought the Lord to help me, and declaring that during life, that sacred Book should be my guide, and at the close, if I sunk to perdition, said I, Just, O God! yet dreadful! but if thy clemency and divine goodness should at last rescue me from the jaws of a burning hell, this miracle of grace shall be gratefully remembered by me, a moment of mercy!

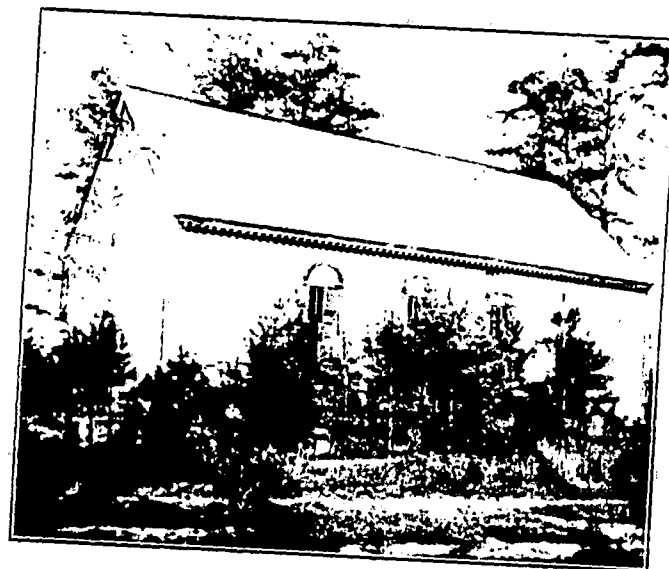
"The things which followed, which were such things as belong to my peace, the inexpressible change, the instantaneous cure, I am incapable of speaking; but O, my soul was lodged in Immanuel's breast, the city of refuge; the ark of my rest.

"And in those days God sent preachers into our dark regions who were burning and shining lights. They came to us under the direction of John Wesley, whose name to me is of precious memory. His writings magnified the Bible and gave it preference and honor. He declared he regarded the authority of no writings but

the inspired. He urged the sufficiency of the Scripture for faith and practice, saying, 'We will be downright Christians.' This doctrine pleased me and so did the conduct of the holy preachers. I entered the connection, and soon entered the list among the traveling ministers, where I labored both day and night, pleading with God for that connection in particular, and the world in general."

It is not known at this time where he first met the Methodist preachers. It may have been in Virginia as we are not informed as to the date of his removal to North Carolina.

Immediately after his conversion everything irreligious was abandoned, his iron will knowing no half-way ground, and he deliberately laid his fiddle on a huge fire and burned it. Whatever he did, he wished to do well.



A TYPICAL COLONIAL CHURCH

Old Cypress Church, about three miles from Morings P. O., Surry County, Va., where Rev. James O'Kelly perhaps began to preach.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY MINISTRY—CONDITIONS, IN VIRGINIA, OF CHURCH AND STATE AT THIS PERIOD—FIRST METH- ODIST MINISTERS VISIT THE STATE.

All Methodist historians agree that O'Kelly began his ministerial career at an early age, having been converted while young. *Encyclopedia of Methodism*, page 678, says he began to preach about the middle of the Revolutionary War. He must not have been as young as they supposed, for he was about thirty-nine years old when he was converted. As to what trade or occupation he followed before he was converted and began to preach, history is silent. From facts recently discovered it may have been that he was a man of some means, and did not have to earn his bread "in the sweat of his face."

When and where he preached his first sermon is not known. The first mention we have of his preaching in Methodist history was in an old colonial church in southern Virginia, about the middle of the Revolutionary War, or the year 1777.* The *Christian Sun* of January 7, 1886, in an article by Maj. R. W. York, says: "Now it was January 2d, 1775, that James O'Kelly was licensed to preach, or authorized to preach, and sent out, one of that great immortal band of Methodist lay preachers, but he was not ordained either deacon, or priest (elder). No Episcopal bishop would

* McClintock and Strong's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, etc., under "James O'Kelly."

have ordained him to either order while being a Methodist. Methodism was under ban in the Established Church. One pious and godly (Devereux) Jarratt is mentioned in all Methodist histories in Virginia. He made stated visits among the Methodists for the purpose of baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper. He traveled with Mr. O'Kelly to his societies for this purpose. Now, let the historic fact be remembered that from January 2, 1775, when Mr. O'Kelly became a Methodist lay preacher, to the Christmas Conference of 1784, at Baltimore, Maryland, nearly ten years, he was a layman, a member of the Episcopal Church, as it was commonly called. Then it was at this conference that Mr. O'Kelly ceased to be a layman, and a lay-preacher, and was ordained severally deacon, and elder by Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D."*

We take the above to be correct, since Major York had in his possession, in 1876, the prayer-book presented to James O'Kelly when he was ordained to preach January 2, 1785. In this prayer-book, January 2, 1775, was given as the date when he began to preach, as a lay-preacher, from which it is evident that he had been preaching, in Virginia and North Carolina, a little more than three years before he was mentioned in the "Minutes" of the Methodist Conference at Leesburg, Virginia, in 1778.

One writer noticing this early work of James O'Kelly says: "The people flocked to hear him, and great was the work of God under his powerful exhortations and earnest prayers. The parish minister was greatly en-

* See a copy of this paper in Library of Elon College, N. C.

raged that an upstart Methodist preacher should have the temerity to preach in his chapel, and what was worse, that he should attract more people than the regular successor of the apostles. In spite of the curate's violent opposition he (O'Kelly) continued to preach in the chapel for more than a year with increasing success. The next year he joined "Asbury's Ironsides."*

From his first appearance in public, in Virginia, he showed more than ordinary ability, and soon took a high position in the ranks of Methodism.

Before proceeding further it seems well to take a bird's-eye view of conditions existing in the colony at this time, in order that we may the more fully understand some of the difficulties O'Kelly and his associates had to overcome in establishing Methodism on Virginia soil. The conditions are well portrayed in a letter written in 1774 by Hon. James Madison, who afterwards became president of the United States. Says he: "Poverty and luxury prevailed among all sects; pride, ignorance and knavery among the priesthood, and vice and wickedness among the laity. That is bad enough, but it is not the worst I have to tell you. That diabolical, hell-conceived principle of persecution rages among some, and to their eternal infamy, the clergy furnish their quota of imps for such purposes. There are at this time in the adjacent counties, not less than five or six well-meaning persons in close jail for publishing their religious sentiments, which, in the main are very orthodox." He further says: "I have neither pa-

* See McClintock and Strong's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, under "James O'Kelly"; also Bennett's *Memorials of Methodism in Virginia*.

"The Lord of the harvest soon called forth a great company of preachers from the woods of Columbia; from their shops and farms. The Lord gave the word, and great was the company of the preachers. They ran to and fro, and knowledge increased.

"In those days the people of America groaned, by reason of oppression, they prayed the King of Britain to ease their burden, but the King consulted the young men, and refused to remove any of their burdens, but sent his army and shot the people of Columbia (America). The people revolted, and returned the flaming compliment. The King's people smote us hip and thigh, but the resolute Franks came over in ships, and helped us; then we prevailed."

Let us now take up the thread of Methodist history in Virginia and North Carolina. The first Methodist preacher to reach Virginia was Rev. Robert Williams, who landed in Norfolk early in the year 1772, and preached his first sermon from the old court-house door. This was only a short time after Rev. Francis Asbury had landed at Philadelphia, October 27, 1771. Rev. Richard Wright, who was appointed with Rev. Francis Asbury, at the Bristol (England) Conference to come to America in 1771, was stationed in Norfolk in 1773. In the fall of 1772 Williams and Rev. William Waters came together, and Waters wrote: "But, alas! we found very few in the course of our 300 mile journey who knew anything experimentally about the Lord Jesus Christ, or the power of His grace." So far as we know Mr. Williams was the first man to circulate Methodist tracts in Virginia. He printed and circulated John Wesley's sermons.

From this time the Wesleyan Societies in Virginia began to increase in numbers, and the ministry was steadily reinforced by young native itinerants. From the effects of these Methodist revivals many young men, whose hearts had been touched by the love of God, would enter the traveling connection. Mr. Wesley, however, never thought of establishing a new church either in England or America, but endeavored to purify the old form of worship. He lived and died an Episcopalian, and wished all the members of his societies in England, Ireland and America to do the same. And when the societies in America were organized as "The Methodist Episcopal Church" in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1784, it was without the direction of John Wesley. In fact Henry Moore says: "Mr. Wesley never gave his sanction to any of these things: nor was he the author of one line of all that Dr. Coke published in America on this subject."*

When Mr. O'Kelly began to preach, members of the societies regarded themselves as a part of the Established Church, seeking a higher religious life. In the year 1779, one year after James O'Kelly remained on trial in Virginia, there was not a Methodist preacher from Rev. Francis Asbury down who could administer the Holy Sacrament, celebrate the rites of matrimony, baptize a child, or perform the burial rites. These rites they were compelled to seek at the hands of the Episcopal clergy. But many of these were, indeed, men of loose principles and bad habits. In many

* See Moore's *Life of Wesley, American Edition*, Vol. I, page 279.

parishes the immorality of the ministers was notorious. Instead of being models of piety, they were examples of dissoluteness; instead of reverence, they received the ridicule of the people. When a body of men professing to be ministers of Christ, break from all restraints of gospel principles, and attend horse races, cock fights, fox hunts; when they drink wine to excess, sit up all night at card parties, and ridicule experimental religion as bigotry and superstition, can it be thought strange that a pious mind should revolt against such a class, and spurn them as spiritual guides, although they may have felt the pressure of prelatic hands, and stood in the link of a fancied succession? Dr. Hawks, in describing the conditions of the times, says: "As a body the clergy were anything but invulnerable." Drinking was one of the most common faults of the Episcopal clergy of the times, one instance being recorded where a clergyman was arrested for disturbing the public peace, and taken before a magistrate in the dead hours of the night, was fined and sent home. Another would go to his church and preach and then go to the home of one of his parishioners and drink so much brandy that he would have to be put in his gig and tied in and a servant sent along to lead his horse home.

Such were some of the conditions in Virginia and North Carolina when James O'Kelly began to preach, not to establish a new church, but to save souls from perdition. And further—

From the above it is seen that O'Kelly began to preach, not as a Methodist, as we now know that denomination, but as an Episcopalian, and a member of John

Wesley's societies, pleading for a purer and higher religious life than was generally taught from the Established pulpit. Preachers of this class usually met with much opposition, and as time went on the relations between the Established Church and the Wesleyan societies became more and more strained, and after the close of the Revolutionary War, all saw that it was only a question of time when the two would separate. As we have seen, Mr. O'Kelly was credited with having joined "Asbury's Ironsides" in 1778, and from that time we have a fairly good record of him, and his work, in the Methodist Conference of Virginia, until the year 1792, when he withdrew from the ranks of Methodism and began to organize the Christian Church.

CHAPTER III.

HIS WORK AS AN ITINERANT IN THE METHODIST SOCIETIES IN VIRGINIA—A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF METHODIST HISTORY IN AMERICA—THE LEESBURG AND FLUVANNA CONFERENCES.

We come now to O'Kelly's work as a Methodist lay preacher in Virginia, and in the border counties of North Carolina. As has been previously noted, he remained on trial at the Methodist Conference that met at Leesburg, Virginia, May 19, 1778, and became an assistant in that body. This was only six years after the first Methodist sermon had been delivered in the colony, and about seven years after Rev. Francis Asbury came over as a missionary to the societies in the American forests. All the English preachers, save Mr. Asbury, had returned to England, and he was in seclusion at Judge White's in Delaware, on account of the Revolutionary War. Rev. William Waters presided at this Leesburg Conference, he being the oldest native itinerant, and he it was, perhaps, who assigned Rev. James O'Kelly to his work. Fortunately, we have learned something of the nature of his work for that year. In the *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. 15, published in 1792, in London, a Mr. Allen (perhaps Rev. John Allen) has this to say in regard to O'Kelly's work in 1778: "In May, 1778, I began to preach the gospel. During the summer I preached only about home; but being earnestly pressed by the circuit preachers to travel, after many sore conflicts, I consented to ride in New Hope

Circuit in North Carolina, including my own place and some people in Wake County. During the winter we had considerable work in the circuit; Brother James O'Kelly traveled as my assistant, whose labors were greatly owned of God; numbers joined our societies, and many professed faith in the Redeemer."

In regard to the withdrawal of the English preachers when the war broke out, Mr. O'Kelly has this to say: "Those preachers who came over the salt water, some of whom conscientiously refused to qualify as American citizens, could not walk at large; therefore there appeared a kind of separation between the Northern preachers, and those in the South. And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring among the people and the Southern preachers, with respect to the ordinances: for the old church had corrupted herself."

If we glance at the events that had transpired in Methodist history just prior to this time we will find some of the causes that gave rise to the O'Kelly movement fourteen years later.*

As early as December, 1772, at a quarterly meeting in Harford County, Maryland, the sacramental question was discussed, and Mr. Asbury says: "Brother Strawbridge pleaded much for the ordinances, and so did the people, who appeared to be much biased by him. I told them I would not agree to it at that time, and insisted upon our abiding by the rules. But I was obliged to connive at some things for the sake of peace."

* For a full account of this, see Drinkhouse's *History of the Methodist Reform, and the Methodist Protestant Church*.

was either sprinkling, or immersion, as the parent, or adult, might choose. Kneeling was thought to be the most appropriate attitude to take when the Lord's Supper was administered, though it was not compulsory, if any one had objection to that posture. It is more than likely that Mr. O'Kelly played an important part in these movements, for in later life he was a great believer in sprinkling. (In those days it was agreed, and Mr. O'Kelly helped to this agreement, as to what hour a preacher should rise. "All preachers were to make it a matter of conscience to rise at four or five in the morning, and it was declared a shame for a preacher to be in bed at six.")

Some of these measures were not liked by the Northern brethren, who were biased by Rev. Francis Asbury, and it is not unlikely that here is where they got a part of their grudge against James O'Kelly when he took the stand he did a few years later.

Mr. Asbury called a conference at Lovely Lane Chapel, Baltimore, Maryland, April 24, 1780. It was composed of fourteen preachers besides himself. In addition to other resolutions they passed the following: "Does this whole conference disapprove of the steps our brethren have taken in Virginia? Answer: Yes. Do we look upon them no longer as Methodists in connection with Mr. Wesley and us until they come back? Answer: Agreed. What must be the condition of our union with our Virginia brethren? Answer: To suspend all their administrations for one year, and all meet together in Baltimore." Again the few turn out the many.

These extracts are given to show that there were many prominent Methodists who saw the need of reform measures, and that James O'Kelly did not stand alone, but because of his ability and prominence became the champion of these measures.

The years just passed over were turbulent ones in his section, for the War of the Revolution was going on, and was soon to be transferred in large measure to the South. Touching his own experience at this period, Mr. O'Kelly says: "After the itinerant preachers fled from the South, for fear of danger, I labored and traveled from circuit to circuit, in North Carolina, to feed and comfort those poor distressed sheep, left in the wilderness. Philip, whose surname was Bruce, helped me—through great perils. We judged it best, for men in our business, to move as quietly as possible. I was taken prisoner by the Tories, and robbed; I was retaken before day, by Captain Peter Robertson, the great and noted Whig. I was afterward taken prisoner by the British. The chief officer urged me to subject myself to my king, and although I was in his hands I would not yield. He offered to release me if I would solemnly promise not to let any man know, asked or not asked, where the British lay. I refused to do that. Then I was despised, and very near famished for bread. At which time I resolved, through grace, to hold to my integrity till death. My honor, my oath—my soul were at stake; till at last, Providence offered me an opportunity, which I gladly embraced, and narrowly escaped their hands. After these things, I went (not as a prisoner) into General Rutherford's camps, and

there, by the testimony of two worthy gentlemen, viz: Colonel Robertson and Colonel Owens, of Bladen, did I establish my political and civil character. I stood my draft as other men. Once my substitute faithfully served a tour. Once I marched on foot as far as I was able. Which of my accusers have done more?"*

Major R. W. York, in the *Christian Sun*, in 1886, says: James O'Kelly was a Whig among Whigs. Rev. Francis Asbury had been forced into involuntary silence throughout the whole period of the war on account of his suspicion of Toryism."

Another incident that shows O'Kelly's patriotism at this time is given. Governor Swain in communicating to Rev. Dr. Caruthers an account of the Slingsby affair and published in Caruthers's *Old North State*, in 1776, speaks of Mr. O'Kelly as "the young Methodist preacher," and relates the following: "The anecdote of the Methodist preacher, which you wish me to relate, I had from the old gentleman's own lips. Mr. O'Kelly, then a young Methodist preacher, when traveling over the country and preaching, was taken at the house of a friend or an acquaintance, by a small party of Tories. His horse and saddle bags were taken from him, and he was tied to a peach tree. A party of Whigs coming up just at the time, a skirmish ensued; and although he was between the two fires, he was not hurt. Before this skirmish was ended, Colonel Slingsby came up with a larger party of men, and the Whigs were dispersed. Recognizing O'Kelly, the Colonel asked him to preach for them, which he did, and drawing up his men in good

* Chap. 22 of the *Apology*.

order he stood with his head uncovered, during the whole service. Mr. O'Kelly said, when relating this anecdote to me: 'Ah! child, your grandfather was a gentleman.' An old lady who was well acquainted with Mr. O'Kelly, tells me, that the man at whose house he was taken, was also taken, bound to the same tree, and killed in the skirmish. She had heard him relate the incident frequently—I only once." Mr. O'Kelly at the time of the Slingsby affair is mentioned as a young preacher, having been in the ministry only five or six years, but at this time he must have been over forty years old.

This is in striking contrast to the experiences of some of Mr. O'Kelly's brethren, for Dr. Bennett in his *Memorials of Methodism in Virginia*, says: "When the war was brought into Virginia many Methodists were whipped for refusing to bear arms." The spirit of liberty in O'Kelly was too strong for him to refuse the call of patriotism, and no such ignominious punishment as the whipping post could ever have been his portion for refusing to bear arms in behalf of freedom.

ley) of England, suspended his answer till the blessed epoch, or time of peace."

On Saturday, July 8, 1780, at Cypress Chapel, in Nansemond County, Virginia, Rev. James O'Kelly and Mr. Asbury met for the first time for a personal interview. Mr. O'Kelly made a fine impression on Mr. Asbury, who wrote in his "Journal": "He, (James O'Kelly) appeared to be a warm-hearted and good man. James O'Kelly and myself enjoyed and comforted each other. This dear man of God arose at midnight, and prayed very devoutly for me and himself." Mr. O'Kelly seems to have met Mr. Asbury at this point for the purpose of taking him on a visit through his circuit, and on the following day Mr. O'Kelly preached at Green Hills, a place somewhere within a day's journey from Cypress Chapel. His text on this occasion was: "Have ye understood all these things?" Mr. Asbury says: "He raised high and was very affecting, but to little purpose: He was troubled with the people about these times."

For the year 1781 we have no record of his work, in the Methodist histories, but we find that a part of that year's work was recorded in the archives of his country. He says in vindication of his patriotism, that he was a private in the Revolutionary War, was taken prisoner, and resisted bribery, as a bait to disclose information against his country; he marched on foot and was honorably discharged at the close of the war.*

Maj. R. W. York, in the *Christian Sun* of January

* Drinkhouse's *History of the Methodist Reform, and the Methodist Protestant Church*, Vol. 1, p. 454.

7, 1886, says: "He (James O'Kelly) had been in the active ministry during the entire war, and had served as a soldier through two campaigns, besides rendering other independent and hazardous service to the cause."

All this is in striking contrast with the conduct of Mr. Asbury and many others, who either had to return to England, when the war came on, or go into hiding.

The conference for 1782 met at Ellis's preaching House in Sussex County, Virginia, April 17th, and Mr. O'Kelly was stationed for the ensuing year in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, with Thomas S. Chew as a helper. The same day conference met, Mr. Asbury had a conference with James O'Kelly and Philip Bruce. Mr. O'Kelly having just returned from his service in the army, was without a regular appointment, and Mr. Asbury says: "I obtained the promise of Brothers Bruce and O'Kelly to join heartily in our connection." This we need not regard as a change in his opinions in regard to church government, but as a truce for the sake of peace. A paper was prepared at this conference by Mr. Asbury for the preachers to sign, binding themselves to adhere to the "old plan" of Wesley. Most of the preachers present signed this instrument without hesitation, but there was one exception, James O'Kelly. Rev. Devereux Jarratt, who lived in the county of Sussex, administered the communion, he being an Episcopalian.

Rev. John Dickens, by being placed at the head of the Methodist Book Concern, in a very short time became a lifelong friend, and an ardent supporter of Mr. As-

unanimously agreed to submit to John (Wesley) of England in matters of Church Government; but we (O'Kelly and his followers) did not."

Rev. Francis Asbury and Dr. Thomas Coke were elected superintendents of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America. We will again let Mr. O'Kelly tell how it was done: "Thomas and Francis (Coke and Asbury) were our superintendents as President Elders according to John (Wesley's) appointment, but they were not elected by the suffrage of conference, although it is so written in the book of discipline." From this quotation we get an idea of Mr. O'Kelly's views on church government, and we see that he was a firm believer in a republican form, instead of an Episcopal form of church government. This matter of voting was one of the things most dreaded by Mr. Wesley, and he never allowed it. Mr. Asbury did not like it, but James O'Kelly was a firm believer in it. In fact, in 1787 Mr. Wesley advised Dr. Coke to put as few things as possible to vote. Said he: "If you (Dr. Coke,) Brother Asbury and Brother Whatcoat are agreed, it is sufficient."

At this meeting Mr. Asbury was ordained one day a Deacon, the next an Elder, and the third Superintendent by Dr. Coke, assisted by Revs. Richard Whatcoat, Thomas Vasey, and P. W. Otterbein, a minister of the German Church—"The holy, the good Otterbein," as he was called.

On Sunday, January 2, 1785, Rev. James O'Kelly and twelve others of the oldest and most experienced ministers were ordained to the office of Elder in the

Methodist Episcopal Church of America. The ordaining presbytery consisted of the same persons who ordained Mr. Asbury a few days before, except that Mr. Asbury assisted at this ordination. Then and there Mr. O'Kelly ceased to be a member of the Church of England, ceased to be a Methodist lay-preacher, which he had been since January 2, 1775, and became henceforth an Elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church of America.*

In the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church of 1784 there were many dissenters, but they could only oppose under the circumstances, and so a church was organized of *ministers*, by *ministers*, and for *ministers*, with Rev. Francis Asbury at its head in truth if not in form. Freeborn Garrettson, in the North, and James O'Kelly in the South, with a respectable minority, were not satisfied with the form of government adopted.†

Dr. Coke afterwards confessed "our societies would have been a regular Presbyterian Church, but for the steps taken by Mr. Wesley and myself." Thus is shown the strength of the minority.‡

The early Christian writers tell us that Mr. O'Kelly most vigorously opposed the Episcopizing of the Methodist Societies of America at this conference, but his efforts were of no avail. When his preferences failed he did not lose hope, however, and begin to despair, for he

* See Maj. R. W. York's sketch in *The Christian Sun* of 1886.

† Drinkhouse's *History of the Methodist Reform and the Methodist Protestant Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 287-8.

‡ Drinkhouse's *History of the Methodist Reform and the Methodist Protestant Church*, Vol. 1, p. 301.

independent, self-willed, and, as a presiding elder, made himself felt and feared by his subordinates.

We now see that the contention of Dr. E. J. Drinkhouse in his *History of The Methodist Reform and The Methodist Protestant Church*, concerning the Asburyan system of church government, is correct. His contention is "that the system of Mr. Asbury was false to manhood in its natural and inalienable rights; false to New Testament precedents and the apostolic church; false to the equality of the brotherhood, and that priesthood of the people inculcated by the direct precepts and positive implications of the Christian's only Master,—the Lord Jesus Christ."

CHAPTER VI.

O'KELLY'S WORK AS ELDER, THEN AS PRESIDING ELDER IN VIRGINIA AND NORTH CAROLINA—THE COUNCIL—INCIDENTS LEADING UP TO THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF 1792.

In the year 1785 James O'Kelly was an elder with preachers in his charge, his district being composed of Amelia, Bedford and Orange. It is supposed that he received his appointment from the Christmas Conference.

In the year 1786 the Virginia Conference met at Lane's Chapel, in Sussex County, Virginia, April 10, and Mr. O'Kelly's district was composed of Guilford, Halifax and Mecklenburg. (This year Revs. James Haw and Benjamin Ogden were sent to Kentucky as missionaries, but when Mr. O'Kelly withdrew from the Methodists in 1792 they joined him.)

It was during this year that a Sunday school was established by Mr. Asbury at the house of Thomas Crenshaw, in Hanover County, Virginia. This was the first in the New World, and we may believe that Mr. O'Kelly had something to do with preparing the people for this institution, since he had been laboring in this section for some time, and was so well and favorably known. Among the number that attended this school was one colored youth who was converted, and afterwards became a preacher among the blacks.

In 1787 the Virginia Conference met at William White's near Rough Creek, in Charlotte County, Virginia, April 19th, and James O'Kelly, as presiding

elder had charge of Bladen, New River, Tar River, Roanoke, (old spelling Roan Oak), Mecklenburg, Brunswick, Sussex, and Amelia. This year a conference similar to the one of 1784 was called, by Dr. Coke, to meet in Baltimore, Maryland, May 1st. One of the main matters to come before this meeting was the ordination of Rev. Richard Whatcoat to the office of Superintendent. Mr. O'Kelly, in his *Apology*, says that "the matter was opened at the Rough Creek Conference in Virginia, and that he opposed the ordination of Mr. Whatcoat." Continuing, he says: "The chief speakers on the subject were Thomas (Coke) and James (O'Kelly). Francis (Asbury) was opposed to a joint superintendent, yet said but little, for he was a man under authority. Although Thomas (Coke) seemed to be somewhat in conference, it maketh no matter to me, God accepteth no man's person. I spake after this manner; that the free people of America were exceedingly jealous of the growing body of Methodists, because of the European heads. Moreover, I did not consider the person (Rev. Richard Whatcoat) adequate to the task on account of his age, and that also he was a stranger to the wilderness of America, etc. But above all I urged that two heads would produce two bodies. Francis (Asbury) proposed for the Baltimore Conference to decide the dispute, to which we all agreed, and there the motion was lost.

"How cruel, and how false is the prevailing report of my leaving the Episcopal Methodists because I could not obtain the place of a bishop. I deny the charge in the presence of the Lord, and in the face of the world.

"And it came to pass about the year 1787, Francis directed the preachers that whenever they wrote to him, to title him Bishop. They did so, and that was the beginning of our spurious Episcopacy." Rev. John Wesley, in writing to Mr. Asbury, says: "How can you, how dare you suffer yourself to be called a bishop? I shudder, I start, at the very thought. Men may call me a knave, or a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel, and I am content; but they shall never, by my consent, call me a bishop. For my sake, for God's sake, put a full end to this."*

In 1788 at the conference held at Petersburg, Virginia, June 17th, O'Kelly's district was composed of Anson, Bertie, Camden, Portsmouth, Sussex, Brunswick, Amelia, Buckingham, Bedford, Amherst, Orange, Hanover, and Williamsburg. During the last mentioned year Virginia was swept by one of the greatest revivals of religion that was ever known. Mr. O'Kelly has this to say about it: "The pleasure of the Lord still prospered in our hands, most gloriously, indeed. We lengthened our cords but our stakes gave way. These were glorious times for gaining proselytes to God, but the people thus converted, did not prosper, because they were deprived of liberty; being influenced too much by the fear of man."

Another writer in noticing this revival, says: "Such a time for the awakening of sinners was never seen before among the Methodists of America. The work was most powerful in the southern counties of Virginia. It

* *Life of Wesley*, Vol. 11, pp. 285-6, quoted by Dr. Drinkhouse, Vol. 1, p. 350, of his *History of the Methodist Reform and the Methodist Protestant Church*.

broke out about midsummer and continued through the year. The whole country between the Roanoke and the James rivers, and from the mountains to the sea, was swept by the flame of the revival. The strong men in the field were Bruce, O'Kelly, Ogburn, Cox, Easter, and Hull; each a tower of strength. They were men of great powers of endurance, mighty in prayer, full of the Holy Ghost." This is given to show that James O'Kelly was a man of great magnetism and power and was so recognized by his co-laborers at that time.

It is said that he was a man much given to prayer, and that he would often rise at midnight and pour out his soul to God in prayer, using these words: "Give me children, or I die," referring to converts. At this time converts were looked for at every service, and the preachers prayed and preached to this end. (Why was it ever *stopped*?)

Mr. O'Kelly gives us a glimpse of these times in the following words: "And it was so that in those days we knew but little of government; we depended on the goodness and wisdom of the bishop. It hath been said by some, that it would have been well if we had remained ignorant on the subject of church government. Yet I must believe that knowledge is better than ignorance, and light better than darkness.

"In those days the districts were formed in a kind of confederacy, and the bishop was amenable to the districts respecting his conduct. This plan was directed by John (Wesley) of England, I believe."

The Virginia Conference for 1789 met at Petersburg, Virginia, April 28th, and Mr. O'Kelly's district con-

sisted of Amelia, Mecklenburg, Bedford, Orange, Hanover, Williamsburg, Halifax, Cumberland, Brunswick, Greenville, Bertie, Camden, Portsmouth and Sussex. In this year the meeting known in history as the "Council" convened for the first time.

The necessities of the church gave rise to this meeting. It was not convenient for all the preachers to attend one meeting, and as they were then holding many small conferences there seemed to be danger of Methodism falling to pieces unless some central power could be brought about to hold it together. So after mature deliberation the bishops recommended the establishment of a *so-called* representative body, to be composed of the wisest and best men of the church to meet at stated periods for the formation of all needful rules and regulations for the government of the church in its various departments. The meeting was not liked by Mr. O'Kelly, and he has this to say about it:

"Francis (Asbury) informed us of an uncommon and glorious union among the traveling preachers, so that the Millenium was approaching, or fast coming on. Then he proposed that a general conference plan should be established, where all might assemble together at one place.

"This led us straightway into disputations. We raised several objections against his purpose, and our thoughts on such a plan of government were approved of through the districts—the motion was lost, and our objections published. And thus it is written in the minutes for the year 1789, page 12: "Whereas, the holding of general conferences on this extensive continent would

constitution, and during this time there was but one law and that was: *The will of Mr. Francis Asbury*. This Mr. O'Kelly could not endure, for in the heat of the struggle for civil liberty he had shouldered his musket, and fought, and suffered imprisonment in order that he might with others be rid of tyranny and oppression, and now he was not willing to be oppressed in ecclesiastical matters by any man, unless he might have some means of redress.

CHAPTER VII.

O'KELLY IN 1792—A GLANCE AT POLITICAL HISTORY —THE BALTIMORE GENERAL CONFERENCE.

Thus far we have endeavored to give the best account possible of O'Kelly's life and work from 1775 to 1792, in order that it might be seen that James O'Kelly was a man of more than ordinary ability and that the Methodists of Virginia and North Carolina, as well as some in England, so recognized him. And further we have given his history, as extensively as possible, that the reader might see that the cause of his withdrawal was *Governmental*, and not *Doctrinal*, as has been so often alleged.

Mr. O'Kelly had presided over the largest and most influential districts in southern Virginia and North Carolina. He was well known in almost every part of Virginia and in much of North Carolina, and also in Maryland. At this time he seemed to be at the height of his power and influence in the Methodist Episcopal Church of America. Only two men were above him in rank. He was well established in his calling, was a recognized leader in the church and had a good income for a clergyman of his day. At the time at which we have now arrived it seems that he had about conquered all the great obstacles and hindrances that come to a minister. He had convictions of his own as to right and wrong, and was not willing to give these up for any man's opinion. He had lived in an atmosphere in

pressure of those disaffected elements which the "aristocratic system," Dr. Coke's favorite phrase for the policy then prevailing, had fomented, and which had lain dormant for a long time—at least since the General Conference of 1784. The thoughtful laity throughout the connection felt the galling yoke, and were only waiting an opportune time to assert their recognition. This is plain from the large concessions made the laity in the "Republican Methodist Church" as organized by James O'Kelly and his associates, and it can be shown that this was not responsible for the poor success of the Christian Church in its infancy.

Both Mr. Asbury and Mr. O'Kelly at this time were confronted by situations that were perilous in the extreme. Each seemed to have recoiled from the consequences and resorted to pacificatory means of averting a formal division. To show this we will give a quotation from Mr. Asbury's "Journal," Vol. 2, page 148:

"We agreed to let our displeased brethren preach among us and as Mr. O'Kelly is almost worn out the conference acceded to my proposal of giving him his £50 per annum, as when he traveled in the connection, provided he was peaceable, and forbade to excite divisions among the brethren."

At the Conference at Manchester, Virginia, Mr. Asbury left the Methodist pulpits open to him and the money to be given him was as each said for past services. However this was never received. This suggested neutrality did not, could not, last long. Mr. O'Kelly says: "I was quickly shut out of doors; none to publish my appointments, the people warned against hearing me

preach the gospel. This act of cruelty did not satisfy the rage of false zeal, but they fell upon my character, even to cruel reproaches. They picked up and retailed things they can not prove."

At this time Charlotte County, Virginia, was the hot-bed of O'Kellyism. Two meetings of the aggrieved members who sided with their loved elder and leader were held. Bishop Asbury, in his "Journal," Vol. 2, page 160, says: "I heard there was a conference appointed for the followers, or adherents, of James O'Kelly, at Reese Chapel in Charlotte County, Virginia, in 1792, to form what they called a free constitution, and a pure church, and to reject me and my creatures." Perhaps both meetings were held at the same church.*

At one of these meetings the seceders strove hard for union with their Methodist brethren, and even sent John Chapel and E. Almonds "over the great mountains with their petition" to Bishop Asbury for a reunion. Here they only asked for "some amendments." All their efforts were in vain. Mr. O'Kelly himself with others then drew up a very humble petition, pointing out a few of the evils they saw in the government of the Methodists, and prayed for union. "The people were forbidden," Mr. O'Kelly writes, "to sign these petitions,

* This church continued to be a place of worship for the Christians until the year 1879; at that time there were but few members, and they were unable to have regular preaching, the prospects were not good for a live church, and so a resolution was introduced in the North Carolina and Virginia Conference authorizing Hon. John M. Moring to sell the church and lot at Reese Chapel, Charlotte County, Virginia, for the benefit of the said conference.

church government, which came down from heaven, was a republic, (Eph. 11:12,) although 'Christian Church' is the name." *CHRISTIAN*

In doctrine the Christians did not differ from the Methodist societies, but in the matter of church government they did. The whole cause from the beginning had been purely *governmental*, and not *doctrinal*, as some would try to show. Theirs was to be a "Republican"—no slavery—glorious church, free from all the evils of misgovernment. One of their first measures was to enact a leveling law. All preachers were to stand on the same footing. No grades were to be allowed in the ministry. No superiority or subordination was to be known among them. No one was to dictate to the other, and all were to be allowed the liberty of private judgment, so far as it did not conflict with the teachings of the New Testament. The lay members were to be allowed more liberty than they had been under the old system, from which they had separated. They agreed that all their plans and regulations made at their conferences should be merely advisory. Each individual church should call its own pastor, and was to enjoy the greatest possible freedom.

Mr. O'Kelly says: "We very plainly felt the loss of union with our Episcopal brethren. The preachers, especially, were much irritated, as the bitter saying published in their last minutes will show. The words are written thus: 'A few, indeed, who were as great enemies to the civil government under which they lived, as to our discipline, have left us; and now we have not a jarring string among us.' The cruel assertion above

written, is as destitute of truth as of love. We took it into consideration in our last conference, and it was unanimously answered thus: 'It is the unanimous opinion of this conference, that the charge is unjust and cruel; and so far as it applies to us, false.'" Later is given a letter from Mr. O'Kelly in which he answers the charge fully, and so we need only make one or more observations.

Mr. O'Kelly was put down as an enemy to the civil government, but alas, how untrue! During the struggle for independence, James O'Kelly was going from church to church preaching the gospel of peace to the distressed people, standing his draft as other men, serving his country faithfully, at the time that tried men's souls, marching on foot until he was completely worn out, made prisoner, and almost famished for bread because he would not disclose valuable information to the enemy. Escaping the enemy's hands, he again took up arms as a foot soldier, and was honorably discharged at the close of the war. And when the war was over he returned home to help rebuild that which the cruelty of war had destroyed. He once asked his accusers "which of the itinerant men have paid more to the support of government than I have done? Let us proceed to show receipts." And the challenge was never answered.

Compare briefly the career of his accuser. When the Revolutionary War broke out Mr. Asbury went into hiding at Judge White's, in Delaware, for fear of the Americans. Judge White was a Tory and so was Mr. Asbury, and that meant that they were not favorable to the cause of the Americans. When the troublesome

Rev. William Guirey was one of the most talented preachers of the early Christian Church. He was born in 1773, and began preaching in 1792 or 1793, first as an Episcopal minister. He was a trial member of the Methodist Conference of 1795-6. About 1797 he joined the Christians, and was very prominent in the General Meetings up to 1810. When the division of 1810 occurred, on account of baptism, he led the immersion branch, and some say that he called that branch "The Independent Christian Baptist Church." He was the first member of the Christian Church who had done foreign mission work, having traveled and preached in the town of Montego Bay, on the island of Jamaica, in 1794. For this he was placed in a loathsome dungeon, and finally was transported to the United States. After he united with the Christian Church, he traveled from Philadelphia to the southern frontier of Georgia, preaching the Word. In 1811 he lived near Chilesburg, Va. He wrote several pamphlets and books. *The History of The Episcopacy*, of 381 pages, is to this day regarded as a valuable work and good authority. Elsewhere we will see the cause of his separation from Mr. O'Kelly and the effusion branch of the Christians.

Rev. Richard Gunter was brought up in the Baptist Church, but, being opposed to "close communion," left that Church and joined the Christians about 1800. He belonged to the North Carolina Conference, lived near Rev. James O'Kelly, and labored in the new church for about thirty years.

Rev. Mr. Hafferty, of North Carolina, is said to

have first suggested the platform, "The Bible alone for the Rule of Faith and Practice," which was adopted by the Christians in 1794.

Rev. John Hayes, of North Carolina, began preaching among the Methodists. He was present at the Baltimore Conference, and withdrew with Mr. O'Kelly, and it is likely that he was one of those who took the twelve-mile walk "to where they had left their horses." He labored in the North Carolina Conference after its formation.

Rev. T. Morris was an aged man in 1810, and it is likely that he was among the ministers who left the Methodists with Mr. O'Kelly in 1792.

Rev. Clement Nance began to preach among the Methodists of Virginia in 1782, but joined the Christians in 1793, or soon thereafter, and cooperated with O'Kelly, Hackett, Moore, Pendleton, and others in Virginia for about twelve years; then he moved to Kentucky, and joined the Christians there; later he removed to Indiana and became a member of the Indiana Central Conference. When he left Virginia there were Christian churches in Caroline, Halifax, Orange, Amelia, Fairfax, and other counties that could ill afford to lose his services.

Rev. Abel Olive, of North Carolina, was a contemporary of Rev. James O'Kelly. He organized Catawba Springs church in 1803, and moved West in 1807, and continued to preach among the Christians.

Rev. Benjamin Rainey, who lived in what is now Alamance County, North Carolina, was also a co-worker with James O'Kelly from the secession of 1793. He

was the author of *Episcopacy Unmasked*, and a *Pamphlet in Vindication of the Christian Doctrine*. He was regarded as an able exponent of the Christian doctrine, and his Bible, with his texts marked, was in existence in 1906.

Rev. Benjamin Reeves, of North Carolina, began to preach late in life, and was an aged minister in 1800.

Rev. James Haw (or Howe) was one of the first Methodist missionaries to Kentucky, going there in 1784. After the secession of Mr. O'Kelly he joined the Christians and spent the major part of his life as a minister in that denomination. When he withdrew from the Methodists in Kentucky he won over, with one exception, all the Methodist preachers in his county, thus showing that he was a man of great influence.

Rev. James Jackson, of Cumberland County, North Carolina, was among those who seceded from the Methodists in 1792.

Rev. Benjamin Jones joined the Christians before 1800.

Rev. D. W. Kerr, the first editor of the *Christian Sun*, was a companion of Mr. O'Kelly in his later years. He was converted in 1818, and began to preach in 1819. He organized the Wake Forest Pleasant Grove Academy, twelve miles north of Raleigh. Twelve years later he was principal of Junto Academy. He was the man who stood for education in his day, and he now rests in the cemetery at Union, Alamance County, North Carolina.

Rev. William Lanphier, apparently a man of some



REV. DANIEL W. KERR
Founder and First Editor of *The Christian Sun*,
1841-1850.

in Pennsylvania; from the best information I can obtain I suppose there are about 20,000 people in the Southern and Western States who call themselves by the Christian name. Our sentiments on doctrinal points have been sufficiently explained in a pamphlet entitled *An Apology for Renouncing the Jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky, to Which Is Added a Compendious View of the Gospel, Etc.* Those persons who are the authors of this pamphlet have since their separation from the Presbyterians united with us. I believe on this, and every other subject, we are of one mind and of one heart, except it be the subject of baptism. Many of our brethren who were formerly Methodists or Presbyterians are in favor of infant baptism; while myself and several others are of a contrary opinion. I have thought proper to receive baptism by immersion on a profession of faith, and have since my baptism baptized three or four preachers; others fear Methodist reproach, etc. I make this communication that you may know how far we agree and how we differ in sentiment."

From this and other data at hand we can mark out the boundaries of the Christian Church in 1810 about as follows: Beginning at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, go to Pittsburg; thence through the settled portions of Ohio to the Mississippi River; thence down that stream to a point due west from the southern Georgia line; thence east to the Atlantic Ocean, and thence up the coast to New Bern, North Carolina; thence to Cape Henry; thence up the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River to the neighborhood of Washington, D. C., and thence to Philadelphia.

O'KELLY'S CHAPEL, CHATHAM COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA.
Organized in 1794. Not far distant from the O'Kelly Farm and Burial Place.



the early Christian Church was for various reasons poorly preserved.*

Rev. James O'Kelly began his autobiography, but it was not completed at the time of his death. During the war between the States this autobiography was in the possession of Dr. J. M. O'Kelly's father, and the house in which he lived was burned by the Union soldiers, and the manuscript was destroyed. Dr. O'Kelly, of Durham, North Carolina, who is a descendant, says that they now have no record of their noted ancestor. It is said that James O'Kelly had a great many manuscripts in his home at the time of his death, and no doubt they were valuable documents, but his wife had lived in the contention about church government so long, and had heard so much about it, that after his death she said she wanted peace from that question, and so she collected these manuscripts and put fire to them in order that further contention might be avoided. What a pity that so much valuable information, for the future historian, should have been destroyed to accomplish so small an end! Yet such was the case, and perhaps many others have done things of this sort, not thinking what a valuable legacy for the future was being destroyed.

From the best information that we have been able to collect, the records of the early General Meetings of the Christians were not preserved, and they have long since been forgotten, as those who were on the scene of action at that time have gone to give an ac-

* Often the minutes of the General Meetings, as previously stated, were burned before the adjournment.

count of their stewardship, before the great Court of Heaven, and their knowledge has been buried with them. What is known is something like tradition, and has been handed down from generation to generation, and we do not doubt but that much has been omitted, and perhaps much added. But much is plausible and feasible. This we give, hoping that it will help to bring some order from chaos, and that at some future day, a more authentic record will be collected, and given to the reading public.

From the date of their organization at "Old Lebanon," in Surry County, Virginia, it is said that the Christians met each year in a deliberative capacity, and for years these meetings were called "General Meetings," and later, "Union Meetings." Up to the year 1810 it seems that all the Christians, south of the Potomac River, and east of the Alleghany Mountains, held one General Meeting per year. We have been able to locate but few of these meetings. Shortly after the Lebanon Conference, some of the preachers became dissatisfied with the name Christian Church, fearing that they might be understood by that name to condemn other denominations. "They reasoned thus," says one: "If we are the Christian Church it will imply that there are no Christians but our party." Some of their party protested against the name of the denomination, and four of their preachers broke off from the new plan, and united on a plan of their own in Charlotte County, Virginia."* Rev. John Robinson was the leader of this movement, and they again as-

* Jesse Lee's History, p. 206.

The reader will pardon the writer for giving an outline of Church history in this way, but it was thought that it would throw some light on the events of the past.*

*The churches in the Valley of Virginia seemed to become separated from the other branches about the year 1828, and held a conference of their own, and they were on fraternal terms with the Virginia brethren, and also with those in the North, but they seemed to be firmly united with neither.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME INCIDENTS IN O'KELLY'S LATER LIFE AND WORK—HIS PREACHING TOURS—HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH THOMAS JEFFERSON—PREACHES IN WASHINGTON, D. C.—HOW THOMAS JEFFERSON CAME TO BE KNOWN AS AN INFIDEL—O'KELLY'S LAST MEETING WITH BISHOP ASBURY—HIS OPEN DISCUSSIONS—HISTORICAL STATEMENTS OF 1809 AND 1829.

For a number of years, just prior to his death, Mr. O'Kelly lived in Chatham County, North Carolina; his name appearing in the records of the county as early as 1797. He was the owner of some property in that county, and there his family resided, but it seems that he was still a traveling preacher, and from the records of his contemporaries he did a great deal of preaching. Near his old homstead the first new Christian church in the South was organized in 1794. It was named O'Kelly's Chapel after its organizer. This was the same year the Lebanon Conference was held. Mr. O'Kelly began his work at home. How much better it would be for us if we began to do the work that is next to us, instead of trying to reach for something farther off! This church is about eight miles south of Durham, North Carolina.

Rev. James O'Kelly seems to have been a great missionary worker, and did a great deal of traveling in connection with his work. From a deed on record in Chatham County we find that he bought from one John Scott, one acre of land where the Martha's Chapel

church now stands, in 1803, and there the new denomination built a church. We give a sentence from this as showing how devout the fathers were. After describing the piece of land Scott says: "I say I do hereby give, grant and convey the said acre of land with all that appertaineth thereto on the said premises to the said O'Kelly and the Christian Church collectively for the particular purpose of erecting a meeting house to be occupied by way of preaching and explaining the Word of the Lord therein, together with any other part of divine services for the benefit of the settlement, according to the true intent and meaning of these presents."

It is said that O'Kelly's wife would see at times that he was restless, and she would say to him: "Go on and preach, I will attend to home." He would make tours of the early Christian churches, and often preach at private houses when there was no church convenient, and one writer adds that he would often preach for three hours at a time. Often times he would define his plan of Church government. He would start from his home and visit all the churches from there to Petersburg, Virginia; and all those east of that town and Richmond, on what is known as the "Southside" of Virginia, as the churches have always been somewhat numerous in that section. Occasionally he would go up in the mountains, and sometimes as far as Washington, D. C.

It is said that he was an intimate friend of Thomas Jefferson, and as Mr. Jefferson was the leader of Republican ideas in Virginia in politics, and Mr. O'Kelly

in religious thought, it is not strange that they should have been warm friends, and very congenial.

It is highly probable, from what occurred at a later period, that he visited Mr. Jefferson at Monticello on his preaching tours. The story goes thus:

"On one occasion Mr. O'Kelly visited Mr. Jefferson in Washington. The great statesman, knowing of the preacher's ability, obtained the use of the hall of the House of Representatives and invited Mr. O'Kelly to preach. The invitation was, after some consideration, accepted, but to the chagrin of the distinguished host, the preacher fell far below Mr. Jefferson's expectation. Believing this failure did his friend a great injustice, the great political leader insisted on a second effort. Mr. O'Kelly agreed. The appointment was again made, and the people urged to give him another hearing. They did hear him again, and were abundantly repaid, for Mr. O'Kelly preached one of the great sermons of his life, and the host was the most delighted man in the audience. When he had finished Mr. Jefferson arose with tears in his eyes, and said, that while he was no preacher, in his opinion James O'Kelly was one of the greatest preachers living.

"Mr. Jefferson's friendship for Mr. O'Kelly was responsible for the charge that this eminent statesman was an infidel. To this day the facts are but little known to the public, but they are well authenticated. It is known that the charge was laid against Mr. Jefferson, but the cause and the injustice of the charge are little known. Mr. O'Kelly's leadership in

the secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church had made for him many strong enemies, who called him an infidel because of his supposed unfaithfulness to his Church. His enemies pressed this charge against him without specifying its nature, till the impression gained credence that he was an infidel to the Christian faith.

"When Mr. Jefferson boldly showed his friendship for Mr. O'Kelly, it was construed by the enemies of the latter as sympathy for him in his work as a reformer, and at once Mr. Jefferson was charged with being an infidel. His political enemies began to proclaim the charge against him in their efforts to defeat him for the presidency, and in a short time the rumor was generally current among the people. So intense was the feeling thus engendered against him, that in some places, notably in Pennsylvania, the report was believed and it was talked among the people that if Mr. Jefferson should be elected President, he would order all Bibles to be burned throughout the land. An instance, well authenticated, is reported of a Christian mother, who, influenced by this talk against him, on hearing that Mr. Jefferson had been elected President, took her Bible and hid it away, declaring that the infidel President should never burn her Bible. There is good reason to believe that this is the origin of the charge of infidelity against Thomas Jefferson, and though having no foundation, many well informed people are not sure, even to this day, that he was not indeed an enemy to the Christian faith. Of course

neither James O'Kelly, nor Thomas Jefferson was an infidel."*

On one of his preaching tours Mr. O'Kelly was taken very sick near Winchester, Virginia. He and Bishop Asbury had not seen each other for some time, and it so happened that the Bishop was in the same locality at the time. On learning that Mr. O'Kelly was very sick he sent two of his brethren, Reed and Walls, to ask if Mr. O'Kelly would like for him to visit him. The reply was in the affirmative. Here on Monday the 23d of August, 1802, we have an account of the last meeting on earth of these two great men. Mr. Asbury, in his "Journal," Vol. III, page 76, has this to say in regard to the meeting: "We met in peace, and asked of each other's welfare, talked of persons and things indifferently, prayed, and parted in peace. Not a word was said of the troubles of former times. Perhaps this is the last interview we shall have upon the earth." This meeting showed that both of these leaders had great souls within, though differing so much in many matters.

During the last thirty years of his life, Mr. O'Kelly labored constantly to promote the interests of the new Church which he had been instrumental in organizing. In all things he is said to have been a very energetic man, and especially so in the work of the Church. It was difficult to deflect him from any well-fixed purpose. The result was, he usually carried his point. He had great firmness in his purposes, and this is

* The above was given the writer by Dr. J. P. Barrett, editor of the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Dayton, O.

said to be one of the marked characteristics of the O'Kelly family in North Carolina to the present day.

He must have been a man of powerful intellect, for it is said of him that on one occasion he preached five sermons at different places in one day, and none of them bore any sameness. This seems to be a most wonderful thing, for there are but few ministers in any denomination at the present day who would attempt to do that, when helps and commentaries are being published annually by the thousand. Not only did he preach often, but sometimes he met in open discussion the enemies of the Christian Church—for they were many—and he would explain the principles of Church government, and the Biblical doctrines upon which it was founded. In the early days of the Church he often met Rev. Stephen Davis, of Gloucester County, Virginia, in open debate. Mr. Davis was one who withdrew with Mr. O'Kelly in 1792, and then went back to the Methodists to become one of the most bitter enemies of the Christian Church. Not only did Mr. O'Kelly have to preach and organize, but it was a life and death struggle to hold what he had accomplished.*

We find that Bishop Asbury and the strongest and most popular Methodist preachers followed close on his tracks to win back those who had cast their lot with the Christians. In 1805 Mr. Asbury visited Isle of

* To give the reader some idea of the hot persecutions of the early Christians, or O'Kellyites as they were called, we quote from a sketch of the life of Rev. Joseph Thomas: "It was not infrequent that the ministers of other bodies came to oppose and ridicule what they styled this 'rotten Arminian mushroom doctrine which was preached by the tail end of the Methodists, the O'Kellyites.'"

Wight and Nansemond counties, Virginia, and wrote in his "Journal": "A reaction has set in against the O'Kelly movement, as General Wells and family have returned to the Methodists, and Willis Walls is coming back, besides twenty others who left the Methodists." When Rev. Francis Asbury wrote those lines in his "Journal" he little thought that in this neighborhood, and by the people mentioned, or their descendants, there would be a strong Christian Church organized which would live and flourish for many years; but such was the case.

Soon after the organization of the Christian Church in 1794 Mr. John Scarborough Wills, who was an officer in the Revolutionary army, gave the site for a chapel, and a Christian Church was erected near Scott's Factory, about four miles from Smithfield, Isle of Wight County, Virginia. It was named Will's Chapel, in honor of the man who gave the site. This church was ministered to in the early days by Rev. Mills Barrett, and at one time it had about one hundred and twenty-five members. Later it began to decline, but as late as 1840 there was a Sunday School held there. The membership dwindled away, and some went to other churches, and the house decayed. Perhaps Oakland Christian Church may have grown from the seeds planted there.

By some means or other the report of the new organization was carried beyond the mountains, and some ministers, feeling that there was need of a reform in Church government, came over to the denomination. Prominent among these we find the names of

Ogden and Haw, who were among the first missionaries to Kentucky, and it is said that in other localities there were recruits. His opponents say that O'Kelly sowed the seeds of discord broadcast all over the section in which he was so well known, and that it was not without its effect, for the people who were seeking the greatest liberty flocked to his standards, and the new Church, in the face of all the opposition that a strong and well-organized body could bring to bear upon the situation, continued to grow in numbers.

Even when it was known to the world at large that they were gaining as fast as could be expected under the circumstances, the leading Methodist writers and historians circulated reports that they were diminishing. Rev. Jesse Lee, who was the Methodist historian of the time, writing in the year 1809, says: "They (the Christians) have been divided and subdivided till at present it is hard to find two of them that are of the same opinion. There are but a few of them in that part of Virginia where they were the most numerous." From this statement we infer that Lee had closed his eyes to the painful truth to him, and his brethren, or that he had not taken the pains to inform himself thoroughly on the subject, since at that very time the cause was prospering under Mr. O'Kelly's personal leadership. Another writer in 1829 says that the adherents of James O'Kelly, or the Christians, numbered several thousands, and had many ministers, thus showing that there had been a phenomenal growth during these years, or that Mr. Lee was mistaken in his assertion in 1809. We think the evidence strong enough to show he was mistaken.

CHAPTER XIV.

O'KELLY AS AN AUTHOR—SOME OF HIS WORKS.

Mr. O'Kelly was a man who realized the power of the press, and soon after his withdrawal from the Methodists he began to publish books and pamphlets regarding the position of himself and his adherents. In some of these he defended his patriotism and his Christian character. The first seems to have been *The Author's Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Government*. Probably this was first published about 1798, and is commonly called *The Apology*. (Dates are variously given by different writers. According to one he seems to have published his first work prior to July, 1798. The first edition is supposed to have been printed in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.) Before September, 1799, he sent out another, as we learn from Mr. Asbury's "Journal." As several of his works were reprinted, we account for the discrepancy of dates in that way. This book circulated freely both among his own and other people, and we may judge that it was a powerful work, for the Methodist Church is said to have ordered that all that could be got should be burned, and to-day copies of that book are very rare, notwithstanding the fact that it went through several editions; the last record of a republication being in 1830.*

* A copy was kindly loaned the writer by Dr. J. O. Atkinson, Elon College, North Carolina. This was a reprint by Dennis Heartt, Hillsboro, North Carolina, 1829.

CHAPTER XVII.

O'KELLY BEFORE HIS WITHDRAWAL—QUOTATIONS FROM DIFFERENT WRITERS—AFTER THE WITHDRAWAL—MISREPRESENTATIONS—FALSE ACCUSATIONS—O'KELLY IN HISTORY TO-DAY—QUOTATIONS FROM RECENT HISTORIANS—O'KELLY AS HIS OWN WITNESS—LETTERS—DIFFICULTIES IN HIS WAY.

In this chapter it is the purpose to show, first, in what esteem Rev. James O'Kelly was held previous to the Baltimore Conference of 1792 by the Methodists, and to do this we will give several quotations from his contemporaries. Second, we will note what was said of him at the time of his withdrawal, and for some years thereafter. Here we will find the misrepresentations, and evil speeches made against him and his work. Third, we will give quotations from later Methodist writers and historians, to show that the earlier Methodist historians were sadly mistaken in the pictures they gave of the man. We do not condemn any one, but facts will stand for themselves, and the reader may determine for himself what is the truth of the matter.

In studying these bits of history there is an old maxim, the truth of which has impressed itself upon me with great force. It is this: "Circumstances alter cases." Up until 1792 there had been no fault found with O'Kelly and his work. Everything he had done bore the stamp of approval. He was always a power in the field, and one of the bright and shining lights. Let

us see what some of the Methodists have put in print, and left as a heritage for the present and future generations.

One writer says: "James O'Kelly had long lived on the border between Virginia and North Carolina as a circuit preacher and presiding elder. His influence swayed the ministry and people on both sides all along the line. He had been a devout and zealous man, an eloquent preacher and a strenuous Methodist, a tireless laborer, and an heroic opposer of slavery, and enforced the anti-slavery law of the church.*

Mr. Asbury says in his "Journal," volume 1, page 367: "Brother O'Kelly gave us a good sermon from the text, 'But I keep under my body, and bring it under subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway' (1 Cor., 9:27), on April 5, 1764, at Ellis's Chapel, Sussex County, Virginia." On page 384 of the same volume Mr. Asbury says: "Brother O'Kelly let fly at them (about slavery) and they were made mad enough."

His influence was felt everywhere in the section in which he had labored so long, for one writer says: "He was one of the most commanding men of the itinerancy and preached at the Baltimore Conference of 1792, from Luke 18:5, and the power of the Lord attended the word." This was on Sunday afternoon before the "Right of Appeal" was lost the first of the next week. Another writer says: "Mr. O'Kelly had

* His firm opposition to the institution of slavery is one reason why we always believed he was of Irish and not of American birth.

Unitarian in sentiment, and another part being Trinitarian. There was a division in that year in the Christian Church, but it was over the ordinance of Baptism.

Isle of Wight, Va., October 24, 1859.

Bro. Wellons: At your request I will state that I was present in 1810, when a division occurred between the Christians in the South, which led to the organization of the North Carolina and Virginia Conference. It was the second year of my ministry. The cause of the division was the mode and subjects of water baptism and not the introduction of Unitarianism, as has been stated, on the authority of Leonard Prather. To my own certain knowledge *every Christian minister* in the General Meeting of 1810, when the division occurred, was a Trinitarian. I had never then heard the doctrine of the Trinity denied by anybody. The statement made on the authority of Leonard Prather, filled me with astonishment.

Truly yours,

(Signed)

MILLS BARRETT.

Every preacher in the General Meeting at Pine Stake in 1810 a Trinitarian; Rev. James O'Kelly was there; Rev. Mills Barrett, a young man just beginning to preach, having been associated with the leading preachers, and soon to become a leader in the Christian Church, South, yet he had never heard the doctrine of the Trinity denied by any one! Could any one get Unitarian preachers and Unitarian sentiments out of such a gathering?

It is also recorded of Mr. O'Kelly in the year 1810 that he was in conversation with a Unitarian minister, and that Mr. O'Kelly asked him the direct question: "If Jesus Christ were now on earth, and you knew it were he, would you worship him? The minister answered: "No sooner than I would you, for I do not believe he was any more divine." Mr. O'Kelly's reply was, "Then I have no fellowship with you."

The *Methodist Prayer-Book* that was presented to Rev. James O'Kelly when he was ordained to preach was in existence a few years ago. To that he subscribed. No Unitarian could do this. In 1829, three years after the death of Mr. O'Kelly, Mr. A. S. Foreman, of Norfolk County, Virginia, published a pamphlet in which he gave the doctrines held by James O'Kelly and the Christian Church. In this he declared that they are the same in reference to the doctrines of the Trinity as those held by the Methodist Episcopal Church. Mr. Foreman was well acquainted with Revs. James O'Kelly and Rice Haggard, and knew their position. Neither James O'Kelly nor the Church he organized was Unitarian in 1829, and the leaders from that time till now have always stamped as false the report that there was any tinge of Unitarianism in the Christian Church, South.*

The reader has now seen the source of the charge of heresy against Mr. O'Kelly, and the Christian Church, South. He knows by whom it was first circulated.

* The inquiring reader is respectfully referred for further investigation to Rev. W. B. Wellons's pamphlet, *The Christians South Not Unitarian in Sentiment*, published at Suffolk, Va., in 1860. A copy in the writer's possession.

He proclaimed: 'The Father is greater than I,' in a higher state of glory and exaltation! 'I left my glory and became poor, even a servant; took upon me no reputation, even washed my disciples' feet; submitted to the shameful death of the cross, between two noted thieves, in order that my followers might be rich, and glorious in heaven.' It is not to be denied that Jesus received worship, as is due only to God. Brethren, I can assure you that the prophet Isaiah testifies that Jesus is the very God, and there is no God besides. Isaiah 45:23. The word is, 'I am *Deus*.' The prophet spoke by the Spirit of Jesus, if the Apostle Peter is good for this assertion; O hear: 'The Spirit of Christ which was in them.' 1 Peter 1:11. But the second Adam came forth from the bosom of his Father, in possession of eternal life; so came down the Lord from heaven, a quickening Spirit. He is my Lord and my God forever. Amen."*

In addition to the above we give selections from the Hymn Book compiled by himself in 1816 for the use of the Christians.† We do this that the public may see from the man himself what he believed and taught:

Hymn 74, L. M.

ONE GOD OVER ALL.

"The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Is the most high, yet God alone;
The God who formed the heavenly host,
Yet the Creator is but one."

* *The Prospect Before Us*, p. 37 and following.

† From Hymns and Spiritual Songs Designed for the Use of Christians, by James O'Kelly, printed at Raleigh, N. C., from the Minerva Press, by Thomas W. Scott, 1816.

Hymn 91, C. M.

GOD IN CHRIST.

"The great Supreme can be but one,
And Christ in God is he!
The Father dwelling in the Son,
Through all eternity!

"Jesus the Lord is truly God;
The Spirit is the same:
For each impressed the earthly clod,
When from His hand we came."

Hymn 92, C. M.

TO US THERE IS ONE GOD.

"His glorious name we spread abroad,
As He to us revealed;
Believe in Christ, believe in God;
And have your pardon sealed.

"The law of God we all receive,
The law of Christ fulfill;
Obey the Holy Ghost and live;
And thus we do His will!"

From Mr. O'Kelly's *The Divine Oracles Consulted*, we submit the following as a further illustration of his teachings and what he believed respecting the Divinity of Christ: "The divine child growing in favor with God and man may be illustrated as follows: With respect to man, previous to his public ministry, he was much admired for his beauty, his virtue, humility, and wisdom, a display of which, in the twelfth year of his humanity, astonished the great doctors of Jerusalem. Thus the Deity favored the humanity, until the perfect humanity received the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and thus being perfect God and perfect man, he became a full and complete Saviour. He was the great

culated. He has heard the evidence, and the counter-evidence, and we believe that any fair-minded person is convinced that the charge is without any foundation in fact. We have seen that he was true to, and always did preach, the same doctrines as are taught by the Methodist Episcopal Church. His withdrawal was caused by a purely *governmental principle*, his *doctrinal principles* always remained the same.



JAMES O'KELLY MEMORIAL WINDOW
First Christian Church, Greensboro, North Carolina.
Planned by Rev. L. I. Cox.

still believed that truth would finally prevail, and would be recognized by all thinking people.

Even in his extreme old age he seems to have been well preserved in his mental faculties, and tradition says that he would preach for two or three hours at a time. One of his main themes seems to have been "Liberty of Conscience." His will, made the same year in which he died, showed that he was still in full possession of his ever active and powerful mind.

Some years ago it was the privilege of the writer to meet and talk with Mr. Alfred Moring, who was then a very old man, and at that time (1897) he was perhaps the only living man who had heard Mr. O'Kelly preach. At the time Mr. Moring heard him he was a mere boy, and Mr. O'Kelly was a very old man—too old to stand up, and so, like Jesus in the mountains of Judæa, he sat while he preached to the audience. Since studying the subject I have often wished that some one were living who could give us a description of the man's features, and then give us the order of his sermons. Such is not the case, and unless the few scraps of history are soon collected the early history of the Christian Church, and the record of its organizer, will be lost, and coming generations will have poor knowledge of the real history of this Church, and its noble leaders in the early days.

↘ In the early part of the year 1826 Mr. O'Kelly realized that his sun would soon set, and having some property that he wished to dispose of, on the 26th day of April, 1826, he made the following will, which we give in full:

"Will of James O'Kelly, in his own handwriting, to wit:

"In the name of God, Amen. I, James O'Kelly, of Chatham County, State of North Carolina, being in soundness of mind do constitute this my last will and testament, cordially and solemnly according to the true and honest intentions of these premises—First, as to my body and soul, God being the former of my body and Father of my spirit, I surrender them at His call, my body to the earth from whence it came, and my soul to God who gave it, in full assurance of a resurrection and a comfortable hope of acceptance. As to my temporal property it is my will to dispose of it as follows:

"Item. I give and bequeath unto my son, John O'Kelly, five dollars and what he has already received to him and his heirs forever.

"Item. I give and bequeath unto the heirs of my son, William O'Kelly, deceased, ten dollars and what they have already received, to them and their heirs forever.

"Item. I give and bequeath unto my dear and loving wife, Elizabeth O'Kelly, after my just debts are paid, every cent's worth of property of every kind—horses, hogs, cattle, sheep, household and kitchen furniture, plantation, utensils, monies, bonds, notes of hand, to the last cent of property at her own disposal forever. If a free man hath a right to 'do' what he will with his own I constitute this my last will and testament. Moreover, I appoint John Moring, Sen., Executor to this my last will and testament.

"In witness whereof I have set my hand and affixed my seal this 26th day of April, 1826.

"(Signed) JAMES O'KELLY. (Seal.)

"Test:

"John Moring, Jr.

"Willis Moring."

The above instrument was probated at the November term of the Chatham County Court, and recorded.

Although he had been a valiant soldier of the Cross, and had led thousands to the way of life, and had done so much good, yet it was necessary for him to pay the price for having been born mortal. "Pallid death knocks with equal foot at the hovel of the poor and the palace of the rich." On the evening of the 16th of October, 1826, at his home in the northeastern part of Chatham County, North Carolina, the summons came for James O'Kelly to shake off the mortal coil, and go before the Judge of all the earth to give an account of the deeds done in the body. We have not been able to get many of the details regarding his last illness and death. The circumstances connected with, and the direct cause have not been learned, but as he was in his ninety-second year and had led a very strenuous life, we may suppose that he was worn out.

As an appendix to the reprint of Mr. O'Kelly's *Apology* Rev. John P. Lemay, among other things, has this to say: "He (James O'Kelly) departed this life in the triumphs of faith on the evening of the 16th of October, 1826, after a painful and lingering illness which he bore with Christian fortitude and a perfect

resignation to the will of heaven. He was, I learn from a gentleman who had been in the habit of itinerating with him for many years, in the ninety-second year of his age, and had been a minister of the Gospel upwards of fifty years. Not long after embracing religion he became a Methodist traveling preacher, in which capacity he continued until 1793."

He was buried in the family cemetery which was on the farm that he had given to his son, William O'Kelly.

It is recorded that when Mr. O'Kelly's death was announced to Bishop McKendree, he was silent for awhile and then said: "A great man has fallen." He was an admirer of Mr. O'Kelly in his early days, and, at one time, labored with him, as we have seen.

It seems that for some time there was no slab or shaft erected to mark the place where his mortal remains were laid. In the year 1850, at the conference at Union, Alamance County, North Carolina, Revs. George G. Walker, James A. Turner and Dr. E. F. Watson were appointed a committee to have a suitable monument erected at the grave of Mr. O'Kelly, but the work of the committee was not completed until 1854, when the monument was formally unveiled. In this year the North Carolina and Virginia Conferences, embracing the churches in central Virginia and North Carolina, met at O'Kelly's Chapel in Chatham County, North Carolina, and united, taking the name of "The North Carolina and Virginia Conference." This seems to have been some time in the month of October, 1854. Rev. W. B. Wellons, who was a recognized leader in the denomination at that time, was at this meeting, hav-