

THE BIOGRAPHY OF MRS. R. M. NELSON

About four score years ago, John Garland, a native of South Carolina, and Esther Mangum, of North Carolina, married and moved to Little Rock, Arkansas. While living there on a farm, four children were born to them. It was at this place, on September 23, 1863, that Catherine Garland made her advent into what she later found to be a big and varied world.

As one may notice from the date of her birth, she came upon the stage of life during a time of sorrow and hardships; as the only thing that she can recall of her father is seeing him brought into the house on stretchers when he came home, wounded while fighting in one of the battles of the awful Civil War. Faintly mingled with this recollection is a dim scene of his death and funeral. She was lucky indeed that she was too young to realize the plight of a two and a half year old girl who must face the hardships of these Reconstruction days without a father. Lucky too, that a mother still survived to lead her into the way of a pure Christian girlhood; and prepare her for her entry into womanhood, wifehood, and motherhood as a strong, noble character with full strength to resist temptation and rule her own home with a firm hand of love and devotion, a devotion that has followed her through all these years.

The baby child was bitten by a rat and died of the effects a short time afterwards. After the death of her father and baby sister, her mother moved with her three small girls to Memphis, Tennessee. When they arrived in Memphis, they found that their baggage had been broken into and their goods stolen--a distressing experience for a widow with three small children to care for. In

her distress, the mother gave the Mason's distress sign, the father having belonged to that order; so quite readily the good people came to her rescue and they soon had what they needed for comfort and health.

In looking around for a place to stay they were shown a haunted house. None of them were afraid of haunts, but the first prayermeeting night they locked all the doors and all hands went to prayermeeting, but on the return home they found every door wide open; so they got some neighbors to go with them through the house, but found nothing out of place so far as the eye could detect. Apparently nothing inside of the house had been touched, but they decided that they did not care for a haunted house and found living quarters elsewhere.

After remaining in Memphis for two years, they came back to North Carolina, the mother's native home, where a brother-in-law met them at the train and took them to his home in South Carolina, where they visited for a month. In her sister's home was a man who helped do the farm work. A few nights before the folks arrived he had dreamed of meeting a lady leading a little child. So his first sight of the visitors was Mother Garland leading little Catherine by the hand. And in the later years, the man, Eli Waldon, became little Catherine's step-father. He was a very kind gentleman and Catherine loved him very much.

At the end of the visit, the mother took her children out on a farm in Union County, North Carolina, about twelve miles from Monroe. She put the children in school there. The schoolhouse was a small one room log building, having a huge fireplace, and was furnished with slab benches roughly hewn from logs. These benches had no backs and were so high from the floor that the feet of the

little children had to dangle in space.

One day, while sitting quietly studying her lesson, a big snake dropped down from the chimney and raced around the room frightening the children. (Can not you just hear those slates falling to the floor as the children jumped to keep the snake from running across their feet? They used slates then instead of paper.) It was at this same little log school house that Catherine met Robert Nelson, who was destined to win her affection, and there their courtship began. Catherine was a little dainty pretty child much admired by both teacher and pupil, and Robert was the first to fall in love with her. When the teacher would let him go out under the oaks to study his arithmetic he would creep up by the schoolhouse and slyly talk with her through the crack. Those stolen moments finally culminated in a happy union which continued for nearly fifty years.

Although Katie talked to Robert through the crack between the logs, her first invitation for a walk with a boy was while walking home from church one Sunday. A neighbor, Bill Dees, rode up by her, jumped off of his horse and asked for the privilege of "seeing her hone." His request was granted and Katie had her first experience of having "been with a boy." Later there were other suiters to ask the privilege of an evening with her. A Dr. Lackie insisted that she marry him. She "waited" with him at her brother Tom's wedding, but he caused Robert no uneasiness; however, when Frank Richardson, Tom's brother-in-law, appeared on the scene Robert was disturbed and objected seriously to her going with him at all. Frank was the only rival of whom Robert was ever jealous. But in spite of all rivals, Robert won the day and took the prize. When she was sixteen and he, nineteen, they

were married and began life together in a log cabin which was built on a lot of land left him from his father's estate.

Their married life began in a way which was typical of the farming class of that period and of the section of the country. The fields must be cleared; so Robert and Katie worked cutting trees, burning brush, and getting ready for their first crop. How hopefully and happily they toiled on this first mile of married life! In due time little Bessie came along to make the first picture more real and to bind the two more closely in their wedded bliss. Her appearance meant separation for the two for a few days, as Catherine went to her mother's and step-father's in order to have her mother's care during the days when she needed it so much. Oh, the lonely hours for Robert during her absence! He resolved that if they had any more tiny visitors they would have a nurse at the little log cabin, a resolution that he kept all through the years.

The coming of the baby, of course, added its share to the mother's care. But the thrill of the baby's prattle only sweetened the feeling of added cares. Bessie was soon old enough to be crawling around on the floor. But when her mother was away for an hour or so, she soon learned to tie Bessie to the bed post for safety until she could return.

Katie became a Christian in her childhood and joined the Baptist church at Liberty Hill when fourteen years old. She had no tastes for worldly pleasures, such as parties and dancing though Robert liked them in his boyhood days. So when Robert's sister had a memory quilt pieced in his honor, they had a quilting party at his home and invited every girl to the quilting who had pieced a square, and they had a dance in the evening and invited

all the boys. But Catherine refused to remain for the dance, and that proved to be the last dance that Robert ever attended.

Catherine took her rides with the young men on horseback. She wore harriding skirt and had a side saddle. One time in her life she rode behind a cousin of hers. But, she said, she blushingly held on to the saddle instead of holding on to him. Oh, such good times as they had riding horseback! When buggies came they were very expensive and few could own them. Catherine thinks that they were ^{much more} pleasant than riding in cars.

In her early married days she, like all other mothers of her time, had to make the family wardrobe from the raw wool and cotton to the finished garment. When the weather was bad and she could not help Robert in the fields, she would go to the old room in the kitchen and weave the cloth to make the clothes, working often till late. One might card a lot of rolls and the next night spin them; and at odd moments the stockings and socks were knitted. Often she would knit socks and sell them using the money to buy meat. The neighbor women each tried to see who could weave the prettiest piece of cloth or make the loveliest garment.

Catherine worried during the first days of married life. They had an apple orchard and Robert liked his hard cider, and went with a crowd that liked it. She refused to nag at him, but had a certain hour each day to kneel and pray that the Lord would rescue him. Soon he was under conviction. She saw that there was something wrong. He did not tell her what it was, but went out in the grove to pray and was saved. Very soon a preacher, Jim Little, asked him to go and conduct prayer meeting for him, as he was called away. Robert thought he couldn't, but he had promised to do as the Lord would have him to do; so he went. The boys were

there and made fun of it, but he went through with it and lived to see all of his chums saved.

His ideas of worship differed from the Baptist Church; so he took up his lot in the Methodist Church. Then when he would go with Catherine to her Church he was not allowed to commune with her, and because she communed with him at his church her church talked of bringing charges against her. So she joined his church and remained there. Finally, a few years ago, they both joined the Nazarene Church.

But going back to the olden days; Robert and Katie were often invited to a neighbor's home to a house raising, a corn shucking, or a wood chopping. The ladies cooked a good dinner, vegetables, chicken and dumplings, pies, cakes, hams, etc. They had no stoves, but had to do the cooking in a big open fireplace, using pots and skillets. Many of the kitchen chimneys were equipped with pot racks which would hold four or five pots and support them while they were being used. While the men were out working, talking, telling jokes, and generally having a good time lending a helping hand to a neighbor (who would return the favor when he was bidden to do so) the women-folk would be cooking the meal and having a good time also. In those days a neighbor would walk miles to lend a helping hand and enjoy the get-together schemes that had the social aspect as well as the industrial.

When the Nelson family numbered five, i.e., children, Bessie, William, Ella, Leila, and Ethel; they began to hear of the wonderful advantages of the Georgia soil; so they decided to move. They advertised their land goods for sale and the morning of the sale saw crowds of people moving about the place. They sold everything they possessed that could not be packed into boxes. So in the

latter part of November 1889, Jimmy and Harvey Parker came with a two mule covered wagon to take them the first lap of the journey, that being at John Garland's in South Carolina. After visiting there with her brother a day or two, he got out his covered wagon and took them with their baggage to Cheraw, S.C., where they boarded a train and went to Doctortown, Georgia. When they arrived at Doctortown, they found that they would have to make the rest of the trip on a boat up the Altamaha River. They were also informed that there would be no boat until the next day, and that there was no hotel at Doctortown; so they would have to go on to Jessup to spend the night. The next morning they met the boat and embarked for Ochoopee White Bluff. Here they were met by a Carolinian, Mr. John Dees, who had preceeded them in the search for something better. He took them out to his home and they remained with him for a while until Robert could find a farm. He at last found a place which had a two room house on it, and there he moved his family, and renewed the struggle for a living on the farm of Perry Warren, near Altamaha, Georgia. While they were still occupying this house, a brother-in-law, Amos Parker, with a large family, came and shared their two room house until he also could find a farm for his family in the same community. Then later on Henry Griffin, a son-in-law to Amos Parker, came with his family. They also shared the two room Nelson home until they could find a farm.

The next year there was quite a company of followers from North Carolina seeking a better soil and climate. In this party were two more of Robert's sisters and their families. So when E.L. Smith's family of seven found that the two rooms were still open to them, they shared them also until a farm could be secured. Now, all of Robert's sisters had reached the land of plenty and all settled down ho

down hopefully to raising black seed cotton, corn, sugar cane, and sweet potatoes.

After remaining on the Warren farm for one year, they moved to the Cedar Grove community. It was during that year that David Tasker held a tent meeting at Pearson's Chapel at Altamaha, Georgia. It was during this revival that the second child, William Eli, was converted and joined Pearson's Chapel M.E. Church. Also, on the 7th of April of that year, a second son, Wamon, was born to the Nelson family. That was also the year when Mrs. Nelson had all of her teeth extracted, and a full new set put in by Dr. Pierson. Also, in that year Ethel, the fifth child, was burned, almost to death. The third year in the Georgia land was spent in the Phillips community, on the Ben Stripland farm. This place was near enough to Pearson's Chapel; so they could again attend church there.

From this farm they moved to the New Rail Road (The Seaboard Airline) across the Ochopee River, and located on the Canoochee River near Hagan, Georgia. Their children attended school at Bloomingdale, Hagan, and Claxton. After two years they moved to the Cedar Grove settlement and spent one year at the Zeek Wedingcamp farm. Thence they returned to the banks of the Canoochee River for another year. From there they moved to the Nancy Gleen Hendrix farm near Deloach's mill. Thence to Augusta, Georgia for three months. From there they moved back to the farm, settling on the Martin Smith farm, on what is called the "Level," near Bay Branch church and school.

From this farm they moved to the Lovic Smith place, in Smith Town, near Belleville, Georgia. After two years there they moved to the Alex Hammock place, near the Tattnall Camp Ground. There a tract of land was bought and thirty acres cleared and fenced.

All liked the community and the influence was good, so they remained there for five years.

At the Lovic Smith place the first daughter was married to Commodore Beecher Smith. At the Alex Hammock place the third daughter, Lela Ann, was married to Stewart Plunket Smith. It was also from that place that William Eli went to the Middle West to attend school, first at Peniel College, Greenville, Texas; then to Central Plains College, Plainview, Texas; and to Seth Ward College, also located in Plainview, Texas. After graduating from this Junior College he went to Dallas, Texas and attended the Southern Methodist University for one year. From there he went in his senior year to Asbury College, Wilmore, Kentucky, where he graduated in 1917. Finishing the theological course in 1918, he was married on May 29th, 1918 to Julia Blair of Bucyrus, Ohio. They sailed for Africa one year later as missionaries under the Methodist Episcopal Church.

From this Alex Hammock place also came Ethel and was married to Howell P. Mattox. Also Ella Florence went from there to join her brother William in Peniel College, and going with him to Plainview, finally married a brother of the president of the school, H. R. Gladney.

But now they have a large family; six boys and six girls. A bit of documentary information concerning them will not be out of place:

Bessie, the eldest, was born Wednesday December 1, 1880. Married C. B. Smith. Resides at Hagan, Georgia.

William Eli was born Wednesday April 4, 1883. Married Julia E. Blair. Resides at Thurmont, Maryland.

Ella Florence was born Thursday December 25, 1884. Married H.R. Gladney. Resides at Robstown, Texas.

Lela Ann was born Sunday February 13, 1887. Married

S. P. Smith. Her first husband passing away, her second marriage was to Mr. John Kelley. Resides at 124 Lister St., Shreveport, La.

Mary Ethel was born Monday March 4, 1889. Married H. P. Mattox. Resides at Vidalia, Georgia.

Wamon was born Monday April 6, 1891. Died Wednesday December 5, 1916.

Mattie Blanche was born Saturday June 24, 1893. Married Vaughn Sperry. Resides at Tavares, Florida.

Lee Roy Nelson was born Saturday March 30, 1895. Married Mary L. Harvey. Resides at Reidsville, Ga.

James Madison was born Wednesday February 24, 1897. Married Blanche Griffin. Resides at 21291/2 Detroit Avenue, Toledo, Ohio.

Nannie Kate was born Wednesday March 29, 1899. Resides at Reidsville, Georgia.

Charles Hinton was born Saturday August 3, 1901. Married Johny Belle Powell. His first wife passing away, he married Aleen Henry. Resides at 1228 Oak Street, Toledo, Ohio.

Paul Hanson was born Friday August 12, 1904. Married. Resides at 2407 Blain Ave., Toledo, Ohio.

They leave the farm and take up the hotel business. They begin their career at Hagan, Georgia. From Hagan they move to Glennville and reside there for six years and then move to Reidsville. They were very successful in the business for twenty-five years, but the sad part of their hotel career was the death of Robert. His death was the second break in the family chain, Wamon having preceded him in 1916, being electrocuted while working with the Miami Telephone Company in Miami, Florida.

It was but a short time until the date for the golden wedding of Robert and Catherine. They were making preparations for the celebration, and were looking forward to a happy family reunion to honor the occasion. But Robert was chosen as a delegate to represent his church at the assembly of the Nazarenes in Columbus, Georgia,

and there, sitting in the pew of the church on November 9, 1929, he fell into the arms of his good friend, the Rev. Mr. Hanson, and was pronounced dead of heart trouble.

That was the great shock of Catherine's life. She was sick at the time. All day she had felt that Robert was coming home. She wanted him so much. The kins-folk knew the attachment that existed between the two. Everyone was afraid to break the news. In fact, to think of one of them was to think of the other. So at the same time that she knew he was coming home he was at the Undertaker's being prepared for his last earthly journey. Truly, he was going home, but, oh, the lonely days for Catherine in the going. Still, she is not as one who has no hope. She knows that some day she, too, will be going home and there the little Catherine of long ago will be reunited with the same Robert with whom she had first talked through the crack of the little schoolhouse wall, and with whom she had walked to and from church and school, and with whom she had daily knelt around the family altar with their little ones that they were trying to train in the way that they should go. Yes, he left her in body, but his spirit still hovers around to cheer her in her lonely hours. And Catherine hasn't sat around and moaned and groaned at the hand of fate. She still moves around trying to do her bit for the benefit of humanity, striving to make herself bigger and better by traveling and seeing new things and beautiful and interesting places in the world. She is just passing away the time until the summons comes to call her home to be reunited in the eternal home with her Robert.

The End.

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and W.E. Nelson on Jan. 4, 1936.
Recopied by Mary Kathryn Nelson Brown
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