



An image of Rev. James Smith of Delaware, from the 1893 history of "Old Brick," entitled *Annals of the Kensington Methodist Episcopal Church, Philadelphia*.

“Delaware Jimmey”

A Sketch of the Rev. James Smith

by Rev. J. Rush Anderson (1853)

Editor’s Note: this sketch is from the periodical Ladies’ Repository, in its September 1853 issue. It paints a portrait of Rev. James Smith (1788-1851), a Philadelphia Conference preacher and Presiding Elder. He was identified as Rev. James Smith of Delaware, to distinguish him from other ministers of the same name; on one of the marble tablets in St. George’s Church, Philadelphia, listing the ministers of the church, may be found both “Rev. James Smith of Delaware” and “Rev. James Smith of Baltimore.” The author of the sketch, Rev. J. Rush Anderson (1824-1863), was also a member of the Philadelphia Conference, and a native of Radnor Township, where his tombstone may be seen today beside the Radnor United Methodist Church.

He went not, like the quarry slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon; but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approached the grave
Like one that wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.¹

For several years past, and indeed, up to the session of 1850, no stranger could visit the Philadelphia Conference without observing a portly looking, gentlemanly minister, somewhat advanced in life, with black hair sprinkled with gray, who usually sat three or four benches from the Bishop’s chair, and to the right of it, near the middle aisle of the church. He was often actively employed in the business of the conference,

¹Adapted from the poem *Thanatopsis* by William Cullen Bryan.

which was chiefly owing to his occupying the office of Presiding Elder, a position which he held for twelve years of his itinerant life. He had a prompt and decisive manner; and easy, bold, and open address; and his "Mr. President" was always the prelude to some plain, honest, sensible remarks, which never failed to arrest the attention of his brethren. He was, too, a positive man, not given much to conservatism, and this commended him to the confidence of all. When he represented his preachers, his language concerning them was a true index of the esteem in which they were held. If he spoke in high confidence (or otherwise) the reason was well known. He had never schooled himself in the art of disguising his feelings, and no one could, therefore, fail to perceive his preferences and dislikes.

This was the Rev. James Smith. His long service in the Methodist itinerancy, his connection with some of those changes in its arrangements which have been effected so silently and safely, and especially now that he is no more, the kind regards which gather around his memory entitle his name to a place in the historical records of our church.

At one period of his life he was distinguished from two other ministers of the same name by several epithets. Some called him "Black-haired Jemmy Smith," some "Delaware Jimmey," and others "Proud Jimmey." The last did not rightly appreciate the man. His high-minded and honorable bearing they mistook for pride. Had they known him better, they would have seen him anxious always to honor merit, however humble its position. His coal-black hair, ere it was touched with gray, was the occasion of the first named sobriquet, which in itself was complimentary; for added to this was a countenance ruddy, and of remarkably regular features, it rendered him quite handsome. The other epithet referred to the place of his birth. He was a Delawarean.

The lower or southeastern portion of Kent County is like most of the peninsula, quite level; and though of a moist soil, yet, being on the highest range of country between the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays, it is not furnished with any large streams of water. This has led persons to call it a marsh and, from its altitude, they have further designated it as the "Marsh high up." This name has been corrupted in pronunciation so as to be now embraced in the unmeaning word, "Marshy hope." The country here is variegated between the original forest and the cultivated field. The soil is moderately productive. The residences of its people are scattered from a quarter of a mile to a mile apart, and it is removed away from public travel, being several miles from any stage route. Yet such as

it is, it has become one of the classic spots of our Methodism. It furnished Bishop Asbury with a retreat, so far from the noise and confusion of war that he was not disturbed by its raging; near to it is the birthplace of the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, and here also the Rev. James Smith was born, and we may add, born in the lap of Methodism. No other religious sentiment prevails here. The people were too far away from them to hear the calls of the village pastors; and the weary itinerant went and called them. They heard his voice, and thus Methodism came to be the religion of the place. The people knew no other, and when they learned of them they cared not to barter this away. They are still satisfied.

He was born on the 15th of May, 1788. His parents were attached to the Methodist Episcopal Church. His mother was an example of piety, and used her best endeavors to train him up for the Lord. As she had not many obstacles in the way, she labored in hope. The temptations and allurements of a city or village life did not surround her child. Sometimes he went to the neighboring school; at other times he was employed in the healthful but laborious duties of the farm; and years of childhood passed away before he became familiar with any other scenes beside, save those of religion. These, with the lessons taught him by his mother, deeply affected him. In his sixteenth year, he sought a pardoning God, and during one evening, while at prayer in the house of a neighbor, he found him. This was a time of joy for his soul. He never forgot it. When age was stealing on him, he would speak of it with an air of delight; and it is well remembered now how he once expressed himself while riding through his native country, and conversing on the subject; "O," said he, "I shouted then; I shouted with all my might." The neighbor's name at whose house he experienced this grace was Hardesty. He was a local preacher.

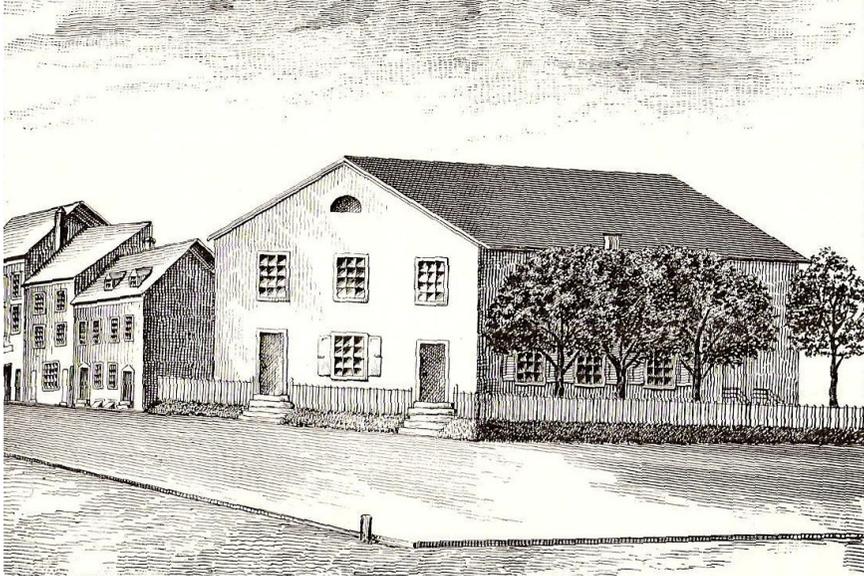
The young man was faithful to God. He was zealous for his cause. He was studious. He was not, indeed, permitted to enter college; neither had he access to a very large library. A small frame schoolhouse contained all that he could call his Alma Mater, and the chief book in his library was the first and last book of Christian theology – the Bible. This he read and studied till its truths were incorporated into his mind, and fully exerted upon in their amazing stimulus; yet he was not seized with the idea that he was a great prophet. He remained quietly at home. He grew up where he was born. In his own country there were the early honors of the ministry conferred upon him, and he was called upon to

discharge their duties. He gave satisfaction; and in his twenty-third year his neighbors recommended him to the Philadelphia Conference as a suitable person to be received into the travelling connection.

This was in the spring of 1811. Then it was that he left the paternal roof, no more to reside beneath it. His parents, brothers, and sisters bade him their farewell, and looked forward to know what the conference would do with the son and brother whom they had surrendered unto it. Upon its adjournment, he returned and brought them word that he "must go to Virginia." "I thought," remarked a sister of him a few years since, "they sent him a great way off; but he got his horse and saddle-bags, and went." In those days such an undertaking had somewhat of the sublime about it. It was one of sacrifice always – sometimes of peril. But he had made his election; he had yielded to convictions of duty; and he was willing to forsake all for Christ.

He traveled for one year in Virginia, and for the six following in Maryland, preaching among the people the unsearchable riches of Christ. Then he came to Philadelphia, and, as was the custom of that time, was one pastor, along with others, who had charge of several churches, united into one circuit. Among these were St. George's and Ebenezer. At this period of his life he was remarkably handsome, and preached brief and eloquent sermons. He was popular also. He remained here for two years. The next eight were spent on the peninsula; making in all fifteen years which he passed in this interesting portion of Methodist operations. In 1828 he crossed the Delaware, and preached that year and the next in Bridgeton, New Jersey. Thus during nineteen years did he preach without rest or intermission, his health having been continued to him through all this time. But sickness now compelled him to relax his efforts. But as such, what Methodist preacher was ever happy? Home and friends can never make him so while the vineyard of the Lord invites him there to labor. In 1833, therefore, he became effective again, and spent two years at Burlington, New Jersey; and two at Kensington in Philadelphia.

He was at the close of his service at Kensington about fifty years of age. He had been for twenty four years actively engaged in preaching the Gospel, and during that time had prepared himself fully for any station of responsibility in the church into which Providence might call him. He was well acquainted with all the workings of our economy, and could well judge of any defects inherent in it or attached to it. And he



An image of the Methodist Church in Kensington, Philadelphia, which Smith knew, and served twice. Founded in 1804 and known as “Old Brick,” the congregation erected the church pictured above in 1833 and replaced it in 1854 by the structure that still stands today.

was a Methodist, perfectly satisfied with Methodism, and yet not insensible to the fact that, as a great moral engine, her power is greater or less as she is or is not adapted to the circumstances of the times.

And he was now appointed Presiding Elder of the North Philadelphia District, whence, after four years of service, he was removed to take charge of the South Philadelphia District, where he discharged the duties of his office for a full term.

No one acquainted with the workings of the economy of our church can be ignorant of the responsibilities attached to the office of a Presiding Elder. He takes charge of all the preachers on his district; he calls together and presides over all its quarterly conferences; and he sits in counsel with the Bishop, and advises in all the changes in its arrangements which he judges expedient. The people, therefore, look to him that his wishes may be gratified, and censure him for any real or imagined oppression they may be compelled to suffer. Young men who wish to enter the ministry feel themselves, in a great measure, to be

dependent upon his good opinion for admission, and afterward upon his advice for counsel; and those who are more veteran in this glorious but arduous work expect his influence to secure for them pleasant fields of labor, and give to him either gratitude or blame in proportion as their desires, and often their necessities, are met .

It would be too much to say of Mr. Smith that all his preachers were always satisfied when, at the close of a conference session, they heard their appointments announced; for sometimes silent tears would stand in their eyes, and their hearts, overwhelmed with sorrow, would find some consolation only in faith and hope. But the Methodist itinerant, generally moved by the impulses of natural affection and honorable feelings easily, is yet well taught in the school of submission; and as he knows that all his brethren are likely to suffer, he consents to bear his necessary griefs, and strives to believe that the very best has been done for him that could be under the circumstances. And it can be said of this man of God truly, that so far as consistent with the good of the church, he aimed to satisfy all the preachers.

The young men, too, found in him a kind and generous friend. His eyes were always open to discover those who gave promise of usefulness, and to impress them for ministerial service. He would take the diffident youth by the hand and encourage him for the conflict. He would procure his license and recommendation, and be his friend in conference, and afterward gently admonish and instruct him. There are many strong, vigorous and useful men within the bounds of the Philadelphia Conference, whose voices speak forth fearlessly from Zion's walls, who once leaned upon his arm, and now feel that he died their creditor. They are his sons; he was their father. Long may they live to be useful, and to reflect honor upon his memory!

The laymen of the church, also, he strove to render satisfied by having useful ministers appointed to them; yet such were his views of the necessity of more frequent preaching in churches, where large congregations had been gathered, that his course in dividing circuits often met with their disapprobation. This, however, he was prepared to meet by kindness and conciliation, yet in the exercise of prudent firmness. He was well aware of the difficulties in the way of this work ere he entered upon it; three of the greatest of which were, the breaking up of the regular appointments of the local ministry; the effect it had upon the finance of the divided circuits; and the severing of social ties which had previously existed between persons whose residences were quite distant from each another.

But he did not enter upon this task alone. The Rev. Solomon Higgins, his alternate upon the two districts above-named, the Rev. Matthew Sorin, and the consent of the Episcopacy were with him in it. In the northern part of the conference, therefore, circuit after circuit was divided, and stations were formed – some for married and others for single preachers – till, with a few exceptions, every congregation was brought to enjoy preaching from the traveling ministry on every Sabbath. The utility of these changes was demonstrated by the experience of a few years. The increased demand for ministerial service created by them opened the door of entrance into the itinerancy to many local preachers, and thus gave them opportunities for usefulness, which they could never otherwise have enjoyed, while the advantages of constant and regular preaching increased the liberality of the churches. Besides these, the work of God extended itself rapidly under the new arrangement. Stations became strong, and circuits capable of fresh divisions; while still it was discovered, that amidst all changes the ties of religion remained as firm as ever; and not only did no estrangement of feeling take place among brethren, but the sentiment that “Methodism is a unit,” further developed itself:

For “mountains rise and oceans roll
To sever us in vain.”²

In 1846, Mr. Smith went out of the Presiding Eldership, and was stationed again at Kensington, where he remained for two years. It was during his stay at this station that he made a visit to the place of his birth, the scenes of his boyhood and early ministry. It was made, he said, for the purpose of recreation, and to see a sister whom he had not visited for several years. But it was a visit calculated to stir up a cheerful melancholy in his mind by recollections of the past. He was then in his sixtieth year. “I am,” remarked he, “the oldest efficient minister in the Philadelphia Conference. It is nearly thirty-seven years since I entered.” How many changes had transpired during that time! Yet, amidst them all, Methodism, the child of Providence, had become mighty. The field had enlarged, but many of the workmen had left it. All the early associates of this aged laborer had retired from active service. Solomon Sharp, Lawrence Lawrenson, Laurence M’Combs, Jacob Moore, and a

²Anderson quotes a Charles Wesley hymn, which begins “*God of all consolation, take/The glory of thy grace/Thy gifts we render back/In ceaseless songs of praise.*”

hundred others had departed. Even the long-lived Ezekiel Cooper had just gathered up his feet. A few were lingering, unable to work more, near the gates of the vineyard, waiting for their master. He remained alone of all those who entered with him, and was now the eldest of his brethren, yet attended he upon the vineyard with his wonted vigilance and care.

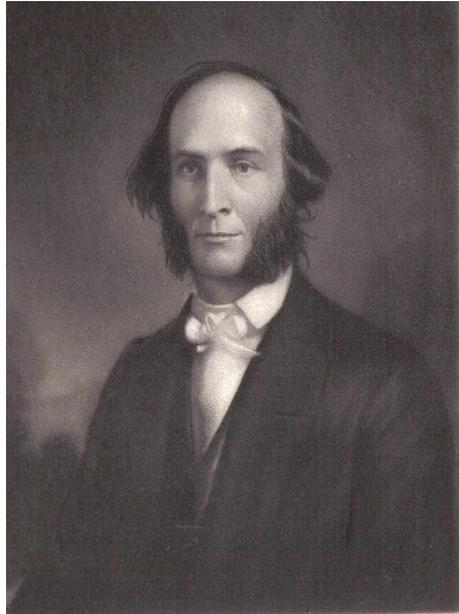
But this was not all that his retrospect suggested. His father, mother, brothers, and sisters had passed away, till only one sister remained; and she was widowed, and her daughter and four sons arrived almost at the noon of life. He wished to see her ere death should render him incapable of the sight, and was now on his journey. As the carriage moved cheerfully along the level road which led to her home, he gave way to his reflections, and while musing sang frequently a stanza, which is now but imperfectly remembered, though these are scattered fragments, to which two lines are added to make out the verse:

Away down in that beautiful valley
 Where hope cheers the meek and the lowly
 All "envy and folly" shall cease;
 'Tis there the Lord will deliver,
 And saints drink of that wonderful river,
 And love, peace, and joy forever.

It was evident, however, that his mind dwelt not on these beautiful words. There were many scenes through which he had come in life's journey, the remembrance of which enchanted it. In early life he had loved and married, but his early love had died. The children who cheered their pilgrimage while together, had sweetened also the cup of bitterness of which his soul tasted when he bade her a last "farewell." But of these, one had been nipped in the bud, and another in the blossom, till but one remained – his last and only child. How mournfully sad is the history of human life! He spent a week with his sister, and preached on the Sabbath day in Wesley Chapel, the church of the neighborhood, to a congregation of his relatives and friends. After which he returned to his charge, where he remained until the ensuing conference.

And now he was called upon to endure the greatest trial of his whole life. We forbear to speak of all the sorrows poured into his cup at this time, some of which were sufficient to crush a person of refined sensibilities such he possessed; of one however, we may speak freely. The

loss of his early companion had been supplied to him by a second marriage, and for several years he had enjoyed great domestic felicity. Mrs. Smith, now his relict, had rendered home happy, and her affections, along with those of her husband, had centered themselves upon his only daughter, who had passed her youthful days under the paternal roof. In receiving their kindnesses, she returned them by the happiness which she created in the little household. She had afterward married most happily for herself and her parents. But this domestic bliss was now broken off by her premature death. The consumption had completed its work upon her, and the parents



Rev. J. Rush Anderson, author of this biographical sketch.

her companion, and her two orphans were called to follow her to the grave. This was during the session of conference. It was a touching scene to behold the aged parent, who had outlived all his children, mourning for the last, and standing desolate, as some noble forest tree, stripped of all its branches by death's rude storms. But he bowed before the last one. His manly, affectionate and Christian heart, in the midst of overwhelming sorrow, said to the merciful giver of all good, "Thy will be done." The year which was thus ushered in with so great an affliction, and afterward filled with so many temptations, was spent at Manayunk, but not vainly. He succeeded in laying there the foundation of what has since become quite a flourishing church.³

³This would be the Ebenezer Church in Manayunk, Philadelphia, founded in 1847. The congregation erected its first building in 1848, at Gay and Mansion Streets, and rebuilt on the same site in 1900. This structure was destroyed by fire in 1975, and the congregation merged into the Ridge Avenue United Methodist Church. Harold Koch, *The Leaven of the Kingdom* (Ephrata: Science Press, 1983), 35.

His next appointment was to the Wilmington District. It is said of him that, at the time of receiving it, he intimated to the presiding Bishop that it would be his last. He entered upon its duties with zeal and alacrity, and it appeared to his friends that he was determined to act the part of a truly spiritual Samson. He bowed himself with a firm hold on the pillars of sin's temple. He had faithful and laborious ministers sent to all the circuits and stations under his charge, and presided over them as one determined to inspire them with the utmost activity they were capable of exerting. He himself was active. Scarcely or never did the sun look into his chamber and find him sleeping, for:

Though as there were husbandry in war, he early rose
And to the field went he.⁴

He fought as a good soldier. He preached as a truly commissioned herald of salvation. And he was no mean preacher. Bold, plain, calm and vigorous were his discourses. He dealt not in metaphysics, nor human philosophy, nor the beautiful but perishing flowers of rhetoric, but in truth, divinely omnipotent truth – truth for the head and the heart. He loved virtue and hated – perfectly hated – sin. Against it he shot barbed arrows. “O, wretched man that I am!” on one occasion he exclaimed, and then hastened to describe the wickedness and wretchedness of the transgressor. He gave all characters of sinners their portion in language undisguised. He sought out the seducer, and held him up to the contempt of the virtuous and the bitter execrations of those who mourn over ruined innocence. He threatened them with the wrath of God. His words were bitter, burning words. He said, “Such a one should be hissed out of the world, buried in a dunghill, and have this sentence inscribed over him for an epitaph, ‘Here lies Infamy, covered with filth.’”

But was he successful in this his last field of labor? Yes; he reaped a harvest of souls. Hundreds of probationers were reported from weak country circuits. The success of the Gospel on his district was greater than anywhere else in the conference. It seemed as though God specially favored the portion of the vineyard under his charge, and permitted him to remain in it just long enough to give him such a discharge as such a servant would have prayed for. In the month of December of the last year of his appointed service there, he was taken sick, and his indisposition continued to wear him away, till the next

⁴A rather loose quote from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Act 1, Scene 2.

conference session, when he had barely strength enough to see and converse with some of his companions in labor. Ere the session ended he took his departure.

On the night before he died, he, like the patriarch Jacob, blessed his grandchildren, and then said "Now, I am ready. My wife, my son, my grandchildren, your husband and father is about to die and leave you. Be kind to each other." He added, "I dedicated myself to God when a boy of sixteen years, nor have I ever willfully withdrawn the trust confided to him. I have committed errors, as all mortals are liable to do; but I feel that the atonement of Christ has availed for them all, and I am now freely and fully justified through his blood. My faith is unshaken – my prospects are clear; meet me, all of you – meet me in heaven." He then prayed for those who had thus received his dying charge, and thrice exclaimed, "Halleluiah!" He concluded thus: "That is all I have to say. I am now satisfied." His last words were, "I am perfectly rational." He died about the last of March, 1851.

"And devout men carried him to his burial." His companions in arms stood around the grave of the veteran, and saw him laid in his last resting place. They then scattered from the conference to enter upon their wonted toils. He is now slumbering in the rear of Ebenezer ME Church of Philadelphia, in a plot of ground which he had selected several years previous to his death; while his brethren who bewailed him are still in the field, for he was the last one of them who have fallen.

Mr. Smith was once elected to a seat in the highest council of our church, and sat in the General Conference of 1840. He will be long remembered; for the good which he has done

Is not interred with his bones.⁵

And prudent men have ceased –

His follies to disclose,
And drag his frailties from their dread abode;
There they alike in trembling hope repose,
The bosom of his Father and his God.⁶

⁵An allusion to Mark Antony's speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, which reads, "The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones."

⁶Anderson quotes, though not entirely accurately, from the last stanza of Thomas Gray's poem, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."