

*[Unpublished Paper of David Scott Clark]*

The Rev. James A. Clark  
by D.S. Clark

The late Rev. James Armstrong Clark was born Dec. 4, 1831 at High Chester Mills near Hawick, Scotland. Like the world's great army of nobles he sprang from humble circumstances. His parents were the conventional "poor and pious." His father was an elder in the Free Church of Robertson Parish.

When James was seven years old his parents moved to Harden Cottage near the famous Harden Castle. The little one story stone cottage still stands. Here he attended the Robertson Parish school and, after the Disruption, the Free Church, which received him as a communicant at the age of fifteen years. He wrought at masonry with his father between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, and the stone dikes (fences) which he built are still to be seen. But during these years of humble toil he was grappling with the problem of an education and filling the moments of rest and leisure with Latin Grammar, Caesar, Virgil, Geometry, &c., reciting to the minister of his church. His books bear the marks of his sweaty fingers, evidently being carried along to his work. At the age of nineteen he entered the Free Church Normal College at Edinburgh, remaining the winter session. The next year finds him teacher of Yarrow Free Church School. Here he taught two and a half years. During his vacations he wrought with his father at masonry and pursued his studies, and thus covered most of a college course in English, Mathematics and Language, and did much general reading. While teaching he led singing in the church, visited and prayed with the sick, taught Bible class and gave an address every Sabbath.

It was at Yarrowfens he met Miss Margaret Scott, daughter of Walter Scott, of Catslackburn, who became his wife in April 1854, bore to him six children and died December 1881.

Having closed his school at Yarrow in 1854 and married, he emigrated to America, landing in Philadelphia in May. Here he taught a Commercial College on Chestnut St. near Fifth for one year. During this period began that lifelong friendship with Rev. Dr. Dales, who died at last year's meeting of the Synod.

Having the ministry still in view he sold the Commercial College in 1855 and repaired to Franklin College, New Athens, O., and in the fall of 1855 entered the Theological Seminary at Allegheny, Pa. During his stay in Allegheny he acted for a time as city missionary, and today several churches exist as the outgrowth of his work. In April 1857, he was licensed to preach and filled the vacancies of Presbytery by appointment during the remainder of the course. For superior qualifications he was advanced one year in his course in Theology, and closed his Seminary course in the spring of 1858. In the fall of 1858 he was called to the U.P. churches of Prospect and Mt. Chestnut, Butler Co., Pa., which call he accepted and in April 1859 was ordained and installed. In 1876 he resigned Mt. Chestnut to accept a call for half time at Portersville, and in 1888 he resigned Portersville, and gave half time to the church at West Liberty.

After his settlement in 1858 the churches grew rapidly till the outbreak of the Civil War, when the fold was sorely depleted by drafts and volunteers. Yet he faithfully stood at his post through difficulties and hardships which few now know and understand.

In 1881 he lost his partner in life who had borne, as faithfully and self-sacrificingly as he, the brunt of life's hard battle. In 1884 he married Mrs. Frances Wilson, of Zelienople, who cheered and blessed his closing years and survives to mourn his loss.

On Tuesday, July 17, 1894, he went to the meeting of Synod at Conneaut Lake in good health and full of life and hope. The heat was extreme. He suffered severely and could not rest. He returned home on Friday the 20th, jaded and worn, yet making preparations on Saturday for the services of the following day. On Saturday night acute dysentery set in. Medical aid was summoned, but no human power could stay the approach of that stern visitor. It was death from the first. With all the phenomenal strength of his body he fought the last great battle and fell, as every man must. His Christian character came out both in his rational and ????? hours. The Church and the salvation of men were constantly on his mind. His life's great work was his thought in death, preaching to men and conducting the services of God's house as he tossed in semi-slumber, uttering fervent ejaculations in the prayers at his bedside, and trying to join in the singing of the 23rd Psalm as he was sinking into unconsciousness.

At 10:20 a.m., July 26, he closed his eyes on earth to open them upon the crown, the mansions and the throne. On Saturday five or six hundred people assembled from far and near to take a last look and drop a tear of sorrow over the silent form. The church in which he had so long preached was filled as it never was filled before, and the grounds without were thronged as no occasion had ever thronged them. The services were conducted by Rev. McKee, of Butler, assisted by Profs. McClelland and Dodds, of Grove City, Revs. Breaden, McClester, Gilfillan, Sherard and Cooper, of the Presbytery, and Rev. Cutler of the M.E. Church. Then with sorrowing hearts we laid his body down by the side of his wife, his eldest son and his little babe; and thus his career before the eyes of men was stamped with that irrevocable "Finis."

Some estimate of his work and character is now in place. As a preacher, he might be described as vigorous. He preached without notes or helps of any kind. With strong voice and ready utterance, there was no halting nor stumbling in his delivery. He preached only after careful preparation, nearly every sermon being written out in full. His thirty-five years of sermonizing represents an amount of work in the study altogether immeasurable. His homiletics were of the rigidly logical type, planned and arranged with exact care. In accordance with the rules of discourse, and he felt dissatisfaction with any preaching that did not conform to homiletical canons.

As a pastor, he was arduous and willing, going at any call, to any distance, at any hour, in any weather. He visited and catechised his congregations regularly, and the youth who grew up under his care are well grounded in the doctrines and principles of the Church. His theology was the strongest kind of Scotch Presbyterianism. His convictions were formed in the throes of the Disruption in the Church of Scotland and always bore the stamp of the times that produced them. On all the great doctrines denominated orthodox he stood unshaken as Gibraltar; yet a glance at his library tells how he strove to keep abreast with the times.

As a Presbyterian few have been so faithful, seldom, if ever, missing a session, yet so modest among his brethren that he never asked nor sought preferment. Others might think themselves entitled to honors; such things never seemed to enter his mind. Duty was his polestar. He looked on all things in the light of duty. From the greatest event in his life to the smallest all was duty.

His place was not conspicuous in the eyes of the world, his field, remote from the centers of population; yet just such fields as his are the springs that make the rivers. His congregations, never very large, were ever removing to cities and centers of labor, and the great West. He sowed for other men to reap. This often seemed discouraging; yet the work was no less great and good. "A tree is known by its fruits." A life almost pathetic in its uneventfulness may yet be mighty for good. Every moral reform was sure to find a friend in Rev. Jas. A. Clark. He was always in the front ranks and several generations in that day ahead of his time. He stood for abolition in that day, for temperance and legal prohibition in

later days and feared not to preach and vote as he believed. He advocated woman's rights and supported the movement for National Reform.

He brought the Scotch Sabbath with him from his native heath and stood against the encroachments of secularism in State and home. The community in which he lived so long bears the stamp of his principles; for no liquor has been openly sold in the village for twenty five years; and a more religious, temperate, Sabbath-loving community would be hard to find.

As to his personal qualities: he was blessed with remarkable health, seldom sick, and only two or three times in all his life missing a service through inability or, perhaps, for any cause. He records that in the third year of his Seminary course he preached every Sabbath without missing a recitation in class. His bodily strength, developed in youth by the hard labor of his lot, was worthy of mention.

He had rare qualities of mind. Most of his education was, as he records, "self-culture," and to acquire such an education as he had, mostly unassisted, was a rare feat. He was a strong scholar in Mathematics, and read Latin with a facility that living scholars might well envy.

He had, as a noted man said of him, "the grace of continuance." Through all his life one steady purpose runs. If he turned aside for awhile, it was only a means to reach his life's great purpose. It was largely this virtue that made him what he was. If times were hard and work discouraging, he did not falter. He did not quit his post because he was not paid enough, nor because other men had better fields. He did not grow dissatisfied because his place was obscure, nor because the world did not recognize his abilities and bestow its honors. He was loyal to the trust he had assumed and would not betray it for life or death. He lived as one that must give account, and "endured as seeing him who is invisible." He could not look lightly on the vows he had taken, and he would be faithful even to his own hurt. Sometimes he has borne sharp criticism for his loyalty to principles; but with him it was a choice between honesty and dishonesty; and he would be true; but false never.

No mark of his character appeared more plainly than his frankness. He was the farthest removed from duplicity. There were no dark corners in his heart and no tortuous ways in his life. What he was, he was out and out, in daylight and in dark, from January to December. No one doubted where he stood.

His religious faith was marvelous. It was the fitting product of the pious ancestry from which he came. God keeps his covenant from generation to generation. If the unseen and eternal were visible and tangible, he could not have been more certain of its reality. No matter what came or went, no shadow of distrust ever seemed to cross his mind. God and heaven and spiritual things were just as real and certain to him as the consciousness of himself. He never preached any doubts, seldom Apologetics; he could hardly understand the need of such a thing.

In addition to all this, he was unselfish in his nature. He never seemed to think of himself. If he got little or nothing, he never complained, and seemed to think, "It matters not; it is only I." In thirty-five years of ministry, perhaps not once has remuneration been casually mentioned in public. In a certain sense it might be said of him, "He saved others, himself he" would "not save." Even on his deathbed he did not want to exact any attentions, and feared lest we might weary ourselves for him.

Thus passed away from earth one of God's noblemen, who from the humble peasantry of South Scotland rose to dignity and unmeasured usefulness. All honor to his noble efforts. In closing I feel that the story of his life has not really been told; it never can be. May the world be blest with generations such as he!