THE DODDS: SOUTHERN METHODIST EDUCATORS

WALTER N. VERNON*

Few Southern Methodist families have made a greater impact on education—both religious and secular—than did six members of the Dodd family. In the last four-fifths of the nineteenth century, that impact was felt especially in Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Florida.

I. THE FATHER’S CAREER

The first of these educators was James Best Dodd, born April 3, 1807, in or near Leesburg, Loudon County, Virginia. He was the son of William Dodd and Martha Best Dodd.

James B. Dodd attended Leesburg Academy as a youth. He joined Leesburg’s historic Methodist Episcopal Church May 28, 1830; church records note that he (and others) "stood out their time on probation." The original building, the Old Stone Church, stood on the first Methodist-held land in America, title being dated May 11, 1776.

As Teacher and College Professor

When Dodd finished his Academy course, he probably became the first to leave the family's traditional farming vocation and began a teaching career. Many of his descendants have engaged in public school and university teaching, and in the church school programs—local and denominational. He organized private schools and became renowned as a good educator in Virginia at Winchester, Middleburg, Carrollton, and Harper’s Ferry.

In 1832 he married Delila Fox, daughter of Dr. Bartelson Fox, a widely esteemed physician of Georgetown, District of Columbia. Delila was educated in Pennsylvania at Linden Hall in what Dodd described as being at "a beautiful town near Lancaster inhabited by Moravians" with "a female seminary of great celebrity." Their children who survived to adulthood and their birth places were James William, Winchester, March 25, 1834; Thomas John, Harper’s Ferry, August 4, 1837; Virginius Wesley, Middleburg, August 18, 1841; and Martha Elizabeth, Harper’s Ferry, December 28, 1842.

In 1841 James B. Dodd, at age 34, was invited by the Rev. John Lane, Board of Trustees Chairman of the planned Centenary College in Brandon Springs, Mississippi, to become Professor of Mathematics at a yearly salary of $2,000. In accepting, he was the first of his family to migrate to the Deep South and—later—to the Southwest.

For the opening of Centenary on November 9, 1841, the president, Dr. T. C. Thornton, was delayed and was not there for his scheduled address. Dr. Dodd, asked to fill in, spoke on "The Object, Nature and Utility of Mathematical Science," saying

The Mathematical Sciences are not unavailable toward demonstrating ... the fundamental doctrines of natural Theology ... They will be found ... to be highly conducive, if not absolutely essential, to the conclusiveness of that argument which the Theist, in opposition to the Atheist, would bring for the Existence of the Creator, from the manifestation which he has made of Himself in His work. Upon the evidence of Design in the works of nature, we ground the argument for ... a Supreme Designer.  

Soon afterward, the college in a prospectus said of Dr. Dodd that "The Trustees doubt not but this accomplished gentleman will ably sustain the responsibility of the department." The Trustees also elected him Auditor of the College.

Dr. Dodd remained at Centenary until 1846, a year after the college was relocated at Jackson, Louisiana. He then accepted the position of Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy (including Astronomy) in Morrison College, a unit of Transylvania University at Lexington, Kentucky. There, he was part of an institution that had begun in 1790 as Transylvania Seminary, and had merged in 1798 with Kentucky Academy to become Transylvania University. The institution functioned under this name until 1865. Morrison College was the only segment definitely connected with the Methodists.

Dr. Henry B. Bascom was university president, 1842 to 1849. Famous persons had varied connections, through the years, with institutions which became Transylvania's components, including George Washington, John Adams, Jefferson Davis, Stephen F. Austin, and Henry Clay.  

* Dodd Vernon, a brother, contributed significantly to this article.
2 Letter from the Rev. Melvin Lee Steadman, Jr., February 15, 1960. Copies of all letters referred to are in the author’s possession.
3 Letter from James B. Dodd to Delila Fox Dodd, December 18, 1859, after he visited Linden Hall.
4 Address Delivered at the Opening of Centenary College, November 9, 1841, by James B. Dodd, Southerner Office, 1841, p. 12.
5 Edward Mayes, History of Education in Mississippi, 1899; Transcript of Chapter VIII, p. 5.
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As Dean, Professor, and President

Eventually Dr. Dodd was listed additionally as Dean of the Faculty. He wrote widely used mathematical textbooks. Among many other schools, the Preparatory Department of the University used his Arithmetic and Elementary Algebra. In the College, of course, classes used his more advanced textbooks.

The Kentucky Annual Conference appointed as its representatives in the direction of university affairs, a Board of Visitors comprising Dr. J. A. Waterman, Dr. John Miller, and the Rev. G. W. Brush. The Conference’s General Agents were the Rev. S. Starks and the Rev. R. P. Neely. At midyear in the nineteenth century, the University listed 223 students in Morrison College, 167 in the Medical School, and 62 in the Law School. P. S. Ruter was then Professor of Ancient Languages and Literature, and the Rev. Littleton Fowler was given an honorary degree; both men were later connected with the first Methodist college (the first Protestant one) in Texas, Rutersville College, which in 1852 selected Ruter as its president.8

When Bascom resigned from Transylvania in 1849, Dodd was named President Pro Tem of the University—a difficult task; one history of the institution says that “When James B. Dodd . . . became President Pro Tem . . . he faced a dismal prospect.”9 He was not a “popular” preacher and orator in the sense of wide acclaim among all levels of the populace. Furthermore, Transylvania had to compete for loyalty and financial backing with another Methodist college in Kentucky.

Nevertheless, Dodd was a man of outstanding integrity, intelligence, and friendliness—as well as of scholarship and administrative ability. He was a devout Christian gentleman who did not shirk responsibilities, and these qualities sustained him in his formidable tasks and great problems. W. W. Lambuth of the Louisville Conference wrote of these years:

The labors of Brother D[odd] . . . were unusually great; but the arduous duties thus imposed were promptly met, and discharged with great ability. . . . He was an industrious student; his mind was ever active. He was a student of theology . . . always ready and pleased to talk out beloved Methodism . . . Those who knew him intimately not only esteemed but venerated him.10

But troubles multiplied. His wife, Delilla, died about this time, leaving him a single parent with three sons and one daughter, and, in 1850, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, severed its loose connection with Transylvania, which then reverted to the Board of Trustees, representing the State of Kentucky. Dodd wrote, in the autumn of 1849, “I have scarcely time to write at all, so numerous are my present duties at this institution, being both President and Professor.”11

He wrote, on July 4, 1850, that “if I could find a situation in Illinois which would afford me good support, I would be willing to remove to that state.”12 That statement foreshadowed the end of Dodd’s connection with an institution which owed more to his labors than it could ever repay. In a review of Transylvania: Tutor of the West, Dodd Vernon, associate editor of the oldest newspaper in the South, concluded that on the basis of evidence set forth in the book that “he [Dodd] managed to keep the school’s doors open despite incredible financial problems. Without his firm and prudent guidance, there would be no Transylvania today.”13

Thus, after he had served as President seven years, James Best Dodd had decided to seek a less demanding position. This would give him time to concentrate on his textbook writing and selling. In that era, publishers expected textbook authors to persuade school boards and administrators to adopt their texts. Dodd had done some of that, and soon did more, after accepting a position with Kentucky Normal School in 1861. Then he had a less strenuous life, but he did have to travel a great deal in publicizing his books.

A Pioneer in Mathematics and An Author of Textbooks

As early as 1838, well before his college faculty connection, James B. Dodd was preparing mathematics textbooks. He submitted the manuscript of his first volume to Pratt, Woodford and Company in New York. They responded promptly that they were “disposed to publish your arithmetic.” And they thus analyzed his approach:

Your method will be more natural and equally thorough as that pursued by others. To lead a pupil by almost imperceptible steps into a science and to define the process by the simplest and clearest terms possible seems to be [a] great art. . . .14

The reference to “your method” refers to Dr. Dodd’s basic (and, in mathematics, pioneering) approach to teaching. In sharp contrast to that used by most mathematics textbooks of that day, he used an inductive method, moving from simple, easily understood example to the underlying principle or rule. Other authors were wedded to the deductive approach, attempting to teach beginners a rule, then to apply it to specific problems.

From that beginning, he went on to produce a number of textbooks (with unreal prices to us who live now), as follows: Algebra for High Schools and Colleges, A New Common School Arithmetic, An Elementary and Practical Arithmetic (45¢), Elements of Algebra (84¢), Higher Algebra.


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10The *Christian Advocate* (Nashville), April 11, 1872.

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Examples and terminology in these texts demonstrate that the author sought to make mathematical science a practical tool for those who learned it. They include timely references to revenue cutters, privateers, chaise, horse, harness, barrels of flour, plantations, corncribs, and bales of cloth.

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He got negative reverberations to this address. Writing from Columbia, South Carolina on March 16, 1860 to his second wife, Eliza (whom he had married after becoming a widower), he reported:

I have received a reply by Professor Charles Davies to the Essay which I read to the New York Teachers Association. It is an indescribably contemptible thing. I have sent my rejoinder to New York for publication; also my special strictures on his Arithmetick. Algebra, and Geometry. 15

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On the other hand, Dodd's texts had wide acceptance across the nation. They were adopted by such institutions as Trinity College, Genesee Wesleyan Seminary, Baldwin Institute of Ohio, Kentucky Military Institute, New York City Normal School, high schools in Baltimore, public schools in Cincinnati, Teachers Collegiate and Commercial Institute in New Haven, and the public schools in Indiana, Delaware, New Hampshire, Maine, Illinois, and New Jersey. He visited—as his other duties and time allowed—school superintendents and boards. On an 1859 tour of Pennsylvania, for example, he stopped in Harrisburg, Lancaster, Carlisle,

Chambersburg, Gettysburg, Philadelphia, and thence to Baltimore. On his return trip he made stops at Washington, Georgetown, and Alexandria.

His Remarriage

His first wife died on February 25, 1849, at age 41. His second wife was Eliza Jane Ralston. He probably became aware of her through her brother (and his personal friend), the Rev. Thomas Neely Ralston, a Methodist minister and well-known theologian. He had been living in Lexington from 1843 to 1847 as president of the Methodist Female Institute in Lexington.

Certainly he had never met Eliza (though he had seen a miniature picture of her) when he started a courtship—even mentioning marriage before they met in person. Early in their correspondence he wrote: "Whatever the newspapers may say about me as a mathematician, I wish you to believe that he who aspires to your acquaintance, friendship, and . . . is not altogether made up of triangles, circles, etc." 17 Less than a month later he wrote that he hoped that Eliza would "turn your attention in earnest to 'things matrimonial.' " 18 Marriage, shortly afterward, was hastened, no doubt, by his children's need for a mother.

He then wrote his first wife's parents, explaining his second marriage, and praising their daughter's excellence as a wife and mother. James B. Dodd was a devoted husband. When on trips he wrote Eliza frequently. Eleven years after they had married, he wrote her from Wilmington, Delaware on June 17, 1860 thus: "I delight to remember that there is one, though far away, who is to me more precious than riches . . . ." About the same time he wrote: "It is the greatest comfort of my life to be thus loved by one whom I regard as truly a lady, in every sense of that word." 19

Serving the Church at Large

In the mid-1800s the Methodist Episcopal Church, South woke up to the fact that it had no real university. The General Conference of 1854, consequently, authorized a convention of its leading educators, including James B. Dodd. The appointees in April, 1856 at Nashville, Tennessee organized themselves as the Educational Institute of the church. It was to "meet annually and work to improve Southern Methodist education by raising larger college endowments, providing special training for teachers, and improving textbooks." 20

15Copy in author's files.
16From Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, December 18, 1859.
17Ibid., November 20, 1849.
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James B. Dodd was one of its leaders in qualifications and activity, and the organization elected him 3rd Vice President. The Institute asked him to deliver, at its 1858 session, an address on the Science of Mathematics; it published the address, and designated him to preside at one of the sessions.

Outstanding church leaders comprised this group: Robert Paine, George Foster Pierce, William M. Wightman, David S. Doggett, and Holland N. McTeire (all were currently, or future, bishops), A. L. P. Green, J. R. Longstreet, R. H. Rivers, L. C. Garland, Edmund W. Sehon, and Nathan Scarritt. The Institute was the forerunner of such present-day groups as the University Senate and the Association of Schools and Colleges of the United Methodist Church. It eventually proposed a university to be launched in Nashville to serve the whole church, and in 1875 Vanderbilt University was opened.

The Dodd family had wide contacts across the church, but they were loyal and active in their local churches. James B. Dodd mentions frequently, in his letters while on trips, his attendance at church services. He wrote to Eliza one time: “You will, of course, go to religious meetings as often as you have opportunity. It matters but little with whom you worship... provided it be in spirit and in truth... In the midst of my distracting duties and cares, I will endeavor not to forget that I have a soul to be saved.” T. N. Ralston called him “a perfect gentleman, a scholar, and a Christian.”

Slowing Down and Final Years

After James B. Dodd left the Kentucky Normal School, thereby losing an assured salary, he and his family were not affluent. He taught private schools in Kentucky, at Washington and at Greensburg. In years just preceding the Civil War the Dodds, non-slaveholders, were loyal to the Union. However, after the John Brown raid at Harper's Ferry, James wrote to Eliza from New York (where he was promoting the use of his texts) confirming his Southern feelings:

I think you need feel under no apprehension from the Negroes in Kentucky. That horrible affair at Harper's Ferry, I am inclined to think, will teach a useful lesson to Abolitionists. John Brown and his confederates will doubtless be hung, which will surely cause those mad fanatics to consider the error of their ways. I have no idea that any considerable number of Northern people sympathize with that wretched old man Brown.

After the war started the Dodds moved for a time to Carrollton, Kentucky, and lived for a year with relatives in Leavenworth, Kansas.

At the war's height in 1863, Dodd wrote to Eliza about the appointment of their son, Thomas, to the Millersburg School. He mentioned that “The Conference gave a unanimous vote for loyalty to the Federal Government. Dr. _____, the Presiding Elder, who came near leading our boys astray, was required to confess and renounce his errors, on pain of suspension from the ministry... It is now known that ours is the only loyal conference in the Church, South.”

By 1866 the Dodds had moved to Greensburg, Kentucky where he opened a girls' school. In 1868 he suffered a stroke of paralysis and was unable to write with either hand. However, he laboriously learned to write with his left hand, and prepared several beautiful manuscripts, with a view to publication. Uncomplaining about his handicap, he wrote matter-of-factly to their son, William, on October 18, 1869, “I perceive no change in my own condition.”

He died on March 27, 1872 and was buried in the family plot at the Lexington Cemetery, near the grave of Henry Clay. An evaluation of his life was that

He was a calm, steady worker, undiscouraged by difficulties, unruffled by opposition. Nothing deterred him from what he considered his duty. This great energy of purpose... and above all, to a pure love of truth, very naturally achieved for him that enviable fame which he had among the instructors and scholars of the country.

II. CAREERS OF JAMES B. DODD’S SONS

James William Dodd

James B. Dodd’s oldest son, James William, was born at Winchester, Virginia in 1834. He was seven years old when his family went to Mississippi where the father, James B. Dodd, was to teach at Centenary College. At the age of ten he began a collegiate course at Centenary, then located in Louisiana, and finished at Transylvania University when sixteen years old.

Teaching in Private Schools

He was first a teacher of Greek in Kemp’s Academy in Lexington, later going to Nicholasville to direct Bethel Academy for several years. He went in 1856 to Shelbyville and established Dodd’s High School where he taught until he left Shelbyville in 1872. While there he was called “The Arnold of Kentucky,” and the school was called “The Rugby of Shelbyville.”

21Texas Christian Advocate, March 2, 1858.
22From Booneville, Missouri, November 23, 1858.
23Letter to Eliza Jane Dodd, July 1, 1886.
24Letter from New York, November 13, 1859.
25Army Pass, signed September 3, 1862 by O. H. Browning, meets this.
26Letter on September 28, 1863.
27Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky (ibis), p. 533-34.
28Article by Ed. W. Shinnick, “Some Old Time History” in a Shelbyville, Kentucky paper, date not shown.
James B. Dodd was one of its leaders in qualifications and activity, and the organization elected him 3rd Vice President. The Institute asked him to deliver, at its 1858 session, an address on the Science of Mathematics; it published the address, and designated him to preside at one of the sessions.

Outstanding church leaders comprised this group: Robert Paine, George Foster Pierce, William M. Wightman, David S. Doggett, and Holland N. McTyeire (all were currently, or future, bishops), A. L. P. Green, J. R. Longstreet, R. H. Rivers, L. C. Garland, Edmund W. Sehon, and Nathan Scarritt. The Institute was the forerunner of such present-day groups as the University Senate and the Association of Schools and Colleges of the United Methodist Church. It eventually proposed a university to be launched in Nashville to serve the whole church, and in 1875 Vanderbilt University was opened.

The Dodd family had wide contacts across the church, but they were loyal and active in their local churches. James B. Dodd mentions frequently, in his letters while on trips, his attendance at church services. He wrote to Eliza one time: “You will, of course, go to religious meetings as often as you have opportunity. It matters but little with whom you worship... provided it be in spirit and in truth... In the midst of my distracting duties and cares, I will endeavor not to forget that I have a soul to be saved.” T. N. Ralston called him “a perfect gentleman, a scholar, and a Christian.”

Slowing Down and Final Years

After James B. Dodd left the Kentucky Normal School, whereby losing an assured salary, he and his family were not affluent. He taught private schools in Kentucky, at Washington and at Greensburg. In years just preceding the Civil War the Dodds, non-slaveholders, were loyal to the Union. However, after the John Brown raid at Harper's Ferry, James wrote to Eliza from New York (where he was promoting the use of his texts) confirming his Southern feelings:

I think you need feel under no apprehension from the Negroes in Kentucky. That horrible affair at Harper's Ferry, I am inclined to think, will teach a useful lesson to Abolitionists. John Brown and his confederates will doubtless be hung, which will surely cause those mad fanatics to consider the error of their ways. I have no idea that any considerable number of Northern people sympathize with that wretched old man Brown.

After the war started the Dodds moved for a time to Carrollton, Kentucky, and lived for a year with relatives in Leavenworth, Kansas.

At the war's height in 1863, Dodd wrote to Eliza about the appointment of their son, Thomas, to the Millersburg School. He mentioned that “The Conference gave a unanimous vote for loyalty to the Federal Government. Dr. _____, the Presiding Elder, who came near leading our boys astray, was required to confess and renounce his errors, on pain of suspension from the ministry... It is now known that ours is the only loyal conference in the Church, South.”

By 1866 the Dodds had moved to Greensburg, Kentucky where he opened a girls' school. In 1868 he suffered a stroke of paralysis and was unable to write with either hand. However, he laboriously learned to write with his left hand, and prepared several beautiful manuscripts, with a view to publication. Uncomplaining about his handicap, he wrote matter-of-factly to their son, William, on October 18, 1869, “I perceive no change in my own condition.”

He died on March 27, 1872 and was buried in the family plot at the Lexington Cemetery, near the grave of Henry Clay. An evaluation of his life was that

He was a calm, steady worker, undiscouraged by difficulties, unruffled by opposition... Nothing deterred him from what he considered his duty. This great energy of purpose... and above all, to a pure love of truth, very naturally achieved for him that enviable fame which he had among the instructors and scholars of the country.

II. CAREERS OF JAMES B. DODD’S SONS

James William Dodd

James B. Dodd's oldest son, James William, was born at Winchester, Virginia in 1834. He was seven years old when his family went to Mississippi where the father, James B. Dodd, was to teach at Centenary College. At the age of ten he began a collegiate course at Centenary, then located in Louisiana, and finished at Transylvania University when sixteen years old.

Teaching in Private Schools

He was first a teacher of Greek in Kemp’s Academy in Lexington, later going to Nicholasville to direct Bethel Academy for several years. He went in 1856 to Shelbyville and established Dodd's High School where he taught until he left Shelbyville in 1872. While there he was called “The Arnold of Kentucky,” and the school was called “The Rugby of Shelbyville.”

21Texas Christian Advocate, March 2, 1858.
22Letter to Eliza Jane Dod, July 1, 1866.
23Letter from New York, November 13, 1859.
24Letter on September 28, 1863.
25Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky (ibid), p. 533-34.
26Article by Ed. W. Shinnick, “Some Old Time History” in a Shelbyville, Kentucky paper, date not shown.
In the summer of 1872, after teaching for sixteen years in Shelbyville, he was offered the presidency of Kentucky Eclectic Institute at Frankfort. He accepted, but the school was co-educational, violating his conviction that this was undesirable.

Teaching at Vanderbilt University

In 1879 he was asked to accept the chair of Latin at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Henry Nelson Snyder commented that “McTyeire and Garland brought together in the first faculty an all-star team of men already made and widely-known... J. William Dodd, a famed Latinist from Kentucky... Here was what might be regarded as a great army of proud talent to greet the more than 400 students who matriculated in October, 1875.”

At Vanderbilt again he was popular; he organized a society called “The Ugly Boy’s Knife,” and a few years later the members of that group conferred on him the degree of “The Boy’s Friend.” One of his former pupils in Vanderbilt (then teaching in an Eastern college) commented that “Professor Dodd was a boy everywhere except in the school room, and there he was a king.”

Paul K. Conkin, author of a recent discriminating history of Vanderbilt, says Dodd “became the most beloved faculty member on campus.”

One day Dodd was a bit late in meeting one of his classes, and the boys—for it was an all-male student body then—had put a dog in his chair, pretending to be reciting to it. Undaunted, he said, “Good afternoon, gentlemen; I see that you are going democratic, and have elected one of your number as chairman.”

William Dodd was deeply saddened by the death of his oldest daughter, Alpha, thirteen years of age, from an attack of diphtheria in 1885. This probably hastened his death two years later. A full page and a half appeared in The Vanderbilt Observer, reporting her death and praising her outstanding qualities. Participating in Alpha’s funeral were Dr. Wilber Fisk Tillett, Dr. O. P. Fitzgerald, Dr. A. M. Shipp, and Dr. Thomas J. Dodd.

This left the bereaved parents with one daughter, Paynie. She lived a long and fruitful life, dying in 1965. She became a talented medical artist, working with doctors in Johns Hopkins Medical School, the Rockefeller Institute, and the New York City’s Chief Medical Examiner’s Office.

The Bachelor of Ugliness

James William Dodd, according to the most recent history of Vanderbilt University, was a “widely renowned orator and became the most beloved faculty member on campus, although the evidence does not establish him as an outstanding scholar. In 1885 he helped establish an enduring Vanderbilt tradition—the Bachelor of Ugliness. At the whimsical conferral of the first such degree on Polly Branch, Dodd gave her a Barlow knife. After Dodd’s early death in 1887, the awarding of the degree became a ‘sacrament’ in honor of Uncle Billy, or what quickly became the most sought-after honor for Vanderbilt men.”

Dodd had earlier (1877) been given the degree of LL.D. by Indiana Asbury University (now DePauw University).

The death of Alpha so depressed her father that his health became impaired; he took leave of absence from Vanderbilt, and went back to Frankfort where he died on August 15, 1887. Later when a new sanctuary was built for Centenary Church at Shelbyville in 1897, he was memorialized in an art glass window, with the inscription “The Boy’s Friend,” and reference to “Uncle Billy” from his Vanderbilt years.

Thomas John Dodd

The second son of James B. Dodd was Thomas John, born August 4, 1837 at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia. His early school years were in Louisiana while his father taught there, and he was graduated from Transylvania University in 1857. He earned an M.A. degree at Centre College, and later was awarded a D.D. degree by the same institution. He was a Methodist minister and a teacher—in private schools, colleges, and universities, and an author whose writings were widely published.

Thomas J. Dodd’s wife, the former Evelyn Baker (descended from a Hugenot family), was a well-known writer. She was called “a gifted authoress,” and was referred to as “one of Covington’s most prominent women.”

As Pastor and Teacher in Kentucky

Thomas J. Dodd joined the Kentucky Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1860, and was a pastor at several churches, including Oxford, Greenwich, Frankfort, and Covington. Evidently, he was a model pastor at Covington, by reference to his diary:

May 19—Rose at six o’clock
Read 11th Chapter of James’ Epistle
Read Preface (Latin) to Nardy’s Greek Testament and two chapters in
Thoughts on Sabbath School
Made second draft of sermon for Prof. Brown’s Commencement at Paris, Ky., June 8
Retired at 10 o’clock

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30 Ed D. Shinnick, Ibid.
31 Conkin, Gone with the Ivy, Ibid., p. 60.
32 Story handed down in the Dodd family.
33 Paul K. Conkin, Ibid., p. 60.
34 Article by Rev. W. F. Taylor in a December, 1897 issue of The Nashville Christian Advocate.
35 The Covington Courier, June 10, 1904.
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May 20—Made fourth draft of the address for Millersburg.
Wrote to Virginits [his brother]

June 14—Called on Miss Evangeline
Quarterly Conference at 8 o’clock

June 18—Read Job XIX in Syriac... Labored on sermon for Sabbath morning
May 25—Read in Syriac... Read in Arabic Grammar. Read Pss. XIV in Hebrew
June 28—Read a little Chaldee

His conference appointed him to the Millersburg High School where he was principal; he taught a private school in Paris, and he was elected president of Kentucky Wesleyan College in 1875. Almost universally he was liked by his students and their parents. Later W. Preston McCauley, long-time friend, wrote a tribute to him as a “laborious, cultivated, and faithful scholar who lived an honorable, useful, diligent, loving, self-sacrificing life.” He inspired his students to work hard. “His superiority was manifest in the work he could get out of boys who proposed to do none.”

His Tenure at Vanderbilt University

Thomas Dodd was appointed to the Vanderbilt University faculty initially as Professor of History and English in the Academic Department. Fairly soon President McTyeire without consulting Dodd, shifted him to the Biblical Department to teach Hebrew. He felt his rights were ignored, and tension developed between the two men. He soon discovered that the admissions requirement for theology students was so low that many of them could hardly do normal university student’s work. Also the usual friendship and respect among professors was lacking in certain cases. Dodd was suspicious of theologians who had studied and “had drunk from the German wells of rationalism.” Dodd sourly remarked that [William M.] Baskerville had gone to Germany... he had imbued so largely of German free thought and free speech as to be sceptical in religion, and profane in conversation, and altogether abandoned his ministry in the Gospel.

In turn, Baskerville had been heard to complain of the policy of “placing broken-down Methodist preachers” in chairs such as Dodd occupied. Baskerville was also, it may be mentioned, Bishop McTyeire’s son-in-law.

In 1884 McTyeire began a complete reorganization of the Biblical Department, and Dodd and other professors charged McTyeire acted with unchecked, arbitrary power. Dodd’s wife was not well and he decided to leave, submitting his resignation in March, 1885.

The trouble at Vanderbilt—especially in the Biblical Department—was noticed with regret across the church. For example, The Arkansas Methodist commented on June 6, 1885, “Professors Tillett and Tigert are the only members of the old faculty re-elected. Dr. Dodd resigned and the chair of Dr. Shipp was vacated. We regard the loss of these men as a calamity.”

As an Author in Papers, Journals, Books

In October, 1890, the Quarterly Review in Nashville carried an article, “Methodism and Advanced Thought” by Thomas J. Dodd. He defined Advanced Thought as “progressive orthodoxy,” free from the old Augustinian or Calvinistic theology. He based his stance on what he considered the principles proposed by John Wesley, such as “individual responsibility for belief in all matters of doctrine... to base conviction only on evidence or reason... giving prominence only to the fundamental, saving truths of the gospel, and making life and character the tests of acceptability in Church-membership.”

He wrote in the Nashville Christian Advocate for December 26, 1891 a memoir of Dr. T. N. Ralston, outstanding theologian of that day, pointing out that Ralston was loved by all who knew him. An article entitled “Pseudo-Miracles” appeared in July-August, 1897 issue of Quarterly Review, declaring that “We have never seen the evidence for a single extra-biblical miracle that can bear comparison with the evidence given in the Gospels for the miracles of Jesus.”

Dodd’s third article in the Review (January-February, 1898) was “Originality in Thought.” He proposed that “All other things being equal, the man who most frequently utters his own honest thoughts... in his own style, will... command most attention, and wield most power over an audience... What the preacher chiefly needs is the study of his subject, not of books about the subject... The first subject of study... is, of course, the Bible.” (pp. 384-5).

The most notoriety Thomas Dodd received was in the 1880s when he spoke on John Wesley at a conference meeting at Nicholasville. Rev. Stephen Noland, editor of The Central Methodist, charged it was a caricature of Wesley. Others joined in the letter-writing about the speech, including Dr. John J. Tigert, Rev. W. P. Harrison, Book Editor in Nashville, E. E. Hoss, Editor of the Nashville Christian Advocate, and various others. Near the close of the furor Rev. C. H. Owen wrote that “The moderation, courage, thoroughness, and gentlemanly bearing is so

36Thomas Dodd Papers at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn.
37Undated clipping from The Lexington Herald.
38Rev. W. F. Taylor in Thomas J. Dodd’s Funeral Message.
40Ibid.
41Paul K. Conkin, Gone with the Ivy (Ibid.), p. 71.
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Thomas Dodd wrote two books, and one of his sermons was included in another. In *John Wesley, A Study for the Times*, he voiced this opinion of Wesley's theology: "There are some well-meaning persons ... who aver ... that if they have not clear views of those capital doctrines—the fall of man, justification by faith ... they can have no benefit from his death. ... I do not believe this. I believe the merciful God regards the lives and tempers of men more than their ideas ... the goodness of the heart, rather than the clearness of the head." In 1899 his second book was published by the Methodist Book Concern of the Methodist Episcopal Church, entitled *Miracles: Were They, or Were They Not, Performed by Jesus?* The author's preface declared, "We assert the general proposition that miracles were wrought by Jesus, and we hope to show that the proof afforded by the Gospels, is, in all regards of the most convincing nature. ..." *The Methodist Review* in its November, 1899 issue carried a review, presumably by Editor John J. Tigert, which called *Miracles* "a book of great merit ... especially valuable. It is a Christian scholar's worthy legacy to the church." Dodd had died that year.

**Thomas Dodd's Closing Years**

When Thomas Dodd left Vanderbilt he opened the Dodd Select High School in Nashville. *The Nashville Banner* reported on May 24, 1887 that year's closing program, calling Dodd "one of the most scholarly men in the State," and that he was reported to have been offered the presidency of two or more colleges in the South. Later he moved to Covington, Kentucky and opened a school for boys; the closing program on May 30, 1890 had speeches by students on such topics as Filthy Lucre, A Plea for Cranks, and Go It While You're Young, Boys.

Thomas J. Dodd died on February 9, 1899, and his funeral service was held at the Scott Street Methodist Church in Covington, of which he had once been pastor. Following his death, an article in the *Nashville Christian Advocate* for May 11 called him "undoubtedly the ablest linguist in the South, and the peer of any in the North." The library that he left comprised 1,824 volumes, including a goodly number in foreign languages. Publication dates were as early as 1537, and more than a dozen were printed prior to 1800. He was praised widely at his death.

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43 *Nashville Christian Advocate*, February 1, 1890.
44 *John Wesley, A Study for the Times* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1891), pp. 142, 144.
45 *Preface to Miracles*, p. 3.

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**C. Virginius Wesley Dodd**

The third son of James B. Dodd was Virginius Wesley Dodd, born in Middleburg, Virginia in 1840. He earned an M.A. degree, undoubtedly from Transylvania University. In 1861 at Leavenworth, Kansas (where he had relatives), he opened "an English, Mathematics and Classical school." In the early 1870s he was teaching history and English literature in the coeducational Kentucky High School at Frankfort, of which his brother, James William, was principal. A school announcement said it was "endowed with full collegiate powers and privileges" and stated that graduates would be awarded the B.A. degree.

Virginius then went to Texas about 1876, teaching school successively at Fort Worth, Mansfield, Fruitland, and Sunset. At Mansfield he became acquainted with the family of the Rev. James M. Small, a Cumberland Presbyterian minister, who later moved to Bowie. Small earlier had been a pastor in California, where he and his wife agreed to rear a four-year-old child, Kate Scott, whose mother (Mrs. James Scott) had died. Virginius and Kate became close friends when he was teaching near Bowie. They were married on May 8, 1884 by the Rev. L. P. Smith, Methodist pastor of the Montague and Bowie Circuit.

Virginius and Kate bought a farm near Brushy Mound, northwest of Bowie. Later they moved to what had been Indian Territory, living on a farm near Fort Cobb and later near Carnegie. He was active in the Methodist Church. They raised four children: Frances (Fannie) Hawling, James Thomas, Martha (Mattie), and Flora. Virginius W. Dodd died on June 20, 1913, honored and praised by all who knew him. Burial was at Carnegie. One daughter, Fannie, married a Methodist minister, Walter N. Vernon, Sr.; they spent most of their ministry in Texas.

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**III. THE DAUGHTERS AS EDUCATORS**

To the second marriage of James B. Dodd (to Eliza Jane Ralston) five children were born; two died in infancy; the eldest, Josephine, died in 1873 as a young girl; and the two who survived longer were Flora B. and Lida H. The last named never married; both became teachers. Their mother, Eliza J. Dodd, moved to Leavenworth, Kansas after her husband's death in 1872 to make her home with a younger brother, W. H. Ralston. She died in 1905.

Flora and Lida by 1895 had moved to Denver, where Flora opened "Miss Dodd's Select High School." The school aimed, a folder stated, "to develop a love of study, and a self-reliance that shall enable the student to advance chiefly by his own efforts, the teacher being merely a guide."

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46 *The Leavenworth Times*, August 11, 1905, in column, Forty-four Years Ago.
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48Folder in possession of the author.
The Dodd sisters gave as references Rev. (later Bishop) David H. Moore, Editor of the Western Christian Advocate, Cincinnati; Rev. (later Bishop) W. F. McDowell, Chancellor of the University of Denver; and J. M. Greenwood, Superintendent of Schools in Kansas City, Missouri.

Flora also undertook special studies at the University of Denver, preparing herself by 1900 to teach Latin and Mathematics at Key West Seminary, Florida. The Key West institution later changed its name to Ruth Hargrove Seminary. It was designed primarily for children from Cuba, and was sponsored by the Woman's Board of Home Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. While she was there, the school erected a new building to provide an expanded Christian nurture program.

Flora Dodd wrote to her mother letters about her work, some of which appeared in The Old Ladies Journal, published in Leavenworth by a Home for Aged Women. Lida cared for the mother until she died.

Flora B. Dodd, after a fall in early 1935, died on February 15 of that year. Lida H. Dodd then went to live with her niece, Mrs. Fannie Dodd Vernon, wife of the Rev. W. N. Vernon, pastor of Line Street Methodist Church in Hillsboro, Texas. Lida died in July 1937. Both sisters were buried in Riverside Cemetery, in Denver.

IV. LIVING DESCENDANTS OF THE DODDS

Very few descendants of the two older sons of James B. Dodd (James William and Thomas John) survived infancy and they have no living descendants today. But the third son, Virginius Wesley, had nearly one hundred living descendants in 1988. Many of them have chosen teaching as a short or lifetime career. Others are ministers, full-time church education workers, journalists, lawyers, authors, historians, architects, social workers, homemakers, government employees, business men and women, and craftsmen.

"So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message... if it is to serve,44 if it is to teach... if it is to encourage others, we should do so."

DISCOVERY

Edited by
FREDERICK E. MASER

NEW LIGHT ON THE METHODISTS AND THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

We are more than proud to present our readers an hitherto unpublished letter of Captain Thomas Webb to Lord Dartmouth, and also a fully annotated letter of John Wesley to his Lordship. The contributor is Dr. Frederick V. Mills, Sr., Professor of History at LaGrange College, LaGrange, Georgia, Georgia's oldest independent school.

The Webb letter, which follows, speaks for itself. An additional note is necessary for the Wesley letter. When Dr. Mills discovered the original of the Wesley letter he thought it was a first until he discovered a copy printed in Telford's edition of Wesley's letters, Vol. VI, 155ff. However, Dr. Mills points out some interesting things about the Wesley letter. He writes:

Telford's is a copy of a copy. The enclosed is a copy of the original from the Dartmouth Papers. Moreover, it was during the research on this letter that I discovered the reason why John Wesley appeared to reverse positions on American affairs when in fact from a loyal Englishman's point-of-view he was perfectly logical.

We express thanks to Dr. Mills for two exciting letters and his illuminating comments and annotations.

Thomas Webb's View of the American Scene as Reported to Lord Dartmouth

This letter written by Thomas Webb (1724-1796) expresses the strong Tory sentiments of a British officer and Methodist preacher on a series of events leading to the Declaration of Independence by the American colonies. Unlike Thomas Rankin—see Methodist History (January, 1985) for his letter of December 29, 1774—who advocated a policy of reconciliation to Lord Dartmouth, Webb urged coercion by naval force and economic restriction. Both men were "sons" of John Wesley and effective preachers, but their positions on American affairs were markedly different. The position which John Wesley took on the American troubles