

## DEATH OF OAK-CHI-AH, A MISSIONARY.

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On the second day of November, 1849, a lad came from Fort Smith with a note from a Mr. Moore, informing us that Oakchiah, the Indian preacher, had just died at his house, and he wished instructions with regard to his interment. Mr. Goode wrote to Mr. Moore to have the corpse decently buried, and to forward the bill of expenses to our mission, and it should be paid. It was accordingly done. A brief sketch of this native minister of Christ may not be wholly devoid of interest to the reader.

He was a full-blood Choctaw, born in the old nation, about the year 1810, as we learned in conversation with him at Fort Coffee, where he spent a few days on his way to conference. Previous to their emigration from Mississippi there was a revival of religion in the tribe, during which many precious souls were converted to God. Oakchiah was one of the trophies of the cross, won to the fold of the blessed Savior and numbered with the heirs of salvation. He was young, sprightly, and active, and full of energy and zeal in the cause which he had so heartily espoused. When he was admitted into the Church and baptized, he was called William Winans; he still retained his Indian name, however, and was called Oakchiah as long as he lived. Soon after his conversion he became deeply solicitous for the salvation of his friends and neighbors—his kindred according to the flesh. Whenever an opportunity was given he would rise up in the congregation, and with native, pure, and burning eloquence would warn the people to repent of their sins and come to the Lord Jesus Christ, that they might not perish, but have everlasting life. His word was attended with such unction and power that his ardent appeals were well-nigh irresistible. Persecutions, heartless and bitter, followed; Satan and his emissaries were aroused, and became furious in their fruitless efforts to stay the tide of religious influence that was sweeping over the land.

The Indian converts were all persecuted, but those who were actively engaged in propagating the revival influence were pursued with bitter scorn and opprobrious epithets.

When jeers, taunts and ridicule failed to direct the attention from the service of God, threats of violence and death were employed.

Oakchiah's gifts were such that the Church had soon given him authority to speak and to conduct religious worship, and he was regarded generally as a preacher. But he stood alone in his father's family, all of whom, except himself, were bitter persecutors of the cause of Christ. He was commanded by his father to desist from preaching, and warned that if he persisted his life should certainly pay the forfeit. The old man thought it surely trial enough to have a son to become a Christian, but to have him *preach* was a degradation to which the father could not tamely submit. But Oakchiah, having attained unto maturity of years, felt himself responsible to God for his conduct; and although he was a dutiful, respectful and affectionate son, yet he felt that he must obey God rather than man. He had an appointment to *talk* to the people on a certain day, and his father knew it, and determined that the matter of controversy should at once be brought to an issue. He accordingly notified his son that if he should attempt to preach on that occasion he would do so at his peril; but Oakchiah, prompted by convictions of duty and guided, as he believed, by the divine Spirit, went to the church and published the glad message of mercy and life to his fellow-men. Having faithfully preached Christ to his people for the last time, as he supposed, he returned to meet his infuriated parent, at the threshold of the cabin. There the father stood with form erect, broad and athletic, in the vigor of manhood; his tawny visage was rendered almost black by the malice which rankled in his breast; the deadly rifle was in his hand, and he was fully prepared to consummate his fiend like purpose. Oakchiah approached, expecting to fall, but was calm and fearless; for he was in the discharge of duty, and God's grace wonderfully strengthened and sustained him in the dark hour of trial. With deep peace in his soul and with love beaming in his countenance, and with unusual tenderness in the intonations of his voice, he addressed his parent: "Father, will you shoot me? What have I done that I must die so soon? Father, I die a *Christian*, and shall go to the land of the pure and good to live with the blessed Savior!"

Although the rifle had been leveled to take deadly aim the old man paused, his muscles relaxed, the weapon fell to the ground, and a torrent of tears gushed from his eyes, and flowed down his cheeks. He was a warrior who could boldly meet the deadly foe on the battle-field; his spirit never cowered in presence of danger or of death; he scorned the rage and power of man; but the meek spirit of a follower of Christ completely unmanned him. In such forbearance and love he saw arguments irresistible in favor of the Christian religion. Thus the father was conquered; his haughty spirit was subdued; he became deeply penitent, and was soon numbered with the believers in Jesus. The lion was transformed into a lamb; the old soldier became a disciple, having received the kingdom as a little child. He was still living in 1844, a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and a devoted Christian. He visited our mission, talked and prayed with the pupils in the school, and seemed to be a sensible, cheerful and happy old man.

Oakchiah was licensed to preach, and admitted into the Mississippi conference; he traveled two or three years, was ordained a deacon, and then asked the conference to grant him a location, that he might go with his tribe to their new homes in the west. By that removal the Church members sustained irreparable loss; their ministers, houses of worship, religious ordinances, and Church privileges were left behind. They were deprived of pastoral influences, and doomed to be scattered abroad as sheep without a shepherd; their temptations, trials, and persecutions were of no ordinary character. But the Choctaws did not long continue destitute of ministry of the word and the ordinances of the Lord's house. Their old pastors had not forgotten them; soon a small band of Gospel pioneers were seen to take up their line of march to the western border. Threading their way on horseback, through the swamps, across the rivers, and over the mountains, pursuing the trails, they finally penetrated the unbroken forests where the Indians had been located. The scattered flocks were again collected to the fold, the Church reorganized, and once more the rude dwelling of the Indian became a Bethel, from which prayer and praise went up to God, who is the "shepherd and bishop of souls." But, alas! many were missing, having strayed away from the fold, and yielded to

the power of the tempter. Oakchiah retained his integrity, in a good degree, remaining firm in the faith, yet for a season he had lost much of the zeal and fervor which had characterized his religious life in the old nation. In the year 1843 he was re-admitted into the itineracy, within the bounds of the Arkansas conference, and appointed by Bishop Andrew to the Puckchenubbee circuit, in the southern portion of the nation. Rev. J. M. Steele was placed in charge of the circuit. At the session of the Indian conference Oakchiah was returned to Puckchenubbee by Bishop Morris; but his work was already done; he had preached his last sermon.

In returning from conference he became sick, and was left on the roadside in the care of Chukmabee, who did not regard the symptoms as alarming, and supposed that rest and refreshment would restore him, so that within a day or two he would again be able to resume his journey. On the thirty-first day of October he reached Fort Smith, exhausted and suffering severely with fever and pain in the breast. He was destitute of money, and knew not what to do, and so lay down by the side of the street in the shade of a building to spend the night. But a friend, in passing, saw his condition, and took him to the house of a kind Christian family, who did all in their power for his comfort. A physician was called, restoratives were given, and he retired without any apprehensions of immediate danger. Early in the morning he was heard to walk from his room out upon the porch, where he fell upon the ground. A friend ran to him to give him aid, and to inquire after his welfare. Oakchiah replied in Choctaw; raising his hand and pointing upward, in a few moments he expired. He was fully apprised of his condition, knew that the time of his departure was at hand, and so gave the signal of victory, and went to claim his mansion in the skies. There was no kind friend at hand to converse with him in his own language; none to receive his dying message, and bear words of love and tenderness to his distant wife and little sons. Yet it was evident that he died in the faith; God was with him; he was triumphant in the last conflict. His body now sleeps on the southern bank of the Arkansas, a little above the Fort—there to await the “voice of the archangel and the trump of God,” when all who are in their graves shall come forth.

Oakchiah was about five feet and six inches in height, with a frail and delicate constitution. His features were regular, and his countenance pleasant and very expressive. He was dignified, graceful and easy in his manners, and more than ordinarily communicative for an Indian. He was a popular, earnest and very successful preacher. His style was not bold and majestic, but gentle, soothing and pathetic—that which melts and subdues the heart. “In almost every instance when I have heard him preach,” said his colleague, “the congregations have been bathed in tears before the sermon closed.”

O, what a thrilling scene shall be witnessed in the great day, when Oakchiah, and the ministers under whose labors he was brought to Christ, and the scores converted through his instrumentality, shall hear the voice that shall wake the dead, and shall arise and come forth clothed in the habiliments of immortality! Then shall they hail each other in the home of the saved alone, to join in redemption's song: “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us to be kings and priests unto God and his father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.”

Oakchiah's father had received intelligence of his son's death, and had come to learn the particulars, and to take the pony, saddle, blankets and clothing home to the bereaved wife and children. The old gentleman was near sixty years of age, yet in the enjoyment of vigorous health. He felt deeply the death of his son, spoke of him with tenderness and affection, and even made a visit to Fort Smith, that he might see the grave where his remains were deposited.

The horse and outfit of Oakchiah had been sent to Fort Coffee immediately after the funeral had taken place. When the father returned from his visit to the grave he emptied the saddle-bags of his son, to ascertain the contents; and as they had contained the outfit of an itinerant minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, I will name the articles. There was a shirt, a pair of stockings, a box of matches, a leather cup, an English grammar, a Choctaw Testament and hymn-book, a small package of brown sugar, and about a quart of the kernels of dried hickory-nuts. Such was the outfit of an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, and such his preparation for

a journey of over two hundred miles to attend the session of his conference.

The outfit of the white minister in that country did not materially differ from that just described. Every traveling preacher would carry his blankets, his provisions, a cup, matches, and a rope with which to "stake out" his pony. He might be so fortunate as to find a comfortable bed beneath some friendly roof, but he would more probably be compelled to wrap his blanket about him, and then lie down beneath the shelter of a forest oak to enjoy the luxury of sleeping in the open air. We knew a minister who was uniformly permitted, in a certain neighborhood, to sleep in a vacated corn-crib; and he was thankful for the privilege, especially in rainy weather.

J. Y. BRYCE.

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## AN ANCIENT SIOUX LEGEND.

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An ancient Sioux legend of the creation is the most popular story in the repertoire of Chauncey Yellowrobe son of a Rosebud Sioux chieftain and a teacher in the federal Indian school, in Rapid City, South Dakota.

"When the Great Spirit had created his wonderland here of mountains and prairies and streams and trees," Yellowrobe tells his students, "he sought to fashion a human being worthy to enjoy its grandeur. He shaped the clay in his hands, and baked it in his campfire, but when he drew it forth it was pale and had not baked rapidly enough, and he threw it behind him.

"He moulded another form, and laid it in the hot ashes, but when he drew it out it was blackened and crisp. So he tossed it to one side. Then he moulded a new figure, even more carefully than before, packed the red coals around it, and when he lifted it from the fire it was red and sound and perfect.

"And he put it into the great wilderness of the west, and it multiplied its kind and was the tenant of the Great Spirit's own garden."—*Oklahoma City Times*, May 7, 1926.