

## **Robert Graham**

President John W. McGarvey

*The College of the Bible*

The second portrait above, as you all know, represents the second president of this college. Physically, he was the contrast of Robert Milligan. An Englishman by birth, he grew up with the solid frame and muscle of a typical Englishman. A carpenter by trade, from his boyhood, his diligent work at that trade hardened the muscles which nature gave him, so that he was a model of strength.

When he was in college, on one occasion a proud, aristocratic, and mischievous student while at the breakfast table, hurled a biscuit, a hard biscuit, at the poor man who was the waiter, and hit him a severe blow on the cheek. The poor fellow walked up to him and slapped him. That was a terrible outrage, for a servant boy to strike an aristocratic boarder. The latter jumped up and ran after the fellow as he went out at the kitchen door, and a lot of his comrades followed him like a mob. Bob Graham, as they called him, was sitting at the far end of the table, next to the kitchen door. He saw the whole affair, and just as these men drew near he jumped up, clenched his fists, and shouted, "Stand back, gentlemen! Fair play! One at a time!" None of them wanted to come in contact with those fists; so they went wisely back to their seats at the table. That was Robert Graham when he was a young man. And the idea of fair play, "a square deal," and justice to all, high and low, characterized him as long as he lived. He was very popular with the students, and this incident did not make him any less so.

He told me more than once that he had never taken any exercise for health. He took plenty of it when he was a carpenter, he thought, to do him all his life. He told me this on seeing how diligently I had to work to keep my body strong. He also said to me, knowing how frequently I was sick, that he fully expected to outlive me several years. He died five years younger than I am now. Such is the uncertainty of life.

It was his skill and industry as a carpenter in early life and until after he was married, that led him to become a scholar and a preacher. Mr. Campbell needed the services of a good carpenter at Bethany. This young man was recommended very highly by some brethren, and he sent for him. He was so well pleased with him in every way, that he advised him to give up his carpenter's trade, come to college, and become a preacher. Mr. Campbell was the editor and publisher of the only hymn book of our people at that time and he devoted the profits of this publication to the education of young men for the ministry. By this means he enabled Robert Graham to accept

his advice. Robert took his place among the best of the students. He was still there and in his senior year when I went to Bethany. It was the custom then in Bethany, on account of the scarcity of professors, to assign some of the freshman classes to a few of the choicest of the graduating class. They worked, of course without compensation, but with a good deal of benefit to themselves. I was at first put under him in my Latin, and he was one of the best teachers I have ever had. A. R. Benton, since then the eminent scholar and teacher of Indianapolis, was my professor in Greek.

When Bro[ther] Graham graduated, Mr. Campbell sent him out on a collecting tour through the Southwest. A great many people had become indebted to him for the Millennial Harbinger, for hymn books, and other things. So he sent Robert Graham through Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and some portions of Texas, to hunt up these debtors, and to preach the gospel as he went. He traveled on horseback.

This tour led him to observe the state of society and the prospects of the people in those thinly settled regions. He decided to locate at Fayetteville and build a college. He did so. In erecting the building he himself was the architect and the superintendent of the work. It was very strange to those farmers and rough mechanics to see a college man working as a carpenter, excelling them all in skill. And when heavy timbers were to be carried on hand spikes, they were amazed to see this college man holding the hand-spike against the stoutest men among them. So he won popularity, finished his college, and had a large patronage. In the meantime he was not neglecting the spiritual wants of the people. He traveled far and wide on horseback through the forests and over the mountains, to reach distant appointments, where, at a stand built in the forest, for the audience would be too large for any of the log school-houses or meeting-houses, he would preach, usually protracting his sermon from one-and-one-half to two hours, and sometimes exceeding two hours. Notwithstanding that, some of the brethren would come to him and say, "I rode twenty (often thirty or forty) miles to hear you preach today, and it does not seem to me to pay to ride so far to hear so short a sermon." Then, after the meeting he would ride home, often after riding far into the night, in order to be in his place at the college next morning when the bell rang.

So he worked until the civil war came on. Then, in the confusion of the time, his college was burned down, and the young men whom he might have expected to come to his college were all enlisted in the army. So he saw that his work in Arkansas was done. Through some friends he was invited to come to Cincinnati, and he came to

preach to our leading congregations there. After laboring there for a short time he moved to Harrodsburg as a professor in Kentucky University. Not long after that he was called to San Francisco. A few brethren there, anticipating that there would be built the great metropolis which it has since become, wanted to organize a church that would grow with the city. He went and preached for what was called then and is called now the First Christian church in San Francisco. It was not large and never has grown very large. The work was very hard and discouraging, but he struggled with it heroically until he was called back to be president of the College of Arts of this institution. There were no railroads then across the Rocky Mountains and no one dreamed that there ever would be. The journey was made by the ocean, and in sailing vessels. He remained president of the College of Arts until Hamilton College was organized, when he was made president of that, and served it faithfully until he was called to the presidency of the College of the Bible after the death of Robert Milligan. He was an untiring worker, ready to go without his dinner any day when there was pressing work to be done. He showed such interest in the work at all times that he won high praises of the board of Curators and of all connected with the institution.

Finally, old age with its infirmities began to come upon him. When he was seventy-five years of age he resigned the presidency, retaining his professorship. Another year or two of labor compelled him to resign his professorship. He went to Pittsburgh to visit a friend, and from there the news came of his death. His remains were brought here and laid away in God's land out there where there is a host of good men and women sleeping until the resurrection morning.

I was sick in bed when he died, with a very severe attack of La Grippe<sup>1</sup> and the doctor and my family and friends kept the news from me. He was brought here, brother Loos preached his funeral, and he was buried before I knew anything about it. My friends feared that if I should learn of his death it would be to me in my feebleness like the last feather on the camel's back. I knew nothing of it until a day or two after his burial, when someone carelessly left the daily paper lying on my bed. I reached after it and thought I would see what was going on. The very first thing my eye fell upon was the account of the death of President Graham, I was not so shocked as my friends feared; for I had expected it. He had not only a strong body, but a strong voice. He could make the remotest man in those vast crowds in the forest of Arkansas hear him. When he let that voice out to the full measure it rumbled almost like the distant thunder. His thoughts were good, his language fine, his power as a preacher eminent. He was an excellent teacher in every department which he undertook to teach.

Two characteristics of his life stood out very admirably, his economy and his liberality. One day he showed me a little ten cent memorandum book which he drew out of his pocket and said, "I can trace every dime that has come into my hands for years by my little memorandums and tell where it came from and where it went." I was very much astonished, for one of the hardest things for me to do has ever been to keep a memorandum of expenses with any degree of satisfaction. Most men who are that close and exact about their money matter are penurious, but he was very far from being so. On leaving San Francisco when he had paid all the passage expenses of his family he had about three hundred dollars in gold that he had saved up. He handed it to the treasurer of the church<sup>2</sup> and told him to use it for the good of the church. When he got home, one dollar, (or fifty cents, I have forgotten which) was all that he had left. When he left Arkansas in the midst of the Civil War, the college having burned down, he had no property. He needed some money, however, to get away from there. He went to some of the wealthy brethren and asked them to loan him enough for his purpose without security, for he had nothing to give as security. They let him have all he wanted, and he came to Cincinnati. When he was president of Hamilton College, he corresponded with these brethren in regard to the payment of this money. The government had issued the proper money called "greenbacks" and had made this legal tender in payment of all debts; and "greenbacks" were so much below par at that time that it took one dollar and eighty cents to buy one dollar in gold. These brethren told him that he might pay his debts to them in greenbacks and they would be satisfied. He said, "No, brethren, I will not pay in greenbacks. The money I borrowed from you was worth one hundred cents on the dollar and I will pay you back in the same kind of money." And he stuck to that, although they urged him to take advantage of the greenbacks, and paid every cent of it in gold. Now that was the character in business of the man who was the second president of this college.

Brethren, when I look forward to the future I always wonder what is to be the future of the College of the Bible. I always recollect with thankfulness the prayers of these two men. They are a great consolation. In the Old Testament how often after David had died and gone, it is said under the reign of wicked kings, that Jehovah spared the people for David's sake. And I am sure that for Robert Milligan's and Robert Graham's sake, God will spare the College of the Bible a long time even if it should begin to prove unworthy.

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End Notes

<sup>1</sup> La Grippe is an old name for influenza

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<sup>2</sup> The name Bro. Ford has been crossed out